

7 PM COMPILATION

June, 2024

Features of 7 PM compilation

- ❖ Comprehensive coverage of a given current topic
- ❖ Provide you all the information you need to frame a good answer
- ❖ Critical analysis, comparative analysis, legal/constitutional provisions, current issues and challenges and best practices around the world
- ❖ Written in lucid language and point format
- ❖ Wide use of charts, diagrams and info graphics
- ❖ Best-in class coverage, critically acclaimed by aspirants
- ❖ Out of the box thinking for value edition
- ❖ Best cost-benefit ratio according to successful aspirants

INDEX

[Kurukshetra May 2024 Summary] Green Waste management technologies for rural India-Explained Pointwise.....	2
[Kurukshetra May 2024 Summary] Use of Green Technologies in Sustainable Water Management- Explained Pointwise	5
Special Category Status- Explained Pointwise	8
Political Empowerment of Women in India- An Analysis- Explained Pointwise	11
Exam Paper Leaks- Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise	16
Agnipath scheme-Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise	18
NEET Controversy – Reasons and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise.....	22
Lithium Reserves in India – Challenges and Way forward- Explained Pointwise	25
Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India-Significance, Challenges and Way forward – Explained , Pointwise.....	30
Indian Migrants in Gulf Countries – Challenges and Way forward	35
Climate Change Negotiations after Bonn Climate Meet – Challenges and Way Forward	39
Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act (POSH Act)-Significance and concerns- Explained Pointwise.....	43
G7 and India- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise.....	45
The Issue of Indian Railway Safety- Explained Pointwise.....	48
Hindu Kush Himalayas Snow Melting- Reasons and Consequences- Explained Pointwise	53
Methanol poisoning deaths due to Spurious alcohol in India- Explained Pointwise.....	56
National Testing Agency (NTA)- Functioning and Challenges- Explained Pointwise	60
Speaker of Lok Sabha- Functioning and Challenges- Explained Pointwise	62
India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise.....	66
The Great Nicobar Island Development Project- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise ...	70
50 years after the 1975 emergency – Lessons and Way forward – Explained Pointwise.....	74
The Challenge of Cross-border Terrorism in India- Explained Pointwise.....	78
Urban Flooding in India-Causes, Impacts and Remedies – Explained, pointwise.....	81

[Kurukshetra May 2024 Summary] Green Waste management technologies for rural India- Explained Pointwise

Waste management in rural areas worldwide, particularly in India, is still **underdeveloped**, resulting in harmful environmental effects because the methods used to handle waste are not adequate compared to the rate of waste generation.

With a large portion of the population residing in **rural areas**, it becomes necessary to **empower** these communities while addressing environmental concerns for **sustainable development**.



Source-Earthwatch India

What are the present waste management practices in rural areas?

- 1) Open Burning and Air Pollution**-They face challenges with **open burning** of agricultural residues, e-waste, and plastics, releasing **harmful pollutants** and **worsening air pollution** and climate change.
- 2) Inefficient Waste Management Systems**- Inefficient waste management systems such as open dumping, **e-waste open burning**, **river dumping**, **pollution from plastic waste etc** in rural areas, deprive communities of potential **resources** and economic opportunities.

What are the green waste management technologies for rural areas?

Composting Solutions	These systems utilise sensors to monitor temperature , moisture levels , and aeration, optimising the composting process and producing high quality compost for use in agriculture.
Smart Waste Modelling	Utilise data analytics platforms to analyse waste generation patterns, identify areas with high waste management and optimise waste management strategies accordingly. Data-driven insights can help authorities make informed decisions to reduce waste generation and improve recycling rates
Waste to Energy Solution	Technologies such as anaerobic digestion or biomass conversion help in generating renewable energy from organic waste materials . This not only reduces landfill waste but also provides a sustainable energy source for the community

Recycling Robots	Introducing AI robotics into recycling centres enhances waste sorting efficiency, diverting recyclable materials from landfills . With AI robots capable of accurately differentiating between materials, recycling centres can operate longer hours .
Pneumatic Waste Pipes	Installing pneumatic waste pipes below public containers makes waste transportation to processing centers more efficient, reducing the necessity for conventional trash pickups. This innovative system minimises and prevents contributing to and more efficient waste management practices.
Solar-powered Trash Compactors	Solar-powered compactors increase trash bin capacity by up to 5 times , reducing the frequency of pickups and optimising waste collection processes.
E-Waste Kiosks	It encourages proper disposal and recycling of electronic devices, mitigating environmental management hazards associated with e-waste. This will prevent seeping of harmful chemicals into soil and water.

What is the significance of green waste management technologies for rural areas?

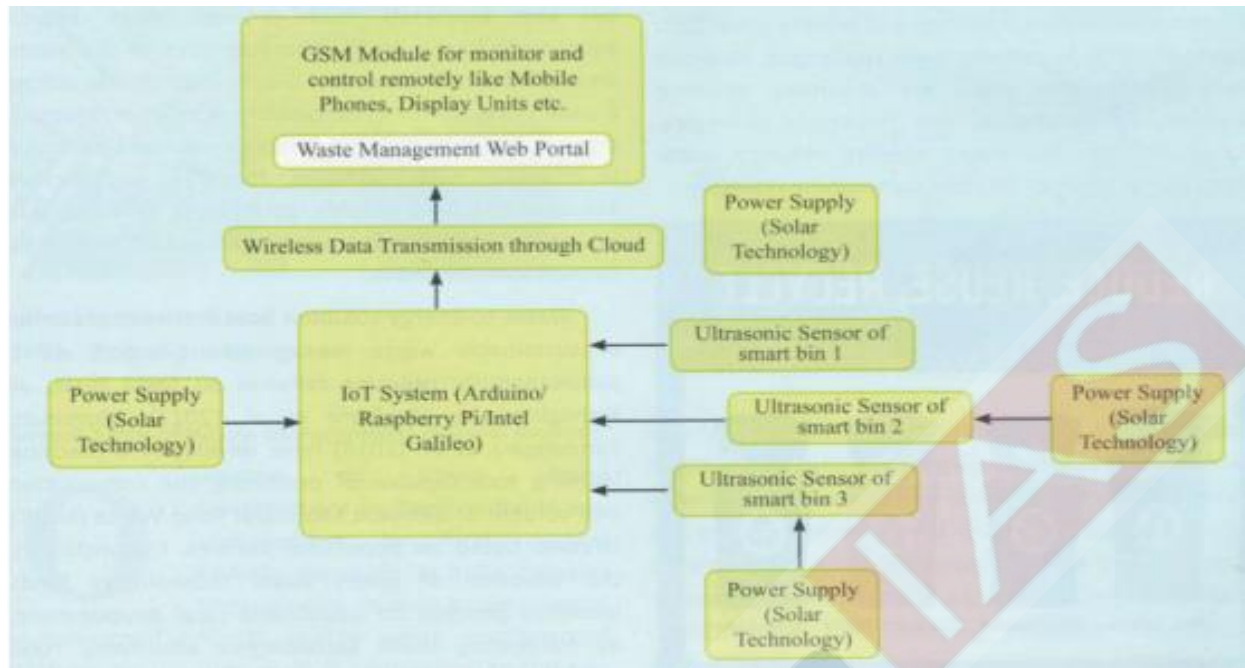
- 1) Empowering Rural Communities**-It offer multifaceted benefits, including **environmental conservation** and **socio-economic development**. It will also bridge **urban-rural socio-economic gaps** and ensure **equitable resource distribution** for all.
- 2) Environmental Sustainability**-Composting and biogas generation help manage organic waste sustainably while enhancing **soil fertility** and **reducing greenhouse gas emissions**.
- 3) Economic Opportunities**- Green waste technologies create income streams through the **sale of compost and biogas**, fostering rural entrepreneurship. This is also crucial for ensuring transition to **circular economy** and fulfilment of **Net Zero Targets by 2070**.
- 4) Climate Resilience**-Proper waste management reduces **greenhouse gas emissions** and helps in mitigating **climate change** impacts.
- 5) Community Engagement and Awareness**-Promoting green waste technologies empowers communities with **knowledge and skills**, fostering **ownership** and **responsibility**.

What are the challenges in adoption of green technology in rural areas?

- 1) Infrastructural bottlenecks**- Limited infrastructure, resources, and awareness about **proper disposal practices** contribute to **improper waste management** in rural villages.
- 2) Lack of Funds**-The village panchayats do not have adequate funds to promote the incentivisation of adoption of green technology.
- 3) Resistance to Adoption**-In rural areas, people often use coal or wood for heating and cooking. It's hard to adopt newer, greener methods because of cultural habits, financial concerns, and the practical difficulty of making the change.

What are the potential solution?

- 1) Adopting Smart Waste Management System (SWM)**-It employs IoT technology to revolutionize **waste processing, enhance efficiency**, and promote **sustainability**.



Source-Kurukshetra

- A) Smart bins with **ultrasonic sensors** are placed across rural areas. They gather real-time data that is communicated to a central control using **cloud platforms**.
- B) Solar-powered sensors ensure **continuous operation** and planned routes help save fuel costs.
- C) When waste levels go above 80%, **GPS-guided trucks** pick up waste efficiently, saving time and resources. This setup improves waste management in rural India with **eco-friendly and efficient solutions**.

2) **Social Inclusion of Waste Pickers in Rural Villages**-They are subjected to worst forms of **humiliation, discrimination, and socio-economic marginalization**. This is despite the fact that they play an important role in **waste management**. Thus, there is a need to adopt a comprehensive framework that should-

- A) recognise their **contributions** and grant them access to **basic services**.
- B) ensure occupational **health and safety** and stabilise their **incomes**.
- C) promote **social inclusion** and empowerment.

3) **Digital Monitoring of Waste Management**-Using IoT, mobile apps, and data analytics, it improves **waste collection and disposal**.

- A) These systems connect stakeholders like waste pickers, recyclers, ULBs, and citizens via **mobile apps**, creating a **digital network**.
- B) Real-time data monitors the waste journey from **collection to recycling**, facilitating seamless monitoring and management. **For ex-**The Eco Green Village Mobile Application for Waste Management, pioneered in **Indonesia**, targets rural areas to improve cleanliness, predict climate impacts, and advance Smart Kampong Initiatives through technology.

What are some of the best practices for successful implementation of green technologies in rural areas?

Successful implementation of green technologies requires the adoption of best practices and **community-driven initiatives**. Projects like the **National Biogas and Manure Management Program (NBMMP)** and the **Swachh Bharat Mission** have facilitated the establishment of biogas plants and **decentralised waste management systems**. This has yielded positive socio-economic and environmental outcomes. Some of the best practices are as follows-

- 1) **Karnataka** -The “**Flasiru Mane**” project, pioneered by the NGO Hasiru Dala, trains women from marginalised communities to produce compost from **organic waste**, generating livelihoods and promoting **environmental leadership**.
- 2) **Gujrat**- Punsari village in Gujrat exemplifies sustainable development by generating **electricity** from village waste, showcasing the potential of **waste-to-energy**
- 3) **Punjab**-The “Pind Cycle” program incentives villagers to collect agricultural waste for **biomass energy production**, reducing crop burning incidents, improving **air quality**, and providing **alternative sources of income** for rural households.

Read more-[Green Technologies- Explained Pointwise](#)

What should be the way forward?

- 1) The local best practices should be **replicated** in other rural regions.
- 2) Formulation of **local waste management plans** should be encouraged. These plans may outline strategies for collecting, transporting, and treating waste.
- 2) There should be promotion of **rural entrepreneurship** that is in **alignment** with the objective of **SDGs**.
- 3) The government must implement **policies** that effectively address **environmental injustice** toward marginalised and remote communities.
- 4) The government should promote **cohesion policies** between **Urban** and **Peri-Urban areas**.
- 5) Concept of Sustainable ‘**Green**’ **Rural Municipalities** should be promoted.
- 6) The government should incentivise **adoption of green waste technology** and create a conducive environment for sustainable waste management.
- 7) There is a need to provide **financial incentives, subsidies**, and **technical assistance** to support small **rural entrepreneurs** and **rural enterprises**. This requires concerted efforts from **policymakers, development agencies**, and **local stakeholders**.
- 8) **Public-private partnerships** should be leveraged to facilitate **technology transfer**, foster innovation and **entrepreneurship** in rural areas.

By promoting adoption and scaling up green waste technologies, India can pave the way towards a **greener** and **more inclusive future** for its rural population.

[Read more-Compulsory Afforestation in India](#)

[UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-3-Environment, Conservation of Environment](#)

[Kurukshetra May 2024 Summary] Use of Green Technologies in Sustainable Water Management- Explained Pointwise

Sustainable water management is a **necessity for our present and future generations**. The Sustainable water management is a **multi-prolonged strategy** that rests on four pillars which are **environment, economic, social**, and **energy and resources**. Use of green technologies is necessary for sustainable water management.



Source- Kurukshetra

What are the Green Technologies being used in Sustainable Water Management?

Biofilters for storm water	The storm water is filtered by retrofitting conventional biofilters . There is a submerged (partly anoxic) zone with an embedded carbon source . This helps in cleaning storm water.
Denitrification	Denitrification and removal of copper from storm water have significantly improved the storm water quality. The use of E.Coli improves the water quality for secondary use.
Bioreactors	A bioreactor is a device containing bacteria and microorganisms placed on a moving bed biofilm reactor. The waste is deposited on a packed or fibrous bed and attached to a membrane to form a biofilm.
Biofilters	Microorganisms or bacteria are allowed to grow on biofilters to make a biofilm. Wastewater is passed through biofilm which will speed up the degradation of pollutants and organic matter present in the waste water.
Bioremediation	Microorganisms are applied to the wastewater sites to remove dangerous species or to convert toxins into less or non-toxic materials .
Electrowinning	Current is passed through wastewater with the help of electrodes. Metals are then electro-extracted from their oxidized forms to deposit on the cathode. Heavy metals including copper, nickel, silver, gold, cadmium, bismuth, cobalt , and others can be recovered from wastewater through electrowinning.
Desalination	Desalination technologies are being used to produce freshwater from seawater.

Other Green Technologies employed in the field of Water Management

Forward Osmosis	It uses a new eco-friendly chemical compound to draw the water molecules through a membrane leaving the salt behind. Then we separate the chemical from water through a heating process. This chemical can be reused in the process.
Clathrate Desalination	This technique traps water molecules in carbon dioxide and pressurises water molecules into clathrate crystals . Later, these crystals are broken down to release freshwater.
Dewvapouration	This technique humidifies a stream of heated air by running a stream of saline water on a heated surface.
Freeze Desalination	It uses the phase shift of water from liquid to solid state to remove salt from the ice crystals.

What are the advantages of using green technology for sustainable water management?

- 1. Averting the water scarcity-** The indiscriminate exploitation and poor management of water has reduced the per capita annual availability of water, **from 1816 cubic metre (cu m) in 2001, to 1544 cu m in 2011 to 1140 cu m in the year 2050**. The use of green technology will help in averting the water scarcity.
- 2. Countering negative effect of climate change-** The use of green technology helps in **augmenting the supply of water, falling water table, water quality, and climate change**.
- 3. Treatment of Waste water-** Waste water treatment using green technology helps in increasing the water resource availability in the country. **For ex-** Use of **Bioremediation, electrowinning technology** helps in effective treatment of waste water.
- 4. Economic Growth and Job Creation-** The employment of green technology offers potential for **job creation in manufacturing, installation, maintenance, and research and development**.
- 5. Improved Public Health-** Green technologies in sustainable water management **increases the pollutants removal-efficiency and nutrient recovery**. The protection of human health and the environment improves with the employment of green technology in water management.

What are the Success stories of successful implementation of Green technologies?

- 1. Deep Tunnel Sewerage System-** The Deep Tunnel Sewerage System is a massive **underground superhighway for Singapore's used water management**. The DTSS has adopted green technologies like energy efficient pumps, advanced membrane bioreactors, and a cogeneration plant that converts biogas into electricity. **This process has resulted in reduced energy consumption, lowered carbon emissions, and increased resource recovery** from wastewater.
- 2. Employment of Bio-remediating technique by Oil India-** Bio-remediating technique by Oil India reduces **oil contamination in water bodies** so that these areas can be made conducive to the growth of aquatic life.
- 3. Werribee Treatment Plant in Melbourne-** It has successfully implemented green technologies to achieve sustainable management of wastewater. Each year the plant produces **40 billion litres of recycled water** which is then used for irrigation of parks, golf courses, and agricultural lands.

What are the challenges in the use of green technology in sustainable water management?

- 1. Scalability and Cost-Effectiveness-** The scalability and cost-effectiveness of green technologies for **small-scale or remote applications** is a major challenge for a developing country like India.
- 2. Low Public Acceptance-** There is low public acceptance of non-chemical water treatment method. It is also influenced by various factors, like **economic conditions** and **changes in government policy**.
- 3. Huge requirement of Investment and Financing-** The implementation of green technologies **requires significant investment and financing**. The requirement of huge investment and finance is a challenge for governments, industries, and individuals.
- 4. Environmental Impact-** Green technologies can have unintended environmental impacts, such as **changes in local ecosystems** or **water quality**.
- 5. Integration with Existing Infrastructure-** Green technologies require integration with existing infrastructure. This is can be a **challenge due to compatibility issues**.

[Read More- Green Technologies- Explained Pointwise](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- 1. Research and Development-** Continuous research and development are essential for **identifying and implementing green technologies** that are suitable to the needs of the sector.
- 2. Collaboration with the stakeholders-** The **researchers, engineers, and industry professionals must innovate and collaborate** to increase the adoption of green technology in water management.
- 3. Public Policy for Green technology adoption-** There must be emphasis on the development of Policy frameworks that include **financial incentives, tax breaks, and regulatory requirements that drive the adoption of green technologies**.
- 4. Public Awareness Programs-** Massive public awareness programs along with behavioural change are the key to **encourage the public and state** towards the embracement of green technology.

[Read More- MDPI](#)

[UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Environmental Conservation](#)

Special Category Status- Explained Pointwise

With the formation of the **new NDA government at the Centre dependent upon two regional parties of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh**, the issue of demand for special category status has again gained prominence. In this article we will look at the benefits associated with special status and the concerns surrounding it.

What is Special Category Status? What is the history of Special Category status and the factors considered while awarding it?

A Special Category Status(SCS) is a classification **given by Centre to assist in the development of those states that face geographical and socio-economic disadvantage**.

History of Introduction and Aim- SCS mechanism was introduced in 1969, on the recommendation of the Fifth Finance Commission of India. It was based on the **Gadgil formula**. The mechanism of SCS was developed to **assist certain states in their development and fast-tracking growth**, if they faced historical economic or geographical disadvantages.

Factors considered for according SCS (According to Gadgil Formula)

- a. Difficult and hilly terrain
- b. Low population density and/ or a sizable tribal population
- c. Strategic location along borders
- d. Economic and infrastructural backwardness
- e. Non-viable nature of state finances

The 14th Finance Commission has done away with the 'special category status' for states, except for the Northeastern and three hill states. According to the 14th Finance Commission, the resource gap of the states should be filled by increasing the devolution of tax to 42% from the existing 32%.

This includes the Assam, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttarakhand and Telangana.

What are the reasons behind Andhra Pradesh's and Bihar's Demand for Special Category Status?**Andhra Pradesh Special Category Status Demand**

1. Bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh to create Telangana- Andhra Pradesh had to suffer a loss of revenue and the loss of developed capital around Hyderabad due to AP Reorganisation Act, 2014.

2. Increased debt level of Andhra Pradesh- The debt of the residuary state of Andhra Pradesh, which was Rs 97,000 crore at the time of bifurcation, has reached Rs 2,58,928 crore by 2018-19.

3. Reduced Post-devolution revenue deficit- The 14th Finance Commission had estimated that post-devolution revenue deficit for AP for the five-year period 2015-20 would be Rs 22,113 crore. However, the actual post-devolution revenue deficit has been Rs 66,362 crore.

4. Unjust and inequitable Distribution- The successor state of Andhra Pradesh has inherited nearly 59% of the population, debt, and liabilities of the original state, but only 47% of its revenues.

Bihar Special Category Status Demand

1. Economic Backwardness- About one-third of Bihar's population lives in poverty. The state has a low per-capita GDP of around ₹54,000, marking it as one of India's poorest states.

2. Impact of Bifurcation- Bihar's bifurcation led to industrial decline, with many industries moving to Jharkhand, resulting in fewer employment opportunities.

3. Natural Challenges- The state faces regular floods in the north and droughts in the south, impacting agriculture and livelihoods.

4. Need for Welfare Funding- Bihar's Chief Minister highlighted the need for SCS to secure approximately ₹2.5 lakh crore for various welfare measures over five years.

5. Lack of Resources- Bihar argues its lack of natural resources and continuous water supply for irrigation contributes to its underdevelopment.

What are the benefits associated with the special category status?

Special category status provides significant financial and tax benefits to the recipient states from the central government. This aims to aid their development, to overcome their geographical and socio-economic disadvantages.

1. Higher grants-in-aid- Higher grant-in-aid provided to the state government of the special category states from the Centre. For ex- **Per capita grants** to Special Category States is **Rs 5,573 crore per year**, whereas **Andhra Pradesh (AP)** which is pushing for SCS receives only Rs 3,428 crore.

2. Enhanced Central Funding- In the Special Category States, the Central government funds **90% of the Centrally sponsored scheme**, compared to 70% in non-SCS states. The **unspent money in a financial year** does not lapse and is carried forward.

3. Tax Exemptions and incentives- The SCS states enjoy special **industrial incentives** such as **Income-tax exemptions, custom duty waivers, reduced excise duty, corporate tax exemption** for a certain period, **concessions and exemptions** relating to GST, and **lower state and central** taxes.

4. Improvement of employment opportunities- Special incentives to the special category states provide resources which are **vital for the rapid industrialization of the primarily agrarian state**. It also leads to improved employment opportunities for the youth and overall development of the state.

5. Investment in infrastructure- Granting of SCS **encourages investments** in **specialty hospitals, five-star hotels, manufacturing industries, high-value service industries** such as IT, and premier institutions of higher education and research.

What are the Concerns with Special State Status?

The 14th finance commission had opposed the continuation of special state status on the following grounds.

1. Increased Burden on Central Finances- Provision of additional funds, tax concessions and other benefits to SCS states puts a **significant financial burden** on the central government's budget. This also leads to concerns about **fiscal sustainability**.

2. Inequitable Distribution of Resources- Allocation of Special Category Status to **some states** while denying it to other states can lead to an inequitable distribution of resources.

3. Increase in Dependency and Reduction of Accountability- There are concerns that the **SCS states may become overly dependent on central assistance**. This also reduces their incentive to mobilize their own resources and hinder the development of a self-sustaining economy.

4. Permanent continuation of temporary SCS Status- Some states which had received SCS only for a temporary period have **continued to enjoyed it for decades**. There is lack of periodic impact assessment and re-evaluation.

5. Lack of Constitutional Basis- SCS **lacks a clear constitutional or legal foundation**. It is granted by the administrative decision of the National Development Council or the central government, making it vulnerable to changes.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. Reassessment Criteria for SCS- There is a need to revisit the **criteria for SCS**. It can be expanded to consider the revenue deficit.

2. Alternative Funding Models: Following the **Raghuram Rajan Committee's suggestion**, we must explore new funding models based on a multi-dimensional index.

3. Increased Devolution by Finance Commission- There must be an increase in the devolution by the finance commission to address the poverty alleviation, focused aid for disaster management and agriculture, and policies that attract new industries and create job opportunities.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)
UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Centre state relations

Political Empowerment of Women in India- An Analysis- Explained Pointwise

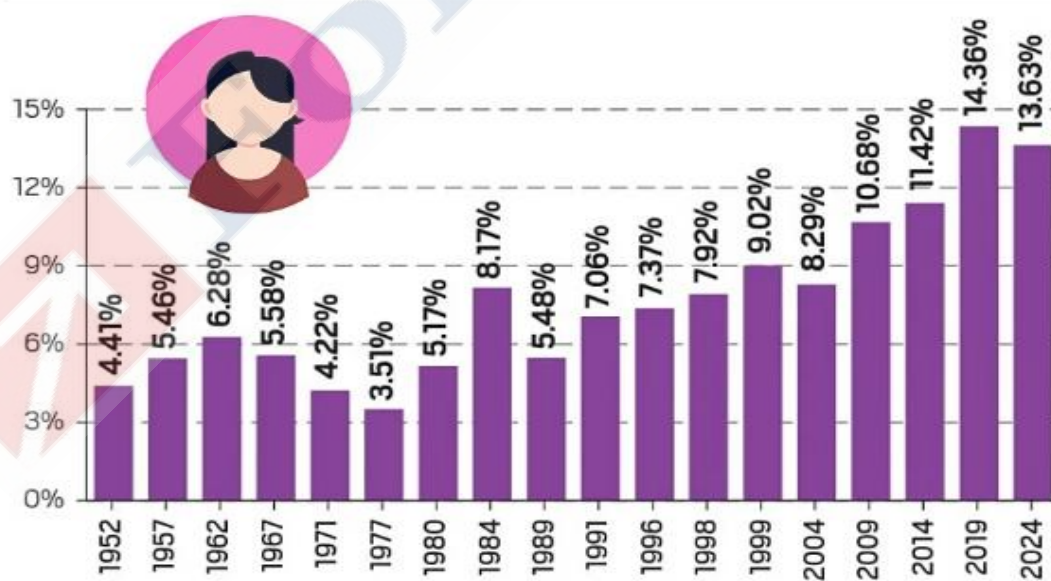
With the recent declaration of the Lok Sabha Results, the issue of **political empowerment of women in India has again started to garner attention**. The number of elected women MPs has fallen in the **2024 Lok Sabha has fallen to 74** from the **78 women MPs elected in 2019**. In Lok Sabha elections 2024, a **total of 797 women contested the elections**, and 74 of them got elected. The strength of the **74 women MPs constitutes 13.63% of the elected strength of the lower house**. This is much lesser than the proposed reservation for 33% of women representatives after the next delimitation exercise.

What has been the status of women representation in India?

a. Representation of Women in Parliament over the Years

1. Women made up just **4.41%** of the strength of the **Lower House** in **1952**. The number increased to **more than 6% in the Lok Sabha** held a decade later.
2. However, the number **dipped to below 4% in 1971**, ironically, with **Indira Gandhi, India's first and only woman Prime Minister**, at the helm.
3. There has been a slow, but steady rise in women's representation (with a few exceptions). The women representation crossed the **10% mark in 2009** and peaked at **14.36%** in 2019.
4. Of the 74 women MPs elected in 2024, **43 are first time MPs**. Women MPs have an average age of 50 years and are younger as compared to the overall age of the House, which is 56 years. These women MPs are as educated as their male counterparts, with 78% completing under graduation.

CHANGE IN WOMEN'S STRENGTH IN LOK SABHA OVER THE YEARS



Women in Lok Sabha 2024. (Data via PRS Legislative Research)

Source- The Indian Express

Sabha has increased post independence (~16% in 17th lok Sabha), India is **behind a number of countries of Africa and South Asia** (like Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka).

Why is there a need for greater political empowerment of Women in India?

1. Accountability and Gender-sensitive Governance- Political empowerment of women facilitates **direct engagement in public decision-making** and is a means of **ensuring better accountability to women**. It helps in **undertaking reforms** that can help make **all elected officials more effective at promoting gender equality in public policy** and ensuring their implementation.

2. Breaking the Patriarchal mould of Indian Politics- Indian Politics has been patriarchal with top party positions and positions of power have been occupied by male. Increase in women representation in parliament, **dismantles the patriarchal nature** of Indian politics.

3. Focus on Gender issues- According to UN Women, higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women's issues. This ensures appropriate policy response to **address gender issues** and **introduce women-sensitive measures**.

4. Gender Equality- Women's political participation is a **fundamental prerequisite** for gender equality and genuine democracy. It helps **establish public enquiries on women's issues** and use findings to place issues on **government agendas** and **within legislative programmes**.

5. Change of Stereotypes- Enhanced representation helps in cooperation with the women's movement and the media to **change the stereotyped image of women** as only 'homemakers', to change it to 'lawmakers'.

6. Improvement of Economic Performance and Infrastructure- According to UN University, Women legislators **improve the economic performance of their constituencies 1.8 per cent more than male legislatures**. Evaluation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana shows the **share of incomplete road projects is 22 percentage points lower in female** led constituencies.

What are the reasons behind low political representation of women in India?

1. Gender Gaps in Political Ambition- Gender conditioning leads to lack of political ambition in women:

- (a) Women are **less encouraged** to run for office/election than men.
- (b) Women's **tendency to shy away from competition** also plays a role since the political selection process is likely perceived as highly competitive.
- (c) The fear of **'big politics'** and factors such as **self-doubt, stereotypes** and **personal reservations** prevent even the most politically gifted women from entering government
- (d) Women's **willingness to advance in their political careers** can also be influenced by family and relational considerations. **For ex-** In Sweden, **female politicians who are promoted to mayor** (i.e. the highest office in municipal politics) **experience a significant increase** in the likelihood of divorcing their partner, whereas this is not the case for men.

2. Patriarchal Society- The patriarchal nature of Indian politics also prevents the increase in women participation in India.

- (a) **Gender Disparities-** There are still many obstacles in the way of women in positions of leadership due to gender inequality in areas like as **education, access to resources**, and **the persistence of biased views**.
- (b) **Sexual division of labour-** Women are responsible for the **majority of housework and child care**. This creates hindrance for them to enter politics.
- (c) **Cultural and Social Expectations-** Cultural and Social Expectations are **forced upon women** which prevent women from participating in politics.

3. Cost of Contesting Election- Cost of contesting elections is rising with times. **Lack of access to resources and assets** means that women are much less likely to be able to raise the funds for contesting elections than men.

4. Male politicians as Gate-keepers- Party leaders generally **prefer to promote male rather than female candidates**. There is a **general bias in the thinking regarding winnability of female candidates** preventing them from selecting women leaders for election.

5. Growth of criminalisation and corruption- The exodus of women from politics can also be attributed to a lack of political education coupled with the **growth in criminalization and corruption**.

What measures have been undertaken for political empowerment of Women and increasing their participation?

Legislative Measures

1. Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam (Women reservation Act)- It has been passed to provide **33% reservation** for **women in the Lok Sabha** and **state legislative assemblies**.

2. 73rd and 74th amendment Act- This amendment act provided **33% reservation to women in local bodies**. Some states like Bihar have **increased the women reservation in the local bodies to 50%**.

3. Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women- In 1997 (11th Lok Sabha), the **Committee on Empowerment of Women** was formed to advance the position of women

4. Gender-Neutral Rules of Lok Sabha- The rules of the Lok Sabha were made completely gender-neutral in 2014 under the leadership of Meira Kumar. Since then, every document has called the **head of a Lok Sabha Committee** as the **Chairperson**.

Constitutional Measures

1. Article 14- It has established **equality as a fundamental right**. It inevitably necessitates equal opportunity, as stated in Article 15.

2. Article 46- It puts on the state the **responsibility to safeguard vulnerable groups** against social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

3. Article 243D- It ensures participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions by mandating **at least 33% reservation for women** in total seats and the offices of chairpersons of Panchayats.

4. Article 326- Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of **adult suffrage**.

International Covenants

Globally, several international commitments have been made, for achieving gender equality and these have emphasized on enhancing women's representation in political sphere.

1. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)- Upheld women's right to participate in public life.

2. Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Millennium Development Goals (2000) and Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030)- All these called for removing barriers to equal participation and also took into account **increasing women's representation in parliament** to measure progress towards gender equality.

Political Participation of Women: International Conventions

- **Basic Human Right:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) declare **Political Participation as a basic human right**.
- **Eliminate Discrimination:** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979.
 - Article 7 calls for the State parties to **take appropriate steps to eliminate discrimination against women** in the political sphere.
 - Women must have equal right to vote and be eligible to hold public office, participate in policy formulation and implementation.
- **Women Participation:** The 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) considered 'Women in power and decision making' as one of the 12 critical areas in its **Platform of Action**.
- **30% Representation at Decision Making Level:** The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) endorsed a **30% target of women participation** at decision-making levels (1995).

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What Should be the Way Forward?

1. **Checks on the criminalisation of politics-** We must address the larger issues of electoral reforms such as measures to check **criminalisation of politics** and **influence of black money** to achieve the desired results of women reservation.
2. **Intra party democracy-** Institutionalisation of Intra party democracy will make available a wider pool of women candidates.
3. **Nomination to Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils-** Every Political Party must **nominate 33% women** and **67% men** for every election to **Rajya Sabha and State legislative councils** to achieve true women representation.
4. **Promotion of women participation at panchayat level** through strengthening women self-help groups. This will ensure able women candidates for MP/MLA elections.
5. **Strengthening women's agencies and organizations** for building a progressive society with equality of opportunities among all citizens.
6. **Promotion of girl's participation in College/Universities** student political parties and political debate to increase their political prowess for future.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- **GS 1** Issues related to women, **GS II**, Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Exam Paper Leaks- Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise

Recently, **exam paper leaks** in the Hindi heartland become one of the top poll issues in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections. **Exam paper leaks and scams** in states of **Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar**, have been a key concern for young voters in the age group of 18-25. In this article, we will delve into the issue of exam paper leaks and the ways in which it can be curtailed.



Source- The Indian Express

What are the recent cases of exam paper leaks in India?

There have been **41 paper leaks** over the **last five years** in **15 states**, which has affected **1.4 crore job seekers** who had applied for over **one lakh vacancies**. This has translated into angst and disappointment among the young voters. Some of the recent paper leaks are mentioned below-

- 1. UP Constable Recruitment and Promotion Exam Paper Leak (2023)**- The **UP Constable recruitment and promotion examination paper** was leaked, leading to the cancellation of the exam and the arrest of three individuals suspected of being involved in the scam.
- 2. REET 2023 Paper Leak**- The Rajasthan Eligibility for Elementary Teachers (REET) exam paper leak which was conducted by the **Rajasthan Subordinate and Ministerial Services Selection Board (RSMSSB)**.
- 3. TSPSC Assistant Engineer Exam Paper Leak (2023)**- The **Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC)** Assistant Engineer recruitment exam was cancelled due to paper leak.
- 4. NEET UG 2024**- The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) for undergraduate medical courses witnessed **multiple paper leak incidents**.
- 5. Assam Class 10 Board Exam 2024**- In Assam, **a paper leak in the Class 10 state board exams** prompted significant political controversy and public outcry.

What are the negative impacts of frequent Paper leaks in India?

- 1. Disproportionate impact on rural and marginalized community students**- The students from remote rural backgrounds and marginalised castes, are **disproportionately impacted** as they come with the **pressure of debts** undertaken to **pay fees of applications, coaching centres and computer training centres and rent**.
- 2. Emotional, Mental and Physical Fatigue**- With the cancellation of exams, there is an increase in the fatigue of students and the **fear of a new generation of aspirants** joining the queue.

3. Exacerbation of Job Crisis- The cancellation of recruitment procedures has added to spiralling of crises in the already scarce job market.

4. Disruption of academic calendars- The postponement and cancellation of Exams due to paper leaks, **throw the academic schedules into disarray** and cause uncertainty for students.

5. Loss of trust and confidence- The frequent paper leaks lead to students losing their faith in the **fairness and meritocracy of exams**, and **questions the value of their efforts and education**.

What steps have been taken to address the exam paper leaks in India?

To address the issue of exam paper leaks in India, the following steps have been undertaken.

1. Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act- The act aims to **prevent unfair means in the public examinations**. This act aims to bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility in the public examinations system.

Read More- [Public Examinations \(Prevention of Unfair Means\) Act](#)

2. Formation of the National Testing Agency (NTA)- The NTA was **formed as a professional exam-conducting body** to make the examination system more scientific, reliable, and professional.

3. Transition to Online Exams- Moving exams online was **thought to be a solution to paper-based exams**, as it reduces the risks associated with printing and distribution.

What are the lacunae with the exam system in India?

1. Loopholes in the Examination Process- Question paper **setting, printing, and distribution** are often vulnerable to leaks due to inadequate security measures.

2. Inadequate IT Systems- Online exams are **vulnerable** due to **inadequate testing and deployment of IT systems**. This further makes them susceptible to hacking.

3. Inadequate Penalties and Enforcement- The existing laws which criminalize cheating **have not led to convictions**. This demonstrates lack of effective enforcement and penalties.

4. Lack of Special Investigation Agency- India lacks a **dedicated agency** to investigate all types of examination offenses and bring culprits to justice quickly.

5. Discretion of the state governments in adopting the Public Examinations Bill- **The Public Examination Bill** leaves it to the discretion of the state governments to **draft their own acts by serving as a model bill**. However, state governments have displayed partisan interests in drafting model bills in the past, like the Model APLM Act.

What should be the Way Forward?

1. Compensation in case of exam cancellation- There must be **adequate compensation for years of labour, exorbitant financial cost, and the emotional toll incurred by lakhs** of candidates who pin all their hopes on the public exam.

2. Establishment of fast-track courts- Fast track courts must be established for the trial and convictions for people involved in **paper leaks**.

3. Strengthening of Examination Processes- We must enhance security measures in question paper setting, printing, and distribution to plug loopholes. We must **leverage blockchain technology** to **securely store and manage exam-related data**.

4. Enhancement of Penalties and Enforcement- We must impose stringent penalties on persons resorting to unfair means, as per the Public Examinations Prevention of Unfair Means Act.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Government policies and interventions for the development of various sectors (Bills and Acts)

Agnipath scheme-Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise

The Agnipath scheme, launched on June 14, 2022, is currently operational. The initial batch of **Agniveers** has finished their training and joined different units of the armed forces. The scheme has faced **criticism**, especially from veterans, for various reasons.

It also became a major political issue in the recently concluded **Lok Sabha election**, especially in states like **Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan**, where the Armed Forces are a popular choice for employment. The Principal opposition block in the elections campaigned against this recruitment scheme, which seemed to strike a chord with **voters** of the above-mentioned states.

Since no **single political party** could secure a clear majority in the recently held Lok Sabha election, significant allies of the ruling dispensation are pushing for a **review** of the contentious recruitment plan. In the backdrop of these **changed realities**, Agnipath scheme warrants a thorough **investigation** into its pros and cons.

What is Agnipath scheme?

1) **Introduction-**It is a **short-service manpower model** under which around 45,000 to 50,000 soldiers will be recruited **annually**. Of these, **75%** will leave the service in four years. 25% will be allowed to continue for another 15 years under **permanent commission**. At present, all sailors, airmen, and soldiers, except the technical cadre of the medical branch, are recruited to the services under the scheme, which has also opened doors for the recruitment of **women** to the IAF and the Navy.

2) Broad objectives of Agnipath scheme-

A) To enhance **youthful profile** of the Armed Forces so that they are at their best fighting abilities, and increased risk taking ability, at all times.

B) To bring in young talent from society who can effectively use new technologies and have higher technical skills, using the country's technical institutions.

C) To provide an opportunity to the youth who may be keen to **serve the Nation** in uniform albeit for a short period of time.

D) To imbibe the Armed Forces **ethos, camaraderie, commitment** and **teamwork** in the youth.

E) To provide abilities and qualities such as **discipline, dynamism, motivation** and **work-skills** so that the youth remains an asset.

3) Post Demobilisation Employment Opportunities-

What is the significance of Agnipath scheme?

1) Leaner and Younger Force-It will reduce the **permanent force size** significantly for the country's armed forces, which currently consist of over 13 lakh personnel. Only 25% of recruits will be allowed to continue for another 15 years under permanent commission. This change is expected to lower the **average age in the forces from 32 to 26** within the next 6 to 7 years.

2) Reducing Defense Expenditure: A leaner military and reduced benefits will significantly lower the **defense budget**, which has been a major concern for governments for many years. Over the past decade, Pay and Allowances (P&A) and Pension expenses have increased from 50% to 55%, while the portion allocated to acquisition and stores expenditure has decreased. **Reserch and Development**, which is critical for the self-reliance and has been aggressively pushed by the government through its 'Make in India' initiative and **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan**, hovers at a meagre **3-4 percent**. In 2022-23, P&A and Pension will make up **79% of the Ministry of Defence's total revenue expenditure**.

Broad Distribution of the MoD's Expenditure, 2013/14-2022/23

3) Investment in Modern Warfare-The saved money can be utilized to buy **state-of-art technology** and **equipment** which are the backbone of modern warfare. With its implementation, the military will become a **future-ready fighting force**, capable of meeting multiple challenges across the full spectrum of conflict

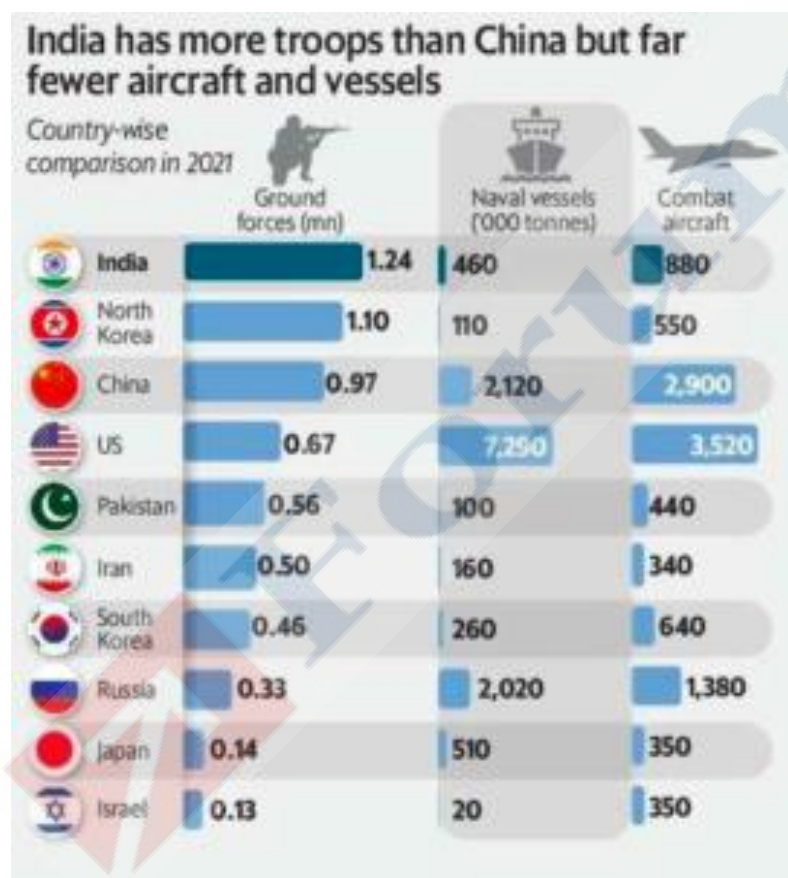


Figure 1. Source: Mint

4) All India, All Class Recruitment: This will make recruitment into the armed forces more **inclusive** by allowing enrolment from all parts of the country and all sections of society. This is important for the Army, which currently follows a **regiment system** based on region and caste.

5) Ensuring rotation of troops-The scheme aims to rotate soldiers more frequently by having shorter terms. This prevents **stagnation** and brings in **new talent and skills regularly**, ensuring a disciplined rotation of troops.

6) Adhoc Buffer Force: The ex-agniveers could act as an **adhoc buffer force** who may be called to serve again for boosting national security in times of external/internal threats.

7) Providing skilled workforce: After serving for 4 years, the 'Agniveers' (the temporary soldiers) would be discharged, and it is expected

that they would contribute to the **skilled workforce** in various sectors, given their **disciplined training** and **exposure**

8) Following the Trend Towards Personnel Reduction and Increased Capital Expenditure-There is a trend towards reduction in the number of personnel and emphasis on increasing capital expenditure on modern weapons and equipment in major countries.

For ex-the **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** underwent a massive demobilization from the 1980s onwards, bringing down total numbers from 4.5 million to about 2 million, with the focus on.

What are the concerns associated with Agnipath scheme?

1) **Protests and opposition:** The Agnipath scheme has faced widespread protests and opposition from various sections, **including potential recruits, ex-servicemen, and political parties.** There are concerns about the **job security, pension benefits,** and future prospects of the "Agniveers" after their four-year tenure.

2) **Increase in training capacities and infrastructure:-**With a constant inflow of new Agniveers every year, there will be a need to significantly enhance **training capacities and infrastructure** to accommodate their basic and advanced training requirements.

3) **Augmentation of administrative setup-**The scheme will require an **augmentation and strengthening of the administrative machinery** to handle the increased recruitment, periodic release after 4 years, and retention of 25% of the Agniveers for longer service.

4) **Impact on Armed Forces Structure and Soldier Motivation-** The change from **Class-Based Recruitment Replaced with All-India All-Class Recruitment** could harm the armed forces because it affects their managerial and operational efficiency. Indian Army soldiers, though trained well, also find motivation in their **social identity,** caring about their reputation among **peers in their caste, village,** or social group.

5) **Weaken Unit Cohesion and Combat Effectiveness-**Technology and advanced weapon systems alone **cannot guarantee success** in combat. As seen in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Hamas conflict, technological superiority can be countered by the adversary's technological measures. Thus, **the human element, conventional combat tactics, and interpersonal bonding among soldiers** can not be overlooked to prepare the army for modern warfare.

6) **Capability Drawbacks-**Agniveers undergo limited training of **six months.** Veterans and analysts doubt whether units would entrust **Agniveers** with tasks like **handling ammunition, ordnance, weapons, and classified stores,** or undertaking repairs on combat vehicles and artillery.

7) **Unhealthy Competition Among Agniveers-****Training, integrating,** and deploying soldiers with varying experience levels and motivations could pose significant challenges. Selecting the 25% of short-term contracted soldiers to be retained may lead to **unhealthy competition.** If not addressed, this could become a serious issue and harm the **unit's health** in the long run.

8) **Recruitment by Inimical Elements-**There are concerns that after their discharge, Agniveers could be vulnerable to recruitment by **inimical elements like Naxalites, insurgents, militants,** and gangsters for nefarious purposes

9) **Personnel Shortages and Resource Utilization-**The Army, along with the other two services, is short of about **1,55,000 personnel,** with the Army having the most vacancies at 1,36,000. The Agnipath scheme aims to fill these positions, which are mostly **non-officer combat roles.** **Releasing 75% of trained recruits** after four years of service in this context would be a **waste** of resources.

10) **Rehabilitation of Agniveers-**

A) The bond between a soldier and the state is called the '**military covenant.**' Soldiers risk their lives to protect national interests, and in return, the nation promises them respect, recognition, gratitude, and fair

compensation for their sacrifices. This connection is vital for keeping militaries strong, and it's important that the Agniveers **don't feel neglected** after their service.

B) If Agniveers don't receive **adequate support after leaving the military**, it might make a career in **uniform less appealing**. This could lower the quality of recruits joining the military. Also, if trained soldiers are discharged each year without employment, it could be risky if they become **unemployed** and **frustrated**. Some fear this could lead to **increased militarization of society**.

What should be the way forward?

1) **Raising Age Limit and Permanent Retention Quota**:-The Indian Army proposed extending the service period from **4 years to 7-8 years for Agniveers**. It suggested raising the entry age for Agniveers in technical roles to 23 years and increasing the percentage of Agniveers transitioning to regular service after 4 years from **25 percent to 60-70 percent**.

2) **Nurturing the Human Element**-The facets of the human element in Agniveers need to be addressed by the leaders responsible for their training and assessment. **Value-based nurturing** based on **unit ethos** needs to commence from the outset, irrespective of technological advancements in warfare.

3) **Incorporation of Psychological Testing**-There is a need to introduce **psychological test** as part of the recruitment process, similar to the methodology used for officer selection in the military. This will help unit commanders manage **human resources** better and facilitate the **grooming** and **assessment** of Agniveers.

4) **Continuous Preparation for Combat and Integration of Agniveers**-In combat, a military unit must perform well. Preparation for facing the enemy happens continuously and doesn't wait for actual combat. Likewise, **unit commanders should** focus on integrating **Agniveers** into the unit and ensuring that they work well as part of the team.

5) **Fostering Unit Cohesion through Character Development**:-To enhance unit pride and cohesion, there should be focus on **individual character development**, as it forms the foundation of **discipline, motivation, and teamwork**, essential for battlefield strength and unit camaraderie.

6) **Bridging the Military-Civilian Divide**-The military is highly respected for its role in national security. The beginning of Agniveer recruitment marks a move towards creating a **citizen's army**. Agnipath should help young people learn more about the military, bridging the gap between **military and civilian life**.

7) Enhanced Entitlements & Benefits-

A) They should be covered under **contributory pension and generous gratuity scheme**. Ex-gratia should be provided for disability during training. Moreover, if an Agniveer dies in war, their family should receive a **subsistence allowance**.

B) They should get opportunities in **other security forces**, veteran status, and preference for **government jobs**. Around 25-30% of soldiers should be retained through a transparent, merit-based system, with the option for voluntary extension.

8) **Implement robust skilling and resettlement programs**:-Developing robust skilling and resettlement programs in **collaboration** with the **private sector** and other **government agencies** could help ensure a smooth transition for "Agniveers" into civilian life after their tenure. The government may bring **a legislation** that mandates compulsory absorption of agniveers by private employers and corporates.

9) **Enhancing Educational Standards** -Educational requirements should be raised to 10+2, and a more rigorous national entrance exam should be implemented.

Read More-[Indian Express](#),[The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-3-Various Security Forces and Agencies and their Mandate

Read more-[On the Challenges with the Agnipath Scheme – It is the conditioning of the Agniveer that merits attention](#)

NEET Controversy – Reasons and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise

In the recently declared result, **67 candidates** who secured the top rank with the maximum possible score of 720 out of 720 in the recently held **NEET examination**. In the previous five years, the maximum number of toppers scoring 720 was just three. Around 1,500 candidates were awarded “**grace marks**” for “loss of time” during the exam, raising questions about the fairness and consistency of the evaluation process.

Many people, including **politicians** and **some candidates**, want the NEET results to be checked again or even for the exam to be **cancelled due to the controversies** and possible **unfairness**. To deal with this, the **NTA** and the **Education Ministry** constituted a **4 members committee** to look into the results of those who got extra marks. The NEET controversy has once again **reignited debates** around issues like the suitability of the **examination format**, the impact of coaching institutes, and the need for a more **holistic** and **equitable assessment system** for **medical admissions** in India.

What is the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET)?

1) Introduction-The NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) is an entrance examination for students who wish to pursue **undergraduate medical courses** (MBBS/BDS) and postgraduate courses (MD/MS) in **government** or **private medical colleges**.

2) Conducting Body-The exam is conducted by **National Testing Agency** (NTA). It is an autonomous body, constituted under the **Ministry of Education**.

3) Languages-The NEET exam is conducted in **offline mode** and in **13 languages**. Candidates can select the question paper medium from the following languages: English, Hindi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Odia, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, or Punjabi.

What is the significance of NEET Examination?

1) Single Entrance Test for Medical Admissions-It serves as the **single entrance test** for admission to **undergraduate medical (MBBS), dental (BDS)**, and other allied courses like AYUSH in government and private medical colleges across India. This test helps evaluate medical aspirants across the country in a **consistent** and **standardized** way.

2) Regulating Medical Education Quality-It ensures that students entering the medical field meet a certain level of **quality** and **merit**. By using a single entrance test for evaluation, it aims to **uphold the quality** of medical education and ensure that future healthcare professionals are competent.

3) Addressing Admission Malpractices-Before NEET, each state or institution used to conduct its own entrance tests for medical college admissions. This often resulted in problems like **cheating, capitation fees**, and a **lack of transparency**. Bringing all exams under the National Testing Agency (NTA) reduces these issues by making the process **more centralized, transparent**, and **less prone to corruption** or misconduct.

4) **Upholding Reservation Policies**-It acts as a basis for **distributing seats** in medical colleges, which includes enforcing reservation policies for various student groups like economically disadvantaged sections or **scheduled castes and tribes**. This has been upheld by the Supreme Court in the case of **Christian Medical College, Vellore v. Union of India**.

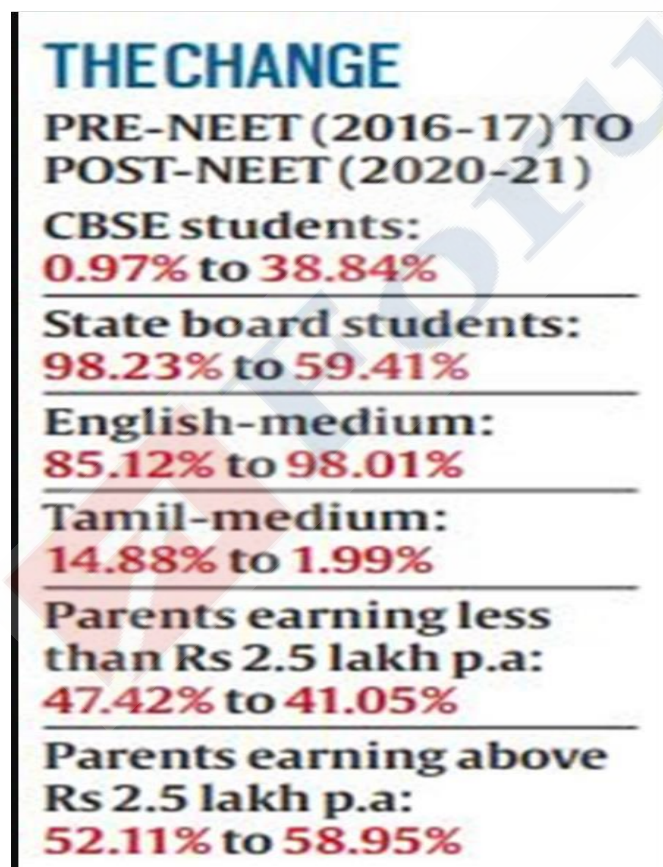
5) **Enhancing Global Recognition of Indian Medical Degrees**- NEET meets **global** standards for medical entrance exams, making Indian medical degrees more **credible** worldwide. This helps Indian medical graduates study more, get licenses, or work abroad, boosting **India's reputation** in healthcare globally.

8) **Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness**- It simplifies the **admissions process** by removing the necessity of conducting **multiple entrance exams** by states and institutions. This saves time, money, and effort for both **students** and **educational bodies**.

What are the Reasons behind NEET Controversy?

1) **Undermine Federal Structure and State Autonomy**- NEET undermines the federal structure by removing **states' authority** to admit students to government medical colleges. Education falls under **state jurisdiction**, allowing them to regulate education for **state universities**. NEET's introduction, for admission to all medical colleges, violates this **federal structure** and **states' autonomy** in educational decisions.

2) **Syllabus Disparity**-NEET's syllabus may not **align exactly** with what state boards teach, making it **difficult** for students to adjust to the exam format. This can make it tougher for students from **state boards** compared to those from **CBSE or ICSE boards**. **The Rajan committee**, set up by the Tamil Nadu government, pointed this out as well.



3) **Equity and Representation Concerns**- Reports like the **Rajan Committee** show that after NEET started, fewer students from **rural areas**, **Tamil medium schools**, **low-income families**, and Tamil Nadu state board schools got admission into **medical colleges**. This raises concerns about NEET's impact on **equitable representation** and **social justice**. This is main reason that Tamilnadu government has been opposing this mode of exam since its introduction.

4) **Language Barrier**-NEET is conducted **only** in a few languages like English, Hindi, and some **regional languages**. This poses a challenge for students from **other regional languages**, which are not covered under the current exam pattern.

5) **Translation Errors**-Even though the test is conducted in 13 languages, they are still many **translation errors**. For ex-Neet 2021 had a translation error in a **Physics Question**. Similarly, In the 2018 NEET, as many as 49 questions had errors in **Tamil translation**. This led to a **Madras High Court order** to award four marks for each of the **49 wrongly translated questions** for all 1.07

lakh candidates who appeared NEET in the Tamil Language.

6) **Stress and Mental Health Concerns**-The **fierce competition** and stress to excel in NEET adversely impact the **mental health** and **overall well-being** of students. This strain can lead to tragic outcomes such as **suicides**. For ex-Suicides of students in **Kota**.

7) **Dominance of Coaching Industries**-The dependency of students on coaching institutes for qualifying NEET examination raises concerns about the **commercialization of education**. These institutes charge substantial fees and further **deepen** the disparity between **advantaged** and **disadvantaged students**. As per **Rajan committee report**, 99% of students who gained admission in 2019-20 had taken coaching. This underscores the **dominance** of coaching industries.

8) **Limitations of MCQ-based Mass Testing**-Well-designed MCQs can probe capacities like reasoning and judgment of the students. However, they cannot assess qualities like **reflection and critical thinking**, which are of **paramount importance** for professions like medicine.

9) **Transparency and Fairness**-Many young people have felt unfairly judged over time. Fair evaluation isn't just about **morals**; it's also an important condition for **ensuring equity**. The recent controversy over the **2023 NEET results** has raised concerns about the **transparency** and **fairness** of the evaluation process.

10) **Logistical Challenges**-Conducting a nationwide exam for over 2 million applicants poses logistical challenges in ensuring **smooth conduct**, **addressing technical glitches**, and preventing **irregularities like paper leaks**. For ex-allegation of paper leaks in Bihar.

What should be done to resolve NEET Controversy?

1) **Addressing Socioeconomic Disparities**- Implement measures to provide equal opportunities for students from **diverse socioeconomic backgrounds**. This could include providing **financial assistance**, **scholarships**, and **coaching support** to economically disadvantaged students.

2) **Language Accessibility**-Conduct NEET exams in multiple languages to **accommodate** students from different **linguistic backgrounds**. This would help reduce the language barrier and ensure that all students have a fair chance of **performing well** in the exam, regardless of their language proficiency.

3) **Alignment of Curricula**-There is a need to ensure **alignment** between **NEET syllabus** and **various state board curricula** to minimize disparities in preparation among students from different educational backgrounds. Collaboration between **central** and **state education boards** can help achieve this alignment.

4) **Focus on Critical Thinking Skills**- NEET exam pattern should be revised to include questions that **assess reflection**, **critical thinking** and **practical knowledge** relevant to medical education and practice.

5) Implement Rajan Committee Recommendations-

A) It suggests using **"normalized"** Higher secondary scores to ensure **fairness** across different boards.

B) It also suggests **recognizing socio-economic** and other obstacles that could impact performance in the higher secondary exam and modifying scores accordingly using an **"adversity score"** system.

6) **Regulation of Coaching Industries**-There must be some form of regulations on charging of **exorbitant fees** by private coaching institutions. They must be mandated to organise **seminars** and **mental health workshops** to minimize **negativity** among students.

7) **Multi-Stakeholders Engagement**-There is a need to engage stakeholders, including **students**, **parents**, **educators**, policymakers, and medical professionals to develop **solutions** that address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

8) **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement**-There is a need to **continuously evaluate** and improve the NEET examination system, monitor reforms, **gather stakeholder feedback**, and adjust policies to maintain exam **effectiveness** and **integrity**.

9) **Robust Grievance Redressal Mechanisms**-There should be establishment of **robust grievance redressal** system for candidates to raise concerns and have them addressed in a timely manner. **Judicial oversight** can be encouraged to ensure **fairness** and **trust** in the **process**.

Read more-[Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-2-Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

A detailed article on Paper Leaks can be [read here](#).

Lithium Reserves in India – Challenges and Way forward- Explained Pointwise

Lithium (Li), sometimes also referred as **'White gold'** due to its high demand for rechargeable batteries, is a soft and silvery-white metal. It started a race of mining and procurement of Lithium reserves in India and all over the world. In this process, the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** discovered lithium reserves of 5.9 million tonnes in the **Salal-Haimana area of Reasi district in Jammu and Kashmir**, making India one of the **top 10 countries** with lithium reserves.

This attracted interest from **several companies**, including JSW Group, Hindalco Industries, Ola Electric, Vedanta Group, Shree Cement, and even State-run Coal India Ltd. The government quickly amended rules to allow **private miners** to bid for critical minerals like lithium, leading to an auction in November 2023.

However, the **auction got only two bids** and the government had to cancel it. The lithium reserves were listed in the third round of auctions, which ended last month. However, the response from the **private companies** are far from expectation. In this article, we will discuss, what are the challenges that are keeping them from mining lithium reserves in India and where are the other reserves.

What are the reasons behind this underwhelming response from private players for Lithium auction?

1) **Mineral Exploration and Classification**-There are **four stages** of mineral exploration – G4, G3, G2, and G1 – as classified by the United Nations Framework Classification for Reserves/Resources (UNFC-1997), with G4 as the initial stage. Each level represents a **progressive step** in exploration, from initial identification to a detailed understanding of resource potential. The lithium reserves in Kashmir are **currently classified under G3**, the second preliminary exploration stage after reconnaissance, indicating a **low level of confidence in the quantity, grade, and mineral content estimates**.

2) **Unproven and Speculative Reserves**-The biggest deterrent for companies in bidding for the lithium reserves in Kashmir is that they are **unproven** and **highly speculative** at the G3 stage.

2) Geological hurdles-

A) The lithium found in Kashmir is in the form of clay deposits mixed with other minerals, unlike the **commercially viable brine** or **hard rock deposits** mined globally. Extracting lithium from such deposits is yet to be tested **commercially**, and India's mining industry **lacks** the required technical expertise.

B) Further, J&K is **ecologically sensitive** and falls under **seismic zone V**—a classification for the most seismically active regions. These factors make any industrial intervention in the area a challenging task.

3) **Sensitive Location**-The location of the reserves in Kashmir, close to the **Line of Control** and in an **ecologically fragile Himalayan region**, poses additional challenges due to potential **political volatility** and **local resistance**.

What is the status of lithium reserve in India and the World?

The Atomic Minerals Directorate for Exploration and Research (AMD), part of the Department of Atomic Energy, has found about 1,600 tonnes of lithium resources in igneous rocks in the **Marlagalla-Allapatna area of Mandya district**, Karnataka.

Other potential areas are-

- A) **Mica belts** in Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh.
- B) **Pegmatite belts** in Odisha and Chhattisgarh.
- C) **Rann of Kutch** in Gujrat.

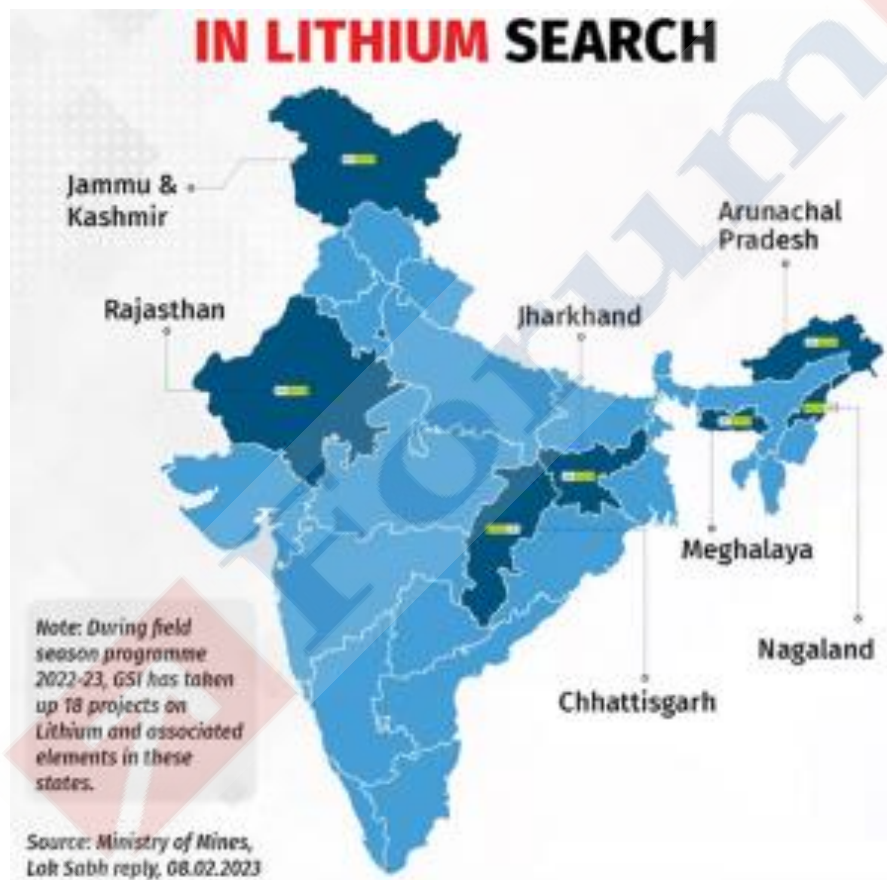


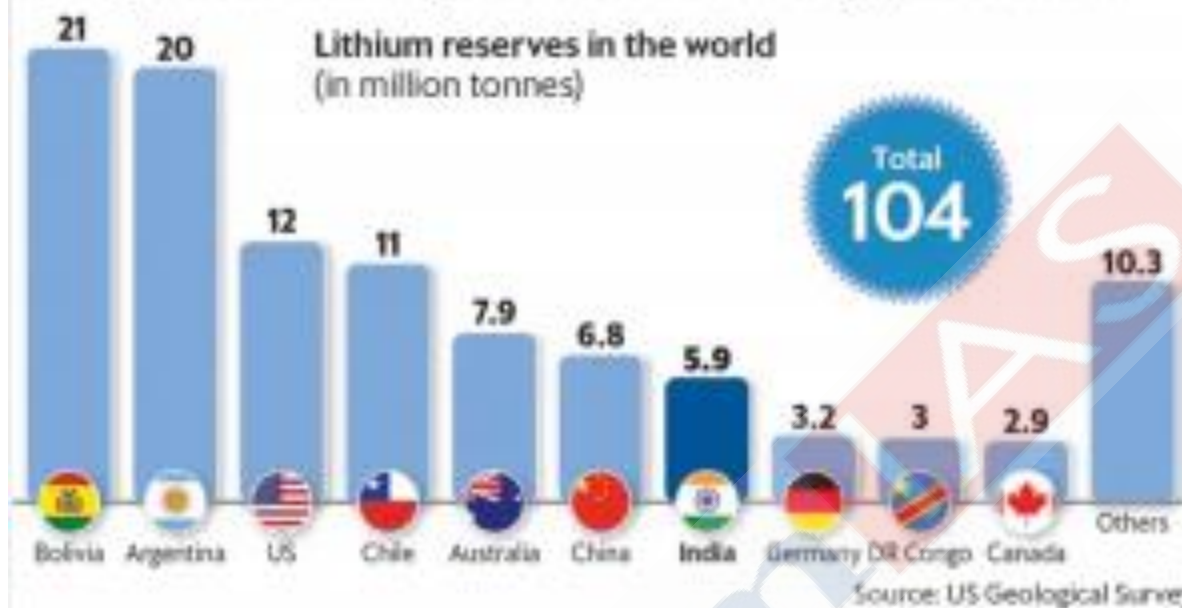
Figure 2. Source-Ministry of Mines

Global Lithium Reserves and Production

In 2021, the world produced over 100,000 tonnes of lithium, which is four times more than in 2010. Australia is the **biggest producer**, making **52%** of the world's lithium. Unlike Chile and Argentina, where lithium is taken from brines, Australia gets its lithium from hard-rock mines, mainly from spodumene.

Fields of white gold

India may account for 5.7% of global reserves if the discovery in J&K is confirmed.



Source-US Geological Society

China, which is the **third biggest producer of lithium**, holds a significant position in the lithium supply chain. In addition to mining within China, Chinese companies have bought about \$5.6 billion worth of lithium assets in countries like Chile, Canada, and Australia in the last ten years. China also has **60% of the world's lithium refining** capacity for batteries.

Country-wise Global Production

Rank	Country	2021 Production (tonnes)	% of Total
#1	Australia 🇦🇺	55,416	52%
#2	Chile 🇨🇱	26,000	25%
#3	China 🇨🇳	14,000	13%
#4	Argentina 🇦🇷	5,967	6%
#5	Brazil 🇧🇷	1,500	1%
#6	Zimbabwe 🇿🇼	1,200	1%
#7	Portugal 🇵🇹	900	1%
#8	United States 🇺🇸	900	1%
	Rest of World 🌐	102	0.1%
	Total	105,984	100%

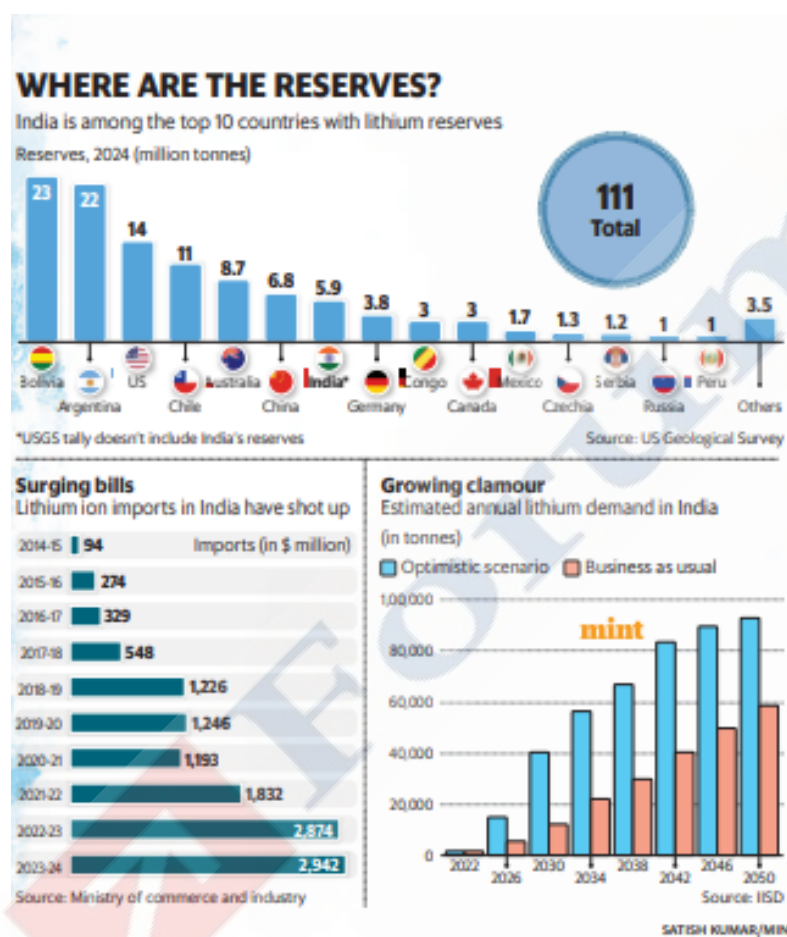
Reserves-The “**Lithium Triangle**” region of **Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina** accounts for more than half of the global lithium reserves. However, lithium production is concentrated in Australia, Chile, and China.

Refining-China controls most of the **world's lithium refining**, making up two-thirds of the capacity. It's also a big supplier of lithium-ion batteries to **India**, providing about 75% of them.

What is the need and significance of the domestic production of Lithium for India?

1) **Meeting Growing Lithium-ion Battery Demand**:-India's lithium demand is projected to increase because more people will be using things like phones, renewable energy batteries, and **electric cars** in future. The demand for lithium in India is predicted to increase from 1,634 tonnes in 2022 to between 60,000 and 93,000 tonnes by 2050.

2) **Reducing Import Dependence**:-India currently has **no lithium production** and relies heavily on lithium-ion imports, which have surged from \$94 million in 2014-15 to nearly \$3 billion in 2023-24. **For ex**-India imports almost **70-80 per cent of its lithium and 70 per cent of its lithium-ion** from **China**. Developing domestic lithium reserves could help reduce **India's import dependence** and associated costs.



3) **Supporting Clean Energy Transition**:-Lithium is important for lithium-ion batteries, which are key for storing energy from sources **like solar and wind power**. Access to lithium reserves can help India switch to **cleaner energy** and keep the power grid stable.

4) **Enabling Electric Vehicle Adoption**:- Ensuring a stable lithium supply can ensure the **adoption of EVs** in India and contribute to reducing **greenhouse gas emissions** from the transportation sector.

5) **Strategic Importance**-China has **mines in the lithium triangle** and has refining capacity for more than half of the world's lithium. China has previously exerted its dominance, such as in 2010 when it stopped **Rare Earth Elements (REE) exports to Japan** during a disagreement. This highlights the importance for India to **boost its domestic production** to reduce its dependence on China for

lithium and other critical minerals.

What steps have been taken by the government to explore lithium reserves in India?

1) **Geological Surveys**: The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has been actively involved in conducting **geological surveys** and **explorations** to identify potential lithium reserves across different regions of the country.

2) **Policy Reforms**: The government has introduced policy reforms to encourage exploration and development of lithium and other critical minerals. In 2023, the **Ministry of Mines** made a list called '**Critical Minerals for India**.' This list includes minerals that are crucial for the country's economic growth and national security.

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Lithium is considered a 'strategic' mineral because India relies entirely on imports for it. This puts lithium at the top of the priority list.

3) **Protecting Mining Sector from Foreign Exploitation**-Indian government is committed to protect its mining sector from foreign exploitation by law. According to the Mines and Minerals Act, only Indian individuals or firms with Indian members can get licenses for mining. This prevents a situation seen in countries like Argentina or Chile, where foreign companies extract lithium, but the benefits mostly is not reaped by the producing country.

4) **Auctions and Licensing**: The government has conducted auctions and issued licences for the exploration and extraction of lithium reserves. This includes offering lithium-bearing blocks for bidding to private companies and ensuring partnerships between government agencies and private sector players. For ex-In 2023, 20 blocks of critical and strategic minerals were auctioned to boost the mining process, including two lithium blocks in Jammu and Kashmir and Chhattisgarh.

5) **International Collaboration**: India has engaged in international collaboration and partnerships to leverage global expertise and technologies in the exploration and development of lithium reserves. For ex-the Ministry of Mines, through the state-owned Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL), has entered into a draft exploration and development agreement with Argentinian miner CAMYEN for possible acquisition and development of five-odd lithium blocks.

6) **Mineral Security Partnership**-India has recently joined an important group called the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP), led by the United States. MSP consists of 13 countries, including Australia, Canada etc, The goal of MSP is to encourage both public and private investment in global supply chains for critical minerals.

What are the challenges in extraction of Lithium in India?

1) **Environmental Concerns**-Lithium mining is resource-intensive, and the mineral waste produced can further pollute water and soil, affecting local inhabitants, agriculture, and biodiversity. For ex-Lithium mining requires a lot of water around 2.2 million liters to extract just one ton of the metal.

2) Technical Challenges-

A) India doesn't have the capability to refine lithium to make high-quality batteries. To do this, India needs to start from scratch by building the necessary facilities and expertise. Lithium found in Reasi is different from the one found in South America, making the refining process more difficult and expensive. India still lacks experience in this area, adding to the challenges.

B) Turning lithium ores into battery-grade lithium involves multiple steps. This multi-stage process requires sourcing chemical precursors like cobalt sulphate, nickel sulphate, and manganese sulphate. These chemicals must be obtained from specialized battery-grade companies, which India currently lacks.

3) Security Challenges-

A) India-Pakistan disputes over the Chenab River, proximity to the Line of Control, and the evolving situation since the abrogation of Article 370 may complicate capitalisation on the reserves.

B) Jaish-e-Mohammed's offshoot, the People's Anti-Fascist Front, declared that it won't allow India to access the resources.

4) **Lack of exploration and mining activities**- Lithium exploration and mining activities in India are still in their nascent stages. There has been limited investment and focus on developing lithium resources.

5) **Socio-economic Concerns**-A study from 2018 looked at how lithium mining affects both society and the environment. Researchers say that not enough research has been done in the past 40 years to tackle the **sustainability problems** caused by impact of lithium mining on **affected communities**.

6) **Mining Policy**: The absence of an **integrated mining policy for strategic metals** and minerals, and poor domestic capabilities could hinder lithium exploitation.

What should be the way forward?

1) **Enhance Exploration Efforts**-India should intensify its efforts to explore and identify potential lithium reserves within the country.This includes conducting **more geological surveys, using remote sensing, and drilling in areas** where there might be possibility of finding lithium.Collaboration with **international experts** and utilising **advanced exploration** technologies can aid in this process.

2) **Promote Research and Development**:- India should invest in research and development for lithium extraction. It should encourage **academic** and industrial research to develop cost-effective and environmentally sustainable methods for lithium extraction from various sources, **such as pegmatites, brines, and clay deposits**.

3) **Establish a Supportive Regulatory Framework**:-The government should develop a **comprehensive policy** and **regulatory framework** to encourages lithium exploration, mining, and processing activities.This means simplifying the **licensing process, offering financial benefits**, and ensuring **environmental sustainability**.

4) **Foster International Cooperation**-India can engage in **international cooperation** and knowledge-sharing initiatives with countries that have established lithium industries.

For ex-Australia and India has a **comprehensive strategic partnership**. It has lithium reserves in hard rock form, similar to India's deposits. Australia's knowledge in **processing hard rock lithium** could lead to **technology transfer** and strengthen the positive political relationship between the two countries.

5) **Strengthen Global Supply Chain**-India must also partner with **like-minded countries** such as the United States, Japan, Australia, Indonesia and South Korea to strengthen **global lithium supply chain management** and reduce strategic vulnerabilities.

6) **Leverage International Forums**-India should leverage forums such as the **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, Mineral Security Partnership** and the **Quad** to connect initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region and later extend them globally.

UPSC Syllabus:- GS I, Distribution of key natural resources across the world; GS III, Infrastructure: Energy; GS III, Conservation.

Read more-[Rare Earth Elements: Strategic Importance and Reducing Import Dependence](#)

Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India-Significance, Challenges and Way forward – Explained , Pointwise

A recent **World Bank report** suggests giving more power to Panchayats and boosting their financial capacity to counteract **recentralization** caused by the increasing use of online **payment systems** and **digital beneficiary tracking**. The report emphasizes that empowering Panchayats is vital for effective **local governance** and recommends delegating **more authority** to them instead of reducing their power. Therefore, in this article, we will discuss the evolution of Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India, the significance of PRIs for ensuring **social**

justice and inclusive growth, various challenges hindering the growth of Panchayats and way forward to address these challenges.

How did Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) evolve in India?

Article 40 of the Constitution, under the Directive Principles of State Policy, acknowledged the importance of panchayats. Although panchayats gained constitutional recognition, their structures differed among states because the Directive Principles were not legally binding. Consequently, several committees were established to promote uniformity in their structure.

- 1) The **Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957)** recommended a three-tier model: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first states to adopt this system.
- 2) The **Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)** proposed a two-tier system, taxation powers for Panchayats, and constitutional recognition.
- 3) The **GVK Rao Committee (1985)** emphasized Zilla Parishad's role in development and suggested the appointment of a District Development Commissioner.
- 4) The **LM Singhvi Committee (1986)** recommended constitutional recognition for Panchayati Raj Institutions and the establishment of Nyay Panchayats.
- 5) Finally, The **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** gave constitutional status to the PRIs and established a system of uniform structure, elections, reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and women and devolution of fund, functions and functionaries to PRIs. The Amendment included a new Part IX to the constitution, with the title "The Panchayats". It covered provisions from **Article 243 to 243(O)**; and a **new Eleventh Schedule** covering 29 subjects within the functions of the Panchayats.

What are some important constitutional provisions related to PRI in India?

Article 243B	This article provides for the direct election of members to the Panchayats at the village, intermediate, and district levels . It also specifies the tenure of Panchayats and the process for their dissolution
Article 243D	This article provides for the reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Panchayats , proportionate to their population. It also reserves one-third of the total seats for women.
Article 243G	This empowers the state legislature to provide Panchayats with the authority and powers to function as self-government institutions.
Article 243H	State legislatures are empowered to authorize Panchayats to levy, collect, and appropriate taxes, duties, tolls, and fees .
Article 243I	It mandates the formation of state finance commissions every five years by the Governor.
Article 243K	It provides for the establishment of an independent State Election Commission to conduct regular and fair elections to the Panchayats.

What is the status of funding for PRI's in India?

As per the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report** on the financial dynamics of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India, PRIs generate revenue through following ways-

- 1) **Revenue Composition:** Panchayats earn **only 1% of their revenue** through **taxes**. Majority of their revenue comes from grants provided by the Centre and the States. Data indicates that **80%** of the revenue is from **Central government grants**, while **15%** is from **State government** grants.

2) **Revenue Statistics**-In the fiscal year 2022-23, Panchayats recorded a total revenue of Rs 35,354 crore. Only Rs 737 crore came from their own **tax revenue sources**, like taxes on professions, land, stamps, properties, and services.

They also earned Rs 1,494 crore from **non-tax sources**, mainly from interest payments and Panchayati Raj programs. Notably, Panchayats received Rs 24,699 crore from the Central government and Rs 8,148 crore from

3) **Revenue Per Panchayat**:On average, **each Panchayat** earned about **Rs 21,000** from its own tax revenue and **Rs 73,000** from non-tax sources. In contrast, grants from the Central government averaged around Rs 17 lakh per Panchayat, while State government grants totaled over Rs 3.25 lakh per Panchayat.

4) **State Revenue Share and Inter-State Disparities**:Panchayats' share in their respective State's own revenue remains **minimal**.**For ex**-in Andhra Pradesh, revenue receipts of panchayats form just 0.1% of the State's own revenue, while in Uttar Pradesh, it forms 2.5%, the highest among states.

What is the significance of Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India?

1) **Strengthen grassroots-level democracy**: PRIs provide a platform for **direct participation** of people in governance at the **grassroots level**, promoting democratic values and accountable administration.

2) **Decentralization of power**: The three-tier structure of PRIs (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad) facilitates the **decentralization of power** from the state to the local level, ensuring better understanding and addressing of local needs and priorities.

3) **Rural development**: It plays an important role in **planning** and **implementing** various rural development programs related to agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, and social welfare. **For ex**-The **Panchayat of Hiwara**, Uttarakhand, Pedda Amberpet Gram Panchayat, Telangana etc. are one of the best performing and developed Panchayats in India.

4) **Inclusive governance and empowerment of women**: The reservation system in PRIs **ensures representation** and **participation of marginalized sections of society**, such as women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, promoting inclusive governance and empowerment. **For ex**-**Chaavi Rajawat**- An MBA turned Sarpanch made impressive changes by bringing better water, solar power, paved roads, and toilets in her ancestral village.

5) **Fullment of SDGs**:-PRIs, being closer to the people, can provide public services better and faster, dealing with local problems promptly and meeting community needs. The role of PRIs is crucial in bringing development to the **grassroots and implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level**.

6) Address Climate Change-

A) **Adaptation**-Panchayats have a deep understanding of local conditions, traditional practices, and **indigenous knowledge systems**. This knowledge can be invaluable in developing **locally relevant adaptation strategies** to cope with the impacts of climate change, such as drought, floods, or changing weather patterns.

B) **Mitigation**-Panchayats can contribute to sustainable **natural resource management practices**, such as water conservation, afforestation, and soil conservation. This can help **mitigate** the impacts of climate change.

7) **Social mobilization**:They serve as platforms for involving people in developmental projects and building a **feeling of community ownership** and **responsibility**.

8) **Preserving local culture and traditions**: It can play a role in **preserving** and **promoting local cultures, traditions, and indigenous knowledge**. This will ensure preservation of India's rich cultural diversity.

9) **Accountability and transparency:** Directly electing PRI representatives and holding Gram Sabha meetings make **local governance** more **accountable** and **transparent**.

What are the initiative taken by the government to empower Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India?

Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA)	It aims to strengthen the Panchayati Raj system by enhancing the capacities of Panchayats for effective governance and efficient service delivery. It focuses on training, capacity building, and providing technical support to Panchayats .
e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project	This initiative aims to transform the functioning of Panchayats through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) . It includes the development of applications for planning, implementation, and monitoring of various schemes and services at the Panchayat level.
Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs) through PRIs	The Ministry has a nine-theme plan for Local Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs), involving the third tier of Government and traditional bodies in non-Part IX areas. It aims to combine key development programs at the Panchayat level, spread activities to all villages over time, and use digital tech for transparency and accountability .
Panchayat Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme	It provides incentives to states for devolving functions, funds, and functionaries to Panchayats as per the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission. It encourages states to empower Panchayats and promote accountability.
e-Gram Swaraj e-Financial Management System	This is a Simplified Work Based Accounting Application for Panchayati Raj which assists in enhancing the credibility of Panchayat through inducing greater devolution of funds to PRIs.
Geo-tagging of assets	Ministry of Panchayati Raj has developed " mActionSoft " – a mobile based solution to help in capturing photos with Geo-Tags (i.e. GPS Coordinates) for the works which have asset as an output.
SVAMITVA Scheme	Survey of Villages and Mapping with Improved Technology in Village Areas (SVAMITVA) scheme was launched on National Panchayati Raj Day 2020 to enable economic progress of Rural India by providing " Record of Rights " to every rural household owner.
Gram Swaraj Urja Abhiyaan	The Ministry of Panchayati Raj is collaborating with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy to encourage adoption of renewable energy in Gram Panchayats. This move aims to make Gram Panchayats self-reliant in energy and shift them from being just energy consumers to energy producers in the future.
Citizen Charter	The " Meri Panchayat, Mera Adhikaar- Jan Sevaayein Hamaare Dwaar " campaign was launched to ensure that Gram Panchayats have a Citizen Charter approved by Gram Sabhas. This Charter lists the different services provided by the Panchayat to citizens and the time limit for each service

What are the issues faced by the PRIs in India?

1) **Issues raised by second ARC in the Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India-**

A) **Inadequate devolution of functions, funds, and functionaries** :It noted that the devolution of **functions, funds, and functionaries** to PRIs has been inadequate that limits their ability to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

B) **Capacity constraints and lack of training**-It highlighted the need for capacity building and training of **elected representatives and officials** of PRIs to enhance their skills and knowledge for effective governance.

C) **Multiplicity of agencies and lack of coordination**:-It highlighted the multiplicity of agencies involved in **rural development programs** and the **lack of coordination** among them.This leads to duplication of efforts and inefficient implementation.

D) **Interference from bureaucracy and state governments** -It raised concerns about excessive bureaucratic control and interference from state government officials.This undermines the **autonomy and decision-making power** of PRIs.

E) **Lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities** -It highlighted the lack of clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities among the three tiers of PRIs (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zilla Parishad), leading to **overlapping functions and conflicts**.

F) **Insufficient data and monitoring mechanisms**-It emphasized the need for **better data collection** and monitoring mechanisms to assess the performance and impact of PRIs in delivering services and implementing development programs.

G) **Lack of financial autonomy**-It stressed that PRIs don't have **enough financial independence** since they mostly depend on irregular and inadequate grants from state governments.

H) **Lack of accountability and transparency mechanisms** :It noted the absence of **robust accountability and transparency mechanisms**, such as social audits and performance evaluation system.This leads to potential misuse of funds and lack of public trust.

I) **Inadequate infrastructure and resources** -There is a lack of basic infrastructure, such as office buildings, equipment, and human resources, hindering the effective functioning of PRIs.

What are the recommendations to reform Panchayat Raj Institution(PRI) in India?

1) Recommendation by 2nd ARC-

A) **Strengthening the Gram Sabha**-The ARC proposed giving more power directly to the Gram Sabha. It suggested that the **Gram Sabha** should not only supervise but also be involved in planning **economic development** and **social justice programs**.

B) **Devolution of Functions, Funds, and Functionaries**:It recommended devolving more **power, fund, and staff** to local Panchayat Raj institutions (PRIs) based on the principle of subsidiarity. It advised states to transfer all responsibilities listed in the **Eleventh Schedule** of the Constitution to the PRIs.

C) **Capacity Building and Training**:The ARC stressed the importance of training **elected officials and staff of PRIs** to improve their abilities for better governance. It suggested creating **special institutions for training and research** focused on the Panchayat Raj system

D) **State Finance Commissions**:State Finance Commissions need to be **empowered** to recommend sufficient transfer of resources from the **state to the local bodies**.

E) **Separate Election Commission for Local Bodies**:It recommended the establishment of **separate State Election Commissions** for conducting elections to the PRIs and urban local bodies to ensure their autonomy and independence.

F) **E-Governance and Citizen Participation**:It highlighted the importance of leveraging **information and communication technologies (ICT)** for e-governance initiatives at the local level to improve transparency, accountability, and citizen participation.

2) Miscellaneous recommendations by various experts–

A) **Build Local Tax Capacity**-It can be achieved through filling bill collector vacancies, **digitizing property records, and granting panchayats** more freedom to levy their own taxes and cesses.

B) **SHG-Panchayat Linkages**– Linking Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with Panchayats can improve **village governance**. This convergence enhances financial access and collective action for women. Recent studies show that SHGs empower **marginalized women** to participate in local elections, highlighting their importance in grassroots democracy.**For ex-in Bihar**

C) **Improve Administrative Data Quality**-There is a need to improve administrative data quality and enhance its **accessibility by using visuals like maps and interactive charts** that can be easily understood by citizens. By involving citizens in creating these tools, everyone can better understand and use the data to make informed decisions.

D) **Develop Scoring Systems for Panchayats**-There is a need to establishing a transparent scoring system to assess Panchayats that can be overseen by an **independent body**.This can foster **accountability and performance improvement**. Based on the performance ,Panchayat officials and staff can receive rewards like certificates and increased funds for the village which can motivate them to perform their duties diligently.

Read more–[Challenges faced by Urban Local Bodies In India](#)

UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-2- Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein

Indian Migrants in Gulf Countries – Challenges and Way forward

The recent case of deaths of over 40 Indian migrant workers in a fire in **Kuwait** has once again brought attention to the lack of **safety** and **deplorable living conditions of Indian migrants** in Gulf Countries. There have been similar incidents in recent past such as- the harsh working conditions and human rights violations during the **FIFA World Cup in Qatar**, the rapid development of infrastructure for the **Dubai Expo**, and the disproportionate impact of **COVID-19** on migrants in **Saudi Arabia** due to **cramped living spaces**.These tragic incidents necessitate immediate action from Indian government.

In this article, we will discuss the challenges faced by the **Indian migrant workers** in Gulf countries and steps that can be taken to ensure the **fulfilment of human rights** of migrant workers in Gulf Countries.

What is the status of Indian workers in Gulf countries?

1) **Indian Diaspora in GCC Nations**-The **Ministry of External Affairs** stated that about 8.88 million NRIs live in six Gulf nations. Specifically, 3.41 million NRIs reside in the United Arab Emirates, 2.59 million in Saudi Arabia, 1.02 million in Kuwait, 0.74 million in Qatar, 0.77 million in Oman, and 0.32 million in Bahrain.

Indians constitute the **largest expatriate community** in the **GCC nations**, making up around 30% of the total expatriate workforce in the region.

2) **State wise trend of migrating workforce**-Kerala Migration Survey (KMS) 2023 estimates that 2.2 million people from the state have migrated, with 80% residing in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Off late, **Uttar Pradesh** and **Bihar** have begun replacing Kerala, which was a significant contributor of the blue-collar workforce, from India to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. This has been highlighted by **UAE-based organisation, Huntr**.

3) **Profile of the migrating workforce**-

A) **Age** -Most workers going to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are between **20 and 40 years old**, the prime working age.

B) **Gender**-Historically, men dominated this workforce, but the Huntr report shows **increased participation of women**, particularly in hospitality.

C) **Education**-Workers vary in education from minimal formal **schooling to vocational training**, with some having job-specific skills. Many come from **low-income families** hoping for better financial prospects in Dubai.

4) **Job Composition**-Around **70% of Indian migrants** in the GCC are blue-collared workers (low or semi-skilled workers).

What is the significance of Indian Migrants workers for India and Gulf Countries ?

1) **For India-**

A) **Economic Contribution**-Remittances from Indians in the Gulf is one of the major sources of foreign exchange remittances to India. Their remittances account for more than a **quarter of the annual remittances** from the Indian diaspora.

B) **Skill Development**-Migrating to Gulf countries help Indian workers to acquire **new skills** and **gain experience**. When they return to India, they can bring back **valuable knowledge** and **expertise** that can help different sectors of the Indian economy.

C) **Enhance India's Soft Power**-The presence of a large Indian diaspora in Gulf countries strengthens **diplomatic and trade relations** between India and these nations. The diaspora serves as a bridge for **cultural exchange**, investment, and business partnerships between the two regions.

2) **For Gulf Countries-**

A) **Labor Supply**-Indian migrant workers fulfill **labor shortages** in various sectors of the Gulf economies especially in construction, infrastructure, healthcare, hospitality, and domestic services. **For ex-**In Kuwait Indian workers constitute nearly a fifth of the country's workforce.

B) **Diversity and Multiculturalism**: The presence of Indian migrant workers adds to the **cultural diversity** of Gulf countries, enriching society through the exchange of **customs, traditions, languages, and cuisine**.

C) **Economic Growth**: Indian migrant workers help Gulf countries grow economically by **boosting important industries**, creating jobs for locals, and increasing consumer spending.

What are the challenges faced by the Indian workers in Gulf countries?

- 1) **Exploitative Labor Practices**-Migrants, particularly those employed in low-skilled or unskilled job sectors, experience exploitation from employers who might **hold back their pay**, offer inadequate **working conditions**, or disregard labor rights.
- 2) **Recruitment Malpractices**-Recruitment agents impose **exorbitant fees** on migrants, who also face contract substitutions with **altered wages or job roles upon arrival**.Further,there is an additional risk of **passport confiscation** by employers or sponsors.
- 3) **Legal and Visa Issues**-Concerns regarding visas, work permits, and legal status expose migrants to the risk of deportation or exploitation by employers who may use **deportation threats** to suppress their rights.**For ex-**the visa sponsorship or “**kafala**” system, which binds workers to their employers, limiting their ability to seek better living or working conditions.
- 4) **Poor Living Conditions**- Migrants often live in **overcrowded** and **substandard accommodations**, which can have negative impacts on their health and well-being.**For ex-**the labor camp in Kuwait where the **recent fire** occurred was overcrowded and lacked proper safety measures like **fire exits and firefighting equipment**.
- 5) **Lack of Data and Invisibilization of Migrants**-There is a lack of data on migrants, both at their **origin and destination countries** which acts as a major challenge in addressing their issues. **For ex-** In Qatar, the lack of **clarity and uniformity** in data from different agencies made migrant workers, especially those in low-wage jobs, **less visible**.
- 6) **Legal Frameworks and Redressal Mechanisms**- The extended legal procedures, **associated costs**, and absence of **legal aid** and interpreters compound the challenges faced by the vulnerable migrant community.
- 7) **Language and Cultural Barriers**- Language barriers and cultural differences can pose challenges in **communication and integration** into the **local community**.This leads to social isolation and difficulties in accessing support networks.
- 8) **Discrimination and Racism**-They are subjected to **discrimination** and **racism**, both within the workplace and in society at large.This can affect their **living** and **working conditions** and opportunities for advancement.
- 9) **Mental Health Issues**-The stress of migration, coupled with other challenges can contribute to mental health issues such as **anxiety, depression**, and feelings of **isolation** among Indian migrants.
- 10) **Strain in Family Relationship**-They have to endure **long separations** from their families due to **strict sponsorship rules** and expensive family reunion processes. This separation can strain family bonds. Additionally, many migrants feel compelled to send remittances, which strains their **finances** and makes them more **vulnerable** to exploitation..

What are the initiative taken by Indian government to ensure welfare of migrant workers?

Emigration Act	The Emigration Act of 1983 provide the legal framework to regulate emigration of Indian workers.It mandates recruitment agencies to register and follow regulations on emigration procedures.
E-Migrate System	An online system that facilitates skilled and semi-skilled workers to get emigration clearances and track their immigration status .It prevents exploitation by recruiting agents and unregistered subagents .
Labor Mobility Partnerships	India has signed several labor agreements and Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with GCC nations like UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain to enhance protection for workers.These agreements cover areas like employment contracts, model labor policies and worker rights .

Pre-Departure Orientation Programs (PDOS)	It focuses on improving the soft skills of Indian migrant workers, especially those heading to the Gulf region and Malaysia . This includes understanding the culture, language, traditions, and local laws of the destination country.
Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)	Established to provide emergency financial support to Indian workers in distress abroad. It can be used for repatriation, legal assistance, accommodation in shelters, and medical assistance .
Indian Workers Resource Centre	It has been set up at Dubai and four more IWRCs have been approved in Sharjah (UAE), Riyadh and Jeddah (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), to provide guidance and counselling on all matters pertaining to overseas Indian workers.
Awareness Campaign	A campaign called ' Surakshit Jaaye Prasikshit Jaaye ' (Go Safe, Go Trained) was launched to promote safe and legal migration.

What should be the way forward?

- 1) **Strengthening legal frameworks**:-India should work towards finalizing and implementing the **draft Emigration Bill 2023** to provide a stronger legal framework to protect migrant workers' rights.
- 2) **Improving regulation of recruitment agents**:There should be strict monitoring and regulation of recruitment agents in India to prevent exploitation like charging exorbitant fees, contract violations etc. Further, registration with the **eMigrate** system should be made **mandatory** for all migrant workers.
- 3) **Setting up robust grievance redressal mechanisms**:-There is a need to expand the scale and effectiveness of initiatives like the **MADAD portal** for workers to file complaints.
- 4) **Enhance Diplomatic Efforts**: The government should engage in dialogue with Gulf countries to advocate for the **rights of Indian migrant workers** and **promote bilateral agreements** that protect their rights and provide avenues for legal recourse. **For ex-**reform of the **Kafala sponsorship system**
- 5) **Leverage Global Platforms for Advocacy**-
 - A) If bilateral diplomatic efforts don't work, India could consider making careful statements at the **United Nations Human Rights Council's** review sessions.
 - B) India can push for change by referencing international agreements like the **UN Human Rights Convention** and the **ILO's Declaration on Workers Rights**.
 - D) India can also use reports from organizations like the **ILO to highlight key issues**, such as the need for better protection for workers in sectors like agriculture and **domestic work in Saudi Arabia**.
- 6) **Enhancing welfare measures**:There is a need to enhance budgetary allocations for the **Indian Community Welfare Fund** to provide more **emergency assistance**. More **Indian Workers Resource Centers** in Gulf nations should be set up to provide support services.
- 7) **Promoting skill development**-The government should offer **skill training** and **certification programs** for prospective migrant workers. This can improve their employability and access to skilled job opportunities.
- 8) **Promote Financial Literacy**- Migrant workers should be provided **financial literacy** to help them manage their finances effectively, **avoid debt traps**, and make **informed decisions** about remittances and investments.
- 9) **Promote Social Integration**: There is a need to promote social integration initiatives that encourage interaction between **migrant workers and the local community**. These initiatives may have language and **cultural training programs**, community outreach initiatives, and recreational activities.

10) **Encourage Family Reunification:** The government should **streamline** visa processes and reduce financial barriers to facilitate **family reunification** so that migrant workers could bring their families to join them in Gulf countries.

Read more–[On Strengthening of India's Ties with the Gulf](#)

UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-2-International Relations-Effect of Policies and Politics of Developed and Developing Countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.

Climate Change Negotiations after Bonn Climate Meet – Challenges and Way Forward

A recent Climate Change Negotiations in **Bonn, Germany**, struggled to agree on a new target for climate finance beyond the current \$100 billion annually from developed to developing countries by 2024. The talks were expected to outline specific figures ahead of **COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan**, but instead produced a lengthy “input paper”. According to the **2015 Paris Agreement**, developed countries are required to **regularly raise money above the existing figure of \$100 billion per year** after 2025 due to the increasing needs for climate finance. This increased target, known as the **New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)**, for the period after 2025, is expected to be decided in the upcoming CoP summit.

According to a **UNFCCC report** last year, developing countries need about **\$6 trillion by 2030** to fulfill their climate commitments. For **adaptation alone**, which is part of these commitments, they require between **\$215 billion and \$387 billion annually**. The report also highlights that global investments of approximately **\$4.3 trillion per year until 2030** are necessary for transitioning to clean energy worldwide, with an additional **\$5 trillion** annually required after 2050 to achieve **global net zero emissions**.

This article will highlight the key outcomes of recently concluded talks examine the challenges climate change negotiations face, and propose a path forward.

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What are the outcome of recently concluded Bonn climate meet?

- 1) **Inadequate progress on New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG)** – Little progress was made on setting a new target for **climate finance** that developed countries must provide to developing nations after 2024. Developed and developing countries **disagreed** on how much money should be provided and which developing countries should contribute.
- 2) **Divergence on NCQG amount**-There was a divergence on deciding the NCQG amount. **Developing countries** proposed annual figures of **\$1.1-\$1.3 trillion** whereas **developed nations** did not make any specific financial offer.
- 3) **Trust deficit**-The discussions highlighted the ongoing **lack of trust** between developed and developing countries. Developing nations emphasized that the Paris Agreement clearly obligates **developed countries** to provide **climate finance**.
- 4) **Disagreements over Global Stocktake (GST) dialogue**-The first annual dialogue after the GST at COP28 exposed disagreements. Developed nations demanded stronger **emission reduction targets** from all parties but avoided discussion on **transitioning away from fossil fuels**.
- 5) **Fossil fuel transition**-Due to COP29 taking place in Azerbaijan, an oil-producing nation, there are concerns that the important topic of **transitioning away from fossil fuels** would **not** receive adequate **attention**.

6) **Inadequacy of Loss and Damage Support**-Developing nations, especially Least Developed Countries (LDCs), emphasized that current mechanisms to handle loss and damage from climate change impacts are **insufficient**.

7) **Deadlock on Mitigation Work Programme (MWP)**-Negotiations on the MWP have stalled because **developing countries** are resisting additional pressures, while **developed countries** are advocating for further discussions.

8) **Lack of consensus on Article 6 (market mechanisms)**-There were clarifications on some positions. However, there was **no agreement** on the guidelines for **market mechanisms** under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

What is the significance of Climate Change Negotiations?

May was the warmest on record, marking 12 consecutive months of record-breaking temperatures, according to Europe's **Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)**. The **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** also stated that there is now an **80% likelihood** that at least one year between 2024 and 2028 will surpass 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. **In the backdrop of this development**, climate change negotiations assumes great significance.

1) **Global Cooperation**: They provide a **platform** for countries to come together and **collectively** address climate change issue.

2) **Setting Targets and Commitments**: Negotiations establish targets for **emissions, reductions, adaptation measures**, and **financial support**. For ex- Paris Agreement. These targets guide national policies and actions.

3) **Legal and Policy Frameworks**-Global agreements like the **Kyoto Protocol** and the **Paris Agreement** establish legal frameworks that enforce countries' specific commitments. These agreements promote **transparency** and **accountability** by enabling nations to monitor progress and ensure mutual responsibility.

4) **Financial Support**-These negotiations involve discussions on **climate finance**, where developed countries pledge **financial assistance** to developing countries for mitigation (reducing emissions) and adaptation (building resilience to climate impacts).

5) **Technology Transfer**: They facilitate the **transfer of technology** and **knowledge** between developed and developing countries to support **sustainable development** and climate resilience.

6) **Long-Term Goals**-They set long-term goals, such as achieving **net-zero emissions** or limiting global temperature rise to **specific thresholds**. This helps in guiding global efforts towards a sustainable future.

7) **Public Awareness and Engagement**: Climate negotiations raise **public awareness** about the urgency of climate action and the need for **global solidarity**. They mobilize **civil society**, businesses, and **other stakeholders** to support climate goals.

8) **Addressing Equity and Justice**-They address fairness concerns by acknowledging **historical responsibilities** for emissions and **vulnerabilities** to climate impacts. Their goal is to achieve **equitable sharing** of responsibilities and benefits among nations and communities.

9) **Adaptive Governance**-They advocate for adaptive governance approaches that promote **flexibility** in policies and strategies. This helps in adapting to **evolving scientific knowledge** and **shifting climate conditions**.

10) **Accountability and Transparency**-They establish frameworks for **monitoring, reporting, and verifying countries' actions** and progress towards their commitments. This accountability promotes transparency and ensures that nations are taking meaningful steps to address climate change.

What are the challenges in Climate Change Negotiations?

- 1) **Conflicting national interests**:-Countries have diverse economic, political, and developmental priorities, which can conflict with **climate action goals**. Balancing these interests with the need for **collective action** is a major challenge.
- 2) **Equity and burden-sharing**:-Deciding on **fair** and **equitable ways** to distribute the responsibilities of climate action, especially between developed and developing nations, has been a contentious issue. Disagreements regarding **historical responsibilities** and capacities have impeded **progress**.
- 3) **Finance and Funding issues**-
 - A) **Insufficient Funding Levels**: Developed countries' funding for climate action in developing nations is **not adequate** enough to meet ambitious goals like those in the Paris Agreement.
 - B) **Lack of Predictability and Stability**- **Developing countries** find it challenging to plan and execute long-term climate projects due to **unpredictable funding**. Fluctuations in annual disbursements can disrupt ongoing initiatives.
 - C) **Balancing Adaptation and Mitigation**-There is a disparity in **funding allocation** between **adaptation** (building resilience to climate impacts) and **mitigation** (reducing greenhouse gas emissions).
 - D) **Private Sector Engagement**- Mobilizing **private finance** for climate projects is difficult because of perceived risks, inadequate incentives, and the difficulty of **aligning private sector** goals with **climate objectives**.
 - E) **Debt Sustainability Concerns**:-Climate finance, which includes **loans or debt-related instruments**, can increase debt burdens in developing countries.
- 4) **Technology Transfer**:-Facilitating the transfer of clean technologies to developing countries on favorable terms is difficult because of issues related to **intellectual property rights, market barriers, and capacity limitations**.
- 5) **Emissions targets and commitments**-Setting ambitious yet achievable emission reduction targets and ensuring countries **stick to their commitments** has been difficult, mainly because of concerns about **economic competitiveness** and **growth**
- 6) **Inclusion and participation**-It has been challenging to include and address the voices and concerns of all stakeholders, including **civil society, indigenous communities, and marginalized groups**, in the negotiation process.
- 7) **Scientific uncertainty**-Despite strong scientific evidence, some countries and stakeholders still **question** climate science.This hampers **agreement** and **action**.
- 8) **Implementation and compliance**- There arises a great difficulty in ensuring effective **implementation and compliance by all parties** because of lack of **political will, resources, or enforcement mechanisms**.
- 9) **Complexity and scope**-Climate change spans across **multiple sectors** such as energy, agriculture, and transportation, posing challenges for **comprehensive negotiations**.
- 10) **Geopolitical tensions**- **Geopolitical rivalries, trade disputes, and shifting global power** dynamics can influence the dynamics of climate change negotiations and hinder cooperation.

How can climate change negotiations be made more effective and productive?

- 1) **Enhance transparency and trust**-There is a need to build trust among parties.This can be done by ensuring **enhanced transparency** in **reporting emissions** and **climate actions** during climate change negotiations.
- 2) **Strengthen scientific collaboration**-It is important to promote cooperation among scientific communities and include more experts in negotiations to minimize **uncertainties**, offer **reliable data**, and **improve** decision-making processes.
- 3) **Prioritize adaptation and loss and damage**-Greater focus should be devoted towards **adaptation strategies** in climate change discussions, as well as addressing **the loss and damage experienced by vulnerable nations** from climate change effects..
- 4) **Promote Climate Justice and Equity**-Climate change negotiations should address **equity concerns** by acknowledging **historical emissions responsibilities** and supporting vulnerable groups like **indigenous peoples** and **marginalized communities** in decision-making.
- 5) **Facilitate technology transfer and capacity building**-The negotiations should ensure that **developed nations** fulfill their commitments to facilitate the transfer of **climate-friendly technologies** and assist in capacity building for developing nations.
- 6) **Explore innovative financing mechanisms**:- In addition to **traditional financing** channels,the negotiations should also promote exploration of innovative financing mechanisms, such as **carbon pricing**, **green bonds**, and **public-private partnerships**.
- 7) **Encourage inclusive participation**-Negotiations should include **all stakeholders**, such as civil society, indigenous communities, and marginalized groups, to increase **support** and **commitment** to climate policies and actions.
- 8) **Promote sectoral approaches**-The negotiations should promote **sector-specific approaches**, such as in energy, agriculture, and transportation in addressing climate change issue.This can help address the **complexities of climate change** and identify **targeted solutions**.
- 9) **Enhance compliance and accountability**-The negotiations should propose ways to enhance compliance mechanisms and use **incentives or penalties** to **motivate** countries to fulfill their commitments.
- 10) **Foster regional and sub-national cooperation**-Encouraging regional and sub-national cooperation, alongside global negotiations, can effectively tackle **local climate challenges** and facilitate the **exchange of knowledge and best practices**.
- 11) **Navigating Geopolitical Tensions**-Climate change negotiations must acknowledge the impact of **geopolitical tensions** and **power dynamics** on issues of Climate Change.This approach can help **navigate complex negotiations** and foster **consensus**.

Read more-[Climate Negotiations and India](#)

UPSC Syllabus-GS Paper-2-International Relations & GS Paper-3-Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act (POSH Act)-Significance and concerns- Explained Pointwise

Sexual Harassment at the workplace is **one of the major issues faced** by women in the modern world. **Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act (POSH Act)** was enacted to effectively counter the sexual harassment cases in India. While there has been a rise in the cases registered under this act, SC has also raised concerns regarding some serious lapses and uncertainties surrounding the Act.

What is the status of sexual harassment at workplace in India?

According to a survey conducted by the **Indian National Bar Association** of over 6,000 employees in 2017. According to the survey, **sexual harassment is widespread in different job sectors**. The sexual harassment varies from vulgar comments to an outright demand for sexual favours.

According to the **Ministry of Women and Child development between 2015-2017**, a total of **1631 cases** had been filed under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. There has been a **wide disparity among states**, with Uttar Pradesh recording for nearly 25% of all cases, followed by Delhi (16%).

What is the POSH Act? What are the important provisions of the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act (POSH Act)?

About the Act- The POSH Act is a legislation enacted by the **Government of India in 2013** to **address the issue of sexual harassment faced by women** in the workplace. The Act aims to create a safe and conducive work environment for women and provide protection against sexual harassment.

Background of Enaction- The Supreme Court in the landmark judgment in the **Vishakha and others v State of Rajasthan 1997** case gave the '**Vishakha guidelines**' for prevention of sexual harassment at workplace. India has also signed the **CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women)** 1980. India has also ratified the convention later.

The POSH Act was enacted to give a statutory and a legal backing to these guidelines and Conventions.

Important Provisions of the POSH Act

1. Definition of Sexual Harassment- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) **defines sexual harassment as one or more of the following unwelcome acts or behavior**. Such as

- (i) physical contact and advances; or
- (ii) a demand or request for sexual favours; or
- (iii) making sexually colored remarks; or
- (iv) showing pornography; or
- (v) any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature;

2. Prevention and Prohibition- The Act places a **legal obligation on employers** to **prevent and prohibit sexual harassment** in the workplace.

3. Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)- The employers are required to constitute an **Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** at each workplace with **10 or more employees** to receive and address complaints of sexual harassment. The Complaints Committees **have the powers of civil courts** for gathering evidence.

4. Duties of Employers- According to the Act, the employers must **undertake awareness programs, provide a safe working environment**, and **display information about the POSH Act** at the workplace.

5. Complaint Mechanism- The POSH Act lays down a **procedure for filing complaints, conducting inquiries, and providing a fair opportunity** to the parties involved.

6. Penalties- Non-compliance with the Act's provisions can result in penalties, including fines and cancellation of business licenses.

What is the Significance of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act in India?

1. Ensures Emotional Well-Being of women- Sexual harassment **can endanger the victim's emotional and mental health**. It can lead to the **loss of self-esteem**, and it **may even compromise personal relationships**. Hence, the Act aims to ensure the emotional well-being of women in India.

2. Improved Physical Health- Weak emotional health often leads to **physical health issues**, such as **loss of appetite, headaches, weight fluctuations, and sleep disturbances**. Hence, the Act aims at improving the physical health of women in India.

3. Ensures protection of women against Financial hardships- Sexual harassment frequently leads to **financial hardship and challenges** due to loss of job references and hostile work environment. **For ex-** According to a study led by the ILO, **lewd behaviour and threatening at workplaces** were the most well-known reasons due to which women left the workforce in Uttar Pradesh.

4. Protection against economic losses- **Low productivity, low employee turnover, low morale, and high legal costs arising from sexual harassment** costs millions of Dollars. The economy also suffers due to premature retirement and higher insurance costs (paid if women left the job).

What are the challenges with the POSH Act cases in India?

The Supreme Court of India has recently raised several serious lapses and uncertainties in the implementation of the POSH Act. These are mentioned as followed-

1. Non-compliance of Companies and organisations- There are many private companies and organisations which have not constituted an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to look into the complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace. **For ex- Only 16 out of 30 national sports federations had constituted Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs)** as mandated.

2. Improper constitution of ICCs- The majority of the ICCs either have an inadequate number of members or lack mandatory external member. Most of the committees lack people who have knowledge about **legal technicalities involved in conducting the inquiry, cross-examinations, and its importance**.

3. Lack of Gender Neutrality- The law does not take into account **sexual harassment** faced by **men, transgender, and transsexual individuals**.

4. Exclusion of certain categories of women- The Act does not cover **women working as agricultural workers and in the armed forces**. These are **largely male-dominated sectors**.

5. Fear of Victimization- Victimization in sexual harassment often occurs, when a woman lodges a complaint against a superior. The POSH Act is **silent on victimisation** and **has neither any preventive provisions nor any remedies**. **For ex-** A survey revealed that **nearly 70% of women did not complain** due to fear, embarrassment, lack of confidence in complaint mechanism etc.

What are the other women initiatives for safety of Women?

One Stop Centre Scheme	It is a centrally sponsored scheme for addressing the problem of violence against women . It was launched in April 2015.
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UJJAWALA	It is a comprehensive scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation.
SWADHAR Greh	The scheme through the provisions of shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid , aims to rehabilitate women in difficult circumstances.
Nari Shakti Puruskar	The Ministry of Women and Child Development announces these national level awards for individuals/ groups/ Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)/ institutions for encouraging women to participate in decision making roles.

What Should be the Way Forward?

Justice JS Verma committee has recommended several changes to the POSH Act. The important recommendations are as follows-

- 1. Wider definition of rape-** The committee has recommended to view rape and sexual assault as not merely a crime but also as an expression of power. So, **any non-consensual penetration of a sexual nature has to be included** in the **definition of rape**.
- 2. Replacement of ICC with tribunal-** The committee has **recommended the establishment of a tribunal**, instead of an ICC. Because dealing with such complaints internally could discourage women from complaining.
- 3. Inclusion of excluded women-** POSH Act should be amended to **include women in armed forces, agriculture to get their grievances redressed**. The Act should focus on gender-neutral.
- 4. Punishment of companies for non-compliance-** The government must form a committee to identify the **companies not formed the ICC, companies victimizing the women**. These companies must be financially penalized or name and shamed to make them compliant to the provisions of the Act.
- 5. Creation of Gender equity company index-** The government should aim to **create a Gender equity company index** like **LGBT+ workplace equality index**. This will create a healthy gender-sensitive competition among companies to hire more women, and provide them with enough respect.
- 6. Raising awareness-** Government needs to raise the awareness about **gender-sensitive child-rearing practice**. The government can also introduce **a gender-equity syllabus at school level**. Further, the Act must be enforced diligently to ensure the dignity and respect that women deserve at the workplace.

Read More- The Hindu

UPSC Syllabus- GS Paper 1- Issues related to women

G7 and India- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The Prime Minister of India attended the **50th Summit of G7 group** which was held in from **13 to 15th June 2024**. India is not a member of the G7. However, India participated as a guest in the 2019, 2021, and 2022 G7 summits at the invitation of France, the UK, and Germany respectively. This reflects **India's rising global stature** and the **recognition of its role as a major economic and geopolitical actor**. The association of India with G7 comes with its own advantages and challenges. **G7 Importance in India**

Some Key Outcomes of G-7 Group Summit

1. Promotion of G7 PGII (Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment)- Under this PGII, G7 will **mobilise USD 600 billion by 2027** to deliver infrastructure projects to developing and middle-income

countries.

- 2. Support and Promotion to India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**– G-7 nations committed to promoting the IMEC. It also forms part of the PGII initiative.
- 3. Support to Infrastructure Projects**- G7 also extended support for the **Lobito Corridor in Central Africa** and **Luzon Corridor** and the **Middle Corridor**.
- 4. Enhancing Interoperability of AI Governance**- G7 countries aim to **enhance interoperability amongst their AI governance approaches** to promote greater certainty, transparency and accountability.
- 5. Extraordinary Revenue Acceleration (ERA) Loans for Ukraine**- The G7 countries agreed to provide financing of approximately **USD 50 billion in additional funding** to Ukraine by the end of 2024.

What is the G-7 Group? What are the achievements of the Grouping?

G-7- G-7 is a group of the most developed and advanced economies of the world. The members of the G7 group are **France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan, the United States, and Canada**. Summits are held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by the group's members.

Origin-

- a. The G-7 originated from the **Oil crisis of 1973** and **the resulting financial crisis**, which forced the leaders of **6 major industrial nations** to convene a meeting in 1975.
- b. The participating countries were the **US, UK, France, West Germany, Japan, and Italy**. Canada joined in 1976, leading to the formation of the G-7.
- c. It was known as the '**G8**' for several years after the original seven were joined by Russia in 1997. However, it was renamed as **G-7 after Russia was expelled as a member in 2014** following its annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine.

Significance of the G7 Grouping

- 1. Grouping of advanced economies**- G7 group controls **60% of global net wealth** and drives **46% of global GDP**. It also represents **10% of the world's population**.
- 2. Facilitates Dialogue**- The G7 acts as a **forum for member nations** to have **open and frank discussions on critical global issues**. This allows them to understand different perspectives and build consensus.
- 3. Forges Collective Action**- G7 aims to **develop coordinated political responses** to global challenges. This involves collaborative efforts on issues like **trade agreements, security threats, or climate change initiatives**.
- 4. Innovations in Governance**- The introduction of initiatives like the "**Hiroshima AI Process**" highlights the G7's role in addressing emerging technological challenges.
- 5. Global crisis response**- G7 has coordinated actions on global economic recoveries, health emergencies like the **COVID-19 pandemic**, and geopolitical conflicts including the **Russian invasion of Ukraine**.

What are the Challenges that the G-7 Group faces?

- 1. G7 is not representative in current times**- In the initial years, it accounted for **2/3rd of global GDP**. However, the G-7 group now accounts **only for 1/3rd on PPP basis** and less than **50% on nominal basis (market prices)**. The emerging 7 (E7) economies of India, China, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Russia, Turkey are not part of it.
- 2. Failure in tackling Global issues**- G7 failed in tackling global issues and challenges of **Climate change, terrorism, West Asian crisis, COVID 19 pandemic**.

3. Historical Polluters- G-7 accounts for 59% of historical CO2 emissions and pledged phase out fossil fuels. There has been no visible progress of the same and they currently account for twice the CO2 emission than African continent.

4. Trade Conflicts- Trade disputes among G7 members and with other countries disrupt global economic stability. Weakening of rules based of trade regime through WTO and trade wars has active role of G7 countries.

5. Populism and Nationalism- The rise of populist and nationalist movements within G7 countries challenge multilateral cooperation and the G-7 group's commitment to globalism and liberal democratic values.

What is the significance of India's association with G-7 Countries?

1. India's Economic Significance- According to the IMF, India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. India's economy is larger than 4 G-7 member countries – France, Italy, the UK and Canada. India's abundant young and skilled workforce, coupled with its market potential, low manufacturing costs, and favourable business climate, makes it an attractive investment destination.

2. India's growing strategic Importance in the Indo-Pacific- India has emerged as a major strategic partner for the Western G-7 countries. This has helped in containing China's expanding influence, particularly in the Indian Ocean.

3. India's Role in Addressing the European Energy Crisis- India's ability to secure discounted Russian oil and supply refined fuels to Europe has made it an important player in addressing the European energy crisis.

4. India's Potential for Mediating the Russia-Ukraine Conflict- India's long-standing relationships with both Russia and the West makes it a potential mediator in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict.

5. Regulation of AI- India has been an active participant in the debate on the global regulation of AI. With the focus of G-7 countries on the regulation of Artificial Intelligence, India's association with G-7 countries can help in the development of a common global framework for AI.

What are the Challenges with India's further deepening of engagement with G-7 Countries?

1. Escalating conflict in Europe- With the escalation of conflict in Europe, India finds it hard to duck its consequences. This is reflected in the choice of Indian PM to stay away from the Ukraine peace conference in Switzerland that took place after the G7 summit.

2. Defence Dependence on Russia- India's reliance on Russia for over 60% of its military equipment creates a complex situation. A strained West-Russia relationship could disrupt supply chains and force India to diversify its defence partnerships.

3. Economic Interdependence- Deep economic ties with both the US and China makes it difficult for India to balance its trade relations with both these countries.

4. Geopolitical Rivalry- The intensified competition between the US and China in the Indian Ocean region forces India to take sides on issues that don't directly align with its national interests.

5. Non Inclusion of India as a permanent member- G-7 has an obsolete membership structure which does not include the emerging economies like India.

What Should be the Way Forward?

India's evolving relationship with the G7 signifies its growing importance in global economic and strategic affairs. The synergies between India and G7 nations, driven by shared values and mutual interests, present vast opportunities for collaborative growth. As India continues to rise on the global stage, its partnership with the

G7 will play a pivotal role in shaping a balanced and inclusive world order. Following should be the way forward-

- 1. Deepening Economic Ties-** Encouraging investment in sectors like **renewable energy, technology, infrastructure** and **enhancing trade liberalization efforts** can bolster economic relations between India and G-7 group.
- 2. Strategic Collaborations-** Strengthening defense cooperation through **joint exercises, intelligence sharing,** and **technology transfers** can address common security challenges.
- 3. Multilateral Engagement-** India's active participation in G7 forums can contribute to shaping inclusive global governance frameworks. **Joint efforts in climate action, focusing on sustainable development and green technologies,** can set benchmarks for global environmental policies.
- 4. Technological Innovation-** Collaborative efforts in **digital infrastructure development, cybersecurity,** and **artificial intelligence** can drive the next wave of technological advancements. Joint research initiatives in fields like **biotechnology, space exploration,** and **renewable energy** can foster innovation.

[Read More- The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS Paper 2- Important International Organisations








The Issue of Indian Railway Safety- Explained Pointwise

The Issue of Indian Railway safety is **again under scrutiny** with the **recent incident of freight train ramming into a passenger train,** near Siliguri in West Bengal, which left at least nine people dead and more than 40 injured. Last year, the **tragic Balasore train accident** also highlighted the grim situation of railway safety prevailing in the country. These accidents highlight the **urgent need for comprehensive reforms** and **improved safety protocols** to ensure the well-being of passengers and prevent such devastating accidents in the future.

What are the previous train accidents due to lapses in Indian railway safety?

Deadliest train accidents in India

Source: PTI | The Hindu Graphics

	<p>Purushottam Express Deaths: 305 Aug. 20, 1995: Crashed into the stationary Kalindi Express near Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh</p>	
	<p>Jammu Tawi-Sealdah Express Deaths: 212 Nov. 26, 1998: Collided with three derailed coaches of Frontier Golden Temple Mail in Punjab's Khanna</p>	
	<p>Jnaneswari Express Deaths: 148 May 28, 2010: The Mumbai-bound train derailed near Jhargram in West Bengal and hit by an incoming goods train</p>	
	<p>Pamban-Dhanushkodi train Deaths: 126 Dec. 23, 1964: Washed away by the Rameswaram cyclone</p>	
		<p>Brahmaputra Mail Deaths: 285 Aug. 2, 1999: Crashed into the stationary Avadh Assam Express at Gaisal station</p>
		<p>Indore-Rajendra Nagar Express Deaths: 152 Nov., 2016: 14 coaches derailed at Pukhrayan, approximately 60 km from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh</p>
		<p>Howrah Rajdhani Express Deaths: 140 Sep. 9, 2002: Derailed over a bridge on the Dhave river in Bihar's Rafiganj, blamed on terrorist sabotage</p>

Source- The Hindu

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, an average 23,000 people died every year between 2010 and 2021 in railway accidents.

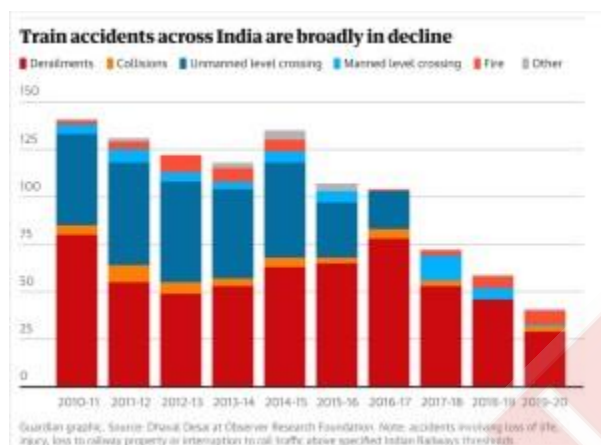
Derailments	Derailments have been a major cause of train accidents in India. Lapses in safety protocols, track maintenance, and failure to identify and rectify track defects have resulted in derailments. For ex- The derailment of the Puri-Haridwar Utkal Express in 2017 , which claimed 23 lives and injured many, was attributed to negligence in track maintenance.
Collisions	Train collisions have occurred due to lapses in signalling systems, human errors, and failure to maintain safe distances between trains. For ex- Collision between the Gorakhdham Express and a halted goods train in Uttar Pradesh, in 2014, resulting in a high number of casualties and injuries.
Signal failures	Malfunctioning or improper signalling systems have been responsible for train accidents. Inadequate maintenance, faulty equipment, and human errors in signalling operations have resulted in collisions and other mishaps. For ex- The collision of two trains in Gaisal, West Bengal (1999), occurred due to a signalling error.
Level crossing accidents	Lapses in ensuring the safety of level crossings have led to accidents involving trains and road vehicles. Failure to eliminate manned level crossings, inadequate warning systems, and negligence in adhering to safety procedures have contributed to such accidents. For ex- Train-bus collision in the Kanshiramnagar district of Uttar Pradesh , which killed 38 people and injured 17 people.
Overcrowding and overspeeding	Overcrowding of trains beyond their capacity and overspeeding have also led to accidents. Lack of proper crowd management and failure to enforce speed limits have been significant safety concerns. For ex- The 2018 Amritsar train accident , where a train struck a crowd watching a Dussehra event near the railway tracks, causing numerous fatalities, highlights the risks associated with overcrowding.

Why the safety of Indian Railways is paramount?

- 1. High volume of passengers-** India is the fourth-largest rail network in the world at **68,043 km** and almost **3.5 billion people** travel on this network annually. With a **massive population** and **millions of people relying on the railways for their daily commute**, ensuring the safety of Indian Railways becomes crucial.
- 2. Economic impact-** Indian Railways is a crucial component of the country's transportation infrastructure and plays a vital role in the economy. **Any disruption** or **safety-related issues can lead to economic setbacks**, affecting industries, businesses, and overall development.
- 3. Lifeline for economic migrants-** Trains are the **lifeline for a bulk of India's poorer economic migrants**. The economic survey used unreserved railway travel as a proxy for economic migration between 2011 and 2016 and concluded that the annual average inter-state migration was close to nine million.
- 4. Reputation and public trust-** The safety of Indian Railways is essential to maintain the public's trust and confidence in the system. Instances of accidents and safety lapses **can erode the reputation of the railways** and **result in passengers losing faith** in the reliability and security of train travel.
- 5. International comparison-** Countries like **Japan, China**, and **several European nations** have demonstrated that high safety standards are achievable. The focus on **safety is not only crucial for passenger well-being** but also to align with global best practices and enhance India's image on the international stage.
- 6. Regulatory compliance-** Safety is a regulatory requirement and a legal obligation for Indian Railways. **Adhering to safety protocols** and **regulations is not only necessary** to prevent accidents but also to **comply with**

national and international standards. This ensures that the railways operate within a framework that safeguards the well-being of passengers.

What are various government initiatives to address the Indian railway safety concerns?



Source- The Guardian

Kavach system	KAVACH is an indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection (ATP) System for Indian Railways. It has been deployed on 1,465 route km and 139 locomotives on South Central Railway as on February 2024.
Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)	The Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK) was set up with a corpus of ₹1 trillion for five years starting 2017-18. It focuses on replacing, renewing, and upgrading critical safety assets.
Project Mission Raftar	It is an Indian Railway project, introduced in the Railway Budget of 2016-17 and approved by NITI Aayog in 2017. The goal is to double the average speed of freight trains and increase passenger train speed by 50% . While the focus is on improving speed , it indirectly contributes to safety by reducing travel time and potentially minimizing the risks associated with prolonged journeys.
Maintenance and Renewals	The railway ministry plans railway maintenance in advance. By November 2023, around 3000 kilometers of track renewals were completed , meeting 66% of the annual target .
Audit reports and recommendations	The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) periodically conducts audits of Indian Railways, identifying shortcomings and making recommendations to address safety concerns .
Mission Zero Accident	The mission comprises two sub-missions . Elimination of unmanned level crossings- The target is the elimination of all unmanned level crossings on Broad Gauge in the next 3-4 years . This will reduce deaths due to accidents and will improve the throughput of the network. TCAS (Train Collision Avoidance System)- A new technology has been developed to equip 100% of the High-Density Network with TCAS in the next 3 years. It will prevent head-on collisions and also improve throughput with increasing average sectional speeds.

Upgradation of infrastructure	The government has been investing significant funds in the modernization and upgradation of railway infrastructure . This includes the electrification of railway lines, the expansion of rail networks, and the introduction of high-speed and ultra-high-speed lines , such as the Vande Bharat Express.
Implementation of safety measures	Efforts have been made to implement safety measures across the railway network. These include the installation of fire and smoke detection systems in coaches, the provision of fire extinguishers that aids locomotive pilots in triggering the brake system automatically.
Elimination of manned level crossings	The government has been working towards the elimination of manned level crossings , which are prone to accidents. Efforts are being made to replace them with underpasses, overpasses, and other safety measures to enhance railway safety.

What are the challenges in ensuring the safety of Indian railways?

- 1. Technical glitches and system failures-** The occurrence of technical glitches and system failures, such as the **electronic interlocking error in the Balasore train crash**, poses a significant challenge to ensuring the safety of Indian Railways. These issues can lead to **signalling errors, track misalignment, and other critical safety hazards**.
- 2. Funding constraints-** The allocation and utilization of funds for safety-related works face challenges. The **decline in funding for track renewal, diversion of funds to non-priority tasks, and constraints in the Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh** pose obstacles to effectively addressing safety concerns.
- 3. Inadequate maintenance and inspections-** The **CAG audit reports** highlight **shortcomings in maintenance activities, inspections, and track renewal processes**. Shortfalls in inspections, failure to submit or accept inquiry reports after accidents, and declining funding for track maintenance contribute to safety concerns.
- 4. Congestion and overcrowding-** The Indian Railways network experiences **severe congestion**, especially on **major trunk routes, leading to overcrowded trains and increased risks**. The **high volume of passengers and inadequate capacity utilization** can impact safety protocols and create challenges in managing passenger flow during emergencies.
- 5. Compliance and implementation-** **Ensuring compliance with safety protocols and timely implementation of safety measures** across the vast railway network is a complex challenge. The need for **strict adherence to scheduled timelines** for accident inquiries, **acceptance of inquiry reports, and effective monitoring mechanisms** is emphasized in the reports.
- 6. Human Factors-** Human error, such as **incorrect setting of points, mistakes in shunting operations, and overspeeding**, has been identified as a significant factor contributing to train accidents.
- 7. Incomplete Safety Systems-** The Kavach (Train Collision Avoidance System), though promising, **covers only 1% of the rail network**, insufficient to significantly reduce accidents due to human errors.
- 8. Increased Traffic-** Post-COVID-19, there's a **30% rise in consequential train accidents** due to higher passenger and freight traffic.
- 9. Slow Capacity Expansion-** Delayed infrastructure upgrades strain the system. **For ex-** The **Bahanaga Bazar accident in Odisha** was due to faulty wiring and signaling.

What should be the way Forward?

- 1. Conduction of thorough investigations-** It is essential to **conduct comprehensive** and **timely investigations into train accidents** to identify the root causes and determine accountability. This includes **submitting and accepting inquiry reports** within prescribed timelines and ensuring that the findings are made public for analysis and discussion.
- 2. Strengthen maintenance practices-** **Prioritize track maintenance, inspections, and infrastructure upgrades** to prevent derailments and ensure safe operations. We must implement **mechanized methods of track maintenance** and **leverage improved technologies** to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of maintenance activities.
- 3. Allocate sufficient funding-** We must ensure **adequate funding for safety-related works, including track renewal, signalling systems, and infrastructure upgrades**. Proper utilization of funds from initiatives like the **Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)** should be ensured to address safety priorities effectively.
- 4. Enhance staffing and training-** **Address staffing shortages in safety-related positions** and provide **comprehensive training programs for staff members** involved in train operations. Focus on **improving skills, knowledge, and adherence to safety protocols** to minimize human errors.
- 5. Implementation of advanced technologies-** Embrace **advanced technologies, to enhance safety monitoring, early detection of faults, and real-time decision-making**.
- 6. Prioritize safety as a culture-** **Encourage reporting of safety concerns, promote safety awareness and education** among staff and passengers, and **instill a sense of responsibility for safety** in every aspect of railway operations.
- 7. Establish a Safety Regulatory Body-** This would **oversee safety standards**, especially with the increasing inclusion of private operators and new high-speed corridors.
- 8. Leverage Technology and AI-** Adopt more advanced technologies and artificial intelligence to reduce human error and enhance overall safety operations. Successful examples of **Automatic Train Protection Systems**, working in the Mumbai suburban for the last few decades, could be emulated elsewhere.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3- Infrastructure, Disaster Management

Hindu Kush Himalayas Snow Melting- Reasons and Consequences- Explained Pointwise

According to the **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)** report, the **snow persistence** of the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and the Indus basins in the Hindu Kush Himalayas have reached a **historical low** in 2024. The **low snow persistence** points to **increased snow melting** in the Hindu-Kush Himalayan Region. The accelerated melting is **beyond scientists' projections** and causes **huge challenges** in one of the most populated regions of the world.

Where is the Hindu Kush Himalayas? What is the status of snow persistence in the Hindu Kush Himalayas?

The HKH mountains extend around **3,500 km** over **eight countries**– **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan**. These mountains are also called the 'water towers of Asia' because they are the origins of **10 crucial river systems** on the continent — Amu Darya, Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze, Yellow river, and Tarim.

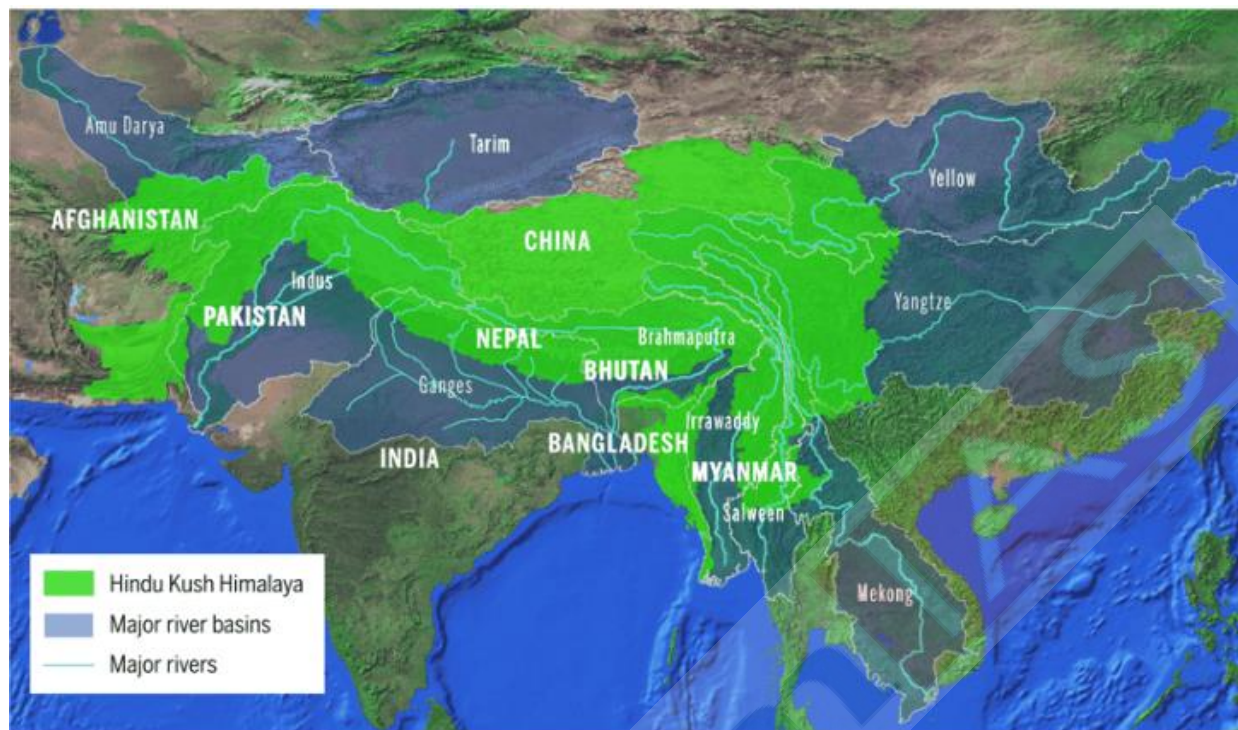


Fig.1: The Hindu Kush Himalaya

Snow Persistence- Snow persistence is the fraction of time, the snow is on the ground. When this snow melts, it provides water to people and ecosystems. In the river basins of the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), snowmelt is the biggest source of water in the streams. Overall, it contributes 23% of the runoff to the region's 12 major river basins every year.

Snow persisting on the ground is important for the Ganga river basin because its melt contributes to 10.3% of Ganga's water as compared to only 3.1% from glacier melts. In the Brahmaputra and the Indus basins, snowmelt brings 13.2% and around 40% of the water, respectively, versus 1.8% and 5% from glaciers.

About the Findings of the Report

- a. 2024 HKH snow update analysed data from 2003 to 2024. It found significant fluctuations in snow persistence between November and April every year, when snow accumulates above ground.
- b. Snow persistence in the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, and the Indus river basins has dropped significantly in 2024. The Ganga river basin noted its lowest snow persistence in 22 years, 17% below the long-term historical average. Snow persistence in the Brahmaputra basin was 14.6% below normal in 2024.
- c. Outside India, the basin of the Amu Darya river- which flows through Central Asia-recorded its lowest snow persistence in 2024, which is 28.2% below normal. The Helmand river, an important source of drinking water for Iran and Afghanistan, was almost 32% below normal in 2024.

What are the major reasons behind the snow melting in Hindu Kush Himalayan regions?

1. Weakened western disturbances- Western disturbances are low-pressure systems that originate over the Mediterranean Sea, the Caspian, and the Black Seas and bring rain and snow to the HKH region in winter. However, the region where these storms originate experienced persistently high sea-surface temperatures.

This **disruption weakened and delayed the arrival of the western disturbance**, resulting in reduced winter precipitation and snowfall in the HKH region.

2. Global Warming- Global warming has **exacerbated, prolonged and intensified** La Niña–El Niño conditions. This has lowered the Hindu Kush Himalayan region’s snow persistence capacity.

3. Climate Change- The impacts of climate change are **profoundly being felt in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Regions (HKH)**. The rising temperatures **lead to glacier retreat and changes the snowfall patterns**.

4. Growth of Invasive species- The growth of Invasive species in the Himalayan natural ecosystem has **disrupted the delicate balance of ecosystem** and threatened the survival of native species. **For Ex-** Clusters of purple flowers (**Cirsium arvense**), mats of white clover (**Trifolium repens**) are the threatening invasive species of the Himalayas.

5. Environmental Degradation- **Deforestation, overgrazing, unsustainable land use practices, and infrastructure development** are causing environmental degradation, including soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and water pollution.

Why is the conservation of Hindu Kush Himalayan Region significant?

1. Water Security- Abundant rainfall, vast snow-fields and large glaciers in Himalayas are the feeding grounds of the mighty rivers of India like Ganga, Brahmaputra. These river basins provide water to almost one-fourth of the world’s population and are a **significant freshwater source for 240 million people in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region**.

2. Energy Security- Almost **33% of the country's thermal electricity** and **52% of its hydro power** is dependent on river waters originating in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Regions.

3. Influence on Indian Climate- By virtue of their high altitude, length and direction, the Himalayas help in the sustenance of Indian monsoon. They also prevent the cold continental air masses of Central Asia from entering into India. It helps to **maintain an ambient temperature in the Indian subcontinent** which favours the flourishing of civilisation.

4. Forest Wealth- The Himalayan forests provide fuel wood and a large variety of raw materials for forest based industries. **For Ex- Medicinal plant based pharmaceutical industry.**

5. Cultural and Spiritual Significance- The Hindu Kush Himalayas are regarded as a sacred and spiritual centre by numerous cultures and religions, including **Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism**.

6. Biodiversity Hotspot- The Himalayan region is recognized as one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots and contributes to global ecological balance. **For Ex- Eastern Himalayan Biodiversity hotspot.**

What initiatives have been taken for the conservation of Hindu Kush Himalayan Region?

Recognizing the importance and vulnerabilities of the HKH, several initiatives have been launched to promote conservation, sustainable development, and regional cooperation.

1. Regional Cooperation Framework- The **International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)** has been facilitating regional cooperation through its transboundary conservation initiatives. This framework aims to **enhance biodiversity and ecosystem services, reduce poverty through sustainable use of rich biodiversity and sociocultural resources**, and promote transboundary cooperation for sustainable development.

2. Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment- This comprehensive assessment report, launched in 2019, emphasizes the **need for sustainable development** and **climate resilience of the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region**.

3. SECURE Himalaya Project- It is a part of “Global Partnership on Wildlife Conservation and Crime Prevention for Sustainable Development” (**Global Wildlife Program**) funded by the **Global Environment Facility (GEF)**. It promotes **sustainable management of alpine pastures and forests** in the high range Himalayan ecosystems.

4. India’s National Mission on Sustaining Himalayan Ecosystem- It was **launched in 2010** and **covers 11 states** (Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, all northeast states and West Bengal) and 2 UTs (J&K and Ladakh). It is one of the eight missions under the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

Read More- [Restoring the Ecological Health of the Himalayas- Explained Pointwise](#)

What Should be the way Forward?

1. Reforestation- Reforestation with **native tree species** and removing the invasive species can help the ground retain more snow.

2. Preparation for Water Stress situation- **Better weather forecasting** and early warning systems can help local communities prepare for impending water stress.

3. Collaboration and community involvement- Communities’ involvement in **local, national level decision-making** and **promoting regional cooperation** are vital for comprehensive solutions for the sustainability of snow in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.

4. Need to lower the emissions- There is a **need to reduce emissions**. This would help in mitigating increasing sea-surface and ground temperatures, both of which lower the persistence of snow. We need to build the political will for our government representatives and business leaders to **cut the cord on dirty fossil energy consumption and production**, especially among G-20 countries, which account for 81% of all emissions.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Methanol poisoning deaths due to Spurious alcohol in India- Explained Pointwise

The Issue of Methanol poisoning deaths due to Spurious alcohol in India has generated fresh concerns, after the **recent hooch tragedies claimed the lives of 22 people** in the **Villupuram and Chengalpattu districts of Chennai**. The methanol poisoning deaths due to spurious alcohol have been a significant concern in India. The need is strict vigilance and enforcement of laws to prevent these unnatural deaths in India.



Source- The Indian Express

How are spurious alcohol produced in India? What are the different cases of Spurious Alcohol related Poisoning Deaths in India?

How does the alcohol become spurious

- 1. Methyl alcohol (methanol) and ammonium nitrate**- Generally the alcohol becomes spurious due to the contamination by **methyl alcohol or methanol** to increase its alcohol content. **Ammonium nitrate** is also a major contaminant.
- 2. Unsafe distillation of Hooch**- **Unsafe distillation** of 'hooch' which is a derivative of cane sugar. The unsafe distillation leads to formation of methyl alcohol, which is dangerous for human health.
- 3. Contamination due to addition of herbs or chemicals**- Certain herbs or chemicals which are added to the liquor to increase the strength or improve the flavor, **react badly with other chemicals**. These lead to formation of deadly chemicals.

Effect of Spurious Alcohol on Health

- 1. Toxicity of Methyl alcohol, or methanol**- Methyl alcohol or methanol, which is commonly used for antifreeze, is added to illicit liquor to increase its alcohol content. Methanol is **highly toxic to humans**, and **ingestion of just 10ml can result in blindness**, and **30ml or more is usually fatal**.
- 2. Adverse impact of ammonium nitrate**- Ammonium nitrate may cause **headache, dizziness, abdominal pain, vomiting, heart irregularities, convulsions, collapse**, and **death**, when swallowed in high concentrations.

Recent Cases of Spurious Alcohol in India

- 1. Bihar**- Bihar, a dry state since 2016, has **witnessed several hooch tragedies**. In early 2023, six people died in Nalanda district. In November 2021, another significant incident in the state led to the death of at least 30 people over three days.
- 2. Haryana**- In November 2023, **six people died in Yamunanagar district** after consuming suspected spurious liquor.

3. Gujarat- Despite its status as a dry state, Gujarat has experienced severe hooch tragedies. In July 2022, more than **22 people died**, and many others fell ill due to consuming spurious alcohol in **Ahmedabad** and **Botad districts**.

4. Uttar Pradesh- The state has seen numerous hooch-related deaths over the years. In May 2021, **22 people died in the Azamgarh and Ambedkarnagar districts** due to spurious liquor consumption.

What are the negative impacts of methanol poisoning deaths due to spurious alcohol in India?

Health Impacts

1. Acute Poisoning and Death- Spurious alcohol contains methanol, **a toxic substance that can cause severe poisoning** leading to coma and death if untreated.

2. Long-term Health Consequences- Survivors of methanol poisoning may suffer from **permanent blindness, kidney failure**, or other **long-term neurological impairments** due to the toxic effects of methanol on the body's organs.

Social Impacts

1. Family Disruption- The sudden death or severe illness of a family member due to spurious alcohol consumption causes **significant emotional** and **financial strain on families**. This also leads to **economic instability** and psychological trauma.

2. Crime and Violence- The illegal production and distribution of spurious alcohol **leads to increased crime rates**, which includes violence and corruption.

3. Stigmatization- Victims of spurious alcohol poisoning and their families **often face social stigma**, which impacts their social relationships and community standing.

Economic Impacts

1. Increase in Healthcare Costs- The **treatment of methanol poisoning** and **its long-term consequences** places a substantial burden on the healthcare system.

2. Loss of Productivity- The deaths and disabilities caused by spurious alcohol consumption lead to a **loss of productive workforce**. This negatively affects local economies and reduces overall economic productivity.

What are the reasons behind the problem of methanol poisoning deaths due to spurious alcohol?

1. Unorganized and unregulated sector- Country-made liquor is **mainly produced by local breweries**. Huge unfulfilled demand for booze drives supply underground into an unregulated industry. This sector is prone to corruption and lack of regulation, which leads to hooch tragedy incidents.

2. Lack of regulatory controls- Illegal or illicit liquor is **manufactured mostly in villages on farmlands where it is difficult to inspect the area** by regulatory authorities. Hence the liquor produced is of substandard quality.

3. Easy availability of contaminants- **Easy availability** of methyl alcohol and **the purchase of furniture polish** by local vendors **at nominal prices** is used to produce illicit liquor.

4. Price- The difference in the **prices of Indian Made Foreign liquor and illegal liquor**, is also one of the main reasons for the rise in spurious liquor, as it fills the demand for booze of population. According to WHO, **'unrecorded and spurious'** alcohol makes up more than half of all alcohol consumed in India.

5. Defiance of state policies- States like Bihar, Gujarat have **enacted total prohibition on alcohol**. However, defiance of state policies, has created a flourishing underground illicit liquor business supported by bordering states.

What measures have been taken to address the problem of illicit liquor in India?

Legal and Regulatory Measures

1. Prohibition Laws- States like Bihar and Gujarat have **implemented complete prohibition laws**. They have banned the sale and consumption of alcohol to curb the production and distribution of spurious liquor .

2. Regulation of Methanol- The Food Safety and Standards (Alcoholic Beverages) Regulations 2018 stipulate the **maximum permissible quantities of methanol** in different types of liquor **to prevent methanol poisoning**.

Enforcement Actions

1. Raids and Seizures- Law enforcement agencies frequently **conduct raids on illegal distilleries and bootlegging operations**. These raids often result in the seizure of large quantities of spurious alcohol and the arrest of those involved in its production and distribution .

2. Legal Prosecutions- Individuals caught producing or selling spurious alcohol **face severe legal consequences**, including **imprisonment and hefty fines**, to deter such activities.

Health Interventions

1. Emergency Medical Response- Training healthcare providers to quickly identify and treat methanol poisoning, including the use of antidotes like **ethanol** and **fomepizole**, which can mitigate the toxic effects of methanol .

What should be the Way Forward to tackle illicit liquor?

1. Targeting of illicit raw material like methanol- The administration should **use local informants and their network to target the vendors** which are responsible for selling sub-standard raw materials and poisonous chemicals used for making spurious liquor.

2. Timely inspections and raids- The state government should **plan regular and massive raids in rural areas** where there is major production of illicit liquor. It would help break down the links of illegal production units.

3. Uniform and comprehensive liquor use policy- A **uniform and comprehensive policy** should bring **uniformity regarding liquor laws** in all states. It should take into consideration measures like **increasing the legal age of drinking, spreading awareness regarding de-addiction and rehabilitation centers & zero tolerance for illicit liquor**.

4. Use of Technology- Utilization of **GPS-equipped vehicles** to track the movement of molasses and alcohol inside the state. **Use of CCTV** in distilleries and retail shops to curb illegal trade.

5. Establishment of Accessible Treatment Facilities- **Establishing more treatment centers** equipped to handle cases of alcohol poisoning, especially in rural and remote areas where spurious liquor incidents are more common.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues related to Health

National Testing Agency (NTA)- Functioning and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The **National Testing Agency (NTA)** has been caught in the middle of the storm of the NEET controversy. With the **recent cancellation of the UGC-NET examination**, the reputation of National Testing Agency has further been tarnished. The **complaints of paper leaks, deviations of procedure, irregularities in the examinations** has further creaked the reputation of the agency.



Figure 3. Source- NTA

What is the National Testing Agency? What is its envisaged role?

National Testing Agency- National Testing Agency (NTA) was established as a **Society registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860**. It is an autonomous and self-sustained testing

organization to conduct entrance examinations for admission/fellowship in higher educational institutions.

Aim- NTA aims to conduct **efficient, transparent and international standardized tests** in order to **assess the competency of candidates** for admission and recruitment purposes.

Composition- NTA is chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by the Ministry of HRD. The CEO of NTA is the Director General to be appointed by the Government. The Director General is assisted by 9 verticals headed by academicians/ experts. NTA consists of a Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions.

What was the intention behind the establishment of National Testing Agency (NTA)?

1. Relieved other agencies from the duty of examination conduction- Establishment of a specialized testing body like NTA has relieved other agencies such as CBSE, AICTE of their responsibilities of conducting Entrance examinations.

2. Incorporation of Online Mode of examination- Some of the examinations such as **JEE Mains are conducted by NTA in the online mode at least twice a year**. This gives enough opportunities to candidates and helps to bring out the best in them.

3. Infrastructure for simulated practice- NTA has also created **online infrastructure** such as a '**mobile app**' and **Test Practice Centres (TPCs)** to help students practice and take mock tests on their own computers or smartphones. It has helped in **democratization of education**.

4. Adoption of global best practices- NTA was designed to **adopt technology** and **best global practices** to bring in high reliability, transparency, and standardized difficulty levels in the examinations. It has collaborated with international organizations like **ETS (Educational Testing Services)**.

5. Implementation of Programme of Action (POA) 1992- Creation of National Testing Agency is to give effect to the **Programme of Action (POA), 1992** which envisaged the concept of a **common entrance exam** on an **all-India basis for admission** to professional programs.

6. Research and Training- NTA was aimed at the **establishment of a strong R&D culture** as well as a **pool of experts in different aspects of testing**. It was also aimed to provide training and advisory services to the institutions in India.

What are the issues with functioning of NTA?

1. Controversies and Irregularities in the conduction of examination- The allegations of irregularities in the **conduct of exams like NEET-UG**, including **suspected question paper leaks, distribution of wrong question papers**, and **technical glitches** have posed serious questions on the integrity of the organisation.

2. High scores and Grace marks- The award of Grace marks to the candidates and **unusual spike in the number of candidates securing full marks in the NEET exam** (67 students securing full 720/720) has raised eyebrows on the procedure adopted by the National Testing agency.

3. Lack of Transparency and Accountability- There have been allegations regarding the **lack of transparency and accountability on part of NTA** to address the concerns of the students. NTA has often been criticized for being an opaque body, lacking transparency in its operations. **For ex- Denial of demands for a CBI inquiry and a retest of the NEET exam** on part of NTA.

4. Operational and Administrative Challenges- The centralised nature of the National Testing agency has created operational and administrative challenges for the agency. Many of the **empanelled test centres by the NTA lack infrastructures like CCTVs** for monitoring the examination process.

5. Reverting to pen-paper mode from the progressive online medium- The reversal to pen and paper mode from the online mode has increased the vulnerability of the examinations conducted by NTA to leaks. **For ex- UGC-NET was an offline exam conducted by the CBSE till 2018**, when it was taken over by the NTA and **became an online exam**. However, it was reverted to offline, pen-and-paper exam, which is potentially more vulnerable to paper leaks.

[Read More- Exam Paper Leaks- Concerns and Way Forward- Explained Pointwise](#)

What should be the way Forward?

1. Full operational transparency in NTA- The institution of **full transparency on part of NTA** in the conduct and **publication of result**, can help it regain trustworthiness in the eyes of candidates.

2. Accountability and punishment of the guilty- The government should take steps to rehaul the NTA's systems and personnel. This will ensure that the **technical glitches, cheating scams, paper leaks**, and **proxy candidates** that have plagued the exams this year are not allowed to happen again.

3. Dismantling the centralised structure of National Testing Agency- The centralised **structure of the NTA should be dismantled**. This may well curb the Union government's centralising tendencies leading to examinations of enormous scale that are harder to manage in a far-flung nation.

4. Taking help from the State government- For all-India examinations, the States should join the Central Govt in recovering the integrity of the beleaguered examination system. The state governments should also be shared some responsibilities for entrance examinations.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Various regulatory and statutory Bodies

Speaker of Lok Sabha- Functioning and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

With the commencement of the 18th Lok Sabha, the office of the pro tem speaker, speaker and the deputy speaker of Lok Sabha has gained prominence. The appointment of seven-time MP Bhartruhari Mahtab as the 'Speaker pro tem' of the 18th Lok Sabha by the president, has already led to tensions between the ruling coalition and opposition. With the election of the speaker slated on June 26, and the reports about office of deputy speaker being offered to one of the NDA allies, it becomes pertinent to look at the powers and functions of these offices.



Source- The Indian Express

What are the process of selection and the roles and responsibilities of the Speaker Pro tem, Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha?

Speaker Pro Tem

Constitutional Provision	Article 95(1) of the Constitution provides for the office of Speaker Pro tem, who has to be appointed by the President. The term 'pro tem' means 'for the time being' or 'temporary'.
Mentions in the Constitution	1. The term 'Speaker Pro tem' is not found in the Constitution or rules of Lok Sabha. It is a conventional term which finds mention in the 'Handbook on the working of

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	Ministry of Parliamentary affairs. 2. As per tradition, one of the senior-most members of the Lok Sabha is selected by the government , who is then administered oath by the President.
Functions	1. The Speaker Pro tem administers oath of office to other MPs. 2. The Speaker Pro tem presides over the election of full-time Speaker.

Speaker of Lok Sabha

Constitutional Provision	Article 93 of the Constitution provides that the Lok Sabha shall choose two members to be its Speaker and Deputy Speaker . The election of the Speaker is held on a date fixed by the President . All the Speakers in independent India have been elected unopposed.
Functions	<p>Two important constitutional functions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Certifying a Bill to be a Money Bill. Rajya Sabha has limited role over money bills. Deciding on disqualification under the Tenth Schedule for defection. <p>Other Functions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Presiding Over House Proceedings– The Speaker oversees the sessions of the Lok Sabha, ensuring discipline and decorum among members. The Speaker decides the agenda for parliamentary meetings and interprets procedural rules. Final Interpreter within the House- The Speaker is the final interpreter of the provisions of (a) the Constitution of India, (b) the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of Lok Sabha, and (c) the parliamentary precedents, within the House. Constitution of Committees- The Committees of the House are constituted by the speaker and function under the speaker's overall direction. The Chairmen of all Parliamentary Committees are nominated by Speaker. Power of Referrals of the Bill- The Lok Sabha rules provide the Speaker with the powers of referral of Bills introduced to Standing Committees. Permits the adoption of Motion- Except for the no-confidence motion, all other motions which come before the House come only after the Speaker permits them. Guardian of Privileges of the House- The Speaker is the guardian of the rights and privileges of the House, its Committees and members. Suspension of members- The speaker can suspend members for grave disorder up to a maximum of five days. Administrative Authority- The Speaker is the head of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, and manages administrative affairs and security arrangements within the Parliament Estate. Inter-Parliamentary Relations- The Speaker serves as the ex-officio President of the Indian Parliamentary Group, facilitating inter-parliamentary relations.

Deputy Speaker

Constitutional Provisions	Article 93 of the Constitution provides for the office of Deputy Speaker . The election of Deputy Speaker is held on a date fixed by the Speaker .
Constitutional Conventions	The convention of offering the post of Deputy Speaker to the Opposition started in the year 1991 . Till the 16th Lok Sabha, this convention has been followed without a break . However, no Deputy Speaker was elected in the 17th Lok Sabha.
Functions	The Deputy Speaker is an important constitutional officer who steps in during the vacancy or absence of the Speaker .

	<p>He/She also presides over the joint sitting of both the Houses of Parliament, in case the Speaker is absent from such a sitting.</p> <p>Whenever the Deputy Speaker is appointed as a member of a parliamentary committee, he/she automatically becomes its chairman.</p>
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What are the challenges with the functioning of the Office of Speaker of Lok Sabha?

1. Issue of Partisanship in Deciding Disqualification Under the Tenth Schedule- The Office of the Speaker has been used to decide in the disqualifications in such a way so that it favours the ruling party and dispensation. **For ex- Sixteen MLAs in the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly were disqualified by the Speaker, Nabam Rebia**, in 2016 despite not officially leaving the party or defying its directives.

Also the period to decide disqualification under anti-defection law, has been prolonged to favor the ruling dispensation. **For ex-** In 2017, the **Manipur legislative assembly anti-defection case**, the court gave a reasonable period of four weeks but the defection complaint was pending for years.

2. Misuse of the Certification Power- The Office of the Speaker has the certification power in case of money bill. However, there have been allegations regarding the misuse of discretionary powers of speakers with political affiliations in deciding money bill. **For ex- Certification of Aadhar as Money Bill was opposed by many legal luminaries.**

3. By passing of Committees and Scrutiny- The referral of Bills to committees by the speaker have **declined from 71% during 2009-14 to 16% during 2019-24**. The by passing of parliamentary committees goes against the parliamentary principles of building consensus on important matters.

4. Suspension of MPs- The opposition parties have alleged that speaker often played a partisan role in deciding on the suspension cases against the MPs. **For ex- Large-scale suspensions of Opposition MPs during the winter session of 2023.**

5. Lack of due deliberation and discussion- The restriction of debates or discussions on bills of national interest by the speaker, have often led to poorly crafted legislation which lacked sufficient deliberation. **For ex- Passage of the 3 farm laws in 2020** without debate and discussion, led to nationwide protests and subsequent repeal.

6. Increased Disruptions and Stalling of Proceedings- A Speaker **perceived as biased can lead to frustration and disruptions from the opposition**. This ultimately hinders the functioning of Parliament.

What are the observations of the SC and various committees on ensuring robust functioning of the Office of Speaker?

<p>Issue of partisanship in the Decision on Disqualification</p>	<p>1. Kihoto Hollohan versus Zachilhu case, 1993- The Supreme Court held that the decision of the speaker in cases of disqualification is not final and can be questioned in any court. The decision is subject to judicial review on the grounds of malafide, perversity.</p> <p>2. Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. The Hon'ble Speaker Manipur Legislative Assembly & Ors. case (2020)- The Supreme Court recommended that Parliament should consider amending the Constitution to substitute the Speaker as the arbiter of disqualification disputes with an independent tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court or High Court judge. The Court also held that disqualification petitions should be decided by Speakers within three months, except in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>3. Nabam Rebia vs Deputy Speaker Case, 2016- SC held that a speaker will</p>
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	<p>be disabled from deciding disqualification petitions under the anti-defection law (10th schedule of the constitution) if a notice for their removal is pending.</p> <p>1. The 255th Report of the Law Commission of India (2015)- It reiterated the need for an independent mechanism to decide on disqualification, instead of the Speaker.</p> <p>2. The 2010 report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice- The report also suggested that the role of the Speaker in deciding disqualification petitions should be replaced by an independent mechanism.</p>
<p>Political Neutrality on Part of Speaker in certification of Bills, debates and deliberations</p>	<p>Learning from the Global Best Practices</p> <p>1. United Kingdom- In the UK, the Speaker of the House of Commons is expected to be strictly non-partisan and resign from their political party upon election. The Speaker is also not allowed to vote except in the case of a tie.</p> <p>2. Germany- In Germany, the President of the Bundestag (lower house) is expected to be politically neutral and resign from their party. They also do not have a casting vote in the case of a tie.</p> <p>V.S. Page Committee- The committee suggested that if the Speaker had conducted himself or herself in an impartial and efficient manner during the tenure of his or her office, he or she should be allowed to continue in the next Parliament.</p>

What Should be the Way Forward?

- 1. Amendment of the Constitution**- India should consider amending the Constitution to explicitly require the Lok Sabha Speaker to resign from their political party upon election, similar to the global practices observed in the cases like UK, Germany, Canada and Australia.
- 2. Code of Conduct for Speaker**- Steps must be taken to develop a comprehensive code of conduct for the Speaker that lays down principles of impartiality, transparency and accountability. This code should be enforced by an independent body.
- 3. Greater scrutinisation of Bills**- The Speaker must refer important Bills to Standing committees for scrutiny. Also, the suspensions that affect the robust functioning of Parliament, should be carried out with restraint.
- 4. Greater Security of Tenure**- The Speaker must be provided with greater security of tenure. For amending the constitutional provision for their removal by only a high threshold (requirement of 2/3rd majority). This will insulate them from political pressures.
- 5. Training and Development Programmes**- The Speaker must be provided with regular training and development opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills and ability to remain impartial, including on parliamentary procedures, leadership, conflict resolution.
- 6. Strengthening of Parliamentary Committees**- The parliamentary committees should be empowered to scrutinize the Speaker's decisions and actions, and recommend corrective measures if needed. This will improve accountability of the Office of the Speaker.

Conclusion

Pranab Mukherjee, famously remarked about the Office of Speaker- "The Speaker's role is not just about running the House; it's about being a bridge between the government and the opposition, and ensuring that the democratic process is upheld." The example of N. Sanjiva Reddy resigning from his party upon becoming

Speaker in 1967 sets a positive precedent of non-partisanship. We must continue to build a healthy parliamentary democracy by politically neutralising the office of the Speaker.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues related to legislature

India-Bangladesh Relations- Explained Pointwise

The recent visit by **Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina** marked **the first state visit by a foreign leader during PM Modi's third term**. Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina and Narendra Modi have been **relentless in advancing the bilateral relations between Delhi and Dhaka over the last decade** and **turning India and Bangladesh into valuable partners of each other**. The productive consequences of the two leaders' commitment to overhaul ties have been hailed as marking a **"golden chapter"** (**'sonali adhyay'**) in the history of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations.

Outcomes of the Recent India-Bangladesh Bilateral Meeting

1. Unveiling the **'vision for a shared future'** and turning the **"extraordinary relationship"** of the last decade into a **"transformational partnership"**.
2. Focus on the **unfinished agenda of connectivity** that includes the **easing of visa procedures, freer movement of goods, cross-border energy and electricity flows, and the building of digital bridges**.
3. Commencement of the long overdue negotiations on a **comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA)** between India and Bangladesh.



India-Bangladesh Relations

The **close India-Bangladesh relations** was again illustrated when PM Narendra Modi congratulated Ms. Sheikh Hasina on her return to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term.

India-Bangladesh Relations

- » The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the **1971 Bangladesh Liberation War**. India provided critical military support in its independence.
- » India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was **anti-Indian sentiment**.
- » After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, there has been **deepening of India-Bangladesh relations**.

Areas of Cooperation

- » **Political Cooperation**- Indian PM's visit to take part in their **golden Jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh Independence, Gandhi Peace Prize 2020 to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.
- » **Land Boundary Agreement (2015)**- Swapping of the disputed enclaves.
- » **Economic cooperation**- India is the **second-biggest trade partner** of Bangladesh, bilateral trade between India-Bangladesh has reached **\$18 billion in 2021-2022**, **duty-free quota access** to Bangladesh under SAFTA & **joint feasibility study** on Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)
- » **Infrastructure Cooperation**-India as a '**major development partner**' of Bangladesh, **extended Lines of Credits worth over \$7 billion**, **Ahaura-Agartala rail link**, **Maitri Setu**
- » **Energy cooperation**-Bangladesh **importing 2,000 MWs of electricity** from India, **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline** for high speed diesel supply.

Significance

- » **Geo-strategic**- Bangladesh provides India with **access to the Bay of Bengal** and an important route for **trade and connectivity** with Southeast Asia
- » **Geo-political**- Cooperation on issues such as **counter-terrorism and border security** and **India's bid for UNSC permanent membership**
- » **Economic**- Critical for India becoming a **\$5 trillion economy** and achievement of **goals of new FTP**.
- » **Cultural and civilisational**- Large Hindu Bengali population in Bangladesh and religious sites like **Ranir Bungalow Temple, Bhoj Vihara**

Challenges

- » **Sharing of Transboundary River Waters- Teesta river water dispute.**
- » **Deportation of Rohingyas**- India seeks to give **primacy to deportation from its mainland first** and then **later facilitate deportation** from Bangladesh
- » **Cross-Border terrorism, infiltration & Drug Smuggling & Trafficking**- Raised additional threats to **internal security**.
- » **Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh**
- » **Attacks on minorities across both the borders**

Way Forward

- » **Early resolution of Transboundary river water Dispute**
- » **Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh FTA**
- » **Establishment of Joint Task Forces, Smart Border Management.**

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What is the history of India-Bangladesh Relations?

India-Bangladesh relationship are civilisational, cultural, social and economic. The relationship is deep-rooted in history. However, the relationship also had its share of highs and lows.

<p>During Bangladesh Independence (Phase of High)</p>	<p>The foundation of India's relationship with Bangladesh was laid in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan. The very first Independent government of Bangladesh, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was formed and administered from Theatre Road in Kolkata.</p>
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During the Military rule in Bangladesh (Phase of low)	India-Bangladesh relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975. There was a rise in anti-India sentiment, during the military rules of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General H.M. Ershad (1982-1991), over issues ranging from boundary disputes, insurgency and water-sharing .
After the return of Parliamentary Democracy in Bangladesh in 1991 (Phase of repair and towards high)	After the return of Parliamentary democracy in 1991 and Sheikh Hasina coming to power in 1996, India and Bangladesh scripted a new chapter of cooperation in bilateral ties with a treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters . Since then, India and Bangladesh have built cooperation in trade, energy, infrastructure, connectivity and defence.

What is the significance of India-Bangladesh Relations?

- 1. Geo-strategic-** Bangladesh holds significant geostrategic importance for India as India's eastern neighbour. Bangladesh provides India with **access to the Bay of Bengal** and an **important route for trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia**.
- 2. Geo-political-** A stable and friendly Bangladesh is crucial for India's security. Geo-political cooperation on issues such as **counter-terrorism** and **border security** is vital for maintaining peace in the South Asian region. Support of Bangladesh is crucial in India's bid for **UNSC permanent membership**.
- 3. Economic-** Bangladesh is a critical economy for **India's exports and bilateral trade**. Deepening of India-Bangladesh economic relationship is crucial for India achieving its goal under the new foreign trade policy and of becoming a \$5 trillion economy.
- 4. Cultural and civilisational-** Bangladesh has large number of Hindu Bengali population and has large number of religious-cultural sites associated with India such as **Ranir Bunglow Temple, Bhoj Vihara**.
- 5. International cooperation-** Active cooperation between India and Bangladesh is crucial to success of regional forums such as the **BIMSTEC** (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), **SAARC** (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and **COPs to UNFCCC**.

What are the areas of Cooperation between India and Bangladesh?

- 1. Political Cooperation-** India and Bangladesh have maintained close political relationship among them, with frequent bilateral visits and close bonhomie between the heads of the government. **For Ex-**
 - a. Indian PM's visit to Bangladesh** to take part in their **golden Jubilee celebrations of Independence**.
 - b. India has awarded Gandhi Peace Price 2020** to Bangladesh's founding president **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.
 - c. Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina visit to India** to take part in the **G-20 summit**.
- 2. Land Boundary Agreement (2015)-** India and Bangladesh **swapped the disputed islands** and allowed the inhabitants to choose their country of residence. This solved a **major long-standing dispute** between India and Bangladesh.
- 3. Economic cooperation-** Bangladesh has emerged as India's largest trade partner in South Asia. India is the **second-biggest trade partner of Bangladesh**.
 - a. The bilateral trade between India-Bangladesh has reached \$18 billion in 2021-2022 from \$10.8 billion in 2020-21.**
 - b. India and Bangladesh have also concluded a joint feasibility study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022** to reduce or eliminate custom duties on traded goods.
 - c. India has provided duty-free quota access to Bangladesh on all tariff lines, except tobacco and alcohol, under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) since 2011.**

4. **Infrastructure Cooperation-** India is a 'major development partner' of Bangladesh, as India is funding several infrastructure and connectivity projects in Bangladesh.
- India has extended Lines of Credits worth over \$7 billion to Bangladesh since 2010.
 - Ahaura-Agartala rail link** has been inaugurated that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura. The link has given India access to **Chattogram and Mongla ports** in Bangladesh for the movement of cargo. It is likely to boost small-scale industries and develop Assam and Tripura.
 - '**Maitri Setu**' bridge which is a 1.9 km long bridge connecting Sabroom in India with Ramgarh in Bangladesh has been inaugurated.
 - Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala Bus Service** launched in 2015 has reduced the distance between Kolkata and Agartala from **1,650 km** (through chicken's neck or Siliguri corridor) to just 500 km.
5. **Energy cooperation-** Bangladesh imports **nearly 2,000 megawatts of electricity** from India. The **India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline**, connecting Siliguri in West Bengal and Parbatipur in Bangladesh, will transport **one million Metric Tonnes Per Annum (MMTPA)** of **High-Speed Diesel to Bangladesh**.
6. **Defence Cooperation-** India-Bangladesh border of **4096.7 km** is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbours. India and Bangladesh conduct Joint Exercises like **Exercise Sampriti** (Army) and **Exercise Bongosagar** (Navy).
7. **Tourism sector-** Bangladeshis make up a **large portion** of tourists in India. In 2017, the number of tourists from Bangladesh outnumbered all the tourists arriving from Western Europe.
8. **Medical Cooperation-** Bangladesh accounts for more than **35% of India's international medical patients and contributes** to more than **50% of India's revenue from medical tourism**.

What are the areas of Tension in India-Bangladesh Relations?

- Sharing of Transboundary River Waters-** India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers, but only two transboundary river water sharing treaties have been signed, so far- Ganga Waters Treaty and The Koshiyara River Treaty. **For Ex-** Major point of contention is the **Teesta river water dispute**. Bangladesh seeks equitable distribution of Teesta waters, which has not been agreed by India and its state of West Bengal.
- Deportation of Rohingyas-** India and Bangladesh have mutual but conflicting interests in deportation of Rohingyas to mainland Myanmar. India seeks to **give primacy to deportation from its mainland first** and then later facilitate deportation from Bangladesh to Myanmar.
- Cross-Border terrorism and infiltration-** Cross-border terrorism and infiltration through the Bangladesh border have **raised additional threats to internal security of India**. **Armed Dacoity** in border districts, **fake money transfer, cattle smuggling** and **prostitution** have also raised internal security concerns in India.
- Drug Smuggling & Trafficking-** According to **2007 International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) report**, the drugs trafficking through India from Bangladesh, remains a prime transit point of trafficking heroin from South Asia to Europe.
- Growing Chinese Influence in Bangladesh-** Bangladesh is an **active partner** in the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. China has made substantial investments in Bangladeshi infrastructure by building **12 highways, 21 bridges** and **27 power and energy projects**. China's increasing involvement with Bangladesh potentially undermines India's regional standing and impede its strategic aspirations.
- Attacks on minorities across both the borders-** The ethnic attacks on **Bangla-speaking Hindus in Bangladesh** and the **attacks on Bangladeshi's in India** have strained the India-Bangladesh P2P and cultural relation.

Read More- [Emerging Challenges for India after the Bangladesh Elections](#)

What Should be the way forward for India-Bangladesh Relationship?

- 1. Early resolution of Transboundary river water Disputes-** The **early resolution of Teesta** is the better way to boost India-Bangladesh relations by the **formation of tripartite committee of India, Bangladesh and West Bengal**.
- 2. Early conclusion of India-Bangladesh Free Trade Agreement (FTA)-** Bangladesh is set to **lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026**, thereby losing its duty-free and quota-free market access in India. Hence India **finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh at the earliest**. India must also ensure that the FTA is not misused by China to dump goods in India through RCEP agreement (Bangladesh is also a member of RCEP agreement).
- 3. Establishment of Joint Task Forces and Smart Border Management-** There is a need to establish joint task forces comprising law enforcement agencies from both countries to effectively **combat cross-border drug smuggling, human trafficking and Illegal immigration**.
- 4. Establishment Digital Connectivity Corridor-** There is a need to establish a digital connectivity corridor between the two countries, focusing on **high-speed internet connectivity, digital services, and e-commerce**. This can create new avenues for trade, collaboration, and technological exchange.
- 5. Restoration of Global image of Bangladesh-** India must help in restoring the global image of Bangladesh which has been facing U.S. Sanctions on account of '**democratic backsliding**' and '**human rights violations**'. India must work closely with the law enforcement agencies of Bangladesh to reduce the ethnic attacks on Bangla speaking Hindus.

One of the prime interest is developing North-East India, better connectivity to South-East Asian Countries and exploring the Indo-Pacific region. To achieve that, deepening of India-Bangladesh relations is a significant step.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- India and its neighbourhood Relations

The Great Nicobar Island Development Project- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The NITI Aayog's conceived '**The Great Nicobar Island Development Project**' is in news again as it is **facing protests and appeals to halt the project** on environmental grounds by **conservationists, naturalists, various political parties and civil society groups**.

This development project has been promoted as a '**mega-infrastructure project**' and a '**strategic masterstroke**' by the NITI Aayog. The project is of critical importance for defence, logistics, commerce and industries, and eco-tourism. Hence, these benefits and the risks associated with the project needs to be comprehensively evaluated.



Figure 4, Source- The Hindu

What is the Great Nicobar Island Development Project?

The Great Nicobar Project- The project involves a comprehensive Rs 72,000-crore infrastructure upgrade on Great Nicobar Island. It is being implemented by the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development**

Corporation (ANIIDCO).

The project covers **16,610 hectares** and aims to leverage the island's strategic location near the Malacca Strait. The Great Nicobar Island Development project includes developing an

1. An International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)
2. A greenfield international airport
3. Two greenfield cities
4. A coastal mass rapid transport system
5. A free trade zone

Geography of the Great Nicobar Island

The island of Great Nicobar is the southernmost tip of India and a part of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago that **comprises 600-odd islands**. It is **hilly and covered with lush rainforests**. It receives around **3,500 mm of annual rainfall**.

The rainforests and beaches host numerous **endangered and endemic species** including the **giant leatherback turtle**, the **Nicobar megapode**, the **Great Nicobar crake**, the **Nicobar crab-eating macaque**, and the **Nicobar tree shrew**. It has an area of 910 sq km with mangroves and Pandan forests along its coast.

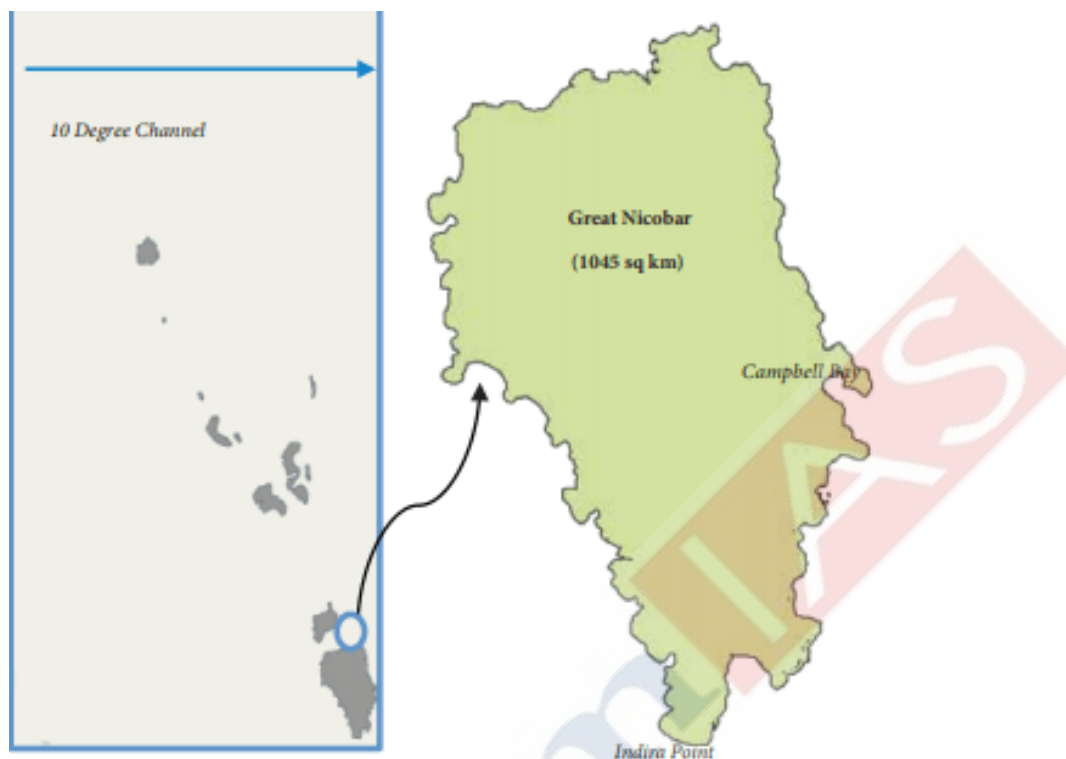


Figure 5. Source- Copyright infringement not intended

Read More- [Importance of Andaman and Nicobar Islands- Explained Pointwise](#)

What is the significance of Great Nicobar Island Development Project?

- 1. Geo-strategic benefit-** Great Nicobar Island is **located close to the Malacca Strait**, which is the main waterway connecting the Indian Ocean to the Pacific. The Great Nicobar Island Project aims to **take advantage of this strategic position to enhance India's role** in the regional and global maritime economy.
- 2. Geo-Security Concerns-** The **Bay of Bengal** and **Indian Ocean region** are vital for India's strategic and security interests, especially with the **Chinese naval expansion**. The project will strengthen India's maritime security and deterrence capabilities.
- 3. Upgradation of military infrastructure-** The Great Nicobar project also helps in the upgradation of military infrastructure by the establishment of airfields, jetties, and surveillance facilities.
- 4. Economic Boost-** The project includes an International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), which can make Great Nicobar a significant player in cargo trans shipment. The **ICTT is expected to boost economic activities** in the region.
- 5. Creation of Job opportunities for locals-** The Nicobar plan involves the **creation of infrastructure** (ports, airports etc.). This will help in creation of job opportunities for the locals.
- 6. Tourism Development-** It helps in **creation of tourism prospects in the region**. This will aid the income generation in the region. The per capita income in Andaman & Nicobar Islands for the year 2015-16 was **Rs. 1,24,361**. This was **much lower than the per-capita income of other Union Territories** (Chandigarh, Delhi, and Puducherry.)

7. Social Benefits- The Project would help in the creation of affordable state-of-the-art facilities for **healthcare, quality education, and adequate air, sea and web infrastructure.** It will also facilitate the delivery of e-governance services such as **telemedicine** and **tele-education**, as a part of the Digital India initiative.

What are the associated concerns with the project?

1. Threat to biodiversity- Nearly a million trees could be felled as part of the project. This could potentially devastate the island's ecosystem, including **coral reefs, the Nicobar Megapode bird, and leatherback turtles.** The compensatory afforestation is being planned in Haryana.

2. Threat to rights of Indigenous Tribes- The proposed Nicobar project endangers the rights of the **Shompen and Nicobarese tribes,** living on the island. It also violates the letter and spirit of the **Forest Rights Act (2006),** which holds the **Shompen as the sole legally empowered authority** to protect, preserve, regulate and manage the tribal reserve.

3. Seismic Vulnerability- The proposed port which is an integral part of this project, is located in a seismically volatile zone, which **experienced permanent subsidence of around 15 feet during the 2004 tsunami.** This **raises concerns about the safety and viability of constructing such a large-scale infrastructure project in a high-risk, disaster-prone area.**

4. Lack of Adequate Consultation- The project has been pushed through without adequate deliberations of all the stakeholders like the **The Tribal Council.** The National Green Tribunal's high-powered committee's report reviewing the environmental clearances has also not been made public.

5. Undermining international obligations- The Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary located in the Great Nicobar Island forms part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence the **preservation of this pristine biodiversity** is an **International Obligation of India.**

6. Lack of adequate Social Impact Assessment- The Campbell Bay panchayat has raised concerns regarding the **lack of adequate social impact assessment** before land acquisition. **For ex-** Increased contact with outsiders, will increase the risks of Shompen tribe to diseases for which their immunity is not developed.

7. Economic unviability- The aspiration to replicate Singapore/Hong Kong duty-free ports/free trade zones on remote Great Nicobar Island (2,000 km from Chennai and Kolkata) **without a hinterland, resources or industrial backup** makes it economically unviable and unrealistic.

What Should be the Way Forward?

We must aim to address the trilemma of infrastructure development, preserving pristine biodiversity respect and being sensitive to the rights of the indigenous inhabitants, and tribals. Following measures should be adopted to address the trilemma-

1. Due regards to tribal rights- The development work must be carried out with due regard to tribal rights. This should involve proper adherence to policies like the **Shompen Policy of 2015.** The **Shompen Policy of 2015 calls for giving priority to tribal rights** over large scale development proposals.

2. Separation of security and development capabilities- The security capabilities of Andaman and Nicobar Island need to be addressed separately. This must have no linkage with the developments contemplated for Great Nicobar Island.

3. Reassessment of economic feasibility of the project- The **project lies equidistant (1,300 km) from established transshipment hubs and bunkering ports** of **Singapore, Port Klang (Malaysia) and Hambantota (Sri**

Lanka). Hence the economic viability of yet another transshipment terminal in Great Nicobar Island needs to be reassessed, especially since India inaugurated its own transshipment terminal in Vizhinjam in Kerala.

4. Proper Social and Environmental Impact Assessment- Any construction under the Great Nicobar Development plan should involve a proper and detailed Environment impact assessment (as mandated by the **Environment Protection Act 1986**). This will make development more socially and environmentally feasible.

5. Eco-friendly Construction- The construction of infrastructure should be done using eco-friendly practices like **strict adherence to GRIHA code for building construction**.

6. Transparency in Data and Report- **NITI Aayog and the agencies participating in planning should maintain transparency in data**. The government should release the data on the rationale, the process of creation, consulted groups etc. in public domain. This will give a holistic view to critics and supporters.

7. Enhanced International Cooperation- India should **enhance Cooperation with countries** like **Japan, South Korea** etc. This will help in developing successful island development models.

8. Exploration of other Islands- Other islands in the the Nicobar group, apart from GNI, like **Little Nicobar, Nancowry, Kamorta and Katchall** can be explored. These could accommodate most components of such a project, without risking environmental, ecological and anthropological damage on large scale.

Conclusion

India needs to achieve the Vision of “Happy and Prosperous Islanders on ecologically-protected Islands”. To achieve that, India needs to adopt development plans that are technically feasible, economically profitable and socially acceptable.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3 – Infrastructure

50 years after the 1975 emergency – Lessons and Way forward – Explained Pointwise

This year marks the beginning of the 50th year since the imposition of Emergency on June 25, 1975. The emergency imposed in the year 1975 is considered to be the darkest chapter in the democratic history of India. The period of emergency serves as a reminder of the need to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals.



Figure 6, Source- The Indian Express

What are the constitutional provisions behind the imposition of Emergency?

The emergency provisions are contained in **Part XVIII of the Constitution of India**, from **Article 352 to 360**. These provisions enable the Central government to meet any abnormal situation effectively.

The Constitution stipulates three types of emergencies-

1. National Emergency
2. Constitutional Emergency
3. Financial Emergency

The state of national emergency had been imposed thrice since Independence-

1. During the wars with China in 1962
2. During the war with Pakistan in 1971
3. Emergency imposed in 1975.

It was the imposition of National Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975, that is considered to be the most infamous in the annals of our democracy. 'Internal disturbances' was cited as a major reason by President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to impose the Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution.

Important constitutional amendments enacted during Emergency

38th Amendment Act, 1975 made the President's declaration of Emergency non-judicial. The amendment barred judicial review of proclamations of emergency made by the President, whether to meet external, internal, or financial threats (under Article 360). The amendment codified and enlarged the state's power to remove fundamental rights from citizens during states of emergency

42nd Amendment Act, 1976 was the most significant amendment enacted during the Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi. It attempted to reduce the power of the Supreme Court and High Courts to pronounce upon the constitutional validity of laws. It gave Parliament unrestrained power to amend any parts of the Constitution, without judicial review. After the Janata Party came to power in 1977, they brought the 43rd and 44th Amendments to partially restore the pre-Emergency position

What is the rationale behind imposition of emergency in India? What are the famous Supreme Court judgements regarding emergency in India?

The rationale behind the incorporation of emergency provisions in the Indian Constitution is to

- a. safeguard the sovereignty, unity, integrity and security of the country
- b. The democratic political system and the Constitution itself

Article 356 (constitutional emergency) was introduced to ensure safety against extreme emergencies and protect legislative processes.

Article 360 (Financial emergency) was added Dr B.R Ambedkar to cushion the country's drastically falling financial position and foreign currency reserves.

Supreme Court judgements on emergency

Minerva Mills Ltd. vs Union of India (1980)	The Supreme Court held that the power of judicial review cannot be suspended even during an emergency. The basic structure of the Constitution, including the power of judicial review, cannot be abrogated.
S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994)	The Supreme Court held that the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356 is subject to judicial review. The Court laid down guidelines and limitations on the use of Article 356.
Bhup Nath Mete vs State of West Bengal (1974)	The Court held that the suspension of fundamental rights under Article 359 does not mean that all legal remedies are barred. Writs can still be filed on grounds of non-compliance with statutory provisions.

These judgments highlight the Supreme Court's **evolving stance on balancing the need for strong central authority during emergencies with the protection of individual rights and the rule of law**. The Court has sought to limit the misuse of emergency powers while upholding their constitutional validity.

What reasons were given by the government for the imposition of emergency of 1975?

- 1. Economic crisis-** There was a prevailing situation of economic crisis like **high unemployment, sluggish industrial growth, rising prices of essential commodities**, and a general environment of discontent among the people. This was translating into major disenchantment with the government.
- 2. Student unrest in Gujarat and Bihar-** Agitations against rising prices and corruption was started by the students in **Gujarat in 1974**. The unrest and protest **subsequently spread to Bihar**. The defeat of the Congress party in Gujarat was an alarm for the government regarding its unpopularity.
- 3. JP movement-** The JP movement, led by Jayaprakash Narayan, **gained national appeal** and demanded the dismissal of the Congress government in Bihar. It was **supported by opposition parties like the Jana Sangh and Bhartiya Lok Dal**. This movement galvanised the masses against the regime which was becoming unpopular.
- 4. Railway strike-** The railway employees strike **led by George Fernandes in 1974**, paralyzed the nation. The strike demanded better service conditions and raised workers' rights issues.
- 5. Conflict with the judiciary-** There was a persistent conflict between the government and judiciary over **fundamental rights, the basic structure of the Constitution, and the appointment of the Chief Justice**. This languishing conflict between govt and judiciary led to a stalemate.
- 6. Lack of Internal Democracy-** **Concentration of power** in the hands of one leader, **lack of respect for democratic functioning**, a culture of sycophancy, corruption in the vital organs of the state also pushed the country towards emergency.
- 7. Allahabad High Court verdict-** The judgment of the **Allahabad High Court on June 12, 1975, nullified the election to the Lok Sabha of the then Prime Minister in 1971** on the grounds of abusing official machinery for electoral gains. This judgment served as the final straw and Emergency was proclaimed two weeks later.

What was the effect of the imposition of emergency of 1975?

The imposition of the Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 had significant and far-reaching effects on India. Some of the effect are mentioned below-

- 1. Suspension of civil liberties-** The Emergency allowed the government to suspend fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution, such as the **rights to freedom of speech, assembly, and movement**. This led to a brutal crackdown on political opposition and dissent.
- 2. Arrest of opposition leaders-** Prominent opposition leaders like **Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and L.K. Advani** were arrested and jailed under draconian laws like the **Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA)**. According to some estimates, over 100,000 people were arrested during the Emergency.
- 3. Censorship of the media-** The media was heavily censored, with the government clearing all news reports before publication. This led to a **complete breakdown of press freedom**. **For ex-** The Indian Express publishing a blank editorial in protest.
- 4. Constitutional amendments curtailing powers of judiciary-** The 38th and the 42nd Amendment were passed. These **reduced the power of the judiciary to review constitutional validity of laws**. It also expanded the powers of the central government at the expense of states.

5. Forced sterilization program- The government launched a **coercive family planning program that involved forced mass sterilizations**, leading to widespread public resentment.

6. Economic impact- The **strikes, protests, and political instability** during the Emergency severely damaged the Indian economy. This led to high inflation, slow growth, and a decline in living standards.

7. Political backlash- The excesses of the Emergency led to a **massive public backlash, resulting in the Congress party's defeat in the 1977 elections**. This marked the first time the ruling party had lost power since independence.

What are the judgements and the reports that have criticized emergency in India?

Several key judgments and commissions have criticized the imposition of Emergency in India by Indira Gandhi in 1975.

ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla (1976)	This controversial Supreme Court judgment during the Emergency, by a 4:1 majority, upheld the government's position that the right to life and personal liberty could be suspended during an Emergency. The sole dissenting judge was Justice H.R. Khanna , who was later superseded for the position of Chief Justice. The judgment was widely criticized for reducing the importance of fundamental rights.
Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)	In this landmark judgment, a 9-judge bench of the Supreme Court unanimously overruled the ADM Jabalpur judgment . The court ruled that the right to life and personal liberty is an inalienable human right that existed even before the Constitution, and cannot be suspended even during an Emergency

Shah Commission Report (1978)- The Shah Commission, headed by Justice J.C. Shah, was set up after the Emergency to inquire into "excesses" committed during that period. The commission's report was **highly critical of the government's actions**, including the **mass arrest of opposition leaders, censorship of the media**, and the **forced sterilization program**.

What lessons can be drawn from the emergency which will ensure thriving democracy in India?

1. Avoiding despotism- Our Constitution mandates democratic governance based on people's participation, wider consultations and consensus, conformity with the spirit and provisions of the Constitution and compliance with the laws made by the legislature. **Despotism has no place in democracy**. An elected ruler **must rule within the constitutional framework**, avoiding personal interest and aggrandisement.

2. Avoid conflict with Judiciary- The executive must not conflict with judiciary. The judgements must be interpreted by the executive from a larger lens. Judgement like the **Golaknath, Kesavananda Bharati and Allahabad High Court** judgment were viewed from a narrow prismatic lens by the executive.

3. Protecting the fundamental rights of the people- The **govt must value and protect the fundamental right to freedom of speech, right to life**. Any infringement on fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, is fiercely contested by the people of India through their ballot verdict.

4. Greater Responsibility of Media and civil society- It was famously remarked by L.K.Advani about the media in the period of emergency- **You were asked only to bend, yet you crawled**. Hence the **civil society and media must play a more responsible role** to avoid another emergency in future.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 1- Post Independence History

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The Challenge of Cross-border Terrorism in India- Explained Pointwise

The recent Reasi terrorist attack on the day the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, took his oath of office for a third term points to the serious challenge of cross border terrorism in India. The attack in Reasi was similar to the attack on the Consulate General of India (CGI), Herat, Afghanistan on May 23, 2014, three days prior to first swearing-in of the Prime Minister. All these cross-border terrorist attacks on such important days has been to embarrass and enrage India on days of great political significance.

What is cross-border Terrorism? What are the sources of cross-border terrorism in India?

Cross Border Terrorism- Cross-Border Terrorism is a form of terrorism in which soil of one country is used to create terror in bordering countries. It is a form of grey zone conflict and is an undeclared war. It is considered to be highest form of strategy to bleed a nation for prolonged period by small efforts.

During the last several years thousands of civilians have lost their lives in acts of cross border terrorism. Apart from thousands of defence, paramilitary and police personnel who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

Sources of Cross Border Terrorism



Figure 7.Source- India Map

Indo-Pakistan Border	The Indo-Pakistan Border (3,323 Km) runs along the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and J&K. Cross-Border Terrorism from Pakistan has been exacerbated due to the non-recognition of boundaries by its terrorist groups and their success in acquiring legitimacy due to religious or ethnic identity. Inadequate Cooperation from Pakistan has made the management of border further difficult for India.
Indo-China Border	Indo-China Border (3,488 Km) runs through the Indian states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. This border has also been a source of cross border terrorist activities in India. This border remains a cause of constant vigil for Indian forces.
Indo-Bangladesh Border	The Indo-Bangladesh Border (4,096 Km) passes through West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Illegal Migration across this border poses serious security threats and acts as a fertile ground for organisations like the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan to penetrate and expand their activities. Poor law and order situation at the border, has led to smuggling of arms and drugs. The Supply of arms helps in sustaining any conflict.
Indo-Nepal Border	India-Nepal Border (1,751 Km) is an open border to facilitate the free movement of people across the border. Anti-India organizations use this border to plant their people in the territory of India. Smuggling of gold, small arms, drugs and fake currency helps terrorists in executing an attack.
Indo-Myanmar Border	The Indo-Myanmar Border (1,643) passes through the northeast states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. The insurgents and terrorist groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) operate from Myanmar, which threaten the security of India as well as Myanmar.
India-Bhutan	The Indo-Bhutan border (699 km) passes through states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Sikkim. Illicit establishment of camps by militant outfits in the dense jungles of south-east Bhutan helps insurgents from India in executing anti-India activities.
Maritime Borders	India's long coastline remains comparatively unguarded with minimal presence of coast guards. The 26/11 cross-border terrorist attack took place through maritime borders.

What are the reasons behind cross-border terrorism in India?

- 1. Pakistan sponsored terrorist groups-** Cross-border terrorism from Pakistan has been exacerbated by Pakistani terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. These terrorist organisations view the border as illegitimate and continue to infiltrate into India to carry out attacks.
- 2. Lack of adequate cooperation from Pakistan-** Pakistan has provided material support to secessionist militants in India's border states like Jammu & Kashmir and the Northeast. There has been inadequate cooperation from Pakistan in stopping cross-Border terrorism. For ex- Failure of India-Pakistan's joint anti-terrorism mechanism and dialogue.
- 3. Porous and difficult-to-secure borders-** India's borders with most of its neighbors like Bangladesh, Nepal are porous and difficult to fully secure due to complex geographical features like mountains, deserts, and riverine areas. This makes it easier for terrorists to infiltrate into India.

4. Over Ground Workers- The local population is recruited as over-ground workers by the terrorist outfits in border areas. These over-ground workers support and facilitate the cross-border movement of terrorists by **providing them transportation, shelter, and other assistance.**

5. Corruption among officials- Corrupt officials allow **illegal cross-border movement in exchange for bribes.** This provides avenues for criminal elements and terrorists to enter India.

What are the effects of cross-border terrorism in India?

Cross-border terrorism has had severe consequences for India. These are mentioned below-

1. Loss of civilian and defence personnel lives- There has been loss of lives of thousands of civilians in acts of cross-border terrorism over the years. Thousands of **defense, paramilitary and police personnel** have **sacrificed their lives** in the line of duty fighting cross-border terrorism.

2. Disruption of peace and security- Cross-border terrorism has disrupted peace and security along India's borders, particularly with Pakistan. It has led to a deterioration of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan.

3. Illegal infiltration and smuggling- Cross-border terrorism has **facilitated illegal infiltration and smuggling of narcotics, arms and weapons** across India's borders, especially with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

4. Economic costs- The resources and efforts diverted to counter cross-border terrorism have come at an economic cost to India in terms of **defense expenditure** and **lost economic opportunities.**

5. Psychological impact- The constant threat of cross-border terrorism has **created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among the civilian population** living along the borders.

What are the steps taken by India to Counter Cross Border terrorism in India?

National Investigation Agency (NIA) and Multi Agency Centre (MAC)	Government of India has created NIA in 2008 after Mumbai attacks which acts as a federal agency to combat terror. Multi Agency Centre (MAC) revamped after the 26/11 attacks. This acts as a multi-agency intelligence coordination mechanism for counter terrorism.
Combating Financing of Terrorism Cell (CFT- Cell)	Combating Financing of Terrorism Cell (CFT- Cell) has been created to deal with the policy matters on combating terrorist financing and Fake Indian Currency.
Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)	This system has replaced manual surveillance/patrolling of international borders by electronic surveillance to enhance detection and interception capabilities.
Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)	India has been pushing for the adoption of this convention in the UN. It provides a legal framework to enhance the prosecution and extradition of terrorists.

What should be the way Forward?

1. Reassessment and speeding up of border management policies- There is a need to reassess policies related to management of India's international borders such as **intelligence apparatus, internal security** and **border management.** The smart fencing of all Indian Borders must be expedited.

2. Kinetic Strikes- The surgical strikes like the **Uri Surgical Strike** and the **airstrike like the Balakot airstrikes** must be carried out to deter the terrorists. The military should also look at alternative means to strike at the terror camps across the LoC (Line of Control) and LAC (Line of Actual Control) through mechanisms like **Precision Engagement Capability.**

3. Specialised force and training- India should move in the direction of specialisation of military to fight cross-border terrorism. A judicious mix of properly trained manpower and affordable and tested technology is likely to yield better results.

4. Beefing up Cyber defence Mechanism- A holistic cyber defense mechanism must be developed to effectively counter cyber-linked terrorism, including conducting cyber operations and implementing strong countermeasures against cyber attacks from foreign soil.

5. Speeding up judicial process- India's national criminal justice system must be enhanced and legal protocols must be streamlined to enable speedy trials of cross border terrorism cases.

6. Counter-radicalization programmes- The counter-radicalization programs focussing on promoting non-violence and tolerance must be implemented, especially in educational institutions. This will reduce youth's exposure to cross border terrorism and radical ideology. This will reduce the number of over-ground workers in India.

[Read More- The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 3 – Internal Security

Urban Flooding in India-Causes, Impacts and Remedies – Explained, pointwise

After enduring extreme temperatures nearing 50 degrees Celsius, Delhi residents are now dealing with unprecedented rainfall, causing severe waterlogging and chaos across the capital. Following one of its hottest periods on record, Delhi received a staggering 228.1 mm of rain in just 24 hours. This amount surpasses Delhi's average rainfall for the entire month of June, transforming the recent relief from heat into widespread disruption.

Over the past few years, India has seen an increase in the frequency of urban flooding in Indian cities. For instance, Hyderabad in 2000 and 2020, Ahmedabad in 2001 and 2020, Delhi in 2002, 2003, 2009 and 2010, Chennai in 2004 and 2015, Mumbai in 2005, Surat in 2006, Kolkata in 2007, and Srinagar in 2014 are a few of the most prominent ones.

Urban Flooding has become a persistent challenge, aggravated by rapid urbanization, inadequate infrastructure, and changing climatic patterns. During the monsoon season, cities across India often face flooding of streets, homes, and public areas because drainage systems are overwhelmed and urban surfaces do not absorb water. This problem disrupts daily life and poses risks to public health, infrastructure, and economic activities.

Thus, understanding the causes and consequences of urban flooding is important for implementing effective mitigation strategies and ensuring sustainable urban development in the face of increasing urban populations and climate uncertainties.

What are the causes behind the urban flooding phenomenon?

1) **Unplanned Rapid Urbanization**-Unplanned urban growth has destroyed natural drainage systems, leading to encroachment on floodplains and wetlands, less permeable surfaces due to widespread concrete construction, and changes in natural watershed boundaries..

2) **Lack of Effective Urban Governance**-Despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, key areas such as urban planning, land use, and economic development have not fully transferred to city governments as

required. The structure of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) lacks clarity that leads to **uneven distribution of power** between elected representatives and executive wings. This leads to **poor urban governance** and **mismangement** of waterlogging issues.

3) **Inadequate and Outdated Drainage Infrastructure:** Many Indian cities are still reliant on colonial-era drainage systems designed for rainfall intensities of **20-25mm per hour**, which are inadequate for current precipitation patterns. This results in **insufficient capacity** to handle increased water volume and **frequent overflow** during heavy rainfall,

4) **Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events-**The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports** indicate an increase in the **frequency and intensity** of extreme rainfall events in India. This leads to a higher volume of water than **drainage systems** can handle and **increased runoff** due to the soil's inability to absorb water quickly.

5) **Loss of Water Bodies and Green Spaces:** A study by the **National Institute of Urban Affairs** revealed that major Indian cities have lost **70-80%** of their water bodies over the last 40 years. This has led to reduced **natural water storage capacity**, increased surface runoff, and disruption of the **natural water cycle**.

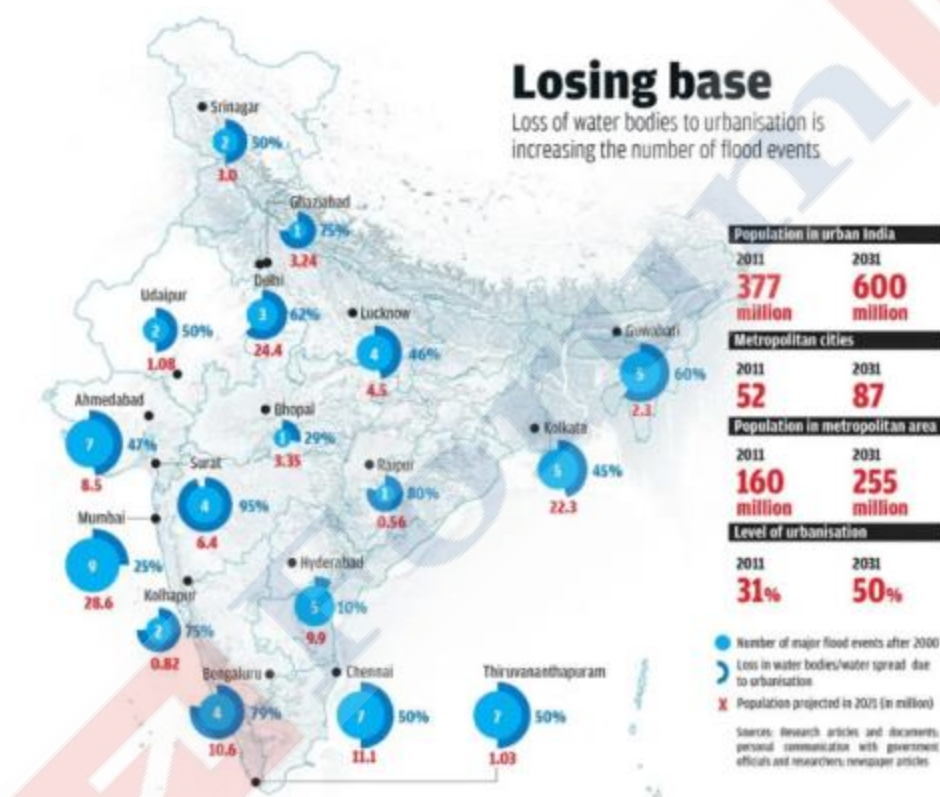


Figure 8. Source-Down to Earth

additional **low-lying areas** that are vulnerable to waterlogging.

8) **Lack of Integrated Urban Water Management-**There's a lack of coordination between various departments handling **water supply, sewage, and stormwater drainage**. This results in **fragmented approach** to water management. **For ex-** the administration is fragmented among at least 11 different agencies responsible for **roads and drains in Delhi**.

Number of Urban Flood Events in major cities since 2000 and the loss (in %) of water bodies due to urbanization

6) **Solid Waste Mismanagement-** **Improper** solid waste management is **choking drainage** systems. This causes clogged drains and **reduced water flow capacity** leading to waterlogging of cities.

7) **Groundwater Depletion and Land Subsidence:** **Excessive** extraction of groundwater has caused land subsidence in numerous urban areas. As groundwater is depleted, the land sinks, creating

9) **Siltation of Rivers and Water Bodies**-The **National Institute of Hydrology** reports significant siltation in urban water bodies and rivers. This leads to reduced **water holding capacity** of lakes and rivers and impaired **natural drainage systems**.

9) **High Population Density**-Rapid urbanization and population growth lead to more paved surfaces like **pavements, roads, and buildings**. This reduces **natural water absorption** and **increases surface runoff**, worsening waterlogging during heavy rains because water can't soak into impermeable surfaces.

What is the impact of urban flooding?

1) **Loss of Lives and Injuries**-.People can become trapped or swept away in submerged areas, resulting in **fatalities and injuries**.

2) **Damage to Infrastructure**: It can lead to widespread damage to buildings, roads, bridges, and other infrastructure. Homes, businesses, and **public facilities** may be flooded or destroyed, causing **substantial financial losses** for individuals, communities, and the government

3) **Displacement of Vulnerable Population**:Poor individuals may be compelled to vacate their **house and seek temporary shelter**, encountering difficulties in finding appropriate accommodation and enduring the loss of **personal belongings**.

4) **Disruption of Vital Services**:It can cause disruptions to essential services like **electricity, water supply, and communication networks**. This can aggravate hardships for affected communities and impede **rescue and relief efforts**.

5) **Waterborne Diseases**: It can increase the risk of waterborne diseases such as **cholera, typhoid, and diarrhoea**.

6) **Economic Consequences**:Businesses may experience **financial losses** from property damage and operational interruptions. Furthermore, the government bears expenses for **rescue and relief operations, infrastructure repairs**, and rehabilitation.

8) **Mental and Psychological Stress**-The experience of **trauma, anxiety, stress, and losing personal belongings** can impact the mental health of those affected.

What steps have been taken by Indian government and various state government to address the issue of urban flooding?

1) National Level Initiatives:

A) **National Urban Flooding Programme**-It aims to establish a **holistic approach** to urban flood management, encompassing guidelines for **flood risk assessment** and strategies for mitigation.

B) **Smart Cities Mission**-It **integrates urban flood management** as a pivotal component and advocates for the adoption of technology in real-time flood monitoring and **early warning systems**.

C) **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)**-It focusses on enhancing urban infrastructure, especially stormwater drainage systems, and allocates funds for **upgrading and expanding drainage networks** in selected cities.

D) **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**- It has issued **comprehensive guidelines** on **urban flooding** that provide a framework for flood risk assessment and management.

2) State and City-level Initiatives:

A) **Mumbai**-The implementation of the **BRIMSTOWAD (Brihanmumbai Storm Water Disposal System)** project includes upgrading existing pumping stations and installing new ones, as well as conducting **desilting** of major nullahs (drains) before the monsoon season.

B) **Chennai**-C-FLOWS, an acronym for **Chennai FLOod Warning System**, is a flood warning system customised for use in Chennai. The six-module ensemble can predict flooding due to heavy rainfall, sea-level rise and increase in water levels of the three rivers — **Cooum, Adyar and Kosasthalaiyar** — that traverse the city.

C) **Kolkata**-The **Kolkata Environmental Improvement Project (KEIP)** involves upgrading sewerage and drainage systems, installing new pumping stations, and dredging and **renovating canals**.

D) **Bengaluru** :Efforts include **rejuvenating lakes and water bodies**, implementing **rain gardens and bioswales in specific areas**, and undertaking initiatives to remove encroachments on stormwater drains.

E) **Ahmedabad**:Development of the **Sabarmati Riverfront**, which includes flood management measures.

What should be the wayforward?

1) **Capacity Development of ULBs**-There is a need to encourage staff to acquire **new skills** by offering suitable incentives. State governments and ULBs should prioritize rebuilding the foundational structure of **local government institutions, ensuring adequate staffing** at the ULB level and establishing training facilities.

2) **Water-Sensitive Urban Design and Planning**-Water-sensitive urban design and planning techniques are most important. These methods consider **land features, surface types** (whether they absorb water or not), natural water flow, and have minimal environmental impact. **City master plans** should include mandatory assessments of vulnerabilities and risks.

3) **Adopting Scientific Management Measures**- Initiatives should begin with mapping areas **vulnerable to waterlogging**. Hydraulic and hydrological models should analyze **flood patterns**, with results incorporated into **urban master plans**.

4) **Decentralized Stormwater Management**: Promoting decentralized stormwater management techniques such as **rainwater harvesting, bioswales, and retention ponds** can mitigate waterlogging at the local level.

5) **Smart Drainage Systems**: Utilizing advanced technology like **sensor-based drainage** systems that can detect water levels and regulate flow in real-time can improve the efficiency of urban drainage networks. **For ex-airborne laser terrain mapping (ALTM)** is an active remote sensing technology that employs light detection and ranging to measure topography at a high spatial resolution over large areas. It can serve as a crucial tool in **urban planning and developing flood riskmaps**.

6) **Synergistic Approach**-There is a need for improved coordination between various institutions especially between **water resources and disaster management authorities** for integrated and coordinated approach.

7) **Engaging Grassroots Organizations** -Engagement with grassroots organisations is necessary to promote awareness on holistic flood risk management. Participatory approach for early action coordination among stakeholders can help mitigate waterlogging issue.

For ex-Environmental Foundation of India (EFI), Chennai-It has restored over 39 lakes in Chennai, significantly reducing waterlogging in surrounding areas.

8) **Revival of Local Water Bodies**-There is a need to prioritize the protection and restoration of traditional local water bodies in urban areas. These water bodies would be integrated into **urban blue-green infrastructure** to enhance **water levels and quality**

For ex-Biome Environmental Trust, Bengaluru-They have led in **decentralized wastewater** treatment and

rainwater harvesting. Their “**A Million Recharge Wells**” campaign has raised groundwater levels and lessened flooding.

9) **Green Infrastructure:** Implementing green roofs, rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavements, and urban green spaces can absorb rainwater and minimize surface runoff, thereby reducing strain on drainage systems.

10) **Nature-Based Solutions:** Implementing nature-based solutions such as restoration of natural wetlands, creation of urban forests, and revitalization of water bodies can enhance natural water absorption and reduce waterlogging.

Read more-Bengaluru Water Crisis

UPSC Syllabus-: GS III, Disaster and disaster management.