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## CURRENT AFFAIRS

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#### Headlines:

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- **India's Strategic Options on the Teesta River Project (GS Paper II: India and its Neighbourhood)**
- **Customised Self-Governance Framework for Ladakh (GS Paper II: Polity & Governance)**
- **Government Summons Meta Over CSAM Ads and Cyber Security (GS Paper II (Governance) & GS Paper III (Internal Security))**
- **Achieving India's \$1 Trillion Export Target (GS Paper III: Economy)**



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## 1. Calibrated Engagement: India's Strategic Balancing with China and Japan (GS II: IR)

### Context:

The Government of India has introduced calibrated relaxations for specific China-linked entities within investment and public procurement frameworks, while simultaneously advancing strategic supply chain partnerships with regional allies like Japan.



### Policy Background & Recent Shift

- **Press Note 3 (2020):** Mandated strict government screening for investments from land-border sharing nations to protect domestic industries and secure critical public infrastructure.
- **Calibrated Relaxation:** Recent policy adjustments permitting selective participation in strategic infrastructure and easing automatic route investment limits mark a transition from total decoupling toward calculated de-risking.

### Strategic Rationale & Regional Partnerships

- **Economic Pragmatism:** Balancing critical energy security, domestic manufacturing capabilities, and infrastructural development with existing realities of industrial and supply chain dependence.
- **India-Japan Synergy:** Deepening cooperation in critical minerals and the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) acts as an economic counterweight, fostering a rules-based Indo-Pacific maritime order.

## Challenges & Geopolitical Context

- **Security Constraints:** Technological vulnerabilities, persistent cyber risks in critical sectors, and investment screening challenges complicate economic opening.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Reflects a broader geopolitical landscape where emerging economies must balance open trade against national security imperatives amid intense regional competition.

## Way Forward

- **Calibrated Framework:** Implement a robust, risk-based investment screening model while aggressively strengthening domestic supply chain capabilities under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- **Resilient Alliances:** Cultivate trusted transnational partnerships to diversify global value chains, effectively balancing economic openness with national security safeguards.

## 2. India's Strategic Options on the Teesta River Project (GS Paper II: India and its Neighbourhood)

### Context:

India will consider all related developments on the Teesta river issue, following Bangladesh and China's discussions on executing the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP).

### What it is?

- A transboundary project involving dredging and reservoir construction to mitigate seasonal floods and dry-season water scarcity in Bangladesh.

### Key Facts:

- **Geographical Origin:** Originates from Sikkim's Pahunri glacier, flows through West Bengal, and enters Bangladesh to join the Brahmaputra.
- **Treaty Deadlock:** A 2011 water-sharing agreement remains stalled due to objections from West Bengal over domestic water scarcity.
- **Chinese Bid:** Bangladesh engaged China for a \$1 billion loan and technical assistance to execute the river restoration project.

- **Security Threat:** A Chinese presence near the vulnerable Siliguri Corridor ("Chicken's Neck") poses direct surveillance risks to India.



#### Laws & Guidelines:

- **Joint Rivers Commission (1972):** Bilateral framework established to manage water resources and resolve disputes for 54 shared rivers.
- **International Water Law:** Guided by principles of "equitable utilization" and preventing significant harm to downstream nations.
- **Diplomatic Policies:** Driven by India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy to ensure regional stability and counter external strategic footprints.

#### Key Challenges:

- **Sub-National Veto:** Domestic federal structures allow state governments to stall international treaties, creating diplomatic impasses.
- **Geopolitical Encirclement:** China leverages infrastructure loans to expand its footprint in South Asia, diluting India's influence.
- **Riparian Conflict:** Absence of a dry-season water-sharing formula causes agricultural distress in Bangladesh, straining bilateral goodwill.
- **Ecological Degradation:** Siltation and changing rainfall patterns have reduced lean-season flow, complicating water-sharing calculations.

#### Way Forward:

- **Counter-Funding:** India must fast-track its proposal to fund and execute the project, keeping external powers out of sensitive zones.
- **Internal Consensus:** The Centre should engage West Bengal with compensatory packages to resolve the domestic political deadlock.
- **Joint Basin Management:** Shift toward collaborative, scientific river basin management for joint flood forecasting and ecological restoration.
- **Sub-Regional Frameworks:** Utilize platforms like BBIN to foster comprehensive water-energy grid integration across the sub-continent.

Resolving the Teesta dispute through proactive assistance and internal consensus is vital to safeguard India's strategic autonomy and bilateral trust.

### 3. Customised Self-Governance Framework for Ladakh (GS Paper II: Polity & Governance)

#### Context:

The Ministry of Home Affairs proposed a customised sui generis governance framework under Article 371 for Ladakh, featuring a new Union Territory-level elected body.

#### Governance Framework for Ladakh

- A tailored administrative model providing democratic representation, legislative autonomy, and financial powers to the Union Territory of Ladakh while safeguarding its unique cultural identity.

#### Key Facts:

- **UT-Level Body:** Establishes an interim elected institutional framework covering distinct executive, financial, and legislative functions.
- **Stakeholder Consensus:** Drafted through joint sub-committee consultations between the Centre, Leh Apex Body, and Kargil Democratic Alliance.
- **Core Demands:** Local representatives continue to reiterate demands for full Statehood, Sixth Schedule status, and dedicated civil services.



### Constitutional & Policy Framework:

- **Article 371 Invocation:** Utilizes special constitutional provisions (like Articles 371A-J) to protect tribal land, culture, and employment.
- **Institutional Synergy:** Designs the new elected body to function harmoniously alongside existing Panchayati Raj Institutions.

### Key Challenges Associated with Ladakh Governance:

- **Functional Overlap:** Risk of jurisdictional conflicts between the proposed elected body and existing Autonomous Hill Development Councils.
- **Political Discontent:** Bridging the expectations gap between the Centre's interim framework and the public demand for full Statehood.

### Way Forward:

- **Clear Legislative Delineation:** Draft precise legal text defining the explicit executive and financial domains of the new elected body.
- **Sustained Dialogue:** Maintain transparent, continuous institutional engagement to systematically address local employment and ecological anxieties.

While the sui generis framework effectively bridges current democratic deficits, long-term stability hinges on balancing strategic border security with local political aspirations.

## 4. Government Summons Meta Over CSAM Ads and Cyber Security (GS Paper II (Governance) & GS Paper III (Internal Security))

### Context:

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) will summon Meta over reports of Instagram advertisements promoting Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), while simultaneously questioning WhatsApp's proposed 'username' feature.

- **Regulatory Intervention:** A government mandate holding tech intermediaries accountable for hosting illegal child exploitative content and deploying features that may increase cyber fraud.

### Key Facts & Salient Features:

- **CSAM Controversy:** Investigations revealed paid Instagram ads overtly promoting illegal child exploitation material, linking users directly to Telegram channels.
- **Platform Defense:** Meta asserts a "zero-tolerance" policy, using AI to proactively detect and remove violating content among its 3.5 billion users.
- **WhatsApp Usernames:** An upcoming privacy feature allows messaging without exposing phone numbers, notifying recipients of the sender's origin country.
- **Fraud Risks:** MeitY warns that masking contact numbers could drastically escalate phishing attacks, impersonation, and untraceable digital arrest scams.

### Legal & Institutional Framework:

- **IT Act, 2000 (Sec 67B):** Explicitly criminalizes the electronic publication or transmission of material depicting children in sexually explicit acts.
- **IT Rules, 2021:** Mandates strict intermediary liability, requiring tech platforms to swiftly remove illegal content upon notification.
- **POCSO Act, 2012:** Provides a robust statutory framework protecting children from all forms of sexual offenses and digital exploitation.
- **NCPCR & MeitY:** The primary statutory bodies monitoring child rights violations and enforcing national digital compliance protocols.

### Challenges & Issues:

- **Algorithmic Evasion:** Criminal networks continuously adapt to bypass automated AI detection algorithms and advertisement content filters.
- **Privacy vs. Security:** Balancing the anonymity offered by usernames against law enforcement's critical need to trace cyber fraudsters.

### Way Forward:

- **Proactive Vetting:** Platforms must overhaul pre-publication advertisement screening and implement verifiable traceability mechanisms for anonymous features.
- Enforcing strict intermediary accountability is crucial to harmonize digital privacy with national cyber-security, ensuring platforms remain secure for vulnerable demographics.

## 5. Achieving India's \$1 Trillion Export Target (GS Paper III: Economy)

### Context:

The Commerce Ministry urged Indian firms to abandon domestic complacency and actively build global brands to achieve the ambitious \$1 trillion export target.

### What is it?

- **Export Promotion Drive:** A strategic government initiative aimed at scaling domestic industries and establishing competitive Indian brands in international markets.

### Key Facts & Developments:

- **Global Opportunities:** Strong international willingness exists to trade with India, especially by leveraging newly signed Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- **Government Backing:** The Export Promotion Mission provides crucial logistical support for overseas branding, localized warehousing, and international exhibitions.

- **Industry Demands:** During the recent meeting, trade bodies strongly advocated for enhanced and accessible export-related credit to facilitate expansion.

### **Institutional Framework:**

- **Board of Trade:** An apex advisory body under the Ministry of Commerce that integrates industry feedback into national foreign trade policy.

### **Challenges & Issues:**

- **Domestic Complacency:** Indian companies remain overly reliant on the large, secure domestic market, actively avoiding global competition.
- **Competitiveness Gaps:** Exporters frequently struggle with achieving the necessary production scale, strict quality control, and international outreach.
- **Credit Bottlenecks:** Insufficient access to affordable export financing severely limits the ability of domestic firms to scale operations abroad.

### **Way Forward:**

- **Credit Expansion:** The government must streamline export financing mechanisms and lower borrowing costs for firms targeting international markets.
- **Quality Compliance:** Industries must actively utilize state support to upgrade manufacturing standards and aggressively market brands overseas.

Reaching the \$1 trillion milestone requires a structural economic shift from a comfortable domestic mindset toward a quality-driven, export-led growth model.