

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



1st Week

May. 2024

Features :

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

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GS Paper 1

Subject: Geography

Topic- geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes

Indian Ocean Warming and Its Impact

Context-The article discusses the likely impact of increase in warming of Indian ocean on monsoon patterns, intensity of cyclones etc.

What does the recent study led by scientists at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune predict?

The study predicts the impact of expected global carbon emission trends on the Indian Ocean. It highlights that the Indian Ocean has already warmed by 1.2° C and could further heat up by 1.7° C to 3.8° C from 2020 to 2100.

What are the potential consequences of this warming trend in the Indian Ocean?

- 1) **Increase in Marine Heatwaves**-The study warns of an increase in 'marine heatwaves', which could rise from an average of 20 days per year to 220–250 days per year.
- 2) **Increase in thermal capacity of ocean**- The ocean's heat is rising, not just on the surface but also from the surface down to 2,000 meters below. Currently, it's increasing at a rate of 4.5 zetta-joules per decade in that depth range. It's expected to speed up to 16–22 zetta-joules per decade in the future.
NOTE- Joule is a unit of energy and 1 zetta joule is a billion-trillion joules (10^{21}).
- 3) **Impact on biodiversity**-This prolonged heating could lead to a near-permanent heatwave state in the tropical Indian Ocean, causing coral bleaching and harming the fisheries sector.

Read more- [Impact of Climate Change on Monsoon](#)

How does the warming of the Indian Ocean impact mainland India?

- 1) The warming of the Indian Ocean can lead to an increase in severe cyclones and make the monsoon more erratic.
- 2) This could result in longer periods of drought followed by intense rainfall and flooding on the mainland.

What is the limitation of current global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions pose in addressing the warming of the Indian Ocean?

The current global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions may not be able to significantly mitigate the warming of the Indian Ocean. This is because, unlike land, the oceans respond more slowly to changes in external inputs thus making it challenging to reverse the warming trend.

Way forward-India should partner with neighboring countries to gather more data, which is currently lacking compared to the Pacific. This data will help make better predictions and guide efforts to protect people and infrastructure.

Subject: Indian Society

Topic- Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.

The debate around a sunbeam ('surya tilak')

Context: The article discusses the debate around a sunbeam ('surya tilak') focused on the forehead of a Ram idol in the Ayodhya temple. Some scientists criticized the involvement of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), arguing it mixes science with religion and challenges scientific principles.

What debate has focused on a sunbeam ('surya tilak') around the forehead of a Ram idol in the Ayodhya temple?

The debate began when a focused sunbeam ('surya tilak') was engineered to fall on the forehead of a Ram idol in Ayodhya.

Abhay Karandikar of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) said the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) played a crucial role.

Critics objected to the IIA's involvement, arguing that a college student could have designed the system, and said it mixed science and religion, undermining scientific thinking.

How has India approached the science-religion relationship?

Accommodative Science: India has historically embraced both science and religion. The 1956 **Calendar Reform Committee (led by Meghnad Saha)** adjusted local calendars to a national standard while accommodating religious practices.

DST Projects: The Department of Science and Technology (DST) funded **SATYAM (Science and Technology of Yoga and Meditation)** and research on cow products, blending traditional knowledge and scientific investigation.

Temple Projects: The Central Building Research Institute (CBRI) and the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) helped in temple projects, like setting up the 'surya tilak', showing how scientific principles are incorporated into religious contexts.

The definition of "pregnant persons"

Context: The article discusses a Supreme Court (SC) ruling that broadened the definition of "pregnant persons" to include non-binary and transgender men, not just cisgender women. This shift promotes more inclusive language, supporting better legal and healthcare protections for diverse gender identities.

What is the definition of "pregnant persons"?

"Pregnant persons" is a term used by the Supreme Court to include all individuals capable of pregnancy, regardless of gender identity.

In the **A (Mother of X) v. State of Maharashtra case**, this term was used over 40 times by the bench led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud.

The definition covers non-binary people and transgender men, in addition to cisgender women. For details information on **Same Sex Marriage Verdict** [read this Article here](#)

What is the context of the decision?

The Supreme Court ruling aligns with its **Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes**, which emphasizes unbiased legal language.

Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud stated outdated terms hinder the law's transformative role and equality for all genders.

The decision follows the court's earlier judgment urging legislative safeguards for same-sex couples.

What is the implication of the Supreme Court ruling that broadened the definition of "pregnant persons"?

1. Using gender-neutral terms promotes legal recognition and protection for all who can experience pregnancy.
2. Transgender and non-binary individuals often face discrimination in healthcare and legal settings. The ruling sets a precedent for inclusive language.
3. The court's decision may influence legislative safeguards for same-sex couples, as it did in its judgment on same-sex marriage.
4. This change could gradually shift social and legal understandings of gender and family toward inclusivity.

GS Paper 2

Subject: Indian Polity

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

News: The Supreme Court of India is determining if Article 31C still exists. This article protects laws that distribute wealth and resources under Article 39(b) and (c) of the Constitution, following earlier decisions that impacted property laws and raised questions about its ongoing validity.

For details information on **Redistribution of wealth** [read this Article here](#)

What is Article 31C?

Introduction of Article 31C: It was added to the Indian Constitution in 1971 via the 25th Amendment, primarily in response to the Supreme Court's decision in the Bank Nationalisation Case. In this case the court had invalidated a government act to nationalize banks due to issues with the compensation offered.

Purpose of Article 31C: The article shields laws that implement the principles specified in Article 39(b) and (c)—ensuring the distribution of material resources to prevent wealth concentration—from being challenged on the grounds of violating rights to equality and freedoms under Article 14 and Article 19.

Why is the existence of Article 31C in question?

Legal Revisions and Challenges: The existence of Article 31C is in question due to its history of amendments and legal challenges. Notably in the Kesavananda Bharati case where parts of it were struck down, affecting its overall standing.

Impact of the Minerva Mills Ruling: In the Minerva Mills case, the Supreme Court limited Parliament's power to amend the Constitution. This cast doubt on the expansions made to Article 31C under the 42nd

Amendment, specifically whether the original version of Article 31C survived these changes.

Current Supreme Court Review: Currently, the Supreme Court is examining Article 31C to address unresolved constitutional uncertainties. This includes its application in property laws such as the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Act. The Act uses Article 39(b) to justify the redistribution of cessed properties, making this review crucial for determining the future application of Article 31C in socio-economic legislation.

What are the arguments regarding Article 31C?

Argument Against Automatic Revival: Senior Advocate Zal Andhyarujina argued that the original Article 31C was completely replaced by an expanded version in the 42nd Amendment. Therefore, when the new version was struck down in the *Minerva Mills* case, the original could not automatically revive. This argument is based on the legal principle that once replaced, the original provision ceases to exist unless explicitly reinstated.

Argument for Doctrine of Revival: Solicitor General Tushar Mehta contended that the original Article 31C should automatically be revived based on the doctrine of revival. This view is supported by precedents like the ruling on the National Judicial Appointments Commission, where struck-down amendments led to the revival of previous provisions, suggesting that the pre-amended Article 31C should resurface if the subsequent amendments are invalidated.

Challenges of holding general elections in India during hot weather

Context: The article discusses the challenges of holding general elections in India during hot weather. It mentions efforts by the Election Commission to make voting accessible and protect voters from heat. The author suggests considering weather when scheduling future elections to increase voter turnout and participation.

How is the weather affecting the India's Elections?

Voter Turnout: The elections are scheduled during April to June, a period known for rising temperatures in India, which often exceed 40 degrees Celsius. This extreme heat affects voter turnout as it discourages people, especially those in rural areas, from traveling long distances to vote.

Effect on Campaign Activities: The high temperatures not only impact voters but also the campaigners. There are instances of political leaders fainting at rallies, highlighting the severe conditions under which campaigning occurs.

What are the measures taken by the Election Commission?

Task Force Creation: The Election Commission of India formed a task force with officials from the IMD, NDMA, and MoHFW to review the impact of heat waves and humidity.

Health Authority Instructions: Directed MoHFW to prepare state health authorities for assisting in heat wave conditions affecting election operations.

Facility Enhancements at Polling Stations: Arranged for shelters, drinking water, and fans to be available at polling stations to help voters cope with the heat.

What should be done?

Reschedule Elections: Consider adjusting the election timetable to cooler months to enhance voter comfort and participation, avoiding the peak heat of April to June.

Enhance On-site Facilities: Expand the provision of shelters, fans, and water at all polling stations, as already implemented by the ECI, to better accommodate voters and staff during hot weather.

Health Preparedness: Strengthen health services during elections, directing state health authorities to prepare for and address heat wave conditions, following ECI's directives.

Collaborative Task Force Review: Maintain and possibly expand the task force that reviews weather impacts before each polling phase, ensuring timely and effective response measures.

Right to Peaceful Death

Context-The article draws the comparison in end-of-life care practices in India and Western countries. It highlights the need to have a rational system in place that can allow everyone to live with some dignity during the last few days and to allow them to go in peace.

How do end-of-life care practices differ between Western countries and India?

In Western countries, more individuals are documenting advanced medical directives, expressing their preferences for end-of-life care. Terminally ill patients are often allowed to die naturally by removing life support if the chance of recovery to a reasonable quality of life is low. Whereas in India, about 70% of patients with incurable critical illnesses end up dying while hooked up to machines in ICUs. In most situations, there is no family member around the patients and families have to deal with big hospital bills.

Read more- [Living wills –A dignified way to death](#)

What are some reasons behind the continuation of such practices in India?

- 1) **Misconception in Healthcare-** There is a mistaken belief among some healthcare providers that they must prolong life at all costs, even when treatment is futile.
- 2) **Routinization of ICU Deaths-** Earlier, ICUs were mainly for people who could be saved. Now, ICU deaths have been accepted by society as normal.
- 3) **Lack of Legal Clarity-** There's a lack of legal clarity regarding end-of-life care in India. The absence of a specific law leaves room for confusion and complicates decision-making processes for both healthcare professionals and families.
- 4) **Nuclearization of Families-** Due to rising nuclearization of families and absence of old people, average person is no longer familiar to the death, called **death illiteracy**. As a result, families struggle to accept the death as something natural.
- 5) **Misleading Terminology-** The term "passive euthanasia" is misleading and makes things more confusing. According to the ICMR document, it's a wrong name. Euthanasia means deliberately ending a life, so it can't be passive. When life support is stopped because treatment won't help, it's not killing; it allows natural death.

What steps can individuals take to ensure their preferences for end-of-life care are respected?

- 1) Individuals should prepare a living will that outlines their desires for medical treatment in case they become incapacitated.
- 2) Living will should be witnessed and countersigned by a gazetted officer.

3) The concerned individual should discuss these wishes with immediate family members to ensure that they are respected.

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

Electoral Expenditure in Indian Democracy

Context-The article highlights the fundamental issue of electoral expenditure as a core concern for India's democratic ethos. The BJP and Congress have collectively spent a huge amount, over ₹20 billion, during the 2019 general elections. This is despite the Representation of the People Act having fixed spending limits for individual candidates.

What are the expenses of political parties for different purposes in Indian elections?

- Media Advertising** - Both national and state-level parties spent a lot of their "general party propaganda" budget on media advertisements. This is more than what they spent on rallies and other activities (Table 2).
- Digital platforms**- The study also examined the role of digital platforms like Google and Meta (formerly Facebook), where big spenders, primarily national parties, allocated disproportionately higher budgets for advertisements, while state parties had a negligible presence (Table 3).
- The Role of Third-Party Campaigners**- The article draws attention to the unregulated involvement of third-party or non-party campaigners, individuals or groups participating in campaign activities without being formally registered as political parties or candidates (Table 4)

Two elections and the expenditure sheet of parties

The researchers of CSDS-1 Lokniti analysed the expenditure reports submitted by the BJP and Congress during the Karnataka and Tripura State Assembly elections in 2023. Their expenditure reports for the 2023 Assembly elections were released by the Election Commission.

Table 1: The amount spent on party propaganda and candidates' expenses out of the total expenditure by each party for assembly elections

States (s)	Party	Total expenditure by the party	Expenditure on general party propaganda	Expenditure for candidates
Karnataka	BJP	₹15,900 lakh	₹14,900 lakh (79%)	₹9,700 lakh (49%)
	Congress	₹13,600 lakh	₹8,900 lakh (65%)	₹4,700 lakh (29%)
	AAP	₹714 lakh	₹633 lakh (79%)	₹181 lakh (29%)
	JDS	₹7,900 lakh	₹2,800 lakh (39%)	₹1,000 lakh (19%)
	SP	₹1,800 lakh	NIL	NIL
Tripura	BJP	₹2,800 lakh	₹1,800 lakh (64%)	₹1,000 lakh (39%)
	Congress	₹665 lakh	₹130 lakh (20%)	₹565 lakh (89%)
	CPI-M	₹789 lakh	₹136 lakh (17%)	₹753 lakh (99%)
	AITC	₹713 lakh	₹332 lakh (47%)	₹242 lakh (34%)
	RSP	₹4 lakh	₹4 lakh (100%)	NIL

Note: All figures are rounded off.
*The party has spent all the amount on heads like rent, wages etc.
Source: Expenditure reports submitted by the parties to the EC.

Table 2: Expenses incurred for various aspects of the campaigning process out of the total expenditure set aside for party propaganda in State assembly elections

States (s)	Party	Expense on media ads	Expense on publicity material	Expense on public meetings rallies etc.
Karnataka	BJP (₹14,900 lakh)	₹7,800 lakh (52%)	₹600 lakh (4%)	₹6,500 lakh (44%)
	Congress (₹8,900 lakh)	₹4,500 lakh (50%)	₹90 lakh (1%)	₹4,300 lakh (49%)
	AAP (₹633 lakh)	₹176 lakh (28%)	₹97 lakh (15%)	₹160 lakh (25%)
	JDS (₹2,800 lakh)	₹2,400 lakh (86%)	NIL	₹400 lakh (14%)
	SP (₹1,800 lakh)	NIL	NIL	₹1,800 lakh (100%)
Tripura	BJP (₹1,800 lakh)	₹600 lakh (33%)	₹300 lakh (17%)	₹900 lakh (50%)
	Congress (₹130 lakh)	₹130 lakh (100%)	₹130 lakh (100%)	NIL
	CPI-M (₹753 lakh)	₹6 lakh (0.8%)	₹53 lakh (7%)	₹694 lakh (92%)
	AITC (₹332 lakh)	₹87 lakh (26%)	₹4 lakh (1%)	₹241 lakh (73%)
	RSP (₹4 lakh)	NIL	₹0.7 lakh (17%)	₹3.3 lakh (83%)

Note: All figures are rounded off. Also, the amount not included in the table was spent on heads like travel expenses etc. NIL signifies that no amount was spent.
*The party has spent all the amount on heads like rent, wages, etc.
Source: Expenditure reports submitted by the parties to the EC.

Table 3: The amount spent by political parties to run ads on Google and Meta between March 31 to April 29

Platform	Party	Amount spent
Google and Meta	BJP	Over ₹271M
	Congress	Over ₹33M
	AAP	Over ₹M
	CPI-M	NIL
	JDS	NIL
	SP	NIL
	AITC	Over ₹7M
	CPI	NIL
	RSP	NIL

Note: Meta Ad Library defaults to the last 30 days, ending on April 26, without custom date selected. NIL signifies that no amount was spent.
Source: Google Ad Transparency Centre and Meta Ad Library

What are the ramifications of significant expenditure disparity among political parties?

- Unequal Expenditure: Favoring Wealthy Parties**- This big difference in expenditure highlights how the lack of spending limits favors wealthy political parties, tilting the competition in their favor.
- Ensuring Fairness in Party Spending**- This observation highlights the need to regulate overall party spending to ensure fair access to media platforms and a level playing field based on the strength of ideas rather than financial resources.
- Unregulated Third-Party Spending** - The unchecked spending and the content

shared by third-party campaigners raises questions about transparency and responsibility (Table 4). Without rules on how much third parties can spend, especially since the electoral bond scheme is scrapped, there's a chance that untraceable money could get into elections and lead to secret agreements.

Read more- [Electoral Bonds Scheme Verdict](#)

Table 4: The corresponding amount spent by various publishers outside the ambit of third parties only on ads on digital platforms, during the Lok Sabha elections in 2024

The party which they support	Platform	Publisher	Amount spent*
BJP	Meta	Litix Chashma	₹126 lakh
		NahO Navekan-Narendra Modi Fans	₹4,697 lakh
	Google	Adverse Technologies Pvt. Ltd.	₹0.89 lakh
Congress		CBM Directional Marketing Private Limited	₹6.9 lakh
	Meta	Congress Hill No	₹1.3 lakh
	Google	Congress Sarkar Bharosa Bharatar	₹11.3 lakh
AITC	Google	Designboard Innovations Pvt. Ltd.	₹129 lakh
	Meta	Trinamoolo Nabo-Jonar	₹37 lakh
	Google	IPAC	₹71.6 lakh

Note: No third-party campaigners among the top 50 spenders were found for the other parties analysed in the study (SP, JDS, CPI, AN, RSP, and CPI-M)
*The amount spent on ads by the publisher and calculated from January 29 to April 27, 2024 (66 days).



Cost of a vote: Senior Congress leaders D.K. Shivakumar, Rahul Gandhi and Siddaramanah before the swearing in function for the new Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka, in Bengaluru on May 20, 2023. AAP

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Proposed Reforms** - Election Commission has released a report titled 'Proposed Electoral Reforms' report in 2016. This advocated for the introduction of expenditure ceilings for political parties in India.
- 2) **Learning from international practices** - It recommends adopting ideas from countries like Australia and the UK, where third parties must register formally, disclose their spending, and follow different spending limits. By adopting these steps, India can aim for global standards of fairness in elections, which would increase people's trust and confidence in democracy.

Topic - - polity-devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Challenges faced by local bodies in India

Context: The article discusses challenges faced by local governments in India. It highlights issues like lack of data on finances, low revenue collection, and insufficient funds from higher levels.

What are the challenges faced by local bodies in India?

Fiscal Data Challenges: Local bodies lack detailed financial data, making budget management and planning difficult. Creating an accessible database for local financial data is critical. The Eleventh Finance Commission has provided grants for this purpose.

Revenue Generation Issues: Local bodies struggle with generating their own revenue, and there is limited information available due to the absence of a comprehensive database. Recommendations have been made to enhance local bodies' taxing powers and improve the collection of property taxes and user charges.

Fund Devolution from Central and State Governments: Support from state and central governments in fund allocation to local bodies is inconsistent. Issues include delayed setup of State Finance Commissions (SFCs) and incomplete implementation of their recommendations. Additionally, grants from Union finance commissions are often conditional, leading to underutilization.

Capacity to Utilize Funds: There are concerns about local bodies' capacity to effectively utilize allocated funds, leading to the creation of parastatals to oversee certain programs.

For details information on **challenges faced by local bodies in India** read [Article 1](#), [Article 2](#), [Article 3](#)

What is the significance of decentralization in addressing these challenges?

Empowering Local Decision-Making: Decentralization allows local bodies to prioritize expenditure based on local needs, enhancing service delivery effectiveness.

Enhancing Fiscal Capacities: By decentralizing powers, local bodies can have access to adequate resources and autonomy in financial decisions, thus overcoming challenges like low revenue collection and inadequate devolution of funds.

Improving Accountability: Decentralization promotes transparency and accountability in local governance by creating frameworks for local accountability and disseminating information on local body activities and finances.

For details information on **Decentralization in India** [read this Article here](#)

Subject: Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

Public policy education in India

Context: The article discusses the need to improve public policy education in India. It suggests making these programs more practical, relevant, and accessible to all students and professionals. This would help future leaders better address India's social and economic challenges.

For details information on **India needs public policy education** [read this Article here](#)

What are the benefits of improved public policy education in India?

1. Enhanced public policy education can create more informed and engaged citizens who are better equipped to participate in policymaking processes.
2. A broader understanding of policy challenges among various professional sectors can lead to more effective decision-making and service delivery.
3. Entrepreneurs with policy knowledge can better navigate regulatory landscapes, promoting innovation and growth in the startup ecosystem.
4. Cross-disciplinary education can produce a generation of problem-solvers who understand complex societal issues and contribute to effective solutions.
5. Improved education can help build a robust pipeline of future leaders for public service, ready to tackle India's most pressing challenges.

What should be done?

1. Integrate public policy education into undergraduate and postgraduate curricula across various disciplines to provide a foundational understanding of policy impacts.
2. Develop executive programs targeted at professionals in fields such as urban planning, healthcare, and education to improve their policy-related decision-making skills.
3. Include public policy courses in entrepreneurship programs to help business founders understand and navigate regulations effectively.
4. Implement innovative educational formats like immersive travel programs, hybrid models, and intensive summer schools to offer hands-on experience and facilitate cross-disciplinary learning.
5. Foster collaborations between students, policymakers, civil society leaders, and academics to enhance practical understanding and networking.

Issues associated with rising Sugar content in food items

Context: The article discusses how rising health awareness in India is leading to a decrease in sugar consumption, affecting companies that produce sugary foods and drinks. It highlights controversies and changes in product labeling and advertising regarding their health implications.

How are companies responding?

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Reducing Sugar Content: Companies are actively reducing sugar in their products. For example, Mondelez reduced added sugars in Bournvita by 14.4% and introduced a variant with 50% less sugar. Similarly, Nestle India reported a reduction of added sugars by up to 30% across various products over five years.

Rebranding Products: Hindustan Unilever renamed its health food drinks category to "functional nutritional drinks," moving brands like Horlicks and Boost under this new label to better reflect their nutritional profile and align with consumer health consciousness.

What controversies have arisen?

Bournvita's Marketing Controversy: Bournvita faced criticism when a social media influencer questioned its classification as a "health drink" due to its high sugar content. This led to regulatory action, with the Ministry of Commerce and Industries directing e-commerce platforms to remove such products from their health drinks category.

Nestle's Sugar Addition in Infant Food: Public Eye, an NGO, accused Nestle of adding sugar and honey to its infant milk and cereal products.

What legal and policy changes are being considered?

Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labeling: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is contemplating the introduction of front-of-the-pack nutrition labels. This change aims to help consumers make more informed choices by clearly displaying nutritional information on product packages.

Indian Nutrition Rating System: In September 2022, FSSAI proposed an Indian Nutrition Rating system, a star rating method to assess the nutritional profile of packaged foods. This system could rate items from half a star to five stars, providing a quick and understandable assessment of food quality.

Issues in India's spices export

Context- Several countries, like Singapore, Hong Kong, and the U.S., are investigating potential contamination in spice mixes sold by Indian brands MDH and Everest. The concern is that these spice mixes may contain higher than allowed levels of ethylene oxide, a toxic chemical used to preserve food.

What are some of the health concerns regarding India's export of spices?

1) Ethylene oxide is used as a sterilizing agent in food products, including spices, to reduce microbial contamination and extend shelf life. However, its improper and excessive use can leave behind toxic and carcinogenic residues. MDH and Everest's spice mixes are allegedly contaminated with high levels of EtO, which is associated with cancers like lymphoma and leukemia.

What are the steps taken by Spice Board of India to address this issue?

- 1) The Spice Board in India has initiated mandatory testing of consignments shipped to Singapore and Hong Kong, gathered analytical reports from relevant agencies, and proposed corrective measures to exporters.
- 2) Guidelines have been issued to exporters on preventing EtO contamination, including norms for testing, storage, and the use of alternative methods.
- 3) The FSSAI has directed state regulators to collect samples of major spice brands, including MDH and

Everest, to test for EtO.

4) Activists have called for stringent safety checks and proper implementation of regulatory norms.

Read more- [On India's Agricultural Export Sector – Export potential](#)

What are some of food safety challenges faced by India?

- 1) **Operational challenges**- This includes India's diverse food landscape, lack of standardized record-keeping, intentional food fraud, and difficulties in tracing ingredients and assessing potential risks.
- 2) **Logistic Barriers**-This includes a lack of government or private notified food testing labs in at least 10 States/Union Territories as mandated under the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006.As per FSSAI Annual Report of 2021-22, there is uneven distribution of labs, insufficient food safety officers, and resource constraints.
- 3) **Lack of transparency**-FSSAI's operations often lack transparency. This hinders efforts to meet safety standards, build accountability, and trust.

What is the potential impact of these investigation on Indias food exports?

- 1) India's spice export industry that is worth around \$700 million may get negatively impacted due to the current controversy over safety concerns.
- 2) If regulators in China, ASEAN countries, and the European Union also raise similar concerns, it could hurt Indian spice exports worth over \$2.5 billion, which is around 58.8% of India's total global spice exports.
- 3) Small companies, co-operatives, and farmers could face potential losses due to reduced prices by companies.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) The issue demands urgent attention to uphold the reputation of the entire spice trade ecosystem in India.
- 3) A recent CUTS report suggested updating India's food safety standards to match international practices and providing better information to food companies to help them follow regulations more effectively.

Issues in implementation of PM-JAY

Context-The article highlights the challenges faced by the PM-JAY and analyses the need to bring changes in its design from an expert point of view.

What is Ayushman Bharat Scheme?

Ayushman Bharat is the government's flagship program aimed at achieving universal health coverage (UHC) in India, launched in 2018.

Read more- [Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana](#)

What are the issues faced by PM-JAY?

- 1) **Hospital Dues**- Certain hospitals in particular states have raised grievances about being owed large sums of money by PM-JAY.
- 2) **Issues with design**- PM-JAY was not intended to provide complete universal health coverage or cover all healthcare costs, as it currently makes up less than 2.5% of total health spending in India.
- 3) **Misuse of resources**-There is misuse of government resources which increases inefficiencies in the public healthcare system

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4) **Demand-side perspective**-People often choose private hospitals over public hospitals due to the perception of better-quality care due to issues like capacity constraints, delays in claim payments, claim rejections etc. In public hospitals.

5) **Performance Disparity among States**- The performance of states under PM-JAY varies significantly in terms of coverage, dispersion of hospitals, governance processes. This is because of factors like hospital capacity, network adequacy, and the role of the public sector in ensuring healthcare access in underserved areas.

What should be the way forward?

1) **Design change**- There is an urgent need to make potential design changes to make PM-JAY more sustainable and effective in achieving its objectives.

2) **Strengthen public health sector**- There is a need to improve the public health sector by dealing with limited resources and creating systems that encourage healthcare providers and patients to support universal health coverage.

3) **Enhancing Government Healthcare Spending**- There is a need to include pooling government healthcare expenditures and separating the roles of payers and providers in healthcare.

4) **Diverse Approaches to Influence Healthcare Behavior**- Rather than just focusing on pricing, there needs to be an emphasis on other mechanisms to influence the behavior of healthcare providers and patients. Additionally, state government programs that can complement and support the goals of PM-JAY should be explored

5) **Addressing Out-of-Pocket Expenditure**- There is a need to develop system where outpatient care, diagnostics, and drugs can be covered to reduce out-of-pocket expenses further.

India's healthcare system on right track.

Context-The article highlights the progress made by India in providing quality health care facilities in last few years. This improvement also demonstrates India's commitment to achieve its goal of providing quality and affordable healthcare for all, as outlined in the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017.

What trend has been observed in out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure?

There has been a consistent decline in out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) as a share of total health expenditure, dropping from 62.6% to 39.4% between 2014-15 and 2021-22.

What are the reasons behind this trend?

1) **Utilization of services**-Free ambulance services, improved government secondary and tertiary services, and the Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme have all played significant roles in reducing out-of-pocket expenditure.

2) Free Drugs and diagnostics-

A) Free drugs and diagnostics services in facilities, including those at over 1,69,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (AAMs, Health and Wellness Centres) have led to major financial savings for families.
B) More than 10,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras sell over 1,900 quality generic medicines and nearly 300 surgical items at affordable prices across districts. Since 2014, this scheme has saved consumers an estimated Rs 28,000 crore.

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3) **Price Regulation**- Regulating prices of coronary stents, orthopedic knee implants, cancer drugs, and other vital medicines has saved people Rs 27,000 crore each year.

What is the impact of access to safe drinking water on health?

1) Access to safe drinking water and sanitation significantly improves health. When the Jal Jeevan Mission launched in 2019, only 17% of rural households had tap water. Now, about 76% have access to functional household tap connections. As per a WHO report, once tap water is made available in every rural household, it would save four lakh lives over five years.

2) The WHO predicts that the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen, which made rural India open defecation free (ODF), could have prevented over 300,000 deaths from diarrhea and malnutrition between 2014 and October 2019.

Mention some of the important healthcare schemes to embolden health infrastructure in India?

1) **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana**-This is aimed at creating medical colleges and new AIIMSs.

2) **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Infrastructure Mission**- This aims to strengthen the public health infrastructure in cities and villages so it can effectively handle health crises or outbreaks.

Read more- [PM ABHIM \(Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission\)](#)

3) **Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package** –This is aimed at developing pediatric and adult ICUs.

4) **15th Finance Commission grants**- The health grants, totaling Rs 70,000 crore under the 15th Finance Commission award, are being injected into the primary health system.

Boosting Organ Donation in India

Context- The article highlights the need for better identification and certification of brain death cases, increased awareness among the public, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations to improve the low organ donation rates in India.

What is the current state of organ donation in India?

1) As per the Union Health Ministry, there is a low rate of organ donations in India, which is less than one donor per million people each year.

2) According to transplant data, 16,041 organs, mostly kidneys, were donated in 2022. Delhi topped the country with 3,818 donations.

What are the reasons for low organ donation rates in India?

The main reason for low organ donation rates in India is the poor identification and certification of brain death cases, even though there are many potential cases available.

What are the directives issued by the DGHS to accelerate organ donation in India?

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) under the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, to address the issue-

1) **Protocol for Identifying Organ Donation Opportunities** -The Standard Operating Procedure mandates that doctors on duty, assisted by transplant coordinators, must recognize every potential case of brain death admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and ascertain whether the individual had made a commitment to

donate their organs.

2) **Facilitate Organ Donation Discussions with Families**- If the individual had not committed to donate their organs, then hospital authorities should make family members aware of the opportunity to donate organs before the heart stops.

3) **Ensuring Compliance with Organ Donation Regulations**- The DGHS has asked all the hospitals to facilitate and monitor the certification of brain death cases. This will help in ensuring compliance with the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act and Rules.

Read more- [Unique ID for organ donation](#)

What should be the way forward?

Awareness Campaigns -The Health Ministry has asked the hospitals to install 'Required Request Display Boards' in important places. These boards will tell people that if someone has brain death or a heart attack, donating organs like kidneys, liver, heart, pancreas, eyes, skin, and bones can save lives.

Risks associated with thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS)

News: The article discusses a rare side effect, thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), linked to the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

What is Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS)?

Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) is a rare condition that involves blood clots and a low platelet count. It has been linked to adenoviral vector COVID-19 vaccines like Oxford-AstraZeneca.

For more details information on **Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS)** [read this Article here](#)

What are the risks associated with TTS?

TTS can lead to severe clotting at unusual sites such as the brain or gut, with higher risks in younger populations (Tier 1 cases).

Reports indicate a range from 0.2 to 17.6 cases per million doses over a 21-day period, with significant regional variations.

The fatality rate due to TTS varies, reported between less than 0.1 to 1.3 deaths per million doses in different countries.

How was the COVID-19 vaccine developed?

Adaptive Design: The vaccine was developed using an "adaptive and seamless" design, recommended by the WHO for emergencies. This approach differs from traditional, rigid three-phase clinical trials.

Expedited Trials: The rapid development meant that the detection of very rare side effects, like TTS, was not as feasible during initial trials.

What was the global response?

Suspensions: Many countries, including South Africa and over 20 European nations, temporarily halted the use of the vaccine, especially among younger adults, early in 2021.

U.S. Decision: The United States opted not to approve the vaccine, despite having several million doses

stockpiled.

Regulatory Reviews: The European Medicines Agency and WHO conducted reviews and concluded that the benefits of the vaccine outweigh the risks, emphasizing the importance of communicating the specific risks associated with the vaccine.

What are the legal and ethical challenges related to TTS?

Ethical Challenges

Vaccine Suspension Decisions: Different countries made varied decisions about suspending the vaccine, often focusing on younger adults, raising questions about equitable and consistent health policy.

Benefit-risk profile:

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) concluded on March 18, 2021, that the benefits of the **vaccine outweighed the risks of rare side effects** after reviewing 25 cases of TTS among 20 million vaccinated in the UK and the European Economic Area.

Similarly, the **WHO's Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety confirmed in 2021, a favorable benefit-risk profile** based on the data from approximately 47 million doses.

However, the UK High Court is currently evaluating a case involving a compensation claim amounting to £255 million, against vaccine side effects. This **case highlights the ethical complexities of balancing public health safety and** analyzing the severity and rarity of the side effects.

Expanding Access to PhD Programs in India

Context-The article highlights the significance of allowing 4-year bachelor's degree holders to pursue a PhD directly.

In India, a significant majority (78%) of students pursue undergraduate degrees, while a smaller proportion (11%) continue to postgraduate studies. Allowing direct entry into PhD programmes for undergraduate students taps into this larger talent pool that can engage in doctoral research.

How does the four-year bachelor's degree program contribute to better scholars?

- 1) The four-year bachelor's degree is based on the national credit framework that offers rigorous training in research methods, critical thinking, and analytical skills.
- 2) It allows students to engage in independent research projects, internships, and research activities. This provides them with significant experience and expertise.

What is the significance of the UGC's new policy regarding PhD eligibility?

- 1) **Expanding PhD Opportunities-**The new policy permits students to pursue a PhD in a subject of their choice, regardless of the discipline of their four-year bachelor's degree. This promotes opportunities to pursue research across multiple disciplines, which is a global practice.
- 2) **Tapping Into Young Talent-**Direct entry into PhD programs for undergraduate students would help tapping into this larger talent pool. This is also in consonance with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Read more- [One year of National Education Policy](#)

3) **Recognizing Academic Diversity**-It would ensure recognition of the academic achievements of students from diverse educational backgrounds.

4) **Fostering Innovation and Excellence in Doctoral Research**-This would encourage universities to promote innovation, excellence, and inclusivity by offering a range of options for students to engage in doctoral research. This will place India at the forefront of worldwide research and innovation and equip a new generation of young scholars to tackle complex challenges.

What are some of the concerns expressed by a few academicians?

1) **Dilution of PhD standard**-Some academicians believe that allowing 4 years undergraduate students to directly pursue Phd may dilute the integrity of PhD programs.

However, students seeking admission after completing a four-year bachelor's degree program must meet certain criteria, including having a minimum of 75% marks in aggregate or its equivalent grade.

2) **Assistant Professor Eligibility** -There is a mistaken notion that qualifying for the UGC-NET based on a four-year undergraduate degree automatically grants eligibility to teach undergraduate students as an Assistant Professor.

However, qualifying in the UGC-NET based on a four-year undergraduate degree alone is not sufficient for appointment as assistant Professors unless one completes a PhD and fulfil the requirements contained in the University Grants Commission Regulations, 2022.

How does the UGC-NET change affect PhD admissions?

Starting from the June 2024 session, the UGC-NET now includes an "admission to PhD only" category. This allows universities to use UGC-NET scores for PhD admissions.

What is the significance of this change?

1) **Simplifying PhD Entrance**-This will reduce the need for appearing in multiple PhD entrance tests conducted by different universities, each with its own syllabi and exam patterns. With a single entrance test, students can concentrate on preparing for a single exam conducted twice a year and optimize their prospects of success.

2) **Streamlining University Operations** -Using UGC-NET scores, universities can streamline administrative processes, reduce logistical challenges, and allocate resources more efficiently towards other academic and student support initiatives.

New Cashless Scheme for Accident Victims

News: This article discusses the **Indian government's plan to provide up to 1.5 lakh rupees of cashless emergency care for road accident victims**. This initiative aims to reduce delays and refusals in treatment while ensuring accessible, prompt, and reliable healthcare services.

For details information on **Road Accidents in India** [read this Article here](#)

What is the New Cashless Scheme for Accident Victims?

Scope: The Indian government's new scheme provides up to 1.5 lakh rupees of cashless treatment for road accident victims. It ensures one week of hospitalization under the Ayushman Bharat program.

Inclusivity: All accident victims receive coverage regardless of their insurance status.

Funding: Costs are reimbursed through the **Motor Vehicle Accident Fund**, which initially compensated only

hit-and-run victims.

Objective: The scheme aims to reduce treatment delays and refusals while talks with general insurers explore third-party vehicle coverage premium contributions to keep costs low.

For details information on **cashless treatment of road accident victims** [read this Article here](#)

Why does India need a cashless scheme for accident victims?

Urgent Medical Attention: Many lives are lost due to road accidents in India. Immediate care could save lives, but financial uncertainty often causes hospitals to delay treatment.

Payment Confusion: Accident victims are sometimes denied or face delayed treatment while hospitals figure out payment details. Even insured patients wait hours for cashless approval.

Consistent Funding: The Motor Vehicle Accident Fund, created in 2022, now covers accident victims and will reimburse costs promptly, reducing confusion over bill payments.

Subject: International Relations

Topic- international relation-Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Global Impacts of China's European Strategy

Context: The article discusses Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Europe, where he aims to influence European countries amid their difficult decisions involving the US, Russia, and China. It highlights Europe's challenges, including military threats and economic pressures, and how these might affect global relations, including with India.

What is Xi Jinping's European strategy?

Deepen Economic Ties: Xi plans to secure economic partnerships by promising investments. For instance, he intends to support Hungary's growing EV industry and counter potential European sanctions on China's EV makers.

Divide Europe from the US: Xi seeks to exploit European divisions. French President Macron favors closer economic ties with China and opposes isolating Beijing. Xi also meets leaders of Serbia and Hungary, who support China-Russia relations.

Counter European Strategies: He aims to reverse Europe's "de-risking" strategy against China by emphasizing trade benefits.

How does Europe view the China-Russia alliance?

Concern Over Ukraine Conflict: Many European nations are wary of China's support for Russia, given Putin's invasion of Ukraine. France, for example, sees Putin as a significant threat to European security.

Hope for Xi's Moderation: Some Europeans believe Xi Jinping is the only global leader who could influence Russia's behavior. They want him at a planned Ukraine Peace Conference in Switzerland.

Divided Responses: Serbia and Hungary's pro-Russia stances align with Xi's objectives. Xi aims to deepen this divide, emphasizing China's rejection of Western narratives about international law and a rules-based order.

What divisions exist in Europe's relationship with the US?

NATO Funding: Donald Trump criticized European NATO members for not contributing enough to defense. He insists the US shouldn't protect those not paying their fair share.

Trade Disputes: Trump also accused the European Union of protectionism, demanding a fairer trade relationship. These complaints strain US-European relations.

Strategic Autonomy: French President Emmanuel Macron emphasized European sovereignty and advocating for a balance between the US and China, rather than simply following the US.

How does this affect India?

Complex Power Dynamics: India faces a challenge balancing relations among the US, Russia, and China. Europe's decisions about these powers impact India's foreign policies.

Trade and Security Impacts: Europe's engagement with Russia and China directly affects India's interests. If Europe increases its defense burden against Russia and counters China's economic influence, it can shape India's own strategies.

US Influence: The US pressures Europe to balance against Russia while also countering China's influence in Asia, impacting India's regional security concerns.

Strategic Opportunities: India has enhanced its relationships with key European nations like France, sub-regional groups like the Nordics, small economic groups like EFTA, and the European Union, but further strategic engagement is needed. Focusing on security issues, like Ukraine, and strengthening trade ties could benefit India's position in global politics.

Topic- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Achieving goal of Viksit Bharat in the next 25 year

Context-The article enlists the requirement for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat in the next 25 years.

What are some of the important international trends in economy and diplomacy?

- 1) The international economy is now rebuilding its supply chains and ensuring more reliable manufacturing especially in competitive domains like semiconductors, electric mobility and green technologies.
- 2) Conflict and climate change are changing how countries connect with each other. Supply chains and logistics are aiming to be more resilient. Recent events like tension in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal blockage highlight this.

What are the key requirements for achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat in the next 25 years?

- 1) **International Environment-**The international environment plays a significant role, presenting both opportunities and challenges for Viksit Bharat. Formulating foreign policy to leverage global resources, markets, technologies, and best practices is important.
- 2) **National Strengths-** Expanding manufacturing and adopting critical and emerging technologies are crucial for India to become a leading power by building strong national capabilities.
- 3) **Diplomacy-**Effective diplomacy is important for international collaboration and ensuring India's integration into global networks especially in competitive domains like semiconductors, electric mobility, and

green technologies.

4) **Strategic Autonomy**- In the post-Covid world, it's crucial for India to have strategic autonomy to safeguard national security and economic strength. Initiatives like 'Make in India' are essential for both the economy and national security.

5) **Skills and Talent**- It's important to recognize and use Indian skills and talent, especially in digital areas. India needs to expand education and training and ensure they align with Indian values and practices. Read more- [Pathways to a Viksit Bharat](#)

6) **Connectivity and Security**- It's important to deal with the effects of conflict and climate change on connectivity and logistics. In this backdrop, initiatives like the IMEC corridor, INSTC, and Trilateral Highway that help in improving connectivity and security are steps in the right direction.

7) **International Engagements**- It's important for India to be actively involved in international initiatives like Quad, BRICS, I2U2, SCO, and East Asia Summit to protect its interests and maintain balance.

8) **Leadership**-Effective leadership, represented by a Vishwa Bandhu approach, is essential for carrying forward initiatives and partnerships to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat.

Topic- India and its Neighborhood Relations

Navigating India's Global Rise Amidst Regional Decline

Context - The article highlights a paradox in contemporary Indian foreign policy. On one hand, India is rising globally, whereas on the other hand its influence in the South Asian region is declining.

What are the reasons behind India's global rise?

- 1) India's global rise is attributed to growth in absolute power (economic growth, military capabilities, young demography), peer accommodation, and a conducive international situation.
- 2) India's inclusion in key global institutions like G-20, G-7, Quad, BRICS, and SCO highlight its geopolitical significance and powerful global presence.
- 3) Increased global focus on the Indo-Pacific, where India plays a central role, has helped boost India's global standing.

What are the factors that have led to decline in India's regional power?

Despite its global rise, India's influence in South Asia has declined sharply compared to the Cold War era or China's current influence in the region.

- 1) **Indian Influence Decline and Global Prominence**-India's rising global prominence is also one of the reasons for its regional declining status. For instance- the American withdrawal from the region and China's increased presence have negatively affected India. However, these factors have led the United States and its allies to back India's global goals in countering China's influence.
- 2) **Neighboring Strategies**- Smaller South Asian countries are using strategies like balancing, bargaining, hedging, and bandwagoning, perceiving China as a beneficial counterbalance to India.
- 3) **The Rise of China and its Impact** -China's rise is the main factor behind India's regional decline. This is because, for the first time, India faces stiff geopolitical competition from a rising superpower neighbor. The arrival of China in South Asia, the U.S. withdrawal, and India's tilt towards the Indo-Pacific have shifted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favor.

What are the implications of this paradox for India?

- 1) India's situation rising globally but weakening regionally has big consequences for its global goals.
- 2) It raises questions about whether a country that is not able to maintain its prominence in its periphery then how it can be a pivotal power in international politics.

Read more- [On Potential of India-China Relations: A China-India partnership, its vast global potential](#)

What steps can be taken by India to regain its regional prominence?

- 1) India needs to recognize that the region, its neighbors, and the geopolitics have changed significantly in the past fifteen years or so.
- 2) There is a need to revisit traditional conceptions of the region and 'modernize' India's primacy in South Asia.
- 3) India should focus on its strengths rather than trying to match China's might in every aspect. For ex-reclaiming the Buddhist heritage.
- 4) India should leverage its maritime advantages in the Indo-Pacific to address its continental handicaps by engaging smaller South Asian nations in the Indo-Pacific strategy. For ex- India and its partners like the U.S., Japan etc. can find ways of engaging and partnering with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh as part of their larger Indo-Pacific strategy.
- 5) There is a need to view the region through a non-India-centric lens and work with external friendly partners in the Indian Ocean and South Asia.
- 6) India's soft power need to be utilized innovatively to maintain influence in the region, like promoting informal communication among political and civil society figures in countries where India is reluctant to engage directly in conflicts. For ex-dealing with Myanmar crisis.

Topic- - Important International Institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Slow Progress in achieving SDGs

Context: The United Nations summit on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was held in New York recently. It assessed progress towards achieving the 17 SDGs and 169 specific targets set by the agenda-2030, adopted in 2015. The article highlights the slow progress and challenges in achieving SGGs.

What are SDGs?

Description-SDGs stand for Sustainable Development Goals. They are a set of 17 global objectives established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of the agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Coverage-These goals cover a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues, aiming to address the world's most pressing challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

Nature-The SDG programme is internationally non-binding. However, all countries have committed to work towards these goals.

Read more- [India's Sustainable Development Goals](#)

What has been the overall progress towards achieving the SDGs?

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- 1) **Slow Progress**- Reports indicate that progress has been slow and off track. While there were some improvements between 2015 and 2019, they were largely inadequate to meet the goals.
- 2) **Impact of Covid-19**-The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global crises have significantly impeded progress.
- 3) **Lack of adequate attention to environmental goals**- Not enough focus has been attached to goals about the environment and protecting biodiversity. This slow progress is worrying because it goes against the idea that all the SDGs are connected and cannot be separated. It also puts the environment at risk of getting worse in a faster manner.

What are key areas that require urgent action?

The UN SDG Report 2023 identified five key areas for urgent action: -

- 1) Commitment of governments to seven years of accelerated, sustained, and transformative actions to deliver on SDG promises.
- 2) Concrete, integrated, and targeted policies and actions to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and end the war on nature, with a focus on advancing women's and girls' rights and empowering the vulnerable.
- 3) Strengthening national and subnational capacity, accountability, and public institutions to deliver accelerated progress.
- 4) Recommitment of the international community to deliver and mobilize resources to assist developing nations.
- 5) Continued strengthening of the UN development system.

What is the impact of this slow progress?

- 1) If the current pattern persists, it will result in a faster decline in environmental quality. This contradicts the aim of moving towards sustainability.
- 2) The SDGs have not been sufficient in making much political difference at the national or local level, except discussions and some small changes in rules and institutions. It suggests that setting global goals does not directly impact politics on local or national levels.

What are the suggestions given by 2019 report 'Future is Now' for accelerating SDG implementation?

- 1) **Systematic Approach to Achieving the 2030 Agenda** -It highlights how the 2030 Agenda can truly change things by using a systematic approach. This implies finding a balance between different results and ensuring that actions help achieve several SDGs at the same time
- 2) **Selecting Priority Areas**-It recommends choosing the most suitable starting points based on local needs and regional or national priorities. Then, it suggests using four key tools-governance, economy and money, actions by individuals and groups, and science and technology.
- 3) **Collaborative Partnership for Global Sustainable Development** -People in these sectors must collaborate and build new partnerships to develop and execute sustainable development plans that suit each country's unique needs and priorities. This will help make big changes globally.

Conclusion- In 2024, many countries around the world will have elections, involving 64 nations and nearly half of the world's population. It's important for the new governments to think about sustainability and align their national policies accordingly.

GS Paper 3

Subject: Indian Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Fluctuations in global trade

News: The article discusses the fluctuations in global trade and focuses on India's export performance. It covers India's struggles and improvements in export numbers, the impact of declining commodity prices, and specific sectors showing growth.

For details information **On India's Agricultural Export Sector** [read this Article here](#)

How has India performed in Exports?

India's merchandise exports declined by 4.7% in 2023, slightly better than the average for developing Asia, which saw a 6.8% decrease.

In the financial year 2023-24, India's exports were valued at \$437.1 billion, down 3.1% from the previous year.

Exports of electronics surged by 24% due to incentives like the Production Linked Incentive scheme, highlighting a successful sector amid broader challenges.

Excluding petroleum and gems and jewellery, core non-energy exports from India saw a modest increase of 1.4%.

Agricultural Exports: While there were occasional bans on exports like non-basmati rice and wheat, agriculture and allied sectors still showed healthy growth. Categories like meat, poultry, spices, fruits and vegetables, and oil seeds contributed positively to export figures.

What are the key factors affecting India's Exports?

Global Economic Climate: Uncertainties in the global economy, including impacts from COVID-19 and geopolitical conflicts, have influenced India's export dynamics.

Commodity Prices: Lower international commodity prices have reduced the dollar value of exports. For instance, the sharp decline in crude oil prices significantly reduced India's petroleum export bill by \$13.3 billion.

Sector-Specific Growth: There has been notable growth in certain sectors, such as electronics, which saw a 24% increase in exports, largely driven by incentives like the Production Linked Incentive scheme.

Geopolitical Tensions: The ongoing conflict in Europe post-February 2022 initially spiked commodity prices, affecting export revenues before they began to decline.

What challenges and opportunities lie ahead?

Challenges

Decline in Labour-Intensive Sectors: Exports in sectors like gems and jewellery and textiles have significantly decreased, needing strategic focus to revive these industries.

Global Instability: Ongoing geopolitical tensions and uneven global economic growth pose risks to sustained export growth.

Opportunities

Global Economic Recovery: With global growth projected at 3.2% in 2024 by S&P Global, there is potential for increased demand for Indian exports.

Bilateral Trade Agreements: India's ongoing negotiations and agreements with major economies can enhance export opportunities and drive growth in various sectors.

Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) for Blue Economy

Context: The article highlights the vast economic opportunities offered by the oceans for India, which remain largely untapped despite holding immense wealth and resources. Focussing on Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) can be a game changer.

The development of good Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) is crucial for exploiting these economic opportunities. UDA technology involves underwater and space-based sensors for providing the information on availability of resources in the ocean.

Significance of Blue economy for India

First, India's maritime domain is nearly as vast as its land area and contains 80% of the nation's resources but contributes only 4% to its GDP.

Second, the potential for growth through the blue economy, encompassing fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, offshore energy, and deep-sea mining, is substantial.

Third, it could propel India towards becoming the world's third-largest economy by generating millions of jobs and trillions in revenue.

Fourth, Deep-sea minerals, including polymetallic nodules and rare earths, hold boundless value, with advancing technology making their sustainable extraction feasible soon. The nation quickest to harness the opportunities in open maritime territories may control the resources and territory in the long run.

What are the challenges in acquiring Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA) technology?

Protected technology: These technologies are closely guarded by developed countries. India must focus on indigenous development of underwater sensor technology to overcome challenges related to cost.

Unique oceanic conditions: Present technologies are suitable for cold and temperate oceans, which differs completely to the tropical conditions of the Indian Ocean.

Expensive: Lastly these technologies are costly.

How India can develop Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA)?

First, India's approach should include strengthening its domestic capabilities in sensor technology and chip development.

Second, UDA requires use of thousands of datasets to work properly. The design of data gathered by government are not suitable. An open-API framework could facilitate data sharing and enable the development of AI applications in maritime domain awareness.

Third, A strategic initiative similar to the **PM Gati Shakti plan** for terrestrial development should be established for economic UDA. This would organize and enhance the efficiency of data collection and usage across various maritime sectors.

The concept of "**Smart Maritime Zones**", like smart cities could be advanced under the Gati Shakti plan.

These zones would use technology-driven maritime spatial planning to ensure the sustainable exploitation of marine resources.

Key finding and recommendations of the India Employment Report 2024

Context: The article discusses the India Employment Report 2024, which analyzes job trends over 22 years using surveys. It highlights improvements in job quality, higher female job participation, recovery after COVID-19, and challenges like youth unemployment, informal jobs, and the need for better education and job policies.

For details information on **the India Employment Report 2024** read [this Article here](#)

What improvements are noted in the job market?

Pre COVID-19 Improvements

From 2000 to 2019, there was a significant shift from agricultural jobs to non-farm sectors, indicating economic progress.

A steady increase in regular employment was noted, with a decrease in unorganized sector jobs.

During COVID-19 Changes

Temporary halt in the growth of regular employment and rise in unorganized sector jobs. Significant 9% yearly increase in farming jobs during the pandemic. Non-farm jobs also increased by more than 2.6%, surpassing growth rates from 2012 to 2019.

Post COVID-19 Recovery

Recovery in regular and casual wages, with casual wages increasing even more from 2019 to 2022. Decrease in unemployment rates from 6% in 2018 to 3.2% in 2023. Female workforce participation rose significantly, from 24.5% in 2019 to 37% in 2023.

What are the current employment challenges?

High Agricultural Employment: About 46.6% of workers are still employed in agriculture as of 2022, a slight increase from 42.4% in 2019, indicating a need to boost non-farm employment.

Skill and Job Mismatch: The increasing capital and skill intensity of jobs has led to a surplus of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, despite higher educational attainments.

Low Women's Participation: Women remain primarily in less remunerative agricultural roles, and the labor market demands more diverse job opportunities for them in non-farm sectors.

Youth Unemployment: Educated youth face high unemployment rates, with 28% of graduates unemployed in 2022, showcasing a significant mismatch between education levels and job opportunities.

NEET Challenges: Around 28% of youth were **not in employment, education, and training (NEET)** in 2022, with females disproportionately affected, highlighting a critical area for policy intervention.

What are the key recommendations of the India Employment Report 2024?

1. Boosting production to create more jobs, focusing on labor-intensive manufacturing, services, and agriculture;
2. Enhancing job quality;
3. Addressing labor market disparities, especially by increasing women's employment and formulating effective strategies for NEET;
4. Improving training systems and labor market policies to better match job supply and demand, with significant private sector involvement.
5. Developing accurate statistics to understand labor market changes due to rapid technological advances.

Changes made by India's Securities and Exchange Board (SEBI) for NRIs and OCIs

News: The article discusses changes made by India's Securities and Exchange Board (SEBI) to allow non-resident Indians (NRIs) and overseas citizens of India (OCIs) to invest more in Indian equities through the Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) route. New rules increase investment limits and require detailed information about investors to ensure transparency and prevent misuse.

What changes have been made by India's Securities and Exchange Board for NRIs and OCIs?

Raised Investment Caps: SEBI has increased the investment limits for NRIs and OCIs in FPIs from a collective 50% to 100% of the corpus. Previously, individual limits were capped at 25%.

Investment Through Controlled Firms: NRIs and OCIs can now invest up to 100% of an FPI either directly or through entities they control. This expands opportunities for their involvement in Indian equities.

Enhanced KYC Requirements: All FPIs must provide the PAN and KYC details of each investor to depositories. If PAN and KYC details are missing, enhanced limits still apply, but only if the FPI's investment manager is linked to a SEBI-registered mutual fund or an RBI-regulated entity.

Stricter Disclosure Rules: If FPIs hold over 33% of their assets in one Indian company or more than ₹25,000 crore in total, they must provide detailed investor information. This prevents round-tripping and hidden investments by promoters.

What issues arise from the new rules?

Aadhaar Verification Challenges: The new KYC norms require Aadhaar verification, which is problematic for many NRIs and OCIs who do not have an Aadhaar or an active Indian mobile number. This can hinder their ability to comply with KYC requirements.

Potential Reduction in Investment: Although the intention is to increase transparency, the Aadhaar requirement could discourage NRIs and OCIs from investing through this route, especially since many invest via mutual funds where similar restrictions might be less stringent.

Decline in India's FDI

Context: This article highlights a decline in India's foreign direct investment (FDI) and an increase in existing foreign investors repatriating or disinvesting. It suggests that slow application approvals and government restructuring may have contributed to this trend, requiring institutional revamps.

What's the Issue with Repatriation and Disinvestment?

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Rising Rates: From 2001-02 to 2008-09, repatriation and disinvestment rates were minimal, between 0.08% and 1.15% of gross FDI. However, these rates sharply increased, reaching 12% in 2009-10, 29% in 2011-12 and 41% in 2022-23. This share surged to 59% in the first 11 months of 2023-24

Negative Impact: This trend negates the positive impact of FDI inflows, leading to a net reduction in the capital retained in India.

Potential Causes: Structural changes like demonetization in 2016, GST rollout in 2017, and the removal of the FIPB may have contributed to investors pulling out. Global factors like economic uncertainty and rising interest rates also play a role.

What should be done?

Re-establish Institutional Oversight: Consider reviving an empowered board like the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) to streamline approvals and reduce delays, as the existing decentralized system caused 46 FDI proposals to be delayed.

Address Repatriation: Investigate why the share of repatriation and disinvestment reached 41% in 2022-23 and 59% during April-February 2023-24, to better understand investors' concerns.

Simplify Procedures: Create a system that eliminates procedural and policy challenges, encouraging existing foreign investors to stay and expand their operations, as FDI helps stabilize the balance of payments.

The new RBI draft guidelines for project loans

News: The new RBI draft guidelines are designed to enforce credit discipline in project loans. They aim to ensure only serious participants receive financing while addressing issues that led to past non-performing asset (NPA) crises.

What provisions do the new RBI draft guidelines include?

Higher Provisioning: Provisioning for standard assets will increase to 1-5%, up from the current 0.4%.

Minimum Exposure in Consortium Loans: Lenders in a consortium must take at least a 10% exposure in infrastructure projects valued at ₹1,500 crore. For larger projects, a 5% exposure or ₹150 crore is required, whichever is higher.

Moratorium Period: A moratorium period on loan repayment is limited to six months after commercial operations start.

Credit Impairment: Reduction in net present value during construction, due to factors like change in projected cash flows, may lead to credit impairment.

How will the new RBI draft guidelines affect the banks?

Increased Provisioning Costs: Banks must set aside up to 5% of the loan amount during construction, compared to the current 0.4%. For a ₹10-trillion loan book with 15% infrastructure exposure, this translates to a profit hit of ₹4,500 crore over three years.

Higher Lending Rates: To cover increased provisioning costs, banks will likely increase lending rates on infrastructure projects.

Stricter Moratorium Limits: A six-month moratorium after project commencement could limit repayment flexibility, making financing less attractive.

What are bankers' concerns?

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Investment Risks: Bankers believe the stricter rules could discourage project financing, risking private investment at a time when capital expenditure is increasing.

Questionable 5% Provisioning Rule: Bankers challenge the 5% provisioning requirement during construction, considering it overly restrictive and questioning its impact on loan profitability.

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

Telecom Sector and Spectrum Auctions in India

Context-The article discusses the 3G spectrum auction of 2010, held after the 2G spectrum allocation scandal of 2008. It highlights that the auction achieved two objectives: transparency in spectrum allocation and revenue generation for the government.

However, the author argues that the current auction format is detrimental to the sector's growth and downstream competitiveness.

What method was used for spectrum allocation before 2010, and why was it changed?

Before 2010, spectrum allocation was done administratively, which suffered from issues like lack of transparency, favoritism, and scandals. The Supreme Court intervened and mandated spectrum auctions "for all time to come" to address these concerns, recognizing the systemic flaws in methods like the first-come-first-served (FCFS) for administrative allocation.

What are the issues with the current auction-based spectrum allocation?

- 1) **Revenue Outcomes from Auctions-**The revenue outcomes from auctions have been mixed, with high reserve prices leading to unsold spectrum and steep opportunity costs.
- 2) **Spectrum Auction Success Rates-** In only one out of the seven auctions held, all the spectrum available was sold. This happened in 2010, shortly after the 2G scam.
- 3) **Limited role of policy maker-** Deciding whether to use auctions or administrative allocation for spectrum assignment is a policy matter that should be left to the DoT and TRAI. They are the expert bodies responsible for this task. This is a tech policy which does not warrant courts intervention.
- 4) **Transparency and Revenue Generation-** Auctioning is not the only way to generate revenue because it can also come from other sources, like toll roads.

What is the importance of providing spectrum at a reasonable upfront fee?

- 1) **Downstream Competitiveness-** User industries' competitiveness downstream depends a lot on strong connectivity. Offering spectrum to operators at a fair upfront cost can improve efficiency at the company level and enhance competitiveness.
- 2) **Boosting Digital Infrastructure-** Digital infrastructure is compared with toll roads that is, as well-built roads contribute to America's wealth, in a similar way, quality digital infrastructure can also contribute to India's prosperity.

Read more- [Telecom Sector Reforms](#)

What are some of the recent developments to address the challenges related to the current format of auctioning?

- 1) The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has recently asked the Supreme Court to change its 2012 order. This would permit the administrative allocation of spectrum in specific situations where auctions aren't technically feasible or desirable, such as for space and satellite applications.
- 2) The recently passed Telecom Act, 2023 has also specified that only limited and narrowly defined cases, including spectrum for BSNL, will be given on an administrative basis.

Conclusion- Thus, TRAI and DoT are the best authorities to handle telecom policies. Whether to hold auctions or not should be their decision, and they should be responsible and accountable for it.

Delays in payment of MSMSEs

Context- MSMEs are a crucial part of the Indian economy, accounting for a significant share of the country's manufacturing output, exports, and employment. The article highlights the hardship faced by MSME particularly related to lack of access to credit and delayed payments.

What are the steps taken by the government to address the issue of delayed payments?

Micro and small enterprises account for most of the annual delayed payments, as shown by several studies.

- 1) The government has taken steps to address this issue, such as launching the **Samadhaan portal** to monitor outstanding dues to MSMEs.
- 2) In the Union Budget 2023-24, the government introduced a provision to ensure timely payments to MSMEs within 45 days of supply of goods and/or services. This is aimed at addressing the typical payment cycle of 90 to 120 days.

What are the unintended consequences of this new provision introduced in Union Budget 2023-24?

- 1) **Higher Tax Burden for Big Companies**-The recent regulation permits larger companies to deduct payments to these enterprises from their taxes only once the payments have been made. If they're not allowed to deduct these payments from their tax returns, it would lead to a rise in their tax burden.
- 2) **Cancelling Orders with MSMEs** -Big companies are trying to circumvent this rule by canceling orders with registered MSMEs because they prefer longer payment schedules.
- 3) **Orders from Unregistered MSMEs**-They are currently sourcing orders from unregistered MSMEs, as it provides them with increased operational flexibility.
- 4) **Influencing Suppliers to Revoke MSME Registration**- Big companies are attempting to compel suppliers to withdraw their MSME registration because of their significant bargaining power.
- 5) **Impact on MSME Registration**- MSMEs are opting to deregister to avoid losing orders from big companies. By the end of last year, the total number of MSMEs registered on the Udyam registration portal was 316 million, with 150 million informal micro-enterprises registered on the Udyam Assist Platform.

Read more- [MSMEs: Significance, Challenges and Solutions](#)

What has been the government's response to deal with this unintended consequence of the new provision?

- 1) The government has begun discussions with stakeholders to explore potential solutions for addressing the problems.
- 2) The government has sought suggestions on ways to ensure timely clearance of MSME bills.

India struggling to become a global manufacturing hub

Context: This article discusses how poor-quality products have plagued India's manufacturing reputation. The government and regulators have taken steps to improve quality, like mandating GMP for drugs and testing cars and spices but concerns over enforcement and inconsistencies remain.

How have poor-quality products plagued India's manufacturing reputation?

Pharmaceutical Scandals: Indian pharmaceutical exports caused multiple deaths globally due to non-standard and counterfeit drugs. This led to mandatory WHO GMP certification for all manufacturers. For more information [read here](#)

Spice Contaminants: Singapore and Hong Kong banned spice blends from MDH and Everest due to high ethylene oxide (ETO) levels. Despite testing exports, FSSAI ignored ETO levels domestically. For more information read [Article 1](#), [Article 2](#)

Vehicle Safety: Before adopting the Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP), based on the Global NCAP, Indian consumers couldn't assess car safety accurately due to the absence of standardized crash-test data.

Why is India struggling to become a global manufacturing hub?

Inconsistent Quality Standards: Despite exporting high-quality goods to developed markets like the U.S. and Europe, Indian manufacturers often sell substandard products domestically, which tarnishes the nation's manufacturing reputation.

Regulatory Lapses: The FSSAI failed to enforce strict quality standards domestically, particularly with MDH and Everest spices that contained high levels of ethylene oxide (ETO).

Limited Inspection Capacity: The government mandates WHO GMP for all drug manufacturers but lacks the institutional capacity to enforce compliance consistently.

High Costs: Power and logistics costs remain high, making it difficult for manufacturers to maintain quality while staying competitive.

Tax Burden: High taxes on cars mean domestic customers pay more than overseas buyers for vehicles, but they receive lower-quality products.

What should be done?

Increase Testing Facilities: Set up more labs and hire qualified inspectors to oversee manufacturing processes.

Support Small Enterprises: Help micro, small, and medium businesses upgrade quality with guidance and resources.

Reduce Production Costs: Lower logistics and power costs to help maintain competitiveness without compromising quality.

Reform Tax Policies: Adjust taxes to balance pricing for domestic customers while maintaining safety standards.

Promote Quality Mindset: Foster awareness in companies to improve manufacturing quality and aim for global standards.

Topic- Effects of Liberalization on the Economy and GS Paper-2- Statutory, Regulatory and various Quasi-judicial Bodies.

The globalization of the Indian legal industry

Context-The article provides a critical analysis of recently notified “Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022” that allows foreign lawyers to set up their offices in India for some limited purposes. These rules have been notified by the Bar Council of India.

Why has the Indian legal industry remained insulated from globalization?

This insulation was partly due to the suitability of Indian lawyers for applying laws according to India's socio-economic values.

What are the reasons for notifying Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India, 2022?

- 1) India has become a prominent center for cross-border commerce. Thus, globalization of the legal industry became inevitable.
- 2) BCI emphasizes that the world is increasingly interconnected and refers to the need for the legal profession in India to adapt accordingly.

What are the functions authorized for foreign lawyers according to the new regulations?

- 1) Under the new rules, registered foreign firms and lawyers can engage in transactional or corporate work, such as joint ventures, mergers, acquisitions, and intellectual property matters, on a reciprocal basis.
- 2) They can now advise and appear in international arbitration cases conducted in India, irrespective of whether foreign law may or may not be involved. However, foreign lawyers cannot appear before Indian courts, tribunals, or statutory authorities.

What was the previous restriction on foreign lawyers practicing in India, and how have the new rules changed this?

- 1) The Supreme Court of India had prohibited foreign lawyers from practicing law in India in either litigation or the non-litigation side.
- 2) The court limited their involvement in international arbitration cases to temporary visits to India. However, the BCI Rules indicate a broader scope for foreign lawyers, albeit within a heavily regulated structure.

Read more- [Shaking Up The Rule Of Lawyers](#)

What are the long-term benefits of these new rules?

- 1) **Enhancing Access for Indian Lawyers** - The reciprocity requirement can ensure that Indian lawyers receive increased access to the legal profession in foreign jurisdictions. This could enable a sustained exchange of know-how, skills, and expertise between lawyers across jurisdictions.
- 2) **Fostering Competition and Opportunities**- The entry of foreign firms in India will increase competition. This will lead to more job opportunities for Indian lawyers, fostering a better work culture and remuneration. This will also incentivize competing stakeholders to improve the quality of their services.
- 3) **Economic Leadership**-This is likely to be beneficial not just for the Indian legal community but also for India's ascent as a leading economic power.

What are some of the risks posed by these new rules?

- 1) **Regulatory Disparities** -Differences in regulations between Indian and foreign law firms in their home countries can create unintended distortions.
- 2) **Advertising Restrictions** -Although Indian lawyers are barred from seeking clients through advertising, such limitations are less likely to be present in other legal systems.
- 3) **Difference in Ethical guidelines**-The ethical guidelines for foreign-qualified lawyers may vary from those in India, leading to uncertainty about which set of rules applies in a transaction or arbitration context.
- 4) **Monetary Capabilities of Foreign Firms**- Certain multi-jurisdictional law firms with offices in various countries may have greater monetary capabilities than their Indian counterparts. This will make it difficult for the Indian firms to compete.

How is the Bar Council of India addressing these benefits and risks?

- 1) The Bar Council of India has imposed stringent registration requirements on foreign entrants and excludes them from litigious work.
- 2) They are also engaged in dialogue with critics to carefully balance the benefits and risks. This demonstrates a consultative approach to decision-making.

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

Factors affecting the petroleum industry

Context: The article discusses the complex factors affecting the petroleum industry, including geopolitical events, economic policies, and environmental concerns. It highlights the challenges faced by countries like India in managing oil price volatility and suggests strategies such as building oil reserves and investing in renewable energy.

What are the complex factors affecting the petroleum industry?

Geopolitical Tensions: The U.S. has reimposed sanctions on Venezuela but allowed Chevron (U.S company) to continue operations there to manage petrol prices and protect U.S. interests. Similarly, Conflicts in the Middle East, especially between Israel and Iran, threaten the stability of oil supply routes, notably the Straits

of Hormuz, through which 30% of internationally traded oil passes.

Environmental Policies: The U.S. Inflation Reduction Act allocates \$400 billion to reduce carbon emissions, showing a shift towards clean energy that may conflict with fossil fuel economics.

Sanctions and Market Fragmentation: Sanctions on countries like Venezuela, Iran, and Russia have fragmented the global oil market, leading to regional trading patterns. For example, Russia now mainly supplies crude to India and Iran to China, despite Western sanctions.

Demand Shifts in Energy: Shifts from coal to gas in countries like China and India and the planned increase in LNG capacity by Qatar indicate changing dynamics in energy demand and supply.

What are the dilemmas faced by oil companies and the AI industry in balancing growth with carbon emission goals?

Profit vs. Environment: Oil companies are profiting from higher oil and gas prices but face the challenge of reconciling their business operations with net-zero carbon emission targets. This creates a dilemma between continuing to capitalize on fossil fuels and shifting towards renewable energy investments.

Energy Demand vs. Sustainability: The AI industry's significant electricity demand, required for data centers and cloud services, confronts the limits of current renewable energy capabilities. Leaders like Bill Gates and Sundar Pichai, committed to net-zero emissions, face the challenge of choosing between scaling growth and relying on gas-based power to meet their energy needs.

What should India do in response to oil market volatility?

Build Strategic Reserves: India should enhance its strategic oil reserves to hedge against market volatility and ensure supply security during global disruptions.

Diversify Energy Sources: Increasing the share of natural gas in India's energy mix can reduce reliance on oil and stabilize energy prices.

Invest in Infrastructure and Renewables: Promoting investments in smart infrastructure and scaling up renewable energy sources can lessen dependency on oil.

Promote Research and Public-Private Partnerships: Encouraging R&D in clean energy and fostering public-private partnerships can accelerate India's transition to sustainable energy solutions

Subject: Science & Technology

Topic- Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life

Impact of AI on jobs

Context: The article discusses the impact of AI on jobs and how social forces shape technology development. It mentions concerns about AI replacing jobs, but also points out how technology like AI can add value to businesses without reducing employee numbers.

What are the impacts of AI?

Positive Impacts of AI:

Improved Efficiency: AI improves search results and product recommendations, leading to better inventory management as noted by Jeff Bezos. This contributes to business growth and increased employment at companies like Amazon.

Conversational Interfaces: AI like ChatGPT uses human-like conversational styles, making technology more accessible and user-friendly.

Negative Impacts of AI:

Job Losses: AI is projected to cause significant job losses in sectors like call centers in India, affecting over 300,000 workers, and potentially 300 million white-collar jobs globally as per Goldman Sachs.

Public Misconception: A risk of deceptive claims about AI's capabilities, prompting government bodies like the America's Federal Trade Commission to caution against exaggerations that could mislead consumers.

For details information on **impacts of AI** read [Article 1](#), [Article 2](#), [Article 3](#)

How do social forces influence technology?

SCOT Theory: The Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory argues that technology's direction and pace are steered by social dynamics, not just technical capabilities, evidenced by the collective scholarly efforts described in "The Social Construction of Technological Systems".

Direction of Development: Social forces shape the direction and speed of technological advancements, as seen with AI where technology is developed to reduce headcounts for increased profits.

Adoption and Evolution: The bicycle evolved due to social needs, from a pedal-less version to the safety bicycle with equal-sized wheels and chain drives, widely adopted for its practicality and as a symbol of modernity.

For details information on **Social and Political Impacts of AI** [read this Article here](#)

What should be the approach to developing AI?

Regulate Claims and Expectations: Governments should regulate AI claims to prevent deceptive practices, following the FTC's example of cautioning against overhyped capabilities.

Enhance Value Addition: AI should aim to add genuine value beyond replacing jobs, similar to Amazon's use of AI for improving inventory management and customer experience, leading to business growth and not merely reducing employee headcount.

Topic- Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nano-technology, Bio-technology and issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights

Judicial Activism and its impact on manufacturing sector

Context- There's a problem emerging in India where some tech companies are using standard essential patents (SEPs) against the telecom manufacturing sector. This directly affects India's goal of building its own cell phone manufacturing industry.

What are standard essential patents (SEPs)?

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Description-SEPs are patents that cover technologies adopted by the industry as "standards." For ex-technologies such as CDMA, GSM, LTE are all industry standards in the telecom sector.

Control-Private tech companies mostly control the process of setting standards through organizations called Standard Setting Organizations (SSOs)

Significance-They are important for ensuring interoperability of cellular phones manufactured by different companies.

What are the challenges that arise from the ownership of SEPs by certain companies?

1) **Limited Influence in Standard Setting**- Countries like India, which don't innovate much in the telecom sector, have little say in how standards are established or how SEPs are licensed.

2) **"Patent holdup" problem**- Without other options, SEP owners can demand high royalties from manufacturers, which can stifle competition. This is known as the "patent holdup" problem in economics.

3) **Anti-competitive practice**-The technology industry has been found to be guilty of engaging in anti-competitive practices due to the secretive nature of operating. This is evidenced by the hefty fines some SEP owners had to pay worldwide for unfair competition.

For ex-the largest of these SEP owners, Qualcomm, has been fined \$975 million by China (2015), \$873 million by South Korea (2017) etc.

4) **Impact on creation of job**-While the government helps manufacturers with programs like "production linked incentives," SEP owners are criticized for taking money out of the country without creating jobs.

Read more- [Patent Rules 2024- Significance and Challenges](#)

What has been the response of the Indian judiciary to this issue?

The Indian response to the issue involves judicial lethargy and activism at the Delhi High Court

1) In 2013, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) investigated whether Ericsson abused its dominant position by demanding high royalties for its SEPs.

2) Ericsson challenged CCI's power before the Delhi High Court, resulting in a lengthy legal battle.

3) Despite pending competition law issues, the Delhi High Court proceeded with lawsuits filed by SEP owners against cellular phone manufacturers.

4) The court granted "interim" remedies requiring manufacturers to deposit money, impacting their working capital.

What is the impact of this judicial activism on India's manufacturing sector?

1) **Fund Availability**-The court ordered manufacturers to deposit money temporarily. This has affected their available funds for business.

2) **Hamper investment**-This judicial activism has negatively impacted the government's attempts to attract investment in the manufacturing sector.

Way forward-Indian government should intervene to regulate SEPs, like the European Parliament. This will safeguard India's manufacturing interests.

Subject: Environment

Topic- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Need of stricter Animal Protection Law

News- The killing of a dog named Jai in Mumbai caused outrage in India, leading to calls for stricter punishments for animal cruelty in Indian law. The #JusticeForJai campaign spread rapidly on social media, with people organizing prayer meetings and candlelight vigils.

What are the inadequacies of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960 in India?

The PCA Act, 1960, which criminalizes various forms of animal cruelty in India, has several shortcomings-

- A) Enforcement is weak, and penalties are minimal, failing to effectively prevent animal cruelty.
- B) Most offenses are bailable and non-cognizable, hampering immediate police action.
- C) Fines are negligible, some as low as ₹10, and haven't been updated since the 1890 Act.
- D) Courts can choose between imprisonment or a fine for offenders, often resulting in lenient sentences.
- E) There's a lack of provisions for rehabilitative punishments like community service at animal shelters.

Read more- [WILDLIFE \(PROTECTION\) ACT, 1972](#)

What improvements does the Draft PCA (Amendment) Bill, 2022 propose?

The Draft PCA (Amendment) Bill, 2022 was published by the Department of Animal Husbandry. It has introduced significant enhancements, including-

- A) Incorporating the five fundamental freedoms for animals.
- B) Increasing punishments and fines for various offenses.
- C) Introducing new cognizable offenses.

What are the limitations of the proposed Draft PCA (Amendment) Bill, 2022?

For certain serious offenses, such as extreme cruelty and killing animals, the draft Bill still allows for either imprisonment or fines. This could allow offenders to avoid imprisonment by paying fines.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Upholding the value of Ahimsa(non-violence)**-Since India has been a strong advocate of non-violence since ancient times, it is morally incumbent upon India to demonstrate an example in showing kindness towards animals.
- 2) **Enactment of draft bill**-The government should ensure that the amendments to the PCA Act (1960) are enforced. This would be a significant stride towards enhancing animal protection laws in India.

Climate Change and its Impact on Labor Productivity

Context- The International Labour Organization's (ILO) has recently released a report, 'Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate'. The report highlights the need to ensure that labor becomes climate-proofed and to address the evolving work environment due to global warming.

What are the six key impacts of climate change on workers identified by the ILO?

The ILO identifies excessive heat, solar ultraviolet radiation, extreme weather events, workplace air pollution, vector-borne diseases, and agrochemicals as the key impacts of climate change on workers.

What sectors are particularly affected by heat hazards according to the report?

- 1) **Agriculture Sector**- Globally, the informal farm labor sector is the most vulnerable to heat, especially in developing countries, where workers often lack adequate weather protection.
- 2) **MSME sector**- In India, the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector employs about 21% of the total workforce, lacks proper oversight from State Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) departments due to its higher level of informalization. This leaves workers highly exposed to heat hazards.
- 3) **Construction Sector**-It employs 12% of India's workforce. Construction workers deal with the urban heat island effect because construction is mostly concentrated in cities, where temperatures tend to be higher due to urbanization. Workers endure risks like physical injuries and health issues such as asthma due to air pollution, especially in highly polluted Indian cities.
- 4) **Gig workers**- Gig workers constitute around 1.5% of India's total workforce, expected to rise to about 4.5% by 2030 according to Nasscom. They are also heat-susceptible.

Read more- [Heat Action Plans](#)

What are existing laws and regulations regarding workers' safety?

India has more than 13 central laws regulating working conditions across sectors, including the Factories Act, 1948. These various laws have been consolidated into a single code that is Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020 (OSH Code, 2020).

What are the shortcomings of these laws?

- 1) **Concerns over new law implementation**- Many unions are dissatisfied with the new code because as per them, it lowers safety and inspection standards. Further, the government hasn't notified its enforcement. Because of this, unions and the courts still use the older laws to address issues and hold parties accountable.
- 2) **Lack of Government Oversight for Unregistered MSMEs** -Most of India's 64 million MSMEs are not registered under this law, so they are not subject to government inspections.
- 3) **Outdated Regulations**- The rules under the Factories Act, framed decades ago, lack adequate provisions for thermal comfort based on the level of activity and do not mention air conditioning or other cooling alternatives.
- 4) **Updating existing regulations**- Regulations need updating to handle how effluents and byproducts are disposed of. This is because their effects on human health can change with temperature fluctuations.
- 5) **Regulatory Gaps in Silica Exposure Management** - The existing rule doesn't mandate silica removal technologies in quarries or mines. This is deeply concerning in the backdrop of the rise in coal production and the expansion of mines that could lead to an increase in silicosis cases, a fatal and incurable pulmonary disease caused by fine particulate matter exposure.
- 6) **Bypassing workers concern**- Unions and workers face pressure from corporate management and state bureaucracy, who prioritize attracting industries over addressing worker concerns related to heat hazards.

Way forward- A universally recognized regulatory framework is required to ensure that work and workers are resilient to climate changes. This is because the connection between labor productivity, human health, and climate change is often overlooked

Subject: Internal Security

Significance of Submarine Capabilities for India

Context: India's 30-Year Submarine Building Plan is not running as per the expectations. India's 30-Year Submarine Building Plan was launched in 1999. It was aimed at creating a fleet of 24 conventionally powered submarines to secure India's maritime interests. However, there is a delay.

As of now, even the initial phase of this plan, termed Project 75, has not been completed, with subsequent phases also lagging behind schedule.

What is the significance of Submarine Capabilities for India?

1) Maritime Security

To deny hostile submarines freedom in the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and the northern Indian Ocean. To protect India's 5,600 km coastline, 1,800 km of island territories, and 2.37 million sq km exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

The region's hydrological conditions and the presence of strategic chokepoints like the Straits of Malacca amplify the need for a capable naval force to secure these waters.

2) Economic Importance

Two-thirds of global trade, including oil, gas, and commodities, passes through Indian waters, necessitating submarine capabilities to secure maritime trade routes.

What are the challenges faced in the Submarine acquisition?

To tackle hostile conditions: The shallow waters off the western coast limit operations of larger submarines near critical areas like Karachi. Whereas the eastern seaboard's steep descent into the Bay of Bengal is more suitable for large nuclear-powered submarines. This uneven terrain necessitates a mixed fleet of conventional and nuclear submarines to address varied operational demands effectively.

Lack of indigenous expertise in submarine design and construction, leading to dependence on foreign partners.

Strategic partners: In 2020, the Strategic Partner (SP) model was introduced under the Defence Acquisition Proposition. Submarine acquisition requires involving Indian firms like Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) and L&T in collaboration with foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The model requires indigenous procurement of 45 per cent for the first boat, incrementally stepping up to 60 per cent for the sixth and last. It discourages foreign companies from participating.

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

The challenges faced by India's crypto regulation

Context: This article discusses how Sam Bankman-Fried's crypto exchange FTX collapsed due to fraud, leading to major financial losses. It also describes India's uncertain regulatory approach to cryptocurrencies, including strict taxes and anti-money laundering rules that haven't deterred traders effectively.

For details information on **Cryptocurrencies in India** [read this Article here](#)

Sam Bankman-Fried, founder of FTX, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for fraud and conspiracy. FTX's collapse in November 2022 led to losses of \$8 billion for its customers, \$1.7 billion for its investors, and \$1.3 billion for Alameda lenders.

How did the FTX collapse affect the crypto market?

The collapse of FTX severely impacted the crypto market, sinking its value to \$796 billion, a two-year low. This decline came after the market peaked at \$3 trillion in November 2021, showing a significant reduction in value.

Following the collapse, cryptocurrencies, like Bitcoin, hit multi-year lows.

The FTX downfall prompted increased regulatory scrutiny, highlighting the need for clearer oversight. The event led to a general loss of confidence in the crypto industry, affecting exchanges and traders, and reshaped the conversation on digital asset regulation worldwide.

What challenges does India's crypto regulation face?

Unclear Policy Framework: A comprehensive cryptocurrency bill has been delayed since 2021, leaving the government unable to provide clear guidelines on the legality of digital assets.

High Taxation: In 2022, a 1% tax deducted at source and a 30% capital gains tax were imposed on crypto trading without allowing for loss offsets. These taxes have deterred some traders.

Inclusion in PMLA: A March 2023 notification brought crypto currencies and other digital assets under India's anti-money laundering law. Its objective was to check money laundering by placing the responsibility of transparency and checks on Indian crypto exchange platforms.

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Fragmented Oversight: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), and the government have inconsistent views on cryptocurrencies, with the RBI particularly critical.

Loss of Revenue and Users: High taxes and unclear regulation caused 3-5 million Indian traders to switch to offshore platforms, leading to \$3.8 billion in lost trading volume.

Way forward:-India needs clarity on which regulatory body should oversee crypto: RBI, SEBI, or a new hybrid body. The key question is not just who will regulate but why, as other nations like the UK and EU have already implemented clear regulatory frameworks.

For information on **Crypto under PMLA** [read this Article here](#)

Topic- Various Security Forces and Agencies

Importance of Defense Universities

Context - The article highlights the importance of defense universities in advancing academic rigor and strategic thinking within the armed forces. It gives the example of countries like Pakistan and China, which have established multiple universities for their armed forces, while expressing concern over the absence of an Indian Defense University (IDU).

What has been the history behind the setting up of the Indian Defense University (IDU)?

- 1) The proposal for establishing an IDU in India dates back to 1967 when the Chiefs of Staff Committee first proposed the idea.
- 2) In 1982, a Study Group formed by the COSC emphasized the necessity of an apex educational institution for the armed forces.
- 3) After the Kargil conflict in 1999, a committee led by Dr. K. Subrahmanyam recommended setting up the IDU. This has got the 'in-principle' approval in 2010. However, after that, progress has been very slow.

What is the shortcoming of current defence training institutions in India?

There are several world-class training and education institutions run by India's armed forces providing an ecosystem of professional training. However, there are certain loopholes:

- 1) They don't have a comprehensive and integrated Professional Military Education framework.
- 2) They don't have a multi-disciplinary approach to strategic thinking.
- 3) According to the author, existing affiliations with universities for degree courses are not an optimal solution.
- 4) According to the author, establishment of the Rashtriya Raksha University (RRU) alone will not address the existing shortcomings because the two institutions, that is RRU and IDU have different objectives and curricula.

The RRU Act doesn't mention education related to 'defense' in its goals, and its curriculum isn't solely focused on military needs for managing war and executing plans.

What is the significance of setting up Indian Defense University (IDU)?

- 1) **Preparing Military Officers for Modern Warfare** -It will equip military officers to cope with the changing dynamic and chaotic nature of modern warfare. For ex-In Europe and West Asia, the unpredictable nature of warfare means military officers must achieve results despite unclear information and rapidly changing situations.
- 2) **Enhancing Strategic Thinking**- These institutions will foster academic rigor and enhance strategic thinking within the armed forces.

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- 3) **Strengthening India's Military Education System** -The IDU would address the issues in India's PME system by offering a central military learning institution with a skilled faculty, including academics and current or retired military and civil officers.
- 4) **Broadening curricula**- The university's curriculum would include various relevant subjects in national security and defense, covering both sciences and humanities.
- 5) **Recognizing the Importance of Professional Military Education**-Developed nations like the USA have

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acknowledged the significance of a well-constructed Professional Military Education (PME) continuum that augments the abilities of military officers over long career spans.

There is an urgent need to operationalize the IDU to bolster defense preparedness, strategic culture, and inter-service integration.

