9 PM Current Affairs
Monthly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination

December
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UPSC

सत्यमेव जयते

Features :

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

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Importance of research security in India

Source: The post importance of research security in India has been created, based on the article "**Research security should be a national priority**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 2nd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Security

Context: The article highlights the importance of research security in India as it invests in advanced technologies. It discusses risks like cyberattacks and foreign interference, global examples of breaches, and suggests measures to protect sensitive research while balancing openness and collaboration.

For detailed information on **Research and Development in India** read this article here

What is the importance of research security for India?

1. India aims to achieve its development goals by 2047, emphasizing science and technology.

2. Investments in areas like AI, biotechnology, and quantum technology are critical.

3. Research security protects sensitive data, intellectual property, and national interests from risks like foreign interference and cyberattacks.

4. A breach can delay progress and expose critical data to adversaries.

What are the global risks related to research security?

1. A Harvard professor was arrested for hiding links with Chinese funding while receiving U.S. defense funds.

2. COVID-19 vaccine research was targeted by cyberattacks in 2020.

3. The European Space Agency (ESA) faced cyberattacks, leading to partnerships with the European Defence Agency on cybersecurity.

4. These incidents highlight vulnerabilities in advanced research and the need for strong protections.

How are other countries addressing research security?

Several nations have developed policies:

1. **United States**: The CHIPS and Science Act includes research security measures. The National Institute of Standards and Technology offers guidelines.

2. **Canada**: Policies include National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships and restrictions on collaborations with countries like China and Russia.

3. **European Union**: A risk-based approach emphasizes self-governance, proportionate responses, and guidelines for Horizon Europe.

4. China's military-civil fusion strategy integrates civilian research with defense applications.

What steps can India take to promote research security?

1. **Vulnerability Mapping:** Systematically identify risks by assessing foreign influences and insider threats in universities and key labs, as seen in the arrests at Harvard University linked to undisclosed foreign funding.

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2. **Develop Guidelines:** Create a research security framework similar to the European Council's risk-based approach, minimizing over-regulation while protecting critical research areas.

3. **Engage Experts:** Collaborate with researchers to understand sensitive areas, essential for designing effective security measures.

4. **Global Partnerships:** Build capacity by working with trusted international partners, learning from global instances like the cyberattacks on COVID-19 vaccine research and ESA.

5. **Institutional Framework:** Establish a dedicated research security office within the Anusandhan National Research Foundation to coordinate efforts and ensure research is "as open as possible, as closed as necessary."

What are the challenges to implementing research security?

1. **Conflict with Academic Freedom**: Research security may restrict international collaborations. For example, open data sharing and partnerships drive scientific progress but could be limited by security measures.

2. **Balancing Open Science and Security**: Open science initiatives, like shared infrastructure and citizen science, are crucial. However, strict controls can hinder these efforts, affecting innovation.

3. **Bureaucratic Overload**: Indian research institutions already face excessive regulations. Adding security measures could increase the burden on researchers and slow progress.

4. **Risk of Misuse**: Security measures could become tools for political interference. Ensuring decisions are science-driven is crucial.

Question for practice:

Examine the importance of research security for India in the context of its development goals and the challenges of balancing openness with protection.

Urban health challenges

Source: The post Urban health challenges has been created, based on the article "**India's cities, their non-communicable disease burden**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 2nd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Context: The article discusses poor health outcomes in urban areas, especially among marginalized workers. It highlights the need for better implementation of health policies, better access to healthcare, and the use of technology for health monitoring. It calls for collaborative action to create healthy cities for all.

For detailed information on **Research and Development in India** read this article here

What Are the Challenges Faced by Urban Marginalized Workers?

1. Marginalized workers, like gig workers, drivers, and sanitation workers, face poor working conditions.

2. Many lack health insurance and work in unhygienic environments. Sanitation workers, for example, clean cities while deprived of hygiene and nutrition.

3. **Financial Instability**: High out-of-pocket (OOP) medical costs lead to financial crises during health emergencies.

4. **Limited Healthcare Access**: Public healthcare systems fail to serve marginalized groups adequately.

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How Is Urbanization Affecting Health?

1. Urbanization has led to 50% of the world's population living in cities, projected to reach 70% by 2050.

2. In India, 49% of the urban population lives in slums, facing poor living conditions (UN-Habitat, 2022).

3. Rapid urbanization contributes to fragmented, overburdened health systems.

4. Hazardous environments and limited healthcare access harm marginalized groups like migrant workers and slum dwellers.

5. India's workforce includes 41 million inter-State migrants (Census 2011), adding to health challenges.

6. Rising non-communicable diseases (e.g., diabetes, hypertension) are noted despite reduced tobacco use (NFHS 2005-2021).

How Can Technology Help Improve Health Outcomes?

1. Real-time Health Monitoring: Tools can monitor hypertension and diabetes, enabling individuals to track their health ("health in our hands").

2. Screening through technology offers two advantages:

a. It provides population-level data for epidemiological modeling and public health planning.

b. It raises individual and community awareness of health risks.

3. Community-based Health Education: Technology aids in creating sustainable health promotion activities, reducing health system burdens. It helps inform people about healthcare pathways and social protection schemes, reducing out-of-pocket expenses.

What Should be Done?

1. State-level NCD action plans must focus on primary healthcare access for marginalized groups.

2. Collaboration is needed between local bodies, health departments, and communities.

3. Community-led health surveillance systems can address non-communicable diseases (NCD) challenges in urban settlements.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges faced by urban marginalized workers and how technology can help improve their health outcomes.

India's plan to establish an AI Safety Institute

Source: The post India's plan to establish an AI Safety Institute has been created, based on the article "**What India's AI Safety Institute could do**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 2nd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3 – Science and Technology – S&T effects on everyday life

Context: The article discusses India's plan to establish an AI Safety Institute under the IndiaAI Mission. It emphasizes learning from global initiatives, focusing on technical research, international collaboration, and addressing societal risks while avoiding overly strict regulations that hinder innovation.

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For detailed information on **India AI Mission** read this article here

What is the AI Safety Institute?

1. The AI Safety Institute is a proposed initiative under IndiaAI Mission. It aims to enhance India's AI safety and governance capabilities.

2. It focuses on technical research, risk assessment, and building global partnerships in AI safety.

3. The Institute aims to address risks like **bias, discrimination, social exclusion, gendered risks, labor market impacts, and privacy concerns**.

4. Supported by a **₹10,372 crore budget**, it positions India as a global AI governance leader.

For detailed information on **Regulation of AI** read this article here

Why is AI Safety Important Now?

1. Global Prioritization: Events like the UN Summit of the Future and the Quad Leaders' Summit have highlighted the urgent need for safe AI practices. The Global Digital Compact emphasized human-centric oversight and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

2. Bletchley Process: This international initiative includes AI Safety Summits in the U.K., South Korea, and France, forming a global network of AI Safety Institutes.

3. India's Leadership: India's role in the G20 and Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) showcases its growing influence in shaping AI governance policies globally.

4. Rapid Technological Advances: Countries like the U.S. and U.K. already have AI Safety Institutes collaborating with AI labs for risk assessments and early testing of large models.

How Can India Build Its AI Safety Institute?

1. **Stay Independent of Regulation:** Keep the institute separate from rulemaking to encourage innovation and collaboration.

2. **Focus on Research and Testing:** Conduct risk assessments, red-teaming, and bias identification.

3. **Address Global Majority Concerns:** Focus on risks like bias, social exclusion, privacy, and labor markets.

4. **Join the Bletchley Network:** Collaborate with international safety institutes and share expertise.

5. **Promote Inclusive Governance:** Align with global efforts like the **Global Digital Compact** to prioritize collaboration and inclusivity.

What Can India Achieve?

1. Contribute to global AI governance dialogues.

2. Set a benchmark for evidence-based, human-centric AI policies.

3. Strengthen its role as a global leader in AI safety and innovation.

Question for practice:

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Evaluate the importance of establishing an AI Safety Institute in India to address societal risks and enhance global collaboration.

India's Economic Slowdown and Path to Recovery

Source: The post India's Economic Slowdown and Path to Recovery has been created, based on the article "A push for growth" Published in "Indian Express" on 2nd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Growth

Context: The article discusses India's slowing GDP growth, driven by weak industrial performance, reduced investments, and muted consumption. It suggests improving rural demand, boosting government spending, creating jobs, and offering tax benefits to strengthen domestic demand and sustain growth.

For detailed information on **Sharp slowdown in India's economic growth** read this article here

What is the Current State of India's Economy?

1. GDP growth slowed to **5.4%** in Q2 of 2024-25 from **6.7%** in Q1 and **8.2%** in 2023-24.

2. Industrial growth dropped to **3.6%** in Q2 from **8.3%** in Q1.

3. Sectors like **mining, manufacturing, and electricity** performed poorly.

4. Agriculture grew due to a good kharif harvest.

5. The **services sector** maintained steady momentum.

6. Merchandise exports were weak due to slow global growth.

How has consumption and investment been impacted?

A. Impact on Consumption

1. Moderation in Growth: Private consumption growth slowed to **6%**, which is higher than the **4% growth in 2023-24**, but still moderate.

2. Rural vs Urban: Rural consumption improved due to good **agriculture production**, reflected in **FMCG and two-wheeler sales volumes**. Urban consumption slowed because of **high food inflation** and a **slack IT job market** affecting household income.

B. Impact on Investment

1. Government Capex Decline: Centre's capex fell by **15%** in the first half of the year. State government capex dropped by **11%**.

2. Investment by central public enterprises contracted by **11%** in the same period.

Will growth improve in the second half?

1. GDP growth is expected to recover due to **better agriculture production**, **rural demand**, and likely lower food inflation.

2. Government capex may rise as only **37% (central)** and **28% (state)** of budgeted capex was spent in the first half.

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3. Private investments are gaining momentum, with **capital goods companies** seeing a **10% increase** in order books in 2024-25.

What are the challenges ahead?

1. Imported inflation and global risks like a **trade war** could impact growth.

2. Excess capacity in China may lead to competition in Indian markets.

What steps are needed to sustain growth?

1. Boost consumption by **creating jobs** and providing **tax benefits** in the upcoming budget.

2. Focus on **widening the consumption base** to include all segments of society.

3. Strengthen **domestic demand** to counter global uncertainties and ensure sustainable growth.

Question for practice:

Examine the factors contributing to India's slowing GDP growth and the measures needed to sustain economic recovery.

The role and challenges of State Commissioners under the RPWD Act 2016.

Source: The post the role and challenges of State Commissioners under the RPWD Act 2016 has been created, based on the article "**Citizens with disabilities, making their rights real**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 3rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context: The article highlights the role and challenges of State Commissioners under the RPWD Act 2016. It discusses issues like delayed appointments, lack of independence, ineffective functioning, and suggests best practices, such as Karnataka's initiatives, for better disability rights implementation.

What is the status of disability in India?

1. According to the 2011 Census, persons with disabilities constitute 2.21% of India's population, but the 2019 WHO survey reported severe disability among 16% of Indian adults, indicating underreporting.

2. India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and enacted the RPWD Act, 2016. It aligns national legislation with the UN Convention principles.

3. The Act promotes a rights-based approach and creates the position of State Commissioners for Disabilities.

What are the role and challenges of State Commissioners under the RPWD Act 2016?

A. Role of State Commissioners under the RPWD Act, 2016

1. Monitoring and Review: Oversee the implementation of the RPWD Act across states and ensure compliance with its provisions.

2. Quasi-Judicial Powers: Act like civil courts under Section 82, with powers to investigate violations of the law.

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3. Policy Intervention: Address policies, programs, and actions that violate disability rights and recommend corrective measures.

4. Promoting Research: Undertake studies on disability-inclusive policies and practices, like social protection and climate change impacts.

5. Community Engagement: Interact with persons with disabilities and organizations to address concerns and ensure inclusivity.

B. Challenges Faced

1. Delayed Appointments: Highlighted in *Seema Girija Lal v. Union of India* (2021).

2. Lack of Independence: Majority of Commissioners are civil servants, with only 8 states appointing non-civil service experts.

3. Poor Functioning: Many fail to resolve complaints or address discriminatory practices, eroding public trust.

4. Missed Opportunities: Few states like Karnataka and Delhi ensure proactive engagement through mobile adalats and district reviews.

What are the best practices for effective functioning?

1. Some states like Karnataka have taken positive steps by working with law schools and legal experts to strengthen the capacities of State Commissioners.

2. They also organize mobile courts to address grievances of disabled individuals in remote areas directly and quickly.

3. Additionally, designating District Magistrates as Deputy Commissioners for disabilities has been effective in making local governance more inclusive.

4. Karnataka's practices, like capacity building through law schools, show how evidence-based approaches enhance governance and grievance redressal.

How Can Research Enhance Disability Rights?

1. State Commissioners are encouraged to conduct and promote research on disability rights.
2. Collaborating with UN entities to explore areas such as disability-inclusive social protection and the impact of climate change on disabled persons can help develop more inclusive policies and improve the overall rights situation for persons with disabilities in India.

Question for practice:
Discuss the role, challenges, and best practices for State Commissioners under the RPWD Act, 2016, in ensuring disability rights in India.

Why Manual Scavenging Still Exists in India

Source: The post Why Manual Scavenging Still Exists in India has been created, based on the article "**Express investigation of manual scavenging: The apathy must end**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 3rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

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Context: The article highlights the continued practice of manual scavenging in India despite legal bans and safety mandates. It discusses government failures, lack of accountability, and the social inequalities that force marginalized workers into hazardous sewer-cleaning jobs, risking their lives.

What is the Current Status of Manual Scavenging in India?

1. Manual scavenging is officially banned in India since 1993, but the practice persists.

2. The 2013 law mandates 44 types of protective gear for workers cleaning sewers, yet compliance is poor.

3. Between 2018 and 2023, 443 workers died while cleaning septic tanks and sewers, according to the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

4. Enforcement is weak, with only one conviction for 75 sewer deaths in Delhi over 15 years.

5. Municipalities deny the practice and often fail to provide safety equipment.

6. Private contractors avoid accountability by not keeping proper records.

7. Many deaths occur in prominent locations, such as malls and hospitals in Delhi.

Why do government efforts fail?

1. The Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act (2013) and Supreme Court orders have not been implemented effectively.

2. Civil society groups highlight caste-based discrimination, economic inequalities, and poor sewerage infrastructure as reasons.

3. Machines are often too large for narrow urban lanes, forcing manual work.

For detailed information on **Manual Scavenging** read this article here

What Needs to Be Improved?

The government needs to strengthen enforcement of existing laws, hold contractors and local bodies accountable, and address the social issues that force people into this dangerous work. The success of initiatives like Swachh Bharat Mission should also include the safety and well-being of sewer workers.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons for the persistence of manual scavenging in India despite legal bans and government efforts.

Religious nationalism threatens democracy and minority rights

Source: The post Why Manual Scavenging Still Exists in India has been created, based on the article "**Pratap Bhanu Mehta writes: Why the South Asian neighbourhood is on edge**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 3rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1-Society-Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Context: The article discusses the rise of religious nationalism in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It warns that this ideology harms democracy, increases sectarian violence, and threatens minorities. It argues that religious nationalism will lead to authoritarianism and destroy both human rights and democratic values in these countries.

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For detailed information on **Threat of Majoritarianism to Indian and US Democracies** read this article here

What is the main issue in South Asia?

South Asia, including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, is witnessing rising religious nationalism. This threatens democracy, peace, and human decency. These countries show similar symptoms of communalism, with state policies increasingly targeting minorities and fostering religious conflicts.

What is happening in Bangladesh?

1. **Loss of Legitimacy:** Sheikh Hasina's government faces declining legitimacy. Political rivalry between the Awami League and its opponents dominates Bangladesh's political history.

2. **Rise of Islamism:** Islamist groups are gaining influence, creating risks for minorities, especially Hindus.

3. **Communal Targeting Denials:** The elite deny Hindu targeting, citing reasons like collateral damage or performative secularism. India often exaggerates the situation for political gains, worsening the issue.

What role does India play?

1. **Concerns About Minorities:** India claims concern for minorities in Bangladesh but uses it politically to stoke communalism domestically.

2. **Internal Majoritarianism:** India is normalizing hate speech, lynching, and prejudice. For example, actions like mosque claims and Waqf Board issues escalate communal tensions.

3. **Ayodhya Effect:** The Ayodhya dispute's outcome fuels further Hindu nationalist agendas rather than resolving communal issues.

What is Pakistan's situation?

1. **Religious Identity Crisis:** Pakistan's state identity, based on religion, puts minorities like Ahmadiyyas and Shias at risk. Recent Shia-Sunni violence, such as in Kurram, highlights this problem.

2. **Perpetual Crisis:** The military's weakening legitimacy and religious benchmarking contribute to ongoing instability.

3. **Lessons for Others:** Pakistan demonstrates how state-enforced religion leads to authoritarianism and violence, influencing Hindutva ideologies in India.

What is the key lesson?

1. The identities of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh remain tied due to their shared history of partition and current communal politics. Each uses the other's turmoil to justify its actions, worsening the regional crisis.

2. State-sponsored religious nationalism always leads to authoritarianism, undermines democracy, and causes humanitarian crises.

3. Examples include the communal targeting in Bangladesh, India's majoritarian politics, and Pakistan's religious identity crisis.

Question for practice:

Discuss how religious nationalism in South Asia threatens democracy and minority rights in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

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Challenges of a Three-Child Norm in India

Source: The post Challenges of a Three-Child Norm in India has been created, based on the article "**Reversing family planning: A three-child norm is regressive**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 3rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1-Society-population and associated issues

Context: The article discusses India's declining fertility rate, highlighting concerns about population policies. It critiques Mohan Bhagwat's suggestion for a three-child norm, emphasizing its negative impact on women and societal progress. It advocates improving education, healthcare, and welfare instead of encouraging larger families.

For detailed information on **Population control measures in India** read this article here

What is the Current Fertility Rate in India?

1. India's total fertility rate (TFR) has fallen from over five births per woman in 1965 to 2.01 in 2022.

2. This rate is now below the replacement rate of 2.1.

3. A study by Lancet predicts that by 2050, India's TFR could drop to 1.29.

What are the Concerns with a Three-Child Norm?

1. **Impact on Women's Rights**: Women will bear the disproportionate burden of having and raising children, reversing progress in education and employment.

2. **Low Female Labour Participation**: India's female labour participation rate is already low at 37%, and this policy may worsen it.

3. **Negative Effects on Poor Families**: Women from poorer and conservative families will be the most affected, further entrenching gender inequality.

4. **Administrative Challenges**: India lacks the socio-economic progress and welfare efficiency seen in Scandinavian countries, which successfully support larger families through incentives like equal paternity leave.

What are the Implications for Southern States?

1. Andhra Pradesh, led by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, has removed a two-child limit for candidates in local elections and is considering incentives for larger families. Telangana might follow this example.

2. Southern states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have effectively controlled their population growth, worry about negative impacts on financial awards from the Finance Commission and reduced parliamentary representation. These concerns suggest a need for national policy adjustments.

For detailed information on **What is "Maharashtra's two-child norm" for govt employees?** read this article here

What Should Be the Way Forward?

1. Encouraging larger families would harm social progress.
2. Instead, India should focus on strengthening education and healthcare.
3. This would ensure balanced development and avoid burdening women or reversing societal gains.

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Question for practice:

Evaluate the potential social and economic impacts of implementing a three-child norm in India, as discussed in the article.

Pardoning powers of U.S. and Indian presidents

Source: The post pardoning powers of U.S. and Indian presidents has been created, based on the article "**What are the controversies around pardoning power?**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 4th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

Context: The article explains the pardoning powers of U.S. and Indian presidents, highlighting controversies like Joe Biden's pardon for his son. It compares systems, discusses misuse concerns, and suggests reforms for fairness and trust in democratic processes.

What is the Pardoning Power in the U.S.?

1. The U.S. President has absolute power to grant pardons for federal criminal offences, except in cases of impeachment.

2. A pardon can be issued before or after conviction or even before legal proceedings begin.

3. Historical examples include George Washington pardoning leaders of the Whiskey Rebellion in 1795 and Bill Clinton pardoning his half-brother Roger in 2001.

For detailed information on **Pardoning Power in the U.S** read this article here

What is the Current Controversy?

1. President Joe Biden pardoned his son, Hunter Biden, for federal tax and gun offences.

2. Hunter Biden was convicted of illegally buying and possessing a gun as a drug user and pleaded guilty to tax evasion.

3. The pardon also covers any federal crimes Hunter may have committed between 2014 and 2024.

4. Joe Biden had earlier promised not to pardon his son but justified this decision by claiming selective prosecution.

5. This decision has sparked debates, much like Donald Trump's 2020 pardon of his son-in-law's father.

How Does the Pardoning System Work in India?

1. Articles 72 and 161 of the Constitution empower the President and Governors to grant pardons, commutations, or reprieves.

2. These powers are exercised based on the advice of the council of ministers.

3. In India, a pardon removes conviction, punishment, and related disqualifications.

4. Controversies have arisen due to delays and perceived political motives in mercy petitions.

5. The Supreme Court in *Epuru Sudhakar* (2006) ruled that pardons can be judicially reviewed if they are arbitrary, mala fide, or influenced by external factors.

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For detailed information on **The Supreme Court's Judgment on Pardoning Powers of the Governor** read this article here

What Should be Done?

1. Critics argue that pardoning powers were created during monarchies and are often misused for political purposes.

2. In the U.K., the Criminal Cases Review Commission investigates alleged miscarriages of justice, reducing the use of royal pardons.

3. A transparent system for correcting judicial errors is recommended to maintain trust in democracy.

4. Pardons should avoid nepotism or arbitrariness to ensure public trust in constitutional offices.

Question for practice:

Examine how the pardoning powers of the U.S. President and the Indian President differ and discuss the controversies surrounding their use.

Theatre of Negotiations' experiment

Source: The post Theatre of Negotiations' experiment has been created, based on the article "**Rethinking 'representation' for a meaningful COP30**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 4th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3 - Environment

Context: The article discusses the challenges of climate change negotiations at COP29 and suggests a new approach to representation. It proposes giving equal rights to humans and non-humans, like the atmosphere and oceans, in negotiations, aiming for more inclusive and effective climate action.

Why is COP29 seen as slow progress?

1. COP29 negotiations in Baku faced criticism for limited progress. Critics argue that the lack of a unified global authority and a universal metric for diverse nation-states' interests hinder effective climate action.

2. There is no global authority to act for the planet, making unified action difficult.

3. Diverse political, economic, and social interests of nations hinder consensus.

4. Critics argue that 'business as usual' is not working.

For detailed information on **COP 29 Outcomes** read this article here

What is the 'Theatre of Negotiations' experiment?

1. **Overview**: The 'Theatre of Negotiations' was a week-long event held in May 2015 at Sciences Po, Paris, involving 200 students from 143 universities worldwide.

2. **Purpose**: It aimed to reimagine traditional COP climate negotiations by granting equal representation to both humans and non-humans, such as the atmosphere and oceans.

3. **Representation**: Non-human entities "spoke" through proxies to express their stakes in climate talks. For instance, the "Ocean" imposed conditions on the "United States," and the "Atmosphere" addressed "China" about emissions.

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4. **Inclusive Approach**: Delegations included state representatives, scientists, businesses, and civil society, ensuring diverse perspectives.

5. **Outcomes**: Participants learned the importance of clear communication, while organisers identified logistical challenges.

6. **Significance**: The experiment demonstrated new ways to address climate challenges by rethinking sovereignty and ecosystem interdependence, offering an inclusive model for future negotiations.

How is representation of non-humans evolving globally?

1. Non-humans, like the atmosphere and oceans, are gaining legal and political agency as "interest bearers."

2. Countries like **Ecuador** and **New Zealand** grant legal rights to rivers and ecosystems.

3. **India** and **Pakistan** use courts to provide representation for non-humans.

4. In Canada, institutions recognize the moral standing of non-humans.

5. This reflects a growing trend to expand governance to include environmental entities, ensuring a more inclusive approach to climate action.

What should COP30 in Belém focus on?

1. COP30 in the Amazon could represent the "Amazon" itself as an entity.

2. Transparency and alignment of policies with climate values are essential for success.

3. Hosting COPs in oil-dependent economies erodes trust and progress.

4. New negotiation methods and actionable commitments are needed to bridge the gap between ambition and action.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the representation of non-humans in climate negotiations can lead to more inclusive and effective climate action.

India's Population Growth and Its Wide Impacts

Source: The post India's Population Growth and Its Wide Impacts has been created, based on the article "**Why scrutiny of lower fertility rates isn't the answer to the delimitation crisis**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 4th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1-Society-population and associated issues

Context: The article discusses India's population growth and its political, economic, and social impacts. It highlights the consequences of varying fertility rates among states, suggesting solutions like freezing delimitation, addressing demographic change, promoting economic growth, and focusing on reducing fertility in high TFR states.

What is India's population scenario?

1. India's population is expected to peak at **170 crores by 2070** and decline afterward.

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2. The **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** is **2**, slightly below the replacement level of **2.1**.

3. About **two-thirds** of India's population lives in states with replacement or lower fertility rates.

4. **Five states** have a TFR above 2.1, requiring focused intervention.

5. TFR varies significantly, from **1.5** in some states to **3.0** in others (as per NFHS-5).

6. Population reduction efforts must focus on empowering women and improving reproductive health services in high-TFR states to ensure balanced growth.

For detailed information on **UN Report on India's Population Growth** read this article here

How has delimitation been addressed politically?

1. **Freezing of Delimitation**: Delimitation of Parliamentary seats based on population was frozen in 1976 for 25 years and extended again in 2001 for another 25 years.

2. **Rationale for Freeze**: This measure prevents penalizing states that successfully reduced fertility rates.

3. **Extension Proposal**: Extending the freeze for another 25 years is suggested to maintain fairness.

4. **Alternative Solutions**: Proposals like allocating seats based on vote share were discussed but deemed impractical.

5. States like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, with low fertility rates, might lose Parliamentary representation without this freeze.

How does population affect resource distribution?

1. The Finance Commission allocates resources based on population.

2. Before its 14th edition (constituted in 2013 for 2015-2020), calculations were based on the 1971 population.

3. From the 14th Finance Commission onward, calculations shifted to using current population figures (2011 Census data).

4. To offset disadvantages to states with low fertility rates, a "demographic change" variable was introduced.

5. In the 15th Finance Commission, population was weighted at 15%, and demographic change at 12.5%.

6. States with higher populations benefit more, while states reducing fertility rates receive less unless adjustments are made. This approach balances fairness and supports population control efforts.

For detailed information on **Challenges of delimitation in India** read this article here

Why is increasing fertility in low-TFR states unwise?

1. **Low Fertility Rates Reflect Progress**: States with low Total Fertility Rates (TFR), like 1.5 (NFHS-5), have achieved this by understanding the hardships of large families.

2. **India is Overpopulated**: The population will peak at 170 crores by 2070, requiring high economic growth for a decent standard of living.

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3. **Behavioral Patterns Are Hard to Change**: Residents in low-TFR states may resist efforts to increase fertility due to their existing mindset.

4. **Impracticality**: Raising TFR where it is already low contradicts the goal of reducing overall population pressure.

What should be done?

1. **Enhancing Women's Empowerment**: Empowered women tend to have fewer children.

2. **Improving Reproductive Health Services**: Better services help couples plan smaller families.

3. A multi-pronged approach, including freezing delimitation, improving health services, empowering women, and supporting lagging states economically, is necessary for harmonious relations and balanced development.

Question for practice:

Examine how India's population dynamics influence political representation, resource allocation, and the need for targeted interventions in high TFR states.

Trump's Tariff Policies Reshaping Global Trade Dynamics

Source: The post Trump's Tariff Policies Reshaping Global Trade Dynamics has been created, based on the article "**Ready, set, tariff: Donald Trump's bargaining chip and Delhi's chance to reshape bilateral trade**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 4th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses Donald Trump's tariff-driven policies, focusing on reshaping global trade and finance. It highlights his threats against BRICS, emphasis on leveraging tariffs for foreign policy, and India's need to adapt its trade strategy with the US.

For detailed information on **Trump's Tariffs and Their Impact on Trade** read this article here

What is Trump's tariff strategy?

High Tariffs on Imports: Trump plans to impose 60% tariffs on Chinese imports and 20% on imports from other countries, aiming to reduce trade deficits and strengthen domestic industries.

Tariffs for Foreign Policy: Trump's nominee Scott Bessent highlights tariffs as tools to achieve objectives like increasing allies' defense spending, stopping drug trafficking, and deterring military aggression.

Leveraging US Market Power: The US, being the largest importer, uses its market size to dictate global trade terms.

Actions During First Term: Trump withdrew from the Pacific Free Trade talks, renegotiated NAFTA, and imposed tariffs on China, Canada, and the EU, reshaping global trade relations.

Why does Trump target BRICS nations?

1. Trump threatened 100% tariffs on imports from BRICS nations if they create an alternative currency to the US dollar.

2. He wants to defend the dollar's global reserve currency status.

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3. However, BRICS countries lack unity and financial capability for such a move.

4. India's economic ties with the US remain vital, despite echoing BRICS rhetoric on de-dollarisation.

What challenges do US trade partners face?

1. **Pressure on Negotiations:** Mexico and Canada faced 25% tariff threats over drug and migrant issues, prompting them to negotiate.

2. **Europe's Trade Surplus:** Trump labeled Europe "more dangerous than China," pushing it to reduce trade imbalances.

3. **Limited Retaliation:** European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde advised against retaliatory tariffs, favoring negotiation.

4. **Uncertainty in Trade Relations:** Partners must adapt to Trump's tariff-led foreign policy goals.

What should India do?

1. **Reassess Trade Policies**: India should adapt to Trump's tariff-driven policies by emphasizing reciprocity and mutual benefit, as highlighted by S. Jaishankar.

2. **Leverage US-China Rivalry**: India can strengthen trade ties with the US by using Trump's focus on China to its advantage.

3. **Focus on Mutual Gains**: India should align with Trump's vision of a "fair-trade block" among allies with shared interests. India has an opportunity to align with this vision while protecting its economic interests.

Question for practice:

Examine how Trump's tariff-driven policies influence India's trade strategy and its relationship with the United States.

Analyzing India's Economic Slowdown and Policy Responses

Source: The post Analyzing India's Economic Slowdown and Policy Responses has been created, based on the article "**Bring on the rate cut**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 4th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-growth, development and employment.

Context: The article discusses India's economic slowdown and policy responses. It highlights factors like high interest rates, manufacturing slowdown, and the need for better fiscal and monetary coordination. It emphasizes the importance of targeted reforms, especially in agriculture and food supply chains, to sustain growth.

For detailed information on **India's Economic Slowdown and Path to Recovery** read Article1, Article2

What caused the economic slowdown in India?

1. High real policy rates: Persistent real policy rates higher than unity led to a slowdown in durable consumption, especially among first-time salary earners. Manufacturing and construction, which are interest-sensitive sectors, saw the largest growth slowdown. Like, Firms preferred earning treasury income rather than expanding capacity.

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2. Lack of counter-cyclical policies: Domestic policy did not respond adequately to the falling export growth by boosting domestic demand. This imbalance contributed to the economic slowdown.

3. Simultaneous tightening of policies: Government spending slowed due to the election, while macro-prudential policies tightened in overheated areas. However, monetary policy did not ease to counterbalance these actions.

4. Consumption patterns: Despite the K-shaped recovery, private consumption grew at 6% this year, up from 4% last year, showing the slowdown was cyclical. **Example**: Services continued to grow, indicating a recovery in certain sectors.

5. Inflation and high interest rates: High inflation expectations and tight liquidity also contributed to slow growth.

What role do global factors play in India's growth?

1. Global shocks from U.S. policy: The article mentions that U.S. policy under Donald Trump could lead to global shocks, which would require counter-cyclical domestic policies in India.

2. Impact of global inflation: Global inflation, particularly due to food and fuel prices, affects India's domestic inflation and economic growth.

3. Export growth slowdown: India's export growth has been affected by external factors, further highlighting the impact of global conditions on India's economy.

What can be done to improve the economy?

1. Monetary policy adjustments: A policy rate cut is long overdue to boost demand. High real rates need to be reduced. Cutting rates will help reduce liquidity pressure and support growth.

2. Fiscal reforms in agriculture: Restructure agricultural policies to shift consumer demand to non-grain food items. Like, spending more on vegetables and reducing barriers to private participation in supply chains.

3. Better coordination of policies: Improve fiscal and monetary coordination to ensure smooth growth. The government should support demand while monetary policy should ease when needed.

4. Encourage investment and employment: Induce firms to invest and employ more by ensuring steady growth.

Question for practice:

Examine the key factors contributing to India's economic slowdown and the policy measures needed to address them.

Sixteenth Finance Commission and India's Fiscal Challenges

Source: The post Sixteenth Finance Commission and India's Fiscal Challenges has been created, based on the article "**States and the challenge before the Finance Commission**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 6th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-Indian Polity – Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Context: The article discusses the Sixteenth Finance Commission chaired by Arvind Panagariya, focusing on fiscal challenges in India. It highlights the need for a fair distribution of resources between States and the Union, addressing issues like devolution, growth incentives, urbanization, and demographic changes.

For detailed information on **Fiscal Federalism in India** read this article here

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What is the Role of the Sixteenth Finance Commission?

1. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, led by Arvind Panagariya, is tasked with addressing India's fiscal challenges and improving the financial relationship between the States and the Union.

2. It aims to create a balance between equitable redistribution of resources and incentivizing growth in high-performing States like Tamil Nadu.

For detailed information on **16th Finance Commission** read this article here

How do global trends impact the Commission's decisions?

1. Global economic changes, such as "**friendshoring**" and "**reshoring**," are reshaping trade and investment.

2.These trends provide opportunities for India, especially Tamil Nadu, to strengthen its position in international markets.

3. The Commission must align its policies to support this growth.

How Has the Finance Commission Changed Over Time?

1. Since its first formation in 1951, each Finance Commission has tried to fairly distribute resources.

2. They have increased the States' share of taxes and directed funds to less-developed regions.

3. However, there have been discrepancies in achieving these goals, as shown by the Fifteenth Finance Commission's results where the actual money given to States was only 33.16% of the Union's gross tax revenue instead of the proposed 41%.

What challenges do progressive States face?

1. **Aging Population:** States like Tamil Nadu face rising costs to support an aging population, as their median age is above the national average. This reduces consumption-based tax revenue.

2. **Urbanization:** Tamil Nadu is rapidly urbanizing, with its urban population projected to reach 57.30% by 2031, compared to the national average of 37.90%. This creates infrastructure demands.

3. **Middle-Income Trap:** Progressive States risk stagnation and "growing old before becoming rich."

4. **Fiscal Strain:** Limited fiscal autonomy and inadequate resource allocation hinder these States' ability to sustain growth and address local needs effectively.

What should be done for future resource distribution?

1. States should receive 50% of the gross central taxes to better manage local schemes and expenses.

2. There is a need to balance between giving enough resources to both less-developed and progressive States to support overall growth.

What is the broader impact of the Commission's work?

1. The Commission's decisions affect manufacturing, urban challenges, and climate resilience.

2. Its work is vital for ensuring that all States contribute to and benefit from national progress, aiming to position India among the leading global economies.

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Question for practice:

Examine the impact of global economic trends on the decisions and policies of the Sixteenth Finance Commission.

India strengthens global relations through Modi's visits

Source: The post India strengthens global relations through Modi's visits has been created, based on the article "**A three-nation visit as a foray into summit diplomacy**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 6th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nigeria, Brazil, and Guyana from November 16-21, 2024. It highlights India's focus on strengthening bilateral ties, promoting Global South perspectives, and enhancing cooperation in diverse sectors across three regions.

Why was Nigeria the first stop?

1. **Key Highlights:** Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and the fourth-largest economy. It was invited to the G-20 and BRICS due to its growing global influence.

2. **Ceremonial Honours:** PM Modi was gifted the keys to Abuja and received a national award recognizing India-Nigeria ties.

3. **Bilateral Cooperation:** Discussions included expanding trade, investment, education, energy, and agriculture. India also committed to fighting terrorism and radicalization with Nigeria.

4. **MOUs Signed:** Three MOUs were finalized despite delays.

5. **India's Role:** Nigeria benefits from India's development assistance and human resource programs.

What was India's contribution at the G-20 summit in Brazil?

1. **Focus Areas:** Hosted in Rio de Janeiro (November 18-19), the summit advanced the Global South's perspectives initiated in New Delhi. Key priorities were social inclusion, sustainable development, and governance reform.

2. Achievements:

• Launched the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty.

• Adopted a roadmap for stronger multilateral development banks.

3. Challenges:

• Limited progress on climate finance.

• No significant breakthroughs on UN and WTO reforms.

4. **India's Diplomacy:** PM Modi met leaders from the US, Europe, and the Global South. Indian and Chinese foreign ministers discussed steps for rapprochement.

What made Guyana significant?

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1. **Historical and Strategic Importance:** Guyana has a 40% Indian-origin population and growing energy resources. It also plays a key role in the Caribbean.

2. **MOUs Signed:** 10 agreements covered energy, defence, urban development, and education.

3. **India-Caribbean Community Summit:** PM Modi proposed seven pillars of cooperation, including agriculture, climate change, technology, and culture. These pillars aligned with Caribbean priorities.

4. **Recognition:** Guyana's President praised Modi as a "champion among leaders."

What was the overall outcome?

1. In six days, the visit showcased India's growing global role and commitment to fostering ties.

2. The outcomes included deeper bilateral and regional cooperation, strengthened India's G-20 leadership, and expanded relations with Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Question for practice:

Discuss the significance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nigeria, Brazil, and Guyana in strengthening India's global role and fostering bilateral and regional cooperation.

China's Critical Minerals Control Challenges US Dependency

Source: The post China's Critical Minerals Control Challenges US Dependency has been created, based on the article "**China's mineral export curbs have a silver lining for the US**" published in "**Live mint**" on 6th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-International Relations- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests,

Context: The article discusses China's dominance in critical minerals essential for clean energy and military uses. It highlights U.S. dependence, Trump's anti-green policies, efforts to boost domestic mining, and geopolitical tensions influencing critical mineral strategies during his upcoming presidency.

For detailed information on **Issue with China's Export Restrictions** read this article here

How Does China Dominate Critical Minerals?

1. China plays a crucial role in the global energy transition due to its dominance in critical minerals.

2. It recently banned exports of antimony, gallium, and germanium to the U.S., which are used in semiconductors, ammunition, and electronics.

3. China also restricted graphite exports, a key material for EV batteries and grid storage.

Why Are Critical Minerals Important?

1. **Essential for Energy Transition**: Minerals like graphite, cobalt, and lithium are crucial for EV batteries and grid storage.

2. **Military Applications**: Minerals such as gallium, graphite, and rare earths like lanthanum are used in semiconductors, bombs, and electronics.

3. **U.S. Dependency**: The U.S. depends entirely on imports for 12 of 50 identified critical minerals, including gallium and natural graphite. Over 50% of its supply for 29 others comes from foreign sources.

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What Is the U.S. Doing to Address This?

1. The U.S. is boosting domestic critical mineral production to reduce dependence on imports, especially from China.

2. **Grants and Loans**: The Pentagon funded Graphite One to mine graphite in Alaska. The company is also seeking further loans from the Export-Import Bank to counter China's dominance.

3. **Increasing Mining**: Non-fuel mineral mining employed 150,000 people in 2023, almost matching oil, gas, and coal production combined.

4. **Trump's Presidency Impact**: Trump supports mining and drilling. His administration may ease mine permitting, open federal lands for mineral extraction, and prioritize stockpiling critical minerals to reduce foreign reliance.

What Challenges Lie Ahead?

1. **Geopolitical Tensions**: China's export bans, such as on graphite, impact U.S. supply chains.

2. Decarbonization efforts may slow under Trump, but critical mineral demand will remain high.

3. U.S. dependence on China drives urgency to build domestic capacity despite geopolitical tensions.

Question for practice:

Examine how China's dominance in critical minerals impacts U.S. energy transition and military capabilities.

Brazil's Cadastro Ambiental Rural (CAR) system

Source: The post Brazil's *Cadastro Ambiental Rural* (CAR) system has been created, based on the article "**Let digital public infrastructure help meet climate aims**"published in "**Live mint**" on 6th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article discusses Brazil's *Cadastro Ambiental Rural* (CAR), a digital platform to map and monitor rural land use. It ensures compliance with environmental laws, promotes sustainable practices, reduces costs for farmers. The system could be adapted for other countries to meet sustainability goals and create evidence-based policies.

What is Brazil's CAR system?

1. **CAR (Cadastro Ambiental Rural)** is Brazil's digital rural environmental registry under the Forestry Code.

2. It maps, monitors, and regulates rural properties to promote sustainable land use.

3. Farmers self-declare their land, providing geo-referenced details on boundaries, forest areas, water bodies, and preservation zones.

Why is CAR important for Brazil?

1. **Addresses Deforestation**: Brazil has lost **97% of its native vegetation** due to aggressive agricultural expansion.

2. **Supports Trade Compliance**: CAR helps Brazil meet regulations like the **EU Deforestation**

Regulation, ensuring access to global markets.

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3. **Promotes Sustainable Practices**: Farmers prove compliance with sustainability targets using CAR.

4. **Reduces Costs**: Small producers avoid high certification costs for deforestation-free products.

5. **Facilitates Policy Design**: Policymakers use CAR data to offer **incentives for compliance** and enforce penalties.

6. **Encourages Loans**: Lenders use CAR for verifying sustainability compliance before approving agricultural loans.

7. **Consumer Assurance**: Buyers verify product origins using CAR.

What is CAR's potential for global climate action?

1. CAR could be modular and interoperable like India's digital public infrastructure (DPI).

2. It could integrate with **sustainability certificates**, **benefit transfers**, and other government solutions.

3. Other countries could adapt CAR-like systems for their ecological challenges.

4. CAR can inspire a **climate-change DPI** model.

5. With **CoP-30 in Brazil**, the government could showcase CAR globally.

6. It can help regulators develop evidence-based policies to meet sustainability goals.

Question for practice:

Examine how Brazil's Cadastro Ambiental Rural (CAR) addresses environmental sustainability and supports global climate action.

Lessons learned from the 1896 Bombay Plague

Source: The post Lessons learned from the 1896 Bombay Plague has been created, based on the article "**Public health — insights from the 1896 Bombay Plague**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 7th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health,

Context: The article discusses the 1896 Bombay Plague and how colonial authorities used mapping, policing, and surveillance to control the epidemic. It highlights the shift from focusing on public health to maintaining order and examines lessons for modern public health policies, ethics, and surveillance practices.

What was the Bombay Plague and its impact on Colonial India?

1. The Bombay Plague of 1896-97 was a major epidemic in colonial India.

2. It originated in Bombay through trade with the Far East and spread across the subcontinent, killing over 370,000 people by September 1899. The outbreak exposed weaknesses in public health infrastructure.

3. The colonial government formed the Indian Plague Commission in 1898, chaired by T.R. Fraser, to study the epidemic.

4. Despite extensive investigations and five volumes of documentation, the Commission failed to determine the plague's origins and transmission.

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5. The Indian Plague Commission used maps to highlight control measures rather than disease spread. Unlike John Snow's maps of cholera cases, these maps emphasized railway lines, inspection stations, and quarantine zones.

6.The focus was on maintaining order rather than addressing community health needs.

What role did policing play in managing the plague?

1. Policing was central to controlling the plague. The government used police to enforce quarantines, monitor movement, and collect data.

2. Observation camps near railway stations were operated by police.

3. Military ward orderlies were deployed in hospitals.

4. Chaukidars reported deaths to police stations, a practice that continues in some areas for death registration.
 5. The reliance on policing linked public health with colonial control, prioritizing order over care. The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, gave the state unrestrained powers, often misused.

What were the ethical implications of these measures?

1. Colonial strategies prioritized control over care, raising ethical concerns.

2. Maps and data reinforced power dynamics and overshadowed individual suffering.

3. Control measures were aimed at protecting colonial interests, not improving community health.

4. The Indian Plague Commission's focus on control reflected a lack of transparency and respect for individual rights.

What lessons can be learned for modern public health?

The Bombay Plague provides key insights for today's public health strategies:

1. **Framing health problems**: Prioritize individuals and communities over control measures.

2. **Evolving surveillance**: Transition from policing to health professionals for surveillance reflects ethical progress.

3. **Ethical governance**: Balance effective control with transparency and respect for freedoms.

4. **Power dynamics**: Ensure data collection methods do not reinforce inequities.

5. **Continuity in practices**: Practices like death reporting by police highlight lasting influences of colonial approaches.

By learning from history, policymakers can design surveillance systems that address health crises ethically and effectively.

Question for practice:

Examine how colonial strategies during the 1896 Bombay Plague influenced public health practices and their ethical implications.

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India's Manufacturing Growth and Challenges it Faced

Source: The post India's Manufacturing Growth and Challenges it Faced has been created, based on the article "**Building on the revival of the manufacturing sector**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 7th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-growth, development and employment and changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Context: The article discusses India's efforts to become a global manufacturing hub through the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme. It highlights the sector's growth, challenges like high input prices, the need for regional balance, and focus on MSMEs and women's participation to boost inclusive development. For detailed information on **India Struggling to become a Global Manufacturing Hub** read this article here

What is the Impact of the PLI Scheme on India's Manufacturing Sector?

1. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme has transformed India's manufacturing landscape.

2. It has driven growth in mobile manufacturing, electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and textiles.

3. Manufacturing output grew by **21.5%**, and Gross Value Added (GVA) grew by **7.3%** in 2022-23 (ASI data).

4. Sectors like basic metals, chemicals, motor vehicles, and food products contributed **58% of manufacturing output**, with a growth of **24.5%**.

5. The PLI scheme has enhanced production, exports, and job creation.

What challenges does India face in manufacturing?

1. **Input Costs**: Input prices surged by **24.4%** in 2022-23, causing a gap between output growth (21.5%) and GVA growth (7.3%).

2. **Import Dependency**: High import costs of raw materials impact competitiveness.

3. **Regional Imbalance**: Over 54% of manufacturing GVA and 55% of employment are concentrated in states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh, limiting equitable growth across other regions.

4. **MSME Challenges**: MSMEs contribute 45% to manufacturing GDP but face barriers due to high investment thresholds in PLI schemes. This limits their ability to scale up and integrate into value chains.

5. **Low Female Participation**: Manufacturing output could rise by 9% with increased women's participation. Lack of supportive infrastructure, such as childcare facilities, hinders this potential.

What is India's manufacturing vision for 2047?

1. India aims to raise manufacturing's share in GVA from **17% to 25% by 2030-31** and **27% by 2047-48**.

2. Sustained efforts in domestic manufacturing and value addition are critical.

3. Policies improving ease of doing business will help achieve this vision.

Conclusion: India's manufacturing sector is growing steadily with strong policy support. Expanding PLI, addressing challenges, and fostering inclusivity can make India a global manufacturing powerhouse.

Question for practice:

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Examine the impact of the PLI scheme on India's manufacturing sector and the challenges hindering its growth.

RBI's monetary policy decisions aim to balance inflation control and economic growth

Source: The post India's Manufacturing Growth and Challenges it Faced has been created, based on the article "**Staying the course: The RBI has done well to stay focused on inflation amid rate cut clamour**" published in "**The Hindu**" and the article "**MPC FOCUSES ON STABLE INFLATION, LIQUIDITY BOOST**" published in "**Live mint**" on 7th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-growth, development and employment

Context: The article discusses the RBI's monetary policy. It highlights the decision to keep interest rates unchanged but lower the cash reserve ratio to improve liquidity. The RBI revised GDP growth and inflation forecasts downward due to weak consumption and investment. It emphasizes balancing inflation control with growth, while expecting improved economic conditions in the second half of the year.

For detailed information on **Monetary Policy Transmission** read this article here

What decisions did the RBI's MPC make?

1. **Interest Rate:** The MPC kept the benchmark interest rate unchanged at **6.50%** for the 11th consecutive time.

2. **Focus:** The MPC maintained a **neutral policy stance**, balancing inflation control and growth support.

3. **CRR Reduction:** To improve liquidity, the RBI reduced the **cash reserve ratio (CRR)** by **50 basis points to 4%**, releasing ₹1.16 trillion liquidity in two phases.

4. **Growth Forecast:** The RBI lowered the **GDP growth forecast** for FY25 to **6.6%** from **7.2%**, and for Q1FY26 to **6.9%** from **7.3%**.

5. **Inflation Target:** The FY25 inflation forecast was revised upward to **4.8%** from **4.5%**, reflecting food price spikes.

6. **Support Measures:** Liquidity measures like OMOs and activity in the **NDF market** were enhanced to stabilize the economy.

How Has Inflation Affected the Economy?

1. **Rising Prices**: Inflation spiked in September and October due to high food prices, impacting household spending.

2. **Lower GDP Growth**: Q2FY25 GDP growth fell to **5.4%** from an earlier estimate of **7%**, driven by weak private consumption and investment.

3. **Impact on Urban Spending**: High inflation reduced households' spending power, affecting urban consumption

4. **Balanced Risks**: While inflation risks remain due to adverse weather and global price hikes, cooling measures like the kharif harvest are expected to help.

What are the risks and expectations?

1. Risks include global commodity price rises, adverse weather, and geopolitical uncertainty.

2. The RBI expects inflation risks to remain balanced.

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3. Liquidity support measures, like OMOs, are expected to continue in Q1CY2025.

4. A rate cut cycle may start in **February 2025** with a 50 bps reduction.

How is the economic situation evolving?

1. Domestic economic activity rebounded post-Q2FY25, helped by the festive season and rural demand.

2. The RBI remains hopeful of GDP recovery and inflation cooling in H2FY25.

3. The government may consider steps like **rolling back import duties on edible oils** to ease inflation and boost consumption.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the RBI's monetary policy decisions aim to balance inflation control and economic growth in the current economic scenario.

Risk of silicosis among Indian mine workers

Source: The post risk of silicosis among Indian mine workers has been created, based on the article "**Silica scars: On India's silicosis problem**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 7th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper

Context: The article discusses the severe risk of silicosis among Indian mine workers exposed to silica dust. It highlights government inaction, poor enforcement of safety laws, misdiagnoses, and the exploitation of workers in low-literacy, resource-dependent mining regions.

What is Silicosis and Why is it a Concern?

1. **Silicosis** is a chronic lung disease caused by inhaling microscopic silica dust particles found in sand and stone.

2. It occurs when silica particles lodge in the lungs, impairing their normal function. The risk is age-agnostic but depends on exposure duration. Once developed, it is irreversible and life-threatening.

3. A **1999 report by the Indian Council of Medical Research** estimated over 8 million Indians were highly exposed to silica dust. This number has likely increased due to expanded mining activities to meet India's growth aspirations.

4. Workers often delay seeking medical help until the disease becomes critical.

5. Health-care providers frequently misdiagnose silicosis as tuberculosis, further worsening the problem.

6. Silicosis exemplifies poor enforcement of worker safety laws, especially in resource-dependent regions with limited health-care access.

What Actions Has the National Green Tribunal Taken?

1. On November 29, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) directed the Central Pollution Control Board to create new guidelines for silica mining and washing plants.

2. The Uttar Pradesh government was also instructed to establish health-care facilities near silica mines.

3. These steps aim to reduce health risks and provide medical support for affected workers.

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What Does the Law Say About Worker Safety?

1. The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 requires mine operators to:

• Notify authorities about workplace threats and cases of silicosis.

• Provide free annual health check-ups for workers.

2. However, mine operators often fail to report cases, preventing authorities from tracking workplace practices. States also do not collect this data independently.

What is the Broader Context of This Issue?

1. Mining regions, often with low literacy and health-care coverage, rely heavily on mining for income.

2. This dependency compels workers to endure poor conditions without seeking help, exacerbating the health crisis.

3. The state's lack of proactive measures contrasts with India's active climate justice advocacy internationally.

Question for practice:

Examine how government inaction and poor enforcement of safety laws contribute to the prevalence of silicosis among Indian mine workers.

Warren Buffet's Philosophy on Wealth Redistribution

Source: The post Warren Buffet's Philosophy on Wealth Redistribution has been created, based on the article "**The place of charity in an unequal society**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 9th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Context: The article discusses Warren Buffet's philanthropy and his belief in equalizing opportunities through wealth redistribution. It questions wealth concentration, highlights policy-driven inequality, critiques reliance on private charity, and advocates state-led solutions like taxation and fair wages to address inequality.

What is Warren Buffet's Philosophy on Wealth?

1. Wealth for Equalizing Opportunities: Buffet believes wealth should address inequalities and provide equal opportunities for the less fortunate.

2. Role of Luck: He attributes his financial success to luck, like being born a white male in the U.S., which gave him opportunities denied to others.

3. Philanthropy in Practice: He has donated $52 billion to charitable causes, including $870 million recently transferred to foundations managed by his children.

4. Avoiding Generational Wealth Accumulation: Buffet criticizes the practice of passing wealth to descendants, calling it harmful to society.

5. Philosophical Context: His ideas align with "luck egalitarianism," which argues inequality caused by bad luck should not persist.

6. Moral Responsibility: He emphasizes using wealth to level the playing field rather than perpetuating privilege, advocating for fairness in opportunities.

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What Are the Criticisms of Private Charity?

1. Inequality in Wealth Creation: Private wealth used for charity often originates from systems that create inequality. For example, deregulation and neoliberal policies since the 1980s have increased wealth concentration among a few individuals.

2. Economic Inequality Growth: Wealth inequality surged during the Reagan-Thatcher era, benefiting the wealthy while wages stagnated for the majority.

3. Market Monopolies: Billionaires like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos gained wealth through monopolistic practices, not luck. Amazon workers faced stagnant wages and poor conditions while wealth accumulated for its owners.

4. Unfair Financial Systems: Warren Buffet's wealth grew through financialization and policies that reduced union power and suppressed wage growth.

5. Policy Failures: Differences in opportunities stem from failed policies, not just luck. Effective state intervention is necessary to address these disparities sustainably.

What should be done?

1. Address the Root Causes of Inequality: Focus on policies that prevent wealth concentration rather than relying solely on philanthropy. Wealth inequality is not just luck but a result of poor policy choices, as seen with monopolies like Microsoft and Amazon.

2. Implement State-Led Redistribution: Introduce progressive taxation to reduce inequality. Like, Thomas Piketty advocates for redistributive taxation rather than depending on charity.

Question for practice:

Discuss how Warren Buffet's philosophy on wealth aligns with criticisms of private charity and the need for state-led solutions to address inequality.

S. Jaishankar's statement in Parliament on India-China relations

Source: The post S. Jaishankar's statement in Parliament on India-China relations has been created, based on the article "**A good beginning but China negotiations must continue**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 9th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International relations-India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context: The article discusses S. Jaishankar's statement on India-China relations. It highlights the lack of clarity on disengagement details, the challenges in border management, and the need for transparency. It also calls for greater political unity in addressing India's concerns with China.

For detailed information on **India China Relations** read this article here

What was the focus of the Minister's statement in Parliament on India-China relations?

1. The Minister addressed developments in India-China relations, marking his first detailed statement since the 2020 Eastern Ladakh border tensions.

2. He highlighted China's troop amassment in 2020 and India's counter-deployment, which led to disengagement through negotiations.

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3. He avoided using the term "buffer zones" but referred to "temporary and limited measures" in areas like Galwan Valley and Pangong Lake to prevent further friction.

4. Disengagement is declared complete, but issues like "de-escalation" and restoring patrolling rights in Depsang and Demchok remain unresolved.

5. The statement confirmed that borders remain abnormal with large-scale troop deployments for a fifth consecutive winter.

What Issues Remain Unaddressed?

1. Detailed Terms of Disengagement: The specific arrangements for troop withdrawal and terms of disengagement at various friction points like Depsang and Demchok are not disclosed.

2. Access to Patrolling Points: It's unclear whether Indian troops can resume patrolling at traditional areas, including five points beyond Y-Junction in Depsang Plains and the Charding Nala junction in Demchok.

3. New Patrolling Concepts: The concept of "coordinated patrolling" is undefined, raising questions about the size and frequency of patrols and the extent of restrictions.

4. Status Quo Restoration: Despite disengagement, the status quo along the border has not been restored to the pre-April 2020 conditions, with China reportedly changing it unilaterally.

5. Concerns over Yangtse: Reports suggest Chinese troops are allowed to patrol Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh, despite earlier objections from India labeling their demands "unreasonable."

What should be done?

1. India should avoid permanent buffer zones and insist on restoring the April 2020 status quo.

2. Ensure Transparency: Share disengagement details publicly, as vague terms like "coordinated patrolling" raise questions.

3. Engage Opposition: Build bipartisan consensus, as seen in agreements on Confidence Building Measures (1996) and Political Parameters (2005).

4. Highlight Economic Security Risks: Avoid dependency on Chinese supply chains, given China's history of weaponizing economic ties.

5. Maintain Consistent Messaging: Align Army and Ministry statements to counter China's grey-zone tactics effectively.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the effectiveness of India's approach to addressing the challenges in its relations with China post-2020 border tensions.

Improving Skills and Jobs with Gamified Simulation-Based Learning

Source: The post Improving Skills and Jobs with Gamified Simulation-Based Learning has been created, based on the article "**Gamify India's skilling initiatives**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 9th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-growth, development and employment.

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Context: The article discusses India's unemployment problem and the need for better skilling programs. It highlights the gap between the skills of job seekers and industry needs. The article suggests using gamified and simulation-based training to improve skill development and employability.

For detailed information on **Potential of India's EdTech sector** read this article here

What is India's skilling challenge?

1. India needs 78.5 lakh new non-farm jobs annually until 2030 to meet workforce demands (Economic Survey 2023-24).

2. Only 21% of youth (15-29 years) received vocational/technical training (PLFS 2022-23).

3. Formal vocational training reached just 4.4% of youth in 2022-23.

4. Only 51% of graduates are employable (Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran).

5. Existing skilling programs lack quality, industry relevance, and reach.

How is Industry 4.0 affecting skilling?

1. Introduction of Advanced Technologies: Industry 4.0 (I4.0) integrates artificial intelligence, robotics, IoT, and big data into smart manufacturing.

2. Adoption by Manufacturers: Over two-thirds of Indian manufacturers are expected to adopt digital transformation by 2025.

3. Government Initiative: SAMARTH Udyog Bharat 4.0 supports digital transformation in industries.

How can gamified and simulation-based learning help?

1. Improves Engagement: Gamified learning uses points, badges, and leaderboards, making training interactive and enjoyable.

2. Better Knowledge Retention: Simulation-based learning offers hands-on practice in controlled environments, improving long-term learning.

3. Addresses Skills Gap: Only 1.5% of engineers and 40% of MSME workers have Industry 4.0 skills. Gamified methods can help bridge this gap.

4. Global Examples: Singapore and Germany have successfully integrated gamified and simulation-based training.

How can India implement these methods?

1. Platforms like **SWAYAM** and **Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH)** can host gamified and simulation modules.

2. **SWAYAM**: Over 40 million participants, 93.45% course completions in engineering and sciences.

3. **SIDH**: 7.63 lakh users enrolled in 752 courses, offering 7.37 lakh minutes of digital content.

4. Custom modules can simulate professional scenarios, track trainee progress, and connect students with industry projects.

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For detailed information on **Skill India Digital (SID) Platform** read this article here

Question for practice:

Examine how gamified and simulation-based learning can address India's skilling challenges and enhance employability in the context of Industry 4.0.

India's claim of decoupling economic growth from GHG emissions

Source: The post India's claim of decoupling economic growth from GHG emissions has been created, based on the article "**The issue of India's economic growth versus emissions**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 9th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article explains India's claim of decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions. It highlights that India has achieved relative decoupling, where emissions rise slower than GDP, but absolute decoupling, where emissions decline with growth, remains a distant goal.

For detailed information on **India's Strategy for Net Zero** read this article here

What is the meaning of Decoupled Economic Growth from GHG Emissions?

1. **Definition:** Decoupling means breaking the link between economic growth and environmental degradation. It shows a nation's ability to grow economically without proportionally increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

2. Types of Decoupling:

• *Absolute Decoupling:* Economic growth occurs while emissions decrease. Example: GDP rises, but emissions fall.

• *Relative Decoupling:* Both GDP and emissions grow, but GDP grows faster. Example: India's GDP grew six-fold since 1990, while emissions tripled.

3. **Importance:** Decoupling balances growth, reduces emissions, and addresses energy poverty, ensuring sustainable development in developing nations like India.

Has India Decoupled Economic Growth from GHG Emissions?

1. Economic Survey's Claim: Between 2005 and 2019, India's GDP grew at a CAGR of 7%, while GHG emissions rose at a slower CAGR of 4%, indicating relative decoupling but not absolute decoupling.

2. National Data: Since 1990, India's GDP has increased six-fold, but emissions have only tripled. This highlights that the economy has grown faster than emissions.

3. Sector-Wise Analysis: Agriculture and manufacturing, major emission contributors, need further evaluation to confirm decoupling at the sectoral level.

4. Type of Decoupling: India has not achieved **absolute decoupling** (where emissions decline with growth). Instead, emissions continue to rise, though at a slower rate.

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5. Challenges Ahead: As a developing nation yet to peak its emissions, achieving absolute decoupling remains a long-term goal requiring sustainable policies, renewable energy adoption, and emission mitigation strategies.

What More Needs to Be Done?

1. Emissions are expected to rise as India's economy grows and emissions have not yet peaked.

2. Achieving absolute decoupling will require continued efforts in renewable energy, emission mitigation, and sustainable policies.

3. These steps are vital to meet India's long-term climate goals and ensure sustainable development.

Question for practice:

Discuss India's progress and challenges in decoupling economic growth from greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Improving Education for Children Living in Poverty

Source: The post Improving Education for Children Living in Poverty has been created, based on the article "**Indian school education is in need of a radical reboot**" published in "**Live mint**" on 9th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Context: The article discusses the challenges of improving foundational literacy and numeracy in schools, especially for children living in poverty. It highlights the need for better teacher-student ratios, improved resources, better nutrition, social worker support, and a radical rethinking of curriculum and school structures.

For detailed information on **Challenges and Solutions of the Indian Education System** read this article here

What are the challenges faced by children in poverty?

1. Children in poverty have less access to resources, care, and supervision.

2. They face poor nutrition, frequent illnesses, and higher absenteeism.

3. Stress and mental health issues caused by poverty impact learning.

4. These challenges are understood sociologically but not addressed adequately in curriculum or teaching methods.

How can schools improve educational outcomes for these children?

1. Implementing Basic Requirements: Schools need more teachers, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas, to maintain reasonable pupil-teacher ratios (PTR). The article suggests that instead of a standard 30:1 ratio, a 15:1 ratio might be more effective for schools serving impoverished communities. Corruption in teacher education needs addressing, and a supportive and empowering culture for teachers is crucial.

2. Enhancing Resources and Support: Schools should be equipped with adequate classroom spaces, toilets with running water, and sufficient high-quality learning materials. Social workers should be employed to help manage children's individual needs and engage with their families.

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3. Improving Nutrition: The nutritional content of school meals should be improved. The current budget for midday meals is very low, at ₹5.50 per meal, with some states providing additional funds for milk or eggs. A nutritious breakfast should also be provided to help children learn better.

What structural changes are needed in the school system?

1. There is need to shift from age-based classes to grouping students by learning levels, which would allow for more personalized and effective teaching.

2. Teachers could focus on building students' knowledge based on their current learning levels.

3. Additionally, reducing the curriculum load, as recognized by the National Education Policy and the National Curriculum Framework 2023, to focus on essential learning and reduce unnecessary educational pressure.

Question for practice:

Examine how structural and resource-related challenges in schools contribute to poor educational outcomes for children living in poverty.

Food and Energy Security

Source: The post Food and Energy Security has been created, based on the article "**In energy-dependent world, the issue of food security**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 10th December 2024
UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-growth, development and employment

Context: The article examines the critical link between food and energy security in an energy-dependent world. It highlights the intertwined crises of food insecurity and energy poverty, exacerbated by climate change, geopolitical tensions, and socio-economic inequalities, emphasizing the need for integrated solutions to address these global challenges.

Why are food and energy insecurities considered intertwined global crises?

1. Food and energy insecurities are deeply interconnected as agriculture, a critical system for humanity, relies heavily on energy and is both a consumer and contributor to climate change.
2. Addressing one issue without tackling the other undermines global stability, as both systems face challenges like climate change, population growth, geopolitical tensions, and reliance on outdated infrastructure.

How is agriculture dependent on carbon-intensive energy, and what are the impacts?
1. Agriculture uses nearly 70% of global freshwater and contributes over 20% of greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Its reliance on fossil fuels for irrigation, mechanization, fertilizer production, and transportation creates environmental degradation and vulnerability to energy price shocks.
3. Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns further disrupt agricultural productivity, endangering the livelihoods of 2.5 billion people.

How does energy price volatility affect agriculture?

1. Energy price fluctuations directly increase fertilizer costs, leading to higher food prices. For example, natural gas, vital for ammonia synthesis in fertilizers, significantly impacts agricultural costs.

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2. Geopolitical actions like China's phosphate fertilizer export ban in 2021 disrupted supply chains, delaying critical cropping seasons in countries like India.

How does energy poverty exacerbate global inequities?

1. Low-income countries, which account for a small share of global energy demand, are disproportionately affected by supply disruptions.
2. In sub-Saharan Africa, low fertilizer usage and unreliable power grids hinder agricultural productivity, increasing food insecurity.
3. For instance, African countries spent $1.9 billion on fertilizer imports in 2021, more than double the amount in 2016.

How do extreme weather events impact energy and food systems?

1. Extreme weather events disrupt energy and food systems by damaging energy infrastructure and reducing agricultural productivity, leading to higher food prices, especially in rural areas.
2. Renewable energy, such as solar-powered irrigation and biomass energy, can transform agriculture by enhancing efficiency and sustainability, but its adoption is hindered by high costs and inadequate infrastructure, particularly in low-income nations.

What are the financial implications of addressing food and energy insecurity?

1. Ensuring basic caloric needs for vulnerable populations requires $90 billion annually until 2030. Tackling malnutrition needs an additional $11 billion per year.
2. Transforming global food systems could cost $300–$400 billion annually, amounting to 0.5% of global GDP.
3. For low-income nations, these costs often exceed 95% of GDP.

What are the risks of failing to address these twin crises?

1. Inaction could lead to trillions in global economic losses from reduced productivity and adverse health outcomes.
2. Climate-induced energy disruptions may destabilize regions, driving social unrest and mass migration.
3. For example, Africa's mineral wealth, essential for renewable technologies, is often exploited without benefiting local economies.

Why is inclusivity crucial in addressing these crises?

1. Despite record investments in renewables, ongoing fossil fuel expansion and structural barriers to clean energy access risk excluding vulnerable communities. Solutions must ensure equitable benefits for all.
2. Agriculture must be reimagined as both a provider of sustenance and a cornerstone of sustainable development.
3. Collaborative and inclusive action is essential to prevent hunger and achieve global climate goals.

Right to disconnect

Source: The post **right to disconnect** has been created, based on the article "**Indians need the right to disconnect**" published in "The Hindu" on 10th December 2024

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UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health,

Context: The article "Indians Need the Right to Disconnect brings to light the increasing stress and mental health challenges faced by Indian employees due to prolonged working hours and the inability to disconnect from work after office hours.

What do studies reveal about workplace stress in India?

1. A report revealed that Indian women in professional jobs like IT, media, and auditing work more than **55 hours a week**.
2. Workers in marginalized and unorganized sectors face even worse working conditions.
3. A study found that **49% of Indian workers** experience workplace stress that negatively impacts their mental health.

What is the right to disconnect?

1. The right to disconnect is the ability of employees to disengage from work-related communication outside official working hours.
2. It aims to ensure mental well-being and a better work-life balance.

How have other countries addressed the right to disconnect?

1. **France**: The French Supreme Court ruled that employees are not required to work or respond to communication outside working hours. Not being reachable after hours cannot be classified as misconduct.
2. **Portugal**: It is illegal for employers to contact employees outside working hours except during emergencies.
3. **Spain**: Workers have the right to disconnect to protect their privacy and ensure their leave and holidays are respected.
4. **Australia**: The Fair Work Legislation Amendment established employees' right to disconnect outside working hours.
5. **Ireland**: Employees are entitled to disconnect from work for a healthier work-life balance.

Does India have laws for the right to disconnect?

1. India does not have specific laws recognizing the right to disconnect.
2. The Constitution and judicial pronouncements emphasize the need for a healthy and dignified work environment.

What constitutional provisions support workplace well-being?

1. **Article 38** mandates the State to promote public welfare.
2. **Article 39(e)** directs the State to protect workers' health and strength.

What judicial rulings reinforce workplace dignity?

1. In **Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997)**, the Supreme Court recognized the right to dignity and provided guidelines to ensure workplace safety.
2. In **Ravindra Kumar Dhariwal v. Union of India (2021)**, the Court called for reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities.

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3. In **Praveen Pradhan v. State of Uttaranchal (2012)**, the High Court stated that workplace discipline should not involve humiliation or inhumane treatment.

Has there been any legislative action?

1. In 2018, MP Supriya Sule introduced a Private Member Bill in the Lok Sabha to establish the right to disconnect.
2. The bill proposed a **penalty of 1% of the total remuneration of employees** for companies that violated the provisions.

Why is the right to disconnect important for India?

1. Recognizing the right to disconnect will enhance productivity and support employee well-being.
2. It will foster healthier work environments and strengthen India's workforce.
3. By adopting such measures, India can better achieve its goal of becoming the **third-largest economy by 2030**.

Reforms in Merchant Shipping

Source: The post Reforms in Merchant Shipping **has been created, based on the** article "On reforms in merchant shipping" **published** in "The Hindu**" on** 10th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS-2 Governance

Context: The article provides an in-depth analysis of the proposed reforms in India's merchant shipping sector through the introduction of two significant bills—the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024, and the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024.

Why is a new Merchant Shipping Bill needed?

1. These Acts are outdated and fail to address contemporary needs, especially for offshore vessels, which form 50% of Indian-flagged ships.
2. Regulatory gaps, restrictive provisions, and the lack of a framework for private maritime training necessitate modernisation.

What are the shortcomings of the current laws?

1. Welfare provisions only apply to Indian-flagged ships, while 85% of Indian seafarers work on foreign-flagged vessels.
2. Lack of enabling provisions to implement international conventions.
3. Outdated, license-era provisions hinder modernisation and ease of doing business.

How does the Bill address vessel registration?

1. Reduces Indian ownership threshold from 100% to 51%, allowing NRIs, OCIs, and foreign entities to register Indian vessels.
2. Allows Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) to own ships.
3. Introduces bareboat charter-cum-demise, enabling entrepreneurs to own vessels after charter periods.
4. Temporary registration for vessels destined for recycling, benefiting ship recycling hubs like Alang.

How does the Bill expand vessel regulation?

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1. Includes non-mechanised vessels and crafts such as submersibles, hydrofoils, amphibious crafts, Mobile Offshore Units (MOUs), and drones under its ambit.
2. Strengthens coastal security by empowering authorities to regulate all vessel types, addressing gaps exposed during the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

How does the Bill tackle marine pollution?

1. Incorporates international conventions like MARPOL, the Bunker Convention, and the Civil Liability Convention.
2. Aligns with IMO standards, reducing sulphur content in marine fuel and banning single-use plastics.
3. Launches the 'Swachh Sagar' portal for proper ship-waste disposal.

What are the new provisions for seafarers?

1. Extends welfare measures to Indian seafarers on foreign-flagged ships.
2. Aligns working conditions with the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), ensuring better safety, benefits, and support.

How does the Bill address the gaps in maritime training regulation??

1. Over 160 private institutes operate without a legal framework, leading to unauthorised operations and fraudulent practices. Previously, training was government-controlled, with no need for regulation.

2. The Bill introduces legal provisions to regulate maritime training institutes. It also eliminates unauthorised institutes and ensures high-quality education nationwide.

What is the focus of the Coastal Shipping Bill?

1. Separates technical ship regulations from commercial coastal operations.
2. Covers licensing, coastal plans, and integration of inland and coastal shipping.
3. Supports the Sagarmala program by promoting coastal shipping infrastructure and hinterland connectivity.

What potential benefits do the new Bills offer?

1. Modernises India's maritime framework in line with global standards.
2. Enhances coastal security, maritime safety, and ease of business.
3. Strengthens infrastructure, promotes environmental sustainability, and boosts seafarer welfare.
4. Unlocks the growth potential of India's maritime sector, fostering bipartisan support.

Invesment in Palliative Care in India

Source: **The post** Invesment in Palliative Care in India **has been created, based on the article** "Why India needs to invest in palliative care**" published in "Indian Express" on 10th December 2024**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS-2 Governance

Context: The article underscores the urgent need for India to invest in palliative care as an integral part of its healthcare system. It highlights the multifaceted benefits of palliative care in alleviating health-related suffering, especially for patients with terminal illnesses or chronic conditions.

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What is Palliative Care and Why is it Important?

1. Palliative care focuses on alleviating physical, psycho-social, spiritual, and financial suffering for patients and their caregivers.
2. It ensures individuals live with dignity and die peacefully, particularly in the face of terminal illnesses like cancer.

Why is Dying with Dignity a Global Concern?

1. In countries like the UK, debates around assisted dying have highlighted shortcomings in healthcare systems.
2. Data shows:
   - Two-thirds of requests for assisted dying come from terminal cancer patients.
   - Key reasons include loss of dignity, fear of becoming a burden, inadequate pain management, and financial constraints.

How Does Palliative Care Impact Patients and Caregivers?

1. Patients with suicidal thoughts, when provided adequate care, often live meaningful lives and die with dignity.
2. Palliative care addresses multifaceted issues: pain relief, emotional support, and financial planning.

What is the Current State of Palliative Care in India?

1. Less than 4% of those in need have access to palliative care.
2. Most care is provided by underfunded NGOs facing challenges like procuring licenses for oral morphine, a key pain relief medication.

What Are the Challenges in Expanding Palliative Care?

1. **Legislative Hurdles:**
   - Advance medical directives and living wills need clear enforcement.
   - Example: The Supreme Court disallowed parents from removing a feeding tube for a 30-year-old in a vegetative state, despite their inability to afford care.
2. **Funding Shortages:**
   - Even in the UK, hospices are shutting down due to reliance on charity.
   - Accessible palliative care requires significant government investment.

How Does India's Socioeconomic Landscape Complicate Assisted Dying Laws?

1. India's stratified society makes vulnerable populations prone to exploitation under assisted dying laws.
2. Example: Canada's Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) law has led to concerns about its misuse and a decline in accessible healthcare services for vulnerable populations.

What Steps Should India Take to Address Health-Related Suffering?

1. Integrate palliative care into the public healthcare system to make it universally available.
2. Increase investment in training healthcare workers and funding NGOs providing palliative care.
3. Address societal indifference to suffering by promoting awareness about the benefits of hospice and palliative care.

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What is the Call to Action?

1. With rising non-communicable diseases and an ageing population, India must act urgently to prioritize palliative care.
2. The focus should be on accessible, compassionate, and affordable care to prevent suffering and reduce calls for assisted dying laws, which could have disastrous implications for the country.

What is at Stake if India Does Not Act?

1. Isolated pleas for assistance in dying may become widespread.
2. Vulnerable populations could be disproportionately affected by poorly implemented laws.
3. Neglecting palliative care will exacerbate suffering, leading to ethical, legal, and social crises.

Vaikom Struggle

Source: The post the **Vaikom Struggle** has been created, based on the article **"Vaikom — two States, two leaders and a tale of reform"** published in "**The Hindu**" on 12th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 1- Indian History

Context: The article delves into the socio-political and historical significance of the Vaikom Struggle, which marks its centenary in 2024.

What was the Vaikom Struggle, and why was it significant?

1. The Vaikom Struggle was a socio-political movement in the 1920s against the prohibition of backward caste Hindus from walking on streets near the Vaikom Mahadeva temple in Travancore princely state.
2. It marked a landmark moment for religious reform and social justice in India, setting the stage for future mass movements advocating equality.

How did the struggle evolve into a mass movement?

1. Initially led by leaders of the Kerala State Congress Committee and social activists, the movement gained momentum when Periyar E.V. Ramasamy joined in 1924.
2. His involvement galvanized people across classes, ultimately leading to the removal of these restrictions in November 1925.

What were the wider consequences of the Vaikom Struggle?

1. The movement inspired similar efforts nationwide, such as B.R. Ambedkar's temple entry protests at Ambadevi Temple and Kalaram Mandir.
2. In South India, legislative actions like the 1932 Bill for temple entry, Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation (1936), and the Madras Temple Entry Authorization Act (1947) progressively dismantled caste-based restrictions in temples.

How did these reforms pave the way for modern legislation?

These movements and legislative acts created a precedent for incorporating religious reforms into the Constitution. B.R. Ambedkar's addition of the phrase "subject to public order, morality, and health" in Article 25 enabled the state to intervene in religious practices to ensure equality.

Can the state regulate religion without compromising secularism?

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1. Yes, state regulation of religion is aimed at ensuring equality and access in public spaces like temples.
2. Laws such as the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1959, and judicial rulings (e.g., Shirur Mutt case, 1954) have upheld the state's role in managing secular aspects of temples while respecting essential religious practices.

How is the centenary of the Vaikom Struggle being commemorated?

1. On December 12, 2024, Tamil Nadu and Kerala governments are jointly celebrating the centenary to honor the movement's legacy.
2. This event highlights the collaboration between two states and commemorates the contributions of leaders like Periyar and B.R. Ambedkar in advancing social reform.

What is the enduring significance of the Vaikom Struggle?

1. The struggle symbolizes the fight for social justice and equality, reaffirming the reformist trajectory in South India.
2. It serves as a reminder of the collective efforts required to challenge caste-based oppression and bring about meaningful change.

The Assisted Dying Law in Britain

Source: The post the **Assisted Dying Law in Britain** has been created, based on the article **"The long and complex road to assisted dying"** published in "**The Hindu**" on 12th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper II: Governance - Issues relating to health, human rights, and the ethical governance of public policies.

Context: The article discusses the introduction and debates surrounding the **Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25**, also known as the Assisted Dying Law, in the United Kingdom. It sheds light on the broader ethical, legal, and philosophical questions tied to the right to die, framed by recent developments in Britain and comparisons to global practices.

What is the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25?

1. The Bill, also known as the Assisted Dying Law, allows terminally ill adults in England and Wales with less than six months to live to seek assistance in ending their lives. The process requires approval from two doctors and a High Court judge.
2. The Bill aims to address such situations by allowing a dignified choice for terminally ill individuals.
3. The Bill has tight controls, including independent medical assessments, reflection periods, and judicial oversight, to ensure the process is not abused.

Why is assisted dying such a complex issue?

The debate revolves around fundamental ethical, legal, and societal questions. It pits the right to personal autonomy and dignity against concerns about potential abuse and societal values around the sanctity of life.

What are the primary arguments against assisted dying?

1. **Slippery Slope Argument**: Critics argue that once allowed, the scope of assisted dying could expand, leading to abuse, particularly against vulnerable groups like the elderly and disabled.
2. **Concerns from Canada**: Canada's law, initially limited to foreseeable death, has expanded to include those with grievous medical conditions, diluting its original boundaries.

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3. **Philosophical and Religious Objections**: Critics see the law as a threat to the sanctity of life and claim it is disguised as compassion but undermines the inviolability of life.

How do proponents respond to the criticism?

1. **Carefully Drafted Legislation**: The Bill only permits assisted dying for competent adults with terminal illnesses, requiring assessments by two doctors, a 14-day reflection period, and High Court approval.
2. **Respect for Autonomy**: Proponents argue the law upholds personal liberty, allowing individuals to make decisions about their own lives and alleviate unbearable suffering.
3. **Ethical Justification**: Supporters contend that preventing terminally ill patients from seeking relief violates their dignity and autonomy.

What universal lessons can be drawn from Britain's debate?

1. The discussions underscore the importance of balancing ethical concerns with personal dignity.
2. The debates highlight the need for clear laws to prevent abuse while respecting individual autonomy and freedom.
3. Assisted dying laws must balance personal freedom with societal ethics.

What is India's position on assisted dying?

1. India recognizes a limited right to die, allowing passive euthanasia and advance medical directives per the Supreme Court's Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018) judgment.
2. This right is grounded in liberty, privacy, and dignity but does not yet extend to active assisted dying.

Why is the right to assisted dying important?

1. The ability to choose to end unbearable suffering respects human dignity and autonomy, core principles of a meaningful life.
2. While laws must include safeguards, they cannot ignore the fundamental right of individuals to decide on matters of life and death.

Nehru's Economic Vision and Its Impact on India

Source: The post the **Nehru's Economic Vision and Its Impact on India** has been created, based on the article **"How Nehru's vision hobbled India's economy"** published in "**Indian Express**" on 12ᵗʰ December 2024.
UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy
Context: The article critically analyzes the economic policies of India under Jawaharlal Nehru. It argues that Nehru's vision of economic development, while well-intentioned, ultimately had a stifling effect on India's economic growth and development.

How did Nehru's early political views influence his economic policies?

Nehru's early views were radical, incorporating aspects of communism such as nationalization and collective farming. However, he moderated his stance during the 1930s and 1940s due to resistance from colleagues like Sardar Patel.

What were Nehru's primary objectives for India's economy?

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Nehru aimed to eradicate poverty and achieve self-sufficiency through an emphasis on heavy industry and modern technology. Despite acknowledging the employment potential of small industries and agriculture, most capital was allocated to heavy industries.

What were the key instruments of Nehru's economic policies?

These included:

1. Five-Year Plans (especially the Second Plan, which solidified his vision).
2. Expansion of the public sector.
3. Licensing of private industries.
4. Import restrictions and tariffs.
5. Price and distribution controls.
6. Emphasis on technical education over primary education.

What was the role of the Planning Commission and industrialists?

The Planning Commission's Panel of Economists largely endorsed the Nehru-Mahalanobis approach. Initially, even industrialists supported facets of the plan but grew critical after hasty nationalization and economic crises.

How did economists like B.R. Shenoy and Milton Friedman critique Nehru's policies?

- **B.R. Shenoy:** Warned that excessive development beyond available resources would lead to inflation and socio-economic instability.
- **Milton Friedman:** Criticized exchange controls, licensing systems, and subsidies as major obstacles to India's economic growth.

What was the impact of India's import and export policies?

India's import regime was marked by inefficiencies, lack of foreign exchange allocation criteria, and a controlled investment system. Export policies stifled India's global trade presence, leading to a decline in market shares of key products like tea and jute.

What were the economic outcomes of Nehru's strategies?

1. Per-capita GDP rose by only 2% between 1951-52 and 1963-64.
2. Heavy industries grew significantly, but agriculture and consumer goods industries stagnated.
3. India's share in global exports fell from 2.5% in 1947 to 0.9% in 1966.
4. Food production lagged behind demand, necessitating the Green Revolution.

How did socialism influence subsequent decades?

Nehru's socialist policies entrenched a bureaucratic hesitation towards market-oriented reforms, delaying India's economic liberalization until 1991.

Why Chief Justices Need Longer Tenures?

Source: The post the **Chief Justices Need Longer Tenures** has been created, based on the article **"Chief Justices need longer tenures"** published in "**The Hindu**" on 12th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 2- Polity and governance

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Context: The article discusses the persistent issue of short tenures for Chief Justices in Indian High Courts, a problem that undermines the institutional effectiveness and operational efficiency of the judiciary. It highlights recent examples, explores the critical role of a Chief Justice, and provides a historical comparison to emphasize the need for longer tenures**.**

Why are short tenures of Chief Justices a concern?

Short tenures limit the ability of Chief Justices to effectively manage their responsibilities. They often retire before fully understanding the institution they lead, which impacts the overall efficiency and innovation within the judiciary.

Why is a Chief Justice's role critical?

The Chief Justice oversees:

1. Administrative and financial health of the High Court.
2. Recommendations for judgeship appointments.
3. Formation of various committees.
4. Staff welfare and disciplinary actions.
5. Representation of the judiciary at seminars, symposia, and bar associations.
6. Legal education and engagement with advocate associations.
7. Judicial responsibilities as the State's top authority.

Are the challenges similar across all High Courts?

1. No, the challenges vary significantly across High Courts depending on their location and specific requirements.
2. Understanding these unique needs demands time, which short tenures do not allow.

What have experts and judges said about this issue?

1. Justice L. Nageswara Rao of the Supreme Court stated that judges elevated to the apex court need a minimum of **7-8 years**, if not 10, to settle into their roles.
2. Chief Justices with brief tenures have echoed similar concerns, lamenting their inability to initiate reforms or improvements due to limited time.

Was this always the case?

No, during British rule, Chief Justices typically had longer tenures. For instance:

1. Between 1862 and 1947, the Madras High Court had only **11 Chief Justices**, averaging **8 years** per tenure.
2. In contrast, from 1947 to 2012, the Court had **24 Chief Justices** in 65 years, averaging only **2.75 years**. Excluding long-serving Chief Justices P.V. Rajamannar (13 years) and Veeraswami K. (7 years), the average drops to **just over 2 years**.

Why does this issue need urgent attention?

Short tenures leave little room for innovation, reform, and systemic improvement. The increasing complexity of a Chief Justice's duties makes prolonged tenures essential for meaningful contributions.

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What can be done to address this problem?

1. The solution requires joint deliberation among stakeholders, including the Bar, to design measures ensuring longer and more effective tenures for Chief Justices.

2. This needs to be prioritized before it deeply impacts the judiciary's institutional health.

Why Government Interventions in Monetary Policy Won't Spur Growth

Source: The post the **Why Government Interventions in Monetary Policy Won't Spur Growth** has been created, based on the article **"Pressuring the RBI to lower the interest rate isn't going to solve the problem"** published in "**Indian Express**" on 12th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 3 Syllabus – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context*:* The article addresses the ongoing debate about the role of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in steering economic growth amidst slowing growth rates and rising inflation. It critiques recent public statements made by India's Commerce and Finance Ministers that subtly pressurize the RBI to lower interest rates to spur economic activity.

What recent developments have prompted a debate on RBI's autonomy?

1. Recent statements by India's Commerce and Finance Ministers have indirectly suggested that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should lower interest rates, indicating government concerns over slowing growth.
2. Quarterly growth rates have been declining since April 2024, even though the GDP growth rate in 2023-24 was a historic 8.2%.

Why is this a significant issue?

The central question revolves around whether the government should interfere with the RBI's functioning and whether the RBI can significantly influence current economic growth.

Is government interference in RBI's functioning appropriate?

1. No, it is inappropriate for the government to interfere.
2. The RBI operates independently under its board, which is appointed with government involvement.
3. Once appointed, the board should act autonomously, in line with the principle of separation of powers.

What is the RBI's primary mandate since 2016?

1. The RBI's main mandate is to control inflation, with a target of 4%, as set by the government.
2. Publicly pressuring the RBI to act differently undermines its credibility as an independent institution.

How has economic growth been recently?

1. Real GDP grew by 6% in the first half of 2024-25, compared to 8.2% in the first half of 2023-24.
2. Manufacturing growth dropped to 4.5% from 9.6% over the same period.

Is the RBI capable of stimulating growth in this scenario?

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1. No, the RBI's tools, such as interest rate adjustments, are unlikely to stimulate growth when the core issue lies in weak demand.
2. Lowering interest rates will not prompt firms to increase production if they do not anticipate higher sales.
3. Firms expand production based on rising demand, not lower borrowing costs.
4. A reduction in interest rates is a supply-side solution, but the current issue is a demand-side problem.

What has been proposed regarding food inflation?

1. The Commerce Minister and Chief Economic Advisor suggested excluding food inflation from the official inflation index.
2. High food inflation (above 10% in October 2024) reduces consumer spending on non-food items, negatively impacting manufacturing.
3. Ignoring food inflation without addressing its causes is equivalent to abandoning inflation control.

Urban Local Governance in India

Source: This post on **Urban local governance in India** is based on article **"The missing spotlight on urban local government polls"** published in **The Hindu on 13th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS 2- Polity - Devolution of Powers and Finances up to Local Levels and Challenges Therein.

Context: The article highlights the critical yet often overlooked issue of elections for Urban Local Governments (ULGs). It contextualizes the importance of these elections as a pillar of local self-governance under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) of 1992.

Why was the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) enacted?

1. The 74th CAA, introduced in 1992, was meant to codify the role of ULGs in local governance. However, even after three decades, its objectives remain unmet.
2. ULGs are decentralised local self-governance institutions responsible for providing civic services and ensuring citizens' quality of life.
3. They serve as the first point of contact for urban residents.

Has the ONOE discourse addressed ULG elections?

1. No, ONOE discussions have mostly excluded ULG elections.
2. Reports like the 79th Standing Committee report (2015) and NITI Aayog's discussion paper (2017) omitted ULG elections, citing their status as State subjects and logistical challenges due to the large number of such bodies.

What does the High-Level Committee (HLC) suggest?

In a departure, the HLC recommended synchronising ULG elections within 100 days of Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections. The government accepted this recommendation in 2024, marking an important step.

How significant are ULGs in India's governance and economy?

ULGs govern 4,800+ cities, serving nearly 40% of the population, a figure projected to exceed 50% by 2050. Cities contribute over 60% to India's GDP, underscoring their importance in driving economic growth and social well-being.

Why is it vital to ensure regular ULG elections?

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Regular elections ensure democratically elected governments that can address local needs effectively, strengthen accountability, and uphold the constitutional principle of decentralisation.

What Challenges Exist in Conducting Timely ULG Elections?

1. A 2024 CAG report found that over 60% of ULGs experienced delays in elections, sometimes spanning several years. These delays lead to State governments taking direct control, which undermines local democracy.
2. Delayed elections weaken citizen representation, reduce accountability, and leave ULGs under administrative control, bypassing the electorate's mandate.
3. Delays persist even after elections. For example, in Karnataka, councils took an average of 11 months to form after election results, effectively disempowering elected representatives.
4. Delays are often linked to ward delimitation, court cases over reservations, and the involvement of State governments in politically sensitive areas.

What role do SECs play, and why are they disempowered?

SECs, responsible for conducting ULG elections, often lack authority over key processes like ward delimitation. Only 4 of 15 States assessed by the CAG empowered their SECs in this regard.

Why is empowering SECs necessary?

Empowering SECs ensures independence in managing elections and avoids delays caused by administrative and political interference.

What has been proposed to improve ULG elections?

1. The HLC recommended synchronising ULG polls with other elections and empowering SECs to handle delimitation and reservations.
2. The government plans to form an implementation group to act on HLC recommendations and conduct nationwide consultations to refine ULG election processes.
3. With cities becoming critical to India's growth, ensuring robust, timely, and accountable local governance is crucial for sustainable development.

Beijing's War Against Air Pollution: Lessons for Delhi

Source: The article on **Beijing's War Against Air Pollution: Lessons for Delhi** has been based on article **"Beijing's war against air pollution"** published in **The Hindu** on **13th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topics: GS Paper-3- Environment - Environmental Pollution and Degradation

Context: The article discusses Beijing's significant reduction in air pollution between 2013 and 2017 and draws parallels with Delhi's current air quality challenges.

What was the pollution scenario in Beijing, and how does it compare to Delhi today?

1. Beijing, in 2015, had a yearly average Air Quality Index (AQI) of 144, which is similar to Delhi's current AQI of 155 in 2024.
2. Over the years, Beijing successfully reduced its pollution levels by one-third, particularly between 2013 and 2017.
3. Since both cities are capitals of emerging economies, Beijing's achievements provide a valuable framework that Delhi could emulate to address its own pollution crisis.

What are the primary sources of pollution in Beijing and Delhi?

1. The sources of pollution in Beijing in 2013 were broadly categorized into three main areas:

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- **Energy and coal combustion**, which contributed 22% of PM2.5 emissions.
- **Transportation**, which accounted for 31% of emissions.
- **Industrial and construction activities**, which added 33% of emissions.
2. In Delhi, data from the winter months highlights similar trends but with significant regional contributions from neighboring areas in the National Capital Region (NCR).
3. Controlling pollution in Delhi will require not only local actions but also collective efforts across the NCR.

What strategies did Beijing implement to reduce pollution?

1. **Phased Anti-Pollution Programme**: Beijing's anti-pollution efforts were implemented in three phases: 1998-2008, 2009-2012, and 2013-2017. The approach focused on careful planning and gradually building public participation, with the local government autonomously leading these efforts.
2. **Energy and Coal Combustion Control**: Beijing reduced emissions from coal consumption through several measures:
   a. Transitioning power plants to ultra-low emission and clean energy alternatives.
   b. Renovating coal-fired boilers to improve efficiency and lower emissions.
   c. Eliminating the use of residential bulk coal for heating.
3. **Transportation Reforms**: The city addressed vehicle emissions by:
   a. Retrofitting cars and public service vehicles with diesel particulate filters (DPFs).
   b. Offering subsidies to scrap high-pollution vehicles, rather than simply banning them.
   c. Expanding subway and bus networks to provide more sustainable public transportation.
   d. Optimizing urban layouts to reduce the need for long-distance travel.
4. **Industrial and Construction Pollution Control**: Beijing tightened environmental standards for industries and construction activities by:
   a. Implementing end-of-pipe (EOP) treatments to minimize emissions.
   b. Eliminating outdated industrial practices and encouraging green construction models.
   c. Using video monitoring to enforce compliance and penalize violations.
5. **Regional Cooperation**: Beijing coordinated with five neighboring provinces to create a regional pollution control plan. This collaboration significantly contributed to the reduction in pollution levels.

What were Beijing's results from these efforts?

1. Between 2013 and 2017, Beijing achieved remarkable reductions in major pollutants:
- Sulphur dioxide emissions dropped by 83%.
- Nitrogen oxide emissions fell by 43%.
- Volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions were reduced by 42%.
- PM2.5 concentrations decreased by 59%.
2. These achievements were supported by a six-fold increase in government investment over four years. This financial commitment was crucial to implementing the extensive measures required to combat pollution.

What are the barriers preventing Delhi from addressing its pollution crisis?

- The primary barrier to tackling Delhi's pollution crisis is the lack of political will. The Central and State governments often blame each other instead of working together to solve the problem.
- This blame game has continued for over a decade, while no substantial progress has been made.
- Private measures such as air purifiers, though effective for individuals, exclude disadvantaged communities and fail to address the broader public issue of pollution.

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What can Delhi learn from Beijing's success?

Delhi can adopt several key strategies from Beijing's experience:

1. Upgrade Transportation:

Delhi should develop an integrated bus and metro network, replace outdated buses via subsidies, and improve last-mile connectivity. Dedicated cycling and walking lanes, congestion charges, higher parking fees, and differentiated fuel costs can discourage private vehicle use.

2. Shift to Clean Energy:

Phasing out coal-fired power plants, promoting rooftop solar with subsidies, and linking them to the grid with bill discounts can accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

3. Regional Collaboration:

Like Beijing, Delhi must coordinate with NCR states to address shared pollution sources effectively.

4. Boost Public Awareness:

Citizens must demand clean air as a right and reject the normalization of poor AQI, fostering accountability and sustainable change.

Sluggish Salaries and Economic Slowdown in India

Source: The article on **Sluggish Salaries and Economic Slowdown in India** is based on article **"What sluggish salaries and slowdown in Indian economy might mean"** published in India Express on 13th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy

Context: The article addresses the challenges faced by the Indian economy, emphasizing sluggish salary growth and a broader economic slowdown.

What does the slowdown in the Indian economy and sluggish salaries indicate?

1. The Indian economy is facing a significant slowdown, which is reflected in sluggish salary growth and weak employment generation.
2. The government and economists have raised concerns over subdued household consumption driven by low wage growth and inflation.

What are the government's observations regarding the economic slowdown?

1. The finance ministry flagged challenges like a slowdown in urban demand in its monthly reviews for August and September.
2. The second quarter GDP data revealed a deeper slowdown than expected.
3. The government has questioned the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) optimistic growth projections and its assessment of inflation and monetary policy.

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What are the findings on wage growth across key sectors?

1. A study by FICCI and Quess Corp Ltd highlights low single-digit wage growth in six sectors: IT, Retail, Logistics, FMCG, Banking and Financial Services and Engineering, Manufacturing, and Infrastructure
2. After adjusting for inflation, real wage growth has been negligible or negative.
3. Rural real wages declined by -0.4% in the five years ending 2023-24, and agricultural wages grew marginally by 0.2%.
4. In the first five months of 2024, rural real wage growth was 0.5%, and agricultural wages grew by 0.7%.

What impact do these trends have on household consumption?

1. Weak income growth, inflation, and inadequate job creation have suppressed household consumption.
2. Concerns have been raised over the declining share of national income accruing to labor, particularly to less-skilled workers.

How does the employment generation relate to the economic slowdown?

1. Despite decades of steady growth, the economy has failed to generate sufficient productive and remunerative jobs for the growing labor force.
2. In 2023-24:
   a. 46% of workers were employed in agriculture.
   b. 79% of non-farm workers were in informal sector enterprises.
3. Labor force participation (ages 15 and above) increased from 49.8% in 2017-18 to 60.1% in 2023-24, but job quality remains a concern.

What role does capital intensity play in employment challenges?

The growing capital intensity of production has limited the creation of labor-intensive jobs, further exacerbating unemployment and underemployment.

Can interest rate cuts alone address the slowdown?

1. No. While monetary policy adjustments, such as interest rate cuts, can provide short-term relief, they are not sufficient to address structural issues.
2. Tackling the long-standing economic challenges requires comprehensive reforms and sustainable solutions.

What is the way forward for the Indian economy?

1. The focus should shift to creating productive, high-paying jobs.
2. Policymakers need to address inflation, improve labor income distribution, and boost consumption.
3. Reforms targeting informal employment and labor-intensive sectors are essential for long-term economic stability.

Decolonizing the Obsession with Foreign Degrees

Source: This post **Decolonizing the Obsession with Foreign Degrees** based on article **"US reduces student visas: You don't need to be obsessed with foreign degrees"** published in Indian express on 13th December 2024.

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

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Context: The article shows the dependence of Indian students on Euro-American universities, considering it a reflection of diminished self-confidence in Indian academic institutions. Over 1.33 million Indian students study abroad, compared to only 46,878 foreign students in Indian universities, highlighting this one-sided exchange.

What does the reliance on foreign institutions show?

1. The obsession with foreign universities damages the self-worth of Indian academic institutions.
2. It reflects a colonized mindset, with many aspiring to foreign degrees instead of strengthening local academic infrastructure.

What are the issues with Indian universities that contribute to this trend?

1. **Degradation of Institutions**: Institutions like Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan and Jawaharlal Nehru University have faced setbacks due to local politics, poor administration, and lack of funding.
2. **Lack of Academic Freedom**: Insufficient funds, lack of academic freedom, and poor pedagogic environments deter quality education and research.

How does the hierarchy of civilizations affect Indian academia?

1. Colonial-era hierarchies perpetuated by thinkers like Thomas Babington Macaulay continue to dominate Indian academia.
2. Many subaltern scholars who advocate for marginalized communities settle abroad in elite academic institutions, further deepening the asymmetry.

What examples highlight academic inequality between Indian and Western institutions?

1. Leading professors from Western universities like Harvard or Cambridge rarely engage with Indian institutions.
2. Indian academics and students primarily aim to enhance their CVs by studying or publishing abroad, reinforcing inequalities.
3. Preference for PhDs from foreign universities in Indian faculty recruitment demoralizes those working locally.

What changes can be made to address this imbalance?

1. **Symmetrical Dialogue**: Encourage mutual exchange of ideas between Indian and Western institutions.
2. **Strengthen Local Academia**: Create high-quality Indian journals, provide better funding for education, and improve academic culture.
3. **Promote Confidence**: Indian students and professors should take pride in pursuing and contributing to local institutions like Delhi School of Economics or Jadavpur University.

What is a cosmopolitan academic culture?

1. A genuinely educated individual embraces global perspectives while maintaining local roots.
2. For example, Indian students should study both Ashis Nandy and Zygmunt Bauman, Kalidas and Shakespeare, with equal appreciation.

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How Protectionism Threatens Global Knowledge Exchange and Higher Education

Source: The article **How Protectionism Threatens Global Knowledge Exchange and Higher Education** is based on article **"Ideas need to travel: Without international students, American universities lose out"** in The Indian Express on 13th December 2024.

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

Context: This article addresses the interconnectedness of global education systems, the implications of restrictive visa policies in the United States, and the challenges faced by the Indian higher education sector. It focuses on the evolving dynamics of international education, particularly under the Trump administration's protectionist policies, and how they impact not only Indian students but also the global standing of American universities.

What is the immediate concern regarding Indian students and US visas?

1. The US is restricting visa access for Indian students.
2. This has created anxiety, particularly with Trump's protectionist policies targeting immigration, naturalization, and student visas.
3. Trump's administration is seen as protectionist and unwelcoming to foreigners. His focus on restricting immigration and expelling undocumented residents raises concerns about the future of international student intake in the US.

How does restricting foreign students affect American universities?

1. American universities have been significantly enriched by international students, especially those in STEM fields.
2. Limiting this access could:
   o Reduce the diversity and intellectual rigor of these institutions.
   o Impact the US's status in the knowledge economy, as producing knowledge gives a competitive edge.

Why do Indian students prefer foreign universities over Indian ones?

1. Indian universities fail to match the quality of education offered abroad.
2. Factors include:
   o A chaotic higher education system, worsened by NEP (National Education Policy).
   o Students' belief in better opportunities and outcomes from foreign degrees, often linked to the NRI lifestyle.
   o The projected expenditure for Indians studying overseas is expected to reach $70 billion by 2025.

What are the risks for both the US and India with current trends?

1. **For the US**:
   o Reduced quality in universities over time.
   o Loss of brilliant international faculty and students.
2. **For India**:
   o Retaining top talent but lacking the infrastructure to support their excellence.
   o Decline in the global value of India-educated individuals due to NEP's dilution of educational standards.

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What is the broader impact of protectionist policies on global education?

1. Protectionist policies, like restricting student visas, signify a step back from the equitable international ecosystem envisioned in the 21st century.
2. These policies could create a zero-sum game in knowledge expansion, stifling innovation and progress for all.

How can both nations adapt to ensure mutual benefit?

1. The US must recognize the long-term benefits of international students in maintaining its universities' global edge.
2. India must invest in higher education reforms to retain and develop talent locally, creating a self-sufficient ecosystem of excellence.

Concern over a speech by Justice S.K. Yadav of the Allahabad High Court

Source: The post concern over a speech by Justice S.K. Yadav of the Allahabad High Court has been created, based on the article "**Wounding the spirit of the Constitution of India**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 14th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Context: The article criticizes Justice S.K. Yadav's speech for promoting bigotry and incitement to violence, violating constitutional values. It demands accountability, calls for collective resistance through civil disobedience, and urges reaffirmation of India's pluralistic, non-denominational constitutional spirit.

For detailed information on **Constitutional morality** read this article here

What did Justice S.K. Yadav do?

1. Justice S.K. Yadav of the Allahabad High Court delivered a controversial speech, which violated constitutional values.

2. His remarks were widely perceived as incendiary, bigoted, and promoting mob violence.

3. The speech was reported as "genocidal street-talk" that targeted minorities and encouraged divisive rhetoric.

What Actions Have Been Taken?

1. **Impeachment Motion:** Opposition Members of Parliament initiated an impeachment motion against Justice S.K. Yadav for his controversial speech.

2. **Supreme Court's Intervention:** The Supreme Court of India sought a report on the incident after citizens and activists raised concerns.

3. **Citizen Activism:** Concerned citizens wrote to the Chief Justice of India, demanding accountability for Justice Yadav's remarks.

4. **Public Outrage:** Protests and petitions highlighted the slow response to the judge's speech.

Why is this Incident Significant?

1. The incident highlights the erosion of judicial propriety.

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2. It also raises concerns about the judiciary being influenced by political ideologies.

3. Public humiliation and divisive rhetoric from judicial figures harm the Constitution's values of justice, liberty, and equality.

What Should Be Done?

1. Citizens, judiciary, and lawmakers must work together to protect constitutional values.

2. Resistance to hate speech and divisive rhetoric is essential.

3. The focus should be on reaffirming India's pluralistic identity as outlined in the Preamble: "We, the people of India."

Question for practice:

Examine how the controversial speech by Justice S.K. Yadav and its aftermath reflect the challenges to constitutional values and judicial accountability in India.

Donald Trump's return as U.S. President and its impact on South Asia

Source: The post Donald Trump's return as U.S. President and its impact on South Asia has been created, based on the article "**Trump's return and the South Asia outlook**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 14th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses Donald Trump's return as U.S. President and its impact on South Asia. It highlights increased U.S.-India cooperation, reduced focus on democracy, continued opposition to China, and challenges for South Asian countries in balancing major powers.

For detailed information on **Trump's Re-election and India US Relations** read this article here

What is the Impact of Trump's Return on U.S.-India Relations?

1. Strengthened Cooperation Against China: Trump's foreign policy prioritizes countering China, aligning with India's regional objectives. His focus on pushing back China supports India's leadership in South Asia.

2. Less focus Over Democracy and Human Rights: Unlike Biden, Trump is likely to focus less on democracy and human rights. This will help avoid friction over India's pragmatic support for regimes like Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina government and Myanmar's junta.

3. Support for Regional Leadership: Trump's burden-sharing approach emphasizes India's leadership while the U.S. supplements it. This will deepen Indo-Pacific collaboration, including areas like defense and development.

4. Economic and Strategic Cooperation: Projects like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in Nepal and economic assistance in Sri Lanka could continue, boosting India-U.S. ties.

5. Alignment on Afghanistan and Pakistan: With reduced U.S. interest in Pakistan post-Afghanistan withdrawal, irritants in bilateral relations may diminish further.

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What Could Be the Challenges for South Asia Under Trump's Administration?

1. Under Trump, South Asia may face challenges due to his confrontational stance towards China. 2. This could pressurize countries in the region to choose sides more definitively.

3. Additionally, Trump's unpredictable policy decisions might limit the regional countries' flexibility in international relations.

How Might Trump's Foreign Policy Approach Impact Global Issues?

1. Trump's promises to tackle global issues like the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia could, if successful, alleviate economic pressures in South Asia from food and fuel inflation.

2. However, his focus on American interests and reduced emphasis on nation-building could lead to varied impacts across different countries in the region.

Conclusion

Trump's return as U.S. President may strengthen U.S.-India ties, focusing on countering China while reducing emphasis on democracy and human rights. His policies could benefit India's regional leadership and South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, but pressure on others like Bangladesh may rise. His focus on peace efforts may help South Asia tackle economic challenges.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the impact of Donald Trump's potential return as U.S. President on U.S.-India relations and South Asia's geopolitical dynamics.

India's need to triple climate investments to meet its targets

Source: The post India's need to triple climate investments to meet its targets has been created, based on the article "**India needs to triple green investments for meeting climate targets: Report**" published in "**Down to Earth**" on 14th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Environment

Context: The article discusses India's need to triple climate investments to meet its targets. It highlights green finance progress, gaps in funding, and sector-wise trends. Most mitigation funds are private, while adaptation funds rely on public sources, especially government budgets.

What is India's Climate Investment Need?

1. India requires **Rs 16,250,000 crore ($2.5 trillion)** by 2030 to achieve its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). This means **Rs 1,100,000 crore ($170 billion)** annually is needed.

2. Adaptation alone demands **Rs 8,560,000 crore ($1 trillion)**, or **Rs 5,733,000 crore ($67 billion)** annually from 2015 to 2030.

What is the Current Green Finance Status?

1. India invested **Rs 425,300 crore** in green finance during 2021-22.

2. Mitigation efforts received **Rs 371,200 crore ($50 billion)**, a 20% increase from 2019-20.

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3. Adaptation sectors received **Rs 1,09,200 crore ($15 billion)**, a three-fold increase from 2019-20.

4. The **CPI report, titled** *The Landscape of Green Finance in India*, analyzed both public and private sources of green finance. **83% of mitigation finance** was domestic, with the private sector contributing **66%**.

5. International mitigation finance rose to **17%**, with **66% from private sources**, up from **40% in 2019-20**.

6. Clean energy attracted **47%** of mitigation funding, energy efficiency **35%**, and clean transportation **18%**.

7. Adaptation funds were **98% public**, primarily from government budgets.

How is Adaptation Finance Sourced?

1. **98% of adaptation finance** is from public domestic sources, primarily government budgets.

2. Farm adaptation activities saw negligible private funding, with less than **1% from private equity and venture capital**.

3. International adaptation finance grew by **19%** in 2021-22, with **92% from public sources**.

Which Adaptation Sectors Received the Most Funds?

1. **Disaster risk management: 42%** of adaptation funds, with a ten-fold increase since 2019-20.

2. Flood and cyclone mitigation: 32% of funds.

3. **Agricultural adaptation activities: 24%**, with crop insurance taking **58%**, mostly funded by public sources.

Question for practice:

Discuss the trends and sources of funding for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts in India.

Zika virus transmission in Africa is low due to differences in mosquito species

Source: The post Zika virus transmission in Africa is low due to differences in mosquito species has been created, based on the article "**Genomic variation in mosquitoes responsible for low rates of Zika transmission in Africa: Study**" published in "**Down to Earth**" on 14th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Science and technology-Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Context: The article explains that Zika virus transmission in Africa is low due to differences in mosquito species. The native mosquito, Aedes aegypti formosus, is less effective at spreading the virus. Temperature and mosquito genetics influence Zika spread, though urbanization and climate change may increase future risks.

For detailed information on **Zika virus** read this article here

Why is Zika Virus Transmission Low in Africa?

The Zika virus spreads less in Africa due to differences in mosquito species. The native mosquito, **Aedes aegypti formosus (Aaf)**, is less effective at transmitting the virus than its globally invasive counterpart, **Aedes aegypti aegypti (Aaa)**. Aaf feeds on both humans and animals, lowering human infection risks, while Aaa primarily feeds on humans, making it more efficient at spreading the virus.

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How Do Mosquito Variations Affect Transmission?

Aedes aegypti exists in two forms:

1. **Aedes aegypti aegypti (Aaa)**: Found outside Africa, it breeds in artificial containers, lives in human habitats, and feeds mainly on humans.

2. **Aedes aegypti formosus (Aaf)**: Native to Africa, it breeds in natural habitats, like tree holes, and feeds on both humans and animals.

The mixed feeding behavior of Aaf acts as a natural barrier, reducing Zika virus transmission in Africa.

How Do Genetics and Temperature Influence the Spread?

1. **Genetics**: Zika burden closely matches the proportion of Aaa mosquitoes in African regions. Aaf mosquitoes are genetically less capable of transmitting the virus.

2. **Temperature**: Sub-Saharan Africa has ideal conditions for Zika transmission in some regions. However, areas with extreme temperatures (too hot or cold) limit mosquito survival and virus spread.

What Did the Study Find About Urban Risks?

1. Researchers analyzed 59 African cities with populations over 1 million.

2. They found: 23 cities (39%) are already suitable for Zika outbreaks due to their climate and mosquito populations.

3. Rapid urbanization and climate change could increase vulnerability to Zika in African cities.

Conclusion

The low Zika burden in Africa is due to mosquito genetics and feeding preferences. However, urbanization and climate change could make African cities more prone to outbreaks in the future.

Question for practice:

Discuss how mosquito species, genetics, and environmental factors influence the transmission of the Zika virus in Africa.

How caste system affects India's social capital

Source: The post how caste system affects India's social capital has been created, based on the article "**Caste salience in Indian society must fall for social capital to rise**" published in "**Live mint**" on 16th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1- Society

Context: The article discusses India's lack of social capital, linking it to the caste system, which creates divisions and distrust. It suggests promoting inter-dining, protecting inter-caste marriages, universal public schooling, and early childhood exposure to diversity as solutions.

For detailed information on **Caste based Inequalities in India** read this article here

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Why Does India Lack Social Capital?

1. **Caste System:** India's caste system divides people into thousands of communities (jatis), preventing inter-marriage and inter-dining. As David Reich notes, India is "an extremely large number of small populations." This creates trust within communities but distrust across them.

2. **Fragmented Society:** M.N. Srinivas observed that caste divisions strengthened through democratic politics, making social unity difficult. B.R. Ambedkar called castes "anti-national" and a barrier to nation-building.

3. **Public Interest vs. Private Gains:** Lack of shared community causes neglect of public spaces. Cities face problems like traffic congestion, leading to frustration and distrust.

4. **Economic Barriers:** Caste limits access to credit, keeping small businesses small.

What are the solutions?

1. **Promote Inter-Dining**: Establish common canteens in educational institutions and workplaces to encourage different communities to share meals. Introduce public food courts and communal feasts on national holidays to foster a sense of unity.

2. **Support Inter-Caste Marriages**: Protect inter-caste couples from societal coercion, emphasizing the state's role in ensuring their safety.

3. **Leverage Technology**: Use digital payment systems and platforms like the Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN) to provide fair financial opportunities, reducing economic disparities linked to caste.

4. **Universal Public Schooling**: Implement inclusive education from the kindergarten level to promote early exposure to diversity, aiming to instill egalitarian values in children.

5. **Influence Parenting and Early Childhood Experiences**: Encourage diverse, multicultural environments for raising children to develop comfort with various racial and ethnic backgrounds, reducing bias and fostering inclusivity from a young age.

Question for practice:

Discuss how India's caste system impacts social capital and suggest solutions to overcome these challenges.

India's Digital Growth and Women's Safety Challenges

Source: The post India's Digital Growth and Women's Safety Challenges has been created, based on the article "**The digital frontier of inequality**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 16th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1- Society-Social empowerment

Context: The article discusses India's progress in digital transformation and its challenges. It highlights tech-facilitated gender-based violence, government initiatives to combat it, and the need for stricter laws, digital literacy, tech industry collaboration, and survivor support systems for safer online spaces.

For detailed information on **The stage has been set for gender equity in Digital India** read this article here

What is the context of India's digital revolution?
 1. India is undergoing a digital revolution, recognized globally for its digital public infrastructure.

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2. It has 1.18 billion mobile connections, 700 million Internet users, and 600 million smartphones. 3. Women hold 55.6% of Jan Dhan accounts, benefiting from digital services.

4. Rural India boasts 20% more Internet users than in urban areas (2021 Nielsen report)

What are the risks of digital transformation for women?

1. Digital transformation exposes women to tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).

2. Urban women in public roles face harassment like cyberstalking and trolling.

3. Many rural women lack digital literacy and awareness of their rights, making them more vulnerable.

4. TFGBV includes cyberstalking, trolling, sharing intimate images without consent, and impersonation.

What steps has India taken to combat TFGBV?

1. **Legal frameworks**: The IT Act, 2000, and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2024.

2. **Reporting**: National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal enables anonymous complaints.

3. **Awareness**: Programmes like Digital Shakti educate women on online safety.

4. **Support Systems:** Helplines like TechSakhi provide information and assistance to survivors.

5. **Campaigns:** Launched "Ab Koi Bahana Nahi" to address gender-based violence.

6. **International commitment**: India signed agreements like the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to promote safe ICT environments.

What are the solutions to ensure safer online spaces?

1. **Stricter laws and accountability**: Enforce stronger penalties for online violence and hold social media platforms accountable.

2. **Expand digital literacy**: Educate rural women and integrate safe practices into school curriculums.

3. **Community involvement**: Conduct workshops to involve men and boys as allies.

4. **Tech collaboration**: Work with tech companies to enhance safety features and use AI for detecting abuse.

5. **Support systems**: Strengthen helplines like TechSakhi and offer counselling and legal aid for survivors.

Question for practice:

Examine the challenges posed by India's digital transformation for women and the measures taken to address tech-facilitated gender-based violence.

How Carbon Markets Work and Their Challenges

Source: The post How Carbon Markets Work and Their Challenges has been created, based on the article "**How would a carbon market function?**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 16th December 2024

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UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article explains carbon markets, where businesses buy and sell the right to emit carbon. It highlights how these markets help reduce pollution by making companies pay for emissions. It also discusses potential problems, like governments increasing credits or firms cheating emissions.

For detailed information on **Carbon Markets: Benefits and Challenges** read this article here

What is a Carbon Market?

Carbon markets allow businesses to buy and sell permissions to emit carbon dioxide. Each permission, called a carbon credit, equals 1,000 kilograms of CO2. By controlling the number of credits, governments can manage how much carbon is released into the air. This system started in the U.S. in the 1990s to control sulfur dioxide emissions.

For detailed information on **Carbon markets and its significance** read this article here

Why are Carbon Markets Useful?

1. **Regulation of Emissions:** They regulate carbon emissions by issuing carbon credits, with one credit allowing the emission of 1,000 kilograms of CO2. This mechanism helps governments control overall emissions effectively.

2. **Economic Incentive:** Companies have to buy carbon credits to emit, which economically incentivizes them to reduce their carbon footprint.

3. **Market Efficiency:** Trading carbon credits in a market allows companies that need more credits to buy from those who need less, promoting efficient distribution of emissions allowances.

4. **Encourages Technological Advancements:** As companies seek to minimize carbon costs, there's an incentive for innovation in carbon tracking and reduction technologies.

5. **Large Company Support:** Major corporations, such as ExxonMobil and General Motors, advocate for carbon markets as they provide flexibility and market-based solutions for managing emissions, unlike direct regulatory interventions.

What Challenges Do Carbon Markets Face?

1. **Oversupply of Carbon Credits**: Governments that are not serious about reducing emissions may issue too many carbon credits. This can lower the price of credits, making it ineffective in reducing emissions.

2. **Cheating and Illegal Emissions**: Some governments may allow firms to cheat by illegally emitting more carbon than their credits permit, reducing the credibility of the system.

3. **Voluntary Reporting Preferred by Corporations**: Large firms like ExxonMobil and General Motors prefer voluntary emission reporting, such as the Carbon Disclosure Project. They oppose strict government-imposed limits, arguing it may lead to higher costs and production restrictions.

4. **Economic Growth Concerns**: Critics worry that strict caps on carbon credits could unnecessarily slow economic growth. Politicians might impose restrictions without bearing personal economic consequences.

5. **Effectiveness of Carbon Offsets**: Firms often purchase carbon offsets for public relations rather than ensuring genuine emission reductions. This raises doubts about the actual environmental impact of offsets.

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6. **Challenges for Small Businesses**: Small businesses, particularly in developing countries, face difficulties in monitoring and reporting emissions. Limited access to advanced tracking tools, like real-time energy sector data, hampers their participation.

Question for practice:

Examine the usefulness and challenges of carbon markets in regulating emissions and promoting environmental sustainability.

India's mineral diplomacy

Source: The post India's mineral diplomacy has been created, based on the article "**India's firmer attempts at mineral diplomacy**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 16th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS paper2-international relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Context: The article discusses India's efforts to secure critical minerals for its manufacturing and technology sectors. It highlights India's partnerships with other countries, government initiatives like KABIL, and the need for stronger private sector involvement, diplomatic capacity, and sustainable partnerships to improve mineral security.

For detailed information on **Critical Mineral Mission of India** read this article here

Why are critical minerals important for India?

Critical minerals like lithium and cobalt are essential for manufacturing and technology sectors, especially for renewable energy and batteries. India imports most of its critical minerals, making it dependent on countries like China. This dependence raises strategic concerns.

What is India's strategy for mineral security?

India is adopting **mineral diplomacy** with two key pillars:

1. **Bilateral engagement with resource-rich countries:** Building partnerships with countries like Australia, Argentina, Kazakhstan, and the U.S. India formed Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL) in 2019 to secure mineral supplies.

2. **Global cooperative engagements:** Collaborating with multilateral groups like the Quad, G-7, and the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP). Aligning with global best practices for critical mineral supply chains.

What are India's achievements in mineral diplomacy?

1. **Australia Partnership**: Signed a critical mineral investment partnership in 2022, identifying two lithium and three cobalt projects.

2. **Latin America Engagement**: In 2024, signed a $24 million lithium exploration agreement with Argentina for five lithium brine blocks; exploring assets in Bolivia and Chile.

3. **Kazakhstan Collaboration**: Formed **IREUK Titanium Limited**, a joint venture to produce titanium slag, marking the first collaboration with Central Asia.

4. **Private Sector Involvement**: Altmin Private Limited partnered with Bolivia's YLB to secure lithium-ion battery materials.

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5. **Global Engagement**: Signed an MoU with the International Energy Agency to align policies with global standards.

What are the challenges in India's mineral diplomacy?

1. Limited private sector involvement: No clear roadmap for private companies to participate in the critical mineral supply chain.

2. **Weak diplomatic capacity:** Lack of a dedicated division for mineral diplomacy in the Ministry of External Affairs.

3. **Lack of sustainable partnerships:** India's partnerships with EU, South Korea, and Quad nations need strengthening to leverage technological and diplomatic support.

What steps can strengthen India's mineral security?

1. **Involve private sector**: Develop a critical mineral supply chain strategy that includes private companies.

2. **Enhance diplomatic capacity**: Create a dedicated mineral diplomacy division within the Ministry of External Affairs.

3. **Forge trusted partnerships**: Collaborate more with technologically advanced countries like South Korea and the EU.

Question for practice:

Examine the challenges faced by India in ensuring mineral security and the steps needed to overcome them.

How Powerful Countries Dominate Through Global Chaos

Source: The post How Powerful Countries Dominate Through Global Chaos has been created, based on the article "**Geopolitics has played a massive role in the rise of 'Master States'**" published in "**Live mint**" on 17th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International relations

Context: The article explains how powerful countries, or "Master States," use geopolitical chaos to gain economic and military dominance. It highlights how nations like Britain, the US, Germany, and Japan leveraged resources, markets, and opportunities during global upheavals to succeed.

What is the Westphalian System?

1. The Westphalian system describes a world where countries, known as nation-states, operate under their own rules.

2. These rules are often shaped by a few powerful countries, referred to as "Master States," which dominate because of their military and economic strength.

3. Master States maintain control by creating rules that benefit themselves and disadvantage less developed countries. This creates an unequal global economic system.

How Have Master States Historically Gained Power?

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1. **Colonization and Conquest**: European powers like Britain plundered resources from colonies in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Colonies provided cheap raw materials, labor, and markets for British goods.

2. **Slavery and High Tariffs**: The U.S. used slavery to address labor shortages and protected its manufacturers with high tariffs while stealing European technology.

3. **Geopolitical Chaos**: The U.S. benefited from World War II by supplying war materials and leading reconstruction. The 1944 Bretton Woods system established the U.S. dollar as the global trade currency.

How Did the U.S. Help Japan and Germany After World War II?

1. After World War II, the U.S. helped rebuild Japan and Germany. It funded Europe's recovery through the Marshall Plan and boosted Japan by buying its products during the Korean War and beyond, which helped Japan's economy flourish.

2. The rise of Master States relies significantly on their ability to manipulate global rules and take advantage of geopolitical disturbances to cement their economic and military superiority.

Question for practice:

Discuss how Master States have historically gained power by leveraging geopolitical chaos and economic strategies.

Indian Railways Electrification Drive Lacks Strategic Clarity

Source: The post Indian Railways Electrification Drive Lacks Strategic Clarity has been created, based on the article "**The hidden cost of greenwashing the Indian Railways**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 17th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Infrastructure: Energy, Railways etc.

Context: The article criticizes the Indian Railways' hasty electrification drive. It highlights the wastage of diesel locomotives with years of service left, questions environmental benefits, and argues that the policy lacks economic and strategic clarity, causing significant financial loss.

For details information on **Railway network in 14 states 100% electrified in FY23** read this article here

What is the Issue with Indian Railways' Electrification Efforts?

1. **Wastage of Diesel Locomotives:** As of March 2023, 585 diesel locomotives were idle. Today, the number is 760. Over 60% of these locomotives have a remaining life of more than 15 years.

2. **Minimal Foreign Exchange Savings:** According to the AC Nielsen report (2014), Railways' diesel consumption is just 2% of India's total diesel use (2021-22). Trucks consume 28%, and agriculture consumes 13.2% of diesel, showing Railways' minimal contribution.

3. **Environmental Claims Are Misleading:** 50% of electricity in India comes from coal-fired plants. Railways earn 40% of total freight revenue by transporting coal. Electrification increases coal dependency, shifting pollution to thermal plants.

4. **Policy Lacks Clarity: The** rush for 100% electrification wastes serviceable assets and taxpayer money, causing financial losses.

What is the Strategic Reasoning Behind Keeping Diesel Locomotives?

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1. **Disaster Management**: Indian Railways plans to retain **2,500 diesel locomotives** for emergencies and strategic purposes.

2. **Traffic Needs**: Around **1,000 diesel locomotives** will remain operational for a few more years to meet traffic demands.

3. **Residual Service Life**: Over **60% of idle locomotives** still have more than **15 years of service left**.

Conclusion: The Indian Railways' rush for 100% electrification lacks practical and environmental justification. Over 760 diesel locomotives, 60% with over 15 years of life, are being wasted. Electrification relies on 50% coal-generated electricity, increasing pollution. Retaining 3,500 diesel locomotives highlights policy contradictions. This approach causes significant financial loss without achieving real "green" goals.

Question for practice:

Examine the economic, environmental, and strategic issues associated with the Indian Railways' rush for 100% electrification, as highlighted in the article.

India's Path to Overcome Green Hydrogen Challenges

Source: The post India's Path to Overcome Green Hydrogen Challenges has been created, based on the article "**Green hydrogen and the financing challenge**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 17th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Infrastructure: Energy

Context: The article highlights India's challenges in achieving its green hydrogen goals due to high production costs and financing barriers. It suggests innovative financing, policy frameworks, industrial hubs, and global collaborations to reduce risks and scale green hydrogen production efficiently. For details information on **Green Hydrogen Mission** read this article here

Why is Green Hydrogen Important for India?

1. **Ambitious Goal:** India aims to produce **5 million metric tonnes (MMT)** of green hydrogen annually by **2030** to decarbonize its industrial sectors and achieve **net-zero emissions by 2070**. However, current progress is slow, with BloombergNEF estimating that India may meet only **10% of its goal**.

2. **Reducing Reliance on Fossil Fuels**: Current traditional hydrogen methods (grey/blue) cost $1.9-$2.4 per kg, while green hydrogen costs $5.30-$6.70 per kg. Scaling production can reduce this gap.

3. **Global Leadership Opportunity**: Countries like the U.K., U.S., and Japan are creating hydrogen hubs, providing successful examples for India.

4. **Industrial Hubs Development**: States like Odisha, Maharashtra, and Gujarat can become green hydrogen hubs.

5. **Access to Abundant Renewables**: Leveraging India's renewable energy resources with efficient financing can lower production costs.

6. **Economic Potential**: Policies like purchase agreements and international collaborations can attract investments and boost exports.

What are the major challenges related to India's green hydrogen sector?

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1. **High Production Costs**: Green hydrogen costs **$5.30-$6.70 per kg**, while grey/blue hydrogen costs only **$1.9-$2.4 per kg**, making it hard to attract investment.

2. **Levelised Cost of Electricity (LCOE):** High **Weighted Average Cost of Capital (WACC)** in emerging markets like India increases LCOE. Studies show WACC rising from **10% to 20%** can increase hydrogen costs by **73%**.

3. **Electrolyzer Costs:** These range between **$500-$1,400/kW** for alkaline systems and **$1,100-$1,800/kW** for proton exchange membrane systems.

4. **Slow Investments Globally**: By **May 2024**, only **27.6%** of **1,572 large-scale hydrogen projects** (valued at **$370 billion**) reached final investment decisions.

5. **Lack of Policy Innovation**: Unlike the **U.K.'s Low Carbon Hydrogen Standard** or **U.S. hydrogen hubs**, India lacks policies to build market confidence and integrated ecosystems.

How Can India Overcome Financing Barriers?

India must adopt a multi-pronged approach to attract investments:

1. Policy Measures:

• Implement **long-term hydrogen purchase agreements**.

• Provide loan guarantees to reduce risks.

• Use regulatory **sandboxes** to experiment with new business models.

2. Innovative Financing Models:

• Introduce modular project financing to scale facilities in phases.

• Use "anchor-plus" financing where industrial anchor customers support initial capacity.

• Adopt equipment-leasing structures to reduce upfront electrolyzer costs.

3. Global Collaboration:

1. Set up standardized hydrogen certification to boost exports.

2. Develop **cross-border trade partnerships**, such as the Australia-Japan Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain Project.

Way Forward

India needs to develop industrial hubs in states like Odisha, Maharashtra, and Gujarat, where projects can demonstrate effective business models and achieve lower hydrogen prices through strategic planning and financial structuring.

Question for practice:

Evaluate how India can overcome the challenges of high production costs and financing barriers to achieve its green hydrogen goals.

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La Niña delays impact India's weather patterns

Source: The post La Niña delays impact India's weather patterns has been created, based on the article "**How does La Niña affect India's climate?**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 17th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article discusses La Niña, a climate phenomenon that affects global weather. It explains its delayed emergence in 2024, its effects on rainfall, temperature, and air quality, and how it impacts India's monsoon and winter seasons. Climate change may increase its frequency.

What is La Niña and El Niño?

La Niña is a phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). It occurs when the Pacific Ocean between Indonesia and South America becomes cooler than normal. Its counterpart, El Niño, causes warming of the same region.

For details information on **El Nino: Concept and impacts** read this article here

How is La Niña affecting winter in India?

1. This winter, southern cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad are colder than usual. Northern India has a delayed winter with above-normal temperatures.

2. **Current ONI values** show that La Niña has not formed yet.

3. If La Niña had formed, north India would have experienced colder winters.

4. 35-Year Analysis:

• La Niña winters have *colder nights* but *higher daytime temperatures*.

• **Wind Speed:** Winds are stronger during La Niña, reducing air pollution.

• **Planetary Boundary Layer Height (PBLH):** PBLH is slightly lower, which can trap pollutants near the ground.

How is La Niña affecting India?

1. **Delayed Onset**: La Niña was expected to emerge by July 2024 but has not yet formed. There is now only a 57% chance it will develop this year.

2. **Air Quality Effects**: Higher wind speeds during expected La Niña conditions could help disperse air pollutants, potentially improving air quality. However, cooler temperatures might increase biomass burning, worsening pollution due to more pollutants being trapped near the ground.

3. **Monsoon Impact**: La Niña years typically see normal or above-normal rainfall in India, benefiting the monsoon season. In contrast, El Niño years often bring less rainfall and hotter summers, like the severe heatwaves India faced in April of this year.

4. Future Outlook: If La Niña persists into 2025, it may bring relief from heat waves and strengthen the monsoon.

For details information on **Negative impact of delayed La Niña** read this article here

Conclusion

La Niña's delayed emergence is affecting weather patterns. Its formation could benefit India by reducing heat and strengthening the monsoon. However, it may also impact winter air quality and temperature patterns in the coming months.

Question for practice:

Examine how the delayed emergence of La Niña in 2024 is impacting India's winter, air quality, and monsoon patterns.

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France faces political crisis after failed elections

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Source: The post France faces political crisis after failed elections has been created, based on the article "**Costly gambles: Emmanuel Macron is driving France into one crisis after another**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 17th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International relations

Context: The article discusses France's political crisis after President Macron's failed gambles. A hung parliament, economic troubles, and unstable governments have worsened the situation. Macron's refusal to work with the Left has prolonged the crisis, risking further instability and economic harm.

What Led to France's Current Political Crisis?

1. President Emmanuel Macron called a snap legislative election to secure a new mandate for his centrist coalition and stop the far-right National Rally's rise.

2. However, the election led to a hung parliament. The left-wing **New Popular Front (NFP)** emerged as the largest bloc, but Macron appointed **Michel Barnier**, a conservative leader from the Republicans (who finished fourth), to form the government.

3. Barnier's government collapsed within **three months**, leaving France without a budget for **2025**.

Who Is France's New Prime Minister?

1. Macron has now appointed **François Bayrou**, leader of the Democratic Movement party, as Prime Minister.

2. His party holds just **33 seats** in the **577-member National Assembly**, making him weak in Parliament.

3. Even if Macron's coalition (Ensemble) and the Republicans combine, they **still lack a majority** (289 seats).

What Are the Challenges Facing the New Government?

1. The Socialist Party, part of the left-wing alliance, has refused to join the new government.

2. This leaves Bayrou's government dependent on Marine Le Pen's **far-right National Rally** for survival.

3. Passing an emergency budget to ensure essential services is Bayrou's immediate task.

4. Negotiations will be difficult as the far-right opposes **further cuts in social spending**.

How Severe Are France's Economic Issues?

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France is facing significant economic troubles:

• Rising unemployment and falling domestic consumption.

• The fiscal deficit has jumped to **6.1% of GDP**, worse than Greece, Spain, and Italy (countries hit hard in the 2008-09 debt crisis).

• France's national debt has grown to **€3.2 trillion**, over **112% of GDP**.

Question for practice:

Discuss the factors that led to France's current political crisis and the challenges facing its new government.

Religion and Reservations in India

Source: This article on **Religion and Reservations in India** is based on article " **How Supreme Court, govt have attempted to define importance of religion in SC & OBC reservations**" published in **The Indian Express** on **17ᵗʰ December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS-2- Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Context: The article addresses the complex and contentious issue of **religion and reservations** in India, focusing on **Other Backward Classes (OBC)** and **Scheduled Caste (SC)** quotas. It examines the evolving legal and governmental positions on whether religion can be a basis for providing reservation benefits and highlights specific Supreme Court and High Court rulings that have shaped the debate.

Can reservations be based on religion, especially for Other Backward Classes (OBC)?

1. While the Constitution (Article 16(4)) allows states to provide reservations for "backward classes" underrepresented in public services, the Supreme Court in *Indra Sawhney v Union of India* **(1992)** ruled that religion cannot be the *sole* basis for determining backwardness.
2. The court emphasized that other **social, economic, or educational criteria must also justify reservations.**
3. Several states have provided OBC reservations to Muslims. For example:
   • **Kerala**: Muslims have been part of OBC quotas since 1956.
   • **Karnataka**: In 1995, based on the Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy Commission's 1990 report, Muslims "as a whole" were deemed socially and economically backward.
   • **Tamil Nadu**: Included Muslim groups in the OBC quota in 2007.
4. However, challenges persist. For instance, on **May 22, 2024**, the Calcutta High Court struck down OBC reservations for 77 classes—mostly from the Muslim community—stating that the reservations were based on religion without "objective criteria" to prove backwardness.

How does religion impact Scheduled Caste (SC) reservations?

1. The Constitution (Article 341) allows the President to specify SC communities. The **Scheduled Castes Order, 1950** restricts SC status to Hindus, later extended to Sikhs (1956) and Buddhists (1990). Converts to Christianity and Islam remain excluded.
2. In the *Soosai v Union of India* (1985) case, the Supreme Court ruled that a religious convert cannot retain SC status unless they prove caste-related discrimination persists in their new religious community.
3. The **Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007)** found caste discrimination exists across all religions and recommended that SC status should extend to converts to Christianity and Islam. However, the Centre rejected this recommendation.

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4. A key challenge is pending in the **Ghazi Saaduddin v State of Maharashtra** case (since 2004), which questions the constitutional validity of the 1950 Presidential Order. In April 2024, the Supreme Court delayed the case, citing the Centre's formation of a commission led by ex-CJI K G Balakrishnan to examine the issue. The commission's report is now expected by **October 2025**.

What are the legal hurdles regarding reservations for religious groups?

Legal challenges arise when reservations for religious groups are provided without clear justification:

- **Andhra Pradesh (2005)**: The state introduced 5% reservations for Muslims within the OBC quota. The Andhra Pradesh High Court struck it down, stating the government did not use "objective criteria" to prove backwardness.
- **Calcutta High Court (2024)**: Similar reasoning invalidated reservations for 77 predominantly Muslim classes.

The Supreme Court is yet to decide on the Andhra Pradesh case, despite indicating it would address it after the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) judgment in 2022.

India's Demographic Advantage and Challenges

Source: This article on **India's Demographic Advantage and Challenges** is based on article " **India's asset-less, ageing population with poor health is a crisis in the making"** published in **The Indian Express** on **17th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

Context: The article critically examines India's demographic situation, highlighting the gap between its potential demographic dividend and the challenges hindering its realization. India, currently at its demographic prime, has a substantial proportion of its population in the working-age group (15-59 years), which will continue for the next few decades. However, the article underscores that demographic advantage alone is not sufficient unless accompanied by the right policies and investments to ensure high productivity, education, skills, and health.

What is India's demographic status, and what are the key challenges?

1. India is in its demographic prime, with **67.3%** of its population aged **15-59 years**, a unique advantage expected to last for three more decades.
2. By 2030, India will have the **largest workforce** in the world, but this can only translate into economic growth if supported by **proper education, skills, and health**.
3. However, current challenges include:
   - **Education**: Only **41% of women** and **50.2% of men** (15-49 years) have 10+ years of schooling.
   - **Health**:
     o **Anaemia**: 57% of women and 25% of men are anaemic.
     o **BMI**: 18.7% of women and 16.2% of men have a BMI below normal.
   - **Learning Outcomes**: Among adolescents, only **77%** of 17-18-year-olds can read a Class 2 textbook, and just **35%** can perform division.

How do nutrition and health issues among children impact India's future workforce?

1. **Under-5 Health**:
   o **Stunting**: 35.5% are stunted.
   o **Wasting**: 19.3% are wasted.
   o **Underweight**: 32.1% are underweight.
   o **Anaemia**: 67.1% of children (6-59 months) are anaemic.

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2. **Diet**: Only **11.3% of children under two years** receive a minimal adequate diet. Poor nutrition hinders **90% brain development**, which occurs before age five, affecting future cognitive abilities.

What is the risk of an ageing population post-2030?

1. After 2030, India will start **ageing**, with the workforce shrinking and the elderly population rising.
2. Without intervention, India risks a **large, asset-less, ageing population in poor health**, creating economic burdens rather than growth opportunities.

What urgent steps must India take to harness its demographic dividend?

1. Conduct a **real-time analysis** of the demographic situation.
2. Redesign policy frameworks to strengthen:
   o **Nutrition**: Ensure minimal adequate diets for children.
   o **Healthcare**: Address anaemia, undernutrition, and physical health gaps.
   o **Education**: Improve learning outcomes, especially foundational skills like reading and arithmetic.
3. A strong foundation of **nutrition, health, and education** across the life cycle is critical to ensure India's demographic dividend can capitalize on future economic opportunities and avoid becoming a burden.

Indianness of the Constitution

Source: This article on **Indianness of the Constitution** is based on **"Yogendra Yadav writes: What's Indian about the Indian Constitution?"** is published in **The Indian Express** on 17th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topics: GS-2- Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure.

Context: The article reflects on the **Indianness of the Indian Constitution**, a question that has surfaced repeatedly since its drafting and continues to be debated. It critiques the ideological and political attempts, particularly by certain factions, to question the Constitution's legitimacy on the grounds of its alleged "foreign" origins.

Why is the question about the Indianness of the Constitution important? Was this question raised earlier?

1. The question of Indianness is central because it challenges the Constitution's legitimacy and authenticity, which is being questioned by those aiming to undermine India's constitutional republic.
2. The debate reflects an ideological conflict about whether the Constitution aligns with India's cultural and civilizational values.
3. Even during the Constituent Assembly debates, the question of the Constitution being "alien" or "foreign" was brought up due to its reliance on Western constitutional traditions and English as its working language.

What does "Indianness" of the Constitution not mean?

1. An Indian Constitution cannot mean a document untouched by foreign ideas. A modern state requires a written constitution that incorporates universal principles.
2. Mere adding illustrations from Indian mythology or renaming laws (e.g., Indian Penal Code to Bharatiya Nyaya Samhita) does not inherently make it Indian.
3. Simply privileging Hindu-ness or any singular element from India's past does not ensure authenticity. This approach mimics systems like Pakistan (Islamic Republic) or even models like Nazi Germany or modern Israel, which undermine India's pluralistic identity.

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How can the Constitution reflect Indianness authentically?

1. **Radical Originality**: Creating an entirely new Constitution by rejecting Western political thought and building one solely on India's civilizational heritage. This was Gandhi's vision in *Hind Swaraj*. However, this remains impractical since no workable draft exists.
2. **Compositional Originality**: Adapting and modifying Western constitutional ideas to suit India's context and traditions. This is the approach taken in India's Constitution.

How does the Indian Constitution reflect compositional originality?

1. The Constitution was not a result of sudden creation. It was written in under three years and it was the product of over a century of modern Indian political thought and engagement with multiple intellectual traditions.
2. It brought together diverse visions of India, combining received ideas from Western constitutionalism with India's civilizational wisdom to forge an "Indian modernity."
3. The lived experience of Indian jurisprudence and public participation over the past 75 years proves that even those unfamiliar with the Constitution resonate with its morality and values.

What unique Indian features does the Constitution showcase?

1. **Union of India**: Unlike classic federal states, the Constitution aligns with India's multi-layered governance traditions from pre-modern times.
2. **State-Nation Concept**: India's model respects cultural and social diversity, unlike European-style nation-states.
3. **Secularism**: Indian secularism adopts a "principled distance" approach based on *maitri* and *sarva dharma samabhava*, not the Western models of American or French secularism.
4. **Socialism**: The socialist features align with India's value of *karuna* (compassion).
5. **Rejection of caste and untouchability**: The Constitution builds on long-standing Indian traditions of reform.

What is the essence of Indianness in the Constitution?

1. The Constitution reinterprets and recasts inherited ideas, blending modern principles with India's intellectual traditions, much like an *authentic Indian dish* made from foreign ingredients.
2. The Indian Constitution is a testament to India's *desi genius*. It is modern yet deeply rooted in Indian values, traditions, and cultural context, creating something unique and authentically Indian.

Procedure for removing judges

Source: This article **Procedure for removing judges** is based on article **"What is the procedure for removing judges?"** published in The Hindu on 17TH December 2024.

Syllabus: GS 2- Polity- Appointment to various Constitutional Posts, Powers, Functions and Responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Context: The article discusses the procedure for the removal of judges in India and highlights the specific case involving Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court. It explains the constitutional and legal framework for removing judges and delves into the allegations against Justice Yadav that have prompted a motion for his removal.

What does the Constitution say about the removal of judges?

1. Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution state that a Supreme Court or High Court judge can be removed by the President on grounds of *proved misbehaviour* or *incapacity*.
2. This must be approved by both Houses of Parliament with:
- A majority of the total membership of that House, and
- A two-thirds majority of members present and voting in the same session.

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How are *misbehaviour* and *incapacity* defined?

The terms are not explicitly defined in the Constitution. However, the Supreme Court has interpreted *misbehaviour* to include wilful misconduct, corruption, lack of integrity, or offences involving moral turpitude. *Incapacity* refers to physical or mental inability to perform duties.

What is the role of the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968?

The Act provides a detailed procedure for removal:

1. A motion must be signed by at least **50 MPs** in the Rajya Sabha or **100 MPs** in the Lok Sabha.
2. The Chairman (Rajya Sabha) or Speaker (Lok Sabha) can either admit or refuse the motion.
3. If admitted, a **three-member committee** (comprising judges and a jurist) investigates the allegations.
4. If the judge is absolved, the motion is dropped. If found guilty, the report is presented to both Houses, which must pass the motion with a *special majority*.

What standards govern judges' conduct?

The *Reinstatement of Values of Judicial Life* (adopted by the Supreme Court in 1997) mandates that judges must reaffirm people's faith in judicial impartiality and avoid any behaviour unbecoming of their office.

Though the *Judges (Inquiry) Bill, 2006* was not passed, it suggested defining 'misbehaviour' to include violations of judicial codes of conduct. It also proposed minor penalties like warnings, censures, or temporary withdrawal of judicial work for misconduct that does not warrant removal.

Why is judicial conduct so significant?

Judges must uphold the dignity of their constitutional office. Any behavior that undermines public confidence in their impartiality can harm the judiciary's credibility.

What challenges are involved in the removal process?

The process is stringent, requiring a **special majority** in both Houses of Parliament. Even if the inquiry committee finds a judge guilty, the motion often fails to pass, which protects judicial independence.

How does the "Blackstone's ratio" apply?

The principle that *"it is better for ten guilty persons to escape than for one innocent to suffer"* applies to the removal process. The rigorous procedure ensures judicial independence by safeguarding judges from frivolous or politically motivated removal attempts.

Complexity in achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India

Source: The post complexity in achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India has been created, based on the article "**The challenge of universal health coverage**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Context: The article highlights India's diverse healthcare challenges and the need for state-specific strategies for universal health coverage. It emphasizes the importance of addressing local health profiles, reducing out-of-pocket expenses, and strengthening primary healthcare for effective solutions.

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For detailed information on **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** read this article here

Why is there complexity in achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India?

1. **Diverse Health Systems**: India has multiple health system types across states, with some states having more than one system. This diversity complicates a one-size-fits-all approach to UHC.

2. **Uneven Health Expenditure**: Per capita government health expenditure varies widely. For example, Himachal Pradesh spends ₹3,829, Kerala ₹2,590, and Bihar only ₹701 (National Health Accounts 2019-20).

3. **State-Specific Challenges**: West Bengal has a low fertility rate (1.64) but a high teenage pregnancy rate (16%). In contrast, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have teenage pregnancy rates of only 2.4% and 3.4%.

4. **High Out-of-Pocket Expenditure**: Despite increased government spending, out-of-pocket costs remain high. West Bengal's rate was 67% in 2019-20, and Andhra Pradesh's was 64%.

5. **Non-Communicable Diseases**: States like West Bengal, Bihar, and Gujarat have high blood sugar rates but low hypertension. Kerala and Tamil Nadu face high rates of both conditions, requiring tailored interventions.

6. **Infrastructure Gaps**: A 58% shortfall in primary health centers in states like West Bengal weakens primary care delivery.

7. **Misaligned Policies**: High C-section rates in public hospitals of West Bengal show inefficiencies in resource utilization, despite schemes like **Swasthya Sathi**.

What should be done?

1. The complex healthcare landscape requires a holistic approach, considering local health profiles, historical and cultural factors, and regional public health needs.

2. A one-size-fits-all solution is ineffective; instead, state-specific strategies and enhanced primary care are essential for effective healthcare delivery.

Question for practice:

Examine the factors contributing to the complexity of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in India and suggest measures to address these challenges.

India's AI-powered surveillance and its impact on privacy rights

Source: The post India's AI-powered surveillance and its impact on privacy rights has been created, based on the article "**The legal gaps in India's unregulated AI surveillance**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Science and Technology – Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

Context: The article discusses India's increasing use of AI-powered surveillance and its impact on privacy rights. It highlights legal gaps, issues with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, lack of safeguards, and suggests adopting transparent, risk-based regulations to protect citizens' constitutional rights.

How has India expanded its surveillance infrastructure?

1. In 2019, India announced plans to create the world's largest facial recognition system for policing.

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2. Over the next five years, AI-powered surveillance systems were deployed at railway stations, and Delhi Police integrated AI for crime patrols.

3. Plans include launching **50 AI-powered satellites**, enhancing surveillance infrastructure further.

What concerns does AI-powered surveillance raise?

1. **Privacy Violation**: AI systems like facial recognition collect data indiscriminately, as seen in **Telangana Police's data breach**, where databases from schemes like "Samagra Vedika" were accessed.

2. **Lack of Regulation**: India has deployed surveillance without risk assessments or guidelines, unlike the EU's **Artificial Intelligence Act**, which bans real-time biometric surveillance in most cases.

3. **Legal Gaps**: The **DPDPA 2023** provides broad exemptions for government data collection, such as in **Section 7(g)**(epidemics) and **Section 7(i)** (employment data). Citizens face stricter rules under **Section 15(c)**, penalizing errors like outdated personal data.

4. **Proportionality Issues**: India's surveillance lacks safeguards, challenging the principles of the **K.S. Puttaswamy judgment**, which recognized privacy as a fundamental right.

For detailed information on **Social and Political Impacts of AI** read this article here

How does India's approach differ from global practices?

1. The **EU's Artificial Intelligence Act** categorizes AI by risk levels, banning high-risk activities like real-time biometric surveillance except in emergencies.

2. India uses AI-powered facial recognition in cities like Delhi and Hyderabad without risk assessments or public guidelines.

3. India's **Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA)** grants broad exemptions, unlike the EU's stricter regulations.

4. While the EU ensures accountability, India lacks a regulatory framework; promised laws like the **Digital India Act**remain pending.

For detailed information on **Regulation of AI** read this article here

What should be done?

1. Adopt **transparent data collection practices**, including disclosure of what data is collected, its purpose, and storage duration.

2. Ensure **independent judicial oversight** for data processing exemptions.

3. Follow a **risk-based approach** like the EU to regulate high-risk AI applications.

4. Embed privacy measures and consent mechanisms into AI systems before deployment.

5. **Retroactive fixes** for privacy issues are costly and inefficient.

6. Transparent rules, consent mechanisms, and accountability can prevent misuse.

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7. Addressing gaps in the **DPDPA** and enacting the **Digital India Act** are urgent for safeguarding privacy and civil liberties.

Question for practice:

Discuss how India's expanding use of AI-powered surveillance raises concerns about privacy rights and how these challenges can be addressed effectively.

Importance of minority rights in democracy

Source: The post importance of minority rights in democracy has been created, based on the article "**The Constitutionon minority rights**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Polity-Constitution of India —historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Context: The article discusses the importance of minority rights in democracy, their historical origins, constitutional provisions in India (Articles 29, 30, 350A, 350B), judicial interpretations, and frameworks for defining and protecting minority institutions, emphasizing equality, cultural preservation, and institutional excellence.

What is the importance of minority rights in democracy?

Minority rights are essential for the survival of democracy. They ensure equality, protect diversity, and uphold dignity. As Franklin Roosevelt said, "No democracy can survive without recognizing minority rights." The UN declared December 18 as Minority Rights Day in 1992 to highlight this importance.

How did minority rights originate?

1. 19th Century Constitutional Laws:

• Austria's Constitutional Law (1867) recognized ethnic minorities' absolute right to preserve their nationality and languages.

• Hungary's Act XLIV (1868) included similar provisions.

• The Swiss Constitution (1874) granted equal rights to three national languages in civil services, legislation, and courts.

2. Post-World War I Treaties:

• Five treaties protected minorities in Poland, Romania, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia.

• Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Turkey also included minority protections in peace treaties.

• Countries like Albania, Finland, and Iraq voluntarily committed to minority protections.

3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Article 27 gave individuals the right to enjoy their culture and participate in cultural forums.

How did India's Constitution address minority rights?

1. The framers of the Constitution were sensitive to minority needs. Articles 25-30 were introduced to ensure cultural and religious freedoms:

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• **Article 25:** Freedom of religion.

• **Article 29:** Right to conserve language, script, and culture.

• **Article 30:** Right to establish and administer educational institutions.

2. Pandit G.B. Pant stressed that satisfying minorities was essential for peace and progress in India.

3. Additional Provisions:

• **Articles 350A and 350B:** Provide for education in the mother tongue and appoint special officers for linguistic minorities.

• **Institutional Support:** The National Commission for Minorities and the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions address issues and provide safeguards.

How does the judiciary interpret minority rights?

1. Kerala Education Bill (1957): The Supreme Court emphasized that the dominant term in Article 30 is "choice," allowing minorities to establish institutions without compromising their character. It held that the State cannot impose conditions that undermine minority rights while granting aid or affiliation.

2. **Educational Autonomy:** In *St. Xavier's College Society (1974)*, the court observed that minority rights ensure equal opportunities in establishing and managing educational institutions.

3. **TMA Pai Foundation (2002):** The court clarified that minorities should be defined at the state level and laid down guidelines for determining the nature of minority institutions.

4. **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** In *Aligarh Muslim University (2024)*, the court reaffirmed Article 30 as a facet of equality and non-discrimination.

5. **Balance of Rights and Regulation:** Courts have consistently upheld that reasonable regulations ensure educational standards without infringing on minority rights.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Indian Constitution and judiciary have addressed the protection and promotion of minority rights.

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For detailed information on **Religious nationalism threatens democracy and minority rights** read this article here

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Question for practice:

Examine how the Indian Constitution and judiciary have addressed the protection and promotion of minority rights.

How ABDM Anonymizer Enhances Healthcare Data Security

Source: The post How ABDM Anonymizer Enhances Healthcare Data Security has been created, based on the article "**Give anonymized medical data an extra privacy shield**" published in "**Live mint**" on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Security and GS paper 2-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health

Context: The article discusses the Ayushmann Bharat Digital Health Mission's (ABDM) anonymizer module, which ensures personal medical data is anonymized for security. Anonymization protects data during breaches, enables safer workflows in hospitals, and allows aggregated data for healthcare improvements without compromising privacy.

What is the anonymizer module in ABDM?

1. The Ayushmann Bharat Digital Health Mission (ABDM) includes an anonymizer module to de-identify personal medical data.

2. This ensures patient information is hidden by default and only accessible to doctors and nurses.

3. Anonymization reduces the risks of personal data misuse during breaches. For example, anonymized medical records cannot directly link data to individuals. This protects patients' privacy and improves the safety of digital hospital systems.

4. Unlike most hospitals, which store patient data as plain text, ABDM's anonymization adds a layer of security.

5. Anonymized codes are used for other functions like billing or diagnostics, minimizing risks in case of data breaches.

How does anonymization unlock secondary data use?

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1. Aggregated, anonymized medical data can help identify health trends, disease clusters, and personalized treatments. For instance, trends derived from anonymized datasets could improve public health policies.

2. Anonymization removes the need for individual consent under India's data protection laws, enabling wider data use for research and development.

What are the limitations of anonymization?

1. Anonymization is not foolproof. Historical cases, such as Harvard professor Latanya Sweeney identifying anonymized medical records in a database, highlight its vulnerabilities.

2. Repeated use or layering of datasets can make de-anonymization easier.

3. Additional measures like Secure Data Environments (SDEs) are needed to strengthen data protection.

What are Secure Data Environments (SDEs)?

SDEs change the way data is used by allowing algorithms to work directly on secure, anonymized datasets without transferring data to analysts. For example, Europe's health data spaces and the UK's NHS use SDEs to protect privacy. India can adopt this approach to further improve ABDM's anonymization system.

How does this benefit India's healthcare system?

1. The anonymizer module in ABDM demonstrates forward-thinking in India's digital health system.

2. By integrating interoperable SDEs, India can safely enable secondary use of medical data, advance research, and improve health outcomes.

3. It aligns with global practices and strengthens data protection in healthcare.

Question for practice:

Examine how the anonymizer module in the Ayushmann Bharat Digital Health Mission (ABDM) enhances data security and enables secondary use of medical data while addressing its limitations.

Gukesh's Journey to Becoming World Chess Champion

Source: The post Gukesh's Journey to Becoming World Chess Champion has been created, based on the article "" published in "**The Hindu**" on 16th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper 1 – Sports

Context: This article reflects on the remarkable achievements of Indian chess prodigy Gukesh Dommaraju, who became the World Chess Champion at the age of 18, breaking records and showcasing an extraordinary style of play. The article also highlights the growing prominence of Indian chess on the global stage. It discusses Gukesh's unique playing style, his ability to create and control positions with originality and accuracy, and his mental resilience, which sets him apart from other players.

Who is Gukesh Dommaraju, and what milestone did he achieve?

1. Gukesh Dommaraju became the World Chess Champion at the age of 18, setting a record likely to last for decades. His victory signifies the rise of Indian chess prodigies.
2. Gukesh's victory highlights that chess is evolving into a game dominated by youngsters. Aggression and "fighting chess" have become the norm, replacing the conservative and dry approaches of the past.

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How does the style of play today differ from earlier eras?

Unlike the strategic but often passive matches of the past—like the 2000 World Championship between Garry Kasparov and Vladimir Kramnik—today's games involve active over-the-board thinking. Players avoid premature draws and fight for a win, as seen in Gukesh's final game against Ding Liren.

What are Gukesh's defining qualities as a player?

1. Gukesh is known for his originality, creativity, and ability to calculate accurately.
2. He is compared to a young Anatoly Karpov due to his capacity to build and dominate positions.
3. He avoids simplifications, making it difficult for opponents to draw.
4. Gukesh plays with confidence and the intention to win every game, unlike opponents who settle for draws.
5. He is not overconfident and demonstrates immense mental and physical strength.

What sets Indian chess apart from other countries?

1. Indian chess players, including Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi, show continuous progress due to their hard work and dedication.
2. They train for 10 to 11 hours daily, unlike many international players whose growth halts at a certain stage.

How does the Indian system support chess players?

1. The current system offers limited support. Success is largely due to personal effort by players and their families.
2. Sponsorships are region-specific, and government backing is minimal compared to the USSR's robust chess infrastructure.

How does India's chess scene compare with historical benchmarks?

While India has 36,000 active registered players, this is far below the USSR's 4.5 million tournament players during Kasparov's era.

What makes Gukesh's success significant for the chess world?

1. Gukesh's originality, resilience, and fighting spirit reflect the changing dynamics of chess, where younger players dominate with aggressive and innovative styles.
2. His rise underscores India's growing influence in the chess world, despite systemic challenges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Kuwait Visit

Source: The post Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Kuwait Visit has been created, based on the article "C Raja Mohan writes: What Indian PM's first visit to Kuwait in four decades means for diplomacy in Middle East" published in "Indian Express on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS2- International relations- Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

Context: This article examines the significance of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Kuwait, marking the first visit by an Indian prime minister to the Gulf nation in over four decades. It highlights the strategic importance of the Middle East for India's security, economic growth, and international diplomacy, particularly in light of the region's ongoing structural changes.

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What is the significance of PM Modi's visit to Kuwait?

1. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit marks the first by an Indian PM to Kuwait in over four decades, closing a significant gap in India's diplomatic engagement with the Gulf region.
2. It underscores the growing importance of the Arab Gulf nations for India's security and economic prosperity.

How has India's relationship with Kuwait evolved over time?

1. Relations were strained during the 1990-91 Gulf War due to India's affinity for Saddam Hussein's Iraq.
2. High-level visits resumed in the 2000s, with Vice President Hamid Ansari visiting Kuwait in 2009.
3. PM Modi's visit reflects a definitive shift in priorities, part of a broader engagement with Gulf countries.

How has PM Modi transformed India's ties with the Gulf region?

1. Modi has visited the Gulf frequently: seven times to the UAE, twice to Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and once each to Bahrain and Oman.
2. This frequent engagement contrasts with the limited Gulf visits by his predecessors.
3. The transformation is evident in strong personal rapport, growing commercial ties, security partnerships, and new connectivity projects.

What geopolitical developments frame the timing of this visit?

1. The visit coincides with the recent fall of the Assad dynasty in Syria, signaling a potential restructuring of the Middle East.
2. The decline of Ba'athist regimes, historically supported by India, paves the way for closer ties with moderate Arab monarchies.

What historical challenges have shaped India's Gulf diplomacy?

1. India's post-colonial affinity for Ba'athist republics like Iraq and Syria led to strained relations with conservative Gulf monarchies.
2. India's reluctance to condemn invasions by close partners (e.g., Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or Russia's invasion of Ukraine) reflects the tension between principles and strategic interests.

How have Gulf monarchies changed in recent years?

1. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are embracing reforms promoting religious moderation, social modernization, and economic diversification away from oil dependence.
2. These reforms align with India's interests, making the Gulf a natural partner.
3. Pakistan's influence in the region has diminished, with Arab monarchies prioritizing their ties with India.

How does the fall of the Assad regime affect India-Kuwait relations?

1. The decline of Ba'athist republics removes a historical hurdle in India's relationship with Kuwait.
2. It opens new opportunities for engagement as the Middle East undergoes political restructuring.

What are the broader implications for India's Middle East diplomacy?

1. India must better understand the core concerns of moderate Arab states, which include resistance to Ottoman and Persian dominance, opposition to radical Islamist movements, and dissatisfaction with Israel's stance on Palestine.
2. The Abraham Accords offer a framework for India to encourage cooperation between Israel and Arab states.

What does this visit mean for India's role in the Middle East?

1. Modi's visit to Kuwait symbolizes a broader effort to deepen India's ties with moderate Arab states amidst a rapidly changing Middle Eastern order.
2. It signifies India's commitment to becoming a key player in the region's economic and security dynamics.

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Constitution and Individual Dignity in India

Source: The post **Constitution and Individual Dignity in India** has been created, based on the article "Pratap Bhanu Mehta writes: In today's India, can the Constitution protect individual dignity?" published in "Indian Express on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS-2- Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure

Context: This article critically examines the challenges faced by the Indian Constitution in upholding individual dignity and freedoms amidst the country's evolving political and social dynamics. It reflects on recent parliamentary debates about threats to constitutional values, focusing on how India's politics of identity and executive dominance impacts the foundational principles of the Constitution.

How does politics influence the debate on the Constitution?

1. The debate in Parliament has become partisan, focusing on whether the BJP or the Congress poses a greater threat to the Constitution.
2. While such debates showcase democratic accountability, they fail to inspire confidence that core constitutional values, such as individual dignity and checks and balances, will be preserved.

What is the significance of avoiding "authenticity" debates in constitutional matters?

- **Key Point:** The framers deliberately avoided burdening the Constitution with questions of faith, history, and identity.
- **Reason:** These issues, though important, are best addressed outside the context of state or legal power to avoid making the Constitution a zero-sum game.
- **Conclusion:** Debating the "authenticity" of the Constitution is futile and risks undermining its neutrality.

What are the core aspirations of constitutionalism?

1. Protection of individual rights and dignity.
2. Affirmation of political equality.
3. Establishment of checks and balances on government power.
4. Preservation of democracy and political agency for all citizens.
5. Practices of political justification for decisions affecting public life.

What are the major threats to constitutional values in India?

1. **Identity Politics:** Freedom is subverted by reducing individuals to caste, religion, or national identities.
2. **Executive Power:** Both major political parties have failed to curb the rise of unchecked executive authority.
3. **Economic Inequality:** Lack of economic justice undermines the functioning of democracy.
4. **Social Power Dynamics:** Permanent majorities and minorities distort the Constitution's intent to liberate individuals.

How does the Basic Structure Doctrine relate to constitutional time and permanence?

1. **Concept:** The Basic Structure Doctrine treats the Constitution as quasi-eternal, limiting amendments to those consistent with its fundamental principles.
2. **Significance:** It provides stability but risks being invoked opportunistically rather than through genuine allegiance to constitutional values.

What is the historical role of constitutions in representing social power?

1. **Traditional Constitutions:** Represented and balanced real social power, such as classes or groups.
2. **Modern Constitutions:** Abstract away from specific social forms, relying instead on universal legal principles.
3. **India's Exception:** The Constitution acknowledges caste as a social form, raising debates about whether this should be a temporary or permanent feature.

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What is the contradiction in India's constitutional politics?

1. The Constitution aims to liberate individuals, but contemporary politics reinforces ascriptive identities, such as caste and religion, as permanent majority and minority categories.
2. This dynamic challenges the Constitution's ability to function as a modern, inclusive framework.

Can the Constitution navigate these contradictions?

The answer remains uncertain. The success of the Constitution depends on:

1. Preserving individual freedoms and dignity.
2. Ensuring that social forces do not claim permanent majority status.
3. Upholding a democratic spirit that transcends identity politics.

By addressing these challenges, India can hope to sustain the integrity of its Constitution and its commitment to individual dignity.

Arctic Tundra Emitting More Carbon Than Absorbing It

Source: The post **Arctic Tundra Emitting More Carbon Than Absorbing It** has been created, based on the article "Why Arctic tundra is emitting more carbon than it absorbs, for first time in many millennia" published in "Indian Express on 18th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS –3- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment.

Context: The article sheds light on a significant and concerning environmental shift in the Arctic tundra, which has long functioned as a massive carbon sink.Recent analyses reveal that this biome has now become a net emitter of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4), both potent greenhouse gases (GHGs). This marks a significant departure from the role it has played for millennia in stabilizing global climate systems.

What is happening in the Arctic tundra?

1. The Arctic tundra, a frozen, treeless biome that has stored carbon for thousands of years, has become a source of carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4) emissions.
2. A recent report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reveals this alarming shift, driven by rising temperatures and increased wildfires.

How does the Arctic tundra store carbon?

1. Plants absorb CO_2 from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.
2. Organic matter decomposes very slowly due to the cold climate.
3. Carbon from dead plants and animals remains trapped in permafrost (ground frozen for at least two years straight).
4. Arctic soils store over 1.6 trillion metric tonnes of carbon, double the amount currently in the atmosphere.

Why is the Arctic tundra emitting more carbon than it absorbs?

1. **Rising Temperatures**:
   a. The Arctic is warming four times faster than the global average.
   b. 2024 recorded the second-warmest annual surface air temperatures in the Arctic since 1900.
   c. Thawing permafrost activates microbes that decompose organic matter, releasing CO_2 and CH_4.
2. **Increased Wildfires**:
   a. Wildfires in the Arctic have intensified in frequency and severity.

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b. 2023 saw the worst wildfire season on record, while 2024 had the second-highest wildfire emissions.
c. Wildfires accelerate permafrost thaw and release greenhouse gases (GHGs).

What are the consequences of these emissions?

1. The Arctic tundra has shifted from being a carbon sink to a carbon source for the first time in millennia.
2. This exacerbates climate change, as CO_2 and CH_4 are heat-trapping GHGs driving global warming.

Can this trend be reversed? What challenges lie ahead?

Yes, but only by significantly reducing global GHG emissions. Lower emissions would slow permafrost thaw and reduce carbon release. However, there are some challenges:

1. Global GHG emissions continue to rise.
2. A study by the Global Carbon Project estimates that total CO_2 emissions in 2024 will increase to 41.6 billion tonnes, up from 40.6 billion tonnes in 2023.
3. Efforts to combat climate change are being outpaced by ongoing fossil fuel burning and land-use changes.

What actions are scientists recommending?

1. Reducing global emissions is the only viable solution to prevent further carbon release from the Arctic.
2. Brendan Rogers, a scientist contributing to the Arctic Report Card, urges aggressive emission reduction efforts to mitigate the impacts.
3. By understanding and acting on these findings, we can work towards protecting the Arctic tundra and its crucial role in the global carbon cycle.

Global Events Impacting India's Economic Outlook in 2025

Source: The post Global Events Impacting India's Economic Outlook in 2025 has been created, based on the article "**In 2025, the hurdles to India's growth**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 19th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy

Context: The article discusses India's economic outlook in 2025, highlighting challenges like slow growth, fiscal deficit, and global volatility. It questions the effectiveness of government policies like the PLI scheme and trade strategies, and emphasizes the need for private sector investment and export growth.

For detailed information on **Concerns about the Indian economy amid global uncertainties** read this article here

What is the India's economic outlook in 2025?

1. **Economic Growth**: India may surpass Japan to become the fourth-largest economy, reaching a $4 trillion GDP. However, nominal growth is expected to stay below 10% for the third consecutive year, down from the decade average of 11%.

2. **Fiscal Challenges**: The fiscal deficit is projected to fall from 4.9% to 4.5% of GDP, signaling contractionary fiscal policies. Rising committed expenditures, like the Eighth Pay Commission, could strain finances.

How Are Global Events Impacting India?

1. **US Economic Policies**: Donald Trump's potential tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China could create global volatility, affecting trade and investments.

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2. **Currency Pressures**: Higher US interest rates and a stronger dollar are testing the RBI's ability to defend the rupee. Inflation moderation pressures RBI to cut rates, risking further currency depreciation.

3. **Trade Agreements**: India's inconsistent trade approach, such as avoiding RCEP but signing deals with Australia and UAE, shows hesitancy. Pending FTAs with the UK and EU highlight missed opportunities amid China plus one shifts benefiting others.

4. **Private Sector Investments**: Global uncertainties have limited private investment growth, despite government initiatives like the PLI scheme, which disbursed only Rs 32,620 crore over four years, with significant funds going to mobile phones and semiconductors.

5. **Geopolitical Influence**: A $4 trillion economy could strengthen India's global standing, but uncertainties dampen this potential.

What Are the Challenges Ahead?

1. The Eighth Pay Commission and rising committed expenditure could strain public finances.

2. The upcoming 16th Finance Commission will need to balance competing fiscal interests, impacting Centre-state relations and election strategies.

3. Reduced elections in 2025 (only Delhi and Bihar have elections) may allow the government to focus more on policy reforms.

Question for practice:

Discuss how global economic events and domestic fiscal challenges are impacting India's economic outlook in 2025.

Significance of President Dissanayake's visit to India

Source: The post significance of President Dissanayake's visit to India has been created, based on the article "**Express view on President Dissanayake's India visit: Building bridges with Sri Lanka**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 19th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International relations -India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context: The article discusses Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to India, focusing on strengthening bilateral relations. It highlights key issues like trade, energy, fishing disputes, Tamil minority rights, and Sri Lanka's stance on foreign powers, particularly China's involvement in the region.

For detailed information on **India Sri-Lanka Relations** read this article here

What is the significance of President Dissanayake's visit to India?

This is Anura Kumara Dissanayake's first overseas visit since becoming Sri Lanka's President. It comes at a crucial time for India-Sri Lanka relations. Both nations aim to deepen their economic and strategic partnership.

Why is this visit important for economic ties?

1. Sri Lanka confirmed it will continue with the IMF programme for economic recovery. The government plans to increase welfare spending.

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2. Both countries are urged to resume talks on a Free Trade Agreement. Key areas of focus include: Energy supply, Technology exchange, Indian investments in Sri Lanka

3. The joint statement highlights the role of **digital public infrastructure**, including an Aadhaar-like system and UPI payments, for Sri Lanka's development.

What challenges exist in bilateral relations?

1. **Fishermen disputes:** Fishermen often cross maritime borders, causing tensions. Overfishing is also an issue. A **coordinated fishing model** may resolve this.

2. **Tamil minority rights:** Prime Minister Modi urged Sri Lanka to hold **provincial council elections** as per its Constitution. He avoided directly mentioning the **13th Amendment**, reflecting the sensitive nature of the issue.

How does Sri Lanka address security concerns in the Indian Ocean?

1. President Dissanayake assured India that Sri Lanka's land would not harm Indian interests. He also supported a **free, open, and secure Indian Ocean Region**.
2. This statement indirectly references **China's activities**, especially at the Hambantota port, which China is developing.

What should India and Sri Lanka focus on moving forward?

Both nations should:

• Define **red lines** for their foreign policies.

• Strengthen communication to avoid misunderstandings.

• Elevate their relationship to be a significant partnership in South Asia.

This visit signals potential for stronger ties if challenges are addressed carefully.

Question for practice:

Examine the key challenges and opportunities in India-Sri Lanka relations highlighted during President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to India.

India's Shift to a Services-Led Economy and Its Challenges

Source: The post India's Shift to a Services-Led Economy and Its Challenges has been created, based on the article "**Services led exports are a mixed blessing for us**" published in "**Live mint**" on 19th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Indian Economy- changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.

Context: The article highlights India's shift to a services-led economy, driven by strong service exports surpassing merchandise exports. It notes India's success in high-value services but warns of job inequality, uneven sectoral growth, and the need to address economic disparities.

For detailed information on **Challenges with India's service-driven growth** read this article here

Why Are India's Service Exports Outshining Merchandise Exports?

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1. In November 2024, India's service exports were projected to surpass merchandise exports.

2. The trade deficit reached a record $37.9 billion in November, but strong service exports were a positive sign.

3. Services are less affected by tariffs and geopolitical issues compared to goods.

What Makes Service Exports Resilient?

1. Unlike goods, services face fewer protectionist barriers and geopolitical risks.

2. Despite challenges in IT and AI disruptions, Global Capability Centres (GCCs) have emerged as key growth drivers.

3. GCCs offer higher-end services and better value realization than traditional IT companies.

How Is India's Service Sector Different from China's Manufacturing?

1. While China became the global factory for low-cost goods, India moved up the value chain in services.

2. From basic IT tasks like Y2K fixes to customized software and GCCs, India's talent pool drives high-value services.

3. India ranks fifth globally in service exports and aims for $2 trillion annual exports by 2030.

What Are the Challenges of a Services-Led Economy?

1. **Limited Job Creation:** Services create fewer jobs than manufacturing. Fresh workers from rural areas are easily trained for factory work, but services demand higher education and skills.

2. **Income Inequality:** Services pay higher wages than manufacturing, leading to increased income disparities.

3. **Sectoral Employment Mismatch:** Agriculture and industry employ 69% of the workforce, while services employ only 31%, despite services contributing 55% to GDP.

4. **Stagnant Manufacturing Growth:** Manufacturing remains at 17% of GDP, showing India's leapfrogging from agriculture to services skipped the middle manufacturing phase.

5. **Social Discontent Risk:** Uneven growth between employment and sectoral output can spill over into social tensions, threatening national progress.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons behind the resilience of India's service exports compared to merchandise exports and their implications for the economy.

Indian judiciary's suo motu powers

Source: The post Indian judiciary's suo motu powers has been created, based on the article "**Refrain from judicial overreach: It'll strengthen India's judiciary**" published in "**Live mint**" on 19th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-Structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

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Context: The article discusses the Indian judiciary's suo motu powers. It highlights their importance in addressing urgent issues but criticizes misuse, delays, and overreach. It emphasizes the need for guidelines and feedback to ensure timely, effective, and credible judicial interventions.

What are Suo Motu Powers of the Judiciary?

1. Suo motu powers allow courts to take up cases on their own, without a formal petition.

2. These powers aim to protect public interest, ensure justice, and address overlooked issues.

Why is the Use of Suo Motu Powers Controversial?

1. **Growing Invocation:** Increasing use of these powers in matters already handled by lower courts has raised concerns.

2. **Jurisdictional Tensions:** Supreme Court interventions can overshadow the work of high courts. For example, in the RG Kar Medical College rape case, the Supreme Court acted after significant progress by the Calcutta High Court.

3. **Potential Political Influence:** There is criticism over perceived political motivations in some cases.

What Are the Challenges in Suo Motu Interventions?

1. **Delays in Resolution:** Prolonged engagement without results frustrates the public. *Like in* Yamuna pollution case took over 20 years to be transferred to the National Green Tribunal.

2. **Implementation Challenges:** Judicial directives often lack follow-through. During COVID-19, the Supreme Court's intervention highlighted healthcare gaps but lacked concrete results.

3. **Overreach Concerns:** Courts sometimes venture into legislative or administrative domains. In the Ramlila Maidan case, the Supreme Court expanded Article 21 to include a "Right to Sleep."

How Can Suo Motu Powers Be Improved?

1. **Frame Guidelines:** The judiciary should create clear guidelines for suo motu actions.

2. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Courts must track implementation to ensure compliance with directives.

3. **Strengthen High Courts:** High courts should be allowed to handle local matters effectively.

Conclusion:

1. Suo motu powers are vital for justice but must be used judiciously.

2. Overuse, delays, and poor implementation harm public trust in the judiciary.

3. Guidelines and better mechanisms are needed to ensure timely and effective justice.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges associated with the judiciary's use of suo motu powers and suggest measures to improve their effectiveness.

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Making Affordable Generics More Reliable

Source: This post on Making Affordable Generics More Reliable is based on article " Making affordable generics more reliable" published in The Hindu on 19th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

Context: The article delves into the critical role of generic medicines in addressing healthcare affordability in India. It underscores the importance of generic drugs in reducing healthcare costs, particularly in a country marked by vast income disparities and high out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure. However, it highlights the challenges associated with ensuring the quality, efficacy, and safety of generics, which are essential for their reliability and effectiveness.

Why are generic medicines important for healthcare affordability?

1. Generic drugs, being bioequivalent to branded drugs, are cost-effective alternatives crucial for addressing healthcare affordability, especially in countries like India with significant income disparities.
2. India leverages economies of scale and low production costs to supply affordable medicines both domestically and internationally.
3. With out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure at 39.4% of total health expenditure in 2021-22, generics significantly reduce financial burdens and improve treatment adherence.
4. Through the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana, generic medicines worth ₹5,600 crore sold over a decade saved consumers an estimated ₹30,000 crore by August 2024.

What challenges do generic medicines face in India?

1. **Quality Concerns:** Despite bioequivalence to branded drugs, quality control lapses have compromised their efficacy and safety in some cases.
2. **Therapeutic Variability:** A study by PGIMER, Chandigarh, revealed that while an innovator itraconazole drug achieved therapeutic levels in 73% of patients within two weeks, generic formulations often required 6–8 weeks, dose escalation, or switching.
3. **Manufacturing Defects:** Generic capsules showed defects such as fewer and unevenly sized pellets, impacting absorption and bioavailability.

Why do generic and innovator drugs differ in efficacy?

1. **Excipients:** Variations in binders, fillers, disintegrants, and coatings affect dissolution rate, stability, and drug delivery mechanisms.
2. **Manufacturing Processes:** Differences in compression force, granulation methods, and tablet hardness can influence drug disintegration and absorption rates.
3. **Bioequivalence Thresholds:** Regulatory standards allow pharmacokinetic parameters to vary between 80%-125% of the innovator drug's range. This variability can be problematic for drugs with a narrow therapeutic index.
4. **Stability Issues:** Generic drugs may suffer from reduced shelf life and reliability due to inadequate stability testing.

What are the regulatory challenges in India's drug regulation system?

1. **Decentralisation:** India's drug regulation system is fragmented, with significant authority granted to State Drug Regulatory Authorities (SDRAs). This leads to inconsistent enforcement and quality standards.
   a. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has limited authority and can only recommend actions to States.
2. **Inadequate Stability Testing:** Stability testing, mandated in 2018, is inconsistently implemented. Additionally, generics approved before 2018 are not subject to retrospective testing, allowing substandard drugs to persist in the market.

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3. **Lenient Impurity Standards:** India's Pharmacopoeia permits higher impurity levels than U.S. and EU standards. Stricter International Council for Harmonisation (ICH) guidelines were rejected due to cost concerns.

What reforms are necessary to improve generic drug reliability?

1. **Centralised Drug Regulation:**
   a. Transfer regulatory authority from States to the Centre to ensure consistent enforcement of quality standards.
   b. Strengthen the CDSCO with additional resources, personnel, and central drug-testing laboratories.
2. **Enhanced Stability Testing:**
   a. Enforce uniform stability testing protocols.
   b. Mandate periodic reassessment of all approved generics, including those approved before 2018.
3. **Stricter Impurity Standards:**
   a. Align India's Pharmacopoeia with global benchmarks by adopting stricter impurity guidelines.

What role should the CDSCO play in these reforms?

- The CDSCO should be overhauled to implement robust regulatory safeguards, ensuring protection against substandard and counterfeit medicines.
- Key actions include stringent regulatory protocols, effective inspections, and strong enforcement mechanisms.

What steps have been recommended historically to address these issues?

1. Decades-old recommendations by the **Bhatia (1954), Hathi (1975), and Mashelkar (2003) committees** have called for centralised oversight of drug regulation.
2. Implementing these recommendations is essential to restoring public confidence in generic drugs.

What is the key takeaway regarding generics and quality assurance?

1. While generics are indispensable for equitable healthcare, equity must not come at the expense of quality.
2. Centralising drug regulation, enforcing stricter testing protocols, and adopting stringent impurity standards are critical steps toward making generics more reliable and trustworthy.

Positive Signals from India-China Talks

Source: This post on **Positive Signals from India-China Talks** has been created based on "Positive signals emerge from India-China talks" published in The Hindu on19th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS 2- India and its Neighborhood- Relations

Context: The article discusses the resumption of boundary talks between India and China, marking the first meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) in five years. This meeting, held in Beijing on December 18, 2024, involved India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

What was the key highlight of the meeting between India and China?

1. The key highlight was the first meeting of the Special Representatives (SRs) on boundary talks in five years.
2. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi positively affirmed the implementation of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) disengagement and discussed measures to maintain peace, the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage, border trade, and trans-border river data sharing.

What agreements were discussed during the talks?

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1. The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to a fair and reasonable resolution of the boundary dispute, as outlined in the 2005 political guidelines.
2. Both sides positively reviewed the October 2024 disengagement agreement, which enabled patrolling and grazing in areas like Depsang and Demchok.
3. Discussions were aimed at advancing border management and preventing border issues from hindering bilateral relations.
4. Mr. Doval and Chinese leaders emphasized restoring cooperation in economic, cultural, and trade areas.
5. The talks highlighted a need for new momentum in bilateral relations.

What is the significance of the SR process resumption?

1. The SR mechanism, established in 2003, had been paused since 2019 due to heightened tensions, including the 2020 LAC standoff.
2. This resumption marks a step toward re-establishing diplomatic mechanisms and fostering peace at the border. It also paves the way for further troop de-escalation and a fair resolution of the boundary dispute.

What was China's perspective on the meeting?

1. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement about the "six-point consensus," which emphasizes maintaining peace at the border and strengthening bilateral ties.
2. Chinese Vice President Han Zheng described India and China as influential global powers, urging the restoration of political trust and collaboration in economic, trade, and cultural areas.

What role did the October 2024 disengagement agreement play?

1. The October 2024 agreement resolved issues at the last of seven friction points at the LAC.
2. It facilitated the SR meeting and formal talks between Indian PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan, where the agreement was hailed as a détente.

What were the key outcomes of the meeting?

1. Commitment to drawing lessons from the 2020 standoff for better border management.
2. Positive directions for resuming cross-border exchanges, including religious pilgrimages and trade.
3. A roadmap for de-escalation and troop withdrawal.
4. Agreement to hold the next SR meeting in New Delhi.
5. Both sides emphasized strategic communication and the restoration of political trust to ensure stable bilateral development.
6. Ajit Doval highlighted India's commitment to enhancing ties, while Wang Yi was invited to New Delhi for the next round of talks.

Strengthening the Roots of an Agri-Carbon Market

Source: This post on Strengthening the Roots of an Agri-Carbon Market has been created based on "Strengthening the roots of an agri-carbon market" published in The Hindu on19th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topics: GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

Context: The article explores the transformative potential of carbon markets in Indian agriculture. It outlines how these markets could incentivize sustainable farming practices while simultaneously addressing climate change. The focus is on how carbon pricing, through compliance and voluntary carbon markets, can encourage businesses and individuals to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. It also highlights India's growing interest in establishing its own carbon markets and the progress made so far.

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What are carbon markets, and how do they work?

1. Carbon markets offer a way to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while incentivizing sustainable farming practices.
2. **Compliance Markets**: Regulated systems impose emission caps on companies. Exceeding these caps requires purchasing carbon credits or paying carbon taxes.
3. **Voluntary Markets**: Unregulated platforms like Verra and Gold Standard allow organizations to trade carbon credits freely.
4. Both systems aim to lower GHG emissions and meet global climate goals.

What principles are crucial for carbon markets?

1. **Additionality**: Credits must lead to new emission reductions, requiring adoption of fresh practices.
2. **Permanence**: Benefits, such as soil carbon storage, must be long-lasting.

What recent advancements have been made in India's carbon markets?

1. India plans to launch compliance and voluntary carbon markets.
2. NABARD, in collaboration with research bodies, has listed five agriculture carbon credit projects under Verra.
3. Over four years, 50 projects have targeted 1.6 million hectares, aiming to generate 4.7 million credits annually. However, no credits have been issued yet, and farmers haven't received payments.

What findings emerged from carbon farming projects in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh?

1. **Inclusiveness**: Marginalized communities and women (4% participants) were largely excluded.
2. **Land Ownership**: Carbon farmers cultivated more land, with 63% owned by non-marginalized castes compared to 46% among non-carbon farmers.
3. **Adoption of Practices**: Techniques like zero tillage and intercropping were newly adopted, meeting the additionality criterion.

What challenges are hindering project success?

1. Poor communication (45%) and lack of training (60%).
2. Discontinuation of sustainable practices (28%) due to insufficient financial incentives.
3. Delayed payments, with 99% of farmers receiving no carbon credit income.

How can projects be improved to boost farmer participation?

1. Offer higher prices for credits from inclusive projects targeting smallholders and marginalized communities.
2. Ensure regular training, effective communication, and timely payments.
3. Collaborate with research institutions to minimize yield penalties and safeguard food security.

How can technology and collaboration strengthen carbon markets?

1. Advances in remote sensing, satellite imagery, and drones can enhance monitoring.
2. Building a robust agricultural carbon market requires policymakers, researchers, and private entities to ensure inclusivity, transparency, timely rewards, and effective implementation.

Section 6A of the Citizenship Act

Source: This post on **Section 6A of the Citizenship Act** has been craeted based on "Section 6A of the Citizenship Act — why it fails Assam" publsihed in The Hindu on 19th December 2024.

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UPSC Syllabus: GS-2-Indian Constitution—Historical Underpinnings, Evolution, Features, Amendments, Significant Provisions and Basic Structure

Context: The article critically examines the constitutional validity and implications of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, in the context of Assam.

What is Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955?

1. Section 6A, introduced in 1985 after the Assam Accord, provides a framework for granting Indian citizenship to migrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who settled in Assam:
   I) **Before January 1, 1966:** Migrants are declared Indian citizens.
   II) **Between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971:** Migrants are eligible for citizenship after 10 years of residence.
   III) **After March 25, 1971:** Such individuals are deemed illegal migrants and liable for detection and deportation.

What is the significance of the recent Supreme Court ruling on Section 6A?

1. In October 2024, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, in a 4:1 majority decision, upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A.
2. However, the ruling has been criticized for overlooking constitutional violations and relying on arbitrary reasoning.

How does the judgment justify singling out Assam?

1. The Court argued that Assam's smaller population and land area make the influx of migrants more impactful compared to other states like West Bengal or Tripura, which share longer borders with Bangladesh.
2. However, it simultaneously concluded that the influx did not affect Assamese language, script, or culture, leading to contradictory reasoning.

Why was Section 6A introduced, and what are its implications?

1. The Assam Accord, addressing concerns over cultural preservation, economic strain, and political imbalance, led to the inclusion of Section 6A.
2. However, critics argue that the provision does not adequately safeguard Assam's cultural identity and fails to resolve the issues it was designed to address.

What constitutional concerns arise from Section 6A?

1. **Violation of Article 29 (Cultural and Linguistic Rights):**
   a. Article 29 guarantees the protection of cultural and linguistic identities.
   b. The Court ruled that Section 6A does not infringe on Assamese cultural rights since it does not prevent active conservation efforts.
   c. However, critics argue that the demographic shift caused by migration undermines Assam's cultural identity, evident in the declining percentage of Assamese-speaking people (from 69.3% in 1951 to 48.38% in 2011) and the increasing proportion of Bengali-speaking people (from 21.2% in 1951 to 28.91% in 2011).
2. **Temporal Unreasonableness:**
   a. Laws must remain reasonable over time, but Section 6A lacks a temporal limitation, allowing individuals to apply for citizenship indefinitely, even 40 years after the cut-off date.
3. **Flawed Mechanism for Identifying Migrants:**
   a. The burden of initiating proceedings lies with the state, without a mechanism for voluntary self-identification.
   b. The foreigners' tribunal, tasked with determining citizenship, is overwhelmed by the volume of cases, causing inefficiency and confusion.

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What are the challenges in implementation?

1. **Communication and Training Gaps:** Many farmers reported no communication or training about sustainable practices.
2. **Delayed Carbon Credit Payments:** 99% of farmers have not received payments for carbon credits.
3. **Sustainability Challenges:** 28% of farmers reverted to conventional farming due to insufficient financial incentives.
4. **Demographic Shift:** The increasing proportion of Bengali-speaking individuals has significantly altered Assam's cultural and linguistic demographics.

What criticisms have been made of the Supreme Court's ruling?

1. **Contradictory Reasoning:** The Court acknowledged Assam's unique challenges but failed to recognize the cultural and linguistic displacement caused by migration.
2. **Neglect of Temporal Unreasonableness:** By allowing Section 6A to remain in force indefinitely, the Court upheld outdated and arbitrary policies.
3. **Failure to Address Cultural Erosion:** The judgment overlooks how unchecked migration has eroded Assam's linguistic and cultural identity, violating Article 29.

Ambedkar's Legacy and Dalits' Ongoing Struggle

Source: The post Ambedkar's Legacy and Dalits' Ongoing Struggle has been created, based on the article "**Don't invoke Babasaheb Ambedkar selectively**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 20th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1- Society-Social empowerment

Context: The article discusses the ongoing political controversy over Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy, highlighting how politicians, especially from dominant castes, exploit it without addressing caste-based discrimination. It stresses that Dalits fight for dignity, equality, and opportunities, not just identity, and emphasizes Ambedkar's vision for the nation.

What Is the Current Political Controversy over Ambedkar?

1. Politicians, mostly from dominant castes, are debating Ambedkar's legacy without addressing caste discrimination.

2. Congress historically resisted Ambedkar's initiatives, opposing reservation and the Mandal Commission recommendations.

3. The party treated Dalits as a poor class ("gareeb janta") rather than addressing caste realities.

4. Dalits still face issues in education, health, and employment, similar to 50-60 years ago, despite budget allocations.

How Has the Government Addressed Dalit Issues?

1. The government has introduced initiatives like the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023**, focusing on women's empowerment.

2. It emphasized Dalit dignity by creating **panch teerth sites** to honor Ambedkar's legacy.

3. Programs such as **GYAN (gareeb, yuva, annadata, nari)** aim to empower marginalized groups, including Dalits.

4. Dalit representation in the BJP has significantly increased in recent years.

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5. Despite these efforts, caste-based discrimination persists, with incidents like a Dalit man being urinated upon.

What is the Role of Babasaheb Ambedkar Today?

1. Babasaheb Ambedkar remains a revered figure, central to Dalit aspirations for dignity and equality.

2. His legacy extends beyond Dalits, influencing broader discussions on discrimination and nation-building.

What are Dalits Fighting for Today?

1. Dalits seek equal opportunities, equity in governance, and respect for their aspirations beyond mere identity politics.

2. Their struggle encompasses broader themes of aspiration and national inclusivity.

Question for practice:

Examine the current political controversy surrounding Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy and its impact on the fight for Dalit dignity and equality.

5 ways in which India-Russia relations will shape in 2025

Source: The post 5 ways in which India-Russia relations will shape in 2025 has been created, based on the article "**5 ways in which India-Russia relationship will shape the world in 2025**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 20th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article highlights the importance of India-Russia relations in 2025. It explains how this partnership supports global stability by balancing Russia's ties with China, fostering multilateralism, stabilizing energy markets, aiding Arctic governance, and moderating group dynamics like BRICS and SCO.

For detailed information on **India-Russia Relations** read this article here

What are the 5 ways in which India-Russia relations will shape in 2025?

1. Bridge Between Russia and the World:

• India acts as a link between an alienated Russia and the global order.

• Its multilateral approach anchors Russia to a system it might otherwise disrupt.

• India connects diverse global systems without pushing specific geopolitical agendas.

2. Balancing Russia-China Relations:

• India prevents Russia from becoming overly reliant on China.

• Russia seeks equal partnerships, which India provides, unlike China.

• At BRICS summits, Russia values India's independent stance over aligning solely with China.

3. Energy Trade and Market Stability:

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• India-Russia energy trade complies with sanctions while stabilizing global energy markets.

• This benefits Europe by avoiding energy crises.

• India's fossil fuel trade with Russia supports price stability crucial for Europe.

4. Strategic Role in the Arctic:

• India's presence with Russia in the Arctic counters potential Russia-China dominance.

• Projects like the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor enhance Arctic governance and connectivity.

5. Moderating Global Groupings:

• India's leadership ensures platforms like BRICS and SCO remain non-weaponized against the West.

• India facilitated UAE, Egypt, and Vietnam joining BRICS to foster balance.

Question for practice:

Examine how India-Russia relations in 2025 contribute to balancing global power dynamics and fostering multilateral cooperation.

Supreme Court Rules Coconut Oil as Edible Oil

Source: The post Supreme Court Rules Coconut Oil as Edible Oil has been created, based on the article "**Is coconut oil an edible oil or a haircare product? Here is what Supreme Court ruled**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 20th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Economy-taxation

Context: The article discusses how the Supreme Court decided that coconut oil should be classified as an edible oil for taxation purposes, not as a hair care product, despite being sold in small packets sometimes. This decision means coconut oil now attracts a lower Goods and Services Tax rate of 5% instead of 18%.

How was coconut oil classified earlier?

1. **Before 2005**: Coconut oil was broadly treated as an edible oil under tax regulations.

2. **2005 Amendment (CET Act)**: Coconut oil was classified under Section III as an edible oil, attracting an excise duty of 8%. Hair care products, under Section VI, were taxed at 16%.

3. **2009 Circular**: The Central Board of Excise and Customs classified coconut oil in containers smaller than 200 ml as hair oil to impose a higher tax of 16%.

4. **2015 Withdrawal**: The circular was withdrawn after tribunals ruled that small packs could not be presumed to be hair oil.

5. **Tribunal Rulings**: In challenges by companies like Madhan Agro, tribunals held coconut oil as edible oil, regardless of packaging size.

What led to the Supreme Court case?

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1. In 2007, the central excise authorities issued show-cause notices to Madhan Agro Industries, questioning whether coconut oil sold in small packets should be taxed as a hair care product.

2. The company challenged this decision, leading to legal proceedings.

3. In 2015, after the Tribunal ruled that coconut oil in small packs is still edible oil, the Central Excise Commissioner appealed to the Supreme Court.

4. The case revolved around whether small-sized coconut oil should be taxed at the higher 18% rate for hair oils or the 5% rate for edible oils.

What were the Supreme Court's views?

1. Supreme Court's 2018 Views on Coconut Oil Taxation:

Split Verdict: The bench of Justices Ranjan Gogoi and R Banumathi delivered differing opinions:

• Justice Gogoi classified coconut oil as edible oil regardless of its packaging size, emphasizing its primary use as food.

• Justice Banumathi applied the **Common Parlance Test**, ruling that coconut oil in small containers is commonly understood as hair oil and should be taxed accordingly.

• The common parlance test determines how the public or market generally understands or uses a product. It is used when a product can be classified under two tax categories.

2. Supreme Court's Recent (2023) Views:

• **Classification Under HSN Norms**: The court ruled coconut oil as an edible oil based on Harmonised System of Nomenclature (HSN) norms, irrespective of packaging size.

• **Rejection of Common Parlance Test**: The test was deemed inapplicable as the product is clearly defined under the law.

• **Size Irrelevance**: The court noted that small-sized packaging is common for both edible and hair oils.

• **Standards of Weights and Measures (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 1977**: The court referred to this rule, which allows edible oils to be packed in sizes like 50 ml, 100 ml, and 200 ml.

• **Examples of Precedents**: The court cited cases like homeopathic hair oil being classified as a medicament (2023) and *anardana* as seeds (2022) to justify its decision.

Question for practice:

Discuss the Supreme Court's decision on the classification of coconut oil for taxation purposes.

The Rise and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence

Source: The post The Rise and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence has been created, based on the article "**Artificial intelligence: The latest opium of the masses**" published in "**Live mint**" on 20th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.

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Context: The article compares AI to religion, highlighting its growing influence and appeal. It discusses both AI's benefits, like solving global problems, and its failures, such as accidents and project failures. The author calls for a balanced, skeptical approach to AI's potential and limitations.

For detailed information on **Generative AI** read this article here

What are the impacts of AI?

1. AI is captivating public attention, much like religion did in its prime. It promises convenience and efficiency.

2. AI is becoming an "addictive toy" that people use without fully understanding. Businesses globally adopted AI 270% more between 2015 and 2022.

3. The AI industry is projected to be worth $1.8 trillion by 2030. ChatGPT, for example, reached 100 million users in just two months.

How does AI benefit society?

1. **Global Problem Solving:** AI aids in tackling global challenges such as flood management and environmental cleanup. For instance, Google Flood Hub uses AI to provide advance flood alerts in 80 countries.

2. **Environmental Impact:** Organizations like The Ocean Cleanup utilize AI to map and remove ocean litter more efficiently, enhancing environmental sustainability.

3. **Technological Advancements:** AI tools like ChatGPT rapidly gain widespread use, demonstrating their popularity and utility in everyday tasks.

4. **Productivity Boost:** GenAI tools improve developer productivity by approximately 4% without compromising code quality, showing their potential to enhance software development efficiency.

What are the challenges of AI?

1. **Unrealistic Expectations**: The term "Artificial Intelligence" can create unrealistic expectations. Renaming it as "Systematic Approaches to Learning Algorithms and Machine Inferences" (Salami) could help manage expectations better.

2. **Failures in Implementation**: Many AI projects fail due to miscommunication, data issues, and high costs. About 30% of Generative AI projects are abandoned after the proof-of-concept stage, and over 80% of AI projects overall fail, according to studies.

3. **High Failure Rate**: Around 30% of Generative AI projects are abandoned after the proof-of-concept stage. Over 80% of AI projects fail, often due to miscommunication or data issues.

4. **Limited Impact**: A study showed GenAI only boosted developer productivity by 4%, with minimal impact on team performance or code quality.

Question for practice:

Discuss the benefits and challenges of AI as outlined in the article.

Controversy over surveying religious places

Source: The post controversy over surveying religious places has been created, based on the article "**It is for historians to dig for tell-tale remains, not bigots**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 21st December 2024

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UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1-Society – secularism

Context: The article discusses the controversy over surveying religious places like mosques to find evidence of earlier temples, questioning its legality under the Places of Worship Act, 1991. It argues such actions violate secularism, Article 26 rights, and promote communal tensions.

For detailed information on **Controversy with the Places of Worship Act** read this article here

What Does the Places of Worship Act State?

1. The **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991**, prohibits the conversion of a place of worship from one religion to another.

2. It maintains that the **religious character of a place as on August 15, 1947**, must remain unchanged.

3. Any suits or appeals pending in courts regarding such conversions as of the Act's commencement are to **abate immediately**.

4. New legal suits or proceedings for altering the religious character of places of worship are barred after the Act's enforcement.

5. The Act was enacted during heightened tensions around the **Ram Janmabhoomi movement**, to prevent violence and communal unrest.

6. The **Ayodhya judgment** of the Supreme Court hailed this Act for **protecting secularism**.

What Was the Observation of the Former Chief Justice of India?

1. In 2022, then-CJI D.Y. Chandrachud made an oral observation in the Gyanvapi mosque case.

2. He stated that "a survey may not necessarily fall foul of the Places of Worship Act."

3. This observation caused confusion, as it was not part of a formal judgment but was misinterpreted by lower courts.

4. Following this, courts in Uttar Pradesh ordered surveys of mosques to determine their religious character, violating the 1991 Act.

Why Are Such Surveys Considered Problematic?

1. **Violation of the Places of Worship Act, 1991**: The Act bars altering the religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits related surveys. Surveys contradict this law by trying to reopen settled matters.

2. **Potential for Communal Violence**: For example, surveys in mosques led to violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, resulting in loss of lives. Such actions risk heightening communal tensions.

3. **Legal Misinterpretation**: Lower courts ordered surveys based on oral observations by former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud in 2022. However, these observations lacked legal standing.

4. **Violation of Article 26**: Article 26 guarantees religious groups the right to manage their worship practices. Surveys interfere with these rights and can be deemed unconstitutional.

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5. **Secularism at Risk**: The Act, upheld in the Ayodhya judgment, is seen as protecting secularism. Surveys undermine this principle, fueling religious disputes.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Places of Worship Act, 1991, seeks to uphold secularism and whether surveys of religious sites align with its provisions.

Significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait

Source: The post significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait has been created, based on the article "**A chance to strike gold during the Kuwait visit**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 21st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-International relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait, highlighting its significance for strengthening bilateral ties. It covers Kuwait's strategic importance, its wealth, and strong ties with India, emphasizing areas where both countries can further cooperate and elevate their relationship.

For detailed information on **Why the Gulf matters for India** read this article here

What is the significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait?

1. It is the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in 43 years.

2. The last visit was by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1981.

3. The visit aims to strengthen ties and fill the gap in India's West Asia engagement.

Why is Kuwait important strategically?

Geographic Location: Kuwait is located at the northeast end of the Persian Gulf, sharing borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia, making it strategically significant in West Asia.

American Military Bases: It hosts important American military bases, ensuring its relevance in regional security.

Oil Reserves: Kuwait holds the sixth-largest oil reserves globally, contributing significantly to global energy markets.

Neutral Mediator: Kuwait often plays a neutral role in regional disputes and acts as an interlocutor.

Wealth and Investments: Its sovereign wealth fund, valued at $924 billion (March 2024), is the fourth-largest globally.

Unique Democracy: It is the only Gulf monarchy experimenting successfully with democracy.

What is the state of India-Kuwait ties?

1. India and Kuwait share historical and cultural bonds, with diplomatic relations established in 1961.

2. Bilateral trade was $10.47 billion in FY 2023-24, with Kuwait as the sixth-largest crude supplier to India.

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3. Around 1 million Indians live in Kuwait, forming the largest expatriate group.

4. During COVID-19, India provided vaccines to Kuwait, while Kuwait sent oxygen and medical supplies to India.

5. Kuwait quickly repatriated the mortal remains of 40 Indians who died in a fire in June 2024.

What are the potential areas for strengthening ties?

1. Signing a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement and defense cooperation pact.

2. Collaborating on infrastructure projects under Kuwait's 'Vision 2035.'

3. Setting up Indian Institutes (IIT/IIM) and hospitals in Kuwait to enhance people-to-people connections.

4. Inviting Kuwait to join the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

5. Enhancing cooperation in space technology and increasing airline seat allocations.

Question for practice:

Discuss the significance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait and the potential areas for strengthening India-Kuwait ties.

Federal Reserve faces uncertainty in monetary policy

Source: The post Federal Reserve faces uncertainty in monetary policy has been created, based on the article "**The Fed is as clueless as markets**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 21st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Context: The article explains uncertainty in the U.S. Federal Reserve's monetary policy. Inflation is unpredictable, Trump's policies add risks, and experts debate whether interest rates are at neutral. The Fed is cautious, unsure of future moves, emphasizing economic and political unknowns.

For detailed information on **US Federal Reserve cut interest rates** read this article here

Why is the Federal Reserve uncertain about future monetary policy?

1. **Moderation in Inflation:** The Fed cut rates by 100 basis points to 4.25-4.5%, responding to inflation easing from 2022 peaks. However, uncertainty persists about future trends.

2. **Inflation Risks:** 15 of 19 Fed officials see upside inflation risks, the most since 2022. Core PCE inflation rose by 0.3% in both September and October, exceeding projections.

3. Impact of Trump's Agenda:

• **Tariffs:** Proposed tariffs could raise prices, echoing trade war effects from Trump's first term.

• **Tax Cuts:** New tax cuts may boost growth and inflation, especially if deficit-funded.

• **Labour Supply:** Planned deportations could reduce workforce availability.

What are the issues with interest rates?

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1. **Uncertainty on Neutral Rate:** Officials disagree if current rates are "neutral." Powell says rates are restrictive, while Hammack suggests they are close to neutral.

2. **Economic Impact:** Some fear interest rates may not stimulate or restrict the economy effectively.

3. **Inflation Risks:** Core PCE inflation rose by 0.3% in September and October, exceeding projections, showing data volatility.

4. **Data Challenges:** Inflation surprises are common, especially in the first quarter, despite seasonal adjustments.

What is the Fed's next step?

1. The Fed may pause rate changes to assess economic conditions. Powell indicated they are near a point to slow adjustments.

2. However, Trump's policy actions, especially trade and tax measures, could lead to either rate hikes or economic slowdown.

3. The uncertainty reflects unknowns about inflation trends, political risks, and how the economy responds to current rates.

Question for practice:

Examine the factors contributing to the Federal Reserve's uncertainty about future monetary policy decisions.

World Bank Report Addresses Climate Change Impact on Low-Income Countries

Source: The post World Bank Report Addresses Climate Change Impact on Low-Income Countries has been created, based on the article "**Water at heart of climate solutions: World Bank report outlines policy priorities & steps to address finance gaps**" published in "**Down to earth** " on 21st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article discusses a World Bank report highlighting how climate change affects people, especially in low-income countries. It emphasizes water's critical role, the need for investment in water management, and solutions to ensure sustainability and reduce vulnerabilities.

For detailed information on **World Bank Report Highlights Poverty and Climate Challenges** read this article here

What is the World Bank Group's 2024 Report About?

1. The World Bank Group's report, released at COP29 in November 2024, focuses on how individuals play a key role in both being affected by and addressing climate change.

2. It draws insights from 72 Climate Country and Development Reports (CCDRs) that guide countries in combining development with climate action.

3. It highlights people's central role in addressing climate risks and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).

What Are CCDRs?

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1. CCDRs, launched in 2022, guide countries in aligning development with climate action.

2. They aim to enhance resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and achieve SDGs.

3. CCDRs bring together governments, private sectors, and citizens to address climate challenges.

How Does Climate Change Affect Low-Income Countries?

Labour Productivity Loss: Rising temperatures reduce productivity, especially in labor-intensive sectors.

Drought Impacts: Droughts harm agriculture, food security, and energy production, leading to malnutrition and migration.In **Malawi**, droughts could push 14% of people below the poverty line.

Flood Impacts: Floods cause displacement, waterborne diseases, loss of lives, and infrastructure damage. Like, floods in countries like **South Africa** reduce agricultural production and jobs.

Economic Losses: Climate change causes significant financial losses. For example, **Argentina** may lose $2.1 billion (0.6% of GDP) due to reduced agricultural output by 2050.

Health Crises: Waterborne diseases are increasing due to climate change. For Example, by 2040–2050, **Uzbekistan** and **Zimbabwe** will face higher disease rates.

What Solutions Do CCDRs Suggested?

1. Water is crucial for agriculture, food security, human development, and economic growth. Climate change worsens water scarcity and extreme events.

2. **Investment in Water Management**: Current investments in water are only 0.5% of GDP in most countries. An investment of $1.8 trillion is suggested to yield benefits worth $7.1 trillion by 2030, addressing the finance gap in the water sector.

3. **Wastewater Management**: Improvement of wastewater treatment plants is necessary to ensure water quality and efficiency while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

4. **Demand-Side Management**: This approach emphasizes sustainable and efficient use of water resources.

5. **Performance Monitoring**: Installing systems to monitor and enhance the performance of water treatment facilities is recommended to ensure operational efficiency and environmental compliance.

Question for practice:

Examine how the World Bank's 2024 report highlights the impact of climate change on low-income countries and the solutions suggested to address water management challenges.

Making Indian agriculture sustainable and competitive

Source: The post Making Indian agriculture sustainable and competitive has been created, based on the article "**What can the budget do for agriculture**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Agriculture- marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraint

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Context: The article emphasizes making agriculture productive, competitive, and sustainable. It suggests increasing agri-R&D, promoting balanced fertiliser use, improving value chains for fruits and vegetables, reducing anti-market policies, and prioritizing farmers' welfare while addressing climate challenges and environmental sustainability.

What are the key challenges in Indian agriculture?

1. Climate change impacts agriculture, with temperatures rising by 0.7°C since 1951 and monsoon precipitation decreasing by 6%.

2. Soil health is declining due to poor farming practices and imbalanced fertiliser use.

3. Fertiliser subsidies promote excessive nitrogen (urea) usage while neglecting phosphates (P), potash (K), and micronutrients.

4. India's negative Producer Support Estimate (PSE) of -15.5% highlights anti-market policies like export controls, price dumping, and trade restrictions.

How can agriculture become more sustainable and climate-resilient?

1. **Agri-R&D Investment**: Increase spending from 0.5% to 1% of agri-GDP for developing climate-resilient crops and technologies.

2. **Soil Health Management**: Promote balanced fertilisation with biofertilisers, nano-urea, and micronutrients.

3. **Natural Farming Mission**: Focus on sustainable agriculture, but balance it with population growth needs.

For detailed information on **Technologies for sustainable agriculture development** read this article here

What reforms are needed in Indian Agriculture?

1. **Increase Agri-R&D**: Raise spending from 0.5% to 1% of agri-GDP for climate-resilient agriculture.

2. **Balance Fertiliser Use**: Balance fertiliser subsidies by reducing the skew towards urea, which leads to overuse of nitrogen and underuse of other nutrients. Implement policies encouraging the use of biofertilisers and micronutrients for soil health.

3. **Implement Direct Income Transfer**: Use data from PM-KISAN and soil health cards to ensure efficient fertiliser pricing.

4. **Strengthen Value Chains**: Follow the milk sector model (similar to the National Dairy Development Board) to increase farmers' share in fruits and vegetable prices from one-third to 75–80%.

5. **Avoid Anti-Market Policies**: **Stabilize Export Policies**: Avoid abrupt export bans and restrictions to ensure stable market conditions for farmers, minimizing negative market price supports and enhancing farmer incomes.

Question for practice:

Examine the key challenges and necessary reforms in Indian agriculture to make it more sustainable, competitive, and climate-resilient.

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Rupee's Fall Driven by Stronger US Dollar

Source: The post Rupee's Fall Driven by Stronger US Dollar has been created, based on the article "**Why the Rupee's fall should not be cause for concern**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests. And GS paper 3- Economy

Context: The article explains the rupee's fall past 85 is due to a stronger US dollar, not a weaker rupee. It advises focusing on overall trade competitiveness, inflation control, fiscal discipline, and growth, rather than defending the rupee against the dollar alone.

What is the Current Status of the Rupee Against the Dollar?

1. The rupee has recently fallen to 85.02 against the dollar, marking a significant drop from its previous range of 81-84.

2. This change is attributed to a stronger US dollar rather than a weaker Indian rupee. The dollar index increased from 99.8 to 108.3, influencing the rupee's value.

How Has the Rupee Performed Against Other Major Currencies?

1. Despite depreciating against the dollar, the rupee has appreciated against the euro, pound, and yen.

2. The exchange rates have moved from 93.49 to 88.17 against the euro, 111.98 to 106.29 against the pound, and 0.58 to 0.54 against the yen.

What caused the US dollar to strengthen?

The dollar strengthened globally due to:

1. US President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs and immigration policies.

2. Expectations of inflation from tax cuts and spending.

3. This has increase US bond yields, which increased from below 3.8% (September 25) to over 4.5%.

What are the risks of a strong US dollar?

A strong dollar and high US interest rates could:

1. Hurt US exports by making them less competitive.

2. Reduce business investments.

3. Slow the US economy, forcing the Federal Reserve to cut rates.

What Should the Indian Government and RBI Do?

1. The government and RBI should not focus solely on the dollar but consider the rupee's value against a basket of currencies.

2. They should avoid using interest rates to defend the rupee and instead focus on controlling inflation, managing deficits, and maintaining economic stability to offset potential capital outflows.

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For detailed information on **India's stumble on rupee trading holds a lesson on globalization** read this article here

Question for practice:

Examine the factors contributing to the strengthening of the US dollar and its impact on the Indian rupee.

Recommendations of K Radhakrishnan Panel on India's National Entrance Exams

Source: The post Recommendations of K Radhakrishnan Panel on India's National Entrance Exams has been created, based on the article "**Express View on exam reform recommendations: Test, not stress**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education

Context: The article discusses the problems in India's national entrance exams, including paper leaks and delays. It highlights K Radhakrishnan panel's recommendations to improve transparency, security, and efficiency, such as reducing the NTA's role, improving infrastructure, and using digital systems to ensure fairness for all candidates.

What are the problems in India's national entrance exams?

1. Frequent Paper Leaks: In the last five years, 41 paper leaks across 15 states affected 1.4 crore candidates.

2. Postponements and Cancellations: In 2024, NEET and UGC-NET faced delays due to compromised integrity.

3. Delays in Results: CUET results were delayed for the third consecutive year, causing challenges for students.

4. Overburdened NTA: The NTA conducted 244 exams since 2018, with candidates increasing from 67 lakh (2019-202

5. Technological Glitches: Poor user interfaces and inadequate support systems, like CUET's glitches, highlighted infrastructure gaps.

For detailed information on **National Testing Agency (NTA)** read this article here

What recommendations did K Radhakrishnan's panel propose?

1. Reducing NTA's Role:

• The panel suggested that the National Testing Agency (NTA) should only conduct entrance exams, not recruitment tests.

• Since 2018, the NTA has conducted 244 exams, with the number of registered candidates doubling from 67 lakh (2019-2021) to 122 lakh (2022-2023).

2. Improving Exam Security:

• The panel recommended a tiered collaboration between the Centre and states, similar to election management, for securing exams.

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• It proposed adopting a "digi-exam" system inspired by DigiYatra for biometric candidate verification.

3. Modernizing Exam Methods:

• A shift to computer-adaptive testing was suggested, where questions match the ability of candidates.

Why is a digital overhaul necessary, and what challenges exist?

1. Need for Digital Infrastructure: The panel stressed creating robust security systems and accessible digital platforms. Examples like CUET glitches show that tech-driven reforms need careful planning.

2. Ensuring Equity: It emphasized making the systems user-friendly to avoid creating inequalities. Every candidate should be able to navigate the processes without stress or confusion.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges faced by India's national entrance exams and the recommendations proposed by the K Radhakrishnan panel to address them.

How Cooperatives Help Farmers

Source: The post How Cooperatives Help Farmers has been created, based on the article "**India should try the Amul model for all agricultural commodities**" published in "**Live mint**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context: This article discusses the challenges Indian farmers face in getting fair prices for their produce and highlights successful cooperative models like Amul that have helped farmers receive better returns. It also talks about government and banking efforts to support such cooperative models, enhancing farmer welfare and productivity.

What are the Main Challenges Faced by Indian Farmers?

1. **Low Earnings**: Farmers receive only one-third of the final selling price of their produce, with the rest taken by traders, wholesalers, and retailers.

2. **APMC Issues**: Markets under Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) added more middlemen, increasing burdens on farmers instead of reducing them.

3. **Lack of Effective Cooperatives**: Unlike Amul's success in dairy, cooperative efforts for essential crops have been less effective due to political interference and government oversight.

4. **Limited Bargaining Power**: Farmers struggle with price discovery and fair procurement, often facing exploitation in traditional systems.

5. **Dependence on Middlemen**: Many farmers rely on intermediaries for market access, reducing profitability.

How Have Cooperative Models Benefited Farmers?

1. **Increased Earnings**: Amul returns 80–82% of milk prices to farmers, ensuring better income.

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2. **Social Infrastructure**: Cooperatives like Campco and Totgars' Cooperative Sale Society provide education, healthcare, and savings mechanisms.

3. **Market Stability**: Amul ensures fair price discovery and prevents price escalation.

4. **Global Success**: Amul achieved a ₹59,445 crore turnover in 2023-24 and ranks as the world's strongest dairy brand.

5. **Supportive Services**: Farmers receive discounts on supplies and veterinary care through cooperatives.

6. **Financial Empowerment**: District cooperative banks provide credit at low rates, improving financial access.

7. **Other Examples**: Spice boards in Kerala and betel-nut cooperatives in Karnataka boost returns and welfare.

For detailed information on **Cooperative Societies: Benefits and Challenges** read this article here

What Efforts Are Being Made to Support Farmer Cooperatives?

1. **Creation of a Ministry of Cooperation**: The Indian government has established this ministry to promote the cooperative movement across various sectors under the vision of *Sahakar se Samriddhi* (Prosperity through Cooperation).

2. **Promotion of Specialized Cooperatives**: Institutions like Bhartiya Beej Sahakari Samiti, National Cooperative Organics, and National Cooperative Export are being set up to support organic farming, farm exports, and seed production.

3. **RBI's Oversight**: The RBI is stepping up regulation of cooperative banks to enhance farmer benefits and financial stability.

What is the Global Perspective on Farmer Cooperatives?

Globally, the farmer cooperative model has proven to be economically viable. Banks like Rabo Bank in the Netherlands and various cooperatives in former Soviet Republics have developed strong agricultural economies, showing the potential success of this model on a global scale.

Question for practice:

Examine how cooperative models like Amul have improved farmer welfare and income in India.

India's Electric Vehicle Growth and CAFE Norms

Source: The post India's Electric Vehicle Growth and CAFE Norms has been created, based on the article "**Fuel efficiency norms could accelerate clean mobility**" published in "**Live mint**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article highlights India's electric vehicle growth, supported by government policies and investments. It emphasizes the importance of CAFE norms in reducing emissions, encouraging EV adoption, and aligning with global standards for a sustainable, low-carbon future and economic growth.

What is India's Current Status in Electric Vehicle Adoption?

1. India has reached a milestone with over 5 million electric vehicles (EVs) on the road by the end of 2024.

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2. The percentage of EVs compared to total vehicles has increased from 0.7% in 2020 to 6.3% in 2024.

3. The breakdown includes 2.6 million two-wheelers, 2 million three-wheelers, 300,000 four-wheelers, and 10,000 buses.

4. These vehicles have helped reduce carbon emissions by approximately 10 million tonnes.

How is the Government Supporting EV Growth?

1. The Indian government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has invested $15.1 billion in electric mobility through various schemes, enhancing the country's role as a significant player in the EV market.

2. Additionally, startups in this sector have received around $6.4 billion in private investments.

What are CAFE Norms and How Do They Impact EV Adoption?

1. Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms are regulations aimed at reducing vehicle emissions.

2. India plans to implement stricter norms, CAFE III and CAFE IV, which set limits of 91.7gm and 70gm of CO2 per kilometer, respectively.

3. These norms encourage automakers to increase their production of EVs, which are treated favorably under these regulations through 'super credits'.

4.CAFE norms help reduce fuel consumption and emissions, aligning India with international standards.

5. They also encourage automakers to invest in EV technology, leading to reduced costs and increased production efficiency. This, in turn, supports the broader adoption of EVs.

For detailed information on **Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms** read this article here

How Will CAFE Norms Benefit India's Economy and Environment?

1. **Emission Reduction**: CAFE norms set stricter CO2 limits, reducing emissions to 91.7gm/km by 2027 and 70gm/km by 2032, supporting decarbonization goals.

2. **Encouraging EV Adoption**: EVs receive "super credits," motivating automakers to produce more. Over 5 million EVs already reduce 10 million tonnes of carbon emissions.

3. **Global Alignment**: Switching to international testing standards improves emission data accuracy.

4. **Economic Growth**: CAFE norms promote clean-tech investments, EV innovation, and job creation.

5. **Examples of Success**: The EU increased EV market share from 3% to 19% (2019–2021) with similar standards.

Question for practice:

Examine how the implementation of CAFE norms contributes to India's electric vehicle adoption, economic growth, and environmental sustainability.

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New Interception Rules and Safeguards

Source: The post **New Interception Rules and Safeguards** has been created, based on the article **"What are the new interception rules and safeguards?"** published in "**The Hindu**" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 2- Government Policies and Interventions for Development in various sectors and Issues arising out of their Design and Implementation.

Context: The article addresses the new interception rules under the Telecommunications (Procedures and Safeguards for Lawful Interception of Messages) Rules, 2024, notified by the Union Government of India. These rules replace the longstanding Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951, which governed lawful interception of messages.

What are the new Telecommunications (Procedures and Safeguards for Lawful Interception of Messages) Rules, 2024?

1. These rules were notified by the Union Government on December 6, 2024.
2. They empower certain enforcement and security agencies to intercept messages under specific conditions.
3. These rules supersede Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951.

Who is authorized to issue interception orders?

1. **Competent Authorities:** The Union Home Secretary and the Secretary of the State government's Home Department.
2. **In 'Unavoidable Circumstances':** An officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Union Government may issue interception orders.
3. **In Remote Areas or Operational Reasons:** The head or the second senior-most officer of an authorised agency at the central level. The head or the second senior-most officer of the authorised agency at the State level (not below the rank of IG Police).

What conditions apply to interception orders?

1. Interception orders issued due to operational reasons must be submitted to the competent authority within three working days.
2. If the competent authority does not confirm the order within seven working days, the interception must cease.
3. Interception records must be destroyed every six months unless needed for functional requirements or court orders.

How do the new rules differ from Rule 419A?

1. **Relaxation of Conditions:** Interception is now allowed in 'remote areas or for operational reasons', not just 'emergent cases.'
2. **Limitation of Officers Authorized at the State Level:**
    a. Only the head and second senior-most officer of the authorised agency can issue orders.
    b. Under Rule 419A, there was no limit on the number of IGP-rank officers authorised for interception.
3. **Unused Interception Data:** Messages intercepted without confirmation within seven days cannot be used for any purpose, including as evidence in court.

What legal precedents influenced the framing of these rules?

1. The Supreme Court's decision in *People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs. Union of India and Another* (1996):
    o   Defined 'public emergency' and 'public safety.'
    o   Emphasized that privacy rights must be protected with just, fair, and reasonable safeguards.
2. Rule 419A was introduced in 2007 following the Supreme Court's directions in the same case.

What are the concerns regarding the new rules?

1. **Relaxed Safeguards:**

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a. The removal of 'emergent cases' as a prerequisite for interception by authorised agencies lacks additional checks.
2. **Accountability Issues:**
   a. The rules do not specify punitive actions for misuse of interception powers.
   b. No provisions to address potential abuse of interception powers during the seven-day window before confirmation.

India's Undersea Warfare Power

Source: The post **India's Undersea Warfare Power** has been created, based on the article **"Pointing the beacon at India's undersea warfare power"** published in "The Hindu" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 3-Defence

Context: The article focuses on India's significant strides in undersea warfare capabilities, highlighting the Indian Navy's advancements and its critical role in ensuring maritime security. It provides a comprehensive overview of pivotal developments, challenges, and opportunities within the context of India's growing maritime power and strategic aspirations.

What significant achievements marked the Indian Navy's undersea warfare capabilities in 2024?

1. **Operation Sankalp Expansion:** Expanded from the Strait of Hormuz to the Red Sea, ensuring shipping security from piracy and Houthi attacks.
2. **Commissioning of INS Arighaat:** India's second indigenous nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) was commissioned in August 2024, enhancing the nuclear triad and deterrent capability.
3. **Testing of the K-4 SLBM:** Successfully tested with a range of 3,500 km from INS Arighaat, potentially placing most of China within striking range.
4. **Approval of Project-77:** Final clearance for building two nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) at ₹40,000 crore, with over 90% indigenous content, to be delivered by 2036-37.

What developments were made regarding conventional submarines?

1. **Project-75 (Scorpene-class Submarines):** The sixth Scorpene-class submarine, INS Vaghsheer, is set for commissioning.
2. **Planned Expansion:** Proposal to order three more Scorpene-class submarines, with 60% indigenous content.
3. **Project 75(I):** Focused on acquiring Air Independent Propulsion (AIP)-enabled submarines, with Spain's Navantia and Germany's Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems as key contenders. Initial indigenous content to be 45%, increasing to 60% by the sixth boat.

What is the significance of Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) for India's naval capabilities?

1. **Approval for Development:** Sanction to build 100-tonne UUVs at ₹2,500 crore.
2. **Strategic Advantage:** UUVs are low-cost, high-return options, symbolizing India's focus on niche undersea technologies to counter evolving maritime threats.

What challenges impede the Indian Navy's undersea warfare advancements?

1. **Budgetary Constraints:** Mismatch between planned acquisitions and modernisation allocations.
2. **Project Delays:** Excessive delays in specifying requirements, shortlisting manufacturers, issuing tenders, and evaluations.
3. **Sustained Funding Needs:** Long-term projects demand consistent and adequate funding.

How do these advancements align with India's maritime vision and international cooperation?

1. **Balanced Blue Water Force:** Aiming to integrate undersea, surface, and aviation elements for maritime stability and security.
2. **Strategic Partnerships:** Enhances collaboration with maritime nations, boosting India's stature as a security provider.

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3. **Alignment with SAGAR:** Reinforces India's maritime vision of "Security and Growth for All in the Region" and supports a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

The Global Warming Challenge for India

Source: The post **The Global Warming Challenge for India** has been created, based on the article **"The global warming fight has a challenge for India "** published in "The Hindu" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS-3- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Context: The article addresses the critical challenges India faces in the global fight against climate change. It reflects on the outcomes of the COP29 climate conference, highlighting the inadequacies in global climate commitments and the unique hurdles India must overcome to balance its developmental needs with environmental sustainability.

What was the outcome of COP29 in Azerbaijan?

1. The COP29 climate conference in Azerbaijan was disappointing.
2. The meeting coincided with a political transition in the U.S., contributing to a stalemate in climate negotiations.
3. Despite these challenges, global warming continues to accelerate, requiring urgent emission reductions.

What are the global targets for achieving net-zero emissions?

1. Developed countries: Target year 2050.
2. China: Target year 2060.
3. **India: Target year 2070.**

What are the two major developments impacting India's transition timeline?

1. **EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):**
   a. Effective from 2026.
   b. Imposes customs duties on imports unless exporting countries match the EU's carbon tax levels.
2. **Pressure for early emission peaking:**
   a. G-7 Summits in Hiroshima and Apulia called for major economies to peak emissions by 2025.
   b. India faces increasing pressure to adopt an early peaking timeline.

What are India's twin challenges in energy transition?

1. **Electricity consumption gap:**
   a. India's electricity consumption is only one-third of the global average.
   b. The country needs more electricity to replace fossil fuels and sustain growth.
2. **Compressed transition timeline:**
   a. India cannot wait until 2070 due to international pressure for early peaking.

Note: Peaking: The point where emissions plateau before declining to net-zero. Early peaking limits energy growth, making the timeline crucial for future capacity-building.

What is India's projected energy demand by 2070?

1. A study estimates a demand of 21,000 Terawatt hours (TWh).
2. By comparison:
   o India's energy consumption in 2020 was 6,200 TWh.
   o The International Energy Agency predicts 3,400 TWh by 2040, which seems unrealistically low.

Which energy sources are viable for India's transition?

Renewables vs. Nuclear:

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1. Nuclear power is more cost-effective at ₹3.80/unit compared to renewables, which cost ₹4.95–₹7.50/unit.
2. The nuclear option also requires less land (1,83,565 sq.km vs. 4,12,033 sq.km for renewables).

What steps are required to ramp up nuclear energy in India?

1. Government support for large-scale investments.
2. Public-private partnerships, especially in hard-to-abate sectors.
3. Larger nuclear reactors (700 MW–1,000 MW) to meet demand.
4. Designating nuclear power as green energy to align with global standards.

What are the financial challenges in India's energy transition?

1. COP29 commitments: Developed countries pledged $300 billion annually by 2035 against a $1.3 trillion demand.
2. Challenges:
   a. Most funding will be non-concessional, unsuitable for many developing nations.
   b. Green finance depends on tariff hikes and improved health of power distribution companies (DISCOMs).
   c. Political consensus is needed to sensitise the public to higher electricity tariffs.

Why is equitable carbon space crucial for India?

1. The global carbon budget is likely to be exhausted within a decade.
2. Developed nations and China have already established their peaking levels, limiting future carbon availability for India.
3. India must establish its right to carbon space by rapidly expanding electricity generation and diversifying energy sources.

Understanding Speed Guns

Source: The post **Understanding Speed Guns** has been created, based on the article **"The principle behind the working of a speed gun, used for motion tracking"** published in "The Hindu" on 23rd December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 3 - Science and Technology- Developments and their Applications and Effects in Everyday Life

Context: The article explores the scientific principle behind speed guns, focusing on their use, underlying mechanism, and evolution. The context is framed around the increasing deployment of speed guns by traffic police, as exemplified by their adoption in Puducherry in September 2023 to curb speeding vehicles. It discusses the physics of the Doppler effect, the core concept that enables speed guns to measure the speed of moving objects accurately.

What is a speed gun?

1. A speed gun is a device used to measure the speed of a moving object without physical contact.
2. It works by bouncing electromagnetic radiation of a specific frequency off the object and analyzing the reflected waves using the Doppler effect.
3. Common applications include traffic monitoring by law enforcement, assessing athletes' performance, and other motion-tracking needs.

How does a speed gun work?

1. Speed guns emit electromagnetic waves, usually radio waves, toward a moving object.
2. These waves reflect back to the device, and the frequency of the returning waves changes based on the object's motion.
3. If the object is approaching, the frequency increases; if it's moving away, the frequency decreases.
4. A built-in computer calculates the speed by analyzing this frequency shift using the Doppler effect.

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What is the Doppler effect?

1. The Doppler effect explains how wave frequencies change due to relative motion between a wave source and an observer:
2. When the source approaches, waves are compressed, leading to higher frequency and pitch.
3. When the source moves away, waves stretch out, resulting in lower frequency and pitch. For example, a train horn sounds higher-pitched when approaching a station and lower-pitched when leaving. Speed guns apply this principle using radio waves instead of sound.

What role does the Doppler effect play in speed guns?

The Doppler effect allows speed guns to measure an object's speed by detecting changes in wave frequency:

1. Radio waves are emitted at a fixed frequency.
2. The reflected waves have a shifted frequency due to the object's motion.
3. The speed gun calculates the object's velocity by multiplying the frequency shift by the speed of light and dividing by twice the emitted frequency.

What are the advantages and limitations of using speed guns?

Advantages:

1. Speed guns offer accurate measurements over various distances and velocities.
2. They are not affected by air resistance, making them reliable for different applications like traffic enforcement and sports performance analysis.

Limitations:

1. **Wave divergence:** Radio waves naturally spread out as they travel, which can lead to the beam hitting multiple objects and causing inaccurate readings.

2. **Continuous-wave radar issues:** These systems may track multiple objects simultaneously, complicating data accuracy.

3. **Cost of improvements:** Engineering solutions to minimize errors, like advanced targeting systems, often make devices more sophisticated and expensive.

What is the difference between radar and LIDAR speed guns?

1. **Radar speed guns:** Use radio waves to measure speed. However, wave divergence can lead to less precise targeting.
2. **LIDAR speed guns:** Use laser light instead of radio waves. Laser light has minimal divergence, enabling better targeting and more accurate measurements. LIDAR systems are increasingly replacing radar speed guns due to their higher precision.

Why is LIDAR gaining popularity over radar?

1. LIDAR speed guns provide enhanced accuracy and precision because laser beams diverge far less than radio waves, allowing for more focused and reliable measurements.
2. Despite being more expensive, their performance benefits make them the preferred choice for applications requiring high accuracy.

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India's Renewed Strategic Partnership with Kuwait

Source: The post India's Renewed Strategic Partnership with Kuwait has been created, based on the article "**Express view on PM's Kuwait visit: Delhi must deliver on West Asia promise**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 24th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article highlights India's renewed diplomatic and strategic ties with Kuwait. It discusses past neglect, reasons for strained relations, recent agreements on defence and trade, Kuwait's investment in India, and the need to deepen partnerships with Gulf countries.

For detailed information on **Significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait** read this article here

Why Was India's Relationship with Kuwait Neglected?

1. India did not engage closely with Kuwait after Saddam Hussein's invasion in 1990, due to India's geopolitical alignments and sympathies at the time.

2. This caused a strain in relations as Kuwait felt India was ambivalent about the violation of its sovereignty.

How Did Kuwait Rebuild Relations with India?

1. Despite past differences, Kuwait reopened its economy to Indian workers across sectors.

2. Indians became the largest expatriate group in Kuwait.

3. Kuwait has become a key source of foreign investment, with 89% of total FDI from GCC countries received in the last decade.

4. Kuwait facilitated diaspora interactions and respected India's cultural sensitivities, strengthening ties further.

What is the Broader Context of India's Gulf Relations?

1. India strengthened ties with moderate Arab states, supported by PM Modi's visits.

2. India played a role in the Abraham Accords and has stakes in Gulf stability.

3. The current Israel-Palestine conflict and Gulf instability make these ties crucial.

What Steps Should India Take?

1. Operationalise defence and security agreements with Kuwait.

2. Create a business-friendly environment to attract Gulf investments, especially Sovereign Funds.

3. Recognise Kuwait's support for the Indian diaspora and respect for cultural sensitivities.

Question for practice:

Examine the factors that led to the neglect of India's relationship with Kuwait and the steps taken to rebuild and strengthen these ties.

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GST Council delays reforms and rate rationalization

Source: The post GST Council delays reforms and rate rationalization has been created, based on the article "**Express view on PM's Kuwait visit: Delhi must deliver on West Asia promise**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 24th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Indian Economy- resource mobilization (taxation)

Context: The article discusses GST Council's delay in decisions on tax reductions for insurance and food delivery, extensions for rate rationalization and compensation cess, odd GST rate structures on goods like popcorn, and India's complex multiple-rate GST system needing reform.

For detailed information on **7 Years of GST** read this article here

What decisions were deferred by the GST Council?

1. The GST Council, in its 55th meeting, postponed decisions on critical matters:

• **Lowering GST rates** for health and life insurance.

• **Reducing taxes** on food delivery charges by aggregators.

2. The **Group of Ministers (GoM)** on rate rationalization and compensation cess was also given more time to submit reports.

What are the challenges of India's GST rate structure?

1. **Multiple tax slabs**: India has four or more GST slabs, unlike 49 countries with a single rate and 28 with two rates (World Bank 2018).

2. **Complex classifications**: For example, popcorn is taxed differently: salted (5%), pre-packaged (12%), and sugar-mixed (18%).

3. **Confusing item distinctions**: Cream buns and regular buns are taxed at different rates, as are frozen parathas and rotis.

4. **Increased compliance burden**: Businesses face difficulties adhering to varied rates.

5. **Discretionary power**: Bureaucrats have excessive authority due to the system's complexity.

6. **Ease of doing business**: The system hampers India's business environment.

What was discussed regarding GST rationalization?

1. In its 45th meeting, the council discussed the need to rationalize GST rates, potentially by reducing the number of tax slabs and addressing the classification of items.

2. The council also extended the levy of the compensation cess until March 2026 to repay loans taken during the pandemic.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges of India's GST rate structure and the GST Council's efforts toward rationalization.

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18th biennial State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023)

Source: The post 18th biennial State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023) has been created, based on the article "**Why growth of India's overall green cover is not all good news**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 24th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article discusses the 18th biennial State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023), published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI). It highlights a slight increase in forest cover and a significant rise in tree cover. It also notes the loss of dense forests, replaced by plantations, as well as the environmental concerns associated with plantations compared to natural forests.

For detailed information on **India State Of Forest Report** read this article here

What does the ISFR-2023 report reveal?

1. **Increase in Green Cover**: The 18th biennial State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023) by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) shows India's green cover exceeding 25% (25.17%), including 21.76% forest cover and 3.41% tree cover.

2. **Forest Cover Growth**: Forest cover grew by 156 sq km, while tree cover increased significantly by 1,289 sq km since 2021.

3. **Loss of Dense Forests**: India lost 3,913 sq km of dense forests in two years, consistent with a two-decade loss of 24,651 sq km.

4. **Role of Plantations**: Plantations offset the loss, with 1,420 sq km of plantations classified as dense forests since 2021.

How do plantations affect the environment?

CHANGE IN DENSE FOREST COVER 2003-2023

	2021-23	2003-2013	2013-2023	2003-2023
LOST				
VDF to NF	295	288	1277	1565
MDF to NF	3362	6714	15086	21800
VDF to scrub	24	5	65	70
MDF to scrub	313	144	1153	1297
Disappeared	3994	7151	17581	24732
VDF to OF	228	134	1128	1262
MDF to OF	5166	6414	22249	28663
Total loss	9388	13699	40958	54657
GAINED				
NF to VDF	56	43	483	526
NF to MDF	839	3631	7554	11185
Scub to VDF	1	0	54	54
Scrub to MDF	102	105	1043	1148
OF to VDF	496	124	2567	2691
Plantations	1494	3903	11701	15604
OF to MDF	8610	6122	34301	40423
Total gain	10104	10025	46002	56027
NET CHANGE	716	-3674	5044	1370

VDF: Very Dense Forest (canopy over 70%) | **MDF**: Moderate Dense Forest (canopy 40-70%)
OF: Open Forest (canopy 10-40%) | **Shrub** (canopy under 10%) | **NF**: Non-Forest (no canopy)

Source: ISFR 2003-23

1. **Reduced Biodiversity**: Plantations often consist of single species, limiting biodiversity compared to natural forests which support numerous species.

2. **Vulnerability to Threats**: Plantations are more prone to fire, pests, and epidemics due to uniform age and species composition.

3. **Carbon Storage**: Natural forests store more carbon in their structure and soil than plantations. For instance, the UNFCCC flagged India's assumption that plantations reach the carbon stock of natural forests in just eight years.

4. **Replacement of Dense Forests**: Dense forests have declined by 24,651 sq km since 2003, partially replaced by plantations, which grow faster but lack ecological functions of natural forests.

5. **Climate Goals**: Though plantations grow quickly, they are often harvested early, undermining long-term climate targets.

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6. Plantations may help temporarily but cannot fully replace the ecological benefits of natural forests.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the environmental implications of replacing natural dense forests with plantations, as highlighted in the ISFR-2023 report.

Rise of cash transfer schemes by Indian states

Source: The post rise of cash transfer schemes by Indian states has been created, based on the article "**Cash transfers must not lead states to fiscal ruin**" published in "**Live mint**" on 24th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper**3** – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment.

Context: The article discusses the rise of cash transfer schemes by Indian states, driven by political motives and economic stress. It highlights fiscal risks, lack of uniform eligibility checks, corruption, and the need for studies on their impact and sustainability.

For detailed information on **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** read this article here

Why Are States Cash Transfers Increasing?

1. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) criticized states for increasing subsidies and cash transfers, especially to farmers, women, and youth.

2. Nine states allocated ₹1 trillion for cash transfers to women in 2024-25 budgets, with actual spending likely exceeding ₹1.5 trillion (PRS Legislative Research).

3. Political parties, regardless of their ideologies, are using these schemes for electoral gains.

What Are the Key Features of This Trend?

1. Political Motivation:

• Political parties compete to introduce more cash transfers for votes.

• Even fiscally conservative parties, like the ruling BJP, have adopted these schemes.

• Examples include elections in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh, where cash transfers influenced outcomes.

2. Economic Necessity:

• Cash transfers address declining real wages and high unemployment.

• They temporarily boost consumption and support weak consumer demand.

How Do Cash Transfers Differ From Universal Basic Income (UBI)?

1. Unlike UBI, cash transfers lack a formal policy framework.

2. There is no consistent means-testing, leading to eligibility issues and corruption.

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3. Some schemes exclude government employees and taxpayers, but enforcement varies.

For detailed information on **Benefits and Criticisms of Universal Transfers** read this article here

What Are the Risks of Growing Cash Transfers?

1. Fiscal profligacy can crowd out developmental spending.

2. The RBI warns that subsidies and cash transfers may harm long-term economic productivity.

3. Increasing spending on cash transfers could hurt India's fiscal stability and global credit ratings.

Are Cash Transfers Effective Politically or Economically?

1. There is no evidence that cash transfers guarantee votes.

2. Political parties need studies to assess their return on investment.

3. Without better planning, these schemes may lead to a fiscal race-to-the-bottom.

Conclusion

India needs stricter eligibility criteria, corruption control, and detailed studies to balance fiscal sustainability with short-term economic benefits from cash transfers.

Question for practice:

Discuss the political and economic factors driving the rise of cash transfer schemes in Indian states and their associated risks.

India's Key Sources of Dollar Earnings

Source: The post rise of India's Key Sources of Dollar Earnings has been created, based on the article "**We need more sectors to become reliable dollar earners**" published in "**Live mint**" on 24th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper**3** – Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

Context: The article discusses India's reliance on essential imports and the need for strong dollar earners like remittances and software services. It highlights challenges in boosting exports, opportunities in tourism, education, and engineering, and stresses improving value-added sectors.

What Are India's Major Imports and Export Challenges?

1. Major Imports

• India imports essential goods worth over $250 billion, including crude oil, coal, fertilizers, steel, and copper.

• Pharmaceuticals, special minerals, and renewable energy inputs are also crucial.

• High import dependency impacts net earnings from exports like petrol, diesel, and polished diamonds.

2. Export Challenges

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• Traditional exports like textiles dropped from 21.1% (2004) to 8% (2024), overtaken by Vietnam and Bangladesh.

• Polished diamonds' share fell from 16.9% to 7.5%, with high import costs.

• AI threatens low-end software jobs; competition in garments and automation risk labour-intensive sectors.

What Are India's Key Sources of Dollar Earnings?

1. **Inward Remittances**: India leads globally with $129 billion in remittances, primarily from Gulf countries and North America. Reducing transaction costs can boost this further, inspired by UPI's success.

2. **Software Services**: Exports exceed $200 billion, relying on skilled talent. Growth depends on adapting to AI challenges and climbing the value chain.

3. **Engineering Goods**: Exports reached $110 billion, growing 40% in six years.

4. **Mobile Phones**: Exports crossed $20 billion recently, showing steady growth.

5 **Petroleum Products**: Account for a fifth of merchandise exports but face high import costs and oil price volatility.

What Are Some Emerging Opportunities and Risks?

1. Emerging Opportunities

a. **Tourism**: India attracts only 9 million foreign tourists compared to Spain's 85 million and Thailand's 29 million. Better promotion and infrastructure can double arrivals.

b. **Mobile Phone Exports**: Rising from zero to $20 billion, showing potential as a steady dollar earner.

c. **Project Exports**: Combining services and goods, leveraging India's human capital.

2. Emerging Risks

1. **Automation**: Threatens labor-intensive sectors like garments, footwear, and diamond polishing.

2. **Dependence on Imports**: High import content in engineering goods and petro-products reduces net export earnings.

3. **Education Costs**: Draining $70 billion, with a need to boost domestic education exports.

Wise

Question for practice:

Examine the challenges and opportunities for India's export sector in enhancing its net dollar earnings, considering the reliance on imports and emerging global trends.

India's Bureaucracy: Key Issues and the Path to Reform

Source: The article on **India's Bureaucracy: Key Issues and the Path to Reform** is based on **"India's 'steel frame' does need a check"** which was published in The Hindu on 24th December 2024.

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UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 2-Governance

Context: The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by India's bureaucracy, specifically focusing on the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which has long been central to the country's governance.

What is the significance of the IAS in India's governance system?

1. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS), often referred to as the "steel frame" of India, originated from the colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS) and has been central to the country's administrative machinery post-Independence.
2. IAS officers occupy pivotal governance roles but face challenges like politicisation, lack of specialisation, and outdated personnel practices.

What are the main challenges faced by the IAS today?

1. **Politicisation**: Political interference impacts transfers, promotions, and suspensions, undermining morale and professionalism. Frequent department rotations prevent officers from developing domain expertise.
2. **Corruption and Inefficiency**: India's moderate rank on the World Bank's measure of government effectiveness highlights issues in policy implementation and administrative independence.
3. **Centralisation of Decision-Making**: While centralised governance under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has driven economic reforms, it has sidelined bureaucratic insights and reduced accountability.

What historical efforts have been made to reform India's administrative system?

1. **Administrative Reforms Commissions (ARCs)**: The First ARC (1966) and Second ARC (2005) emphasised merit-based promotions, accountability, and specialisation. Key recommendations included lowering the entry age for civil services, performance-based promotions, and safeguards against arbitrary transfers.
2. **Limited Implementation**: Despite over 50 commissions and committees since Independence, many recommendations remain unimplemented due to bureaucratic inertia and political resistance.

How has the Modi government approached bureaucratic reforms?

1. **Curbing Politicisation**: Measures to limit politically motivated transfers and enhance accountability were introduced.
2. **Lateral Entry Initiative**: From 2018 to 2023, 57 lateral entrants, including private sector experts, joined senior bureaucratic roles. By 2023, only 33% of Joint Secretaries at the Centre were from the IAS, compared to near-total dominance a decade ago.
3. **Challenges to Lateral Entry**: Resistance from retired civil servants and political opposition over concerns about morale, promotion incentives, and lack of reservation for marginalised groups.Political pressure led to a temporary halt in the lateral entry initiative.

How can international models inspire Indian administrative reforms?

1. **The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)**: DOGE focuses on reducing inefficiency, cutting wasteful expenditure, and leveraging expert leadership.
2. Similar measures in India could include:
   i. Streamlining government operations.
   ii. Creating metrics to assess bureaucratic performance.
   iii. Setting a fixed timeline for reform implementation.

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What are the key obstacles to bureaucratic reform in India?

1. **Resistance from Within**: Institutionalised seniority-based progression and generalist roles hinder reform efforts. Proposals for lateral entry and performance-based promotions face pushback.
2. **Political Interference**: Legislative measures like the Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010) have stalled. Supreme Court directives, such as establishing civil services boards in 2013, have seen limited enforcement.

What reforms are essential to modernise India's bureaucracy?

Administrative reforms are vital to address inefficiencies, enhance governance, and ensure that India's economic growth and governance objectives effectively serve its people.

1. **Merit-Based Recruitment and Promotions**: Prioritise domain expertise and measurable performance over seniority.
2. **Accountability Mechanisms**: Protect bureaucrats from arbitrary political transfers and ensure adherence to performance metrics.
3. **Specialisation and Data-Driven Decision-Making**: Foster specialisation in policymaking roles. Invest in robust data infrastructure to track bureaucratic performance and inform decisions.

India's Role in the Global Job Market

Source: This article on **India's Role in the Global Job Market** is based on **"Envisioning India as a global skill supplier"** which is published on **The Hindu** on **24th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS 3- Indian Economy and issues relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development and Employment

Context: The article examines the potential and challenges of positioning India as a global hub for skilled labour in the context of evolving international labour market dynamics. It underscores the growing importance of skilled migration in addressing demographic and economic shifts, such as ageing populations, digitalisation, and economic diversification, in traditional and emerging migrant destinations like the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Germany, Japan, and Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Why is India positioned to play a major role in the global job market?

1. India's skilled workforce has the potential to address global skills gaps.
2. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressing hope for India's significant role in the international labour market, global trends such as demographic shifts, technological advancements, globalisation, and climate change have highlighted the need for skilled workers worldwide.

How are global migration trends shaping immigration policies?

1. Major migrant destinations like the U.S., the U.K., Canada, and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, as well as emerging destinations such as Germany, South Korea, and Japan, are increasingly focusing on skill-intensive immigration.
2. These nations seek international workers to address challenges like ageing populations, declining fertility rates, digitalisation, and economic diversification.

What are the challenges India faces in bridging global skills gaps?

India lacks a comprehensive policy framework for international labour mobility. Key challenges include:

1. **Fragmented Policy Structure**: Existing policies are piecemeal and lack evidence-based approaches.

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2. **Data Gaps**: Emigration data is limited to low-skilled workers migrating to select countries, hindering policy formulation.
3. **Ineffective Bilateral Agreements**: Current labour mobility agreements lack systematic evaluation or integration into a broader policy framework.

What steps are needed to make India a global skills hub?

India must adopt a comprehensive, skill-centred migration policy. Essential steps include:

1. **Skill Demand Assessment**: Identify and anticipate skill demands in key destination countries using tools like skill-forecasting exercises and big data analytics of real-time job vacancies.
2. **Enhancing Skill Development**: Align India's skill development initiatives with global standards through:
   o Updating curricula in relevant institutions.
   o Reorienting International Skill Centres' training programmes.
   o Offering customised short-term skill training for specific countries.

   3. Convergence of Qualification Frameworks: Align the National Skills Qualification Framework with the qualification systems of destination countries.

How can India address the issue of return migration?

1. Return migration is becoming prominent due to temporary immigration policies.
2. India should focus on:
- **Skill Accreditation**: Facilitate accreditation of skills acquired abroad through specialised institutions to enable seamless reintegration into the Indian labour market.
- **Effective Utilisation of Returnees**: Create mechanisms to leverage the advanced skills of returning migrants.

Why is a skill-centred migration information system important?

India needs a robust labour migration information system to enable evidence-based policymaking. This system should:

1. Track key quantitative and qualitative indicators of skills and migration.
2. Regularly collate, analyse, and report data to support skill partnerships with destination countries.
3. Promote skill-centred mobility and enhance developmental outcomes.

What is the ultimate goal for India's international labour mobility policies?

1. The aim is to transition India into a global skill capital by addressing global skill demands, raising skill quality to international standards, and ensuring the effective reintegration of returning migrants.
2. A coordinated approach involving data-driven policymaking, enhanced skill development, and global partnerships is critical for achieving this vision.

India's Reliance on China for Critical Minerals

Source: This article on India's Reliance on China for Critical Minerals has been created based on India's reliance on China for critical minerals published in The Hindu on 24th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topics: GS1- Distribution of Key Natural Resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent)

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Context: The article provides an in-depth analysis of India's reliance on China for critical minerals, highlighting the challenges and potential solutions to this dependency. It contextualizes the issue within the broader framework of global mineral supply chains, focusing on China's dominant role and India's vulnerabilities.

What are critical minerals, and why are they important?

1. Critical minerals are resources that are essential for a country's economic development and national security.
2. In 2023, the Ministry of Mines in India identified 30 such minerals, highlighting that the country is entirely dependent on imports for 10 of them.

Does China dominate the critical minerals sector?

1. Yes, China has achieved unparalleled dominance in the critical minerals sector. This is due to its vast resource base and strategic investments.
2. China has discovered 173 types of minerals, including copper, lithium, gallium, and crystalline graphite. In 2022, the country identified 132 new mineral deposits, of which 34 were large-scale.
3. Additionally, China controls significant portions of global processing, refining 87% of rare earth elements, 58% of lithium, and 68% of silicon.
4. It has also secured overseas mining projects and established robust midstream refining capabilities, which have strengthened its global supply chain dominance.

How does China weaponize its critical mineral exports?

1. China strategically restricts the export of minerals critical to industries in Western nations and their allies, such as semiconductors and batteries.
2. For instance, China imposed a rare earth embargo on Japan in 2010 and recently restricted the export of antimony, gallium, and germanium.
3. In December 2023, it banned the export of rare earth extraction and processing technologies.
4. However, China carefully balances such restrictions by avoiding actions that might harm its domestic industrial enterprises or heavily export-dependent sectors.

Which minerals does India heavily depend on China for?

India depends heavily on China for six critical minerals, with significant import reliance for each:

- **Bismuth**: India imports 85.6% of its requirements from China. This mineral is mainly used in pharmaceuticals and chemicals.
- **Lithium**: India's reliance on China is 82%. Lithium is a crucial component in electric vehicle (EV) batteries and energy storage systems.
- **Silicon**: India imports 76% of its silicon from China. This mineral is essential for semiconductors and solar panels.
- **Titanium**: India depends on China for 50.6% of its titanium needs. Titanium is widely used in aerospace and defence applications.
- **Tellurium**: India sources 48.8% of tellurium from China. This mineral is vital for solar power and thermoelectric devices.
- **Graphite**: India relies on China for 42.4% of its graphite, which is indispensable for EV batteries and steel production.

Why does India rely on imports despite having domestic resources?

1. India's dependency on imports stems from several structural challenges. Many critical minerals are deep-seated, requiring advanced exploration and mining technologies.
2. Such high-risk investments have deterred private sector participation due to inadequate policy incentives.

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3. Additionally, India's processing capabilities are limited.
4. For example, India has not been able to process its recently discovered 5.9 million tonnes of lithium in Jammu and Kashmir due to a lack of technology to extract lithium from clay-based reserves.

What steps is India taking to reduce dependency on China?

India has initiated multiple measures to address its reliance on China:

1. **Securing Overseas Assets**: India established KABIL, a joint venture of three state-owned companies, to secure mineral resources abroad.
2. **Global Partnerships**: The country has joined international initiatives like the Minerals Security Partnership and the Critical Raw Materials Club to diversify its supply sources.
3. **Investment in Research**: Institutions such as the Geological Survey of India and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) are conducting research to advance exploration and extraction technologies.
4. **Recycling and Circular Economy**: India is promoting recycling and circular economy practices to reduce dependence on virgin mineral resources.
5. **Production-Linked Incentives (PLI)**: The government has introduced incentives for extracting critical minerals through recycling processes.

What are the challenges in reducing dependence on China?

1. Reducing India's dependency on China requires sustained investment and long-term policy commitment.
2. Developing advanced exploration, mining, and processing capabilities will take time. Additionally, the transition to a self-reliant critical mineral ecosystem will necessitate significant technological advancements and international collaboration.
3. Despite these challenges, India's initiatives provide a promising foundation for addressing its vulnerabilities in the critical minerals sector.

Reimposition of the Protected Area Regime (PAR)

Source: The article on **Reimposition of the Protected Area Regime (PAR)** is based on **Why has the MHA reimposed restrictions in three NE States?** published in The Hindu on 24th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus Topic- GS 2-Polity

Context: The article discusses the recent decision by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in India to reimpose the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the northeastern States of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram. This move requires foreigners visiting these States to obtain prior permission and Protected Area Permits (PAP), reversing a previous relaxation of these restrictions.

Why has the MHA reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in three Northeastern States?

1. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram on December 17, 2023.
2. This decision restricts and monitors the movement of foreigners in these states. Foreign visitors must now obtain prior permission and Protected Area Permits (PAP) from the government.
3. The relaxation previously granted to these states under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, was withdrawn due to growing security concerns.

What is the Protected Area Regime and the 1958 Order?

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1. **Protected Area Regime (PAR):** A system restricting foreign nationals from entering certain areas near international borders without permission.
2. **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958:**
   a. Prohibited entry or stay of foreigners in protected areas without a permit issued by the Central Government or its authorized offices.
   b. Permits specified details like entry point, place of residence, and duration of stay.
   c. Areas covered included regions between the inner line and the international border in states such as Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim (partly protected/restricted), and all of Andaman & Nicobar Islands (restricted).

When and why was the 1958 Order relaxed?

1. **Relaxation Period:** The PAR was initially relaxed on December 30, 2010, for Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland due to improved security conditions and to promote tourism.
2. **Extensions:**
   a. Relaxation was extended periodically (1-2 years at a time) until 2022.
   b. In 2022, the relaxation was extended further until December 31, 2027.
3. **Withdrawal in 2023:** The MHA withdrew the relaxation due to heightened security concerns in border areas.

What prompted the withdrawal of the relaxation?

1. **Security Concerns:**
   a. **Ethnic Violence in Manipur:** Ongoing clashes between Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities since May 3, 2023. The Chief Minister attributed the violence to "outsiders and foreign hands."
   b. **Myanmar Refugees:** Over 40,000 undocumented migrants entered Mizoram and about 4,000 into Manipur after the 2021 military coup in Myanmar.
   c. **Ethnic Ties:** Migrants, primarily from the Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group, share ethnic links with Mizoram and Manipur communities.
2. **Border Issues:**
   a. India shares a 1,643 km border with Myanmar through Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram.
   b. The Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allowed movement within 16 km of the border, was suspended in January 2023.

How can foreigners obtain a Protected Area Permit (PAP)?

1. **Permitting Authorities:** Indian Missions abroad, MHA, District Magistrates, Resident Commissioners of States, Home Commissioners and Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRRO).
2. **Special Conditions:**
   a. Citizens of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan (and foreign nationals of these origins) need prior MHA approval.
   b. Foreign visitors must register with the FRRO or Foreigners Registration Officer within 24 hours of arrival.
   c. Myanmar nationals, previously exempt from PAP requirements if holding valid visas, are now required to register with FRRO within 24 hours.

What are the implications of the reimposition?

1. The reimposition of the Protected Area Regime aims to bolster national security in light of increased threats in the border areas.
2. This includes monitoring the influx of undocumented migrants and addressing concerns over ethnic violence, ensuring tighter control over the movement of foreigners in the region.

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How the US China science agreement evolved

Source: The post How the US China science agreement evolved has been created, based on the article "**U.S. and China renew S&T Agreement**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 26th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses the renewal of the U.S.-China science and technology agreement, highlighting its history, benefits, and changes. It explains how such agreements promote cooperation, research, and mobility, while addressing concerns about intellectual property and critical technologies in the renewed agreement.

For detailed information on **On US-China relations** read this article here

What is the U.S.-China Science and Technology Agreement?

1. **Historical Background**: Signed on January 31, 1979, by Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter, the Agreement marked a new era in U.S.-China diplomatic relations, fostering cooperation in science and technology. Since then, the Agreement has been renewed every five years while expanding in scope.

2. **Governance**: It is overseen by the U.S.-PRC Joint Commission on Scientific and Technological Cooperation, with designated agencies as executive agents.

3. **Scope**: The Agreement includes protocols between agencies and 40 sub-agreements across various fields, from agriculture to nuclear fusion.

4. **Impact on R&D**: China's R&D spending grew from $375 million in 1979 to $442 billion in 2021, making it a global leader in science.

What changes were made in the renewed Agreement?

1. **Enhanced Researcher Safety and Data Reciprocity**: The renewed Agreement includes provisions to ensure better safety for researchers and equitable sharing of research data.

2. **Focus on Basic Research**: Cooperation is limited to basic research conducted at intergovernmental levels.

3. **Defined Themes of Mutual Benefit**: Research will now focus only on previously agreed areas of mutual interest.

4. **Exclusion of Critical and Emerging Technologies**: Cooperation in sensitive and emerging technologies is excluded to address concerns about disproportionate benefits to China.

5. **Intellectual Property Concerns**: A 2017 report revealed over 400 Chinese patents linked to projects under the Agreement, commercialized without U.S. benefits, prompting stricter terms.

What has the U.S. gained from the Agreement?

The U.S. has gained significantly from the Science and Technology Agreement with China:

1. **Academic Contributions**: The collaboration has resulted in an increase in co-authored research papers across various scientific fields, enhancing knowledge sharing and innovation.

2. **Student Exchange Enhancement**: The number of Chinese students in the U.S. grew from 2,770 in 1985 to 109,525 in 2000, fostering cultural and educational exchanges.

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3. **Economic Opportunity**: Despite intellectual property concerns, the Agreement has broadened opportunities for scientific and technological advancements.

4. **Strategic Leverage**: It allowed the U.S. to monitor and respond to China's rise in global science.

What does the Agreement teach about S&T cooperation?

The Agreement highlights that:

1. Bilateral S&T cooperation is vital for progress.

2. Success depends on **capacity-building and sustained R&D investment.**

3. It allows countries to address conflicts through cooperation.

4. China has grown from a "junior partner" in 1979 to a competitor in global science, demonstrating the transformative potential of such agreements.

Question for practice:

Examine how the U.S.-China Science and Technology Agreement has evolved over time to address challenges in research collaboration and intellectual property.

India and China Strengthening Trust and Cooperation

Source: The post India and China Strengthening Trust and Cooperation has been created, based on the article "**An India-China reset needs bold and new thinking**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 26th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Context: The article emphasizes peaceful dispute resolution and cooperation between India and China. It highlights the need for trust-building, mutual respect, and collaborative efforts in trade, diplomacy, and global issues. It proposes actionable steps for better relations and mutual growth.

For detailed information on **Strengthening China-India Relations** read this article here

How Have India and China Handled Past Disputes?

1. India and China peacefully resolved the 2020 Galwan Valley standoff.

2. Leaders Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping lent political authority to a disengagement agreement.

3. The agreement was reached after multiple diplomatic and military discussions.

4. This prevented the violent confrontation from escalating into a larger conflict.

5. The Line of Actual Control was stabilized, ensuring peace.

6. Both leaders demonstrated maturity in conflict resolution.

7. The resolution shows their ability to prioritize dialogue over hostility.

8. Trust-building steps, such as these, set a precedent for managing future disputes constructively.

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What Challenges Do India-China Relations Face?

1. **Unsettled Boundary Disputes**: The Line of Actual Control remains a contentious issue, with the potential for future clashes, as seen in the 2020 Galwan Valley incident.

2. **Mutual Distrust**: India suspects China's alliance with Pakistan and its stance on Kashmir-related terrorism. Beijing views India's involvement in the Quad as a threat.

3. **Trade Imbalance**: India's trade deficit with China is significant, though China can address this by importing more Indian goods.

4. **Limited Engagement**: In 2023, China issued visas to 200,000 Indians, but India issued fewer than 10,000 to Chinese nationals.

5. **Geopolitical Tensions**: Anti-China narratives in Indian media and India's deviations from the "One China" policy strain ties.

Why Should India and China Cooperate?

1. **Economic Benefits**: India's large market can boost China's slowing economy, while China's technology can aid India's development goals.

2. **Global South Unity**: Joint efforts can help underdeveloped nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

3. **Global Stability**: Cooperation can address global issues like the Russia-Ukraine war and the West Asian crisis.

What Are Immediate Steps to Build Trust?

1. **Resume Flights**: Restart direct flights suspended during COVID-19 to increase connectivity.

2. **Issue More Visas**: India issued less than 10,000 visas to Chinese nationals in 2023, while China issued over 200,000 to Indians.

3. **Reinstate Journalists**: Reverse decisions leading to the exit of journalists from both countries to improve communication.

4. **Lift App Bans**: Allow Chinese apps like WeChat, banned after the Galwan clash, to enhance digital interaction.

5. **Boost Trade**: Reduce the trade deficit by importing more from India and fostering Chinese investments, as suggested by India's Chief Economic Adviser.

What's the Vision for 2025?

A breakthrough year can be achieved through high-level visits by leaders. Mutual trust, stronger trade ties, and cooperation on global issues can redefine India-China relations, benefiting both nations and the world.

Question for practice:

Discuss the immediate steps India and China can take to build trust and strengthen their relationship.

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India's PM visit boosts India Kuwait ties and stability

Source: The post India's PM visit boosts India Kuwait ties and stability has been created, based on the article "**Key partnership: India and Kuwait are trying to deepen ties during a crucial period**" published in "**The Hindu** " on 26th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context: The article discusses Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait, highlighting its importance in strengthening India-Kuwait ties. It covers historical connections, trade, energy partnerships, defence cooperation, and the need for India to enhance relations amidst regional instability.

For detailed information on **Significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait** read Article 1, Article 2

How Significant are the Historical and Economic Ties Between India and Kuwait?

1. India and Kuwait have a long history of trade and cultural exchanges, dating back to when the British East India Company established trade routes through Kuwait.

2. The Indian rupee was even used as legal tender in Kuwait until its independence in 1961. Today, there are over half a million Indians work there in Kuwait, making them the largest expatriate community there.

3. Bilaterally, trade exceeds $10 billion annually, with Kuwait being India's sixth largest supplier of crude oil and fourth largest supplier of LPG.

What Were the Key Outcomes of the Visit?

1. During the visit, India and Kuwait signed a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize defense cooperation.

2. Additionally, Kuwait awarded Prime Minister Modi the Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer, a high honor, symbolizing the strengthened relationship between the two nations.

What Broader Regional Issues Impact This Visit?

1. The visit occurred amid ongoing regional conflicts, including Israel's actions in Gaza and instability in Syria.

2. These conflicts affect Indian interests, especially concerning the safety of over eight million Indians living in the region and ongoing infrastructure projects like I2U2 and IMEC.

3. Such international dynamics make it essential for India to maintain and enhance its diplomatic relationships in West Asia.

Question for practice:

Examine the significance of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait in the context of historical ties, economic partnerships, and regional stability.

India's Global Leadership in Growth and Sustainability

Source: The post India's Global Leadership in Growth and Sustainability has been created, based on the article "**India's leadership has a valuable role to play in a multipolar world**" published in "**Live mint**" on 26th December 2024

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UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-Global Groupings and Agreements affecting India's interests.

Context: The article highlights India's growing global influence, emphasizing its leadership in sustainable development, economic growth, and diplomacy. It showcases India's role in fostering multilateral cooperation, addressing global challenges, and positioning itself as a key driver of the global economy.

For detailed information on **India's platform for global leadership** read this article here

What is the global economic outlook and key challenges?

1. Global growth is expected to remain steady at **3.2% in 2024 and 2025**.

2. Inflationary pressures are reducing, and the global economy avoided a recession despite monetary tightening.

3. Key challenges include **climate change**, **unstable debt dynamics**, and increasing **protectionism**.

4. Fragmentation and polarization are rising, but global issues like **sustainable growth**, **energy transitions**, and **governance of advanced technologies** require cooperation.

How is India emerging as a global leader?

1. India promotes a **rule-based international order** and democratic values.

2. Supplied **vaccines and medicines to over 100 countries** during COVID-19, showing global responsibility.

3. Leads **International Solar Alliance** and **Global Biofuels Alliance** for sustainable development and climate resilience. These efforts promote sustainable development, climate resilience, and energy transitions.

4. Expanded strategic economic ties through **FTAs** and liberalized **FDI restrictions**.

5. Advocated for **African Union's inclusion** in G20 and reforms for equitable representation in global institutions.

6. Balances global relationships, strengthening credibility as a mediator and leader in the **Global South**.

What is driving India's economic growth?

India is the **world's fifth-largest economy** and the fastest-growing major economy, contributing **17% to global growth in** 2023.

It aims to become a **$10 trillion economy** by the 2030s and a developed nation by **2047**.

Initiatives like **Make in India** and the **Production-Linked Incentive Scheme** boost domestic capabilities and resilience.

What is India's vision for the future?

1. India plans to leverage its **demographic dividend**, strengthen **critical infrastructure**, and embrace **digital transformation**.

2. It aspires to be part of the **G3 era** alongside the US and China, driving the global agenda.

3. By advancing **multilateralism**, enhancing regional partnerships, and bridging developed and developing nations, India can lead a more equitable global system.

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4. Key focus areas include **inclusive growth**, **technology governance**, and **skilling its workforce**.

Question for practice:

Examine how India is emerging as a global leader in addressing global challenges and driving sustainable economic growth.

India's Ageing Population and Elder Care Challenges

Source: The post India's Ageing Population and Elder Care Challenges has been created, based on the article "**Senior security: India needs an affordable elder care ecosystem**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 26th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper1- Society- Social issues

Context: The article highlights India's ageing population, rising elder care needs, and socio-economic challenges. It discusses the growing "silver economy" for affluent elders but emphasizes struggles faced by poorer seniors. Despite policies, poor implementation hampers effective elder care solutions.

For detailed information on **Care for elderly population in India** read this article here

What is the current status of India's elderly population?

1. India has 153 million elderly people (aged 60 and above) in 2024.

2. This number is expected to grow to 347 million by 2050.

3. The elderly will form 15-20% of the total population as fertility rates fall below replacement levels.

What challenges do India's elderly face?

1. **Financial Struggles:** 40% of the elderly belong to the lowest wealth quintile, and 20% have no income.

2. **Healthcare Issues:** Many suffer from diseases like heart problems, kidney ailments, dementia, and Alzheimer's.

3. **Social Pressures:** Urbanization and nuclear families reduce family support, leading to abandonment of sick or disabled elderly.

4. **Inadequate Access to Elder Care:** Existing schemes like the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly are poorly implemented.

5. **Economic Divide:** Private sector solutions target wealthy seniors, excluding the majority.

What policies and laws exist for elder care in India?

1. National Policy on Older Persons (1999): India was ahead of global efforts in addressing elderly care.

2. Maintenance and Welfare of Senior Citizens Act (2007): Children are legally required to provide financial support to parents. The law includes fast-track mechanisms and provisions for old-age homes.

3. National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (2010): Focuses on dedicated healthcare services for the elderly.

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4. Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme: Extended health insurance to all senior citizens above 70 years, regardless of income.

What steps are needed for the future?

1. Develop a robust elder care system that is affordable and accessible.

2. Address financial security, healthcare, and social support for all elderly, especially the poor.

3. Ensure effective implementation of existing schemes and laws.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges faced by India's elderly population and the measures needed to address them.

No detention policy

Source: This post on **No detention policy** has been created based on article **"Express view on No Detention Policy: Scrapping it will aggravate problems"** published in The Indian Express on 26th December 2024.

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

Context: The article delves into the implications of scrapping the **No Detention Policy (NDP)**, which was introduced under the **Right to Education Act, 2009**, as a progressive step to ensure universal education and reduce school dropouts. The policy aimed to eliminate the pressure of examinations for students up to Class VIII by promoting automatic progression to the next grade, irrespective of performance in exams. This approach was designed to encourage retention and inclusion, especially for students from marginalized communities.

What is the No Detention Policy (NDP) and why was it introduced?

1. The No Detention Policy (NDP) was introduced under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which aimed to eliminate the stress and humiliation of failing exams for students up to Class VIII.
2. The policy sought to prevent school dropouts by ensuring that students are not detained or eliminated based on examination performance. It was a shift from traditional elimination exams to a more inclusive approach in education.

What changes have been made to the NDP over the years?

1. After 15 years of implementation, the NDP has been significantly diluted.
2. An amendment to the RTE Act in 2019 allowed state governments to decide on the detention of students.
3. Starting from the next academic year, Class V and Class VIII students in government schools can be detained based on their performance.

How has the dropout rate changed since the introduction of the NDP?

1. When the RTE Act was passed in 2009, the dropout rate for students between Classes I to VIII was 42.5%.
2. It was even higher for SC and ST students, at 51.2% and 56.8%, respectively.
3. By 2024, the dropout rate has decreased to 12.6%, according to UDISE data, indicating some success of the NDP in reducing dropouts.

What are the concerns about student learning levels despite the reduced dropout rate?

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1. A 2023 report by ASER highlighted that only 25% of students aged 14-18 could fluently read a Class II-level text, indicating poor learning outcomes.
2. While the dropout rate has improved, the quality of education remains a concern.

What was the intended role of teachers under the NDP, and what challenges do they face?

1. The RTE Act envisioned that teachers would provide "special care" to students who failed to meet learning standards.
2. However, the shortage of 8.4 lakh teachers in government schools and the overburdened responsibilities of existing teachers make it difficult to provide individualized attention.

How might detention impact marginalized students and the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP)?

1. Detention is likely to discourage students, especially from marginalized communities, further aggravating dropout rates.
2. The NEP's vision of innovative education and universal access clashes with the punitive approach of detention, which risks alienating students from the education system.

What is the overall argument against scrapping the NDP?

1. Scrapping the NDP could reverse the progress made in reducing dropout rates and disproportionately harm marginalized students.
2. It also fails to address the systemic issues of inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages, which are essential for improving learning outcomes.
3. Detention-based approaches contradict the goals of inclusive and innovative education as outlined in the NEP.

School-Going Innovators in Jammu & Kashmir

Source: This article on School-Going Innovators in Jammu & Kashmir is based on article "In J&K, school-going innovators show the way" published in The Indian Express on 26th December 2024.

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

Context: The article highlights the remarkable strides made by school-going students in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in addressing local challenges through innovative solutions. It places these achievements within the broader framework of India's efforts to foster innovation at the grassroots level, particularly through the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) initiative under the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) by NITI Aayog.

What makes J&K a standout in fostering school-level innovation?

1. J&K has emerged as a leading region in school innovation due to its proactive participation in the **Atal Tinkering Marathon**.
2. In 2023, **1,627 teams** from the UT participated, contributing 10% of the total 20,000 projects nationwide.
3. J&K's participation rate in the Marathon was **36%**, compared to the national average of **3.18%**, making it 10 times higher.
4. Additionally, J&K produced **20 teams** in the top 500 innovations, exceeding the national average of 14 per state/UT.

What types of problems are these young innovators solving?

J&K students are addressing hyperlocal issues with solutions that have **national and global relevance**:

1. **Carbon Monoxide Detection in Winters**: A team from GHSS Fatehgarh, Baramulla, developed a mechanism to sense high levels of CO and open motorized windows to prevent silent deaths.

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2. **Flash Flood Prediction**: Two girls from GHSS Amirakadal, Srinagar, created a model using sensors to predict flash floods caused by snowmelt.
3. **Groundwater Detection System**: Students from Air Force School Jammu developed "Bhu Jal Nirdharak," which uses electrodes and sensors to locate groundwater accurately, supported by a local-language app.
4. **Apple Grader for Farmers**: GHSS Kreeri students created a cost-effective Apple Grader to clean and sort apples, improving profitability for local farmers.

How are these innovations connected to broader educational goals?

Each innovation fosters interdisciplinary learning:

- **Flash Flood Model**: Integrates geometry, physics, chemistry, meteorology, and programming.
- **Apple Grader**: Connects students with local businesses for real-world prototyping, akin to Silicon Valley's innovation ecosystems.

What initiatives have driven this transformation?

The transformation in J&K's education and innovation ecosystem is powered by:

1. **Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL)**:
   a. **127 ATLs** established across J&K.
   b. J&K is the first UT to partner with NITI Aayog to establish **500 ATLs**.
   c. Smaller labs and shared ATLs for up to three schools cater to the region's needs.
2. **Teacher and Official Training**: AIM and J&K's Education Department conduct regular training.
3. **Community Programs**:
   a. **ATL Sarthi** clusters (10-30 labs) promote peer learning and monitoring.
   b. Events like **Pragaash 2023** connect stakeholders across the UT.

What role do community organizations and collaborations play?
1. Organizations such as Pi Jam and NIT Srinagar have strengthened the ecosystem by organizing events and connecting stakeholders.
2. Collaborative efforts include local garage collaborations for prototyping and training and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

How does J&K's approach inspire the rest of India?
1. J&K's success demonstrates that building innovation ecosystems tailored to local needs can unlock the potential of remote and underserved regions.
2. This model can be replicated across hilly, tribal, and remote regions to nurture the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs.

Understanding MSP and Its Importance

Source: This article on **Understanding MSP and Its Importance** has been created based on article **"Why guaranteeing MSP is essential for farmers and India"** published in The Indian express on **26th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Issues related to Direct and Indirect Farm subsidies and Minimum Support Prices

Context: The article focuses on the critical issue of guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers in India through legal measures. MSP has long served as a safety net to protect farmers from market fluctuations, ensuring that they receive a fair price for their crops. However, over the decades, the growing gap between production costs and MSP, coupled with systemic inefficiencies, has led to widespread exploitation of farmers, mounting debts, and alarming rates of farmer suicides.

What is MSP, and why was it introduced?

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1. MSP, or Minimum Support Price, was introduced approximately 60 years ago as a safety net for farmers when India faced challenges feeding its growing population.
2. It guarantees a minimum price for crops, ensuring that farmers are not exploited by market forces.
3. Initially, MSP aimed to encourage agricultural production but did not factor in production costs.

How has MSP evolved, and what challenges have emerged?

1. Over time, the costs of production increased while MSP lagged behind.
2. Farmers became reliant on the market, leading to exploitation and financial distress.
3. This disparity has contributed to rising farmer suicides, with reports suggesting 4,00,000 suicides officially recorded in the last three decades, while unofficial estimates place the number closer to 7,00,000.

Why do some argue that farmers in Punjab do not need MSP?

1. Critics claim that groundwater depletion, particularly due to water-intensive crops like rice (which consumes 3,000–3,500 liters of water per kilogram), is a major issue.
2. They argue that MSP encourages unsustainable farming practices

Counterarguments:
1. Farmer unions suggest that a guaranteed MSP for 23 crops could promote crop diversification, encouraging farmers to grow less water-intensive and more profitable crops.
2. This would address groundwater concerns and provide long-term solutions.

How could a guaranteed MSP law promote sustainability?

1. Diversifying crops under MSP guarantees would reduce electricity consumption in agriculture by 60%, conserve groundwater, and ensure more efficient use of resources.
2. Additionally, Punjab could lead the way in producing oilseeds, pulses, and other crops, reducing India's reliance on imports and saving nearly ₹2 lakh crore annually.

How does MSP relate to public health and national wealth?
1. Guaranteeing MSP could reduce reliance on imported palm oil, which is often processed with harmful chemicals, thereby safeguarding public health.
2. It would also stabilize the agricultural economy and reduce farmers' financial distress, preserving national wealth.

Are farmers currently receiving the promised MSP?

1. In states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, farmers often sell crops below MSP due to inadequate procurement systems.
2. For instance, despite an MSP of ₹2,325 per quintal for paddy, farmers sell it for ₹1,000–1,400 in many cases. Similarly, procurement caps force farmers to sell surplus crops at lower rates.
3. An OECD report highlights that India's farmers have faced losses amounting to ₹60 lakh crore over the years due to underpriced MSP rates. In 2023 alone, these losses were estimated at ₹14.72 lakh crore, exacerbating farmer debt and distress.

How does guaranteeing MSP address critical issues? What steps must the government take?

1. MSP guarantees can prevent farmer suicides, reduce inflationary pressures, conserve water, and promote sustainable farming.
2. They also strengthen India's self-reliance by reducing dependency on imports and protecting public health.

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3. The government should urgently enact a legal guarantee for MSP across 23 crops, invest wisely in agriculture, and establish effective procurement mechanisms.
4. This will stabilize the agricultural sector, ensure fair incomes for farmers, and contribute to national development.

Potential of rupee-backed stablecoins in India

Source: The post potential of rupee-backed stablecoins in India has been created, based on the article "**Let rupee-backed stablecoins complement RBI's CBDC**" published in "Indian Express" on 27th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy

Context: The article discusses the potential of rupee-backed stablecoins in India. These stablecoins combine cryptocurrency benefits with rupee stability. They can enhance financial inclusion, reduce costs, and support the rupee's global influence, but require strong regulations and technological infrastructure.

What Are Stablecoins and Why Were They Introduced?

1. Stablecoins are crypto assets created to reduce the extreme volatility of traditional cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin.

2. They are pegged to stable assets, such as fiat currencies (e.g., US dollar, Indian rupee) or gold, to provide price stability.

3. For example, popular stablecoins like Tether and USD Coin are pegged to the US dollar.

4. Stablecoins retain the advantages of cryptocurrencies, including fast, secure, and low-cost transactions, while minimizing risks associated with value fluctuations.

5. Their introduction was driven by events like Bitcoin's 30% value drop in May 2021, which made users skeptical of cryptocurrency reliability.

6. Blockchain-based stablecoins can cut transaction costs by 40-50% (BIS report), enhancing their utility in global and local markets.

7. Rupee-backed stablecoins are emerging as a localized solution for India, aligning with domestic financial systems and regulations.

8. The BIS and Financial Stability Board (FSB) have both highlighted the transformative potential of stablecoins, while cautioning against their risks.

What Makes Rupee-Backed Stablecoins Unique for India?

1. Currency Stability: Rupee-backed stablecoins protect Indian users from currency fluctuations associated with dollar-pegged stablecoins.

2. Regulatory Alignment: They operate under Indian laws, avoiding international regulatory complexities.

3. User Convenience: Transactions in rupees align with users' financial activities, ensuring ease of use.

4. Economic Strength: They strengthen the rupee's global position and foster localized digital financial systems. This can boost financial inclusion, efficiency, and the rupee's soft power internationally.

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How Can Stablecoins and CBDC Work Together?

1. India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC), the e-rupee, has limitations like transaction restrictions.

2. Rupee-backed stablecoins can complement the e-rupee by promoting a broader digital finance ecosystem. This approach may enhance adoption and financial inclusion in India.

For detailed information on **Digital Rupee: Advantages and Challenges** read this article here

What Steps Should India Take?

1. Develop Robust Technological Infrastructure: Create systems for issuing, trading, and storing rupee-backed stablecoins. Ensure cybersecurity and interoperability.

2. Educate Users: Run awareness programs about risks in stablecoin transactions.

3. Regulate Effectively: Align policies with BIS and FSB guidelines to prevent instability.

Question for practice:

Examine how rupee-backed stablecoins can enhance financial inclusion and strengthen the rupee's global position while addressing associated risks.

Fair Taxes for Reducing Inequality in India

Source: The post Fair Taxes for Reducing Inequality in India has been created, based on the article "**Dis/Agree: Taxing the rich more will reduce inequality**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 27th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: The article highlights India's low public spending, growing inequality, and the need for progressive taxation. It suggests taxing the super-rich fairly, including wealth taxes, to fund essential services, reduce inequality, and improve economic and social conditions.

For detailed information on **Redistribution of wealth and Wealth Tax in India** read this article here

What is the Current State of Public Spending and Inequality in India?

1. Public spending is inadequate to meet basic social and economic rights like food, healthcare, education, and housing.

2. Climate adaptation and green transition investments are also below the minimum requirement.

3. India is among the most unequal countries, with most GDP gains benefiting the top 10%.

4. India's tax-to-GDP ratio is one of the lowest in the G20.

5. This inequality has led to stagnated mass consumption, reduced private investments, and increased social divisions.

What is the Tax Problem in India?

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1. **Low Tax-to-GDP Ratio**: India's tax-to-GDP ratio is among the lowest in G20 and below many middle-income countries.

2. **Regressive Tax System**: The tax system relies heavily on indirect taxes, burdening the poor and middle classes.

3. **Tax Avoidance by the Rich**: Ultra-rich individuals exploit loopholes and tax havens, paying lower effective tax rates than salaried people.

How Has Inequality Affected Economic Growth and Social Cohesion?

1. Extreme inequality has not spurred investment or productivity but has led to economic stagnation and less private investment.

2. It has also increased social and political tensions, suggesting persistent poverty, despite government efforts to alter data and indices to hide this issue.

How Could Taxing the Super-Rich Help?

1. The G20 Summit and economists like Gabriel Zucman advocate for taxing ultra-high-net-worth individuals more effectively.

2. Proposals include a global minimum wealth tax of 2% for billionaires and similar measures for those with assets over $100 million.

3. This approach requires international cooperation and better financial transparency.

4. Fair taxation of the rich can generate significant revenue for public spending. It can reduce inequality, fund essential services, and improve economic and social conditions.

5. India's current situation demands progressive fiscal policies to address these issues.

What Are the Challenges and Benefits of Implementing Wealth Taxes?

1. While administering a wealth tax in India may seem challenging, digital advancements have made it more feasible.

2. Taxing the wealthy fairly could increase government revenue and help reduce economic disparities, despite concerns that it might deter investment or encourage wealth migration.

For detailed information on **Challenges of implementing a wealth tax** read this article here

Question for practice:

Discuss how taxing the super-rich could address India's issues of low public spending and growing inequality.

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Critiquing Thomas Piketty's Views on India's Economy

Source: The post Critiquing Thomas Piketty's Views on India's Economy has been created, based on the article "**Dis/Agree: Piketty is wrong, India is not that unequal**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 27th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: The article critiques Thomas Piketty's claims about income inequality and tax collection in India. It argues that his data and conclusions are flawed, highlights India's tax-to-GDP ratio as higher than reported, and questions the need for higher wealth taxes.

What Are Piketty's Claims About Income Inequality in India?

1. Thomas Piketty suggests that India has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world, second only to South Africa.

2. He believes that the income Gini coefficient in India might be around 0.6, based on his estimates.

3. However, this figure is contested by other experts who point out that India's consumption Gini is about 0.34, suggesting that an income Gini around 0.4 is more plausible than 0.6.

4. Piketty proposes taxing the rich at higher rates to increase tax revenues.

5. He believes that using these funds to provide services for the poor could help reduce inequality and spur economic growth in India.

For detailed information on **Challenges of implementing a wealth tax** read this article here

What are the issues with Piketty's Views on India?

1. **Income Inequality Claim:** Piketty claims India's income inequality (Gini ~0.6) is second highest globally, but India lacks an official income survey. Plausible income Gini is closer to 0.4 (consumption Gini: 0.34).

2. **Tax-to-GDP Ratio:** Piketty asserts India's tax-to-GDP ratio is 13%. Recent IMF data (2019-20) shows it is **16.7%**, higher than China (16%) and Vietnam (13.3%).

3. **Growth and Inequality Argument:** Piketty inaccurately claims India's government supports inequality to incentivize growth. However, India has achieved over **6% growth annually for 30 years** without extreme inequality.

4. **Redistribution Hypothesis:** Policies must be data-driven, not based on speculative claims.

What Should Be the Next Steps?

1. Conduct an **official income distribution survey** to accurately measure inequality (current consumption Gini: 0.34; likely income Gini: ~0.4).

2. Reassess taxation policies with updated **tax-to-GDP ratio** (16.7% in 2019-20; 18-19% today, higher than China's 16% and Vietnam's 13.3%).

3. Avoid policies based on speculative claims like **Piketty's 13% tax-GDP ratio** or extreme inequality assertions.

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4. Align tax strategies with factual data to foster sustainable growth and redistribution.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the validity of Thomas Piketty's claims about income inequality and tax collection in India based on the data and critiques presented.

Criticisms of the KBLP

Source: The post criticisms of the KBLP has been created, based on the article "**What is the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project? Why is it controversial?**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 27th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Infrastructures

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the Daudhan Dam, a key part of the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project. This project aims to transfer water for irrigation, drinking, and power, but faces environmental and displacement concerns.

For detailed information on **Ken-Betwa Link Project** read this article here

What are the main features of the KBLP?

1. **Water Transfer**: Transfers water from the Ken River to the Betwa River through a 221-km canal.

2. **Irrigation**: Provides annual irrigation to 10.62 lakh hectares (8.11 lakh ha in MP and 2.51 lakh ha in UP).

3. **Drinking Water**: Supplies drinking water to 62 lakh people.

4. **Power Generation**: Generates 103 MW hydropower and 27 MW solar power.

5. **Construction Phases**: Phase-I involves the Daudhan Dam, Phase-II includes the Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex, and Kotha Barrage.

What are the criticisms of the KBLP?

1. Deforestation and Wildlife Impact:

• The project will submerge 98 sq km of the Panna National Park, leading to large-scale deforestation and the felling of 2-3 million trees.

• It threatens tiger populations in Panna, where tigers were successfully reintroduced after extinction in 2009.

• The Ken Gharial Sanctuary's gharial population and vulture nesting sites may also be adversely affected.

2. Hydrological Concerns:

• Experts question the availability of surplus water in the Ken River and demand public access to hydrological data for further study.

• IIT-Bombay research indicates that river-linking projects can reduce rainfall by up to 12% in September, disrupting local ecosystems.

3. Displacement of Local Communities:

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• The Daudhan Dam will displace 5,228 families in Chhatarpur district and 1,400 families in Panna district.

• Protests have emerged due to inadequate compensation and minimal local benefits, particularly in Panna.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the benefits and criticisms of the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project (KBLP).

Reducing stress among bureaucrats for better governance

Source: The post Reducing stress among bureaucrats for better governance has been created, based on the article "**Spare a thought for over-stressed Indian bureaucrats**" published in "**Live mint**" on 27th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Important aspects of governance

Context: The article emphasizes reducing stress among bureaucrats. It highlights the need for self-care, lifelong learning, and systemic reforms. It calls for fair incentives, humane policies, and a focus on well-being to ensure effective governance and national progress.

For detailed information on **India's Bureaucracy: Key Issues and the Path to Reform** read this article here

What Causes Stress in Bureaucracy?

1. **Rigid Systems:** Bureaucrats face limited flexibility and innovation due to outdated, rigid processes.

2. **Arbitrary Decisions:** Superiors' unpredictable judgments create a stressful work environment.

3. **Lack of Incentives:** The absence of rewards for innovation or exceptional performance discourages motivation.

4. **Heavy Workload:** Excessive responsibilities strain their mental and physical well-being.

5. **Limited Experimentation:** Fear of failure restricts creativity and adaptability.

How Can We Support Bureaucrats?

1. **Adapt Learning Approaches:** Encourage bureaucrats to continuously adapt by learning, unlearning, and relearning, as highlighted by Alvin Toffler. This approach prepares them for changing governance challenges.

2. **Revise Incentives:** Introduce tangible rewards for innovation and exceptional performance. Allow a range of experimentation to motivate and engage them, moving away from decisions based solely on the whims of superiors.

3. **Promote Self-Care:** Emphasize the importance of self-care, inspired by the Bhagavad Gita's focus on self-realization. Encouraging a balanced life helps maintain their well-being and effectiveness.

4. **Implement Systemic Reforms:** Foster a more humane work environment by reducing bureaucratic stress and workload, ensuring that bureaucrats can serve with fulfillment and not at the expense of their health.

Conclusion

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India's governance relies on its bureaucrats, but rising stress threatens their health and effectiveness. Alvin Toffler's idea of adaptability and the Bhagavad Gita's emphasis on self-care underline the need for reforms. Tangible rewards, innovation, and humane policies are vital for ensuring their resilience and purpose.

Question for practice:

Discuss how systemic reforms and self-care practices can help reduce stress among bureaucrats and improve governance.

Challenges faced by marginalized students

Source: The post challenges faced by marginalized students has been created, based on the article "**Marginalised by caste, marginalised in education**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 28th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education.

Context: The article discusses the struggles of marginalized students, especially Dalits, in accessing higher education due to rising fees, systemic caste-based discrimination, and financial constraints. It highlights dropout rates, suicides, and the need for systemic reforms in education and employment.

What are the challenges faced by marginalized students?

1. **Financial Barriers**: Marginalized students struggle with high educational costs. For instance, Atul Kumar, a student from a low-income background, lost his IIT seat due to an inability to pay the ₹17,500 seat booking fee.

2. **Rising Tuition Fees**: Fees at institutions like IITs and IIMs have increased significantly, exacerbating financial challenges for students from marginalized communities. IIT tuition fees rose by 200% in 2016, from ₹90,000 to ₹3 lakh per annum.

3. **High Dropout Rates**: Many students are forced to abandon their education due to rising costs. Between 2017 and 2018, 2,461 students dropped out of IITs alone. Over five years, more than 13,500 SC, ST, and OBC students dropped out from central universities and IIMs.

4. **Caste-Based Discrimination**: Dalit students often face social and academic exclusion due to caste biases. Notably, 92% of urban septic tank workers belong to marginalized communities, reflecting ongoing caste-based job segregation.

5. **Mental Health Challenges**: The pressure of financial and social discrimination leads to severe mental health issues. Over the past seven years, 122 students from IITs and IIMs committed suicide, with many attributed to financial and academic stress.

6. **Employment Challenges**: After graduation, marginalized students encounter difficulties in securing employment. An RTI in 2024 revealed that 38% of students across 23 IIT campuses were unplaced.

For detailed information on **Impacts of financial strain on educational** read this article here

What reforms are needed?

1. Need for systemic reforms to address financial constraints, fee hikes, and caste-based discrimination.

2. It emphasizes the need for inclusive environments and targeted support for marginalized students in education and employment.

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Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges faced by marginalized students in accessing higher education and the reforms needed to address these issues.

Captive Elephants in India Face Rising Exploitation

Source: The post Captive Elephants in India Face Rising Exploitation has been created, based on the article "**Rules that still manacle the captive elephant**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 28th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Ecological and Environment

Context: The article discusses the mistreatment of captive elephants in India, despite their protection under the Wildlife Protection Act. It critiques new government rules that could lead to further exploitation, such as the transfer of elephants for commercial purposes and the cycle of capturing wild elephants.

What is the current situation of captive elephants in India?

1. Captive elephants in India face mistreatment despite being protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

2. As of January 2019, there were 2,675 documented captive elephants.

3. They are exploited for religious events, tourism, and entertainment, often subjected to isolation and abusive training.

4. Microchips from deceased elephants are reused to legalize captured wild elephants.

5. The 2024 rules allow commercial exploitation through transfers, as seen in the gifting of an elephant from Assam to a Delhi temple.

6.These practices undermine elephant conservation.

What are the new rules introduced in 2024?

1. **Purpose of Rules**: The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) introduced the *Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024* to regulate the transport and ownership transfer of captive elephants and curb illegal captures.

2. **Ownership Transfer**: The rules allow ownership transfer if the current owner cannot maintain the elephant. However, there is no requirement for this transfer to be non-commercial, leading to potential trading of elephants as movable property.

3. **Temporary Transport**: Elephants can be transported temporarily across or within state borders. The rules lack clear justification requirements, raising concerns about elephants being rented out for religious ceremonies, weddings, or political events.

4. **Lack of Accountability**: The rules do not mandate the removal or destruction of microchips after an elephant's death, facilitating misuse. For instance, microchips could be reused to legalize illegally captured wild elephants.

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5. **Birth in Captivity**: The rules recognize calves born in captivity as legally owned, perpetuating the cycle of commercial exploitation.

6. Trade of an endangered: elephants are often transported from northeastern to southern and western states, such as an elephant "gifted" from Assam to a Delhi temple. The new rules facilitate such transfers, enabling trade of an endangered species instead of protecting them.

What Actions Have Been Taken So Far?

1. In August, the Elephant Project under MoEFCC flagged illegal transfers of captive elephants.

2. It issued a memorandum emphasizing digitizing genetic profiles and strict adherence to the 2024 rules.

3. However, these measures lack strong enforcement to ensure elephant welfare.

What Needs to Be Done?

1. The government should enforce humane birth control measures and stop using live elephants for temples, processions, and tourism.

2. Alternatives like electronic elephants should be promoted.

3. Civil society and temple committees must take responsibility for changing current practices.

Question for practice:

Examine the impact of the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024 on the welfare and conservation of elephants in India.

India's Energy Shift Toward Renewable Energy Sources

Source: The post India's Energy Shift Toward Renewable Energy Sources has been created, based on the article "**The shift fuelling country's growth engine**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 28th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Infrastructures

Context: The article discusses India's energy evolution, focusing on the shift from coal to renewable energy (RE). It highlights the growth of public and private sectors, energy access programs, and future goals like energy independence by 2047, while addressing challenges in RE integration and fossil fuel dependency.

For detailed information on **India's transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy** read this article here

What is the Background of India's Energy Sector?

1. India has progressed from using coal and oil to adopting renewable energy (RE) over the past 25 years.

2. This shift is part of the country's broader socio-economic growth, influenced by evolving public sector undertakings, energy access schemes, and regulatory frameworks.

How Has India's Oil Industry Evolved?

1. **Early Beginnings**: Oil was first discovered in Digboi, Assam, in the late 19th century by an English engineer.

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2. **Mid-20th Century**: The government established ONGC for exploration and IOCL, BPCL, and HPCL for marketing.

3. **Major Discoveries**: In 1974, ONGC discovered Bombay High, which now accounts for 70% of India's domestic oil production.

4. **Private Sector Entry**: The 1999 New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP) allowed private companies to explore oil and gas. Reliance Industries discovered gas in KG-D6 in 2002, while Cairn Energy found the Mangala oil field in 2004.

5. **Challenges**: Domestic crude production has stagnated at 30-35 million tonnes annually since 2011. In 2023-24, production fell to 29.4 million tonnes.

6. **Future Goals**: India is promoting green fuels to reduce reliance on oil imports.

What Challenges and Advances are Present in Renewable Energy?

A. Challenges in Renewable Energy

1. **Seasonal and Unreliable Supply**: Renewable energy (RE), like solar and wind, depends on weather, making it less reliable.

2. **High Storage Costs**: Expensive storage technology limits the integration of RE into the grid.

3. **Discom Financial Strain**: Power distribution companies prefer cheaper thermal power despite falling RE costs.

4. **Slow Grid Absorption**: RE capacity grew to 136 GW by 2024, but it contributes only 12% to India's energy mix.

5. **Slow Adoption of Next-Generation Fuels**: Technologies like biodiesel and green hydrogen have not scaled effectively.

B. Advances in Renewable Energy

1. **Significant Capacity Growth**: India targets 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030.

2. **Policy Support**: The National Biofuel Policy of 2018 and the ethanol blending program aim for 20% ethanol in petrol by 2025-26.

3. **Green Hydrogen Mission**: This initiative focuses on green energy exports and energy independence by 2047.

4. **Government Initiatives**: Policies supporting decentralized solar and transmission infrastructure boost RE growth.

What Role Does Coal Play in India's Energy Strategy?

1. Coal remains central to India's energy strategy despite global pressure to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

2. Coal India Ltd (CIL) has seen growth and private participation, leading to increased coal production.

3. The government plans to phase out coal slowly, with a target of a more significant reduction by 2047.

How Has Energy Access Improved in India?

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1. **Universal Electrification:** Programs like Saubhagya connected all households to the national grid.

2. **Electricity Supply:** Rural areas get 18-20 hours, and urban areas 22 hours daily.

3. **LPG Access:** The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) provided clean cooking fuel to 103.3 million households.

4. **Targeted Subsidy:** PMUY now offers Rs 300 per cylinder for up to 12 refills annually.

5. **Impact:** 20.3 million PMUY families used more than six refills in 2023-24.

What Future Energy Goals Does India Have?

1. India aims for energy independence by 2047 with a shift towards non-fossil fuel sources, aiming for 500 GW of capacity by 2030.

2. The National Green Hydrogen Mission is part of this strategy, intending to make India an energy exporter and reduce fossil fuel reliance significantly.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges and advances in India's renewable energy sector as highlighted in the article.

Community Action and Governance in Environmental Issues

Source: The post Community Action and Governance in Environmental Issues has been created, based on the article "**Bishnois v Delhiites: Two different mindsets**" published in "Down to Eat" on 28th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article highlights two cases: Salman Khan's arrest for poaching in Jodhpur and Delhi's failure to address pollution. It shows how community action in Jodhpur forced accountability, while Delhi's middle class lacks involvement, worsening environmental issues.

What Happened with Salman Khan in Jodhpur in 1998?

1. In 1998, Salman Khan, a famous actor, was arrested in Jodhpur for poaching a chinkara, an endangered species.

2. The Bishnoi community, deeply committed to conservation, took a strong stand against the crime.

3. Their determination, rooted in tradition, forced politicians to act, especially with state elections approaching in November 1998.

4. This shows how community pressure can influence governance.

How Did Delhi Handle Its Pollution Problem in the Late 1990s?

1. Delhi faced severe air pollution issues in the late 1990s. In 1996, the Centre for Science and Environment released a report, *Slow Murder*, exposing vehicular pollution.

2. Following this, the Supreme Court ordered the Delhi government to phase out vehicles older than 15 years by March 31, 1998.

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3. However, during the 1998 elections, then-Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma backtracked due to political pressure from affected vehicle owners.

4. The BJP government failed to take effective steps, and even after Verma's resignation, his successor Sushma Swaraj also avoided tackling pollution seriously.

Why Are These Cases Important?

1. These cases from 1998 highlight the power of community involvement. In Jodhpur, the Bishnoi community's activism ensured Salman Khan faced the law.

2. In Delhi, the lack of public pressure allowed pollution problems to worsen.

3. This contrast emphasizes that strong community action is essential for enforcing environmental policies.

For detailed information on **Commons and Community Governance** read this article here

Question for practice:

Examine how community involvement influenced governance in addressing environmental issues in Jodhpur and Delhi in 1998.

How India Maintains Peace Amid Global Turmoil

Source: The post How India Maintains Peace Amid Global Turmoil has been created, based on the article "**Why we're lucky to be Indians in such a terrible world**" published in "**Live mint**" on 30th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Important aspects of governance and International Relations

Context: The article discusses how despite global turmoil and internal issues like corruption and poor governance, India has managed to maintain relative peace. It contrasts India's situation with violent regions globally and examines factors like the Indian populace's general disinterest in violent extremism and effective suppression of violence by security forces.

What is the Current Global Situation?

1. **Global Conflicts**: The article mentions ongoing devastating wars in Ukraine and the Levant, showcasing regions engulfed in violence and political turmoil.

2. **Economic Collapse**: It highlights the economic breakdowns in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, which have faced severe financial distress.

3. **Regional Unrest**: Bangladesh is also experiencing upheaval, adding to the list of countries with significant internal conflicts.

4. **Comparative Stability**: Against this backdrop of global instability, the sentiment among Indians that they are fortunate to live in a relatively stable country stands out, as India does not face such extreme crises.

Are Indians Really Better Off?

1. India's stability seems greater compared to the economic collapse in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

2. Comparing Lebanon's orderly evacuation to chaotic Bengaluru traffic questions if Indians are truly better off.

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3. India's issues with bad air and dirty water kill more people than wars in some regions.

4. Despite visible poverty and rubble in places like Gurgaon, India provides a shot at a peaceful life.

Why Has India Maintained Relative Peace?

1. **Low Extremism Involvement:** Proportionately, few Indian Muslims have engaged in acts of terror. A 2015 intelligence report highlighted that the Islamic State found Indian recruits underwhelming and unsuitable for roles like suicide bombers.

2. **Political Dismissals:** The assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE led to a significant political backlash in Tamil Nadu, showing a domestic intolerance for extremism linked to political violence.

3. **Effective Security Measures:** Indian security forces have been quick to suppress violent uprisings, often disregarding the human rights of the poor, thus preventing sustained violence.

Question for practice:

Examine how India's relative peace amidst global turmoil and internal challenges is maintained according to the article.

How India Can Overcome the Middle-Income Trap

Source: The post How India Can Overcome the Middle-Income Trap has been created, based on the article "**Dodging a middle-income trap may take extra-economic efforts**" published in "**Live mint**" on 30th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: The article discusses how India should adopt new economic policies and attitudes to avoid the middle-income trap and enhance growth. It emphasizes the need for increased investment, innovation, and structural reforms. It also critiques adopting Western socioeconomic narratives unsuitable for India's economic context.

For detailed information on **Can India escape middle- income trap?** read this article here

What is the view of the World Bank's chief economist on Indian Economy?

1. Indermit Gill, the World Bank's chief economist, argues that India might take 75 years to reach a quarter of the United States' per capita GDP, while China could achieve this in just 10 years.

2. He suggests that India needs new approaches and structural reforms to avoid the "middle income trap," where growth slows as a country reaches a moderate level of income.

What Challenges Do Middle-Income Countries Face?

Middle-income countries, including India, face several challenges:

1. **Growth Plateau**: Countries in the middle-income range ($1,100 to $13,000 per annum) often experience a slowdown in growth, a phenomenon known as the middle-income trap.

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2. **Investment and Innovation**: Effective growth requires significant investment in physical and human capital, and incentives for innovation. However, these are often insufficient.

3. **Institutional Effectiveness**: Structural reforms need strong institutions, but political and social limitations can hinder these changes.

4. **Social and Political Resistance**: For example, India's attempt to reform farm laws failed due to lack of political support and public trust.

How Can India Overcome These Challenges?

1. **Building Social Capital**: Strengthening trust in government and social mechanisms to facilitate acceptance and support for policy reforms.

2. **Adopting Suitable Policies**: Avoiding unaffordable Western socioeconomic policies such as high taxes on the 'rich' and universal basic income, focusing instead on policies suited to India's economic realities.

3. **Increasing Productivity**: Encouraging hard work and faster learning to improve labor productivity, which is notably lower than that in the US, China, Brazil, and South Africa.

4. **Promoting Innovation and Structural Reforms**: Invest in physical and human capital, provide incentives for innovation, and strengthen institutions to carry out necessary reforms effectively to foster growth and avoid the middle-income trap.

5. **Adapting to Global Economic Shifts**: Learn from global leaders like China in sectors such as electric vehicles, where creating new engines of growth in fast-changing technologies can offer substantial rewards.

For detailed information on **Strategies to escape the middle-income trap** read this article here

Question for practice:

Examine how India can adopt new economic policies to effectively avoid the middle-income trap and accelerate growth.

India's Economic Slowdown and Its Future Outlook

Source: The post India's Economic Slowdown and Its Future Outlook has been created, based on the article "**2025: The new normal**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 30th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: The article discusses India's current economic growth, which has slowed down recently due to various factors such as government policies and global uncertainties. Despite high growth in previous years, future economic improvement remains uncertain, impacting investment, particularly in smaller companies.

For detailed information on **India's Economic Slowdown and Path to Recovery** read this article here

What is the Current State of the Indian Economy?

1. The Indian economy is experiencing moderate growth, with a slowdown in recent quarters.

2. After achieving an 8.2% GDP growth in FY24, it decreased to 6.6% in Q1 of FY25 and further to 5.4% in Q2.

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3. The growth rate is now described as the "new Hindu rate of growth" at around 5.5%.

Why is the Economy Slowing Down?

1. **Restrictive Monetary Policies:** The Reserve Bank of India has implemented policies that limit growth.

2. **Reduced Government Spending:** Due to elections, government capital expenditures have decreased.

3. **Private Sector Slowdown:** Domestic political issues, global uncertainties, and fears of economic dumping have slowed private investments.

How are Government Expenditures Impacting Growth?

1. Government spending has been a major driver of growth, with infrastructure projects significantly boosting economic activity.

2. However, government capital expenditure (capex) has declined by 6.6% from April to October of FY25. This reduction in spending is impacting the overall economic growth.

What is the Impact on Stock Markets?

Despite economic challenges, stock markets have seen significant gains:

1. The S&P BSE Smallcap Index rose by 47.52% in 2023 and 29% in 2024.

2. The Nifty MicroCap 250 Index increased by 66.44% in 2023 and 34.35% in 2024.

3. The Nifty 50 had smaller gains, rising by 20% in 2023 and 9.58% in 2024.

What is the Future Outlook?

The economy's future remains uncertain, with modest growth expected to continue. High previous returns in the stock market, particularly among small-cap and microcap companies, may not be sustainable if economic growth remains subdued. The overall economic indicators suggest a potential prolonged slowdown, mirroring the period from 2014 to 2019.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the reduction in government capital expenditures is impacting India's economic growth according to the article.

Build Dormitory Housing for India's Industrial Workers

Source: The post Build Dormitory Housing for India's Industrial Workers has been created, based on the article "**Housing industrial workers: It is crucial for success in manufacturing**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 30th December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States

Context: The article discusses plans announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to build dormitory-style housing for industrial workers. This housing will be developed in partnership with the private

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sector and supported by government funding to improve living conditions and support the growth of manufacturing in India.

For detailed information on **Importance of providing housing for factory workers** read this article here

What is the New Housing Plan for Industrial Workers?

1. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a new plan in the July Budget to build rental housing for industrial workers.

2. These will be dormitory-type accommodations developed through a public-private partnership (PPP) model, supported by viability gap funding (VGF) to make construction financially feasible.

Why is This Plan Necessary?

1. The manufacturing sector in India relies on a large workforce, often requiring workers to migrate from different areas.

2. Current housing for these workers is informal, scarce, and often in poor condition, which discourages migration, especially among women, and affects manufacturing productivity.

What Challenges Exist in Developing Industrial Housing?

1. Private sector efforts to build housing near industrial areas are restricted by strict zoning laws, complicated building approval processes, and high operating costs.

2. Existing rules limit how buildings can use space, which results in inefficient land use and discourages investment.

How Does the Report Suggest Improving the Situation?

1. A report from NITI Aayog suggests treating worker housing as essential infrastructure.

2. It recommends government support such as tax relief, interest subventions to lower borrowing costs, and relaxed building regulations to allow more efficient use of land.

Conclusion

Improving housing for industrial workers is crucial for boosting India's manufacturing sector. Adequate housing ensures a stable and healthy workforce, which supports large-scale manufacturing and job creation.

Question for practice:

Discuss the key elements and expected benefits of the new dormitory-style housing plan for industrial workers announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

One Nation, One Election and Representative Democracy

Source: This post on **One Nation, One Election and Representative Democracy** has been created based on article **"One Nation One Election and representative democracy"**published in **The Hindu on 30th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topics- GS 2-Polity

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Context: The article critically examines the proposal for **One Nation, One Election (ONOE)** as outlined in the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, in the context of India's representative democracy. The proposal aims to streamline elections for the LokSabha and State Legislative Assemblies to reduce administrative costs and election fatigue.

What is the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024?

The Bill proposes simultaneous elections for the LokSabha and State/Union Territory Legislative Assemblies by introducing Article 82(A). Key points include:

1. Synchronising elections to align LokSabha and State Assemblies.
2. Fixing the LokSabha's tenure, with mid-term elections only covering the remainder of the term if dissolved early.
3. Amendments to Articles 83, 172, and 327 to take effect after the 2029 elections, with implementation from 2034.
4. A separate Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill aligns the tenure of Union Territory Assemblies with this framework.

What are the goals of One Nation, One Election (ONOE)?

The proposal seeks administrative efficiency and reduction in election fatigue. However, it raises concerns about inclusivity and the representation of diverse voices in Indian democracy.

How does representative democracy function in India?
Representative democracy allows citizens to elect representatives who make decisions on their behalf. Key principles include:

1. Free and fair elections.
2. Political accountability.
3. Protection of minority rights alongside majority rule. This system balances governance stability with the accommodation of diverse interests, relying on periodic elections and institutional checks and balances.

What challenges does representative democracy face globally?

A 2024 study highlights increasing disillusionment:

1. Citizens in 24 nations, including India, expressed doubts about its effectiveness.
2. Alternatives like direct democracy, expert rule, or authoritarian regimes are being considered by some.
3. In several countries, support for military rule or strong leaders bypassing parliamentary checks indicates growing frustration with institutional inefficiencies.

What were Jayaprakash Narayan's critiques of Indian parliamentary democracy?
Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) identified significant flaws in his 1959 work, *A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity*:

1. **Risks of minority governments:** India's multi-party system may lead to unstable or unrepresentative governments.
2. **Demagoguery and populism:** Political parties manipulate public opinion through half-truths and divisive rhetoric.
3. **Centralisation of power:** Parliamentary democracy concentrates power, weakening intermediary institutions.
4. **High financial costs of elections:** Excessive costs tether democracy to moneyed interests. While critical, JP's intent was to reform and strengthen democracy. His insights remain relevant in the ONOE debate.

Has the ONOE proposal adhered to democratic principles?
Critics argue the process lacked inclusivity and transparency, violating the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy, 2014:

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1. **Inadequate consultation period:** Citizens were given only 10 days to respond to a public notice issued in January 2024.
2. **Lack of explanatory material:** No background papers or detailed notes were provided.
3. **Framing of questions:** The 'yes/no' format appeared perfunctory, suggesting a pre-decided agenda.

These procedural flaws risk alienating citizens and undermining trust in the reform process.

What are the potential implications of ONOE for representative democracy?
1. **Centralisation vs. federalism:** Synchronising elections may centralise power, overshadowing state-specific issues with national narratives.
2. **Inclusivity and participation:** Rushed reforms risk sidelining citizen voices and weakening democratic inclusivity.
3. **Electoral accountability:** Frequent elections enable regular evaluation of governments. Simultaneous elections might dilute this accountability.

What is essential for preserving democracy in the context of ONOE?
India's democracy thrives on citizen participation, inclusivity, and accountability. While efficiency is important, reforms like ONOE must:

1. Reflect diverse perspectives.
2. Foster consensus through meaningful public engagement.
3. Avoid centralisation and rushed processes to maintain trust in democratic governance.

This ensures that Indian democracy remains representative in both letter and spirit.

The Challenge of Holding Judges Accountable in India

Source: This post on **The Challenge of Holding Judges Accountable in India** has been created based on article **"The challenge of holding judges accountable"** published in **The Hindu on 30th December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus topics- GS 2-Polity

Context: The article delves into the challenges surrounding judicial accountability in India, focusing on the limitations and intricacies of the current mechanism for holding judges of the higher judiciary accountable. The discussion gains relevance in light of recent controversies, such as the conduct of Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court, and reflects on historical precedents like the cases of Justices V. Ramaswami, SoumitraSen, and P.D. Dinakaran.

What is the process for holding judges accountable in India?

1. The review mechanism requires "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" as determined by a three-member committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.
2. The committee is activated only after an impeachment motion is successfully moved in either the LokSabha or the RajyaSabha and approved by the presiding officer of the House.
3. Articles 124(4), 124(5), 217, and 218 of the Constitution of India, along with the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, outline the procedure.

Why is Justice Yadav's case significant?
Justice Yadav's speech at an event organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad highlighted biases against the Muslim community, spotlighting challenges in holding judges accountable.

What were the past impeachment cases?

Allegations against Judges	Outcome
Justice V. Ramaswami- • Accusations included extravagant spending on his official residence and purchases like silver-headed maces without proper tendering.	Despite the motion's failure, then CJI Sabyasachi Mukherjee did not allocate work to Justice Ramaswami, and no cases were assigned to him until his retirement.

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• He was found guilty by the three-member committee, but an impeachment motion failed in the LokSabha in 1993 due to 205 abstentions by Congress members, despite 196 votes in favor.	
Justice SoumitraSen-Misappropriation of ₹33.23 lakh in 1983 as a court-appointed receiver and misrepresentation of facts.	The RajyaSabha voted overwhelmingly for his removal, but he resigned in September 2011 before the LokSabha could table the motion.
Justice Dinakaran-Serious charges included appropriating over 300 acres of farmland in Tamil Nadu.	He resigned on the day of the first sitting of the three-member committee investigating the charges, effectively halting the process

How does resignation affect accountability?

1. Resignation allows judges to avoid impeachment proceedings, retain pensions, and other benefits. This is a privilege not extended to politicians or public officials.
2. The Forum for Judicial Accountability (FJA) argued that investigations should continue post-resignation to reinforce public confidence in the judiciary and ensure accountability.

What was proposed by jurist Mohan Gopal regarding resignation and investigations?

1. Gopal argued that allowing a judge's resignation to terminate an investigation undermines the purpose of accountability.
2. He emphasized the importance of completing investigations for transparency.

What are the broader implications of these issues?

1. The current framework disproportionately shields judges, enabling them to evade accountability.
2. Reforms are necessary to address gaps in judicial oversight, ensure public trust, and prevent misuse of resignation as a shield against accountability.

Restoring Constitutional Order in Manipur

Source: This post on **Restoring Constitutional Order in Manipur**has been created based on article **"Restoring constitutional order in Manipur"** published in The Hindu on 30th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topics: GS 3- Internal security

Context: The article addresses the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, India, and the response or lack thereof from key institutional actors, particularly the judiciary and executive branches. The article critiques the Supreme Court's inconsistent and episodic interventions in addressing the crisis, emphasizing the need for sustained judicial oversight and comprehensive measures to restore constitutional order and rebuild public trust.

What has led to the Supreme Court's intervention in Manipur?

1. The ethnic violence in Manipur and the executive's failure to act decisively have forced the judiciary to step in.
2. However, the Supreme Court's response has been sporadic and often ineffective in holding the executive accountable.
3. In 2024, the Supreme Court conducted only six hearings on the main batch of petitions concerning Manipur.
4. Despite escalating violence, it did not pass significant orders, with the only notable action on December 9 when it sought details on destroyed and encroached properties.

What unprecedented issues have emerged in Manipur since May 3, 2023?

1. **Demographic and geographical separation:** Enforced through a militarized buffer zone.

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2. **Surrender of state authority:** Armed militant groups dominate law and order.
3. **Illegal oaths:**ArambaiTenggol administered hateful ethno-cultural oaths to legislators.

How has the Supreme Court addressed these issues?
1. While it responded to some incidents in 2023, such as the viral video of tribal women being assaulted, its actions in 2024 have been largely absent.
2. For example, trials for key cases like the sexual assault and parade of two tribal women are yet to begin, despite CBI filing chargesheets in October 2023.

What directions did the Supreme Court issue on August 7, 2023?
1. **Relief and rehabilitation committee:** Led by Justice Gita Mittal, comprising three retired judges.
2. **Special Investigation Teams (SITs):** Formation of 42 SITs across six groups, headed by a retired Director-General of Police and staffed by CBI officers.

Have these measures been effective?

1. No. The relief committee's functioning has been largely mechanical.
2. SITs have filed chargesheets for only 6% (192 cases) of 3,023 registered cases by November 20, 2024.
3. Additionally, many IPS officers in SITs have sought repatriation, undermining the structure.

What steps should the Supreme Court take to restore trust and the rule of law?
1. **Transfer trials outside Manipur:** To ensure impartiality and fair proceedings.
2. **Improve SIT transparency:** Regular updates for petitioners and victims' families.
3. **Constitute a bipartisan High-Powered Commission:**
   a. Include eminent persons from both communities.
   b. Task it with investigating and reporting directly to a Special Bench of the Supreme Court.
4. **Special Bench for Manipur cases:** Handle cases related to ethnic violence exclusively.

Why are these measures critical?

1. The lack of effective judicial action and governance has deepened feelings of neglect and eroded trust in the rule of law.
2. These steps can provide Manipur with a much-needed healing touch and restore constitutional order.

Need of Cyclone prediction in India

Source: This post on**Need of Cyclone prediction in India**has been created based on article **"Why better prediction of cyclone intensity, heavy rainfall is needed"** published in The Hindu on 30th December 2024.

UPSC Syllabus topics: GS 3- Disaster Management

Context: The article underscores the urgent need for improving the prediction of tropical cyclone intensity and associated heavy rainfall, emphasizing the profound societal and environmental consequences of these phenomena. Tropical cyclones, although infrequent in the North Indian Ocean basin compared to other regions, pose a significant threat to densely populated coastal areas, as exemplified by past events like the Bhola cyclone of 1970.

Why is better prediction of cyclone intensity and heavy rainfall important?

1. Tropical cyclones are among the most devastating natural disasters, causing widespread destruction and loss of life.
2. Despite having fewer cyclones compared to other regions, the North Indian Ocean basin is highly vulnerable due to its densely populated coastal areas.
3. The Bhola cyclone of 1970 serves as a grim reminder of the catastrophic potential of such events.
4. Observations show shifts in cyclone patterns, intensity, and frequency, highlighting the need for improved forecasting and adaptive measures.

What are the trends in tropical cyclone activity in the North Indian Ocean?
1. **Bay of Bengal vs. Arabian Sea**: The Bay of Bengal experiences more cyclones than the Arabian Sea. However, the Arabian Sea has seen a **52% increase in cyclonic storms** and a **threefold rise in the duration of very severe cyclonic storms** in recent years.

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2. **Intensification**: There is an increased likelihood of cyclonic storms intensifying into severe cyclonic storms. Satellite-era data indicates a rising trend in accumulated cyclone energy over the North Indian Ocean.
3. **Environmental Drivers**: Rising ocean heat content and decreasing vertical wind shear contribute to these trends.

How might climate change impact tropical cyclones in the future?

1. **Anthropogenic Climate Change**:
   a. Likely to result in more powerful cyclones.
   b. Tropical cyclone precipitation rates are projected to increase due to higher atmospheric moisture levels.
2. **Key Changes**:
   a. Higher frequency of rapid intensification events.
   b. Poleward migration of the latitude of maximum intensity.
   c. Slower forward movement of tropical cyclones.

What made Cyclone Fengal unique and challenging?

1. **Trajectory and Impact**:
   a. Cyclone Fengal followed an unusual path, making landfall near Puducherry on November 30, 2024.
   b. It stalled upon reaching the coast, maintaining intensity until December 1 due to a balanced steering flow and moisture from saturated soils.
2. **Rainfall**:
   a. Unprecedented rainfall: Puducherry and Villupuram districts recorded **40-50 cm in a single day**.
   b. Neighbouring districts like Cuddalore and Tiruvannamalai received over **20 cm in 24 hours**.
   c. The deluge caused catastrophic agricultural losses and disrupted livelihoods.
3. **Forecasting Challenges**:
   a. IMD accurately predicted the landfall near Puducherry three days in advance.
   b. However, the cyclone's northeastward movement on November 27 and its stalling near the coast were not accurately forecasted.

Why do weather prediction models struggle with heavy rainfall forecasting?

1. **Fengal's Case**:
   a. None of the models predicted the exceptional **40+ cm rainfall totals** in 24 hours.
   b. Challenges arose from limited observational data over oceans and the complex cloud dynamics within the cyclone.
2. **Broader Issues**:
   a. Forecasting rapid intensification and heavy rainfall during landfalls remains difficult.
   b. Advancements in modeling techniques and real-time data assimilation are crucial.

What actions are needed to improve cyclone forecasting?

1. **Critical Areas for Research**:
   a. Predicting rapid intensification.
   b. Forecasting heavy rainfall during landfall.
2. **Investments**:
   a. Sustained investments in advanced forecasting technologies and research.
   b. Addressing gaps in observational data and improving modeling capabilities.
3. **Climate Models**:
   a. IPCC projections indicate more intense cyclones with heavier rainfall and slower speeds, making research more urgent.

Why is improving cyclone predictions essential?

Despite progress, precise predictions of cyclone behavior remain a challenge. Enhanced forecasting can safeguard lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems from the devastating impacts of tropical cyclones, ensuring resilience in vulnerable regions.

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Assessing Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in India

Source: The post Assessing Food Security and Nutrition Challenges in India has been created, based on the article "**What meal data reveals about hunger**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 31st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-food security

Context: The article discusses food security in India, noting that while most Indians meet their basic meal needs, significant numbers still face hunger and undernourishment. It emphasizes the need for better data on food quality and nutritional value to fully address food insecurity.

For detailed information on Food Security and Nutrition Report 2023 read Article 1, Article 2, Article 3

What Does the Data Say About Hunger in India?

1. The **SOFI 2023** report estimates **74 million undernourished people in India** between 2020 and 2022.

2. The **Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023** ranks India **111th out of 125 countries**, highlighting challenges like **child stunting, wasting, and undernourishment**. This underscores widespread food insecurity.

How Many Meals Do Indians Consume?

1. The **HCES 2022-23** survey shows that **97.5% of the population consumed at least 60 meals** in 30 days, meeting the threshold of two meals a day.

2. Only **2.5% of the population**, or around **35 million people**, consumed fewer than 60 meals, suggesting occasional meal skipping or limited access to food.

What About the Quality of Food?

1. The **HCES 2022-23** does not measure the quality of food consumed, which is critical for nutrition.

2. While most individuals meet their basic food needs, food diversity, and nutritional value are not assessed.

3. This indicates **freedom from hunger**, but not necessarily **freedom from food insecurity**.

What Are the Challenges in Assessing Food Security?

1. There is **limited reliable data** on the severity of hunger and food insecurity. For example, the **NSS 78th round (2020-21)**collected data on meal skipping due to a lack of resources, but this data is unavailable to the public.

2. Without detailed information on food quantity and quality, a full understanding of food insecurity remains elusive.

How Can Food Security Be Improved?

1. Addressing food insecurity requires policies that ensure **access to nutritious, safe, and stable food**.

2. Government programs providing free food grains help, but achieving **zero hunger** needs solutions for **distribution, accessibility, and affordability**.

3. Comprehensive data collection is essential to identify regional disparities and create targeted solutions.

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Question for practice:

Examine how the availability of comprehensive data on food quality and nutritional value can influence the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving food security in India.

How Banks Can Adapt to New Savings Trends

Source: The post How Banks Can Adapt to New Savings Trends has been created, based on the article "**The recent deposit shortfall is a wake-up call for banks in India**" published in "**Live mint**" on 31st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy- growth and development

Context: The article discusses how banks have experienced periods where credit growth exceeded deposit growth. Recently, this issue has not improved because credit growth fell without a rise in deposit growth, hinting at deeper changes in how people save. It critiques the assumption that a lack of deposits hinders credit growth and suggests that banks should update their financial practices and better reward depositors to adapt to changing economic behaviors.

For detailed information on **Concerns related to savings in India** read this article here

What is the Issue with Deposit and Credit Growth?

1. Between April 2022 and October 2024, there was a sixth occurrence where deposit growth was slower than credit growth.

2. Unlike previous instances where adjustments in both deposits and credits rectified imbalances, this time, the issue persisted due to declining credit growth without any increase in deposit growth.

Why Does a Deposit Crunch Not Hinder Credit Growth?

1. Contrary to popular belief, a deposit crunch does not prevent credit growth. It only raises the cost of funds for banks.

2. During 2004-2007, even with higher credit growth compared to deposit growth, banks managed well because they could pass the increased costs to retail borrowers more easily than to commercial ones.

What is Financial Repression?

1. Financial repression refers to the scenario where savers receive returns below inflation, leading to negative real interest rates.

2. This has historically helped fund cheap credits for businesses and governments.

3. Even in market-driven economies like the U.S., such strategies were used post-World War II and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How Have Savers' Behaviors Changed?

1. Between 2013 and 2023, the proportion of household financial assets to GDP rose from 41% to 46%.

2. More significantly, the portion of these assets kept in deposits and currency fell from 67% to 45%.

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3. This shift indicates that households are diversifying away from traditional bank deposits, influenced by maturing capital markets and digital finance options.

What Can Banks Do Differently?

1. Banks need to revise how they evaluate the performance of their business units.

2. The current fund transfer pricing system might skew the perceived profitability of lending-focused units over those focused on raising deposits.

3. A more balanced approach considering the real cost of funds and rewarding deposit-raising efforts fairly could help.

4. Additionally, employing analytics to set competitive deposit rates might retain loyal customers and address rising funding costs.

Question for practice:

Discuss how changing economic behaviors and financial practices could impact banks' approaches to managing deposit and credit growth?

Developing countries should prioritize the service sectors

Source: The post Developing countries should prioritize the service sectors has been created, based on the article "**Services offer a clear and speedy path to economic development**" published in "**Live mint**" on 31st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy- growth and development

Context: The article argues that developing countries should focus more on services like finance, health, and tourism for growth, rather than relying solely on manufacturing. Services are growing faster, boosting productivity, foreign investment, and providing opportunities for women and skilled workers.

For detailed information on **Services Sector in India** read this article here

What is the Current Economic Situation for Developing Countries?

1. Developing countries have experienced a stagnant decade with no growth in per capita income since 2010.

2. Middle-income countries face the risk of aging before achieving substantial wealth.

3. High-income nations are grappling with the challenges of high debt levels and low productivity growth, which may lead to economic stagnation.

4. These economic conditions hinder international cooperation and progress, contrasting with the advancements seen after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

5. The overall economic landscape for developing countries is challenging, requiring strategic adjustments in policy and focus.

Why Should Developing Countries Shift Their Focus to Services?

Developing countries should shift their focus to services for several compelling reasons:

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1. **Economic Contribution**: Services now constitute more than two-thirds of global GDP and half of global trade. This significant contribution underscores their potential to drive economic growth.

2. **Productivity and Investment**: In East Asia, services have led to increased labor productivity and foreign direct investment. For example, Vietnam's labor productivity in services increased by 2.9% from 2008 to 2016 following WTO accession reforms.

3. **Employment Opportunities**: Services sectors employ nearly 50% of the workforce in East Asia, offering more opportunities for skilled workers and women. The proportion of women in the workforce is higher in services compared to manufacturing.

4. **Digital Growth**: The rapid adoption of digital technologies in services enhances efficiency and connectivity, contributing to economic dynamism and competitiveness.

What Should Policymakers Do?

Policymakers should support both services and manufacturing, maximizing the potential of the services sector to deliver growth and jobs. This dual focus can help countries transition from low- to middle- to high-income status more effectively.

Question for practice:

Discuss the reasons why developing countries should prioritize the development of service sectors over manufacturing to achieve economic growth and stability.

Global Elections 2024 Show Decline in Democracy

Source: The post Global Elections 2024 Show Decline in Democracy has been created, based on the article "**Ashok Lavasa writes: 2024 gave us reasons to question and have faith in democracy**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 31st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Governance-Democracy

Context: The article discusses the global elections of 2024, noting widespread voter dissatisfaction with democracy and incumbent politicians losing power. It highlights issues like corruption, misgovernance, and the decline in public discourse quality, emphasizing the challenges democracies face in fulfilling public expectations.

What Happened in the 2024 Elections?

1. In the 2024 elections, over 80% of incumbent parties globally lost more support than in previous elections, marking a significant shift in voter sentiment.

2. The United States saw a shift to the right, completing a hat trick of anti-incumbency.

3. The United Kingdom moved to the left in its electoral outcomes.

4. Botswana's incumbent party was unseated after six decades.

5. In South Korea, the opposition Democratic Party won a majority, balancing against the ruling People Power Party.

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6. Despite not losing power, incumbent parties in India, South Africa, and Japan lost a significant number of seats.

What Are the Challenges for Democracy?

1. **Voter Discontent:** In 2024, about 54% of adults across 31 nations expressed dissatisfaction with how democracy worked. They felt political leaders and parties did not represent their interests.

2. **Decline in Democratic Qualities:** The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance observed a decline in key democratic attributes such as credible elections and freedom of expression, raising concerns about the integrity of democratic processes.

3. **Misgovernance and Corruption:** Democracies face issues like corruption and ineffective governance, preventing them from meeting the expectations of their citizens. For instance, in India, election campaigns often promise short-term benefits rather than focusing on necessary reforms.

4. **Decline in Public Discourse:** The tone of election campaigns has worsened, with increased use of derogatory language and personal attacks. This trend was evident in countries like India and the United States, negatively affecting the political environment.

What Does the Future Hold for Democracy?

1. Despite the challenges, elections still offer hope by showing that people are willing to change leaders through democratic processes.

2. However, for democracy to be effective, political parties need to focus on genuine long-term solutions rather than short-term gains.

3. If they fail, alternative forms of governance might become more appealing.

Question for practice:

Examine how the 2024 global elections reflected widespread voter dissatisfaction with incumbent politicians and their governance.

How Culture and Merit Shape American Policies

Source: The post How Culture and Merit Shape American Policies has been created, based on the article "**America needs Indians on H-1B visas**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 31st December 2024

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-International Relations-Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Context: The article discusses the tension between cultural values and merit in America, especially in contexts like college admissions and H-1B visa policies. It highlights historical biases and current debates involving prominent figures like Vivek Ramaswamy, Donald Trump, and Elon Musk, focusing on how cultural preferences impact professional and educational opportunities.

What Is the Debate About Culture and Merit?

1. **Critique of American Values**: American politician Vivek Ramaswamy criticizes U.S. culture for prioritizing mediocrity over excellence, highlighting a societal preference for social popularity (like prom queens and jocks) over academic or technical achievements (like math Olympiad champs).

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2. **Public Reaction**: Ramaswamy's comments sparked controversy, with detractors accusing him of overlooking the importance of balanced societal values that include leisure and social experiences.

How Has History Shaped College Admissions?

1. **Early Focus on Academic Merit:** Initially, top U.S. colleges like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton primarily valued academic excellence in admissions, largely based on subject test scores.

2. **Shift in Criteria Due to Rising Anti-Semitism:** As the number of Jewish students increased, so did anti-Semitic attitudes. This led to a shift in admissions criteria around the 1920s to include assessments of "character," demonstrated through sports and extracurricular involvement, which helped limit Jewish admissions.

3. **Broadening of Admission Standards:** The new criteria aimed to favor White Anglo-Saxon applicants by evaluating traits like involvement in sports and perceived "manliness," moving away from strictly academic achievements.

What Are the Broader Implications of the Culture-Merit Debate?

1. **Influence on Immigration Policies:** The culture-merit debate influences policies like the H-1B visa, emphasizing the need for high-skilled labor while also fostering debates about the balance between professional achievements and broader societal contributions.

2. **Societal Expectations:** The debate reflects and shapes societal expectations about success, often emphasizing certain careers and educational paths as more valuable.

3. **Modern Leaders Influence:** The discussion around culture and merit has been influenced by prominent figures like Donald Trump and Elon Musk. They have emphasized the value of high-skilled immigrants in sectors like technology, highlighting a division between economic contributions and broader social inclusion.

What Historical Examples Highlight the Complexity of 'Intelligence'?

1. **Ancient Greeks**: They valued physical agility, rational judgment, and virtuous behavior as signs of intelligence, showing a broad interpretation of what it means to be intelligent.

2. **Romans**: Their culture highlighted the virtue of masculine courage, indicating that bravery and strength were considered intelligent traits.

3. **Islamic Societies**: Revered the holy soldier, showing that religious and military prowess were significant markers of intelligence.

4. **Traditional Chinese Culture**: Valued skills in music, chess, calligraphy, and drawing, emphasizing artistic and strategic abilities over the typical modern focus on IQ and academic success.

Question for practice:

Discuss how the historical evolution of college admissions criteria reflects the tension between cultural values and merit in America.

States and the Danger of Poorly Manufactured Drugs

Source: This post on **Issue of Poorly Manufactured Drugs** has been created based on **States and the danger of poorly manufactured drugs published in The Hindu on 31st December 2024.**

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

Context: This article addresses the critical issue of **poorly manufactured drugs** in India and the systemic challenges that enable the proliferation of such drugs across states. The context revolves around a recent tragic incident in **Ballari district, Karnataka**, where five young mothers allegedly died due to contaminated drugs produced by a pharmaceutical company based in West Bengal. This case highlights the broader problems within India's **drug regulatory framework**, which is governed by the **Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**.

Why is regulating pharmaceutical companies across States challenging in India?

Under India's Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940:

1. Pharmaceutical companies are licensed and inspected only by drug inspectors in the State where their facilities are located.
2. They can sell their products across the country, leaving States like Karnataka unable to prevent the inflow of substandard drugs from other States.
3. For example, out of 894 samples tested by Karnataka's drug laboratories in three years, 601 failing samples were from manufacturers outside Karnataka.

What is the current limitation in dealing with substandard drugs from other States?

1. Karnataka's drug department can only initiate criminal prosecutions, which take time. During ongoing trials:
2. The pharmaceutical company can continue manufacturing and selling drugs.
3. Only inspectors from the company's home State can suspend or revoke its manufacturing license.

How can information sharing help address this issue?

1. A centralised database of test results from all State and central drug testing laboratories can allow drug inspectors and procurement officials to:
   - Track a company's drug testing history.
   - Make informed, risk-based decisions during enforcement and procurement.
2. Sharing inspection reports and licensing information across States in a unified database can:
   - Help procurement agencies avoid dubious manufacturers.
   - Prioritise manufacturers from States known for rigorous inspections.

What role can a centralised database play in ensuring drug quality?

1. A database should include:
   - Test and inspection reports from all States.
   - Details of pharmaceutical companies blacklisted for supplying substandard drugs.
2. This would:
   - Prevent procurement agencies from relying solely on company disclosures.
   - Help identify manufacturers with poor track records, improving public health.

Why is blacklisting verification necessary?

1. Procurement agencies currently cannot independently verify if a pharmaceutical company has been blacklisted.
2. A central register by the Union Ministry of Health can resolve this issue, making procurement more reliable.

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What legal reforms are needed for individual States?

States should have powers to:

1. Block out-of-State manufacturers from selling drugs during investigations for serious adverse events or deaths caused by their products.
2. Require manufacturers to prove issues have been rectified before resuming sales.

Why can't States amend the law independently?

1. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, is central legislation.
2. Legislative reform must be initiated by the Union Health Ministry. Karnataka supports reforms to enhance drug quality nationwide.

What steps are critical to improving drug quality across India?

1. Create a centralised database of test results, inspection reports, and blacklisted manufacturers.
2. Equip States with legal powers to regulate out-of-State manufacturers during investigations.
3. Drive legislative reforms at the central level to ensure stricter regulation and coordination between States.

Sheikh Hasina Extradition Demand

Source: This post on **Sheikh Hasina Extradition Demand** has been created based on **The Sheikh Hasina extradition demand, India's options** published in **The Hindu on 31st December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Syllabus 2: International relations

Context: This article discusses the complex legal, diplomatic, and human rights implications of Bangladesh's formal request to India for the extradition of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to New Delhi in August 2024 amid allegations of crimes against humanity during anti-government protests. Bangladesh has initiated legal proceedings against Ms. Hasina, labeling her as an absconder and seeking her trial for alleged state-sponsored violence, including genocide. The article delves into the challenges India faces in responding to the extradition demand, outlining potential legal defenses and obligations under international and domestic law.

Why has Bangladesh requested Sheikh Hasina's extradition?

1. In December 2024, Bangladesh formally requested India to extradite former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to face judicial proceedings.
2. She fled to New Delhi in August 2024 amid anti-government protests.
3. Charges against her include conspiracy to eliminate protesting students, mistreatment, killings labeled as genocide, and crimes against humanity.
4. An arrest warrant was issued by the International Crimes Tribunal on October 17, 2024.

What are the legal proceedings in Bangladesh regarding Ms. Hasina?

1. The Tribunal set a deadline of December 17, 2024, for concluding investigations.
2. A charge sheet against Ms. Hasina and 45 others, including former ministers and officials, is expected soon.

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3. Under Bangladeshi law (Section 339 B of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898), trials in absentia are permissible.

Can India extradite Ms. Hasina under international and domestic law?

1. India and Bangladesh signed an extradition treaty in 2013, governed by the Indian Extradition Act, 1962.
2. India must consider the **aut dedere aut judicare** principle, obliging states to extradite or prosecute individuals accused of grave international crimes.

What are India's possible defenses against extraditing Ms. Hasina?

1. **Political Offense Exception**:
   - Crimes committed by Ms. Hasina, if proven, likely exceed the scope of political offenses, as reports indicate state-sponsored violence and crimes against humanity during her tenure.
2. **Rule of Non-Inquiry**:
   - Traditionally, extradition is at the executive's discretion, though courts now play a larger role.
   - Articles 20 and 21 of the Indian Constitution protect Ms. Hasina as a "person," ensuring fundamental rights even for non-citizens.

What could be India's alternative approach?

1. India may allow **house arrest** for Ms. Hasina, enabling her to participate in her trial via video conferencing.
2. She could be tried with her chosen legal representation and could serve any potential sentence in India under a sentencing agreement.
3. This approach aligns with international law while safeguarding Ms. Hasina's rights and avoiding a breakdown in India-Bangladesh relations.

What role can the International Criminal Court (ICC) play in this case?

1. **Jurisdiction**:
   - Bangladesh is a party to the Rome Statute, enabling ICC intervention.
   - The alleged crimes meet the ICC's criteria for material, personal, territorial, and temporal jurisdiction.
2. **Complementarity Principle**:
   - The ICC steps in only when national courts are unable or unwilling to ensure a fair trial.
   - If Ms. Hasina's rights to an impartial trial are at risk, the ICC's Prosecutor could initiate a preliminary examination under Article 15 of the Rome Statute.

What are the implications for India-Bangladesh relations?

1. Extraditing Ms. Hasina without addressing concerns about her rights could strain ties.
2. A collaborative trial process would demonstrate a fair and balanced approach, emphasizing the protection of human rights while respecting judicial processes.

What are the potential outcomes of this case?

1. **Domestic Trial in Bangladesh**: If the trial in absentia proceeds, Bangladesh must ensure fairness and adherence to international legal standards.
2. **ICC Involvement**: If national trials fail to meet impartiality standards, the ICC could intervene.

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3. **Cooperative Approach**: India's proposed in-house arrest and support for Ms. Hasina's virtual trial may strike a balance between legal and diplomatic obligations.

India's Obligations Towards the Rohingya

Source: This post on **India's Obligations Towards the Rohingya** has been created based on **article On India's obligations towards the Rohingya** published in **The Hindu on 31ˢᵗ December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Syllabus 2: International relations

Context: This article delves into India's obligations and policies concerning Rohingya refugees, a marginalized and stateless population facing severe human rights violations in Myanmar. It critiques India's approach to managing the Rohingya refugee crisis, juxtaposing it against international norms and conventions on refugee protection.

What did the recent report by The Azadi Project and Refugees International reveal about India's treatment of Rohingya refugees?

1. The report highlighted severe violations of constitutional and human rights concerning Rohingya refugees detained in India. It criticized India for failing to uphold its international human rights obligations.
2. Key findings include:
   i. Many Rohingya refugees remain incarcerated even after completing their sentences.
   ii. The detention practices violate both domestic and international legal frameworks.

Who are the Rohingya, and how are they protected under international law?

1. **Population and Context:** The Rohingya are the world's largest stateless population, numbering approximately 2.8 million. Persecuted in Myanmar, they have been forced to flee due to genocidal violence.
2. **Rohingya in India:** Nearly 22,500 Rohingya refugees currently reside in India, according to the UNHCR.
3. **International Protections:**
   i. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol emphasize **non-refoulement**, barring states from returning individuals to countries where they may face persecution, torture, or severe human rights violations.
   ii. Non-refoulement is recognized as **customary international law**, binding all states, even non-signatories.
   iii. The principle has been affirmed by the UNHCR and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as absolute and without exception.

What is India's stance on the Rohingya refugee issue?

1. **Non-Signatory Status:** India is not a party to the Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Additionally, it has not signed key instruments such as the Convention Against Torture or the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.
2. **Domestic Legal Framework:** Rohingya refugees are detained under laws like the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Passport Act, 1967, which classify them as "illegal migrants."
3. **Judicial Responses:**
   i. In *Mohammad Salimullah and Anr. vs. Union of India (2021)*, the Supreme Court rejected pleas to halt the deportation of detained Rohingya, citing national security concerns.

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ii. In October 2024, the Delhi High Court dismissed a PIL to enroll Rohingya children in local schools, citing the need for a policy decision by the government.

What are India's international obligations towards the Rohingya?

1. **Human Rights Treaties:** Despite not being a signatory to the Refugee Convention, India is bound by obligations under:
   i. The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (ICCPR), which prohibits refoulement to places where individuals might face torture or degrading treatment.
   ii. The **Convention on the Rights of the Child** and the **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination**, which India has ratified.
2. **Non-Refoulement in Indian Law:**
   i. The Supreme Court has ruled that international norms apply in the absence of domestic laws (*Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan, 1997*).
   ii. Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution mandates that the state respect international law and treaty obligations.
   iii. Several High Court judgments (e.g., *Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi vs. Union of India, 1998* and *Dongh Lian Kham vs. Union of India, 2015*) have upheld non-refoulement as integral to the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

What are the main concerns about India's refugee policies?

1. **Absence of a Standardised Policy:**
   * Refugee treatment varies based on India's geopolitical interests. Tibetans, Sri Lankans, and Afghans receive more consistent protections compared to Rohingya refugees.
   * The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, excludes persecuted Muslim minorities like the Rohingya from its provisions.
2. **Lack of Legal Aid and Representation:**
   * Rohingya refugees face challenges securing legal aid as many civil society groups have lost Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) licenses, limiting funding.
3. **Detention Conditions:**
   * Many refugees, including pregnant women and children, live in dehumanizing conditions in detention centers like the Matia Transit Camp.
   * The Supreme Court directed surprise inspections of such camps in Assam to assess living conditions.

UPI Duopoly's Rise and Market Vulnerabilities

Source: This post on **UPI Duopoly's Rise and Market Vulnerabilities** has been created based on **article UPI duopoly's rise and market vulnerabilities** published in **The Hindu on 31st December 2024.**

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS 3-Indian Economy

Context: This article delves into India's obligations and policies concerning Rohingya refugees, a marginalized and stateless population facing severe human rights violations in Myanmar. It critiques India's approach to managing the Rohingya refugee crisis, juxtaposing it against international norms and conventions on refugee protection.

How successful has UPI been in India?

1. Since its launch eight years ago, UPI has seen meteoric growth, now accounting for nearly **eight in every 10 digital transactions** in India.

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2. In August 2024 alone, UPI transactions were valued at over **₹20.60 lakh crore**.
3. This success is notable in a country with **low digital literacy** and a history of cash dependency.

What is the current penetration of UPI in India?

1. UPI has reached **30% of the population**, an impressive figure for a relatively new payment technology.
2. However, **70% of the population remains untapped**, requiring innovations in **service offerings, app design**, and the overall **product base**.

What are the challenges posed by market concentration in the UPI ecosystem?

1. The market is highly concentrated, with two Third Party App Providers (TPAPs) — **PhonePe (48.36%)** and **Google Pay (37.3%)** — controlling **85% of the market share**.
2. The third-largest player, **Paytm**, holds a mere **7.2%** share.

What risks does this duopoly pose?

1. **Systemic Vulnerability**:
   - The dominance of two TPAPs creates **single points of failure**, where disruptions in either app can affect the entire UPI network.
   - Nearly **80% of transactions** rely on these two apps, necessitating **failsafes and backup mechanisms**.
2. **Reduced Competition and Innovation**:
   - Dominance by two players creates **high barriers to entry** for smaller competitors.
   - The lack of competitive pressure discourages **investment in innovation**.
   - Providers primarily focus on achieving scale for **cross-selling financial products**, rather than improving UPI services.
3. **Foreign Dominance**:
   - Both PhonePe and Google Pay are **foreign-owned** (Walmart and Google, respectively).
   - This raises concerns about **data protection** and **potential backdoor access** to sensitive information.
   - Indian TPAPs lack the **funding** to compete with these players.

What steps have regulators taken to address these risks?

1. In **2020**, the **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)** mandated that no TPAP should exceed **30% market share** in transaction volume.
2. A **two-year deadline** was set for implementation, but it has been **repeatedly extended**.
3. By August 2024, the duopoly remains dominant, with **PhonePe at 48.36%** and **Google Pay at 37.3%**.

Are there plans to change the market share cap?

1. Reports suggest the **NPCI might increase the cap** from **30% to 40%**, potentially allowing dominant TPAPs to further **consolidate their market hold**.
2. Such decisions could **undermine efforts** to create a level playing field for smaller players.

What can be done to address these vulnerabilities?

1. Implementation of the market cap is **crucial** to fostering a competitive and innovative UPI ecosystem.
2. Encouraging **Indian TPAPs** to grow and compete can provide a **counterbalance** to the current duopoly.

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3. Under the right conditions, smaller market participants can bring in **new innovations** and strengthen the ecosystem.

Why is addressing these risks important for UPI's future?

1. UPI's success and continued growth depend on **public trust**, which relies on resilience, reliability, and openness to innovation.
2. Failing to address these risks could **erode trust**, stall UPI's growth, and hinder its potential to transform India's digital payment landscape.

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