

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



3rd Week

Mar. 2024

Features :

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

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GS Paper-1

Subject: Indian Society

Relation between violence, mental health and homelessness of women.

Context-The article highlights the fact violence and mental health conditions among women have a cause-and-effect relationship, and both factors significantly heighten the risk of homelessness.

What is the status of violence among women?

As per National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), almost 30% of women between the ages of 18-49 years have experienced physical violence beginning at age 15; around 6% have reported sexual violence.

What is the main reason behind triggering homelessness of women?

- 1) Many women with mental health conditions leave their house because they want to escape unending violence whether it was from a predatory father or a husband who controlled all aspects of life etc.
- 2) There are women who had access to mental health care but still they left their home due to violence.

Read more- [On Crimes Against Women – A persistent social crisis](#)

What are some of the reasons provided for mental health problems of women?

- 1) There are higher prevalence rates of depression, anxiety or eating disorders among women.
- 2) They also suffer from mental health issues due to postpartum depression. Postpartum depression is a medical condition that many women get after having a baby.

What are the limitations of these reasons for explaining mental health issue of women?

- 1) They neglect the detrimental impact of violence on women's lives by giving excessive focus to bio-medical reasons.
- 2) They do not acknowledge the role played by patriarchy and caste-based discrimination which takes a profound toll on women.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Acknowledgement of work**-There is a need to recognize and compensate women for their unpaid labour in household roles.
- 2) **Creation of separate space**-There should be dedicated space for women to find supportive networks and alternate family structures outside of typical heteronormative relationships.
- 3) **Ownership Rights**-Women should have access to basic income, housing, and land ownership that may offer economic independence and reduce vulnerability to homelessness.
- 4) **Reforms in Curricula**-There is a need for change in curriculum that helps growing adolescents interrogate and challenge harmful gendered norms and practices.
- 5) **Multi-stake holder approach**-In order to understand the impact of violence on women's mental health, there is a need to involve diverse professionals, innovative research, and meaningful involvement of those with lived experiences.

Subject: Geography

Topic-Salient features of World's Physical Geography

Rise of ocean temperatures: Oceans have a fever here's why

News: This article discusses how the ocean's surface temperature is rising to record levels, mainly due to human activities like burning fossil fuels.

What is the Current State of Ocean Temperatures?

In February 2024, the global sea surface temperature was 21.06°C, the highest since 1979. It surpassed the previous record of 20.98°C set in August 2023. Since March 2023, temperatures have been exceptionally high.

What are the factors contributing to the rise of ocean temperatures?

Human Activities: Since the 19th century, burning fossil fuels has released large amounts of greenhouse gases, significantly contributing to global warming.

Greenhouse Gas Absorption: About 90% of the extra heat trapped by greenhouse gases is absorbed by the oceans, steadily increasing their temperatures.

El Niño: This weather pattern, causing abnormal warming of waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, contributes to both ocean and global temperature rises.

Reduced Sahara Dust: Less dust blowing off the Sahara Desert means less shading over the Atlantic, leading to increased sunlight absorption and higher ocean temperatures.

What are the concerns related to the rise of ocean temperature?

Impact on Marine Ecosystems: Warmer oceans lead to increased stratification, disrupting the mixing of water layers. This affects marine life, especially the population of phytoplankton, crucial for marine food webs.

Coral bleaching: These have doubled in frequency between 1982 and 2016, causing intense coral bleaching, which harms coral reproduction and increases vulnerability to diseases.

Changes in Marine Behavior: Warming oceans alter the migration patterns of aquatic animals.

Intensification of Storms: Warmer oceans contribute to more frequent and severe storms. They increase evaporation rates and heat transfer, leading to stronger winds, heavier rainfall, and more flooding when storms reach land.

Historical Data Point: Record sea surface temperature of 21.06°C in February 2024, illustrating the ongoing warming trend.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

Topic- Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Why are democracy and nationalism important for India: Nationalism and democracy

News: This article shows how democracy, originating in ancient Athens, and nationalism, emerging in 17th century Europe, have evolved over time. The article also highlights the challenges and importance of maintaining these principles in modern India,

How did democracy and nationalism develop over time?

Origin of Democracy: Democracy began in 6th century BCE Athens. Initially, it was limited, mainly to property owners, excluding women and slaves.

Evolution of Democracy: Over time, democracy evolved to become more inclusive, gradually expanding the right to vote to a wider section of the population.

Rise of Nationalism: Nationalism emerged in the 17th century, particularly after Europe's Thirty Years' War, influenced by the Peace of Westphalia. This introduced ideas like national sovereignty and defined territorial boundaries.

Nation Formation: Early nationalism often linked to ethnic identity, as seen in homogeneous nations like France and Germany. However, multiethnic empires like the Austrian-Hungarian and Ottoman existed alongside.

Post-War Nation-States: After World War I, many multiethnic empires dissolved, creating nation-states often based on ethnicity. Some, like the Soviet Union, included various ethnicities, leading to tensions.

Modern Plural States: Post-World War II, nations evolved into plural states with citizenship based on loyalty rather than ethnicity, culture, or religion.

For information on **Democracy** [read here](#)

For information on **Nationalism** [read here](#)

Why are democracy and nationalism important for India?

1. Democracy and nationalism are vital for India as they **unify a diverse population and give everyone a voice in governance**. With nearly a billion people voting in the upcoming 18th Lok Sabha elections, democracy allows citizens from various backgrounds to choose their leaders. This democratic process **strengthens national unity**.
2. Similarly, India's approach to nationalism, **embracing a multi-ethnic and pluralistic society** since independence in 1947, has **fostered a sense of belonging among its diverse population**.
3. Together, democracy and nationalism **promote stability and inclusivity in a nation** with over 1.4 billion people.
4. This combination is **crucial for India's ongoing transformation**, but it requires careful management and adherence to constitutional principles.

What are the challenges of maintaining democracy and nationalism in modern India?

Managing Diversity: India's immense diversity in religion, language, and culture presents a challenge in creating a unified national identity while respecting pluralism.

Ethnic and Cultural Tensions: The presence of multiple ethnicities and cultures, some resulting from historical multi-ethnic states, can lead to tensions and challenges in nation-building.

Constitutional Integrity: Upholding the constitution and its principles, especially in a vast and diverse democracy, requires constant vigilance and commitment.

Democratic Participation: Ensuring active and fair participation in the electoral process for India's vast population is a logistical and administrative challenge.

Balancing Nationalism with Inclusivity: Striking a balance between promoting nationalism and avoiding exclusion or marginalization of certain groups is crucial for social harmony and national unity.

Way forward

To move forward, India must continue strengthening its democratic processes and uphold the pluralistic nationalism enshrined in its Constitution.

Free Speech Check Unit - Government being judge, jury & executioner

News- The Supreme Court has recently stayed a government notification setting up a Fact Checking Unit (FCU).

Context- Government of India has notified the PIB's Fact-Check Unit (PIB-FCU) under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) as the fact check unit of the Central Government.

What is Fact-check unit?

Establishment- It was established under the Press Information Bureau in November 2019.

Objective- To act as a deterrence to creators and disseminators of fake news and misinformation.

What are the issues with setting up of fact-check Unit by the Government of India?

- 1) **Violative of freedom of speech and expression-** There are concerns that PIB's fact-check unit and its power to censor content may have a chilling effect on free speech and expression provided under Art 19(1)(a). Democratic politics is an open contestation of ideas and personalities.
- 2) **Suppressing dissent-** It is not required to provide written orders detailing its reasoning for taking certain actions. This provision can be used to suppress inconvenient journalism, dissent and disagreement.
- 3) **Violation of separation of power-** As it plays the role of judge, jury and executioner, it usurps the role of the courts in dealing with fake news. This is violative of the principle of separation of power.
- 4) **Ambiguity on definitions-** There is lack of a clear definition of what types of information qualify as 'fake or false or misleading'. This lack of clarity creates ambiguity and can lead to arbitrary censorship by the government.

Read more- [PIB's Fact-Check Unit](#)

Topic- Separation of powers between various organs (judiciary)

Judges joining politics in India: The judge's code

News: The article discusses how former Judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay joined politics right after leaving his judicial position. It compares his move with similar actions by past judges.

What are the former incidents of judges joining politics in India?

CJI K Subba Rao: He resigned three months before retirement and became the opposition's presidential candidate. Known for supporting civil liberties.

Justice Baharul Islam: Initially a politician, he served in the Rajya Sabha, became a High Court Judge, and then a Supreme Court Justice. He resigned five weeks early and was nominated for the Lok Sabha but returned to the Rajya Sabha. His judicial decisions faced scrutiny when re-entering politics.

Justice K S Hegde: He transitioned from being a Rajya Sabha member to a Supreme Court Justice, then left to successfully contest a Lok Sabha seat and became the Speaker of the lower house.

What are the major concerns of judges joining politics in India?

Judicial Impartiality: Concerns arise about a judge's neutrality if they enter politics, as seen with Justice Baharul Islam, whose political return led to scrutiny of his judicial decisions.

Institutional Integrity: Judge Gangopadhyay's actions, like conflicts with fellow judges and controversial public statements, raised questions about maintaining the judiciary's integrity.

Preserving Judicial Independence: Gangopadhyay's transition to politics right after resigning from a high judicial office can be seen as compromising the judiciary's independence, a concern echoed in past instances.

What should be done?

Uphold Judicial Standards: Judges should adhere to standards like the **Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct**. This means avoiding political bias and preserving the dignity of their office, as exemplified by Justice K S Hegde, who maintained a gap between his judicial and political careers.

Implement Self-Restraint: As former Supreme Court Judge E S Venkataramiah noted, judges must exercise self-restraint and humility. This helps curb personal biases and maintain judicial integrity.

Topic- Salient Features of the Representation of People's Act.

Time for a technology manifesto

5 Years ago, in the last general election, Indians did not give much importance to technology while casting their votes. Only few major political parties like BJP and INC have given some attention to it.

But the last 5 years have witnessed intensive adoption of digitization. It has turned technology into a mediator of power and access. Online platforms, smartphones, telecommunication networks have become an important part of ordinary Indians.

What was the digital vision of political parties in the last general election?

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- 1) The BJP highlighted technology as a catalyst for economic and social goals, including enhanced delivery of entitlements and increased farm incomes.
- 2) The INC highlighted digital rights reforms, addressing access, free expression, and privacy in a dedicated section.
- 3) The All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) supported legal reforms for surveillance etc.

Why should the political parties introduce technological manifestos for voters?

- 1) **Undemocratic practice**- Distancing political parties from regulating digital policies are not only unsustainable, but also anti-democratic. Online platforms, smartphones, telecommunication networks and data centres are part of the lives of ordinary Indians. Hence, there should be development of a digital society by its democratic representation.
- 2) **Digital Divide**-There is a need to highlight the inequitable and uneven distribution of digital growth. It has largely concentrated on urban, male, upper-income groups while large sections of the masses remain deprived of internet connectivity. This provides a basis to advance proposals of social justice by digitization and technology.
- 3) **Mainstreaming digital rights**-The coercive digitizing of public and welfare services; use of free and open-source software; mass citizen surveillance; online fear, abuse etc. require mainstreaming of digital rights in political discourse of country.
- 4) **Arbitrary internet shutdown**-Despite the Telecommunications Act of 2023, little has changed in the regulation of internet shutdowns. There have been many internet shutdowns in states like Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, and Rajasthan that has significantly affected millions of lower-income Indians reliant on smartphones. Addressing arbitrary internet shutdown requires a robust regulatory framework by keeping lower income citizens at its heart.
- 5) **Finding of CSEP report**- The Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) on public health observed that “a majority of voters say that the provision of health facilities affects their voting choice to some extent”. In a similar way, technologies that are essential for employment, health, and modern living may affect voting choice. Thus, voters may demand tech manifestos in future.

Read more- [What election manifestos must do, why they matter](#)

It is possible that no political party will win the next general elections on its technology promises. However, it is an opportune moment for all of them to offer an alternate digital vision for India.

Subject: Governance

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

Digital Competition Bill in India

News: The article discusses a new Digital Competition Bill in India. This Bill aims to regulate the digital sector and prevent anti-competitive practices.

What is the Digital Competition Bill?

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Drafting Process: The Bill was drafted by a 16-member committee on digital competition law after a year of deliberation.

Target Group: It focuses on regulating "**systemically significant digital enterprises**" (SSDEs), which are large tech firms with major revenue and user base in India. SSDEs are identified by having at least ₹4,000 crore in Indian revenue and \$30 billion globally.

Bill's Aims: Designed to prevent anti-competitive practices, ensure transparency, and curb unfair favoritism in the digital sector.

Current Status: The Bill is open for public comment and may require further adjustments before being finalized.

What are the benefits of the Digital Competition Bill?

Increases Transparency: Requires tech companies to be more transparent in their operations and dealings.

Protects Innovators and Startups: Exempts smaller companies and startups from stringent rules, encouraging innovation.

Aligns with Global Standards: Follows a similar approach to the EU's Digital Markets Act, showing an effort to align with international regulatory frameworks.

Boosts Digital Economy: By regulating effectively, it supports the growth of India's digital market, expected to reach \$800 billion by 2030.

How is the bill intended to regulate big tech companies?

1. The Digital Competition Bill intends to regulate big tech companies by requiring them to operate in a fair, transparent manner, and establish clear complaint-handling mechanisms.

2. It specifically prohibits these companies from unfairly favoring their own products or those of related parties.

3. Additionally, the Bill restricts the misuse of non-public data of business users and prevents the restriction of third-party apps.

4. It also bans practices like "steering" or "self-referencing" and predatory pricing.

5. These regulations apply alongside compliance with the existing Competition Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.

What are the concerns with the bill?

Stifling Innovation: There's worry that strict regulations could limit creativity and growth in the tech sector.

Too Much Power to Regulators: The Bill's ex-ante approach may give regulators excessive discretionary power, raising concerns about potential misuse.

Duplication with Existing Laws: It might overlap with provisions in the current Competition Act, leading to regulatory complexity and potential confusion.

Potential for Conflicting Decisions: This overlap could result in parallel inquiries and divergent rulings for the same issue under different laws.

New Citizenship Amendment Rules in India: Citizens on the edge

News: The article criticizes the new Citizenship Amendment Rules in India, stating that they create complex and unfair procedures for refugees seeking citizenship, don't protect their rights, and are likely to cause bureaucratic difficulties and uncertainty for applicants.

For details information on **Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019** [read here](#)

What are the new Citizenship Amendment Rules?

Scope of the Act: The Citizenship Amendment Rules implement the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, which offers Indian citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Pakistan who entered India before December 31, 2014.

Proof of Nationality and Entry: Applicants must prove their nationality and show they entered India before the cut-off date. This is difficult for those who fled persecution and may have lost important documents.

Committee-Based Processing: Applications are processed by state and district level committees, but the procedures and guidelines for these committees are not clearly defined.

Document Verification: The committees assess the authenticity of documents, a challenging task when the issuing authorities are non-existent or unclear, as observed in global examples like Afghan refugees in Australia.

Eligibility Certification: Applicants must provide certificates from local community institutions as proof of religious and national identity, but how these certificates will be assessed is unclear.

For more information on **Citizenship Amendment Rules** [read here](#)

What are the criticisms of the Citizenship Amendment Rules?

Promoting Religious Discrimination: The Rules are criticized for being arbitrary and discriminatory on religious grounds, offering citizenship routes primarily to non-Muslims.

Opaque Procedures: They establish complex and unclear procedures, lacking legal safeguards for asylum seekers, which could lead to a bureaucratic nightmare.

Documentary Burden: The emphasis on documentary evidence places an onerous burden on refugees who may not have access to such documents, especially those who fled persecution.

Committee Ineffectiveness: The Empowered and District Level Committees tasked with processing applications lack clear guidelines, raising concerns about their effectiveness and fairness.

Potential for Arbitrary Decisions: The lack of transparency and procedural clarity in the Committees' functioning could lead to arbitrary decisions, reminiscent of the issues faced in Assam's Foreigners Tribunals.

Topic- Important Aspects of Governance, Transparency and Accountability, E-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;

Role of digitization in India's economy: Data marketplaces: the next frontier

News: The article discusses how digitizing government operations and using **non-personal data (NPD)** can boost India's economy. However, India lacks strong rules for managing this data.

For details information on **Digital Economy** read [Article1](#), [Article 2](#)

What is the role of digitization in India's economy?

Boosting GDP: Digitization can potentially add \$450-500 billion to India's GDP by 2025, playing a crucial role in economic growth.

Government Operations: Rapid digitization in government processes enhances efficiency and transparency.
Utilizing Citizen Data: Government's collection and use of Non-Personal Data (NPD) aid in improving public services and decision-making.

Predictive Analytics: Applying AI and analytics to NPD helps in forecasting in areas like meteorology, infrastructure, and employment.

What are the different types of data collected?

Personal Data: This type involves identifiable information about individuals. It can be used to directly map an individual, like names or identification numbers.

Non-Personal Data (NPD): This is the primary type of data collected by the government. It excludes personal identifiers.

Data Use: Both types of data are crucial for governmental planning and public service delivery, with NPD serving as a significant resource for 'public good' applications.

What are the major concerns related to regulations for non-personal data in India?

Lack of Enforceable Regulations: Current policies like the **National Data Governance Framework Policy** offer only limited guidance without strict legal enforcement.

Risk of De-anonymisation: There's concern about the potential to identify individuals from NPD, compromising privacy.

Absence of Central Regulatory Authority: No dedicated body exists to oversee NPD usage and sharing.

Unclear Ownership and Sharing Mechanisms: Ambiguity in who owns NPD and how it should be shared among stakeholders.

Vulnerability to Misuse by Big Tech: Unregulated NPD could unfairly benefit large corporations, leading to privacy breaches.

Inefficiencies in Data Exchange: The current approach to data sharing is not optimized, hindering the full utilization of NPD in decision-making and public service enhancement.

What steps are taken to regulate the collection of data?

1) Regulation in India-

National Data Governance Framework Policy (NPD Framework): Introduced by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) to guide the use of NPD.

Expert Committee Recommendations: Led by **Kris Gopalakrishnan**, focusing on issues like de-anonymisation risks and data sharing mechanisms.

State-Level Initiatives: For example, the agriculture data exchange in Telangana, and the India Urban Data Exchange by the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs with the Indian Institute of Science.

2) Global Efforts

Australia: Implemented data exchange frameworks and protocols in various sectors like housing, employment, and agriculture.

United Kingdom: Established specific data exchanges to address unemployment and other social issues.

Estonia: Known for its advanced digital governance, Estonia has developed efficient data exchange systems.

Criticisms of Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) - India's voters deserve a bond

News: This article discusses the **Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS)** in India, introduced to provide a transparent way of funding political parties. However, concerns have been raised about its effectiveness in preventing black money in politics and the confidentiality of donor identities. The Supreme Court is involved in determining the legality and transparency of the scheme.

For details information on **EBS** [read here](#)

Why was EBS introduced?

Objective of Eliminating Black Money: EBS was introduced with the goal to eliminate black money from political funding, as stated by the finance minister in his 2017-18 Budget Speech.

Lack of Transparency in Political Funding: The scheme aimed to address the issue of political parties relying heavily on anonymous cash donations, often less than ₹20,000, which didn't require revealing the donor's identity.

Intended to Cleanse Political System: The idea was to create a 'clean' channel for political contributions, moving away from anonymous cash donations and towards a more traceable and accountable system.

Shift from Cash to Bank Transactions: It's aimed to enhance transparency in political funding by allowing contributions through bond purchases from the State Bank of India. This shift towards bank transactions was intended to make the process more traceable and accountable.

What are the criticisms of EBS?

Lack of Transparency: The anonymity of donors in the EBS prevents the public from knowing who funds political parties.

Questionable Source of Funds: Many bond purchasers seemed to have income disproportionate to their business, raising doubts about the legitimacy of their funds.

Legal and Ethical Concerns: The Supreme Court and the RBI questioned the EBS, especially its transparency, enforceability and traceability aspects.

For details information on **Electoral Bonds Scheme Verdict** [read here](#)

Potential for Misuse: The scheme's confidentiality clause makes it nearly impossible to link bond purchasers with political parties, opening doors for undisclosed and questionable political donations.

Complicated Enforcement under Section 7(4): This section of the EBS makes it difficult to disclose buyer information, thereby hindering investigations and reducing accountability.

What is the role of the State Bank of India (SBI) in the EBS?

The State Bank of India (SBI) is responsible for **issuing Electoral Bonds** in the EBS. However, questions have arisen about SBI's **record-keeping**, particularly whether it can **link bond purchases to specific donors and recipients**. This aspect has become crucial in discussions about the transparency and effectiveness of the EBS.

What should be done?

Parliamentary Oversight: Engage Parliament to develop more transparent and accountable funding methods, as the article suggests the legislative body holds the key to reform.

Public Awareness: Educate citizens about the importance of clean political funding to encourage demand for

more transparent practices.

Judicial Review: Allow the judiciary to periodically review and suggest improvements to the scheme, ensuring it aligns with democratic principles and transparency standards.

For information on **State Funding of Election** [read here](#)

Ombudsman needed in the aviation sector in India:

News: This article discusses the Indian Civil Aviation Ministry's idea of creating an ombudsman for the aviation sector. This is to better address passenger complaints and concerns, especially with issues like extra fees and refund policies, in a rapidly growing industry.

What are the issues with the aviation sector in India?

Extra Fees: Some low-cost carriers charge for seat selection at web check-in, which can be seen as deceptive fees.

Refund Policies: Confusion over who is responsible for refunds during flight cancellations, as seen during Covid-19.

Complaints Management: Existing systems like AirSewa may not fully address the growing number of passenger complaints.

Why is an ombudsman needed in the aviation sector in India?

Addressing Complaints: An ombudsman can effectively handle increasing passenger complaints, which the existing AirSewa helpline may not fully cover.

Transparency in Fees: To tackle issues like deceptive fees, such as the seat selection charges at web check-in by low-cost carriers.

Clarity in Refunds: To resolve confusion around refund policies, highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic with unclear responsibilities for refunds between airlines and booking portals.

Representation for New Flyers: Essential for representing the concerns of new consumers, especially with the projected increase in domestic passengers to 300 million by 2030, including many first-time flyers from smaller towns.

Topic- -Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Rising number of stray dog attacks

Context- Stray dogs kill thousands of Indians every through rabies, and dozens of other diseases. The World Health Organization estimates that the figure could be 20,000. Of these, "30% to 60%" are poor children under the age of 15.

What is the existing legal mechanism to deal with stray dogs?

- 1) India has among the most compassionate legal regimes in the world.
- 2) If a dog mauls and kills a child, the dog would be taken away for a few days and observed. If it does not appear aggressive, it will be returned to the same place where it has bitten the child.
- 3) There is no legal bar on people feeding stray dogs.

Read more- [The Issue of Stray dogs in India](#)

What are the arguments against the compassionate approach of the government and society in dealing with the issue of stray dogs?

- 1) **Favoring dogs over human poor**- A small group of global animal lovers has pressurized India into enacting sophisticated laws that favour dogs over the human poor.
- 2) **Public safety**- Stray dogs can pose a risk to public safety by attacking elderly people, children or other animals.
- 3) **Spread of diseases**- Stray dogs can carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans, such as rabies.
- 4) **Inconvenience**-Stray dogs can cause a nuisance by barking loudly, damaging property, and creating a mess. Lakhs of Indians are bitten every year; innumerable motorcyclists fall when they are chased by dogs.
- 5) **Ineffective control measures**-Measures like sterilization are not very effective. A sterilized dog can still bite and can spread 40 or 50 diseases. Further, it's not possible to vaccinate 60-80 million dogs every year.
- 6) **Suppression of natural instinct**-Like any animals, humans also want to exert control over their environment. So, in that context, India's decision to sacrifice human welfare, especially of the poor who are forced to share the immediate environment with stray dogs is violation of this basic right.

Eliminating diseases- One region at a time

Context- The Carter Center, a leader in the global elimination and eradication of diseases, has recently reported that guinea worm disease is close to eradication. From 3.5 million cases a year in 21 countries in 1986, the number had come down to 13 in five countries in 2023, a reduction of 99.99%. This would be the second disease after smallpox to be eradicated and the first one with no known medicines or vaccines.

What is the difference between Elimination and eradication of transmission?

Eradication of transmission- This is the permanent cessation of infection by a pathogen with no risk of reintroduction.

It is a highly desirable objective to enhance the health of the people, especially the poor who are most vulnerable to infectious diseases.

Elimination of transmission – It targets achieving zero transmission in a defined region. It is a step towards eradication.

What are the reasons to recommend disease elimination as a public health strategy?

- 1) **Meeting SDGs**-It energizes the public health system to meet the sustainable development goal of ending the epidemics of malaria, tuberculosis and Neglected Tropical Diseases by 2030.
- 2) **Improvement at grassroot level**- It would result in improvement in primary health care, diagnostics and surveillance.
- 3) **Encourage participation of workers**- It will ensure increased involvement of field staff and community health workers because they have a clearly defined goal before them.

4) **Nudge politicians**- It generates high political and bureaucratic commitment, and public support. These efforts positively impact the health system.

Read more- [Guinea worm disease](#)

What are the challenges in elimination of disease?

- 1) **Cost**-Elimination of transmission is challenging and resource intensive.
- 2) **Neglect of other diseases**-It imposes an additional burden on the system and could lead to the neglect of other important health functions, especially for weak health systems.

What should be the strategy to eliminate diseases in India?

- 1) **Pathogen specific approach**-It will be strategic to focus on pathogens whose impact on the population is high and whose numbers are low enough to make elimination feasible.
- 2) **Capacity building**-The government must invest in developing robust surveillance systems that could capture every incidence of the disease. The government needs to strengthen laboratories for screening and confirmation, train the workforce for meeting elimination goals and ensure availability of medicines.
- 3) **Adopting region specific approach**- It will be difficult to achieve elimination of many diseases for whole country. Thus, the government should adopt region specific approach. For ex- kala azar is now limited to just few blocks of 5 States in India. So,only these blocks can be targeted specifically.
- 4) **Multisectoral Collaboration**-There is a need for multisectoral collaboration and innovative strategies which prefer locally effective solutions at regional level. However, regional implementation needs constant technical and material support from centre.

Subject: International Relations

Topic- International relations- Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests

Shift of focus-From Indo-Pacific to Indian ocean region

Context - The Indian government has attached great focus on the Indo-Pacific region to strengthen the Quad. However, policy attention has shifted back to the Indian Ocean since October 2023 due to certain compelling reasons.

What was the need to shift focus from Indo-Pacific to Indian ocean region?

- 1) **Deterioration of India-Maldives relations** -The Maldives, with Mohamed Muizzu as President, has adopted an anti-India attitude. Despite New Delhi's patience and diplomatic tact, Male continues to deepen its pro-China policies. China has recently announced a new agreement under which unspecified military assistance would be extended to Maldives.
- 2) **Regionalization of Israel-Hamas conflict** - Both the Western Indian Ocean and the Northern Indian Ocean that stretch from the Arabian Sea to the Suez have become active geographies. There is gradual regionalization of the Israel-Hamas conflict. This was reflected in the attacks by Houthis rebels on international shipping which led to a massive drop in transits through the Suez Canal.
- 3) **Intensification of strategic contest between India and China**-China's strategic intent is to create an adverse environment for India's security by turning the country's neighbours against it. For ex- building of

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naval bases in Indian ocean littoral states such as Djibouti, Kyaukphyu, Gwadar, and Hambantota.

4) **Strategic ambiguity of European nations**-While European nations are concerned about China's illegal claims in the South China Sea, they fail to acknowledge China's **assertiveness** and **hostile intent** in Indian Ocean also. The geographic distance of the European nations from China gives them a sense of security.

Read more- [Strategic significance of Indo-Pacific region for India](#)

What should be the way forward?

1) **Priority to Indian ocean region**- India needs to convey a clear message to its strategic partners that while it is conscious of its Indo-Pacific responsibilities, it must prioritize the Indian Ocean region to secure its strategic interest in its immediate neighborhood.

2) **Review of IORA & CSC**-There is a need to review the working of Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC). IORA has been underperforming and CSC faces the danger of losing the Maldives due to its pro-China tilt.

3) **Creation of Indian Ocean Cooperation Organization**- There should be the creation of a new organization called Indian Ocean Cooperation Organization to bolster maritime security and optimizing the potential for the Blue Economy.

This group may comprise of four nations from the neighbourhood (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar) and four island states (Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros, and Madagascar).

4) **Strengthening Indian Navy**- Foreign Affairs Insights & Review ranked the Indian Navy the seventh most powerful in the world. To contain aggressive posturing of China and to become net security provider in Indo-Pacific, India should find new budgetary resources for its Navy to make it the third or fourth strongest.

Two wars and the consequences for America's standing

Context - United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer demanded a new government in Israel in the wake of rising civilian tolls in Israel Gaza war. This was equivalent of a political earthquake hitting U.S.-Israel ties that are becoming increasingly fragile.

What is the role played by USA in The Israel-Hamas and the Ukraine wars?

1) Ukraine war-

A) The U.S.A. has provided \$75 billion in military and civil aid to Ukraine since February 2022. This aid has been used in weapons purchases, keeping the government functional and its humanitarian requirements.

B) USA is providing substantial intelligence support to Ukraine in the form of real-time information on Russian deployments.

2) **Israel-Ghaza war**- It is perhaps, the only major country supporting Israel. Further, a substantial aid for Ukraine has been diverted for Israeli use by the Americans last October.

Read more- [Ramification of regime change in USA for India](#)

What will be the impact of U.S. election-year politics on both these wars?

1) **Current government retaining the power**- The trajectory of the Biden policy and its shape is known. However, great political and demographic changes are taking place in the manner with which the U.S. views the world. For example- younger Americans are less positively inclined to Israel than the older ones. As per YouGov poll, more people between the ages of 18 to 29 empathized with Palestinians than with Israelis. Thus, there will be cloud of uncertainty.

2) **Victory of Donald trump-**

A) **Ukraine War** - This would definitely affect U.S. policy towards Ukraine. He has already stated the USA would suspend military aid to Ukraine and his government would try to quickly negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war.

2) **Israel-Ghaza war-** As for is Israel is concerned, his government will remain a strong supporter. It is important to know that it was his government that has recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital in the place of Tel Aviv.

So, it is possible that his government may not criticize Israeli government for human rights violation in Ghaza. These policies may undermine the role of the U.S. as a guarantor of European security. Its unreliability will also affect its alliance relationships in the Indo-Pacific — with South Korea, Japan and the Philippines, and its growing partnership with India.

Free Speech Check Unit - Government being judge, jury & executioner

Source - This post on **Free Speech Check Unit-Government being judge, jury & executioner** has been created based on the article “**Express View on SC stay on Fact Check Unit: Judge, jur**

Topic- International relations- India and its Neighborhood- Relations

India-Bhutan relations

Context- The Prime Minister of Bhutan has recently visited India and there were excellent discussions with Prime Minister as well as the President of India. This week, Mr. Modi is to pay a return visit to Bhutan.

What is India's Neighbourhood First Policy?

Under its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, India is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbors.

How does relationship with Bhutan epitomize India's neighborhood first policy?

1) **Respect for Bhutan's unique cultural practice-**India has always respected Bhutanese identity, Bhutan's unique religious practices and its desire to be economically prosperous while retaining its own way of life. India has never posed any threat to Bhutan's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2) **The Gelephu project-**India, including its business entities, is going to play a significant role in development of Gelephu Mindfulness City. This project will lead to higher income for the people of Bhutan without compromising on its commitment to the principle of environmental sustainability.

Read more- [Gelephu Mindfulness City project: Bhutan's opening move. its Gelephu gambit](#)

3) **Hydropower Cooperation-**This is the bedrock of India's relations with Bhutan. Several cooperative hydro projects have been commissioned by the two governments. It supplies clean electricity to India and a source of sustainable revenue for Bhutan which has helped it to come out of the Least Developed Country status.

4) **Developmental aid-**India has been a major development assistance partner to Bhutan and contributed ₹5,000 crore to its 12th Five Year Plan. India does not merely undertake projects which are of benefit to it but also pays a lot of attention to the priorities of the Bhutanese people.

India-Nepal relations

News- Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda has recently won a vote of confidence in the 275-member lower house of Parliament recently.

What are areas of cooperation between India and Nepal?

1) **Humanitarian aid** - During the Covid-19 pandemic, India aided more than \$7 million to Nepal. This included the supply of more than 23 tones of medicines and medical equipment, more than 9.5 million doses of vaccines, and a medical oxygen plant.

2) **People to people exchange**-About 8 million Nepalese citizens live and work in India, and some 6 lakh Indians live in Nepal. Indians are about 30% of foreign tourists in Nepal. The bilateral remittance flow is estimated at \$3 billion from Nepal to India, and \$1 billion in the opposite direction.

A detailed article on India-Nepal Relationship can be [read here](#).

What is the impact of political instability in Nepal on India?

1) **Rise of Anti-India stance**- The new partner in the government is K P Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) which is known to have anti-India sentiments. For ex- During infamous trade blockade, Oli the then Prime Minister, portrayed India as the neighborhood bully in his country.

2) **Pro China tilt**-China has been pouring aid and investment in infrastructure to take Kathmandu away from New Delhi. Nepalese imports from China have almost tripled from last few years. With Oli, who has **clear China leanings**, back in government in Nepal, India will have to be more vigilant. India must keep people of Nepal at its Centre. It must ensure that China or its proxies do not get an opportunity to increase suspicion against India. More than an "elder brother", India should try to be an equal partner for Nepal.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

Topic: GS Paper 3- economy- mobilization of resources

Need for reforms in India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system

News: The article discusses the need for reforms in India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system.

What is the current status of UPI in India?

High Usage: As of February 2024, UPI recorded 12.1 billion transactions amounting to ₹18.3 trillion.

Dominant Payment Method: UPI transactions constitute over 80% of India's digital payments.

Free of Charge: UPI services are offered without transaction fees for both peer-to-peer and customer-to-merchant payments.

Government Support: Partial compensation for UPI enablers comes through a government scheme, despite the service being free.

For information on UPI [read here](#)

What are the benefits of UPI in India?

Public Good Status: As supported by the Finance Minister, UPI is considered a digital public good, demonstrating its importance and utility for the general population.

Economic Impact: By facilitating easy and cost-effective transactions, UPI contributes significantly to the digitalization and efficiency of India's economy.

User Trust: UPI's widespread adoption and major market share in India's digital payments sector highlight its benefits. Its reliability and ease of use have fostered trust among millions, making it a preferred choice for seamless financial transactions.

What are the criticisms of UPI in India?

Monopolistic Control: National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) sole authority over UPI limits competition and could lead to complacency.

Regulatory Concerns: The Reserve Bank of India, despite not holding equity in NPCI, plays a conflicting role as both owner and regulator.

Sustainability Issues: The zero-charge model for UPI transactions, though popular, raises concerns about long-term viability.

Imbalanced Market Share: Dominance by foreign entities like PhonePe and Google Pay, holding over 80% market share, limits local and smaller players' opportunities.

Lack of Transparency: NPCI's status as a not-for-profit organization and the unclear revenue model for participants create opacity in the UPI ecosystem.

For information on NPCI [read here](#)

How can the UPI system be improved?

Introduce Transaction Fees: Implementing merchant discount rates (MDRs) for UPI could make the system financially sustainable.

Encourage Competition: Licensing new entities, possibly as competitors to UPI, would enhance innovation and efficiency.

Promote Transparency: Clear policies on business revenue models for participants are needed for better financial clarity.

NPCI's Corporate Transformation: Transitioning NPCI to a for-profit company could increase transparency and investment opportunities.

Market Share Regulation: Instead of setting a quota for UPI players, alternative methods to encourage diversity in the market should be explored.

RBI's Policy Revision: Reconsidering RBI's decision to not pursue new umbrella entities (NUEs) might invigorate the digital payment landscape.

India's Goal for 2047: Sustaining rapid growth is challenging

News: The article discusses India's goal of becoming a developed country by 2047. It explains the challenges and factors needed for economic growth, comparing India's progress with other countries and emphasizing the importance of good policies and global conditions.

What is India's Goal for 2047?

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Developed Country Status: India's primary goal is to become a developed country by 2047, focusing on broad societal and economic development.

High-Income Economy: The target is to reach a per capita income of about US\$14,000, aligning with the World Bank's high-income country criteria.

Improving on Past Performance: Recognizing slower growth in earlier decades, the goal is to significantly accelerate development, similar to the post-1990s economic reforms.

What are the factors needed for India to become a developed country by 2047?

Economic Growth: India needs to **maintain an 8% annual growth rate until 2047**. This mirrors the growth rates of nations like South Korea and Singapore that have successfully developed.

Policy and Governance: Effective policies in areas like fiscal management, foreign trade, education, health, and law are crucial. This reflects the success factors of developed East Asian countries.

Global Context: India's progress will be influenced by global economic and geopolitical situations, as seen in the examples of Sudan and Yugoslavia, where external factors heavily impacted their development trajectories.

Technological Progress: Adapting and innovating in technology is vital, similar to how China and East Asian countries have advanced.

Addressing Climate Change and Resource Scarcity: Mitigating climate impacts and managing resources efficiently is essential, akin to global challenges faced by all developing nations.

What challenges do developing countries face?

Lack of Resources: Developing countries often have limited capital, skills, and technology. For instance, Sudan, despite its natural resources, remains poor due to a lack of these key elements.

Political Instability: Civil unrest and wars greatly hinder progress. Sudan's long civil wars have left it with a per capita income of just over \$500.

Economic Policies: Changes in economic regimes can disrupt growth. Yugoslavia, for example, saw its growth and development halt due to political fragmentation after changing its economic system.

Global Economic Conditions: The broader economic environment greatly impacts these countries, influencing their growth trajectories and ability to develop.

Topic- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Significance of Financial inclusion for India

News: The article discusses how increasing financial inclusion, especially among women, is crucial for development in India.

What is financial inclusion?

Financial inclusion is the delivery of financial services at affordable costs to all sections of society (including the disadvantaged and low-income segments).

The term 'Financial' includes all types of financial services, including savings, payments and credit from all types of formal financial institutions.

For more information [read here](#)

What factors influence financial inclusion?

Education's Role: Educated women are more likely to be aware of and use micro-credit schemes.
Impact of Digital Skills: Women with digital skills are more inclined to engage in digital financial transactions.
Occupation Matters: Working women, irrespective of their job type, often know about and use loan programs.
Media Access: Access to electronic media influences financial literacy and service usage.
Age Factor: Younger women tend to adopt digital modes of payment more readily.
Household Influence: The gender of the household head and their assets affect access to micro-credit programs.

Why is financial inclusion important for India?

Supports Sustainable Development: Financial inclusion is **linked to 8 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals**, essential for India's overall progress.
Reduces Gender Disparities: The NFHS data underscores the reduction in the gender gap in financial sectors, resonating with findings from the **Global Gender Gap Report** and highlighting the significance of inclusive finance in gender equality.
Boosts Women's Economic Empowerment: By increasing women's access to financial services, it enhances their economic independence and opportunities.
Facilitates Widespread Account Ownership: The increase in bank account ownership, with a **significant 42% rise in India**, demonstrates its expanding reach.
Improves Social and Economic Growth: Broad financial inclusion contributes to the overall socio-economic development of the country.

What are the government initiatives for financial inclusion in India?

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana: This initiative greatly contributed to opening over 28 crore bank accounts for women, enhancing their financial access.
Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana: National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM): Focuses on improving rural women's livelihoods and financial stability.
Skill India Mission: Provides skill training, helping women gain employment and financial independence.
Mission Shakti: Aims at empowering women through various socio-economic measures.
Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana: Offers housing-related financial assistance, improving women's living conditions and economic stability.
Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana: A maternity benefit program that supports women financially during pregnancy and childbirth.

Topic- Changes in Industrial Policy and their Effects on Industrial Growth.

EV import policy can face execution challenges

News- The government has recently announced the reduction on import duties on electric vehicles (EVs) if the EV manufacturer produces vehicles in India.

What are the provisions of trade policy regarding manufacturing of electric vehicles?

- 1) **Objective**-To position India as a manufacturing hub for electric vehicles (EVs) with cutting-edge technology.
- 2) **Investment Threshold**- A minimum investment of ₹4150 Crore (approximately USD 500 Million) is required to participate. There's no upper limit on investment, encouraging large-scale manufacturing facilities.
- 3) **Timelines and Localization**- Companies have 3 years to set up manufacturing plants in India and begin EV production. They must achieve a domestic value addition (DVA) of 25% within 3 years and 50% within 5 years.
- 4) **Import Duty Concessions**- To incentivize participation, companies can import a limited number of EVs at a concessional customs duty of 15%. For ex-for models of electric cars with a combined cost, insurance, and freight price in India of \$35,000 or above, the tariffs will be slashed from 100 to 15%.

What are the issues with the new policy?

- 1) **Entry of Chinese Giant**-It is possible that China's BYD which dominates the Electric car market could enter India and gives stiff competition to domestic manufacturer.
- 2) **Lack of clarity**-To build a global value chain, it is important that not only the tariffs on the final product be reduced, but also on intermediate goods. There is no clarity on reduction of important duties for intermediate goods.

What are the challenges in execution of this policy?

- 1) **Monitoring**-It will be difficult to track the cooperation of a company that has received a reduction in duties. It is possible that the company may not fulfill its commitment.
- 2) **Lack of effective guidelines**-There will be delays in the investment and meeting of localization requirements by the companies that have been granted concessions. There is no clarity on how the government deals with firms that ultimately fail to fulfil investment targets.
- 3) **Issue with concession-based mechanisms**-As per experts, trade policy requires overall low and stable tariffs for sectors that are relevant for entering global value chains. Such concession-based mechanisms are always difficult to track and make policies less consistent.

India's manufacturing sector relies on foreign countries: It's time to put a figure on India's exposure to global value chains

News: This article explains how India's manufacturing sector relies on foreign countries, especially China, for key materials. It shows that India is more dependent on China than it appears because even products from other countries often have Chinese components.

How does reliance on global supply chains, especially China, affect India's manufacturing sector?

Rising Trade Deficit: India's industrial sector trade deficit with China reached \$84.4 billion in 2022, a 27% increase from 2021, highlighting growing reliance.

Complex Global Value Chains: India's dependence on China is more intricate due to global value chains; parts and components are often sourced from multiple countries.

High Look-Through Exposure to China: On average, 23% of India's foreign-sourced manufacturing inputs are indirectly from China, revealing a deeper reliance than apparent at first glance.

Increased Dependence Over Time: India's reliance on Chinese inputs has risen sharply from 5% in 2000 to 23% in 2022, indicating growing vulnerability.

Critical Sectors Affected: Key Indian sectors like basic metals, transport, and electrical equipment are significantly dependent on foreign, especially Chinese, inputs.

What research method was used to analyze how much a country relies on foreign inputs in manufacturing?

Replicating Baldwin's Study: The analysis follows the methodology used by Richard Baldwin et al., focusing on the interdependencies in manufacturing sectors.

Utilizing OECD Input-Output Tables: The research employs input-output tables from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to track the flow of products between countries.

Measuring Face-Value Exposure: This aspect considers the direct origins of intermediate products used by a country's manufacturing sector, like India's electronics sector sourcing from Vietnam.

Assessing Look-Through Exposure: This deeper analysis identifies the original sources of these intermediate products, such as Vietnamese suppliers relying on Chinese inputs, revealing indirect dependencies.

Way forward

To reduce dependency, India should diversify its manufacturing inputs, source from various countries, and possibly attract foreign investment. This approach would mitigate risks evident from the high trade deficit and growing indirect reliance on China, as seen in sectors like metals and transport equipment.

Subject: Agriculture

Topic - - Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm Subsidies and Minimum Support Prices.

Diversify the crop basket

Context - The article highlights the lessons that can be learnt by Punjab from other states to improve its productivity.

Which states are the most productive states in terms of value creation in agriculture on a per hectare (ha) basis?

There are two ways to estimate the productivity-

1) Divide state Agri-GDP by Net Sown Area (NSA)- In this, Andhra Pradesh (AP) has the highest productivity, followed closely by West Bengal (WB). Punjab ranks 13th.

2) Divide Agri-GDP by Gross Cropped Area (GCA)-In this, Bihar has the highest productivity followed by Odisha.

What are the reasons behind the poor performance of Punjab in terms of value creation in agriculture?

1) **Faulty MSP regime**-Punjab is over-dependent on rice-wheat system induced by the MSP regime and open-ended procurement. Therefore, Punjab could not diversify production baskets geared towards high-value products.

2) **Subsidies** - The government gives free power and highly subsidized fertilizers to farmers. These subsidies encourage adoption of the rice-wheat system. For ex- 84% of Punjab's Gross cropped Area is under wheat and rice, leading to 76 per cent of its blocks being over-exploited in terms of groundwater.

What are the steps that can be taken by Punjab to address this issue?

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- 1) **Shift to other crops** - A minimum of 1.5 million hectares (Mha) of rice area (out of about 4.5 Mha) needs to be shifted to pulses, oilseeds, maize and fruits and vegetables.
- 2) **Crop-neutral incentive structures** - There is a need for institutionalizing crop-neutral incentive structures. Farmers switching to these alternative crops must be rewarded with about Rs 25,000/ha.

Read more- [MSP Guarantee Law and Farmer's Protest](#)

What are the lessons that Punjab can learn from other high performing states?

- 1) **Andhra Pradesh** - With 24 % of its agriculture value added (AGVA) attributed to fisheries, AP leads the nation in fish production. It is this proficiency in cultivating high-value shrimp that boosts their profitability. Punjab can also adopt this method.
- 2) **Tamil Nadu** - It employs **Ultra High-Density Plantation (UHDP)** for mango cultivation. This method allows 674 mango trees per acre compared to the traditional method of 40 only. This leads to a significant increase in yield and profits.
- 3) **West Bengal** - This is a state with only 2 % agriculture power consumption in 2021-22 creating 40% more value than Punjab. It cultivates vegetables on 15 % (1.5 Mha) of its total GCA. The state has a dedicated Agri-Export Zone (AEZ) for vegetables.

Punjab and Haryana need to embrace a demand-driven high-value agricultural system, if they truly want their farmers to be prosperous. This would require shedding the mindset of an MSP-based cropping system.

Topic- Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Small Scale LNG - A big idea

News- The Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri has recently dedicated to the nation India's first small-scale liquefied natural gas (SSLNG) unit at GAIL (India) Ltd's Vijaipur complex in Madhya Pradesh.

What is SSLNG (small-scale liquefied natural gas)?

- 1) It refers to gas in its liquid or super-chilled form supplied in specialized trucks and small vessels to industrial and commercial consumers in regions not connected by pipelines.
- 2) The SSLNG chain can start from a large-scale LNG import terminal from where the LNG can be transported to consumers by **cryogenic road tankers or small vessels**.
- 3) The chain can also start at locations with ample natural gas supply or production, where small liquefaction plants can be set up. For ex-The SSLNG unit at Vijaipur.

Read more- [Energy Transition In India](#)

What is the significance of small-scale liquefied natural gas (SSLNG) unit?

- 1) **Transition to green energy**-The government aims to increase the share of natural gas in its primary energy mix to 15% by 2030 from 6% at present. This is because natural gas is far less polluting than conventional hydrocarbons like coal and oil. It is seen as a key transition fuel in India's journey towards green energy and future fuels.
- 2) **Decarbonization of transportation sector**-It is cleaner fuel with reduced emission of carbon dioxide and negligible amounts of particulate matter, nitrogen oxide, and Sulphur dioxide as compared to diesel.
- 3) **Overcome transportation challenge of Natural Gas**-There are many places that are not connected by the

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country's natural gas pipeline grid. This hinders the use of LNG directly as fuel for long-haul trucks and inter-city buses. This challenge can be overcome by small-scale liquefied natural gas unit.

4) **Save forex reserve**-It is usually cheaper than crude oil, from which diesel is derived. Thus, replacing a major chunk of India's diesel consumption by LNG could lead to substantial foreign exchange savings.

What are the challenges in its wider adoption?

- 1) **Paucity of LNG-powered vehicles**-There is shortage of LNG-powered vehicles in India.
- 2) **High cost**-The LNG-powered vehicles have higher initial cost as compared to diesel run vehicles.
- 3) **Financing ecosystem**- India does not have a robust LNG vehicle financing ecosystem.
- 4) **Retail network**-India does not have LNG retail network.

What steps have been taken to overcome this challenge?

1) Companies such as GAIL and Petronet are working to build a viable ecosystem for transporters to move from diesel vehicles to LNG.

2) Petronet has collaborated with commercial vehicle manufacturers and other public sector oil & gas companies for trials and pilot projects for LNG-fuelled trucks and buses.

3) Petronet has established a few LNG dispensing stations along highways. Similarly, Indian Oil Corporation is also planning to build LNG dispensing stations along major highways.

Present status of nuclear energy

News: The first-ever Nuclear Energy Summit was held recently in Brussels. The summit highlights nuclear energy's role in combating climate change.

What is the Significance of Nuclear Energy in Combating Climate Change?

Environmental advantages: COP28 recognized nuclear energy's capacity to significantly reduce carbon emissions, compared to solar farms and other renewable sources. The declaration at the conference agreed for tripling nuclear capacity by 2050.

Source of continuous energy: It can become a source to provide uninterrupted energy, without any geographical limitation.

Economic Advantages: With lower operating costs, smaller land requirements, and longer life cycles, nuclear power stands out among renewable energy sources.

However, there's a significant gap in nuclear energy financing from Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and private investors.

What are the financing mechanisms and technological advancement opportunities in the nuclear energy field?

Small Modular Reactors (SMR) and extended fuel cycles enhance safety and efficiency. Which reduces nuclear-related risks and opens the industry to private investment.

Successful Cooperative Funding Models from France, South Korea, Russia, and the U.K. demonstrate the viability of cooperative funding models.

Recent liberalization efforts, including invitations for private investment and plans for substantial capacity expansion. It signals a promising future for India's nuclear energy sector.

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic- Science and technology-Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics.

Role of AI in elections: Many elections, AI's dark dimension

News: The article discusses the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its advanced form, Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), on elections and society.

For details information on **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)** read [Article1](#), [Article2](#)

What is the role of AI in upcoming elections?

Influencing Voter Behavior: AI, particularly Generative AI, has the potential to significantly influence voter behavior and decision-making in elections, as seen in the anticipation for the 2024 elections.

Spreading Disinformation: AI's ability to create hyper-realistic Deep Fakes and false narratives poses a risk of spreading disinformation, potentially misleading the electorate.

Amplifying Falsehoods: AI technologies can enhance falsehoods and enlarge mistaken beliefs, contributing to a heightened level of misinformation during election campaigns.

Adversarial Capabilities: AI systems might develop adversarial capabilities such as 'poisoning' and 'back dooring', which could be used to manipulate election outcomes or voter perceptions.

What are the concerns about AI?

Disruption to Democracies: AI's ability to create convincing falsehoods and to spread disinformation poses a risk to democratic processes.

Existential Threats: AI systems may develop adversarial capabilities such as 'poisoning', 'back dooring', and 'evasion', reducing their reliability and potentially causing harm.

Reliability Issues: As seen with Google AI's portrayal errors, AI models can sometimes be inaccurate or misleading.

Dependability Concerns: AI's tendency for 'hallucinations', or making probabilistic errors, makes it hard to fully trust AI systems in critical scenarios.

How should India approach AI?

Exercise Caution: Given its advanced digital status, India should approach AI, especially AGI, with caution, recognizing its disruptive potential.

Regulatory Measures: Implementing regulations to manage AI's impact, particularly in elections, is crucial to safeguard democratic processes.

Awareness of Risks: Leaders and policymakers should be aware of AI's risks, such as spreading disinformation and its adversarial capabilities like 'poisoning' and 'back dooring'.

Balancing Benefits and Threats: While AI offers significant benefits, India must balance these against potential harms, including bias and the creation of misleading or harmful content

Concerns of AI in finance: Regulating AI in finance looks like a wild goose chase

News: This article discusses the challenges of regulating artificial intelligence (AI) in finance. It highlights concerns about AI's transparency, biases, and misuse.

For detailed information on AI read - [Article1](#), [Article2](#)

What are the concerns of AI in finance?

Ethical Concerns: There is a significant risk that AI systems, driven by flawed or incomplete data, may adopt biases. This may lead to decisions that don't align with ethical standards expected in financial practices.

Transparency Issues: The decision-making processes within AI systems are complex and not easily understood, which can lead to a lack of trust and difficulties in assessing the fairness and accuracy of AI-driven decisions.

Misuse of AI: There's a significant concern about the misuse of AI in finance, especially in exploiting regulatory loopholes for profit. The complexity of AI systems makes such misuse hard to detect for regulators and competitors, adding a layer of risk to the financial sector.

Why is regulating AI challenging?

Rapid Evolution: AI technology evolves quickly, making it hard for regulations to keep up.

Complexity: The intricate nature of AI systems complicates understanding and effective regulation.

Technology Gap: There's a widening gap between regulatory capabilities and technological advancements, leading to supervision lagging behind necessary responses.

What should be done?

Adopt Advanced Supervision Tools: Regulators should employ real-time digital supervision techniques. Utilizing activity-based supervision and algorithmic data analytics proactively can improve oversight and understanding of AI in finance.

Enhance Transparency: There's a need to increase the transparency of AI systems. Making the decision-making processes of AI more understandable and clearer can build trust and allow for better regulation.

Close the Technology Gap: Addressing the gap between regulatory capabilities and technological advancements is crucial. Regulators need to equip themselves with the latest tools to effectively monitor and regulate financial activities in the digital age.

Focus on Ethical AI Use: Emphasizing the ethical use of AI in financial sectors should be a priority. This includes ensuring that AI decisions are unbiased and adhere to ethical standards.

Continuous Adaptation: Given AI's rapid evolution, regulators must continuously adapt their strategies and tools to stay effective. This ongoing adaptation is vital to manage financial risks effectively.

Subject: Environment

Topic- Environmental Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

IPCC Assessment Reports: The problem of equity in IPCC reports

News: The article discusses a study that reviewed over 500 climate change scenarios from the IPCC. It found that these scenarios show ongoing disparities between rich and poor countries in income, energy use, and emissions until 2050.

What are IPCC Assessment Reports?

IPCC Assessment Reports review scientific information about climate change. They include three Working Group reports:

- a) Physical science aspects of climate change.
- b) Climate adaptation strategies.
- c) Mitigation actions to reduce climate change.

There's also a synthesis report combining findings from all three groups.

These reports evaluate scientific literature to understand climate change's scientific, technical, and socio-economic aspects.

The IPCC is currently in its Seventh Assessment cycle (AR7).

Over 500 scenarios were analyzed, reflecting on actions like reducing carbon dioxide emissions and increasing carbon sequestration.

How does IPCC assess future scenarios?

1. IPCC assesses future scenarios using Integrated Assessment Models (IAMs).
2. IAMs combine human, earth systems, economics, energy, and vegetation models.
3. These models consider: a) Macroeconomic trends like GDP growth, b) Future energy consumption patterns, c) Land-use changes, d) Climate evolution based on physics laws.
4. IAMs aim to offer policy-relevant guidelines for climate action.
5. However, these models prioritize least-cost assessments. For example, they assess the cost of solar plants or afforestation in different countries, but this approach may not equitably distribute climate action burdens between rich and poor countries

What did the recent study find?

The study analyzed 556 scenarios from the IPCC's AR6 report. It focused on future emissions, mitigation actions, and carbon sequestration. Key findings include:

1. Persistent income, energy-use, and emissions disparities between developed and developing countries until 2050.
2. Regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, West Asia, and the rest of Asia, home to 60% of the world's population, will have per-capita GDP below the global average in 2050.
3. Inequities in goods and services consumption, and energy and fossil fuel use, between the Global North and South.
4. Higher burden on developing countries for mitigation actions and carbon dioxide removal.

Why does equity matter in climate change?

1. Equity in climate change is crucial due to varied responsibilities and capabilities of countries.
2. The principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities are central to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Article 3 of the UNFCCC states that **climate action should be based on equity, with developed countries taking the lead.**
3. Richer countries have greater resources and historical contributions to climate change, implying they should shoulder more responsibility. Current climate models often overlook these equity principles, focusing mainly on technical and economic feasibility.
4. The study highlighted that modelled pathways need to align with equity, ensuring developed countries accelerate towards net negative emissions and leave the remaining carbon budget for less developed regions. However, the scenarios often project the opposite.

India's severe air pollution problem: Express View on IQAir's pollution report

News: The article discusses India's severe air pollution problem. It highlights that not only big city like Delhi, but also smaller cities are suffering from very poor air quality. **The Swiss agency IQAir's report** shows worsening conditions and emphasizes the need for better pollution control and coordination among agencies.

For details information on **World Air Quality Report 2023** [read here](#)

What is the cause of air pollution in India?

1. In Delhi, **geographical factors** play a role, alongside **residents' transport choices**. **Industrial activities** and **construction work** are significant contributors.
2. **Crop stubble burning** in areas around Delhi worsens the city's air quality.
3. A **lack of comprehensive data on pollution sources** hinders effective solutions, especially in smaller cities.
4. The **spread of pollution to Tier 2 cities** like Guwahati and Patna shows a broader trend. These causes, as identified in the IQAir report, illustrate the complexity of India's air pollution problem.

What can be done to mitigate air pollution?

1. **Addressing staff shortages in state pollution bodies** to improve monitoring and enforcement.
2. Implementing targeted interventions in specific airsheds where pollution accumulates due to geographical or meteorological conditions. The National Clean Air Programme emphasizes such **targeted approaches** for effective results.
3. **Enhancing coordination** between local, state, and central agencies for unified action.
4. **Tackling pollution from varied sources** like agriculture, industry, power plants, transport, and households.
5. Successful mitigation **requires a comprehensive strategy** addressing all contributing factors to air pollution.

For details information on **Air Quality Management Plan** in India [read here](#)

Water- An instrument of global conflict and build world peace

Context- World Water Day, which falls on March 22, is a global initiative backed by the United Nations. It has been observed every year since 1993. The theme this year is “Leveraging Water for Peace.”

Around 2 billion people are facing persistent global challenge of securing access to clean water. Water scarcity threatens individual well-being and collective prosperity. Therefore, there is a need for sustainable management of water resources.

What are the reasons for water crisis in India?

Read more- [Water Crisis in India](#)

What is the impact of scarcity of water?

- 1) **Endanger water security-** It leads to the poor functioning of ecosystems. It also threatens food and water security.
- 2) **Hamper peace-** According to the World Resources Institute, 17 countries face ‘extremely high’ levels of water stress which may lead to **conflict, unrest** and **peace** among people. It has been a cause of conflict in the past as well. For Example, the disputes between the Mesopotamian cities of Lagash and Umma over water resources.
- 3) **Impact on Rural Livelihoods:** With a significant portion of the world's rural population relying on water for agriculture, water scarcity directly impacts livelihoods.
- 4) **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Transboundary water cooperation is integral to realizing the SDGs. It highlights the interconnectedness of water management with health, food security, and ecosystem services.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Rainwater harvesting-** There is a need to adopt rainwater harvesting (in-situ and ex-situ) in India. It enables resilience against water scarcity and drought by increasing recharge and aiding irrigation.
- 2) **Rejuvenation of ponds-** Existing government's such as the watershed management, Mission Amrit Sarovar and the Jal Shakti Abhiyan programmes give emphasis on water conservation and rainwater harvesting, rejuvenation of waterbodies.
However, there is the need for a protocol of the revival of ponds/waterbodies.
- 3) **Additional Measures-** There is a need for some additional interventions to ensure ‘**water for peace**’ such as -
 - a) **Monitoring-**There should be effective monitoring of the groundwater table and the reclamation of the water quality of groundwater, rivers and waterbodies.
 - b) **Circular water economy-**There should be effective pricing of water uses and promotion of a **circular water economy**.
 - c) **Efficient irrigation system-**Ensuring efficient irrigation techniques such as integrating water resources with micro-irrigations systems and IOT based automation.
There is a need to grow low water requirement crops and adoption of optimal crop plan that has integrated farming system models.
 - d) **Ending Freebies-**Populist policies like free electricity should be done away with.
 - e) **Enhanced Water Diplomacy and International Law:** The adoption of universal principles for International Water Law and improved cooperation over water-sharing are crucial. This approach can facilitate equitable water allocation, fostering regional stability and peace.

F) Inclusive Water Governance: Collaborative governance, which involves all stakeholders, including indigenous and local communities, is essential. It will ensure effective and equitable water allocation among nations.

G) Addressing Transboundary Water Challenges: A sophisticated form of cross-border water governance is required to manage the world's freshwater resources effectively, especially in transboundary contexts.

Subject: Disaster Management

Topic- -Disaster management- Forest fire

Status of forest fires in India: Heat, aridity, clear skies

News: The article details forest fires in the Coonoor forest range, Tamil Nadu, where the Indian Air Force used an Mi-17 V5 helicopter with a Bambi Bucket to drop water on the fires. This is part of efforts to control the intense wildfires in the region.

What is the current status of forest fires in India?

Frequency and Season: As per the **India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2019**, forest fires are common in India, particularly from November to June.

High Risk Areas: The ISFR 2019 identifies over 36% of India's forest cover as fire-prone (about 4% extremely prone' to fire, and another 6% was 'very highly' fire prone). Northeast India, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Uttarakhand face severe risks.

2024 Fire Incidents: FSI data shows the highest number of fires in Mizoram (3,738), Manipur (1,702), Assam (1,652), Meghalaya (1,252), and Maharashtra (1,215).

South India's Trends: Despite generally lower risk, Tamil Nadu has experienced increased wildfire incidents.

What are the reasons for forest fires in India?

Human Actions: Fires often start due to human activities like discarding cigarettes, leaving campfires unattended, and burning debris.

Natural Causes: Lightning strikes are a frequent natural cause of forest fires.

Climatic Factors: This year, the spread of forest fires is influenced by high aridity, above-normal temperatures, and clear sky conditions, especially in Southern India.

Recent Temperature Trends: Southern India experienced exceptionally high temperatures recently, with February being the hottest since 1901, contributing to dry forest conditions.

Specific Regional Conditions: The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) reported high Excess Heat Factor (EHF) in western Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, with temperatures hitting 40 degrees Celsius, unusually high for mid-March, increasing the risk of fires.

Topic- Role of Media and Social Networking Sites in Internal Security Challenges, Basics of Cyber Security; Money-Laundering and its prevention.

Time for digital “nakabandi”

Context- CERT-In, along with CSIRT-Fin, has recently issued a whitepaper on Application Programming Interface (API) security. This should give a boost to digital nakabandi. It is the tactical term for access control and area domination by law enforcement authorities. This is particularly important in the backdrop of rising guerilla tactics employed by hackers and cyber-prowlers

What is an API?

APIs are mechanisms that enable two software components to communicate with each other using a set of definitions and protocols. For example, the weather bureau’s software system contains daily weather data. The weather app on your phone “talks” to this system via APIs and shows you daily weather updates on your phone.

What is the significance Of API for digital economy?

India is pacing towards a largely digital economy in which API is the mainstay of the sharing mechanism. It facilitates seamless data exchange between applications. It empowers banks to enhance customer experience and create revenue streams.

Read more- [Cyber attacks and Cyber Security in India](#)

What are the steps taken by the government to promote data sharing?

- 1) The government's e-governance initiatives like the Open Government Data (OGD) platform have over 5 lakh resources, 12,000 catalogues and over 1 lakh APIs.
- 2) The government has launched a Policy on Open Application Programming Interfaces that sets out the government's approach to the use of Open APIs to promote software interoperability for all e-governance applications.
- 3) The National Data and Analytics Platform (or NDAP) is NITI Aayog's flagship initiative that hosts datasets from across India's vast statistical infrastructure.

What are the issues with data sharing in India?

- 1) There is no model data-sharing toolkit that could help chief data officers to manage risk associated with the sharing and release of data sets. Consequently, many data cells are reluctant to share data sets.
- 2) The source code is not hidden from partners while linking various systems.

What are some norms for API security?

There is use of token-based authentication to securely manage access tokens, securely managing and storing API keys.

There are security assessments, and regular updating of response plans to address and mitigate the impact of potential API attacks.

What are the issues with traditional norms for API security?

- 1) A person can access an API any number of times from one IP or ID. Therefore, many data breaches use this route of data aggregation through excessive exposure and then misusing it.

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- 2) There is no search limit for sensitive or resource-intensive data
- 3) There is no restriction on the number of requests from a single user or IP address to prevent attacks.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Digital nakabandi**- The digital nakabandi must include implementing rate-limiting to distribute the allowed number of search requests evenly over time and tying request limits to user authentication. In the case of sensitive or resource-intensive data, there is a need to set lower request limits.
- 2) **Leveraging Artificial Intelligence**- Organizations should leverage machine learning to analyze unique user behaviors. Analyzing the typical search behavior of one's users, with AI-based models, is very important.