

9 PM Current Affairs Weekly Compilation

For UPSC CSE mains examination



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Features :

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

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Donald Trump targeted DEI programs

Source: The post Donald Trump targeted DEI programs has been created, based on the article “**Stand by DEI: It’s a social and business imperative**” published in “**Live mint**” on 24 January 2025

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

Context: The article discusses how **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives** in the U.S. faced setbacks under President Trump and some corporate leaders. It highlights the benefits of DEI for business performance and urges Indian companies to commit to these principles despite global trends.

For detailed information on **Trump’s Second Term Reshapes America and World** [read this article here](#)

What Happened to DEI Initiatives in the U.S.?

1. President Donald Trump targeted DEI programs, labeling them as harmful and shutting them down.
2. High-profile CEOs also criticized these initiatives, calling them racist and anti-American.
3. Major companies like Walmart and John Deere scaled back their DEI efforts.
4. These actions suggest that previous commitments to DEI might have been more about appearances.
5. The backlash happened despite a nationwide push for more DEI after the killing of George Floyd in 2020, showing a significant reversal in attitudes toward these initiatives in some sectors of corporate America.

Why is DEI Important for Business?

1. **Improves Employee Retention:** Businesses with robust DEI practices see a 2.4 times increase in employee retention, as found by BCG’s BLISS Index. This indicates a happier, more committed workforce.
2. **Enhances Creativity and Innovation:** Diverse teams bring varied life experiences, boosting creativity and innovation. This diversity leads to more effective problem-solving and product development.
3. **Boosts Financial Performance:** Companies with diverse viewpoints better meet customer needs, leading to superior profits. Diversity in teams correlates with better business outcomes.
4. **Influences Consumer Choices:** According to Kantar’s Brand Inclusion Index 2024, 75% of consumers consider a brand’s commitment to diversity when making purchases.

How Should Indian Companies React?

1. **Defining DEI Goals:** Clearly articulate the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mission and values.
2. **Promoting Equality:** Continue advancing DEI to address social and economic disparities prevalent in India, thus supporting national efforts toward equality.

3. **Fostering Innovation:** Leverage diverse teams to boost creativity, meet customer needs effectively, and improve financial outcomes.

Question for practice:

Examine how President Donald Trump's administration and certain corporate leaders influenced the progression of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the U.S.?

SC suggests appointing ad hoc judges temporarily

Source: The post SC suggests appointing ad hoc judges temporarily has been created, based on the article “**Why Supreme Court suggested appointing retired High Court judges on ‘ad hoc’ basis**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 4 January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- Polity-judiciary

Context: The Supreme Court suggested using retired judges temporarily to reduce the backlog of cases in High Courts. Under Article 224A, the Chief Justice of a High Court, with the President's approval, can ask retired judges to serve again. This process requires multiple steps, including approvals from various government officials.

For detailed information on **SC Guidelines for “Appointment of Ad-hoc Judges” in HCs** [read this article here](#)

What is the suggestion by the Supreme Court regarding ad hoc judges?

On January 21, the Supreme Court suggested appointing retired judges temporarily to address the growing backlog of criminal cases in High Courts. This recommendation is aimed at managing the increasing number of pending cases.

How are ad hoc judges appointed?

The ad hoc judges appointed procedure is a **combination of constitutional provisions (Article 224A), guidelines under the 1998 MOP, and directives from the Supreme Court in the Lok Prahari case (2021).**

A. Constitutional Provision (Article 224A)

1. Article 224A provides the foundation for appointing ad hoc judges. It states that:

- The Chief Justice of a High Court can request a retired judge to serve temporarily.
- This requires the prior consent of the President and the retired judge's agreement.

2. Such judges will have the same powers, jurisdiction, and privileges as a High Court judge, but they will not be "deemed" as regular High Court judges.

B. Guidelines Under the 1998 Memorandum of Procedure (MOP)

The **1998 MOP** outlines a detailed procedure for appointing retired judges:

1. The Chief Justice of the High Court forwards the retired judge's name and details of the proposed duration of appointment to the state's Chief Minister.
2. The Chief Minister forwards the recommendation to the **Union Law Minister**. The Union Law Minister consults the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
3. After consultation, the Union Law Minister forwards the recommendation and CJI's advice to the Prime Minister.
4. The Prime Minister advises the **President** to approve the appointment.

C. Supreme Court's 2021 Decision (*Lok Prahari Case*)

1. The Supreme Court in *Lok Prahari Through Its General Secretary S.N. Shukla IAS (Retd.) v. Union of India (2021)* added further clarity and conditions for such appointments:

- **Routing through the Collegium:** The recommendation must now go through the **Supreme Court collegium**, which includes the CJI and the two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court.

2. **Trigger Points for Appointment:** Ad hoc judges can be appointed only under specific conditions:

- Vacancies exceed **20% of the sanctioned strength**, excluding pending proposals.
- Over **10% of pending cases** are older than five years.
- Efforts to fill regular vacancies must already be initiated.

3. Additional Recommendations:

- Chief Justices of High Courts should prepare **panels of retired and soon-to-retire judges** eligible for appointment.
- Judges should generally be appointed for **2-3 years**, with **2-5 ad hoc judges per High Court**.
- The process should undergo **periodic reviews** to assess its effectiveness.

Why is this provision rarely used?

1. The provision under Article 224A is considered "dormant."
2. In 2021, the Supreme Court found only three recorded instances of ad hoc appointments:
 - Justice Suraj Bhan (1972) for election petitions in Madhya Pradesh HC.
 - Justice P. Venugopal (1982-83) in Madras HC.
 - Justice O P Srivastava (2007) for Ayodhya title suits in Allahabad HC.
3. There are no recorded instances of ad-hoc judges being appointed since the 2021 decision.

4. This suggests that ad hoc appointments are not commonly used despite the growing backlog of cases in High Courts.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons for the rare use of Article 224A to appoint ad hoc judges in High Courts despite its potential to address the backlog of cases.

India's Economic Challenges and Policy Reform Needs

Source: The post India's Economic Challenges and Policy Reform Needs has been created, based on the article "Behind India's economic slowdown, our very own Deep State" published in "Indian Express" on 24 January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation, of resources, growth, development and employment.

Context: The article criticizes India's outdated budget-making process, high taxation, and restrictive economic policies. It blames the "Deep State" of bureaucrats, industrialists, and media for harmful decisions, leading to slowed GDP growth, excessive government spending, and declining foreign investments.

For detailed information on **SC Guidelines for "Appointment of Ad-hoc Judges" in HCs** read [Article1](#), [Article2](#)

What Is the Issue with India's Budget-Making Process?

1. India's budget-making process is outdated and resembles colonial-era practices.
2. The process is secretive, with decisions made behind closed doors.
3. It primarily benefits TV media and senior bureaucrats (IAS officers), sidelining external experts.
4. Policy-making lacks input from professionals outside the government, unlike in mature democracies.
5. For example, despite calls for lateral entry by leaders like Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi, such reforms were not implemented effectively.
6. The secrecy and limited participation hinder transparency and accountability in creating effective economic policies for modern India.

Why Is India's GDP Growth Slowing Down?

1. **Excessive Taxation:** The personal income tax to GDP ratio (X-PIT) is projected to reach 3.9% by FY2025, higher than most non-advanced countries like China (1.1%) and Vietnam (1.8%).
2. **High Overall Tax Burden:** India's tax-to-GDP ratio (X-TAX) is likely to exceed 19% in FY2025, higher than East Asia's 13.5% and close to developed countries like Korea (20%) despite India's lower per capita income.

3. Restrictive Trade Policies:

- High tariffs on manufactured goods increase the cost of imports, making them less competitive in the Indian market. This protects domestic industries but reduces efficiency, innovation, and global competitiveness.
- Restrictions on foreign direct investment (FDI) limit the entry of international firms, cutting access to advanced technology, capital, and expertise.
- Together, these policies discourage global investors, reduce competition, and slow economic growth by isolating India from global supply chains and markets. For example, removing Switzerland's most-favoured nation status could have impacted investor confidence.

What Are the Consequences of High Taxation?

1. **Slow GDP Growth:** High taxes contribute to reduced economic activity, slowing India's GDP growth despite global expansion.
2. **Burden on the Middle Class:** The middle class, which pays most taxes, faces financial strain, causing dissatisfaction.
3. **Excessive Government Spending:** High tax revenues lead to wasteful spending, including freebies.
4. **Decline in Investments:** High taxes discourage foreign investments. For example, personal income tax-to-GDP ratio (3.9%) exceeds non-advanced regions like Eastern Europe (3.4%).

What Needs to Be Done?

1. Reform taxation policies to reduce excessive reliance on personal income and overall taxes.
2. Address the Deep State's role in policy-making.
3. Implement better economic policies to boost foreign investment and reduce tariffs.

Question for practice:

Examine how India's outdated budget-making process, high taxation, and restrictive trade policies contribute to slowed GDP growth and declining foreign investments.

H-1B visa exploitation harms workers and professionals

Source: The post H-1B visa exploitation harms workers and professionals has been created, based on the article "**Best of both sides: The H-1B visa system is designed to exploit foreign talent**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 24 January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-International relations

Context: The article discusses the exploitation in the H-1B visa program. It highlights fake resumes, low wages, and abuses by Indian IT body shops. It criticizes corporate America for legal wage suppression and debunks myths about the STEM crisis and racial bias.

What is the H-1B Visa Program?

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The H-1B visa is for skilled foreign workers, often labeled as the “best and the brightest.” It is widely used in the IT sector.

For detailed information on **H-1B Visa Program** [read this article here](#)

How Are Indian IT Body Shops Exploiting Workers?

1. Thousands of small Indian-owned IT firms, known as "body shops," exploit H-1B workers. Examples include:

- **Fake resumes:** Workers often add fake experience to secure jobs.
- **Proxy interviews:** Others take interviews on behalf of candidates.
- **Living conditions:** Workers live in squalid guesthouses and face threats of deportation.
- **Debt and coercion:** They pay visa fees, taxes, and sign exploitative contracts.

2. One worker admitted selecting candidates for jobs by flipping a coin during interviews.

For detailed information on **H-1B Controversy and India's Position** [read this article here](#)

What Role Does Corporate America Play?

1. Corporate America exploits the H-1B program to suppress wages and replace American workers with cheaper foreign labor.

2. The H-1B Visa Reform Act of 2004 restructured wage levels, setting them at the 34th and 50th percentiles, enabling underpayment legally.

3. Companies favor H-1B workers over Americans, as documented in research and court cases.

4. The Department of Labor permits firms to manipulate prevailing wage levels, making wage theft compliant with the law.

5. Example: Elon Musk's claim of a "broken" H-1B program is inaccurate; it functions as designed for corporate profit.

Is There a STEM Crisis in the U.S.?

1. The U.S. does not face a genuine STEM crisis; this is a myth created by flawed studies.

2. A study by the National Science Foundation in the late 1980s exaggerated the need for STEM professionals.

3. This myth led to the creation of the H-1B visa program under the 1990 Act.

4. Researcher Carolyn Veneri found that real unemployment in tech is obscured by counting underemployed individuals as fully employed.

5. For example, a former engineer working as a sales clerk is counted as employed, skewing unemployment data.

Key Takeaway

The H-1B program is flawed and exploits workers. It benefits corporations while harming both American professionals and foreign workers. Legal loopholes and corporate greed, not a STEM crisis, are the root causes of this problem.

Question for practice:

Examine how the H-1B visa program is exploited by both Indian IT body shops and corporate America, and its impact on workers and professionals.

India's approach to end TB

Source: This post on **India's approach to end TB** has been created based on article "[India's winding road to '#EndTB'](#)" published in The Hindu on 24th January 2025.

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 delves into India's ongoing battle against tuberculosis (TB) and its efforts to achieve the ambitious 'End TB' targets by 2025. Despite TB being a curable disease, it remains the leading infectious killer globally, with India contributing 26% of the global TB burden. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly hindered India's progress toward its TB elimination goals, set ahead of the global 2030 target.

Why is TB a global concern, and what are the End TB targets?

1. TB remains the leading infectious disease killer globally.
2. End TB targets aim for a **90% reduction in TB deaths**, an **80% reduction in new cases**, and **zero catastrophic costs** for TB-affected families by 2030.
3. India pledged to achieve these targets by 2025 but faces setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is India's current status in TB burden and drug-resistant TB?

1. According to the **Global Tuberculosis Report 2024**, India:
 - a. Accounts for **26% of global TB cases**.
 - b. Is a hub for **drug-resistant TB (DR-TB)** and TB-related deaths.
2. Ground realities need better understanding to make national policies effective.

Who are the vulnerable groups affected by TB in India?

1. High-risk groups include:
 - a. People exposed to **dust (e.g., miners, stone carvers)**.
 - b. Those suffering from **undernutrition, overcrowding, and diabetes**.
 - c. **Migrant workers** who lack access to consistent healthcare.
2. Contributory factors like **silicosis** and poor living conditions exacerbate TB risk.

How effective is India's treatment system for TB?

1. India's National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) ensures **free and effective drugs**, achieving **95% treatment initiation** for notified cases.
2. However, in **2023**, supply chain disruptions caused:

- a. Drug shortages, forcing patients to buy medicines from private sources.
- b. Higher risk of **antibiotic resistance** and **catastrophic health expenses**.

What is extrapulmonary TB, and why is it often neglected?

1. **Extrapulmonary TB (EP-TB)** affects organs other than the lungs, such as the **lymph nodes, kidneys, brain, and bones**.
2. EP-TB constitutes **24% of notified TB cases**, but:
 - a. Symptoms are often **vague** and mimic other diseases.
 - b. There is a lack of focus on EP-TB in NTEP's screening algorithms.
3. Experts emphasize training general practitioners and frontline workers to improve **early diagnosis**.

What challenges exist in diagnosing TB?

1. Studies show:
 - a. Only **35% of private practitioners** and **75% of government doctors** can correctly diagnose classical TB symptoms.
 - b. **Molecular tests (e.g., CBNAAT, Truenat)** are available mostly at the **district level**, causing delays and extra costs.
2. Key challenges include:
 - a. A shortage of **trained human resources**.
 - b. Dependence on **specialists** for diagnosis.
 - c. Reluctance among private practitioners to **notify TB cases**.

What successful initiatives can India learn from?

1. **Idukki district, Kerala**:
 - a. Partnered with **Kudumbashree** women's self-help groups to achieve TB elimination targets through **community participation**.
2. **Vietnam**: Demonstrated the effectiveness of **active case finding** among high-risk populations for better-targeted interventions.

What are the key takeaways for India's fight against TB?

1. **Multisectoral action** is needed to address region-specific challenges.
2. **Strengthening the supply chain** is crucial to prevent treatment disruptions.
3. **Advocacy by political leaders** and active community involvement can drive progress.
4. Restructuring conventional frameworks and adopting **best practices** from other countries is essential.

Is there any progress toward achieving the End TB goals?

Despite challenges, there is hope:

- India's **TB case notification** reached the highest level ever.
- TB deaths declined by **24%** compared to 2015, surpassing the global decline.

What needs to change for India to achieve its targets?

1. Ownership and accountability at **all administrative levels**.
2. Focus on **early diagnosis, active case finding, and comprehensive training**.
3. Improved access to diagnostic tools like CBNAAT and Truenat at **local levels**.
4. A shift in approach to **address geographical and social disparities** effectively.

Election Commission of India (ECI)

Source: This post on Election Commission of India (ECI) has been created based on article "[A grey birthday for the Election Commission of India](#)" published in The Hindu on 24th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 2-Polity

Context: The article critically examines the functioning of the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, which is also celebrated as National Voters' Day (January 25). The author highlights the concerns of India's founding leaders, particularly Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, about the independence and impartiality of the electoral process, and argues that these concerns are still relevant today.

Why is January 25 significant for the ECI?

1. January 25 marks the **75th anniversary of the Election Commission of India (ECI)**, which is also celebrated as **National Voters Day**.
2. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar emphasized the independence of the ECI and the importance of maintaining unbiased electoral rolls during the Constituent Assembly debates in June 1949.

What concerns did Dr. Ambedkar express about electoral rolls?

1. Ambedkar warned against **electoral roll manipulation** by the executive.
2. His primary concern was **identity-based exclusion** of voters. However, he also cautioned about the **mass inclusion of voters** to tilt election results.

What irregularities occurred in the Maharashtra State elections?

1. The ECI registered **9.7 crore voters** for the 2024 Maharashtra State elections, despite the Ministry of Health projecting the **adult population at 9.54 crore**.
2. The ECI's figures implied **100% or more voter registration** of the adult population, an anomaly compared to previous elections.

How unusual was voter enrollment for the Maharashtra elections?

1. Between the 2019 and 2024 elections, only **32 lakh voters** were added to Maharashtra's rolls.
2. However, in the **six months between the 2024 Lok Sabha and State elections**, the ECI registered **48 lakh new voters**, a 50% increase compared to the previous five-year period.

What was the outcome of this surge in voter enrollment?

1. The **BJP-led Mahayuti alliance** gained **72 lakh more votes** in the State elections compared to the Lok Sabha elections.
2. Only **24 lakh voters shifted allegiance** from the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi to the BJP alliance.
3. This leaves **48 lakh votes** unaccounted for, which aligns with the **48 lakh new voter registrations** during the six-month period.

Are these new voters legitimate?

1. Questions arise about whether these **48 lakh new voters** were genuine:
 - a. Were their **documents verified** during enrollment?
 - b. Why did nearly all of them vote for one alliance?
2. The ECI has not provided adequate explanations or released data to clarify these anomalies.

How did the ECI respond to the allegations?

1. The ECI has been **silent and dismissive** of these questions.
2. Some argue that **opposition parties failed to detect these issues**, but the responsibility to ensure fair elections lies with the ECI, not political parties.

How can the sanctity of electoral rolls be preserved?

The use of **Aadhaar for voter verification** is suggested:

- Aadhaar can help **'unghost' and de-duplicate electoral rolls** through biometric verification.
- A **backup process** can address instances of failed biometric verification.

Why is Aadhaar verification essential?

1. Aadhaar verification ensures the **accuracy and integrity of electoral rolls**, which are the foundation of India's democracy.
2. Dr. Ambedkar and other founding leaders would likely support such a measure to strengthen electoral democracy.

What are the broader implications of the Maharashtra case?

1. The Maharashtra election highlights the risks of **executive interference** in the electoral process.
2. It underscores the need for **transparency, accountability, and reforms** in India's election management to maintain trust in democracy.

The U.S. and WHO: A Vital Partnership for Global Health

Source: This post on **The U.S. and WHO: A Vital Partnership for Global Health** has been created based on article "[WHO is right - The U.S. must return to WHO's fold in its own interest](#)" published in The Hindu on 24th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 2-International relations

Context: The article discusses the implications of the United States' decision under President Donald Trump to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO). The withdrawal, driven by accusations of bias and mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, is portrayed as a short-sighted and potentially damaging decision, not only for global health efforts but also for the United States itself.

What decision did the U.S. make regarding WHO?

1. Former U.S. President Donald Trump announced the withdrawal of the United States from the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, accusing it of bias and mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The U.S. plans to officially exit WHO within 12 months and halt all financial contributions.

What reasons did Mr. Trump give for the withdrawal?

1. Mr. Trump accused WHO of being **partisan towards China** despite the U.S. being its largest financial contributor.
2. He criticized WHO for its **slow response to the COVID-19 pandemic** and claimed it was "owned and controlled by China."
3. His administration had previously attempted to halt WHO funding in 2020 but was unable to finalize the move during his term.

Why is the U.S. withdrawal significant for WHO?

1. The U.S. is a **founding member of WHO** and its **biggest financial backer**, contributing around **18% of WHO's overall funding**.
2. Withdrawal of these funds will severely impact global health programs, including:
 - a. **HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis interventions.**
 - b. **Eradication of infectious diseases.**
 - c. **Equity in access to life-saving drugs.**
 - d. **Strengthening health systems and disease outbreak prevention.**

How does this decision affect global health?

1. Pathogens and diseases do not respect borders, and global health operates in a **shared system**.
2. The **COVID-19 pandemic** demonstrated that **collaboration, open sharing of data, and technology** among nations are crucial.
3. The lack of U.S. participation and funding will weaken WHO's ability to ensure global health security.

Why is U.S. participation in WHO crucial for global health?

1. Global health challenges require **collective action**. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that **"no one is safe until everyone is safe."**
2. Without U.S. support, the global health community may face setbacks in combating future pandemics and ensuring health equity.

What is the broader hope of the global health community?

1. The global health community hopes for a **reversal of the U.S. decision** to withdraw from WHO.
2. The U.S.'s return is seen as critical for restoring **funding, collaboration, and leadership** in global health initiatives.

Understanding Poverty in India

Source: This post on **Understanding Poverty in India** has been created based on article "[Is poverty being underestimated in India?](#)" published in The Hindu on 24th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 2- Issues relating to Poverty and Hunger.

Context: The article addresses the ongoing debate surrounding poverty estimation in India, especially in light of recent data released by the government.

How has poverty been historically defined in India?

1. From the late 1970s to 2005, poverty was defined by the expenditure required to sustain a minimum calorie diet, with updates every five years based on NSSO data.
2. Initially, NSS estimates closely matched National Accounts, but over time, discrepancies arose.
3. The Tendulkar Committee later revised poverty estimation methods. After 2011-12, the government neither published official poverty estimates nor conducted new surveys, leading to alternative poverty measures such as the multidimensional poverty index.

Has poverty been underestimated in India?

For:

1. Poverty estimates depend on the poverty line and data. Claims of drastic reductions in poverty are questionable due to inconsistencies in methodologies and poverty lines.
2. For example, newer data collection methods, like the modified mixed reference period (MMRP), lead to higher expenditure estimates, which can lower poverty estimates when applied to older poverty lines.

Against:

1. Poverty has drastically reduced over the last two decades due to factors like high GDP growth, flagship government programs, and the National Food Security Act.
2. Using any method, poverty estimates for 2022-23 were close to 10%, and recent data suggest it might now be in single digits.
3. However, defining poverty in broader terms beyond calorie consumption is essential.

What are the issues with HCES data collection and methodology?

For:

1. Over the years, there has been a divergence between NSSO consumption data and National Accounts.
2. Experimenting with recall periods (e.g., seven days for food items, 30 days for others) has made older and newer data incomparable.
3. The NSSO's current methodology, involving three household visits for better recall, gives higher expenditure estimates but lacks an updated poverty line suited to this data.

Against:

1. The old uniform reference period (URP) approach is outdated, as it fails to capture infrequent expenditures.
2. Modern methods are better suited to reflect broader consumption patterns, such as spending on services.
3. While criticisms exist, the data suggest a significant decline in poverty—closer to 17% or more—since 2011-12.

What does the data reveal about rural and urban poverty?

For:

1. Rural-urban consumption gaps are narrowing, with rural areas showing diversified consumption patterns similar to urban areas.
2. However, the rural-urban classification, based on the 2011 Census, is outdated, as many rural areas are now peri-urban.

Against:

Against:

1. If peri-urban regions are reclassified as urban, urban poverty would likely show a sharper decline.
2. Nevertheless, public policy interventions continue to play a vital role in reducing poverty across both rural and urban areas.

Is there a need for an upward revision of the poverty line?

For:

1. Some studies, such as one by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies using the Rangarajan methodology, estimated poverty at 25% in 2022-23.
2. However, this lacks consensus. A clear and consistent methodology is necessary, but achieving agreement remains challenging.

Against:

1. The UNDP poverty line of \$2.15/day estimated poverty at 12.9% in 2019. NITI Aayog's estimates are also lower than the 25% figure cited.
2. A single, consistent poverty line is essential for accurate measurement.

Are criticisms of the index valid?

For:

1. The UNDP's framework allows countries to customize their indices.
2. India's inclusion of additional indicators, such as bank accounts and maternal health, is appropriate for its context. Broadening the basket is a step in the right direction.

Against:

1. The index has limitations. Many indicators, like access to electricity or bank accounts, are permanent improvements, meaning households will not be deprived in the future. This creates a downward bias in poverty estimates.
2. Additionally, the index does not account for income vulnerability, which should be measured.

Delays in local body elections in India

Source: The post Delays in local body elections in India has been created, based on the article "**Delays in civic polls put spotlight on 'weak' state election commissions**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 25th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2-policy-Election

Context: The article discusses delays in local body elections across India despite constitutional mandates under the 73rd and 74th Amendments. Weak State Election Commissions, ward delimitation issues, and government inaction are key reasons behind these delays in urban and rural elections.

For detailed information on Challenges faced by local bodies in India read [Article1](#), [Article2](#)

What are the constitutional provisions for local elections?

1. **73rd and 74th Amendments:** Gave constitutional status to panchayats and urban local bodies (ULBs).
2. **Articles 243U and 243E:** Mandate elections before the expiry of local bodies' terms.
3. **Articles 243K and 243ZA:** Empower State Election Commissions (SECs) to oversee elections.

What are the conditions of local body elections in India?

1. **Frequent Delays:** Elections to local bodies are often delayed, as seen in Uttarakhand (over a year), Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (last elections in 2017), and Bengaluru (term ended in 2020, no elections since).
2. **Non-adherence to Schedule:** The 73rd and 74th Amendments mandate timely elections, but no fixed schedule exists for these.
3. **Weak SECs:** Only 11 out of 35 states empower SECs for ward delimitation; in most states, this is controlled by governments.
4. **Ward Delimitation Issues:** Delays result from government inaction and legal disputes, such as Nagaland's 20-year delay over women's reservation objections.
5. **Operational Delays:** Even after elections, state governments delay operationalising councils by 11 months on average.
6. **Widespread Problem:** 61% of ULBs in 15 major states (Janaagraha, 2023) and 60% nationwide (CAG, 2024) experienced delays.

What does the Kovind committee propose for simultaneous elections?

1. The Kovind committee, led by former President Ram Nath Kovind, proposed a structured approach to simultaneous elections in India:

- **Simultaneous Elections:** Advocates for synchronized polls for the Lok Sabha and state legislative Assemblies.
- **Local Body Elections:** Recommends that elections to rural and urban local bodies occur within 100 days of the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. This includes 256,990 gram panchayats and over 2 million rural wards, alongside 3,408 municipalities and 80,436 urban wards.
- **Objective:** Aims to streamline election processes and reduce the frequency of elections across different levels of government.

2. **Exclusion in the 129th Amendment Bill (2024):** The bill proposed simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections but excluded local body polls.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons behind delays in local body elections in India despite constitutional mandates under the 73rd and 74th Amendments.

The Decline of Progress in Modern America

Source: The post The Decline of Progress in Modern America has been created, based on the article "The end of progress?" published in "Business Standard" on 25th January 2025

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 decline of progress in America, highlighting the erosion of Enlightenment values under Trump's leadership. It raises concerns about corruption, weakened institutions, inequality, and reduced investments in science, education, and public welfare, impacting global progress. For detailed information on **The Decline of America's Leadership** [read this article here](#)

How did Enlightenment values drive progress, and why are they under threat?

- 1. Enlightenment Values and Progress:** Enlightenment thinkers believed in the power of scientific experimentation and the rule of law to advance society. These values led to transformative technologies and improvements in living standards.
- 2. Threats to Enlightenment Values:** Under Trump's leadership, there is an outright rejection of Enlightenment values like respect for truth and expertise. This shift is evident in policies and rhetoric that undermine scientific research and educational institutions.
- 3. Example of Decline:** Trump proposed massive cuts in research funding, threatening the U.S.'s leadership in science and technology, historically driven by Enlightenment principles of rational inquiry and investment in knowledge.

What challenges does America face in maintaining progress, and how has MAGA leadership exacerbated these issues?

- 1. Poverty:** 16% of American children live in poverty, highlighting inequality.
- 2. Education:** U.S. education is mediocre, with poor international assessment performance.
- 3. Health:** Life expectancy in America is the lowest among major advanced economies.
- 4. Corruption:** Open campaign contributions, like Tesla's \$465 million loan under Obama, now serve elite interests.
- 5. Institutional Attacks:** MAGA undermines knowledge institutions and reduces funding for research and education.
- 6. Budget Cuts:** Trump proposed massive cuts to research funding during his first term.
- 7. Global Impact:** A weakened U.S. affects global progress, with China advancing through long-term planning and technological investments.

What Are the Possible Futures for America?

1. Scenario 1: Reaffirming Enlightenment Values

America could address its deep problems, reject the MAGA movement, and recommit to progress through science, education, and fairness.

2. Scenario 2: Oligarchic Capitalism

America and China may continue with oligarchic and authoritarian capitalism, leading to reduced shared prosperity. For example, Trump's cuts to research funding and neglect of public welfare signal this trajectory.

3. Scenario 3: Europe's Leadership

While America and China stagnate, Europe could champion progressive capitalism and social democracy.

4. The second scenario is deemed most likely, with America's systemic issues worsening global progress.

What Are the Global Implications?

1. **Impact on Global Economy:** The shift towards oligarchic practices in the U.S. might set a precedent for other nations, potentially destabilizing international economic relations.

2. **Global Leadership Shift:** With declining U.S. investments in science, China's commitment to long-term innovation might shift global leadership in technology toward China.

3. **Potential for Conflict:** The decline in U.S. leadership could lead to more authoritarian forms of governance globally, as seen in the parallel with China's state capitalism.

4. **Historical Patterns:** Past political shifts, such as the rise of fascism, led to global turmoil. The article suggests that a similar destabilization could recur, affecting international law and security.

Question for practice:

Examine how the erosion of Enlightenment values under MAGA leadership has impacted America's progress and its global implications.

India and Indonesia strengthen ties under Prabowo

Source: The post India and Indonesia strengthen ties under Prabowo has been created, based on the article "President Prabowo Subianto's Republic Day visit could pave the way for deeper India-Indonesia ties" published in "Indian Express" on 25th January 2025

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

Context: The article highlights growing India-Indonesia ties during President Prabowo's visit. It emphasizes collaboration in BRICS, the Indo-Pacific, trilateral partnerships, and ASEAN forums. The focus is on overcoming differences, enhancing strategic ties, and shaping the Indo-Pacific's future together.

For detailed information on **Indonesia's new President, his controversial past, and strategic importance** [read this article here](#)

What is the significance of President Prabowo's Visit to India?

1. **Strengthening Strategic Partnership:** The visit aims to establish a broader and more strategic India-Indonesia partnership, reflecting Prabowo's vision of Indonesia as a global player beyond ASEAN.

2. **Past Cooperation:** Collaboration during India and Indonesia's consecutive G20 presidencies in 2022 and 2023 enhanced bilateral ties.

What Challenges Does the New Partnership Face?

1. Building Rapport Between Foreign Ministers:

- The success of the partnership depends on how India's S Jaishankar and Indonesia's new foreign minister, Sugiono, establish a working relationship.
- A strong ministerial rapport is necessary to achieve the high-profile Modi-Prabowo dynamic, which was limited under the Modi-Jokowi relationship.

2. Managing Differences Over China:

- Indonesia has deep economic ties with China, making it cautious in aligning fully with India's stance on Beijing.
- Despite this, Prabowo's tendency for autonomous policymaking creates room for collaboration beyond the "China factor."

3. **Myanmar Issue:** India and Indonesia hold different views on Myanmar, but their continued dialogue presents an opportunity to find common ground.

What Opportunities Does the New Partnership Face?

1. **BRICS Membership:** Indonesia joined BRICS in 2023, opening avenues for collaboration similar to India and Brazil's cooperation within the bloc.

2. **Indo-Pacific Collaboration:** Indonesia now supports India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and has committed to the maritime resources pillar, aligning with ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

3. **Trilateral Frameworks:** Partnerships with Australia and Japan, especially through security initiatives like Japan's Official Security Assistance (OSA) to Indonesia, offer new possibilities for strategic collaboration.

4. **ASEAN Integration:** Inviting Indonesia to join BIMSTEC could further enhance its role in India's eastern neighborhood.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges and opportunities in strengthening the India-Indonesia strategic partnership under President Prabowo's leadership.

Threats to India's constitutional values

Source: The post threats to India's constitutional values has been created, based on the article "Reclaiming the Republic's founding values" published in "Indian Express" on 25th January 2025

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

Context: The article highlights threats to India's constitutional values, including rising religious majoritarianism, economic inequality, weakened federalism, and crony capitalism. It urges restoring secularism, socialism, welfare, and federalism while defending the Constitution's vision of justice, equality, and dignity for all.

For detailed information on **India's Inequality and Neoliberal Reforms Versus Constitution** [read this article here](#)

What Threats Does India's Republic Face?

- 1. Religious Majoritarianism:** Rising communalism undermines India's secular identity. Lynching incidents against Muslims and violations of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, show growing intolerance. Ambedkar warned that "Hindu raj" would harm India.
- 2. Economic Inequality:** Wealth concentration has increased, leaving marginalized groups excluded. Economic democracy, envisioned in the Constitution, is undermined by privatization, weakened labor rights, and pro-corporate policies.
- 3. Erosion of Federalism:** Centralization of power disrupts state autonomy. The misuse of governors and proposals like "One Nation, One Election" weaken the Union's federal structure. Cultural and linguistic uniformity threatens diversity.
- 4. Crony Capitalism:** Pro-corporate agendas exacerbate inequality. Welfare state principles in the Directive Principles, like reducing income and status disparities, are neglected.

For detailed information on **Indianness of the Constitution** [read this article here](#)

What Should be Done to restore the Republic?

1. Protect secularism, socialism, and welfare state principles enshrined in the Constitution.
2. Oppose crony capitalism and restore labor rights.
3. Strengthen federalism by respecting state autonomy and diversity.
4. Uphold constitutional values of justice, equality, and dignity for all citizens.

Question for practice:

Examine the threats faced by India's Republic and suggest measures to restore its constitutional values.

Threats to India's constitutional values

Source: The post threats to India's constitutional values has been created, based on the article "**New study reveals how microplastics can potentially affect the brain, cognitive function: Study**" published in "**Down to Earth**" on 24th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment- Pollution

Context: The article discusses a study on how microplastics may block blood flow in the brain, impairing brain function and causing cognitive issues in mice. The researchers warn that it's uncertain if this will have the same effect on humans and call for more research.

For detailed information on **Project on Microplastic Contamination** [read this article here](#)

What are microplastics and where are they found?

1. Microplastics are plastic particles smaller than 5 millimeters. They originate from small plastic pellets or when larger plastics break down over time.
2. These particles are everywhere, from oceans and land to Antarctic ice and human environments.
3. Microplastics can travel through the atmosphere and enter the human body. Their presence has been confirmed in various ecosystems and human settlements.

How do microplastics impact brain function in mice?

1. **Observation in the cerebral cortex:** Researchers tracked microplastics in the mouse brain using imaging techniques. These particles were observed in the blood vessels of the cerebral cortex, a brain region responsible for awareness, memory, and movement.
2. **Blockage of blood vessels:** Immune cells detected and engulfed microplastics in the bloodstream, leading to blockages in blood vessels. This obstructed blood flow, impairing brain function.
3. **Cognitive and neurobehavioral effects:** Mice displayed cognitive impairments and neurobehavioral abnormalities, including depressive-like states.
4. **Weight loss in mice:** Mice showed weight loss, possibly due to reduced movement and changes in feeding behavior.
5. **Persistence of microplastics:** Microplastics were not cleared from the body for at least a week, contributing to their prolonged effects.
6. **Susceptibility in mice:** The small diameter of blood vessels in mice (less than 100 micrometers) increases the likelihood of blockages compared to humans.

Can the findings in mice apply to humans?

Researchers warn against directly applying these results to humans. Human circulatory systems are larger, and blood vessels have different diameters, making blockages less likely. For example, human coronary arteries are about 4 mm wide, while mouse vessels are less than 100 micrometers.

Conclusion

The study reveals alarming effects of microplastics on mice but emphasizes caution in extrapolating the findings to humans. The potential impact on human health, particularly neurological and cardiovascular disorders, requires urgent and detailed research.

Question for practice:

Discuss the potential effects of microplastics on brain function and overall health based on the findings in mice.

Global Failures in Preventing Genocides and Atrocities

Source: The post Global Failures in Preventing Genocides and Atrocities has been created, based on the article “**Genocide and the world’s averted gaze**” Published in “**The Hindu**” on 27th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper2- International Relations-Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

Context: The article discusses the Holocaust, genocide at Auschwitz, and international failures to prevent atrocities in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, and Gaza. It questions global inaction, the line between self-defense and genocide, and the unequal treatment of suffering.

For detailed information on **Genocide convention: Preventing genocide** [read this article here](#)

What happened at Auschwitz during the Holocaust?

1. On January 27, 1945, Soviet soldiers liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau. They discovered 8,000 emaciated prisoners and evidence of mass killings, including 44,000 pairs of shoes, spectacles, and cooking utensils.
2. Approximately 1.1 million people, mostly European Jews, were murdered at Auschwitz.
3. The Nazis destroyed records to hide the full scale of the killings.
4. The Holocaust killed six million Jews and tens of thousands of Roma, Sinti, and others deemed inferior.

How did genocide unfold in Nazi Germany?

1. The Nazis codified Jewish persecution through laws like the 1935 Nuremberg Laws. Jews lost citizenship and faced emigration restrictions.
2. Countries like the U.S. and U.K. imposed strict immigration policies, leaving many Jews unable to escape. As Germany invaded Europe, Jews were rounded up for extermination.

How Did the Allies respond to the Holocaust?

1. The Allies were aware of Nazi atrocities by 1942 through reports like the **Riegner Telegram** and the Polish Government-in-Exile’s pamphlet *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland* (December 1942).
2. Despite evidence, action was limited. At the **Evian Conference (1938)**, 32 countries offered only sympathetic statements but no concrete solutions.
3. By the **Bermuda Conference (1943)**, mass killings were unambiguous, yet the Allies failed to act decisively to aid Jewish refugees.

4. Bureaucratic obstacles, xenophobia, and restrictive immigration laws in the U.S. and U.K. further prevented Jews from escaping Nazi persecution.

Have genocides occurred after the Holocaust?

Despite the promise of "Never again," genocides continued:

Cambodia (1975-79): The Khmer Rouge killed over two million people.

Rwanda (1994): 800,000 to 1,000,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in 100 days.

Srebrenica (1995): 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were massacred in a UN-declared safe zone.

Darfur (2003-05): About 200,000 people were killed in Sudan.

What is happening in Gaza today?

1. Gaza faces severe destruction. Over 47,000 people, mostly women and children, have died.
2. The UN reports 92% of homes, 87% of schools and much infrastructure destroyed.
3. Healthcare infrastructure is devastated, and entire populations have been displaced multiple times.
4. **10,000 people** are estimated to be missing under the rubble.
5. Gaza remains under siege, with foreign press barred from entering.
6. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating genocide charges against Israeli and Hamas leaders.
7. Despite the destruction, arms continue to flow to Israel. This reflects a global tendency to prioritize political alliances over humanitarian concerns.

Why is there criticism of global responses?

The international community often ignores or delays action during genocides. Gaza highlights unequal treatment, with some leaders defending actions that may cross into genocide. This questions the global tendency to "look away" from such crises.

Question for practice:

Examine how the Holocaust and subsequent genocides reflect global failures in preventing atrocities and addressing humanitarian crises.

Trump's Second Term Shapes Indo-Pacific Strategy

Source: The post Trump's Second Term Shapes Indo-Pacific Strategy has been created, based on the article "An enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific" published in "The Hindu" on 27th January 2025

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

Context: The article discusses Donald Trump's second term as U.S. President, focusing on his strong emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region. It highlights his efforts to deepen security, economic, and technological cooperation with Quad nations to counter China's influence and ensure regional stability.

For detailed information on **Trump's Second Term Reshapes America and World** [read this article here](#)

What is the significance of Trump's second term for global geopolitics?

1. Donald Trump's second term as U.S. President marks a historic political comeback.
2. It has significant implications for global geopolitics, especially in the Indo-Pacific region.
3. Foreign ministers from India, Japan, and Australia attended his inauguration, highlighting the importance of the Quad alliance in his foreign policy.
4. Trump's administration aims to deepen defense, economic, and technological cooperation with like-minded nations to address challenges and maintain regional stability.

How did Trump redefine the Indo-Pacific during his first term?

1. **Adoption of the term 'Indo-Pacific':** Trump replaced 'Asia-Pacific' with 'Indo-Pacific,' expanding the geographic scope to include the Indian Ocean. This shift emphasized maritime security, global trade routes, and countering China's growing influence.
2. **Structural changes in defense:** In 2018, the U.S. Pacific Command was renamed the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, reflecting its operational focus on this region. Specialized units in the U.S. Department of Defense were created to strengthen partnerships with Indo-Pacific nations.
3. **Revival of the Quad:** Trump prioritized the Quad alliance (U.S., India, Japan, and Australia), elevating its dialogue to the ministerial level. This promoted collaboration in maritime security, resilient supply chains, and technology.

What are the prospects for the Indo-Pacific in Trump 2.0?

1. **Continuation of bipartisan focus:** Trump is expected to take a more assertive stance against China. However, he will rely on Quad nations (India, Japan, and Australia) to share the responsibility for regional security.
2. **Early Quad initiatives:** The administration's first foreign policy move was a Quad foreign ministers' meeting. Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasized China as the U.S.'s greatest adversary and highlighted the Quad's commitment to peace, maritime security, and resilient supply chains.
3. **Joint priorities:** The Quad reaffirmed their dedication to international law and regional stability. They planned regular meetings and a leaders' summit to be hosted by India.

4. Trump's second term will likely focus more on hard power dynamics, adapting to the evolving Indo-Pacific landscape. He may enhance security frameworks while also supporting broader mechanisms that uphold the rules-based order and regional prosperity.

Question for practice:

Discuss the significance of Donald Trump's second term for the Indo-Pacific region and its implications for global geopolitics.

India advancements in 2025 space technology

Source: The post India advancements in 2025 space technology has been created, based on the article "Indian space programme breaks into 2025 on 'mission mode'" published in "The Hindu" on 27th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Science and Technology-Awareness in the fields of Space

Context: The article highlights India's advancements in space technology in early 2025. It discusses ISRO's successful SpaDeX docking experiment, the POEM4 mission with various payloads, and private space companies' contributions. It also mentions leadership changes at ISRO, approvals for a third launch pad, Vikas engine tests, and progress in solar research through the Aditya-L1 mission.

For detailed information on **Space sector in India** [read this article here](#)

What is the SpaDeX Docking Experiment?

1. **SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)** is an ISRO mission to achieve in-orbit satellite docking, a critical step for space stations and lunar missions.
2. It was launched on **December 30, 2024**, aboard the **PSLV-C60** from Sriharikota.
3. The two satellites were deployed into a **475-km circular orbit** and gradually maneuvered to dock.
4. Initial docking attempts started on **January 7, 2025**, but faced challenges due to unexpected drift.
5. After multiple adjustments, the satellites successfully docked on **January 16, 2025** at a distance of 3 meters.
6. Post-docking, both satellites were controlled together, showcasing operational readiness for **lunar and space-station docking**.
7. The experiment involved private companies like **Kepler Aerospace** for ground support and **s2a systems** for tracking satellite separation.

What was the role of POEM4 in space experiments?

The role of POEM4 in space experiments was multifaceted and crucial for advancing space technology:

1. **Testbed for Technology:** POEM4 utilized the PSLV's fourth stage as an orbital platform, hosting 24 payloads from ISRO, academia, and the private sector.

2. **Robotic Demonstrations:** Technologies tested included ISRO's Relocatable Robotic Manipulator, which demonstrated movement capabilities, and the Debris Capture Robotic Arm Manipulator, aimed at capturing space debris.

3. **Plant Growth Experiments:** The Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies successfully germinated cowpea seeds, studying plant growth in space.

4. **Propulsion Experiments:** Manastu Space tested its green propulsion system, achieving a significant tilt of the stage. Bellatrix Aerospace conducted similar tests, further proving the module's capabilities in maneuvering in orbit.

5. **Communication and Imaging:** N Space Tech's SwetchaSAT-V0 tested communications across different bands, and GalaxEye's payload created synthetic-aperture radar images, enhancing imaging techniques in space.

How did private companies contribute to the missions?

1. **Kepler Aerospace:** Provided ground station-as-a-service for the SpaDeX mission, enabling command and control of two satellites simultaneously.

2. **Pixxel Space:** Launched three hyperspectral satellites as India's first private satellite constellation, with deployment successful and two-way communication established.

3. **Digantara:** Launched the Space Camera for Object Tracking to enhance space situational awareness.

4. **XDLINX Labs:** Deployed a miniaturized communications satellite that transmitted a "hello from space" message.

What other developments happened at ISRO?

1. V. Narayanan replaced S. Somanath as ISRO chairman on January 14, 2025.

2. The Union Cabinet approved Rs 3,984.86 crore for a third launch pad at Sriharikota, operational by 2029.

3. ISRO successfully tested the restart capability of the Vikas engine for atmospheric operations.

Conclusion

India's space programme is progressing rapidly in 2025 with successful missions, private sector involvement, and leadership changes. These advancements are laying the groundwork for future human spaceflights, lunar missions, and the Bharatiya Antariksh Station.

Question for practice:

Discuss the role of private companies in advancing India's space missions in 2025.

India Need a Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology (CCST)

Source: The post has been created, based on the article “A cabinet committee on science and technology is a must today” published in “Live mint” on 27th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Science and Technology and GS Paper 2- Governance-Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors

Context: The article advocates for creating a Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology (CCST) in India, chaired by the Prime Minister. This committee would coordinate policies, manage trade-offs, oversee strategic plans, and strengthen India’s position in the global technology race.

Why Does India Need a Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology (CCST)?

1. Global Politics Driven by Technology

- Technology is now the foundation of global politics.
- The U.S. protects its semiconductor and AI industries as national interests, while China uses its tech sector to further Communist Party goals.
- India needs a strategic approach to navigate this global tech race and respond to challenges like sanctions and export controls.

2. Managing Cross-Ministerial Trade-Offs

- Ministries often face conflicting goals. For example, while the railway ministry plans full electrification for modernization, diesel locomotives are critical for defence preparedness and troop mobility.
- A CCST can resolve such trade-offs by ensuring coordinated decisions across departments.

3. Modernizing Strategic Programme Management

- Expertise in technology is now spread across private industries, research institutions, and public enterprises.
- National missions like AI, quantum computing, genomics, and aerospace need cross-sector collaboration for effective implementation.
- A CCST can unify these efforts and balance the need for speed with long-term planning.

4. Making Strategic Decisions

- Technology policy requires prioritization: Should India prioritize market competition or global scale?
- Should climate goals outweigh energy needs for AI data centers?
- A CCST can provide direction for such dilemmas and ensure alignment between Union and state policies.

What Can India Learn from China?

1. China has set up a Central Science and Technology Commission (CSTC) to oversee its tech ecosystem, approve mega-projects, and align science with political goals.
2. Although this approach has risks, it has helped China maintain a strong global tech presence.

Conclusion

The establishment of a CCST would help India navigate and excel in the ongoing global tech competition, ensuring strategic alignment and effective use of resources at both the national and state levels. This approach mirrors actions taken by other major powers like China, emphasizing the strategic necessity of such a committee.

Question for practice:

Examine the need for a Cabinet Committee on Science and Technology (CCST) in India and its potential role in addressing global technological challenges and internal policy trade-offs.

Current state of India's tax system

This post on **Current state of India's tax system** has been created based on article **"Our tax system retards growth. It's time for an overhaul"** published in The Indian Express on 27th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy

Context: The article critiques the current state of India's tax system, particularly its Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, and calls for an overhaul to prioritize economic growth rather than revenue maximization. Using the symbolism of the Roman god Janus, the author reflects on past policy decisions and their consequences, urging introspection and forward-thinking reforms for the coming years.

What issues arose from the 55th GST Council meeting?

1. **Policy Backsliding:** Chronic tinkering with GST rates continues, alongside retrospective amendments to nullify Supreme Court judgments.
2. **Example of Retrospective Taxation:** The council nullified a Supreme Court ruling that allowed input tax credits for warehouses and infrastructure projects, sending a message that even court victories can be overruled.
3. **Impact on Investment:** Such amendments undermine India's reputation as an investment destination, signaling disrespect for the rule of law.

How does retrospective taxation affect India's economy?

1. **Historical Example:** The Vodafone case resulted in an international arbitration award of ₹8,000 crore against India.
2. **Present Issue:** Retrospective amendments discourage foreign investment, increase policy uncertainty, and harm India's image as a rule-of-law-driven country.
3. **Proposed Resolution:** No more retrospective amendments should be a key policy change.

What is the core flaw in GST Council's functioning?

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1. **Revenue-Centric Approach:** The Council prioritizes revenue maximization over growth, often publicizing exaggerated claims of tax evasion.
2. **Lack of Simplification:** Complex notifications, arbitrary demands, and inadequate appellate systems remain unaddressed.
3. **Input Tax Credit Denials:** Denying credits on lease rentals and joint development rights hampers the real estate sector and the broader economy.

What are the proposed reforms to simplify GST?

1. **Streamlining Rates:** Introduce a single GST rate of 12% for hotels/restaurants and a maximum rate of 18% for essential sectors like cement.
2. **Economic Impact Studies:** Analyze whether lower tax rates could boost demand and, ultimately, tax collections.
3. **Sector-Specific Adjustments:** Exempting certain real estate activities from GST could make affordable housing more viable.

How do high tax rates and complex systems harm the economy?

1. **Historical Parallels:** India's pre-1991 tax system, focused on high rates and exemptions, stifled economic growth.
2. **Current Trends:** Signs of reverting to old practices are evident, benefiting professionals like lawyers and accountants but burdening businesses.
3. **Adverse Outcomes:**
 - a. Increased imports from China (from \$70 billion in 2018-19 to \$100 billion in 2023-24).
 - b. Manufacturing's GDP share falling below 15%.
 - c. Continued rupee depreciation.

What is the proposed way forward for the tax system?

1. **Growth Maximization Framework:** Shift focus from revenue collection to economic growth.
2. **Reforms 2.0:** Introduce a long-term fiscal policy for 2025-2030 to enable 9-10% annual GDP growth.
3. **Philosophical Shift:** Recognize that taxes should be the byproduct of growth, not the primary goal.

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution

This post on **Article 370 of the Indian Constitution** has been created based on article “**In our Constitution, two competing visions of power**” published in The Indian Express on 27th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 2- Polity

Context: The article provides a detailed critique and analysis of the Supreme Court's judgment on the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. It also ties the discussion to historical debates that took

place during the framing of the Constitution, particularly the tensions between uniformity and diversity in federal arrangements.

What is the context of the Supreme Court's judgment on Article 370?

1. In December 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the abrogation of Article 370, which granted Jammu and Kashmir special status.
2. While the judgment was largely discussed in political terms, the constitutional reasoning behind it was relatively overlooked.
3. This case highlighted the constitutional philosophy of "integration," which played a pivotal role in the Court's interpretation.

What was the Court's constitutional reasoning regarding Article 370?

1. The Court noted that Article 370 originated from unique historical circumstances aimed at ensuring the gradual "integration" of Jammu and Kashmir into India.
2. While rejecting the government's constitutional mechanism for the abrogation, the Court concluded that Article 370 granted the President unilateral authority to revoke the provision.
3. This interpretation involved bypassing the clause that required a recommendation from Jammu and Kashmir's Constituent Assembly.

What definition of "integration" did the Court adopt?

1. The Court implicitly defined "integration" as homogeneity, arguing that the existence of a special status for a state was incompatible with integration.
2. For the Court, true integration necessitated uniform constitutional relationships between all states and the Union.
3. The petitioners challenged the Court's definition, arguing that integration should reflect India's diversity and constitutional pluralism. They contended that Article 370 symbolized the recognition of India's heterogeneity and that diversity, rather than homogeneity, was essential for true integration.

How does this debate connect to India's constitutional history?

1. This contest mirrors earlier debates in the Constituent Assembly regarding the Fifth and Sixth Schedules, which provided special autonomous arrangements for Adivasi populations.
2. Critics feared these provisions might encourage secessionism, while leaders like Jaipal Munda defended them as expressions of coexistence and mutual respect within the Union.

What broader constitutional question does the Article 370 case highlight?

1. The case reflects the enduring tension between centralization and decentralization in India's federal framework.
2. The Constitution has always been a site for competing visions of power: one emphasizing uniformity and centralization, and the other advocating for diversity and decentralization.

How has power distribution evolved in the Indian Constitution over 75 years?

1. Since its inception, the Indian Constitution has exhibited a tendency toward centralization.
2. This trend is partly embedded in the constitutional text and reinforced by Supreme Court judgments.
3. While such centralizing tendencies were justified in 1950, it is crucial to question whether they remain relevant in the pluralistic and diverse India of 2025.

What is the significance of debating these constitutional visions today?

1. As the Indian Constitution completes 75 years, critically examining its legacy of power distribution is essential.
2. The act of questioning whether centralization continues to serve India's pluralistic society is the truest tribute to the Constitution and its enduring relevance.

State of the Indian Economy Before Budget 2025-26

This post on **State of the Indian Economy Before Budget 2025-26** has been created based on article "[State of economy before the Budget](#)" published on **The Indian express** on **27th January 2025**.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3-Economy

Context: The article provides an analysis of India's economic condition leading up to the Union Budget announcement.

What is the government's current economic stance?

1. The government is seen as **pro-corporates and pro-cronies**, with corporate profits increasing from ₹10,88,000 crore in 2022-23 to ₹14,11,000 crore in 2023-24.
2. During these two years, **scheduled commercial banks wrote off corporate loans** amounting to ₹2,09,144 crore and ₹1,70,000 crore, respectively.

How has India's economic growth evolved over the years?

1. Growth in the last three decades has been impressive compared to the 1950s-80s, primarily due to liberalization, enabling people to produce, trade, and innovate.
2. Despite this, the economy is **growing at 6-7%**, which, although faster than many large economies, adds less in absolute terms to GDP compared to the U.S. (USD 787 billion) and China (USD 895 billion). India added only USD 256 billion in 2024.

Why is the growth rate falling?

1. **Key drivers of growth** such as private consumption, public investment, and private investment are declining.
2. **Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)** (constant prices) in three recent quarters was ₹22,82,980 crore, ₹23,42,610 crore, and ₹24,82,288 crore, reflecting slow consumption growth.
3. **Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE)** in the same quarters was ₹3,36,707 crore, ₹3,83,709 crore, and ₹4,00,698 crore.

What are the reasons for sluggish private consumption?

1. **Inflation:** Food inflation averaged 6.18% (2012-2024), with healthcare costs rising 14% annually and education costs by 11%.
2. **Stagnant wages:** Between 2017 and 2023, real wages of agricultural workers (male) increased from ₹138/day to ₹158/day, while construction workers' wages rose from ₹176/day to ₹205/day. Female workers earn ₹40-45 less on average.

How is investment performing?

1. **Public investment:** Stuck between 6.7-7% of GDP over the past decade.
2. **Private investment:** Ranges between 21-24% of GDP, showing no significant growth.
3. **Central government capital expenditure:** Declined from 4.7% of GDP (2019-20) to 3.8% (2023-24).

What is the state of inflation and unemployment?

1. Inflation remains a **millstone**, particularly for essentials like food, healthcare, and education.
2. **Unemployment:** CMIE reports an all-India rate of 8.1% in December 2024. Youth and gender-based unemployment figures paint an even bleaker picture.

What about income tax and relief measures?

1. In FY 2023-24, **6.68% of the population filed income tax returns** (8.09 crore). Of these, **4.9 crore filers** paid zero tax.
2. While providing relief to taxpayers is important, relief for daily wage earners is even more critical.

What are the challenges with India's tax structure?

1. The **complicated GST system** disproportionately affects the poor and middle class. Tax simplification is essential to reduce economic burdens.
2. The **fiscal deficit** and **revenue deficit** are major concerns.
3. Public perception is influenced by the government's actions, with debates on whether the upcoming budget will adequately address these economic challenges.

Understanding Global Power Shifts and Emerging Influences

Source: The post Understanding Global Power Shifts and Emerging Influences has been created, based on the article "Today's world is literally and metaphorically bipolar" published in "Live mint" on 28th January 2025

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 global power structure, highlighting a bipolar world dominated by the US and China. It emphasizes economic strength, trade networks, and reforms as key for emerging powers like India to gain influence and join global leadership platforms.

What is the global power structure today?

1. The world is largely bipolar, dominated by the US and China.
2. The US remains powerful due to military strength, global alliances, and the dollar as a reserve currency.
3. China has risen as a near-peer competitor with strategic trade investments and initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
4. Emerging powers like India and others are yet to reach the level of being a 'pole.'

For detailed information on **No, the US-led global order is not collapsing** [read this article here](#)

How does defence spending influence power?

1. **US Defence Spending:** The US spends more on defence than the next five countries combined (Russia, India, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and Germany). This allows the US to maintain about 750 military bases globally, with 350 in strategic locations like Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Italy.
2. **China's Efficiency:** China spends only a third of the US defence budget but has emerged as a near-peer adversary. Its influence stems from trade, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and strategic bases like Djibouti.
3. **Russia's Limitations:** Despite its large nuclear arsenal and resources, Russia lacks economic strength and diversity, limiting its global influence.
4. **Emerging Powers:** Countries like India and Indonesia lag behind as they need economic growth and reforms before becoming influential powers.
5. Thus, defence spending impacts power but requires complementary economic and strategic initiatives.

How does China expand its global influence?

1. **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):** China invests heavily in infrastructure projects across Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia to build economic partnerships.
2. **Strategic Bases:** China has established its first international military base in Djibouti, strategically located near the Red Sea and Suez Canal.
3. **Listening Posts:** It operates listening posts in Cuba and Kazakhstan for strategic monitoring.
4. **Trade and Investment:** China focuses on trade-led influence in regions like the Caribbean and its maritime zones, boosting economic interdependence.
5. **Cost Efficiency:** Despite spending only a third of the US defence budget, China rapidly expands global influence through economic means.

How can India increase its global influence?

- 1. Focus on Economic Strength:** India must prioritize creating inclusive prosperity, achieve upper-middle-income status, and balance fiscal and current accounts to strengthen its foundation for influence.
- 2. Leverage G7 Membership:** India has been invited to 11 G7 outreach meetings. Securing permanent membership would enhance its role in global economic discussions.
- 3. Join Key Trade Groups:** Joining plurilateral trade groups like CPTPP or RCEP is crucial to becoming part of global supply chains, which increasingly involve multiple countries.
- 4. Expand Trade Networks:** Strengthening trade networks will help India gain influence in international trade and economic systems.
- 5. Undertake Domestic Reforms:** Reforms to enhance economic efficiency and competitiveness are necessary for long-term growth and global recognition.
- 6. Highlight Economic Indicators:** India's GDP, measured in both exchange rates and PPP, places it among the world's largest economies and strengthens its claim to global leadership.
- 7. Manage Bipolar Dynamics:** India should recognize the current US-China bipolar structure and strategically navigate this landscape to expand its influence.

For detailed information on **India's Growing Stature – A Rising Power** [read this article here](#)

Question for practice:

Examine how economic strength, defence spending, and strategic initiatives shape global influence in the current bipolar world.

Regulatory and Health Issues of Alcoholic Tinctures

Source: The post Regulatory and Health Issues of Alcoholic Tinctures has been created, based on the article "Getting drunk, on homoeopathy" published in "The Hindu" on 28th January 2025

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

Context: The article discusses the public health risks of alcoholic tinctures marketed as homeopathic remedies in India. It highlights regulatory challenges, weak enforcement, and legal hurdles, emphasizing the harm to health and revenue, especially with high alcohol content in such products.

For detailed information on **Methanol poisoning deaths due to Spurious alcohol in India** [read this article here](#)

What is the Issue with Alcoholic Tinctures in India?

- 1. High Alcohol Content:** Homoeopathic tinctures contain up to 12% alcohol, significantly higher than "strong beer," which has 7% alcohol. This makes them attractive substitutes for alcoholic beverages.

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2. **Public Health Risk:** Regular consumption of these tinctures can cause serious illnesses, such as alcoholic hepatitis. Unsuspecting consumers believe they are remedies without realizing their alcohol content.

3. **Deaths in Prohibition States:** States like Bihar and Gujarat, which prohibit alcohol, reported deaths due to spurious tinctures.

4. **Regulatory Gap:** Public health and alcohol taxation are State responsibilities, but States cannot regulate tinctures due to the Union's Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

5. **Taxation Loophole:** Medicinal alcohol is taxed at 18% (Union rate), much lower than State taxes on alcoholic beverages, causing revenue losses.

6. **Legal Challenges:** Rule 106B (1994) limits tincture sales but faces prolonged litigation by the homoeopathy industry, delaying enforcement.

How Does the Constitution Regulate These Tinctures?

1. **State Role:** Public health and alcohol taxation fall under State jurisdiction as per List II of Schedule VII.

2. **Union Exception:** Entry 84 of List I allows the Union to tax alcohol meant for medicinal purposes.

3. **Pre-GST Era:** Medicinal alcohol was taxed at 4% under the Medicinal and Toilet Preparations (Excise Duties) Act, 1955.

4. **Post-GST Confusion:** The 101st Constitutional Amendment removed this exception. However, the Union now taxes medicinal alcohol at 18%, still lower than State taxes on alcoholic beverages.

5. **Concurrent List Conflict:** Drugs are in the Concurrent List; States require presidential assent for amendments to the Union's Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.

What Attempt had been made to Regulate Tinctures?

1. **Rule 106B (1994):** The Union government introduced Rule 106B under the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945, limiting retail tincture bottles to 30 ml with 12% alcohol and 100 ml bottles for hospitals.

2. **Industry Resistance:** The homoeopathy industry opposed this rule, challenging it in courts, causing enforcement delays.

3. Judicial Action:

- **Delayed Enforcement:** The Supreme Court transferred 13 cases against Rule 106B to itself in 2017. The matter remains unresolved.

- **Bhagwati Medical Hall Judgment:** The Court ruled that only the Union can regulate homoeopathic tinctures, frustrating State efforts.

For detailed information on **Impacts of the SC ruling on alcohol regulation** [read this article here](#)

What Should be Done?

1. **Amend Legal Framework:** Allow States to regulate and tax homoeopathic tinctures, ensuring accountability under public health laws.
2. **Resolve Litigation:** The Union should lay Rule 106B before Parliament for 30 days to settle ongoing lawsuits.
3. **Enhance Public Awareness:** Labels must warn about health risks, similar to warnings on alcoholic beverages.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the impact of regulatory gaps and legal challenges on the public health and taxation of alcoholic tinctures in India.

India's Budget Priorities for Achieving Climate Goals

Source: The post India's Budget Priorities for Achieving Climate Goals has been created, based on the article "The Union Budget as a turning point for climate action" published in "The Hindu" on 28th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy-Budget and Environment

Context: The article discusses India's need to prioritize climate action in the FY26 Budget. It highlights renewable energy goals, the impact of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, promoting a circular economy, boosting green finance, and improving climate resilience through insurance.

What are the challenges India faces in achieving climate goals?

1. **Renewable Energy Target:** India aims for a renewable energy capacity of 500 GW by 2030 but has currently installed only 203.18 GW.
2. **Scheme Implementation:** The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana has seen low completion rates, with only 6.34 lakh installations out of 1.45 crore registrations (4.37%).
3. **Domestic Manufacturing:** The local production of solar panels meets only 40% of the demand, with domestically manufactured panels costing 65% more than imported ones.
4. **Extreme Weather:** Increasingly frequent extreme weather events add urgency to these challenges.

How can the Budget accelerate India's green energy transition?

1. Enhance PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana:

- Out of 1.45 crore registrations, only 6.34 lakh installations (4.37%) are complete.
- Allocate funds to the Renewable Energy Service Company (RESCO) model to reduce upfront costs for low-income households using credit guarantees and innovative financing.

2. Boost domestic solar manufacturing:

- Domestic production meets only 40% of solar demand, with domestic panels costing 65% more than imports.

- Expand production-linked incentives (PLI) across the solar module supply chain to address this gap and reduce costs.

3. Utilize Railways' land for renewables:

- Railways' land and track corridors have the potential to generate up to 5 GW of solar and wind energy.
- Introduce public-private partnerships to unlock this opportunity.

How can India protect exports from the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)?

1. CBAM starts in 2026 and could impose 20%-50% carbon levies on \$8.22 billion worth of Indian exports to the EU.
2. MSMEs, contributing 30% to GDP and 45% to exports, are most vulnerable.
3. A '**Climate Action Fund**' is needed to support decarbonization in these sectors, similar to Japan's Green Transformation Fund.

How can India transition to a circular economy?

1. A circular economy could yield ₹40 lakh crore (\$624 billion) annually by 2050 while cutting emissions by 44%.
2. Weighted tax deductions (150%) and accelerated depreciation benefits can promote recycling and refurbishment technologies.
3. A sovereign green bond framework should fund circular economy infrastructure.

How can green finance drive India's climate goals?

1. **Green finance is essential to meet India's climate goals:** India requires ₹162.5 trillion (\$2.5 trillion) by 2030 to achieve its Nationally Determined Contributions.
2. **Investor confidence through standardized definitions:** Standardizing green finance definitions can build investor trust, crucial for attracting the necessary investments.
3. **Infrastructure for green finance:** Allocating Budget funds for market readiness programs, verification systems, and financial institution capacity building is necessary to implement effective climate finance taxonomy.
4. **Encouraging investments:** Introducing differential tax treatments for taxonomy-aligned investments can further encourage green investments and help meet climate targets.

Question for practice:

Discuss the challenges India faces in achieving climate goals and how the Budget can address them.

Sri Lanka's recovery and ongoing economic challenges

Source: The post Sri Lanka's recovery and ongoing economic challenges has been created, based on the article "Navigating growth challenges in Sri Lanka" published in "The Hindu" on 28th January 2025

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 Sri Lanka's economic recovery after its worst crisis, supported by IMF aid, Indian assistance, and tourism growth. It highlights challenges like brain drain, inexperienced Parliament, fiscal instability, and geopolitical tensions while urging bold policies for sustainable growth.

For detailed information on **Sri Lanka's efforts to improve its economy** [read this article here](#)

What is the current economic situation in Sri Lanka?

1. Sri Lanka's economy is stabilizing after its worst economic crisis in 2022-23. It defaulted on external debt in April 2022.
2. Prudent policies by the Central Bank, a \$3 billion IMF program, and \$4 billion in Indian aid helped stabilize the economy.
3. Debt restructuring worth \$17.5 billion with private bondholders and China provided relief.
4. Tourism is recovering, with over 2 million visitors in 2024, boosting foreign exchange reserves.

What challenges does Sri Lanka face internally?

1. **Brain Drain:** Over 300,000 skilled professionals left Sri Lanka in 2024, creating a talent gap in sectors like IT, banking, and healthcare. This affects business growth and governance.
2. **Inexperienced Parliament:** Out of 225 MPs, 150 are first-time representatives from the NPP, raising concerns about legislative and policymaking capacity.
3. **Tourism Imbalance:** Despite a 38% rise in tourists (2 million in 2024), benefits remain concentrated in Colombo. Regions like the north and east need promotion.
4. **Fiscal Strain:** Loss-making SOEs, like SriLankan Airlines and Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, drain public funds. Effective restructuring is required.

What are the external factors affecting Sri Lanka?

1. Geopolitical Challenges:

- **Geopolitical Tensions:** The re-election of President Donald Trump in the U.S. impacts regional dynamics, with Sri Lanka needing to navigate its strategic relationships carefully.
- India is crucial to Sri Lanka's economic growth, but relations must balance economic ties with security concerns.

- President Dissanayake has promised non-interference in India's concerns, such as halting visits from Chinese spy ships.

2. Debt Repayments:

- Debt repayment risks will rise by mid-2027.
- Sri Lanka must rely on trade-led growth and partnerships with the IMF, World Bank, and India to avoid another crisis.

What steps can the government take?

The government should focus on:

1. Improving public sector services.
2. Promoting sustainable tourism.
3. Rationalizing spending and restructuring SOEs.
4. Strengthening ties with India through energy projects, digital identity systems, and trade agreements.
5. Presenting a bold and practical National Budget in February 2025 to address these issues effectively.

Question for practice:

Discuss the internal and external challenges Sri Lanka faces in its economic recovery and the steps the government can take to address them.

Why India Should Take a Conservative Approach to Growth Ahead of Budget 2025

This post on **Why India Should Take a Conservative Approach to Growth Ahead of Budget 2025** has been created based on article "[Ahead of Budget 2025, why India should take a conservative approach to growth](#)" published in **The Indian Express** on 28th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy

Context: The article discusses why India should adopt a conservative approach to growth ahead of the 2025 Budget. It emphasizes the importance of achieving sustained, long-term growth with low risk rather than chasing aggressive, short-term targets that could lead to instability.

Why is a conservative approach to growth important for India?

1. A conservative approach allows India to sustain long-term growth with minimal risks. Historical evidence shows that countries relying on debt-fueled growth often face sharp slowdowns or restructuring.
2. For India, achieving consistent 6% real growth over 20 years would increase GDP per capita from \$2,650 to \$10,000 by 2045. Even at 5.5% growth, this target could be achieved by 2047.

3. The timeline (2045 vs. 2047) is less critical than achieving sustainable, low-risk growth over extended periods.

What are the economic assumptions for this growth trajectory?

1. **India Inflation:** 5% per annum
2. **US Inflation:** 2% per annum
3. **INR Depreciation:** 3% per annum
4. **Population Growth:** 1% per annum

What challenges are contributing to the current moderation in growth?

a) Rising Household Indebtedness:

1. Indian households have shifted from borrowing for emergencies or appreciating assets to borrowing for depreciating assets and experiences.
2. Factors like **click-driven EMIs**, social media influence, e-commerce convenience, and lack of incentives for cash-down purchases contribute to debt-led consumption.
3. Rising retail NPAs indicate higher household indebtedness. Debt-fueled consumption shifts growth from the future to the present, leading to eventual payback challenges.

Solution:

1. Encourage cash-down purchases by offering better pricing compared to EMI-based purchases.
2. Evaluate the long-term impact of debt-fueled consumption and tweak risk weights on personal loans.

b) Competition from Chinese Exports:

1. Despite the **China+1 strategy**, India faces stiff competition from China's robust manufacturing base, built over decades of investments and infrastructure development.
2. China's surplus capacity, due to weak domestic demand, is leading to deflation in export prices, affecting Indian exporters.
3. India has potential to grow its manufacturing footprint with government support and favorable geopolitical conditions. However, progress will be slow and challenging.

c) Temporary Global Headwinds:

1. Rising US interest rates, a strong US dollar, and a narrowing yield gap (2.2%) between India and the US.
2. Net FDI has sharply fallen due to MNCs selling stakes in their Indian operations (e.g., Timken, GE Vernova, Whirlpool, Hyundai). These sales are driven by sector valuations, not pessimism about India.

How are stock markets responding to growth narratives?

1. Small and mid-cap stocks have gained popularity due to high returns post-Covid. However, this stems from the sharper fall they experienced during the downturn. For instance:
 - a. Large-caps fell from 100 to 70 during Covid, resulting in a 40% recovery.
 - b. Small/mid-caps fell from 100 to 30, yielding over 200% recovery to return to 100.
2. Nearly **75% of current demat accounts** (out of 20 crore) were opened post-Covid, meaning new investors lack experience with earlier market cycles like 1992, 2000, or 2008.
3. Investors should remember the principle of "reversion to the mean," as highlighted by John C. Bogle, and temper expectations of sustained small/mid-cap outperformance.

What should policymakers and investors focus on?

For Policymakers:

1. Prioritize sustainable growth with low risk rather than short-term acceleration.
2. Address the rising indebtedness by promoting financial literacy and discouraging debt-fueled consumption.
3. Support manufacturing growth with better policies and infrastructure, recognizing the slow progress.

For Investors:

1. Avoid being swayed by IPO frenzies or small/mid-cap hype. Understand the cyclical nature of markets and adopt a long-term perspective.

Debate surrounding MSP

This post on **Debate surrounding MSP** has been created based on article "[MSP is not enough. Government should become key player in markets to relieve farmer distress](#)" published in **The Indian Express** on **28th January 2025**.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Indian Economy

Context: The article discusses the ongoing debate surrounding the demand for a legally binding Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers in India, particularly in light of farmer protests and distress. It critiques the singular focus on MSP as a solution, arguing that it is a narrow and potentially counterproductive approach to addressing farmers' challenges.

What is the current debate about MSP in India?

1. The debate centers around making the Minimum Support Price (MSP) legally binding.

2. While this aims to address farmers' distress, it is seen as a narrow and counterproductive solution that may exacerbate rural poverty and destabilize agricultural markets.
3. Legally binding MSP overlooks challenges like climate-induced production shocks, the need to align agricultural production with changing dietary preferences, and the broader livelihood issues of rural citizens beyond cultivation.

Why is focusing solely on MSP problematic?

1. Focusing solely on MSP ignores the reality that rural livelihoods extend beyond farmers, including traders and supply chain workers.
2. Additionally, MSP doesn't protect farmers from climate-induced yield shocks and may lead to inefficiencies in market dynamics.
3. The risks of combining high MSP with depressed retail prices undermines the livelihoods of traders and other rural workers, destabilizes markets, and may create inefficiencies in the agricultural supply chain.

What are the two key alternatives to an MSP-centric approach?

The two alternatives are:

1. **Income Support:** A quasi-Universal Basic Income (q-UBI) for rural households. q-UBI extends income support beyond cultivators. Setting the payment higher than PM-Kisan payouts (e.g., at the average income of a five-acre farmer) ensures better protection against price and quantity shocks.
2. **Price Deficiency Payments:** Compensating farmers for price shocks while maintaining market discipline.

How do price deficiency payments work?

1. When crop prices in a district drop drastically, farmers are compensated for a fraction (e.g., 30%) of their average losses.
2. This shields farmers from extreme volatility while incentivizing market adaptability.

How should public procurement evolve?

1. Public procurement should be decentralized and include a broader range of crops to reflect changing demand patterns.
2. It should align with welfare schemes like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and mid-day meals.

The key suggestions for improving public procurement are:

3. Expand crop coverage in welfare schemes while narrowing beneficiary targeting to manage subsidies.
4. Encourage states to take the lead in implementing decentralization under frameworks like PM-AASHA.

5. Ensure states are fiscally responsible to minimize wastage.

How can strategic reserves benefit farmers and consumers?

1. Strategic reserves should include essential crops like pulses and onions, in addition to rice and wheat.
2. This would shield farmers and consumers from price shocks, stabilizing demand and fostering a resilient food system.

How should the government support farmers instead of stipulating MSPs?

1. The government should actively participate in markets by rationalizing procurement at market prices.
2. Procurement should reflect demand conditions and existing inventories to prevent overstocking and wastage.
3. The focus should move from setting fixed MSPs to stabilizing demand through diversified procurement and dynamic market participation.

Why is it important to move beyond MSP?

1. A sole focus on MSP risks missing the opportunity to implement a comprehensive policy framework.
2. An integrated approach can safeguard rural livelihoods, foster dynamic markets, and align agriculture with future demands.

What infrastructure and experiences support this shift?

1. The proposed reforms build on existing systems like PM-Kisan, PM-AASHA, and lessons learned over the past decade.
2. Careful planning and collaboration are essential to implement these changes effectively.
3. The approach aims to create a sustainable and equitable system that supports farmers, stabilizes agricultural markets, and aligns policies with future demands, ensuring resilience against economic and climate challenges.

Understanding Radical Innovations

This post on **Understanding Radical Innovations** has been created based on article "[How India can lead the way in transformative innovations](#)" published in **The Indian Express** on 28th January 2025.

UPSC Syllabus topic: GS Paper 3- Science and technology

Context: The article focuses on the concept of *radical innovation*—groundbreaking ideas or inventions that fundamentally alter how people solve problems, experience the world, or navigate daily life.

What defines a "radical innovation"?

1. Radical innovations solve problems in fundamentally new ways, cause significant performance improvements, or bring about transformative changes.
2. They stand apart from incremental innovations by overcoming fundamental constraints in existing systems or designs.

How is "radical innovation" different from "incremental innovation"?

1. Incremental innovation involves adjusting input variables (like size, color, or components) to optimize performance within existing constraints.
2. In contrast, radical innovation surpasses fundamental constraints, enabling entirely new possibilities.

How do engineers approach innovation?

Engineers follow a structured process involving:

- **Objective Function:** A goal to maximize, minimize, or optimize.
- **Input Variables:** Design choices available to achieve the goal.
- **Constraints:** Limitations that must not be violated.
An innovation becomes radical when it overcomes fundamental constraints, breaking through barriers that incremental changes cannot address.

How did the Wright Brothers' aircraft demonstrate radical innovation?

1. **Objective Function:** Enable faster travel.
2. **Constraints in Existing Systems:** All vehicles (cars, trains, ships) required surface contact for movement.
3. **Radical Innovation:** The aircraft overcame the fundamental constraint of surface dependence by enabling flight.

What was the radical innovation in early telephone systems?

1. **Objective Function:** Minimize call connection time.
2. **Constraint:** Human operators could not physically connect calls in less than 1.5 seconds.
3. **Radical Innovation:** The electro-mechanical switch automated call connections, removing the need for human operators and allowing the system to scale.

Can radical innovation occur outside engineering, such as in the arts?

Yes, a notable example is **jasrangi**, a vocal duet created by Late Pandit Jasraj. He overcame **fundamental constraint such as:**

- **Constraint:** Male and female singers have naturally different vocal pitches.

- **Radical Innovation:** By adjusting the base notes ('Sa') for each singer to align with their natural range, jasrangi made classical duets easier and more harmonious.

Is there a competition between incremental and radical innovation?

1. No, both types are essential for progress. Incremental innovation drives steady advancements, while radical innovation leads to transformative leaps.
2. They enable groundbreaking changes that redefine industries, systems, or experiences.

How can young people contribute to transformative innovations?

1. **Focus on Fundamental Constraints:** Identify and address core challenges in systems or designs.
2. **Leverage Design Thinking:** Use structured techniques to identify problems and create solutions.
3. **Adopt a Problem-Solving Mindset:** Concentrate on the right problem, as it's often half the journey to innovation.

Overcoming fundamental constraints requires creativity, persistence, and a deep understanding of the problem. However, this approach holds the key to globally transformative innovations.

Protecting old trees and animals is important

Source: The post Protecting old trees and animals is important has been created, based on the article "Ageing trees and animals are more valuable than we think" published in "Live mint" on 29th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Environment

Context: The article explains why protecting old trees and animals is important. Ancient trees store carbon and help fight climate change. Old animals support ecosystems and may offer medical benefits. Scientists and policymakers are now working to protect these irreplaceable natural resources.

Why Do Old Trees and Animals Matter?

1. Importance of Old Trees

- Old trees store more **carbon** than younger trees. This helps fight climate change.
- William Keeton, a **forest ecologist**, says ancient trees play a major role in carbon storage.
- The **US lost 99%** of its old-growth forests since 1500 CE. Most remaining forests are in the **Pacific Northwest**.
- These forests were saved because they housed the **endangered spotted owl**.
- Old trees provide shelter for wildlife. **Fallen giant trees** create habitats for **salmon**.

2. Importance of Old Animals

1. **Rockfish live over 200 years** and produce millions of eggs. Killing them can collapse fisheries.
2. **Female orcas live up to 100 years** and guide younger pod members.
3. **Old elephants and wolves** maintain social order in their groups.
4. North Atlantic right whales have a median lifespan of 22 years, but Southern right whales can live 130 years.
5. **Sea sponges live for thousands of years**, but fishing destroys them, and they cannot regrow quickly.

What Policies Exist to Protect Old Trees?

1. **US Forest Service Initiative (2022):** Launched a project specifically to protect old-growth forests for their intrinsic value. Unfortunately, the plan was withdrawn due to incomplete approvals before a change in presidency.
2. **Mapping and Discussion:** The first-ever comprehensive survey of old growth in the U.S. was completed, identifying both ancient and mature forests that could potentially become old growth. This initiated broader discussions on conservation strategies.

What Needs to Be Done?

1. Scientists suggest adding protections under the **UN Convention on Biological Diversity**.
2. Conservation efforts should include both old trees and ancient animals. Saving them is crucial because they cannot be replaced.

Question for practice:

Discuss why protecting old trees and ancient animals is crucial for the environment and ecosystems.

ASER 2024 report shows recovery in rural education

Source: The post ASER 2024 report shows recovery in rural education has been created, based on the article “**ASER report brings good news — classrooms have recovered post Covid**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 29th January 2025

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

Context: The article discusses the ASER 2024 report on children's learning in rural India. It shows a full recovery from post-pandemic learning losses. Government schools have improved the most. The National Education Policy 2020 has helped strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy across states.

For detailed information on **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023** [read this article here](#)

What Does the ASER 2024 Report Reveal?

1. Recovery in Reading Skills:

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- There's a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels among Class III students, with 27.1% now able to read at Class II level, up from 20.5% in 2022.
- Class V students show similar recovery trends, with 48.8% capable of reading Class II level texts, nearly returning to the 50.5% mark of 2018.

2. Improvement in Arithmetic:

- The proportion of Class III students capable of doing subtraction has increased to 33.7% in 2024, the highest in a decade.
- For Class V, those able to do division rose to 30.7% in 2024, showing significant improvement.

3. Government Schools Leading Recovery:

- Government schools have outperformed private schools, particularly in arithmetic, where Class III subtraction skills increased by 36.6% between 2022 and 2024.

4. Role of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 played a major role. It focused on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN). Unlike past programs, this is the first nationwide push for improving learning outcomes.

5. State-Specific Progress:

- Almost all states improved compared to 2022. Low-performing states like **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu** showed remarkable progress. For example, **Uttar Pradesh**- Class III reading at Class II level rose from **6% (2014) to 27.9% (2024)**.
- High-performing states like **Himachal Pradesh and Maharashtra** also recovered from pandemic losses. In these states, learning levels in Class III government schools had dropped by half in 2022 but have now improved.

What Is the Overall Impact?

The overall impact is positive, showing that concerted efforts under the NEP 2020 across various states are enhancing foundational literacy and numeracy among primary school children, setting a foundation for future educational achievements.

Question for practice:

Examine how the ASER 2024 report highlights the role of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in improving foundational literacy and numeracy in rural India.

China built powerful AI model with less resources

Source: The post China built powerful AI model with less resources has been created, based on the article “**In DeepSeek breakthrough, lessons for India**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 29th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Science and Technology-Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology

Context: A Chinese company built an AI model as strong as those from OpenAI and Google. It used less time and money. This challenges the idea that AI needs big resources. Open-sourcing it changes AI's future. India can learn and benefit from this shift.

What is the Chinese AI Breakthrough?

- 1. Model Development:** A Chinese company developed an AI model called **DeepSeek**, which rivals or exceeds the capabilities of models from major companies like OpenAI and Google DeepMind.
- 2. Time and Budget:** DeepSeek was built in just over **two months** with a budget of **less than \$6 million**, compared to the billions typically invested by tech giants.
- 3. Under Sanctions:** Achieved despite U.S. sanctions limiting access to **advanced chips and hardware**, showing innovation can overcome resource limitations.
- 4. Open-Sourcing:** The model is open-sourced, making it accessible to anyone, which democratizes AI technology and challenges the need for costly infrastructure.

What Are the Implications for the AI Industry?

- 1. AI Development Becomes Cheaper and Faster** – DeepSeek was built in **two months** with **less than \$6 million**, challenging the idea that AI requires **billions of dollars**.
- 2. Tech Giants Face Challenges** – Companies like **OpenAI and Google DeepMind** invested **billions** in AI, but DeepSeek shows that AI can be developed **efficiently**.
- 3. Impact on Nvidia and Data Centers** – AI models may no longer need **large GPU clusters**, reducing dependence on **Nvidia's expensive hardware**.
- 4. Investment Shift** – Venture capital may move from **big AI infrastructure** to **smaller, innovative AI startups**.

What Are the Risks of Open-Sourcing AI?

1. Making powerful AI models **freely available** raises concerns about **misuse by bad actors**, including **criminal groups and rogue states**.
2. Governments must create **rules for responsible AI use** to prevent abuse while allowing innovation.

What Does This Mean for India?

- 1. India Can Compete Without Huge Investments:** AI progress no longer depends on **billions in funding and massive computing power**. India can build **efficient AI models** with its **strong software talent and frugal engineering mindset**.

2. **AI for Key Sectors:** India can develop **cost-effective AI applications** in **agriculture, healthcare, and education**, benefiting millions.

3. **Learning from China's Necessity-Driven Innovation:** India can use **limited resources wisely** to create world-class AI models, just as China did under **sanctions**.

Question for practice:

Examine how the development of DeepSeek challenges the notion that AI progress requires massive financial and computational resources.

Wheat prices are rising despite government efforts

Source: The post Wheat prices are rising despite government efforts has been created, based on the article “**GRAINY PICTURE: Several questions arise from the recent trend of wheat prices**” published in “**Business Standard**” on 29th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security

Context: The article discusses rising wheat prices despite government market interventions. It highlights speculative activity, weather concerns, and subsidy burdens. It also examines food stock levels, the impact of free grain distribution, and debates on revising the public distribution system amid poverty decline.

Why Are Wheat Prices Rising Despite Government Intervention?

1. Wheat prices in Delhi reached ₹3,360 per quintal, even though the government released large stocks through the **Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS)**.
2. In **FY24, 10 million tonnes of wheat** were pumped into the market to cool prices.
3. However, in **November 2023, only 2.5 million tonnes** were allocated, and about **1.76 million tonnes were sold**. Despite this, wheat prices **rose by ₹150 per quintal** in Delhi.
4. **Low stocks with flour millers and biscuit makers** – They have limited supplies and need more wheat.
5. **Speculative activity** – Traders are hoarding wheat, expecting further price increases.
6. **High auction prices** – The **reserve price was ₹2,325 per quintal**, but actual auction prices were much higher, showing high demand.

Is Weather a Concern for the Wheat Crop?

1. A **sharp rise in day temperatures** in North India raised concerns about wheat crops.
2. Scientists say **night temperatures remain normal**, keeping the **24-hour average at 15-16°C**, which is **ideal** for wheat growth.
3. However, if **night temperatures rise**, wheat crops could be affected.

How Are Government Food Subsidies Impacting Wheat Stocks?

1. The government provides **free wheat and rice** to **800 million people** under **Pradhan Mantri Gareeb Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY)** until FY29.
2. **74%** of the **₹205,250 crore** food subsidy budget was spent by **November 2024**, compared to **58% last year**.
3. Wheat stocks were **18.41 million tonnes** in **January 2025**, slightly above **16.35 million tonnes** last year.
4. **Higher auction prices** than the **₹2,325 per quintal reserve price** indicate **unsatiated demand**.
5. Food subsidy overspending may **exceed budget estimates** if spending continues at the same rate.

What Are the Key Takeaways?

1. **Wheat prices are rising despite record production (113.29 million tonnes in 2023-24).**
2. **Market demand, speculation, and weather concerns contribute to price hikes.**
3. **Food subsidies are putting pressure on government finances.**
4. **Experts suggest reforming PDS and adjusting food subsidy policies.**
5. **India's poverty has declined, but millions still struggle with low incomes.**

Question for practice:

Discuss the reasons behind rising wheat prices despite government interventions and the impact of food subsidies on wheat stocks.

BRICS Plus seeks alternatives to US dollar

Source: The post BRICS Plus seeks alternatives to US dollar has been created, based on the article "**Brics payments system: A real threat to dollar?**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 30th January 2025

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 BRICS+ efforts to reduce reliance on the US dollar by using local currencies for trade. It highlights challenges like economic diversity, regulatory issues, and US resistance. It emphasizes BRICS+ developing digital payment systems to strengthen financial independence and trade.

For detailed information on **India should quit the Brics** [read this article here](#)

What is BRICS+ and Its Expansion?

1. BRICS+ is a group of emerging economies originally consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

2. In 2024, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran joined, followed by Indonesia in January 2025. This expansion brings its total to 10 members and nine partners.

3. Together, they represent about 55% of the global population and 40% of the global GDP at purchasing power parity.

Why is BRICS+ Looking for Alternatives to the US Dollar?

1. **Reduction of Dependence:** BRICS+ aims to minimize reliance on the US dollar due to the economic sanctions that affected Russia during the Ukraine crisis, where access to SWIFT was denied.

2. **Diverse Economic Engagement:** By settling trade in local currencies, BRICS+ countries aim to enhance economic sovereignty and reduce transaction costs, improving trade efficiency among members.

3. **Developing Financial Alternatives:** The introduction of digital payment systems and the push to use the Chinese RMB, which accounts for about 2% of total cross-border transactions, reflects a strategic move to diversify financial interactions beyond the dollar.

What Are the Challenges Facing BRICS+?

1. **Diverse Political and Economic Systems:** Members have different governance models and economic structures, making cooperation difficult.

2. **US Dollar Dominance:** The dollar accounts for most global forex reserves and trade invoices, limiting alternatives.

3. **Risk of US Sanctions:** The US has threatened 100% tariffs if BRICS+ pushes de-dollarisation.

4. **Limited RMB Use:** The renminbi is used in only 2% of global transactions, restricting its global impact.

What Is the Future Potential of BRICS+ Initiatives?

1. **Cross-Border Payments:** BRICS+ is developing a payment system to reduce reliance on the US dollar. This is important after the West blocked Russia from SWIFT.

2. **Digital Payment Growth:** China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Indonesia have advanced digital payment systems. India's Unified Payments Interface supports local currency trade.

3. **Regional Trade Expansion:** RMB usage is rising in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, strengthening financial independence.

4. **Risk Diversification:** BRICS+ payments aim to reduce trade risks, not replace the dollar immediately.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons behind BRICS+ efforts to reduce reliance on the US dollar and the challenges they face in achieving this goal.

UK and India strengthen partnership in technology

Source: The post UK and India strengthen partnership in technology has been created, based on the article “**How UK and India can collaborate for a Viksit Bharat**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 30th January 2025

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 strong technology collaboration between the UK and India, highlighting their shared progress in sectors like fintech, green innovation, and advanced manufacturing. It emphasizes the potential of partnerships, joint ventures, and skilled workforce development to achieve mutual growth and global impact.

For detailed information on **India-UK Relations** [read this article here](#)

How is the UK-India partnership growing?

1. Technology Collaboration

- Many UK industries rely on technology developed in Indian **Global Capability Centres (GCCs)**.
- **Vaccine development** during the pandemic showed the impact of UK-India technology collaboration.
- The **UK-India Technology Security Initiative** boosts cooperation in emerging and critical technologies.
- UK fintech firms can expand in India by sharing **regulatory best practices**.

2. Economic Ties

- The UK was **third globally** in venture capital investment in technology in 2024.
- London has **more start-ups than the rest of Europe combined**.
- The UKIBC **aerospace and defence group**, representing **\$60 billion in revenue**, is expanding partnerships in India.

3. Green Energy Goals

- The **Sunrise Project** links top UK and Indian universities to develop renewable energy solutions.
- The **City of London** can finance India’s **energy transition**.
- Expanding **priority-sector lending to EVs and renewable energy** can accelerate India's sustainability goals.

For detailed information on **The growing partnership between India and the U.K.** [read this article here](#)

How can UK-India defence and manufacturing ties improve?

- 1. Co-Development of Technology:** UK and Indian firms are already collaborating on **advanced manufacturing and defence technology**. India has **scale and demand**, while UK firms benefit from India's **cost-effective manufacturing**.
- 2. Aerospace and Defence Group:** The **UKIBC aerospace and defence group**, representing **22 UK firms with \$60 billion in global revenue**, is eager to expand partnerships with India.
- 3. Policy Reforms in India:** The UKIBC suggests that **refinements in India's defence acquisition procedure** can encourage foreign firms to enter the Indian market.
- 4. Graduated Approach to Indigenous Content:** A **more flexible approach** to indigenous content requirements can attract more foreign investment in India's defence sector.
- 5. Higher FDI Participation: Revisiting FDI thresholds** can allow more UK firms to join **India's strategic defence programmes**.
- 6. Start-Up Collaboration:** The UK can support its **high-growth defence start-ups** by creating an **accelerator programme** to enter India's defence technology ecosystem.

What can be done for better the UK-India relationship?

- 1. Expand Technology Collaboration:** Support UK-India **Technology Security Initiative** to develop AI, fintech, and defence technology. UKIBC represents **22 UK firms** with **\$60 billion** in revenue.
- 2. Increase Investment in Start-ups:** Create a **G2G-backed investment fund** for emerging technologies. A **start-up accelerator** can help UK firms enter India's market.
- 3. Develop Skilled Workforce:** Encourage **British students** to study AI in India. Mid-size UK firms should explore India's **Global Capability Centres (GCCs)**.
- 4. Improve Defence Ties:** Adjust **India's FDI rules** to attract UK firms into **strategic defence programs**.

What is the future of the UK-India relationship?

The UK-India partnership is strong and growing. **2024 was a good year**, and **2025 will be better**. More businesses will see India as a strategic partner. The article calls for bold ideas and greater collaboration to unlock the full potential of the partnership.

Question for practice:

Examine how the UK-India partnership is evolving in technology, economic ties, green energy, and defence collaboration.

UGC Draft Regulations 2025 Harm Universities and Faculty

Source: The post UGC Draft Regulations 2025 Harm Universities and Faculty has been created, based on the article "**Manoj Jha writes: UGC is diminishing universities**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 30th January 2025

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

Context: The article criticizes the draft UGC Regulations 2025 for reducing university autonomy and harming higher education. It highlights issues in faculty appointments, promotions, and research standards. It also argues that ideological bias influences recruitment and threatens academic freedom.

For detailed information on **UGC Draft Regulations 2025** read [Article1](#), [Article2](#)

How Do the UGC Draft Regulations 2025 Affect University Autonomy?

The draft regulations reduce the autonomy of universities. They weaken the powers of states in appointing vice-chancellors. This affects the federal structure of higher education governance.

What Are the Key Issues in Faculty Appointments and Promotions?

1. **New Barriers for Professorship:** Assistant professors with more than 10 years of experience must serve as associate professors for three years before applying for professorship. This rule punishes deserving candidates.
2. **Limited Promotions for Professors:** Only 10% of professors at Level 14 can move to Level 15. This creates an artificial hierarchy and harms faculty morale.
3. **Unfair Promotion Delays:** Earlier, Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) promotions were backdated. The new rule removes this provision, allowing universities to delay promotions without accountability.

How Do the Regulations Impact Research Standards?

1. **Inconsistent Publishing Rules:** The 2018 policy required journal publications instead of books for promotions. The 2025 draft reverses this but exempts college teachers from publishing requirements.
2. **Disbanding of the CARE List:** The removal of this journal list weakens research standards. These frequent changes confuse faculty and harm academic careers.

Is the UGC Acting Without Legal Backing?

1. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposed replacing the UGC with the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI).
2. However, HECI has not been established. The UGC continues to issue regulations without the legal framework to do so.

Why Is There Concern About Recruitment in HEIs?

1. **Faculty Vacancies:** There is a demand to fill vacant teaching positions, but recruitments are not transparent.
2. **Discrimination in Hiring:** The frequent use of "Not Found Suitable" (NFS) in faculty selection affects SC, ST, and OBC candidates. This weakens affirmative action efforts.

3. Ideological Appointments: Many administrative positions are given to individuals who align with the ruling ideology. Some people hold multiple positions in different HEIs.

Conclusion

The UGC Draft Regulations 2025 weaken university autonomy, disrupt faculty promotions, and lower research standards. Rules on hiring create unfair barriers and promote ideological bias. The removal of backdated promotions and arbitrary quotas harm faculty morale. Frequent regulatory changes damage academic stability and violate constitutional principles.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the impact of the UGC Draft Regulations 2025 on university autonomy, faculty promotions, and research standards.

India's declining defence budget

Source: The post India's declining defence budget has been created, based on the article “**For Nirmala Sitharaman, a wishlist from the armed forces**” published in “**Indian Express**” on 30th January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Government Budgeting.

Context: The article discusses India's declining defence budget as a share of government spending and GDP. It highlights inadequate capital allocation for military modernization and an imbalanced distribution among the Army, Navy, and Air Force. It also criticizes unclear accounting practices in defence expenditure.

What is the Trend in India's Defence Spending?

1. Defence spending as a share of government expenditure is declining. It fell from **13.81% in 2020-21 to about 13% in 2024-25.**
2. As a percentage of GDP, it dropped from **2.4% in 2020-21 to 1.9% in 2024-25.**
3. The **capital budget increased** from **₹1,31,697 crore in 2020-21 to ₹1,72,000 crore in 2024-25,** averaging **7% annual growth.**
4. Despite rising capital spending, **modernization efforts remain underfunded,** affecting military preparedness.

How Does India's Defence Spending Compare Internationally?

1. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank consider up to 3% of GDP on defence as acceptable.
2. NATO members are required to spend at least 2% of GDP.
3. The US spends more than 4%, while China, like India, spends less than 2%.

How is the Capital Budget Distributed Among the Services?

The budget distribution does not match the needs of the services:

1. **Army (84% of total personnel):** Receives only 22-28% of the capex budget, limiting its ability to buy weapons, helicopters, and protective gear.
2. **Navy (5.5% of personnel):** Gets 31-36% of the capex budget but lacks enough warships and submarines to secure India's coastline and sea trade routes.
3. **Air Force (10.5% of personnel):** Receives the largest share (38-45%) because aircraft are very expensive. For example, 36 Rafale jets cost \$8.7 billion. Locally made Sukhoi-30MKI jets cost ₹100 crore more per unit than imported ones.
4. The total defence budget is divided as follows:
 - **57% for personnel costs** (30.7% salaries, 22.7% pensions, 4.1% for civilian organizations).
 - **15% for operations and preparedness.**
 - **27.7% for capital expenses.** Most modern militaries spend 50-60% on modern equipment, but India spends much less.

What Issues Exist with Defence Budget Accounting?

1. **Unclear Budget Categorization:** Allocations for the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB), Coast Guard (CG), and Jammu & Kashmir Light Infantry (JAK LI) are placed under the MoD (Civil) head instead of the respective services.
2. **Lack of Transparency:** Earlier, capital budgets for the Army, Navy, and Air Force were separate. Now, they are grouped together, making it difficult to track specific allocations.

Question for practice:

Discuss the trends and challenges in India's defence spending, including its allocation among services and comparison with international standards.

China's progress in nuclear fusion

Source: The post China's progress in nuclear fusion has been created, based on the article "For Nirmala Sitharaman, a wishlist from the armed forces" published in "Indian Express" on 30th January 2025

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

Context: The article talks about China's progress in nuclear fusion. A reactor maintained plasma for over 1,000 seconds. Fusion energy could solve the energy crisis and climate change. Many countries are researching it. ITER, a global project, aims to advance fusion technology.

For detailed information on **Nuclear Fusion Technology** [read this article here](#)

What Did the Chinese Reactor Achieve?

1. The **Experimental Advanced Superconducting Tokamak (EAST)** reactor in China maintained **plasma stability for over 1,000 seconds (17 minutes)**.
2. This is a **new record**, surpassing its **previous record of 400 seconds in 2023**.
3. Plasma stability is essential for fusion energy, as it requires **temperatures higher than the Sun's core**.
4. Maintaining stable plasma is difficult because even small changes in **magnetic fields** can disrupt it.
5. EAST's success is a **significant step** towards commercial fusion reactors, which require stability for hours or days.

How Far Is Fusion Energy From Commercial Use?

1. Fusion research has been ongoing for **over 70 years**. A working fusion power plant may not be ready before **2050**.
2. Fusion is not included in **global net-zero energy plans** because it is still under development.

What Are the Advantages of Fusion Energy?

1. **High energy output:** One gram of fusion fuel gives energy equal to **eight tonnes of coal**.
2. **Abundant fuel:** Uses **deuterium and tritium**, which are available in nature.
3. **Zero emissions:** Unlike fossil fuels, it does not release carbon dioxide.
4. **No nuclear waste:** Unlike fission reactors, it does not produce hazardous waste.

What Are Recent Breakthroughs in Fusion?

1. **2021 (UK, JET Laboratory):** Produced **12 MW of electricity for 5 seconds**, enough for **10,000 homes**.
2. **2022 (US, Lawrence Livermore Lab):** Achieved **net energy gain** for the first time.
3. **MIT (2023):** Developed materials to withstand extreme fusion conditions.
4. **China (2023, 2024):** EAST reactor set new plasma stability records.

Are Private Companies Investing in Fusion?

Private companies have invested **\$6.2 billion** in fusion energy (IAEA, 2023).

1. **Helion (US):** Plans to produce **50 MW by 2028** for Microsoft.
2. **Commonwealth Fusion Systems (US):** Aims for **400 MW by 2030s**.

What Is the ITER Project?

ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) is the world's largest fusion project.

Location: Southern France.

Participants: 30+ countries, including India.

Goal: 500 MW of fusion power by 2039.

Importance: Will not generate electricity but will guide future fusion power plants.

Way forward

Experts believe commercial fusion power could be ready in **15-20 years**. Some companies plan to start by **2030s**, but challenges remain.

Question for practice:

Examine the progress and challenges of nuclear fusion energy based on recent advancements and investments.

India launches mission to secure critical minerals

Source: The post India launches mission to secure critical minerals has been created, based on the article "**Critical efforts: New critical minerals mission must engage private sector**" published in "**Business Standard**" on 31st January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Infrastructures

Context: The article discusses India's new **National Critical Mineral Mission**. The government will invest ₹16,300 crore, with ₹18,000 crore from public-sector units. It aims to secure minerals like lithium for industries. China controls global supply chains. India must develop domestic resources and invest abroad.

For detailed information on **Critical Mineral Mission of India** [read this article here](#)

What is the National Critical Mineral Mission?

The **Union Cabinet** has approved the **National Critical Mineral Mission**. This mission aims to secure the supply of critical minerals. These minerals are essential for industries like **batteries, semiconductors, and automobiles**.

For detailed information on **National Critical Mineral Mission** [read](#) this article here

Why are critical minerals important?

- 1. Essential for Key Industries:** Critical minerals like **lithium and molybdenum** are used in **batteries, semiconductors, and automobiles**.
- 2. Supply Chain Resilience:** The **pandemic** showed how a **shortage of semiconductors** impacted India's **automobile sector**.

3. **Global Dependency on China:** China **dominates** the extraction and processing of critical minerals in **Africa and Indonesia**.

4. **Rising Demand and Prices:** The **International Energy Agency** predicts prices of some critical minerals will **increase 20-50 times by 2050**. In the past, industries built fortunes on **coal and petroleum**. Now, companies can profit from **critical minerals**.

5. **Economic and Security Concerns:** Without a secure supply, **industries and energy security** are at risk.

Does India have its own critical minerals?

1. India has some **reserves of critical minerals**, but they are **not fully explored**. Many deposits are in **politically sensitive areas** or **biodiversity hotspots**.

2. This makes extraction difficult. Recent **auctions for exploration licences** did not attract much interest from the private sector.

3. **Recent auctions** for exploration licences saw **low private sector interest**.

4. The government needs **policy support and technology** for better resource utilization.

5. **Khanij Bidesh India Ltd (KABIL)** is focusing on **lithium and cobalt**, securing overseas partnerships in **Argentina and Australia**.

Conclusion

The mission's success depends on how actively **Indian companies** participate. India must develop strong companies in this sector for its **growth and energy security**.

Question for practice:

Examine the significance of India's National Critical Mineral Mission in securing essential resources for key industries and reducing dependency on China.

India strengthens Tamil ties with Sri Lanka

Source: The post India strengthens Tamil ties with Sri Lanka has been created, based on the article "**An opportunity to settle Sri Lanka's ethnic problem**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 31st January 2025

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

Context: The article discusses India's symbolic move to name a cultural center in Jaffna after Thiruvalluvar. It mentions the importance of the 13th Amendment in Sri Lanka's Constitution. It notes the JVP-led government's stance on power devolution. It highlights many unresolved ethnic issues.

For detailed information on **Stampede Disaster and its Management in India** [read this article here](#)

Why Did India Name the Jaffna Cultural Centre After Thiruvalluvar?

1. India named the Jaffna Cultural Centre after **Thiruvalluvar**, a Tamil poet-philosopher, to strengthen ties with **Sri Lankan Tamils**.
2. Initially, the centre did not include "**Jaffna**" in its name, causing protests among **Sri Lankan Tamils**.
3. India responded quickly by renaming it "**Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre**."
4. The centre was **built by India**, highlighting India's **support for Sri Lanka's Tamil heritage**.
5. This move reinforces the **shared cultural and historical ties** between **India and Sri Lanka**.

How Has India's Role in Sri Lanka Changed Over Time?

1. **1983 Anti-Tamil Violence:** The anti-Tamil pogrom drew India into Sri Lanka's ethnic issue.
2. **Indo-Lanka Accord (1987):** India mediated and signed the Accord, leading to the **13th Amendment (13A)** and creating **Provincial Councils**.
3. **JVP and LTTE Opposition:** **JVP** opposed 13A as an Indian imposition, while **LTTE** rejected it and demanded Tamil Eelam.
4. **India's Continued Support for 13A:** Indian leaders, including **Jaishankar in October 2024**, urged its full implementation.
5. **Modi's 2024 Statement:** During **Dissanayake's visit**, he avoided direct mention of 13A but called for **Provincial Council elections**.
6. **Jaffna Cultural Centre (2024):** India reinforced Tamil ties by naming it "**Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre**."

Why Has the 13th Amendment Not Been Fully Implemented?

1. **Lack of Full Political Commitment:** Though the **13th Amendment (13A)** was passed in 1987, it has not been fully implemented, especially in **Tamil-speaking areas**. Successive Sri Lankan governments have hesitated to grant full autonomy to **Provincial Councils**.
2. **Opposition from Political Parties:** The **Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)** opposed 13A, calling it an **Indian imposition**. Even now, the **JVP-led National People's Power (NPP) coalition** has not clarified its stance.
3. **India's Changing Stance:** India has long urged Sri Lanka to **fully implement 13A**. However, during **Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to India in December 2024**, Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** did not explicitly mention it, raising concerns about India's position.
4. **Political Uncertainty in Sri Lanka:** In **February 2023**, Sri Lankan Prime Minister **Harini Amarasuriya** stated that 13A should be implemented but questioned its effectiveness. **The NPP's 2024 manifesto** promised a **new constitution** but made no strong commitment to devolution.

5. **Delay in Elections:** Provincial Councils operated from **1988 to 2019**, but elections have been indefinitely postponed. Local body elections may happen soon, but they **cannot replace Provincial Councils**, which handle larger governance issues.

6. **Judicial Interference:** The **Northern and Eastern provinces were merged for nearly 20 years**, but the **Sri Lankan Supreme Court annulled** the merger in **2006**, reversing a key devolution effort.

What Should the Sri Lankan Government Do?

1. **Stop Viewing 13A as an Indian Imposition:** Sri Lanka's past constitutions were influenced by **British, American, and French systems**. The JVP-led government should recognize 13A's **evolutionary process (1983-87)**.

2. **Hold Provincial Council Elections:** Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** urged Sri Lanka to conduct these elections. Local bodies cannot replace **Provincial Councils** as they lack financial independence.

3. **Use the NPP's Majority to Solve Ethnic Issues:** The **National People's Power (NPP) coalition** holds a **two-thirds majority** in Parliament. It has a rare chance to ensure democracy and equality.

Question for practice:

Examine the reasons for the incomplete implementation of the 13th Amendment in Sri Lanka and its political implications.

Preventing crowd crushes requires thorough safety measures

Source: The post Preventing crowd crushes requires thorough safety measures has been created, based on the article "**The science is clear, crowd disasters are preventable**" published in "**The Hindu**" on 31st January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3-Disaster and disaster management.

Context: The article discusses the preventable nature of crowd crushes, like the recent tragedy at the Maha Kumbh in India, where 30 people died. It urges governments and event organizers to adopt measures to manage crowd densities and enhance safety at large events.

For detailed information on **Stampede Disaster and its Management in India** [read this article here](#)

What causes crowd crush disasters?

1. **High Crowd Density:** At five people per square meter, injuries occur. At seven or more, deaths are likely.
2. **Restricted Space:** Limited areas force people into dangerously tight spaces, as seen at the Maha Kumbh.
3. **Lack of Proper Planning:** Few entry and exit points increase risks.
4. **Sudden Surges:** Fast-moving crowds create deadly pressure.

Where else have crowd crush disasters happened?

Created with love ❤ by ForumIAS- the knowledge network for civil services.
Visit academy.forumias.com for our mentor based courses.

Similar tragedies have happened worldwide:

Houston, U.S. (2021): 10 people died at a music concert.

Itaewon, South Korea (2022): 159 people died during a Halloween festival.

Sanaa, Yemen (2023): 90 people died at a charity event.

Nigeria (2024): 35 people died at a religious festival.

How can crowd crushes be prevented?

- 1. Increase Entry and Exit Points:** More pathways reduce congestion, preventing deadly compression.
- 2. Stagger Arrival Times:** This avoids sudden surges that increase density.
- 3. Keep Passageways Clear:** Removing obstacles prevents dangerous bottlenecks.
- 4. Responsibility Lies with Authorities:** Crowd members cannot control density or movement. Once a crush starts, people cannot move or breathe. Governments, event organizers, and promoters must ensure crowd safety.
- 5. Segment the Crowd:** New York City's New Year's Eve event divides crowds into groups of 100, reducing risk.
- 6. Enforce Safety Laws:** Many organizers avoid regulations to maximize profits, risking lives.

Question for practice:

Discuss the key causes of crowd crush disasters and the measures that can prevent them.

India aims for growth with increased capital expenditure

Source: The post India aims for growth with increased capital expenditure has been created, based on the article "**Government needs to spend – for India to grow**" published in "**Indian Express**" on 31st January 2025

UPSC Syllabus Topic: GS Paper3- Economy- Government Budgeting.

Context: The article discusses India's goal of a \$5-trillion economy and the role of capital expenditure in growth. It highlights budget allocations, public and private investments, challenges like weak demand and elections, and the need for careful monitoring to ensure effective spending and economic stability.

For detailed information on **Increased Capital Expenditure by Indian states in 2024** [read this article here](#)

Why is capital expenditure important?

- 1. Boosts Economic Growth:** Capital expenditure (capex) significantly impacts growth, particularly when consumer spending is low. It has a high multiplier effect, stimulating further economic activities.
- 2. Increases GDP Contribution:** Recent data shows India's gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) rose to 30.8% of GDP in FY24 from a pre-pandemic average of 28.9%, indicating robust investment activities.

3. Supports Infrastructure Development: The government has prioritized infrastructure, evident from increased allocations for interest-free loans to states, aiming to promote industrial growth and land reforms through strategic investments.

4. Responds to Economic Slowdowns: Capex plays a critical role in countering economic slowdowns, evident from the strategic increase in budget allocations despite challenges like electoral disruptions and global uncertainties.

What are the recent trends in investment?

1. Rise in Capital Expenditure (Capex): Government capex increased from 1.6% of GDP in FY19 to 3.4% in FY25. State capex also rose to 2.6% of GDP, exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

2. State Capex Support: The government raised the 50-year interest-free loan allocation to Rs 1.5 trillion in FY25. Rs 550 billion is unconditional.

3. Slowdown in Public Capex Due to Elections:

- Central government capex declined by **15.4%** year-on-year in H1FY25.
 - State government capex fell by **10.5%**.
 - Public sector enterprises' capex dropped by **10.8%**, reaching only **43.6%** of their annual target.
- 4. FDI Trends:** Gross FDI inflows increased to **\$48.6 billion** in FY25 from **\$42.1 billion** last year, but higher profit repatriation weakened net FDI.
- 5. Infrastructure Sector Recovery:** Road development orders rose by **20.5%** in H1FY25, after a **15% decline** in FY24.

What are the key challenges ahead?

- 1. Weak private investment due to high costs and global risks.**
- 2. Depreciation pressure on the rupee due to FPI outflows.**
- 3. Slow utilization of state capex budgets.** In FY24, states used only **Rs 1.1 trillion** out of the **Rs 1.3 trillion** budgeted.

Conclusion

The government has set ambitious capex targets. Spending slowed due to elections but is expected to pick up. Private investment remains weak, but policy support may improve it. Careful monitoring of capex is necessary for sustained economic growth.

Question for practice:

Examine the role of capital expenditure in driving India's economic growth and the challenges associated with its effective utilization.