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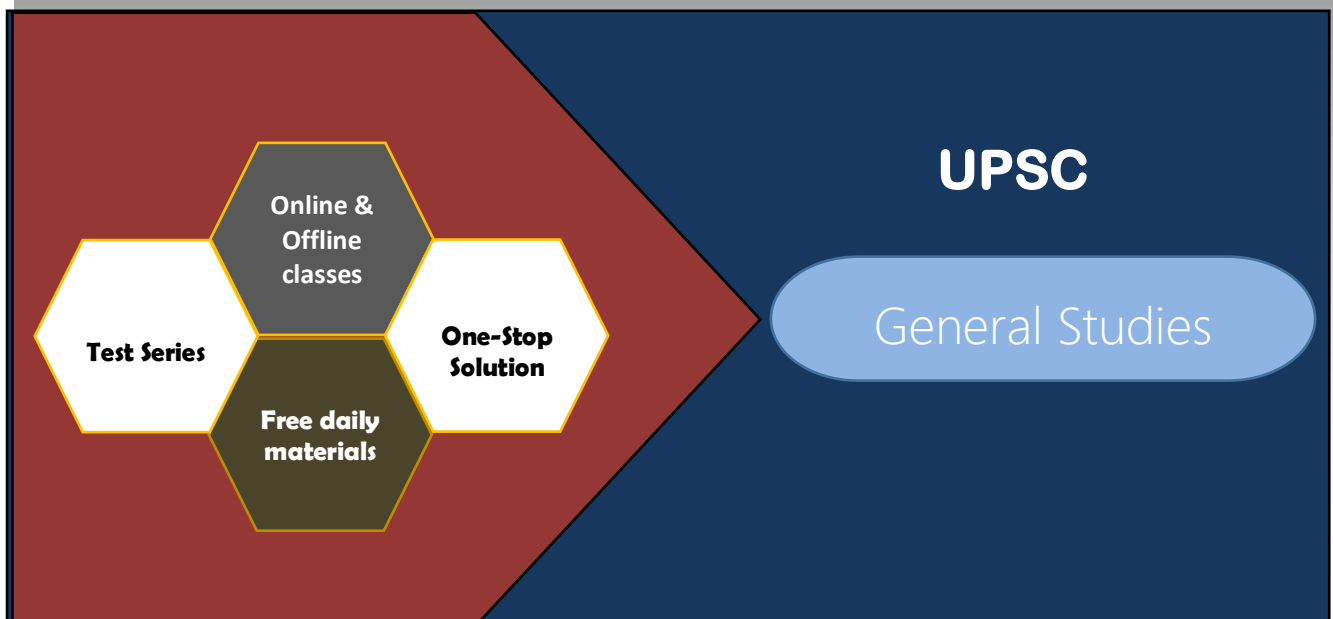
Monthly current affairs magazine

SHIKSHA

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THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS**



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GS 1 : Heritage, culture ,Geography of the World and Society

1. Western Disturbances

The days have been unusually warm for winter in New Delhi with the maximum temperature remaining above normal mostly on account of fewer western disturbances affecting this year.

Western Disturbances

- A western disturbance is an **extratropical storm originating in the Mediterranean** region that brings sudden winter rain to the northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent.
- They are labelled as an **extra-tropical storm** originating in the Mediterranean, is an area of low pressure that brings sudden showers, snow, and fog in northwest India.
- In the term “**extra-tropical storm**”, storm refers to low pressure. “Extra-tropical” means outside the tropics. **As the WD originates outside the tropical region, the word “extra-tropical” has been associated with them.**
- It is a **non-monsoonal precipitation pattern** driven by the westerlies.
- The moisture in these storms usually originates over the **Mediterranean Sea, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea.**
- Extratropical storms are **global phenomena** with moisture usually carried in the upper atmosphere, unlike their tropical counterparts where the moisture is carried in the lower atmosphere.
- In the case of the Indian subcontinent, **moisture is sometimes shed as rain when the storm system encounters the Himalayas.**
- Western disturbances are **more frequent and strong in the winter season.**

Impact: Winter Rainfall and Extreme Cold

- Western disturbances, specifically the ones in winter, bring moderate to heavy rain in low-lying areas and heavy snow to mountainous areas of the Indian Subcontinent.
- They are the cause of most **winter and pre-monsoon season rainfall** across northwest India.
- An average of four to five western disturbances forms during the winter season.

Its significance

- Precipitation during the winter season has great importance in agriculture, particularly for the rabi crops.
- Wheat among them is one of the most important crops, which helps to meet India's food security.

2. Need to expand the food safety net

The National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, through the Public Distribution System (PDS), provides a crucial safety net for roughly 800 million people. Even critics of the PDS appreciated its services during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Background: COVID-19 lockdown and policy gaps in ensuring food security

- **Too many still excluded from the PDS:** The humanitarian crisis resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown, made it apparent that too many were still excluded from the PDS.
- **Governments decision:** In response to the humanitarian crisis, the Government made one sensible policy decision swiftly. It doubled the entitlements of the 800 million who were already covered by the PDS (from five kilograms per person per month, to 10kg). But that does nothing for those without ration cards.

National food security Act (NFSA)

- **Aims to provide subsidized food grains:** The NFS Act, 2013 aims to provide subsidized food grains to approximately two-thirds of India's 1.2 billion people.
- **Legal entitlements for existing food security programs:** It was signed into law on 12 September 2013, retroactive to 5 July 2013. It converts into legal entitlements for existing food security programmes of the GoI.
- **Integrating various government schemes:** It includes the Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme and the Public Distribution System (PDS). The Midday Meal Scheme and the ICDS are universal in nature whereas the PDS will reach about two-thirds of the population (75% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas).
- **It recognizes maternity entitlement:** Pregnant women, lactating mothers, and certain categories of children are eligible for daily free cereals.
- **Key provisions:** The NFSA provides a legal right to persons belonging to "eligible households" to receive foodgrains at a subsidised price. It includes rice at Rs 3/kg, wheat at Rs 2/kg and coarse grain at Rs 1/kg under the

Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS). These are called central issue prices (CIPs).

How Public Distribution System (PDS) is determined?

- PDS coverage is determined by Section 3(2) of the NFSA 2013.
- It states that the entitlements of eligible households “shall extend up to seventy-five per cent of the rural population and up to fifty per cent of the urban population.”
- Section 9 of NFSA required that the total number of persons to be covered “shall be calculated on the basis of the population estimates as per the census of which the relevant figures have been published.”



What are the exclusion problems?

- **Coverage ratio is too low:** The exclusion problem could be because the NFSA coverage ratios were too low to start with, or due to the ‘freeze’ in coverage in absolute terms (around 800 million).
- **Population increase has not been accounted:** Between the last Census in 2011 and today, population increase has not been accounted for in determining the

number of ration cards. No one could have anticipated that the 2021 Census would be postponed indefinitely. This means that even a decadal update has not happened.

- **Lack of sensitivity to understand the problem:** There is no attempt at understanding or addressing the hardships of people who are deprived of the food security net that the PDS provides.
- **Court's observation and a suggestion:** Government inaction led to the matter being taken to the Supreme Court of India in the Problems and Miseries of Migrant Labourers case. The Court agreed that the prayer to increase coverage "seems to be genuine and justified". It directed the Union of India to "come out with a formula and/or appropriate policy/scheme, if any, so that the benefits under NFSA are not restricted as per the census of 2011 and more and more needy persons/citizens get the benefit under the National Food Security Act". Going further, the Court said that the Government could consider "projection of population increase" to resolve this issue.
- **Burdening the states:** In its response, the Government attempts repeatedly to shift the blame to State governments. But States are responsible for identifying people for PDS ration cards, once they are given the numbers to be covered by the central government.

Way ahead

- Several State governments have used their own resources this includes poor States such as Chhattisgarh and Odisha to expand coverage beyond the centrally determined quotas.
- Robust procurement trends and a comfortable food stocks position are what make an expansion affordable.
- Adjusting for population increase, as directed by the Supreme Court, will increase coverage by roughly 10% (from 800 million to 900 million).
- Any sensible policy should have an in-built mechanism for updating coverage annually to account for population increase.

Conclusion

- Instead of allowing the Government to delay this any further (the matter has been in Court since 2020), the Supreme Court should be firm, directing the Government to get on with apportioning the additional coverage of roughly 100 million across States, so that the States can start identifying new ration card beneficiaries.

3. Taking care of Vulnerable Homeless People

In India, the northern states face extreme weather in peak winter and summer. Hundreds of homeless people die in winter due to harsh cold conditions and, in summer, due to intolerable heat.

Why homelessness needs attention?

- **Lack of record:** There is an absence of official records enumerating deaths due to homelessness. It undermines the scale of the crisis in the era of statistics and showcases states apathy.
- **Extreme poverty:** Homelessness is one of the worst forms of marginalisation as most homeless individuals suffer from malnutrition and extreme poverty.
- **Poor health condition:** Access to healthcare facilities and their affordability is also a hurdle. Exorbitant conditions affect mental health in many cases.
- **Vulnerability to violence:** Moreover, these conditions also give rise to drug and alcohol consumption. It creates a conducive situation for substance abuse. Such circumstances increase an individual's vulnerability to violence, especially in the case of women and children.
- **Social castigation:** Stigmatisation and social marginalisation compound their precarious situation. In a nutshell, homelessness strips a person from all human rights.

Reasons for homelessness

- Extreme poverty,
- Inadequate affordable housing,
- High levels of inequality,
- Discrimination,
- Low wages,
- High rents,
- The soaring cost of living

The 2011 Census noted 1.77 million homeless nationwide, reporting 938,348 urban homeless and 830,000 rural homeless. [4] There is much debate over the actual numbers of homeless in India.



What are the estimates of homelessness in India?

- **The 2011 census estimate:** Nearly 17.7 lakhs people as houseless, however, the census fails to capture the entire homeless population.
- **Commissioners of Supreme courts:** since census are conducted in every 10 years, this data is decadal old. As per the Commissioners of the Supreme Court, 1 percent of the urban population is homeless, making it a population of ~37 lakhs.
- **The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs:** Ministry conducted a third-party survey in 2019 to identify the urban homeless. It estimates that approximately 23.93 lakh people are homeless. Population increase and the COVID-19 pandemic have fueled the rise in the homeless population.



What is the “Shelter for Urban Homeless (SUH)” Scheme about?

- The scheme seeks to provide shelter to the urban poor. SUH is a sub-scheme under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM). The scheme guidelines mention the following provisions:
- All weather permanent shelters will be open for 24 hours.
- Permanent community centre for at least 100 people for every 1 lakh population.
- Each one should cater to 50-100 persons depending on local conditions.

What are the problems in shelter homes?

- **Entry level barrier:** Homeless people face entry-level barriers in accessing public shelters due to local issues such as shelter location, entry fees, and identification proof for verification.
- **Non-availability of IDs:** Most of the homeless are in the informal economy, lacking necessary documentation like voter ids, Aadhar card, etc. It makes them ‘invisible’ in the eyes of the city administration, and their voice remains unheard.

73 MILLION +



Families in India do not have access to decent shelter according to government data.”

Addressing the issue of homelessness

- **Responsibility of ULBs:** The responsibility of accessing the homeless population rests with the urban local bodies. Local authorities need to conduct surveys to assess the homeless population.
- **Decentralisation of funds:** State governments must implement the 74th Constitutional Amendment in its true spirit. Its implementation will empower ULBs, which can then bring all the shelter homes under the ambit of SMCs and train them to manage local issues.
- **Ensuring the benefits through ULBs:** It can help them to secure benefits and guarantee the convergence of various government schemes, thus also addressing deep-rooted issues like violence and exclusion.

Conclusion

- The aim of providing housing for all will remain a distant dream if the homeless are not covered. Sheltering the homeless is a crucial link in the overall housing continuum. The state governments need to empower municipal bodies to ensure the decentralisation of governance.

4. Great Barrier Reef

A joint report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre (WHC) expressed concern about the status of the

Great Barrier Reef (GBR) in Australia, recommending that it “be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger.”

About Great Barrier Reef

- Australia’s Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest reef system stretching across 2,300 km and having nearly 3,000 individual reefs.
- It hosts 400 different types of coral, gives shelter to 1,500 species of fish and 4,000 types of mollusc.
- Coral reefs support over 25% of marine biodiversity even as they take up only 1% of the seafloor.
- The marine life supported by reefs further fuels global fishing industries.
- Besides, coral reef systems generate \$2.7 trillion in annual economic value through goods and service trade and tourism.
- In Australia, the Barrier Reef, in pre-COVID times, generated \$4.6 billion annually through tourism and employed over 60,000 people including divers and guides.

What does the new report say?

- The current report surveyed 87 reefs in the GBR between August 2021 and May 2022.
- Coral cover is measured by determining the increase in the cover of hard corals.
- The hard coral cover in northern GBR had reached 36% while that in the central region had reached 33%.
- Meanwhile, coral cover levels declined in the southern region from 38% in 2021 to 34% in 2022.
- The record levels of recovery, the report showed, were fuelled largely by increases in the **fast-growing Acropora corals**, which are a dominant type in the GBR.

Threats found

- Acropora corals are also the most susceptible to environmental pressures such as rising temperatures, cyclones, pollution, crown-of-thorn starfish (COTs) attacks which prey on hard corals and so on.

Does this mean the reef is out of the woods?

- Behind the recent recovery in parts of the reef, are the low levels of acute stressors in the past 12 months – no tropical cyclones, lesser heat stress in 2020 and 2022 as opposed to earlier.

- Besides predatory attacks and tropical cyclones, scientists say that the biggest threat to the health of the reef is climate change-induced heat stress, resulting in coral bleaching.
- The concern is that in the past decade, mass bleaching events have become more closely spaced in time.
- The first mass bleaching event occurred in 1998 when the El Niño weather pattern caused sea surfaces to heat, causing 8% of the world's coral to die.
- The second event took place in 2002.
- But the longest and most damaging bleaching event took place from 2014 to 2017. Mass bleaching then occurred again in 2020, followed by earlier this year.

5. SC offers to find solution to 'deceitful conversions'

The Supreme Court said that- acts of charity or good work to help a community or the poor should not cloak an intention to religiously convert them as payback.

What did the SC say?

- Conversion on the basis of a voluntarily felt belief in the deity of a different faith is different from belief gained through allurements.
- The court said it would examine such veiled intentions behind religious conversions through allurements by offering food, medicines, treatment, etc.

What is Religious Conversions?

- Religious conversion is the adoption of a set of beliefs identified with one particular religious denomination to the exclusion of others.
- It is one of the most heated issues in the society and politics which can be defined as the adoption of any other religion or of a set of beliefs by the exclusion of other i.e. renouncing one religion and adopting another.
- There are various reasons for which people do convert their religion like:
 1. **Voluntary Conversions** i.e. conversions by free choice or because of change of beliefs.
 2. **Forceful Conversions** i.e. conversions by coercion, undue influence or inducement.
 3. **Marital Conversions** i.e. conversions due to marriage.
 4. **Conversion for convenience** i.e. social mobility

Constitutional ambiguity over conversions

- The question whether ‘right to convert’ comes under the ambit of ‘right to propagate any religion’ holds fundamental importance to determine the constitutionality of anti-conversion laws.
- Article 25 talks about the term “propagate” which means to promote or transmit or merely a freedom of expression.

Why is this getting prominence in India?

Selective persecution and religious marginalization is often debated in India due to religious conversions for:

1. Ghar Wapsi
2. Inter-faith Marriages (often termed as Love Jihad)

What about Incentivised Conversions?

- There are many cases of incentivized conversions for the poor sections of society in exchange for a dignified social life.

For them, the solution lies in addressing the root issues:

1. Ending discrimination
2. Providing high-quality and free education to the poor and disenfranchised
3. Improving access and quality of free health facilities and medicines
4. Improving nourishment and
5. Providing adequate employment opportunities to all

How has Parliament handled anti-conversion bills?

After independence, Parliament introduced a number of anti-conversion bills which were not enacted for want of majority approval.

- In post-Independent India, the first **Indian Conversion (Regulation and Registration) Bill, 1954**, which sought to enforce “licensing of missionaries and the registration of conversion.”
- This was followed by the introduction of the **Backward Communities (Religious Protection) Bill, 1960**, “which aimed at checking conversion of Hindus to ‘non-Indian religions’.
- Non-India religions included Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism,.
- The **Freedom of Religion Bill in 1979**, which sought “official curbs on inter-religious conversion.”

Conclusion

- Religious conversion gives new identity to the communities converted which in turn leads to social mobility.
- Hence, anti-conversion amount to discrimination and a violation of the right to equality.
- However, inter-faith marriages should not be pre-conditioned with religious conversion.
- This certainly raises concerns for the majority of society.
- Also mass conversions for the sake of revivalism should also not be promoted in any ways.

6. Why climate action needs women?

- Women have historically been underrepresented at the UN's global conference on climate change, and this year's COP 27 congregation in Egypt, was no exception. A photo of the heads of state and government representatives participating in the event which went viral across social media, at the beginning of the summit, in fact, showcased the presence of only seven women leaders among the grand total of 110 attendees.

Women participation in climate negotiations

- **Analysis by BBC percentage of women is very less:** As per an analysis conducted by the BBC, women accounted for a mere 34 percent of the committee members in negotiations rooms with some country teams having more than 90 percent men.
- **Participation women at recent COP27 was one of the lowest:** According to the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), which tracks women's participation in climate forum, the recent COP27 numbers represented one of the lowest concentrations of women seen at the UN climate summit.
- **Despite of collective pledge to increase women participation, number fallen:** These number have in fact, fallen from a peak of 40 percent women's participation during COP24 in 2018 and despite the countries collective pledge to increase female representation at these talks as early as 2011.
- **Skewed gender ration in negotiations on key climate issues:** This skewed gender ratio, however, reflected the broader trend across delegation teams, which participated in negotiations on key climate issues such as funding, limiting the use of fossil fuels, carbon emissions, etc.

Why climate action needs women?

- **Women are most disproportionately affected by disasters:** Females are in fact, most disproportionately affected when disasters hit as they suffer greater economic repercussions, bear an additional burden of unpaid care and domestic work, have lesser access to resources, and are pushed to drop out of school or marry early to help manage the family's financial stress.
- **Domestic household responsibilities become more worse in disasters:** Their responsibility to secure water, food, and fuel for their families becomes much more difficult during floods, droughts, or other climate-related crises, forcing them to travel to longer distances, putting their own health at risk.
- **Climate change also increases women's vulnerability:** As per new research published by ActionAid, climate change also increases women's vulnerability to gender-based violence, further bringing about damaging consequences for their reproductive as well as psychological health.
- **Sustainable development and gender equality are intrinsically linked:** The goal of pursuing sustainable development and bringing about gender equality are intrinsically linked, and one cannot be achieved without the attainment of the other.
- **Considering the various roles women play in the management of natural resources:** Women just like any other member impact the overall management of natural resources through the various roles that they play including in the economy, in households, and the society. Their inclusion in climate negotiations is thus, crucial to ensure the development and implementation of a balanced approach to the diverse dimensions of sustainable development such as the economic, social and environmental.
- **Women have been at the forefront on environment related movements:** Women and girls in all their diversity for centuries have played a transformative role in climate change adaptation as well as mitigation, and have been at the forefront of movements related to environmental and climate justice, putting forth some of the most creative and effective approaches for the promotion of sustainable energy transitions that help in the protection of local systems and are based on indigenous knowledge.
- **Gender diverse corporate boardrooms resulted in the adoption of more climate-friendly policies:** There exists a growing body of evidence that shows the association between women's participation and leadership in climate action, and better resource governance, conversation outcomes, and disaster readiness. This stands true, even for the private sector, where diversifying corporate boardrooms on the basis of gender have resulted in the adoption of more climate-friendly policies. For instance, according to a working paper series by the European Central Bank, "a 1 percent increase in the share of female firm managers leads to a 0.5 percent decrease in CO₂ emissions
- **Comprise nearly half of the world's population:** The question, which therefore needs to be raised, is whether climate change mitigation, disaster

reduction, and adaptation strategies can really be holistically developed without the inclusion of women who comprise of nearly half of the world's population.

- Women with their strong body of knowledge and expertise should, thus, be recognised as co-owners and agenda-settlers of the climate process with their skills, knowledge and experience being utilised to improve climate governance outcomes at the local and national levels as well as in multilateral climate forums and the private sector.



What can be done to increase women participation in climate change negotiations?

- **Quotas can be provided not only to increase participation but also to address inequalities:** To begin with, measures, including quotas can be put in place to not only increase women's meaningful participation and leadership at all levels of climate action decision-making but also to address persisting inequalities including in terms of their access and control of resources such as land, technology, and finance.
- **Integrating a gender perspective across spectrums:** Secondly, a conscious effort needs to be made by the policy makers to integrate a gender perspective across spectrums, ranging from design, monitoring and evaluation, implementation and funding of all national climate policies, plans and actions to ensure that the needs and concerns of women are being adequately addressed.
- **Expanding gender responsive finance and services:** The member states must expand gender-responsive finance as well as gender-responsive public services, healthcare systems, universal social protections, combining

measures both to eliminate gender-based violence in climate policies and to promote a care economy, thereby, guaranteeing the provision and access to justice for women.

- **Implementing the ways to multiply gender equality, thereby empowering women to harness their skills:** Heads of states must identify and implement ways to multiply gender equality, empowering women and young girls. To put it simply, global investments, especially for women and girls belonging to marginalised communities must be focused on directly amplifying and fostering their skills, resilience and knowledge, thereby, removing critical barriers that hinder their participation in decision-making positions.



Way ahead

- There remains no doubt that climate change inevitably results in the exacerbation of gender inequalities.
- The world leaders, therefore, need to pay attention to the voices of women who continue to bear a differential impact with mitigations strategies and negotiations being specifically tailored to the gender issues that women are confronted with during a climate-related crisis.

Conclusion

- Climate change is a complex global phenomenon, which requires comprehensive global action that includes each and every individual. The UN Climate Change Conference, one of the biggest summits instead of excluding women, should therefore, serve as an opportunity to recognise and augment the innovative climate actions that are being brought by women. It should also provide a platform for understanding how existing structures prevent women's engagement and subsequently, develop response mechanisms with

policy measures that take into account the immediate as well as long-term gendered impacts of environmental calamities.

GS 2 : Polity, Governance, International Relations

1. Reforming the Election Commission

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court is examining a bunch of petitions recommending reforms in the process of appointment of members of the Election Commission.

Electoral reforms and reluctant Governments

- **Long pending reforms:** A list of over 20 reform proposals was compiled in 2004. More proposals were added to the list over time and are pending with government.
- **Ineffective model code of conduct:** These range from strengthening the Commission's inherent structure to handling the misuse of muscle and money power during elections, which violate the Model Code of Conduct.
- **Judicial intervention because of reluctant Government:** It is hoped that the Bench will also examine electoral reforms suggested to governments by successive Election Commissions over the last two decades or so.

Issue of appointment of election commissioners

- **The Dinesh Goswami Committee in 1990:** It is suggested that the Chief Election Commissioner be appointed by the President (read: executive) in consultation with the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of the Opposition (and in case the Leader of the Opposition was not available, then consultation be held with the leader the largest opposition group in the Lok Sabha).
- **Statutory backing for collegium led appointment:** It said this process should have statutory backing. Importantly, it applied the same criteria to the appointments of Election Commissioners, along with consultation with the Chief Election Commissioner.
- **The National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution:** The commission under Justice M.N. Venkatachalam, said that the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners should be appointed on the recommendation of a body comprising the Prime Minister, the Leaders of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

- **The 255th Report of the Law Commission:** Chaired by Justice A.P. Shah, said the appointment of all the Election Commissioners should be made by the President in consultation with a three-member collegium consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (or the leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha), and the Chief Justice of India.



What is T.N.Seshan case?

- **Conferred equal power on election commissioners:** The T.N.Seshan case conferred equal powers on the Election Commissioners as those enjoyed by the Chief Election Commissioner (referring to the Chief Election Commissioner as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals).
- **Equal protection was not conferred:** Supreme court offered majority power, whereby any two can overrule even the Chief Election Commissioner. Yet, it did not accord the Election Commissioners the same constitutional protection (of removal by impeachment) as is accorded to the Chief Election Commissioner.

Several former Chief Election Commissioners have opined that the appointments in the EC need reforms

Why security of tenure is important for Election Commissioners?

- **Hesitancy to act:** Without security of tenure, they may hesitate to act independently, which they otherwise might if they were truly secure.
- **Junior to chief election commission:** In the absence of full constitutional security, an Election Commissioner could feel they must keep on the right side of the Chief Election Commissioner.
- **Remain loyal to government:** They might also feel they should remain within the ambit favoured by the government.
- **Fear of non-elevation:** An Election Commissioner can never be sure whether they will automatically be elevated to the top post because nowhere has elevation been statutorily decreed.

What are the suggested reforms?

- **Same procedure for removal of judge:** It is suggested measures to safeguard Election Commissioners from arbitrary removal, in a manner similar to what is accorded to the Chief Election Commissioner, who can only be removed by impeachment, which is by no means easy.
- **Appointment by collegium:** While the Chief Election Commissioner should be appointed by a collegium, this must apply equally to the Election Commissioners.
- **Reform by constitutional amendments:** The Election Commissioners must now equally be protected from arbitrary removal by a constitutional amendment that would ensure a removal process that currently applies only to the Chief Election Commissioner.



Conclusion

- Reforms in election commission is absolutely necessary but manner of reforms is debatable. Judiciary's role is not to reform the institution but to deliver the justice. This might be another case of judicial overreach in legislative domain any reform. Any reform in election commission has to come from legislature.

2. QUAD and the Telecom network security

The advent of 5G provides the Quad or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue of the United States (US), Japan, Australia and India, a unique opportunity to demonstrate how democracies can engage in effective technology collaboration.

Background: The Huawei and QUAD response

- **Huawei's connection with Chinese Communist Party:** Recognising the risks that companies like Huawei, which is connected to the Chinese Communist Party, pose to telecommunications networks, each member country of the Quad has taken steps to ensure secure and resilient access to 5G.
- **Australia's measure:** Australia, for one, banned Huawei from its 5G rollout in 2018 and did the same with ZTE, citing national security concerns.
- **US concerns:** For its part, the US has been raising concerns about Huawei since 2012, and doubled-down on its efforts in 2019 by adding Huawei to the Entity List.
- **Japan creating Open RAN:** Japan, meanwhile, a long-time leader in the telecommunications space has accelerated its efforts to create 'Open Radio

Access Networks (Open RAN)', which promote vendor diversification and competition for better solutions.

- **India 5G and conflict with China on border:** India took what it called a “step towards the new era” by deploying its first 5G services in select cities in October 2022; it is aiming to extend the network across the country over the next few years. India is unlikely to include Huawei in its networks, given the clash with Chinese forces in Galwan Valley in June 2020 and concerns about vendor trustworthiness.

US release on Quad meet.
Says, "Noting the importance of digital connectivity and secure networks, the officials discussed ways to promote the use of trusted vendors, particularly for fifth generation (5G) networks."

QUAD alignment on securing 5G telecom networks

- **Agreement in first meeting:** During the first in-person leaders' meeting in September 2021, Quad countries agreed to “build trust, integrity, and resilience” into technology ecosystems by having suppliers, vendors, and distributors ensure strong safety and security-by-design processes, and committed to a “fair and open marketplace”.
- **Memorandum of cooperation on 5g suppliers:** Later, at the fourth meeting in May 2022, partners signed a New Memorandum of Cooperation on 5G Supplier Diversification and Open RAN, and reaffirmed their desire to “collaborate on the deployment of open and secure telecommunications technologies in the region.”

Why QUAD must cooperate on Network Security?

- **Fast emerging telecom technologies:** For one, virtualised (software-based) networks will be the norm in the next 10 years, by which time 6G networks will begin to rollout. Early attention to security issues for emerging telecommunications technologies will help ensure that there is sufficient focus on security in the runup to 5G rollouts.
- **Interoperable software's need to check:** The Quad's advocacy of Open RAN networks or network architectures that consist of interoperable software run on vendor-neutral hardware is another reason why there is a need to focus on software supply chain and software-based infrastructure security.
- **To ensure the comprehensive network strategy:** Critics of Open RAN solutions often point to security concerns to argue against deploying these technologies. A comprehensive 5G security strategy is necessary to ensure trust in these networks. 5G networks are critical infrastructure and it is imperative for states to ensure their security.
- **For instance:** In 2018, Australian officials were the first to warn the public of the risks posed by untrustworthy vendors on 5G networks. Officials from the other Quad countries have followed suit and, along with key partners such as the European Union and United Kingdom, there is a clear consensus on the fundamental importance of secure and resilient communications networks.

How QUAD will be a key player in Talent Development?

- **Bridging the gap of talent pool:** Nations across the globe are suffering from a talent shortage in the technology domain. With heightened demand for high-skilled workers, like-minded nations must cultivate and share their expertise with one another to bridge critical gaps.
- **Quad Fellowship:** this, the Quad created the Quad Fellowship, which will support 100 students per year to pursue STEM-related graduate degrees in the United States. This could be an effective way to grow the talent pipeline in a way that fills current and emerging needs.
- **Restructuring programs that can fulfil the current and future demand:** Many nations have started to consider changes to immigration policies for high-skilled talent. Australia, for example, has raised its permanent immigration cap by 35,000 for the current fiscal year, and Japan is planning to expand its programs soon.
- **Creative ways of QUAD countries to recruit talent:** Shortage of talent pool that all Quad countries are experiencing as they seek creative ways to grow their technology talent pool. Indian companies, for example, are beginning to recruit in rural areas to address significant tech worker shortages that may stymie a growing start-up ecosystem.



What QUAD need to do?

- **Ensure close coordination:** While these commitments are significant, maintaining momentum requires close coordination of resources and policies. No one country can build resilient, open, and secure telecommunications networks on its own, particularly as countries deploy 5G and think ahead to 6G.
- **Adhering to the goals and principles:** To ensure that operationalisation moves forward in line with the Quad's stated principles and goals, the member countries must work together in four key areas: standard-setting; security; talent development; and vendor diversity.
- **Develop a recruitment framework for telecommunications:** Quad countries have an opportunity to set a precedent for other democracies by rethinking what it means to be "qualified" for a position. Companies can look beyond degrees during the hiring process and focus on relevant skills by jointly developing assessment criteria for worker readiness and performance.
- **Incentivise 5G deployment in underserved areas:** To ensure that talent is not left out of the candidates' pool for tech jobs, Quad members can agree to prioritise secure 5G deployment in rural regions. Lack of access to reliable information and communications can be a significant barrier to entering the

workforce, and expanding 5G deployment is a critical aspect of broadening the talent pool.

- **Enhance public-private partnerships:** As Quad countries build their infrastructure and talent pools at home, they must also think about other countries that only consider cost when choosing Huawei and other untrusted telecom providers. As such, the Quad could leverage public-private partnerships to bolster the presence of trusted companies in new locations. By using coordinated, strategic financial incentives, they will also have an opportunity to train and educate third country governments on the threats posed by untrusted 5G vendors. Consequently, they will contribute to broader network security and resiliency as 5G is more widely deployed.
- **Provide R&D incentives:** The governments of the Quad countries should offer incentives to promote ongoing work in hardware, software, and security improvements, specific technologies such as high-band technology and end-to-end network slicing, and research areas including telehealth, energy research, and agriculture. A broad base of enabling technologies and applications would encourage new entrants into the market.

Conclusion

- Quad countries are well-positioned to accomplish plenty together. Of the many areas where they can progress, securing 5G is particularly promising due to the clearly stated objectives that Quad countries share. The Quad countries have the potential to provide a secure, flexible and open 5G network model to the Indo-Pacific and nations seeking democratic alternatives for their telecommunications infrastructure.

3.G20: Setting the World Agenda Through Task Forces

- India's G20 presidency began on December 1. It will be driven by the underlying vision of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", best encapsulated by the motto "One Earth, One Family, One Future". As the main "ideas bank" of the G20, the activities and deliberations of the Think20 (T20) engagement group of the G20 are spread over seven task forces.

Task force on "Macroeconomics, trade, and livelihoods"

- **Create Coherence in monetary and fiscal policy:** It has the mandate to make recommendations on coordination within the G20 to create coherence in monetary and fiscal policy, trade, investment, and supply chain resilience.
- **Recover together, recover stronger:** The aim is to give further impetus to the initiatives taken by the Indonesian presidency to "Recover Together, Recover Stronger" in the post-pandemic period.

- **Consensus on international trade:** With supply chain resilience emerging as a common concern against the backdrop of ineffective WTO mechanisms, the G20 has assumed the mantle as the most significant platform to forge consensus among the top 20 economies on international trade policy.



Task force on “Digital Futures”

- **Digital infrastructure:** It will endeavour to build an inclusive digital public infrastructure to ensure affordability and safe access by all.
- **Interoperability of Digital services:** It will discuss the universal interoperability of digital services. It will also address issues of digital financial inclusion and skills, both integral to economic growth.

Task force on “LiFE, Resilience, and Values for Wellbeing”

- **Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE):** The LiFE initiative aims to put the individual at the centre of the discourse and to sensitise every human being, regardless of nationality and geography. If individuals become more conscious of their lifestyle choices and act more responsibly, it can make a huge difference.
- **Contribution of all:** The focus on LiFE is a timely initiative given the fact that the deleterious effects of climate change on the economy and livelihood are felt the most by the vulnerable countries around the world.



Task force on “Green transitions”

- **Refuelling growth:** Growth will be the aim of the task force on green transitions as it recommends pathways for a smooth transition to clean energy without compromising on efforts for global economic revival in a post-pandemic world.

Task force on the “Global financial order”

- **Restructuring the financial institution:** It will examine the potential for realigning the global financial architecture. The challenge today is to restructure institutions in accordance with contemporary economic needs, including for infrastructure.
- **Finance and resource mobilization:** Greater access to development finance and resource mobilisation through innovative methods is of key importance.

Task force on “Accelerating SDGs”

- **Sustainable collaboration:** It will explore new pathways to deliver on the 2030 agenda through strengthened and sustainable collaboration.
- **Focus on circular economy to reduce waste:** Given the earth’s finite resources, a shift towards a circular economy and deliberate and mindful consumption is likely to reduce waste and help build a virtuous cycle for development.

Task Force on “Reformed Multilateralism”

- **Road map for Multilateralism 2.0:** It will seek to create a roadmap for “Multilateralism 2.0”. A targeted reform agenda for key multilateral institutions, whether the United Nations or its affiliated frameworks such as the WHO, WTO and the ILO, must be undertaken.
- **Representative world order:** With sincere efforts, the global community can look forward to the birth of a more representative and egalitarian multipolar world order from the chrysalis of the G20.



Conclusion

- The year ahead is an opportunity for India to share its values to world. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the guiding canon for India’s Neighbourhood First Policy and Vaccine Maitri, places higher human values above narrow nationalism. It is an approach that is expected to permeate all aspects of India’s G20 Presidency.

4. North East as Gateway to Indo-Pacific Strategy

- India’s ‘Look East’ and ‘Act East’ policies have moved into the phase of Indo-Pacific policy and strategy. But what we in the national capital interpret as the ‘Indo-Pacific’ is different from the perceptions of this policy in North-eastern and eastern India.

Indo-pacific

- The Indo-Pacific is geographic region interpreted differently by different countries.
- For India, the geography of the Indo-Pacific stretches from the eastern coast of Africa to Oceania whereas, for US, it extends up to the west coast of India which is also the geographic boundary of the US Indo-Pacific command.



Importance of North-East

- **Security of India:** The Northeast which comprises seven 'sisters' or States and one 'brother', Sikkim, has been witnessing transformation as it heads towards better security conditions and development
- **Geography and Biodiversity:** North-eastern Indian States are blessed with a wide range of physiographic and ecoclimatic conditions and the geographical 'gateway' for much of India's endemic flora and fauna.
- **Siliguri corridor only connecting link:** North-East is home to 3.8% of the national population and occupies about 8% of India's total geographical area. Siliguri corridor, a narrow strip of land in West Bengal, popularly known as "chicken's neck" connects this region to the rest of mainland India.

Present condition of north east

- **Improved security:** Security conditions have improved significantly since 2017. However, the core issues behind the insurgency have remained unresolved.

- **Serious non-traditional threats:** A notable contrast in security assessments of the authorities and others came to the fore. The official perspective was that the pernicious phenomena of smuggling, drug trafficking, transnational border crime, insurgent activity, and the influx of refugees (from Myanmar) represented serious non-traditional threats.
- **Chinese hand in nefarious activities:** China was viewed as a 'constant player' behind these nefarious activities. This has necessitated vigilance and strict action by the Assam Rifles and other security agencies.
- **Sensitive border management:** The insensitive handling of those engaged in lawful exchanges with the neighbouring countries. A balanced view indicates that considerable scope exists for more effective and people-sensitive border management in the future.

Development as priority in North East

- **Rising road infrastructure:** The Northeast is on the right path to concentrate on economic development. More is awaited through improvement in roads linking north-eastern towns and job creation for thousands of graduates produced by local universities.
- **Hub of medical tourism:** Manipur needs to be promoted as the hub of medical tourism for other Indian States and neighbours such as Myanmar.
- **Investment needs to increase:** The State's research and development facilities to leverage the region's biodiversity should be expanded. Accelerated development requires increased investment by Indian corporates and foreign investors as well as better management.
- **Blueprint for economic development:** Strategic and business community to contribute to crafting a concrete blueprint for leveraging opportunities relating to commerce, connectivity, and human capital development.

Cultural diplomacy from North east

- **Showcasing the culture of north east:** An ambitious endeavour by 75 artists from nine countries highlighted the region's 'unity in diversity' through music, dance, drama, and cuisine.
- **Education, tourism and trade:** Clearly, expanding the reach of cultural diplomacy and people-to-people cooperation through greater educational exchanges, tourism, and trade is desirable.
- **Regional cooperation through cultural exchange:** Harsh Vardhan Shringla, former Foreign Secretary, aptly stressed that the "shared culture, history and mutual social threads that tie the region with India also an important component towards fostering regional cooperation".



Cultural dimension to Indo-Pacific

- **Geo-cultural dimension:** At Kolkata, intellectuals and performers in the cultural domain from India, the U.S., Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh reflected on the Indo-Pacific construct's cultural dimensions. Moving beyond geopolitics and geo-economics, neighbors should focus on "the geo-cultural dimension" of the Indo-Pacific.
- **Expanding people to people cooperation:** Diplomats from the region agree on the importance of expanded people-related cooperation which would lead to wider acceptance of the Indo-Pacific and consolidation of the Quad.

Conclusion

- While implementing India's Indo-Pacific strategy, voices from Northeast and eastern India must be heard. Thus, beyond 'Look East' and 'Act East' lies 'Think and Relate East', especially within our own country.

5. We are the most transparent institution: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has said that it had become a "fashion" for its former judges to comment on earlier decisions of the Collegium when they were part of it while adding that the apex court was the "most transparent institution".

What is Collegium System?

- The Collegium of judges is the Indian Supreme Court's invention.
- It does not figure in the Constitution, which says judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts are appointed by the President and speaks of a process of consultation.
- In effect, it is a system under which judges are appointed by an institution comprising judges.
- After some judges were superseded in the appointment of the CJI in the 1970s, and attempts made subsequently to effect a mass transfer of High Court judges across the country.
- Hence there was a perception that the independence of the judiciary was under threat. This resulted in a series of cases over the years.

Evolution: The Judges Cases

- **First Judges Case (1981)** ruled that the "consultation" with the CJI in the matter of appointments must be full and effective.
- However, it rejected the idea that the CJI's opinion, albeit carrying great weight, should have primacy.
- **Second Judges Case (1993)** introduced the Collegium system, holding that "consultation" really meant "concurrence".
- It added that it was not the CJI's individual opinion, but an institutional opinion formed in consultation with the two senior-most judges in the Supreme Court.
- **Third Judges Case (1998)**: On a Presidential Reference for its opinion, the Supreme Court, in the Third Judges Case (1998) expanded the Collegium to a five-member body, comprising the CJI and four of his senior-most colleagues.

The procedure followed by the Collegium

Appointment of CJI

- The President of India appoints the CJI and the other SC judges.
- As far as the CJI is concerned, the outgoing CJI recommends his successor.
- In practice, it has been strictly by seniority ever since the supersession controversy of the 1970s.
- The Union Law Minister forwards the recommendation to the PM who, in turn, advises the President.

Other SC Judges

- For other judges of the top court, the proposal is initiated by the CJI.

- The CJI consults the rest of the Collegium members, as well as the senior-most judge of the court hailing from the High Court to which the recommended person belongs.
- The consultees must record their opinions in writing and it should form part of the file.
- The Collegium sends the recommendation to the Law Minister, who forwards it to the Prime Minister to advise the President.

For High Courts

- The CJs of High Courts are appointed as per the policy of having Chief Justices from outside the respective States. The Collegium takes the call on the elevation.
- High Court judges are recommended by a Collegium comprising the CJI and two senior-most judges.
- The proposal, however, is initiated by the Chief Justice of the High Court concerned in consultation with two senior-most colleagues.
- The recommendation is sent to the Chief Minister, who advises the Governor to send the proposal to the Union Law Minister.

Does the Collegium recommend transfers too?

- Yes, the Collegium also recommends the transfer of Chief Justices and other judges.
- Article 222 of the Constitution provides for the transfer of a judge from one High Court to another.
- When a CJ is transferred, a replacement must also be simultaneously found for the High Court concerned. There can be an acting CJ in a High Court for not more than a month.
- In matters of transfers, the opinion of the CJI “is determinative”, and the consent of the judge concerned is not required.
- However, the CJI should take into account the views of the CJ of the High Court concerned and the views of one or more SC judges who are in a position to do so.
- All transfers must be made in the public interest, that is, “for the betterment of the administration of justice”.

Loopholes in the Collegium system

- **Lack of Transparency:** Opaqueness and a lack of transparency, and the scope for nepotism are cited often.

- **Judges appointing Judge:** The attempt made to replace it with a 'National Judicial Appointments Commission' was struck down by the court in 2015 on the ground that it posed a threat to the independence of the judiciary.
- **Criteria:** Some do not believe in full disclosure of reasons for transfers, as it may make lawyers in the destination court chary of the transferred judge.

Way ahead

- In respect of appointments, there has been an acknowledgment that the "zone of consideration" must be expanded to avoid criticism that many appointees hail from families of retired judges.
- The status of a proposed new memorandum of procedure, to infuse greater accountability, is also unclear.
- Even the majority opinions admitted the need for transparency, now Collegiums' resolutions are now posted online, but reasons are not given.

6. Criminalization of Politics

- The increasing trend of criminalization of politics is dangerous and has steadily been eating into the vitals of our democratic polity along with growing corruption of a humongous nature.

What is criminalization of politics?

- **Criminals becomes legislators:** The criminals entering the politics and contesting elections and even getting elected to the Parliament and state legislature. Criminalization of politics is the focus of public debate when discussion on electoral reforms takes place.
- **Criminal nexus:** It is result of nexus between politicians and criminals.

What are the reasons for criminalization of politics

- **Political control of state machinery:** Increasing trend of criminalization of politics is linked to political control of state machinery, corruption, vote-bank politics and above all, loopholes in the legal system.
- **Inaction from bureaucrats:** We cannot expect probity and integrity from the bureaucracy if it is controlled in large measure, by criminals. Good governance gets seriously undermined when, for instance, criminals, gangsters or mafia dons, become the political bosses of bureaucrats and subvert the system to serve their interests.
- **Embracing the corruption:** In such a scenario, the bureaucratic system ceases to resist corruption and often embraces it to carry out the diktats of criminal political bosses and also to suit its own ends.

Criminalization of politics is dangerous to a democratic polity.

What are the effects of criminalization of politics?

- **Hampering free and fair election:** limited choice of voters to elect a candidate to parliament or state. It is against the spirit of free and fair election which is the bedrock of a democracy.
- **Unhealthy democratic practice:** The major problem is that the law-breakers become law-makers, this affects the efficacy of the democratic process in delivering good governance. These unhealthy tendencies in the democratic system reflect a poor image of the nature of India's state institutions and the quality of its elected representatives.
- **Circulation of black money:** It also leads to increased circulation of black money during and after elections, which in turn increases corruption in society and affects the working of public servants.
- **Culture of violence:** It introduces a culture of violence in society and sets a bad precedent for the youth to follow and reduces people's faith in democracy as a system of governance.
- **Weakening the institutions:** This is a pervasive malaise in our body politic, which is assuming cancerous proportions. As a result, the three main pillars of our democracy, namely, Parliament, judiciary and executive, get progressively weakened, and the fundamental concept of a democratic system gets subverted.

What should be done?

- **Fast judicial process:** Fast-tracking the judicial process will weed out the corrupt as well as criminal elements in the political system.
- **Political consensus is necessary:** It is high time all political parties came together and developed a consensus on keeping criminals some of them with serious charges including kidnapping, rape, murder, grave corruption and crimes against women out of the system.
- **Warning by Vohra committee:** The Vohra Committee set up by the Centre in 1993 sounded a note of warning saying that "some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs/armed senas and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, state assemblies and the national Parliament." This was nearly three decades ago.

Supreme Court, on
criminalisation of politics, says
"time has come for parliament to
keep criminals away"

Efforts by Supreme court and Executive

- **Disclosure of criminal records:** In 2002, the Court ruled that every candidate contesting election has to declare his criminal and financial records along with educational qualifications. It must be said that mandatory declaration of assets and existing criminal charges in self-sworn affidavits to the EC, prior to elections, has brought in some degree of transparency.
- **Formation of special courts:** As a follow-up to these directives, in 2017, the Union government started a scheme to establish 12 special courts for a year to fast track the trial of criminal cases against MPs and MLAs. The apex court has since then issued many directions, including asking the Centre to set up a monitoring committee to examine reasons for delay of investigation in these cases.
- **Tackling the pendency of cases:** The number of pending cases continues to be a matter of grave concern, so much so that the Supreme Court had been informed, as per media reports of February 2022, that the number of pending criminal cases against sitting and former MLAs and MPs had risen to close to 5,000 towards the end of December 2021.

Conclusion

- There cannot be any leniency to criminals and the corrupt in public life, especially when it comes to a range of crimes which are serious and heinous in nature. Fast tracking trials and expediting the judicial process through a time-bound justice delivery system alone can cleanse our public life and rid it of this widespread disease.

7. Analyzing the Reservation system and the EWS

- Reservation was introduced as a short-term measure to give opportunities to classes of people who were socially and educationally backward and/or inadequately represented in education, employment, politics and other spheres. The intent was laudable. Reservation has increased the standard of

life for many. But what was supposed to be a short-term measure got extended due to various political and sociological compulsions.

What is the idea of reservation?

- **Based on historical injustice:** Reservation is intrinsically linked to the historical injustice meted out to Shudras and Dalits.
- **Reservation for egalitarian society:** It was during the anti-caste movement that the idea of reservation came up as a way for an egalitarian social order, to ensure fair representation in the socio-political order, and to mitigate and compensate for the inhuman exclusion of humans based on ascriptive status.
- **Equal participation in nation building:** Reservation is implemented in politics, education and public employment so that all those in the hierarchy can participate in nation-building on equal terms.

"The idea of Baba Saheb Ambedkar was to bring social harmony by introducing reservation for only ten years. However, it has continued past seven decades. Reservation should not continue for an indefinite period of time so as to become a vested interest":
Justice Pardiwala #EWS

Is the reservation system successful in eliminating the cause?

- **Cannot claim it successful:** Even after seven decades of reservation, we are not able to claim success in eliminating the cause that required reservation in the first place.
- **successive governments kept extending in a hope of a different outcome:** In our personal lives and careers, if a solution to a problem doesn't give the expected result within a reasonable time frame, we reconsider the solution and try to improve it. However, successive governments kept extending the reservation system, hoping for a different outcome.
- **Reservation system being used as a self-perpetuating mechanism:** People who benefited from reservation wanted the system to continue for successive generations too. It was clear that the reservation system was being used by them as a self-perpetuating mechanism.
- **Those who really need are deprived:** Since the reservation is used as perpetuating mechanism, those who really needed reservation were deprived of its benefits.

Analysis over the outcomes of reservation system and the rising silent demands

- **Background, at the time of Independence and the family professions:** At the time of Independence, the economy was primarily agrarian and based on traditional commerce. People were largely unskilled. They continued engaging in the professions that their family had practiced for generations.
- **Profession changed from caste-based to skill-based:** Free school education and industrialization helped people learn new skills, which gave them scope to migrate to greener pastures. As cities became cosmopolitan, the class divide became a thing of the past. Employment in the industrial sector became largely skill-based rather than caste-based.
- **Social and educational backwardness go hand-in-hand with economic weakness:** More than 70 years of reservation has brought economic prosperity to a large section of people and given them adequate representation.
- **Befitted should make a way for others and to completely oppose the demands:** Ideally, families that have been brought above the poverty line through adequate employment opportunities and other benefits should make way for others who are less fortunate; instead, they oppose extending the system to the economically weaker sections (EWS) of society only because some of the beneficiaries could be from the so-called 'forward' communities.
- **Caste system becoming less prevalent in today's technology cum information age:** The cause for social inequality and oppression was somewhat wrongly attributed to a particular faith and the practice of caste system prevalent in those days. In this technology-cum-information age, the surging middle class population makes the caste system less prevalent.

- **Economic prosperity helps to neutralise the social injustice:** The economic prosperity seen today has neutralised to a large extent the very reason for social injustice the class disparity.
- **The reservation is still kept alive:** However, the caste and reservation system are still being kept alive only so that political parties and those who have benefited from the system so far can continue to milk it.

Basic concerns | With the SC scrutinising the EWS quota, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan had prepared the draft legal issues for the Bench to examine:

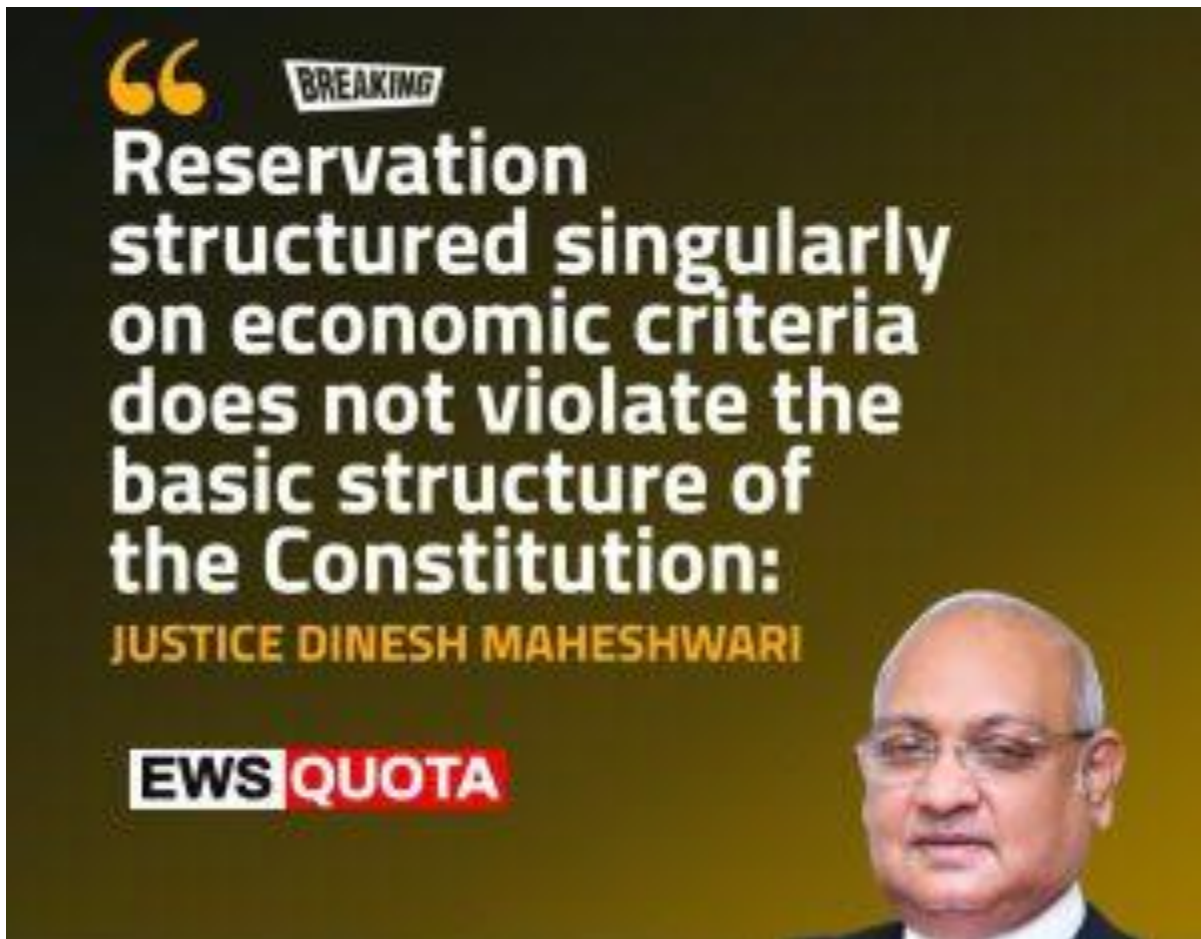
- Whether the 103rd Constitution Amendment Act removes the basis of Indra Sawhney judgment that quota cannot be given on a purely economic basis
- Whether the amendment breaches the Basic Structure of the Constitution in excluding the SEBCs, OBCs, SCs, STs from the scope of EWS reservation
- Whether it breaches the equality code and the Constitutional scheme by giving sanctity to the 'existing reservation', which is only created temporarily
- Whether it breaches the 50% quota limit by permitting EWS reservations up to 10% over and above the existing reservation
- Whether the imposition of EWS quota on private unaided institutions violates the Basic Structure



What are the Misconceptions clarification and the judgement over EWS

- **Misunderstanding that the basic structure of the constitution may violet:** Most objections to this come from a misunderstanding that the basic structure of the Constitution has been violated by the EWS amendment, which seeks to empower the privileged sections of society who are neither socially and educationally backward nor inadequately represented.
- **Misconception that it will reduce the availability of seats:** Another misconception is that the 10% quota in the open category in favour of 'forward' communities reduces the availability of seats in the open category for other classes and communities.

- **What the government clarified:** The government has clarified that this 10% is in addition to the existing reservation in favour of SEBCs. This means it does not in any way affect reservation up to 50% for SEBCs, OBCs, SCs and STs.
- **The egalitarian judgement:** The judgment that sets the basis for this 10% quota said, “If an egalitarian socio-economic order is the goal, the deprivations arising from economic disadvantages, including those of discrimination and exclusion, need to be addressed to by the State; and for that matter, every affirmative action has the sanction of our Constitution.”



Conclusion

- The government has a constitutional and moral duty to achieve the goal of “social, economic and political justice,” mentioned in the Preamble. The 10% quota for the EWS aims to correct an anomaly in the system that is depriving deserving and qualified people. We need to accept that reservation on the basis of economic criteria is the need of the hour and the stepping stone to achieving economic and social justice.

8. There should be uniformity in the rules for granting parole

- There was a huge uproar in the media when Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, a convict serving a 20-year prison sentence for raping two disciples, was seen organising an online ‘satsang’ while on a 40-day parole in October. On the other hand, S. Nalini, a convict in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, who was serving life imprisonment, was given several extensions of parole from December 2021 until her release. Lack of uniformity in parole rules does not bode well for the criminal justice system.

What is Parole and furlough?

- **Short term release:** Furlough and parole envisage a short-term release from custody, both aimed as reformatory steps towards prisoners.
- **Not a Right but a case of Specific exigency:** Parole is granted to meet a “specific exigency” and cannot be claimed as a matter of right.
- **Circumstances considered:** Both provisions are subject to the circumstances of the prisoner, such as jail behaviour, the gravity of offences, sentence period and public interest.

Is there any specific provision pertaining to parole and/or furlough?

- **No specific provision:** The Prisons Act, 1894, and the Prisoners Act, 1900, did not contain any specific provision pertaining to parole and/or furlough.
- **State are empowered to make such rules:** Section 59 of the Prisons Act empowers States to make rules inter alia “for the shortening of sentences” and “for rewards for good conduct”.

You must know

- Since “prisons, reformatories” fall in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, States are well within their reach to legislate on issues related to prisons.

Parole rules are different for different states and on different case

- **Suspension of sentence in Uttar Pradesh:** The Uttar Pradesh rules provide for the ‘suspension of sentence’ (without mentioning the term parole or furlough or leave) by the government generally up to one month. However, the period of suspension may exceed even 12 months with prior approval of the Governor.
- **Maharashtra rules:** Maharashtra’s rules permit release of a convict on ‘furlough’ for 21 or 28 days (depending upon the term of sentence), on ‘emergency parole’ for 14 days, and on ‘regular parole’ for 45 to 60 days.

- **Revised rules in Haryana:** The recently revised rules of Haryana (April 2022) permit 'regular parole' to a convict up to 10 weeks (in two parts), 'furlough' for three to four weeks in a calendar year, and 'emergency parole' up to four weeks. Ram Rahim is on his regular parole.
- **Rules of leaves and its extension in Tamin Nadu and the Nalini case:** Though the Tamil Nadu rules of 1982 permit 'ordinary leave' for a period of 21 to 40 days, 'emergency leave' is permitted up to 15 days (to be spread over four spells). However, in exceptional circumstances, the government may extend the period of emergency leave. Till recently, Nalini was on extended emergency leave owing to her mother's illness.
- **Unlike TN, rules in Andhra Pradesh prohibit extension:** Surprisingly, the Andhra Pradesh rules specifically prohibit such extension (Nalini extension) on account of the continued illness of a relative of a prisoner. They permit 'furlough' and parole/emergency leave up to two weeks, except that the government may extend parole/emergency leave in special circumstances.
- **Odisha:** Similarly, Odisha rules permit 'furlough' for up to four weeks, 'parole leave' up to 30 days and 'special leave' up to 12 days.
- **West Bengal:** West Bengal provides for releasing a convict on 'parole' for a maximum period of one month and up to five days in case of any 'emergency'.
- **Kerala:** Kerala provides for 60 days of 'ordinary leave' in four spells, and up to 15 days 'emergency leave' at a time.

Provision of 'Custody parole'

- **Custody parole:** Release of a prisoner, who is ineligible for a leave under the police escort for some hours for extreme emergency cases.
- **Custody parole In Haryana:** A hardcore convict, who is ineligible for any parole or furlough, may be released for attending the funeral or marriage of a close relative under police escort for a period not exceeding six hours. Haryana has a long list of 'hardcore' prisoners who are not entitled to be released except on 'custody parole' under certain conditions.
- **In Tamil Nadu:** In Tamil Nadu, police escort is given to a prisoner who is released on emergency leave and is dangerous to the community.
- **Kerala:** Similarly, in Kerala, prisoners who are not eligible for emergency leave may be granted permission for visit under police escort for a maximum period of 24 hours.
- **States that do not permit such provision:** Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal do not permit release of habitual criminals and convicts, who are dangerous to society, under Sections 392 to 402 of the Indian Penal Code.

No uniformity in parole and furlough

The rules of set by the states vary in scope and content

- **Furlough is as incentive:** While 'furlough' is considered as an incentive for good conduct in prison and is counted as a sentence served.
- **Parole:** parole or leave is mostly a suspension of sentence. Emergency parole or leave is granted for specified emergencies such as a death, serious illness or marriage in the family. While most States consider only close relatives such as spouse, parents, son, daughter, brother and sister as close family, Kerala has a long list of more than 24 relatives in case of death and 10 in case of marriage.
- **Different circumstances in different states:** Though regular parole or leave is granted after serving minimum sentence (varying from one year to four years) in prison, some States include other familial and social obligations such as sowing or harvesting of agricultural crops, essential repair of house, and settling family disputes. In Kerala, a convict becomes eligible for ordinary leave after serving one-third of a year in prison if he is sentenced for one year.
- **Concern raised:** Despite the fact that temporary release cannot be availed of as a matter of right, the above provisions demonstrate that each State has its own set of rules which not only vary in scope and content, but may also be flouted to give favours to a few.

Conclusion

- Without any common legal framework in place to guide the States and check misuse, arbitrariness is likely to creep in, endangering the entire criminal justice system. With 'prisons' in the State List, this task is not feasible unless at least half of the States come together to request the Central government to legislate a common law for the country on parole and furlough.

9. SAARC vs BIMSTEC

December 8 is commemorated as SAARC Charter Day. It was on this day, 37 years ago, that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), an intergovernmental organization, was established.

What is SAARC?

- **Establishment:** The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- **Members:** It is an intergovernmental organization, was established by Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka Afghanistan acceded to SAARC later.
- **Secretariat:** The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987.
- **Objectives:** The objectives as outlined in the SAARC Charter are, to promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and to improve their quality of life; to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials; to promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among the countries of south Asia.

What SAARC has achieved?

- SAARC has failed abjectly in accomplishing most of its objectives.
- South Asia continues to be an extremely poor and least integrated region in the world.
- The intraregional trade and investment in South Asia are very low when compared to other regions such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Pakistan has adopted an obstructionist attitude within SAARC by repeatedly blocking several vital initiatives such as the motor vehicles agreement, aimed at bolstering regional connectivity.
- Deepening hostility between India and Pakistan has made matters worse. Since 2014, no SAARC summit has taken place leaving the organisation rudderless, and practically dead.



But why to bother about SAARC?

- **South Asia is important for India's national interest:** Because South Asia, that is India's neighbourhood, is important for India's national interests. This is best captured in the current government's 'neighbourhood first' policy.
- **SAARC, a pan south Asia reach:** SAARC is the only intergovernmental organisation with a pan-South Asia reach. India can judiciously employ it to serve its interests in the entire region.
- **Weakened SAARC means heightened instability:** A weakened SAARC also means heightened instability in other promising regional institutions such as the South Asian University (SAU), which is critical to buttressing India's soft power in the region.

Bilateralism or regionalism, which one is best for India?

- **Bilateralism can complement, not substitute regional efforts:** A new narrative is that in South Asia, India can successfully use the instrument of bilateralism over regionalism to pursue its interests. While bilateralism is undoubtedly important, it can at best complement, not substitute, regional or multilateral efforts.
- **Regionalism in East Asia and Africa:** Regionalism has brought immense success in other parts such as East Asia and Africa. Regionalism can deliver prosperity in the South Asian region too, especially because multilateralism is weakening.

- **concept of new regional economic order:** Looking at ASEAN's spectacular success in regional integration, international lawyers Julien Chaisse and Pasha L. Hsieh have developed the concept of a new regional economic order, a process through which developing countries search for a trade-development model, based on incrementalism and flexibility; this is different from the neoliberal model laid down by the Washington Consensus.



What is BIMSTEC?

- **Regional organization of seven members lying in or adjacent to BOB:** The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity.
- **Establishment:** This sub-regional organization came into being on 6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.
- **Act as a bridge between South and South East Asia:** The regional group constitutes a bridge between South and South East Asia and represents a reinforcement of relations among these countries.
- **Provides Inter regional cooperation platforms:** BIMSTEC has also established a platform for intra-regional cooperation between SAARC and ASEAN members.

Did you Know?

- BIMSTEC comprises five South Asian nations (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka) and two ASEAN countries (Myanmar and Thailand).
- Pakistan is NOT a BIMSTEC member.

Importance of BIMSTEC for India

- **India shifted its diplomatic energy from SAARC to BIMSTEC:** In recent years, India seems to have moved its diplomatic energy away from SAARC to BIMSTEC. This resulted in BIMSTEC, after 25 years, finally adopting its Charter earlier this year.
- **BIMSTEC is better than SAARC charter:** The BIMSTEC Charter is significantly better than the SAARC Charter. For instance, unlike the SAARC Charter, Article 6 of the BIMSTEC Charter talks about the 'Admission of new members' to the group. This paves the way for the admission of countries such as the Maldives.
- **However no flexible formula like 'ASEAN Minus X':** Notwithstanding the improvements, the BIMSTEC Charter, to boost economic integration, does not contain the flexible participation scheme of the kind present in the ASEAN Charter. This flexible scheme, also known as the 'ASEAN Minus X' formula, allows two or more ASEAN members to initiate negotiations for economic commitments. Thus, no country enjoys veto power to thwart economic integration between willing countries.
- **Obstructionist attitude of Pakistan within SAARC:** Given the experience of SAARC, where Pakistan routinely vetoes several regional integration initiatives, it is surprising that BIMSTEC does not contain such a flexible participation scheme. A flexible 'BIMSTEC Minus X' formula might have allowed India and Bangladesh or India and Thailand to conduct their ongoing bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations under the broader BIMSTEC umbrella. This would have eventually strengthened BIMSTEC by enabling the gradual and incremental expansion of these binding commitments to other members. India should press for this amendment in the BIMSTEC Charter.

Some steps to take

- **BIMSTEC should not end up as another SAARC:** For this, its member countries should raise the stakes. A high-quality FTA offering deep economic integration, something that Prime Minister Narendra Modi also advocated at the last BIMSTEC ministerial meeting would be an ideal step.
- **India should try make the organizations flexible to ensure peace and prosperity in the region:** Likewise, India should explore legal ways to move successful SAARC institutions such as SAU to BIMSTEC. These steps will give stronger roots to BIMSTEC and enable erecting a new South Asian regional order based on incrementalism and flexibility, ushering in prosperity and peace in the region.

Conclusion

- Since South Asia cannot repudiate regionalism, reviving SAARC by infusing political energy into it and updating its dated Charter will be an ideal way forward. However, in the current scenario, this is too idealistic. So, the next best scenario is to look at other regional instruments such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral, Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).

10. Why is Parliament silent on Voiding of NJAC: Vice-President

VP asked the two Houses for not taking cognizance, over the last seven years, of the 2015 Supreme Court judgment setting aside the Constitutional amendment to constitute the National Judicial Appointment Commission (NJAC).

Background

- Since few days, Judiciary and Executive are at loggerheads.
- VP pointed out that the amendment had been passed with unprecedented support by both Houses and approval from 16 State Assemblies.
- However, on October 16, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that it was not in consonance with the basic structure of the Constitution, and scrapped the legislation.

What was NJAC?

- The NJAC was a body which was proposed to make appointments of Chief Justices, Supreme Court judges, and High Court judges in a more transparent manner as compared to the existing collegium system.
- It sought to replace the Collegium System.
- It was proposed via the National Judicial Appointments Commission Bill, 2014.
- The bill was passed by both the houses; Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and also received the President's assent.
- The commission was established by the 99th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2014.
- The Act proposed that the members of NJAC would be composed of members from the legislative, judicial, and civil society.

Composition of NJAC

- Chief Justice of India would be the Chairman of the NJAC
- Two senior-most judges of the Supreme Court
- The Law and Justice Minister

- Two eminent persons would be selected by a committee which would be composed of the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of Opposition

Why was the NJAC Act struck down?

- The five-judge SC bench struck down the NJAC Act along with the 99th Constitutional Amendment Act in a 4:1 ratio.
- It was repealed by a five-judge bench, famously known as the **Fourth Judges Case, 2015**.
- It was **termed 'unconstitutional'** and was struck down, citing it as having affected the independence of the judiciary.

Benefits of the NJAC Act

Justice Chelameshwar praised the NJAC Act because-

- **Transparent process:** It involved a smooth and transparent process for the appointment of judges.
- **Brings checks and balances:** the exclusion of checks and balances principle leads to the destruction of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- **Seeks balance of power:** In a democratic setup, the executive cannot be completely excluded.
- **Global examples:** In the dissent order, an example of the United States of America was given, where the head of the Executive is conferred with the power to appoint the judges.

Issues with collegium system

- **Alleged favouritism:** The collegium system does not provide any guidelines or criteria for the appointment of the Supreme Court judges and it increases the ambit of favouritism.
- **Ambiguous process:** The absence of an administrative body is also a reason for worry because it means that the members of the collegium system are not answerable for the selection of any of the judges.
- **Isolating the executive:** The check and balance principle is necessary because it ensures that no organ of democracy is exercising its power in an excessive manner.
- **Extra-constitutional nature:** The collegium system tells us that even though the collegium system is not mentioned anywhere in the Constitution, rather it has evolved over a period of time from different landmark cases.
- **Lack of transparency:** Nepotism has been often witnessed in the judiciary due to a lack of criteria for the appointment of judges.

What can we, as aspirants, observe here?

- After analyzing both NJAC and the collegium system, it can be inferred that neither of the methods is complete and both lack certain aspects.
- Many former judges and legal experts are supporting the NJAC.
- However, legal jurists are divided on NJAC, with some supporting it while others calling for amendments to the Act.
- It is quite evident that neither the collegium system nor the NJAC is accurate; both have some shortcomings.

Way forward

- NJAC needs to be amended to keep the judiciary independent.
- According to Justice Deepak Gupta, retired senior civil servants need to be inducted into the body appointing judges.
- The Supreme Court needs to lay down certain guidelines for appointing judges and those guidelines should be strictly followed and codified.
- Apart from that, all the notifications should be issued in the public domain to make the process more transparent.

11. G20: India at Urban20 (U20)

- Fifty percent of the world's population currently lives in urban areas, which is projected to increase by 1.5 times to 6 billion. However, cities continue to face mounting challenges in accommodating the needs of this rapidly expanding population. As a catalyst for global change, what promises can India's presidency hold for half the world's urban population?

Background

- India's G20 presidency began on December 1. It will be driven by the underlying vision of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", best encapsulated by the motto "One Earth, One Family, One Future".
- G20's Sustainable Development agenda aligns itself with sustainable actions to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

What is Urban 20 (U20)?

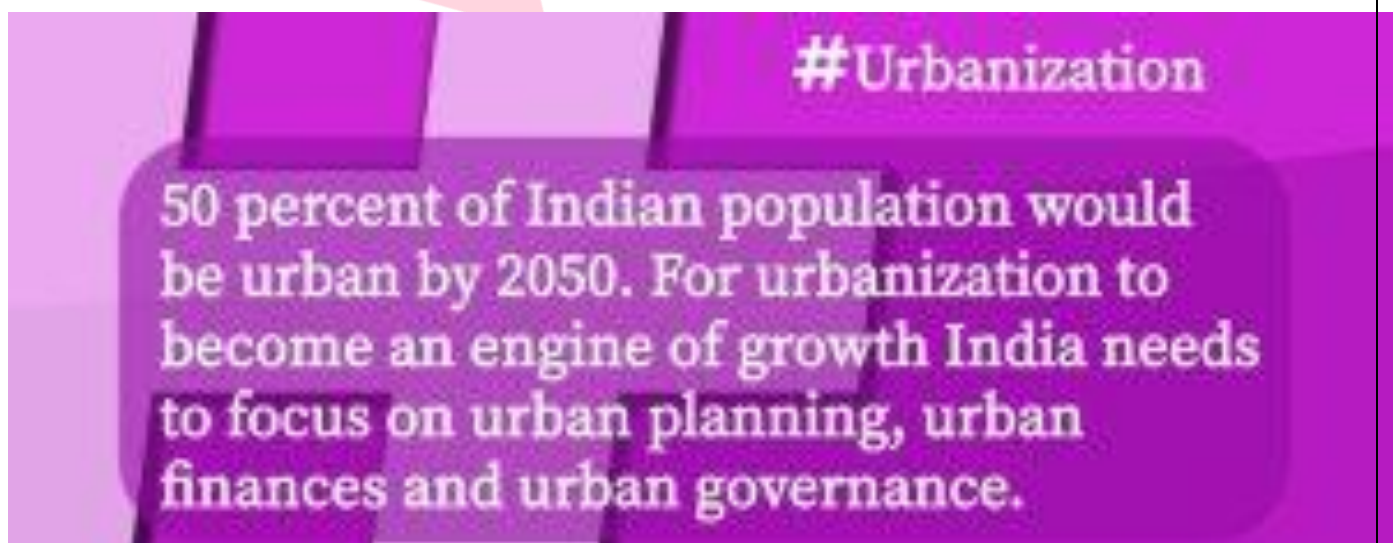
- **A city diplomacy initiative within G20 ecosystem:** Within the G20 ecosystem, a city diplomacy initiative called the "Urban 20" (U20) was launched in December 2017. As one of the formal Engagement Groups under

G20, the U20 forum was meant to collectively raise critical urban issues of G20 cities during the G20 negotiations.

- **Special emphasis on cities:** U20's City Sherpas emphasise on the increasing importance of cities (both G20 and non-G20) as a country's engines of innovation, economic growth, and productivity.
- **Focus on climate change and sustainable development:** U20 specifically focuses on climate change, sustainable development, and socio-economic issues in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Largely remained a platform of recommendation:** Despite U20's concerted efforts to run parallel to G20, the absence of any written constitution, procedures, or formal agreement has made U20 unable to effectively address the aspirations and concerns of cities. U20 seems to have largely remained a platform for expression and making recommendations without being able to directly influence urban planning or implement policy initiatives.
- **In this backdrop India has a unique opportunity:** Within this framework, India now has the unique opportunity to outline and action specific U20 goals to link with the larger objectives of one of the most influential international forums.

How U20 2023 provides an unique opportunity to India?

- India's U20 prospect can work towards engaging in meaningful policymaking and investments towards fulfilling the global 2030 Agenda.
- By mindfully planning the allocation of urban resources and inspiring sustainable practices, India can set a new balanced template. While learning from the best practices of some of the soundest cities,



How India can initiate actions at U20

- **Prioritizing post Covid urban social and emotional wellbeing:** In a post-pandemic world, U20 2023 can priorities the role of urban mental health to raise awareness of its bearing as a consequence of an overpowering-built environment Urban amenities must account for the improvement of the overall quality of life and social-emotional well-being.
- **Emphasizing on efficient data and policies:** U20 2023 can create a primer for effective data collection, analysis, monitoring, and reporting for timely assessment or urban plans to align with G20 and national agendas. Going further, India must emphasize policies for efficient data use and supporting data governance.
- **Increasing efficiency of digital services and bridging the digital divide gap:** Digital literacy in urban India is only at 61 percent, suggesting a pervading low awareness of the government's e-services. Moreover, gender biases in technology and digital skills lead to a greater gender digital divide suggesting a huge disparity in access to digital services. New regulatory frameworks are needed to encourage research and investment in bridging such gaps.
- **Gender inclusive planning to develop equitable cities:** U20 2023 can call for global collaborations to develop equitable cities by engaging in dialogues around gender-inclusive planning. This is not only to benefit women and children but to include representation of diverse marginalised genders and LGBTQ+ persons in the urban planning process.
- **Prioritizing capacity building and training for city planners:** It is also essential to highlight the importance of capacity building and training for planners and civic officials about the various sensitivities and impacts of urban development plans. India can bolster global joint discussions around increased investment in urban healthcare facilities.
- **Boosting investment in sustainable energy transition:** While delivering on the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda and 2030 Agenda, India can reinforce direct investment in areas such as sustainable energy and mobility transition. For instance, managing the risks of urban flooding in a changing climate has become a global focus area for policymakers.
- **Investing in quality education and skill development:** With cities burgeoning, investing in quality education and skilling has become critical to better prepare for the future of work and jobs for. Policies, across sectors, must support better skilling and training for entrepreneurship. For example, while the PM Employment Generation Programme and other Credit Support Schemes support MSMEs for training the youth and generating employment, we are yet to see their effectiveness and outreach. On the other hand, the rising trend of the gig economy demands innovative policymaking to accommodate the aspirations of the urban youth.
- **Local participation must be enhanced:** Most importantly, U20 2023 can reinforce the importance of local-regional involvement for the integration of perspectives at the national and sub-national government bodies as the way

forward. Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) can be strengthened further to facilitate basic infrastructure needs, inclusive economic growth and equitable development.

The 7 petals on the Lotus represent the 7 continents of the globe and also the 7 notes of music. G20 will bring the world together in harmony

How India can lead?

- India's theme of G20 2023 holds the promise of interconnectedness to bring in an attitudinal change through deliberation, partnerships, dialogues, cooperation and knowledge-sharing.
- India can lead the way for global response and action by setting the stage for newer partnerships and agreements to facilitate community empowerment and social justice at both the local and societal levels.
- By stressing on equity, inclusivity, sustainability and resilience, U20 2023 will be able to honour its commitment to establish better cities.

Conclusion

- By exploring the interlinkages and shared issues related to urban planning, India can help pave the way to bring about a global consensus for renewed urban vigour.

12. Status of Maternal mortality in India

- India has improved its maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 97 deaths per lakh in 2018-2020 from 103 deaths per lakh in 2017-2019. This is a considerable improvement from the 130 deaths per lakh in 2014-2016, the latest data released by the office of the Registrar General of India showed.

What is maternal mortality?

- As per World Health Organization, Maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management but not from accidental or incidental causes.



Maternal mortality ratio (MMR)

- **Main indicator:** Maternal mortality ratio is a Key indicator maternal mortality ratio.

- **Definition:** The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period.
- **Shows risk of maternal death:** It depicts the risk of maternal death relative to the number of live births and essentially captures the risk of death in a single pregnancy or a single live birth.
- **SDG target:** Target 3.1 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations aims at reducing the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.

Andhra Pradesh	45	(13 - 78)	2.4	0.08%
Telangana	43	(4 - 83)	2.3	0.08%
Karnataka	69	(35 - 103)	3.5	0.12%
Kerala	19	(0 - 42)	0.9	0.03%
Tamil Nadu	54	(24 - 85)	2.7	0.09%
SOUTH SUBTOTAL	49	(35 - 64)	2	0.09%
Gujarat	57	(28 - 86)	3.9	0.14%
Haryana	110	(58 - 162)	8.0	0.28%
Maharashtra	33	(10 - 56)	1.8	0.06%
Punjab	105	(40 - 170)	5.4	0.19%
West Bengal	103	(64 - 143)	5.0	0.18%
Other states	77	(55 - 98)	3.9	0.14%
OTHER SUBTOTAL	76	(63 - 89)	4	0.15%

Maternal mortality Ratio (MMR) in India: An overview of recent figures

- **North eastern states show improvement:** In 2014-2016, the north-eastern state's MMR was at a dangerously high 237 deaths per one lakh live births. This has improved significantly over the years to 229 in 2015-2017, 215 in 2016-2018 and 205 in 2017-2019, showed the data released November 28, 2022.
- **Southern states always better than national average:** The southern state was always performing better than the national average and has almost consistently brought down even that figure from 46 in 2014-2016, 42 in 2015-2017, 43 in 2016-2018 and 30 in 2017-2019.
- **Kerala the best performer:** Kerala continues to remain the best performer, with a low MMR of 19 per one lakh live births.

- **On regional level Assam improved but continues to have high MMR:** On the regional level, Assam continues to have the highest MMR (195) but has improved its own performance over the years.
- **Better performing states:** Among the better-performing states with an MMR lower than 100, barring Kerala, are Maharashtra (33), Telangana (43), Andhra Pradesh (45) and Gujarat (57).
- **Other states with high MMR:** Madhya Pradesh (173), Uttar Pradesh (167), Chhattisgarh (137), Odisha (119), Bihar (118), Rajasthan (113), Haryana (110), Punjab (105) and West Bengal (105).
- **States with high MMR mostly belongs to socioeconomically poor regions:** Most of these states belong to the Empowered Action Group (EAG) a classification of socioeconomically poor regions on whom the country's development depends.

The Statistics including Maternal Mortality Rate and lifetime risk

- **Maternal mortality rate:** It is the maternal deaths of women in the ages 15-49 per lakh of women in that age group.
- **As defined by Registrar General of India:** The Registrar General of India defines as "the probability that at least one woman of reproductive age (15-49 years) will die due to childbirth or puerperium (postpartum period), assuming that chance of death is uniformly distributed across the entire reproductive span."

Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) v/s Maternal Mortality Rate

- **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):** This is derived as the proportion of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births, reported under the Sample Registration System (SRS).
- **Maternal Mortality Rate:** This is calculated as maternal deaths of women in the ages 15-49 per lakh of women in that age group, reported under SRS.

Table 1: Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), Maternal Mortality Rate and Life Time Risk; India, EAG & Assam, South and Other states, 2018-20

India & Major States	MMR	95% CI	Maternal Mortality Rate	Lifetime risk
INDIA	97	(88 - 106)	6.0	0.21%
Assam	195	(117 - 272)	12.1	0.42%
Bihar	118	(78 - 157)	11.2	0.39%
Jharkhand	56	(10 - 101)	4.2	0.15%
Madhya Pradesh	173	(126 - 220)	15.3	0.53%
Chhattisgarh	137	(54 - 219)	9.9	0.35%
Odisha	119	(71 - 167)	7.3	0.25%
Rajasthan	113	(71 - 155)	9.6	0.33%
Uttar Pradesh	167	(126 - 207)	14.3	0.50%
Uttarakhand	103	(52 - 154)	6.3	0.22%
EAG AND ASSAM SUBTOTAL	137	(121 - 154)	11	0.38%

Maternal mortality rate in India

- India's maternal mortality rate is six.
- poor-performing states include Madhya Pradesh (15.3), Uttar Pradesh (14.3), Assam (12.1), Bihar (11) and Chhattisgarh (9.9).
- Kerala is the only state to achieve a maternal mortality rate of less than one, at 0.9.
- Other states in the leading category include Maharashtra (1.8), Telangana (2.3), Andhra Pradesh (2.4) and Tamil Nadu (2.7).
- The lifetime risk figures also show a similar trend, with Madhya Pradesh leading the way at 0.53 per cent, followed by Uttar Pradesh (0.50 per cent), Assam (0.42 per cent), Bihar (0.39 per cent) and Chhattisgarh (0.35 per cent).
- At the national level, the lifetime risk of maternal mortality stands at 0.21 per cent.

Conclusion

- India's performance on the maternal mortality front has been improving consistently as the country achieves its national target of reducing MMR to below 100. But it still lags behind the UN-mandated Sustainable Development

Goals target of an MMR equivalent to 70 deaths per 100,000 live births. The country has eight years to meet this benchmark by 2030. Other indicators assessing maternal health indicate large room for improvement.

13. Religious conversion and Fundamental right to freedom of religion

While hearing a petition seeking a ban on forced conversions, Division Bench judge of the apex court said, “The purpose of charity should not be conversion. Every charity or good work is welcome, but what is required to be considered is the intention,” The observation, loaded with significant implications, is to be considered in the light of the provisions of the Constitution relating to people’s fundamental right to freedom of religion, its legislative history and judicial interpretation.

Fundamental right to freedom of religion

- **Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion before the constitution of India:** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, which was before the makers of the future Constitution for independent India had proclaimed: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” [Article 18].
- **Extensive debate on religious freedom as a people’s right in the Constituent Assembly:** Keeping this in mind, religious freedom as a people’s right was repeatedly debated in the Constituent Assembly. In cognisance of Christianity’s traditions of evangelism and proselytisation, it was to include the right to propagate religion.



Journey of a Right to freedom of religion before and after The Constitution

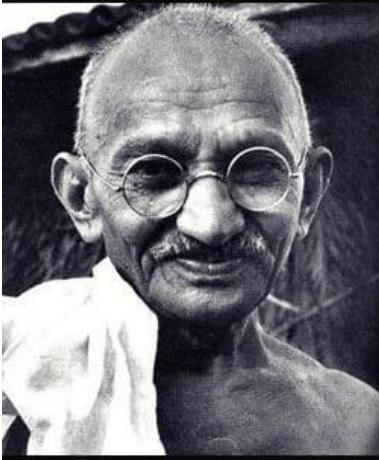
- **British rulers facilitated conversion to their religion:** The British rulers of India, who were never shy of introducing measures to facilitate the conversion of others to their faith.
- **British rulers enacted Native Converts Marriage Dissolution Act in 1866:** They had enacted in 1866 a Native Converts Marriage Dissolution Act to provide the facility of divorce to married Indians who converted to Christianity and were thereupon deserted by their non-converting spouses.
- **The Act recently dropped which was once thought to by the law commission of India:** After Independence, the Law Commission of India recommended that this Act be revised to make it a general law on the effect of post-marriage change of religion, but the government did not take any action on it. The original Act remained in force till recently but was eventually dropped from the statute book by the Repealing and Amending Act of 2017.
- **Alerted by the missionaries' princely states enforced anti conversion laws:** Alerted by the missionaries' evangelistic activities, several princely states of the pre-Independence era had enforced anti-conversion laws Raigarh, Udaipur and Bikaner among them.
- **Constitution Bench in case where state freedom of religion Acts was challenged:** During 1967-68, state legislatures in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh enacted similar laws, both ostensibly titled as Freedom of Religion Act. Christian leaders lost no time in challenging their constitutional validity in the Supreme Court. Heading a Constitution Bench, Chief Justice of the time AN Ray, argued that converting people interfered with their religious freedom and held that Article 25 granted "not the right to convert another

person to one's own religion but (only) to transmit and spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets" .

- **The Constitution Bench decision inspired some other states to enact similar laws:** Beginning with the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act 1978. Today there are such laws in about half of our states. Some of these have been either newly enacted or made more stringent, since the beginning of the present political dispensation in 2014. All of them prohibit converting people from one to another religion without their free will and, to indicate this, use various expressions like force, fraud, inducement and allurement.
- **Drafts on the conversion:** While the first draft of the future Constitution proposed to restrain conversion except by one's own free will, the second was to recognise the "right to preach and convert within limits compatible with public order and morality."
- **Constitution recognised the right to propagate:** Eventually, the Constitution recognised the right to propagate, along with freedom of conscience and the right to profess and practice, one's religion as people's fundamental right. Prima facie, individuals' right to forsake their religion by birth and embrace another faith was integral to freedom of conscience
- **Supreme Courts observations regarding the right to propagate:** As regards the propagation of religion, in two cases decided in 1954, the apex court observed that Article 25 covered every individual's right "to propagate his religious views for the edification of others" (RP Gandhi) and that "it is the propagation of belief that is protected, no matter whether the propagation takes place in a church or monastery, or in a temple or parlour meeting" (Shirur Math).

Do you know this interesting news?

- The Bombay High Court has recently held that the freedom of conscience of a person "includes a right to openly say that he does not believe in any religion"



Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different road, so long as we reach the same goal. Wherein is the cause for quarreling?

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Mahatma Gandhi's view on freedom of religion

- Mahatma Gandhi once said that “all faiths are equally true though equally imperfect”
- He had pleaded that, instead of converting others to one's own faith, “our innermost prayer should be that a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim and a Christian a better Christian” (Young India, 1924).
- He had also once said: “If I had power and could legislate I should stop all proselytising” (Harijan, 1935).

How is religious freedom protected under the Constitution?

- Article 25(1) of the Constitution guarantees the “freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion”.
- It is a right that guarantees a negative liberty – which means that the state shall ensure that there is no interference or obstacle to exercise this freedom.
- However, like all fundamental rights, the state can restrict the right for grounds of public order, decency, morality, health and other state interests.

Conclusion

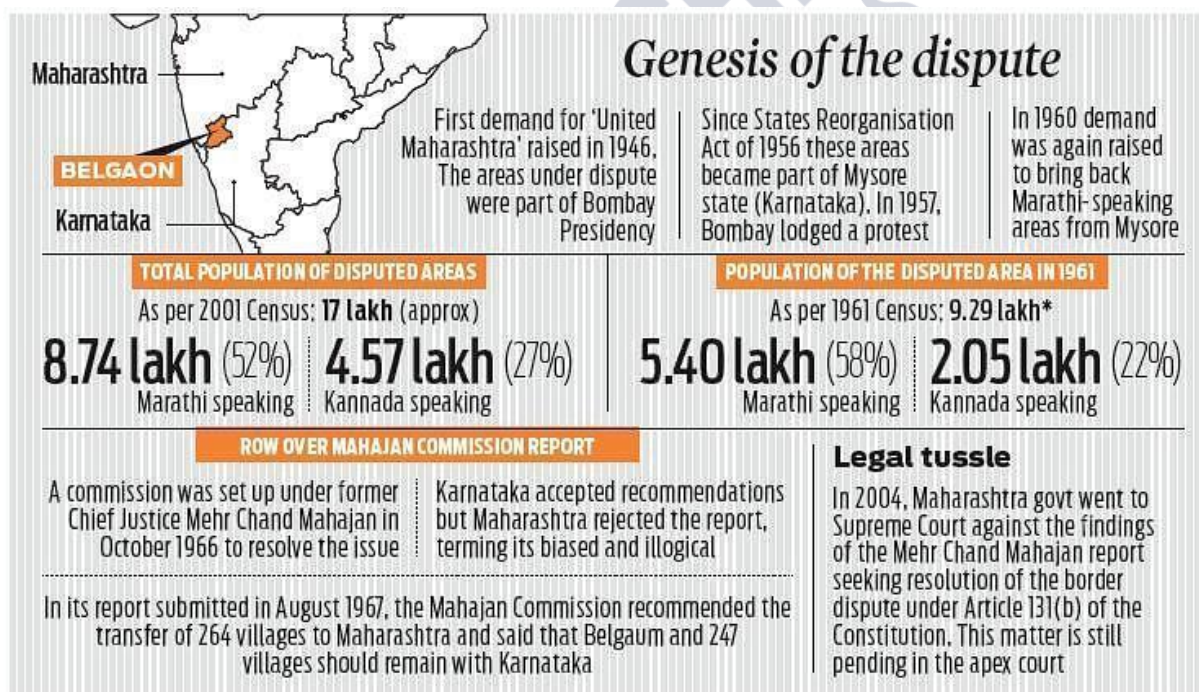
- An observation made by the Supreme Court on “forced conversions” is to be considered in the light of the provisions of the Constitution relating to people's fundamental right to freedom of religion, its legislative history and judicial interpretation and set the future roadmap to make. Pluralism and inclusiveness are characterized by religious freedom. Its purpose is to promote social harmony and diversity.

14. Karnataka-Maharashtra border Dispute: Is it just a political tool?

The eruption of strong language chauvinism on the border of Karnataka and Maharashtra is neither sudden nor primarily linguistic. The number of speakers of both of Marathi and Kannada languages has been overwhelmingly large. If it is not language, is it the sudden memory of a badly mangled territorial border that has irked people?

What is the dispute in short?

- A petition filed by the Maharashtra government, challenging some provisions of the State Reorganisation Act, 1956 and demanding 865 villages from five districts of Karnataka. The five districts are Belagavi, Karwar, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi and Bidar.,
- In Karnataka, tensions are high, especially in Belagavi district, which borders Maharashtra



When did the dispute begin?

- **Since the State Reorganisation Act passed in 1956:** Maharashtra and Karnataka have sparred over the inclusion of some towns and villages along the state border ever since the State Reorganisation Act was passed by the Parliament in 1956. The Act was based on the findings of the Justice Fazal Ali

Commission, which was appointed in 1953 and submitted its report two years later.

- **Erstwhile Mysore renamed and formed State of Karnataka and the differences erupted:** On November 1, 1956, Mysore state later renamed Karnataka was formed, and differences between the state and the neighbouring Bombay state later Maharashtra erupted.
- **View of Maharashtra:** Maharashtra was of the view that the northwestern district of Karnataka, Belagavi, should be part of the state, leading to a decade-long violent agitation and formation of Maharashtra Ekikaran Samithi (MES), which still holds sway in parts of the district and the eponymous city

What was the Centre's response?

- **Union government set up a Commission in 1966:** Amid protests and pressure from Maharashtra, the Union government set up a commission under retired Supreme Court judge Justice Meharchand Mahajan on October 25, 1966. S Nijalingappa was the Karnataka Chief minister then and VP Nayak was his Maharashtra counterpart.
- **Report came up with a settlement on merging of towns and villages:** The report was expected to be a binding document for both states and put an end to the dispute. The commission submitted its report in August 1967, where it recommended merging 264 towns and villages of Karnataka (including Nippani, Nandgad and Khanapur) with Maharashtra, and 247 villages of Maharashtra (including South Solapur and Akkalkot) with Karnataka.
- **Report tabled in 1970 but no implementation took place as it became a poll issue:** Though the report was tabled in 1970 in the Parliament, it was not taken up for discussion. Without the implementation of the recommendations, demands of Marathi-speaking regions to be part of Maharashtra and Kannada-speaking regions to be part of Karnataka continued to grow. MES made it a poll issue in many parts of Belagavi and won successive elections from constituencies in the district.

Bilingualism: an essential element of the culture of the area

- **Extended families on both sides:** The castes and communities on both sides of the disputed border have their extended families spread on either side of it.
- **Harmonious Cultural exchange:** All of the harmoniums and sitars played by the greatest among Karnataka's singers have been made in Maharashtra's Miraj town for the last 120 years.
- **Influence of Bhakti movement on one another:** In the past, the bhajans of Tukaram have made their way into the hearts of the Kannada speakers with

as much ease as did the vachanas of Basaveshwar's saint-followers into the minds of Marathi speakers.

- **Influence of one another's language:** Thousands of Marathi words are of Kannada origin and a similar number of words in Kannada have assimilated the Indo-Aryan roots through Marathi.

Critique: Dispute is more of a political tool

- **Dispute is visible but not in the essence:** The dispute is in the name of language, but it is not linguistic in essence. It is in the name of a border, but it is not territorial in essence.
- **The dispute is becoming more of a political demand:** People know that the area will see disturbance when politicians want to unleash it. Appealing to language chauvinism acquires an instrumentalist-political demand.
- **Diverting the discontent:** The truth is, neither the language nor the people along the state border are an issue for them, as they should be. What matters to the political war-lords is to find a way of diverting the discontent, no matter what harm it brings to the harmony of communities in the area.

Conclusion

- Almost two decades after the petition, its maintainability remains challenged. Karnataka has resorted to Article 3 of the Indian Constitution to argue that the Supreme Court does not have the jurisdiction to decide the borders of states, and only Parliament has the power to do so. Maharashtra has referred to Article 131 of the Constitution, which says that the Supreme Court has jurisdiction in cases related to disputes between the Union government and states.

15. India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is good for both countries

The ties between India and the UK are often described as a Living Bridge, a dynamic economic force of people, businesses and ideas. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi drives forward plans to make India a developed nation within the next 25 years and the UK forges deeper trade relationships around the globe, our connections are growing stronger every day.

Background: How India-UK trade relationship taking shape in recent time?

- **Enhanced trade relationship:** India and the UK are two of the largest economies on the planet. Economic relationship between the two is reaching new heights with an enhanced trade partnership.

- **Minimised trade barriers:** Both have lowered several trade barriers, pledged to bring down many more and set an ambitious target to double the value of India-UK trade by 2030.
 - **Opening up opportunities in UK:** Since then, Indian firms, including established businesses and recent startups, have been finding opportunities in the UK.
 - **Business and investment in India:** British businesses in fields ranging from food to financial services are expanding and investing in India. The car manufacturer, McLaren, which has just opened a showroom in Mumbai, is one example.
 - **FTA's beneficial for future and mutual growth:** An India-UK free trade agreement is a natural next step for both, bringing two nations with extraordinary plans for their futures closer still.
-
- FTAs normally cover **trade in goods (such as agricultural or industrial products) or trade in services (such as banking, construction, trading etc.)**.
 - FTAs can also cover other areas such as **intellectual property rights (IPRs), investment, government procurement and competition policy, etc.**

What are Free trade agreements (FTA)?

- Free trade agreements are agreements between the two or more countries or trading blocks that primarily agree to eliminate or reduce customer tariff and non-tariff barriers on substantial trade between them.

Importance of Free Trade Agreements

- **FTA include multiple trade aspects:** FTAs cover a wide array of topics such as tariff reduction impacting the entire manufacturing and the agricultural sector; rules on services trade; digital issues such as data localization; intellectual property rights that may have an impact on the accessibility of drugs; and investment promotion, facilitation, and protection.
- **Great impact on economy and society:** Consequently, an FTA has a far-reaching impact on the economy and society. Given this, one legitimately

expects transparency and greater scrutiny of the FTA process both during and after the negotiations.

How a Free trade agreement with UK will benefit India?

- **Greater market access works both ways:** Prime Minister Modi has urged Indian businesses to export their products to the world with “zero-effect, zero-defect”. In other words, high-quality goods with no environmental impact. A free trade agreement between our nations could further help achieve this target. It would help Indian firms to sell to a market that imported almost £820 billion of goods and services from around the world in the last 12 months on record.
- **UK will aid in the ongoing India’s economic progress:** The Indian economy’s future is an exciting one, with the prospect of new technologies, growing businesses and better jobs for its citizens. The UK has the skills and experience to aid this progress. A deal that’s right for both could make it cheaper and easier for ambitious Indian businesses to tap into this expertise. It is also only right that the millions of SMEs that power India’s economy benefit from a deal.
- **Investment in one another’s economy will multiply the opportunities:** The British cybersecurity solutions firm, Telesoft Technologies, has just said it will pump £10 million into its India subsidiary over the next five years supporting a growing telecoms sector. A free trade agreement that smooths British and Indian firms’ path to invest in one another’s economy would mean such opportunities multiply.
- **FTA can be a force of primary economic growth in uncertain times:** A free trade agreement’s value cannot be measured entirely in rupees and pounds. Covid-19’s impact on supply chains, slow global economic growth and volatile markets mean we are living in uncertain times, where free trade could be the primary force of prosperity throughout history. It will help to build the long-term security that people around the world need right now.

Conclusion

- In the economic uncertainty, free trade can be considered as answer to building the long-term security that people around the world need right now. In this, the year of its 75th anniversary since Independence and its G20 Presidency, India is on a path to a new economic future. It would be great to

have UK alongside on this journey, as we together can use trade to benefit our citizens and the world.

16. Curbing individualism in public health

A failure to examine and interpret public health problems from a population perspective is leading to ineffective and unsustainable solutions as far as complex public health problems are concerned. There is a strong tendency in public health to prioritise individual-oriented interventions over societal oriented population-based approaches, also known as individualism in public health.

What are the problems in public health approach?

- **Micronutrient supplementation at Individualistic level instead sustainable approach at public level:** Problems such as undernutrition, for which individualist solutions such as micronutrient supplementation and food fortification have been proposed as solutions in lieu of sustainable approaches such as a strengthening of the Public Distribution System, supplementary nutrition programmes, and the health services.
- **Diagnosis and treatment than the solutions that modify health behaviours:** Similar is the case with chronic disease control, wherein early diagnosis and treatment is the most popular solution, with little scope for solutions that can modify health behaviours (through organised community action).

Recent evidences that show individualism is preferred over population-based approach

1. **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY):** A nationwide publicly-funded insurance scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) falls under Ayushman Bharat. It is the largest health insurance scheme in the country covering hospitalisation expenses for a family for ₹ 5 lakh a year. The goal is to ensure 'free' curative care services for all kinds of hospitalisation services so that there is no financial burden to the beneficiary.
- **Approach needed:** What is not talked about in the entire scheme is the need for hospitalisation services per year for any population.
 - **Approach preferred:** Instead, every individual is given an assurance that if there is a need for hospitalisation expenses, the scheme will cover the expenses, highlighting the risk/probability of every individual facing hospitalisation in a year.

- **Individualistic response:** This is an individualistic response to the problem of hospitalisation expenditure faced by populations. This becomes obvious when one examines the data on annual hospitalisation across populations.
- 2. **vaccination for COVID-19 unlike other vaccinations:** It was evident that a COVID-19 vaccine cannot prevent people from getting the disease but only reduce hospitalisation and deaths in the event of contracting COVID-19.
- **Approach needed:** To effectively manage COVID-19, what was needed was to have primary, secondary, and tertiary health-care facilities to manage the above proportion of cases. This is what a population-based approach to epidemic would be focusing on.
- **Approach preferred:** Instead, by focusing on a vaccination programme for the entire population, it is again an assurance and a promise to every individual that even if you get COVID-19, you will not need hospitalisation and not die. Even after the entire crisis, not much is talked about in terms of the grossly inadequate health-care infrastructure to ensure the necessary primary, secondary and tertiary care services for COVID-19 patients, in turn leading to many casualties.
- **Individualistic response:** The entire focus has been on the success story that every individual is protected from hospitalisation and death achieved through vaccine coverage. Most of the deaths due to COVID-19 are a reflection of the failure to offer ventilator and ICU support services to the 1%-2% in desperate need of it. Curative care provisioning is never planned at an individual level as epidemiologically, every individual will not necessarily need curative care every time. The morbidity profile of a population across age groups is an important criterion used to plan the curative care needs of a population.

What the data on population hospitalization suggests?

- **Episode of hospitalization a year:** Data from the National Sample Survey Organisation (75th round) show that on an average, only 3% of the total population in India had an episode of hospitalisation in a year (from 1% for Assam to 4% for Goa and 10% for Kerala the need also a function of availability). The proportion hovers around 3%-5% across most Indian States.
- **Population based healthcare planning is necessary:** This is population-based health-care planning. Instead, giving an assurance to every individual without ensuring the necessary health-care services to the population is not really helping in a crisis.

Determinants of individualistic approach

- **Misconception in philosophy of public health:** The dominance of biomedical knowledge and philosophy in the field of public health with a misconception that what is done at an individual level, when done at a population level, becomes public health. This is despite the contrasting philosophy and approaches of clinical medicine and public health and the evidence that support the latter and must be based on population characteristics and economic resources.
- **Visibility impact and mistake of judging a population's characteristics:** Health effects are more visible and appear convincing at the individual level, wherein improvements at the population level will be clear only after population-level analysis; this needs a certain level of expertise and orientation about society an important skill required for public health practitioners.
- **Market's role and the effect of consumerism in public health practice:** The beneficiaries for a programme become the maximum when 100% of the population is targeted. Instead of making efforts to supply evidence of the actual prevalence of public health problems, market forces would prefer to cast a wide net and cover 100% of beneficiaries. Propagating individualism has always been a characteristic feature of a consumerist society as every individual can then be a potential 'customer' in the face of risk and susceptibility.

Conclusion

- The need of the hour is population-level planning, which means, population as a single unit needs to be considered. All forms of individualistic approaches in public health need to be resisted to safeguard its original principles of practice, viz. population, prevention, and social justice.

17. Census as a Mirror of Past and Present

A recent study of India's experience under colonial rule concludes that data from the Census of India reveal that between 1880 and 1920 approximately 100 million Indians died due to British policy in India.

How is Census of India conducted?

- The Decennial population census is conducted **every 10 years**.
- The population census activity includes the process of collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating the data collected.

- The first census activity in India was initiated in **1865** for the **1872** census by the then British Government.
- Post-Independence, the **Census Act, 1948** was passed which lays the guidelines and procedures to conduct the census.
- The first census for Post-Independent India was in the year **1951**.
- The conduct and analysis of the Census in India is done by '**Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner**' under the aegis of **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The data collected during the census is critical for planning, analysis, policy formulation and other aspects where data plays a crucial role.
- The census data forms a very important baseline for tracking progress, planning relevant policy interventions.

The 2021 census would be the first census in India where the enumeration would be done digitally.

What is the recent study about?

- Population figures are available from the time of the first Census of India in **1871**.
- The Sullivan-Hickel study utilized the age-wise population distribution in the census to draw conclusions about the evolution of economic conditions in colonial India.
- **Findings** - The mortality rate in British India is seen to rise steadily after 1881, recording an increase of close to 20% by 1921.
- As it is unusual for the mortality rate of a country to rise continuously due to natural causes, this suggests that the living conditions worsened during this period.
- The mortality rate dipped in 1931, which was the last census conducted in British India, but the last famine recorded in the country took place in Bengal in 1943.

What does this indicate?

- By pointing at the sustained rise in the death rate at the height of the Raj, the Sullivan-Hickel study proves **Dadabhai Naoroji's claim** of the economic impoverishment of India under British rule.
- The belief that British policy in India caused repeated famines is strengthened by the fact that there has not been a single famine since 1947.
- This is despite a population explosion following a sharp fall in death rates.
- The decline in the mortality rate surely signals improved living conditions.
- The Census shows that in the 1950s, life expectancy at birth of Indians increased by more than it did in the previous seventy years.

What is the situation after 1947?

- The population numbers recorded after 1947 pointed to the improvement in the lives of Indians since the end of colonial rule in dimensions beyond income.
- It also points to a worsening **gender inequality** in India through the ratio of females to males in the population.
- It is believed that in the absence of factors that lower the life chances of women, including foeticide, this ratio would tend to one.
- The Census of India shows that we have not attained that level in our recorded history, except in pockets within the country.
- After declining for four decades from 1951 it started inching up in 1991.
- But in 2011, it was yet lower than what it was in 1951.

18. Data protection bill in new Avatar: protecting privacy rights

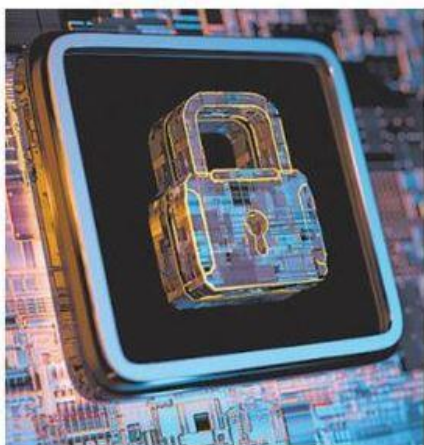
On November 18th Government released the fourth iteration of the data privacy legislation: The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 (Bill).

Demand for the data protection

- The journey towards data protection legislation began in 2011 when the department of Personnel and Training initiated discussions on the Right to Privacy Bill, 2011.
- The major fillip to the data protection case was given by the K. Puttuswamy judgment, 2017 where the supreme court held the “Right to privacy” as a fundamental right under Article 21- right to life and personal liberty.
- After the Puttaswamy judgment, the government-appointed B.N Srikrishna committee the drafting of a law for data protection and privacy. This led to the Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee report which later on led to the Personal Data Protection Bill of 2019.

Bill's ambit

The draft Bill narrows the scope of the data protection regime to personal data protection – a move welcomed by the industry



THIS ACT APPLIES TO:

- Personal data collected from users online
- Data collected offline, but later digitised

THE ACT EXCLUDES:

- Personal data processed by an individual for personal or domestic purpose
- Recorded personal data in existence for at least 100 years

Two major stakeholders of the Legislation Data principles and data Fiduciary

- **Data Principle:** Data principles refers to the subject whose data is being processed. While the Bill lists the “duties” of the Data Principals, these have no bearing on the realisation of the rights provided by the Bill.
- **Data Fiduciary:** It is an entity that processes this data. The drafters of the Bill seem to be affirming that the Data Fiduciary is responsible for safeguarding the interests of Data Principals.
- **What is Data Fiduciary:** The use of the term, “fiduciary” whilst referring to a data processor is significant. In different spheres of the law, when one party owes a “fiduciary” duty towards another a trustee, beneficiary, guardian or ward, the relationship between the two is guided by trust, assurance and good faith.
- **Obligations of data fiduciaries towards data principles:** In line with this philosophy, the rest of the Bill describes the obligations of the Data Fiduciaries towards Data Principals, the rights and duties of the latter and the regulatory framework through which data will be processed.

Two noteworthy aspects of the Bill

1. **Bill outlined the category of Data fiduciaries:** In addition to the general obligations to prevent the misuse of the personal data of individuals, the Bill has outlined a category of Significant Data Fiduciaries, entities that are required to comply with additional measures to safeguard the personal data of individuals.

- **Why is this distinction being necessary:** This distinction is essential as only companies that process vast amounts of data or have a potential impact on the country's sovereignty and integrity need to take such stringent measures. Such measures reduce the compliance cost of companies that are at a nascent stage.
- 2. **Relaxing Data localisation norms:** Onerous provisions on “data localisation” in the previous versions of the Bill, which mandated companies to store user data only within India, have been omitted.
- **How this move will maintain balance:** The reworked Bill permits the government to notify countries to which data transfers may be permitted. This is a major respite for several tech companies, who have long talked about the infeasibility of the data localisation provisions. A balance has now been struck between the legitimate concerns of businesses and the protection of personal data of individuals.

Where else does this bill need attention?

- **Focus remains only on the nature and gravity of the violation:** While the Bill is, by and large, comprehensive. Section 25 and Schedule I, that deal with penalties, require elaboration. Section 25 refers to the quantum of financial penalty that must be imposed on a person guilty of non-compliance in matters related to detail. The focus remains only on the nature and gravity of the violation. The proposed legislation does not consider the financial ranking of a company before imposing penalties.
- **The bill must take financial ranking of the company in consideration:** The Bill must ensure that the penalties imposed are proportionate to the size and operations of a company, to be effective, fines must not drive companies into economic loss.
- **For instance:** A leaf can be taken from the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), amongst other similar regulations, which levies penalties in accordance with the total turnover of companies.

What makes this bill distinct and comprehensive?

- **Promoting cooperation:** The Bill safeguards individual data, whilst also promoting cooperation between data fiduciaries and the government.
- **As per the India's requirements:** While it draws upon the best practices of foreign jurisdictions, such as Europe and Australia, it has been drafted in a manner that is tailor-made to India's requirements.

- **Exemptions are restrictive:** Even the exemptions granted to the Centre are extremely restrictive and in sync with past judicial precedents and Article 19(2) of the Constitution.
- **Significant shift in drafting legislation:** The Bill marks a significant shift in the manner of drafting legislation. Historically, comprehending a piece of legislation in India has usually been akin to the membership of an exclusive club only legal practitioners, policy professionals and a handful of politicians are able to understand and interpret laws.
- **Ensures simplification and accessibility to ordinary citizens:** This Bill marks a transition from legalese to legal simplification, it realises that it is in our best interests to ensure that all laws especially legislation that have a significant impact on citizens are made accessible to all individuals irrespective of their professional or educational standing.

Conclusion

- The Bill safeguards individual data, whilst also promoting cooperation between data fiduciaries and the government. While it draws upon the best practices of foreign jurisdictions, it has been drafted in a manner that is tailor-made to India's requirements. Exemptions granted to the Centre are extremely restrictive.

19. Working of RTI Act

This article discusses various aspects of the RTI act in the country.

Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:

- The Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted in 2005 to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority.
- This Act provided for the right to information for citizens to secure access to information under the control of the public authority.
- The Act also mandates timely responses to citizen requests for government information.
- The RTI gives the citizens the power to participate in the policymaking process and has played a key role in making public authorities accountable and transparent in their functioning.
- RTI has been extensively used by various activists, lawyers, bureaucrats, researchers, and journalists.
- RTI is a remarkable example of participatory democracy.

Efficacy of RTI:

- RTI empowers the common man by providing access to authentic information which makes people more aware and proactive.
 - It has helped them question the efficiency and rationality behind public policies and improve participatory democracy.
- The Act provides an added layer of scrutiny of public offices with improved transparency & accountability.
- RTI has emerged as a tool to fight corruption in India.
 - For instance, an RTI filed by a non-profit organization, Housing and Land Rights Network, revealed that the Delhi government had diverted Rs 744 crore from funds earmarked for the welfare of the Dalit community to the Commonwealth Games.
- The citizen-centric approach of the Act promotes citizen-government partnership in carrying out the programmes for the welfare of the people.
- The RTI Act came as a result of a very strong grassroots movement, where people demanded legislation to seek information from the government. Filing an RTI application is straightforward and a simple process.
 - Studies have shown that a very large percentage of RTI applications are filed by the poorest and the most marginalised, usually asking for information that relates to their very basic rights and entitlements.

Issues with the implementation:

- According to an estimate, between 40 and 60 lakh RTI applications are filed every year, but less than 3 per cent of Indian citizens have ever filed an RTI plea.
- Of the applications filed, less than 45 per cent received the information they had sought, according to the 'Report Card of Information Commissions in India, 2018-19' released by the Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SSN) and the Centre for Equity Studies (CES).
 - But of the 55 per cent who didn't receive the information, less than 10 per cent filed appeals.
- There is also a lack of adequate infrastructure and a shortage of staff in government offices to deal with RTI applications.
- There is the issue of threats and acts of violence against RTI activists.
 - In the last 15 years, at least 86 people who had filed RTI applications have been killed while 175 others have been attacked.
- The proposed Data Protection Bill will set up a system of amending the RTI law in a manner that all personal information will be exempted.
 - The entire proactive disclosure scheme provided for under the RTI Act is going to be completely undermined due to the provisions in the proposed bill.

20. US Government's EAGLE Act

Recently, the White House supported the US Congress pass a legislation whose aim is to eliminate the per-country quota on issuing green cards and the House of Representatives will soon vote on the EAGLE Act of 2022.

Green card

- Green card is officially known as a Permanent Resident Card.
- It is issued to immigrants, allows them to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis.
- The card serves as evidence that the holder has been accorded the privilege of residing permanently.

Benefits of having a green card

- Provides a pathway to citizenship
- Can sponsor immediate family members for the same card
- Provides easy access to US' social security system as also education assistance
- Travel to and from the country becomes much easier
- Can choose to live anywhere in the US
- More freedom in terms of career opportunities as one can apply for a wide variety of jobs
- Can also have some amount of engagement in the political process of the country

Once issued, a Green Card is valid for **10 years**. A Green Card holder can apply for US citizenship after **5 years** of permanent residency.

What is H.R. 3648, or the EAGLE Act of 2022?

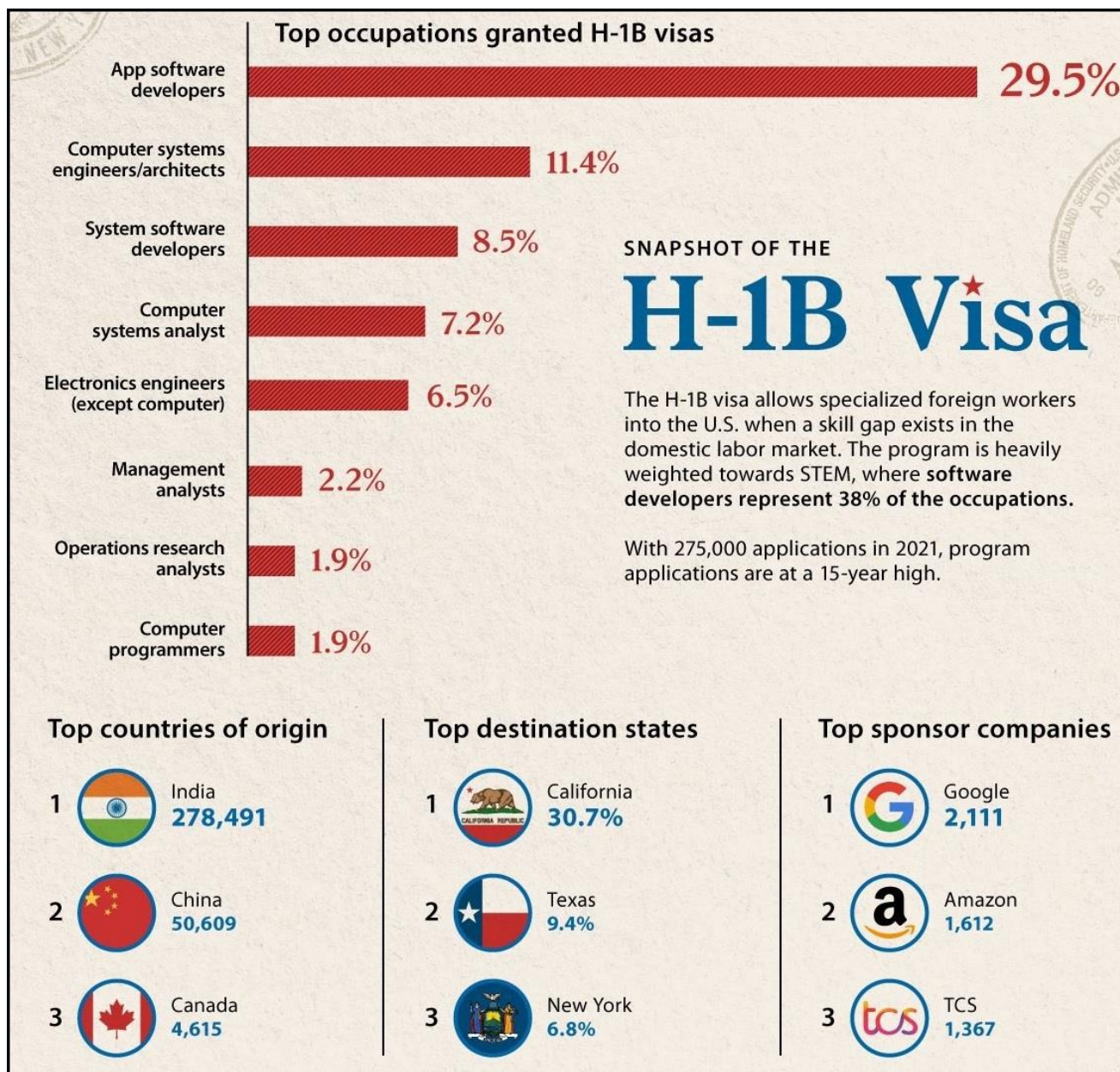
- The Equal Access to Green Card for Legal Employment (EAGLE) Act or HR 3648 will allow US employers to hire immigrants on the basis of "merit, not their birthplace".
- **Existing law** - The limit of green card allotment annually depends on the country of birth of an immigrant, not their nationality.
- As per the law, any country is eligible for up to 7% of green cards per year.
- **Objectives**
 - To allow US employers to focus on hiring immigrants based on merit by eliminating the "**per country**" limitation on employment-based immigrant visas (green cards)
 - To improve the **H-1B specialty occupation visa** program by bolstering the recruitment requirements and strengthening protections for US workers and boosting transparency

- To resolve the major issue of the green card processing backlog
- **Features** - H.R. 3648 also includes important provisions to allow individuals who have been waiting in the immigrant visa backlog for 2 years to file their green card applications.
- The transition will take place over **9 years** so that no countries are excluded from receiving visas while the per-country caps are phased out.
- The bill will also increase the limit on family-based visas from 7 % to 15 %.
- **Impact** - This will reduce the impact of the limitation on less-populated countries and ensure that eligible immigrants from these countries are not excluded.
- Although the applications could not be approved until a visa becomes available, this would provide employment based immigrants with additional flexibilities in changing employers or starting a business.

What will be the impact of the legislation on people from India?

According to the CATO report of 2020, in the United States, 75% of the employment-based backlog was made up by skilled Indian workers.

- The existing law limits skilled citizens from large population countries like China and India from getting permanent residency in the US.
- Immigrants from these countries are forced to wait 20 to 30 times longer for lawful permanent residency status compared to countries with a smaller population.
- According to data released by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), nearly 370,000 Indians were awaiting visa availability, most of whom were in the professionals and skilled workers category.
- **Benefit to people from India** - It will benefit people from India seeking a permanent residence in the US as they will have to wait for shorter durations.
- The Cato Institute said that the bill would raise the average wage of an employment-based immigrant by 12%.
- Faster processing of the citizenship application will help immigrant workers to get protection from exploitation as they would not be completely dependent upon an employer for their legal stay.



What does it have for Americans?

- **Skepticism** - Several Americans said that this would encourage more foreigners to come to the US for residency.
- This would lead to low-wage and low-skilled workers getting Green Cards.
- **Clauses for protecting Americans** - Employers who hire foreign workers will have to advertise the jobs to American workers for at least 30 calendar days to ensure American workers can get the first crack.
- It also offers whistleblower protections for employees to report illegal employer behaviour to the US government.
- The Act will also make it illegal for jobs to be advertised as "only available to H-1B workers" to ensure that H-1B workers are not given a preference over American workers.

21. Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan Scheme

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Ko Kaam Karyakram (PMKKK) has been named as Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS) Scheme by the **Ministry of Minority Affairs**.

What are the Key Points of the Scheme?

▪ **About:**

- It is a **Central-Sector Scheme**, which focuses on the skilling, entrepreneurship and leadership training requirements of the minority and artisan communities across the country.
- This is an integrated scheme that converges **five erstwhile schemes of the Ministry of Minority Affairs** viz,
 - **Seekho aur Kamao:**
 - This is a **placement linked skill development scheme** for minorities aiming to upgrade the skills of minority youth in various modern/traditional skills **depending upon their qualification, present economic trends and market potential**
 - **USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills & Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development):** It aims to promote and preserve **the rich heritage of the traditional arts & crafts** of the minority communities.
 - **Hamari Dharohar:** It has been formulated to preserve rich heritage of minority communities of India.
 - **Nai Roshni:** It is a **Leadership Development Programme** for women belonging to minority communities in the age group of 18 to 65 years. It was started in 2012-13.
 - **Nai Manzil:** The scheme aims to benefit the youth (both men & women) belonging to **six notified minority communities of 17-35 years of age**, who do not have formal school leaving certificate.
- The scheme has been approved by the Cabinet for the period of **15th Finance Commission**.

▪ **Components:**

- Skill and Training
- Leadership and Entrepreneurship
- Education
- Infrastructure Development

▪ **Objectives:**

- PM VIKAS aims to improve the **livelihoods of the minorities, particularly the artisan communities**, using the components of skill development, education, women leadership & entrepreneurship.
- These components complement each other **in the ultimate objective of the scheme to increase the incomes of the beneficiaries and provide support** by facilitating credit and market linkages.

22. Judicial Delays

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud opined that pendency is a perennial drawback that affects the Supreme Court's role as the timely protector of citizens.

Pendency as a perennial drawback:

- The Supreme Court's statistics show that 70,362 cases are pending with it as of April 1, 2022.
- Data in Parliament reveal that there are 498 Constitution Bench cases pending in the Supreme Court as on December 13, 2022.
- 2,870 Public litigation petitions are pending in the Supreme Court.
- Special leave petitions and writ petitions number 4,331 and 2,209, respectively.
- The Supreme court is burdened with "frivolous" public interest litigation and bail applications which has reduced the efficacy of justice administration.
- Bail applications are also one of the reasons for the delay. About 10 bail pleas are heard every day by all 13 Benches of the Supreme Court.
 - The CJI has made it clear that bail petitions deal with the question of personal liberty and should not be delayed.
- About 487 pending election matters in the Supreme court.
- The total number of pending cases concerning crimes against women relating to "harassment, dowry cruelty and death, sexual harassment, domestic violence" are 283, according to data from the Integrated Case Management Information System.
- There are about 1,295 Contempt of court cases pending in the Supreme Court as on December 16, 2022.

Reason behind Judicial Delays:

- Filing of fresh cases is increasing with increase in the population of the country and awareness among the public of their rights.
- No specific timelines can be determined concerning disposal of cases due to the distinct and variable nature of each case.

- Vacancies of judges, frequent adjournments and lack of adequate arrangements to monitor, track and bunch cases for hearing are also factors which lead to pendency.

23. Curbing Individualism in Public Health

There is a strong tendency in public health to prioritise individual-oriented interventions over societal oriented population-based approaches, also known as individualism in public health.

What are the evidences for rising tendency of individualism in public health?

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)

- It falls under Ayushman Bharat.
- It is the largest health insurance scheme in the country covering hospitalisation expenses for a family for **Rs. 5 lakh a year**.
- Goal - To ensure free curative care services for all kinds of hospitalisation services so that there is no financial burden to the beneficiary
- **Population based approach** - Data from the 75th National Sample Survey Organisation show that on an average, 3%-5% across most Indian States had an episode of hospitalisation in a year.
- Ideally, the Government needs to ensure health-care facilities to only 3%-5% of the population to cover all the hospitalisation needs of a population.
- This is population-based health-care planning.
- **Individualistic response** - However, every individual is given an assurance of covering the hospitalisation expenses, highlighting the probability of every individual facing hospitalisation in a year.
- Giving an assurance to every individual without ensuring the necessary health-care services to the population points to the low proportion of population that benefited from the scheme annually.
- More than 90% of those who were promised do not need hospitalisation in the near future.

Vaccination for COVID-19

- It was evident that around 20% of the total COVID-19 positive cases needed medical attention, with around 5% needing hospitalisation and around 1%-2% needing intensive care (ICU) or ventilator support.
- **Population-based approach** - There is a need to have primary, secondary, and tertiary health-care facilities to manage the above proportion of cases.
- However, considering the population as a single unit is neglected.

- **Individualistic response** - Instead, by focusing on a vaccination programme for the entire population, it is again an assurance to every individual that if you get COVID-19, you will not need hospitalisation.

Reasons for dominance of individualism in public health

- **Dominance of biomedical knowledge and philosophy** - There is a misconception that what is done at an individual level, when done at a population level, becomes public health.
- This is against the contrasting philosophy and approaches of clinical medicine and public health and the evidence.
- **Visibility of health impacts among general public** - Health effects are more visible at the individual level, wherein improvements at the population level will be clear only after population-level analysis.
- The public health experts who take individual experiences at face value will judge a population's characteristics based on individual experiences.
- **Market's role and effect of consumerism in public health** - The beneficiaries for a programme become the maximum when 100% of the population is targeted.
- Propagating individualism has always been a characteristic feature of a consumerist society.
- All forms of individualistic approaches in public health need to be resisted to safeguard its original principles of practice - population, prevention and social justice.

24. Personal freedom and the panel on Intercaste/Interfaith Marriages

- Following a report in this newspaper, the Maharashtra government has decided to limit the mandate of the recently constituted Intercaste/Interfaith Marriage-Family Coordination Committee (state level) to gathering information on interfaith marriages.

Intercaste/Interfaith Marriage-Family Coordination Committee

- **Work under Women and child development:** The renamed Interfaith Marriage-Family Coordination Committee will be under the state Women and Child Development Ministry.
- **Will Track frauds:** The committee besides providing support and rehabilitation, when necessary, ostensibly track fraud committed in the name of love jihad.

- **Development come after walker case:** The development came after the Shraddha Walkar case came to light in November. Walkar, 26, was murdered by her live-in partner Aaftab Poonawalla in May, 2022
- **Other states with anti-conversion legislation:** With states such as Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand already having brought in anti-conversion legislation.

Love jihad

- “Love jihad” is a term often used by activists to allege a ploy by Muslim men to lure Hindu women into religious conversion through marriage.

How the initiative will work?

- **Will collect and keep details of interfaith marriages and ensure communication:** This initiative will provide a platform for the women in intercaste/interfaith marriages and their families to access counselling, and communicate or resolve issues.
- **Committee will hold regular meetings:** The committee has been assigned to hold meetings with district officials, and review work on seven parameters, including, gathering information about interfaith or inter-caste marriages from stamp duty and registrar offices, and collect information on such registered or unregistered marriages, among others.

**Oppn slams
Maharashtra govt's
panel on intercaste,
interfaith marriages:
'Stay away from
people's private life'**

What are the concerns raised?

- **Control over the lives of individual citizens:** Such vigilance remains yet another indication of the State's disproportionately burgeoning and utterly unacceptable interest in, and demand for, control over the lives of individual citizens.
- **Denial of women's own choice:** It is not just violative of one's rights of freedom and equality, it also reeks of misogyny in its steadfast denial of a woman's choice of partner as her own free will and not an act of coercion.
- **Committee can be armed:** There is the IPC for all genuine complaints so the committee could be weaponised.
- **It will limit the freedoms of men and women:** In every aspect, monitoring of a citizen's life for her own supposed benefit is a cautionary tale, a limitation of the freedoms of men and women, designed to deter them from leading fuller, freer lives.

How is religious freedom protected under the Constitution?

- Article 25(1) of the Constitution guarantees the "freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion".
- It is a right that guarantees a negative liberty which means that the state shall ensure that there is no interference or obstacle to exercise this freedom.
- However, like all fundamental rights, the state can restrict the right for grounds of public order, decency, morality, health and other state interests.

Conclusion

- The marriage between politics and communalism is not a new phenomenon but to try to inhibit that idea of openness and possibility by casting communal aspersions on personal choice might be a travesty. There needs an innovative and inclusive approach to address the issues arise out of interfaith marriages.

25. Good Governance in India

Issue

- Usually, good governance means cliches and platitudes such as "corruption is bad for good governance", "we should cut red-tape in the country", and "we should use more e-governance in India".

- But it has been observed that this trend is now a thing of the past.

What are the things that shows that there are improvements in good governance?

- **Repealing of obsolete Acts** - The Central government (thanks to the work of economist Bibek Debroy) has repealed an estimated 2,000 Acts, statuettes and subordinate legislation which include
 - Dozens of Appropriation acts,
 - The Excise Act 1863,
 - Foreign Recruiting Act 1874, etc.
- There is a long way to go, especially for State governments, where such obsolete laws are often tools for rent seeking.
- **Changes to the Prevention of Corruption Act** - For 30 years from 1998, any monetary benefit to any private parties, without public interest was construed as criminal misconduct by a public servant.
- This happens generally, regardless of whether there was an intent to a public servant to cause such gains or not.
- Therefore, even honest officers had to face this cruel law.
- The current government finally scrapped this provision of the Prevention of Corruption Act, thereby enabling good governance, by allowing officers to act without fear.
- **Enterprise DigiLocker** - Another possible small step towards good governance is the DigiLocker (an integral part of the India stack).
- Likewise, the Union and State governments can set up enterprise DigiLockers to store all documents that any small or large business is expected to possess Pan card, GSTN number, Aadhaar card, etc.
- Multiple departments which seek the same information over and again can just download these at the click of a button.
- **Compliance portal** - No Central or the State governments has any common portal, through which businesses get to know fully the extent of the compliance burden spread across many departments and agencies.
- The simplest thing to do would be to create a common portal where all the compliances for a particular industry are listed as well as an update of periodic changes to government orders or any court judgment.
- This will ensure that an entrepreneur or a businessman does not have to search for information across 40 to 50 different websites.
- The Reserve Bank of India has the concept of a “master circular” which should be adopted by governments too.

Technology used to engender good governance

- The use of technology is critical in engendering good governance. Some examples abound in Government already, and many more are possible.

- There are startups such as Avantari and Rephrase.ai which use artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) to create “mass personalization” in advertising and communication.

Conclusion

“So, the government go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful for impotency,” said Sir Winston Churchill on governance.

- India has made a lot of progress on good governance, but it is an endless journey; not a one-off destination to be reached.
- As India enters its good governance week (December 19-25, 2022), we can be satisfied that we will soon prove Churchill wrong.

26. Fourth Branch Institutions

There are issues in sorting out the method by which the Election Commission of India is constituted.

In what domain does election fall into?

- According to the classical understanding of modern democracy, there are three wings of state - the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary.
- The task of the Constitution is to allocate powers between these three wings, and to ensure that there is an adequate degree of checks and balances between them.
- Bodies that are involved with administrative and implementational issues (elections being among them) fall within the **executive domain**.

Need for fourth branch institutions

Fourth branch institutions refer to institutions perceived variously as influencing or acting in addition to the three branches of the democratic government i.e. legislative, executive and judiciary.

- Healthy constitutional democracies need “Fourth branch institutions” (integrity institutions).
- Fourth branch needs to exist as basic rights and guarantees cannot be effective without an infrastructure of implementation.

- Fourth branch institutions need to be functionally independent from the political executive because they are the vehicles for implementing rights against the executive.
- Extensive government control over the commissions, including control over appointments has led to it becoming a largely toothless and ineffective body.

The South African and Kenyan Constitutions have dedicated constitutional provisions for fourth branch institutions and requiring them to be independent.

What about fourth branch institutions in India?

- The Indian Constitution provides for election Commission of India, Comptroller and Auditor General, and the Public Service **Commission, and National Commission for Scheduled Castes.**
- **Problem** - While the Constitution goes to some degree to protect the independence of fourth branch institutions, the power of appointment lies exclusively with the executive (President, acting on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers).
- The government decides who gets to be in charge of running fourth branch institutions.
- The **collegium system** for the appointment of judges arose as a response to executive abuse and attempts to control the judiciary.

The ECI is an **autonomous permanent constitutional authority** established in 1950 for administering election processes in India. The ECI operates under **Article 324 (Part XV of the Constitution)** and the Representation of the People Act.

What should the Court do in the case before it?

- It is obvious that the existing system where the executive has absolute power over appointments is unsatisfactory and damages the rule of law.
- It is for the Court to decide how best that might be achieved, but the guiding principles, must be functional and effective independence from the executive.

27. South Korean Model of Elder Education

India's policy attention has mostly been focused on the youth population as how to educate, skill and find jobs, the problem with ageing population has fallen largely off the radar.

Global status of ageing population

- 34 countries in the world currently have senior citizen population (aged 65 and above) more than their working-age population.
- By 2050, it could increase to as much as 90 countries.
- By mid-century, 1 in 6 humans will be aged above 65 years, up from 1 in 11 in 2019.

Status in India

- **Elderly in India 2021 Report** - India's above 60 population is projected to touch 194 million in 2031 from 138 million in 2021.
- **Old-Age Dependency Ratio** - is projected to rise to over 20 per cent by 2031.

Old-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of persons aged 60-plus per 100 persons relative to the age group 15-59

- **Longitudinal Ageing Study India (LASI)** - Nearly 62 and 35% of people aged 45-59 years and 60 years above respectively are currently working.
- But they are not secure, since a bulk of these are engaged in the already overloaded agricultural sector.

What happened in South Korea?

- South Korea witnessed a rapid growth both in its economy and population post the Korean war.
- Its demographic dividend (when the maximum percentage of its population fell within the working age) peaked around 1990.
- Eventually, South Korea witnessed a demographic shift towards older population.
- Its population declined for the first time in 2020 and its fertility rate, 0.84 births per woman, is the lowest in the world.
- But South Korea deals with its ageing population while sustaining its economic prosperity and national security.

What is the South Korean Model?

- Korea's school-age population is declining with falling birth rates.
- Fewer children need to be educated now while the number of adults with re-skilling/upskilling needs is growing.
- To address this, the South Korean government allocate an extra Rs. 75,400 crores for higher and lifelong education.
- This will come through fresh budgetary allocations as well as from the budget for school education and allotted to education and reskilling of older adults.

Should India follow the South Korean Model?

- In India, education as a whole has always remained chronically underfunded.
- The government allots roughly 16% of its expenditure to education and the Centre and States together spend about 4% of GDP on education.
- The historical average is just around 3% of GDP, about half of what experts recommend.
- Given that Indian education sector is underfunded, the argument to allocate more resources for re-skilling and lifelong learning might not be valid.
- But it is important for India to observe the South Korean model.
- If we do not look at the problem of our greying population now, it will be putting an intolerable burden on future generations.

28. Hurdles in Judicial Infrastructure Upgrade

- With every new Chief Justice, India's judicial infrastructure returns to the spotlight. It was Justice S.H. Kapadia who in 2010, first tried to have a systematic plan to examine the conditions of existing infrastructure and realize the future needs of district judiciary.

Attempt at judicial Infrastructure upgrade from Judiciary

- **Magistrate infrastructure:** We have had Justice T.S. Thakur publicly lament the poor conditions in which magistrates' function.
- **Vacancy in district judiciary:** Then Justice Ranjan Gogoi successfully streamlined filling up of vacancies in district judiciary.
- **National judicial infrastructure authority:** Justice N.V. Ramana initiated a discussion on creation of a national judicial infrastructure authority, which has been rejected.
- **Strengthening district judiciary:** And now we have Justice D.Y. Chandrachud raising the issue of strengthening the district judiciary.

Attempt of Government of India in upgrading Judicial infrastructure

- **Allocation of funds:** The Centre has been attempting to improve infrastructure at the district level in a consistent manner by allocating funds.
- **Centrally sponsored schemes:** Since 1993-94, a centrally sponsored scheme (CSS) of the Union government has tried to address the issue of bringing judicial infrastructure up to par.
- **Contribution from states:** Through the scheme, the Centre has been earmarking funds with contributions from respective state governments in the ratio of 60:40 (90:10 for North-eastern states and union territories), including monitoring progress of initiated projects.

- **No improvement in district courts:** Despite the scheme spearheaded by the Ministry of Law and Justice, there hasn't been any considerable improvement in the physical state of our district courts, leaving successive Chief Justices to lament about the poor state of affairs.

Reasons for non-progress in judicial Infrastructure

- **Non-utilization of funds:** Most of the funds allocated under the scheme remain unutilised because states do not come forward with their share, leading to lapse of annual budgetary allocation. Sample this: a total of Rs 981.98 crore were sanctioned in 2019-20. Ultimately, only Rs 84.9 crore came to be spent, leaving 91.36% funds unutilised. In 2020-21, of the sanctioned Rs 594.36 crore, Rajasthan emerged on the top by utilising Rs 41.28 crore but again substantial funds lapsed due to non-utilisation.
- **No ownership of scheme:** There is no single ownership of the scheme. Lack of one coordinating agency prevents its successful execution. The CSS, in its current form, visualises a separate state- and central-level monitoring committees.
- **No representation of judiciary in central committees:** In the central committee, there is no representation of the judiciary as an institution. So, the ultimate consumer of the scheme is absent from the entire process.
- **Lack of planning:** Lack of planning for the future also has its casualties. At present, the central scheme does not plan to cater to future requirements. So, there is no discussion on the foreseeable workload of district judiciary in the coming 10-20 years.
- **No single agency to implement:** The lack of a single agency prevents from realising both the short-term and long-term objectives. Short-term objectives such as constructing courtrooms for the existing judicial strength as opposed to sanctioned strength, record rooms, computer service rooms, etc. suffer in the absence of a single agency that could measure progress of planned initiatives and nudge the stakeholders into acting.

Conclusion

- Justice is keystone of healthy society and just Nation. India cannot move ahead to its economic prosperity without upgrading its judiciary. Upgrading the judicial infrastructure should be priority for the judiciary as well as government.

29. Alleviating the Menace of Private Healthcare

The private health sector plays a dominant role in Indian healthcare system, yet, the discourse on addressing high healthcare costs remains limited to the government.

Status of healthcare in India

- India's public health expenditure as a percentage of its GDP is **1.28%**.
- The share of general government expenditure dedicated to health is **4.8%**.
- Per capita health spending growth has not kept pace with rising incomes.
- Private spending still constitutes nearly **60%** of overall expenditure on health.

Private sector in India

- The private sector in India is dispersed, with marked inequities between rural and urban areas and widespread market failure.
- The income disparities, backwardness, and under-regulation aided the private sector to differentiate into a host of organisations that provide care at inexpensive rates but of poor quality.
- Such contexts offer few incentives for consolidation and achieving this solely through public health insurance is difficult.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 - "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"

Need of the hour

- **Overarching policies** - There is a need for overarching policies that drive down private healthcare costs even for the self-paying consumer with little or no government subsidy.
- A wide range of policy instruments that alter the operating conditions of the private sector have to be enshrined in the national health policy.
- **Business process innovations** - The business process innovations (BPI) such as the innovations by Aravind Eye Clinic and Narayana Hrudayalaya that find little mainstream policy or research attention can be propagated.
- **Task shifting** - The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021 can be a boost to task shifting in healthcare to hold down costs, especially in under-resourced settings.
- **Regional health boards** - Regional health boards (in Canada) that have organised care equitably within regions to bring down healthcare cost, can be replicated in India as well.
- **Medical education** - The high costs of medical education warrants policy attention.
- **Affordable health insurance** - Creating affordable and effective private health insurance products is another important option.
- Affordable private healthcare must only supplement strong public healthcare, while in turn having a complementary effect in enhancing the efficiency of government health spending.

30. Retirement Age of Judges

The Department of Justice made a presentation before the parliamentary panel on Personnel, Law, and Justice recently.

- The Department of Justice made a presentation before the parliamentary panel on Personnel, Law, and Justice that was chaired by BJP MP and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi.
- The presentation comprised details of judicial processes and reforms, including the possibility of increasing the retirement age of high court and Supreme Court judges.
- In July 2022, Union Law Minister Kiren Rijju had informed Parliament that there was no proposal to increase the retirement age of Supreme Court and High Court judges.

Key measures recommended by the Justice Department:

- The Department of Justice told the panel that raising the retirement age for Supreme Court and high court judges could result in non-performing judges remaining in office longer and could have a domino effect with other government workers making a similar request.
- It also suggested that raising the retirement age of judges should be considered along with bringing down pending cases and bringing transparency in the judiciary.
- It said increasing the retirement age may deprive tribunals of having retired judges as presiding officers or judicial members.

Retirement age of Judges:

- The retirement age for Supreme Court judges in India is 65 years while it is 62 years for High Court judges.
 - The Venkatchaliah Report (Report of the National Commission to review the working of the Constitution, 2002) recommended that the retirement age of the Judges of the High Court should be increased to 65 years and that of the Judges of the Supreme Court should be increased to 68 years.
 - The 114th Amendment Bill was introduced in 2010 to increase the retirement age of High Court judges to 65 years. However, it was not taken up for consideration in Parliament and lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.
- Judges are appointed for life to the Supreme Court of the United States as well as the constitutional courts in Greece and Austria.

- In Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Australia, the retirement age for judges is 70 years.

Significance of raising the retirement age:

- The judge-population ratio in India is among the lowest with 21.03 as on December 31 2021. Therefore, an increase in retirement age will enable the judiciary to deal with the enormous pendency of cases.
- It will also ensure the continued presence of a strong talent pool of experienced judges.
- It will be a buffer against impending litigation explosion. As the Indian economy grows, the ratio of litigation to population will increase exponentially.
 - Advanced economies such as Australia, Canada, France, the U.S., the U.K., and Japan have much higher litigation-to-population ratios.
- It will render post-retirement assignments unattractive and, as a consequence, strengthen the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, both of which are crucial to sustaining democracy.

31. Expedite categorization of DNTs: House panel

A Parliamentary panel has pulled up the Centre over the “very slow” process to categorize over 260 Denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs) under either the SC/ST/OBC lists.

- The government officials also pointed ‘delay’ in the approval of benefits under the SEED (Scheme for Economic Empowerment of DNTs) scheme launched in February this year.
- There is a scheme in place with proper budgetary outlay, but there is no whereabouts of targeted beneficiaries for it. Imagine how ironical this is.

DNTs

- The term ‘De-notified Tribes’ stands for all those communities which were once notified under the Criminal Tribes Acts, enforced by the British Raj between 1871 and 1947.
- These Acts were repealed after Independence in 1952, and these communities were “De-Notified”.
- The DNTs (of whom most are the medieval period Banjaras) are the most neglected, marginalized, and economically and socially deprived communities.

- Most of them have been living a life of destitution for generations and still continue to do so with an uncertain and gloomy future.
- More than 10 crore Indians from over 1,400 communities are either denotified, nomadic or semi-nomadic.

SEED Scheme

- It has been formulated for families having income from all sources of Rs.2.50 lakh or less per annum and not availing any such benefits from similar Scheme of Centre Government or the State Government.
- The Scheme will be implemented through a portal, developed by the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment.
- Post verification, the funds will be transferred directly to the beneficiaries in their account.
- The other implementing agencies are Ministry of Rural Development, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and National Health Authority (NHA).

Components of the scheme

The Scheme will have the following four components:

- **Free Coaching:** A component of free Coaching for DNT Students has been envisioned for the educational empowerment of these communities. It seeks to enable them to appear in competitive examinations/ admission to professional courses like medicine, engineering, MBA, etc. for obtaining an appropriate job in the Public/Private Sector.
- **Health Insurance:** Members of these communities are likely to have little or no access to medical facilities and other benefits available under the mainstream health policies. This would ensure a health insurance cover of Rs.5 lakhs per family per year for families as per norms of “Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.
- **Livelihood Initiatives:** The decline of traditional occupations of DNT/NT/SNT communities has exacerbated their poverty. A focus to support livelihood generation for these communities was required.
- **Financial support for Housing:** Considering the shortage of houses for DNTs, it has been proposed to earmark a separate outlay for PMAY to support specific importance in providing houses only for DNTs living in rural areas.

Status of DNT's identification

- **Anthropological Survey of India study:** AnSI had submitted reports on categorisation of 48 DNT communities so far. Further, the AnSI is finalising

studies on 161 communities and is expected to finish studying the remaining communities (about 70) by the end of 2022.

- **Idate Commission:** It had categorised 1,262 communities under SC/ST/OBC lists and 267 communities were left uncategorised.

Why is there such delay?

- **Slow response from states:** Officials cannot begin processing the applications for the SEED scheme unless the State and district-level reviews are completed.
- **Duplication of communities:** There is inaccurate categorization/ duplication of communities which leading to hiccups in the approval process.

32. Making IAS officers effective in dealing with manufacturing sector

The Make in India and Ease of Doing Business policies were framed because Prime Minister Narendra Modi correctly believed that the problems of poverty and unemployment could only be solved by the rapid growth of the manufacturing sector. Despite these efforts, manufacturing has till now not shown any significant increase in its growth. Investments in the sector remain inadequate.

Background: Manufacturing sector in India

- **Development strategies and failures:** The development of strategies and plans for implementation and their execution is done by individuals. Repeated failures in this area point to the necessity of identifying the root causes for why existing personnel charged with policy execution have been failing.
- **Reasons could be:** The reasons could be inadequate knowledge and skills, lack of motivation, environmental constraints or weak supervision and monitoring.
- **Vision by political leaderships, implementation by IAS officers:** While the political leadership lays down the vision, the responsibilities for translating these into ground realities are that of IAS officers.

IAS officers in manufacturing

- **IAS officers ensures adequate skills and training:** Most of the senior posts in the secretariats and districts are held by officers from the IAS. They are responsible for ensuring that subordinate civil servants are adequately trained and skilled, motivated and guided to deliver good outcomes.

- **Frame rules for implementation:** They create the framework of rules that constitute the environment for implementation. Therefore, if policies are to be more effectively implemented, IAS officers need to be better equipped.

How should be the role of IAS officers in manufacturing?

- **Officers should have adequate knowledge:** Achieving global levels of cost and quality competitiveness in the sector requires that officers working in areas relevant to policy-making in the central and state governments understand how laws, regulations and procedures impact the competitiveness of industry.
- **They must know the ways of cost-efficient manufacturing:** They should specifically be aware of the various ways in which these add to or reduce the costs of manufacturing.
- **They should ensure the demand and investment strategy:** They need to appreciate the importance of demand creation for enabling industry to achieve economies of scale and how the stability of policies is required for companies to make long-term investments.

Can IAS officers do this work? What are the challenges?

- **Gap in policies and implementation:** While policies are largely made in Delhi, much of the implementation is done in states.
- **More trust on public sector while a distrust on private sector:** Effective implementation has become complex because of our past history of only trusting the public sector and distrusting the private sector.
- **Even laws and procedures are based on suspicion:** Many of the laws and procedures were based on the suspicion of private-sector industrialists.
- **Legacy of distrust on civil servants:** Equally, the system of checks and balances, inherited from the British, is based on a distrust of civil servants and leads to implementers preferring procedures and correct paperwork over producing results.
- **Civil servants are not private sector friendly in general:** Civil servants are generally not private sector friendly when dealing with issues that have financial implications. This results in long delays, higher costs and loss of competitiveness.

How to equip IAS officers to become more effective in dealing with the manufacturing sector?

- **Bringing in the best global practices:** We need to reform our system of human resource development and bring it in line with the best global practices.

- **Dedicated wing to be created:** A wing be created in the Department of Personnel & Training, and its counterparts in the states. This should be manned by professionals in human resource development whose function would be to select officers on the basis of aptitude from the IAS and other services, and train them to frame and implement policies relating to manufacturing and industrial development.
- **Experience must be considered:** The selection of officers could be made after they have completed around 10 years of service. Thereafter, selected officers would need to be trained and given postings that would enable them to gain more knowledge and experience. This could include secondment to selected private companies so that the officers could get actual working experience. They would then be better able to understand the finer points of competing in the marketplace.
- **Periodic Capability evaluation should be made:** Officers so trained should not be moved to other unrelated areas of work. Periodic evaluations could be made, again by professionals, to identify those capable of moving to the highest levels for making policies and strategies.

Conclusion

- IAS officers can deliver results if they are motivated, trained and allowed to work in the area of their expertise. The recruitment system for the higher civil services ensures high-quality entrants. However, that does not automatically mean good results when posted in jobs that require specialized knowledge and experience. They need to be properly equipped to work in the manufacturing sector.

33. A retelling of the Indian migrant worker's plight

International Migrants Day is observed annually on December 18.

Background Details:

- The factors which have resulted in large-scale migration in the past few years are:
 - COVID-19 pandemic
 - Taliban takeover of Afghanistan
 - Russia's invasion of Ukraine
 - Worsening poverty in the sub-Saharan region
 - Climate change

Data on Migration:

- As per the World Migration Report 2022 of the International Organization of Migration (IOM), there were approximately 281 million international migrants globally in 2020, with around two-thirds being labour migrants.
- There were around 169 million labour migrants in 2019 and 164 million in 2020.
- The share of South Asia is 40%. Moreover, the South Asia-Gulf Migratory Corridor is the world's largest migrant corridor.
- The long-term data analysis has shown that migration is not uniform across the world. It is shaped by economic, geographic, and demographic factors, that result in distinct migration patterns.
- It was reported that as a consequence of the "post-pandemic job search" around 300 Indian engineers from Tamil Nadu were trafficked to Myanmar to work for a crypto-scam and about 20 Indian nurses were trafficked to the United Arab Emirates for fake job offers.
- Kerala government data showed that 1.7 million people returned from abroad during the pandemic (between June 2020 and June 2021) and 1.5 million suffered job losses.
- As per a document tabled in the winter session of Parliament, about nine million Indian migrants are working in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) countries.

Associated Concerns:

- It is argued that though India is the largest source of migrants and remittance-receiving country, the welfare of Indian migrants abroad is hardly prioritized by policymakers.
- It is also a matter of serious concern that India lacks a tangible and comprehensive migration policy to ensure the safe movement of migrants and decent living.
- India still governs international migration through the four-decades-old Emigration Act of 1983.
- The situation in many GCC countries is worrisome. For instance, the existing exploitative nature of the Kafala system has resulted in the mass retrenchment of the labour force.
 - Kafala system is described as a sponsorship system that regulates the relationship between employers and migrant workers.
- COVID-19 has increased the cases of unemployment, under-employment, reduction in salaries, and, even non-payment of salaries, compensation, and residual dues.
- Other recurring issues faced by migrant labourers are irregular payment, poor working conditions, the negation of labour rights, the absence of proper grievance redress mechanisms, and inaccessibility to a transparent judicial system.

Initiatives for Migrant Issues in Asia:

- Several South Asian countries along with their civil society organizations, scholars, and activists are leading a 'justice for wage theft' campaign for the disbursement of the pending salary benefits and other associated dues of labour.
- Countries like the Philippines have recorded the wage theft of their migrants and are legally working on the issue.

Way Ahead:

- Women Migrants:
 - It should be noted that Indian nurses and caregivers have been working in the most volatile and remote countries like Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Israel, and Papua New Guinea.
 - Moreover, the women migrant workforce is largely limited to GCC countries and also to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.
 - Indian Government should thus comprehensively assess the situation of migrant women and create women-centric, rights-based policies.
- The Government should revisit its policies in the context of the post-pandemic scenario by engaging all stakeholders and passing the Emigration Bill 2021.
- The policies should be aligned with the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly Migration and Regular Migration.
 - It is a non-binding resolution that recognizes the challenges of migrant labour across the world.

34. Jan Vishwas Bill, 2022

Last week, the Union Government tabled the Jan Vishwas Bill, 2022, (Bill) in the Parliament with the objective of "decriminalising" 183 offences across 42 legislations and enhancing the ease of living and doing business in India.

Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2022,

- It sought to amend 42 Acts to reduce the compliance burden on individuals and businesses and ensure ease of doing business.
- Some Acts that are amended by the Bill include: the Indian Post Office Act, 1898, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, and the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Key provisions of the Bill

(1) Replacing imprisonment with money penalty:

Under the Bill, several offences with an imprisonment term in certain Acts have been decriminalised by imposing only a monetary penalty under the –

- **Agricultural Produce (Grading and Marking) Act, 1937**, counterfeiting grade designation marks is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to five thousand rupees. The Bill replaces this with a penalty of eight lakh rupees.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000**, disclosing personal information in breach of a lawful contract is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, or a fine of up to five lakh rupees, or both. The Bill replaces this with a penalty of up to 25 lakh rupees.
- **Patents Act, 1970**, a person selling a falsely represented article as patented in India is subject to a fine of up to one lakh rupees. The Bill replaces the fine with a penalty, which may be up to ten lakh rupees. In case of a continuing claim, there shall be an additional penalty of one thousand rupees per day.

(2) Revision of fines and penalties:

- The Bill increases the fines and penalties for various offences in the specified Acts.
- Further, these fines and penalties will be increased by 10% of the minimum amount every three years.
- It is a welcome move and can be viewed as an attempt to reverse the trend of overcriminalisation. However, there is much that needs to be done in order to institutionalise efforts aimed at decriminalisation.

Why was this legislation brought up?

- **Rise in criminal cases:** An unprincipled growth of criminal law has long been a cause of concern for scholars of law.
- **Political motives:** The act of criminalisation often becomes a medium for governments to put across a strong image as opposed to punishing wrongful conduct.
- **Over-criminalization:** Governments offer little in the way of justifications to support such decisions. This phenomenon has been termed “overcriminalisation” by scholars.
- **Increased burden on Judiciary:** As per the National Judicial Data Grid, of the 4.3 crore pending cases, nearly 3.2 crore cases are in relation to criminal proceedings.

- **Overcrowding of prisons:** Similarly, the rise in the prison population is also proof of this. As per the NCRB's Prison Statistics of 2021, a total of 5.54 lakh prisoners were confined in prisons against a capacity of 4.25 lakh.

Scope of the Bill

- **Hefty fines cannot create deterrence:** The Jan Vishwas Bill either omits penal provisions or replaces them with fines in legislation. These are primarily offences which are regulatory in nature.
- **Quasi-decriminalisation:** By and large, an examination of the provisions of the Bill reveals that stress has been on the replacement of imprisonment clauses with fines. This can hardly be termed as 'decriminalisation'.

Achieving decriminalisation in real sense

There is much that is required for the efforts aimed at decriminalisation to fructify in any meaningful way.

(1) Stigma of fines to create deterrence

- In his seminal piece titled – 'Is the Criminal Law a Lost Cause?' Mr. Andrew Ashworth's creates a distinction between regulatory offences and penal offences and exemplifies the same through the functional distinction between a tax and a fine.
- While the purpose of a tax is primarily regulatory in nature, a fine carries with it an element of censure and stigma.

(2) De-linking petty economic offences with over-criminalization

- Secondly, the Observer Research Foundation's report titled Jailed for Doing Business found that there are more than 26,134 imprisonment clauses in a total of 843 economic legislations, rules and regulations which seek to regulate businesses and economic activities in India.
- In this light, the number of offences deregulated under the Bill seems to be a mere drop in India's regulatory framework.

(3) Regulatory offences to be considered for 'decriminalisation'

- This need to be prioritised not only from the point of view of the ease of doing business, but also from the points of view of the ills that plague our criminal justice system itself.
- Debates are ongoing about the decriminalisation of several penal offences such as sedition, offences under NDPS Act & UAPA Acts, triple talaq and anti-conversion laws etc.

- There is an urgent need to assess these offences on a principled basis.

Conclusion

- The intent of the Bill is merely to ensure that imprisonment is replaced with fines for as many offences as possible.
- The extent to which it succeeds in ‘decriminalising’ offences, however, is questionable.
- If these faults are to be rectified, it is pertinent that a more comprehensive exercise is undertaken and that the government prioritises the needs and requirements of the criminal justice system.
- Still this legislation is a welcome move in all senses.

35. Wage Delays Under MGNREGS

Rajya Sabha members of Trinamool Congress alleged that the Union government was discriminating against West Bengal by stopping grants under MGNREGS.

Key Details:

- As per the report by research non-profit Lib Tech India released on December 26, 2022, the Union government has withheld the release of Rs 7,500 crore in MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) funds to West Bengal for a year now over “non-compliance of central government directives”.
 - About Rs 2,744 crore of the Rs 7,500 crore are due in MGNREGA wages to workers, who have not been paid since December 26, 2021.
- The central government has done this by invoking Section 27 of the 2005 Act, which allowed the government to “order stoppage of release of funds to the scheme” in some circumstances.
- The Union Government in its response suggested that funds have been blocked only in West Bengal for “non-compliance with the directives of the Central government” and this pertains to prior fund misuse.

Implications of wage delay:

- Earlier in 2022, the delays in funds disbursement to the States were on account of procedural delays and an overhauling of the Public Financial Management System.
- Wage delays have been a chronic problem with MGNREGS which has resulted in a drop in the number of households working under the scheme in West Bengal from 77 lakh during the pandemic years to 16 lakh in the year 2022-23.

- Work under MGNREGS acts as a form of insurance for the poorest rural households; it was a boon during the pandemic years, aiding migrant workers from urban areas as alternative employment.
- Around 10 percent of the working households and 11 per cent of the total active workers in the country were from West Bengal.
- Among different social groups, Scheduled Caste workers experienced the highest loss due to the stoppage of work. Women workers experienced a loss of about Rs 1,870 crore to Rs 2,758 crore in wages.
- Denial of wages pertains to a violation of fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution as working without wages is similar to “forced labour.”
- There has been a delay in the completion of public works under MGNREGA and inspection of projects has been irregular.
- Despite problems such as a lack of technical support, the requirement to own a smartphone, and functional Internet connections at the locations still being an issue, the government has now also made digital capture of MGNREGS attendance essential at work sites. This might also result in wage delays to workers.

GS 3 : Economy, Science and Technology, Environment

1. Remittances to India set to cross record \$100-billion mark in 2022

India is expected to receive a record \$100 billion in remittance in 2022, the top recipient this year, the World Bank has said.

What are Remittances?

- A remittance is a non-commercial transfer of money by a foreign worker, a member of a diaspora community, or a citizen with familial ties abroad, for household income in their home country or homeland.
- The World Bank defines it as “the sum of worker’s remittances, compensation of employees, and migrants’ transfers as recorded in the IMF Balance of Payments.
- Workers remittances are current transfers by migrant who are considered residents in the source.
- Remittances are a vital source of household income for low- and middle-income countries.

India’s total remittances to grow

- Remittances to India are money transfers from non-resident Indians (NRIs) employed outside the country to family, friends or relatives residing in India.

- In its Migration and Development Brief, the World Bank has said India's remittance will grow 12 per cent from 7.5 per cent last year, resulting in \$100 billion flow as compared to \$89.4 billion in 2021.
- It attributed the feat to the large share of Indian migrants earning relatively high salaries in the US, UK and East Asia.

Key points from the report by World Bank

- Highly-skilled Indian migrants living in wealthy nations such as the US, UK, and Singapore were sending more money home.
- Remittances to low and middle-income countries have grown by 5% in 2022 to around \$626 billion – around half the rate of growth seen in 2021.
- The amount of money sent back home by migrants around the world has grown by 5% in 2022.
- Other top recipient countries for remittances include Mexico, China, Egypt and the Philippines.
- Domestic and International shocks have affected countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka for whom remittances earned by migrants are expected to drop this year
- Barring India and Nepal, other south Asian countries saw a decline of more than 10% in their remittances from 2021, due to the end of government incentives introduced during the pandemic

Why is remittance to India so high this year?

- **Upskilling:** There has been a gradual shift in destinations for Indian migrants aided by a structural shift in qualifications.
- **Work from home:** Indian migrants in high-income countries benefited from work-from-home and large fiscal stimulus packages.
- **Easing of pandemic:** As the pandemic eased, the wage hikes and “record-high employment conditions” helped migrants send money home despite high global inflation.
- **Inflation control in India:** The price support policies kept inflation at bay in India.
- **Crude oil dynamics:** Demand for labour increased with higher oil prices, which in turn increased remittances for Indian labourers.

Significance of remittances

- **Stable source of funds:** Remittance flows tend to remain relatively stable through the business cycle, thereby having the potential to support households in the face of economic adversity.

- **Economic lifeline:** In countries affected by political conflict, they are often an economic lifeline to the poor.
- **Labour contribution:** While migrant remittances contribute to the development of their home country, and also to the host country by filling the gap between labour demand and supply and making a positive net fiscal contribution.
- **Globalization:** In this way, remittances represent globalization with a human face, contributing to the spread of global interdependence at all levels – social, economic and political.

Issues with Remittances

- **Fear of currency depreciation:** It causes the rupee to weaken against the dollar, which in return impacts the businesses exposed to foreign exchange, and the economy overall.
- **Accuracy of data:** A key challenge for policymakers, researchers and investors interested in remittance flows concerns the accuracy and consistency of available data.
- **Accounting inconsistencies:** The varied nature of remittance transactions makes the compilation process complex, resulting in a systemic problem of under-reporting of flows and data asymmetries between host and recipient countries.
- **No formal registration in India:** The main source of data on remittances is the World Bank, which combines national balance of payments data compiled by the IMF with country information.
- **Ignoring informal flows:** A large share of remittances is believed to flow through informal channels, which are often more convenient and cheaper than formal ones.
- **Hawala transactions:** In addition, Hawala (an international network of money brokers) and Hundi (a form of credit instrument) systems operate in parallel to formal remittance channels.

Way forward

- **Promoting labour mobility:** India should aim to increase remittances to say 10% of GDP. The Philippines' model of promoting labour mobility should be replicated in India.
- **Reducing the costs involved:** Both the cost of recruitment of such workers and the cost of sending remittances back to India should come down.

2. India's Central bank digital currency (CBDC) in detail

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has launched the first pilot of the retail digital rupee, also known as e₹-R, on December 1, 2022. The digital token that represents legal tender will be issued in the same denominations as paper currency and coins. The RBI's pilot on the digital rupee will test the robustness of the new system. Let's understand it in detail.

The first pilot project of retail digital rupee

- **Allowed banks:** Initially, only four banks- State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Yes Bank and IDFC First Bank in four cities have been allowed to offer e₹-R. The scope of the pilot will be increased gradually to include more banks, users and locations.
- **Transaction:** People will get e₹-R from banks and will be able to make transactions via their digital wallets. The digital rupee can be stored on mobile phones or devices.

What is a Central bank digital currency (CBDC)?

- **Like fiat currency in digital form:** CBDC is a legal tender issued by the central bank in digital form. Like rupee notes or coins, which are in physical form. Like fiat currency, it can also be exchanged between people. Simply, put it's just like rupee (₹) notes but in digital form (e₹). You can also exchange e₹ for physical currency notes.
- **Unlike fiat currency no need to have account:** However, unlike fiat currency that's usually stored in banks and hence their liability, CBDC is a liability on the RBI's balance sheet. That's why you don't necessarily need to have a bank account to own a digital rupee.

Why do we need CBDC?

- **Cost efficient management:** CBDC will cut the cost related to physical cash management. India spent ₹4,984.80 crore on printing money in FY22 and ₹4,012.10 crore a year before that. These expenses are borne by people, businesses, banks and the RBI. e₹ cuts all kinds of printing, storage, transportation and replacement and settlement costs. Though the RBI will invest a significant amount in building CBDC infrastructure, subsequent marginal operating costs will be very low.
- **Boost to digital economy and financial inclusion:** It'll fulfil the higher cash requirement of the country. The government will be able to make money available in areas where it's a challenge to provide physical cash. Also, it'll

boost India's digital economy, enhance financial inclusion, and make the financial system efficient.

- **People will have money in uncertain times:** Since e₹ is the central bank money, in any uncertain situation like COVID-19, it'll save people's savings. Banks only insure deposits up to Rs 5 lakh. In case of defaults, people could lose their savings.
- **Multiple saving and transaction options:** e₹ will provide you with other options like e-wallets, mobile banking, and UPI to make payments.
- **Much safer payment option:** e₹ is a safe central bank instrument, with direct access to the RBI money for payment and settlement. It is an electronic version of cash, whose main use case is retail



Will CBDC replace UPI?

- **Not expected to substitute but supplement payment option:** The CBDC-based payment system is not expected to substitute other modes of existing payment options. It will supplement by providing another payment avenue to people.
- **India already has a sound payment system:** UPI uses your money deposited with banks but with CBDC, the money becomes the liability of RBI India already has a sound payment system, with payment products like RTGS, NEFT and UPI, etc., coupled with an exponential increase in digital transactions.

No interest on e₹? but why?

- **No interest on digital money:** According to the RBI, if it starts paying interest on digital money, it could lead to a massive disintermediation in the financial

system, in which banks will lose deposits, and thus hurt their credit creation capacity in the economy.

- **Rationale behind No interest on digital rupee:** Banks may be compelled to increase deposit rates, which will increase their costs of funding and decrease net interest income. Ultimately, the cost will be passed on to borrowers.
- **CBDC will be attractive payment option without interest:** If there is no interest, CBDC can still be attractive as a medium of payment, even while its attractiveness as a savings instrument diminishes. Also, banks would restrain themselves from distributing CBDCs if they find it as a threat to bank deposits, which can hamper credit flows and the adoption of CBDCs.



How will CBDC be different from crypto?

- **CBDC is Algorithm based unlike crypto mining:** The central bank will be issuing CBDCs based on algorithm-driven processes, rather than mining through competitive reward methods. These algorithms will have energy efficiency and environmental friendliness as their core principles, unlike private crypto mining.
- **Less energy consumption unlike crypto:** Therefore, issuance and management of CBDCs are expected to have much lesser energy consumption vis-à-vis more energy-intensive processes normally associated with the mining and distribution of private cryptocurrencies.
- **Legal consumer protection:** Unlike private cryptos wherein any individual can compete to mine and create the cryptocurrency, only the central bank can issue the CBDC and can simply opt for conversion of the bank's existing balances to CBDC balances. So, CBDCs will provide the public with the benefits of virtual currencies, while ensuring consumer protection by avoiding the damaging social and economic consequences of private virtual currencies.

Why India needs a digital rupee?

- **Online transactions:** India is a leader in digital payments, but cash remains dominant for small-value transactions.

- **High currency in circulation:** India has a fairly high currency-to-GDP ratio.
- **Cost of currency management:** An official digital currency would reduce the cost of currency management while enabling real-time payments without any inter-bank settlement.

Conclusion

- e₹-R is a digital token that has real value like rupee notes or coins. CBDC will make transactions and currency exchange smoother, and it'll boost financial inclusion. The RBI's pilot on the digital rupee will test the robustness of the new system.

3. Current status of India's economic growth

India's economic growth slowed to 6.5 percent during the July-September quarter because of a fading low-base effect. For the full year, the economy is expected to grow at 7 percent, with risks tilted to the downside. This implies that the second half of the year (October-March) will see growth slow down to 4.6 percent, again largely due to the base effect and slowing global growth.

Background: The COVID Pandemic, geopolitical tensions and the Prospects

- This was the second consecutive quarter with no functional disruption of economic activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Since October, Google, too, has stopped reporting mobility indicators, which had become one of the most tracked data points for analysts and policymakers since the pandemic struck.
- This suggests that COVID-19 is unlikely to come in the way of growth for most parts of the world, with China, which is following a zero-COVID policy, being the key exception.

Performance of Indian economy amidst the current global slowdown

- **Spill over effect in India:** In an interconnected world, Geopolitical tensions, high and broad-based inflation in many parts of the world and sharp increases in policy rates in developed countries amid a looming recession will continue to confront the global economy. These effects will spill over to India as well, despite its structural strengths.
- **Slow growth of contact-intensive service sector:** Growing at 14.7 per cent, contact-intensive services such as trade, hotels and transport continued to be key drivers of the growth momentum in the second quarter. This segment had borne the brunt of the pandemic because of recurrent lockdowns, and is

showing a strong rebound because of pent-up demand, a trend that is likely to continue this year.

- **Strong private consumption:** Private consumption was quite strong in the second quarter, growing by 9.7 per cent, and now 11.2 per cent above the pre-pandemic level.
- **Rising domestic demand, good for the economy:** The resilience of domestic demand will shape the contours of GDP growth in coming quarters as the global growth momentum is anticipated to lose steam. Advanced economies, whose growth is expected to slow sharply next year, account for almost 45 per cent of India's merchandise exports.
- **Strong and firm Agriculture sector:** Despite climate-related disturbances, agriculture surprisingly held its ground in the second quarter.
- **Healthy tax revenue:** So far, healthy tax revenue collections have allowed the government to finance its bloated subsidy bill and investments without much pressure on the fiscal deficit. Led by government capex, investments grew 10.4 per cent in the second quarter.
- **Good corporate balance sheets:** strong corporate balance sheets not only cushion them against global headwinds but also provide an opportunity to kick-start the investment cycle once uncertainty subsides.

The current status of India's manufacturing growth

- **Slowed growth:** Manufacturing GDP growth slowed rather sharply due to the base effect and margin pressure on manufacturing companies. This is somewhat contradictory to the relatively strong signals from the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) which, at 55.9, was in the expansion zone during the July-September quarter, while also being slower than the IIP growth of 1.4 per cent in the same quarter.
- **Support from the government:** Currently, manufacturing is finding some support from government spending on infrastructure, particularly in sectors such as steel and cement. The production-linked incentive scheme has incentivised private investment and fast-forwarded manufacturing investments in electronics and pharmaceuticals.
- **Overall demand is low except few high value segments:** The festive season-related production and the continued strong demand in the automobile sector (especially in high-value segments), was not enough to prevent an overall slide in manufacturing.

The current status of Agriculture sector

- **Strong and firm Agriculture sector:** Despite climate-related disturbances, agriculture surprisingly held its ground in the second quarter. Although rains were 6 per cent above normal this year, they were quite lopsided and led to a drop in rice acreage in some of the rice-growing regions on account of rainfall deficiency and some damage to crops from excess unseasonal rains in October.
- **Inconsistency in rainfall may affect kharif:** In fact, October rains were 47 per cent above the long-period average. Rain shortfall in some regions, excess in others, and unseasonal excess rains point towards some hit to kharif production.
- **Rabi crops look in good swing:** That said, the prospects for the winter crop (rabi crop), which is largely irrigated, look good owing to favourable soil moisture conditions and healthy reservoir levels. While rabi sowing was initially delayed on account of unseasonal October rains, it is now progressing well, with sown area until November 18 about 7 per cent higher than during the same period last year.
- **Overall agriculture growth prospects:** This trend, if sustained, should offset the hit to kharif production to some extent. Overall, we expect agriculture to grow at 3 per cent this year, lower than the decadal average of 3.8 per cent.
- **Food inflation:** Abnormal weather has also triggered food inflation, particularly in cereals, which will cool off only when the prospects for rabi crop become clear. While fall in inflation in October was largely due to a high base effect, core inflation continues to be sticky and food inflation risks persists.

Conclusion

- India's growth cycle has become well-synchronized with those of advanced economies. So, a sharp slowdown in these countries will spill over to India and the maximum impact of domestic interest rate hikes on growth will play out next fiscal given that monetary policy impacts growth with a lag. The key policy challenge for India will be to manage a soft landing amid the possibility of a hard landing in advanced countries.

4. Combating micronutrient malnutrition through food fortification

- When it comes to nutrition, or more specifically micronutrient malnutrition, there is an urgent need to address the maladies that poor nutrition can inflict on the masses, especially given the diverse populations in India.

What is malnutrition?

- Malnutrition refers to deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrients.
- The term malnutrition covers 2 broad groups of conditions.
- One is 'undernutrition' which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height), underweight (low weight for age) and micronutrient deficiencies or insufficiencies (a lack of important vitamins and minerals).
- The other is overweight, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer).

What are micronutrients and why they are so important?

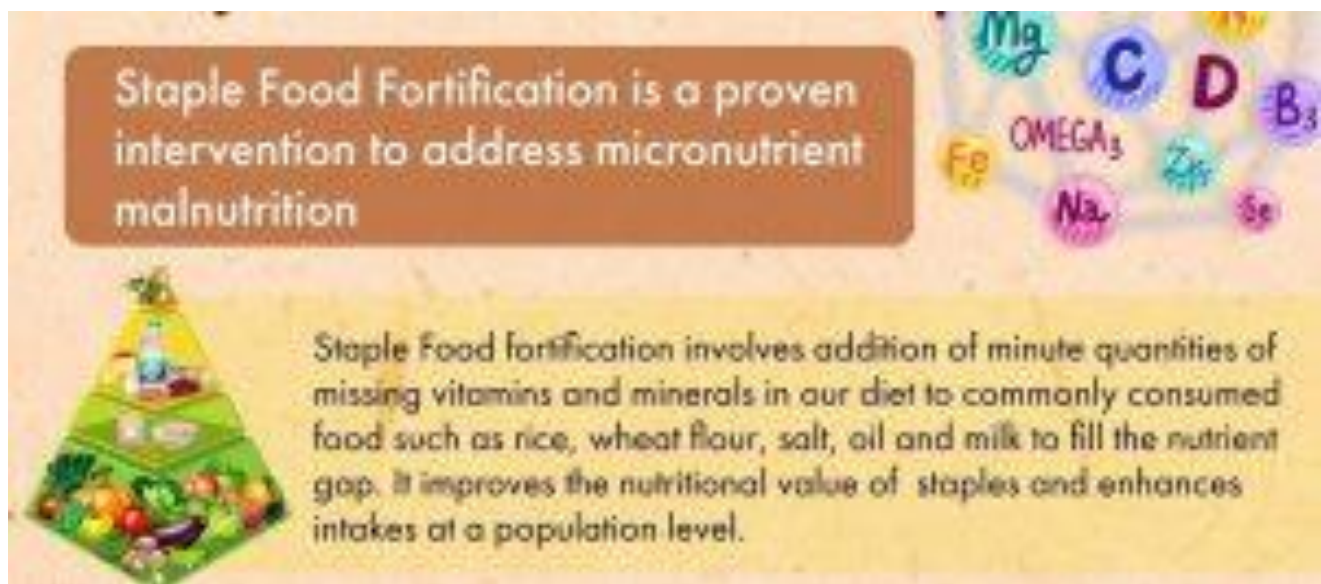
- Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals needed by the body in very small amounts.
- They perform a range of functions, including enabling the body to produce enzymes, hormones and other substances needed for normal growth and development.
- However, their impact on a body's health is critical, and deficiency in any of them can cause severe and even life-threatening conditions. This can lead to reduced educational outcomes, reduced work productivity and increased risk from other diseases
- Deficiencies in iron, vitamin A and iodine are the most common around the world, particularly in children and pregnant women.
- Low- and middle-income countries bear the disproportionate burden of micronutrient deficiencies.
- Many of these deficiencies are preventable through food fortification and supplementation, where needed.

The worrying status of malnutrition in India

- **According to National family Health survey (NFHS):** As in NFHS-5 data, every second Indian woman is anaemic, every third child is stunted and malnourished, and every fifth child is wasted.
- **According to an FAO Food Security Report for 2021:** India ranks 101 out of 116 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2021, with a 15.3% undernourished population, the highest proportion of stunted children (30%), and wasted children (17.3%).
- **Higher rate of stunting:** The picture the Global Nutrition Report 2021 paints is cause for concern, noting that stunting among children in India is significantly higher than the Asian average of 21.8%.

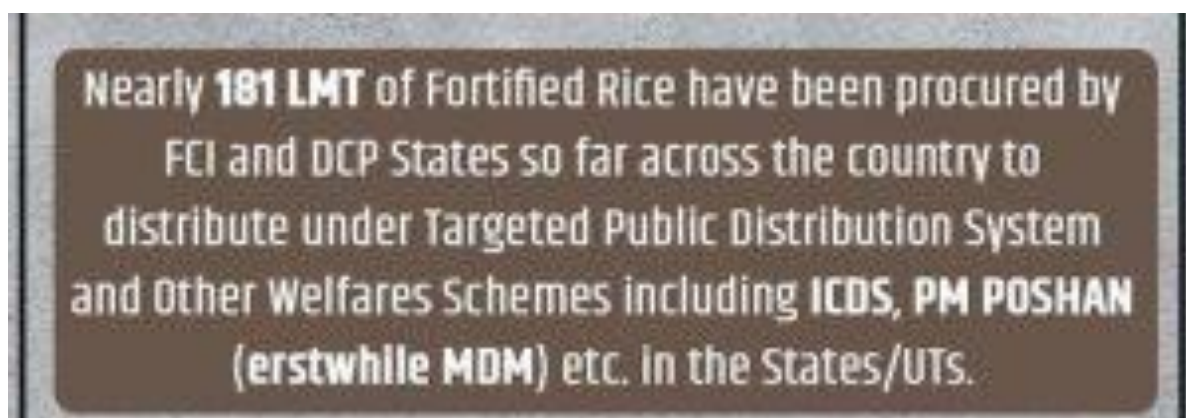
How the countries are tackling malnutrition?

- Since the 1920s, developed countries and high-income countries have successfully tackled the issue of malnutrition through food fortification.
- Of late, the low-and middle-income countries, such as India, have pursued food fortification as one of the strategies to tackle micronutrient malnutrition.
- The health benefits accruing from food fortification have made 80 countries to frame laws for the fortification of cereal flour, and 130 countries with iodised salt, where 13 countries have mandated rice fortification.



What is food fortification?

- Food fortification is the process of adding nutrients to food.
- For instance, rice and wheat are fortified with iron, folic acid and vitamin B12, and salt fortified with iron and iodine. Iodised salt has been in use for the past few decades.



How India is tackling malnutrition and anemia?

- **Fortified rice through PDS:** Pilot projects on the distribution of fortified rice have been taken up in select States, including Maharashtra (Gadchiroli district) as part of a targeted Public Distribution programme for the masses.
- **Scaling up the distribution through various food security schemes:** The programme has been a success in terms of preventing cases of anaemia from 58.9% to 29.5%, within a span of two years, prompting the central government to declare the scaling up of the distribution of fortified rice, the major staple diet of 65% of the population, through the existing platform of social safety nets such as the PDS, ICDS and PM-POSHAN.
- **Cost-effective strategy:** Experiences from the different States on the fortified rice project, so far tally with the results of global programmes that use fortified food as a cost-effective strategy.
- **Reduction in anaemia:** The study found a promising reduction (29.5%) in the prevalence of anaemia among women, adolescent girls, and children put together in Gadchiroli district.

Case study of Noon meal scheme in Gujarat

- In Gujarat, an eight-month long study on multiple micronutrient fortified rice intervention for schoolchildren (six-12 years) in 2018-2019, as part of the Midday Meal Scheme, found increased haemoglobin concentration, 10% reduction in anaemia prevalence, and, more importantly, improved average cognitive scores (by 11.3%).

The probable outcome according to NITI Aayog

- Iron deficiency anaemia is a major public health concern, because it is responsible for 3.6% of disability-adjusted life years or DALYs (years of life lost due to premature mortality and years lived with disability) according to the World Health Organization (WHO) i.e., a loss of 47 million DALYs, or years of healthy life lost due to illness, disability, or premature death (2016).
- According to NITI Aayog (based on WHO meta-analysis on the impact of rice fortification), a rice fortification budget of around ₹2,800 crore per year can save 35% of the total or 16.6 million DALYs per year with no known risk of toxicity.
- In India, the cost of one DALY lost due to iron deficiency anaemia (IDA) is approximately ₹30,000, while the cost of averting an IDA-related DALY is only ₹1,545, resulting in a cost-benefit ratio of 1:18.
- Rice fortification, which costs less than 1% of the food subsidy bill (2018-19), has the potential to prevent 94.1 million anemia cases, saving ₹8,098 crore over a five-year period.

Concerns over the excess of per capita nutrients intake?

- Despite the programme's proven efficacy, activists have expressed concern that excess iron overload from fortified rice has been dangerous for Jharkhand's tribal population suffering from sickle cell anaemia and thalassaemia.
- Iron levels in fortified rice range from 28 mg to 42.5 mg, folic acid levels from 75 mcg-125 mcg, and vitamin B12 levels from 0.75 mcg to 1.2 mcg (FSSAI standards).
- Considering the per capita intake, in a family of three members with a rice consumption of approximately 60 grams per person, the additional intake is 2.45 mg of iron. This in fact compensates our daily losses of iron from the body, which is 1 mg-2 mg per day.

Conclusion

- Given its proven efficacy and cost-effectiveness, food fortification can help us in reducing micronutrient deficiencies and address overall health benefits. The intervention, carried out with precautions is the key to address the issue of the malnutrition.

5. Protests against Vizhinjam Port

Kerala's ambitious Vizhinjam port project for a transshipment container terminal is caught in protests and violence.

Vizhinjam Port Project

- In 2015, the Adani Group signed a concession agreement with the Kerala government to build India's first mega transshipment container terminal at Vizhinjam near Thiruvananthapuram.
- The ₹7,525 crore project – an all-weather deep-sea port with a depth of 24 meters – can service large megamax-sized container ships.
- This natural port has no littoral sedimentation, obviating the need for periodic dredging and lowers maintenance costs.
- The port, which is well-connected to the hinterland, will handle 1 million twenty-foot equivalent units in Phase-I and another 6.2 million TEUs when completed.

Significance of the project for India?

- **Transshipment hub:** The Vizhinjam Port holds the potential to attract a large share of container transshipment traffic that is now handled by Colombo, Singapore or Dubai.
- **Important shipping lane:** It located just off the International Shipping Lane and close to the East-West Shipping Axis.
- **Cargo handling:** A large share of India's exports and imports that are now transhipped through these international ports can be handled at Vizhinjam.
- **Reducing logistic costs:** It would mean a sharp reduction in shipping costs and lead time. This will go a long way in reducing overall logistics costs and making manufacturing competitive.
- **Employment generation:** It will also create thousands of jobs – directly and otherwise.

Reasons for protests

- Local fishermen fear displacement and loss of livelihood. They blame higher tides and increasing coastal erosion on the project.
- Protests has some leftist leaning inherently opposing every development project.
- A Latin Catholic Church has been at the forefront of the protests.
- Many right-wing outfits have thrown their weight behind the project and want its quick completion.
- They blame foreign funding for what they call 'anti-development' protests.

6. What is SHAKTI Policy?

Ministry of Power has launched a scheme for procurement of aggregate power of 4500 MW for 5 years under SHAKTI Policy to help states that are facing power shortages and help generation plants to increase their capacities.

SHAKTI Policy

- SHAKTI is an acronym for Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala Transparently in India.
- It was launched in 2018 to provide coal to stressed power units which lack coal supply.
- It seeks to provide coal linkages to power plants which lack fuel supply agreements (FSAs) through coal auctions.

Need for such policy

- SHAKTI is a policy designated by the government for the allocation of coal among thermal power plants in a transparent and objective manner.
- It aims to transfer the benefits of linkage coal to the end consumers.
- The scheme is supposed to be beneficial not just for the infrastructure sector, but also for the public sector banks which have huge loans unpaid at the end of the power companies.
- The companies, which did not have coal linkages before the introduction of the Shakti Scheme, would benefit when they would get domestic fuel supplies through auction at competitive rates.
- The scheme also aims to reduce the dependence on imported coal and promote domestic industries.
- With this policy, the government also aims to reduce dependence on imported coal.

Coal linkage scenario in India

- Coal linkage to the power sector is governed by provisions of the New Coal Distribution Policy (NCDP), 2007.
- Under the NCDP, a system of issuance of Letter of Assurance (LoA) was introduced.
- The requests for Linkage/LoA are forwarded to the Ministry of Power for its recommendations.
- The coal availability scenario has, now, emerged from scarcity to adequacy.

7. Healthy tax collection and the challenge of effective utilization

Notwithstanding the likely slowdown in economic momentum in the second half of the year, the Union government's tax collections are on track to surpass its budgeted target by a significant amount this year.

The current status Union government's tax collection

- **Gross tax collections have already touched the target:** Data released by the Controller General of Accounts last week shows that gross tax collections have already touched 58 per cent of the full year's target, growing by 18 per cent in the first seven months (April-October) of the current financial year.
- **Healthy growth in corporate tax collection:** Under the broad rubric of taxes, direct tax collections have grown by a robust 26 per cent in the first seven months of the financial year, with healthy growth being seen across both corporate and income tax collections.

- **Higher than the nominal GDP growth:** While the pace of direct collections has eased during July-October when compared to the first quarter, it continues to be higher than nominal GDP growth in the second quarter.
- **Healthy indirect tax collection:** On the indirect tax side, GST collections continued to witness healthy growth, recording an increase of 11 per cent in November.



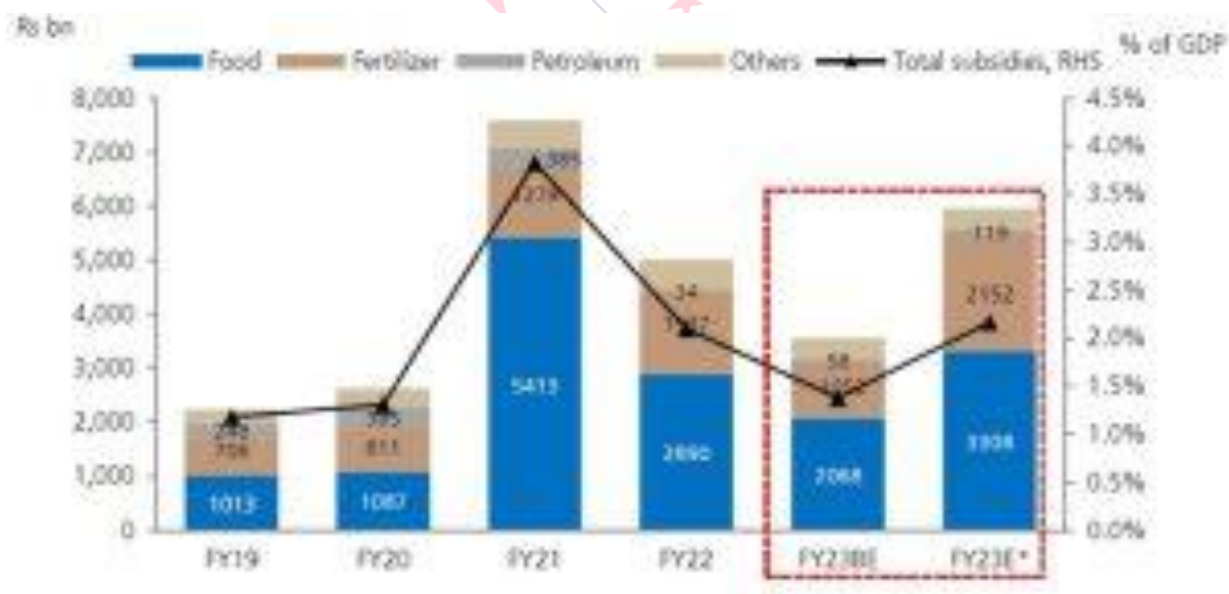
Memory shot in short: Types of Direct Taxes

- **Income Tax:** Depending on an individual's age and earnings, income tax must be paid. Various tax slabs are determined by the Government of India which determines the amount of Income Tax that must be paid. The taxpayer must file Income Tax Returns (ITR) on a yearly basis. Individuals may receive a refund or might have to pay a tax depending on their ITR. Penalties are levied in case individuals do not file ITR.
- **Wealth Tax:** The tax must be paid on a yearly basis and depends on the ownership of properties and the market value of the property.

- **Estate Tax:** It is also called Inheritance Tax and is paid based on the value of the estate or the money that an individual has left after his/her death.
- **Corporate Tax:** Domestic companies, apart from shareholders, will have to pay corporate tax. Foreign corporations who make an income in India will also have to pay corporate tax.
- **Capital Gains Tax:** It is a form of direct tax that is paid due to the income that is earned from the sale of assets or investments

What the Healthy tax collection imply?

- **Higher devolution to states:** Higher tax collections at the level of the central government imply that devolution to states will be higher than the budgeted amount of Rs 8.16 lakh crore. The months of August and November have in fact witnessed double instalments as the Centre has stepped up devolution.
- **States can increase fiscal expenditure:** Along with the interest free loan scheme extended by the Centre, higher devolution implies that states have considerable fiscal room to increase capital expenditure. However, this has not been the case so far. Capex by states has been rather muted.
- **Provides comfort to governments fiscal arithmetic:** As per recent statements by revenue secretary Tarun Bajaj, the government is now hopeful of exceeding the budgeted target by nearly Rs 4 lakh crore. With its spending also likely to surpass earlier expectations by a considerable margin, higher tax collections will provide some comfort to the government's fiscal arithmetic.



Challenges on the expenditure side

- **Increased subsidy bills:** On the expenditure side, the Union government is facing a massive increase in its subsidy bill.

- **Spending is more than actual budget:** Actual spending on the food and fertilizer subsidy and also on LPG will be significantly higher than what has been budgeted for. This is likely to make the fiscal situation challenging.
- **Effective utilization is necessary:** Considering that the central government has maintained the momentum on its capital spending, growing by around 60 per cent in the first seven months of the year, the overall general government fiscal impulse will depend on how effectively states are able to utilise the extra space available to them.

Conclusion

- Calls for increasing spending to support the economy during this uncertain period will only gain traction as the budget approaches. The government must however resist the temptation. It should stick to the glide path of fiscal consolidation.

8. India's Soil conservation strategy

As soil is the basis of food systems, it is no surprise that soil health is critical for healthy food production. World Soil Day (WSD) 2022, annually observed on December 5, aligns with this.

Theme of the World soil day

- WSD 2022, with its guiding theme, '**Soils: Where food begins**', is a means to raise awareness on the importance of maintaining healthy soils, ecosystems and human well-being by addressing the growing challenges in soil management, encouraging societies to improve soil health, and advocating the sustainable management of soil.

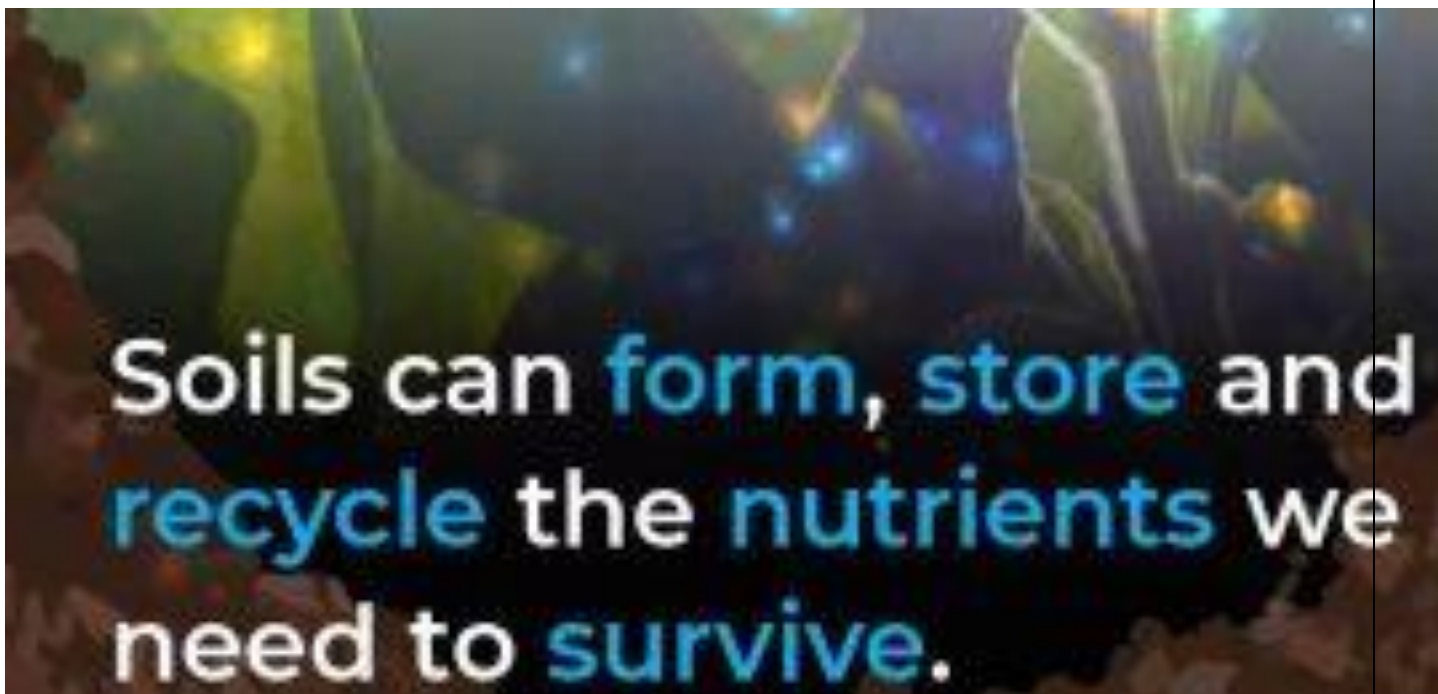
What is soil?

- Soil is the loose material of the earth's surface in which the terrestrial plants grow. It is usually formed from weathered rock or regolith changed by chemical, physical and biological process.

Back to basics: Composition of soils

- **Mineral matter:** It includes all minerals inherited from the parent material as well as those formed by recombination from substances in the soil solution.

- **Organic matter:** It is derived mostly from decaying plant material broken down and decomposed by the actions of animals and microorganisms living in the soil. It is this organic portion that differentiates soil from geological material occurring below the earth's surface which otherwise may have many of the properties of a soil. (Note: The end product of breakdown of dead organic material is called humus.)
- **Air and water:** Normally, both air and water fill the voids in soil. Air and water in the soil have a reciprocal relationship since both compete for the same pore spaces. For example, after a rain or if the soil is poorly drained, the pores are filled with water and air is excluded. Conversely, as water moves out of a moist soil, the pore space is filled with air. Thus the relationship between air and water in soils is continually changing.



Why is soil so important?

- **Healthy soils are essential for our survival:** They support healthy plant growth, habitat for many insects and other organisms, It enhance both our nutrition and water percolation to maintain groundwater levels, act as a filtration system for surface water.
- **Second largest carbon sink after ocean:** Soils help to regulate the planet's climate by storing carbon and are the second largest carbon sink after the oceans. They help maintain a landscape that is more resilient to the impacts of droughts and floods.
- **Contribute to the economies:** They also support buildings and highways and contribute to the economies of our cities. For instance, the rich, deep fertile

soils of the Ganga plain especially its delta and the coastal plains of Kerala support a high density of population through agricultural prosperity.

Soil degradation and its consequences

- **Main drivers of soil degradation:** The main drivers contributing to soil degradation are industrial activities, mining, waste treatment, agriculture, fossil fuel extraction and processing and transport emissions. Further, excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, and irrigation with contaminated wastewater are also polluting soils.
- **Reasons behind the nutrient loss:** The reasons behind soil nutrient loss range from soil erosion, runoff, leaching and the burning of crop residues.
- **Increasing soil pollution undermines food security:** Today, nutrient loss and pollution significantly threaten soils, and thereby undermine nutrition and food security globally.
- **Soil degradation affects around 29% of India's total land area:** Soil degradation in some form or another affects around 29% of India's total land area. This in turn threatens agricultural productivity, in-situ biodiversity conservation, water quality and the socio-economic well-being of land dependent communities. Nearly 3.7 million hectares suffer from nutrient loss in soil (depletion of soil organic matter, or SOM).
- **Irreparable consequences:** Impacts of soil degradation are far reaching and can have irreparable consequences on human and ecosystem health.

SOIL HEALTH CARDS

Soil Health Cards are being issued by the government to better understand the soil composition of the region, that will help farmers with better yield.

India's Soil conservation strategy

- **Five- pronged strategy:** The Government of India is implementing a five-pronged strategy for soil conservation. This includes making soil chemical-

free, saving soil biodiversity, enhancing SOM, maintaining soil moisture, mitigating soil degradation and preventing soil erosion.

- **Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme:** Earlier, farmers lacked information relating to soil type, soil deficiency and soil moisture content. To address these issues, the Government of India launched the Soil Health Card (SHC) scheme in 2015. The SHC is used to assess the current status of soil health, and when used over time, to determine changes in soil health. The SHC displays soil health indicators and associated descriptive terms, which guide farmers to make necessary soil amendments.
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana:** Other pertinent initiatives include the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, to prevent soil erosion, regeneration of natural vegetation, rainwater harvesting and recharging of the groundwater table.
- **Promoting organic farming practices under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):** In addition, NMSA has schemes promoting traditional indigenous practices such as organic farming and natural farming, thereby reducing dependency on chemicals and other agri-inputs, and decreasing the monetary burden on smallholder farmers.
- **FAO's various initiatives to support government efforts in soil conservation:** The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) undertakes multiple activities to support the Government of India's efforts in soil conservation towards fostering sustainable agrifood systems.
- **FAO's collaboration on developing data analytics and forecasting tools:** The FAO is collaborating with the National Rainfed Area Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare (MoA&FW) to develop forecasting tools using data analytics that will aid vulnerable farmers in making informed decisions on crop choices, particularly in rainfed areas.

FAO working with target States

- **To increase capacities of farmers to farm livelihood:** The FAO, in association with the Ministry of Rural Development, supports the Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission's (DAY-NRLM) Community Resource Persons to increase their capacities towards supporting on-farm livelihoods for the adoption of sustainable and resilient practices, organic certification and agri-nutri-gardens.
- **Target states:** The FAO works in eight target States, namely, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Punjab, for boosting crop diversification and landscape-level planning. In Andhra Pradesh, the FAO is partnering with the State government and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) to support farmers in sustainable transitions to agro-ecological approaches and organic farming.

Soil is the foundation of a sustainable
A healthy smiling soil is the
to happiness of the planet



Way ahead

- There is a need to strengthen communication channels between academia, policymakers and society for the identification, management and restoration of degraded soils, as well as in the adoption of anticipatory measures.
- These will facilitate the dissemination of timely and evidence-based information to all relevant stakeholders.
- Greater cooperation and partnerships are central to ensure the availability of knowledge, sharing of successful practices, and universal access to clean and sustainable technologies, leaving no one behind.

Conclusion

- A key component of sustainable food production is healthy soil as nearly 95 percent of global food production depends on soil. The current state of soil health is alarming and unprecedented soil degradation is a major challenge for sustainable food production. India is on track to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

9. India's Economic Growth story and the future roadmap

- By 2047, India will complete 100 years after Independence. By that time, India strives to achieve the status of a developed economy, which means achieving a minimum per capita income equivalent to \$13,000.

Economic growth during the British period

- **Poor state of economy:** It is not realized often that India's economic progress in the first half of the 20th century under British rule was dismal. According to one estimate, during the five decades, India's annual growth rate was just 0.89%.
- **Negligible growth in per capita:** With the population growing at 0.83%, per capita income grew at 0.06%. It is not surprising that immediately after Independence, growth became the most urgent concern for policymakers.

Economic growth after Independence

- In the early period, India's strategy of development comprised four elements:
 1. Raising the savings and investment rate;
 2. Dominance of state intervention;
 3. Import substitution, and
 4. Domestic manufacture of capital goods.
- **Modest growth till 1970:** India's average growth till the end of the 1970s remained modest, with the average growth rate being 3.6%. With a population growth of 2.2%, the per capita income growth rate was extremely modest at 1.4%.
- **Improvement in social indicators:** On certain health and social parameters, such as the literacy rate and life expectancy, there were noticeable improvements.
- **The success of green revolution:** While India had to rely on the heavy imports of food grains on a concessional basis, initially, there was a breakthrough in agriculture after the Green Revolution.
- **Industrial base widened:** The industrial base expanded with time. India became capable of producing a wide variety of goods including steel and machinery.
- **Unsustainable fiscal policy:** Plan after plan, actual growth was less than what was projected. The Indian economy did grow at 5.6% in the 1980s. But it was accompanied by a sharp deterioration in the fiscal and current account deficits, and the economy faced its worst crisis in 1991-92.

Statistics of economic growth after 1991

- **Rapid economic growth:** Between 1992-93 and 2000-01, GDP at factor cost grew annually by 6.20%. Between 2001-02 and 2012-13, it grew by 7.4% and the growth rate between 2013-14 and 2019-20 was 6.7%.
- **Sustained period of high growth rate:** The best performance was between 2005-06 and 2010-11 when GDP grew by 8.8%, showing clearly what the potential growth rate of India was. This is the highest growth experienced by India over a sustained period of five to six years. This was despite the fact that this period included the global crisis year of 2008-09.
- **Rising investment rate:** There was a corresponding increase in the savings rate. The current account deficit in the Balance of Payments (BOP) remained low at an average of 1.9%.
- **Setback to growth after 2011-12:** However, the growth story suffered a setback after 2011-12. The growth rate fell to 4.5% in 2012-13 according to the 2004-05 series. The growth rate since then has seen ups and downs. The growth rate touched the 3.7% level in 2019-20.



Roadmap for Future Growth

- **Keeping the sustained growth rate:** The first and foremost task is to raise the growth rate. Calculations show that if India achieves a 7% rate of growth continuously over the next two decades and more, it will make a substantial change to the level of the economy. India may almost touch the status of a developed economy.

- **Maintaining the incremental capital output ratio:** If India maintains the incremental capital output ratio at 4, which is a reflection of the efficiency with which we use capital, India can comfortably achieve a 7% rate of growth.
- **Investment must be increased:** Raising the investment rate depends on a number of factors. A proper investment climate must be created and sustained.
- **Private investment is crucial:** While public investment should also rise, the major component of investment is private investment, both corporate and non-corporate. It is this which depends on a stable financial and fiscal system. The importance of price stability in this context cannot be ignored.
- **New technologies must be embraced:** India needs to absorb the new technologies that have emerged, and that will emerge. Its development strategy must be multidimensional.
- **Strong Export and manufacturing:** India need a strong export sector. It is a test of efficiency. At the same time, India needs a strong manufacturing sector. The organized segment of this sector must also increase.
- **Strengthened the social safety nets:** As output and income increase, India must also strengthen the system of social safety nets. Growth without equity is not sustainable.

Challenges for India's growth

- **Low per capita income:** India today is the fifth largest economy. This is an impressive achievement. However, in relation to per capita income, it is a different story. In 2020, India's rank was 142 out of 197 countries. This only shows the distance we have to travel.
- **Declining growth in developing countries:** The external environment is not going to be conducive. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development reports a secular decline in growth in developed countries.
- **Climate change may affect the growth:** Environmental considerations may also act as a damper on growth. Some adjustment on the composition of growth may become necessary.

Conclusion

- Considering the India's population, India has no option but to grow continuously. Government has undertaken major structural reform and policy initiatives like GATI-SHAKTI to give fillip to growth of economy. These are the steps in the right directions and more such liberalizing initiatives need to be encouraged.

10. Discussing the Indian Economy's pressing problems

Several agencies, including the IMF and the World Bank have projected lower growth rates for the Indian economy in FY23, than the 7.2 per cent estimated by the RBI in April. The Central bank has now lowered its forecast to 6.8 per cent. Given the current situation, with the Q2 FY 2023.

Current economic growth estimation

- **Economy is likely to grow at 6.5-7.0 per cent:** Given the current situation, with the Q2 FY 2023 GDP growth clocking in at 6.3 per cent, the economy is likely to grow at 6.5-7.0 per cent in this fiscal year.
- **Considering economic uncertainties it is difficult to arrive at precise estimate:** It is difficult to arrive at a precise estimate for growth this year with unprecedented economic uncertainty worldwide, including high global inflation, synchronized monetary tightening, and the impact of the Ukraine war.

Positive signs in the Indian Economy

- **Positive medium-term growth prospects:** Company and bank balance sheets are healthier, credit growth is rising, and capacity utilisation has increased, all of which augur well for investment activity.
- **Positive impact on tourism:** The waning of Covid-19 should hopefully have a positive impact on travel, transport and tourism. Construction activity should pick up further with the reduction in housing inventory and almost stable prices over the last decade.
- **On inflation India is doing better:** On the inflation front, India is doing better than many advanced economies and emerging markets.



What is Indian economy's pressing problems specifically in terms of Labour-intensive growth?

- **Employment a biggest concern:** Employment, an issue that has persisted over the last two decades. In brief, we have not generated enough good jobs to match the scale at which the economy has grown, especially in the organised sector. As a result, we have very high under-employment and poor-quality employment, which have hampered a much-needed move away from agriculture.
- **Lack of precise data on people living in poverty:** We do not have a precise estimate of the current levels of poverty, as there has been no household consumption survey since 2011-12, and the 2017-18 survey was abandoned due to technical issues. But there is reasonable consensus that poverty could be around 10 per cent of the country's population, A low number compared to the past, but as many as 140 million people could still be living in poverty.
- **Lack of non-agricultural jobs:** The rising demand for the MGNREGA, and the importance of food distribution schemes and other welfare programmes for the poor are indicators of the lack of non-agriculture jobs being generated.
- **Lowest rate of women participation in labour force:** An alarming aspect of the employment problem in India is the low participation rate of women in the labour force, which is among the lowest in the world. This loops back to the importance of labour-intensive manufacturing. For example, much of Bangladesh's success, and that of Southeast Asian countries, in exports and manufacturing stems from the large number of women working in their factories.
- **Women literacy is rising but increasing number of educated women are not working:** A positive trend in India has been the growing trend in girls

attending schools and college in the last 20 years, but this also means that an increasing number of educated women are not working.

- **Despite of 1991 reforms still remains an untapped opportunity:** With the LPG reforms, the expectation was that, as the economy opened up to global competition, India's low wage levels would attract private investment into labour-intensive manufacturing, thus generating jobs. This was the path followed by the East Asian economies that experienced high growth and rapid development. But for India this remains an untapped opportunity.
- **Manufacturing is shifting to countries other than India:** Even with rising wage levels in China, manufacturing is shifting to countries other than India. The PLI (production-linked incentives) scheme has been rolled out to encourage manufacturing. It may need some tweaking to be biased towards labour-intensive manufacturing as China vacates space in this area. This may seem at odds with the more popular view that it is small and medium enterprises which promote employment.
- **Country's real exchange rate is not healthy:** An overvalued rupee has discouraged the export of labour-intensive manufacturing goods, which are very price-sensitive in global markets. It has also had a dampening effect on domestic production as our currency has depreciated at a lower rate than other emerging economies like China and Indonesia.
- **Depreciated rupee impacting domestic producers by inflow of cheaper imports:** Domestic producers of goods that compete with imports into our markets have been impacted by the inflow of cheaper imports. This has disincentivised them from expanding production and generating employment.
- **Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are severally hit:** Problems that have come to the fore post-pandemic include the health of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Accurate information on this is somewhat scarce but anecdotal evidence suggests that they have been more severely hit than the formal sector.



Way ahead

- The rupee has been overvalued for long and needs to be allowed to depreciate, though in a calibrated way, ensuring external and financial stability.
- Job growth is crucial if we are to reduce the still high levels of poverty in the country
- Incentivizing the domestic producers so that they can compete with the cheaper inflow of imports and expands their manufacturing thereby generating employment in the economy
- The continued recovery of the formal sector, as indicated by various metrics, in terms of the improved health of corporates and banks should effectively pull up the MSMEs through supply chains linkages, among others.
- We still have a negative real interest rate (that is, the difference between the RBI's policy rate and inflation). Hence, the policy rate needs to rise further, providing a push to financial savings, which are needed to generate higher investment for growth.

- Inflation need to be contained through supply-side measures as well, such as an improvement in the supply of food products.

Conclusion

- High under-employment and poor-quality employment have hampered a much-needed move away from agriculture. A focus on labour-intensive formal manufacturing is the need of the hour.

11. Need for an effective Tourist Police

- Crimes against tourists and other foreign nationals appear to be on the rise in India. Consider several recent cases, and the lessons they suggest.

Some of the recent cases of crime against tourists

- **A case of rape and murder in Kerala:** A few days ago, a Kerala session court sentenced two men to life imprisonment for the rape and murder of a Latvian tourist in 2018.
- **A case of a rape of a girl child in Goa:** A 12-year-old Russian girl was raped in a hotel in Goa on April 6 this year. The rapist was an employee of the hotel in which the girl was staying with her mother.
- **A case extortion in Gurugram:** An Iraqi couple staying at a hotel in Gurugram for the treatment of the husband in the Medanta hospital was accosted by two miscreants posing as policemen on October 23. They accused the couple of carrying drugs and on the pretext of checking their wallets, fled with \$15,000 the couple had saved for the treatment.
- **A case of sexual misconduct in Delhi:** On September 2, a British woman lawyer lodged a complaint of sexual misconduct against a cab driver who was ferrying her from the airport to her hotel in South Delhi. The incident traumatized her to the extent that she left for the U.K. within two days of her arrival.

Status of Crimes against foreigners

- **Drastic decline in cases of crimes against foreigners in Delhi:** According to data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Delhi recorded 27 cases of crime against foreigners last year, a drastic decline from 62 cases reported in 2020 and 123 in 2019.
- **Sharp reduction Rajasthan:** Rajasthan has shown a sharp reduction in registration of crimes from 16 in 2019 to just 4 in 2020 and two cases last year, which could be attributed to the sharp decline in tourist arrivals due to COVID-19.

- **Though there is a decline in cases but the data is still shameful and to be studied:** As many as 29 foreigners were murdered in the last three years. While 14 foreigners fell victim to rape last year, 16 were raped in 2020 and 12 in 2019. As many as 15 cases of assault to outraging modesty of foreign women were registered last year across the country, apart from 14 complaints of cheating. While 142 cases of theft were lodged by foreigners in 2019, it declined to 52 in 2020 and further dipped to 23 in 2021.
- **Women are more prone and most cases go unreported:** Women are more prone to sexual attacks by criminals on the prowl in tourist destinations. For every crime committed against foreigners, there would be several others that go unreported for multifarious reasons, with one of them being the fear instilled in them by the threats of these criminals. In the South Delhi incident, the British national was reluctant to lodge a formal complaint out of fear

How do such cases of crimes against tourists tarnish our image?

- **Not only dents our image but also impacts on tourism:** Crime against foreigners not only dents our image globally but could also adversely affect the inflow of foreign tourists, which is a vital source of income for our country.
- **It impacts Tourism sector which is one of the significant sources of FOREX:** Tourism happens to be one of the biggest foreign exchange earners for India. Such cases may leave tourists moral down and they may lose sense of security.

What is Tourist police scheme and what steps can be taken to ensure security of the Tourists?

- **Booklet on the tourist police scheme and tourist police stations:** The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) has brought out a booklet on the tourist police scheme detailing the mode of setting up of tourist police stations and control rooms, outposts, uniforms, recruitment, qualifications, training and logistics requirements for tourist police stations.
- **Identified tourist spots:** As many as 25 popular tourist spots have been identified in the country where the tourist police necessarily need to be deployed to help foreigners. As an incentive, 30% deputation allowance has been recommended for the police personnel who joins the tourist police on deputation.
- **Identified Criminals in and around tourists' spots need to be kept on constant surveillance:** While the setting up of tourist police stations is a commendable step to provide safety to foreigners, much needs to be done to

instil a sense of security in them even before they leave their countries for India. With theft being the most common crime committed against foreigners, all criminals in and around tourist spots need to be identified and kept under constant surveillance.

- **Fast track courts should be set immediately to try cases of crimes against tourists:** Since foreigners come for short durations, the cases cannot be allowed to linger on in courts for long. Fast track courts should be set up immediately to try cases of crime against foreigners and the culprits punished speedily. It may be recalled that a rape convict, Bitihotra Mohanty, was tried for raping a German national in Alwar (Rajasthan) on March 21, 2006 and he was sentenced to seven years imprisonment on April 12, that is, within 22 days.

A positive step by Ministry of Tourism

- **For the effective implementation of Tourism police scheme:** In order to provide a safe environment for tourists, the Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), organised a conference in New Delhi on October 19, 2022. It was organised with a view to “sensitise the specific requirements of the tourists for effective implementation of Uniform Tourist Police Scheme at pan-India level”.
- **States that have tourist police:** Though the concept of ‘tourist police’ has been in vogue for the past few years, it has not been given the kind of attention it deserves. The States that have tourist police are Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Rajasthan and Kerala.
- **Delhi a neglected state is gearing up for tourist police wing:** In view of the forthcoming G20 Summit, the Delhi police is gearing up its tourist police wing, which was hitherto in a neglected state and so are other States which will see a huge influx of foreigners.

Conclusion

- With optimistic predictions of about 13.34 million foreign tourists arriving by 2024, there is a pressing need to upgrade our security systems specially to provide a flawless security blanket cover to foreign tourists. Safety assumes utmost importance to draw tourists in hordes.

12. India-China trade deficit is at \$51.5 Bn

The trade deficit, difference between import and exports, between India and China has touched \$51.5 billion during April-October this fiscal.

Widening deficit

- The deficit during 2021-22 had jumped to \$73.31 billion as compared to \$44.03 billion in 2020-21.
- According to the data, imports during April-October this fiscal stood at \$60.27 billion, while exports aggregated at \$8.77 billion.
- The merchandise exports from India to China had increased from \$11.93 billion in 2014-15 to \$21.26 billion in 2021-22.

India-China bilateral trade

- In 2021, annual two-way trade crossed \$100 billion for the first time, reaching \$125.6 billion, with India's imports accounting for \$97.5 billion, pegging the imbalance at close to \$70 billion.
- This is certainly a healthy deficit compared to the industrial development in both nations.

A quick backgrounder

- Trade ties began to boom since the early 2000s.
- This was driven largely by India's imports of Chinese machinery and other equipment.
- It rose up from \$3 billion in the year 2000 to \$42 billion in 2008, the year China became India's largest trading partner.

The Hindi-Chini buy buy

- A third of machinery and almost two-fifths of organic chemicals that India purchases from the world come from China.
- Automotive parts and fertilizers are other items where China's share in India's import is more than 25 per cent.
- Several of these products are used by Indian manufacturers in the production of finished goods, thus thoroughly integrating China in India's manufacturing supply chain.
- For instance India sources close to 90 per cent of certain mobile phone parts from China.

India's export to China

- Even as an export market, China is a major partner for India.
- China is the third-largest destination for Indian shipments.
- At the same time, India only accounts for a little over two percent of China's total exports, according to the Federation of Indian Export Organisation (FIEO).

Should we worry about this?

- Trade deficits/surpluses are just accounting exercises and having a trade deficit against a country doesn't make the domestic economy weaker or worse off.
- In this light, India's trade imbalance with China should not be viewed in isolation.
- For instance, pharmaceuticals that India exports to the world require ingredients that are imported from China.
- Chinese imports of Indian seafood are one area that has recently shown robust growth and carries scope to grow in future.

So, having a trade deficit is good?

- Of course NOT. Running persistent trade deficits across all countries raises two main issues.
 1. Availability of foreign exchange reserves to "buy" the imports.
 2. Lack of domestic capacity to produce most efficiently.

Can we ban trade with China?

Ans. Certainly NOT!

- **It will hurt the Indian poor the most:** This is because the poor are more price-sensitive. For instance, if Chinese TVs were replaced by either costlier Indian TVs or less efficient ones, unlike poor, richer Indians may buy the costlier option.
- **It will punish Indian producers and exporters:** Several businesses in India import intermediate goods and raw materials, which, in turn, are used to create final goods – both for the domestic Indian market as well as the global market (as Indian exports).
- **Pharma sector could be worst hit:** For instance, of the nearly \$3.6 billion worth of ingredients that Indian drug-makers import to manufacture several essential medicines, China catered to around 68 percent.

- **Ban will barely hurt China:** According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) data for 2018, 15.3% of India's imports are from China, and 5.1% of India's exports go to China.
- **Chinese money funds Indian unicorns:** India and China have also become increasingly integrated in recent years. Chinese money, for instance, has penetrated India's technology sector, with companies like Alibaba and Tencent strategically pumping in billions of dollars into Indian startups such as Zomato, Paytm, Big Basket and Ola.
- **India will lose policy credibility:** It has also been suggested that India should renege on existing contracts with China. This can be detrimental to India's effort to attract foreign investment.

China is our Frenemy. Here is why.

- The first thing to understand is that turning a border dispute into a trade war is unlikely to solve the border dispute.
- Worse, given India and China's position in both global trades as well as relative to each other, this trade war will hurt India far more than China.
- Again, these measures will be most poorly timed since the Indian economy is already at its weakest point ever — facing a sharp GDP contraction.

Way forward

- In the long term, under the banner of self-reliance, India must develop its domestic capabilities and acquire a higher share of global trade by raising its competitiveness.
- But no country is completely self-sufficient and that is why trade is such a fantastic idea.
- For the long run, a more effective strategy needs to be built to provide an ecosystem that addresses the cost disability of Indian manufacturing leading to such imports.

13. Why are nitrogenous fertilizers still a first choice of farmers?

Two ambitious schemes of the Central government such as Soil Health Card and mandatory neem-coating of urea were supposed to promote balanced use of fertilisers. However, far from weaning farmers from urea, annual consumption of this nitrogenous fertiliser has only risen from 30 to 35 million tonnes (mt) in the last five years.

Rise in the sales of nitrogenous fertilizers

- **Rise in sales of not only urea but also DAP:** This year, not only have urea sales gone up by 3.7 per cent during April-October over the same period of 2021, it has grown even more, at 16.9 per cent, for di-ammonium phosphate (DAP).
- **Sales are not in correct proportion:** It has come even as sales of all other fertilisers including complexes containing nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), K (potash) and sulphur (S) in different proportions have fallen.
- **Urea and DAP are the dominant choice of Indian farmers:** In other words, instead of balanced use of plant nutrients based on soil testing and specific crop requirement, Indian farmers are effectively applying just urea and DAP both high-analysis fertilisers containing 46 per cent N and P respectively.



What are the reasons for increasing use of Urea and DAP Fertilizers?

- **The non-urea fertiliser is decontrolled or fixed by the companies:** The government has fixed the maximum retail price (MRP) of urea at Rs 5,628 per tonne. The MRPs of other fertilisers are technically decontrolled, but

companies have been “told” not to charge more than Rs 27,000/tonne for DAP.

- **Informally fixed prices are higher:** The informally-fixed MRPs are higher at Rs 29,000-31,000 and Rs 34,000 per tonne for NPKS complexes and muriate of potash (MOP) respectively, but farmers have little incentive to buy at these prices.
- **DAP is cheaper to apply:** Farmers are reluctant to apply complexes such as 10:26:26:0, 12:32:16:0 and 20:20:0:13 when DAP is cheaper and has 46 per cent P as well as 18 per cent N.
- **Price is the primary concern for over micronutrients:** The fact that DAP does not contain K, S or other macro and micro nutrients wouldn't matter to a majority of farmers. For them, choice of fertilisers is primarily a function of prices.
- **Subsidies on individual fertilizers are to be blamed:** Underpricing of urea (a historical phenomenon) and DAP (recent) is a product of subsidy-induced market distortions, for which the blame lies squarely with the Government.

Ideal ratio for N:P:K and effects of excessive use

- **Ideal ratio v/s current NPK ratio:** The effects of these the current NPK ratio is about 13:5:1, as against the ideal 4:2:1 would ultimately show up in crop yields.
- **Plants will respond poorly:** Plants, like humans, will respond poorly to fertilisers if only one or two nutrients are given in excess.
- **Disturbs soil health:** Excessive use of chemical fertilizers kills all the microorganisms available in the soil, which are so essential for maintaining soil health

What the government can do?

- **Changing the subsidy policies:** The Government should replace subsidies on individual fertiliser products with a flat per-hectare cash transfer, maybe twice a year.
- **E- wallet account for money transfer only to purchase fertilizers:** Every farmer can have an e-wallet account into which this money can be credited before the kharif and rabi planting seasons. The e-wallet may be used only for the purchase of fertilisers.
- **Maintaining stock of basic fertilizers:** The government can maintain a stock of basic fertilisers, including urea and DAP, to ensure no untoward price rise even in a decontrol scenario.

Have you heard? “PM PRANAM” scheme

- In order to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers by incentivising states, the Union government plans a new scheme – PM PRANAM, which stands for PM Promotion of Alternate Nutrients for Agriculture Management Yojana.
- The proposed scheme intends to reduce the subsidy burden on chemical fertilisers.
- This burden if un eased, is expected to increase to Rs 2.25 lakh crore in 2022-2023, which is 39% higher than the previous year’s figure of Rs 1.62 lakh crore.
- The scheme will not have a separate budget and will be financed by the “savings of existing fertiliser subsidy” under schemes run by the Department of fertilisers.

Conclusion

- The compulsions of electoral politics have clearly trumped concerns over soil nutrient imbalances. Price distortions in fertilisers will not help farming in the long run. Govt can offer acreage-based cash transfers.

14. India-China clash: Why China has opened new front?

There has been yet another transgression by Chinese troops across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China. That it culminated in violence, that it took place this time in the Eastern Sector of their boundary dispute, or that it should take place in the middle of winter should surprise no one. If there is one lesson that can be drawn from India’s experiences with Chinese transgressions over the last decade or so, it is that the Chinese seem to set the pace on the nature and timing of these transgressions.

Army’s statement about the clash

- On December 9, 2022, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) troops contacted the LAC in the Tawang sector, which was contested by own troops in a firm and resolute manner.
- This face-off led to minor injuries to a few personnel from both sides, “Both sides immediately disengaged from the area.”

Events of Chinese transgressions: Need to understand the nature and timing

- **Depsang in Ladakh, 2013:** Chinese troops came across the LAC, pitched tents and refused to move for several weeks until New Delhi threatened to cancel the planned visit of Premier Li Keqiang to India. This might have been a diplomatic victory for the Indian government but it also highlighted the inability of the Indian military to bring an end to the standoff or the unwillingness of the government to let the military take the lead in responding.
- **Chumar in Ladakh, Sept, 2014 in the middle of the Xi Jinping's first visit to India:** Chinese intruded at Chumar, also in Ladakh, in the middle of Chinese President Xi Jinping's first state visit to India. This was in keeping with a reasonably long tradition of Chinese transgressions during important visits but it was also notable for confronting Indian troops in an area where they enjoyed a degree of military advantage.
- **Doklam in 2017:** China provoked India with infrastructure development in a third country in Bhutan's Doklam territory. This was a case of China trying to browbeat an Indian treaty ally.
- **Transgression across multiple locations in 2020 and Galwan valley clash:** The Chinese PLA took advantage of Covid-19 and a lack of Indian military alertness to transgress across multiple locations on the LAC in eastern Ladakh. On June 15, 2020 episode when 20 Indian soldiers were killed and several others were injured in violent clashes with the PLA troops in Ladakh's Galwan Valley.

Why China has opened new front in Tawang?

- **Status quo along the boundary are no longer going to be limited to the Western Sector:** China has traditionally been active in areas close to Ladakh given the significance of the Xinjiang-Tibet region in its domestic narrative. However, with its sights on an ageing Dalai Lama, and the issue of his succession, Beijing will want to bring into focus its claims on Tawang, and the rest of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Huge investment in infrastructure in eastern sector:** China has invested in infrastructure in the Eastern Sector over many years. This includes rail, road, and air connectivity, better telecommunications, as well as improved capacity to station and supply troops and artillery.
- **Centrality of the boundary issue in the India-China relationship:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has repeatedly asserted that it is no longer possible to separate the boundary question from the overall relationship and that peace and tranquillity on the LAC is the key to restoring relations. However, China is likely to keep up the pressure on the ground along the LAC, even as they continue to suggest that the two countries look beyond the differences, much like Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's comments during

his March 2022 visit when he claimed that the two sides need to “inject more positive energy” into the relationship.



India's preparedness and learnings from the incident

- **Indian Army anticipated such kind of transgression in eastern sector:** The Indian Army had for long anticipated that the PLA would activate the eastern sector of the LAC, and to that extent, it is evident that steps were taken to beef up military preparedness in the region.
- **Light on what gaps to address:** What the incident has effectively achieved though is the lighting up of one more section of the LAC at a time the issues in Ladakh have not yet been settled, from the point of view of India.
- **China appears not want to disengage:** After 16 rounds of talks, a disengagement has taken place in eastern Ladakh, but it has not restored the status quo that prevailed in April 2020. China, for its part, appears reluctant to hold any further rounds of talks on the leftover problems in Ladakh, including its play in Depsang and Demchok areas.
- **China is only increasing the economic gap between itself and India:** China has only increased the economic gap between itself and India and in the intervening years, not only built up more infrastructure in its border provinces but also tried to integrate these regions much more closely with neighbouring economies such as Pakistan and Nepal through grand projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and pressuring Thimphu to open formal diplomatic ties with Beijing.

Way ahead

- India's relationship with China has been teetering from bad to worse over the last 32 months since the standoff in Ladakh began, and it seems unlikely to improve unless Beijing's calculus vis a vis India and the region undergoes a drastic change.
- While Delhi's G20 leadership may bring opportunities for engagement with Beijing, what is required first is a clear vision and a grand strategy to deal with the China challenge, instead of reacting to each crisis as it emerges.

Conclusion

- With its sights on an ageing Dalai Lama, and the issue of his succession, Beijing will want to bring into focus its claims on Arunachal Pradesh. The border stand-off seems to have been managed for now, but Delhi needs a clear vision, grand strategy to deal with China instead of reacting to each crisis as it emerges.

15. Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill and the Forests rights

Rajya Sabha passed the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021. The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill in the Monsoon Session. While aspects of protecting species against wildlife trade in line with international standards have scrutinised by civil society, MPs and the Parliamentary Standing Committee, the impact of the criminal legal framework fostered by the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) is less known.

Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2022

- The latest amendment invests in this conception of protected areas and species by adding to the list of protected species and augmenting the penal repercussions.
- The Bill amends the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 by increasing the species protected under the law.
- There are 50 amendments to the Act proposed in the Bill.
- Substituting the definition of 'Tiger and other Endangered Species' to 'Wild Life', this Bill includes flora, fauna and aqua under its protection.
- The Bill also regulates wild life trade as per the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Criminal laws and wildlife conservation in latest amendment

- **Criminal laws remain unchallenged:** The need for criminal laws to assist wildlife conservation has remained unchallenged since its conception.

- **Human- animal conflict not interpreted correctly:** From regulated hunting to complete prohibition and the creation of 'Protected Areas (PA)' where conservation can be undertaken without the interference of local forest-dwelling communities, State and Forest Department control over forests and the casteist underpinnings of conservation would not have been possible without criminal law. In this context, pitting wildlife species against communities as human-animal conflict has eluded the true cost of criminalisation under the WPA.
- **Questionable WPA's policing framework:** The recent move to increase penalties by four times for general violations (from ₹25,000 to ₹1,00,000) and from ₹10,000 to ₹25,000 for animals receiving the most protection should raise questions about the nature of policing that the WPA engenders.

Study by the Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project (CPA Project) in Madhya Pradesh

- **Records found says forest dwellers are majority of accused in wildlife related crimes:** found that persons from oppressed caste communities such as Scheduled Tribes and other forest-dwelling communities form the majority of accused persons in wildlife-related crimes.
- **Found that forest department use threat of criminalisation for cooperation:** The Forest Department was found to use the threat of criminalisation to force cooperation, apart from devising a system of using community members as informants and drawing on their loyalty by employing them on a daily wage basis.
- **Cases filed not only for serious crimes:** Cases that were filed under the WPA did not pertain solely to the comparatively serious offence of hunting; collecting wood, honey, and even mushrooms formed the bulk of prosecution in PAs.
- **Cases files are still pending:** Over 95% of the cases filed by the Forest Department are still pending.
- **Most cases filed were for hunting were lesser protected animals:** Hunting offences that were primarily filed against Schedule III and IV animals (wild boars) which have lesser protection than tigers and elephants formed over 17.47% of the animals 'hunted' between 2016-20. Among the animals hunted the highest, only one in top five belonged to Schedule I (peacock). Surprisingly, fish (only certain species relegated to Schedule I) formed over 8% of the cases filed. A whopping 133 cases pertaining to fishing (incorrectly classified as Schedule V species) were filed in the last decade in Madhya Pradesh.

- **Making FRA subservient to the WPA:** Forest rights, individual and collective, as part of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) were put in place to correct the injustice meted out by forest governance laws. These rights recognised forest-dependent livelihoods. But in inviolate PAs, making the FRA subservient to the WPA, thereby impeding its implementation.

Rights for the dwellers

What the Forest Rights Act, 2006, entails

- Tenurial security over the forestland under occupation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of community right over forest and forest products
- Protection and conservation of community forest resources
- Conversion of all forest villages and habitation located inside the forestland into revenue villages
- In situ rehabilitation of displaced persons evicted without compensation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of ancestral domain (habitat) right to



Residents of Gunduribadi village in Odisha's Nayagarh district get ready for mapping their land boundaries for the Forest Rights Act implementation. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- Seasonal access to nomadic, pastoral and semi-nomadic communities over forestland

- Conversion of all leases granted by erstwhile governments, zamindars and king into permanent land records

What is forest rights Act, 2006?

- **Recognizing rights of forest dwelling communities:** The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 recognizes the rights of the forest dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent for a variety of needs, including livelihood, habitation and other socio-cultural needs.
- **Aim to balance rights and protect:** It aimed to protect the marginalised socio-economic class of citizens and balance the right to environment with their right to life and livelihood.

- **Individual rights:** The Act encompasses Rights of Self-cultivation and Habitation which are usually regarded as Individual rights.
- **Community forest rights:** Community Rights as Grazing, Fishing and access to Water bodies in forests, Habitat Rights for PVTGs, Traditional Seasonal Resource access of Nomadic and Pastoral community, access to biodiversity, community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge, recognition of traditional customary rights and right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource for sustainable use.

Conclusion

- Criminal cases filed by the department are rarely compounded since they are meant to create a 'deterrent effect' by instilling fear in communities. Fear is a crucial way in which the department mediates governance in protected areas, and its officials are rarely checked for their power. Unchecked discretionary policing allowed by the WPA and other forest legislations have stunted the emancipatory potential of the FRA. Any further amendments must take stock of wrongful cases (as in the case of fishing) and resultant criminalization of rights and lives of forest dwelling communities.

16. Breakthrough in Nuclear Fusion Energy

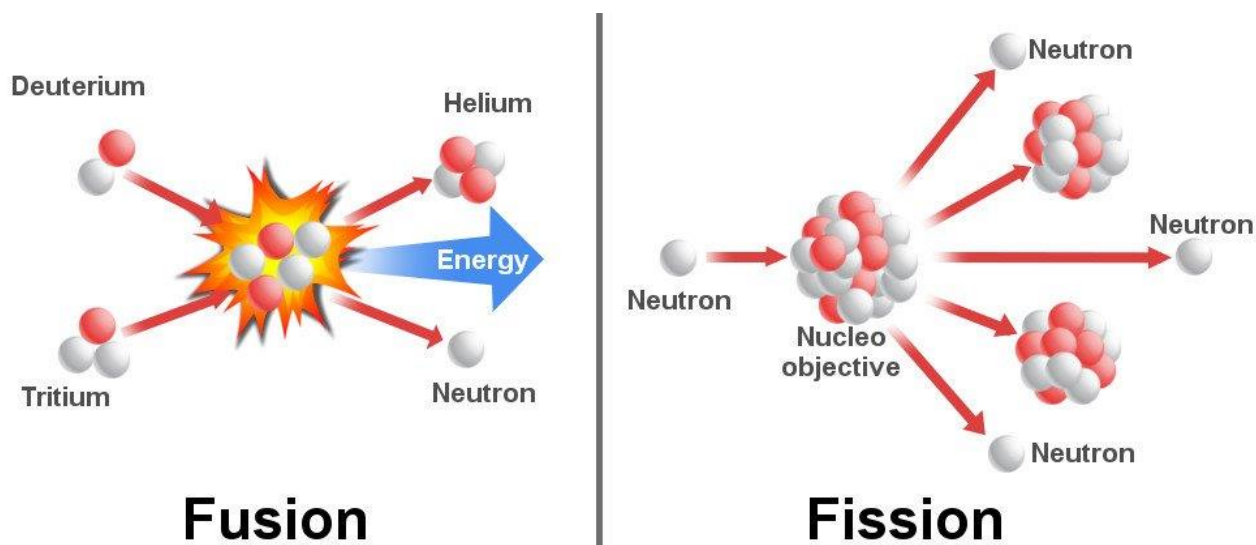
Researchers at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California for the first time produced more energy in a fusion reaction than was used to ignite it, something called net energy gain.

Nuclear fusion

- Nuclear fusion reactions power the sun and other stars.
- Nuclear fusion reaction happens when two light nuclei (hydrogen) merge to form a single heavier nucleus (helium), releasing enormous amounts of energy and heat.
- To combine two identical elements is actually very hard because they have the same positive charge and naturally repel each other.
- A lot of energy is needed to overcome this resistance.
- In the Sun, this happens due to extremely high temperatures of around 10 million degrees Celsius, and significant pressure of more than 100 billion times that of the Earth's atmosphere.

Differences between nuclear fission and fusion

- Fusion is the joining of atomic nuclei and fission is the splitting of atomic nuclei.
- Fusion produces far more energy than that created by fission.
- Fusion, unlike fission, does not create harmful radioactive by-products that need to be stored for thousands of years.



Why is fusion energy so significant?

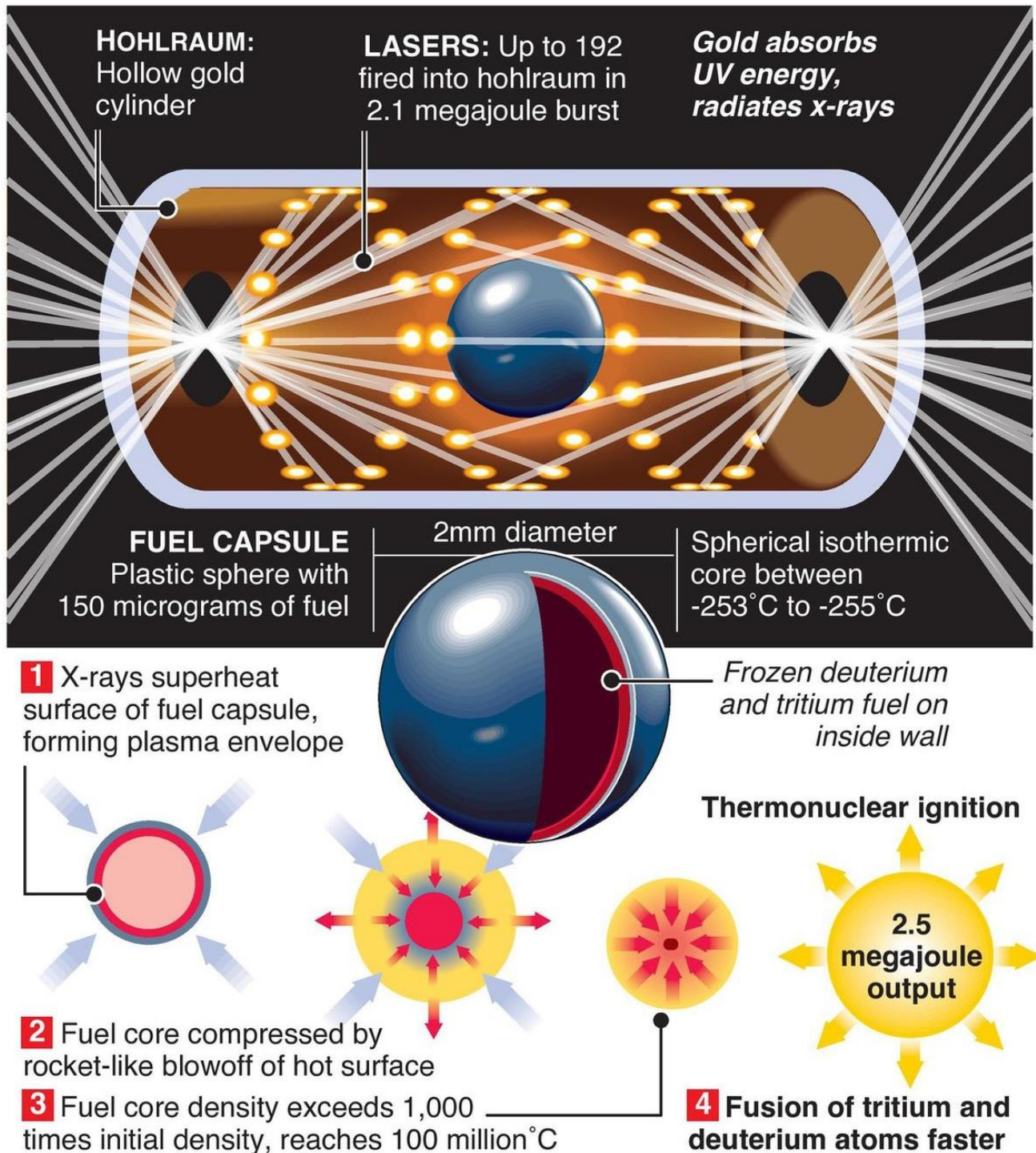
- **Less radioactive** - The waste produced by nuclear fusion is less radioactive and decays much more quickly.
- **No need for fossil fuels** - Nuclear fusion doesn't need fossil fuels like oil or gas.
- **No GHGs** - It also doesn't generate greenhouse gases (GHGs).
- **Targeting net zero** - Widescale use of nuclear fusion could help countries meet their targets to produce net zero emissions by 2050.
- **Availability** - Since most fusion experiments use hydrogen, which can be extracted cheaply from seawater and lithium, nuclear fusion offers the possibility of "basically unlimited" fuel.
- **Self-limiting process** - Fusion is a self-limiting process in which the machine switches itself off if the reaction cannot be controlled.
- Because of its significance, it has been described as the "**holy grail**" of energy production.

How are scientists trying to produce fusion energy?

- **Magnetic confinement** - Magnetic confinement uses a reactor called tokamak, in which a hydrogen plasma is heated to high temperature and the nuclei are guided by strong magnetic fields.

- **International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER)** is a famous example of an experiment trying to achieve fusion using magnetic confinement.
- **Inertial confinement** - In the Livermore lab, a 192-beam laser fire pulses at a small capsule filled with deuterium-tritium atoms inside a cylinder called a hohlraum.
- The latter heats up and releases X-rays, which heat the nuclei to millions of degrees centigrade and compress them to billions of Earth-atmospheres.
- It is called inertial confinement because the nuclei's inertia creates a short window between implosion and explosion in which the strong nuclear force dominates, fusing the nuclei.
- It is relatively easier to attain break-even energy levels through inertial fusion compared to magnetic fusion.





What has the experiment achieved?

- **Gain** - The ratio of the output energy to the input delivered to the container is the gain.
- A gain of 1 is called '**scientific breakeven**' - an important milestone in the development of fusion energy.
- **Lawson criterion** - In August 2022, the facility reported it had produced a burning plasma that met the Lawson criterion.

- According to Lawson criterion, the heat generated was sufficient to potentially trigger other fusion reactions as well as offset heat loss during the reaction.
- Now, the facility has reportedly achieved a burning plasma that meets the Lawson criterion as well as a gain greater than 1.

What issues lie ahead?

- **Effectiveness** - Some of the input energy is devoted to compressing the capsule instead of raising the temperature.
- This fraction will increase as the amount of fuel increases, creating another barrier to high gain.
- **Gain** - Future research will need to focus on reaching the next major milestone – a target gain of $G > 100$, which is required to run a power plant efficiently.
- **Rate of firing** - The rate at which any reactor fires its lasers at the hydrogen capsules needs to be orders of magnitude faster.
- **Conversion to usable form** - Even if the inertial fusion process is more efficient, the produced energy still needs to be converted into usable electricity.
- **Cost** - The cost to run and maintain an inertial fusion reactor needs to decrease dramatically.
- **Commercial viability** - It is still not obvious whether inertial fusion can be commercially competitive.
- Fusion is still far from reality.

17. Capital Expenditure and Fiscal Consolidation

- The 2023-24 Union budget will be announced on February 1, followed by the states' respective budgets. These budgets will set the policy tone for the rest of the year and, as such, are followed closely.

Situation of Capex and fiscal consolidation after pandemic

- **Rise in fiscal deficit:** The overall fiscal deficit of the government has soared and we believe the next few years will be all about getting it back on track.
- **Rising interest payments:** This is important because interest payments on past debt make up a whopping 50 per cent of net tax revenues for the central government, leaving very little room for other spending.

- **less room for social spending:** Given the needs of the economy on various fronts like health, education and capex, it is important to lower the interest burden over time. That can only be achieved by fiscal consolidation.

Analysing the tax revenue and expenditure of central and state Government

- **Central government tax revenues have risen faster than state revenues:** Both benefitted as small and informal firms struggled with the lockdowns and lost market share to large firms, which tend to pay more taxes.
- **Disparity in revenue collection:** A large chunk of the tax revenues in the early part of the pandemic period came from the “special” duty and surcharge on oil, which went primarily to the central government. To be fair, the central government subsequently cut the duty on oil (in both 2021-22 and 2022-23) and the tax share that went to the states rose somewhat.
- **Capex of centre is more:** The Centre has committed to more current expenditure than the states. While it increased across the board during the pandemic, current expenditure rose more for the central government.
- **Higher spending on social schemes:** This was led by higher social welfare spending (for instance, on the free food distribution scheme) and, more recently, higher subsidies (for example, fertilisers) in the face of rising commodity prices.
- **States have a moderate capex:** The common perception is that states have gone all out on unsustainable current expenditure. But the data shows that it’s just a few states which have spent heavily (for example, Telangana, Assam, West Bengal and Punjab).

Analyzing the capex and fiscal deficit of central and state government

- **The central government capex has risen but state capex has contracted:** Making a commendable choice, the central government used both its tax bounty as well as its ability to borrow more at a time when banking sector liquidity was loose to raise capex spending, which rose by 1.2 per cent of GDP between 2019-20 and 2021-22.
- **Cut in state capex:** On the other hand, the states cut back on capex, which has fallen as a percentage of GDP over the last few years, and continues to be on a weak footing in the current year. In fact, putting the central government’s capex alongside the state and public sector capex shows that the overall public sector thrust is not any stronger than it was back in 2018-19.
- **Centre has breached the fiscal deficit target:** The central government’s fiscal deficit has overshoot targets while the state deficit is relatively contained. At a budgeted 6.4 per cent of GDP in 2022-23, the central government’s fiscal

deficit has risen above the pre-pandemic level of 3.4 per cent in 2018-19, and is well above the 3 per cent medium-term target.

- **Sharp fall in states fiscal deficit target:** Even though the state fiscal deficit rose in the first year of the pandemic (from 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2018-19 to 3.8 per cent in 2020-21), it has fallen sharply since (to 2.7 per cent in 2021-22).
- **Low borrowing by states:** In fact, state government borrowing is rather low in the current year so far. If this continues, the fiscal deficit could be even lower in 2022-23 (around 2.5 per cent of GDP), which is well under the 3 per cent medium-term target, and bang in line with pre-pandemic levels.

Challenges

- **Less consolidation by states:** The states have less fiscal consolidation to do than the central government.
- **High quality spending:** Both have a common challenge to commit to more capex, which is considered high quality spending as it “crowds in” private investment if done responsibly. And we believe investment is the only sustainable way to increase the capacity of the economy to grow and create jobs.
- **Balancing the capex and fiscal consolidation:** For the central government, the challenge is to hold on to its capex push at a time of fiscal consolidation. For the states, the challenge is to start doing more.

What should be the way forward?

- **Lowering the fiscal deficit:** The central government’s aim is to lower the fiscal deficit by about 2 per cent of GDP over the next three years. About half of this consolidation can come from lowering current expenditure to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Raising the tax revenue through formalization:** Continued formalisation of the economy that raises tax revenues (though “organic” formalisation will likely be more sustainable than “forced” formalisation).
- **Disinvestment of PSUs:** A bigger push for disinvestment by selling stakes in public-owned companies, and further tax reforms (in terms of direct taxes and the GST).
- **Capex cut is the last option:** If these don’t work, the default option will be to cut capex, which is a concern as it has implications for medium-term growth.

Conclusion

- Fiscal consolidation and capital expenditure should go hand in hand. More government spending means more infrastructure building and more chances

of growth and employment. However, this spending should be done with sound fiscal base.

18. India's Slowing Exports

India's exports declined about 16.7% in October 2022 compared with the year-earlier period. This is the first slide reported since February 2021.

October imports rose at a much milder pace than earlier, most likely because of softening commodity prices worldwide, and trade deficit widened by as much as 50%.

How is the export sector faring?

- Engineering goods, which have lent a strong shoulder to India's goods exports in recent years, slid 21%.
- The reasons for the slowdown is attributed to,
 1. High inflation in developed regions,
 2. Falling demand in China,
 3. Slowdown in the EU and the U.S., and
 4. The Russia-Ukraine war.
- The Commerce Ministry pointed out that for October 2022, a decline of \$2 billion worth of exports was seen in steel and allied products.
- This highlights the fact that the government had levied an export duty on these products to help increase local availability and hence temper local prices. The government has since removed this duty.
- The Ministry also highlighted that in the month of Diwali every year, workers tend to take leave, thus impacting output.

What about other exporting nations?

- Export-dominated Vietnam recorded a 4.5% growth in exports from a year earlier to \$29.18 billion amid 'sustained foreign demand'.
- Similarly, exports by the Philippines grew 20% in October.
- China is an outlier this year because of stringent lockdowns that are impacting manufacturing output, though lockdowns are being eased currently following protests against restrictions.

Is domestic demand enough?

- The monthly Finance Ministry review (October) admits a slowing export scenario but emphasises that domestic demand will carry through.
- The report states that the global slowdown is driven by a 'confluence of high inflation, rising borrowing costs and geopolitical tensions', but cites local demand as being 'resilient'.
- It also expects a re-invigorated investment cycle which will spur growth and job creation in the coming days.
- Interestingly, the Ministry says that inflation has been driven up more by local factors, including higher food prices, than imported reasons.
- Those pressures are set to reduce thanks to easing international commodity prices and the arrival of Kharif crop.

Retail inflation has been consistently above 7% the past few months, but stood at 6.8% in October 2022. Consumer inflation eased to 5.88% for November 2022.

What are the other positive factors?

- In the monthly report, the Ministry pinned hope on the fact that the last month saw the lowest sign-ons this year for the MGNREGS.
- It is hoping that a spike in tractor sales in September and October 2022 reflects improved sentiment.
- One seemingly positive signal for the economy is the **private sector capital expenditure is on track** to touch six lakh crore this fiscal.
- Private capex typically depends on loans from the banking system.
- There have been reports of banks scrambling to gather deposits, with managers and their teams walking the streets announcing deposit rates to help mobilise funds for credit growth.
- Whether this credit growth is due to inflation and low base effect from last year, remains to be seen over the coming months.

19. Road ministry notifies new rules on BH Series registration mark for vehicles

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highway has notified new rules to further increase the scope of implementation of the BH series registrations for vehicles.

What is the update?

The transport ministry has proposed new rules that would permit transfer of vehicles with BH series registration mark to other persons, who are eligible or ineligible for the getting the series.

Bharat series (BH-series)

- There was a procedure of re-registration of a vehicle while moving to another state.
- A vehicle bearing BH registration mark shall not require assignment of a new registration mark when the owner of the vehicle shifts from one State to another.
- Format of Bharat series (BH-series) Registration Mark –

Registration Mark Format:

1. YY BH #### XX
2. YY – Year of first registration
3. BH- Code for Bharat Series
4. ####- 0000 to 9999 (randomized)
5. XX- Alphabets (AA to ZZ)

Why such move?

- Station relocation occurs with both Government and private sector employees.
- Such movements create a sense of unease in the minds of such employees with regard to transfer of registration from the parent state to another state.
- Under section 47 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, a person is allowed to keep the vehicle for not more than 12 months in any state other than the state where the vehicle is registered.

Who can get this BH series?

- BH-series will be available on voluntary basis to Defense personnel, employees of Central Government/ State Government/ Central/ State PSUs and private sector companies/organizations.
- The motor vehicle tax will be levied for two years or in multiple of two.
- This scheme will facilitate free movement of personal vehicles across States/UTs of India upon relocation to a new State/UT.
- After completion of the fourteenth year, the motor vehicle tax shall be levied annually which shall be half of the amount which was charged earlier for that vehicle.

20. World Bank Report on Air Pollution

Recently, the World Bank released a report titled 'Striving for Clean Air: Air Pollution and Public Health in South Asia'.

- The report details how persisting with policies currently being implemented (largely since 2018) will yield results but not to the desired level.

Highlights of the Report

- **Airsheds:**
 - Six large airsheds exist in South Asia, where the air quality in one can affect the air quality in another. They are:
 - **West/Central Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP)** that included Punjab (Pakistan), Punjab (India), Haryana, part of Rajasthan, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh.
 - **Central/Eastern IGP:** Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bangladesh
 - **Middle India:** Odisha/Chhattisgarh
 - **Middle India:** Eastern Gujarat/Western Maharashtra
 - **Northern/Central Indus River Plain:** Pakistan, part of Afghanistan; and
 - **Southern Indus Plain and further west:** South Pakistan, Western Afghanistan extending into Eastern Iran.
 - When the wind direction was predominantly northwest to the southeast, **30% of the air pollution in Indian Punjab came from the Punjab Province in Pakistan** and, on average, 30% of the air pollution in the largest cities of Bangladesh (Dhaka, Chittagong, and Khulna) originated in India. In some years, substantial pollution flowed in the other direction across borders.
- **Exposure to PM 2.5:**
 - Currently over **60% of South Asians are exposed to an average 35 µg/m³ of PM_{2.5} annually.**
 - In some parts of the IGP it spiked to as much as 100 µg/m³ - nearly 20 times the upper limit of 5 µg/m³ recommended by the **World Health Organisation (WHO).**
- **Dominant Sources of Air Pollution:**
 - Large industries, power plants and vehicles are dominant sources of air pollution around the world, but in South Asia, other sources make substantial additional contributions.

- These include **combustion of solid fuels for cooking and heating, emissions from small industries such as brick kilns**, burning of municipal and agricultural waste, and cremation.

What are the Suggestions?

- **Reducing Airsheds:**
 - Governmental measures can reduce particulate matter, **but significant reductions in airsheds require coordinated policies across the airsheds.**
 - If Delhi National Capital Territory were to fully implement all air pollution control measures by 2030 while other parts of South Asia continued to follow current policies, it wouldn't keep pollution exposure below 35 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
 - However, if other parts of South Asia also adopted all feasible measures it would bring pollution below that number.
- **Changing Approach:**
 - South Asian countries including India **need to change their approach in order to improve air quality and reduce pollutants** to levels considered acceptable by the WHO.
- **Close Coordination Required:**
 - Curbing air pollution requires not only tackling its specific sources, but **also close coordination across local and national jurisdictional boundaries.**
 - **Regional cooperation can help implement cost-effective joint strategies** that leverage the interdependent nature of air quality.
 - The most cost-effective one, which calls for full coordination between airsheds, would cut the average exposure of PM 2.5 in South Asia to 30 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ at a cost of USD 278 million per $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of reduced exposure and save more than 7,50,000 lives annually.

21. United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent)

This article talks about the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).

About ULFA:

- ULFA was formed in April 1979 as an offshoot of the Assam Agitation that sought to free the State from foreigners.
- The outfit split into the larger pro-talks group and the Paresh Baruah-headed anti-talks faction, which renamed itself the ULFA(I) in 2013.
- It seeks to establish an independent sovereign nation state of Assam for the indigenous Assamese people through an armed struggle in the Assam conflict.

- The Government of India banned the organisation in 1990 citing it as a terrorist organisation, while the United States Department of State lists it under “other groups of concern.”

Online recruitment:

- Outfit uses social media to recruit cadres. Sub-nationalist Assamese poems and similar content on social Media are used to convince youth to take up armed revolution against the “Indian colonialists” represented by the armed forces.
- Several spotters of the extremist group are assigned to recruit fresh faces from villages in Assam.
- In February 2022, the ULFA(I) refuted the “theories” that it undertakes recruitment drives through social media platforms and blamed the Assam police and the Army for creating fake Facebook accounts in the name of the outfit to discredit ULFA(I).
- But in April 2022, Chief Minister of Assam insisted that the outfit had used Facebook, YouTube and other platforms to lure and induct at least 47 boys and girls into its ranks within a few days.

Eroding Support Base:

- Information gathered from surrendered extremists points to the outfit finding fewer takers than in the past.
- The Indian Army is pre-training teenagers to improve their chances of recruitment in the security forces.
- The Indian Army is also organising vocational courses and coaching classes to prepare local youth from underprivileged families for admission to top colleges across the country. This outreach is also usually done through social media platforms.
- Once they join the organisation, the outfit forbids the use of mobile phones. This meant that they had to cut ties with the very social media channels that had initially drawn them to the ULFA(I). This is making youth quit the outfit.
- Improved connectivity including telecom and roads has ensured rapid development of the villages which further makes the recruitment difficult for the outfit.

22. Security of Border Areas

25th Eastern Zonal Council meeting was held in Kolkata on December 17, 2022.

Highlights of the meeting:

- Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah presided over the 25th Eastern Zonal Council meeting in Kolkata.
- Issues of cross-border smuggling and illegal infiltration along the India-Bangladesh border as well as left-wing extremism were raised at the meeting.
- In his inaugural address, the Union Home Minister suggested that States should also share the responsibility for the security of border areas along with the Border Security Force.
- The Union Home Minister said that Left Wing Extremism has almost been eliminated from the Eastern region of India and efforts should be made to sustain this decisive dominance over Left Wing Extremism.
- He urged states to ensure the creation of a district-level structure of the Narco Coordination Center (NCORD) mechanism and its regular meetings for the prevention of narcotics with the help of Artificial Intelligence.
- The meeting was attended by the Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Jharkhand, the Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar and Ministers from Odisha and other senior officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the States under the Council.

About Zonal Councils:

- Zonal Councils are statutory bodies established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956.
- They are advisory bodies and were established to promote interstate cooperation and coordination.
- There are five zonal councils in India, as follows:
 - **Northern Zonal Council:** Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan
 - **Central Zonal Council:** Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh
 - **Eastern Zonal Council:** Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal
 - **Southern Zonal Council:** Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana
 - **Western Zonal Council:** Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Daman and Diu, Goa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as Lakshadweep, are not members but are special invitees to the Southern Zonal Council.
- The north-eastern states are not members of any of the above councils. Their problems are addressed by another statutory body, the North Eastern Council, created by the North Eastern Council Act, 1971.
- The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.

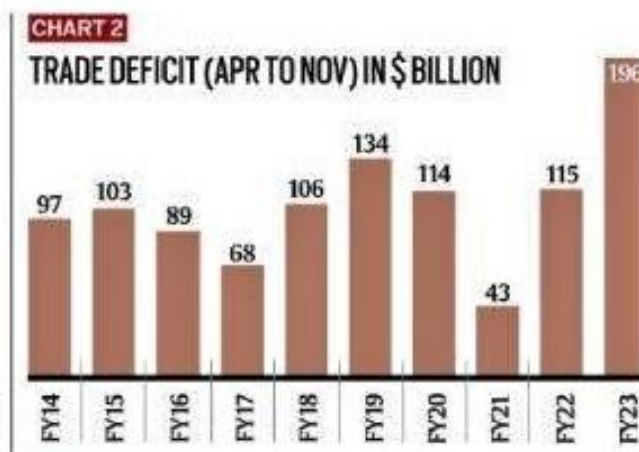
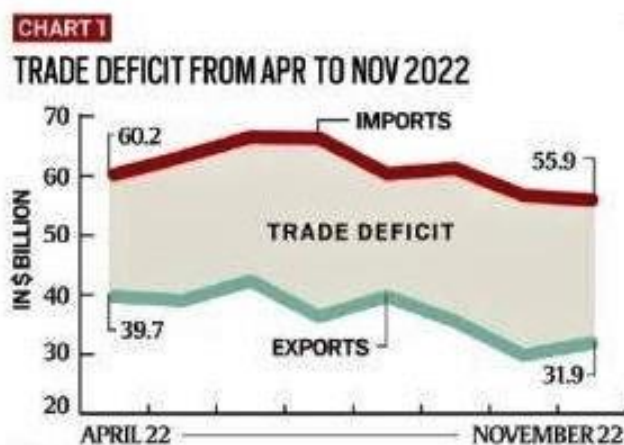
- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.

23. India's Trade Data

The latest trade data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry show a small increase in exports growth (32 billion dollars) and a fall in imports growth (56 billion dollars) in November 2022.

What does the trade data indicate on exports?

- **Exports** - Exports grew by 0.6% over November 2021.
- This November's performance appears better because last year, Diwali was in November and that resulted in fewer working days and, as a result, lesser exports.
- It is over that smaller base that exports have grown by less than a percentage point.
- **Reason for decline in exports** - The bulk of the decline in India's growth rate is being contributed by the fall in volumes exported.
- Across the world, economies, especially those of India's biggest trading partners such the US and European countries, are either in recession or struggling to grow.
- This, in turn, implies a fall in demand for Indian goods that reflects in weaker exports growth.



What about India's imports?

- **Imports** - Imports grew by 5.4% over November 2021.
- The decline in imports growth has been more a balanced effect of declines in volume and prices.
- **Fall in imports growth** - It suggests that India's domestic demand is weakening as the effect of a tighter monetary policy (Higher interest rates and their drag on overall consumption and investment demand)

China is India's second biggest trading partner after the United States.

What about the trade deficit?

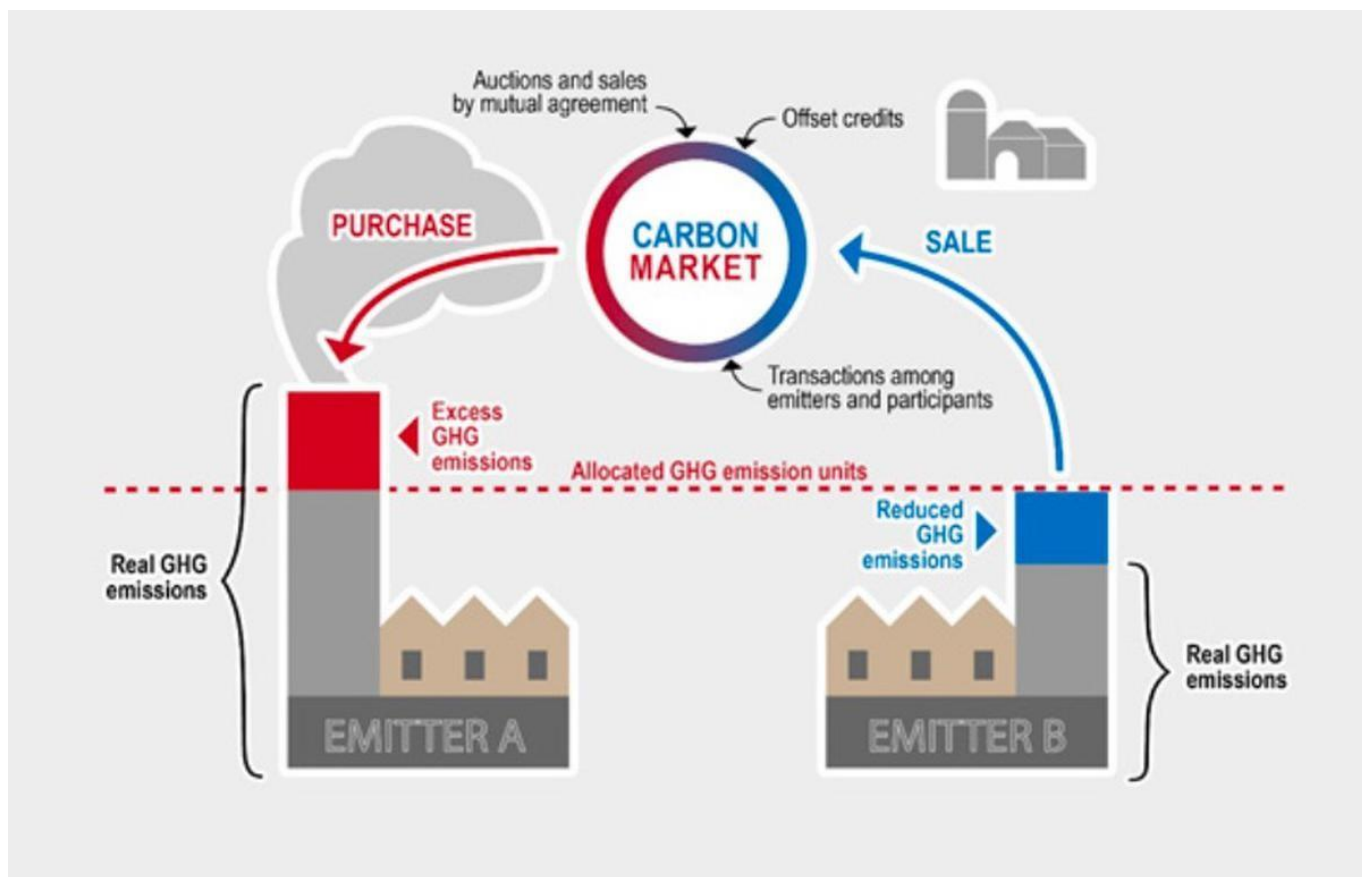
- **Trade deficit** - A trade deficit occurs when a country's imports exceed its exports during a given time period.
- It is also referred to as a **negative balance of trade (BOT)**.
- India's trade deficit during April to November stood at 196 billion dollars.
- **Impact of trade deficit** - A trade deficit implies that Indians need dollars more than the rest of the world needs rupees for the trades to settle.
- As such, a trade deficit puts pressure on the rupee's exchange rate against the dollar (presuming that all imports require payment in US dollars).
- Persistently high trade deficits tend to weaken the rupee's exchange rate.
- Higher trade deficit will push up India's current account deficit (which includes the trade in goods as well as services).

24. Carbon Markets & Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2022

The Parliament passed the Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2022 declining the Opposition's demands to send it for scrutiny to a parliamentary committee and amid concerns expressed by members over carbon markets.

Carbon markets

- Carbon markets are essentially a **tool for putting a price on carbon emissions** - they establish trading systems where carbon credits or allowances can be bought and sold.
- As per the United Nations standards, a carbon credit is a kind of tradable permit that equals one tonne of carbon dioxide removed, reduced, or sequestered from the atmosphere.
- Meanwhile, carbon allowances or caps are determined by countries or governments according to their emission reduction targets.
- According to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) release, interest in carbon markets is growing globally.
- 83% of NDCs submitted by countries mention their intent to make use of international market mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Types of carbon markets

Voluntary markets

- Voluntary markets are those in which emitters - corporations, private individuals, and others - buy carbon credits to offset the emission of one tonne of CO₂ or equivalent greenhouse gases.
- Such carbon credits are created by activities which reduce CO₂ from the air, such as afforestation.
- In a voluntary market, a corporation looking to compensate for its unavoidable GHG emissions purchases carbon credits from an entity engaged in projects that reduce, remove, capture, or avoid emissions.
- In voluntary markets, credits are verified by private firms as per popular standards.
- There are also traders and online registries where climate projects are listed and certified credits can be bought.

Compliance markets

- Compliance markets or regulated markets - set up by policies at the national, regional, and/or international level - are officially regulated.

- Today, compliance markets mostly operate under ‘cap-and-trade’ principle, most popular in the European Union (EU).
- Under the EU’s emissions trading system (ETS) launched in 2005, member countries set a cap or limit for emissions in different sectors, such as power, oil, manufacturing, agriculture, and waste management.
- This cap is determined as per the climate targets of countries and is lowered successively to reduce emissions.
- Entities in this sector are issued annual allowances or permits by governments equal to the emissions they can generate.
- If companies produce emissions beyond the cap, they have to purchase additional permit, either through official auctions or from companies that have their emissions below the limit.
- Other national and sub-national compliance carbon markets also operate or are under development around the world - China, North America, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, and New Zealand.

The World Bank estimates that trading in carbon credits could reduce the cost of implementing NDCs by more than half - by as much as \$250 billion by 2030.

Challenges to carbon markets

- The UNDP points out serious concerns pertaining to carbon markets like
 1. Double counting of greenhouse gas reductions,
 2. Quality and authenticity of climate projects that generate credits to poor market transparency.
 3. Greenwashing - companies may buy credits, simply offsetting carbon footprints instead of reducing their overall emissions or investing in clean technologies.
- As for regulated or compliance markets, ETSs may not automatically reinforce climate mitigation instruments.
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) points out that including high emission-generating sectors under trading schemes to offset their emissions by buying allowances may
 1. Increase emissions on net and
 2. Provide no automatic mechanism for prioritizing cost-effective projects in the offsetting sector.

What does the Energy Conservation Bill 2022 say about carbon markets?

- The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2022 amends the Energy Conservation Act, 2001.
- The Bill seeks to empower the Central Government to establish carbon markets in India and specify a carbon credit trading scheme.

- Under the Bill, the central government or an authorised agency will issue **carbon credit certificates to companies or individuals** registered and compliant with the scheme.
- These carbon credit certificates will be tradeable in nature. This means that other persons would be able to buy these certificates on a voluntary basis.
- But, the Bill doesn't provide clarity on the mechanism to be used for the trading of carbon credit certificates - whether it will be like the cap-and-trade schemes or another method - and who will regulate such trading.

Concerns

- **Introduction of Bill** - The carbon market schemes in other jurisdictions like the U.S., United Kingdom, and Switzerland are framed by their environment ministries.
- Unlike other countries, the Indian Bill was tabled by the Ministry of Power instead of the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- **Existing certificates** - Another important concern raised is that the Bill does not specify whether certificates under already existing schemes would also be interchangeable with carbon credit certificates.
- Notably, two types of tradeable certificates are already issued in India - Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) and Energy Savings Certificates (ESCs).
- These are issued when companies use renewable energy or save energy, which are also activities which reduce carbon emissions. The question is whether all these certificates could be exchanged with each other.
- There are concerns about whether overlapping schemes may dilute the overall impact of carbon trading.

25. Decriminalisation of Offences under GST

The 48th GST Council meeting chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recommended to decriminalise certain offences under Section 132 of the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act, 2017.

Need for criminalizing offences under GST

- There has been a significant increase in tax evasion, with numerous cases of taxpayers using multiple strategies to avoid indirect tax.
- Tax authorities are actively using technology and data from e-way bills and GST returns to check evasion.

- The GST law establishes stringent penalties to ensure smooth intrastate or interstate trade of goods and to combat corruption and maintain an effective tax collection system.

What was previously criminalised under GST?

- The GST Law provides for two different types of penalties which may be both concurrent and simultaneous.
- **Fines** - The department authorities have the authority to impose monetary fines and the seizure of goods as penalties for violating statutory provisions.
- **Imprisonment and fines** - Criminal penalties include imprisonment and fines which can only be awarded in a criminal court following a prosecution.
- The amount of tax evaded, the amount of Input Tax Credit (ITC) improperly claimed or used, or the amount of refund improperly claimed determines the length of the prison sentence.
- The offences are also divided into cognisable and bailable and those that are not cognisable and bailable.
- Certain offences like tax evasion, fraud etc. under GST law also attract IPC and CrPC provisions.
- Up to a fraud of 2 crore rupees [now 5 crore rupees, after CGST (Amendment) Act, 2018], no arrest is made.

What about decriminalising the GST offences?

Recommendations for decriminalisation

- The 48th GST Council meeting has recommended measures such as
 - Raising the minimum threshold of tax amount for launching prosecution under GST from 1 crore to 2 crore with exceptions
 - Reducing the compounding amount from the present range of 50 to 150% of the tax amount to the range of 25 to 100%
 - Decriminalising certain offences specified under the CGST Act, such as preventing any officer from doing his duties, deliberate tempering of material evidence, failure to supply information, etc.
- If decriminalisation of GST offences are implemented, then prosecution, arrest and imprisonment in GST cases would only be in the rarest of rare cases of hard, habitual, deliberate defaulters.

Recommendations to facilitate trade

- The Council recommended prescribing the procedure for filing application of refund by the unregistered buyers.

- The GST Council had also granted in-principle approval for allowing unregistered suppliers and composition taxpayers to make intra-state supply of goods through E-Commerce Operators (ECOs).
- The Council approved the amendments in the GST Act and GST Rules.
- Other recommendation includes facilitating e-commerce for micro enterprises.

26. India to add 145 GW of RE capacity by 2027: IEA

Recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released a report titled Renewable Energy Market Update Outlook for 2022 and 2023.

Global Highlights

- Globally, **forecast additions for 2022 and 2023** have been revised upwards by 8% due to strong policy support in **China, the European Union and Latin America**.
- **Solar PV and wind costs are expected to remain higher** in 2022 and 2023 than pre-pandemic levels due to elevated commodity and freight prices.

India related highlights

- India is expected to **add 145 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy (RE) capacity** in the next five years, with solar energy accounting for 75 per cent of the addition.
 - India is the world's **third-highest energy consumer**.
 - **The renewable capacity deployment will be dominated by utility-scale plants contracted through competitive auctions.**
- **Production Linked Incentives (PLI) initiative** closes nearly 80 per cent of Indian manufacturers' investment cost gap with the lowest-cost manufacturers in China.
- India's **auction volumes declined in 2022**, but the participation rate rose due to policy improvements.
 - From January to September 2022, India auctioned over 8 GW of renewable capacity, 30 per cent below the average for these months in 2019–2021.
- The **under-subscription rate fell to just 10 per cent** in 2022, with most auctions significantly oversubscribed.
- **Reducing off-taker risks prompted greater auction participation** as the number of auctions held by national rather than state agencies increased and

the solar parks programme advanced, facilitating land procurement and grid connection.

- **On the demand side**, higher renewable purchase obligations, and specific targets for wind, hydro, and other RE sources (solar, bioenergy), should further encourage power utilities (Discoms) to procure RE.

27. Merger of NAA-CCI

The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) under the Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime is proposed to be merged with Competition Commission of India (CCI).

NAA

- The National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) was established under Section 171 of the **Central Goods and Service tax Act, 2017**.
- It was initially set up for a period of 2 years after the implementation of GST in 2017.
- It was set up to control unfair profiteering by suppliers (where they were not passing on benefits of reduction in tax rates to consumers, etc.)
- It essentially **works as a price regulator** which ensures that any undue benefit is not reaped by companies, due to changes in GST laws.
- The NAA was subsequently given two extensions.

Problem with the NAA

- The lack of methodology to determine the extent of profiteering by companies has also been a sore point.
- Further, NAA orders have no right to statutory appeal and, hence, a plethora of writ petitions have been filed challenging such orders before the Delhi High Court.
- So, the foundation of the NAA has been the subject of judicial scrutiny.
- The CCI, on the other hand, has been maturing in the years since its inception, with prominent orders imposing penalties on companies being regularly upheld in judicial forums.

CCI

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a statutory body established under the **Competition Act, 2002**.
- It was launched with the objective of preventing practices by companies which have an adverse effect on competition (like cartelisation, etc), and to ensure freedom of trade.

- The CCI is **not a price regulator** but a referee to ensure fair market practice in a competing trade environment.
- The CCI has a clear appellate mechanism with appeals at the first level to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, and thereafter to the Supreme Court.
- Thus, the two regulatory bodies are operationally different.

Issue with merging these two regulatory bodies

- To bring together these two operationally different bodies, a separate wing must be set up in the CCI to handle complaints of GST profiteering.
- There is another issue with the existing practice in the NAA that is to be merged into the CCI framework.
- **Existing practice in the NAA** - In the NAA, the complaints are first screened by a State-level committee.
- Then on approval, complaints are sent to the Director-General of Anti-Profitteering for investigation and, the investigation report sent to NAA.
- So, combining this framework with the CAA's framework is riddled with foundational potholes.
- The CCI, whose focus area is much broader, simply lacks the expertise to interpret GST laws and the passage of GST benefits to the end-consumer.
- **Cases pending** - There are a multitude of cases pending before the NAA that will now fall into the plate of CCI, which would have to learn "on the job" to deal with them.
- Also, the CCI also has its own set of problems like
 - lack of regular officers,
 - lack of expertise in tax and pricing matters,
 - pendency of cases, and
 - further possibility of being overwhelmed with other new responsibilities.
- Given the DNA of the soon-to-be-adopted stepbrother from GST law, this is not going to be an easy task and has the potential of upending the maturity of the CCI gained since its inception.

What is to be done?

- On the face of the objective to reduce regulatory bodies, the CCI would possibly be the nearest parent for the adoption of the NAA.
- However, the practical challenges need to be addressed first by the GST Council and the courts.
- It may be worthwhile to consider alternative avenues in the interests of both the regulatory bodies.

28. Virtual Digital Assets (VDA) and Terror Financing

No Money for Terror conference hosted by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs concluded with a commitment from the 93 participating nations to end all financing of terror, including through the use of emerging digital technologies such as VDAs.

Concerns regarding virtual digital assets

- **VDAs for illicit activities:** The concerns around the misuse of VDAs for illicit activities require careful legislative responses and forward-looking regulatory guardrails.
- **Non reporting and non-transparency:** On a fundamental level, these concerns stem from a lack of reporting and transparency norms, and an absence of international consensus on regulatory design.
- **Lack of reliable data:** The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Deputy Director highlighted the difficulty in regulating VDAs, given the lack of reliable data on VDA transactions.
- **Unregulated transactions:** This allows bad actors to engage in unchecked transactions and defraud investors, as evinced by one of the (erstwhile) largest VDA exchanges FTX.

India's role in regulating the VDA

- **Leveraging G20 Presidency:** As one of the highest-ranked countries in terms of VDA adoption, and now with the G20 presidency, India has a critical role to play in shaping the global regulatory environment.
- **Empowering anti-money laundering authorities:** In the short term, a viable approach for India is in taking the industry and the investor into confidence by allowing anti-money laundering (AML) authorities visibility over VDA transactions, and the power to impose controls upon them and prosecute in the event of any misuse.
- **India should adopt FATF guidelines:** There are several international templates to this effect. The Financial Action Task Force Guidelines on Virtual Asset Transactions (FATF Guidelines) are a case in point, which have been adopted by various jurisdictions, including the EU, Japan and Singapore.

FATFs Guideline regarding VDA regulation

- **Minimum anti-money laundering standards:** The FATF prescribes minimum Anti-money laundering standards that countries should employ to prevent the likelihood of misuse, and the FATF Guidelines prescribe the same for VDA transactions.
- **Licensing and reporting of VDAs:** The Guidelines are applicable to VDA service providers of member states like India. Key features of the FATF Guidelines include licence/registration requirements and extensive reporting and record-keeping obligations for VDA service providers.
- **Travel rule obligations:** One such obligation is the Travel Rule, which requires service providers to record the originator and beneficiary's account details, transaction amount, and purpose of transaction for all wire transfers.
- **Verifying identity above certain threshold:** Customer due diligence obligations, which include verifying the customer and beneficiary's identities should be conducted for all transactions exceeding \$1,000.
- **Obligation on service provider:** The FATF Guidelines also require VDA service providers to perform enhanced due diligence obligations (such as corroborating the customer's identity with a national database or potentially tracing the customer's IP address to ensure there are no links to illicit activities) when a transaction is with a higher-risk country.

India's current laws to regulate VDA

- **PMLA includes reporting obligation:** India's existing Anti-money laundering framework under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) already applies these regulatory tools over traditional financial institutions. Notably, the PMLA also includes reporting obligations for overseas transactions that fall under the ambit of "suspicious transactions" under the framework.
- **PMLA doesn't apply to VDAs:** Currently, the PMLA does not apply to the VDA industry.
- **government can bring VDA under PMLA:** The government has the power to notify any "designated business or profession" as a reporting entity under the PMLA and can issue a notification that classifies VDA service providers as a designated business.

Conclusion

- With the Digital Data Protection Bill and the Digital India Act already in the pipeline, Indians and digital businesses will soon have a coherent rights and responsibility framework to operate within. The time is ripe to extend regulatory oversight over the VDA industry so as to ensure that tech-innovation flourishes in a responsible, accountable manner.

29. Price System for Gas

The critical issue of gas pricing has led to the constitution of an expert committee under the chairmanship of Kirit Parikh.

Status of gas sector in India

- Gas demand is directly linked to availability of the fuel.
- The total volume consumed in the country is 170 million standard cubic metre per day.
- Almost 50% of the gas consumption in India is imported.
- India's gas pricing system is mainly composed of
 - APM (Administrative Price Mechanism)
 - Non-APM (Free market gas)
- **Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC)**, attached to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas declares the APM gas price.
- The non-APM gas is of two types
 - Domestically produced gas from JV (Joint Venture) fields
 - Imported gas

India has set the target to raise share of natural gas in energy mix to 15% by 2030.

Kirit Parikh Committee about

- **Mandate** - Kirit Parikh Committee was constituted to
 - Review the current domestic natural gas pricing regime
 - Examine issues related to ensuring fair price to the end-consumer
 - Suggest market-oriented, transparent and reliable pricing
- **Recommendations**
- The Committee has recommended a change in the formula for pricing of gas produced from nomination fields (APM gas) to make it more market oriented.
- It also proposed for the removal of ceiling price for gas from high pressure-high temperature areas from a specified date.
- It has also recommended that the APM price should be maintained between a floor and ceiling for domestic consumers.

- It has proposed a period after which the pricing will be market determined.
- The price of APM and other gas whose prices are set by government should be fully deregulated ideally by January 1, 2027, if the gas price volatility on the international market has moderated.

Concerns with the Committee recommendations

- The Parikh committee recommendations is said to be tilted in favour of continued subsidy for city gas entities, which is untargeted and unsustainable.
- Indiscriminate grant of city gas distribution licences over the last few years is a questionable and unviable strategy.
- Most of the stakeholders in the industry feel that a suppressed APM price will distort the market.

What lies ahead?

- There is a need for an authority like the **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB)**, on the lines of the State Electricity Authority, to regulate the gas price.
- It is important to have a smooth transition to marketing and pricing freedom for all sources of gas for the growth of the market.

30. Neuralink and the unnecessary suffering of animals

Elon Musk's medical company, Neuralink, has been accused of causing needless suffering and death to around 1,500 animals in just short few years. Sources indicate that animal testing is proceeding too swiftly, which results in unnecessary suffering and death for the animals.

Neuralink company and its objective?

- The 2016-founded company Neuralink is developing a brain implant that will allow paralyzed people to walk again and cure other neurological conditions.

Neuralink

- **A device to be inserted in brain:** Neuralink is a gadget that will be surgically inserted into the brain using robotics. In this procedure, a chipset called the link is implanted in the skull.
- **Insulated wires connected to electrodes:** It has a number of insulated wires connected from the electrodes that are used in the process.

- **Can be operated by smartphones:** This device can then be used to operate smartphones and computers without having to touch it.



The science behind the human brain

- **Neurons of the Brain:** The brain consists of neurons that transmit signals to cells in the body including muscle, nerve, gland and other neuron cells.
- **Functions of each part of the brain:** Every neuron is made up of three parts called the dendrite, the soma (cell body) and the axon. Each of this part has its own function. The dendrite receives the signals. The soma processes these signals. The axon then transmits the signals to the other cells.
- **Neurotransmitters:** The neurons are connected to one another by the synapses which release neurotransmitters. These chemical substances are then sent to another neuron cell's dendrite causing the flow of current across the neurons.

How Does Neuralink Work?

- **Electrodes can read electric signals:** The electrodes that are part of the Neuralink will read electrical signals that are produced by several neurons in the brain. The signals are then outputted in form of an action or movement.
- **Implanted directly in the brain:** According to the company's website, the device is implanted directly in the brain because placing it outside the head will not detect the signals produced by the brain accurately

What Does Neuralink Do?

- **To operate encephalopathy:** Neuralink can be used to operate encephalopathy.

- **People with paralysis can be operated:** It can also be used as a connection between the human brain and technology. This means that people with paralysis can easily operate their phones and computer directly with their brain.
- **It will help people to communicate:** Its main purpose is to help people to communicate through text or voice messages.
- **Wide applications:** Neuralink can also be utilised to draw pictures, take photographs and do other activities. applications

Conclusion

- Though the Neuralink innovation pushing the boundaries of neural engineering, cruelty over the animals cannot be ignored.

31. The AI storm of ChatGPT: Advantages and limitations

Many of us are familiar with the concept of what a “chatbot” is and what it is supposed to do. But this year, OpenAI’s ChatGPT turned a simple experience into something entirely different. ChatGPT is being seen as a path-breaking example of an AI chatbot and what the technology could achieve when applied at scale.

Background

- **ChatGPT by OpenAI:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) research company OpenAI on recently announced ChatGPT, a prototype dialogue-based AI chatbot capable of understanding natural language and responding in natural language.
- **Will be able to implement in softwares soon:** So far, OpenAI has only opened up the bot for evaluation and beta testing but API access is expected to follow next year. With API access, developers will be able to implement ChatGPT into their own software.
- **Remarkable abilities:** But even under its beta testing phase, ChatGPT’s abilities are already quite remarkable. Aside from amusing responses like the pumpkin one above, people are already finding real-world applications and use cases for the bot.

Chatbot

- A chatbot (coined from the term “chat robot”) is a computer program that simulates human conversation either by voice or text communication, and is designed to help solve a problem.
- Organizations use chatbots to engage with customers alongside the classic customer service channels like phone, email, and social media.

ChatGPT

- **Simple definition:** ChatGPT is a chatbot built on a large-scale transformer-based language model that is trained on a diverse dataset of text and is capable of generating human-like responses to prompts.
- **A human like language model:** It is based on GPT-3.5, a language model that uses deep learning to produce human-like text.
- **It is more engaging with details:** However, while the older GPT-3 model only took text prompts and tried to continue on that with its own generated text, ChatGPT is more engaging. It’s much better at generating detailed text and can even come up with poems.
- **Keeps the memory of the conversations:** Another unique characteristic is memory. The bot can remember earlier comments in a conversation and recount them to the user.
- **Human- like resemblance:** A conversation with ChatGPT is like talking to a computer, a smart one, which appears to have some semblance of human-like intelligence.



The Question arises: will AI replace all of our daily writing?

- **ChatGPT is not entirely accurate:** It is not entirely accurate, something even OpenAI has admitted. It is also evident that some of the essays written by ChatGPT lack the depth that a real human expert might showcase when writing on the same subject.
- **ChatGPT lacks depth like human mind:** It doesn't quite have the nuance that a human would often be able to provide. For example, when asked ChatGPT how one should cope with a cancer diagnosis. The responses were kind but generic. The type of responses you would find in any general self-help guide.
- **It lacks same experiences as humans:** AI has a long way to go. After all, it doesn't have the same experiences as a human.
- **ChatGPT doesn't excel in code:** ChatGPT is writing basic code. As several reports have shown, ChatGPT doesn't quite excel at this yet. But a future where basic code is written using AI doesn't seem so incredible right now.

Limitations of ChatGPT

- **ChatGPT is still prone to Misinformation:** Despite of abilities of the bot there are some limitations. ChatGPT is still prone to misinformation and biases, which is something that plagued previous versions of GPT as well. The model can give incorrect answers to, say, algebraic problems.
- **ChatGPT can write incorrect answers:** OpenAI understands some flaws and has noted them down on its announcement blog that "ChatGPT sometimes writes plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical answers.

Conclusion

- OpenAI's ChatGPT turned that simple experience into something entirely different. ChatGPT is a path-breaking example of an AI chatbot and what the technology could achieve when applied at scale. Limitations aside, ChatGPT still makes for a fun little bot to interact with. However, there are some challenges that needs to be addressed before it becomes a unavoidable part of human life.

32. India's first Waste-to-Hydrogen Project

- India assumed the Presidency of the Group of 20 this December. The world's third largest emitter is moving beyond a transition strategy based squarely on solar development by branching out into emerging fields such as hydrogen.

Present Energy status and future Predictions

- **Only country to keep promise:** India is one of the few countries that has kept to its Paris Agreement (21st Conference of Parties or COP21 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) commitments, with an exponential increase in renewable energy capacity.
- **Energy through renewables:** It is anticipated that by 2050, 80-85 per cent of India's overall power capacity will come from renewables by achieving the nationally determined contributions commitments.
- **Reducing the fossil fuel:** India had committed to increasing the share of non-fossil fuels to 40 per cent of the total electricity generation capacity by 2030.



Potential of hydrogen energy

- **6 million tonnes hydrogen:** India consumes about six million tonnes of hydrogen annually to produce ammonia and methanol in industrial sectors, including fertilisers and refineries.
- **Rising demand of hydrogen:** This could increase to 28 million tonnes by 2050, principally due to the rising demand from the industry.

Efforts to promote Green Hydrogen

- **Search for technology to generate:** Ever since the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) shared that it is time for green hydrogen, private players have been looking for new technologies to generate it.
- **Electrolyser is inefficient:** With the challenges of electrolyser capacity for generating green hydrogen globally, finding alternatives to foster green hydrogen in the country is essential.

- **Incentives from central government:** The central government, the prime facilitator of such projects, has been coming up with new initiatives, policies and schemes to unleash the potential of green hydrogen generation and boost its demand.
- **Rational utilization of resources:** The long-term low-emission development strategy of the country submitted to UNFCCC at COP27 focused on the rational utilisation of national resources for energy security in a just, smooth and sustainable manner.

Idea proposed by Pune Municipal Commission

- **Partnership with private player:** PMC has partnered with business management consultant The Green Billions (TGBL) to manage its waste and generate it into useable green hydrogen. TGBL's special purpose vehicle or subsidiary, Variate Pune Waste to Energy Private Ltd, will be undertaking the work.
- **Waste management:** The new facility for generating hydrogen from waste will solve major problems of Inefficient waste management and carbon emissions. Waste management is one of the prime issues in the country, which is blamed for generating pollution in the surroundings.
- **Reducing carbon emissions:** Pune, the second largest city in Maharashtra, hosts many industries, including steel, fertilisers and pharmaceutical industries. The emissions in the city increased by 12 per cent to 1.64-tonne carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂Eq) per capita in 2017 from 1.46 tonne tCO₂Eq per capita in 2012.



How Hydrogen will be generated?

- **Hydrogen generation for 30 years:** Variate Pune Waste to Energy Private Ltd will be managing and utilising the municipal waste of 350 tonnes per day (TPD) for generating hydrogen for 30 years. This waste will comprise biodegradable, non-biodegradable and domestic hazardous waste.
- **Plasma gasification technology:** The Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF) from the waste would later be utilised to generate hydrogen using plasma gasification technology. The technology has been developed while closely working with the Bhabha Atomic Research Institute (BARC) and the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru.
- **9MT Tonnes of H₂:** It is estimated that 150TPD RDF and 9MT tonnes of H₂ would be generated out of 350 TPD waste.
- **Decarbonising the city:** The hydrogen generated at the facility will be utilised locally to help the city lower its emissions. As the Centre is focusing on industrial decarbonisation and facing the challenges of just transition, the project can prove to be a game-changer in helping industries reduce carbon emissions.



Conclusion

- In India, where the hydrogen industry is nascent, it is imperative to keep the cost of hydrogen competitive to expand its usage in various sectors. TGBL will work on the same by making hydrogen affordable and easier to switch in the just-transition.

33. Naegleria fowleri: The Brain-eating Amoeba

South Korea reported its first case of infection from Naegleria fowleri or “brain-eating amoeba”.

Naegleria fowleri (Amoeba)

- Amoeba is a type of cell or unicellular organism with the ability to alter its shape, primarily by extending and retracting pseudopods.
- Naegleria is an amoeba, a single-celled organism, and only one of its species, called Naegleria fowleri, can infect humans.
- It was first discovered in Australia in 1965 and is commonly found in warm freshwater bodies, such as hot springs, rivers and lakes.
- So far, Naegleria fowleri has been found in all continents and declared as the cause of PAM in over 16 countries, including India.

How does it infect humans?

- The amoeba enters the human body through the nose and then travels up to the brain.
- This can usually happen when someone goes for a swim, or dive or even when they dip their head in a freshwater body.
- In some cases, it was found that people got infected when they cleaned their nostrils with contaminated water/ vapour/ or aerosol droplets.
- Once Naegleria fowleri goes to the brain, it destroys brain tissues and causes a dangerous infection known as primary amebic meningoencephalitis (PAM).

Symptoms of PAM

- The CDC says the first signs of PAM start showing within one to 12 days after the infection.
- In the initial stages, they might be similar to symptoms of meningitis, which are headache, nausea and fever.
- In the later stages, one can suffer from a stiff neck, seizures, hallucinations, and even coma.
- The infection spreads rapidly and on average causes death within about five days.

How its spread is linked to climate change?

- With the rising global temperatures, the chances of getting *Naegleria fowleri* infection will go up as the amoeba mainly thrives in warm freshwater bodies.
- The organism best grows in high temperatures up to 46°C and sometimes can survive at even higher temperatures.
- Various recent studies have found that excess atmospheric carbon dioxide has led to an increase in the temperature of lakes and rivers.
- These conditions provide a more favourable environment for the amoeba to grow.

34. Organic solar cells

Recently researchers of **IIT Kanpur** have developed organic solar cell which can convert a steel roof into an energy-producing device. It was supported by fundings from **Department of science and technology (DST)** under **DST-RCUK APEX project**.

About Organic solar cells:

- Organic solar cell consisting of combination of **organic polymer PTB7 a donor and PCBM (an organic semiconductor) as an acceptor**.
- It is a **third-generation solar technology**.
- Benefits:
 - **Higher optical transmission** as compared to only metallic electrodes
 - Device with multilayer electrodes showed **improved photovoltaic performance by 1.5 times** compared to **single-layer top metal electrodes of gold**.
- Organic solar cells can be integrated onto **flexible and conformal surfaces like steel**.
- However, this requires **new, transparent conducting electrodes** that are more durable and have **better optoelectronic efficiency** than the **indium tin oxide currently used**.

35. Restore by use: Regenerative agriculture can help save water; here is how

According to UN's World Water Development Report, 2022, India extracts 251 cubic km or more than a quarter of world's groundwater withdrawal each year which requires to be reduced using regenerative technology in agriculture.

- India extracts **251 cubic km or more than 25%** of the world's groundwater withdrawal each year.
 - **90%** of water extracted from **groundwater** is used for agricultural purposes.

- Over **39 million hectares** (ha) of area under **wheat, rice and maize** has not shown improvement in the past decade.

Regenerative agriculture

- It is a **farming and grazing** practices that benefits by reversing climate change, by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity.
- It aims to **improve soil and water** for better agriculture in future by increasing soil organic matter.
- It uses methods of **chemical-less farming** by using natural inputs, manures, mulching and **cultivation practices** such as crop rotation, diversification, multi-cropping, sowing of diverse and native varieties.
 - **Natural inputs** help improve soil structure and its organic carbon content.
- Planting **water-intensive** and **water-efficient** crops together or in alternating cycles reduces frequency and intensity of irrigation.
- **1% increase** in soil **organic matter** (an indicator of soil health) per 0.4 ha **increases water storage** potential by more than **75,000 litres**.
- **Zero-budget natural farming**, a form of regenerative agriculture, emphasises on using inputs made from crop residue, cow dung and urine, fruits, among other things.
- It emphasises use of **no tillage** to **reduced tillage** which helps in curbs release of CO₂ in atmosphere as **crop residues** are pressed down.
 - In traditional tillage, **biodegradation** of **organic matter** in **open** atmosphere released **CO₂** in atmosphere.
- **Other methods** of regenerative agriculture are- permaculture, agroecology, agroforestry, restoration ecology, keyline design and Natural sequence farming.
 - **Natural sequence farming** is a way of **restoring** degraded, deforested, eroded or salinized land to full fertility by copying natural water courses to control floods, restore ground cover, prevent soil erosion and restore fertility.
- It emphasises on enhanced **Livestock** by- well-managed grazing pattern and animal integration.

Impacts of Regenerative agriculture

- It **increases** soil diversity above and below the ground, water holding capacity and sequesters **carbon** at greater depths.
 - This results in decrease of **CO₂**.
- It improves **Nutrient cycling** as use of waste produced from **ruminant livestock** in mixed-crop and grazing agroecosystems improves soil nutrient

cycle by encouraging **consumption** and **decomposition** of residual crop biomass.

- It promotes recovery of **nitrogen-fixing plant** species.
- It increases species diversity and reduces pest population densities.
- It aids in restoring below-ground biodiversity by enhancing functioning of **soil microbial communities**.
- It enhances **nutrient-holding** capacity of the soil.
- After soil health improves, input requirements will decrease and **crop yields** may increase as soils becomes more **resilient** against extreme **weather**, **pests** and **pathogens**.

