

Forum IAS

7 PM COMPILATION

1st and 2nd Week Oct, 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
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INDEX

Israel Lebanon War – Impacts and Way forward- Explained Pointwise	2
Sixth Schedule for Ladakh- Rationale and Concerns- Explained Pointwise	4
University Ranking Framework-Pros and Cons- Explained Pointwise.....	8
State Control of Temples- Arguments for and against- Explained Pointwise	10
India-Maldives Relations- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise.....	14
Artificial Neural Networks- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise.....	18
Rice Fortification in India- Needs and Challenges- Explained Pointwise.....	22
India-ASEAN Relations- Cooperation and Challenges- Explained Pointwise	24
Classical Languages of India – Explained, Pointwise	28
Gig Workers in India – Challenges and Way Forward – Explained Pointwise	31

Israel Lebanon War – Impacts and Way forward- Explained Pointwise

The ongoing **Israel Lebanon war** has escalated significantly in recent weeks. Israel has **intensified its military operations against Hezbollah**, and has launched a series of airstrikes across Lebanon. Israel has conducted over 1,300 strikes targeting Hezbollah strongholds and military installations. The escalation of conflict into a full-blown war, has led to widespread violence (killing of around 600 Lebanese) and has created a humanitarian crisis in Lebanon.



Source- The Indian Express

What is the background of Israel Lebanon wars?

The Israel-Lebanon conflict has been marked by a series of wars and clashes, with the most notable of these conflicts being the **1982 Lebanon War**, the **2006 Lebanon War**.

Hezbollah	Hezbollah plays a central role in the Israel-Lebanon conflict. Hezbollah is a Shiite militant group and political party based in Lebanon. Hezbollah was founded in the early 1980s, with support from Iran, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Hezbollah has grown into a powerful force in Lebanese politics and maintains a military wing that regularly clashes with Israeli forces. Israel views Hezbollah as a major security threat due to its military capabilities, leading to regular Lebanese skirmishes.
Israeli Invasions	Israel has conducted several military operations in Lebanon. The most significant is the 1982 invasion . Israel's invasions in southern Lebanon have been initially driven by the aim to destroy the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1990s and now against Hezbollah in recent years.

Other factors in the Israel-Lebanon Civil War

1. Shebaa Farms Dispute- **Shebaa Farms**, which is located at the intersection of Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. It remains a **point of contention between Hezbollah and Israel**, after Israeli occupation of the territory.

2. Iran-Israel Proxy War- Iran's financial and military support for Hezbollah, is another key factor in the ongoing Israel-Lebanon conflict. Israel views Hezbollah as an extension of Iranian influence in the region.

What are the Global impacts of the escalation of Israel Lebanon war?

1. Disruption the geopolitical realignment Process in Middle East- Middle East in recent times has been witnessing geopolitical realignments from the **Israel-Arab reconciliation to the Iran-Saudi détente**. However, the recent Israel-Palestine conflict and Israel-Lebanon conflict has disrupted the peace and normalisation process in Middle East

2. Middle East as the theatre of Warfare- Middle East had been a theatre of War with Wars like **Gulf War, Iraq war, 6 day war**. The recent Israel-Palestine conflict has potential to become a full-blown war with involvement of foreign powers like US, EU. This has also made the region a theatre for proxy wars like US and Iran.

3. Disruption of the global connectivity projects and global transport routes- The envisaged projects like **India Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC)** have been disrupted by the prolonged conflict in West Asia. The escalation of the Israel Lebanon conflict endangers the strategic supply routes like the **Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea**.

4. Disruption of the Global supply chains and increased Inflation- The escalation of the conflict impacts the **oil production and supply chain of goods**. This will further increase global inflation, which has already been rattling the world economy.

5. Increased Radicalization in the Middle East- The conflict could serve as a **rallying point for extremist groups across the Middle East and beyond**. Groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS might use the conflict as an opportunity to recruit new members, by framing the war as a broader jihad against Israel and the West.

What will be the impact of the Israel Lebanon Conflict on India?

1. Impact on De-hyphenation and West Asia Policy- India had been successfully implementing its de-hyphenation policy in the region. India's relation with both the Arab World and Israel has improved. However, the escalation of the Israel-Lebanon conflict puts **India in a diplomatic tight spot**, and affects India's de-hyphenation strategy in the region.

2. Increase in Inflation- The escalation of the conflict into a full-blown Israel Lebanon war **impacts the oil and gas production**. Inflation in the country will further increase as India is heavily dependent upon imported oil and gas.

3. Depreciation of the Indian Rupee- The conflict **impacts the inflow of FPI and FDI in the Indian financial market**. Increase in oil prices will further increase India's Current Account Deficit(CAD). All these will lead to depreciation of the Indian rupee.

4. Effect on the India Israel Trade- Israel is a major defence and strategic partner of India. Involvement of Israel for a long period in the conflict will **drastically reduce the trade between India- Israel**. In FY23, India's total exports to Israel stood at \$8.4 billion, while India's imports from Israel were at \$2.3 billion.

5. Reduction of the remittances from West Asia and safety of Indian emigrants- India has a **large diaspora and emigrant population** in West Asia. These are a source of large amount of remittance to India(~40 bn

dollars). If the conflict turns into a full-blown war across the Middle East, India will be severely impacted. The remittances will plummet. **Safe Evacuation of the Indian diaspora** will also be a grave challenge.

What should be the Way Forward?

- 1. UNSC must step up-** UNSC must broker a **peace talk between the two warring factions**. Global leadership platforms must be used to not let Middle East become another theatre for warfare.
- 2. Indirect Negotiations-** Indirect talks mediated by third parties, such as the United Nations, the U.S., or European countries, could help lower tensions between Israel and Lebanon.
- 3. Strengthening UNIFIL's Role-** Strengthening the mandate and capabilities of the **United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon** (UNIFIL), which has been tasked with maintaining peace along the **Lebanon-Israel border**, could help in preventing further conflicts.
- 4. De-militarization of the Shebaa Farm Area-** The Shebaa Farms area could be demilitarized and placed under international control. This will reduce the likelihood of future between Israel-Lebanon conflict over the territory.
- 5. Engaging Regional Actors-** Regional powers like **Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar**, as well as the Arab League, could play an important role in mediating the Israel-Palestine conflict and fostering a more peaceful environment.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS2- International Relations

Sixth Schedule for Ladakh- Rationale and Concerns- Explained Pointwise

Recently, climate activist, **Sonam Wangchuk**, was detained at the Delhi border while leading a **protest for Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**. The demand for sixth schedule status is aimed for **greater autonomy** to the region. While the demands for a separate public service commission and two parliamentary seats were met, the demands of the statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution has been rejected by the MHA.

Also, recently, **similar demands** have been made in **Arunachal Pradesh** and **Manipur** for their inclusion in the **sixth schedule**. The focus is on the protection of ethnic groups under special constitutional provisions.

In this article, we will look at the **historical roots of demands for fifth and sixth schedule of the constitution**. We will look at the provisions of the sixth schedule of the constitution. We will also look examine Ladakh's demands for inclusion in the sixth schedule.



Sixth Schedule

Sixth Schedule of the constitution is again in news, after the reconstitution of high-powered committee to examine **Ladakh's demand for inclusion** in the Sixth Schedule.

Sixth Schedule

- » **Constitutional Provisions- Art 244** of the constitution provides for the sixth schedule of the constitution which is applicable to specific areas of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**
- » **Purpose-** It provides for the formation of autonomous administrative divisions called **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** that have some legislative, judicial and administrative autonomy within a state.
- » The acts of Parliament or the state legislature do not apply to autonomous districts and autonomous regions, or apply with specified modifications and exceptions



Advantages

- » **Democratic Devolution of Powers-** Sixth Schedule has helped in democratic devolution of powers through the creation of **Autonomous District Councils**, which have some legislative, judicial and administrative autonomy within a state.
- » **Preservation of Cultural Practices and Customs-** Tribal language, customs and practices are protected. For ex- **Bodo language of Bodoland were protected.**
- » **Protection of tribal Land rights-** Autonomous councils the powers to legislate on matters like **land, forests, and fisheries.**
- » **Grant-in Funds- Finance commission** recommends Grant-in aids for sixth scheduled areas
- » **Sustainable Socio-Economic Development-** Ensures socio-economic development of a region in consonance with the cardinal virtue of sustainability.



Issues

- » **Limited Geographical Coverage-** Only limited to certain tribal pockets of **Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**
- » **Lack of Effective decentralisation-** Several districts have only one autonomous council. For ex- **Only one District council for entire Bodo Territorial Area districts**
- » **Legislative power of state over autonomous councils-** The laws made by the councils require the assent of governor. In case of conflict, the **governor's assent prevails.**
- » **Financial dependency-** Dependent on state govts for funds in addition to the occasional special package from the Centre. **Lack of timely constitution of State Finance Commission (SFC)**
- » **Corruption, Financial Mismanagement and Lack of skilled professionals**



Way Forward

- » **Increase geographical coverage-** Constitutional amendment to expand coverage of 6th scheduled areas in other tribal dominated regions which need protection. For ex- **Ladakh inclusion in 6th schedule.**
- » **Ensuring regular Elections-** The state governments must ensure regular, free and fair elections to these autonomous councils. For Ex- **Reduce the dominance of Tribal Elites.**
- » **Transparency-** Transparency in **funds, functionaries and functioning** of the autonomous district councils must be enhanced for effective socio-economic development.

What are the Historical roots of demands for the fifth and sixth schedule of the constitution?

Fifth and Sixth Schedule Roots- The demands for fifth and sixth schedule are **rooted in asymmetrical federalism** in India. India follows an **asymmetrical federal structure**, where **certain states or regions** have more autonomy than others. Unlike **symmetrical federations** like the **U.S. or Australia**, where all states share equal powers, India **grants special provisions to some areas** (under **fifth and sixth schedule**), especially those with unique ethnic compositions.

Historical Context behind the introduction of Fifth and Sixth Schedules

Impact of Colonial Rules- The **Fifth and Sixth Schedules** of the Indian Constitution have their roots in **colonial policies** that recognized the distinct nature of tribal populations.

Tribals maintained their autonomy over their lands until British forest policies restricted their rights. This led to rebellions like the **Kol** (1831-32) and **Santhal** (1885) revolts. To address tribal discontent, the Government of India Act of 1935 introduced 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas, which later influenced the creation of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.

What are the Distinctive Features of the Special Schedules which provide for regional Autonomy?

Distinctive Features of special schedules

Fifth Schedule	The Fifth Schedule applies to 'Scheduled Areas,' which are identified based on criteria like a high tribal population and economic backwardness . The fifth schedule areas span across 10 states. Tribes Advisory Councils (TACs) advise on tribal welfare. Governors have powers to regulate land allotment and manage money-lending practices in these areas, ensuring some degree of tribal autonomy.
Sixth Schedule	The Sixth Schedule grants greater autonomy to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura . Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) manage land use, inheritance laws, and social customs . ADCs hold legislative, executive, and financial powers , with the ability to collect taxes and manage local resources . Unlike the Fifth Schedule, ADCs can make laws that supersede those of the state, pending approval by the Governor.
Special Provisions for Northeastern States	Several northeastern states have additional protections under Part XXI of the Constitution (Articles 371A-H), which safeguard local customs and practices. These provisions ensure representation and development in tribal and hill areas of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh .

Why is Ladakh Demanding Inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of The Constitution?

- 1. Political Representation and autonomy-** The **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act 2019**, created two separate **UTs of J&K (with legislature)** and **Ladakh (without legislature)**. While there had been four MLAs from the Ladakh region in the erstwhile J&K Assembly, now the administration of Ladakh is **completely in the hands of bureaucrats**. Thus, sixth schedule status is being demanded to ensure political representation and autonomy.
- 2. Lack of Local Employment opportunities-** The administration of UT of Ladakh has failed to create local employment opportunities for youth of Ladakh. **For Ex- Absence of a public service commission and lack of comprehensive job policy** even after 4 years of creation of UT of Ladakh.
- 3. Preservation of Cultural Identity-** Sixth schedule status is also being demanded to protect Ladakh's unique cultural heritage and traditional customs. **For ex-** Tribals like **Gujjars, Bakarwals, Bots, Changpas, Baltis and Purigpas** have distinct cultures which can better be preserved under sixth schedule of the constitution.
- 4. Preservation of Ladakh's Fragile ecosystem-** Climate activists have raised flagged **serious concerns regarding mining and industrialisation** in the fragile glacial ecological system of Ladakh. Sixth schedule status is being demanded **to protect** the **high-altitude deserts, glaciers and alpine meadows** which are a crucial habitat for rare and endangered species.
- 5. Change in domicile policy of Jammu and Kashmir-** The change of domicile policy in UT of J&K has amplified demands for sixth schedule for Ladakh to ensure domicile for Ladakh population.

6. Strengthening of democratic institutions- The establishment of autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule would also strengthen democratic institutions at the grassroots level. **For ex- More powers and autonomy to Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDC).**

What are The Advantages of Being Included in the Sixth Schedule of The Constitution?

1. Democratic Devolution of Powers- Sixth Schedule has helped in democratic devolution of powers through the **creation of Autonomous District Councils** which have some legislative, judicial and administrative autonomy within a state.

2. Preservation of Cultural Practices and Customs- The inclusion of a region in the sixth schedule ensures protection of local language, cultural practices and customs. **For ex- Bodo language of Bodoland were protected.**

3. Protection of tribal Land rights- Sixth schedule has also helped in protection of agrarian and land rights by granting the autonomous councils the powers to **legislate on matters like land, forests, and fisheries.**

4. Grant-in Funds- Sixth schedule areas are provided with enhanced quantum of Grant-in Funds for rapid development and transformation. **For ex- Finance commission recommendations for Grant-in aids for sixth scheduled areas**

5. Sustainable Socio-Economic Development- The inclusion of a region in the sixth schedule ensures **socio-economic development of a region** in consonance with the **cardinal virtue of sustainability.**

What are The Issues with The VI Schedule of the Constitution?

1. Limited Geographical Coverage- The sixth schedule areas are limited in their geographical coverage and exclude numerous tribal communities, leading to unequal treatment and exclusion. **For ex- Only limited to certain tribal pockets of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.**

2. Lack of Effective decentralisation- The sixth schedule areas often lack effective and real decentralisation of powers and administration. **For ex- Only one District council for entire Bodo Territorial Area districts.**

3. Legislative power of state over autonomous councils- The laws made by the councils **require the assent of governor.** Also, in case of conflict of interest between the District Councils and the state legislature, the latter would prevail.

4. Financial dependency- Autonomous councils are **dependent on their respective state governments for funds** in addition to the occasional special package from the Centre. **For ex- Lack of timely constitution of State Finance Commission for recommending devolution of funds to District Councils and Regional Councils.**

5. Corruption and Financial Mismanagement- The functioning of different councils in the sixth schedule areas has been marred by **corruption and financial mismanagement.**

6. Lack of skilled professionals- The autonomous councils lack skilled planning professionals, which **results in ill-conceived development projects** without proper technical and financial consideration.

7. Lack of Codification of customary Laws- The councils have failed in codifying customary laws of the local tribal population.

8. Political Interference- The autonomy granted by the Sixth Schedule is often undermined by **political interference** from the Centre and State governments.

9. Pending Constitutional Bill which provides for greater reforms- The delay in passage of the **125th Constitutional Amendment Bill**, which aims to empower ADCs, has **hindered greater self-governance** in these areas.

10. Non-implementation of FRA- The Forest Rights Act, 2006, which aims to protect tribal land rights, has not yet been implemented in the sixth schedule area.

What Should be The Way Forward?

1. Creation of elected Village Councils- Village councils must be created with their accountability to the local Gram Sabhas.

2. Ensuring regular Elections- The state governments must ensure regular, free and fair elections to these autonomous councils. For Ex- Reduce the dominance of Tribal Elites.

3. Representation of Women and other Ethnic Minorities- Women and other ethnic minorities must be provided adequate representation in these autonomous councils.

4. Increase geographical coverage- Constitutional amendment must be brought to expand coverage of 6th scheduled areas in other tribal dominated regions which need protection. For ex- Ladakh inclusion in 6th schedule.

5. Transparency- Transparency in funds, functionaries and functioning of the autonomous district councils must be enhanced for effective socio-economic development.

Source- The Hindu

UPSC Syllabus- GS-2 Issues related to Federal Structure

University Ranking Framework-Pros and Cons- Explained Pointwise

In recent times, a lot of importance is being accorded to the University Ranking Frameworks. Global ranking frameworks have gained prominence in recent times, for the rankings of Universities worldwide. India has also instituted its own university ranking framework, National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), for the rankings of Indian Universities.

The image shows the official website of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), Ministry of Education, Government of India. The page features a navigation bar with links to HOME, ABOUT NIRF, PARAMETERS, DOCUMENTS, RANKING, NOTIFICATION/ADVT, FAQs, and CONTACT. The main content area displays 'INDIA RANKINGS 2023' with a grid of 14 categories, each represented by a circular icon and a label: Overall, Universities, Colleges, Research Institutions, Engineering, Management, Pharmacy, Medical, Dental, Law, Architecture and Planning, Agriculture and Allied Sectors, and Innovation.

Source- MHRD

What are the common University Ranking Frameworks?

Global Frameworks

QS World University Rankings	It is a portfolio of comparative college and university rankings compiled by Quacquarelli Symonds , a higher education analytics firm. The six metrics employed are- Academic reputation , Employer reputation , Faculty/student ratio , Citations per faculty , International faculty ratio and International student ratio .
Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU)	ARWU is one of the oldest and most recognized university ranking systems globally. It is also known as the Shanghai Ranking .
Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings	These rankings are widely regarded and provide a detailed analysis of university performance. These use 13 indicators divided into 5 categories - Teaching (the learning environment), Research (volume, income, and reputation), Citations (research influence), International outlook (staff, students, research) and Industry income (innovation).

Indian Framework

National Institutional Ranking Framework	National Institutional Ranking Framework is a ranking methodology released annually by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, to rank institutions of higher education in India .
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What are the advantages of University Ranking Framework?

- 1. Global Recognition-** High rankings for the universities provide a **significant boost** to a **university's visibility** on an international scale. The recognition helps in attracting international students, faculties, donors, and potential research partners from around the world.
- 2. Performance Assessments-** The university ranking framework **provides valuable insights** into a **university's performance** relative to its peers. This information helps institutions in identification of their strengths and weaknesses, guiding them towards strategic planning and resource allocation.
- 3. Quality Enhancement-** The competitive nature of university rankings **encourages universities** to enhance their **educational quality** and **research output**. This drive for improvement leads to better academic programs and student outcomes.
- 4. Collaboration Opportunities-** Higher Rankings help in **facilitating partnerships between universities**, as institutions often seek collaborations with those having strong reputations. This helps in increasing the **number of joint research projects**, and **exchange programs** between the universities.
- 5. Alumni Connections-** Attending a highly-ranked university opens doors to valuable networking opportunities with alumni and industry leaders, making it **beneficial for students seeking internships** or **job placements** after graduation.

What are the arguments against these ranking frameworks?

- 1. Overemphasis on Research-** Global rankings **heavily prioritize research output**, and **fail to fully represent** the quality and relevance of research.
- 2. Increased education fees-** The focus on rankings has led to the **increase in student fees of the public institutions**, resulting in higher burden on the students. This has negatively impacted the students from economically weaker sections in India.

3. Decline of Teaching Standards- The obsession with metrics has diminished the importance of teaching, as the **faculty members are judged on research output** rather than **their ability to teach and mentor students**. Career advancement has been tied to research metrics, which has side lined teaching.

4. Compromise in research Quality- The focus on “**publish or perish**” has fostered a culture where research quality has sometimes been compromised, and has led to misconducts like **plagiarism**.

5. Bias and Lack of Inclusivity- Many ranking systems have biases in their metrics and evaluation criteria, and tend to favour the Western universities. This often **marginalizes institutions from developing countries** or those that **prioritize teaching over research**.

What should be the way Forward?

1. Balancing Research and Teaching- The universities must aim to **balance research and teaching**. While research is vital for innovation, it should not come at the expense of teaching.

2. Separation of research and teaching focussed faculties- Universities should create **separate tracks** for **research-focused** and **teaching-focused faculty** to prevent burnout and resentment.

3. Shift of Focus to Value Research- Universities must shift their culture to **value both research and teaching equally**. The research should be **valued for its societal impact**, and **not just for journal citations**.

4. Focus on enhancing student creativity- The current metrics-driven system **distorts the purpose of education**, **reducing knowledge to a commodity** and students to customers. The aim of the universities must be to prepare them to **become responsible citizens** and **equipping them for real-world challenges**.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues Related to Health and Education

State Control of Temples- Arguments for and against- Explained Pointwise

The recent **controversy over Tirupati Laddu Prasadam**, has once again **stirred the debate** over the **State control of temples in India**. The **State control over temples** in post independence India started with the **state of Tamil Nadu** (then Madras), which brought a **law for state control over temples**. Currently, other states in India also have **legislations for the management of Hindu temples**, which includes the states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

However, these laws of state control of temples in India, have been critiqued by several Hindu religious organisations in the past, on account of **treatment of temples as milch cows** and **non-representative temple boards**. In this article, we will look into the issue of state control of temples in India.



Source- Daily Free Traveller

What has been the History of State Control of Temples in India?

According to census 2011, Hindu temples form the majority of the around 30 lakh places of worship in India. The State control of temples in India has a long history, starting from the colonial period to post independent India.

<p>Colonial Period</p>	<p>a. The East India Company enacted laws in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay between 1810 and 1817, which allowed interference in temple administration to prevent income misappropriation.</p> <p>b. The Religious Endowments Act (1863) passed by the British government, aimed to secularise temple management by transferring temple control to committees. However, the government retained influence through legal frameworks like the Civil Procedure Code and the Charitable and Religious Trusts Act (1920).</p> <p>c. The Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act (1925) established a statutory body, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board. It empowered provincial governments to legislate on temple matters, and allowed oversight by a board of commissioners.</p>
<p>Post Independence Period</p>	<p>a. The law commission of India recommended enactment of legislations to prevent the misuse of temple funds.</p> <p>b. The Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (TN HR&CE) Act, 1951, provided the creation of a Department of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments for the administration, protection, and preservation of temples and their properties.</p> <p>c. Bihar Hindu Religious Trusts Act, 1950 was passed in Bihar to regulate the religious institutions.</p>

Constitution Provision Providing for State Control of Temples

Article 25(2)- Article 25(2) allows the state to regulate economic, financial, political, or secular activities linked to religious practices and to enact laws for social welfare, reform, and opening Hindu religious institutions to all classes of Hindus.

Seventh Schedule- Religious endowments and institutions are listed under the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, allowing both the Centre and states to legislate on the subject.

What are the Judicial Precedents providing for state control over Temple Management?

Shirur Mutt vs. The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras Case, 1954	The Shirur Mutt case set important precedents for the protection of religious freedoms and property rights in India. The Supreme Court (SC) of India ruled that the state can regulate the administration of religious or charitable institutions.
Ratilal Panachand Gandhi v. State of Bombay Case, 1954	The SC held that the state can regulate the administration of trust properties.
Pannalal Bansilal Pitti vs. State Of Andhra Pradesh Case, 1996	The SC upheld a law abolishing hereditary rights over temple management and rejected the argument that such laws must apply equally to all religions.

What are the arguments in favour of state control of temples in India?

- 1. Prevention of Temple Mismanagement**- The central argument presented in favour of temple management control is the enhancement of transparency in the administration of temple funds, and reduction of risks of misappropriation and corruption. Government oversight helps in the responsible and ethical management of temple funds.
- 2. Protection from Commercialization**- Government involvement in the management of temple funds is aimed at their prevention from commercialization and exploitation by vested interests.
- 3. Promotion of Gender Equality**- State management of temples is aimed at ensuring that the temples' services and resources are accessible to all devotees regardless of their gender. For ex- Travancore Devaswom Board supported equitable access to the temple for women in the Sabrimala Temple entry case.
- 4. Redistribution of Resources**- The revenue generated from temples is redirected towards state initiatives that benefit the wider community, such as the infrastructure development or social welfare programs. For ex- HRCE Department of Tamil Nadu uses temple funds for community development programs such as establishing schools, colleges, and hospitals.
- 5. Religious and Cultural Inclusivity**- State control ensures that temples adhere to constitutional principles of inclusivity for the individuals from vulnerable communities. For ex- In Tamil Nadu, the HRCE Department has worked on ensuring temple entry for Dalits and backward communities in several temples that traditionally restricted access.
- 6. Prevention of Exploitation of Devotees**- State control aims to protect devotees from exploitation by temple authorities, such as charging of exorbitant fees for rituals or financially burdening practices. For ex- Temples in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, setting up guidelines on fees for rituals and offerings.

[Read More- 7 PM Editorials](#)

What are the arguments against State Control of Temples in India?

1. Unfair Treatment- According to critics of government's temple control, while the **government controls Hindu temples in several states**, other religious institutions, such as **mosques, churches, and gurdwaras**, are generally allowed to manage their own affairs independently.

2. Mismanagement and Bureaucratic Inefficiency- Government-appointed boards or officials often **lack the expertise, commitment, or religious understanding** necessary to manage temple affairs effectively. This often leads to mismanagement, and bureaucratic inefficiency in the management of temple affairs. **For ex- Allegations of corruption**, poor administration, and neglect of temple properties by the **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department (HRCE)**.

3. Diversion of Temple Funds- The diversion of temple funds for secular activities has often been opposed by the devotees. **For ex- The protests by devotees against the diversion of religious funds for secular activities.**

4. Erosion of Temple Heritage and Traditions- The imposition of administrative norms by the state that are not aligned with the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of temple management, often leads to the erosion of temple heritage and traditions. **For ex- The support to the entry of women in Sabrimala by the Govt**, has been at **odds with the temple's ritualistic traditions.**

5. Decline in Devotee Trust and Participation- Critics argue that the bureaucratic control of the temples leads to decline in the participation and involvement of devotees in temple management.

6. Economic Mismanagement of Temple Assets- In states like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, there have been numerous reported cases of temple land encroachments by the private individuals or the government entities. This further fuelled concerns regarding the **economic mismanagement of temple resources by the State.**

7. Better Management through Private Trusts- Critics of the state control over temples argue that the temples that are not under state control, such as the **Shirdi Sai Baba Temple Trust in Maharashtra**, successfully run charitable hospitals, schools, and community programs.

What Should be the Way Forward?

1. Greater Autonomy with Oversight- Establishment of **independent temple trusts** comprising local religious leaders, community representatives, and legal or financial experts. The government should only undertake the oversight functions.

For ex- Management of Temples on the lines of the management of Golden temple by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which is independent of state control.

2. Greater transparency and accountability in case of temple funds- An **independent auditing body** should conduct regular financial audits of temples and **public disclosure of temple funds** must be made **mandatory.**

3. Formation of Devotee Councils- Local councils comprising devotees and community leaders could be formed to **advise on temple management, rituals, and festivals.** This would **empower the community to safeguard the religious and cultural traditions of the temple.**

4. Government as a Custodian of Heritage, Not Manager- The state's role should shift to that of a custodian responsible for preserving the heritage and architecture of ancient temples.

5. Collaboration with Religious Leaders- Temple funds could be used for social welfare programs such as **healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation**, but only after consultation with temple authorities and religious leaders.

Read More- [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Constitutional Provisions

India-Maldives Relations- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The recent visit of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu to India from October 6 to 8, 2024, marks a significant diplomatic engagement, aimed at mending and enhancing India-Maldives relations. In the recent past, India-Maldives relations had become a major challenge for India's foreign policy establishment. In the recently concluded Maldivian Presidential elections, the electoral issue had become a tussle between **India First vs India out campaigns**. The victory of Mohamed Muizzu was being seen as **Victory of India Out Campaign**.

However, the recent visit of the Maldivian president aims at course correction in the India-Maldives relations. The visit is seen as an effort to reset India-Maldives ties. Some of the Key Highlights of the visit are presented below-

- 1. Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership-** The Maldivian President and the Indian PM held extensive consultations for developing a comprehensive economic and maritime partnership.
- 2. Financial Assistance-** India has extended support to the Maldives in the form of a **\$400 million financial package** along with a **currency swap agreement** worth **₹30 billion**. This assistance aims to help the Maldives tackle its ongoing economic challenges.
- 3. Tourism Promotion-** India and Maldives agreed to launch marketing campaigns to attract more Indian tourists to the Maldives.
- 4. Agreements-** India and Maldives jointly inaugurated several initiatives, including the **launch of the RuPay card in the Maldives** and a **new runway at Hanimadhoo International Airport**.
- 5. Community Interaction-** President Muizzu addressed the concerns of the Maldivian community and reaffirmed his administration's commitment to their welfare.



Source- The Indian Express

What is the Historical Background of India-Maldives Relations?

India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, and commercial connections that date back to ancient times. The name Maldives is believed to be of Sanskrit origin (Mala (garland) + Dweep (Island)). The islands are believed to have been inhabited as early as 5th century BC by settlers from Sri Lanka and Southern India. There were close trade relationships between India and Maldives during ancient and medieval times.

Historical Evolution of India-Maldives Relations

1965	In 1965, Maldives gained Independence from the British. India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Maldives. Indian Mission was set up in Male in 1972.
1978	In 1978, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom took charge in Maldives. Gayoom made many visits to India which strengthened India-Maldives ties.
1988	In 1988, India sent its troops and ships to help Gayoom overthrow a coup attempt by a Maldives businessman and Sri Lankan Tamil fighters.
2008	In 2008, Mohamed Nasheed was elected President. During his tenure, India began closer security cooperation with Maldives. India loaned 2 helicopters, dornier aircraft and patrol boats to Maldives. These were for maritime reconnaissance, surveillance and coast guard security ops.
2013	In 2013, Abdulla Yameen of the opposition PPM was elected to power. The Presidential Period of Yameen saw major strains in the India-Maldives ties . India raised objections to Yameen's imposition of emergency. Yameen adopted pro-China policies . Yameen signed FTA with China & invited Chinese companies in for a number of major investments including the Hullumale island housing projects and friendship bridge. On the other hand Yameen threatened to evict Indian pilots and personnel from Maldives.
2018	In 2018, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih won the presidential elections by defeating Yameen. He adopted India-First Policy . India was invited to start many infrastructure projects including the \$500mn Greater Male connectivity project . In 2021, India-Maldives signed the Uthuru Thilafalhu project to maintain a coastguard harbour base for India. This sparked the India Out campaign .

What is the 'India out' Campaign and 'India First' Policy?

India Out Campaign	'India Out' campaign -It is a political movement to mobilise people in Maldives against India . The campaign is against the presence of Indian military on Maldivian soil. The campaign got louder around key bilateral developments such as the signing of the Uthuru Thila Falhu (UTF) harbour development deal with India in February 2021 & India's announcement of the opening of a consulate in the southern Addu Atoll .
	Supporters of the Campaign - Abdulla Yameen who was the President of Maldives from 2013-2018 joined the campaign. Yameen was Pro-China during his tenure. Yameen signed FTA with China and gave ultimatum to India to withdraw two Indian helicopters from the strategically important Laamu and Addu atolls. The current president designate Dr. Mohamed Muizzu rallied support around the 'India Out' campaign .
India First Policy	India First Policy - Maldives preference for India as the first choice in security partnership, socio-development assistance and COVID response(Vaccines).

	Proponent of the Policy- Ibrahim Mohamed Solih after he became the president in 2018 adopted the India First Policy. This Policy aimed to reverse the anti-India policies of Yameen between 2013-2018.
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What is the Significance of Maldives for India?

Maldives holds enormous significance for India. The Significance of Maldives for India is mentioned below-

- 1. Geo-Economic Significance-** Maldives is strategically located at the crossroads of several important trade routes that run through the Indian Ocean. **50% of India's external trade** and **80% of India's energy imports transit through** the Sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) in the vicinity of the **Maldives**.
- 2. Geo-Political Significance-** Maldives has been a partner of India in many regional groupings. Maldives is a member of the **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)**, **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**, **SAARC**, **SASEC** and **SAGAR** initiative of India. Maldives supports India's permanent membership of UNSC.
- 3. Security Significance-** For India, Maldives is the **first line of defence** against terrorism, piracy on the high seas, drug trafficking, narcotics, and other maritime crime. Maldives geographical location makes it a 'toll gate' between the choke points of the western Indian Ocean (Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Hormuz) and the eastern Indian Ocean (Strait of Malacca).
- 4. Indian Diaspora Significance-** There is a sizeable Indian Diaspora in Maldives. Numerous **Indians are employed** in Maldives' education, medical care systems, tourism and hospitality sector.

[Read More- 7 PM Archives](#)

What have been the areas of Co-operation between India and Maldives?

India has been a major partner of Maldives in its development journey. The major areas of cooperation between India and Maldives are mentioned below-

- 1. Economic Cooperation-** The economic co-operation between India and Maldives is a major pillar of cooperation between India and Maldives. Mentioned below are some of the economic cooperation pillars-
 - (a) **\$500 million** in grants and financing to support maritime connectivity.
 - (b) **\$ 800-million line of credit** from the Export-Import Bank of India
 - (c) India is Maldives' **2nd largest trading partner**.
 - (d) Maldives is an important tourist destination for many Indians. Tourism is the backbone of Maldives economy.
- 2. Infrastructure Cooperation-** Development of sustainable infrastructure in Maldives is one of the main goals of India. India is developing many infrastructure projects in Maldives some of which are mentioned below-
 - (a) India is developing the **Greater Male Connectivity Project-** one the largest project infrastructure project in Maldives. The project aims to **connect Male to Villingili, Gulhifalhu and Thilafushi islands** through a series of bridges, causeways and roads. The project is crucial for the proposed Gulhifalhu Port. It will be a **major catalyst for the Maldivian economy in the future** through jobs and economic activity.
 - (b) India is undertaking Airport Redevelopment Project at the **Hanimaadhoo International Airport**.
 - (c) India is undertaking the development of **strategic harbour projects like Uthuru Thila Falhu Project(UTF)**. It will serve as a harbour for the coast guard of the Maldives National Defence Force
 - (d) India has also undertaken the design and construction of **61 police infrastructures across Maldives**. This will contribute to improved access to policing and will ensure the safety and security of the communities in the islands.
- 3. Military and Security Cooperation-** Maldives relies heavily on trilateral maritime security cooperation with India and Sri Lanka. Hence securing the maritime borders of Maldives is one of the foremost priorities of

Indian Government. The major areas of Military and security co-operation are as follows-

- (a) India and Maldives co-operate in **maritime security**, maritime domain awareness and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations.
- (b) India has donated Landing Assault Craft and 24 Utility Vehicles to Maldives in order to bolster maritime security.
- (c) India has signed a comprehensive Action Plan for Defence in April 2016 to consolidate India-Maldives defence partnership.
- (d) India provides the largest number of training opportunities for Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF), meeting around 70% of their defence training requirements.
- (e) India and Maldives conduct many security Joint Exercises like “Ekuverin”, “Dosti”, “Ekatha” and “Operation Shield”.
- (f) India launched the Operation Cactus in 1988 to help the government of Maldives in the neutralizing the coup attempt.

4. Humanitarian Assistance Cooperation- India has always lent a helping hand to Maldives in humanitarian assistance. Mentioned below are some of the examples of humanitarian assistance

(a) India has signed an MoU with Maldives for **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs)** in 2019. A number of socio-economic development projects are planned to be implemented in Maldives through these projects.

(b) India has provided **100,000 Covishield vaccines to Maldives** in January 2021 during the peak of the pandemic. Through **Operation Sanjeevani**, India supplied 6.2 tonnes of essential medicines to Maldives in the fight against COVID 19. India has handed over **two sea ambulances** to the Ministry of Defence of Maldives.

(e) India provided assistance to Maldives during recovery efforts after the 2004 Tsunami. India also helped address the shortage of drinking water in Maldives in 2014 through **Operation Neer**.

What are the Challenges in India-Maldives Relations?

India-Maldives relations suffer from a lot of challenges. Some of which are mentioned below-

1. Political Challenges- The president elect Dr. Mohamed Muizzu and the former president Abdulla Yameen have been vocal advocates in the **‘India Out’ Campaign**. Both leaders are opposed to India’s military presence in Maldives. Since they will be wielding power in Maldives, it will become a major challenge for India.

2. Radicalisation- A large number of Maldivian citizens had joined violent extremist organisations such as the **Islamic State (IS)**. There has been a steady **rise in recruits joining jihadi groups in Pakistan** over the last decade. There is now a greater risk that terrorist organisations based in **Pakistan will use Maldives as a staging ground for attacks on India** and Indian assets.

3. Growing Chinese Influence- China has enhanced its influence in Maldives. Maldives is an essential ‘pearl’ in China’s ‘String of Pearls’ initiative in South Asia. With the **return of pro-chinese government in Maldives**, India’s diplomatic space will reduce in the region.

4. Climate Change- As both India and Maldives are low-lying island nations, they are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising sea levels and marine heatwaves. Maldives faces the risk of submergence.

What Should be the Way forward for India-Maldives Relations?

1. Engage with the newly elected government- India must engage with the newly elected government of Maldives and address its concerns. India must convey that the projects being undertaken are for the general good of the people of Maldives. Ex- The **redevelopment project at Hanimadhoo** will improve tourist inflow as both the runway and terminal capacity will be increased. Tourism is the mainstay of Maldives economy.

2. Increase the development assistance- India should increase development assistance to Maldives. India should target projects that have **larger impact on general population of Maldives**. This will enhance India's goodwill among the people of Maldives. It will address concerns that have led to **'India Out' Campaigns**.

3. Timely Completion of Infrastructure Projects- Timely completion of infrastructure projects being undertaken by India like the **Greater Male Connectivity Project (GMCP)** will offer a credible and lucrative alternatives to Chinese projects.

4. Target Youth Employment- India's **High Impact Community Development Projects (HICPs)** in Maldives must include projects that aim to **improve employability** and foster entrepreneurship among the youth. This will help in countering the threats of radicalisation and extremism emanating from the soil.

5. Increase in India's Development aid- India should continue to increase the **financial aid and assistance** to Maldives to prevent the debt crisis and economic catastrophe in Maldives.

The newly elected regime of Maldives must understand that China's entry in Maldives is solely to advance its own gains. A strong relationship with India will be to Maldives's benefit.

Read More- [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Syllabus- India and its neighbourhood relations

Artificial Neural Networks- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics has been awarded to **John J. Hopfield** and **Geoffrey E. Hinton** for their groundbreaking work on **artificial neural networks (ANNs)** and **machine learning**. Their discoveries have played a crucial role in the development of modern artificial intelligence (AI), which draws from various branches of science such as statistical physics, neurobiology, and cognitive psychology. Artificial neural networks form the foundation of modern machine learning.

Hopfield and Hinton's innovations provided essential methods for artificial neural networks. John Hopfield developed an **associative memory network** capable of **storing** and **reconstructing patterns like images**. Geoffrey Hinton, building on Hopfield's work, invented a method that enables machines to **autonomously identify features in data**, such as specific elements in images.



Source- The Indian express

What is Artificial Neural Network (ANN)?

Artificial neural networks are Computer algorithms that are designed to mimic the human brain's ability to perform tasks. Hopfield pioneered the work on Artificial neural network (**Hopfield Network**), which was further built upon by Hinton (**Boltzmann Machine**). The two models of Artificial Neural Networks are mentioned below-

Hopfield Network (Developed by Hopfield)	Hopfield network is a form of ANN that resembles a human brain's nerve cells . In this network, each neuron is connected to all others. It allowed computers to ' learn ' and ' remember ' by processing information through the entire network, not just individual parts. This leap allowed machines to recognize patterns, and serves as a precursor to modern facial recognition and image enhancement technologies .
Boltzmann Machine (Developed by Hinton)	Boltzmann machine is another significant ANN model which function by minimizing an energy function, which is a concept rooted in physics. These models performed far more complex and cognitive tasks such as data classification, pattern generation and voice and picture recognition . Hinton also developed backpropagation , which allowed neural networks to learn from mistakes and improve through training on large data sets. This has given

	rise to deep learning (a system with multiple layers of networks that continually refine their accuracy).
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ANN models have led to development and advancement in the field of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Deep Learning and Artificial Generative Intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence is being applied in **numerous fields**, including **astronomy**, where it helps **scientists analyse massive data sets to discover new information**. Machine learning focuses efforts on **data with the highest potential for groundbreaking discoveries**. Deep learning is now central to technologies such as **voice recognition, image identification, translation, and self-driving cars**. The field of AI has further advanced to Generative AI, where AI is generating content.

Relation between AI, Machine Learning, Deep Learning & Generative AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI)	AI is a discipline which focuses on formulating theories and methodologies for constructing machines that emulate human thought processes and behaviours.
Machine Learning (ML)	Machine learning is a subfield of Artificial Intelligence . ML involves the development of programs that train models using accessible data from sources such as webpages, articles, books, etc. These trained models are then used to make useful predictions for new and never-seen before data . The most common ML method to train the models is the supervised learning method .
Deep Learning	Deep learning is a subset of Machine Learning . Deep learning is a type of machine learning that uses artificial neural networks . These multilayered and interconnected neurons (inspired by the human brain), are used to process complex data and make predictions.
Generative AI	Generative AI is a subset of deep learning . It uses artificial neural networks to process data using supervised learning methods . This large-scale supervised learning technology is termed the Large Language Model (LLM) .

What are the advantages of AI which are built upon the Artificial Neural Networks (ANN)?

- 1. Writing and advertising-** AI is being used as a **brainstorming companion** by the writers. **For ex- Drafting press releases, language translation, creating new advertisements** based on existing ones.
- 2. Reading-** Apart from writing, AI technology is used as a reading tool. **For ex- Auto Reading customer mails and segregating them based on complaints.**
- 3. Chatting-** AI is also being used for many special-purpose chatbot tasks. **For ex- Government chatbots** to help citizens get access to the right information on various schemes and policies.
- 4. Security Services-** AI technology built on the advanced Neural Networks can create front-on photos from photos taken at different angles and vice versa. This is being used in **face identification systems** to secure the **airports, international border check-points** etc.
- 5. Enhanced capability of Search Engine Services-** Advanced Artificial Neural Networks have the capability to take search engine services to the next level. **For ex- Text to Image translation** to provide search results.
- 6. Improving Healthcare System-** AI technology has the potential to revolutionise the healthcare sector by improving the accuracy of diagnosis. **For ex- Conversion of X-ray or any CT scan images to real images** can improve the accuracy of diagnosis.

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What are the Challenges with the Artificial Neural Networks?

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1. Increased Biases- Artificial Neural Networks can perpetuate and amplify existing biases. These systems can generate biased outputs like offensive language, demeaning imagery, and prejudicial content, if they are trained on biased, non-inclusive data. **For ex-** [US rights group observation](#) about an AI-based generative imagery programme showing [images of only white men for the prompt 'CEO'](#).

2. Threat of Job Losses- There are fears of job losses as AI can prove to be more cost-efficient and productive to firms as compared to human capital. **For ex-** [Customer service jobs are under threat from the AI chatboxes \(Zomato's Zia\)](#).

3. Use for Malicious Purposes- Generative AI systems based on advanced artificial neural networks can be used to create content for malicious purposes, such as **deepfakes**, disinformation, and propaganda. Nefarious actors may use AI-generated media to manipulate people and influence public opinion, like [use for Post Truth Doctrine](#).

4. Concern over Data Privacy- There are emerging concerns in regard to data privacy in using AI technology. **For ex-** [Use of AI in healthcare involves collecting private information about individuals](#), which raises concerns about data privacy.

5. Issues Related to Copyright and plagiarised contents- AI technology has been associated with copyright violations and production of plagiarised content. **For ex-** [Getty Images has sued Stable Diffusion](#) (Generative AI Company), [accusing them of copyright violations](#).

6. Limitations in Creativity- AI systems lack creativity, originality and human ingenuity as [they use past data as a template](#) for future work.

7. Environmental Concerns- AI systems require a lot of computing power, which have grave implications for the environment. **For ex-** [According to analysts, training a transformer model just once with 213 million parameters can emit carbon emissions equivalent to 125 flights between New York and Beijing](#).

What should be the way Forward?

1. De-biasing while training the AI- We must ensure fairness of the information which is being fed into the system, to ensure that AI [doesn't perpetuate](#) or amplify social biases, like [gender](#) and [racial biases](#).

2. Transparency of information- Users should have transparent information about the limitation and risks of AI.

3. Privacy protection- The user data and confidentiality must be protected to ensure user privacy. **For ex-** [Strict implementation of data protection laws](#).

4. Ethical use of AI- We must ensure that AI is used only for beneficial purposes. The push must be made towards [universal adoption of the Bletchley Declaration](#) by all the countries.

Conclusion

India's progress in AI and scientific research has been hindered by decades of low funding, inefficient governance, and inadequate support for blue-sky research. Many Indian researchers face challenges like resource constraints and administrative burdens, limiting their ability to focus on cutting-edge research. The 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics serves as a reminder of the importance of supporting fundamental research, which often leads to technological breakthroughs. Dismissing such research risks missing out on future opportunities in AI and other emerging fields.

[Read More- The Hindu](#)

[UPSC Syllabus- GS 3 Science and Technology](#)

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Rice Fortification in India- Needs and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

Recently, the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the continuation of the **universal supply of fortified rice under all Union government schemes**, including the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), from July 2024 to December 2028. The primary goal of the scheme is to enhance the nutritional security for all citizens. However, concerns have been raised by the public health experts regarding the scheme.



Source- Down to Earth

What is rice fortification? What is the rice fortification scheme?

Rice fortification- It is the process of adding **essential micronutrients** like iron, folic acid, vitamin B-12, zinc, and vitamins A, B-1, B-2, B-3, and B-6, to rice to enhance its nutritional value. This process seeks to improve the nutritional quality of rice, and help address micronutrient deficiencies and public health concerns.

Rice Fortification Scheme

Type of Scheme	It is a centrally funded initiative , with 100% of the costs covered by the central government. The initiative is part of PMGKAY and aims to provide a unified institutional mechanism for its implementation.
Aim of the Scheme	This initiative aims to combat anaemia and address micronutrient deficiencies across the population.
Distribution of Fortified rice	The fortified rice will be distributed free of charge through welfare schemes like the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), and PM POSHAN in all States and Union Territories.

What are the advantages of Rice fortification in India?

1. Addressing nutritional deficiency- The process of rice fortification significantly helps in addressing the nutritional deficiencies of iron, zinc, and vitamins of Indian population, as rice constitutes a **staple food** for about **65% of the population**.

2. Reduction of Anaemia- Iron fortification specifically targets anaemia, particularly among vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and children. The Improved iron status can lead to **better maternal health** and **reduced risks** during pregnancy.

3. Affordable Intervention- Rice fortification is considered a cost-effective strategy to combat malnutrition as the estimated annual cost for the **scheme is around ₹2,700 crore**, which is manageable given the potential health benefits.

4. Utilization of Existing Infrastructure- The fortification process can be **integrated into existing rice production and distribution systems**, minimizing additional costs and logistical challenges.

5. Cognitive Development and improved educational outcomes- Rice fortification can help in mitigation of cognitive impairments associated with iron deficiency. This will lead to improved educational outcomes.

6. Enhanced productivity of workforce- The rice fortification initiative aims to improve overall public health, reduce healthcare costs associated with malnutrition-related diseases, and enhance productivity in the workforce.

[Read More- Nutritional Security in India- Significance and Challenges- Explained Pointwise](#)

What are the concerns with food fortification in India?

1. Health Risk to Individuals suffering from haemoglobinopathies- Health experts have raised concerns about the indiscriminate distribution of fortified rice, particularly for individuals with **haemoglobinopathies** like **thalassemia** and **sickle cell disease**, as it could lead to serious health complications like organ failure.

2. Undermining of dietary diversity- The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) recommends that no more than **40% of a healthy diet's total calories** should come from cereals, and only a fraction of that from rice. The promotion of consumption of **250-350 grams of fortified rice consumption per day**, could discourage dietary diversity.

3. Concerns about women health safety- Experts warn that the lack of **monitoring for iron fortification's** could be potentially harmful for women. **For ex-** Excessive iron intake in pregnant women can negatively affect fetal development and birth outcomes, which will increase the risk of chronic diseases in children.

4. Commercialisation- Experts have expressed concerns that fortification may benefit industries more than the people. There are concerns that it may be difficult to reverse fortification, even after micronutrient deficiencies are reduced, as commercial players may continue to use it for **profiteering purposes**.

4. Removal of Safety labels by FSSAI- The proposed amendment by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to remove the **warning labels regarding thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia**, has sparked concern among health experts.

What Should be the way Forward?

1. Dietary diversification- The focus must be on safer, long-term, community-based approaches that promote dietary diversification rather than focusing on fortification of a single food source like rice. The NIN, in its **2020 Nutrient Requirements of Indians report**, emphasized the need for a **diverse, natural diet** to meet micronutrient needs, rather than relying on fortification.

2. Increasing the intake of animal-based foods- The focus must be on improving the diet quality by increasing the intake of **animal-based foods and fruits**.

3. FSSAI mandatory labelling and warning- FSSAI must make it mandatory for the suppliers to display warnings about the **potential risks of fortified food to the patients suffering from thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia.**

5. Improving health care services- Improvement of access and utilization of prenatal and postnatal health care services must be prioritized. It would play a significant role in curbing undernutrition **among children through comprehensive awareness programs** and community participation.

Read More- [Down to Earth](#)

UPSC Syllabus- GS 2- Issues related to poverty and hunger

India-ASEAN Relations- Cooperation and Challenges- Explained Pointwise

The PM of India attended the 21st East Asia summit and ASEAN-India Summit in Laos, which will provide a boost to India-ASEAN relations. PM Modi announced a **10 point plan to strengthen India-ASEAN relations.** India is making **concerted attempts** to reboot one of India's most valuable partnerships in Asia and the world. Earlier this year, Delhi had hosted the prime ministers of Malaysia and Vietnam and EAM S. Jaishankar had met several foreign ministers in the region and received them in Delhi. These engagements have once again demonstrated the extraordinary goodwill for Delhi in the ASEAN region and the high expectations from India.

PM Modi's 10 Point plan for Strengthened India-ASEAN Relations

- 1. ASEAN-India Year of Tourism-** Designate 2025 as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism, with India allocating \$5 million for joint activities to promote tourism between member countries.
- 2. Scholarships Expansion-** Double the number of scholarships available at Nalanda University and introduce new grants for ASEAN students at Indian Agricultural Universities.
- 3. People-Centric Activities-** Celebrate the decade of the Act East Policy with events such as Youth Summit, Start-up Festival, Hackathon.
- 4. Women Scientists Conclave-** Organize an ASEAN-India Women Scientists Conclave under the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund.
- 5. Disaster Resilience-** Allocate an additional \$5 million to enhance disaster resilience initiatives.
- 6. Health Resilience Track-** Initiate a new Health Ministers' track aimed at building health resilience across ASEAN nations.
- 7. Trade Agreement Review-** Commit to reviewing the ASEAN-India Trade and Goods Agreement by 2025 to unlock further economic potential.
- 8. Cyber Policy Dialogue-** Establish a regular mechanism for an ASEAN-India Cyber Policy Dialogue to strengthen digital and cyber resilience.
- 9. Green Hydrogen Workshop-** Host a workshop focused on green hydrogen technologies to promote sustainable energy solutions.
- 10. Climate Resilience Campaign-** Invite all ASEAN leaders to participate in the 'Plant a Tree for Mother' campaign, aimed at fostering climate resilience.



Source- The Indian Express

What has been the history of India-ASEAN countries relations?

India's ties with Southeast Asia stretch back more than two millennia. This relation is forged in peace and friendship, religion and culture, art and commerce, language and literature.

Initial Years of engagement	India-ASEAN countries formal engagement began in 1992 as a 'Sectoral Dialogue Partner' (Secretary level interaction). The partnership was instituted as a 'Dialogue Partner' in 1995, which entailed interaction at the Foreign Minister's level. The partnership was elevated to the summit level in 2002 .
Era of Strategic Partnership	At the commemorative Summit meeting celebrating 20 year relationship between India and ASEAN, the partnership was elevated to a strategic partnership . During the 25-year Commemorative Summit in New Delhi (January 2018), India and ASEAN agreed that our Strategic Partnership will be focused on building cooperation in the maritime domain .
Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	The year 2022 marks the 30 years of ASEAN-India relations , and the year has been designated as the year of India-ASEAN countries friendship. At the 19th ASEAN-India Summit to commemorate 30th anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations, the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership . On this occasion, 'Joint Statement on ASEAN-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' was released.

What have been the areas of Cooperation between India and ASEAN Countries?

India's engagement with the ASEAN has been driven by three goals- (i) **enhancing connectivity between India and ASEAN** (i.e. physical, digital, people-to-people, business etc.), (ii) **strengthening the ASEAN organization** and; (iii) **expanding practical cooperation** in the maritime domain.

Geopolitical Cooperation

1. India's engagement with ASEAN is a multi-level interaction process.

Apex Interaction	Annual summits between India and ASEAN, like ASEAN-India Summit .
Support Meetings	Foreign Minister level meetings like ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting (AIFMM) .
Senior Level Meetings	There is regular interaction between senior level officials like AISOM which is prior to the AIFMM and the AI summit .

2. India engages in the '**ASEAN-led frameworks**'- multilateral platforms chaired by ASEAN. India regularly participates in the meetings of the **East Asia Summit (EAS)**, **ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)**, **ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting+ (ADMM+)** and the **Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF)** meetings and its supporting processes.

Geostrategic cooperation

1. **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**- The relationship has evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, with special focus on **maritime cooperation**.

2. **Joint Initiatives**- India and ASEAN have established mechanisms like the **ASEAN-India Cooperation Fund** and **the ASEAN-India Science and Technology Development Fund** to support various collaborative projects.

Geo-Economic Cooperation

1. **Trade Relations**- ASEAN is India's **fourth-largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade reaching around **USD 70 billion**. India recently signed a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA)** in goods in 2009 and expanded this agreement to include **services and investments** in 2014.

2. **Commodities Trade**- Commodity trade between India and ASEAN region has reached **USD 110.39 billion** in April 2021-March 2022, with exports to ASEAN worth USD 42.327 billion and imports from ASEAN worth USD 68.07 billion. This is for the **first time bilateral trade** with ASEAN has **crossed 100 billion**.

3. **Consultation Mechanisms**- The **ASEAN Economic Ministers-India Consultations (AEM + India)** and the **ASEAN-India Business Council (AIBC)** promote Comprehensive Economic Cooperation between India and the ASEAN region.

4. **Investment Initiatives**- Between 2000-2019, cumulative FDIs from ASEAN to India were **\$117.88 billion**. However, these are mainly accounted for by Singaporean investments in India (\$115 billion).

Connectivity Cooperation

1. **Infrastructure Projects**- India-ASEAN relations are characterised by key initiatives, which include the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway** and the **Kaladan Multimodal Project**. These aim to improve transport links between India and ASEAN countries, particularly enhancing access to Northeast India.

Cultural and Social Cooperation

1. **Educational Exchanges**- Programs such as **scholarships for ASEAN students in Indian institutions** and various cultural exchange strengthen people-to-people ties.

2. Capacity Building- Collaborative efforts between India and ASEAN includes capacity building in various sectors. This promotes **youth and women's participation in social development programs**.

[Read More - India and East Asia Relations](#)

What are the Challenges in India-ASEAN relations?

1. Geopolitical concerns- The complex regional environment with the **sharpening of US-China conflict** and **Delhi's own deepening troubles with Beijing**, is a major geopolitical concern for the relations. Further, **India's membership of the newly revived Quad** has also raised concerns in the region.

2. Geostrategic Challenges- The embroilment of ASEAN member states in territorial disputes like **South China Sea Dispute**, **complicates India's engagement with ASEAN**, as India seeks to navigate these disputes while promoting stability in the region.

3. Economic Concerns-

a. Walking out of RCEP- Delhi's decision to walk out of the **regional negotiations on trade liberalisation (RCEP)** at the eleventh hour has created a sense of economic disappointment for ASEAN members.

b. Growing Trade Imbalances- India faces a **growing trade deficit with ASEAN**, with China being the largest trading partner for ASEAN countries. There has been sluggish progress in India-ASEAN trade due to issues related to **implementation, customs procedures, and non-tariff barriers**.

c. Slow Implementation of Connectivity Projects- There has been slow progress on the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway projects, when contrasted with the China's Belt and Road Initiative, which has gained traction among some ASEAN nations.

d. Trade and Investment Barriers- Non-tariff barriers, such as **complex customs procedures** and **inconsistent regulations**, hinder smoother trade and investment flows between India and ASEAN countries.

Internal Divisions within ASEAN

Differing Responses to Myanmar- The military coup in Myanmar has led to varied reactions among ASEAN members, and has complicated collective action. This division makes it difficult for India to align its policies with ASEAN regarding the **regional stability** and **democratic restoration in Myanmar**.

What should be the Way Forward?

1. Redressal of Geopolitical concerns- India should reassert its **stand squarely behind ASEAN in the regional security architecture**. Delhi's efforts at reassuring ASEAN have shown a measure of success, with the region opening up to more defence and security cooperation with India.

2. Focus on emerging areas- India should also focus on enhancing cooperation in new areas such as **digitalisation, health, space technology** and **advanced manufacturing** to strengthen regional ties.

3. Semiconductor Diplomacy- India's '**semiconductor diplomacy**' with Malaysia and Singapore, both of which have significant capabilities in semiconductor production, should be extended with other ASEAN member countries.

4. Accelerated Infrastructure Development- Accelerating key connectivity projects, such as the **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway** and **the Kaladan Multimodal Project**, will further enhance trade and people-to-people connections.

5. Enhanced Trade Agreements- Expansion of the scope and effectiveness of the **ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement** (FTA) can help in addressing trade imbalances and reduction of non-tariff barriers.

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UPSC Syllabus- India and Its Neighbourhood relations- GS 2

Classical Languages of India – Explained, Pointwise

In 2004, the Indian government began recognizing certain languages as “classical languages” of India to highlight their historical importance. Tamil was the first language to receive this status in 2004. Over time, other languages such as Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Odia were also recognized. In October 2024, the government conferred the classical language status to 5 new languages Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Pali, and Prakrit.

This decision brings the total number of classical languages in India to 11. The move aims to preserve and promote these languages, which have significant historical, literary, and cultural importance .

The five languages were granted classical language status based on their fulfillment of the key criteria set by the Government.

Classical languages of India

India’s classical languages are those that hold great historical significance, possessing a rich corpus of ancient literature. Currently, the eleven classical languages are:

1. Tamil (2004)
2. Sanskrit (2005)
3. Telugu (2008)
4. Kannada (2008)
5. Malayalam (2013)
6. Odia (2014)
7. Marathi (2024)
8. Bengali (2024)
9. Assamese (2024)
10. Pali (2024)
11. Prakrit (2024)

What is the criterion for qualification for classical language status?

The decision to declare a language as a “classical language” in India is based on a well-defined set of criteria established by the government. These criteria were first introduced in 2004 and have been periodically revised, most recently in 2024. Here’s a detailed look at the basis for granting classical language status:

1. **High Antiquity:** The language must have ancient texts or recorded history that dates back at least 1500 to 2000 years. This antiquity demonstrates the long-standing existence of the language and its influence over time.
2. **Ancient Literature:** The language must possess a body of ancient literature or texts that are regarded as valuable heritage by generations of speakers. These texts typically span various fields such as philosophy, religion, literature, and science.

3. **Originality in Literary Tradition:** The literary tradition of the language must be original, meaning it is not borrowed from another speech community.
4. **Distinctiveness:** The classical language should exhibit a significant distinction from its modern form or its linguistic offshoots. This means that the even though the language has undergone notable changes over time, it has a preserved ancient form, distinct from contemporary usage.

In 2024, Linguistic Experts Committee (LEC) further **refined the criterion** as follows.

1. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500–2000 years.
2. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a heritage by generations of speakers.
3. **Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.**
4. The Classical Languages and literature could be distinct from its current form, or could be discontinuous with later forms of its offshoots.

On what basis new languages were declared classical languages?

Here's how each language qualified for this prestigious recognition:

Marathi

- **Antiquity:** Marathi traces its roots to **Maharashtri Prakrit**, a language spoken in western India during the Satvahana dynasty. The earliest inscriptions in Prakrit date back to the 1st century BCE. A significant example is a 739 CE copper plate found in Satara, which provides historical evidence of Marathi's antiquity.
- **Literary Tradition:** Marathi has a long and rich literary history from 13th century, with notable ancient texts like the *Dnyaneshwari* and *Tukaram Gatha*. Its medieval literary corpus is considered valuable heritage by generations of speakers.

Bengali and Assamese

- **Antiquity:** Both Bengali and Assamese have evolved from **Magadhi Prakrit**, with historical texts and inscriptions dating back to the timeline from the 6th to the 12th centuries. Both have a deep connection to early eastern Indian languages and shares roots with Assamese. It was also the official language of the Magadha court in East India.
- **Literary Tradition:** Bengali boasts a rich classical literature, including early texts such as *Charyapada* (Buddhist mystic songs from the 8th century CE). The language's medieval and early modern literary corpus, including works by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Rabindranath Tagore, has made significant cultural contributions.

Pali and Prakrit

The term "Prakrit" doesn't refer to just one language but rather a collection of closely related Indo-Aryan dialects.

These vernacular languages became associated with heterodox religious movements, such as Buddhism and Jainism, which emerged during the first millennium BCE. **For example, Jain religious texts**, like the Agamas and Gatha Saptashati, were written in Ardhamagadhi Prakrit, a dialect considered definitive by some scholars.

Similarly, **Pali**, a language derived from Magadhi Prakrit with some Sanskrit influences, was used in the Theravada Buddhist Canon, known as the Tipitaka. It is believed to have been the language spoken by the Buddha himself and remains in use in countries where Theravada Buddhism, such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, thrived.

What are the constitutional provisions related to Languages in India?

Article 343: Hindi in Devanagari script is the official language of the Union. However, English continues to be used for official purposes until otherwise decided by law. Parliament may authorize the continued use of English for official purposes by enacting legislation.

Article 345: state legislatures are allowed to adopt **any official language** for the state.

8th Schedule (Articles 344(1) and 351)

- The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists the official languages recognized by the government. Initially, it included 14 languages, but as of now, 22 languages are recognized, including Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, and Urdu.
- Article 344(1) provides for the constitution of a Commission by the President to make recommendations on the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes and the restriction of English use.
- Article 351 directs the Union to promote the spread of Hindi and develop it so it becomes a medium of communication for all Indians, drawing upon other Indian languages to enrich it.

What are the Benefits of Identification of Classical Languages of India?

Cultural Preservation: These languages have been essential in preserving and transmitting India's ancient knowledge systems, philosophies, and values across generations for thousands of years. For example, Tamil's recognition as a classical language has led to an increase in research and preservation efforts for its ancient texts .

Recognition to the contribution of language: By recognizing these languages as classical, the government acknowledges their deep-rooted antiquity, vast literary traditions, and their invaluable contribution to the cultural fabric of the nation.

Academic and Research Promotion: Scholars working in these languages receive government support and awards, enhancing the study and promotion of the language .

- Two international awards are given annually to scholars who have made notable contributions to the research, teaching, or promotion of classical Indian languages.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) is requested to create Professional Chairs in central universities to support the study of these classical languages.
- A Centre of Excellence for Studies in Classical Languages is established to support advanced research.

Employment and Opportunities: The preservation of ancient texts, archiving, and translation efforts create employment opportunities. For instance, the recent addition of Bengali and Assamese as classical languages will boost research and employment in their respective states .

Sense of Pride: it instills a sense of pride and ownership among the speakers of these languages, promoting national integration and aligning with the broader vision of a self-reliant and culturally rooted India.

What are the Challenges Associated with identification of Classical Languages in India?

1. **Diminished Native Speakers:** Many classical languages, such as Pali and Prakrit, no longer have active native speakers, which makes preservation efforts difficult. Languages like Pali have been out of everyday use for centuries .
2. **Lack of Digital Resources:** The process of digitizing ancient manuscripts and making them accessible is slow and costly. There is a significant gap in bringing classical language texts into the digital era.

3. **Limited Educational Integration:** Despite being classical, these languages are often not integrated into mainstream education systems. Many of these languages are not taught in schools, leading to a loss of knowledge among younger generations

What Should Be Done?

1. **Expand Educational Outreach:** Classical languages should be integrated into school curricula, particularly in regions where these languages were historically spoken. For example, integrating Prakrit and Pali into university studies will help preserve these languages
2. **Digital Preservation:** Governments should prioritize digitizing ancient texts to make them widely available. Tamil, which has benefitted from extensive digitization efforts, serves as a good example of how this can be done
3. **Promote Public Awareness:** Cultural events, academic conferences, and community outreach programs should be organized to raise awareness about the importance of preserving classical languages. Collaboration with international universities can further expand research efforts

By addressing these challenges and implementing targeted initiatives, India can ensure the long-term preservation and flourishing of its classical languages, safeguarding its rich linguistic heritage for future generations.

Gig Workers in India – Challenges and Way Forward – Explained Pointwise

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment is drafting a national law to incorporate gig workers into social security schemes. This move aims to provide benefits such as health insurance and retirement savings to gig workers, a growing segment in the Indian economy. The government plans to require aggregator companies to contribute 1-2% of their revenue to create a social security fund for gig workers. The proposed law will establish a welfare board model to create a fund for gig workers' social security.

In the light of this development, we need to analyse the present status and challenges faced by gig workers in India.

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What is the present status of gig economy and gig workers in India?

Gig workers include ridesharing drivers, food delivery couriers, parcel delivery etc.

As of now, India has around **7-8 million gig workers**, and this number is rapidly growing. NITI Aayog estimates that the numbers of gig workers could expand to 23.5 million by 2029–30.

The gig economy is expected to expand at a **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 12%**, reaching **23-25 million workers by 2030**. This would mean that gig workers would make up **4.1% of India's total workforce** by that time.

A report by **Boston Consulting Group (BCG)** suggests that the gig economy could potentially create **90 million non-farm jobs**.

The gig economy could create 90 million non-farm jobs and contribute an additional 1.25% to India's GDP, reflecting its potential as a significant economic driver.

What are factors behind rapid growth of gig economy in India?

The COVID-19 Pandemic During the lockdowns, many traditional jobs were disrupted, pushing people to seek alternative employment opportunities. With companies moving toward remote work and freelancers offering essential services like food delivery, healthcare support, and logistics, the gig economy became a viable option for many.

Digital Revolution: India's rapid digitalization has been a game changer. The increased access to smartphones, affordable internet, and the rise of platforms like Zomato, Uber, Swiggy, and Ola have provided gig workers with more opportunities.

Changing Workforce Preferences: Today's workforce, particularly younger generations, prefer flexible work arrangements over traditional full-time employment. The gig economy offers workers autonomy, allowing them to manage their own schedules and choose tasks or projects based on their interests or needs.

Additional income: Due to increasing cost of living and inflations, many people, especially those in lower-income groups, are turning to gig work to supplement their earnings.

Business Demand for Cost-Effective Solutions: Companies, particularly startups and small businesses, are leveraging gig workers to reduce costs. Instead of hiring full-time employees, businesses can hire gig workers for specific projects or tasks.

Who are gig workers?

As per NITI Aayog, Gig workers are those engaged in livelihoods outside the traditional employer-employee arrangement. It classifies gig workers into platform and non-platform-based workers.

1. **Platform workers** are those whose work is based on online software apps or digital platforms.
2. **Non-platform gig workers** are generally casual wage workers in the conventional sectors, working part-time or full time.

The Code on Social Security, 2020 also defines gig workers as those engaged in livelihoods outside traditional employer-employee relationship.

Government initiatives for gig workers in India

Labour falls in the Concurrent List of the Constitution, meaning both the Centre and states have jurisdiction over the sector.

Code on Social Security, 2020: The Code on Social Security, 2020 provides for framing of suitable social security measures for gig workers and platform workers on matters relating to life and disability cover, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits, old age protection, etc. The Code also provides for setting up a Social Security Fund to finance the welfare scheme. Section 113 of the Code on Social Security, 2020 provides for registration of unorganized workers, gig workers and platform workers. However, Social Security Code passed by Parliament in 2020 hasn't been implemented yet because the rules are yet to be framed by all states.

e-shram Portal: Government of India has also launched an online portal – e-shram – for registration of all informal and gig workers.

Rajasthan Act: Rajasthan was the first state to introduce a law for gig workers, enacting the Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act on July 24, 2023. This law established a welfare board and unique IDs for workers, and a system to monitor payments through a Central Transaction Information and Management System (CTIMS).

Karnataka Act: Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill-2024 provides provisions against unjust dismissal of gig workers and a dispute resolution mechanism. The labour department will set up a welfare board and a welfare fund for the workers.

What are the downsides of non-recognition of gig workers as Traditional formal employees?

Currently, Indian labour and employment laws recognize three main categories of employees:

- 1) Government employees,
- 2) Employees in government-controlled corporate bodies known as Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs)
- 3) Private sector employees who may be managerial staff or workmen.

All of the above formal employees are ensured certain working conditions, such as minimum wages under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, a set number of hours of work, compensation for termination, etc.

Since gig workers in India lack the 'employee' status under Indian law, it has resulted in several consequences, such as an inability to form unions to represent their interests, exploitative contracts, etc. Therefore, there is also an absence of any tripartite dialogue between the government, employer's organizations and gig worker's unions.

What are the lacunas in present initiatives of government?

Absence of traditional employee status: The Karnataka Bill and Rajasthan Act, like the Code on Social Security 2020, avoids defining employment relations in gig work by using "aggregator" instead of "employer,". It places them outside traditional employer-employee relationships, which limits their access to full labor rights and protections. This prevents the application of protective labor laws to gig workers.

Minimum wages: Institutional protection such as minimum wage protection are missing for gig workers. Occupational safety and health regulations do not apply for gig workers.

Welfare Boards shortcomings: Historically, welfare board models have been poorly implemented, as shown by the Construction Workers Welfare Act of 1996 and the Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, where available funds were underutilized.

Exclusion: Gig workers are not included under the Industrial Relations Code 2020 and are not covered under the dispute resolution mechanism.

Misuse of Power balance by employers: As per the ILO study, asymmetric relations of power and control between workers and platform companies lead to many issues. Not only are workers working without legal status and safety nets, there has also been a gradual pullback of the incentive structure and income levels of workers which had motivated them to join the platform economy in the first place.

e-Shram portal: Like informal workers, gig workers are required to register themselves under the e-Shram portal through self-declaration.

Formal companies with informal workers: Many gig employers, as in some of the well-known companies, operate as formal entities within the formal sector. Therefore, exclusion of gig workers from the traditional employment framework is not justified.

Social Security Gap: The Social Security Code 2020 sets to provide gig workers with only certain social security schemes but not institutional social security, which is provided to formal employees. For example, under institutional social security coverage, formal workers get 26 weeks of paid leave along with job security for the

entire period of maternity under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961. Whereas, under social security schemes, for maternity benefits, there is a cash benefit such as ₹5,000-₹10,000 for registered informal workers.

Low Compensation and platform related issues: Despite being easy to enter, many gig jobs offer inadequate compensation and lack the benefits typical of traditional employment. Platforms have multiple other issues like (a) Frequent and random changes to the commission structure, (b) Delays in payments, (c) Deliberate miscommunication of earnings potential to attract gig workers

Gender Disparities: Women in the gig economy face challenges such as limited career advancement, lack of bargaining power, and lower pay due to gender-based discrimination.

Bad treatment: Due to non-recognition of workers, food delivery workers are often treated badly by the restaurants and order placing stores and even by security guards of housing societies.

What should be done?

Defining Employment Relations: The article argues that the key to securing gig workers' rights lies in clearly defining the employment relationship between aggregators and gig workers. U.K. Supreme Court ruled in the Uber case, where Uber drivers were classified as workers and Uber was considered an employer. A similar approach in India could formalize gig work and provide workers with necessary protections.

NITI Aayog's recommendations for welfare of gig workers in India

Financial Inclusion: Access to institutional credit may be enhanced through financial products specifically designed for platform workers and those interested to set-up their own platforms.

Skill development: Platform-led models of skilling and job creation need to be promoted for the gig and platform sector. This will create avenues for horizontal and vertical mobility for workers to take up jobs in the gig and platform sector.

Enhancing Social Inclusion: Gender Sensitisation and Accessibility Awareness Programmes for workers and their families should be undertaken. Platform businesses can undertake partnerships with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to enable different sections of workers such as women workers and PwDs.

RAISE Framework

NITI Aayog has proposed a five-pronged RAISE approach to ensure realisation of full access to social security for all gig and platform workers.

Recognise the varied nature of platform work to design equitable schemes.

Allow augmentation of social security through innovative financing mechanisms.

Ensure benefits are readily accessible to workers.

Incorporate, while designing schemes, the specific interests of platforms, factoring the impact on job creation, platform businesses and workers.

Support workers to subscribe to government schemes and welfare programmes through widespread awareness campaigns.

Source: NITI Aayog

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