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Mains DNA

General Studies I

1. The '3Cs' That Haunt Indian Education Today

Context

- The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was **presented as a landmark reform in India's education system.**
- However, beneath its promises of transformation, **the policy masks deeper issues stemming from the government's approach to education.**
- Over the last decade, **the Union Government has consistently demonstrated an alarming indifference to the true needs of students and educators.**
- This negligence is reflected in three primary areas: the **centralisation of power, the commercialisation of education, and the communalisation of curricula.**

Brazen Centralisation: A Threat to Federalism

- **Increasing Centralisation**
 - One of the most concerning aspects of the Union Government's education policy has been the **increasing centralisation of decision-making.**
 - **The Central Advisory Board of Education**, which was supposed to ensure collaboration between the Union and State governments, **has not met since September 2019.**
 - Despite implementing a major policy shift through NEP 2020, **the government has not engaged in meaningful consultation with the states.**
 - This disregard for federal principles is particularly problematic because education is a subject under the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution, **meaning both the central and state governments have a role in shaping education policy.**
- **Heavy-Handed Approach**
 - Further evidence of this heavy-handed approach is seen in the PM-SHRI scheme, where the Union Government has allegedly withheld **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)** funds to pressure states into compliance.
 - These funds, **crucial for implementing the Right to Education (RTE) Act**, are being used as leverage to force state governments to align with central policies.
 - **The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has even condemned this coercive tactic**, calling for the unconditional release of SSA funds.
- **Centralisation of Higher Education**
 - The centralisation of higher education governance is equally troubling.
 - The **draft University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines for 2025 effectively strip state governments of their authority** in appointing vice-chancellors in universities funded and operated by them.
 - This **shift in power toward the Union Government, facilitated through Governors who act as Chancellors, undermines the autonomy of state universities** and threatens the federal structure of governance in education.

The Rise of Commercialisation: Education as a Privilege

- **Privatisation of Schools**
 - Another major issue plaguing India's education system is its growing commercialization.
 - **NEP 2020**, while claiming to promote inclusive education, **has in reality accelerated the privatisation of schools.**



- The **policy's emphasis on 'school complexes'** undermines the foundational principles of the **Right to Education Act**, which guarantees access to nearby primary and upper-primary schools.
- Instead of strengthening the public school system, **the government has closed nearly 90,000 public schools since 2014 while allowing a sharp rise in private schools.**
- This shift has **disproportionately harmed the poor**, forcing them into an expensive and often unregulated private education system.
- **Privatisation of Higher Education**
 - In higher education, **a similar trend is evident with the introduction of the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA).**
 - Replacing traditional block grants from the UGC, **HEFA offers loans at market rates, which universities must repay using their own revenues, primarily student fees.**
 - The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education has reported that **universities are increasingly burdened with repaying these loans through fee hikes**, thereby shifting the financial strain onto students.
 - This **policy effectively turns higher education into a privilege accessible only to those who can afford it**, eroding the principle of affordable public education.
 - Moreover, **the rise of financial corruption in educational institutions is closely tied to this commercialisation.**
 - **Incidents such as bribery scandals in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)** and inefficiencies in the National Testing Agency (NTA) highlight the growing mismanagement and political interference in education governance.

Communalisation of Education: Rewriting History

- The third and perhaps most dangerous aspect of the current education policy is the **ideological reshaping of curricula.**
- The **Government has made deliberate efforts to revise textbooks** and syllabi to promote a particular historical and cultural narrative.
- The **removal of references to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination**, Mughal history, and even the Preamble of the Indian Constitution from school textbooks is a clear indication of this trend.
- **Public outrage eventually led to the reinstatement of the Preamble**, but the larger pattern of historical revisionism remains a cause for concern.
- In higher education, **the appointment of professors based on ideological alignment rather than academic merit has become widespread.**
- **Even prestigious institutions** like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) have seen **leadership positions being filled by individuals with political affiliations** rather than scholarly expertise.
- The **UGC's attempts to dilute qualification criteria for academic positions further reflect this effort** to prioritise ideological conformity over educational excellence.

The Consequences and the Way Forward

- The combined effects of centralisation, commercialization, and communalization have had **devastating consequences** for students and educators in India.
- **Public education has been systematically weakened**, access to quality education has become more **unequal**, and the ideological tilt in curriculum threatens the **integrity** of academic discourse.
- To address these issues, **it is crucial to restore financial and administrative autonomy to state governments in education policy, reinstate robust public funding for schools** and universities, and ensure that curriculum changes are driven by **academic expertise** rather than political ideology.
- Additionally, **greater transparency and accountability** are needed to **curb corruption in education administration.**



Conclusion

- **Education is not merely a tool for economic advancement but a fundamental pillar of democracy** and social progress.
- If India's education system continues down its current path, **it risks deepening inequalities and undermining the nation's intellectual and democratic foundations.**
- **The urgent need of the hour is to reclaim education as a public good, ensuring that it remains accessible, inclusive, and free from political and commercial manipulation.**

2. Why Indian Cities Need Local Solutions, Not One-Size-Fits-All Plans

Why in the News?

In the forthcoming decades, India is anticipated to boast the most significant urban population globally.

India Needs a Localised Approach to Urban Development:

- India is going through rapid urbanisation. In the coming decades, it is expected to have the **largest urban population in the world.**
- However, many of the plans that shape this urban future are designed far away from the realities of local communities.
- While 'urban development' is officially a **State subject** in India's Constitution, the **Central government** plays a strong role in shaping urban policy through centrally sponsored schemes like the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), and AMRUT.**
- These missions have helped in many ways, but their **top-down, one-size-fits-all approach** often ignores the specific needs of different cities.

Central Government's Approach for Urban India:

- Since the 1990s, urbanisation in India has been guided by central schemes like the **Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)** and more recently, by five flagship urban missions including Smart Cities.
- The Centre's approach focuses heavily on **infrastructure and mobility**, such as **metro rail projects**, which alone received around **30% of the Union Budget** under the current government.
- While these initiatives have helped some cities, they often leave **little room for States or local bodies** to adapt plans according to local needs.

Problems With the Top-Down Model:

- **Lack of flexibility:** Cities are forced to follow centrally set rules and formats that might not suit their conditions.
- **Mismatch of priorities:** Some cities already have decent sanitation systems or social housing but still receive funds for these sectors instead of their actual needs like mobility or climate resilience.
- **Wasted resources:** Money sometimes remains unused or is spent on unnecessary infrastructure just to show "utilisation," as seen in many **Smart City projects.**
- In short, this model leads to **poor outcomes** because it doesn't let local voices and contexts guide urban development.

Urbanisation Differs Across India:

- India is **not urbanising in a uniform way.**
 - In **Kerala**, cities blend into villages so closely that the Chief Minister once called the entire state "a single city."
 - In **Gujarat**, cities like Ahmedabad have seen the rich move to the outskirts due to crowding in the core, while the poor get pushed further to the margins.
 - **Migration patterns** also vary, with many workers moving from northern states to southern ones, changing the local demographics.



- Each city has its **own challenges and priorities**, which cannot be solved by a standard, centralised solution.

Suggestions:

- Experts suggest a new approach that gives more power and money directly to States and city governments.
- **Financial devolution:** At least **70% of the Union Budget** meant for urban development should be sent directly to States and cities, either through State Finance Commissions or direct transfers.
- **Locally decided plans:** Cities should decide what they need most—be it housing, transport, water, or sanitation—based on **scientific planning** and **public consultation**.
- **Focus on outcomes, not formats:** Funds should not come with rigid rules but should allow flexibility for innovative local solutions.
- **Avoid conditionalities:** Commissions like the 15th Finance Commission have added conditions like increasing property taxes to get funds. This approach reduces local control.

Significance of Localised Approach to Urban Development:

- Urban development should be **localised** because:
 - National institutions are often **too far removed from everyday city issues**.
 - **City governments are closer to people** and can respond faster to problems.
 - Local participation builds **public trust and accountability**, which is crucial for smooth governance.
- Unless India rethinks how it funds and manages its cities, urban challenges will grow worse.
- A centralised approach cannot deal with the rising pressure on infrastructure, housing, jobs, and the environment.

Conclusion:

India's cities are diverse, and their problems are complex. Trying to solve them with **uniform plans from New Delhi** is both inefficient and ineffective.

It's time to **empower local governments**, let cities decide their own priorities, and support them with flexible funding. This shift in thinking is necessary if India wants to build **liveable, inclusive, and sustainable cities** for the future.

3. Five Years After Covid-19- Shifts in India's Migration Landscape

Context:

- **The Covid-19 pandemic** caused severe disruptions in migration, **halting mobility and exacerbating migrant vulnerabilities**.
- **Five years later**, migration patterns have largely **reverted to pre-pandemic trends**, but **new challenges** and emerging factors such as **climate change and economic transformations** continue to shape migration in India.

Reverse Migration During Covid-19:

- The pandemic triggered an unprecedented **urban-to-rural** reverse migration.
- Government estimates suggest a net reverse migration of **44.13 million** during the first lockdown and **26.3 million** during the second.
- **Migrants faced** wage theft, food insecurity, lack of healthcare and education, discrimination, and brutality.
- Many families dependent on **remittances** suffered severe economic strain.

Return to Urban Migration and Rural Economic Challenges:

- The rural economy was **unable to absorb** the returning workforce.
- **MGNREGA provided limited** relief but could not sustain long-term employment.
- Factors driving **return migration to urban areas:**
 - Rural distress and low wages
 - Urban aspirations and economic opportunities



- **Climate change** significantly **impacts agriculture** and allied activities, contributing to distress and aspirational out-migration (as observed in Odisha by FAO and IOM studies).

Urban Migration Trends and Government Initiatives:

- Urbanization is projected to continue, with **40%** of India's population expected to live in cities by **2026**.
- Government initiatives like **Smart Cities Mission** (aims to develop 100 cities into modern urban hubs) encourage migration for economic growth.

Impact on International Migration:

- **Indian emigrants faced job losses**, wage cuts, poor living conditions, and health risks.
- Despite hardships, **remittances remained resilient**, sustaining many Indian households.
- **Migration trends post-pandemic:**
 - Gulf Cooperation Council (**GCC**) countries remain key destinations.
 - **Europe** is attracting more skilled migrants, with Indians being top recipients of the EU Blue Card in 2023.
 - **African nations** are emerging as migration hubs for employment in IT, manufacturing, and healthcare, though challenges persist (e.g., 47 Jharkhand workers stranded in Cameroon).
 - **Healthcare workers** from India continue to be in high demand globally.
 - **Student migration surged post-pandemic:**
 - The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 indicates that the number of student emigrants from Kerala nearly **doubled** from 1.29 lakh in 2018 to 2.5 lakh in 2023.
 - The RBI data shows that **outward remittances for studies** abroad (peaking at \$3,171 million in 2021) **reflected a sharp increase in spending on international education**.
 - We have also witnessed the student crisis during the **Russia-Ukraine war**.

Challenges in Migration Governance and Policy Interventions:

- **Data gaps and the need for improved migration governance:**
 - **2021 Census delay** has hindered accurate assessment of post-pandemic migration trends.
 - **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** 2020-21 recorded a 28.9% migration rate, a marginal increase from 28.5% in NSS 64th Round (2007-08), but does not reflect long-term trends.
 - **Lack of a comprehensive Indian emigrant database** limits policy effectiveness.
- **Social security and welfare initiatives:**
 - **e-Shram portal** (2021) aims to create a National Database of Unorganised Workers (**NDUW**) and provide social security benefits, including insurance and access to subsidised food grains.
 - However, it faces **issues** due to lack of awareness and digital access.
 - **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** scheme (2018) helps migrants access PDS benefits, but many still remain excluded.

The Kerala Model and Future Policy Directions:

- **Kerala Migration Surveys** (every five years since 1998) have significantly improved **migration policy formulation**.
- **States** like Odisha, Goa, Punjab, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu have **replicated** this model.
- **Expanding this approach nationwide** would enhance migration governance and aid in better policy responses.

Conclusion:

- Five years after the Covid-19 crisis, India's migration landscape is **evolving**.
- While urban migration is **resuming** and international emigration **diversifying**, **new factors** like climate change, global economic shifts, and policy interventions are influencing movement patterns.
- **Strengthening migration governance** through data-driven policy reforms and improved social security mechanisms is crucial for ensuring migrant welfare and economic stability.



4. India's Ranking in Global Free Speech Index: Key Insights

Why in the News?

A new global survey by **The Future of Free Speech**, an independent U.S.-based think tank, has ranked India 24th out of the 33 countries surveyed on the question of support for free speech.

What's in Today's Article?

- Free Speech Index (Basics, India's Rankings, Global Trend, Key Findings, Challenges, etc.)

India's Ranking in Free Speech Index:

- A recent global survey by **The Future of Free Speech**, a U.S.-based think tank, has ranked India **24th out of 33 surveyed countries** in terms of support for free speech.
- The report, titled "Who in the World Supports Free Speech?", reveals a concerning decline in the global commitments to protect controversial speech, with India being **an exception where public perception and actual free speech conditions do not align**.

Global Trends in Free Speech:

- The survey, conducted in **October 2024**, found that:
 - Scandinavian countries dominate the index, with **Norway (87.9)** and **Denmark (87.0)** securing the top positions.
 - **Indonesia (56.8)**, **Malaysia (55.4)**, and **Pakistan (57.0)** showed the biggest improvements despite being lower in the rankings.
 - Hungary (85.5) and Venezuela (81.8), despite being authoritarian-leaning, ranked high due to public perception of free speech.
- **India**, with a score of **62.6**, was placed between **South Africa (66.9)** and **Lebanon (61.8)**.

Key Findings About Free Speech in India:

- **Public Support for Free Expression vs. Reality**
 - The majority of Indians believe in free speech without government censorship.
 - However, support for criticizing government policies is lower than the global average.
- **Strong Support for Government Restrictions on Criticism**
 - 37% of Indian respondents agreed that the government should prevent people from criticizing its policies—the highest among all surveyed countries.
 - Comparatively, this sentiment was supported by: 5% in the U.K and 3% in Denmark.
 - This suggests that a significant section of Indians favours restrictions on political speech, reflecting growing support for government control over public discourse.
- **Discrepancy Between Public Perception and International Assessment**
 - Indians and South Africans felt their ability to speak freely had improved.
 - However, global rankings indicate a decline in free speech protection in India, highlighting a disconnect between perception and actual conditions.
- **India's Position in Democratic Backsliding**
 - The report identifies India as a country experiencing "democratic backsliding", similar to Hungary and Venezuela.
 - While free speech laws exist in principle, their enforcement is weak, and restrictions on dissent are increasing.

Challenges to Free Speech in India:

- **Legal and Political Restrictions**
 - India's sedition law (Section 124A of the IPC) had been used to suppress political dissent.
 - **Section 124A of the IPC**, has been removed from the BNS.



- However, the BNS retains the essence of Section 124A in Section 152, which penalizes actions that incite secession, armed rebellion, or subversive activities, encourage separatist activities, or endanger the sovereignty or unity of India.
- Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) has been criticized for targeting journalists, activists, and opposition voices.
- IT Rules 2021 give the government broad powers to regulate social media and digital content, leading to censorship concerns.
- **Rise in Self-Censorship**
 - Fear of legal repercussions and online harassment discourages open expression.
 - Media houses and journalists often face political and economic pressures, leading to biased reporting or avoidance of critical issues.
- **Selective Tolerance for Free Speech**
 - While free speech is widely supported in principle, it is often opposed when it **contradicts political beliefs or religious sentiments**.
 - The arrests of **activists, journalists, and stand-up comedians highlight inconsistent application of free speech rights**.

Way Forward:

- **Reaffirming Legal Protections**
 - **Repealing or amending outdated laws** and **UAPA provisions** that suppress dissent.
 - Strengthening judicial oversight to prevent misuse of laws against activists and journalists.
- **Promoting a Culture of Open Debate**
 - Educational institutions and media should encourage free discussion on diverse perspectives.
 - Political parties should commit to **respecting free speech rights** across ideological lines.
- **Enhancing Digital and Media Freedom**
 - Strengthening laws that protect journalists from **government pressure and corporate influence**.
 - Ensuring that social media regulations do not lead to arbitrary censorship.
- **Aligning Public Perception with Reality**
 - Raising awareness about **constitutional free speech protections**.
 - Encouraging fact-based discussions on government policies and political discourse.

5. The Dystopian Side of Insta-Commerce

Context

- **Labour exploitation has been a persistent issue** in capitalist economies, particularly in urban settings where daily wage workers gather in large numbers at labour markets, seeking employment for the day.
- **With the rise of digital platforms** and the gig economy, **this exploitation has been restructured** and intensified through technology.
- Now it becomes crucial to critically examine both traditional labour markets and modern gig platforms, highlighting the mechanisms of exploitation and the lack of labour rights.

The Traditional Labour Market and the Role of Middlemen

- The traditional labour market, as seen in urban centres, **operates as a form of daily or piece-rate employment** where workers congregate at labour chowks or mazdoor mandis, waiting for employment.
- In this setup, **thekedars (middlemen) play a crucial role** in facilitating the hiring process.
- However, **their role is primarily exploitative**, as they negotiate the lowest possible wages for workers while maximising profits for employers.



- This **system places workers in a position of vulnerability**, as they are forced to accept whatever terms are offered due to a lack of alternative employment options.
- The **imbalance of power in such labour markets makes it difficult for workers to negotiate** fair wages or working conditions.

A Detailed Analysis of The Digitalisation of Labour Exploitation: The Gig Economy

• The Shift from Physical to Virtual Labour Markets

- The **gig economy**, driven by digital platforms, has **transformed the way work is structured and managed**.
- While these platforms present themselves as providers of flexibility and opportunity, **they function primarily as intermediaries** that maximise profits by exploiting workers.
- This **digitalisation of labour has not eliminated exploitation** but has **instead restructured** it in a way that makes it more difficult to detect and regulate.
- Just as **traditional labour markets rely on thekedars (middlemen) to negotiate** the lowest wages for workers, **gig platforms use algorithms to perform the same function**, but on a much larger and more efficient scale.

• Algorithmic Control and the Illusion of Autonomy

- **Gig workers**, such as drivers, delivery personnel, and domestic workers, **appear to have control over their schedules and earnings**.
- However, **this so-called flexibility is highly misleading**. The platforms' algorithms dictate almost every aspect of their work, including:
 - **Work Availability**
 - The **platform decides when and how many jobs are offered to a worker** based on opaque performance metrics.
 - **Workers who reject too many tasks may find themselves de-prioritised** by the algorithm.
 - **Wage Determination**
 - Workers are **not paid fixed wages but rather earn money per task**.
 - The platform dynamically adjusts prices based on demand, often driving wages down when there is an oversupply of workers.
 - **Workload Distribution**
 - Unlike traditional jobs where employees can negotiate hours and contracts, **gig workers are constantly on standby, checking their phones for job opportunities**.
 - This uncertainty forces them to accept whatever is available, leading to excessive work hours with no job security.

• Wage Suppression and the Downward Bidding System

- **Gig platforms replicate the traditional labour chowk system**, where workers bid for jobs in a race to the bottom.
- In the digital space, **this process is automated, making it even more ruthless**.
- Instead of an employer selecting the cheapest worker manually, **algorithms match workers with tasks based on pricing models that prioritise lower wages**.
- **Workers are forced to accept whatever is offered**, as refusing too many jobs may lead to reduced work opportunities in the future.

• Absence of Social Security and Worker Protections

- In traditional employment models, workers receive benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and pension contributions.
- Gig workers, however, are classified as **independent contractors**, meaning that platforms do not provide any form of social security.
- This classification allows companies to avoid responsibilities such as:
 - **Minimum wage guarantees**
 - **Medical benefits**



- **Compensation for accidents or work-related injuries**
- **Protection against sudden job termination**
- Since gig workers are not formally employed, **they have no legal recourse in case of exploitation, unfair dismissal, or wage theft.**
- The absence of employer accountability creates **a system where workers bear all the risks while platforms reap the profits.**

The Legislative Struggle for Gig Workers' Rights and Hypocrisy and the PR Game of Gig Economy Platforms

• The Legislative Struggle for Gig Workers' Rights

- Recognising the plight of gig workers, **labour movements in India have pushed for legal protections**, particularly in states like **Rajasthan and Karnataka.**
- Proposed legislation **sought to provide gig workers with social security, access to real-time work data**, and mechanisms for grievance redressal.
- However, **these efforts have been systematically blocked by powerful corporate interests.**
- **Industry associations like NASSCOM and CII have lobbied against recognising gig workers** as employees, thereby denying them fundamental labour rights.
- The **influence of these corporations on government policy demonstrates the prioritisation of business interests** over worker welfare.

• Hypocrisy and the PR Game of Gig Economy Platforms

- One of the most striking aspects of the gig economy's labour exploitation is the **duplicity of platform founders and executives.**
- While **publicly portraying themselves as champions of worker empowerment**, they simultaneously oppose any legislative measures that would grant workers' rights and protections.
- For instance, **services such as "Insta Maids," which offer domestic help at extremely low wages at Rs 49 for an hour**, exemplify this contradiction.
- The **marketing rhetoric presents these jobs as pathways to financial security and dignity**, while in reality, they reinforce systemic exploitation.
- Some of workers' slogans point to the poignancy of the situation **"rating nahi, haq chaahiye (we don't want ratings, we want rights)!"** and **"insaan hai hum, ghulaam nahi (we are human beings, not slaves)!"**
- The **refusal to acknowledge gig workers as employees and grant them legal protections reveals the corporate hypocrisy** behind these platforms.

Conclusion

- The **gig economy has not introduced a new form of employment** but has rather **intensified and digitalised existing structures of exploitation.**
- By removing direct accountability and fragmenting the workforce, **digital platforms have made it even more difficult for workers to fight for their rights.**
- **Legislative interventions are necessary to ensure that gig workers receive fair wages, job security, and social protections.**
- **Until strong labour laws are enforced** and corporate resistance is countered, **the gig economy will continue to function as a modern-day system of digital slavery.**

6. A Land Where Ambition Grows Minus an Outbound Ticket

Context

- **Migration has always been a defining element of human civilization.** It shapes societies, economies, and cultural landscapes across the globe.



- The recent controversy surrounding the deportation of Indian migrants from the United States sheds light on a complex and painful reality.
- While India celebrates its global achievers, a large portion of its population continues to seek opportunities elsewhere, legally or otherwise.
- Now it becomes crucial to explore the paradox of Indian migration, the factors driving it, the challenges faced by migrants, and the need for a national introspection on creating a future where migration is a choice rather than a necessity.

The Indian Diaspora: Success and Struggles

- India has the highest number of emigrants in the world.
- Many Indians have thrived abroad, with leaders such as Sundar Pichai (CEO of Google) and Satya Nadella (CEO of Microsoft) showcasing India's intellectual prowess.
- These individuals symbolise a success story that India proudly claims. However, the Indian migration story is not uniform.
- At the other end of the spectrum are thousands of undocumented migrants, many of whom embark on perilous journeys to the United States, often via illegal routes through Canada or Mexico.
- Unlike the tech entrepreneurs and skilled professionals, these migrants are not fleeing war or persecution but are seeking economic security and stability that they believe their home country cannot provide.
- Their plight raises a critical question: why do so many Indians, despite belonging to a fast-growing economy, feel the need to risk everything for an uncertain future abroad?

The Paradox of India's Economic Growth and Migration

- A painful contradiction lies at the heart of India's migration crisis. India boasts impressive economic growth, yet rising youth unemployment and economic disparity drive people away.
- While urban centres showcase world-class infrastructure, many citizens still struggle for dignified work.
- States like Gujarat and Punjab, considered economically prosperous, have high rates of illegal migration.
- The desperation of even well-off families, such as the Gujarati family that tragically froze to death at the Canada-U.S. border, suggests that the problem is not just economic but also one of aspiration and social mobility.
- This contradiction raises an uncomfortable question: if India is truly progressing, why do so many of its people feel compelled to leave?

Factors Driving the Migration

- **Booming Economy, Shrinking Opportunities**
 - At first glance, India's economy appears to be thriving.
 - The country boasts a GDP growth rate that outpaces many developed nations, an increasing middle class, and a rapidly expanding digital economy.
 - It is home to some of the world's most valuable startups, a powerful IT sector, and an increasing presence in global manufacturing.
 - Yet, beneath these statistics lies a harsh reality: economic growth has not translated into widespread, inclusive opportunities.
 - One of the primary drivers of migration is
 - Despite India's strong economic indicators, job creation has not kept pace with the millions of young Indians entering the workforce each year.
- **The Middle-Class Exodus: Why Even the Affluent Are Leaving**
 - Traditionally, migration was driven by economic necessity, with poorer individuals seeking low-skilled jobs abroad to support their families.
 - However, in recent years, a surprising trend has emerged, upper-middle-class families and even wealthy individuals are choosing to migrate.



- States like **Gujarat and Punjab**, which are often cited as economic success stories, **see thousands of people leaving every year.**
- Many middle-class families leave not just for **better wages but for improved healthcare, education, and social security.**
- **Many parents see foreign education as a gateway to better job prospects** and a superior quality of life for their children.
- While India's startup culture is thriving, **the bureaucratic hurdles, inconsistent regulations, and corruption make it difficult for businesses to scale efficiently.**
- **Failure of Inclusive Growth**
 - India's migration paradox is **ultimately a failure of inclusive growth.**
 - While the country celebrates its economic progress, **wealth and opportunities remain concentrated in specific industries and among certain sections of society.**
 - The **rapid urbanisation of India has led to development in metropolitan cities, but rural and semi-urban areas continue to lag** in terms of employment generation and infrastructure.
 - Additionally, **sectors like agriculture, which still employ a large portion of India's workforce, face declining productivity and profitability.**
 - **Many farmers' children see no future in agriculture** and look toward migration as a means of escaping economic hardship.
 - The **drug crisis in Punjab, for instance, is partly linked to youth disillusionment** due to diminishing opportunities in farming.

The Illusion of the American Dream

- The **United States**, long seen as the land of opportunity, **has increasingly become a difficult place for migrants, especially undocumented ones.**
- **Many Indians who reach the U.S. illegally find themselves trapped in low-paying jobs, constantly living in fear of deportation.**
- The **American Dream, once considered a golden ticket, often turns into an endless struggle** for survival in a society that does not always welcome outsiders.
- The **recent deportations highlight the harsh reality** of illegal migration.
- While the U.S. has the legal right to deport undocumented individuals, **the manner in which it is done, shackling and handcuffing migrants, raises questions about human dignity.**
- Other countries, like **Colombia and Mexico, have condemned such treatment of their citizens**, recognising that deportation is an administrative process, not a criminal punishment.
- **India, too, must take a firm stand against the mistreatment of its people**, ensuring that its citizens are treated with dignity and respect.

The Way Forward: The Need for Change; Creating Opportunities at Home

- **Job Creation and Economic Reforms**
 - India **must focus on policies that create meaningful employment**, particularly for the youth.
 - While the economy grows, **job opportunities have not kept pace with the rising population.**
 - **Investments in industries such as manufacturing, technology, and services can help absorb the workforce.**
- **Improving Education and Skill Development**
 - Many Indian migrants take low-wage jobs abroad despite having higher education qualifications.
 - **There is a need to align India's education system with industry demands** and provide vocational training that equips young people with skills relevant to today's job market.
- **Strengthening Infrastructure and Entrepreneurship**
 - If India wants to retain its talent, **it must make entrepreneurship and innovation easier.** Many Indians who succeed abroad do so because they find better ecosystems for growth.



- **Encouraging startups, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and providing financial support can create an environment where young Indians can thrive at home.**

Conclusion

- **The true measure of India's progress should not be its economic growth alone but its ability to retain its talent and provide opportunities for all its citizens.**
- **Migration should be an option, not a compulsion driven by desperation.**
- **India must transform from being a country that exports talent to one that attracts and nurtures it.**
- **A rising India must be a place where ambition is fulfilled without the need for an outbound ticket, where success stories are written not just in Silicon Valley but in Indian cities and villages alike.**

7. The Challenges of Public Health Education in India

Context

- **Public health plays a critical role in shaping national healthcare systems, and the increasing demand for professionals in this field has led to the rapid expansion of public health education in India.**
- **However, a widening gap between training and employment, coupled with the absence of a standardised regulatory framework, has created challenges for aspiring public health professionals.**
- **Therefore, it is crucial to explore the evolution of public health training in India, the hurdles faced by graduates, and potential approaches to address these concerns.**

Evolution of Public Health Training and Employment in India

- **Colonial Legacy and Early Public Health Education**
 - **The roots of public health education in India can be traced back to the British colonial period when health interventions primarily focused on controlling infectious diseases and improving sanitation.**
 - **Public health training was embedded within medical education, with an emphasis on hygiene, epidemiology, and disease prevention.**
 - **However, it remained a peripheral subject rather than a distinct discipline.**
 - **A major milestone in the formalisation of public health education was the establishment of the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIHPH) in Kolkata in 1932.**
 - **This institution became a pioneering centre for training professionals in hygiene, sanitation, and disease control.**
 - **Despite this effort, public health remained largely confined to medical colleges, where it was incorporated into preventive and social medicine (PSM), later known as community medicine.**
- **Post-Independence Developments and Expansion of Public Health Education**
 - **After India's independence in 1947, the country faced significant public health challenges, including malnutrition, infectious diseases, and inadequate healthcare access.**
 - **Recognising the need for a strong public health workforce, the government introduced several initiatives to expand healthcare services.**
 - **However, public health training remained restricted to medical graduates, limiting the supply of specialists in the field.**
 - **During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a gradual shift towards broadening public health training beyond medical colleges.**
 - **New institutions such as the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW) in Delhi were established to provide advanced training in public health and family welfare.**
 - **Despite these developments, the field continued to be dominated by community medicine specialists, and there was little focus on interdisciplinary public health education.**
- **The Rise of MPH Programs and Institutional Growth (2000-Present)**



- A significant turning point in public health education in India occurred in the early 2000s, with the introduction of Master of Public Health (MPH) programs.
- Unlike traditional community medicine courses, MPH programs were **open to graduates from diverse academic backgrounds**, including social sciences, nursing, and allied health sciences.
- This shift allowed for a **more interdisciplinary approach** to public health, incorporating expertise from epidemiology, health policy, and health management.
- In **2000, there was only one institution offering an MPH program in India**, but by 2024, the number has grown to over **100 institutions**.

Challenges Faced by Public Health Graduates

- **Disparity between Graduates and Jobs**
 - The **demand for entry-level positions** such as research or program assistants far exceeds supply, **leading to fierce competition and low success rates**.
 - The **issue is compounded by a shrinking number of public health roles within the government**, as efforts to establish dedicated public health management cadres in different states have encountered bureaucratic roadblocks.
- **Growing Demand of Private Sector in Healthcare**
 - Another significant factor limiting employment opportunities is the **growing dominance of the private sector in healthcare**.
 - Unlike government agencies, private hospitals and health institutions often **prioritise hospital administration and business management** over public health expertise.
 - Research and development organisations remain a major employer for public health professionals, but these **rely heavily on foreign grants**.
 - As India is **no longer a priority country for international funding**, these opportunities are also **dwindling**.
- **The Quality of Health Education**
 - Beyond employment challenges, the **quality of public health education itself is a matter of concern**.
 - The **rapid increase in MPH programs has led to a competitive market** where institutions sometimes compromise on admission standards.
 - **Many students enrol without a clear understanding of the field**, while faculty members often lack adequate training and real-world experience.
- **Absence of a Standardised Curriculum**
 - The absence of a standardised curriculum across institutions **results in inconsistent quality among graduates**.
 - Unlike medical degrees, which fall under the regulatory purview of the National Medical Commission (NMC) or the University Grants Commission (UGC), **MPH programs remain unregulated, raising concerns about their credibility and effectiveness**.
- **Geographical Barriers**
 - **Many large and populous states** such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Assam, along with several smaller states, **have limited or no institutions offering public health courses**.
 - This not only **restricts access** to education for aspiring professionals in these regions but also **weakens the overall public health infrastructure**.

Approaches to Strengthening Public Health Education and Employment

- **Creation of More Public Health Jobs**
 - The first and most urgent priority is **the creation of more public health jobs within government systems**.
 - In **developed nations** with well-established public health education frameworks, **governments serve as the primary employers of public health professionals**.
 - **India should follow a similar model** by establishing dedicated public health cadres within state governments.
 - **This would not only enhance employment prospects for graduates but also strengthen public health systems** at multiple levels, from primary care to national health policy implementation.



- **Regulation and Standardisation of Public Health Education**
 - A **specialised regulatory body should be established within the NMC or UGC** to oversee MPH programs.
 - **This agency, led by public health experts, would be responsible for setting curriculum standards**, establishing minimum training requirements, and ensuring that graduates receive adequate practical exposure.
 - Given the dynamic nature of public health, **institutions should still retain flexibility for innovation** while maintaining a baseline of quality and competence.
- **Incorporation of More Practical Learning Opportunities**
 - To bridge the gap between education and employment, **public health training programs must incorporate more practical learning opportunities**.
 - Institutions **should establish stronger ties with government agencies, research organisations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** to provide students with hands-on experience.
 - This **integration will help graduates develop real-world skills** that make them more competitive in the job market.
- **Expansion of Public Health Education**
 - **Efforts should be made to expand public health education** in states where access remains limited.
 - **Encouraging the establishment of new institutions** or introducing public health courses within **existing universities can help distribute opportunities more evenly across the country**.
 - Additionally, **incentivising students to work in underserved regions** by offering scholarships or guaranteed placements in government programs could help **address regional disparities** in public health infrastructure.

Conclusion

- **The field of public health is critical for the well-being of any nation**, yet India's rapidly growing pool of public health graduates faces significant employment and educational challenges.
- **The expansion of public health education, while a positive development, has not been matched by job creation**, leading to an oversaturated market.
- **Strengthening the public health workforce is essential** not only for improving employment prospects but also for ensuring a **robust and resilient healthcare system** for the future.

8. The Gender Budget, Bigger Allocations, Little Impact

Context

- The **Union Budget 2025-26 has been widely acknowledged for its increased allocation towards women-centric schemes**, with the gender budget rising to ₹4.49 lakh crore, a significant 37.25% increase from the previous fiscal year.
- However, **despite the substantial rise in allocations, the benefits have not been equally distributed**, particularly among marginalized women from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.
- Therefore, there is the need to **critically evaluate the gender budget's effectiveness, highlighting its key shortcomings**, structural barriers, and potential solutions to improve its impact.

Primary Concern Surrounding the Gender Budget: Rising Allocations, Limited Outcomes

- Over the years, **the gender budget has grown consistently**, reflecting the government's intent to bridge gender disparities.
- However, **economic benefits have not reached women in proportion to these allocations**, especially among marginalised groups.
- The **government has introduced targeted schemes such as the PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) and the Dharti Aba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan**, yet their actual impact remains limited.
- These schemes have struggled to **address the deep-rooted socio-economic disadvantages** faced by SC/ST women.
- **One major issue is the lack of an intersectional approach in gender budgeting.**



- Despite India having a **gender budget** for two decades, it has **failed to incorporate learnings from previous budgets** or consider factors such as caste, class, and tribal identity.
- Without addressing these intersections, welfare programs remain ineffective in transforming the lives of marginalized women.

Structural Barriers and Implementation Challenges

- **Digital Exclusion**
 - Several structural barriers hinder the **effective implementation** of gender-focused schemes. One such challenge is digital exclusion.
 - While digitisation aims to eliminate intermediaries, **many women, particularly in rural and tribal areas, lack digital literacy**, preventing them from accessing welfare benefits independently.
 - Without investment in digital literacy programs, **the government's push for digitized welfare delivery may inadvertently create new barriers** rather than eliminating old ones.
- **Outdated Census Data**
 - Another significant challenge is the **outdated Census data**.
 - The **last Census in India was conducted in 2011**, meaning **current policy decisions are based on data** that is over a decade old.
 - This **gap in updated statistics weakens accountability mechanisms** and makes it difficult to assess whether funds are reaching those who need them most.
 - For instance, **the Ministry of Tribal Affairs saw a 45.79% budget increase, yet there is no gender-disaggregated data** available to evaluate how these funds benefit SC/ST women specifically.
- **Bureaucratic Inefficiencies**
 - **Bureaucratic inefficiencies further limit the effectiveness of gender-focused allocations.**
 - The **'Dalit Adivasi Budget Analysis 2023-24'** report found that over 35% of funds allocated under the SC and ST Sub-Plans remain underutilised due to complex procedures, lack of community involvement, and poor outreach.
 - **Many women struggle to navigate financial and bureaucratic jargon**, making it harder for them to benefit from government initiatives.

Key Areas for Reform

- **Adopting an Intersectional Approach**
 - Gender budgets **must be designed with an understanding of how caste, class, and tribal identities influence** access to resources.
 - A **comprehensive audit should be conducted at both central and state levels** to ensure budget allocations address these factors effectively.
- **Strengthening Local Governance and Panchayati Raj Institutions**
 - Panchayati Raj institutions **play a crucial role in delivering services at the grassroots level**, yet they often lack autonomy and resources.
 - **Strengthening these institutions, providing adequate funding**, and preventing the dominance of 'sarpanch husbands' (male relatives of elected female leaders who control decision-making) are necessary steps for ensuring that schemes benefit women directly.
- **Community-Led Participatory Planning**
 - Involving women, **particularly those from SC/ST backgrounds, in the planning and monitoring of welfare schemes can improve their effectiveness.**
 - The **Kudumbashree model from Kerala demonstrates how community-led initiatives can enhance outreach and implementation.** Similar models should be adopted nationwide.
- **Improving Data Collection and Transparency**
 - The government must **ensure regular updates to gender-disaggregated data** to track the actual impact of policies.



- Establishing a **gender budget tracking** portal could enhance public accountability and provide real-time insights into fund utilisation.
- **Investing in Digital Literacy**
 - Given the government's reliance on digitisation, **investment in digital literacy programs is crucial to enable women**, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, to access welfare benefits independently.

Conclusion

- While the increased allocation in the Union Budget 2025-26 signals a step in the right direction, **real progress depends on effective implementation.**
- **Addressing structural barriers** such as digital exclusion, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and **outdated data is crucial.**
- More importantly, **policies must move beyond token allocations to ensure that marginalized women, particularly those from SC/ST communities**, receive tangible benefits.
- **By adopting an intersectional approach**, strengthening local governance, and improving accountability mechanisms, **the gender budget can become a transformative tool for women's empowerment** rather than a symbolic gesture.

9. The Empowerment of India's Women with Bold Policies

Context

- **International Women's Day** on March 8 serves as a **timely reminder of the progress made toward gender equality** and the work that remains.
- **India has made notable strides in empowering women**, with government policies playing a crucial role in improving access to sanitation, clean water, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship.
- These **initiatives have not only enhanced women's daily lives but have also reshaped their roles** in governance, the workforce, and community leadership.

Government Initiatives in Women's Empowerment

Sanitation and Clean Water: A Foundation for Dignity and Economic Participation

- **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission)**
 - This **program particularly benefited women in rural areas**, where open defecation posed safety and health risks.
 - By constructing over 116 million household toilets, **the initiative has provided women with a sense of security, privacy, and dignity.**
 - Community-driven efforts, such as those led by **the Maa Tarini Self-Help Group (SHG) in Rourkela**, further highlight the mission's impact.
 - **These grassroots initiatives demonstrate how sanitation efforts** can be both socially transformative and economically beneficial.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM)**
 - Before its implementation, **only 17% of rural households had tap water connections**, forcing women to spend hours fetching water.
 - **Today, over 150 million households have access to safe drinking water**, significantly reducing women's time burden and enabling greater participation in education, work, and economic activities.
 - The **availability of water has had a direct impact on female labour force participation.**
 - Studies indicate a **7.4% increase in women's engagement** in agriculture and allied sectors, particularly in states like Bihar and Jharkhand, where female workforce participation was historically low.
 - **Between 2017 and 2023, rural female workforce participation rose from 24.6% to 41.5%**, demonstrating how infrastructural development can drive social change and economic independence.



Government Initiatives Directed Towards Financial Inclusion of Women

- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)**

- Launched in 2014, **PMJDY has been instrumental in bringing women into the formal banking system.**
- **More than 300 million bank accounts have been opened for women** under this initiative, allowing them to save money, access credit, and engage in financial transactions independently.
- The **scheme has also introduced direct benefit transfers (DBT)**, ensuring that government subsidies reach women directly, reducing dependency on intermediaries.

- **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)**

- This **scheme provides collateral-free loans to small and micro enterprises**, particularly benefiting women entrepreneurs.
- **Out of the total ₹32.36 lakh crore sanctioned under Mudra Yojana, 68% of the loans have been given to women.**
- The **scheme has supported businesses ranging from handicrafts and textiles to food processing and retail**, allowing women to transition from informal labour to entrepreneurship.

- **Stand-Up India Scheme**

- Aimed at promoting entrepreneurship among women and marginalised communities, **this scheme provides loans ranging from ₹10 lakh to ₹1 crore.**
- So far, **over ₹53,609 crore has been sanctioned to 236,000 entrepreneurs**, helping women establish and expand their businesses.
- **By offering financial literacy programs alongside credit access, the scheme ensures that women are equipped with the necessary skills to manage and grow their enterprises.**

Digital Connectivity and the Rise of Women Entrepreneurs

- **BharatNet and PM-WANI Initiatives**

- BharatNet and the Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) have **expanded high-speed internet access to 199,000 villages and 214,000 gram panchayats.**
- The establishment of over 247,000 Wi-Fi hotspots has enabled women in rural areas to **access online banking, digital payment systems, and e-commerce platforms.**

- **UPI and Digital Payments**

- The rise of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has made financial transactions more **accessible** to women entrepreneurs.
- **Women-led businesses, particularly in rural areas, are now able to receive payments seamlessly**, reducing their reliance on cash transactions and improving financial transparency.

- **E-commerce and Market Access**

- Digital platforms have provided women entrepreneurs **with a gateway to larger markets beyond their local communities.**
- The **Government e-Marketplace (GeM) has been instrumental in integrating women-led businesses** into the national procurement system.
- **Over 100,000 women-led micro and small enterprises (MSEs) are now active on the GeM portal**, securing contracts worth ₹46,615 crore.

Case Study: Women Entrepreneurs Leveraging Technology

- A compelling example of digital empowerment is **Reena Kirar**, an entrepreneur from Madhya Pradesh.
- She **leads the Girja Devi Jan Kalyan Samiti, a self-help group producing textiles, food products, and household goods.**
- **By leveraging the GeM portal, Reena expanded her business beyond her local village**, reaching customers across the country.



Women's Representation in Governance

- **Political empowerment** is another critical area where India has made significant progress.
- The **government's recent implementation of a 33% reservation for women** in legislative bodies marks a transformative shift in governance.
- **Women are no longer passive participants but key decision-makers** shaping national policies.
- At the grassroots level, **women constitute approximately 46% of elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**, with over 1.4 million women actively engaged in rural governance.
- Their **leadership has led to more community-centred policies**, improving healthcare, education, and public safety.
- These **developments highlight a broader truth: when women lead, societies thrive.**

Remaining Challenges and the Way Forward

- **Limited Access to Credit**
 - While government schemes **have improved credit access, many women still struggle to secure large-scale funding** due to a lack of collateral and financial history.
 - **Expanding microfinance institutions (MFIs)** and encouraging venture capital investment in women-led businesses could help bridge this gap.
- **Societal and Cultural Barriers**
 - **Traditional gender norms** in some parts of India **still discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship.**
 - Awareness campaigns and **mentorship programs led by successful female entrepreneurs can help change perceptions** and inspire more women to start businesses.
- **Need for Digital Literacy**
 - While digital penetration has improved, a significant digital literacy gap still exists, particularly among rural women.
 - **Government and private sector initiatives must focus on providing digital training to women**, ensuring they can fully leverage online banking, e-commerce, and digital marketing tools.

Conclusion

- **India's strides in women's empowerment through sanitation, financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and governance** are shaping a **more inclusive and equitable society.**
- The **government's targeted policies** have not only improved women's quality of life but have also unlocked economic and leadership opportunities.
- **While progress is evident, sustaining this momentum requires continuous policy focus, investment in education, and the dismantling of socio-economic barriers.**

10. Inclusion in Public Spaces; From Fear to Freedom

Context

- **India has long grappled with deep-rooted gender inequalities**, and one of the most pressing concerns is the accessibility and safety of public spaces for women.
- The country **ranks 128 out of 177 on the Women, Peace, and Security Index 2023**, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change.
- While violence against women is often discussed in terms of domestic abuse and workplace harassment, one crucial **yet overlooked aspect is how public spaces are designed, regulated, and experienced by women.**

Gendered Spatial Control and Women's Mobility

- Public spaces are not just areas of movement; **they are critical zones where socio-economic and political life unfolds.**



- However, **these spaces remain largely male-dominated**, reinforcing gendered spatial control that limits women's mobility.
- Studies show **that women's access to public spaces is often dictated by necessity** rather than choice.
- According to the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16), **only 54% of Indian women could visit markets alone**, while 50% could access healthcare facilities independently.
- Additionally, **the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women in 2023-24 stood at 35.6%**, indicating that more than half of India's female population remains outside the workforce.
- For working women, **public spaces are primarily transitional, areas they pass through between home and work.**
- Unlike men, who can freely loiter, socialise, or relax in public spaces, **women's presence is often restricted to function-driven activities.**
- This **limitation is not just a matter of convenience but a form of social exclusion** that reinforces patriarchal norms.
- **The idea that women must always have a purpose** when outside their homes discourages them from fully engaging in public life.

A Detailed Analysis of the Issue of Safety and Women's Restricted Access

• The Fear of Violence and Its Impact on Women's Mobility

- **Public spaces are often considered unsafe for women** due to the high prevalence of gender-based violence, including catcalling, stalking, groping, and more severe forms of assault.
- This constant threat creates a culture of fear, leading women to **develop defensive strategies** when navigating public areas.
- **Many adopt behavioural modifications, such as:**
 - **Avoiding isolated areas**, poorly lit streets, and public transportation at late hours.
 - **Choosing specific routes that are deemed safer**, even if they are longer or less convenient.
 - **Walking briskly, avoiding eye contact**, or regulating body language to minimize attention.
 - **Dressing conservatively or modifying their appearance** to avoid unwanted harassment.
- These **adaptations highlight how deeply ingrained the fear of violence** is in women's everyday lives.
- Unlike men, who generally move freely in public spaces, **women are conditioned to remain alert, cautious, and hyper-aware of their surroundings.**

• The Role of Public Spaces in Gendered Violence

- While violence against women is **commonly associated with private spheres such as homes or workplaces**, public spaces also play a significant role in perpetuating gender-based violence.
- **Open spaces, such as streets, parks, and bus stations, expose women to threats from multiple strangers** rather than a single perpetrator, increasing their vulnerability.
- Moreover, public transportation, **a necessity for many working women and students, is a hotspot for harassment.**
- Cases of groping, inappropriate touching, and verbal abuse are widespread, **making many women reluctant to use buses, trains, or other forms of shared transit.**
- The lack of adequate security measures, poorly lit stations, and inadequate seating arrangements further contribute to their insecurity.

• Social Perceptions and Victim-Blaming

- One of the most significant barriers to addressing gendered **violence in public spaces is the pervasive culture of victim-blaming.**
- Women who experience harassment or assault are **often questioned about their actions, attire, or location at the time of the incident. Common responses include:**
 - Why was she out so late at night?
 - What was she wearing?
 - She should have been more careful.
- This shift in focus, from the perpetrator's actions to the victim's choices, not only discourages women from reporting crimes but **also reinforces restrictive norms that confine them to private spaces.**



- The burden of safety is placed entirely on women, **absolving men of responsibility and allowing gender-based violence to persist with minimal consequences.**

The Consequences of Restricted Access

- **Limited Economic Participation:** Women are less likely to take up jobs that require late-night shifts, travel, or movement through unsafe areas, restricting their career options and financial independence.
- **Reduced Social Engagement:** Women's participation in recreational activities, social events, and community gatherings is often limited, leading to social isolation.
- **Psychological Impact:** Constant vigilance and fear of harassment contribute to stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of freedom and autonomy.

The Way Forward: A Need for Change at Both Societal and Policy Level

- **Urban Design Improvements:** Well-lit streets, accessible public toilets, and open recreational areas with visible security measures can create safer environments.
- **Stronger Legal Frameworks:** Faster legal proceedings, higher conviction rates for offenders, and stricter penalties for crimes against women can serve as deterrents.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Educating men and society as a whole about gender-based violence, consent, and respect for women in public spaces is essential.
- **Encouraging Women's Presence:** Women must be encouraged to reclaim public spaces, engage in leisure activities, and break the cycle of fear and restriction.

Conclusion

- **While centuries of patriarchal control cannot be dismantled overnight,** meaningful change begins with small but consistent efforts.
- The **fight for women's right to public spaces is not just about safety** but about equity and autonomy.
- **Public spaces should be inclusive environments where women can move freely,** without restriction or fear.
- By reshaping both the built environment and societal attitudes, **India can work towards a future where women are no longer just passing through public spaces** but actively reclaiming and owning them.





General Studies II

1. An IJS is an Idea Whose Time has Come

Context

- The recent fire brigade incident in Delhi, which led to **the discovery of half-burnt currency notes at the residence of a High Court judge, has reignited concerns over judicial accountability** in India.
- Therefore, **it is important to critically examine the larger issue of transparency and integrity within the Indian judiciary**, particularly focusing on the Collegium system of selecting judges.
- Moreover, **it is crucial to discuss the need for reforms**, and the proposal for an Indian Judicial Service (IJS) to address systemic inefficiencies.

A Persistent Concern Over Judicial Accountability

- The fire brigade incident, though shocking, is **only one among several recent controversies that have cast a shadow on judicial credibility**.
- The **Supreme Court's intervention in staying an insensitive verdict by a High Court judge** regarding a minor's sexual harassment case **further exposes the lack of quality control in judicial appointments**.
- Additionally, **the Supreme Court's response to the Lokpal's attempt to investigate corruption allegations against a judge underscores the judiciary's resistance** to external oversight.
- These **instances collectively reflect a judicial system struggling to maintain accountability** while remaining immune to public scrutiny.

Flaws in the Collegium System

- **Lack of Transparency**
 - The **selection and elevation of judges occur behind closed doors**, with no formal records, criteria, or explanations made public.
 - The **decision-making process lacks objective standards**, and the reasons behind selections or rejections are rarely disclosed.
 - This **opacity has led to speculation about favouritism, bias, and even corruption** within the judicial selection process.
 - The **judiciary often declines to share the details of why certain candidates are selected over others**, leading to a lack of public confidence.
 - In contrast, **other civil service appointments, such as the IAS and IPS, follow a structured and transparent selection process**.
- **Nepotism and Judicial Dynasties**
 - Since appointments are controlled by a small group of senior judges, **there is a tendency to favour candidates who belong to influential legal families**.
 - This **has led to the emergence of judicial dynasties**, where judges' relatives are more likely to be selected over equally or more competent candidates from diverse backgrounds.
 - This **practice restricts the entry of talented individuals** who do not have personal connections within the judiciary.
 - Studies have shown that **a significant number of High Court and Supreme Court judges come from families with a history in the judiciary** or legal profession.
 - This concentration of power **limits opportunities for meritorious candidates** from underprivileged backgrounds.
- **Absence of Merit-Based Selection Criteria**



- Unlike other professional recruitment processes, where clear eligibility criteria, examinations, and evaluations determine appointments, **the Collegium system does not have a standardised, merit-based selection mechanism.**
- **There is no written test, interview panel, or structured assessment** of a judge's legal knowledge, ethical standards, or past judgments.
- As a result, **the selection process often becomes subjective**, favouring those with personal or professional proximity to the Collegium members.
- In the civil services, **candidates undergo rigorous exams and interviews before being selected.**
- However, in the Collegium system, judges are often chosen based on **internal discussions with no formal assessment of their judicial competence**, integrity, or decision-making abilities.
- **Arbitrary Transfers and Promotions**
 - Another major flaw is the **opaque system of judicial transfers and promotions.**
 - The **Collegium decides which judges will be transferred from one High Court to another** or elevated to the Supreme Court, but the reasons behind such decisions are rarely disclosed.
 - This **lack of accountability has led to suspicions that transfers may be influenced by favouritism**, personal biases, or political considerations.
 - In several instances, **judges who delivered controversial verdicts or took strong stands against influential figures were transferred to other High Courts** without any clear explanation.
 - **This raises concerns that transfers are sometimes used as a tool for controlling judges** rather than ensuring efficiency in the judiciary.
- **Resistance to External Oversight**
 - Despite the criticism, **the judiciary has strongly resisted attempts to introduce external oversight mechanisms.**
 - The rejection of the **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)** in 2015 is a prime example of this resistance.
 - **The NJAC was designed to make judicial appointments more accountable** by involving representatives from both the judiciary and the executive.
 - However, **the Supreme Court struck it down**, citing concerns over judicial independence.
 - While independence is crucial, **absolute autonomy without checks and balances can lead to an unaccountable system.**
 - Even when allegations of corruption or misconduct arise, **the judiciary prefers internal inquiries, which are often perceived as biased or ineffective.**
 - In contrast, **public officials in other branches of government are subject to investigations by independent bodies** such as the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and Lokpal.
- **Lack of Diversity in the Higher Judiciary**
 - The Collegium system has also contributed to a lack of diversity in judicial appointments.
 - **Women, Dalits, Adivasis, and candidates from economically weaker backgrounds** remain significantly **underrepresented in the higher judiciary.**
 - This lack of inclusivity **affects the credibility of the judiciary and limits perspectives in judicial decision-making.**
 - As of recent years, **only a small percentage of Supreme Court and High Court judges are women**, despite the increasing presence of women in the legal profession.
 - Similarly, **representation from marginalized communities** remains disproportionately low.

The Case for an Indian Judicial Service (IJS)

- **Diversity and Inclusivity:** The current judiciary is dominated by a few elite families, with limited representation from marginalized communities and women. **A nationwide examination would open doors for deserving candidates from all backgrounds.**
- **Merit-Based Selection:** A structured, competitive recruitment process **would ensure that judges are selected based on knowledge, competence, and ethical integrity** rather than personal connections.



- **Transparent Selection Process:** Unlike the closed-door Collegium meetings, the IJS recruitment process would be conducted in a publicly accountable manner, reducing the scope for favouritism.
- **Standardized Training:** Newly appointed judges could undergo rigorous training in various branches of law, ensuring uniformity in judicial competence across different courts.
- **Insulation from Executive Interference:** The judiciary can still maintain its independence by formulating selection criteria while entrusting the recruitment process to an external, neutral body like the UPSC.

Conclusion

- The repeated controversies surrounding the judiciary indicate that **judicial accountability and selection processes in India need urgent reforms.**
- While the Collegium system has allowed the judiciary to remain independent, **its lack of transparency has led to serious concerns about favouritism and inefficiency.**
- **The NJAC, though struck down, could be reconsidered with necessary safeguards to prevent executive overreach.**
- More importantly, **the establishment of an Indian Judicial Service could be a game-changing reform that ensures a fair, merit-based, and transparent process** for judicial appointments.

2. India's Geopolitical Vision Should be Larger

Context

- **India has historically been an influential global player,** balancing economic growth with diplomatic relations.
- **However, recent geopolitical shifts have raised concerns about India's limited role** in resolving international conflicts.
- While **India has taken decisive action in regional crises, such as its interventions in Bangladesh (1971), the Maldives (1988), and Sri Lanka (2009),** it has recently adopted a cautious stance.
- The question arises: **should India be more proactive in global geopolitics?** Experts argue that India must **recalibrate** its foreign policy, balancing economic ambitions with strategic engagement to secure its position as a major global power.

India's Historical and Current Diplomatic Approach

- India's leadership in the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** reflected its early commitment to shaping global politics.
- In contrast, **its current multi-alignment strategy prioritises bilateral ties** over collective geopolitical influence.
- **India has made significant contributions to global welfare** through initiatives like 'Vaccine Maitri,' climate action, and humanitarian aid.
- However, **its reluctance to actively engage in major conflicts, such as the Russia-Ukraine war or the Israel-Palestine crisis,** raises questions about its long-term vision as a global power.
- **Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic outreach to Russia and Ukraine has been commendable,** but India has largely remained a bystander in peace negotiations.
- **Its abstention from UNSC votes on the Ukraine war influenced developing nations, yet India has not capitalised on its unique position** to mediate effectively.
- Given its economic and diplomatic credibility, **should India not aspire for a seat at the "high table" of global conflict resolution?**

The Risks of Remaining Passive

- **Ceding Influence to Emerging Middle Powers**
 - In the absence of Indian leadership, **other nations are stepping in to fill the diplomatic vacuum.**
 - **Countries like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have taken on active mediation roles** in various conflicts, thereby expanding their geopolitical influence.
 - **Türkiye's Role in the Ukraine-Russia Conflict**



- Türkiye hosted direct negotiations between Ukraine and Russia in 2022, demonstrating its ability to mediate in European conflicts.
- This enhanced Türkiye's credibility as a neutral broker and strengthened its diplomatic standing.
- **Saudi Arabia's Multi-Alignment Strategy**
 - Saudi Arabia recently hosted high-profile U.S.-Russia and U.S.-Ukraine negotiations, **positioning itself as a major diplomatic force.**
 - **It is leveraging its oil wealth and strategic location to assert itself as a key player in global geopolitics.**
- **Qatar's Mediation in Africa:** Qatar successfully facilitated a ceasefire between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, proving that small but influential states can play a major role in global conflict resolution.
- If India does not step up, **it risks falling behind these emerging middle powers in diplomatic influence.**
- **By playing an active role,** India could shape discussions on global security rather than merely reacting to them.
- **Diminishing Credibility as a Global Leader**
 - India has often projected itself as the **leader of the Global South,** advocating for the interests of developing nations.
 - However, **if it remains hesitant to engage in conflict resolution, it may lose credibility in the eyes of its allies.**
- **Expectations from a Rising Power**
 - India, **as the world's fifth-largest economy and an aspiring permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC),** is expected to contribute more than just statements.
 - If India seeks a leadership role in global governance, **it cannot afford to be perceived as indifferent to global crises.**
- **Implications for UNSC Aspirations**
 - India argues that UNSC decisions **lack legitimacy** without the world's largest democracy.
 - However, **this argument weakens if India is unwilling to take decisive action** in global affairs outside the UNSC framework.
- **The 'Not an Era of War' Doctrine**
 - Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement to Vladimir Putin that **'this is not an era of war' was widely appreciated.**
 - However, beyond rhetoric, **India has not taken concrete steps to push for peace.**
 - If India remains passive, **such statements may be seen as diplomatic posturing rather than genuine efforts at conflict resolution.**
- **Strategic Setbacks in a Shifting Global Order**
 - The global balance of power is shifting, with increasing **geopolitical fragmentation.**
 - If India does not actively engage, **it may find itself left out of crucial negotiations that could shape the future world order.**
 - **U.S.-China 'Deal' and the Risk of Regional Marginalisation**
 - As tensions between the U.S. and China evolve, **there is a possibility of a new understanding between the two superpowers,** dividing regions into spheres of influence.
 - If India does not assert itself, **it could be excluded from key geopolitical arrangements in Asia.**
 - **Threat to the Quad's Relevance**
 - The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), consisting of India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, is meant to **counterbalance China's influence.**
 - However, **if India remains hesitant to engage more proactively, the Quad itself could lose its strategic significance,** weakening India's position in the Indo-Pacific.
 - **China's Expanding Influence**
 - **China's growing presence in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia** through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is **reshaping global geopolitics.**
 - While **India has expressed concerns over China's economic and strategic expansion, its passive approach limits its ability** to counterbalance Chinese influence effectively.



The Way Ahead for India to Establish Itself as a Key Geopolitical Player

- **Strengthening Regional Policies**
 - India's bilateral relations in West Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia **must be supplemented with active participation in regional frameworks.**
 - While India has maintained strong ties with Central Asian nations, **its reduced engagement in the SCO limits its influence in the region.**
 - Similarly, after opting out of RCEP, **India must find alternative ways to strengthen economic ties with East Asian nations.**
- **Deepening Ties with Europe**
 - With Europe facing internal and external pressures, **India has a strategic opportunity to enhance its presence in the region.**
 - A **trade agreement with the U.S. could serve as a foundation for deeper economic and political collaboration** with the European Union.
- **Playing a More Proactive Role in Conflict Resolution**
 - India does not need to position itself as a mediator but **should be ready to facilitate dialogue and negotiations.**
 - **Its past role in the Korean War (1951-52)** and its recent diplomatic efforts in the UNSC (2021-22) show that **India can bridge divergent geopolitical interests.**

Conclusion

- **India's ambition to be a global power must go beyond economic growth;** it must also involve strategic geopolitical engagement.
- The world is undergoing a structural shift, with **rising unilateralism and realignments** in global politics.
- **By proactively shaping global events** rather than reacting to them, **India can strengthen its influence and secure its place as a key pole in a multipolar world.**
- As the international order evolves, **India's leadership will be judged not only by its economic prowess but also by its willingness to shape a stable and balanced global landscape.**

3. Judicial Appointments in India- Evolution, Challenges, and the NJAC Verdict

Context:

- The controversy surrounding the discovery of massive cash at **Delhi HC judge Justice Yashwant Varma's** home last week has reignited interest in the debate of judicial appointments in India.
- "Things would have been different" if the Supreme Court had not struck down the National Judicial Appointments Commission Act passed by Parliament in 2014." (**Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar**)

Judicial Appointments in India:

- **Article 124** of the Constitution establishes and governs the Supreme Court of India.
- **Article 124 (2):** The President, on the advice of the Council of Ministers, appoints Supreme Court judges in consultation with the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- **B.R. Ambedkar** opposed granting veto power to the CJI, rejecting the substitution of "consultation" with "concurrence."

Evolution of Judicial Appointments:

- **Early years (1950-1970s):**
 - Initially, the **executive had full discretion** in appointing judges.
 - **Judicial independence was not a major issue** despite constitutional amendments.
 - The 1970s saw executive interference, including the **supersession of judges**, leading to concerns over **judicial autonomy.**



- For example, Justice M H Beg was appointed CJI in 1977, overlooking Justice H R Khanna, who was first in seniority.
- **First Judges case (1981) - S P Gupta case:** The Supreme Court ruled that “consultation” (in Article 124) **does not mean “concurrence.”** The **executive retained discretion** in judicial appointments.
- **Second and Third Judges cases (1993 and 1998):**
 - **The Court reversed its earlier stance**, ruling that “consultation” meant “concurrence.”
 - **The collegium system** was established, transferring power from the executive to a body of judges.

The Collegium System:

- Established through judicial rulings, **not mentioned in the Constitution.**
- Headed by the **CJI**, it includes the **four** senior-most Supreme Court judges.
 - **It makes recommendations** for the appointment of judges to the SC, the appointment of Chief Justices of the High Courts, and the transfer of judges of High Courts.
- **A three-member collegium**, headed by the CJI and comprising the two senior-most judges of that court, makes recommendations for the appointment of judges to the High Courts.
- **The collegium system is often criticized** for lack of transparency, accountability, and lobbying within the system.

The National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC):

- The Parliament passed the **Constitution (99th Amendment) Act, 2014**, and the National Judicial Appointments Commission (**NJAC Act, 2014**).
- These two laws provided for an **independent commission to appoint judges** to the SC and High Courts, replacing the collegium system.
- **The NJAC comprised six members:**
 - Chief Justice of India (Chairperson)
 - Two senior-most Supreme Court judges
 - Union Minister of Law and Justice
 - Two eminent persons from civil society (one from SC/ST/OBC/minorities or women) to be nominated by a committee comprising the CJI, the PM, and the LoP in Lok Sabha.
- **It enjoyed near-unanimous political support** and was ratified by 16 state legislatures.

Striking Down of NJAC (2015):

- The Supreme Court declared NJAC **unconstitutional** in a 4:1 judgment.
- **Key issue: Veto** power of non-judicial members, allowing any two NJAC members to reject a recommendation and risking the judiciary being outnumbered by the executive.
- The Court invoked the **Basic Structure Doctrine**, ruling that judicial primacy in appointments is essential for **judicial independence**.
- **Justice Jasti Chelameswar’s dissenting opinion:** Criticized the collegium system’s secrecy, lack of transparency, and lobbying. Argued that NJAC was a better alternative if properly structured.
- **Justice Kurian Joseph (concurring judgment):**
 - Acknowledged lack of transparency, accountability, and credibility in the collegium system.
 - **Later regretted striking down NJAC**, citing collegium failures.

Can NJAC be Revived?

- **The NJAC was struck down before being tested in practice**, leaving room for revisiting judicial reforms.
- **Alternative proposals suggest modifications:**
 - Giving the CJI a **casting vote** to ensure judicial predominance.
 - **Eliminating the veto power** of non-judicial members.
 - Ensuring appointments are not subject to executive reconsideration.



Conclusion and the Way Forward:

- The NJAC case was a **missed opportunity** for judicial reforms.
- Growing concerns over **collegium opacity and internal politics** warrant a fresh debate on judicial appointments.
- **A balanced system** ensuring both **judicial independence and accountability** remains a key issue in India's constitutional framework.

4. The 'Great Abandonment' of Afghanistan

Context

- The **political turmoil in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of U.S. forces** and the subsequent rise of the Taliban has **sparked global debates on foreign policy** and international responsibility.
- While **some argue that engaging with the Taliban is a pragmatic move**, others warn against the potential risks of legitimising a radical regime.
- Therefore, **it is important to discuss the parallels between past and present U.S. actions in Afghanistan and highlights India's shifting stance** toward the Taliban regime.

U.S. Involvement and Its Consequences

- The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, particularly under Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, **played a crucial role in shaping the country's political landscape**.
- Trump's negotiations with the Taliban, which culminated in the **2020 Doha Accords**, effectively **sidelined the elected Afghan government** and paved the way for the Taliban's return to power.
- This **agreement lacked provisions for a sustainable political framework**, protections for women and minorities, or guarantees against terrorism.
- The **result was a rapid collapse of the Afghan Republic** and the establishment of **Taliban rule in 2021**.
- For Afghans, **particularly those in exile, the U.S. withdrawal is seen as a "Great Abandonment,"** leaving the country in a worse state than before.
- Despite the Taliban's lack of international recognition, it has consolidated power, **enforcing strict laws that have reversed two decades of progress**, particularly regarding women's rights.
- The **global community's response has been divided**, with the U.S. and Europe largely disengaged, while Russia, China, Pakistan, and Central Asian nations have extended varying degrees of support to the regime.

India's Changing Approach

- India **initially distanced itself from the Taliban following their takeover**, closing its embassy in Kabul in 2021.
- However, **it has since reopened a 'technical mission' and engaged Taliban leaders at official levels**.
- Reports suggest that **India is considering expanding its presence in Kabul and possibly accepting a Taliban-appointed ambassador** in New Delhi.
- This **shift marks a significant departure from India's previous policies** of supporting democratic Afghan governments and opposing Taliban rule.
- The Indian government justifies this engagement on the grounds of **pragmatism and realpolitik**.
- Proponents argue that the **Taliban is an undeniable reality in Afghanistan, and engaging with them is necessary** for maintaining influence and protecting Indian interests.
- They also claim that diplomatic ties are essential for **humanitarian aid and development projects** in the country. However, these justifications are met with scepticism.

Challenges and Risks of Engagement

- **The Taliban's Internal Conflicts and Uncertain Future**
 - Although the **Taliban appears to have a firm grip on power**, **internal divisions exist**, particularly between the Haqqani faction and Kandahari clerics over policies such as girls' education.



- **Some leaders who advocated for moderate reforms have reportedly fled the country**, indicating deep-seated tensions within the regime.
- Additionally, **Afghanistan's economic situation is dire**, exacerbated by the loss of foreign aid and worsening relations with Pakistan.
- Given these uncertainties, **assuming the Taliban's permanence in power may be premature**.
- **Strategic Risks for India**
 - The argument that **India must engage with the Taliban to maintain strategic influence is flawed**.
 - Unlike its past relationship with the Afghan Republic, where India enjoyed strong security and intelligence cooperation, **any strategic alignment with the Taliban remains highly uncertain**.
 - **Historically, the Taliban has been hostile to Indian interests**, targeting Indian diplomatic missions and personnel.
 - **Expecting a radical Islamist regime to shift its stance toward India would be a risky assumption**.
- **Erosion of Goodwill Among Afghan People**
 - Perhaps the most significant risk is the **loss of goodwill among Afghan citizens, especially those who supported India in the past**.
 - **India's refusal to provide visas to Afghans fleeing the Taliban**, including those who worked closely with Indian institutions, **has led to resentment**.
 - **Many of these individuals previously contributed to strengthening Indo-Afghan ties**, and their exclusion weakens India's long-term influence.

The Way Forward: The Need for a Balanced Policy

- **Support for Afghan Women and Civil Society**
 - India **should use its influence to advocate for women's rights** and provide platforms for Afghan women to voice their concerns.
 - For instance, **India could push for the recognition of the Afghan women's cricket team** and other cultural and professional initiatives.
- **Engagement with the Afghan Diaspora and Opposition Groups**
 - Instead of solely engaging with the Taliban, **India should strengthen ties with exiled Afghan leaders and democratic forces**.
 - **Allowing Afghan opposition figures** to hold conferences and discussions in India would ensure that alternative voices are heard.
- **Selective Engagement with the Taliban**: If India must engage with the Taliban, it should do so cautiously, **ensuring that humanitarian aid and development projects do not serve as tools for Taliban propaganda**.

Conclusion

- India's evolving approach to Afghanistan **presents both opportunities and risks**.
- While realpolitik may dictate some level of engagement with the Taliban, **blindly embracing the regime would be detrimental to India's long-term interests**.
- **A balanced strategy, one that engages with the Taliban without alienating Afghan civil society** and opposition groups, **would allow India to maintain its influence** while upholding its values.
- **In the ever-changing geopolitical landscape of Afghanistan, flexibility and foresight are essential to ensuring that India remains a relevant and respected player**.

5. Charting a Route for IORA under India's Chairmanship

Context

- The **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)** is a **crucial regional organisation** that promotes cooperation among Asian, African, and Australian nations connected through the Indian Ocean.



- With **India set to assume chairmanship in November 2025**, the country has an opportunity to **strengthen IORA's** governance and enhance its **relevance** on the global stage.
- **India's priorities as chair include increasing financial resources, integrating technology for data management,** and developing maritime-ready academic programs.
- Given the region's economic significance and security challenges, **IORA's role in developing cooperation and sustainable development is essential.**

The Strategic Importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

- IOR is an **integral part of the Indo-Pacific but maintains unique characteristics.**
- It is home to **two-thirds of the global population** and serves as a critical **hub for international trade, with 75% of global trade and 50% of daily oil consumption** passing through its waters.
- The **region generates over \$1 trillion in goods and services annually**, with intra-IORA trade reaching \$800 billion in 2023.
- IORA, one of the oldest intergovernmental organisations in the region, **aims to facilitate collaboration among its members** through cultural and academic exchanges, disaster risk management, and economic development.
- Although it **has dialogue partners like the United States, China, and the European Union**, it primarily relies on middle and smaller powers.
- However, **despite its economic importance, the IOR faces significant challenges**, including underdevelopment, political instability, climate change-induced disasters, and security threats such as piracy, terrorism, and human trafficking.
- These **transnational issues necessitate regional cooperation** to find sustainable solutions.

Challenges Faced by IORA

- **Funding Constraints**
 - A major challenge for IORA is its **limited financial resources.**
 - The organisation's **annual budget is largely dependent on the contributions of its member states**, many of which are developing countries.
 - This **financial model poses a problem** as the capacity of these member states to contribute substantial amounts is constrained.
 - **Countries such as Singapore, the UAE, and France are exceptions, but the majority of IORA members are smaller,** less economically developed nations that cannot contribute significantly to the budget.
 - This **creates a funding shortfall, particularly for critical areas like maritime security,** disaster management, and sustainable economic growth in the region.
- **Reliance on Member Contributions**
 - Due to the reliance on member contributions for its budget, **IORA's financial sustainability is inherently precarious.**
 - This **dependency results in fluctuations in available funding,** limiting IORA's ability to plan long-term initiatives and execute programs effectively.
 - While IORA's member states recognise the importance of the association, **they struggle to sustain continuous, large-scale funding commitments,** as they themselves face economic and political challenges.
 - **Many member nations are engaged in their own developmental priorities** and regional concerns, leading to the prioritisation of immediate domestic issues over regional commitments to IORA.
- **Limited Capacity for Data Processing and Policy Analysis**
 - Another challenge facing IORA is its **small Secretariat, which is based in Mauritius,** and its limited human resources and technological infrastructure.
 - The **Secretariat is responsible for coordinating activities across a large and diverse region,** but it operates with a relatively small staff.
 - **Government institutions, such as IORA's Secretariat, often suffer from bandwidth limitations** when it comes to processing and analysing large amounts of data, which is critical for timely and informed decision-making.



- Given the increasing complexity of issues such as climate change, maritime security, and economic development in the Indian Ocean Region, **there is a growing need for sophisticated data management systems.**
- **Insufficient Involvement of the Private Sector and Industry**
 - Despite the significant role that industries such as shipping, marine tourism, oil and gas, and fisheries play in the Indian Ocean's blue economy, **IORA has not sufficiently integrated the private sector into its policy-making processes.**
 - Many of these industries are key contributors to the economic activities of the region, but they are **often excluded from IORA's deliberations** on maritime policy and regional governance.
 - This **lack of private sector involvement not only restricts the flow of capital but also limits the expertise and practical solutions** that industry leaders could bring to IORA's discussions.

India's Role and Strategic Recommendations

- **India's vision for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) aligns with IORA's objectives** and offers a framework for strengthening regional cooperation.
- As chair, **India can leverage its strong diplomatic ties** with member states to develop practical solutions.
- **Several member countries, such as Australia, have advanced research in marine science** and technology, while others like France and Singapore excel in marine-related technologies.
- The **UAE and Oman can contribute investments in sectors where IORA needs support.**
- Additionally, **traditional knowledge from coastal and island nations such as Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and Mauritius should be integrated** into sustainable marine governance strategies.
- To promote long-term development, **IORA should encourage collaboration between industrial leaders and academic institutions.**
- Marine-related employment opportunities are expected to increase, necessitating **specialized training programs.**
- **Introducing interdisciplinary courses, such as marine accounting, can help build a skilled workforce for the blue economy.**

Conclusion

- **IORA holds immense potential** for enhancing regional prosperity and security.
- **India's upcoming chairmanship presents an opportunity to address existing institutional challenges** and reinforce IORA's role as a key player in the Indian Ocean Region.
- By **focusing on financial sustainability, technological integration,** and capacity-building through education and research, **India can help IORA evolve into a more effective and influential organization.**
- Through proactive leadership and strategic partnerships, **IORA can become a model for regional cooperation and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific.**

6. The Assault on Multilateralism and International Law

Context

- **Despite criticisms** regarding its effectiveness and bureaucratic inefficiencies, **the UN remains the most significant global organisation** dedicated to multilateral diplomacy.
- However, **the introduction of the Disengaging Entirely from the United Nations Debacle (DEFUND) Act** by U.S. Senator Mike Lee **threatens to undermine the UN's legitimacy** and functionality by proposing a complete U.S. withdrawal.
- **Such a move would have far-reaching consequences,** not only for the UN but also for global governance as a whole.

The Threat to the United Nations

- **Legal and Institutional Implications of the DEFUND Act**



- If passed, the **DEFUND Act would sever the U.S.'s relationship with the UN** by repealing fundamental legislation, including the United Nations Participation Act of 1945 and the United Nations Headquarters Agreement of 1947.
- **These laws are crucial because they legally formalise U.S. participation in the UN** and establish its obligations, including financial contributions and diplomatic support.
- **Their repeal would mean the U.S. would no longer be bound by its commitments to the UN**, effectively nullifying its role within the organization.
- Furthermore, the DEFUND Act seeks to **halt all financial contributions** to the UN.
- **The U.S. is historically the largest contributor to the UN's budget**, providing approximately 22% of the UN's core funding and 28% of the peacekeeping budget.
- Cutting this funding would **significantly impact UN programs** related to peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, development, and health initiatives.
- **U.S. withdrawal could lead to funding shortages**, weakening the UN's ability to respond to global crises.
- **Diplomatic and Geopolitical Consequences**
 - Beyond financial concerns, **the DEFUND Act would have profound diplomatic and geopolitical implications.**
 - The **U.S. has historically played a leading role in shaping UN policies**, influencing major international decisions, and using its permanent seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) to assert its foreign policy interests.
 - A **withdrawal would mean relinquishing this influence**, creating a power vacuum that could be filled by rival nations, particularly China and Russia.
 - **These countries have already been expanding their influence within UN agencies**, and a diminished U.S. presence could further tilt the balance of power in their favour.
 - Additionally, withdrawing from the UN could **isolate the U.S. diplomatically.**
 - **While other global powers continue to engage in multilateral discussions** on issues such as climate change, nuclear non-proliferation, and human rights, **the U.S. would be left without a seat at the table.**
 - This **could weaken its ability to negotiate international agreements** and influence global policies, ultimately reducing its strategic leverage on the world stage.
- **Impact on UN Operations and Peacekeeping Missions**
 - **One of the most critical areas** that would suffer from a U.S. withdrawal is **UN peacekeeping operations.**
 - The **U.S. has been a key supporter of peacekeeping missions**, providing funding, logistical support, and personnel training.
 - **If the DEFUND Act passes, it would prohibit U.S. participation in these operations, leading to operational difficulties for UN missions** in conflict zones such as South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Mali.

The Shift Towards Economic Nationalism and the Consequence of Unilateralism

- **The Shift Towards Economic Nationalism**
 - The Trump administration's economic policies also reflected a **departure from multilateralism.**
 - The implementation of aggressive tariffs under the guise of national security drew parallels to the protectionist policies of the 1930s, **particularly the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act.**
 - **That historical period saw a rise in trade barriers**, contributing to economic instability and the onset of World War II.
 - In contrast, **the post-war global economy was built on the principles of free trade**, culminating in the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, which later evolved into the World Trade Organisation (WTO).
 - However, **the U.S. under Trump actively undermined the WTO by blocking appointments to its Appellate Body**, which resolves trade disputes.
 - This **obstructionism has pushed the WTO into a state of crisis**, jeopardizing the global trade system that has ensured economic stability for decades.
- **The Consequences of Unilateralism**
 - The broader implications of these actions are clear: **the erosion of multilateral institutions threatens global governance, economic stability, and international law.**



- The Trump administration's rejection of international cooperation in areas such as climate change, public health, and human rights has **created a leadership vacuum**.
- **The weakening of institutions like the UN, ICC, and WTO undermines collective efforts to address pressing global challenges**, making it more difficult to coordinate responses to crises such as pandemics and climate change.
- Furthermore, the U.S.'s retreat from multilateralism has **sparked concerns about retaliation from other nations**.
- The **idea of "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) is fundamentally at odds with the reality** that global leadership requires cooperation, not isolation.
- Without strong international alliances, the U.S. risks **diminishing its influence and facing economic repercussions**.

A New Opportunity for Global Leadership

- **Amidst the U.S.'s retreat**, non-Western nations, particularly India, have an opportunity to assume a greater role in global governance.
- India has consistently advocated for **multilateralism** and adherence to international law.
- **During the G-20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting** in February 2025, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar reaffirmed the importance of an inclusive approach to global challenges, **emphasising the need for peaceful resolutions and international cooperation**.
- Additionally, **the current geopolitical climate presents an opportunity for India to push for long-overdue reforms** in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
- As a rising global power, **India has been advocating for a more representative and democratic UNSC structure**.
- With the U.S. withdrawing from its leadership role, **emerging economies like India can step up to shape the future of global governance**.

Conclusion

- The **'America First' approach, characterized by economic nationalism and political isolationism, has significantly weakened the multilateral institutions** that uphold international law and global stability.
- The potential withdrawal from the UN, sanctions on the ICC, and **obstruction of the WTO signal a shift towards unilateralism that threatens the global order**.
- While these actions may **temporarily serve U.S. nationalist interests, they ultimately undermine long-term global cooperation and stability**.

7. The Challenge of Policing Digital Giants

Context

- In the digital age, **data has become a powerful tool for market dominance**, leading to concerns over monopolistic practices by technology giants.
- The **recent order by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Meta underscores the increasing scrutiny** over data exploitation and anti-competitive behaviour in digital markets.
- Now it becomes imperative to explore the significance of the CCI's decision, **its broader implications in the global regulatory landscape, and the need for India to update its competition laws** to address data-driven monopolies effectively.

An Overview of The CCI's Order Against Meta

- On November 18, 2024, the CCI imposed **a fine of ₹213.14 crore on Meta and introduced a five-year ban on sharing WhatsApp user data** with other Meta-owned platforms such as Facebook and Instagram for advertising purposes.



- The **order was based on the finding that WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy update** constituted an abuse of its dominant position in the markets for Over-The-Top (OTT) messaging services and online display advertising.
- The **policy mandated users to consent to data-sharing on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis**, reinforcing Meta's market power and limiting competition.
- **Meta appealed the decision to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)**, which granted a stay on the ban and the penalty on January 23, 2025, provided Meta deposited 50% of the penalty.
- This **legal battle highlights the growing challenge of regulating tech giants** that leverage data to consolidate their market dominance.

The Role of Data in Digital Market Dominance

- Data has become the **backbone of the modern digital economy**, often likened to oil but with an even greater utility.
- Unlike finite resources, **data can be collected, analysed, and reused indefinitely**, providing immense competitive advantages.
- **Meta, for instance, leverages its vast user data to refine algorithms**, enable hyper-targeted advertising, and create personalized experiences.
- This **data-driven dominance fosters network effects, where more users generate more data**, further strengthening a platform's market position and deterring new competitors.
- **Google's case in India further illustrates this trend.** In 2022, the CCI fined Google ₹1,337.76 crore for abusing its dominance in multiple markets, including mobile operating systems and app stores.
- **Google was penalised for mandating the pre-installation of its apps on Android devices**, a practice that was upheld by the NCLAT in 2023.
- These **cases highlight how dominant players use their control over digital infrastructure** to entrench their positions, making regulatory intervention crucial.

Global Regulatory Efforts to Curb Tech Monopolies

- **United States: Antitrust Investigations and Lawsuits**
 - **Meta (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp)**
 - In 2020, the **U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed an antitrust lawsuit against Meta**, accusing it of engaging in anti-competitive practices by acquiring Instagram (2012) and WhatsApp (2014) to eliminate competition.
 - **The lawsuit argues that Meta's acquisitions were not aimed at enhancing its services** but rather at stifling emerging competitors in the social media and messaging markets.
 - **The FTC has sought a breakup of Meta's business** to restore competitive conditions.
 - **Google's Legal Challenges**
 - In 2024, the **U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia found Google guilty of violating the Sherman Act**, the key U.S. antitrust law, due to its exclusive agreements in the search and online advertising markets.
 - **Google has been sued for monopolising the digital advertising market** by acquiring competitors, forcing advertisers to use its ad services, and limiting the interoperability of rival advertising platforms.
 - **U.S. government has sought structural remedies**, including breaking up parts of Google's ad business to restore fair competition.
 - **These legal actions represent a shift in the U.S. regulatory stance**, which for years had been lenient toward digital monopolies.
 - With bipartisan support, **there is a growing push for stricter oversight and legislative reforms to update antitrust laws for the digital age.**
- **European Union: A Pioneering Approach to Digital Regulation**
 - **Digital Markets Act (DMA) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**



- The **Digital Markets Act (DMA)**, which came into effect in 2023, identifies ‘gatekeepers’, large digital platforms like Meta, Google, and Amazon, that must comply with specific rules to prevent anti-competitive behaviour.
- The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, introduced in 2018, has set a global precedent for data protection by enforcing strict consent requirements and penalising unauthorised data usage.
- The **DMA mandates interoperability between messaging apps, prohibits self-preferencing (such as Google favouring its own search results over competitors)**, and requires companies to provide users with more control over their data.
- **Meta’s Facebook-Germany Case**
 - In 2019, **Germany’s Bundeskartellamt (Federal Cartel Office) found Meta guilty of abusing its dominant position** by combining user data from various platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) without explicit user consent.
 - The **decision forced Meta to allow users to opt out of data merging across its platforms**, setting a precedent for regulating data monopolization as an anti-competitive practice.
- **Google’s €8 Billion Antitrust Penalties**
 - Over the past decade, **Google has faced multiple fines in the EU for anti-competitive practices, totalling over €8 billion.**
 - The European Commission imposed three major fines on Google.
 - **€2.42 billion (2017) for manipulating search results** to favour its shopping service.
 - **€4.34 billion (2018) for forcing smartphone** manufacturers to pre-install Google apps on Android devices.
 - **€1.49 billion (2019) for anti-competitive** advertising practices in online search advertising.
 - **The EU’s approach to regulating digital monopolies is considered one of the most comprehensive in the world**, balancing consumer protection, data privacy, and market competition.

The Way Ahead for India: Need for Reform in India’s Competition Law

- Despite CCI’s proactive stance, India’s current competition law—the **Competition Act, 2002, lacks explicit provisions to tackle data-centric monopolies.**
- Traditional antitrust frameworks focus primarily on price-based dominance, **whereas digital markets function on the principles of data aggregation and network effects.**
- Therefore, **legal reforms must introduce ‘data monopolization’ as a key parameter for assessing market dominance.**
- This **would require redefining terms such as ‘market power’ and “dominant position”** to align with the realities of digital competition.
- One potential solution could be **mandating interoperability and data-sharing agreements to prevent monopolistic control over user information.**
- Additionally, **India could benefit from integrating its competition law with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**, to ensure a coordinated approach between data protection and market regulation.
- Drawing inspiration from the EU’s combination of the DMA and GDPR, **India could create a more holistic framework to tackle the challenges of data exploitation and anti-competitive practices.**

Conclusion

- **The CCI’s action against Meta is a significant step in regulating the digital economy**, but it also underscores the urgent need for legal reforms.
- As **data-driven monopolies continue to shape market dynamics, India must modernise its competition laws** to effectively address these emerging challenges.
- By learning from global regulatory efforts and implementing forward-looking policies, **India can develop a competitive and fair digital marketplace** while ensuring consumer privacy and innovation.
- **The Meta case is not just a legal battle; it is a pivotal moment in the broader discourse on digital market regulation**, shaping the future of India’s digital economy.



8. Freebies vs Welfare- The Dilemma of India's Economic Democracy

Context:

- The debate over welfare measures and freebies has resurfaced with **political parties making populist promises in elections.**
- While welfare schemes are meant to uplift the poor, **excessive dependence on freebies** raises **concerns about economic sustainability, self-reliance, and governance priorities.**

Freebies and Political Promises:

- In the recent Delhi elections, political parties have **competed to offer "freebies"** rather than focus on **development strategies.**
- Earlier, a prominent political party's 2024 manifesto highlights welfare schemes such as:
 - PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana – free rations to 80 crore people since 2020.
 - Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) – ₹34 lakh crore credited to citizens.
 - PM Mudra Yojana – 46 crore loans worth ₹27 lakh crore.
 - PM SVANidhi Scheme – easy credit to 63 lakh street vendors.
- **The question arises:** Are these **welfare measures** or mere **electoral inducements?**

The Economic Burden of Freebies:

- Several states, including **Maharashtra** (admit funding issues for the Ladki Bahin scheme) and **Gujarat**, struggle with funding social schemes and essential public services like education and healthcare.
- **The government claims** 25 crore citizens have moved out of poverty, and 17 crore jobs were created in 10 years, yet freebies continue.
- **Critics argue** that such measures can **hinder economic productivity** and **foster dependency.**

Constituent Assembly Debates on Socialism and Welfare:

- On November 15, 1948, a **motion to declare India a socialist state** was debated but rejected.
- **K T Shah supported socialism**, advocating for:
 - Equal justice and opportunity.
 - Economic security for all citizens.
- **B R Ambedkar opposed the motion**, stating:
 - The Constitution should not dictate economic policies but leave them to governments elected by the people.
 - Prescribing socialism in the Constitution would undermine democracy.

Economic Democracy and Social Order:

- **Damodar Swarup Seth** (discussing Article 38, 'State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people' in 1948) criticized the capitalist structure, arguing that a **socialist democratic order** was essential for **true welfare.**
- **Mahboob Ali Baig Sahib Bahadur** emphasized that political parties have distinct ideologies, and voters expect implementation of their agendas.
- **Ambedkar's perspective** on economic democracy:
 - The **Constitution** sets an economic ideal but **does not prescribe a specific system.**
 - Economic democracy can take **multiple forms**, including individualism and state intervention.
- **J B Kripalani's vision of democracy** (1949): Democracy must be both political and economic. **The class divide in India limits economic democracy, despite political equality.**

India as a Welfare State - Reality Check:



- **A welfare state protects and promotes** the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens based on the principles of
 - **Equal opportunities,**
 - **The equitable distribution of wealth and**
 - **Public responsibility** for those citizens who cannot afford the bare necessities of a decent life.
- **India faces challenges such as:**
 - Poverty
 - Unemployment
 - Widening wealth gap
 - Failing healthcare
- The Supreme Court in **S.Subramaniam Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu** justified freebies, sparking debate over fiscal responsibility.

Conclusion - Need for Introspection:

- E M Forster once said: **“Two cheers for democracy.** One because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism.”
- In his 1845 novel Sybil (or the Two Nations - the rich and the poor), Benjamin Disraeli writes: **“Power has only one duty** — to secure the social welfare of the people.”
- India must evaluate whether **excessive freebies align with sustainable economic growth and true welfare.**

9. A Delimitation Red Flag, the Lessons from J&K, Assam

Context

- The **question of electoral delimitation** in India is a **crucial aspect of democratic governance.**
- The upcoming **delimitation exercise in 2026 has sparked widespread debate** due to concerns regarding the balance of power between States, the impact on minority communities, and the overall implications for India’s federal structure.
- Amid these ongoing debates, **it is crucial to examine the key arguments surrounding the issue, explores the potential dangers of disproportionate representation,** and the importance of maintaining democratic integrity in the delimitation process.

A Detailed Analysis of the Debate on Delimitation: A Democratic Dilemma

- **Balancing Population Growth with Representation**
 - One of the central issues in the delimitation debate is the **disparity in population growth across different regions of India.**
 - **Northern States** such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan have experienced **rapid population growth.**
 - On the other hand, **southern States** like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh **have managed to stabilise or even reduce their population growth rates** through effective governance, education, and healthcare policies.
 - A **population-based delimitation** would naturally lead to an **increase in parliamentary seats for northern States** while reducing the representation of the southern States.
 - This **raises a critical question:** should States be rewarded or penalized for their demographic trends?
 - If parliamentary seats are allocated strictly based on population, **it could disincentivise efforts to control population growth,** as States that successfully implement population control measures would see their political influence diminish.
 - This **would be unfair to the southern States,** which have made significant socio-economic progress and implemented successful development policies.
- **Revisiting Rajya Sabha Representation**



- Another proposal to **counterbalance the potential loss of influence for certain States is redistributing Rajya Sabha seats** equitably among the five geographic zones of India, northern, central, eastern, western, and southern.
- **The Rajya Sabha, as the upper house of Parliament, is meant to represent States rather than individual voters**, making it a crucial institution in maintaining federal balance.
- **Currently**, Rajya Sabha representation is **uneven**, with more populous States having greater influence.
- A **reallocation of seats across geographic zones could ensure that regions with slower population growth do not lose their voice in national policymaking**.
- However, **the effectiveness of this approach depends on the functioning of India's zonal councils**, which were originally established to resolve inter-State disputes and foster regional cooperation.
- Unfortunately, **these councils have become largely inactive**, with many not convening for years.
- **Strengthening these councils and linking them to the Rajya Sabha's representation structure could enhance cooperative federalism** and ensure that all regions have a meaningful role in governance.
- **Challenges to Federalism and Democratic Equity**
 - While these proposed solutions attempt to maintain fairness in representation, **they do not fully address the deeper issue of political power dynamics in India**.
 - A **purely population-based delimitation risks concentrating power in the northern States**, where electoral majorities could dictate national policies without sufficient input from the more developed southern and western States.
 - This **could lead to tensions between regions**, developing resentment and weakening national unity.
 - Moreover, **historical precedents suggest that delimitation exercises have sometimes been influenced by political considerations** rather than purely democratic principles.
 - If the 2026 delimitation follows the patterns seen in Jammu and Kashmir or Assam, where constituency boundaries were redrawn in ways that disproportionately benefited certain political groups, **it could erode trust in India's electoral system**.
 - **Ensuring a transparent, non-partisan approach to delimitation is crucial** to preserving both democratic integrity and federal stability.

Lessons from Jammu and Kashmir and Assam

- **Lessons from Jammu and Kashmir**
 - **Recent experiences in Jammu and Kashmir (2022) and Assam (2023) highlight potential pitfalls** in the upcoming delimitation process.
 - The **Jammu and Kashmir delimitation added six seats to the Jammu region** but only one to the Kashmir Valley, disproportionately favouring Jammu.
 - Additionally, **the redrawing of constituencies resulted in administrative and geographic inconsistencies, such as the merging of Poonch and Rajouri (traditionally part of Jammu) with the Valley's Anantnag Lok Sabha seat**.
 - More concerning is the **apparent communal bias in the redistricting**.
 - All six new Assembly constituencies in Jammu were Hindu-majority, while some Muslim-majority areas were reshaped to create Hindu-majority districts.
 - This pattern raises alarms about the potential use of **demographic engineering** in future delimitation exercises.
- **Lessons from Assam**
 - Similarly, in Assam, **the government's decision to merge districts led to the elimination of ten Muslim-majority constituencies** while increasing Hindu and tribal seats.
 - The creation of constituencies with vastly different population sizes further exacerbates concerns about **political bias**.
 - **These cases suggest that population size alone is not the only factor influencing constituency creation**; communal considerations have played a role, which could have serious consequences for national unity.



The Dangers of Communal Polarisation

- Despite the risks, opposition parties have largely **failed to highlight the potential communal polarisation that could result from delimitation.**
- While States such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have **historically exhibited secular voting patterns, there is no guarantee that this will continue.**
- If electoral boundaries are redrawn along communal lines, **the resulting polarisation could shift voting behaviours, as seen in Jammu and Assam.**
- A **further concern is the precedent set by the central government's policies** in border States.
- Harsh laws and suppressions of dissent, **once limited to conflict-prone areas, have gradually been extended to the rest of the country.**
- Similarly, **if communal redistricting is allowed in border regions, it could become a nationwide practice,** further dividing communities along religious lines.

The Way Forward: Need for a Delicate Balancing Act

- The **debate on delimitation highlights the tension between democratic representation and federal equity.**
- **While it is essential to ensure that all citizens are fairly represented in Parliament,** this must not come at the cost of marginalising certain States or regions.
- Proposals such as freezing parliamentary seats while increasing Assembly representation and redistributing Rajya Sabha seats offer possible compromises, **but their success depends on careful implementation and political will.**
- **As India moves toward the 2026 delimitation, policymakers must prioritise a balanced and inclusive approach** that strengthens, rather than weakens, the foundations of the country's democracy and federal structure.

Conclusion

- The **upcoming delimitation exercise poses two major threats;** an imbalance of power between northern and southern States, and the communalisation of electoral constituencies.
- **If not addressed, these issues could weaken India's pluralistic democracy** and undermine the federal structure.
- A **fair and transparent delimitation process that upholds democratic principles is essential** to ensuring equitable representation and preventing political and social fragmentation.
- **The challenges ahead require urgent attention from policymakers,** opposition parties, and civil society to safeguard the unity and integrity of the nation.

10. Electoral Reforms in India: Challenges and the Path Forward

Why in the News?

The Election Commission of India has invited political parties to discuss strengthening the election process.

What's in Today's Article?

- Electoral Reforms (Need, Legal Provisions, Key Issues, Proposed Reforms, etc.)

The Need for Electoral Reforms:

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has initiated discussions with political parties to address concerns related to electoral transparency and voter integrity.
- Allegations of **electoral roll manipulation, duplicate voter IDs, and EVM transparency** have sparked fresh debates about the need for comprehensive **electoral reforms.**
- Additionally, issues such as **unregulated election expenditures, criminalization of politics, and violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** continue to threaten the integrity of India's elections.



- Strengthening electoral laws is essential to maintaining **free and fair elections**, a fundamental aspect of India's democratic framework.

Legal Provisions Governing Elections in India:

- **Article 324 of the Constitution:** Grants the ECI power over the conduct of elections to Parliament and State legislatures.
- **Representation of the People Act, 1950 & 1951:** Governs voter registration and the conduct of elections.
- **Registration of Electors Rules, 1960:** Regulates the maintenance of electoral rolls.
- **Model Code of Conduct (MCC):** Establishes guidelines for political parties and candidates during elections.
- Despite these legal safeguards, recent elections have highlighted **systemic flaws** that necessitate urgent reforms.

Key Issues in India's Electoral System:

- **Concerns Over Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and VVPATs**
 - Since the 2004 Lok Sabha elections, India has exclusively used Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).
 - From 2019 onwards, **EVMs have been backed by 100% Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**.
 - A **Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in April 2024**, demanding a return to paper ballots and 100% VVPAT-EVM matching, both of which were dismissed by the Supreme Court.
 - However, the Supreme Court directed that **5% of EVMs in each constituency** should be verified in case of any suspicion of tampering, ensuring transparency.
- **Allegations of Electoral Roll Manipulation**
 - Recent elections in **Maharashtra and Delhi** raised concerns over **bogus/fake voters** being added to electoral rolls.
 - **Identical EPIC numbers** (Electoral Photo Identity Card) were reportedly assigned to different voters across states, leading to accusations of voter fraud.
 - The **ECI clarified** that earlier decentralization of EPIC allotment before moving to the **ERONET database** may have caused duplication, and has pledged corrective measures.
- **Rising Election Expenditure and Financial Irregularities**
 - The 2024 Lok Sabha elections saw election spending exceed ₹1,00,000 crore, according to the Centre for Media Studies.
 - While candidates have an expenditure limit, political parties face no cap on spending, leading to extravagant election campaigns.
 - This excessive spending fuels corruption, as candidates often resort to illicit funding sources.
- **Criminalization of Politics**
 - As per the **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) Report (2024)**:
 - **251 MPs (46%) in the Lok Sabha have criminal cases.**
 - **170 MPs (31%) face serious charges like murder, rape, and kidnapping.**
 - Despite Supreme Court directives for political parties to disclose criminal records three times before elections, enforcement remains weak.
- **Violations of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**
 - **Star campaigners** from all major parties have been accused of:
 - Using **derogatory language** against rivals.
 - Making **caste and religious appeals** for votes.
 - Spreading **misinformation**.
- **ECI lacks strong enforcement powers** to take strict action against violators.

Proposed Electoral Reforms:

- **Strengthening EVM and VVPAT Verification**
 - The **sample size for VVPAT-EVM matching** should be determined scientifically, dividing states into regions.
 - If even one discrepancy is found, full VVPAT verification should be conducted in the affected region.



- Introducing "Totaliser" machines, as recommended by the ECI in 2016, would aggregate votes from multiple EVMs, making it harder to manipulate results at the booth level.
- **Preventing Electoral Roll Manipulation**
 - **Linking Aadhaar to EPIC numbers could prevent duplicate registrations**, but privacy concerns must be addressed through stakeholder consultations.
 - The ECI should conduct regular audits of voter lists and rectify anomalies before elections.
- **Regulating Election Expenditure**
 - A legal cap on political party spending should be introduced.
 - Political parties should **disclose financial assistance to candidates**, ensuring expenditure remains within permissible limits.
- **Addressing Criminalization of Politics**
 - **Political parties must strictly comply** with Supreme Court orders to **publicize candidates' criminal backgrounds**.
 - The ECI should have the power to **ban repeat offenders** from contesting elections.
- **Strengthening the Model Code of Conduct (MCC)**
 - The ECI should be empowered to **revoke the "Star Campaigner" status** of leaders who repeatedly violate MCC rules.
 - Under **Paragraph 16A of the Symbols Order**, the ECI can **suspend or withdraw recognition of a political party** for severe MCC violations.
 - Strict implementation of **social media regulations** to prevent the spread of fake news and hate speech during elections.

Conclusion:

Electoral reforms are **vital to strengthening democracy in India**. While the ECI has taken steps to enhance voting transparency and voter integrity, challenges such as **criminalization of politics, campaign violations**, and excessive spending remain unresolved.

A comprehensive legal and administrative overhaul is necessary to ensure that elections remain free, fair, and transparent. Political parties and the ECI must engage in meaningful discussions to implement these reforms, restoring public trust in India's electoral process.

11. Supreme Court's Stand on Linguistic Secularism and Language Rights in India

Why in the News?

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has accused the Centre of imposing Hindi through the National Education Policy at the cost of **"totally destroying Tamil Nadu's progress in education"**.

What's in Today's Article?

- Background (Context, Supreme Court Judgments on Language Policies, etc.)
- NPE and Recent Controversy (Contentions, Future Implications, etc.)

Background:

- The Supreme Court of India has played a crucial role in shaping language policies and upholding linguistic secularism, a principle that promotes **acceptance of the aspirations of different language speakers**.
- This was highlighted in the **2014 judgment of U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan vs State of U.P.**, where the court emphasized that India's language laws are **not rigid but accommodative**, ensuring that linguistic diversity is preserved.



- As language debates continue, particularly in the context of the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, the Supreme Court's past rulings reaffirm the importance of **federal pluralism and democratic sensitivity** in linguistic matters.

Key Supreme Court Judgments on Language Policies:

- **U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan vs State of U.P. (2014)**
 - The Supreme Court ruled that **language laws in India evolve organically and should be accommodative rather than rigid.**
 - It upheld the idea that linguistic secularism is necessary to maintain harmony in a multilingual country like India.
- **State of Karnataka vs Associated Management of Primary/Secondary Schools (2014)**
 - The court affirmed that the **right to choose the medium of instruction is protected under Article 19** (Freedom of Speech & Expression).
 - The state cannot force students or parents to adopt a particular language for primary education.
- **Sunil K.R. Sahastrabudhey vs Director, IIT Kanpur (1982)**
 - The Allahabad High Court ruled that Article 351, which directs the Union government to promote Hindi, does not grant individuals the right to demand education in Hindi.
 - Institutions cannot be compelled to impart education in a specific language unless it aligns with broader national policies.
 - These judgments highlight that India's language laws aim to protect individual linguistic freedoms while promoting inclusivity rather than imposing a single language.

Language Conflicts and Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 343 & The Official Language Debate**
 - **Article 343 of the Constitution** states that **Hindi in Devanagari script is the official language** of the Union.
 - However, **Hindi is not the national language**, as it is not spoken uniformly across all states.
 - The **Munshi-Ayyangar formula**, introduced during the Constituent Assembly debates in 1949, sought to **balance regional language interests while designating Hindi as the official language.**
- **Article 29(1) & Minority Language Rights**
 - This article provides **constitutional protection** for any group with a **distinct language, script, or culture**, ensuring they have the right to **conserve and promote their linguistic identity.**
 - The Supreme Court has clarified that this right is applicable to **both majority and minority communities**, emphasizing **equal language rights for all citizens.**
- **Article 351 & The Promotion of Hindi**
 - Article 351 directs the government to promote Hindi to **develop it as a medium of expression for India's composite culture.**
 - However, courts have ruled that **this does not mean Hindi can be imposed upon individuals or institutions.**

The National Education Policy (NEP) and Language Controversy:

- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has reignited the language debate.
- Critics, including **Tamil Nadu**, **argue that the policy promotes Hindi at the cost of regional languages.**
- The Supreme Court's past rulings reinforce that **no language should be imposed against the will of people**, as language is an emotional and cultural issue.
- Justice Krishna Iyer, in his remarks on the **216th Law Commission Report**, stated:
 - "I am all for Hindi as a personal preference, but I am all against Hindi by compulsion. Linguistic militancy will alienate and divide, but federal pluralism is democratic sensitivity."
- This highlights the importance of **voluntary language adoption** rather than **forced implementation.**

Future Implications of Linguistic Secularism:

- Given the ongoing debates on language policies, the Supreme Court's principle of linguistic secularism will likely shape future policies in education and administration. Some key implications include:
 - **Greater Autonomy for States:** States will continue to have the right to determine language policies for education and administration based on local needs.
 - **Protection of Regional Languages:** The emphasis on linguistic secularism ensures that regional languages are preserved and not overshadowed by Hindi or English.
 - **Legal Challenges to Language Imposition:** Any attempt to impose a particular language could face legal scrutiny, as seen in previous court rulings.
- The courts will play a critical role in balancing national integration with linguistic diversity, ensuring that language policies remain inclusive and democratic.

12. Challenges and Complexities of Federalism in India

Context:

- Federalism in India is facing **multiple challenges**, both minor and major, which require careful political negotiation.
- Issues such as delimitation, state representation, language disputes, and financial allocations have sparked **tensions between the Centre and states**.
- Additionally, **structural issues** like power distribution, administrative imbalances, and political dominance are impacting the **federal structure**.

Key Challenges in Indian Federalism:

- **Regional representation and delimitation:**
 - The issue of delimitation and balancing representation between North and South India remains a contentious topic.
 - **Jammu and Kashmir** still awaits the restoration of full statehood.
- **Centre-State conflicts:**
 - **Tamil Nadu vs. Centre:** Disputes over language and education policies.
 - Tamil Nadu accuses the Centre of withholding **Samagra Shiksha funds and attempting to impose Hindi**.
 - The Centre counters that Tamil Nadu is politicizing the National Education Policy (NEP).
 - States continue to express dissatisfaction over the Centre's growing control over subjects like **health and education**, originally part of the **State List**.
- **Horizontal and vertical imbalances:**
 - There is an increasing gap in development across states, creating horizontal imbalances.
 - **The division of power** between the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists needs reconsideration.
 - **Centralization of authority** has been co-produced by both the Centre and states due to **failures in governance**.
- **Political and administrative federalism:**
 - The dominance of political parties affects the autonomy of states.
 - **The anti-defection law** has weakened legislative oversight, with political party structures superseding federal considerations.
 - National parties, while unifying different regions, sometimes override federal demands.
- **Financial federalism and GST:**
 - The Goods and Services Tax (**GST framework**) is a unique model where states collectively make binding decisions.
 - There is potential for extending such collective decision-making models to other domains, ensuring fair financial governance across states.
- **Inter-State cooperation:**



- Current discussions on federalism often focus on **Centre-State relations rather than State-to-State cooperation.**
- Issues like airshed management and water disputes require states to **collaborate independently** without Centre or judicial intervention.
- **The role of political parties** further complicates independent state-level decision-making.

Conclusion

- Federalism in India remains a "**messy affair**" influenced by political, economic, and administrative complexities.
- While historically federalism has evolved through trial and error, modern challenges necessitate **innovative solutions.**
- **The distinction between party politics and federal governance** needs to be **re-evaluated to ensure the autonomy and equitable development of all states.**

13. Women in Judiciary- Progress, Challenges, and the Path Ahead

Context:

- Women in law have made significant progress in India over the last century. **Cornelia Sorabji became the first woman lawyer in 1924.**
- The number of women lawyers and judges has increased, **but representation in higher judiciary remains low.**

Challenges in Higher Judiciary

- **Glass ceiling in High Courts (HCs)**
 - Women constitute **only 14.27%** (109 out of 764) of High Court judges.
 - Eight High Courts have just **one-woman** judge, while Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, and Tripura have **none.**
 - **Allahabad High Court**, the largest High Court, has only three women judges (2%).
 - Women judges are **appointed at an older age** (average 53 years for women vs. 51.8 years for men), reducing their chances of reaching senior positions.
 - **Only the Gujarat High Court has a woman Chief Justice.**
- **Underrepresentation in the Supreme Court (SC)**
 - Currently, there are **only two** women judges (**Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Bela Trivedi**) in the Supreme Court.
 - **Justice Bela Trivedi's** retirement in June 2025 will leave only one-woman judge.
 - **No woman has been appointed** to the Supreme Court **since 2021**, while 28 men have been appointed
 - **Only one woman** has been directly elevated **from the Bar** to the Supreme Court, compared to nine men.
- **Barriers to women's appointment**
 - **Common justifications:** Lack of eligible women candidates, lack of seniority, or women's unwillingness.
 - **Systemic gender bias and deep-rooted inequality** restrict women's opportunities.
 - Women face **higher scrutiny** than men in judicial appointments.
 - The collegium system is **opaque, lacks clear criteria**, and is male-dominated.
 - **Government reluctance:** Since 2020, nine women recommended for High Courts were not confirmed; five were rejected outright.

Need for Gender Equality in Judiciary

- A gender-balanced judiciary **enhances legitimacy, inclusivity, and public confidence.**
- Women's representation ensures courts reflect the **diversity of society and deliver more balanced judgments.**

Steps Towards Equality



- **Reforming the collegium system:** Introducing transparent selection processes and clear **merit-based criteria**. Creating a **structured process for lawyers** to apply for judgeship.
- **Prioritizing gender diversity:**
 - **Ensuring at least one-third**, if not half, of the higher judiciary comprises women.
 - **Gender diversity** should be considered alongside state, caste, and religious representation.
 - Appointing a diverse and independent judiciary to **uphold constitutionalism and rule of law**.
- **Normalizing women's representation**
 - **Gender balance** should be a stated judicial objective in appointments.
 - Women judges should be **appointed in sufficient numbers** so their presence is normalized, not seen as exceptional.
 - As Justice Indira Banerjee stated, women's appointments should not require special attention—they should be a **regular occurrence**.

Conclusion

- As India celebrates 75 years of the Supreme Court, a **transformative shift** towards gender equality in the judiciary is necessary.
- **A transparent, inclusive, and merit-driven** judicial appointment system is key to ensuring gender-balanced constitutional courts.

14. Empowering Women in Panchayati Raj- Overcoming Proxy Leadership

Context:

- **True development** extends beyond economic growth to **empowerment, inclusivity, and dignity**.
- Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) **reserve 33-50% seats for women** to ensure the inclusion of marginalised voices in local governance.
- While these quotas have undoubtedly brought more women into leadership roles, the system has revealed a **persistent challenge of proxy leadership**.

The Challenge of Proxy Leadership:

- Many elected women sarpanches are **overshadowed by male family members**.
- Reasons include **patriarchal norms**, lack of education, lack governance knowledge and institutional support, and systemic weaknesses.
- Male involvement is often justified as support but **weakens women's authority**.
- **Training programs often fail** due to a patronizing approach towards women leaders.

The Story of Chhavi Rajawat:

- As **India's first MBA sarpanch**, her journey in rural leadership began in 2010 through a seat reserved for women.
- Her re-election in 2015 (in a general seat) was a testament to the power of inclusive and performance-driven governance.
- **But her case is an exception**. Across many panchayats, women leaders continue to struggle due to **systemic hurdles**.
- **Institutional biases and dismissive attitudes** towards women sarpanches undermine their authority.
- Positive examples show that **proactive government officials can empower women**.

Strengthening women's leadership:

- **Capacity building and training:**
 - **The programme for Jharkhand** panchayat leaders showcased how structured learning can empower local representatives.



- **The training included** aspects of **governance, budgeting, planning, funding, risk and conflict management, communication and digital literacy - including AI tools like ChatGPT.**
 - Such programmes must become the norm, not the exception.
 - **Quarterly training sessions** should be conducted for two years post-election.
- **Policy recommendations:**
 - A government committee has proposed **nine key recommendations** to strengthen women's leadership.
 - Former sarpanches should be involved in policy making.
 - **A minimum qualification** of 12th grade should be mandated for elected representatives.
- **Improving remuneration and resources:**
 - **Low honorarium is a major deterrent;** Rajasthan sarpanch receives only Rs 4,500 per month.
 - Similarly, other panchayat representatives receive a sitting fee of just Rs 250 per month.
 - **A dignified salary is necessary** to encourage serious participation.
 - Women sarpanches **should receive smartphones for independent governance access.**
 - **Official transport and technical assistants** can help reduce reliance on male family members.
- **Whistleblowing and accountability mechanisms:**
 - **Proxy leadership must be reported,** but safeguards against misuse should be in place.
 - **Government officials should be added to WhatsApp groups** for real-time guidance.

Conclusion:

- When empowered, women leaders prioritize issues like education, healthcare, and social welfare.
- **The PRI reservation policy has the potential to drive transformative rural governance.**
- Strengthening institutional support and leadership training will **ensure true democratic participation.**





General Studies III

1. India's Textile and Apparel Export Target - Challenges and the Path Forward

Context:

- India has set an ambitious target to elevate its Textile and Apparel (T&A) exports from **\$34.8 billion in 2023-24 to \$100 billion by 2030**.
- However, achieving this goal requires **transformative reforms** in the sector.

Current Status of India's Textile and Apparel Exports:

- India's T&A exports have grown from **\$11.5 billion in FY2001 to \$34.8 billion in FY24**, holding **only a 4% share** in the global market.
- The apparel segment (HSN codes 61 and 62) constitutes 42% of total T&A exports.
- India's global apparel export share has **stagnated at 3%**, whereas competitors like **Bangladesh and Vietnam** have surged ahead.
- **China's global market share has declined** from 34.8% to 29.8%, but **India has not capitalized** on this opportunity.

Key Challenges in the Textile Value Chain:

- **Declining cotton production:**
 - India's cotton production peaked at 39.8 million bales in 2013-14 but is **projected to fall to 30 million bales in 2024-25**, the lowest in 15 years.
 - India is set to become a **net importer of cotton**, with imports reaching 2.6 million bales and exports dropping to 1.5 million bales.
 - **The ban on next-generation herbicide-tolerant (Ht) Bt cotton**, despite Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) approval, has hampered productivity.
- **Disproportionate reliance on cotton over man-made fibres (MMFs):**
 - The global fibre consumption ratio is 30:70 (cotton to MMF), whereas in **India, it is 60:40**.
 - **High costs of MMF raw materials** (polyester, viscose) in India (20% costlier than in Bangladesh, China, and Vietnam) reduce competitiveness.
- **Structural and technological bottlenecks:**
 - Around 80% of India's 1 lakh garment factories operate in the **decentralized sector**, limiting **scalability and technological adoption**.
 - **Weak integration across the textile value chain restricts efficiency**.
- **Trade barriers and market access limitations:**
 - High import tariffs imposed by key markets -
 - EU: 9.7%
 - US: 11.47%
 - **Bangladesh enjoys zero-duty access** to the EU under the "GSP Everything but Arms" arrangement.
 - Vietnam benefits from a mere 1.66% tariff under the "**EU-Vietnam FTA**."

Strategic Reforms for Achieving the \$100 Billion Target:

- **Promoting a fashion-driven industry:**
 - Incentivize MMF-based apparel production and **remove non-tariff barriers** such as Quality Control Orders (QCOs) on MMFs.
 - **Reduce raw material costs to improve competitiveness**.
- **Strengthening the PM-MITRA scheme:**



- **Fast-track the implementation** of the Pradhan Mantri Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM-MITRA) scheme.
- **Enhance scalability and efficiency** by promoting integrated textile hubs.
- **Enhancing trade relations and market diversification:**
 - Negotiate Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the EU and the US to reduce tariff disadvantages.
 - **Explore new markets** such as Japan, Russia, Brazil, and South Korea, focusing on niche segments like **women's western wear and swimwear**.
- **Boosting cotton productivity and quality:**
 - Streamline GM crop approvals and establish a **single-window clearance system** for next-generation Bt cotton.
 - **Expand irrigation, promote high-density planting, and invest in precision farming** to bridge productivity gaps with China (1,945 kg/hectare) and Brazil (1,839 kg/hectare).

Conclusion:

- India's goal of achieving \$100 billion in T&A exports by 2030 is **ambitious but not impossible**.
- However, **bold policy reforms and strategic interventions** are necessary to enhance productivity, improve value chain integration, and secure competitive market access.
- Without these measures, the target will remain a distant dream.

2. Advantage China in Africa's Nuclear Energy Market Race

Context

- The **global energy landscape has undergone significant transformations** in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war.
- As African nations strive to diversify their energy sources, **nuclear power is emerging as a critical component of their energy transition**.
- However, **this shift has also attracted the attention of global powers** eager to secure a stake in Africa's nuclear market.
- **China, in particular, has positioned itself as the dominant player**, challenging traditional Western influence and raising concerns about geopolitical dependencies.

Africa's Nuclear Energy Aspirations

- Currently, **Africa has only one operational nuclear power plant**, the **Koeberg Nuclear Power Station in South Africa**, which was built by a French consortium.
- However, **several African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya, and Zambia, are actively planning to incorporate nuclear energy** into their national power grids.
- Projections suggest that **Africa could generate up to 15,000 MW of nuclear energy by 2035**, representing a significant opportunity for investment, estimated at \$105 billion.
- The **potential for nuclear energy in Africa is not only an economic opportunity** but also a **solution to the continent's chronic electricity shortages** and unreliable power supply.

The Scramble for Africa's Nuclear Market

- **Historically, France dominated Africa's nuclear market**, particularly in Francophone nations.
- However, **France's influence is waning** as other global powers aggressively pursue nuclear partnerships in Africa.
- **The United States, through the US-Africa Nuclear Energy Summit (USANES)**, has sought to establish itself as a major player.
- However, **the future of U.S. involvement** depends on the **political direction of President Donald Trump's administration**.



- **Russia, another key contender, has signed multiple nuclear agreements with African nations, including Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Burundi.**
- **The Russian state-owned nuclear corporation, Rosatom, has been constructing a reactor in El Dabaa, Egypt, since 2022, albeit with slow progress.**
- **South Korea, through Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power (KHNP), has also shown interest in Africa's nuclear market.**
- **However, it is China that has emerged as the most influential and aggressive investor in African nuclear energy.**

China's Dominance in Africa's Nuclear Expansion

- **Recent but Rapidly Expanding**
- **In 2012, the China Atomic Energy Authority launched a scholarship program in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to train African and South Asian students in nuclear science.**
- **This initiative strategically familiarised African nations with Chinese nuclear technologies and procedures, increasing the likelihood of future partnerships.**
- **Today, China operates more than 50 nuclear reactors, reinforcing its status as a global nuclear power.**
- **Growing MoUs**
- **Two state-owned enterprises, the China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN) and the China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC), are spearheading China's nuclear expansion in Africa.**
- **In 2024, during the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing, Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China for the design, construction, and maintenance of nuclear power plants.**
- **Similarly, Uganda signed an MoU with China to build a 2 GW nuclear power plant, with the first unit expected to be operational by 2031.**
- **Kenya, while still undecided on its nuclear partner, plans to have a research reactor by 2030.**
- **Meanwhile, Ghana has opted for U.S.-based NuScale Power and Regnum Technology Group to develop its Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), while China National Nuclear Corporation will construct a Large Reactor (LR).**
- **Diminishing Influence of Russia**
- **In West Africa, pro-Russian governments in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali have signed nuclear cooperation agreements with Rosatom.**
- **However, Russia's economic challenges, exacerbated by sanctions due to the Ukraine war, may hinder its ability to make large-scale investments in African nuclear projects.**
- **This could push these nations toward China, which is better positioned to provide financial and technical support.**

The Impact on India's Energy Security

- **Africa's nuclear ambitions have broader implications for global energy security, particularly for India.**
- **As India aims to increase its nuclear power capacity from 8,180 MW to 100 GW by 2047, securing uranium supplies will be crucial.**
- **India has previously signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Namibia and is exploring uranium mining projects in Niger and Namibia.**
- **However, China's growing influence in Africa's nuclear sector could pose challenges for India's energy security by limiting its access to uranium and nuclear-related infrastructure.**
- **Furthermore, many African countries lack the transmission networks necessary to distribute power from nuclear plants.**
- **China, through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has the capability to develop these networks, further cementing its dominance in Africa's clean energy market.**
- **If China successfully integrates nuclear power with its broader infrastructure projects, it will not only strengthen its position in Africa but also gain greater geopolitical leverage over nations dependent on its investments.**

Conclusion

- **Africa's shift toward nuclear energy presents both opportunities and challenges.**



- While nuclear power can provide a stable and reliable source of electricity, **the sector has become a battleground for global powers seeking to expand their geopolitical influence.**
- **China has emerged as the dominant force** in Africa's nuclear market, outpacing traditional players like France, the U.S., and Russia.
- This **growing Chinese influence raises concerns about economic dependencies and strategic vulnerabilities for African nations.**

3. Farewell to the Equalisation Levy- A Bold Move in Global Taxation

Context:

- The government has proposed the **abolition of the 6% Equalisation Levy on online advertising** in the Finance Bill 2025, reducing the tax burden on digital ad consumers and lowering costs on platforms like Google and Meta.
- This is a significant move in the context of the **ongoing Indo-US bilateral trade talks**, and the imminent threat of reciprocal tax, which is likely to come into force from 2nd April, 2025.
- **If passed in parliament**, the 6% Equalisation Levy would **cease to exist from 1 April 2025**. The origins of the equalisation levy have generated interest as we say goodbye to it.

The Genesis of Equalisation Levy:

- Introduced in **2016** via the Finance Act, rather than the Income-tax Act, to avoid treaty override.
- **Aimed at taxing online advertising revenues** earned by foreign digital companies in India.
- Large multinational digital corporations opposed the levy, citing **double taxation concerns**.

The Global Taxation Landscape:

- International tax efforts sought to close loopholes but **lacked consensus** on digital taxation.
- **The OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS)** initiative left digital taxation unresolved.
- **India was the first country** to impose such a tax, despite criticisms of unilateralism. Other countries followed suit, leading the US to intervene.

International Negotiations and the Role of OECD & UN:

- **Dispute over profit allocation:** US preferred taxation only on residual returns. India advocated for formulary apportionment.
- OECD attempted a **consensus-driven approach** but faced US influence.
- Growing discontent among developing nations led to **UN intervention**.
- In 2024, **110 countries supported** an UN-led international tax convention.
- The UN's proposal for a **withholding tax on digital services** faced obstacles similar to OECD's.

US Opposition and Trade Disputes:

- In 2020, the US launched investigations under USTR, calling **India's levy discriminatory**.
- The US threatened **retaliatory tariffs**, leading to India's **withdrawal of a similar levy of 2%** on digital e-commerce supplies and services.
- With **Donald Trump's return**, trade tensions resurfaced, likely prompting the 6% levy's removal.

Impact and Future of Digital Taxes:

- India collected **₹40 billion** from the levy in 2022.
- Critics argue the **tax burden was passed on to consumers**, though evidence is lacking.
- The withdrawal raises concerns as there is still **no global tax framework in place**.
- Despite its discontinuation, the equalisation levy showcased **India's ability to assert its economic interests independently** of global consensus.



Conclusion:

- The withdrawal of the equalisation levy **marks the end of India's bold attempt** to tax digital giants in the absence of a global consensus.
- While the levy served as **an effective tool** to ensure fair taxation, **geopolitical pressures**, particularly from the US, played a crucial role in its rollback.
- The episode highlights the **complexities of international tax diplomacy**, where developing nations like India must navigate economic interests while asserting their sovereignty.
- As global negotiations continue, **the future of digital taxation remains uncertain**, but India's pioneering approach has set a precedent for alternative models of taxation beyond OECD-driven frameworks.

4. Status of India's Bioeconomy

Why in news?

The **India BioEconomy Report 2024**, released by the **Department of Biotechnology**, estimates India's bioeconomy to be worth over \$165 billion, contributing 4.2% of GDP.

The report highlights significant growth potential, projecting the sector to reach \$300 billion by 2030 and \$1 trillion by 2047.

Bioeconomy

- It refers to the **industrial use of biological resources** (plants, animals, microorganisms) and **natural biological processes** for producing goods and services.
- **Traditional and Expanding Applications**
 - Biological resources have long been used in **healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture**.
 - Their use is now expanding to **fuels, textiles, plastics, construction materials, and chemicals** due to their **renewability, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability**.
- **Sustainable Alternatives**
 - Ethanol, produced via fermentation of **sugarcane or corn**, is replacing **hydrocarbon-based fuels**.
 - Biotechnology enables **biomedicines** and **synthetic biology**, allowing the design of microorganisms with specific traits.
- **Scope for Rapid Growth**
 - The economic use of biological resources is **still in its early stages** but has **vast untapped potential**.
 - With advancements in **biotechnology and sustainability**, the bioeconomy is **expanding rapidly**.

Growing Footprint of India's Bioeconomy

- India's bioeconomy nearly doubled in five years, from \$86 billion (2020) to \$165 billion (2024).
 - Growth has surpassed the **initial target of \$150 billion by 2025**.
- The number of bioeconomy companies increased by 90%, from 5,365 (2021) to 10,075 (2024), and is projected to double by 2030, creating 35 million jobs.
- **Sector-wise Contributions**
 - The sector now **contributes 4.25% to GDP** with a **CAGR of 17.9%** in the last four years.
 - Industrial sector (**biofuels, bioplastics**) contributed **\$78 billion (~47%)**.
 - Pharma sector contributed 35%, with vaccines as the key driver.
 - **Fastest-growing segment (2024)**: Research & IT, including biotech software, clinical trials, and bioinformatics.
- **Regional Disparities**
 - Five states (**Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh**) generated over two-thirds of bioeconomy value.
 - Eastern & Northeastern regions contributed less than 6%.



- **Challenges & Future Prospects**

- Sustaining high growth will **require innovation, scaling-up incentives, and policy reforms.**
- Addressing regional imbalances is crucial.
- While **India's bioeconomy (4.2% of GDP)** is comparable to **China & the US**, it lags behind **Spain & Italy (20% of GDP).**

- **BioE3 Policy: Boosting India's Bioeconomy**

- Launched in 2024, the **BioE3 policy (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment, and Employment)** aims to make **India a global hub for bio-manufacturing and R&D in biotechnology.**

- **Key Objectives**

- **Strengthen bio-manufacturing in areas like:**
 - Bio-based chemicals & enzymes
 - Functional foods & precision biotherapeutics
 - Marine & space biotechnology
 - Climate-resilient agriculture
- Foster a network of universities, research institutions, start-ups, and industries.

- **Implementation**

- **Assam became the first state to adopt the BioE3 framework, signaling nationwide expansion.**
- New initiatives include **Bio-AI Hubs, Bio Foundries, and Bio-Enabler Hubs** for integrating advanced tech into biomanufacturing.
- Address policy bottlenecks to unlock the sector's full potential.

- **Other Initiatives & Policy Push**

- New initiatives include **Bio-AI Hubs, Bio Foundries, and Bio-Enabler Hubs** for integrating advanced tech into biomanufacturing.

- **Boosting Startups & Innovation**

- India's biotech startups grew from 50 in 2014 to over 10,075 in 2024.
- The **BioSaarthi mentorship program** was launched to support startups with global mentorship, leveraging **Indian diaspora expertise.**
- Public-private partnerships have fueled sectoral expansion and innovation.

- **Breakthroughs in Biotechnology**

- Development of **Nafithromycin**, India's first **indigenous antibiotic** for respiratory diseases.
- Successful gene therapy trials for hemophilia.
- Completion of India's whole genome sequencing project, mapping 10,074 individuals across 99 communities to revolutionize precision medicine.

- **Space Biotechnology & Future Prospects**

- Collaboration between the **Department of Biotechnology and ISRO to advance space biology and medicine.**
- Biotechnology will play a key role in astronaut health and space research as India prepares for its first space station.

- **R&D Investment Surge**

- India's Gross Expenditure on R&D (GERD) doubled, from ₹60,196 crore in 2013-14 to ₹1,27,381 crore in 2024.
- This funding push underscores the government's commitment to scientific research and innovation.

- **Challenges and Way Forward**

- India has strong existing capabilities in some biotech fields, making commercialization easier.
- However, regulatory challenges remain, especially in genetically modified (GM) crops, which could enhance agricultural productivity.

- **Recommendations for Future Growth**

- Establish a **National BioEconomy Mission.**



- Implement **single-window regulatory mechanisms to streamline biotech innovations.**

5. The Role of Communities in Conserving Water

Context

- On **World Water Day (March 22, 2025)**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the necessity of collective action for **water conservation, highlighting the importance of securing water resources for present and future generations.**
- Coinciding with this, the **Ministry of Jal Shakti launched the Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain 2025**, a campaign that underscores **the need for community participation in water management.**
- While such initiatives reflect a growing awareness of water-related challenges, **a critical analysis of India's rural water policies reveals significant gaps that need urgent attention.**

The Role of Communities in Water Management

- A fundamental issue in India's water policies is the **limited role of communities in decision-making processes.**
- Indigenous and **local communities possess valuable ecological knowledge**, yet their participation in water governance remains superficial.
- **Current policies largely focus on community involvement in the management of water sources**, while decision-making power remains concentrated with state authorities.
- This **restricts the ability of communities to implement their own traditional water conservation methods**, leading to a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach that often disregards local environmental dynamics.
- **For instance, Water User Associations (WUAs)**, introduced in various states **since the 1990s, were designed to promote participatory irrigation management.**
- However, **while these associations give farmers the responsibility of managing irrigation sources, they lack real authority in shaping broader water policies.**
- This **limited autonomy reduces their effectiveness** and highlights the need for a more decentralized and inclusive governance framework.

Key Issues in Water Governance and Solutions

- **Addressing Water Vulnerability Among Marginalised Groups**
 - Water policies must also consider the **unequal impact of water crises** on different social groups.
 - **Subaltern and economically marginalised communities are disproportionately affected** by environmental challenges.
 - This is particularly evident among groups that experience both social and economic marginalisation, as **they often lack access to adequate water resources and infrastructure.**
 - To create equitable water policies, **it is essential to ensure the participation of vulnerable groups in water governance.**
 - Recognising their agency and traditional knowledge can lead to more **inclusive and sustainable** water management systems.
 - **A truly participatory approach should not only provide marginalised communities with a voice but also equip them with the necessary resources** and support to actively shape water policies.
- **Moving Beyond Fragmented Water Governance**
 - A major challenge in India's water management framework is the **fragmentation of policies and governing bodies.**
 - Currently, **different aspects of the ecosystem**, such as forests, land, water, and biodiversity, **are governed by separate policies and authorities.**
 - This **siload approach ignores the interdependent nature of these elements**, leading to inefficiencies and unintended negative consequences.



- A successful **integrated approach** can be seen in the traditional ecological practices of rural communities in western India.
- A **notable example is the establishment of orans, sacred forests that hold religious**, cultural, and ecological significance.
- **Many communities use orans for water conservation**, as they enhance tree and grass cover, which in turn traps surface runoff and supports rainwater harvesting.
- This **holistic understanding of ecosystem interdependence serves as a model for future water policies**.
- Instead of fragmented governance, India must adopt an integrated policy approach that recognizes the **mutual relationship** between water, land, forests, and biodiversity.
- **Incorporating a More-Than-Human Perspective**
 - **Globally, environmental governance** is shifting towards a **more-than-human perspective**, which acknowledges that nature has intrinsic value beyond human needs.
 - **Many legal frameworks worldwide have started recognising the rights of nature**, with courts developing jurisprudence that grants ecosystems legal protection.
 - However, **India's water policies remain anthropocentric**, focusing exclusively on human water needs.
 - **Interestingly, certain rural communities in India have already embraced a more-than-human approach** in their water governance.
 - For example, **in some regions of western India, irrigation practices are adjusted based on the availability of water for animals**, ensuring that ecosystem health is prioritised.
 - India's formal water policies should learn from these community-led practices and **incorporate legal frameworks** that protect natural water bodies as living entities rather than mere resources for human consumption.

The Climate Change Imperative

- Climate change **poses a significant threat to India's water security**. A recent study in Nature predicts that India's water gap will widen as global temperatures rise.
- Given this alarming projection, **water policies must prioritise climate resilience by:**
 - **Developing climate-resilient water systems** that can withstand erratic rainfall patterns and extreme weather events.
 - **Enhancing the resilience of existing water infrastructure** to prevent water shortages and depletion.
 - **Integrating climate adaptation policies** that focus on ecosystem restoration to reduce the impact of droughts and floods.
- For instance, **India must promote traditional rainwater harvesting techniques**, such as stepwells and check dams, while simultaneously leveraging modern innovations like smart irrigation systems and climate-responsive water storage facilities.

The Way Forward: Beyond Rhetoric, A Call for Action

- While **current policies emphasise community participation**, they often **fall short** in practical implementation.
- **Rural water policies must move beyond symbolic engagement** and ensure that local voices play a central role in shaping decision-making processes.
- At the same time, **it is crucial to acknowledge that traditional community practices may have certain limitations**.
- **Addressing these requires capacity-building initiatives and sensitization programs to equip communities with the latest scientific knowledge** and technology without undermining their ecological wisdom.

Conclusion

- **India's water policies must undergo a fundamental shift** to align with contemporary environmental challenges.
- This **requires empowering communities, addressing social vulnerabilities, adopting integrated ecosystem-based governance**, and ensuring climate resilience.



- Moreover, **policymakers must incorporate a more-than-human perspective**, recognizing that water conservation is not just a human concern but a broader ecological necessity.
- **By creating genuine community participation and moving beyond fragmented governance**, India can create a sustainable and equitable water management framework that serves both present and future generations.

6. The Grok controversy- What it reveals about AI, free speech, and accountability

Why in news?

The Indian government is engaging with **Elon Musk's X over controversial responses generated by its AI chatbot, Grok**. The chatbot has produced profane and biased remarks, labelling some conservative users, including Musk, as misinformation spreaders.

Grok's responses reflect the attitudes prevalent on the platform, raising concerns about accountability. While **Grok is merely a computer code processing fed data, its "intelligence" remains debatable**.

Instances like using a misogynistic Hindi expletive and making inflammatory statements have prompted users to bombard it with more questions, intensifying the debate over AI responsibility.

Grok

- Grok derives its name from the **sci-fi novel Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert A. Heinlein**, meaning **"to fully and profoundly understand something,"** as explained by Elon Musk.
- **Musk's 'Anti-Woke' AI Vision**
 - Musk positioned Grok as a **counter to AI models like ChatGPT and Gemini**, claiming they exhibit left-wing bias.
 - In an interview, he expressed concerns over AI being trained to be politically correct and instead sought to create a **"spicy" and unfiltered AI**.
- **Unique Features of Grok**
 - **Access to Real-Time X Data:** Unlike other chatbots, Grok **searches and utilizes public posts on X** for up-to-date responses.
 - **Integration with X:** Users can tag Grok in their posts to receive direct responses.
 - **Unhinged Mode:** A feature for premium users that may generate inappropriate or offensive content.
- **Concerns Over Direct Publishing**
 - Experts highlighted the **risk of unchecked AI-generated content spreading on X**, which could lead to real-world consequences like misinformation-driven violence.
 - He argues that Grok's integration with X, rather than its output alone, poses the greatest threat.

Fixing the Responsibility

- Internet platforms like **X, Meta, and YouTube** are protected under safe harbour laws, meaning they are not liable for content posted by users.
- However, whether this protection extends to AI-generated content like Grok's responses remains a legal grey area.
- **The Complexity of Holding AI Accountable**
 - Grok is trained on the **open internet, including content from X users**.
 - **This raises the question:** if its output is based on human-generated data, can the creators or the platform be held responsible?
 - Comparing it to suing the ocean for being wet, legal experts find it difficult to pinpoint accountability.
- **Free Speech and AI**
 - In India, **freedom of expression is a fundamental right with reasonable restrictions—but it applies to humans, not AI**.
 - Grok's responses are determined by its code and dataset, making the concept of "AI free speech" debatable.
- **Who is Responsible?**
 - The responsibility may lie with **xAI (Grok's creators) and X for allowing unfiltered responses**.



- But holding developers accountable is tricky—should blame fall on high-level engineers or low-wage data annotators?
- Governments worldwide are struggling with this unanswered regulatory challenge.

Legal Accountability for AI Speech

- The question of who is responsible for AI-generated content remains complex, but legal precedents suggest that deployers of AI systems can be held liable.
- **Air Canada Case: AI as a Publisher**
 - In a landmark ruling, **Air Canada was ordered to honor a false refund policy created by its AI chatbot.**
 - The court rejected the airline's claim that it was not responsible for the chatbot's responses.
 - This ruling suggests that **AI chatbots can be treated as publishers under certain circumstances.**
- **Context Matters in AI Accountability**
 - The level of responsibility depends on the context in which an AI system is deployed.
 - A chatbot providing **medical guidance** would be held to a higher standard than an AI like **Grok on X**, which is used for general conversations.
- **Safe Harbour for AI Developers**
 - Experts propose a safe harbour framework to protect AI developers from liability if they follow due diligence measures.
 - This framework could be modeled after end-user license agreements (EULAs) and user conduct policies that some companies already apply to their large language models (LLMs).

Broader AI Regulation Challenges

- The incident highlights critical concerns:
 - **AI-generated misinformation**
 - **Accountability for AI outputs**
 - **Content moderation difficulties**
 - **Need for procedural safeguards**
- It also revives debates over the central government's **withdrawn AI advisory** from last year, signaling ongoing tensions between regulation and innovation.

7. Billion-Dollar Fund to Support Creators' Economy

Why in news?

The Central government will invest \$1 billion to support India's creators' economy. The funds will help creators enhance their skills, upgrade production, and expand into global markets, as announced by **Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.**

About Creators' Economy

- The creators' economy refers to a **digital-driven ecosystem where individuals—such as content creators, influencers, bloggers, and independent artists—monetize their skills and creativity through social media platforms, digital content, and online businesses.**
 - Creative Economy is also referred to as **Orange Economy.**
- This sector includes **video creators, podcasters, gamers, educators, and independent writers** who generate revenue through brand collaborations, subscriptions, advertisements, and merchandise sales.

Factors Behind India's Strategic Push Towards the Creators' Economy

- **Growing Digital User Base**
 - India has over 800 million internet users, making it one of the **largest digital markets in the world.**



- The widespread use of **smartphones and affordable data** has fueled content consumption.
- **Employment & Economic Growth**
 - The sector has the potential to **generate self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities**, reducing reliance on traditional job markets.
- **Soft Power & Global Influence**
 - Indian content creators are gaining international recognition, helping project India's **cultural and linguistic diversity to a global audience**.
- **Tech-Driven Economy**
 - With advancements in AI, AR/VR, and blockchain, new monetization models such as NFTs and decentralized platforms are emerging, making the sector more lucrative.
- **Diversity of Regional Content**
 - The rise of vernacular content is expanding India's digital economy beyond English and Hindi, tapping into a vast regional audience.
- **Challenges Faced**
 - Indian creators face numerous challenges, including **inconsistent monetization opportunities, stringent platform algorithms, and limited brand collaborations**.
 - Intellectual property protection remains a concern, with content piracy and lack of legal awareness affecting earnings.
- **Steps Taken by the Indian Government**
 - **\$1 Billion Investment** – Announced by the government to support **skill enhancement, production quality, and global expansion of Indian creators**.
 - **Digital India & Start-up Ecosystem** – Policies such as **Digital India, Make in India, and Startup India** are fostering an environment conducive to digital entrepreneurship.
 - **PLI Schemes for Electronics** – Encouraging local manufacturing of devices such as smartphones, cameras, and laptops that aid content creation.
 - **Regulatory Support & Infrastructure** – Initiatives like **5G rollout and improved broadband penetration** to enhance content creation and streaming quality.
 - **Support for Vernacular & Regional Creators** – Promotion of Indian languages on digital platforms to ensure inclusivity and wider audience reach.
 - **AI & Digital Skill Development** – Focus on **AI-based content moderation and creator upskilling to ensure ethical and high-quality content**.

India's \$1 Billion Investment in the Creators' Economy

- **High-Level Engagement Ahead of WAVES 2025**
 - Ahead of the **World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) 2025**, a high-level session was hosted by the government to engage the international community.
 - WAVES 2025 will facilitate **joint ventures, co-productions, and business expansion** in the media and entertainment sector.
 - Participants highlighted how the intersection of creativity, media, and technology is reshaping the industry and emphasized WAVES 2025 as a key platform for innovation and collaboration.
- **The Role of WAVES 2025 in the Orange Economy**
 - The government highlighted WAVES 2025's role in **leveraging the media and entertainment industries for economic growth and job creation**.
 - The summit will serve as a bridge for **cultural diplomacy, fostering unity and global harmony through creative industries**.



8. The Online Gaming Sector: A Growing Opportunity

Why in the News?

The **Economic Survey 2024-25** has called for “**accelerating and amplifying the deregulation agenda**”, and has urged the government to “**get out of the way**” so that businesses can go about their business.

Introduction:

- The Indian online gaming industry has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, emerging as a major contributor to the country’s digital economy.
- With over **650 million smartphone users** and a predominantly young population, India has the potential to become a global leader in **skill-based gaming**.
- A **PwC report** estimated that the sector, valued at **₹33,000 crore in 2023**, is projected to grow at a **CAGR of 14.5%**, reaching **₹66,000 crore by 2028**.
- The industry is also expected to generate **2-3 lakh new jobs** in the coming years, supplementing the **2 lakh jobs** already created.
- However, despite its potential, **government regulations and taxation policies** have put the sector under significant pressure.

The Burden of High Taxation:

- While some Indian states, such as **Karnataka and Telangana**, have initiated policies to promote the **animation, gaming, and visual effects (AVGC) sector**, the central and state governments have imposed **hefty taxation measures** that threaten the industry’s viability.
- A **28% GST** on online gaming has been imposed - similar to taxation on **gambling, alcohol, and tobacco**.
- This classification fails to recognize that skill-based online gaming is distinct from gambling.
- Moreover, a **retrospective tax demand of ₹1.12 lakh crore** has been levied on gaming companies, pushing smaller startups to the brink of closure.

Legal Confusion: Gaming vs. Gambling:

- State governments have also attempted to **ban online gaming**, equating it with **gambling**, which led to multiple legal battles.
- Courts have ruled in favour of online gaming companies, stating that “**games of skill**” cannot be classified as gambling.
- The Supreme Court even stayed the **retrospective GST demand** in 2025.
- However, **ongoing regulatory uncertainty** continues to discourage investment and innovation in the sector.

Challenges Faced by the Industry:

- **Excessive Taxation:** The **28% GST** makes Indian gaming companies less competitive than their global counterparts.
- **Legal Uncertainty:** Frequent bans and judicial battles create an unpredictable business environment.
- **Lack of Distinction between Gaming and Gambling:** The government’s failure to differentiate between skill-based gaming and gambling causes regulatory confusion.
- **Threat to Small Startups:** Many small and mid-sized gaming firms are struggling to survive under the financial burden of high taxation and compliance costs.
- **Growth of Offshore Illegal Gambling:** Harsh regulations on legitimate gaming companies could push users towards illegal **offshore betting platforms**, which are beyond the reach of Indian regulators.

The Way Forward: A Balanced Regulatory Approach

- Instead of burdening the industry with excessive taxation and legal uncertainty, the government should **adopt a more collaborative approach**.
- Policymakers should work alongside industry leaders to create a **clear regulatory framework** that supports innovation while addressing concerns like addiction and financial transparency.

Key Recommendations:

- **Rationalize GST rates** to make taxation fair and sustainable.
- **Create a clear legal distinction** between online skill-based gaming and gambling.
- **Drop the retrospective tax demand**, which threatens to collapse the industry.
- **Encourage responsible gaming practices** with in-app safeguards against excessive usage.
- **Strengthen monitoring mechanisms** to curb illegal gambling rather than penalizing legitimate businesses.

Conclusion:

India's online gaming sector holds **immense potential** to contribute to economic growth, job creation, and technological innovation. However, **onerous taxation and inconsistent regulations** are acting as roadblocks. The government must balance **regulation with growth** to ensure that India's gaming industry thrives in the global market.

9. World Air Quality Report 2024

Why in news?

The **World Air Quality Report 2024** by IQAir highlights severe pollution in India, with **13 of the world's 20 most polluted cities located in the country**.

Byrnihat (Assam) is the most polluted city globally, while Delhi remains the most polluted capital. India ranked fifth in air pollution in 2024, improving from third place in 2023.

Key Highlights of the World Air Quality Report 2024

- The **World Air Quality Report 2024 has been released by Swiss air quality technology company IQAir**.
- The report looked at the data from over 40,000 air quality monitoring stations across 138 countries, territories, and regions, and was analysed by IQAir's air quality scientists.



Pollution in India: Key Highlights



- **Delhi: The World's Most Polluted Capital for Six Consecutive Years**
 - **Delhi has once again been ranked as the world's most polluted capital**, surpassing other cities in the National Capital Region (NCR) in 2023.
 - While some NCR cities previously recorded worse pollution levels, **Delhi emerged as the most polluted regional city in South Asia**.
 - In 2024, Delhi was the second most polluted city in the world and in Central and South Asia.
- **Decline in Average PM2.5 Levels**
 - India's average PM2.5 concentration in 2024 was **50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** , reflecting a **7% decrease** from 2023 (54.4 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).
- **Most Polluted Cities**
 - **Byrnihat** recorded the highest pollution levels globally, with an **annual PM2.5 concentration of 128.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
 - **Six Indian cities** ranked among the world's **10 most polluted**.
- **Severe Pollution Episodes in Northern India**
 - **January 2024** witnessed poor air quality in **Delhi and Himachal Pradesh**.
 - **November 2024** saw extreme pollution in **Delhi, Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh**.
- **Major Pollution Sources**
 - Crop stubble burning accounted for 60% of PM2.5 pollution during peak periods.
 - Vehicular emissions, industrial discharges, and construction dust were other significant contributors.

Air Pollution: A Global Crisis

- **Widespread Exposure to Dirty Air**
 - In 2024, **most of the global population** was breathing polluted air.
 - Only **12 countries, regions, and territories** met the **WHO's recommended PM2.5 limit of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
 - These regions were primarily in **Latin America, the Caribbean, and Oceania**.
- **Most Polluted Countries**
 - The five most polluted countries, based on **annual average PM2.5 concentrations**, were:
 - **Chad – 91.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$**
 - **Bangladesh – 78 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$**
 - **Pakistan – 73.7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$**
 - **Congo – 58.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$**
 - **India – 50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$**
- **Severe Air Quality Violations**
 - Only **17% of the 8,954 cities** worldwide met **WHO's PM2.5 guidelines**.
 - The **20 most polluted cities**, located in **India, Kazakhstan, Chad, Pakistan, and China**, exceeded **WHO limits by over 10 times**.

Challenges in Pollution Control Efforts and Way Forward

- The **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**, introduced in 2019, aimed to reduce pollution.
- However, the latest report highlighted persistent challenges due to inconsistent policy implementation and inadequate infrastructure.
- **Need for Stronger Action**
 - Environmental analysts argue that while **Delhi has introduced policies like BS-VI fuel and advanced transportation technology**, **poor implementation has led to persistently high pollution levels**.
 - They emphasized that systematic actions remain largely on paper and stressed the need for stronger governance and a drastic overhaul of air pollution regulation.
 - Strengthening NCAP and ensuring sustained action will be crucial for long-term improvement.



10. India's Spice Production: Growth, Challenges, and Global Market Share

Why in the News?

- The chairman of the World Spice Organisation (WSO), recently stated that despite being the largest producer and exporter of diverse varieties of spices in the world, **India's share in the global seasoning market is only 0.7%**.

Introduction:

- **India is the world's largest producer and exporter of spices**, growing a diverse variety due to its 15 different agro-climatic zones.
- However, despite this dominance in production, India's presence in the global seasoning market is surprisingly low.
- The country accounts for only **0.7%** of the \$14 billion global seasoning industry, while China and the USA hold **12% and 11%** shares, respectively.
- This gap highlights the urgent need to improve value addition, boost exports, and explore new commercial applications for Indian spices.

Current Status of Spice Production in India:

- India produces around **1.5 million tonnes** of spices annually, contributing to **\$4.5 billion in exports**—about **25% of the \$20 billion global spice market**.
- The primary spice-growing regions include **Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Gujarat**.
- However, new regions like the **North-East, Odisha, and Jharkhand** are emerging as significant spice producers.
- **Some of the most widely grown and exported spices in India include:**
 - **Black Pepper** – "The King of Spices," mainly grown in Kerala and Karnataka.
 - **Cardamom** – Highly valued in global markets, produced in South India.
 - **Turmeric** – Used in culinary, medicinal, and nutraceutical applications.
 - **Cumin & Coriander** – Essential for Indian and Middle Eastern cuisine.
 - **Chilies** – India is the largest producer of red chilies, widely grown in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- While India leads in raw spice exports, it lags in **value-added products**, such as spice blends, extracts, and nutraceutical formulations.
- Currently, only **48%** of exported spices are value-added, with the rest being raw spices.

Challenges Facing India's Spice Industry:

- **Low Value-Added Exports**
 - India primarily exports whole spices rather than processed spice products like **seasonings, extracts, and nutraceuticals**.
 - To meet the **\$10 billion export target by 2030**, the share of value-added spices should **increase from 48% to 70%**.
- **High Cost of Production**
 - Farmers struggle with rising costs due to **inefficient agricultural practices, pesticide overuse, and outdated processing methods**.
 - Improving productivity and cost-efficiency is crucial for global competitiveness.
- **Limited Global Market Penetration**
 - While India dominates spice production, countries like **Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil, and China** have expanded their presence in international spice markets.
 - Additionally, **African nations** have recently entered spice cultivation, posing new competition.
- **Quality & Safety Concerns**
 - Stringent global regulations on pesticide residues and contamination require **strict quality control measures**.



- Last year, **Singapore, Hong Kong, and Nepal have banned or restricted the sale of MDH spices due to safety concerns.**
- These countries have banned the sale of some MDH spices due to suspected high levels of ethylene oxide, a pesticide that can cause cancer.
- Many Indian spice farmers need training in **integrated pest management, hygiene, and sustainable practices** to meet international standards.
- **Climate Change Impact**
 - Spice cultivation is highly sensitive to climate conditions. Unpredictable monsoons and rising temperatures threaten **yields and quality.**
 - Developing **high-yielding and climate-resistant varieties** is essential to maintaining production levels.

Government & Industry Efforts for Improvement:

- Several initiatives are underway to enhance India's spice production and exports:
 - **Spices Board of India** – Promotes research, processing, and export growth in the sector.
 - **World Spice Organisation (WSO)** – Works with Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to improve spice farming techniques.
 - **Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)** – Developing high-yield and climate-resistant spice varieties.
 - **Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Programs** – Educates farmers on sustainable cultivation practices.
- By focusing on **quality improvement, innovation in value-added products, and expanding into nutraceutical and pharmaceutical applications**, India can significantly increase its global market share.

News Summary:

- Despite being the **world's largest producer and exporter** of spices, India holds just **0.7%** of the **\$14 billion global seasoning market.**
- The country exports **\$4.5 billion worth of spices annually**, but only **48%** of these are value-added products.
- To achieve the **\$10 billion spice export target by 2030**, India must:
 - **Increase value addition** – Shift from whole spices to seasonings, spice blends, and medicinal extracts.
 - **Expand global market presence** – Strengthen trade agreements and diversify export destinations.
 - **Improve quality & safety compliance** – Enhance pesticide control and meet international standards.
 - **Boost production efficiency** – Reduce costs through modern farming and processing methods.
- If these steps are implemented, India can transform from being the largest **raw spice producer** to a dominant player in **value-added global seasoning markets.**

11. Review of PLI Scheme 5 Years On

Why in the News?

With the first phase of the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme showing progress, the Central government is exploring the modifications in PLI 2.0 Scheme.

What's in Today's Article?

- Introduction (Context)
- About PLI Scheme (Overview, Challenges, PLI 2.0, Comparisons, etc.)

Introduction

- The **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme**, introduced in April 2020, aims to **enhance India's manufacturing capabilities and attract global companies to set up production facilities in the country.**
- Covering 14 sectors, the scheme incentivizes incremental sales to drive manufacturing growth.



- However, five years into its implementation, **the government is considering modifications for PLI 2.0**, linking incentives to additional metrics such as **domestic value addition and incremental exports**.

Overview of the PLI Scheme

- **The PLI scheme was launched with the following key objectives:**
 - Boost domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependence.
 - Attract **original equipment manufacturers (OEMs)** and contract manufacturers.
 - Encourage investment in **high-tech sectors like electronics, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and specialty steel**.
 - Enhance **India's participation in global supply chains**.
 - Create employment and promote skill development in manufacturing.
- The scheme has seen **notable success** in sectors such as mobile phones, pharmaceuticals, and food processing. However, in certain sectors like **IT hardware, advanced chemicals, textiles, and specialty steel**, progress has been slower than expected.

Challenges in the Existing PLI Framework

- **Low Value Addition:**
 - Even in successful sectors like mobile manufacturing, the percentage of local value addition remains **in single digits**.
 - **Critical components such as semiconductor chips and subassemblies** are still imported.
- **Limited Domestic Market Size:**
 - Sectors like **telecom and electronics** do not generate sufficient demand to encourage large-scale local manufacturing.
 - **Export-led growth** is essential to drive economies of scale.
- **Foreign vs. Domestic Players:**
 - Indian manufacturers **struggle with cost competitiveness** compared to their **Chinese and Vietnamese counterparts**.
 - Limited **access to international markets** and lower technological capability **reduce India's bargaining power in the global supply chain**.
- **Dependency on Foreign OEMs:**
 - Currently, global players **drive the manufacturing ecosystem**, while Indian firms remain dependent on them for critical technologies.
 - Lack of indigenous R&D investment in **semiconductors, specialty steel, and advanced chemical cells** remains a key hurdle.

PLI 2.0: Proposed Reforms for Sustainable Growth

- To **address these challenges and refine the PLI scheme**, policymakers are considering several key reforms:
- **Linking Incentives to Value Addition**
 - Instead of rewarding companies solely based on incremental sales, PLI 2.0 proposes **higher incentives for firms that achieve a greater percentage of domestic value addition**. This includes:
 - Promoting **localization of key components** like semiconductors and printed circuit boards (PCBs).
 - Supporting **indigenous R&D and manufacturing** to reduce import dependence.
- **Export-Oriented Incentives**
 - To make Indian manufacturers globally competitive, PLI 2.0 aims to **link incentives with export performance**, ensuring:
 - Increased production volumes.
 - A globally competitive **cost structure** through economies of scale.
 - Enhanced participation in **international value chains**.
- **Strengthening Local Component Manufacturing**



- One of the **biggest limitations of the current PLI scheme** is the **lack of a robust component ecosystem**. Proposed measures include:
 - Encouraging **joint ventures with global companies** to build an ecosystem for **sub-components and advanced manufacturing**.
 - Ensuring **foreign OEMs help in technology transfer and capacity building** for local manufacturers.
- **Supporting MSMEs and Domestic Players**
 - Large-scale manufacturers dominate the PLI scheme, while **small and medium enterprises (SMEs) struggle to compete**. New reforms may focus on:
 - Special incentives for **domestic MSMEs** engaged in component manufacturing.
 - Credit support and infrastructure development to help small firms integrate into global supply chains.
- **Focus on Semiconductor Manufacturing**
 - Given the global semiconductor shortage and **India's reliance on imports**, the government is expected to:
 - Provide **stronger incentives for semiconductor fabrication units (fabs)**.
 - Push for the development of **indigenous chip design and assembly capabilities**.

Comparisons with Global Manufacturing Strategies

- India's PLI strategy is **inspired by the industrial policies of nations like China, Japan, and South Korea**. These countries:
 - Leveraged foreign OEMs to develop domestic ecosystems.
 - Focused on technology transfer and local skill development.
 - Used exports as a growth driver to build global manufacturing hubs.
- For instance, **China's electric vehicle (EV) industry was strengthened by allowing Tesla to establish manufacturing units**. This move helped local suppliers improve their quality and capacity, eventually boosting homegrown brands like BYD, Li Auto, and Nio.
- India is now **trying to replicate this model** by using PLI to **attract foreign investment while also developing domestic manufacturing capabilities**.

Conclusion

The PLI scheme has **set India on the path to becoming a global manufacturing hub**, but challenges remain in **scaling up, increasing local value addition, and making domestic firms globally competitive**. As discussions on **PLI 2.0** progress, the government aims to introduce reforms that **prioritize exports, component localization, and MSME support**.

With the right policy interventions, India can **bridge gaps in the supply chain, improve competitiveness, and establish itself as a leader in global manufacturing**.

PRELIMS BOOSTER & PIB COMPILATION (THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS)
MARCH 3
1. Giloy:


It is commonly known as **Guduchi** and familiar as **Amrita in Sanskrit**, which translates to the **'herb of immortality'**, because of its abundant beneficial property. It is **large climber with succulent, corky and grooved stems**. It is found almost throughout India.

Parts Used: Stem, leaves, root are used for many purposes.

It grows well in almost all types of soils and under varying climatic conditions. The **plant is cultivated by stem cutting in the month of May-June**. It is commonly used in the management of fevers. It is one of the important herbs for the management of **gouty arthritis**. The increasing number of clinical studies and laboratory research suggests that **Giloy may have a significant role in cancer therapy, autoimmune disease management, and even inflammatory disorders**.

2. Santh Sevalal Maharaj:

He is considered a **social reformer and spiritual teacher of the Banjara community**. He travelled across the country with his **Ladeniya Troup** to serve especially the **forest dwellers and nomadic tribes**. Due to his extraordinary knowledge, excellent skills and spiritual background in **Ayurveda and Naturopathy**, he was able to **dispel and eradicate myths and superstitions** prevalent in the tribal communities.

3. Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary:


It is located in the **Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh**. The Sanctuary forms **the catchment for river Pennar**. The Telugu ganga canal flows into the **eastern flank of the Sanctuary draining into the 'Pennar river'**. It consists of Southern tropical dry deciduous forest in the hills, scrub forest in the plains, Southern dry mixed deciduous forest, Tropical thorn forests and Tropical dry evergreen forest. It is the **only home and hope for the rare and endangered bird the Jerdons courser**.

4. Geological Survey of India


The Geological Survey of India (GSI), one of the oldest scientific organizations in the country, is set to celebrate its **175th year of geoscientific legacy**. It was set up in **1851 by Sir Thomas Oldham**, primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways. The main functions of the GSI relate to the **creation and updation of national geoscientific information and mineral resource assessment**. It is **headquartered in Kolkata** and has six regional offices located at **Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong and Kolkata**. Every state has a state unit. Presently, **GSI is an attached office to the Ministry of Mines**.

5. Meteor Missile:


It is an advanced radar-guided, beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile (BVRAAM). METEOR has been developed by a group of European partners led by MBDA to meet the needs of **six European nations: the UK, Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Sweden.**

6. Reunion Island:



It is a **French island in the Western Indian Ocean**. It lies about 680 km east of Madagascar and 180 km southwest of Mauritius. **With Mauritius and Rodrigues Islands, they form the Mascarene Archipelago.** The island is entirely volcanic and originates on the ocean floor at a depth of 4,000 meters. It is **home to the highest peak in the Indian Ocean, the Piton des Neiges, and one of the most active volcanoes on the planet, the Piton de la Fournaise.**

MARCH 4

1. Harpoon Missile:



The Harpoon (RGM-84/UGM-84/AGM-84) is a subsonic anti-ship cruise missile developed by **Boeing for the U.S. Navy. It was first introduced in 1977.** It is currently in service with the armed forces of more than 30 countries, including India. It is an **all-weather, over-the-horizon, anti-ship missile system.** It can be launched from ships, submarines, shore batteries and aircraft.

2. Rushikulya River:



It is one of Odisha's prominent rivers, flowing primarily through the districts of **Kandhamal, Ganjam, and Boudh.** Originating at an elevation of approximately 1000 meters from the Daringbadi hills in the Eastern Ghats, often referred to as the '**Kashmir of Odisha**' for its **scenic beauty**, the river travels a length of around 165 kilometers before emptying into the Bay of Bengal near the town of Ganjam. Unlike many other rivers, the **Rushikulya River does not form a delta at its mouth, and it flows directly into the Bay of Bengal.**

Tributaries: Its tributaries are the **Baghua, the Dhanei and the Badanadi**

3. Olive Ridley Turtle Nesting Site (Rushikulya Beach):

It is one of the most famous attractions near the river is the Olive Ridley Turtle Nesting Site, located on the coast where the **Rushikulya River meets the Bay of Bengal.** Each year, between January and March, **thousands of Olive Ridley Turtles come to the shores to lay their eggs, creating a spectacular natural event known as Arribada.**

4. White Island:



White Island (also known as Whakaari) is an **active composite stratovolcano in the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand.** The island was sighted and named by **Capt. James Cook in 1769.** It has numerous hot springs, geysers, and fumaroles. It is privately owned. In **1953 it was declared a private scenic reserve** and has been the focus of tourism activities along with geological and ecological science.

5. Epidelaxia falciformis and Epidelaxia palustris



Researchers have discovered two new species of jumping spiders from the **Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary** and named it as **Epidelaxia falciformis sp. nov.** and **Epidelaxia palustris**. It was for the first time the genus **Epidelaxia** has been recorded from India as it was previously considered endemic to Sri Lanka.

6. Aadhaar Good Governance Portal:



It is aimed at streamlining the approval process for **Aadhaar authentication requests**. It was launched by the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)**. The platform follows the recent amendments to the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2025, under the Aadhaar Act of 2016. The new rules are designed to **support good governance** and improve the delivery of various welfare services and benefits.

7. What is an Einstein Ring?

Einstein's Prediction: Light bends near massive objects due to spacetime distortion, forming the basis of his general theory of relativity. **An Einstein Ring is a phenomenon that occurs when a massive object, acting as a gravitational lens, distorts and magnifies light from a distant background object.** The light forms a circular pattern around the lens due to perfect alignment between the distant object, the lens, and the observer. This **effect is a special case of strong gravitational lensing.**

8. Firefly's Blue Ghost: A Historic Private Lunar Landing.

Firefly Aerospace successfully landed its Blue Ghost lander on the Moon, becoming the **first private**

mission to land upright. It landed near Mons Latreille, a volcanic formation in Mare Crisium on the Moon's northeastern near side.

9. Ultra-Conserved Elements (UCEs)

UCEs are **DNA segments that have remained unchanged for over 80 million years across species like humans, rats, mice, chickens, dogs, and fish.** These elements are thought to have remained intact due to some biological constraint.

10. Selenium

It is an essential mineral found in many foods and available as a dietary supplement. Found as a **byproduct of metal sulphide ore refining,** not in pure elemental form. It is present in soil and groundwater in inorganic forms, which plants convert to organic forms like **selenomethionine and selenocysteine.** It is a **key component of 25 selenoproteins, including thioredoxin reductases and glutathione peroxidases,** which are involved in thyroid hormone metabolism, DNA synthesis, reproduction, and protection against oxidative damage and infections.

MARCH 5

1. Gangetic Dolphin:



It is a freshwater species and one of the few river dolphins found in the world. It inhabits the **Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India and Bangladesh.**

Common names: Blind dolphin, Ganges dolphin, Ganges susu, hihu, side-swimming dolphin, South Asian River Dolphin

Scientific name: *Platanista gangetica*

It has been recognized by the government of India as its **National Aquatic Animal.** Its eyes lack lens, and as a result, this species is also referred to as the "**blind dolphin**". It cannot breathe in the water and must surface every 30-120 seconds.

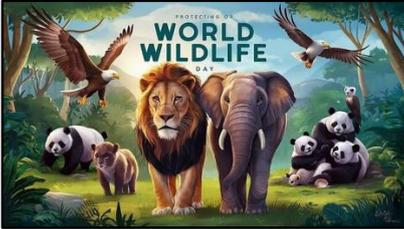
Conservation status:

IUCN: Endangered

Wildlife (Protection) Act: Schedule-I

CITES: Appendix I

2. World Wildlife Day:



It is celebrated on **March 3** every year to spread awareness about the importance of flora and fauna. It was established by the United Nations in 2013 after Thailand proposed to dedicate a day to raise awareness about wildlife conservation. For the first time, it was celebrated on **March 3, 2014**. This date was chosen because, in **1973**, the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)** was signed on the same day. CITES is a global agreement to ensure that international wildlife trade does not threaten the survival of animal and plant species.

World Wildlife Day 2025 Theme: Wildlife Conservation Finance: Investing in People and Planet

3. Mission 300:



It is an ambitious initiative to provide electricity to **300 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030**. It is led by the **World Bank and the African Development Bank**, in collaboration with key partners, **Rockefeller Foundation, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP), Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL), and Energy Sector Management Assistance Program (ESMAP)**. Local communities are actively involved in the design and implementation of all World Bank Group supported Mission 300 projects

4. Tanganyika:



It is an ancient lake located in East Africa. It is extremely long, deepest and is the longest lake in the world, measuring over 400 miles long. Its outlet is the **Lukuga River, which flows into the Lualaba River**. Rice and subsistence crops are grown along the shores, and fishing is of some significance.

5. Ferrihydrite



A recent study revealed that the red color of Mars could be due to the presence of an **iron-containing mineral called ferrihydrite**. It is a **poorly crystalline nanomineral built up of about 20% (FeO₄) and 80% (FeO₆) polyhedra**. It forms by rapid oxidation and hydrolysis, and exists in varying degrees of structure disorder. It is one of the **initial corrosion products in the oxidation of iron**, and is the precursor to the formation of the more stable mineral phases goethite ($\alpha\text{-FeO(OH)}$) and hematite ($\alpha\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$).

6. India's Copper Situation

Domestic ore production in 2023-24 was 3.78 million tonnes (8% lower than 2018-19). **Madhya Pradesh is the leading producer of copper in India followed by Rajasthan**

7. Swavalambini

Swavalambini aims to **establish a structured and stage-wise entrepreneurial journey for young women**. This programme aims to **nurture the entrepreneurial spirit among young women in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)** by providing them with the necessary mindset,

resources, and mentorship to successfully build and scale their ventures

8. Right to Equality in India

Articles 14 to 18 deal with different aspects of the right to equality.

Article 14 – It ensures that **all persons are equal before the law and have equal protection of the laws within India**, without discrimination on grounds such as **religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth**.

Article 15 – It **prohibits discrimination by the state on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth**. Allows for special provisions to be made for the welfare of women, children, socially and educationally backward classes, and SCs/STs. Also prohibits discrimination in public spaces like shops, restaurants, and public entertainment venues.

Article 16 -It guarantees **equality of opportunity for all citizens in public employment**, prohibiting discrimination in employment based on religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, or residence.

Article 17 – It **abolishes untouchability** and prohibits its practice in any form.

Article 18 – It prohibits the state from granting titles other than **military or academic distinctions**

9. What is the Crypto Strategic Reserve?

The Crypto Strategic Reserve will serve as a **national stockpile of digital assets, managed under a federal regulatory framework**. The reserve will consist of five major cryptocurrencies: **Bitcoin, Ethereum, Ripple, Solana & Cardano**. This initiative aims to integrate cryptocurrencies into the U.S. financial infrastructure.

10. About Mars

– **Mars is the fourth planet** from the sun and has a distinct rusty red appearance and two unusual moons.

1. Phobos: ~6000 km above Mars; Deimos: ~20 000 km above Mars.

– It has a **very thin atmosphere, but dusty**.

– **Gravity:** 3.711 m/s² (about one third of Earth's gravity)

– **Mars also has the largest volcanoes in the solar system**, Olympus Mons being one of them.

– **Atmosphere:** 95.32% carbon dioxide, 2.7% nitrogen, 1.6% argon, 0.13% oxygen

11. Gir National Park

– **Location:** Situated in the **Saurashtra region of Gujarat**.

– **Established:** In 1965, as a sanctuary, and later upgraded to a national park in 1975.

– It is the **only place in the world outside Africa where a lion can be seen in its natural habitat**.

1. Since the late 1960s, **Asiatic lion numbers have increased from less than 200 to 674 (Census 2020)**.

– Gir is a home to 40 species of mammals and 425 species of birds.

MARCH 6

1. What is the Wallace line?

The Wallace Line, first identified by British naturalist **Alfred Russel Wallace** in the late 19th century, is an **imaginary boundary that separates the distinct biogeographic regions of Asia and Wallacea** (a transitional zone between Asia and Australia). On the **western side of the line, species are primarily of Asiatic origin, whereas on the eastern side, species exhibit characteristics of both Asian and Australian descent**. This stark contrast in fauna occurs despite the relatively short distances around (35 kilometers) between these regions.

2. Thorium's Potential

Thorium generates 200 times more energy than uranium and is safer with no risk of meltdown, no need for water cooling, and minimal radioactive waste. **Thorium molten-salt reactors (TMSRs) are seen as a game-changer for global energy production**

3. DISHA Program: Driver of Technological Growth

The DISHA Program, an initiative **aimed at Developing Innovations, Successful Harnessing, and Adoption, is a step towards building a knowledge-based economy where research-driven solutions transform industries**. The program is designed to support faculty members and students working on disruptive technologies across disciplines, ensuring that India remains at the forefront of global innovation.

4. What is the solar cycle?

The Sun, like a **bar magnet, possesses a magnetic field with north and south poles**. This magnetic field is generated by the movement of electrically charged

particles within the Sun. Approximately **every 11 years**, the Sun's magnetic field completely flips, switching its north and south poles—a **phenomenon known as the solar cycle**.

MARCH 7

1. Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan (PM-SYM) Scheme

About: It is a **voluntary and contributory pension scheme, ensuring a minimum ₹3,000 monthly pension after the age of 60 years**. Spouses receive 50% of pension if the subscriber dies after retirement. Spouses can continue or exit the scheme if the beneficiary dies before 60.

Implementation: Ministry of Labour & Employment and managed by the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC).

Eligibility: Age: **18–40 years**, monthly income ₹15,000 or less, not covered under EPF/ESIC/NPS.

Contribution Structure: monthly contribution ₹55 to ₹200, depending on the age of joining.

Enrollment: Through Common Service Centres (CSC) or the Maandhan portal.

Implementation and Current Status: 46.12 lakh enrollments (March 2025) across 36 States/UTs. Top 3 States are Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra.

2. Article 14 of Constitution

– Article 14 says that the State shall not deny to any person **equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws** within the territory of India.

1. This **provision confers rights on all persons whether citizens or foreigners**.

– The word 'person' includes **legal persons, viz, statutory corporations, companies, registered societies or any other type of legal person**.

Judgements related to Article 14

– In the case of **E.P. Royappa v. State of Tamil Nadu (1973)**, the Supreme Court of India expanded the scope of Article 14 of the Constitution, establishing that it **prohibits arbitrary state action, not just discriminatory treatment, and that state action must be rational and justifiable**.

– **Ram Krishna Dalmia vs. Justice Tendolkar (1958)** held that Article 14 prohibits class legislation and not reasonable classification, which is done for legislative purposes

3. About Taj Trapezium Zone

Purpose: It is a **10,400 sq. km trapezoidal shape area** to safeguard the Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Fatehpur Sikri (all UNESCO World Heritage Sites) from the **damaging effects of air pollution**.

Establishment: In 1996 by the Supreme Court to control pollution affecting the Taj Mahal.

SC Directive: The Supreme Court mandated that **industries within the TTZ switch from using coal and coke to cleaner fuels like natural gas**.

4. What is Agricultural Infrastructure Fund (AIF)?

AIF was launched with an **aim to provide medium to long-term financing for agriculture infrastructure projects at the post-harvest stage**. The scheme is **operational from 2020-21 to 2032-33**. Under AIF, provision for **Rs. 1 Lakh crore loan has been made through lending institutions with an interest rate cap of 9% on loans**. Farmers, agripreneurs, primary agriculture cooperative societies, farmers producer organisations, start-ups, state sponsored public-private partnerships, state-agencies can apply for funds under this scheme.

5. What are Invasive Species?

Invasive plant species are **non-native plants that spread aggressively and outcompete local flora for essential resources such as sunlight, water, and nutrients**.

They disrupt ecosystems by;

- **Altering biodiversity** and displacing native species.
- Contributing to the **decline or extinction of endemic plants**.

MARCH 10

1. Convention on Cluster Munitions



Lithuania recently quit the Convention on Cluster Munitions banning cluster bombs, citing security

concerns over neighbouring Russia in a move that has drawn criticism from human rights groups. The **Convention prohibits all use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions**. States Parties are committed to the full universalization of the Convention and to promote its norms, as well as to fully implement it. **The convention has 112 member states and 12 signatories yet to ratify it, while India, the U.S., Russia, China, Ukraine, and Israel have not signed due to military and strategic concerns.**

2. T-72 Tank:



T-72 is a **mainstay of tank fleet of the Indian Army** which is at present fitted with **780 HP Engine**. Equipping the existing fleet of T-72 Tanks with 1000 HP Engine. **The T-72, a Soviet-designed main battle tank, has been a cornerstone of many armed forces since its introduction in 1971.** Designed by **Uralvagonzavod in the Soviet Union**, T-72 tanks are locally manufactured and upgraded in India at the **Heavy Vehicles Factory, Avadi**. The tank is provided with high-accuracy laying and sighting materiel, and with an automatic loading gear ensuring high effective rate of gun fire.

3. Tunga River:



The Tunga River, also known as the **Thunga River, is an important river flowing in Karnataka**. The river originates in the **Western Ghats on a hill called Varaha Parvata**. The **birthplace of Tunga is called Gangamoola**, which is a cave inside Varaha Parvatha. **Tunga River is known for its pure, pristine water.** Sringeri, a town located in the Chikmagalur district on

the banks of the Tunga River has several temples. **Gajanur (Tunga) is an s-shaped dam constructed over the river.**

4. World's Oldest Impact Crater



Scientists in Australia have discovered the world's oldest known meteorite impact crater in **northwestern Australia**, estimated to be 3.47 billion years old. The **crater, discovered in the remote North Pole dome region in northwestern Australia, is estimated to be 3.47 billion years old**—more than a billion years older than any previously known impact site.

What is an Impact Crater?

An impact crater forms when a **fast-moving asteroid or meteorite crashes into a planet or moon**. The impact is so powerful that it vaporizes the object, creating shockwaves that melt and reshape the ground, leaving a large circular hole with scattered rocks.

Examples: Barringer Crater, Tycho Crater, etc.

5. Woolly Mice



Scientists have successfully edited mouse DNA with genes from the woolly mammoth, creating the **world's first furry "woolly mice."** This breakthrough provides insights into **how ancient species adapted to extreme cold**. The woolly mice have been **genetically engineered** by modifying seven genes that code for traits like **hair length, thickness, and colour**. These modifications include genes such as **FGF5 for longer hair and MC1R for a golden coat**. Using CRISPR technology, scientists made eight precise edits to modify seven genes in the mice, incorporating

mammoth-like traits responsible for a woolly coat and cold adaptation.

6. Golden passport program

Vanuatu offers a popular Citizenship by Investment (CBI) or “golden passport” program. It allows individuals to acquire citizenship by making significant financial contributions to a country’s economy. The cost of citizenship ranges from \$135,500 to \$155,500, with options for a family of four. Processing time ranges from 30 to 60 days after application submission.

7. About POSHAN Abhiyaan

Objectives:

- Prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6 years).
- Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years).
- Reduce anemia prevalence among women and adolescent girls (15-49 years).
- Reduce low birth weight (LBW) through improved maternal and child healthcare.

Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0

Launched in 2021, it amalgamated various programmes with similar objectives such as Supplementary Nutrition Programme and POSHAN Abhiyaan under one umbrella.

Funding pattern:

- For States & UTs with a legislature: 60:40 between Union and State/ UT Government.
- For Northeastern (NER) & Himalayan States: 90:10 between Union and State Government.

8. Capacity Building Commission

It was established in 2021. It is a three-member Commission, supported by an internal Secretariat headed by a Secretary. Members have been appointed from diverse backgrounds such as private sector, academia, public sector, and civil society. The Commission’s focus is on driving stand harmonisation across the public sector learning and development landscape.

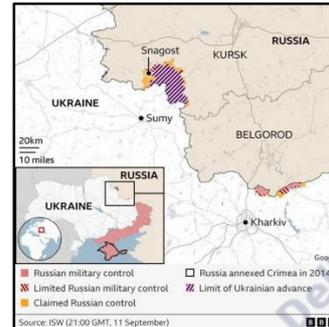
9. Mission KarmaYogi

- In 2020, Government of India has launched Mission Karmayogi, a National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building (NPCSCP).
- It is anchored by an apex body and headed by the Prime Minister.

– The programme aims at building a **future-ready civil service with the right attitude, skills and knowledge**, aligned to the vision of New India.

MARCH 11

1. Kursk Region



Kursk is a city and the administrative centre of Kursk Oblast, positioned along Russia’s southwestern border. It lies in the heart of the European part of Russia, approximately 450 km (280 miles) south of Moscow, along the upper Seym River. The region is part of the Black Earth territory, known for its highly fertile soil. Kursk experiences a moderately continental climate, characterized by distinct seasonal variations.

2. Tejas LCA Mk1A



The Tejas LCA Mk1A is an advanced variant of India’s indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). It incorporates more than 40 improvements over the previous Tejas Mk1 variant, significantly enhancing its combat capabilities and operational efficiency. The Tejas Mk1A is equipped with nine hardpoints capable of carrying a variety of weaponry, including Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles, Air-to-Air/Ground missiles, and Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air missiles (ASRAAM).

What is Tejas LCA?

Tejas is India’s indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft designed by Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). It entered service with the

Indian Air Force (IAF) in July 2016. It has **three production models: Tejas Mark 1, Mark 1A, and trainer variant**. It aims to replace ageing fighter jets like MiG variants currently in service with the Indian Air Force.

3. Jalandheswarar Temple:



Jalandheswarar Temple (also known as Thiruvoral) is an **ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva**, situated in Thakkolam village of Ranipet district, Tamil Nadu. The **original temple complex was constructed by Pallavas and later expanded by Cholas**. The present masonry structure dates back to the Nayak period in the 16th century. It is **one of the shrines of the 275 Paadal Petra Sthalams** - Shiva Sthalams glorified in the early medieval Tevaram poems by Tamil Saivite Nayanars Sambandar.

4. Madhav National Park:



The **Madhav National Park is situated in the Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh** and, on the northern fringe of the **Central Highlands of India forming a part of the Upper Vindhyan Hills** intermixed with plateaus and valley sections. The Park was the hunting ground of Mughal emperors and Maharaja of Gwalior. It **got the status of a National Park in 1958**. The park was established as Madhya Bharat National Park in 1955 and received its present name in 1959. With the recent declaration it has become the **58th tiger reserve of India and the 9th tiger reserve of Madhya Pradesh**, with home to five tigers including two cubs born recently.

5. Vanuatu



Fugitive former IPL chief Lalit Modi recently applied to surrender his passport to the Indian High Commission in London, and **acquired the citizenship of Vanuatu, a tiny island nation in the South Pacific**. It lies **east of Australia and north of New Zealand, or midway between Australia and Fiji**. The country is **home to several active volcanoes, including Mount Yasur**, which is one of the world's most accessible active volcanoes. **Vanuatu offers a citizenship-by-investment programme**, allowing foreigners to obtain citizenship in exchange for a financial contribution, typically for around \$1,50,000 USD.

6. What is Hantavirus?

A family of viruses that cause severe **respiratory and renal illnesses**. It causes **Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome (HPS)**, which starts with flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, and muscle aches. In severe cases, it leads to respiratory distress, fluid buildup in the lungs, and can be fatal

7. What is Isolationism?

Isolationism is a **foreign policy doctrine that emphasizes avoiding political, military, and economic entanglements with other countries**. The idea dates back to **President George Washington, who warned against "entangling alliances"**. Throughout the 19th century, the US largely avoided European conflicts while expanding its influence in the Western Hemisphere. The US rejected the League of Nations and passed Neutrality Acts in the 1930s to stay out of foreign conflicts. Recently, **the concept of "restraint" has gained popularity as an alternative to both isolationism and excessive military intervention**.

8. Natural Rubber

- It is a versatile industrial raw material derived from the rubber tree **Hevea brasiliensis**, native to the **Amazon river basin**.
- It was **introduced to tropical Asia and Africa** by the British in the late 19th century.
- The rubber tree thrives in various agro-climates and soil conditions with an annual rainfall of about 200 cm.

9. EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

- The EUDR mandates that all **commodities entering the EU market must be deforestation-free after December 2020**.

- iSNR certification ensures compliance.

About Rubber Board of India

- **Statutory body established under the Rubber Act, 1947.**
- **Functions under:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- **Headquarters:** Kottayam, Kerala.
- **Functions:** Development of the rubber industry through research, training, and extension activities.
 1. Maintains **statistical data on rubber production and trade**.
 2. Promotes **marketing of rubber and ensures labor welfare**.
 3. Issues licenses for rubber producers, manufacturers, exporters, and traders (Rubber Board License).

10. BioE3 (Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment) Initiative

- **Launched:** 2024
- **Implemented By:** Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology

– Significance:

1. Boosts technology development through **Biomanufacturing & Bio-AI hubs and Biofoundry**.
2. Supports **Net Zero carbon economy, Lifestyle for Environment, and Green Growth**.
3. Promotes **Circular Bioeconomy for sustainable development**.

MARCH 12

1. KHANJAR-XII



The **12th edition of the India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise Khanjar-XII** is set to take place in Kyrgyzstan. It is an annual exercise conducted alternatively in India-Kyrgyzstan. It was first initiated in **December 2011, in Nahan, India**.

2. Sarus Crane:



It is the **tallest flying bird in the world**. They live in Southeast Asia, northern India, and northern Australia. In **India, most sarus cranes are widely distributed along the Gangetic plain and in eastern Rajasthan** in the northern states of India. Population densities decrease going to the south. **This species is not known to be migratory**. They live mainly in wetlands such as canals, marshes, and ponds, sometimes near humans.

Conservation Status:

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

CITES: Appendix II

Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972: Schedule IV

3. Large Phased Array Radar (LPAR):



It has been established by China in Yunnan province, near the China-Myanmar border. It boasts a surveillance range exceeding 5,000 kilometers, allowing China to monitor extensive areas of the Indian Ocean and deep into Indian Territory. It possesses the capability to detect and track ballistic missile launches in real time. Unlike traditional radars, which rely on mechanical rotation, **LPARs use electronically controlled antennas to scan vast areas almost instantly.**

4. North Sea:



The North Sea is a shallow northeastern arm of the Atlantic Ocean, covering 220,000 square miles (570,000 square km) between the British Isles and northwestern Europe.

Borders and Connections: Bordered by Great Britain, Orkney and Shetland islands, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, and Belgium and France. It is connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the Strait of Dover and the English Channel. The Skagerrak links the North Sea to the Baltic Sea via the Kattegat and the Danish straits.

5. H1N1 Virus:



Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen. The first confirmed case of H1N1 in India was reported in May 2009. Since then, the virus has caused several outbreaks, with significant case numbers recorded in 2021, 2022, 2023 and now more recently. Flu viruses are spread from person to person mainly through

coughing or sneezing. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Symptoms: There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu.

6. About Biju Patnaik

He was recognized as one of the key architects of modern Odisha and played a crucial role in India's freedom movement, aviation, and governance. He used his flying skills to help freedom fighters escape British forces and transport secret messages. He founded the Kalinga Foundation and established the Kalinga Prize to promote scientific knowledge. Biju Patnaik was honored with the title "Bhumi Putra" (Son of the Soil) by Indonesia—one of the highest civilian honors given to a foreigner. Awarded Bintang Jasa Utama, Indonesia's highest civilian honor in 1996.

7. About Vizhinjam Port

Location: Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Key Features: One of the deepest ports in India.

Capable of handling Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs).

Developed under the Design, Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer (DBFOT) model.

Significance: Efficient cargo movement, reduces India's dependence on foreign ports like Colombo (Sri Lanka), Singapore, and UAE for transshipment, strengthens India's maritime security

8. About Cassava (Also called 'Bread of the Tropics')

Also known as 'Yuca' or 'Manioc', cassava is a root vegetable grown through stem cuttings. It is a tall semi-woody perennial shrub or tree native to South America and was introduced in Africa & Asia by Portuguese sailors. Nigeria is the world's largest producer of Cassava. It has numerous health benefits as it is rich in energy & vitamins. Under India's National Policy on Biofuels (2018), cassava is recognized as a raw material for ethanol production, enhancing its significance beyond food security.

9. Wheat Production in India

Area: In 2023-24, the area under wheat stood at 318.33 lakh hectares, while the production is estimated at

113.92 million tonnes. In India wheat is the second largest crop after paddy in terms of area coverage. Uttar Pradesh is the top wheat-producing state in the country, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Major Export Destinations (2023-24): Nepal, Iraq, South Korea, UAE and Mongolia.

MARCH 17

1. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary



Drying up of Tamulidoba Beel, a major wetland in Assam's Pobitora wildlife sanctuary brings to the fore an urgent need for habitat management. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the eastern region of Guwahati, Assam, was established in 1998 and covers an area of 48.81 square kilometres. The Sanctuary consists of the Rajamayong Reserve Forest and Pobitora Reserve Forest. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary is known for holding the highest density of Greater One Horned Rhinoceros in the country.

2. Tuberculosis

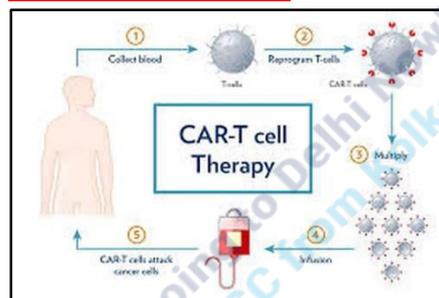


Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria that most often affects the lungs. It spreads through the air when people with TB cough, sneeze or spit. About a quarter of the global population is estimated to have been infected with TB bacteria. About 5–10% of people infected, eventually get symptoms and develop TB disease. TB is preventable and curable. TB is treated with a standard 6-month course of 4 antimicrobial drugs that are provided with information, supervision and support to the patient by a health worker or trained volunteer.

Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB)

Drug resistance emerges when TB medicines are used inappropriately, through incorrect prescription by health care providers, poor quality drugs, or patients stopping treatment prematurely. MDR-TB is a form of TB caused by bacteria that do not respond to isoniazid and rifampicin, the two most effective first-line TB drugs. MDR-TB is treatable and curable by using other drugs, which tend to be more expensive and toxic.

3. CAR T-cell Therapy



CAR T-cell therapy, or chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy, trains the body's own immune cells to identify and destroy cancer cells. This treatment is designed for specific types of blood cancer and is given to patients whose cancer has either relapsed or not responded to first-line treatment.

How does the therapy work?

For any CAR T-cell therapy, a patient's immune T-cells are collected by filtering their blood. These cells are then engineered in a lab to add receptors that can bind with cancer cells. These cells are then multiplied and infused in the patient. Usually, the cancer cells are adept at evading the unmodified T cells. The treatment developed in India is meant for patients with two types of blood cancers that affect the B cells — acute lymphoblastic leukemia and large B cell lymphomas.

Side Effects of CAR T Therapy

A serious immune overreaction causing hyperinflammation and organ damage, seen in 12% of participants, resulting in at least one death. Low red blood cell count, reported in 61% of participants, causing fatigue and weakness.

Thrombocytopenia: Low platelet count, increasing the risk of bleeding, reported in 65% of patients.

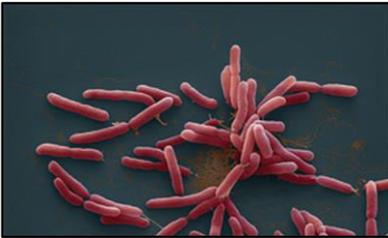
Neutropenia: Low neutrophil count, seen in 96% of participants, raising the risk of infections.

4. Foreign Exchange Reserve:



Foreign Exchange Reserves (also called Forex Reserves) are foreign currency assets held by the central banks of countries. These assets include foreign marketable securities, gold, special drawing rights (SDRs), and reserve position in the IMF. These are denominated and expressed in the US dollar, which is the international numeraire for the purpose. **China is the largest foreign exchange reserve holder in the world. RBI is the custodian of the foreign exchange reserves in India.** The biggest contributor to India's Forex reserves is foreign currency assets, followed by gold.

5. Melioidosis:



It is a **bacterial infectious disease caused by Burkholderia pseudomallei**. Pseudomallei lives in surface water (streams, rivers, lakes) and soil, mostly in tropical or subtropical areas. It is **endemic in Southeast Asia, northern Australia, much of the Indian subcontinent, southern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.** It is also sometimes called **Whitmore's disease**. It has a **high Case Fatality Rate (CFR)** to ranging from 16% to 50% in known endemic regions. Both humans and animals can get melioidosis, but people can't get it from animals. It spreads **through direct contact with soil, air, or water contaminated by the bacteria.**

MARCH 18

1. Bhadra River:



It is the **east-flowing river in Karnataka**. It begins at the Western Ghats range and flows across the Deccan Plateau. The **tributaries Somavahini, Thadabehalla, and Odirayanahalla join it** The river flows across the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. The **Bhadra meets the Tunga River at Koodli, a small town near Shivamogga.** The combined river continues east as the Tungabhadra, a major tributary of the Krishna River. **Bhadra Dam is a dam built across the Bhadra River near Lakkavalli village.**

2. Kyushu Island:



It is the **southernmost and third largest of the four main islands of Japan**. It is bordered by the East China Sea to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east. The **Eastern Channel, or Tsushima Strait, separates Kyushu from the Korean Peninsula in the northwest.** A series of volcanic ranges, including the world's largest active volcanic crater, Mount Aso, are located in Kyushu.

Highest Peak: Mount Kuju (1,794 m)

Major parts of Kyushu have a subtropical climate and heavy rainfall, which supports its subtropical vegetation.

3. Subacute Sclerosing Panencephalitis (SSPE):

It is a **progressive and usually fatal brain disorder related to measles (rubeola) infection**. SSPE tends to occur several years after a person has measles, even though the person seems to have fully recovered from the illness. **Normally, the measles virus does not cause brain damage.** However, an abnormal immune response to measles or, possibly, certain variant forms of the virus may cause severe illness and even death. SSPE has been reported in all parts of the world, but in western countries it is a rare disease. **Males are more**

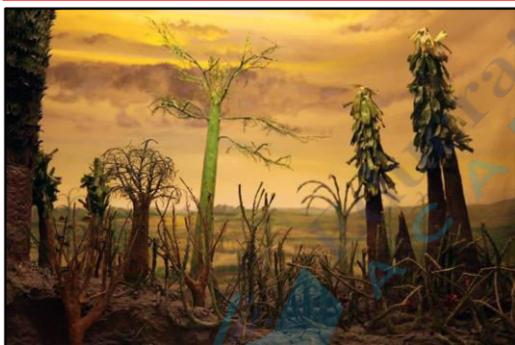
often affected than females. The disease generally occurs in children and adolescents. **High mortality rates are associated with SSPE, and there is no cure for SSPE.**

4. Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary



The first honey harvest was recently done near the **Phansad Wildlife Sanctuary** in the scenic coastal Raigad district adjoining the financial capital of Mumbai. It is **located in the Murud region of Raigad district, Maharashtra**. It was created to preserve some of the coastal woodland ecosystem of the Western Ghats and consists of 17,250 acres of forest, grasslands, and wetlands. The **area was once part of the hunting reserves of the princely state of Murud-Janjira. Pockets of open grassland, called "mals" occur throughout the sanctuary.**

5. End-Permian Mass Extinction (EPME):



The EPME, also known as the **Permian-Triassic Extinction Event** or "**The Great Dying**," was the **most severe extinction event in Earth's history**. EPME was characterized by the **elimination of about 90 percent of the species on Earth**, which included more than 95 percent of the marine species and 70 percent of the terrestrial species. In addition, more than half of all taxonomic families present at the time disappeared. It **ranks first in severity among the five major extinction episodes that span geologic time.**

6. About Indian Long-billed Vulture (Gyps Indicus)

It is a **medium-sized bird with pale brown body feathers, and a semi-bald head**. Its long bill and broad wings are distinctive features. It primarily inhabits cliffs, hilly crags, and open landscapes in central and southern India. **Vultures are nature's most efficient scavengers**, and play a crucial role in preventing the spread of diseases by efficiently disposing of animal remains

7. About the Bodo Peace Accord (2020)

It was aimed at bringing peace and stability to the **Bodo-dominated areas of Assam**, particularly the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The agreement was signed between the **Government of India, the Assam Government, and Bodo organizations, including the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).**

Key Features:

BTC was renamed as the **Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)** with greater autonomy.

Non-Bodo villages within the existing BTC were excluded.

BTC's powers were expanded under the Sixth Schedule.

Bodo was recognized as an associate official language of Assam.

8. Menhirs

Menhirs are upright, man-made, large stones, typically tapered at the top. The **largest known menhir is the Grand Menhir Brisé in France, once 20.6 meters tall.**

Historical Linkages: The word "menhir" comes from the Brittonic words "maen" (stone) and "hîr" (long). It was first used by **French military officer and Celticist antiquarian Théophile Corret de la Tour d'Auvergne.**

Culture Reference: Menhirs are popularly known through the character **Obelix from the Asterix comics, who carries them due to his superhuman strength.**

Age of Menhirs: European menhirs date back to the **late Neolithic and early Bronze Age (4,800 to 3,800 years ago).**

The Mudumal menhirs are about 3,500 to 4,000 years old, making them the oldest in India.

9. Chandrayaan Missions

Chandrayaan-1(2008): Made chemical, mineralogical, and photo-geological maps of the Moon .

Chandrayaan-2 (2019): Its lander crashed, but the orbiter sent hundreds of images of the Moon's surface.

Chandrayaan-3 (2023): It was a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2, to demonstrate end-to-end capability in safe landing and roving on the lunar surface. It was able to have the **Vikram lander successfully soft-land on the moon's south pole region on August 23, 2023.**

Chandrayaan-4 Mission: It is **expected to be launched in 2027.** It will aim to collect samples of the lunar soil from the moon and bring the back to the earth for further study.

Chandrayaan-5 Collaboration with Japan: The mission will be conducted in association with Japan.

Unlike the Chandrayaan-3 mission, which carried a 25-kg rover, **Chandrayaan-5 will carry a 250-kg rover to study the Moon's surface.**

MARCH 19

1. Mount Fuji:



Mount Fuji, also called **Fuji-san**, is **Japan's tallest mountain, with a height of 3,776 meters.** It is situated close to the Pacific coast. It is **part of the Fuji Volcanic Zone**, a volcanic chain that extends northward from the Mariana Islands and the Izu Islands through the Izu Peninsula to northern Honshu. It is a **stratovolcano** that has been dormant since its last eruption, in 1707, but is still generally classified as active by geologists. **Mount Fuji is one of Japan's "Three Holy Mountains" along with Mount Tate and Mount Haku.**

2. River Betwa:



The Betwa River, historically known as **Vetravati**, is **significant in central and northern India, serving as a tributary of the Yamuna River.** It **originates from Jhiri village in Raisen district, Madhya Pradesh, in the Vindhya Range, just north of Hoshangabad (now Narmadapuram).** It flows generally northeast through Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and empties into the Yamuna River just east of Hamirpur after a 610-km course.

Tributaries: The **Jamni** and **Dhasan** rivers are its major tributaries.

3. Sarthi Initiative:



The Sarthi system, named after the Hindi word for 'charioteer', was **launched in January 2023 to digitise all of RBI's internal workflows.** It enables employees to securely store and share documents, improving record management and enhancing data analysis through reports and dashboards. **The online Sarthi Pathshala ('school') helps users become familiar with the system, and the Pathshala was rolled out alongside extensive in-person training.** Additionally, Sarthi mitras ('friends') are people in each RBI office who know the system well and can help colleagues with any issues.

4. Pravaah Initiative:

Building upon the foundation of Sarthi, **the Pravaah system, meaning 'smooth flow' in Hindi, was introduced in May 2024.** This platform allows external users to submit regulatory applications digitally, seamlessly integrating with the Sarthi database for processing within RBI's offices. **The transition to a fully digital infrastructure, supported by centralised cybersecurity and tracking mechanisms, has significantly improved transparency and efficiency.** Pravaah's seamless integration with Sarthi has not only streamlined the submission process but also provided real-time tracking and analytics for both applicants and RBI managers, cutting down on the lengthy delays caused by paper-based systems. **The RBI has seen an 80% increase in monthly applications since Pravaah's**

launch, marking a significant achievement in the central bank's digital evolution.

5. Kanger Valley National Park (KVNP):



It is located in **Jagdalpur in the Bastar district of Chhatisgarh**. The national Park derives its name from the Kanger River, which flows centrally from the Northwest to the Southeast direction. **Kanger River is a tributary of the Kolab River, which ultimately joins the Godavari Tirathgarh Falls, which originates from the Kanger River**, presents an enchanting view falling from a height of 150 feet. The national park has more than 15 limestone caves, including the famous **Kotumsar, Kailash, and Dandak caves**.

6. Caracal



A rare caracal has been recently spotted in **Rajasthan's Mukundra Hills Tiger Reserve**, sending waves of excitement among wildlife enthusiasts. It is a **medium-sized nocturnal wildcat**. In India, it is called **siya gosh**, a Persian name that translates as 'black Ear'. Caracals live on rocky hills or grasslands in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Their numbers in India have dwindled to an estimated 50, primarily in Rajasthan and Gujarat. **Caracals are adaptable animals that can live in a variety of environments, including grasslands, savannas, scrublands, and forests**. They are distinguished by the ability to capture birds by leaping at least two meters into the air from a standstill.

Conservation status:

IUCN Red List: Least concern

The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

7. Buddhist Tourism and Development Initiatives

Swadesh Darshan Scheme (SD)

Launched: 2014-15.

Objective: Integrated development of thematic tourist circuits across India.

Buddhist Circuit: Recognized as one of the thematic circuits under this scheme.

Funding: Provides financial assistance to State Governments/UTs for infrastructure development.

PRASHAD Scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive)

Launched: 2014-15.

Objective: Development of pilgrimage and heritage destinations to promote religious tourism.

Focus on Buddhist Sites: Enhances connectivity, facilities, and spiritual tourism experiences at important Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

8. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj

Shivaji was born in 1627 at Shivneri. He was the key figure in the rise of Maratha power. He is remembered as a benevolent ruler, known for his integrity, religious tolerance, patriotism, and focus on public welfare. **Shivaji's governance focused on Hindu self-rule (Hindavi Swarajya) and national independence**. His administrative innovations, including the **formation of the "Astapradhan" council of ministers**, were based on ancient Hindu political concepts. He **abolished hereditary offices and ensured the welfare of peasants by keeping middlemen in check**.

10. What is an Ancient monument?

– As per the AMASR Act 1958, "Ancient monument" means any **structure, erection, or monument, or any tumulus or place of internment, or any cave, rock sculpture, inscription, or monolith**, which is of historical, archaeological, or artistic interest and which has been in existence for not less than one hundred years.

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958

– It was enacted by the Parliament with an aim "to provide for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance, for the **regulation of archaeological excavations** and for the protection of sculptures, carvings, and other like objects.

11. Mission Saffron Initiative

Launched: 2010-11 (initially for Jammu & Kashmir).

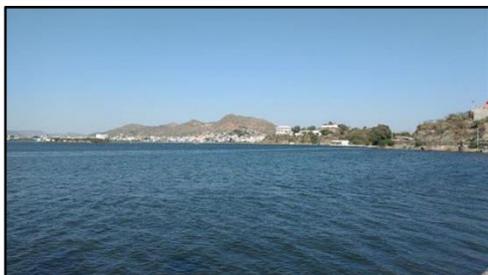
Objective: Promote saffron cultivation by providing financial, technical, and infrastructural support.

Expansion: Since 2021, it has been expanded to the **Northeast (Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya)** under the **“Saffron Bowl Project”** by NECTAR.

The Northeast is seen as a potential alternative for saffron cultivation due to its suitable agro-climatic conditions. Expanding saffron farming ensures better supply and price stability.

MARCH 20

1. Ana Sagar Lake:



It is an **artificial lake situated in Ajmer, Rajasthan**. It was built by raising a dam across the Luni or Lavanavari River. The **lake was built by Arnoraja Chauhan, the grandfather of Prithviraj Chauhan, in 1135 - 1150 AD** and was named after him. The lake also comprises Baradari or pavilions that were built by Shah Jahan in 1637 AD. **The Daulat Bagh Gardens, located on the banks of the lake, was built by Jehangir**. The lake gets dry every summer.

2. Exercise Varuna:



It is the **bilateral Naval Exercise between India and France**. Initiated in **1993**, the exercise was christened **‘Varuna’ in 2001** and has become a hallmark of the India-France strategic bilateral relationship. **VARUNA 2025 is the 23rd edition of the exercise and will take place in the Arabian Sea**.

3. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):



It is the **world's foremost intergovernmental forum for scientific and technical cooperation in the nuclear field**. It works for the safe, secure, and peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology. An autonomous organization within the United Nations system, the **IAEA carries out programmes to maximize the contribution of nuclear technology to society while verifying its peaceful use**. It is widely known as the **world's "Atoms for Peace and Development" organization within the United Nations family**. IAEA reports to both the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.

Headquarters: Vienna,

Membership: Currently, it has 178 member states.

4. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI):



IPOI was **launched by India in November 2019 at the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bangkok**. It builds upon the **“Security and Growth for All in the Region” (SAGAR) initiative** announced by the Prime Minister in 2015. Its objective was to **promote cooperation for a free and open Indo-Pacific and the rules-based regional order**, which will contribute towards strengthening safety, stability and development in the maritime domain. As a non-treaty-based voluntary arrangement, it **aims to achieve greater cohesion and integration through common understanding and actions related to shared interests**. It does not envisage a new institutional framework and leans heavily on the EAS mechanism, which includes ASEAN member states and its eight dialogue partners. The IPOI outlined seven pillars, and it was indicated that one or two countries could take the lead for a pillar with others joining in voluntarily.

5. Tren de Aragua



The US President invoked the **Alien Enemies Act (1798)** for the first time since World War II to deport suspected members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua (TdA).

6. Rangpanchami

Rangpanchami is held five days after Holi, it marks the festive conclusion of the celebrations. The name "Rang Panchami" is derived from "Rang," meaning colour, and "Panchami," referring to the fifth day. Its celebration is observed primarily in **Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and parts of Rajasthan**. It marks the arrival of the spring season and people celebrate by throwing and applying colored powders (gulal) on each other

7. About Competition Commission of India (CCI)

Establishment: Statutory body established in **2009** under the **Competition Act, 2002**.

Ministry: It is a quasi-judicial body operating under the **Ministry of Corporate Affairs**.

Purpose: Aims to prevent **anti-competitive practices**, **promote and sustain market competition**, protect consumer interests, and ensure the freedom of trade in India's markets.

Members: It consists of a **Chairperson and 6 Members** appointed by the Central Government.

Powers & Functions of CCI: Investigates **anti-competitive agreements, cartelization**, and abuse of dominance.

Imposes penalties on companies violating competition laws.

Advises the Central and State Governments on policy matters affecting competition.

8. Online Assurances Monitoring System (OAMS)

The **Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister** recently highlighted the role of the Online Assurances Monitoring System (OAMS) in managing government assurances.

About

It is a **digital platform implemented by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA)** to enhance transparency and efficiency in managing government assurances. Assurances are promises, undertakings, or commitments given by Ministers during answers to parliamentary questions or debates. Assurances should ideally be fulfilled within three months of being made. The **Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA)** is responsible for implementing assurances under the **Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961**.

9. PM-YUVA 3.0 Launch

It aims to **nurture young writers under 30 years of age**, providing them with **mentorship and exposure to hone their creative writing skills**. It builds upon the success of its predecessors, **YUVA 1.0 and YUVA 2.0**, continuing the government's commitment to **fostering literary talent and promoting reading, writing, and book culture in India**.

It focuses on three themes: the **Contribution of the Indian Diaspora in Nation Building, Indian Knowledge System, and the Makers of Modern India (1950-2025)**.

MARCH 21

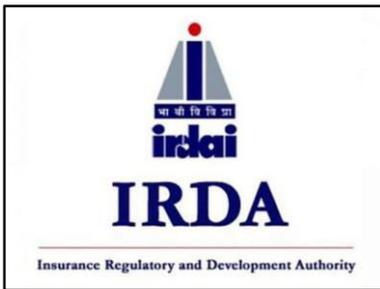
1. LIC:

It is the **largest public sector life insurance company and institutional investor in India**. Headquartered in Mumbai, it plays a crucial role in India's financial market.

Motto: "Yogakshemam Vahamyaham" (From the Bhagavad Gita) – "Your welfare is our responsibility."

It was **established in 1956 through the Life Insurance of India Act**, which nationalized the insurance sector by merging 245 private insurers and provident societies into a single entity. LIC operates through 8 zonal offices in **Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Kolkata, Bhopal, and Patna**.

2. Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI):



It is a **statutory body** formed under the **IRDAI Act, 1999** for the supervision and regulation of the insurance sector.

Powers & Functions:

Promotes competition to **enhance consumer choice and fair pricing.**

Ensures **financial security** of the insurance market

Regulates entities under the **Insurance Act, 1938**, which is the primary law governing the insurance sector

Other relevant laws include:

Marine Insurance Act, 1963 (governing marine insurance).

Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 (covering liability insurance).

3. APAAR ID



APAAR stands for **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry**. It is **part of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** to streamline student records. The initiative is based on the **'One Nation, One Student ID'** It is linked to **Aadhaar** and stored in **DigiLocker** for **easy access**. APAAR is generated through Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+). **Officially, APAAR is voluntary, as per government documents.** However, CBSE and certain state government boards (e.g., Uttar Pradesh) are pushing for 100% student enrollment.

4. Sagarshwar Wildlife Sanctuary:



It is located in the **Sangli district of Maharashtra**. It is **India's first manmade wildlife sanctuary**. It is an artificially cultivated forest without a perennial supply of water, and most of the wildlife species were artificially introduced. **The sanctuary derives its name from an ancient Sagarshwar temple.** The sanctuary houses numerous temples dedicated to Lord Shiva. The forests are southern dry mixed deciduous and southern thorn forest

5. Merchant Discount Rate (MDR):



MDR (alternatively referred to as the Transaction Discount Rate or TDR) is a **fee that merchants and other businesses must pay to a payment processing company for accepting payments from customers via digital modes like credit cards, debit cards, UPI, etc.** MDR compensates the bank issuing the card, the bank which installs the PoS (Point of Sale) terminal and network providers, and payment gateways for their services. **The MDR sums up all the charges and taxes that electronic or digital payments entail.** The MDR typically comes in the form of a percentage of the transaction amount. It is **typically between 1% and 3%.** Merchants must consider these fees as part of managing their business costs and setting their prices. MDR charges are automatically deducted from the merchant's account at the time of settling the transaction **Under the rules laid down by RBI, business owners cannot pass on the MDR charges to their customers.**

6. Exercise Bongosagar:



It is a **bilateral naval exercise between India and Bangladesh**. It is designed to develop high-level interoperability and operational expertise through a broad spectrum of maritime operations. Commenced in the year **2019, Bongosagar 2025 is the fifth edition of the exercise.**

7. Major Types of Puppetry:

String Puppets (Kathputli): Popular in Rajasthan and Gujarat, controlled by strings.

Shadow Puppetry: Leather puppets used to cast shadows, popular in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala.

Rod Puppetry: Puppets controlled with rods, found in West Bengal and Assam.

Glove Puppets: Worn on the puppeteer's hand, notably in Kerala (Pavakathakali)

8. Squad' Alliance

India has been invited to join the multilateral alliance Squad to prevent China's influence in the South China Sea.

About

The Squad is an **informal alliance formed in 2024 with countries such as Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the United States**. The group now plans to invite India and South Korea to join it. The defence forces of this alliance have conducted joint maritime activities in the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines in the South China Sea.

Aim: The Squad's joint maritime activities are **aimed at providing strategic responses to tensions in the Philippines' waters in the South China Sea**.

Currently, **India is a part of Quad, an alliance of the US, Japan, and Australia**, which informally tries to keep a check on China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. The **Quad is a tactical grouping that operates at a higher, more strategic level, across the Indo-Pacific.**

9. About the National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD)

It is a **Central Sector Scheme launched in 2014** (revised in 2021) aims to modernize and expand dairy infrastructure, ensure sustained growth and productivity, and enhance farmers' income.

Component A: Dairy Infrastructure Enhancement:

Focus: Strengthening core dairy infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions.

Methods: Supporting the creation of Dairy Cooperative Societies (DCSs) and Milk Producer Companies (MPCs).

Examples: Funding milk chilling plants, milk testing labs, and quality certification systems.

Component B: Dairying Through Cooperatives (DTC):

Focus: Sustainable development of dairy cooperatives.

Collaboration: Implemented with assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Scope: Enhancing production, processing, and marketing infrastructure.

Area: Implemented in 9 states.

Major Components of Rashtriya Gokul Mission

– **Nationwide Artificial Insemination Program:** It aims to boost the milk production and productivity of bovines, including indigenous breeds.

– **Progeny Testing and Pedigree Selection:** It aims to produce high genetic merit bulls, including bulls of indigenous breeds.

– **Implementation of In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF)**

Technology: The technology has an important role in genetic upgradation of bovine population in single generation.

– **Sex-Sorted Semen Production:** The Department has established sex sorted semen production facilities at 5 government semen stations located in **Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh**.

– **Multi-purpose Artificial Insemination Technicians in Rural India (MAITRIs):** Under the scheme MAITRIs are trained and equipped to deliver quality Artificial Insemination services at farmers' doorstep.

10. About Ashwini Radar

Designed and developed by **Electronics & Radar Development Establishment (LRDE), DRDO**. Uses state-of-the-art solid-state technology for superior performance. **Capable of detecting and tracking targets up to 200 km**. Can track high-speed fighter jets as well as slow-moving aerial threats like **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and helicopters**.

MARCH 24

1. Anthurium



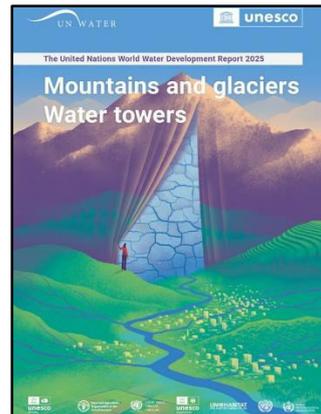
India successfully exported Anthurium flowers from Mizoram to Singapore for the first time, marking a milestone in the country's floriculture sector. Anthurium is a tropical flowering plant known for its ornamental value and air-purifying properties. It is grown mostly indoors and helps remove toxins like formaldehyde, ammonia, toluene, xylene and allergens from the air. Anthurium was included in NASA's list of air-purifying plants due to its ability to improve indoor air quality.

2. Hemavati River



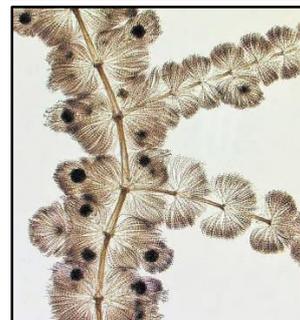
It is an important tributary of the Kaveri. The river begins its journey in the Western Ghats at an elevation of about 1219 m above sea level, near Ballala Rayana Durga in the Chikmagalur District of Karnataka. The Hemavati Reservoir is a masonry dam with a central spillway and earthen flanks built across the river near Gorur village.

3. United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) 2025



The 2025 UN World Water Development Report says that Retreating glaciers threatens the food and water supply of 2 billion people around the world. WWDR is UN-Water's flagship report on water and sanitation issues. It offers an authoritative and comprehensive assessment of the overall state, use and management of the world's freshwater resources. Launched on World Water Day (March 22), the report focuses on a different theme each year and gives policy recommendations to decision-makers by offering best practices and in-depth analyses. UNESCO publishes the WWDR on behalf of UN-Water and its production is coordinated by the UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme.

4. Sheathia rosemalayensis:



It is a new species of freshwater algae. It was discovered in Rosemala, located in the western ghats of Kerala, and has been named after the place where it was found. This discovery is crucial because Sheathia species are extremely rare in India. Before this, only one other species was reported from the Himalayas. Sheathia rosemalayensis has so far been documented only in the southern Western Ghats, a geographically distinct region. In contrast, other species within the Sheathia genus, such as assamica, S. indonepalensis, and S. dispersa, have broader distributions spanning Assam, Nepal, Indonesia, Taiwan and even the Hawaiian Archipelago.

5. Doctrine of Precedent:



The doctrine of precedent is the **custom of the courts to stand by previous decisions**, so that once a **point of law is decided upon by a court, then the same law must be applied to future cases with materially similar facts**. It is often referred to as '**stare decisis**'. The lower courts will take account of and follow the decisions made by the higher courts. It ensures **consistency, predictability and stability** by obligating courts to follow the legal principles established in previous decisions. **The foundation of the doctrine of precedent lies in Article 141 of the Indian Constitution**. This article states that the law declared by the Supreme Court is binding on all courts within India. Essentially, **lower courts must follow the legal interpretations and judgments laid down by the Supreme Court**.

MARCH 25

1. Lapis Lazuli



Lapis lazuli is a **vivid blue metamorphic rock, known for its striking colour and semi-precious gemstone value**. The blue colour comes from lazurite (25-40%), a rare mineral. The shade of blue depends on the amount and structure of sulphur in lazurite. Major sources include **Afghanistan, Chile, Russia, and the United States**.

The **highest-quality lapis lazuli is mined in Badakhshan province, Afghanistan**, where it has been extracted for over 6,000 years. Imported to India from Badakhshan as early as 1000 BCE. Ornaments made of lapis lazuli have been discovered at **Indus Valley Civilization sites (Mohenjo-daro & Harappa)**.

2. World Tuberculosis Day



March 24 is observed as **World Tuberculosis (TB) Day** to raise awareness about TB and efforts to eliminate it. The **2025 theme is "Yes, We Can End TB: Commit, Invest, and Deliver."** India aims to eliminate TB by 2025, ahead of the global target of 2030 set by the WHO End TB Strategy.

3. Derivatives



Financial contracts whose value depends on an underlying asset, index, or rate. Used for hedging risks, speculation, and portfolio diversification.

Common underlying assets: Stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, interest rates, and market indexes.

Exchange-Traded Currency Derivatives (ETCDs):

Standardized contracts allow investors to speculate on **future currency exchange rate movements**.

Traded on stock exchanges, unlike Over-the-Counter (OTC) derivatives which are private.

4. Inner Line Permit (ILP)



The Inner Line Permit (ILP) system, originally an **offshoot of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR), 1873**, remains a crucial tool for protecting indigenous tribal communities in India's Northeastern

states. ILP is an official travel document issued by the state government to regulate the entry of non-residents into restricted areas of certain states. It is required for Indian citizens who are not permanent residents of these states.

ILP States in India: Currently, four states require an ILP for entry: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur (ILP extended in 2019)

5. Strait of Hormuz



Amid tensions with the US, Iran on Saturday flexed its military muscle by installing its missile systems on the three disputed islands (Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa) near the Strait of Hormuz. It is a **narrow waterway between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, specifically the United Arab Emirates, and Musandam (Oman)**. It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman. Its width narrows towards the north but still allows for the passage of large vessels. **The Strait of Hormuz is considered one of the world's most economically important choke points.** About 30% of the world's liquefied gas and 25% of oil pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

6. Bhagat Singh (1907–1931), Sukhdev (1907–1931), Rajguru (1908–1931)

All three of them were the members of the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (HSRA)**, a radical revolutionary organization aimed at overthrowing British rule through direct action and armed rebellion. **Bhagat Singh was deeply influenced by Marxist and anarchist thinkers such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky.** Bhagat Singh became known for his bold actions, including the bombing of the **Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi in 1929**. The goal was not to kill but to protest against repressive laws.

7. Anti-dumping duties

Anti-dumping duties are **imposed to correct this trade pattern and restore fair competition.** While not a protectionist measure, **they aim to protect domestic**

industries from injury caused by dumping, and their use is allowed by the WTO. Duties were imposed based on recommendations from the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) under the Commerce Ministry. **They are imposed as per the multilateral regime of Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO)**, which aims to ensure fair trading practices and a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters. **Article 6 in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) allows countries to take action against dumping.** The Anti-Dumping Agreement clarifies and expands Article 6, and the two operate together.

8. About Anthurium Flowers

Scientific Name: Anthurium

Geographical Distribution: Native to the Americas – from northern Mexico to northern Argentina, including the Caribbean.

In India, it is **widely cultivated in Mizoram and other North Eastern states due to suitable climatic conditions.** Also commercially grown in states like Tamil Nadu (21%), Karnataka (16%), Madhya Pradesh (14%), and West Bengal (12%).

Botanical & Morphological Features: It is a **herbaceous plant and grows as epiphytes (on other plants) or terrestrially.** These are **characterized by a spadix (central spike) and a colorful spathe (leaf-like bract)**, often in shades of red, pink, orange, etc. It contains calcium oxalate crystals; sap is irritant to skin and eyes.

9. Jnanpith Award

It is **considered the highest literary award in India**, given annually for the best creative literary output to writers in any of the **22 languages recognized by the Constitution of India and, from 2013, in the English language.** The award idea was **proposed by Rama Jain to select the best literary work in Indian languages.** It carries a citation, a bronze replica of 'Vagdevi,' and a cash prize of ₹11 Lakh.

MARCH 26

1. Vikramshila University



Vikramshila University was **situated in Bhagalpur, Bihar, along the banks of the river Ganges**, making it a prominent historical site in eastern India. The **university was established by King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty** during the late 8th to early 9th century AD, as a response to the perceived decline in educational standards at Nalanda University. It **emerged as a leading hub for Tantric Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism, playing a pivotal role in the spread of these traditions**. The institution produced renowned scholars like **Atisa Dipankara**, who significantly contributed to establishing Buddhism in Tibet. The **university's administration was overseen by a Kulpati or Mahasthvir**, a distinctive leadership role that ensured its smooth functioning. **Vikramshila University met its end when it was destroyed by Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji** around 1203 AD, an event that also marked the downfall of Nalanda University.

2. IOS Sagar



Indian Ocean Ship (IOS) Sagar is a **maritime security cooperation initiative in the Southwest Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.

Participants: India + 9 African nations: Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and South Africa.

3. What is AIKEYME?



AIKEYME stands for '**Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement**', meaning '**Unity**' in Sanskrit.

Co-hosts: Indian Navy & Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF).

Location: Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.

Participants: India + 10 African nations – Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Training & Operational Phases:

Harbour Phase: Table-top and command post exercises focusing on **piracy and maritime information-sharing**.

Seamanship training & Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) operations.

Sea Phase: Search and Rescue (SAR), small arms firing, helicopter operations, and maritime security drills.

4. Nagarjuna Sagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR):



Location: It is located in the **Nallamala hill ranges (an offshoot of the Eastern Ghats) of Andhra Pradesh**.

This is the **largest tiger reserve in the country**, spreading over an area of 5937 sq. km. It hosts the largest tiger population in the Eastern Ghat landscape. It is named after two major dams in the area, **Nagarjuna Sagar Dam and Srisailem Dam**. Two wildlife sanctuaries, namely **Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and Gundla Brahmeswaram Wildlife Sanctuary (GBM)**, constitute the NSTR. The river Krishna traverses through this reserve for a linear distance of around 270 kilometers.

Vegetation: Tropical dry deciduous forests having an undergrowth of bamboo and grass.

5. Equalization Levy:



The **Equalisation Levy** was introduced in India in 2016, with the intention of taxing the digital transactions. It is aimed at taxing business-to-business transactions. It is also often referred to as the "Google Tax". It is a direct tax, which is withheld at the time of payment by the service recipient. The two conditions to be met to be liable to equalisation levy:

1. The payment should be made to a **non-resident service provider**;
2. The **annual payment made to one service provider exceeds Rs.1,00,000** in one financial year.

Currently, not all services are covered under the ambit of equalisation Levy. **An income chargeable to tax as fees or royalties for technical services will not be included as income for the equalisation levy purposes.** The tax rate under the equalisation levy depends on the type of service or transaction.

6. PM VIKAS Scheme

The Pradhan Mantri Virasat Ka Samvardhan (PM VIKAS) is a Central Sector Scheme by the **Ministry of Minority Affairs**, focusing on the upliftment of six notified minority communities (**Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zoroastrians (Parsis).**

Merges five schemes: 'Seekho Aur Kamao', 'Nai Manzil', 'Nai Roshni', 'USTTAD', and 'Hamari Dharohar'.

Key Focus Areas:

Skilling and Training: Both non-traditional and traditional skills.

Women Leadership and Entrepreneurship: Empowering women through leadership and business opportunities.

Education: Provided through the National Institute of Open Schooling.

Infrastructure Development: Through Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram.

Credit Linkages: Connecting beneficiaries with loan programs from the National Minorities Development & Finance Corporation (NMDFC).

Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) is a knowledge partner of the Ministry under the scheme.

7. Dalle Chilly

Dalle Chilly is known for its **pungency, bright red color, and high nutritional value, with Scoville Heat Units (SHU) ranging from 100,000 to 350,000.** The Scoville scale is a measurement of the pungency (spiciness) of peppers and other hot foods. **The scale is based on the concentration of capsaicin,** an active component of chili peppers that produces a burning sensation when it touches the tongue or skin. **Dalle Chilly received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2020, enhancing its marketability and identity.**

Government Support: The Indian government promotes organic farming in **North East India through the MOVCD-NER scheme,** boosting organic Dalle Chilly production.

Significance: This export boosts Sikkim's global spice profile and highlights India's growing prominence in the organic agricultural market.

8. What is a GI Tag?

It is a sign used on products that have a **specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin.** Geographical Indications are part of the **intellectual property rights that come under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.** In India, **Geographical Indications registration is administered by the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999.** They are typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products. The registration of a geographical indication is valid for a period of 10 years, it can be renewed from time to time for a further period of 10 years each.

9. AIKEYME (Africa India Key Maritime Engagement)

'AIKEYME', which means '**Unity**' in Sanskrit, is a **large-scale multilateral maritime exercise with African nations.**

The first edition will be co-hosted by the **Indian Navy and the Tanzania Peoples' Defence Force (TPDF).** It will take place off the coast of **Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, over six days in mid-April 2025.**

Participating nations include Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa, alongside the co-hosts.

MARCH 27

1. South Island



A strong 6.7 magnitude earthquake struck off New Zealand's South Island recently. It is the **larger and southernmost of the two principal islands of New Zealand, in the southwestern Pacific Ocean**. It is separated from North Island to the north by Cook Strait and from Stewart Island to the south by Foveaux Strait.

2. Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary (Bhadra Tiger Reserve)



Spread across the **Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga districts of Karnataka**. Named after the Bhadra River, which flows through the sanctuary.

Designation: First tiger reserve in India to complete a village relocation program by 2002.

Size & Terrain: Hills and valleys include the **Mullayanagiri (the highest peak in Karnataka), Baba Budangiri and Muthodi ranges**.

3. Lyme Disease:



It is caused by the **bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi***. The infection can lead to problems with the **skin, heart, brain, and joints**. It's transmitted (spread) to humans through a tick bite. **Not all tick bites cause Lyme disease**. Only deer ticks (also called black-legged ticks) can spread the bacteria that cause Lyme disease. It **cannot spread between humans, from pets to humans, through air, food, water, or lice, mosquitoes, fleas, and flies also do not transmit it**.

4. Water Hyacinth:



It is a **free-floating, aquatic plant in the pickerelweed family**.

Scientific Name: *Eichhornia crassipes*

It is native to **tropical regions of South America and is now present on all continents except Antarctica**. It is one of the **world's most serious water weeds** because of its aggressive, fast-growing nature. It **can form dense mats that reduce the water quality, change water flows, and increase sediment**. It crowds out native aquatic plants and animals, altering ecosystems, destroying habitats, and blocking irrigation systems. It has thick, glossy green leaves and lavender to violet flowers with a yellow spot. It was **introduced to India during the British colonial rule as an ornamental aquatic plant from South America**.

5. Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture:



It was **initially established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1983** to address plant genetic resources (PGR). It became the **primary permanent international forum for governments to discuss**,

negotiate, and decide on matters specifically relevant to genetic resources for food and agriculture (GRFA). Over time, the mandate of the Commission expanded, and now it deals with all sectors of GRFA – plant, animal, forest, aquatic, and microbial and invertebrate genetic resources, covering the vast scope of biodiversity for food and agriculture. It has **179 countries as its members**. **India is also a member of this commission.**

6. The Third Battle of Panipat

It is **one of the largest and deadliest battles of the 18th century**. It was fought on **January 14, 1761, between the Maratha Empire and a coalition led by Ahmad Shah Durrani of Afghanistan**. The Marathas, under Sadashivrao Bhau, faced off against Afghan and Rohilla forces. Despite initial successes, the Marathas were besieged, suffering severe food shortages. The battle resulted in a decisive Afghan victory, with massive casualties, including around 60,000-70,000 Marathas killed. The **Marathas' defeat halted their northern expansion for nearly a decade**.

7. About Vikramshila University

It was founded by **King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty in late 8th to early 9th century AD**. It is present at Bhagalpur district, Bihar, India. **Vikramshila was one of the most important Buddhist learning centres of medieval India**, second only to Nalanda University. It was especially renowned for **Tantric studies, which were popular during the Pala period in both Buddhist and Hindu traditions**. Destroyed in the late 12th century by **Bakhtiyar Khalji, a military commander under Qutb-ud-din Aibak**. **Atisa Dipankara was a renowned Buddhist master and scholar who played a significant role in the revival and reform of Buddhism in Tibet during the 11th century**.

8. About Regional Rural Banks (RRBs)

The genesis of RRBs can be traced back to 1975, following the recommendations of the **Narasimham Working Group**. Initially created through an ordinance, RRBs were later given a statutory foundation through the Regional Rural Banks Act, 1976 **First RRB established was Prathama Bank (sponsored by Syndicate Bank) in Uttar Pradesh**. The primary objective of RRBs is to **develop the rural economy by providing banking and financial services**

to: small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and small entrepreneurs.

RRBs follow a tripartite ownership model, ensuring coordinated support from the Centre, State, and sponsoring banks:

Government of India – 50%

State Government – 15%

Sponsor Bank (usually a Public Sector Bank) – 35%

They are regulated by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and supervised by NABARD**.

RRBs have been consolidated in a phased manner based on the recommendations of Dr. K.C. Vyas Committee (2001).

9. About Gold Monetisation Scheme

Launched: September 15, 2015

Objective:

To mobilise gold held by households and institutions

Reduce India's reliance on gold imports

Use idle gold for productive purposes in the economy

The GMS had three components:

Short Term Bank Deposit (STBD): 1 to 3 years (Handled by banks)

Medium Term Government Deposit (MTGD): 5 to 7 years

Long Term Government Deposit (LTGD): 12 to 15 years

It is implemented by all scheduled commercial banks excluding Regional Rural Banks (RRBs).

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1. GSAT – 18



Launch and Mission: GSAT-18, a communication satellite, was **launched by ISRO on October 5, 2016**, using the Ariane-5 VA-231 rocket from **Kourou, French Guiana**.

Specifications: It weighed 3,404 kg at liftoff and has a 15-year mission life (until 2032).

Orbit and Control: Placed in a **Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO)**, it is monitored by **ISRO's Master Control Facility in Hassan, Karnataka**.

Purpose: Provides television, telecommunication, VSAT, and digital satellite news gathering services, enhancing ISRO's fleet and replacing ageing satellites for continuity of communication services.

2. PM SHRI Scheme



Overview: PM SHRI (PM Schools for Rising India) is a centrally sponsored scheme launched under NEP 2020 to establish 14,500 model schools promoting holistic education.

Objectives: Focuses on experiential learning, 21st-century skill development, and competency-based assessment over rote learning.

Infrastructure & Learning: Provides enhanced facilities like labs, libraries, smart classrooms, and eco-friendly infrastructure with water conservation and waste recycling.

Evaluation & Selection: Schools are selected through a Challenge Mode based on the School Quality Assessment Framework (SQA).

Budget: The scheme has an allocation of ₹27,360 crore for 5 years (2022-27), with a ₹18,128 crore central share.

3. Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, 2023



Amendment to RTI Act: Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005, restricting the disclosure of personal information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Removal of Public Interest Clause: The previous provision allowed disclosure of personal information if a larger public interest was justified. The amendment eliminates this clause, ensuring stricter personal data protection.

Blanket Exemption: Post-amendment, all personal data is exempt from disclosure under RTI, even if it concerns public officials or matters of public importance.

Privacy vs. Accountability Debate: While the amendment strengthens individual privacy rights, it raises concerns over diminished transparency in governance, which may undermine the RTI's objective of promoting accountability.

4. Bandipur Tiger Reserve:



It is situated in the Mysore and Chamarajanagar revenue districts of southern Karnataka. It is located at the tri-junction area of the States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Geographically, it is an "ecological confluence" of the Western and Eastern Ghats. It is part of the larger Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is surrounded by River Kabini in its north and River Moyar in its south. It is a shelter for the largest population of wild Asian elephants in South Asia.

5. Gounsa Temple



Unprecedented wildfires ripping through South Korea's southern regions recently destroyed large parts of the Gounsa Temple complex, burning down two buildings that had been designated national treasures. It is the headquarters temple of the 16th District of the Jogye-jong Order (the largest Buddhist Order in Korea).

6. Bedmap3

It extends the previous Bedmap2 dataset. It includes data from 84 new aero-geophysical surveys, 15 data

sources, 52 million additional data points, and 1.9 million line-km of measurements.

Coverage of Gaps: It fills major gaps in knowledge, including information on mountain ranges, the deep interior of East Antarctica, and the coastlines of West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula.

7. Privilege motion

A privilege motion is moved when a **Member of Parliament (MP)** believes that there has been a **breach of parliamentary privileges**. It must relate to a recent incident and warrant the intervention of the House. The **motion can be admitted or rejected by the Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha)**.

If admitted, it is referred to the Committee of Privileges, which:

Investigates the matter.

May summon witnesses or documents.

Submits a report within one month.

The House then considers the committee's recommendations, and penal action is taken only in extreme cases.

8. The Samagra Shiksha scheme

It is being **implemented by the Department of School Education and Literacy**. It is a centrally sponsored scheme. It **aims to provide holistic school education from pre-primary to class XII**, in line with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**. It ensures quality, equitable, and inclusive education, addressing diverse backgrounds, multilingual needs, and different academic abilities.

9. About MRI Technology

MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) is a non-invasive medical imaging technology used to create detailed images of the organs, tissues, and structures inside the body—especially the **brain, spinal cord, muscles, and joints**. **Unlike X-rays or CT scans, MRI does not use ionizing radiation, making it safer for repeated use.**

10. About Abel Prize

Named after legendary **Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel (1802–1829)**, the prize was established by the **Norwegian Parliament in 2002 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Abel's birth**. **First awarded in 2003**, the Abel Prize is often regarded as the Nobel Prize equivalent in mathematics. Recipients are selected by a committee appointed by

the Academy, in consultation with the **International Mathematical Union (IMU)** and the **European Mathematical Society (EMS)**. The award includes a cash award and a glass plaque designed by Norwegian artist Henrik Haugan