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Headlines:

- **Citizenship Determination Must Be Fair and Reasoned:** Supreme Court (GS – II: Polity)
- **Retail Inflation Surpasses RBI Target; Trade Deficit Widens Amid Global and Domestic Pressures** (GS Paper III: Economy)
- **India's Nuclear Energy Expansion: Strengthening Self-Reliance and Clean Energy** (GS Paper III: Science & Technology)
- **Compressed Biogas (CBG): Advancing India's Energy Security and Circular Economy** (GS III)
- **Expansion of Autonomous Hill Councils in Ladakh** (GS II: Polity)



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1. Citizenship Determination Must Be Fair and Reasoned: Supreme Court (GS – II: Polity)

Why in News?

The Supreme Court set aside 27 Gauhati High Court judgments affirming Foreigners' Tribunal decisions that declared several individuals as foreigners. The Court held that citizenship and foreigner status must be determined through a fair, lawful, and reasoned process, and remanded the cases to the respective Foreigners' Tribunals for fresh adjudication.

Key Highlights

- The Court ruled that proceedings with serious civil consequences, such as declaring a person a foreigner, cannot be mechanical, one-sided, or arbitrary.
- Foreigners' Tribunals must ensure:
 - A fair opportunity to be heard.
 - Disclosure of the grounds of reference.
 - Independent evaluation of evidence.
 - Reasoned and legally sustainable conclusions.
- The Court clarified that the remand does not confer Indian citizenship, but only ensures due process.
- Tribunals have been directed to complete fresh adjudication, as far as possible, within six months, with no coercive action against the appellants in the interim.

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before law and prohibits arbitrary state action.
- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty through a fair, just, and reasonable procedure.
- **Article 11:** Empowers Parliament to regulate citizenship through law.

Legal Framework

- Citizenship Act, 1955 governs acquisition and termination of Indian citizenship.
- Foreigners Act, 1946 empowers authorities to identify and regulate foreigners.
- Foreigners' Tribunals adjudicate disputed citizenship cases, particularly in Assam.

Current Challenges

- Ex parte decisions due to non-appearance of individuals.
- Inconsistent assessment of documentary evidence.
- Procedural lapses leading to prolonged litigation and uncertainty.

Way Forward

- Ensure fair, transparent, and reasoned adjudication by Foreigners' Tribunals.
- Strengthen adherence to the principles of natural justice and due process.

- Improve service of notices and access to legal assistance.
- Build the capacity of Tribunal members through regular training.
- Ensure timely disposal of citizenship cases with evidence-based decisions.
- Balance national security with constitutional rights and the rule of law.

2. Retail Inflation Surpasses RBI Target; Trade Deficit Widens Amid Global and Domestic Pressures (GS Paper III: Economy)

Why in News?

India's CPI-based retail inflation rose to 4.4% in June 2026, crossing the RBI's medium-term target of 4% for the first time since January 2025. During the same period, India's trade deficit widened to \$15.3 billion, reflecting higher imports of crude oil, gold, and electronics.

Key Highlights

- Retail inflation rose from 3.93% (May 2026) to 4.4% (June 2026).
- Rising inflation may limit the RBI's room for further policy rate cuts if price pressures persist.
- Food inflation reached 5.05%, mainly due to uneven monsoon and weather-related supply disruptions.
- Fuel and transport inflation increased amid rising global crude oil prices linked to geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- Imports grew faster than exports, leading to a wider trade deficit.
- Higher imports of crude oil, gold, and electronics were the major contributors to the deficit.

Key Terminologies

- **Consumer Price Index (CPI):** Measures changes in retail prices of goods and services consumed by households.
- **Imported Inflation:** Rise in domestic prices caused by an increase in the cost of imported goods such as crude oil, fertilisers, or edible oils.
- **Retail Inflation:** Rise in the general price level measured using CPI.
- **Trade Deficit:** Occurs when the value of imports exceeds exports.
- **RBI Inflation Target:** Under the Flexible Inflation Targeting framework, the RBI aims to maintain CPI inflation at 4% ($\pm 2\%$).

Current Challenges

- Persistent food inflation due to weather-related supply disruptions.
- Imported inflation arising from elevated global commodity prices.
- Widening trade deficit increasing pressure on the current account.
- Balancing inflation control with economic growth.

Way Forward

- Strengthen food supply chains and buffer stocks.
- Strengthen domestic manufacturing under initiatives such as Make in India and PLI to reduce import dependence.
- Diversify energy sources and accelerate renewable energy adoption.
- Ensure coordinated fiscal and monetary measures to contain inflation.

3. India's Nuclear Energy Expansion: Strengthening Self-Reliance and Clean Energy (GS Paper III: Science & Technology)

Why in News?

India has renewed its focus on expanding nuclear power capacity to 100 GW by 2047, supported by indigenous reactor technology, private sector participation, and the development of advanced reactor systems to strengthen energy security and achieve climate goals.

Key Highlights

- India has developed indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs), with 700 MW reactors forming the backbone of its current expansion programme.
- The commissioning of the 500 MW Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) marks a major milestone in India's three-stage nuclear programme.
- The government plans to facilitate greater private sector participation to accelerate nuclear capacity addition.
- India is also exploring Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) to meet future electricity demand from industries and AI-enabled data centres.
- Indigenous nuclear technology has significantly reduced project costs, enhancing India's potential as a global supplier of affordable nuclear reactors.

Key Concepts

- **PHWR:** Uses natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as both moderator and coolant.
- **Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR):** Produces more fissile material than it consumes, enabling efficient utilisation of India's thorium resources.
- **Small Modular Reactor (SMR):** Compact, factory-built nuclear reactor offering enhanced safety, flexibility, and lower capital costs.

Significance

- Strengthens energy security by reducing dependence on fossil fuels.
- Supports Net Zero 2070 commitments through low-carbon baseload power.
- Promotes Atmanirbhar Bharat through indigenous technology and manufacturing.
- Enhances opportunities for high-technology manufacturing and exports.

Challenges

- High initial capital investment and long gestation periods.
- Nuclear safety, waste management, and public acceptance.
- Limited domestic uranium availability and regulatory complexities.

Way Forward

- Accelerate indigenous reactor deployment and fuel-cycle development.
- Strengthen nuclear safety and independent regulatory oversight.
- Promote public-private partnerships and domestic manufacturing.
- Invest in advanced reactor technologies, including SMRs, while expanding skilled manpower and R&D.

4. Compressed Biogas (CBG): Advancing India's Energy Security and Circular Economy (GS III)

Why in News?

Amid continued geopolitical tensions in West Asia and India's dependence on imported crude oil and LPG, Compressed Biogas (CBG) has gained renewed importance as a clean, indigenous alternative fuel. The government is also implementing a mandatory CBG blending obligation, starting at 1% in FY26 and increasing to 5% by FY29.

What is Compressed Biogas (CBG)?

- CBG is produced by purifying biogas generated through the anaerobic decomposition of organic waste such as crop residues, cattle dung, municipal solid waste, and sewage.
- It is chemically similar to CNG and can be used as a transport fuel, for cooking, electricity generation, and industrial applications.

Government Initiatives

- **SATAT (2018):** Promotes establishment of CBG plants and market linkage with Oil Marketing Companies.
- **GOBARdhan Scheme:** Supports waste-to-wealth initiatives by converting organic waste into biogas and bio-manure.
- **CBG Blending Obligation (2025):** Mandates blending of CBG with CNG and PNG to reduce fossil fuel dependence.

Significance

- Enhances energy security by reducing import dependence.
- Promotes waste management, stubble burning reduction, and the circular economy.
- Generates additional income for farmers and supports rural employment.
- Contributes to India's Net Zero 2070 and climate commitments.

Challenges

- Limited CBG infrastructure and slow project implementation.
- High capital costs and financing constraints.
- Risk of crop diversification being affected if dedicated energy crops replace food crops.

Way Forward

- Expand CBG infrastructure and strengthen financial incentives.
- Prioritise agricultural waste and livestock manure over food crops as feedstock.
- Encourage private investment through policy support and assured market linkages.
- Integrate CBG with India's broader clean energy and rural development strategies.

5. Expansion of Autonomous Hill Councils in Ladakh (GS II: Polity)

Why in News?

The Ladakh Administration has announced the creation of 17 new tehsils and proposed extending the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Act to all seven districts of the Union Territory. The move aims to strengthen grassroots governance while discussions on constitutional safeguards for Ladakh continue.

Key Highlights

- Ladakh now has 32 tehsils after the creation of 17 new tehsils.
- The LAHDC framework will be extended to the newly created districts of Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar, and Drass.
- New PHE, Flood Control, PWD, and PMGSY divisions have been established to improve service delivery in remote areas.
- Discussions are underway on a customised constitutional framework to safeguard Ladakh's land, culture, and identity.

Constitutional Framework

- **Article 239:** Administration of Union Territories by the President through an Administrator (Lieutenant Governor).
- **Article 371:** The Centre is exploring a sui generis (special) model under Article 371 to provide constitutional safeguards for Ladakh.

- **Sixth Schedule:** Ladakh is not covered under the Sixth Schedule; LAHDCs function through statutory provisions rather than constitutional status.

Key Terms

- **LAHDC:** A statutory local self-governance institution responsible for planning and development in Ladakh's hill regions.
- **Tehsil:** An administrative subdivision of a district headed by a Tehsildar.
- **Sui Generis Model:** A unique constitutional arrangement tailored to the specific needs of a region.
- **Decentralised Governance:** Devolution of administrative and developmental functions to local institutions for efficient governance.

Significance

- Strengthens grassroots governance and administrative accessibility.
- Improves service delivery in remote Himalayan regions.
- Preserves Ladakh's unique cultural, ecological, and tribal identity while promoting inclusive development.

Challenges

- **Lack of Constitutional Status:** LAHDCs function under a statutory framework with limited powers.
- **Regional Imbalances:** Concerns over equitable administrative representation and resource allocation across districts.
- **Demand for Safeguards:** Continued demand for protection of land, jobs, and cultural identity.
- **Administrative Constraints:** Difficult terrain and dispersed settlements hinder efficient service delivery.

Way Forward

- Finalise constitutional safeguards through stakeholder consensus.
- Ensure equitable administrative representation across all districts.
- Strengthen the financial and functional autonomy of hill councils.
- Promote sustainable development while protecting Ladakh's fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

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