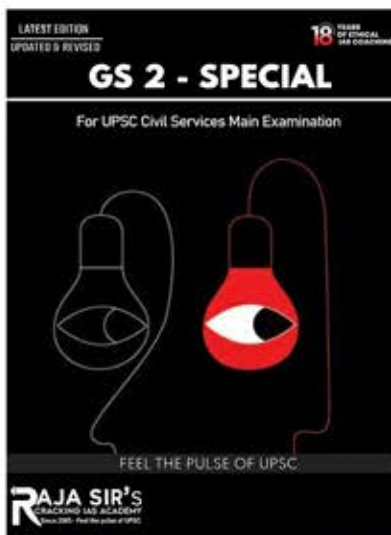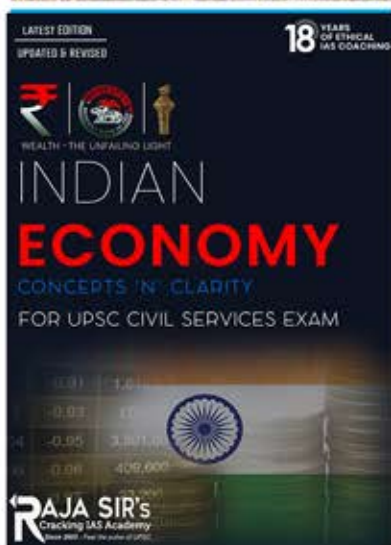# MONTHLY EDITORIALS

Rani Durgavati Gaurav Yatra

The Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government in Madhya Pradesh launched the six-day Rani Durgavati Gaurav Yatra. Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the rally in Balaghat, while the CM also marked....

Assam Rifles' - structure and its role

For the past 18 days, about seven battalions of the Assam Rifles deployed in south Manipur have not received fresh ration with people in Meitei areas allegedly blocking supplies from reaching the camps of the force.

India's conglomerates are getting too big for comfort

India's big businesses are thriving well while small and medium scale firms are still trying to come out of COVID-19 induced losses.According to an Oxfam report, the richest 1% of the country owned more than 40.5% of the total wealth in 2021, while the

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e-commerce exports

The new Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 took several initiatives to increase the value limit of exports through couriers by increasing e-commerce exports from **₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh per shipment.**

The status of e-commerce:
- **Current e-commerce exports in India:** The e-commerce exports from India are valued at $2 billion, which is less than half a percent of the total exports of $447.46 billion in 2022-23.
- **Global e-commerce exports:** Global e-commerce exports are estimated to reach $2 trillion by 2025, indicating significant growth potential.
- **Potential growth for India:** To explore the potential of e-commerce exports in the range of **$200 billion to $250 billion by 2030,** India needs to address the challenges faced by SME exporters by formulating an e-commerce export policy.

Challenges with e-commerce exports in India:
- **Infrastructural Barriers:** Lack of proper infrastructure, such as warehousing and transportation, makes it difficult for e-commerce businesses to scale and reach reac a larger audience. -I IL. I
- **Payment and Financial Services:** Access to payment and financial services, especially for small businesses, is still a major challenge.
- **Lack of Trust:** Customers are often hesitant to make online purchases from unfamiliar websites, which can limit the growth of e-commerce exports.
- **Shipping and Delivery:** Shipping and delivery of products to foreign countries can be expensive and time-consuming, leading to dissatisfaction among customers.
- **Customs and Duties:** Complex customs and duties regulations can make exporting goods challenging and time-consuming.
- **Cybersecurity:** E-commerce websites are vulnerable to cyber attacks, which can lead to loss of sensitive information and negatively impact the reputation of the business.
- **Lack of Standardization:** Lack of standardization in terms of product quality, delivery, and customer service can make it difficult for e-commerce businesses to gain a competitive edge.
- **Competition from International Players:** Competition from well-established international e-commerce companies can make it difficult for Indian companies to grow ana succeed in tne global market.

What are the Related Steps taken:
- **Free-trade Agreements:** To Encourage Cross-Border Trade, the government has signed various Free-trade agreements with countries such as the UAE, the UK, Australia, and others, which has led to a rise in exports.
- **Digital India initiative:** The Digital India initiative has provided solid impetus to other government-led initiatives, including Start Up India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat, which have great potential to translate into lobal success.

How can India lead the E-commerce Export Market?
- **Creating more Awareness:** Creating awareness about e-commerce exports is crucial in promoting and increasing the growth of this industry.
  - Education and training can help in gaining a better understanding of the benefits and opportunities offered by e-commerce exports.

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- - Networking events which can serve as a platform for businesses and individuals to connect and share ideas.
    - Marketing campaigns can also play a crucial role in creating awareness about e-commerce exports.
  - **Improving Infrastructure:** India needs to invest in better infrastructure facilities such as roads, ports, and warehouses to make it easier for e-commerce companies to export their products.
  - **Simplifying Export Regulations:** The government can simplify the export regulations and procedures to make it easier for e-commerce companies to start exporting.
  - **Encourage Foreign Investment:** The government can encourage foreign investment in the e-commerce sector to bring in more resources and expertise to help companies grow.
  - **Developing a strong logistics:** A strong logistic etwork is crucial for e-commerce exports, and India needs to develop this network to ensure that products reach their destination on time.
  - **Building Strong Partnerships:** The government can build strong partnerships with other countries and organizations to help Indian e-commerce companies access new markets and find new customers.

TN Governor's Move is Dangerous, Unconstitutional

Recently, the Tamil Nadu Governor's move to 'dismiss' a Minister highlights the point that the pleasure of the Governor under the Constitution of India insofar as it relates to Ministers is not the same as that of the colonial Governor.

Power to Dismiss a Minister
  - **Article 164 of the Indian Constitution**: It states that the Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor without any advice from anyone. But he appoints the individual Ministers only on the advice of the Chief Minister.
    - **The Chief Minister** alone has the discretion to choose his Ministers.
    - He also decides who will not remain as a Minister in his Council.
    - The Constitution has not transferred the discretion of the Chief Minister to the Governor.
  - **Words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:** Choosing a Minister and dismissing him are no longer within Governor's discretion. It is the Chief Minister who chooses the Minister. It is the Chief Minister who recommends the removal of a Minister.

Difference between Government of India Act 1935 and Constitutional Power on Dismissal of a Minister
  - As per **Section 51(1) and Section 51(5) of the Government of India Act, 1935,** the Ministers were chosen by the Governor and they were dismissed by him at his **discretion**.
    - Thus, the Governor during the colonial rule had absolute discretion to choose a Minister and dismiss him.
  - Undoubtedly, much of the Act of 1935 has been reproduced in the Constitution.

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- **Section 51 of the Government of India Act, 1935** confers on the Governor the discretion to choose as well as dismiss the Ministers.
- But when **Article 164** of the Constitution was drafted, the words **"chosen", "dismissal" and "discretion" were omitted.**
  - It was a significant omission which makes it abundantly clear that the Constitution did **not confer any discretion on the Governor to either choose or dismiss** an individual Minister.

Issues Related to Office of Governor
- **Governor Discretionary Power:**
  - Giving or withholding assent to a Bill passed by the state legislature
  - At the time, for a party to prove its majority, generally after a hung verdict in an election.
- **Lack of Guidelines for Exercise of his/her Power:**
  - For appointing a Chief Minister or dissolving the Assembly.
  - No prescribed time limit set to withhold assent to a Bill.
  - For his recommendations to the President for invoking President's Rule.

Committees Recommendations
- **Regarding the Selection of Governors:**
  - **The National Commission To Review the Working of the Constitution** appointed in 2000 suggested that the Governor of a State should be appointed by the President, after consultation with the Chief Minister of that State.
- **Sarkaria Commission:**
  - Set up in 1983 to look into Centre-state relations, suggested that the Vice President of India and Speaker of Lok Sabha should be consulted by the Prime Minister in the selection of Governors.
- **Punchhi Committee:**
  - Constituted in 2007, proposed that a committee comprising the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Vice President, Speaker, and the concerned Chief Minister should choose the Governor.
  - It recommended deleting the "Doctrine of Pleasure" from the Constitution, but supported the right of the Governor to sanction the prosecution of ministers against the advice of the state government.
  - Provision for impeachment of the Governor by the state legislature was also suggested.

Related Judicial Judgments
- **Shamsher Singh and Anr vs State Of Punjab (1974):** A seven- judge Constitution Bench declared that the President and Governor exercise their formal constitutional powers only upon and in accordance with the **advice of their Ministers** save in a few well known exceptional situations.
- **Nabam Rebia vs Deputy Speaker Case (2016):** A Constitution Bench of five judges reaffirmed that the discretionary powers of the Governor are **limited to the postulates of Article 163(1).**
  - The Court also set aside the decisions in the Mahabir Prasad Sharma and Pratapsing Raojirao Rane cases, where it was held that the Governor can exercise power under Article 164 in an unfettered manner.

Looking ahead

- **Clear Guidelines:** A legislature should be enforced, prescribing clear cut guidelines regarding the exercise of powers by the Governor.
- **Time Bounded:** Time limit should be prescribed for withholding bills.
- **Work on Recommendations:** Need to work upon the recommendations of various committees.
    - India is a Parliamentary democracy; hence Parliament should prevail and similarly the scenario suited for democratically elected State Legislature.

The lessons of Indo-US cooperation in agriculture

- The **Soviet Union's role**in independent **India's early industrialization** through supply of **capital equipment and technology** is well-known. The **Bhilai and Bokaro steel plants**, Barauni and Koyali refineries, **Bharat Heavy Electricals**, Heavy Engineering Corporation, **Mining & Allied Machinery Corporation**, Neyveli Thermal Power Station, Indian Drugs & Pharmaceuticals, and oil prospecting and drilling at Ankleshwar were all products of collaboration with the Soviet Bloc.
- Not as widely known is the part that the United States, and the **likes of Rockefeller and Ford Foundation**, played in India's agricultural development during the 1950s and 1960s. A brief history of this involvement – through **the establishment of agricultural universities**and the **Green Revolution** – is useful in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to the US for strengthening the "**global strategic partnership**" between the two countries.

The first Agricultural University
- In 1950, **Major H.S. Sandhu**, who led the **reclamation of Uttar Pradesh's Tarai region**, and the **state's Chief Secretary A.N. Jha**visited the US and saw the so-called land-grant universities there. These institutions, set up on public land, engaged in **agricultural education** as well as research and extension activity. This was unlike the agricultural and veterinary colleges in India that merely taught and produced graduates. **Research and extension** (training farmers in adopting scientific cultivation practices) was largely left to the state agricultural departments.
- On their return, the two officials recommended to the Chief Minister **Govind Ballabh Pant**that a **US land-grant model agricultural university** – which integrated teaching, research and extension – be established in the **densely-forested Tarai area** near the Himalayan foothills, being reclaimed and converted for farming. Such a university would provide an environment more conducive for learning, purposeful and **problem-solving research**, and **knowledge dissemination to farmers**.
- While Pant accepted the idea, the formal proposal to the Centre, for starting an **agricultural university at Rudrapur in the Tarai**, was submitted only around September 1956. It was based on a '**Blueprint for a Rural University in India**' prepared by H.W. Hannah, Associate Dean of the University of Illinois. The state government made available 14,255 acres of land and, in December 1958, passed the UP Agricultural University Act. **The UP Agricultural**

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University(later renamed as G.B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology) was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on November 17, 1960.

Relationships with US land-grant universities

- *Hannah's blueprint*was published by the *Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)* and circulated to interested state governments. It led to as many as *eight agricultural universities* coming up within eight years, mostly at the initiative of the chief ministers themselves. Punjab, for instance, had Partap Singh Kairon. He, like Pant, was responsive to the needs of farmers: They, and also those of the Tarai, were predominantly refugees from *West Punjab's canal colonies* who knew the benefits the *Lyallpur Agricultural College* had brought to the lands, now in Pakistan.

- All the eight universities received the US Agency for International Development's assistance for training of faculty and provision of equipment and books. Each was further linked to a *US land-grant institution*(table), whose specialists were involved in curriculum design and putting in place research and extension systems in the new universities. Many even stayed in the university campuses for extended periods.

- *The universities were to have their own research farms*regional stations and substations, and seed production facilities (G.B. Pant University, from 1969, also began marketing its seeds under the 'Pantnagar' brand). The importance the US accorded to the whole project can be gauged from its ambassadors *John K. Galbraith* and *Chester Bowles graced* the opening of the Orissa and Mysore agricultural universities respectively.

The Green Revolution's seeds

- *Traditional wheat and rice varieties*were tall and slender. They grew vertically on application of fertilizers and water, while "lodging" (bending over or even falling) when their ear-heads were heavy with well-filled grains. The *Green Revolution* entailed breeding *semi-dwarf varieties* with strong stems that didn't lodge. These could "tolerate" high fertilizer application. The more the inputs (nutrients and water), the more the output (grain) produced.

- *In 1949*, an American biologist *C. Salmon stationed in Japan*– under US occupation after *World War II* – identified a wheat variety developed at an experimental station there. Called *'Norin-10'*, its plants grew to *only 2-2.5 feet*, as against the *4.5-5 feet height of traditional tall varieties.* Salmon took Norin-10's seeds and gave them to Orville Vogel, a wheat breeder at the Washington State University, Pullman.

- *Vogel crossed Norin-10*with locally-grown US winter wheat. From those crosses, one variety giving *25% higher grain yields was selected in 1956* and released as *'Gaines'.* Vogel also shared the seeds of Norin-10 and his original crosses with Norman Borlaug, working with the *Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico*. Borlaug, in turn, crossed these with the spring wheats grown in Mexico. By 1960-61, many varieties incorporating the *Norin-10 dwarfing genes* in a spring wheat background were released.

How those seeds came to India

- Around 1957-58, *S. Swaminathan*, then a barely 33-year-old scientist at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in New Delhi, saw a *paper on the Norin-10 genes*by Vogel in the American Agronomy Journal. He wrote to Vogel

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for the seeds of 'Gaines'. Vogel responded, but noted that 'Gaines', being a winter wheat, wouldn't flower in Indian conditions. He directed him to Borlaug, whose spring wheats containing the ***dwarfing genes*** were better suited for the country.

■ ***Swaminathan got in touch with Borlaug***, who came to India only in March 1963, following a request placed to the ***Rockefeller Foundation.***He sent the seeds of four Mexican wheat varieties bred by him, which were ***first sown in the trial fields of IARI*** and the new agricultural universities at Pantnagar and Ludhiana. By 1966-67, farmers were planting these on a large scale and India, from being an importer, turned self-sufficient in wheat. Much of its wheat imports earlier, ironically, came from the US under ***its Public Law 480 food aid programme!***

Why did the US help India?

■ ***Borlaug's International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center***or **CIMMYT** in Mexico was primarily ***funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.*** The latter, along with the ***Ford Foundation***, also supported the ***International Rice Research Institute*** in the Philippines. Both institutions contributed significantly in ***trebling and quadrupling grain yields***, even as India, by the seventies and early-eighties, had built a robust indigenous ***crop breeding programme*** – thanks to investments in the ICAR and state agricultural universities system.

■ What made the US so much interested in ***India's agricultural development***the way the Soviet Union promoted its ***industrialization?*** Even the idea of an MSP – "***a guaranteed minimum price*** announced in advance of the planting season" and "a market within ***bullock-cart distance*** that will pay...when the cultivator has to sell" – was first pushed by a ***Ford Foundation team's report of 1959.***

■ The answer probably lies in the ***Cold War geopolitics***and ***great-power rivalry*** of those times. It resulted in competition to do-good, extending to "***fighting world hunger***" and sharing of knowledge and ***plant genetic material*** that were viewed as "global public goods". India, contrary to popular perception, wasn't aligned to either bloc at least till the sixties. The strategy of "non-alignment" paid off then, just as "multi-alignment" is today.

CoWIN Data 'Leak'

Following reports that **CoWIN data** had been accessed by a **Telegram bot**, the Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar said the **Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)**, the **nodal cyber security agency**, had reviewed the alleged breach and has found that the **CoWIN portal** was not **"directly breached"**. The data – including citizens' Aadhaar and passport numbers – that an automated account on Telegram was allegedly sharing was done using previously breached databases, he said.

The **Health Ministry issued a press release** on 12 June 2023 where it essentially **ruled out CoWIN's APIs** (short for application programming interface that helps two

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applications share data with each other) being used by the Telegram bot. The responses from the government raise more questions than they answer.

The Centre's Defence

The **Ministry of Health press release** first lays out the **three ways** in which data on **CoWIN can be accessed:**

1. A user **can access their data on the portal** through a **one time password (OTP)** sent to their mobile number.
2. A **vaccinator can access data of a person**, and the CoWIN system tracks and records each time an "**authorised" user accesses the system.**
3. Third party applications that have been provided **authorised access of CoWIN APIs** can access personal level data of vaccinated people after OTP authentication.

- Then it claims that **without an OTP**, data cannot be shared with the Telegram bot. Some reports said that the bot also showed people's date of birth, but the Ministry said that **CoWIN only collects their year of birth** and that there is no provision to capture a person's address on CoWIN. It also said that **there is one API that has a feature of sharing the data by using just a mobile number.** "However, even this API is very specific and the requests are only accepted from a trusted API which has been whitelisted by the CoWIN application".

- Chandrasekhar, in a tweet, said the **CERT-In had reviewed the alleged breach**, and the data being accessed by the Telegram bot was from a **"threat actor database".** He said that the database "**seems to have been populated with previously breached data**", which was not related to CoWIN. "It does not appear that the CoWIN app or database has been directly breached," Chandrasekhar added.

But was there a breach?

- The Ministry has not explicitly clarified whether or not the **CoWIN database** was breached recently or in the past.

- Its entire explanation hinges on the fact that the **only way to access CoWIN's system** is **either through an OTP** or **through a vaccinator** whose access is logged. While the Ministry said that it has **adequate security measures to protect CoWIN's database**, at no point has it said the database itself has not been impacted. This only leaves the possibility that the Telegram bot was not scraping data from CoWIN in real time.

- The Ministry's statement also **does not offer any insight against the assertions** that the Telegram bot was able to **accurately retrieve citizens' data** linked to a particular phone number, and why the details offered by the bot were specific to the **CoWIN database**, including place of vaccination, ID used etc. Then, the Ministry has admitted that **there is at least one API for which an OTP is not a necessity for data sharing.** While this API only accepts requests from a **"trusted API"** that has been **"whitelisted"** by the CoWIN system, there is no clarity on what this trusted API does and why it has been afforded the privilege of bypassing the entire OTP mechanism.

- Besides, **the Ministry is yet to receive a final report** on the incident from **CERT-In** on the issue. As such, it would be premature to disprove a breach until CERT-In explicitly states that in its report. If **one were to go by the government's second reasoning** that the database which the **Telegram bot** was

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using was prepared with information leaked in previous breaches that too, raises some concerns.

- Chief among them is the Aadhaar details corresponding to a **person's mobile number** – the government have never publicly acknowledged **whether Aadhaar data has ever been hacked.** In fact, in 2018, former IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad had said in Parliament that Aadhaar's security "**cannot be broken even with the billionth effort**". It is unclear then how the bot could accurately display people's Aadhaar numbers corresponding to their mobile numbers.

Next steps

- The Health Ministry has asked **CERT-In** to look into this issue and submit a final report. Chandrasekhar said the **National Data Governance policy** has been finalised that **will create a common framework** of data storage, access and security standards across all of the government. **Queries sent to CERT-In** on the issue did not elicit a response.

Technologies to address Air Pollution

Recently, the **Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** provided valuable insights into the projects related to deploying various **technologies to address Air Pollution in India** during a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Air Pollution

- Air pollution refers to the **contamination of the Earth"s atmosphere**by harmful substances beyond their natural levels, due to human activities and natural processes.
    - It originates from sources like **industrial emissions, vehicle exhaust, agricultural practices, and natural events,**and it can have wide-ranging negative effects on **air quality, human well-being, ecosystems, and the overall health of the planet.**
- **Common air pollutants include: PM2.5, PM10**, Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) and Nitric Oxides (NOx), Sulfur Dioxide (SO2), Carbon Monoxide (CO) etc.

Technology Based Projects Deployed to Curb Air Pollution

- **Pariyayantra Filtration Units on Buses:**A pilot study was initiated where **30 buses were retrofitted with Pariyayantra Filtration** units installed on their rooftops.
    - These units were designed to **effectively capture dust particles (through filters fitted on vehicles) from the surrounding environment,**thereby minimizing the contribution of vehicular movement to air pollution levels.
    - **It does not require any power to operate**and is equivalent to the filtration provided by 6 room air filters.
- **WAYU Air Purification Units at Traffic Intersections**: A total of **54 WAYU Air Purification Units**were strategically installed at **major traffic intersections in Delhi.**

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- These units, designed to **purify the air in the immediate vicinity**, played a crucial role in reducing the impact of vehicular emissions on air quality.
        - The WAYU units acted as **localized air purifiers**, offering a potential solution to combat the adverse effects of traffic-related pollution.
    - **Ionisation Technology for Ambient Air Pollution Reduction:**This technology **aimed to neutralize pollutants through ionization processes,** thereby enhancing air quality in the target areas.
        - The study evaluated the **feasibility and impact of ionization technology,**potentially opening new avenues for pollution reduction.
    - **Installation of Medium/Large-Scale Smog Towers:**These towers, acting as **substantial air purifiers**, targeted the **reduction of particulate matter and pollutants on a broader scale.**
    - **Retrofitting Emission Control Devices in In-Use Vehicles:**Older vehicles, especially those adhering to **older emission standards like BS III, contribute substantially to air pollution.**
        - A pilot project was undertaken to **assess the feasibility and effectiveness of retrofitting emission control devices**in such vehicles.
            - The project aimed to provide recommendations for emission reduction from these vehicles, aligning with broader efforts to improve air quality.
        - **Indigenous Photonic System for Air Quality Monitoring:**A project by the **Department of Science and Technology (DST)** focused on developing an **indigenous photonic system** for real-time remote monitoring of air quality parameters.
            - This initiative aimed to**enhance the accuracy and accessibility of air quality** data, enabling more informed decision-making in pollution management strategies.
        - **Advancements in Electric Vehicle (EV) Autonomous Technology:**An autonomous navigation foundation focused on EV-based autonomous vehicles was established under the **DST National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber Physical Systems (NM-ICPS).**
            - The integration of autonomous technology in EVs presents an opportunity to **optimize driving patterns, reduce traffic congestion, and subsequently lower greenhouse gas emissions.**

Other Government Initiatives to Curb Air Pollution
    - Graded Response Action Plan (Delhi)
    - National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
    - BS-VI vehicles
    - Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR)
    - Dashboard for Monitoring Air Quality
    - National Air Quality Index (AQI)

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Digitisation and proper mapping of land records could lead to substantial economic prosperity

- Land is a precious asset for any country, and more so for India where more than 50% of the working population is engaged in agriculture. It is, therefore, all the more important to develop a modern, comprehensive and transparent land record management system.
- Keeping this in view, the government revamped the existing National Land Record Modernization Programme (NLRMP) by bringing into force, the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) in 2016.

Significance of Land

- **Source of Livelihood:** Land provides habitation and sustenance to a wide variety of flora and fauna, including human beings. More than 50% of the working population in India is engaged in agriculture, which depends on land as a primary resource.
  - Land is also used for forestry, mining, and other activities that generate income and employment.
- **Economy:** Land is a valuable asset that can attract investment, promote industrialization, and boost growth. **Special Economic Zones (SEZs)** are examples of land-based initiatives that aim to create hyper-liberalized enclaves for export-oriented production.
  - Land can also generate long-term capital gains when transferred, subject to certain conditions and exemptions.
- **Natural Resources:** Land contains a variety of natural resources, including minerals, water, and forests. These resources are essential for human industry and commerce.
- **Culture and Identity:** Land can be a source of identity and belonging for people. It can be associated with a particular culture or community, and it can play a role in religious and spiritual practices.

Digitization of Land Record Management System needed in India

- **Reduce Litigation:** Land-related disputes account for a large proportion of pending court cases in India, which take a long time and cost to resolve. A comprehensive and transparent land record management system can reduce the scope and frequency of such disputes by providing clear and secure ownership rights that are backed by the government.
- **Improve Transparency**: Land records in India are often inaccurate, outdated, and fragmented across different departments and levels of government. A comprehensive and transparent land record management system can improve the quality and accessibility of land records by digitizing them and linking them to spatial data and other databases such as Aadhaar, tax records, etc.
- **Promote Development:** Land is a valuable asset that can attract investment, promote industrialization, and boost growth. A comprehensive and transparent land record management system can create a conducive environment for land markets and transactions by reducing transaction costs, risks, and uncertainties. It can also enable landowners to access credit, insurance, and markets by using their land titles as collateral.
- **Ensure Equity:** A comprehensive and transparent land record management system can support the implementation of land reforms that aim to redistribute

land among the landless and marginalized sections of society. It can also empower women and other vulnerable groups by recognizing their land rights and enhancing their access to land-related services.

National Land Record Modernization Programme (NLRMP)

The **National Land Record Modernization Programme (NLRMP)** was a **centrally sponsored scheme** that was launched by the Government of India in 2008 with the aim to modernize the land records system in the country and implement the conclusive land-titling system with title guarantee. The **NLRMP was later revamped and renamed as the Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) in 2016 as a central sector scheme with 100% funding by the Centre.**

Salient features of DILRMP

- A **Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN)or Bhu-Aadhaar number** has been assigned for a land parcel, which is a **14 digit alphanumeric** unique ID based on geo-coordinates which will serve as a pan-India number for obtaining ownership details of a plot along with its size and geolocation.
- A uniform system called **National Generic Document Registration System (NGDRS)**has been developed for addressing the diversity prevailing across States with regards to registration of deeds/documents.
- The**Records of Rights have been transliterated in all the 22 scheduled languages** mentioned in the Constitution to address the problem of linguistic barriers in land governance in the country.
- The DILRMP scheme will also facilitate various services such as providing caste, income and domicile certificates, and online information on crop profile, crop insurance and e-linkages to credit facilities/banks.
- A comprehensive land record management system will also help resolve long pending arbitration cases and boundary-related disputes amicably, thus reducing the burden on the judiciary and the administration.

How can DILRMP (Digitisation of Land Records) be beneficial?

- **Improve the Quality and Accessibility of Land Records:**
  - The DILRMP aims to digitize and update the textual and spatial records of land ownership and transactions, such as sale deeds, inheritance records, mortgage and lease documents, cadastral maps, etc.
  - These records are made available online to the public and are updated regularly. This helps to reduce errors, inconsistencies, and gaps in land data, and make them more reliable and transparent.
- **Reduce Litigation and Frauds:**
  - The DILRMP aims to implement the conclusive land-titling system with title guarantee, which means that the land records provide a conclusive proof of ownership of land and are backed by the government.
  - The title holder is protected from any challenge or dispute by other claimants and is indemnified by the government in case of any loss arising from any defect in the title.
  - This helps to reduce the scope and frequency of land-related disputes and frauds, which account for a large proportion of pending court cases in India.
- **Promote Development and Growth:**
  - The DILRMP aims to create a conducive environment for land markets and transactions by reducing transaction costs, risks, and uncertainties.

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- It also enables landowners to access credit, insurance, and markets by using their land titles as collateral.
- This helps to attract investment, promote industrialization, and boost growth in various sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, housing, etc.
- **Ensure Equity and Empowerment:**
  - The DILRMP aims to support the implementation of land reforms that aim to redistribute land among the landless and marginalized sections of society.
  - It also empowers women and other vulnerable groups by recognizing their land rights and enhancing their access to land-related services.
  - This helps to improve their livelihoods, dignity, and social status.

Challenges associated with Land Record Digitisation

- **Lack of Coordination and Cooperation among States:**
  - Land is a state subject and the implementation of DILRMP depends on the willingness and cooperation of the state governments.
  - However, some states are reluctant or slow to adopt the DILRMP due to various reasons such as political, administrative, legal, or technical constraints.
  - There is also a lack of coordination and standardization among states in terms of land laws, policies, procedures, and systems.
- **Inadequate resources and capacity:**
  - The DILRMP requires adequate financial, human, and technical resources and capacity to carry out the massive task of modernizing the land records system in the country.
  - However, there is a shortage of funds, staff, equipment, and infrastructure at various levels of implementation.
  - There is also a need for training and capacity building of the concerned officials and functionaries on the use of modern technology and tools for land record management.
- **Lack of awareness and participation among stakeholders:**
  - The DILRMP requires the active involvement and participation of various stakeholders such as landowners, buyers, sellers, tenants, intermediaries, etc., who are directly affected by the changes in the land records system.
  - However, there is a lack of awareness and sensitization among them about the benefits and procedures of DILRMP.

Looking ahead

- **Enhancing the Coordination and Cooperation Among States:**
  - The central and state governments need to work together to overcome the challenges and issues faced by the DILRMP.
  - They need to harmonize and streamline the land laws, policies, procedures, and systems across the states. They also need to share the best practices and experiences of the DILRMP among themselves.
- **Maintaining Transparency:**
  - The central and state governments need to take strict action against any sabotage or manipulation of the DILRMP.

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- ■ They need to ensure transparency and accountability in the process of land survey, digitization, verification, and titling.
  - ■ They also need to create a grievance redressal mechanism for resolving any disputes or complaints arising from the DILRMP.
- ■ **Mobilizing Adequate Resources and Capacity:**
  - ■ The central and state governments need to allocate sufficient funds, staff, equipment, and infrastructure for the implementation of DILRMP.
  - ■ They also need to provide training and capacity building to the concerned officials and functionaries on the use of modern technology and tools for land record management.
  - ■ They may also leverage the public-private partnership (PPP) mode of service delivery for enhancing efficiency and convenience.
- ■ **Creating awareness and participation among stakeholders:**
  - ■ The central and state governments need to create awareness and sensitization among the various stakeholders about the benefits and procedures of DILRMP.
  - ■ They need to address their apprehensions or misconceptions about the DILRMP by providing clear and accurate information.
  - ■ They also need to encourage their involvement and participation in the process of land record management.

India-Africa Partnership: Achievements, Challenges and Roadmap 2023

- ■ India has historically enjoyed a close relationship with Africa, due to the shared struggle against **colonialism**, the **non-aligned movement** and **shared socio-economic** and **demographic challenges**.
- ■ India-Africa relations have developed steadily in the past 15 years, especially since 2014.
- ■ However, there is still **scope for further strengthening the relations**.

Key highlights of the report
- ■ The report examines the transitions unfolding in demographic, economic, political and social aspects of Africa stamped by the adverse impact of **the pandemic** and **complicated geopolitics.**
- ■ Even as **Ethiopia**, **Sudan**, the **Central African Republic** and other countries continue to battle with the challenges posed by **insurgency**, **ethnic violence** and **terrorism.**
  - ■ Africa is slowly heading toward regional integration and is devoted to democracy, peace and progress.
- ■ There is competition going on between countries like China, Russia and the USA to **strengthen their relations** with parts of Africa to ensure **market access**, **gain energy** and **mineral security**, and **increase political** and **economic influence.**

Africa-China Ties
- ■ China is armed with a consistent and robust policy since 2000 to become virtually **Africa's biggest economic partner**.

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- The report portrays China's role as **'the infrastructure developer'**, **'the resource provider'**, and **'the financier'.**
    - China has invested enormously in Africa in terms of **money, materials** and **diplomatic push.**
- Even though India has a substantive partnership with Africa and a rich fund of goodwill it is **essential for India to review its Africa policy** periodically, **stay resilient** by making the required changes, and place focus on its implementation to counter China in the region.

Recommendations on India-Africa Partnership

1. **Political and Diplomatic Cooperation**
- **Political** and **diplomatic cooperation** should be **strengthened** by restoring periodic leader's summits through the medium of **the India-Africa Forum Summit.**
    - Last summit was in 2015.
- A new **annual strategic dialogue** between the **chairperson of the African Union (AU)** and **India's External Affairs Minister** should be launched in 2023.
- India should work on forging consensus among **G-20 members** on the **AU's entry** into the G-20 as a **full member**.
    - **Prime Minister** recently **communicated** to G-20 leaders requesting support for this proposal.
2. **Defence and Security Cooperation**
- In the **arena of defence and security** cooperation, the government needs to:
    - Increase the number of **defence attachés deployed in Africa**,
    - Expand dialogue on defence issues,
    - Widen the footprint of **maritime collaboration**, and
    - Expand lines of credit to **facilitate defence exports**.
- More can be done to increase the number of **defence training slots** and enhance cooperation in **counter-terrorism**, **cyber security** and **emerging technologies**.
3. **India-Africa Trade**
- **India-Africa trade** touching $98 billion in FY22–23 this figure can go up if access to finance through the creation of an **Africa Growth Fund (AGF)** is ensured.
- A special package of measures should be brought by India to **improve project exports** and **build up cooperation** in the **shipping domain**.

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African Union

- The African Union (AU) is a **continental body** consisting of the **55 member states** that make up the countries of the African Continent.
- It was officially **launched in 2002** as a successor to the **Organisation of African Unity** (OAU, 1963-1999).
- The AU is guided by its vision of "**An Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena"**.

Objectives

- Achieve greater **unity** and **solidarity** between **African countries** and their people
- Defend the **sovereignty**, **territorial integrity** and **independence** of its Member States.
- Accelerate the **political** and **socio-economic integration** of the continent.
- **Promote** and **defend African common positions** on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples.
- **Encourage international cooperation**
- Promote **peace**, **security**, and **stability** on the **continent**.
- Promote **democratic principles** and institutions, **popular participation** and **good governance**.

Other Areas of Cooperation

- A special focus on promoting **trilateral cooperation** and deepening science and technology cooperation could pay rich dividends.
- **Socio-cultural cooperation** should be increased through **greater interaction** between **universities**, **think tanks**, **civil society** and **media organisations** in India and select African countries.
- **Scholarships awarded** to Africans should be named after famous African figures.
- **Visa measures** for African students who come to India for higher education should be liberalised.
    - They should also be given work visas for short periods.
- A special mechanism for implementing the **'Roadmap 2030'** can best be secured through close **collaboration between the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** and the **National Security Council Secretariat** through a team of officials working under the joint leadership of the Secretary, Africa in the MEA, and a designated Deputy National Security Adviser.

India needs to strengthen its already existing ties with Africa. Africa is a continent that accounts for nearly 17% of the world's population today and reaching 25% in 2050. Africa has the potential to become a **huge market** for Indian businesses. Africa is also blessed with an abundance of **mineral resources** which can contribute towards the diversification of India's oil imports and improve **India's energy security**.

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Pride Flag

The **month of June**, recognised worldwide as the **Pride Month**, is marked by many events **across India** to celebrate the **LGBTQIA+ community.** And you might have noticed that most of these events are **marked by a flag** — a **simple red-to-violet rainbow**, and in some cases, the more updated version of it, which is known as the **Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag**, created by Valentino Vecchietti of **Intersex Equality Rights UK** in 2021. This is actually a new version of the previous Progress **Pride Flag created in 2018** by **Daniel Quasar.**

While most organisations in India still use **the older rainbow pride flag** in their events, the new variation of it is being increasingly accepted as a **more inclusive representation for the community**.

What"s the Pride flag?

■ A **Pride flag** essentially represents **the pride associated with LGTQIA+ social movements.** For centuries people belonging to the community **have had to fight for basic rights in countries** across the world. The struggle continues in many countries. **Uganda**, for instance, recently passed a **law criminalising the LGBTQIA+ community**.

■ **In India** too, **gay sex was decriminalised as recently as 2018**. The **Pride flag** was used by activists, members of the community and allies as a **symbol of resistance and acceptance**. It was designed by renowned American artist and activist **Gilbert Baker.**

History of the pride flag

■ The **simple rainbow Pride Flag**, designed by Baker, **made its debut in 1978** at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Parade. The **new flag is based on this very flag.** In his memoir, **Rainbow Warrior**, Baker mentions how he was approached by prominent gay activist **Harvey Milk** and filmmaker **Artie Bressan Jr** to come up with a symbol that will represent "**the dawn of a new gay consciousness and freedom**".

■ "In the past, when I had thought of a flag, I saw it as just **another icon to lampoon**… I discovered the **depth of their power**, their transcendental, **transformational quality**. I thought of the emotional connection they hold. I thought about how most flags represented a place. They were **primarily nationalistic**, **territorial**, **iconic propaganda** — all things we questioned in the '70s. **Gay people** were **tribal**, **individualistic**, a **global collective** that was expressing itself in art and politics. We needed a **flag to fly everywhere**," writes Baker in his memoir.

■ According to Baker, **the Rainbow Flag** was a "**conscious choice**, **natural** and **necessary**" as it was **a symbol of hope in many cultures.** Since then, there has been, **in the spirit of inclusion**, a tradition of adding new elements to this flag. The most significant update of **this rainbow flag was in 2017**, when social justice advocate Amber Hikes conceptualised a **new version of the flag with black and brown stripes** to represent **people of colour**.

■ **In 2018**, American graphic designer **Daniel Quasar redesigned the flag** to include the **colours of the transgender flag**, **blue**, **light pink** and **white**. Quasar added the transgender colours along with **black and brown colours** (representing people of colour) in a **chevron shape** to represent forward movement.

- **The most recent version of the flag** was designed by **Valentino Vecchietti in 2021** as an **intersex-inclusive Pride flag.** A **purple circle** over a **yellow triangle** was included in the chevron part of the pride flag. This is a reference to the **Intersex pride flag.**

Why is it called Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag?

- The **intersex** has largely been underrepresented within **broader queer narratives.** According to the **United Nations**, **intersex people are born with sex characteristics** (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies.
- In 2021, **Intersex Equality Rights (UK)** decided to adapt the **Pride Progress flag design** to incorporate the **intersex flag**, creating the **Intersex-Inclusive Pride flag. Intersex Equality rights activists** did the redesigning. The colours yellow and purple are used in the intersex flag as a counterpoint to blue and pink which are traditionally seen as gendered colours.

What do the colours of the new flag signify?
Red= Life
Orange= Healing
Yellow= New Ideas
Green= Prosperity
Blue= Serenity
Violet= Spirit
Chevron Part
Black and brown= people of colour
White, blue and pink= trans people
Yellow with purple circle= Intersex people

Assam Rifles' - structure and its role

- For the **past 18 days**, about **seven battalions of the Assam Rifles** deployed in **south Manipur** have not received fresh ration with people in **Meitei areas** allegedly blocking supplies from reaching the camps of the force.
- The **Meiteis have been accusing the Assam Rifles**, the **longest-serving paramilitary force in India**, of being partisan and siding with the **Kukis in the ongoing conflict.**

Supply trucks blocked

- Sources said that **while NH2**, the **main highway** through which **civilian trucks take supplies to the Valley**, is facing blockade by the **Kuki population** in Kangpokpi in north Manipur, trucks of the Assam Rifles have been allowed to pass. The problem starts when the **trucks reach Sigmai**, a **Meitei area**. Sources said women from the community have been blocking the roads and **not allowing trucks of the force to pass through.**
- Sources said that while the **Assam Rifles has stocks of dry ration** that can run up to **45 days**, perishable items such as **vegetables have to be replenished every week**. But even dry ration stock is depleting fast as the camps have to sustain additional Army columns rushed to Manipur to control violence.

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The Assam Rifles

- **Assam Rifles** is **one of the six central armed police forces (CAPFs)** under the **administrative control** of the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**. The other forces being the **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)**, the **Border Security Force (BSF)**, the **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)**, the **Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)** and the **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).**
- It is tasked with the **maintenance of law and order in the North East along with the Indian Army** and also **guards the Indo-Myanmar border in the region.** It has a sanctioned strength of **over 63,000 personnel** and has **46 battalions** apart from administrative and training staff.

The dual control structure

- Its **uniqueness lies** in the fact that **it is the only paramilitary force** with a **dual control structure.** While the **administrative control of the force is with the MHA**, its **operational control is with the Indian Army**, which is under the **Ministry of Defence (MoD)**. This means that **salaries and infrastructure** for the force is **provided by the MHA**, but the **deployment, posting, transfer and deputation** of the personnel is **decided by the Army.** All its senior ranks, from **DG to IG** and sector headquarters are **manned by officers from the Army.** The force is commanded by a **Lieutenant General** from the Indian Army.
- In some ways, the force is the **only central paramilitary force (CPMF)**, as its **operational duties** and **regimentation** are on the lines of the Indian Army. However, being a **Central Armed Police force under MHA**, its recruitment, perks, promotion of its personnel and retirement policies are governed according to the rules framed by the **MHA for CAPFs.**
- This has created a **rift within the personnel of the Assam Rifles**, with some sections wanting **singular control of the MoD** while **others prefering the MHA.**
- Those arguing for **administrative control of the MoD** say that it would mean better perks and retirement benefits, which are **far higher compared to CAPFs under MHA.** However, **Army personnel also retire early, at 35**, while the **retirement age in CAPF is 60 years.** Also, CAPF officers have recently been granted non-functional financial upgradation (NFFU) to at least financially address the issue of stagnation in their careers due to lack of avenues for promotion. On the other hand, **Army personnel also get one rank one pension** which is **not available to CAPFs.**

Both MHA and MoD want full control

- This rift is also reflected in the **two ministries' demands.** The MHA has argued that **all the border guarding forces** are under the operational control of the ministry and so **Assam Rifles coming under MHA** will give border guarding a comprehensive and integrated approach. MHA sources also say that **Assam Rifles continues to function on the pattern set during the 1960s** and the ministry would want to make guarding of the **Indo-Myanmar border on the lines of other CAPFs.**
- **The Army**, on its part, has been arguing that **there is no need to fix what isn't broken.** Sources say the **Army is of the opinion that the Assam Rifles has worked well in coordination with Army a**nd frees up the armed forces from many of its responsibilities to focus on its core strengths. It has also argued that **Assam Rifles was always a military force** and not a police force and has been

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built like that. It has argued that giving the control of the force to MHA or merging it with any other CAPF will confuse the force and jeopardise national security.

An old issue

- **Both MHA and MoD** have wanted **full control of the force for a long time.** Opinions to this effect have been expressed by **both Army and police officers** from time to time in the public domain.
- However, **it was in 2013** that MHA first made a proposal **to take operational control of the Assam Rifles** and **merge it with the BSF.** There were discussions held between MHA and MoD, however, no agreeable ground could be found.
- In 2019, after Amit Shah took over as Home Minister, the proposal was renewed – this time with a plan **to merge Assam Rifles with the ITBP.**
- Since then, the Indian Army has actually been pushing for not only total control of Assam Rifles but **also operational control over ITBP**, which guards the Sino-Indian border and is currently engaged in a standoff with the Chinese PLA in eastern Ladakh.
- There have also been petitions filed in courts with regard to who should control the Assam Rifles.

A glorious history starting in 1835

- **Assam Rifles** is the **oldest paramilitary force raised way back in 1835** in British India with **just 750 men.** Since then, it has gone on **to fight in two World Wars**, the **Sino-Indian war of 1962** and used as an anti-insurgency force against militant groups in the North East.
- Raised as a **militia to protect British tea estates** and its settlements from the raids of tribes in the North East, **the force was first known as Cachar Levy.** It was reorganised later as **Assam Frontier Force** as its role was expanded to conduct punitive operations beyond Assam borders.
- Given its contribution in opening the region to administration and commerce, it came to be known as the "**right arm of the civil and left arm of the military**".

Internationalisation of rupee: Why and what are the benefits?

A **Reserve Bank of India**-appointed working group recommended **inclusion of the rupee in the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket** and **recalibration of the foreign portfolio investor (FPI) regime** to accelerate the pace of **internationalisation of the rupee.**

Internationalisation of Rupee

- Internationalisation of rupees is a **process that involves increasing use of the local currency in cross-border transactions.**
- It involves **promoting the rupee for import and export trade** and then other current account transactions followed by its use in **capital account transactions.**
- In the 1950s, the Indian rupee was widely used as **legal tender** in the **United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar.**
- However, the devaluation of India's currency by 1966 led to the introduction of sovereign currencies in these countries to reliance on the Indian rupee.

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Benefits
- **Appreciate Currency Value:**It will improve the demand for the rupee in international trade.
    - This can lead to**increased convenience and reduced transaction costs** for businesses and individuals dealing with India.
- **Reduced Exchange Rate Volatility:**When a currency is internationalized, its exchange rate tends to stabilize.
    - The**increased demand for the currency in global markets can help reduce volatility**, making it more predictable and reliable for international transactions.
- **Geopolitical Advantages:**Internationalizing the Rupee can enhance India"s geopolitical influence.
    - It **can strengthen economic ties with other countries,**facilitate bilateral trade agreements, and promote diplomatic relations.

Challenges
- **Limited International Demand:**
    - The daily average share for the rupee in the**global forex** market is **only around 1.6%, while India's share of global goods trade is ~2%.**
- **Convertibility Concern:**
    - The**INR is not fully convertible**, meaning there are restrictions on its convertibility for certain purposes such as capital transactions. This **restricts its widespread use in international trade and finance.**
- **Demonetization Impact:**
    - The **demonetization**exercise in 2016, along with the recent withdrawal of the ₹2,000 note, **has affected confidence in the rupee,** particularly in neighboring countries like Bhutan and Nepal.
- **Challenges in Trade Settlement:**
    - While efforts have been made to trade with around 18 countries in rupees, transactions have remained limited.
    - **Also, negotiations with Russia to settle trade in rupees have been slow,**hampered by currency depreciation concerns and inadequate awareness among traders.
- **Steps Towards Internationalization:**
    - In March 2023, the RBI put in place the mechanism for **rupee trade settlement with as many as 18 countries.**
    - Banks from these countries have been allowed to open S**pecial Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs)**for settling payments in Indian Rupees.
        - In July 2022, the RBI issued a circular on **"International Trade Settlement in Indian Rupees".**
        - RBI enabled **external commercial borrowings**in Rupees (especially **Masala Bonds**)

Pace-up Internationalization of Rupee
- **Full Convertibility and Trade Settlement:**The Rupee should aim for full Convertibility, allowing **free movement of financial investments** between India and other countries.
    - Encouraging **Indian exporters and importers to invoice transactions in rupees**would optimize trade settlement formalities.

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- **Liquid Bond Market:**RBI should focus on developing a more liquid rupee bond market, providing investment options for foreign investors and trade partners.
    - Also,**there is a need to recalibrate the foreign portfolio investor (FPI) regime** in order to enhance the speed at which the rupee is internationalized.
- **Expansion of RTGS system:**The **Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system** should be **expanded to settle international transactions.**
    - Also, providing tax incentives to foreign businesses utilizing the rupee in India would promote its use.
- **Currency Swap Agreements:**Increasing currency swap agreements, **as seen with Sri Lanka, would facilitate trade and investment transactions in rupees.**
    - Consistent and predictable currency issuance and retrieval, along with a stable exchange rate regime, are essential for maintaining confidence.
- **Inclusion in the SDR basket:**Rupee should be pitched to get included in **Special Drawing Rights (SDR), which is an international reserve asset** created by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** based on a basket of major currencies.
    - Also, Indian Government Bonds (IGBs) can be**included in global indices, attracting foreign investments into Indian debt markets.**
- **Lessons from China"s Experience:**China"s approach to internationalizing the Renminbi provides valuable insights for India:
    - **Phased Approach:**China **gradually enabled the use of the Renminbi** for current account transactions and select investment transactions before progressing towards its use as a reserve currency.
    - **Offshore Markets:**The establishment of offshore markets, such as the **Dim Sum bond and offshore RMBD bond market,** facilitated the internationalization process.

Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI): It consists of securities and other financial assets passively held by foreign investors.
- It is part of a **country's capital account** and is shown on its BOP.
- It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of financial assets.
- FPI is **more liquid, volatile and therefore riskier** than FDI.
- It is often **referred to as "hot money".**
- Examples - Stocks, **bonds, mutual funds, exchange traded funds.**

Special Drawing Rights:
- SDR serves as the unit of account of the IMF, but it is neither a currency nor a claim on the IMF.
- The SDR basket of currencies includes the US dollar, Euro, Japanese yen, pound sterling and the Chinese renminbi (included in 2016).

The **Tarapore Committee"s recommendations (in 1997 and 2006),** including **reducing fiscal deficits, inflation rates, and banking non-performing assets, should be pursued as a primary step towards internationalisation of rupee. Also, advocating for the rupee to become an official currency in international organizations** would raise its profile and acceptance.

Finding True Peace in Yemen

In April this year, just as the Saudi-led war in Yemen completed eight years, a diplomatic delegation from the kingdom reached Sanaa airport for talks with its Houthi enemies.

Genesis
- Saudi Arabia initiated **military operations in Yemen in 2015** to prevent the Houthi rebels, aligned with Iran, from taking control of Yemen.
- The war has resulted in a stalemate, with the Houthis controlling the capital, Sanaa, and the port city of Hodeidah, while the coalition controls the sea and large parts of the south.
- The conflict has led to a s**evere humanitarian crisis,** with a high death toll, displaced population, and widespread food and medical shortages.

Peace Process Initiatives:
- **In April 2023**, a Saudi delegation held talks with the Houthi rebels, leading to agreements such as a **six-month truce, prisoner exchange**, and **easing** of the **blockade on Sanaa and Hodeidah.**
- The peace process aims to negotiate a two-year transition period to finalize the future state of Yemen.

Challenges to the Peace Process
- **Houthi Demands:** The Houthis insist on the kingdom paying salaries from Yemen's oil revenues and seeking compensation for war damage, which Saudi Arabia is reluctant to accept.
- **Negotiation Dynamics:** The Houthis prefer direct negotiations with the Saudis, while the Saudis want to mediate between Yemeni factions through the **Presidential Leadership Council (PLC),** supported by Saudi Arabia.
- **Houthi Dominance:** The Houthis, who have gained the upper hand militarily, have more leverage in the negotiations, potentially undermining the standing and credibility of the PLC.

Key Actors and Dynamics in the Yemen Conflict:
- **Houthis:** The Houthi rebels, also known as Ansar Allah, are a Zaidi Shia group from northern Yemen. They've been in conflict with the Yemeni government since 2004. They took control of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, in 2014.
- **Yemeni Government:** The Yemeni government, led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, has been in power since 2012. Hadi came to power after

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President Ali Abdullah Saleh was ousted following protests during the Arab Spring.

- **Former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and his loyalists:** Saleh ruled Yemen for 33 years until he was ousted in 2012. Initially, Saleh allied with the Houthis against the Hadi government but was killed by Houthi fighters in 2017 after he switched sides.
- **Southern Transitional Council (STC):** The STC is a secessionist organization seeking independence for South Yemen. While they are technically part of the anti-Houthi coalition, they have occasionally clashed with forces loyal to President Hadi.
- **Saudi-led Coalition:** In 2015, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of Arab states to defeat the Houthi rebels and restore the Hadi government. The coalition, which includes countries like the UAE, has been conducting airstrikes in Yemen.
- **Iran:** Iran is alleged to support the Houthi rebels, though it denies providing military support. The conflict is often seen as part of the broader regional power struggle between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran.
- **AL-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and ISIS:** These extremist groups have taken advantage of the chaos and power vacuum in Yemen to expand their influence.
- **The United States and Other Western Nations:** The US, UK, and other western nations have been criticized for supplying arms and logistical support to the Saudi-led coalition.
- **United Nations:** The UN has been trying to mediate the conflict and organize peace talks. It also provides humanitarian aid and works to document human rights abuses.

YEMEN
Who controls what

Seven years since the launch of the Saudi-led campaign, the bulk of Yemen's northern highlands, as well as the **capital city of Sanaa**, remain under the control of Houthi rebels.

- Houthi control
- Government control
- Government influence
- Southern Transitional Council control
- al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) influence
- Oil fields and pipelines

Importance of Yemen:

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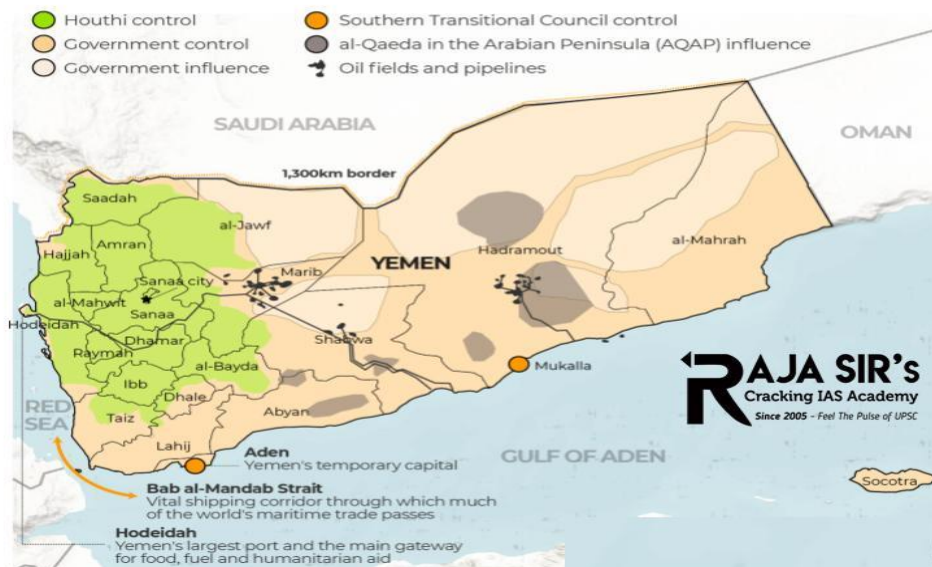
- **Strategic Location:** Yemen's location at the strait linking the **Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden** is critical for global oil shipments.
- **Oil & Energy:** Yemen is a major **source of crude oil.**
- **Expats:** A huge Indian population is living there contributing significantly to the remittances and exhibiting soft power.

India's Initiatives:
- **Operation Rahat:** It was launched by India for a massive air and sea operation to evacuate over 4000 Indian nationals from Yemen in April 2015.
- **Humanitarian Assistance:** India has contributed her assistance in the form of food providing, medical aid, to facilitate education in various Indian institutions.

Despite a temporary halt in fighting, the complex dynamics and conflicting interests of various Yemeni factions, as well as the involvement of regional powers, suggest that achieving lasting peace and stability in the war-ravaged country will be a challenging and lengthy process.

Due process clause or basic structure doctrine?

- The basic structure doctrine highlighted in The Kesavanand Bharati case has completed **50 years.**
- The Supreme Court of India provided two safeguards for the natural rights of the citizenry namely, **the due process clause** and **the basic structure doctrine**.

Due Process of Law:
- The **due process** clause secures people a range of rights that ideally ought not to be taken away by law.
- The term '**law**' in the due process clause stands for **natural law**.
- **Natural law** norms are higher than state-made laws, and the dictate of human reason.
- The due process clause is taken from the **American constitution**.
- The **Fifth Amendment in the American Constitution**, 1791 asserts that "No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law".
- Due process has two aspects: - substantive due process and procedural due process.
    - **Substantive due process** focuses on whether the government is justified in interfering with a person's life, liberty, and property.
    - **Procedural due process** requires the state to follow fair and reasonable procedures when it interferes with a person's life, liberty, or property.

Early debates on Due Process of Law for Indian constitution:
- The **draft clause 11** of the Indian constitution contained the due process clause, which stated "No person shall be deprived of his life, liberty, or property without due process of law."
- **Govind Ballabh Pant** was the prominent opposer of the due process clause considering that the clause would be a hurdle in the implementation of social reform laws such as abolition of the zamindari system.

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- **C. Rajagopalachari delinked 'property'** from it but retaining due process protection for life and liberty.
- Accordingly, the due process clause was passed by the Assembly on April 30, 1947, as **''No person shall be deprived of their life or liberty, without due process of law.''**
- **B. N. Rau** clipped the due process clause by prefixing 'personal' before 'liberty' (taken from the Irish Constitution).
- Later, the **drafting committee dropped the due process clause** from the draft and **replaced it with 'except according to procedure established by law'** (a term borrowed from the Japanese Constitution of 1946).

Resurrection of due process:
- In **Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India (1978)** case marked a paradigm shift in Indian constitutional law.
- New understanding of **Article 21** was that **'personal liberty'** was a vast repository of rights and when this fundamental right was affected by any law and courts, it would seriously interrogate and probe the purpose, rationale, and legitimacy of the law.

Basic Structure Doctrine:
- The basic structure doctrine is often celebrated as **a firm guarantee of the citizen's rights**.
- It is a judicial concoction enunciated by the Supreme Court of India in the **Kesavananda Bharati case (1973).**
- The **amendability of fundamental rights** was the major controversy in Kesavananda Bharati case.
- The historic judgment was delivered by a **13-judge bench** and with a majority of 7:6 **overruling the Golak Nath case.**
    - In **Golak Nath case, 1967** the Supreme Court ruled that Parliament **could not** curtail any of the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution.
- It was held that the **power of Parliament to amend the Constitution** is far and wide and extends to all the Articles but it is **not unlimited** to an extent that it destroys certain basic features or framework of the Constitution.
- The basic structure doctrine (origins are found in the **German Constitution**) has formed the **bedrock of judicial review** of all laws passed by the Indian Parliament.

Unlike the basic structure doctrine, **the due process clause was duly discussed** and endorsed by the Constituent Assembly. The due process clause has a splendid place in the constitutional history of the world. It is the due process clause offers a **surer guarantee for the citizen's natural rights**, not the basic structure doctrine. The due process clause must be firmly embedded in the constitutional architecture of India, and incorporated into the constitutional text.

Even though the Indian Constitution has accepted and borrowed many elements from the American Constitution, it **did not adopt the American notion of "Due Process of Law."** Instead, the **judiciary has the power to determine if a procedure is just, fair, and reasonable**.

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Choose a new palette for India's creative economy

- The creative economy refers to sectors of an economy that involve the creation and exploitation of creativity or knowledge. It includes areas such as art, music, film, design, and digital content creation. Its significance lies in its contribution to job creation, economic growth, tourism, and exports, and its role in fostering societal development.
- Notably, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2022) recognized culture's economic importance and transformative power for sustainable development.

Challenges faced by Indian artistes

- **Economic and market challenges**: Indian artists struggle with issues related to economic sustainability and gaining adequate market access to monetize their work.
- **Preservation of traditional art forms**: In the face of rapidly changing societal trends, preserving and promoting traditional art forms presents significant challenges.
- **Inequalities in representation and support**: Artists often face a lack of transparency in the selection process for financial assistance and event organization. Those based outside cities are particularly disadvantaged.
- **Crime in the art world**: Artists must contend with art-related crimes such as theft, forgery, and illicit trafficking. These crimes undermine cultural heritage, financial security, and public trust.

Suggestions for the creative economy

- **Promoting a collaborative cultural economy**: Creating a collaborative model that supports the cultural economy is vital. This includes encouraging tech-based start-ups in the arts sector.
- **Capacity-building centre for artists**: A capacity-building centre can offer guidance, technical support, infrastructure, and access to investors, contributing to India's soft power.
- **Training and professional development**: Artists need training, professional development, and market access. Networking within larger communities can also foster knowledge sharing.
- **Leveraging data analytics**: Data analytics can be utilized to foster creative ecosystems that contribute to a sustainable world, highlighting emerging trends and informing policy recommendations.
- **Facilitation mechanism for artists and entrepreneurs**: A facilitation mechanism can focus on fostering knowledge sharing, networking, and economic empowerment for individual artists and creative entrepreneurs. This can be achieved by offering business training, incubating innovative projects, and connecting them with global marketing platforms, tools, and practices. This platform can provide sustainable livelihood solutions for artists and artisans, leveraging the latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools to enhance their participation in the business ecosystem.
- **Creative economy** in India must be **promoted by:**
  - Defining and **mapping the creative industries** in India.
  - Funding to **finance creative industries.**
  - Focusing on **joint programmes.**

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- ■ Addressing the issue of Promoting **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** and local artisans.
  - ■ Establishing creative districts and hubs.
  - ■ Forming a **specialised institution** for creative industries.
- ■ While India has made progress in industries associated with the creative economy, the **country has significant scope to upscale the value of its creative economy.**
- ■ There is a **need for drawing up a single definition for creative economy in the country,** while having a dedicated institution, which could explore its untapped potential.

Rani Durgavati Gaurav Yatra

The **Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led BJP government** in Madhya Pradesh launched the six-day **Rani Durgavati Gaurav Yatra**. Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the rally in **Balaghat**, while the CM also marked – when the **queen is believed to have died while fighting the Mughals** in the mid-16th century — as a day of sacrifice

Rani Durgavati
- ■ The queen was a "**symbol of India's self-determination**", saying she fought **Mughal emperor Akbar** and his commander Asaf Khan and gave the ultimate sacrifice.
- ■ **Rani Durgavati is said to have been born in 1524**, in **Mahoba's Chandela dynasty**. The region comes under present-day Uttar Pradesh, near the southern border with MP. Her father was **Raja Salbahan of Ratha and Mahoba**, and the Chandelas were known for building the **famous Khajuraho temples** in the 11th century.
- ■ She was later married to **Dalpat Shah**, the son of the **Gond King Sangram Shah** of the **kingdom of Garha-Katanga**. This kingdom included the Narmada Valley and parts of northern MP. It was **first welded together by Sangram Shah** and is noted as one of the **most powerful kingdoms** of the **Gond tribe.** Durgavati, however, was widowed in 1550, a few years after her marriage. **Her young son Bir Narayan** presided over the throne in name and she then "**ruled the country with great vigour and courage**."
- ■ Historian Satish Chandra, in his book Medieval India, describes her as a **good marksman**, **skilled at using guns**, **bows**, and **arrows**. It was noted at the time that she was so intent on **hunting tigers** that "whenever she heard that a tiger had appeared she did not drink water until she shot it."

The Mughal attack on Garha-Katanga
- ■ **Chandra** also terms the period of the **mid-16th century** as one of **early Mughal expansion in India** (between 1556-76) under Akbar. During her reign, **Durgavati fought with Baz Bahadur**, the sultan of the neighbouring Malwa who was eventually defeated by Akbar. But the **frequent battles** between the two adjoining states continued even after the takeover.
- ■ According to government documentation of the region's history, the queen and her generals **managed the affairs of the kingdom for 16 years.** There was

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evidence of trade with other kingdoms in the form of their currencies being found there and of public works being carried out, such as the **construction of a large public reservoir** near Jabalpur that is now called **Ranital** (the queen's tank).

■ **Abul Fazl**, the **court historian of Akbar** who chronicled these years in **Akbarnama**, described **Durgavati as a combination of "beauty, grace and manlike courage** and bravery". He adds that the prosperity of the kingdom was such that people paid their taxes in gold coins and elephants.

■ The **Mughal governor of Allahabad, Asaf Khan**, also took an interest in attacking Garha-Katanga, attracted by tales of the queen, writes Chandra. Another point of view states it was Akbar who dispatched him. Khan then went to the region with 10,000 cavalry. **Some semi-independent rules here also seized** on the opportunity as one to overthrow the queen. She was, therefore, left with a small force.

■ The queen entered the battlefield and situated her troops in a place called **Narhi**, which was **located in a thick forest**, reached after crossing rivers, and was naturally difficult to breach. She suggested **attacking the enemy forces upfront** as they could not remain hidden for long. They allowed some **Mughal forces** to come through the narrow ravines peculiar to the region, before surrounding them. The first battle was therefore won by the **Gond queen.**

■ However, soon the **Mughals fortified the area** and **overwhelmed the Gonds.** While fighting them in battle, **she was struck by two arrows** and it is believed she stabbed herself with her dagger to not surrender to the Mughal forces. Her son also died in the fighting. It took Asaf Khan nearly two months to consolidate his victory. Afterwards, he decided to keep much of the loot himself instead of presenting it to Akbar, writes Fazl.

■ **Akbar then asked Khan to let go of his gains** and restored the kingdom to Chandra Shah, the younger son of Sangram Shah, after he accepted Mughal suzerainty.

Role of Election Commission of India in Indian Political System

■ **Article 324 of the Constitution** of India provides for the Election Commission of India vested with the power of superintendence, direction and control of conducting the elections to the most crucial elections in the country including Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It further reinforces the independence of ECI by providing for security of tenure as well as service conditions.

■ **Rudolph and Rudolph** note that the Election Commission has a key position at the heart of the new regulatory centrism of the Indian state, as **an institution which acts as an enforcer of 'rules that safeguard the democratic legitimacy of the political system'.**

■ According to **McMillan,** the constitutional provisions regarding Election Commission were an **innovative response to the desire to to have a democratic process that was institutionally entrenched and** yet at an arms-

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length from party- political or governmental interference. The ECI, was therefore imagined as the keystone of Indian electoral democracy.

- The ECI has been a progressive institution taking up measures to ingrain democracy such adoption and national stock-taking of EVMs, ensuring election in far-flung and backward regions, curbing of money power and corrupt practices, evolving and implementing the moral code of conduct etc.

There are certain factors that have ensured the independence and credibility of ECI and these include:

Constitutional Factors

- Article 324 grants the ECI **clear authority over superintendence**direction & control of preparation of the electoral rolls, while subsequent articles (Art 325-Art 329) provide it with Supreme authority over conduct of elections, including insulating ECI from political and judicial interference during the elections.
- While the body started off as a single-member institution, after recommendations of the **Tarkunde and Goswami committees**as well as the needs of Indian democracy it became a three-member body in 1989.
- The emergence of multi-member ECI has checked dictatorial tendencies as well as corruption or nepotism in the institution.

Leadership and activism of institution

- The CECs and ECs have played major role in ensuring the integrity of institution with officers like T.N. Seshan becoming exemplars for successors.
- ECI has tried to strengthen its grassroot level organisation to rid of evils like booth capturing, violence and use of money in elections.
- The ECI also emerged as a campaigner against criminalization of politics, with former Commissioner, **V.G. Krishnamurthy, pithily noted that 'no law-breaker should ever be a law-maker'.**
- To counter criminalisation, ECI mandated in 2002 that candidates file an affidavit with details regarding criminal prosecution, personal assets education qualifications etc.

Regulation and Registration of Political Parties

- Political parties are regarded as the life and soul of Indian electoral democracy. The Election Commission has a role in the regulation and registration of political parties including allocating symbols.
- Importantly, the ECI has power to withdraw registration and right to a symbol from any party deemed guilty of electoral malpractice (violating the 'model code of conduct').
- It prescribes the limits of campaign expenditure by the candidates and parties and monitors the spending too so as to **maintain fairness and integrity of elections in India.**

Technological and other innovations

- The ECI has been at the forefront of developments in ensuring free and fair elections throughout India through developments like VVPAT, ECI 360 degree, SVEEP Programme, computerisation of electoral rolls etc.
- Former chief election commissioner **Y. Quraishi points to the success of ECI in conducting elections during Covid pandemic** by ensuring norms regarding elated to sanitising and social distancing as well as providing the postal ballot option to senior citizens over the age of 80, COVID-positive patients, persons with disabilities and voters employed in essential services.

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- The ECI has been drawn into issues of media regulation over issues of broadcasting regarding elections. With the emergence of social media, the ECI has also tried to ensure fair elections with guidelines being issued for social media campaigning and digital companies also laying down a voluntary code of ethics for the same.

Despite such developments and the bold role played by ECI to maintain a free and fair democratic process in India, there have also been certain issues that have been raised regarding the functioning and politicization of ECI:

- **Financial and administrative autonomy**remains one of the core issues and there have been suggestions to charge the administrative expenditure of ECI on Consolidated Fund of India as well as a dedicated secretariat and staff.
- There have been calls to provide for a **better method of appointment of members of ECI** to ensure quality as well as independence. While the Constitution provides CEC, the status of election commissioners is not as secure and has often faced issues due to infighting as well (N. Gopalaswamy case).
- There have also been questions raised on the **credibility of ECI by opposition parties with many accusing it of being a 'puppet'**of the government or being politicised. The ECI's decisions regarding hate speech, removal of star campaigner status has been questioned.
- There have also been accusations of **EVM tampering**and while the process may be fool-proof, such questioning hampers the legitimacy of the institution and elections.
- Regulation of social media, fake news, rumour mongering continues to pose a lot of trouble for ECI in ensuring free and fair elections.

ECI is the bedrock of Indian democracy and certain reforms are in order to ensure its continued success-

- **Section 125A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, should be amended to provide for more stringent punishment for concealing or providing wrong information.
- Election Commission should be empowered to take strong action on the report of returning officers, election observers, or civil society in regards to booth capture or the intimidation of voters.
- The same constitutional protection to all Election Commissioners as is available to the Chief Election Commissioner.
- The budget of the Election Commission should be treated as —Charged on the Consolidated Fund of India.
- All functions concerning the Secretariat of the Election Commission, consisting of officers and staff at various levels, such as their appointments, promotions, etc., be exclusively vested in the Election Commission.
- Election Commission needs to be given explicit powers to de-register political parties if they do not observe and fulfil the requirements of proposed legislation for the registration and the regulation of the functioning of political parties.

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Demographic transition and change in women's lives

- India is set to become the **most populous country** on the globe with about 1.4 billion people, about half of them being women.
- Empowering women in India by providing **equal opportunities** would lead to **inclusive growth** of the economy.
- Women's childhood, adulthood, and old age have been transformed over the course of the **demographic transition** and have affected them in both **positive and negative ways.**

Challenges and Rights of Women in Indian Society:
Preference for male child:
- **Social norms, patrilocal kinship patterns and lack of financial security** increase the preference for sons.
- Indian families began to have fewer children due to which the **chance of bearing a son** was **reduced**.
- Parents who wanted at least one son, resorted to **sex-selective abortion** and **neglected** sick **daughters**.
- Consequently, the number of **girls (under five years) per 100 boys**, dropped **to 91** in 2019.

Early marriage and childbearing:
- Even though **women's education has increased** with over 70% of girls enrolling in **secondary education**, early marriage and childbearing are **still predominant** forces defining their lives.
- The number of years women spend **caring for children under five** declined from **14 years** in 1992-93 to **eight in 2018-20**, and the years spent caring for children **ages six to 15** dropped from **20 to 14 years.**
- Women **miss the window** for occupation and skill development as they are raising children.
- Hence, **lower fertility does not** translate into higher **labour force participation** for women.

Women in Workforce:
- There has been significant participation of women in the workforce, and high positions in various fields like **politics, business, and entertainment**.
- Several programs and policies aimed at improving women's **health, education**, and economic opportunities have led to this transformation.
- However, there is a prevalence of gender-based violence and harassment, including **domestic violence, dowry-related violence, and harassment at the workplace**.
  - It restricts social, physical, and mental well-being and **decreases their participation** in society.

Rights of women:
- **Right to equality**- Article 14 guarantees the right to equality to all citizens, regardless of their gender.
- **Right to education**- The Right of Children to **Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009**, makes it mandatory for all children, including girls, between the ages of 6 and 14 to receive education.
- **Right to work** -The **Equal Remuneration Act, 1976**, ensures that men and women receive equal pay for the same work.

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- **Right against sexual harassment**- The Sexual Harassment of Women at **Workplace** (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) **Act, 2013 and Vishakha guidelines** by the Supreme court (SC) provide the framework for addressing complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Right to property**- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, was amended in 2005 to give equal inheritance rights to daughters in Hindu families.
- **Right for marriage and divorce**- The **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**, SC judgments on **Shah Bano and Triple Talaq cases** give clarity on such rights.
- **Right to health**- **Maternity Benefit Act, 1961**, provides women with paid maternity leave and other benefits during pregnancy and childbirth.
- **Right against domestic violence**- The Protection of Women **from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**, provides legal protection to women from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by their spouses or relatives.

Women in old age:
- The life expectancy of people has increased since the past few decades due to which female population **aged 65** and above **increased from 5% to 11% between 1950 and 2022.**
- Most women marry men who are older and are more likely to outlive their husbands.
- The 2011 Census shows that only 18% of men above age 65 are widowed, and about **55% of the women are widowed**.
- They suffer due to the lack of access to finances and property and depend on their children, mainly sons.

Harnessing Gender Dividend:
What is Gender dividend?
- The realization of **economic potential** through **increased investments in women and girls**, is known as gender dividend.
- It emphasizes that societies could be more **productive and equitable** if gender gaps, particularly in the labor market, were closed.

Why does it need to be addressed?
- **Changing patriarchal norms** may take a long time, enhancing access of women to employment and assets will reduce their dependence and could break the **vicious cycle of gendered disadvantage**.
    - However, efforts at improving women's labour force participation must be accompanied by access to **safe and affordable childcare**.
- **World Bank report** from Madhya Pradesh found that the **expansion of Anganwadis** to include a **crèche**, **increased work participation** of mothers.
- A study based in urban China found that if state support for childcare declined, **employment** rates for **mothers fell from 88% to 66%.**

Initiatives to Harness the Gender Dividend:
Economic Participation & Opportunity:
- To enhance the employability of female workers, the Government is providing training to them through a network of **Women Industrial and Vocational Training Institutes** at National and regional levels.
- Many enabling provisions were included in the new Labour Codes for creating a **congenial work environment** for women workers.

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- The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA**) mandates that at **least one third of the jobs** under the scheme should be given to women.
- Provisions for women's participation in **non-conventional sectors** such as fighter pilots in Indian **Air Force, Commandos, Central Police Forces**, admissions in **Sainik Schools**, etc. have been incorporated.

Health and Education:
- Various schemes like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** (BBBP), *Scheme for Adolescent Girls* (SAG), **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Swachh Vidyalaya Mission**, etc. ensure that schools are girl-friendly.
- The **National Education Policy (NEP),** 2020 prioritizes gender equity and ensures equitable access to quality education with special emphasis on socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
- POSHAN Abhiyaan: **Prime Minister"s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN)** has specific targets for reducing stunting, anaemia, under-nutrition and low birth weight.

Improving access to childcare:
- To make staffing **crèche** an acceptable form of work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).
- This scheme can be used to develop **social infrastructure** while building physical infrastructure.
- **Self-help group movement** can be harnessed to set up neighborhood child-care centres in **urban and rural areas**.

Social Sector:
- Steps for ensuring social enhancement and security for women include the Universalization of Women Helpline, Child Protection Services Scheme, Swadhar Greh Scheme, **Ujjawala** Scheme, **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY).**
- Initiatives like Women Help Desks (WHDs) at Police Stations, formation of **Nirbhaya Fund** including Emergency Response Support System (ERSS) which is a **pan-India single number (112)**, **Stree Manoraksha** at **One Stop Centres (OSCs**) for psycho-social and mental health care needs of aggrieved women.

Political Participation:
- To bring women into the mainstream of political leadership at the grass root level, government has reserved **33% of the seats** in Panchayati Raj Institutions for women.
- Capacity Building of Panchayat Stakeholders including **Elected Women Representatives (EWRs)** by Ministry of Panchayati Raj is conducted.

Monitoring and collaboration by engaging stakeholders at regional, national and international (like **World Economic Forum**) levels need to be done. Identification of **Reform Areas** and **Reform Actions** in consultation with concerned **Ministries and Departments** can bring **resilience** and unique solutions for addressing gender dividend.

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Loot, intransigence, and the darkening of a colonial blot

The Netherlands will hand back hundreds of precious artefacts taken from Indonesia and Sri Lanka during its colonial period.

- Objects to be returned include a **gem-encrusted bronze cannon and a looted cache of jewels** from the "Lombok treasure".
- The agreed restitution comes as the Netherlands increasingly confronts its colonial past.

Why are Britishers resisting returning Indian artefacts?

- Few artefacts and antiquities are returned by Britishers to India, yet, **many artefacts are still in their museums including the Kohinoor diamond and the Amaravati stupa.**
-
  - **Glasgow became the first United Kingdom museums service to repatriate** seven artefacts including a 14th-century Indo-Persian sword and an 11th-century carved stone door jamb taken from a temple in Kanpur.
- **Legislation Backing:** The **British Museum Act 1963** was created to make it illegal to give looted and nicked treasures back.
- **Economic Loss:** The fear is that if these artefacts were returned, many museums would lose the majority of the objects they have, resulting in economic consequences for the museums.

Need to Returning of Artefacts:

- **Moral Obligation:** The return of stolen property or financial reparations are not a substitute for the trauma and the horrors caused by colonialism and faced by Indians. The return of cultural artefacts is a moral obligation.
- **Justice:** The return of cultural items appears as an image of justice as well as expiates a legal and moral obligation which cannot and should not be ignored.
  - Flaunting the Kohinoor on the Queen Mother's crown in the Tower of London is a powerful reminder of the injustices perpetrated by the former imperial power.
- **Easy & Practical Solution:** The return of some of the treasures looted from India in the course of colonialism is also a much easier solution than financial reparations would be as the money exacted by the British from India in taxes and exploitation has already been spent, and cannot realistically be reclaimed.

International Agreements:

- **The 1970 UNESCO Convention**: On the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property mandate the prevention of organized crime and cultural trafficking, and offer systematic tools to strengthen national capacity.
- **UN Resolution 2347**: It condemns the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, including the destruction of religious sites and artefacts, and the looting and smuggling of cultural property from archaeological sites, museums, libraries, archives, and other sites, notably by terrorist groups.
- As pointed out by the UNESCO 1970 Convention that solely it will not tackle this issue, it should be the collective efforts of the governments, societies,

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> communities, and the people to spread awareness regarding the importance of national and cultural heritage and how to safeguard them.
> ■ History belongs in the past but understanding it, and doing whatever we can about it, is the duty of the present.

Significance of Return of Artefacts:
- **Preserving Heritage**: Cultural property acts as a bridge between the past, present, and future generations, preserving a nation's heritage.
- **National Identity and Pride**: It symbolizes the unique values, beliefs, and customs that distinguish one nation from another.
    - It gives people a sense of belonging and collective memory, strengthening social cohesion and unity.
- **Tourism and Economic Benefits**: Cultural property often attracts tourists from around the world, contributing to the nation's economy.
- **Employment Generation:** The preservation and promotion of cultural property helps in generating employment opportunities.
- **Foreign Policy:** The preservation and protection of the Indian artifacts and cultural heritage are an integral component of India's foreign policy.
- **Education and Research**: Cultural property provides researchers, scholars, and students with valuable primary sources for studying various disciplines, including archaeology, anthropology, history, art, and linguistics.
- **Cultural Diplomacy**: Cultural property represents a nation's soft power, which helps in fostering peace, tolerance, and cooperation among diverse communities globally.

Way Forward:
- **Justice:** Retrospective justice for colonialism is not answered by financial reparations alone, but by moral atonement.
- **Apology:** An apology should be expressed to the victims of colonialism.
    - **Examples:**
        - **Willy Brandt, then Chancellor of Germany,** sank to his knees at the Warsaw Ghetto in 1970 to apologize to Polish Jews for the Holocaust.
        - **In 2016, Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** apologized on behalf of Canada for the actions of his country's authorities in denying permission for the Indian immigrants on the Komagata Maru to land in Vancouver, thereby sending most of them to their deaths.
- **Aware Younger Generation:** Building a Museum of Colonialism would show a determination, in the metropolitan country, to learn the lessons of the Empire — to teach British schoolchildren what sources of loot, pillage and profit built their homeland, just as German children are shepherded to concentration camps to see the awful reality of what their forefathers did.

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Judicial endorsement of a tenure extension system

- The Supreme Court's (SC) verdict that had upheld statutory amendments made in **2021** to allow **multiple extensions** of service to **heads** of **investigative agencies** undermines their **institutional independence**.
- The SC has quashed **two extensions** given to the **Enforcement Directorate** chief for one year each, terming the government"s twin decisions as **illegal.**
  - Repeatedly extending tenures even after the **age of superannuation** keeps government policies in suspicion and also is **not** aligned with the public interest.
- Despite the **bar** on further **tenure** extensions for **Director** of the **Enforcement Directorate** (ED) by SC's judgement, the Union government has given the chief a **third** extension, bringing his tenure to **5 years** from originally **2 years.**

Supreme Court's Judgment:
- SC has declared that the third **tenure extension** to the Director of Enforcement Directorate as **not valid** in **law**.
- SC has upheld **statutory** amendments made in **2021**, that allowed **multiple extensions** of service for **heads** of **investigative agencies** like the **Enforcement Directorate** (ED) and **Central Bureau of Investigation** (CBI).
- SC has **upheld constitutional amendments** made to the **Central Vigilance Commission Act**, **2003**, The Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, and the Fundamental Rules in 2021, enabling the tenure extension.
- According to the SC, an extension of service to heads of investigative agencies shall be given to those who have attained **superannuation** only in "**rare and exceptional cases**".
- The SC judgment had **endorsed the changes** enabling annual extensions to the CBI and ED Directors until they complete five years in that office.

About Central Vigilance Commission:
- The Central Vigilance Commission was set up in **1964** by the Government of India.
- It was set up on the recommendations of the **Committee on Prevention of Corruption**.
- It is an apex **Integrity Institution**, having **complete independence** and **autonomy** in its functions.
- It aimed to exercise **superintendence** over the **vigilance** administration of the organisations in respect of which the executive powers of the Government of India are extended.
- It has been mandated to **advise** the **authorities** concerned in respect of an act of improper conduct or **corrupt** practices, along with review and modification of procedures and guidelines, which may afford scope for corruption.

About Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2021:
- It allows the **Extension of the term** of the Director of Enforcement.
- Under the **2003 Act**, the Director of Enforcement had a **tenure** of **minimum two years**.
- The Bill adds that the **tenure** of the Director may be **extended by up to one year at a time**, till the completion of **five years** from the initial appointment in public interest on committee recommendations.

Fundamental (Amendment) Rules, 2021:

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- The Central Government can give an **extension in service** to the Defence Secretary, Home Secretary, Director of Intelligence Bureau, Secretary of Research and Analysis Wing, Directorate of Enforcement, and Director of CBI if it considers it necessary in the public interest.
- The **fundamental rules, 1922** were amended to sync them with the amendments to the **CVC Act** and **DSPE Act** for ED and CBI.

Though Supreme Court invalidates the extension of the current Director of Enforcement Directorate, it has upheld the amendments made in **2021** for Central Vigilance Commission (**CVC**) and Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) for extension of the chief of **ED** and **CBI** respectively. The extension of tenures of apex agencies forms a cloud of **suspicion over the misuse** of government agencies. Considering that the CBI and the ED investigate corruption in the government and money laundering, it is crucial that these investigative institutions are kept safe from **political interference**.

Critical mineral supplies vital to clean energy shift

As the world rapidly **embraces clean energy technologies and transitions towards a sustainable future,** the demand for **critical minerals** has soared to unprecedented levels. These **essential minerals, including lithium, cobalt, nickel, and copper, play a pivotal role in powering electric vehicles, solar panels, wind turbines, and other clean energy devices.** However, **the surge in demand has outpaced the supply of these critical minerals, giving rise to significant challenges.**

China **holds a dominant position in the supply of certain crucial materials for the green transition**, which is seen as a potential supply risk. An example of this is the **recent restrictions imposed by China** on the **export of important metals like Gallium and Germanium.** This highlights **the concern about relying heavily on a single country for the supply of these essential materials.**

Critical Minerals
- **Minerals:**
  - **Minerals are natural substances that are formed by geological processes.**They have a **definite chemical composition and physical properties.**
  - They are**classified into metallic and non-metallic minerals** based on their characteristics and uses.
    - Metallic minerals are **those that contain metals or metal compounds**, such as iron, copper, gold, silver, etc.
    - Non-metallic minerals are**those that do not contain metals,** such as limestone, coal, mica, gypsum, etc.
  - **Critical Minerals:**
    - Critical minerals are those **minerals that are essential for economic development and national security.**The **lack of availability** of these minerals or concentration of extraction or processing in a few geographical locations may lead to supply chain vulnerabilities and even disruption of supplies.

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For India:

- Expert Committee under Ministry of Mines has**identified a set of 30 critical minerals for India.**
- These are Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium.
- India **has set up KABIL or the Khanij Bidesh India Limited, a joint venture of three public sector companies, to ensure a consistent supply of critical and strategic minerals to the Indian domestic market.**
  - It ensures **the mineral security of the nation; it also helps in realising the overall objective of import substitution.**

Current Scenario for Critical Minerals Around the Globe

- **Rapid Surge in Demand and Market Growth for Energy Transition Minerals (Critical Minerals):**
  - From 2017 to 2022,**the demand for lithium tripled, cobalt increased by 70%, and nickel rose by 40%,** primarily driven by the **energy sector.**
  - According to the **International Energy Agency (IEA)**, the**market for energy transition minerals reached $320 billion in 2022** and is expected to continue growing rapidly.
- **Global Efforts through Policy Measures:**
  - The availability of critical mineral supplies will greatly impact the affordability and speed of energy transitions. To **mitigate uncertain global supply chains, countries are implementing new policies**to diversify their mineral supplies.
    - The **United States (US)**, **Canada**, the **European Union (EU)**, and**Australia have enacted regulatory legislation**, while resource-rich nations like **Indonesia, Namibia, and Zimbabwe have imposed restrictions on the export of unprocessed mineral ores.**
- **Industry"s Role through Vertical Integration:**
  - To secure mineral supplies, industries such as automakers, battery cell makers, and equipment manufacturers are **becoming more actively involved in the critical minerals value chain.**
    - This**includes engaging in activities like mining and refining,** along with **establishing long-term agreements** for purchasing minerals.
  - **Geopolitical Tensions and Resource Nationalism:**
    - It is important to address these challenges because **global relations between nations have become more polarised**, especially due to events like the**US-China trade war** and the **Russia-Ukraine war.** These conflicts have **led to sanctions and disruptions in established trade patterns.**
    - Additionally,**there is an increasing trend of resource nationalism**, where countries prioritise **their own**

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resources and impose restrictions on exports. These factors contribute to uncertainties in global trade flows.
- **Supply-Demand Dynamics:**
  - As the prices of critical industrial metals, such as copper, are expected to increase in the coming years due to growing **demand surpassing supply. This rise in material prices will likely disrupt the production costs of devices like solar panels and electric vehicles.**

Challenges Related to Critical Minerals in India

- India is **currently confronted with both global and domestic challenges in ensuring reliable supply chains for critical minerals.** Internationally, **there are few major risks to consider:**
  - **Covid-19 Impact:** China, which holds a dominant position in critical mineral supply chains, continues to struggle with **Covid-19.** Consequently, **there is a significant risk of a slowdown in the extraction, processing, and exports of critical minerals.**
  - **Russia-Ukraine War:** The conflict has implications for critical mineral supply chains. **Russia is a major producer of** nickel, palladium, titanium sponge metal, and the rare earth element scandium.
    - Ukraine is a **significant producer of** titanium and has reserves of lithium, cobalt, graphite, and rare earth elements.
      - The **ongoing war between the two countries raises concerns about the stability and availability of these critical minerals** in the global supply chains.
  - **Impact of China-Russia Partnership and Disparity in International Initiatives:** The evolving balance of power between countries and continents poses a risk to critical mineral supply chains**, primarily due to the strategic partnership between China and Russia.**
    - This**alliance could have implications for the stability and availability of critical minerals.** In response, developed countries have formed collaborative **strategies such as the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) and the G7"s Sustainable Critical Minerals Alliance.**
      - However, developing countries **have not been actively involved in these initiatives, potentially missing out on the benefits and protection offered by these partnerships.**
  - However, **India does not have many of these mineral reserves, or its requirements may be higher than the availability, necessitating reliance** on foreign partners to meet domestic needs.

Recommended Strategies to Mitigate Challenges Regarding Critical Minerals

- **Keeping up with Rapid Demand Growth:** To ensure that future supplies of critical minerals can meet the rapidly growing demand driven by climate-driven scenarios. It is **crucial to assess whether the global supply of these minerals can keep pace with this surge in demand.**

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- **Diversifying Sources of Supply:** Currently, the reliance on a limited number of countries for these minerals poses risks to the supply chain. By **diversifying the sources, countries and industries can reduce vulnerability** to disruptions in supply caused by geopolitical factors, trade restrictions, or other uncertainties.
- **Ensuring Clean and Responsible Sourcing:** Ensuring that the volumes of critical minerals required for energy transitions **can be supplied from clean and responsible sources.** Mining and refining processes can have environmental and social impacts, including issues such as pollution, habitat destruction, and human rights concerns.
  - It is **important to promote sustainable and responsible practices throughout the critical minerals value chain** to minimise these impacts and ensure a sustainable energy transition.

Looking Forward

- **Ensuring Resource Availability:** Addressing the resource aspect is crucial. It is necessary to assess the availability and accessibility of critical materials required for clean energy technologies. This **includes evaluating the domestic reserves of critical minerals and exploring opportunities for their sustainable extraction** or sourcing from diverse international markets.
  - Additionally, **there should be strategies to ensure a steady supply of these materials, mitigating risks** associated with potential disruptions in global supply chains.
- **Financial Considerations:** The transition to clean energy often necessitates significant investments in **infrastructure development, research and development, and policy support.** There is a need for **financing mechanisms, incentives, and funding models that can attract both public and private investments.**
  - Identifying **avenues for international collaborations and exploring innovative financing options** will also be vital in mobilising the required capital for a successful energy transition.
- **Technology as the Key Driver:** Technology plays a critical role in achieving our energy goals. It is **required for the world to focus on fostering domestic technological capabilities**, promoting research and development, and fostering innovation in clean energy technologies.
  - There is a need for technology transfer, collaborations with academia and industry, and the **creation of an ecosystem that supports the development, adoption, and scaling up of innovative clean energy solutions.**

India needs to draw important lessons from the global scenario. While aiming for a rapid decarbonisation and energy transition, India may face challenges due to the limited availability of key minerals and metals required for a swift transition. The success of India''s efforts in achieving its goals will be dependent on the uncertainties and fluctuations of the world market for these critical resources.

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Scientists need the oxygen of free speech

Recently, more than **500 scientists and academics** wrote to the **Indian institute of Science (IISc)** criticising its administration for prohibiting a discussion on the **Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.**

Science and its Links to Social and Political Matters:
- **The Interdisciplinary Nature of Science:** A narrow perspective suggests scientists should focus solely on science and avoid social questions.
    - Examples, like **climate change research demonstrate** how scientific investigations naturally intertwine with complex geopolitical and historical responsibilities.
    - Inquiries into **energy policy** similarly intersect with environmental concerns and equitable distribution of resources.
    - Most recently, research on **artificial intelligence** has thrown up a host of ethical dilemmas.
    - However, confining science within strict boundaries is artificial and limits the exploration of interconnected issues.
- **Responsible Deployment of Science and Public Benefit:**
    - Scientific and technological advancements alone do not guarantee social progress and can be used to oppress or perpetuate inequality.
    - Scientists have a crucial role in shaping the deployment of science and should not relinquish decision-making power to capitalists or governments.
    - A broader political and historical perspective helps scientists understand the **wider societal impact of their research,** even in pure science fields.
- **Scientists' Role in Decision-making and Deployment of Science**
    - Scientists should be involved in decisions about how scientific knowledge is utilized.
    - By participating in discussions, scientists can help ensure that science benefits society and promotes justice.

An engagement with social issues:
- **India's Tradition of Scientist Engagement with Social Issues:**
    - India has a rich tradition of scientists who actively engage with social issues, showcasing the intersection of science and broader political concerns.
    - This tradition highlights the understanding that scientific issues are often intertwined with societal dynamics.
- **Prominent Individuals and People's Science Movements:**
    - Eminent figures like **Meghnad Saha, D.D. Kosambi, and Amulya Reddy** exemplify the tradition of Indian scientists engaging with social issues.
    - The **Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad,** with its focus on **"science for social revolution,"** has played a significant role in promoting scientific values within the state.
    - The **All India Peoples Science Network** consistently advocates for the use of science for social benefit rather than private profit.
- **Advocacy for Science as a Tool for Social Benefit:**

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- While individual scientists may choose to focus narrowly on scientific topics, the argument is that scientific issues are often interconnected with broader political issues.
- Society has benefited from the participation of scientists in discussions that address the social implications of scientific advancements.

The pressures

- **Administrators' Worries about Government Perception:**
  - Scientific administrators may fear being seen as promoting views contrary to the government's stance.
  - They may take preemptive measures to avoid controversy or government backlash.
  - Self-censorship becomes prevalent as administrators try to avoid potential repercussions from the government.

- **Inappropriate Application of Central Civil Service Rules:**
  - Administrators sometimes invoke **Central Civil Service (Conduct) Rules** to prohibit criticism of the government, even though these rules are intended for government bureaucrats and ill-suited for academic scientists.
  - **In 2015, the Allahabad High Court** ruled that these rules do not apply to Central Universities.

- **Upholding Academic Freedom and Challenging Authority:**
  - The **Tripura High Court ruled in 2020** that even when the rules do apply, citizens' right to free speech, including criticism, remains a fundamental right.
  - Robust resistance against censorship is necessary to protect academic freedom in scientific institutions.
  - Challenging the arbitrary use of authority aligns with the core value of science.

Way Forward:

- Scientific research institutions **should encourage social and political discussions,** rather than suppressing them.
- Researchers and academics in scientific institutions have the **same constitutional rights as others** to participate in social discussions.
- Scientific institutions are **part of the broader society** and have a responsibility to educate and express themselves on matters of public interest.

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EU parliament urges India to act 'promptly' to end ethnic violence in restive state

The European Parliament (EP) has adopted a motion on the Manipur violence and called on the Indian government to act immediately to solve the violence in Manipur and protect religious minorities.

European Parliament:
- It is **one of the seven institutions of the European Union** (The European Parliament, The Council of the European Union, The European Commission, The European Council, The European Central Bank, The Court of Justice of the European Union and The European Court of Auditors).
- The Parliament is **headquartered in Strasbourg, France,** but its work is conducted at three locations: Strasbourg, Brussels (Belgium), and Luxembourg.
- It is **directly elected by European Union voters every 5 years.**

Resolution Deal With
- **Protection of Religious Minorities:** Resolution deals to protect all religious minorities, such as Manipur's Christian community, and to prevent any further escalation.
- **Grant Unhindered Access to Area:** It called on authorities to grant unhindered access to the area by journalists and international observers and to end Internet shutdowns.
- **Repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act:** The resolution called to repeal the unlawful Armed Forces Special Powers Act in line with the recommendations of the UN Universal Periodic Review.
- **Prominency of Human Rights:** Resolution also called on the EU to make human rights prominent in its dialogue and relationship with India.

India's Response to the European Parliament Resolutions:
- **Internal Matter:** India responded to the EP that it is entirely an internal matter.
- **Aware of Internal Conditions & Taking Steps:** Indian authorities at all levels, including the judiciary, are well-known aware of the situation in Manipur and are already taking steps to maintain peace and harmony and law and order.

Manipur Violence:
- **Reasons Behind Violence:**
  - **Orders of the Manipur High Court:** The State government to submit a 10- year -old recommendation to the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry for the inclusion of the Meitei community in the ST list.
  - **Union Tribal Affairs Ministry's letter:** The court referred to the Ministry's letter in 2013 to the Manipur government seeking specific recommendations along with the latest socio-economic survey and ethnographic report.
  - **Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur**:
    - It submitted a representation in 2012 demanding ST status for the Meiteis.
    - The committee also said the Meiteis needed constitutional safeguards against outsiders, stating that the community has been kept away from the hills while the tribal people can buy land in the "shrinking" Imphal Valley.

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- **Why are tribal groups against ST status for Meiteis?**
    - Tribal groups argue that Meiteis have a **demographic and political advantage** over them.
    - They believe that **granting ST status to Meiteis** would result in job losses for tribal communities.
    - There is a **concern that ST status would allow Meiteis** to acquire land in the hills, potentially displacing tribal populations.
    - Tribal groups point out that the **Meitei language is already included in the Eighth Schedule** of the Constitution.
    - Many Meiteis have access to benefits associated with SC, OBC, or EWS status.
- **Meities Argument:**
    - **Historical Recognition and Importance:**
        - They were recognised as a tribe before the merger of the State with the Union of **India in 1949.**
        - The ST status is needed to preserve the community and save the ancestral land, tradition, culture, and language of the Meiteis.
    - **Constitutional Safeguards and Land Concerns:**
        - The **Scheduled Tribe Demand Committee of Manipur (STDCM)** highlights the importance of constitutional safeguards for the Meiteis against outsiders.
        - They raise concerns about the Meiteis being excluded from the hills while tribal people can buy land in the "shrinking" Imphal Valley.

In a constitutional sense, this is an untenable verdict

Recently, a judgment by the Allahabad High Court in **Kiran Rawat vs State of UP** implied that the **live-in relationship is a social problem.**
- It undermines the principles of constitutional morality in personal relationships, which is repeatedly affirmed by the Supreme Court of India.

Constitutional Morality:
- **Guiding Principle:** It refers to the Constitutional principles and values that guide the interpretation and application of its provisions.
- **Includes:** It includes the spirit and objectives of the constitution, promoting justice, equality, freedom and the protection of the fundamental rights.

Personal Liberty:
- **Definition:** Personal liberty is the individual's freedom to make choices, decisions, and actions without undue interference or pressure from external forces, including the state or other individuals.
- **Dealing Aspects:** It deals with the various aspects of an individual's life i.e., physical, mental, and emotional well-being, as well as their autonomy and privacy.

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- **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution:** It deals with the Protection of Life and Personal Liberty. It states that no person shall be deprived of his/her life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

Concerns with the Judgment:
- **Undermined Constitutional Morality:** The High Court's decision undermines the individual's autonomy and personal liberty, which are essential components of constitutional morality.
- **Rejected Precedential Value of The Supreme Court:** This decision undermines the binding nature of Supreme Court judgments and rejects the precedential value of the top court verdicts.
  - It rejects the precedential value of Supreme Court verdicts on live-in relationships, such as **D. Velusamy (2010), Indra Sarma (2013), and Dhanu Lal (2015),** which has recognized and protected the rights of individuals in live-in relationships.
- **Unconstitutional Judgment:** The High Court preferred the personal laws on marriage to the fundamental rights of individuals, which is unconstitutional.
-
- **Tilting towards Conventional Beliefs:** The verdict shows a clear inclination towards social orthodoxy and religious revivalism.
  - In the guise of constitutional adjudication, the court only tried to reiterate the traditional beliefs on marriage and morals.
- The judgment has been criticized for its **departure from constitutional principles, disregard for precedent, and reliance on irrelevant personal laws.**

Earlier Related Judgements by the Supreme Court:
- **Lata Singh vs State of Uttar Pradesh (2006):** The Supreme Court directed police authorities throughout the country to see to it that any adult undergoing **inter-caste or inter-religious marriage is not harassed by anyone.**
- **S. Khushboo vs Kanniammal & Anr. (2010):** The Supreme Court held that there is no statutory offence that takes place when adults **willingly engage in sexual relations outside the marital setting.**
- **Joseph Shine vs Union of India (2018):** The Supreme Court **decriminalized adultery** as defined under Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
  - This was done since the state's police power cannot be used for punishing individual moral aberrations.
- **Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India (2018):** The Supreme Court substantially **struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Court** dealing with same sex relations and made a constitutional adjudication rather than mere moral judgment.

Way Forward
- **Clear Guidelines:** The Supreme Court should provide clear guidelines and legislation should provide legal recognition for live-in relationships.
- **Strengthening Precedent:** Article 141 of the Indian Constitution laid down that the Supreme Court's decisions are binding on all the courts in the country.
  - These records are admitted to be of evidentiary value and cannot be questioned when produced before any court. These records recognised as legal precedents and legal references.

- In the process of constitutional adjudication, the top court is not 'encouraging' or discouraging any social practice or human conduct.
  - **Judicial Training and Updation**: There is a need to conduct training programs for the judiciary to become more dedicated towards fundamental values rather than social beliefs.
  -
  - **Public Awareness:** There is an utmost need to educate the public about legal guidelines to become aware about their rights and judicial decisions.

50th GST Council meet and issues

The 50th meeting of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has been held commemorating a significant milestone in the journey of Goods and Services Tax (GST).

GST Council:
- The **101st Amendment Act of 2016 (122nd Amendment Bill),** paved the way for the implementation of GST.
- The GST Council is a joint forum of the Centre and the states under Article 279-A of the constitution.
- **Article 279-A.** gives the President the authority to appoint a GST Council by executive order.
- The members of the Council include the **Union Finance Minister (chairperson)**, and the **Union Minister of State (Finance)** from various states.
- As per Article 279, it is meant to **"make recommendations to the Union and the states on important issues** related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST Laws".
- It also decides on various rate slabs of GST.

Key Outcomes of GST Council meeting:
- **Establishment of Appellate Tribunals:**
  - **Appointment norms:** The appointment norms for tribunal members have been cleared, and the government has assured that the first set of tribunals will be operational within four to six months.
  - **Tribunal benches:** The states have proposed the creation of 50 tribunal benches, which will be set up gradually, starting with state capitals and cities with High Court benches.
  - **Significance:** It may expedite the resolution of the increasing number of GST litigations burdening the courts.
- **Online gaming industry:**
  - **Businesses:** Disappointment over the Council's choice to implement a 28% GST levy on the face value of all bets in online games, casinos, and horse racing.
  - **e-gaming players:** Consider it detrimental to the flourishing industry and its numerous job opportunities.
  - **Casino-driven economies:** The heavy reliance of Goa and Sikkim on casino-driven tourism revenues.

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- **Uniform Taxation:** Casino, Horse Racing and Online gaming to be taxed at the uniform rate of 28% on full face value.
- **Concerns:**
- **Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN):**
  - Inclusion of Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) under the purview of the Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA).
  - **Significance:** It is one of the requirements under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as it will empower our tax authorities with more information.
  - **Concerns:** There were doubts that GSTN will start sharing information about private businesses to other law enforcement agencies.
- **GST for food and beverages in cinema halls:**
  - **Reduction in GST:** For instance, food and beverages in cinema halls will now attract a lower 5% GST, similar to unfried, uncooked snack pellets, fish soluble paste, and imitation zari yarn.
- **Other tax reductions:** Bringing down rates from 18 percent to 5 percent on 4 items –
  - Uncooked, unfried & extruded snack palettes
  - fish soluble paste
  - Linz-Donawitz(LD) slag (at par with blast furnace slag)
  - imitation zari thread.
- **GST exemptions:**
  - IGST exemption for Dinutuximab (Quarziba), medicines and Food for Special Medical Purposes (FSMP) when imported for personal use subject to existing conditions.
  - Extension of exemption to Food for Special Medical Purposes (FSMP) imported by Centres of Excellence for Rare Diseases or any institution or person on recommendation of such listed Centres of Excellence.
- **Measures for streamlining compliances in GST:**
  - Changes were also proposed to simplify compliance for Goods Transport Agencies (GTAs) and clarify the taxability of services provided by directors of companies to their respective companies.

The recent GST Council meeting addressed various issues such as Appellate Tribunals and tax treatment for the online gaming industry, there are concerns that the Council has shifted its focus away from the promised overhaul of GST rates. Additionally, no successor has been named to lead the ministerial group on rate restructuring. The impact of specific decisions on different sectors will depend on the details, but the Council's future meetings may be less frequent due to the upcoming poll season.

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ADR Report - Electoral Bonds

A recent report by the **Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR)** an Indian **Non-governmental Organization (NGO) established in 1999 situated in New Delhi** sheds light on the significant role played by **Electoral Bonds** as the primary **source of donations for political parties in India.**

- Between 2**016-17 and 2021-22,**the seven **national parties** and 24 regional parties received a **total donation of ₹9,188.35 crore** from Electoral Bonds.
    - The report analyzed donations received from **anonymous Electoral Bonds, direct corporate donations, contributions from MPs/MLAs, meetings, morchas, and collection by party units.**

Highlights of the ADR Report

- **Analysis of Donations and Funding Sources:**
    - The highest donations from Electoral Bonds, totaling **₹3,438.8237 crore, were received in 2019-20, the year of the general elections.**
    - The year **2021-22, which witnessed 11 Assembly elections,**saw donations worth **₹2,664.2725 crore through Electoral Bonds.**
    - Out of the total donations of ₹16,437.635 crore received by the 31 political parties analyzed, **90% came from Electoral Bonds, 28.07% from the corporate sector, and 16.03% from other sources.**
- **National Parties:**
    - National parties experienced a **significant surge in Electoral Bond donations, witnessing a 743% increase between FY 2017-18 and FY 2021-22.**
    - In contrast, **corporate donations**to national parties **increased by only 48%** during the same period.
- **Regional Parties and Electoral Bond Contributions:**
    - Regional parties also witnessed a substantial proportion of their donations coming from Electoral Bonds.
- **Power-Biased Donations of Electoral Bond:**
    - BJP, as the party in power, secures the **highest donation among national political parties.**More than **52% of the BJP"s total donations were sourced from Electoral Bonds, amounting to ₹5,271.9751 crore.**
    - The Congress secured the second-highest Electoral Bond donations, with ₹2955 crore (61.54% of its total donations), followed by the Trinamool Congress with ₹767.8876 crore (93.27%).

Electoral Bonds

- The electoral bonds system was introduced in 2017 by way of a Finance bill and it was implemented in 2018.
- They serve as a means for individuals and entities to **make donations to registered political parties**while maintaining donor anonymity.
- **Features:**
    - **State Bank of India (SBI)**issues the bonds in denominations of **Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore.**
    - **Payable to the bearer on demand and interest-free.**
    - Purchased by **Indian citizens or entities established in India.**
    - Can be bought**individually or jointly with other individuals.**

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- ■ **Valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue.**
- ■ **Authorized Issuer:**
  - ■ **State Bank of India (SBI)**is the authorized issuer.
  - ■ Electoral Bonds are issued through **designated SBI branches.**
- ■ **Eligibility of Political Parties:**
  - ■ Only the political parties registered under Section 29A of the**Representation of the People Act, 1951** and have **secured not less than 1% of the votes polled** in the last general election to the **House of the People** or the **Legislative Assembly,** are eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- ■ **Purchase and Encashment:**
  - ■ **Electoral Bonds can be purchased digitally or through cheques.**
  - ■ Encashment only through an authorized bank account of the political party.
- ■ **Transparency and Accountability:**
  - ■ Parties must disclose their**bank account with the Election Commission of India (ECI).**
  - ■ Donations are made through banking channels, ensuring transparency.
  - ■ Political parties are**obligated to explain the utilization of the funds received.**
- ■ **Benefits:**
  - ■ Enhanced **transparency in political party funding.**
  - ■ **Accountability**in disclosing donation utilization.
  - ■ **Discouragement of cash transactions.**
  - ■ Preservation of **donor anonymity.**
- ■ **Challenges:**
  - ■ Electoral bonds are donations to political parties that hide the identity of the donors and recipients. They may compromise the **right to know**, which is part of the **right to freedom of expression under Article 19**of the
  - ■ Anonymity may be compromised by government access to donor data. This implies that the **government in power can leverage this information and disrupt free and fair elections.**
  - ■ Potential for unauthorized donations violating regulations.
  - ■ Risk of crony capitalism and infusion of black money.
    - ■ Crony Capitalism is an economic system characterized by close, mutually advantageous relationships between business leaders and government officials.
  - ■ Loopholes regarding transparency for corporate entities and donation limits.
    - ■ As per **Companies Act 2013**, a company can make a political contribution only if its**net average profit of three preceding financial years is at 7.5%.** The removal of this clause has **raised concerns of black money in political funding through shell companies.**

Looking forward
- ■ Implement measures to **enhance transparency**in the Electoral Bond Scheme.

- Enforce **stricter regulations for political parties to disclose and**let the **ECI examine the donation** and make observation regarding both bonds and expenditure.
- Identify and **rectify loopholes in the Electoral Bonds**to prevent potential misuse, violation of donation limits, and risks such as crony capitalism and black money infusion.
- Continuously monitor the Electoral Bond Scheme through judicial scrutiny, periodic review, and public engagement to address emerging concerns, adapt to changing landscapes, and ensure a more inclusive decision-making process.

Research in higher educational institutes

- If implemented as envisaged, the **National Research Foundation** — whose creation was approved by the government on 28 June 2023 — has the **potential to address most pressing issues in Indian science** and significantly improve **India's research output.** K VijayRaghavan, former Principal Scientific Advisor to the central government, said it could be a "**major landmark**" for science in India.
- The **NRF** is supposed **to fund, promote and mentor research** in **higher educational institutions**, but these are only the **basic objectives**. There are a number of other ways in which it is expected to improve the **environment of scientific research in the country**.

Broad-basing research

- One of the **main objectives of the NRF** is to **get colleges and universities involved** in **scientific research.** The NRF detailed project report had pointed out that **less than one per cent** of the **nearly 40,000 institutions of higher learning** in the country were currently engaged in research.
- "For some reason, there has been an **artificial separation** between **research and higher education** in the country. There are research institutions, and there are colleges and universities where **very little research is carried out.** One of the objectives of NRF would be **to build research capacities in our universities.** The union of education and research must be restored," said Spenta Wadia, founding director of Bengaluru-based International Centre for Theoretical Sciences, a centre of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Wadia was among the scientists who worked on the detailed project report.
- **NRF** plans to address **this lacuna in multiple ways**. Active researchers, whether serving or retired, can be encouraged **to take up NRF professorships** at universities and colleges to start **or improve their research cells** in collaboration with the existing faculty. There will be **no age barrier for such research mentors;** they can apply for funding as long as they are active and bring value to the host institution. It also plans to offer **doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships** to young researchers at these universities.
- **University professors and researchers** will get opportunities **to participate in long-term projects** aimed specifically at solving societal problems, such as river cleaning, access to clean energy in villages, etc.

Research in social sciences

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- **The NSF** would fund and **promote research not just in natural sciences** but also in **humanities**, **social sciences** and **art**. This is considered vital for inculcating **creativity**, **critical thinking** and **communication skills**.
- As of now, research in these areas has **very limited sources of funding.** "This would be a very welcome move. It is important **to integrate social sciences and humanities** in our decision-making process. It is an excellent idea to support research in these areas," said Ashoka University vice-chancellor Somak Raychaudhury.
- The **detailed project report** noted that finding solutions **to big national problems** required not just application of **science and technology** but an understanding of social sciences, history and **various socio-cultural dimensions of the nation.** Social sciences, Indian Languages and Knowledge Systems, Arts and Humanities are among the **ten major 'directorates'** sought to be established under NRF, along with others like natural sciences, mathematics, earth sciences and engineering.

National priorities

- While the **NRF is envisaged to support all good-quality peer-reviewed research** proposals, it does aim **to identify priority areas** in which science and technology interventions can help larger national objectives. The priority areas could include **clean energy**, **climate change**, **sustainable infrastructure**, **improved transportation** and **accessible and affordable healthcare**.
- Towards this end, the **NRF hopes to fund and support large-scale, long-term**, multidisciplinary, multi-institutional projects. It also proposes to set up **Centres of Excellence** in major thrust areas to focus on research considered important for the country. In addition, the NRF would also back and coordinate the research happening in **mega international projects** like **LIGO or ITER**, that India is actively involved in.

Funding

- The **core objective of the NRF** would be to sharply increase the **funding available to scientific research** in the country, both from government and private sources. **India's spending on research and development** has remained **below 0.7 per cent of its GDP**, when even countries like **Egypt or Brazil** spend more. Advanced competitors, like the United States, China, Israel, Japan or South Korea, spend anywhere **between 2 to 5 percent of their respective GDPs** on scientific research.
- Scientists have noted that the relatively **small amount available for research in India** has a direct bearing on the quality and quantity of research output. The number of researchers **per million population is only 253 in India** while it is more than 1,200 in China, nearly 4,200 in the United States and over 8,000 in Israel.
- The **estimated allocation of Rs 50,000 crore** over a five-year period for the NRF does not form any substantial increase in the current spending, but scientists say this is likely to go up once the NRF starts to make its mark.
- "**Rs 50,000 crore is not a bad sum to start with.** We need to put this money to good use, and show progress in a time-bound manner. Completing projects and making **full utilisation of available resources is very important.** Once the NRF takes off and **its utility is recognised**, I am sure the flow of money will also increase," Wadia said.

Know About Aspartame

The **cancer research arm**of the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** will list the popular sugar substitute **aspartame** as "**possibly carcinogenic to humans**". The listing by the **International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)** is likely next month, the Reuters report said, quoting unnamed sources.

- **Aspartame** is one of the **world's most common artificial sweeteners** and is used in a wide range of **diet soft drinks**, **sugar-free chewing gum**, **sugar-free ice-cream**, **sugar-free breakfast cereals**, etc.
- A number of studies have repeatedly said that **aspartame does not pose a risk for cancer.**The listing by WHO, if it comes, will break from those earlier findings, "pitting it against the food industry and regulators", the Reuters report said.

What is this assessment by the WHO?

- Two different WHO groups — **IARC**and the **Joint Organization Expert Committee on Food Additives, or JECFA** — are currently reviewing the safety of aspartame.
- The IARC concluded a meeting in France last week, and **JECFA** was scheduled to meet from 27 June to 6 July 2023 to update its **risk assessment of aspartame**, including reviewing how much can be safely consumed, The Washington Post reported.
- The result of **both evaluations would be announced**, The Post's report said, and noted that "**many in the nutrition world [were] predicting** the WHO will convey new concerns about the sweetener".
- It said that the IARC assessment "**does not take into account how much of a product a person can safely consume**", and that "this advice for individuals comes from…[the] JECFA, alongside determinations from national regulators".

And what exactly is aspartame?

- Chemically, **aspartame**is a **methyl ester of the dipeptide of two natural amino acids**, **L-aspartic acid** and **L-phenylalanine**. It was discovered by **James M Schlatter**, a chemist at the American pharmaceutical company **G D Searle & Co**. (which is now a subsidiary of Pfizer) in 1965, apparently by accident, when, while researching an **anti-ulcer drug**, he happened to lick his finger and detected a sweet taste.
- According to the **US Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**, **aspartame**is **about 200 times sweeter than table sugar** — which **makes aspartame far less sweet** than other artificial sweeteners like **advantame** and **neotame**, but even then, 1 gram of aspartame has the sweetness intensity of roughly 2 teaspoons (about 8 g) of sugar.
- **Aspartame**is preferred by people **trying to cut calories or lose weight**, or by diabetics, because while **2 teaspoons (8 g) of sugar** provides about **32 kcals of energy**, **1 g of aspartame is only 4 kcals**.
- It is often argued that a **12 fl oz (about 350 ml) can of regular cola**contains about **10 teaspoonfuls of sugar**, while the same quantity of **diet cola** containing aspartame has only 7 kcals. Indeed, **cans/ bottles of diet fizzy drinks** often say "**zero sugar" or "zero calories**" on the packaging.
- **Aspartame**is present in **several brands of artificial sweeteners**, the most common of which in India are Equal and Sugar-Free Gold.

So is aspartame dangerous?

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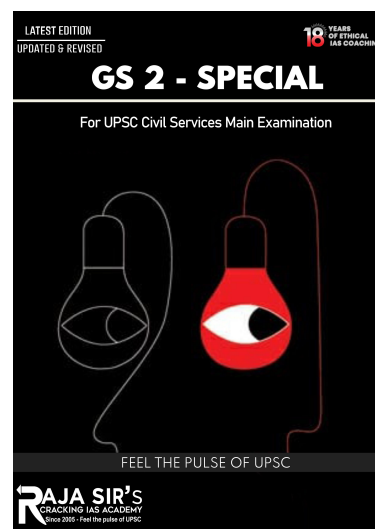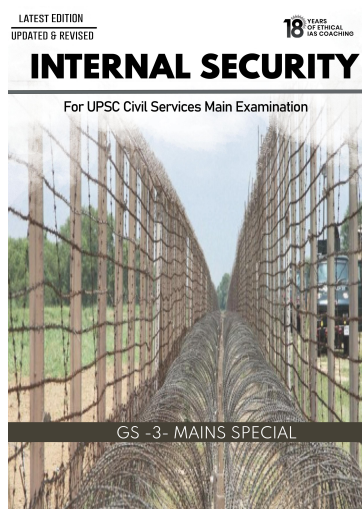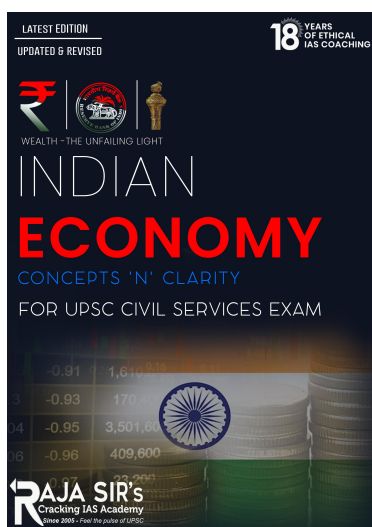Cracking IAS Academy
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- Over more than 40 years, **aspartame**has been one of the **most widely studied and rigorously tested** chemical additives in food, including for its **possible links with cancer.** More than **100 studies** have found no evidence of harm caused by aspartame.
- While doubts and concerns have continued to be raised by some critics and a few studies, there is a **broad scientific consensus on the safety of aspartame**for all groups of people except one — those **suffering from phenylketonuria (PKU)**, a rare inherited disorder in which the patient **does not have the enzyme** that is needed to break down **phenylalanine**, one of the two amino acids in aspartame. Foods containing aspartame carry the warning "**Not for phenylketonurics**".
- The USFDA permitted the **use of aspartame in food in 1981**, and has reviewed the science of its safety five times since then, The Washington Post report said. **Aspartame is also certified as safe for human consumption**by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), national regulators in Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Australia, and even the **WHO's JECFA**. Around 100 countries around the world, including India, permit the use of aspartame.
- The Reuters report noted that past IARC rulings have "**raised concerns among consumers**about their use, led to lawsuits, and pressured manufacturers to recreate recipes and swap to alternatives". This, the report said, "has led to criticism that the **IARC's assessments can be confusing to the public**.

Foods containing aspartame
Found in more than 5,000 foods and drinks, aspartame is far sweeter than sugar. In 1974, the FDA approved its use as a tabletop sweetener and ingredient in gum, cereals, instant coffee, dairy products and other items. Common foods and drinks with aspartame include:

- Tabletop sweeteners, including NutraSweet, Equal and Sugar Twin.
- Beverages and drink mixes, such as Diet Coke, Coke Zero, Diet Snapple, Fanta Zero, Sprite Zero, Crystal Light and Wyler's Light.
- Sugar-free gum, including Trident, Extra, Wrigley's and Mentos gum.
- Gelatin-based products, including sugar-free Jell-O and Royal Gelatin.
- Syrups, including Mrs. Butterworth's Sugar Free Syrup and Log Cabin Sugar Free Syrup.

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India's Moon Mission: How Chandrayaan-3 is better than Chandrayaan-2?

Recently, India's third moon mission, Chandrayaan-3, was successfully launched onboard a Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3) rocket from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. This is India's second attempt at soft-landing on the lunar surface after the failure of previous attempt, Chandrayaan-2, in 2019. So far, only three countries, the U.S., Russia and China, have successfully soft-landed on the moon. Chandrayaan-3 seeks to study moonquakes, composition of lunar surface and atmosphere, understand Earth's life-like elements, how heat passes through the lunar surface and plasma environment on the Moon. The mission will demonstrate Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO) ability of soft landing on lunar surface and roving on the lunar terrain. It is expected to be supportive to ISRO's future interplanetary missions.

While the mission objectives remain the same, unlike Chandrayaan-2, which consisted of a lander, rover, and orbiter, Chandrayaan-3 will launch with **only a lander and a rover**, utilizing the existing orbiter from Chandrayaan-2 for communication and terrain mapping purposes.

ISRO adopted a "**failure-based design**" for Chandrayaan-3 instead of a "success-based design" used of Chandrayaan-2. It means that ISRO's focus during the Chandrayaan-3 mission was on identifying potential failure points and implementing safeguards to ensure a successful landing.

Learning from its Chandrayaan-2 failure, ISRO has **implemented several improvements** in Chandrayaan-3 to ensure success this time. Some of them are as following:

- **Landing area**: The landing area has been expanded. Instead of trying to reach a specific 500m x 500m patch for landing as targeted by Chandrayaan-2, the current mission has been given instructions to land safely anywhere in a **4km x 2.4km area**.
- **Strengthened legs**: The legs of Chandrayaan-3 Lander have been strengthened to ensure that it would be able to land, and stabilise, even at a speed of 108 km/hour.
- **More fuel**: The Chandrayaan-3 Lander is carrying more fuel than Chandrayaan-2 to enhance the Lander's capability to make a last-minute change in its landing site, if the need arises.
- **Solar panels**: The Chandrayaan-3 Lander has solar panels on four sides, instead of only two in Chandrayaan-2. This design modification enables the lander to continue harnessing solar power even if it lands in an incorrect orientation or experiences tumbling.
- **More instruments**: Chandrayaan-3 incorporates additional navigational and guidance instruments to continuously monitor the speed of the lander and making any required corrections.
- **Updated software:** Significant upgrades have been made to the hazard detection and avoidance camera, processing algorithm, and navigation and guidance software of Chandrayaan-3. Multiple layers of redundancies have been implemented to guarantee that alternative systems are available in case of any failure or malfunction.
- **Multiple stress tests:** The Lander has been subjected to multiple stress tests and experiments. ISRO created several kinds of test beds at one of its facilities to simulate lunar landing conditions.

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- ■ <u>How is Chandrayaan-3 different from other moon missions?</u>
- ■ Chandrayaan-3 is different from other moon mission as it will be the **world's first mission to try to soft-land near the lunar south pole.**
- ■ All the previous spacecraft have landed a few degrees latitude north or south in the lunar equatorial region as it is **easier and safer to land near the equator**.
- ■ The surface near the **lunar equator is even and smooth**, with lesser hills or craters. Also, **abundant sunlight** offers regular supply of energy to solar-powered instruments.
- ■ The polar regions of the moon have **numerous craters** and many regions near lunar poles are characterized by lack of sunlight and extremely low temperatures, reaching below minus 230 degrees Celsius. The **absence of sunlight** and **extremely low temperatures** pose obstacles for instrument operation.

<u>Why ISRO wants to explore the Moon's south pole</u>**?.**
- ■ **Unexplored region:** The challenging conditions of the polar regions on the moon have discouraged exploration, but evidence from various Orbiter missions suggests these areas hold significant potential for exploration. For example, the 2008 Chandrayaan-1 mission indicated the presence of substantial amounts of ice molecules in the deep craters of this region.
- ■ **Insights into early history of Solar System:** Also, the extreme cold temperatures in the polar regions of the moon preserves objects as they remain frozen and undergo minimal change over time. As a result, the rocks and soil found in the Moon's north and south poles have the potential to offer valuable insights into the early stages of the Solar System.
- ■ **Presence of water:** The Moon's minimal axial tilt of 1.5 degrees results in certain craters near the lunar north and south poles never receiving direct sunlight. These specific areas are referred to as Permanently Shadowed Regions (PSRs). According to a 2019 NASA report, water can potentially persist for extended durations in PSRs, as certain areas maintain sufficiently low temperatures to keep water stable at the surface.

<u>Significance of the mission</u>
- ■ **Gaganyaan**: With a **human-rated** (thorough process to safely design, build and launch a crewed spacecraft) Launch Vehicle Mark (LVM) to be used for the upcoming Gaganyaan mission, the LVM-3's successful launch of the Chandrayaan-3 has gained significance, as it has further **enhanced the reliability of the launch vehicle**.
- ■ **Shift in India's space programme**: The Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan signal a **shift in strategy**. Earlier, ISRO seemed focussed on **utilitarian objectives** like enabling telecommunications, telemedicine and tele-education, broadcasting, or setting up remote sensing satellites. But **space and planetary exploration** is becoming a priority now.
- ■ **Future space exploration**: The ability to make a **soft landing** on a planetary body is a **crucial technology** which can impact IRSO's ability to carry out, or participate in, other scientific missions to the moon. The US **Artemis programme** significantly expands the scale of future exploration. In the future, there is a likelihood of discontinuing the International Space Station, leading several nations, including the US, to explore the construction of more permanent structures on the lunar surface. India aspires to become a significant partner in these endeavors.

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- **Boost to the Indian space-tech ecosystem**: The successful launch of Chandrayaan-3 could **bolster investor confidence** and **attract more private investment** in space technology. This development will promote cost-efficient and highly reliable space-grade hardware provided by the Indian space industry for this mission. Moreover, it validates India's industry as a potential supplier for lunar programs undertaken by other countries.

Summing up

- As ISRO gets into scientific space exploration, it will most likely also face **greater scrutiny** and demands for **accountability** because space exploration has gained significant strategic, economic, and even military dimensions. It offers tangible power advantages, which is evident by the fact that major global powers are also leading space-faring nations. Hence, ISRO should swiftly progress in this new phase.

- Moreover, the **future of space exploration will heavily rely on collaboration**, as the envisioned missions and infrastructure necessitate capabilities beyond the reach of any single country. However, collaborations will only be established with partners who can add value to the partnership.

- India has the potential to exert a **significant influence on global space policy** and should actively pursue the establishment of a regional space alliance, such as an Asian Space Agency, to enhance collective bargaining power and become a formidable force in the field. While prioritizing the peaceful use of outer space, India must also remain cautious of the potential militarization of space. However, becoming a space power is a crucial initial step, and Chandrayaan-3 can propel India closer to achieving this goal.

Inside Earth's MOON

Our large natural satellite always presents the same face to the Earth, because it completes one orbit of Earth in about the same span of time it takes to complete one rotation. The dark plains on the side facing Earth are volcanic features called seas, or "maria." The first human landing on the moon took place on the Sea of Tranquility.

GRAVITY 0.17 OF EARTH

EARTH 10 ft dunk   MOON 58.9 ft dunk

SURFACE CONDITIONS
AIR PRESSURE: none
TEMPERATURE RANGE: from about -280°F (-173°C) at night to +260°F (+127°C) in the daytime at the equator

PARTLY MELTED OUTER CORE
SOLID IRON CORE
CRUST
LITHOSPHERE
APOLLO 11 LANDING SITE

Astronaut James Irwin on the moon, Apollo 15, August 1971

The moon is 2,159 mi (3,474 km) in diameter, about 1/4 that of Earth

SOURCE: NASA

KARL TATE, SPACE.com

Reforming Climate Finance

- Climate change is a global problem that requires **huge amounts** of **money** to **transform** production and **consumption patterns** around the world.
- Climate change related **cost** is **higher** for **developing countries**, which are often the most **vulnerable** to this phenomenon.
    - Climate financing will allow **mitigation** and **adaptation**.
- There is a requirement of **$2-2.8 trillion** per year by **2030** as the **climate-related investment** required by for **emerging markets and developing countries** (EMDCs) other than **China**.
    - The amount is equivalent to **6-8.5%** of gross domestic product (**GDP**).
- Investments in **developmental** activities for **climate mitigation** accounts for around **75**% of the **initial estimate,** the **rest** is meant for **loss and damage**, **adaptation** and **resilience**, which undermines the **importance** in funding of rest **three activities**.
    - About **$ 1 trillion** of it shall come from **international transfers** of **funds**.
- The **Green Climate Fund** (GCF) exhibits limited **transparency** and **accountability** with respect to how approved **funding** for **adaptation** is **spent**, particularly for projects that claims to generate **local level adaptation outcomes**.

Climate Finance

- According to the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),** climate finance is **local**, **national**, or **transnational** funding from public, private, and alternative sources.
    - It seeks to **support climate change mitigation** and **adaptation** actions.
- Climate finance aims at **reducing emissions,** and **enhancing greenhouse gas sinks**.
- It also aims at **reducing vulnerability** and maintaining and increasing the **resilience** of human and ecological systems to **negative** climate change impacts.
- **Climate finance** will play an important role in the forthcoming meeting of the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** in Dubai in December 2023.
- Some of the countries that are **most** seriously threatened by effects of climate change tend to be those that cause the **least pollution**.
- Relocation of **manufacturing** sector to countries with **cheap labour**, such as **China** and **India**, among others, has skyrocketed their **greenhouse gas emissions (GGE).**
- **Finance** and **economics** of the network are key components to consider for **climate action**.
- The **challenge** with the fund is to **determine** the **quantum** and the **funding responsibilities** in order to transfer funds from **developed** to **EMDCs** for climate-related actions.

Climate finance sources and instruments:

- Green bonds
- Debt swaps
- Guarantees

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- Concessional loans
- Grants and donations

Funds for Climate Finance:

Green Climate Fund (GCF):
- It is the **world"s largest fund devoted** to **help developing countries** reduce their Greenhouse Gas emissions and **adapt** to the **impact** of **climate change**.
- GCF was set up by the **UNFCCC** in **2010**.
- It pays particular attention to the needs of the most **vulnerable** countries.
- It plays an essential role in **compliance** with the **Paris Agreement**, channeling climate finance to developing countries.

Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF):
- It offers **four** different **financial services**:
    - Adaptation to climate change
    - Technology transfer
    - Energy, transport, industry, agriculture, forestry, and waste management
    - Economic diversification for countries dependent on fossil fuels.
- It is administered by the **Global Environment Facility (GEF).**

Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF):
- Its aims to **support 50 countries** classified as **least developed** by the United Nations to tackle their **high vulnerability** to climate change and implement their **national adaptation plans**.
- LDCF is also administered by Global Environment Facility (**GEF**).

UN-REDD Programme:
- It aims to **reduce** the **emissions** caused by **deforestation** and forest degradation **in developing countries**, by helping governments to prepare and implement national **REDD**+ **strategies**.
- It was **established** in **2008** as a part of the **UN.**

Country Climate and Development Reports (CCDRs):
- It **analyses** the **achievements** of a country's development goals of **mitigating** and **adapting** to climate change.
- In the **first** round, these estimates have been **prepared** for **24 countries** and shows **variation** for the investment between **2022** and **2030** as a percentage of **GDP** required.
    - **1.1%** for upper-middle-income countries (**UMI**)
    - **5.1%** for lower-middle income countries (**LMI**)
    - **8%** for low-income countries (**LI**).
- Reason for the difference is the **inclusion** of requirements to **close existing development** and **infrastructure gaps** in **most LIs** and **LMIs.**

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC):
- Nationally Determined Contributions were submitted to the **UNFCCC**.
- India's NDC submitted in **2015** indicates preliminary estimates of **$206 billion between 2015 and 2030** for implementing adaptation actions in agriculture, forestry, fisheries infrastructure, water resources, and ecosystems and **$834 billion** until **2030** for mitigation activities **for moderate low carbon development**.
- NDCs of India are the following:

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- ■ To reach **cumulative electric power** installed capacity from **non-fossil sources to reach 50%.**
- ■ To reduce the **emissions** intensity to **45**% of **GDP** by **2030** as compared to **2005** levels.
- ■ To **increase** forest and tree cover for creation of an additional carbon sink of **2.5** to **3 billion tonnes** of CO2 equivalent.

Investment in Renewable Energy:
- ■ It will **replace carbon-emitting fossil fuel** used for electricity generation.
- ■ The net investment requirement for renewable energy should be **higher than** the usual business alternative of fossil-fuel-based power plants.

Suggestions for improvement in climate related fundings
- ■ **Adaptation** and **mitigation** processes require **financing**, and this flow of money can come from both **private** and **public** sources.
- ■ The international **commercial** flow can be directed by the **private corporate** and **finance** institutions by accepting **environmental principles** and **climate mitigation targets** as done by following:
    - ■ **Science Based Target Initiative (SBTI)** promotes **best practices** in emissions reductions and **net-zero targets** in line with climate science.
    - ■ **The Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ)** is a **global coalition** of leading financial institutions to accelerate **decarbonization** of the economy.
        - ■ It was formed during the **COP26** climate conference in **Glasgow**.
    - ■ **Force for Good Initiative (FFGI)** is an impact-driven institution that focuses on **transforming capitalism** for a secure, sustainable, and superior future.
- ■ The **UNFCCC**, is responsible for supervising **transfers** of funds from **developed** to **developing** countries.
- ■ Any significant movement on **climate finance** in the **UNFCCC** must consider the following:
    - ■ **Climate finance**, essential for mitigating and adapting to climate change
    - ■ **Social transformation Economy Climate action**

The governments shall focus on the financial assistance required to cope with emerging climate risks. There should be an **agreement** on principles of **climate justice** that **not** only work for the **contributory obligations** of each country but also for the **recipient** rights of the country. A more difficult task is the country-wide allocation of **obligatory funding requirements** for adaptation and resilience measures and for **unavoidable loss and damage**.

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India, France and what keeps their ties ticking

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited France on the 25th anniversary of the India-France strategic partnership. The visit was special as the Prime Minister was invited to be the chief guest at the Bastille Day parade. The visit concluded with the signing of several agreements and a series of defense deals. The two countries also outlined a roadmap for the next 25 years of India-France ties (Horizon 2047) which herald a new phase in India's relations with France.

Outcomes of the Indian PM's recent visit

- **"Horizon 2047"** agreement was signed. It included the strategic road map for the next 25 years. It has three pillars — 1) Partnership for security and sovereignty 2) Partnership for the planet and 3) Partnership for the people.
- This agreement includes a variety of fields of cooperation i.e., defence, space, nuclear energy, climate change and green transitions as well as education and people-to-people ties. Through this roadmap, the India-France Strategic Partnership will further diversify into new areas of cooperation while also deepening existing programmes of shared interest.
- **A roadmap to cooperate in the Indo-Pacific region** was also released. The agreement includes military and naval exchanges and a trilateral development fund to help countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Under defence cooperation**, Safran, the French company and the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) will jointly develop jet engines for the advanced medium combat aircraft. Submarines are proposed to be jointly built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders and the Naval Group of France.

Background

- India and France have **traditionally close and friendly relations.** In 1998, the two countries entered into a Strategic Partnership which is symbolic of their **convergence of views** on a range of international issues apart from a close and growing bilateral relationship.
- The areas of **defence & security cooperation, space cooperation and civil nuclear cooperation** constitute the principal pillars of our Strategic Partnership. Apart from these, India and France are increasingly engaged in new areas of cooperation such as **maritime security in the Indo Pacific region, counter terrorism, climate change, renewable energy and sustainable growth and development** among others.
- India and France support a **multi-polar world order**. France has continued to support India's claim for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council and the reforms of the United Nations. France's support was vital in India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and Australia Group (AG). France continues to support India's bid for accession to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- India and France have consistently **condemned terrorism** and have resolved to work together for adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) in the UN.
- India and France also have a **robust economic partnership**. French businesses and industry have forged linkages with the Indian economy and contribute significantly to India's goal to become an Atmanirbhar Bharat. There are over 1000 French businesses in India in different sectors. France is the 7th

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largest foreign investor in India representing 2 % of the total FDI inflows into India (2020).

Significance of the India and France relations

- **Strategic autonomy:** France-India strategic relationship is built on a respect for each other's strategic autonomy. For example, unlike other European countries, France has avoided any comment on India's internal affairs or its foreign policy choices, like Russia's war in Ukraine.
    - On the other hand, India also avoided any mention of the violence in France after the killing of a teenager belonging to the Algerian immigrant community.
    - Both countries are happy with their bilateral relations and show no desire to pull the other into a coalition, grouping or alliance the other is a part of.
- **French support after nuclear tests:** In 1974, and in 1998, France did not join the western push to sanction India for its nuclear tests either; it even stepped in with uranium supplies to power the Tarapur reactors.
- **Strategic partnership:** Franco-Indian strategic partnership comes at the top in comparison to 30 strategic partnerships with various countries. It has remained strong during difficult or good times.
    - Franco-Indian strategic partnership covers all dimensions of a full spectrum partnerships, like defence, space, climate change, critical technologies and people-to-people ties.
    - After the recent visit, Franco-Indian defence ties has developed from a mere buyer-seller model to that of jointly designing, developing and co-producing.
- **Indo-pacific:** France maintains a notable presence as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific region, with overseas territories such as La Reunion, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia, and military bases in the area.
    - Joint exercises between the two countries, use of French military bases by Indian forces and achieving real-time maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean are of paramount importance for India.
- **China:** India can counter China in the maritime space with the active support of France along with Quad partners.
- **Russia:** Gradually France is replacing Russia as a major defense partner of India. Major reasons behind gradual shift in Russia- India defence relations are: First, after invasion of Ukraine, Russia is facing many internal and external challenges. Second, Russia is moving increasingly close towards China.
- **Technological assistance:** The collaboration between India and France in domains such as supercomputing, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies holds significant importance for India's future and has the potential to shape the course of their relationship for the next 25 years.
    - Horizon 2047 agreement is an indication that France understands that no global problem can be tackled meaningfully without India's participation. France is also determined to support India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council

Challenges in India-France relationship

- The **Rafale deal** did not find mention in the joint communiqué, issued after the Paris summit between Mr Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.

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Reference to the construction of three more **Scorpene submarines** was dropped from a later version of the bilateral statement "Horizon 2047".

■ The French President signaled his country's discomfort with the United States' China containment policy with a state visit to Beijing. Also, France's stand on China's BRI contrasts with that of India. Therefore, France **might not be a reliable partner in case of confrontation China.**

■ Seven years after a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between India and France for setting up the world's largest **nuclear power plant at Jaitapur** (Maharashtra), the project has not seen much progress.

■ France is strong enough to have something to offer on the diplomatic, military, space, and nuclear sectors to India, but **not strong enough to shape international order, norms, or rules, or to balance China** if tensions escalate. While India holds significance for France, particularly in trade and defense cooperation, it may not be considered the foremost partner when addressing critical challenges such as Russian aggression or terrorism in Africa.

■ France's GDP is almost equal to that of India's, but **bilateral trade remains far below potential**. Trade with France constitutes only 1.41% of India's total international trade.

Summing up

The divergence between India and France on the **war in Ukraine** has not endangered the development of their bilateral ties. This is because of the trust developed between the two countries over the last 25 years and **mutual understanding** of each other's positions on the subject

France and India are making strategic commitments to each other for the long term. These two middle powers share a **similar worldview**. Both nations pursue independent foreign policies and value strategic autonomy, as they believe it will empower them to influence a multipolar world. Importantly, both countries recognize that their collective efforts will significantly enhance the likelihood of achieving this goal.

Why Normative Recommendations of Finance Commissions Remain on Paper?

■ The **13th Finance Commission (FC)** was set up in 2007 and its recommendations were for 2010 to 2015.

■ The FC is set up under **Article 280 of the Constitution**.

■ The FC give recommendations on **vertical devolution** (Union to state transfers), **horizontal distribution** (between states, on the basis of a formula varying from FC to FC) and **grant-in-aid** (usually written as grants-in-aid).

What are the constitutional provisions for finance commission?

■ **Finance commissions (FC)** are **constituted every five years** by the President of India under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution.

■ FC defines the **financial relations** between the **central government of India and the individual state governments**.

■ It recommends the **distribution of financial resources** between central Government and state governments.

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Recommendations of FC
- **Vertical devolution** which means transfer of financial resources from Union to state.
- **Horizontal distribution** means **distribution of financial resources between states**, on the basis of a **formula** which varies from FC to FC.
- **Grant-in-aid** which is covered under **Article 275** is the funds provided by parliament each year to the **states in need of assistance** and different sums may be fixed for different states.

What is grant-in-aid?
- There is a difference **between grant (Article 282)** and **grant-in-aid.** Grant-in-aid is when recipient operates at arm's length. Thus, grant-in-aid is not subject to as many tight controls as a grant is.

Importance:
- Grants-in-aid are an **important component** of Finance Commission transfers as they act like a **memorandum to states**.
- It enables the Commission to make its **scheme of transfers more comprehensive** and address various issues spelt out in the **ToR (Terms of reference)**.
    - **ToR** is notified by the **Finance Ministry** and they act as **guidelines** to the FC.

Arguments by the state:
- States have argued that **grants** should be **restricted** to only a **small portion** of the states' share in FC transfers.
- Grants are directed to particular sectors with **conditionalities** that **restrict** the **expenditure options of the states.**
    - **Objections** by the states seem to be more towards **conditionalities** and not towards distortions caused by focusing on specific sectors.

What is the objective of FC behind conditionalities put on grants?
- The objective of FC behind conditionalities put on grants is to **address various issues** in a state.

Example:
Justice Delivery
- It is in the conditions in the grants made by **the 13th FC.**
- In our **judicial system** there are over **three crore cases are pending** in various courts in the country.
- The **Department of Justice** has identified a number of initiatives which are part of this action plan and need support including: -
    - **Increasing the number of court** working hours using the existing infrastructure, enhancing support to Lok Adalats, funding to State Legal Services Authorities to enabling them to enhance legal aid, promoting the Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism, etc.
    - **Finance commissions'' expectation** was that providing grants for implantation of the following would address the justice delivery system of the country but **states showed reluctance** in implementing the recommendations.

Statistical System
- For equitable horizontal distribution, the **measurement of cost disabilities** is important.

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- The **cost of services varies across states** due to a large number of factors
- To estimate the cost disabilities of states, two types of data are required:
    - **Quantifiable measure** of the level of various services available in different states
    - **Corresponding unit cost**.
- As of now, **such data are not available**.
- **Measurement of inter-regional trade** data would be useful to **provide insights** in an inter-regional framework
- Hence the 13th FC recommended that the **Ministry of Statistics** take steps to **fill** in the **statistical gaps**.

Recommendations made by financial commission **help states in recognition** of the **areas** where they have been **lacking** and what the state shall do to address such issues. Hence state should try to **implement the recommendation of finance commissions**. On the other hand, finance commissions should allow states themselves to decide where the funds shall be used and provide them with some **autonomy**.

India's conglomerates are getting too big for comfort

- India's big businesses are thriving well while **small** and **medium** scale firms are still trying to come out of **COVID-19** induced losses.
- According to an Oxfam report, the **richest 1%** of the country owned **more than 40.5%** of the **total wealth** in **2021**, while the **bottom 50%** of the **population** only accounted for **3%** of it.
- The share of **assets** in the **non-financial sectors** owned by the **Big-5 business groups** has risen from **10%** in **1991** to nearly **18%** in **2021,** whereas the share of the next **five** has fallen from **18%** to less than **9%.**
- Democracies have battled hard to force governments to **maintain** some distance **from private sectors** in general and **big business** in particular.
    - Those efforts have been **partially successful** in **historical** contexts, where only strong action against **monopoly** and **trustification** was achieved.

Need of conglomerates
- They help to **increase GDP** of the nation, provide **employment** to a large group of people.
- The Big industrialists and businessmen represent the **face** of their **nation**.
- **Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)** by conglomerates play a positive role in the community.

Threats due to big businesses
- **Profit inflation** or **profiteering**, through the manipulation of **costs** and **prices**.
- **Inequality** in income and various opportunities**.**
- It leads to **nepotism**, where the **new generation** inherit the business even if they are **not** worthy of it and this may lead to **suffering** of an economy in long run.
- It dilutes the role that **civil society** can play as a **countervailing power**.

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Trends signalling the narrowing of political distance between the state and big business

- The **embrace** of **neoliberalism** by powerful voices within and outside the state.
    - This implied adoption of the view that the **role** of the **state** is **not** to **regulate private capital**, but to **facilitate** its **growth** as means to all round economic progress.
    - In areas such as **telecommunications** and **civil aviation**, there was an initial **increase** in the number of **new players**.
    - But if a few were **left**, there might be signs of **collusion** among them and the **consumer** will be the **loser**.
- The **state** must help **strengthen domestic big business** to **not** just hold its own against giant global competitors, but to step beyond **Indian shores**.
    - State policy, diplomacy and public resources, public banks had to serve as instruments for the purpose.
    - **Liberalisation** has opened up Indian markets, and subjected **Indian business** to **global competition**.
        - State intervention was modified to **protect** and **promote** sections of **big business** through **large-scale subsidies** and **transfers**.
- **Closeness** of the **governments** to **big businesses** has turned out to be a prerequisite for garnering the resources needed to "**manage**" **elections** and win **electoral support**.
    - Over time, policy has been changed to **legitimize corporate donations** done to political parties, including through the **electoral bonds scheme.**

Distribution of wealth is one of the important criteria which helps to reflect a country''s economic equality and social welfare. **Heterogenous distribution** of wealth becomes problematic when the wealth remains concentrated among a **small population** and that further pushes the bottom section into poverty.

How India can prevent unnatural political alliances?

- **Larger parties** lure **small regional party** into a **pre-poll alliance** to ensure consolidation of votes, even though there is **no guarantee that every voter** will automatically **transfer their vote** to the bigger party.
    - This process undermines the **diversity** of the **country** and the **right** of **regional parties** to **gain power** in case they represent true choice of the voters.
- Voters while voting for a party also votes for their **ideology** which gets **subsumed** or **merged** or **replaced** by **new ideology** when '**unnatural allies**' are formed, such new ideologies may often **not** be in **consonance** with the **choice** of **voters**.
    - When parties contest with '**unnatural allies**', they do **not** abandon their **ideological stances** in case of conflict, but instead, they pivot to an **alternative**, **coherent**, **ideological** stance.

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- The '**unnatural allies**' amongst the parties are the reason of many **political instabilities** of the nation, some of them has also led to **economic crises** in the country as in case of early **1990s**.

Factors of unnatural alliances:
- **Vote Bank:** The **aim** is to ensure that **votes** of **one formation** do **not** get divided and to **minimize splitting** of votes on each side.
- **Electoral system:** it is a political response to the arithmetic of the **first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system** in India's extremely diverse political landscape.
  - First-past-the-post voting (FPTP) is an electoral system wherein **voters cast** a **vote** for a **single candidate,** and the **candidate** with the **most votes** wins the **election.**
  - The FPTP method is **not completely suitable** with India's **unique political variability.**
- **Politics of statism**: It is the doctrine that **political authority** of the **state** is **legitimate** to some extent**.**
  - This may include **economic and social policy**, especially in terms **of taxation and means of production.**
- **Unique diversity of India:** there is **proliferation** of many political parties in order to gain **representation**.
  - Parties exert various methods to get into **power** and **influence** the **public** by unusual strategies and groupings.
- **Inherent ideologies of parties:**
  - Indian politics **cannot** be **force-fitted** into a **two-party system** like other democracies and so such **alliance** is **not stable**.
  - When parties contest with unnatural allies, they do **not abandon deep rooted ideologies.**

Ways for prevention:
Alternative voting method:
- Approval voting is **more aligned** to **prevent** the **splitting of votes** among parties.
- It can potentially **obviate** the **need** for **elaborate** and **complex alliance** and **unity-building** initiatives.
- Approval voting is a **well-researched methodology** used in elections with multiple credible choices, such as in the **United Nations** or **election of the Pope**.
- The **winner** is determined by the candidate with the **greatest number** of **approvals** or **tick marks**.

Benefits of Approval voting for India:
- In the Indian context, approval voting such as **MOTA (Many Of the Above)** can be a way forward**,** though its **mirror image NOTA** are present on every ballot.
- Under MOTA, voters do **not have** to **rank** their **preference** of candidates but instead can choose any number of **appropriate candidates**.
- It is **simple** and **easy** for the average Indian voter to just **tick all chosen parties.**
- **MOTA** is **not** preferred for a **two-party democracy** but for India, MOTA is a **more elegant** way to **reduce voter fragmentation** rather than complex and unstable electoral alliances.

- MOTA can produce more **acceptable outcomes** in a **multi-party democracy**.
- It legitimizes agnosticism without the **need** for a **formal alliance** and the **risk** of **keeping** that **alliance post-election.**
- There is an opportunity to **change** the dynamics of complicated political alliances, **seat sharing,** and **institutionalization** of the politics of **money** and **fear.**
- MOTA can be a solution to end **aaya Ram gaya Ram woes** in Indian politics.
  - The phrase **"aaya Ram gaya Ram"** is an expression of Indian politics leading to frequent **floor-crossing, switching parties** and **political horse trading** in the **legislature** by the elected politicians and political parties.
- **Politics of recognition**: The identity of individual is formed through a process of **mutual** recognition between different people.
- It would **reduce opportunistic political alliances** in favour of ideological politics.

Unity talks among political parties for an election are a manifestation of India's **political diversity** and its **FPTP voting method**. Many times, **regional parties** are true **representative** of the choice of the people which are undermined due to formation of alliance with a **bigger dominant party**. India's **political diversity** is both a **necessity** and an **inevitability, which gets** subsumed under such unnatural alliances**.** The **replacement** of FPTP method with **MOTA** can fundamentally alter Indian politics and society towards **inclusive democracy** and representative democracy.

Incentivisation of mineral exploration

- India is **100**% **import** dependent for most of the **critical minerals supply** except copper, gallium, graphite, cadmium, phosphorus, potash, and titanium.
- As the **balance** of **power shifts** across **countries**, the **critical mineral supply** chains may get affected due to the partnership between **China** and **Russia**, as both are its **major suppliers**.
  - **China** produces **60**% of the world's rare earth elements.
  - This may hamper **India's energy security.**
- One crucial **obstacle for** production of critical minerals in India is the **lack** of **adequate mineral exploration** and **import-dependency,** especially for the critical minerals.

India as a producer of crucial minerals

- India being a producer of crucial minerals, the resource sector has the **potential** to **impact environmental sustainability, social inclusion,** and **economic development.**
- The production of the mining industry across India has **increased** by **about 12%** and mining contributes to 2**.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).**
- It plays a vital role in the **national economy**, as it **employs** more than **half** a **million people**.
- It contributes to the country''s **revenue** through **exports, royalty, taxes** and **duties**.

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- The **ministry of mines** has announced a list of **30 critical minerals** as essential for the growth of many sectors in India.
- These are required to manufacture **green technologies** such as **wind turbines, solar panels, batteries,** and **electric vehicles.**

History of Mineral exploration:

First Come First Serve (FCFS) system:
- **Economic liberalisation** (early **1990s**) and the **National Mineral Policy of 1993** has paved the way for **private investment** for mineral exploration in India.
- **Private companies** could apply for **prospecting** and **reconnaissance exploration permits** in India under the FCFS system for **right** to **explore, mine** or **sell** any **discovered minerals.**
- The report of a working group under the **Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011)** highlighted the importance of the FCFS system to **encourage private investment** in mineral exploration.
    - The report also stated that **auctioning** already-**explored mineral blocks** would **discourage private investment.**
- The **Supreme Court (SC) judgement** held that the FCFS method of natural resource allocation was susceptible to **manipulation, favouritism** and **misuse.**
- SC has stated that **auctioning** as a system of **natural resources** allocation, should **not** be the only **norm** even if it is **profitable**.
- As there are **high risks** and **huge investments** in mineral exploration**, auctions** would **deter** private investment.

Non-Exclusive Reconnaissance Permit (NERP):
- The Amendment to the **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) in 2015** has replaced the FCFS basis of mineral allocation with **auctions**.
- India saw a **steep decline** in mineral exploration activities and many leading global exploration companies withdrew their investments from India in **2015**.
- The NERP was introduced to **enhance exploration activities,** but it was **discontinued** due to lack of **takers.**
- The NERP was ineffective as it did **not confer** any **mining rights** on exploration companies upon discovering mineral resources.

National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET):
- The NMET was established in **2015** to provide **incentives** for **expediting investment** in exploration by public and private entities.
- It was funded through a cess on operating mines, where about **90**% of this has been allocated to projects by the **Geological Survey of India (GSI).**
- Private exploration agencies have utilized **less than 1%** of the NMET expenditure.
- Thus, the NMET did **not succeed** in increasing the participation of private exploration companies.

Exploration Licenses (EL):
- The Ministry of Mines has issued a notice for public consultation on the introduction of **Exploration Licenses (ELs)** to incentivize the exploration of **deep-seated** and **critical minerals.**
- The proposed EL would be granted through **auctioning** an **area suggested** by any **person** to the **state government**.

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- Eligible explorers would **bid** on their desired share percentage of the **auction premium** payable by **Mining Leaseholder** to the **state** (subject to successful discovery and auction).
- The **lowest bid** would **win** the **EL auction** and receive **revenue** after a successfully discovered mine is **auctioned** and **operationalized**.
- As this process may take years or lead to failed outcomes, it needs to offer **more incentives** for **private explorers.**
- Under the present regime, private companies can also conduct some exploration activities after being granted **a Composite Licence (CL).**
  - CLs are granted for areas with **inadequate evidence** of the existence of the mineral and allow the leaseholder to **undertake** both **exploration** and **mining operations.**
- Instead of introducing a new license for exploration, the **existing CL regime** should be tweaked to give impetus to the **reconnaissance** of deep-seated mineral exploration.

Recommendations for greenfield blocks:
- It was given for those greenfield blocks who **lack knowledge** on **presence** of **minerals.**
- The eligible parties should **bid** on the **share** to be paid to the **state government** on successful discovery and mining.
- The proposed CL should **expand** its **scope** to **allow reconnaissance** for maximum area grantable to exploration companies.
- The reconnaissance component of the CL may be granted for an area up to **1000 sq km**.
- It should be ensured to **prevent companies** for conducting exploration activities within a specified time.
- The leaseholders should provide **periodic reports** on the **evidence** of work done.
- They should **relinquish 75%** of the **original area** after **3 years** of reconnaissance.
- It shall allow exploration companies to **sell** or **mine** any resources they discover.
- It shall **address** the **government's concerns** about granting mineral concessions through auctions.
- The **needs** of **exploration companies** would be **fulfilled**, as they would have the **right to mine** their discovered resources.
- Development of **globally competitive exploration industry** will enable the country to be **self-sufficient** for the raw materials needed for **manufacturing, green transition**, etc.

As one of the **fastest-growing economies** of the world, there is an **increased pressure** for India to increase the production of **metals/minerals** in order to meet the growing demand. India"s commitment to the **Paris Agreement** entails the requirement of **crucial minerals** for the transition to a **lower-carbon** economy. The **Make in India initiative** for expansion of the industrial sector would further **increase** the **mineral resources demand**. A **holistic approach** should be adopted for the mining industry by **alignment** of the **government** and **private sector**.

Edge of a Precipice

- It is truly said that **railways are the lifeline of India.** After **democratisation of air travel**, trains have receded from public consciousness, though **most Indians still travel by train** ~ around 13,169 trains carry, in aggregate, more than 2.20 crore passengers every day. Great metropolises like Kolkata and Mumbai come to a halt if suburban trains are disrupted. Running around 8,500 freight trains, the railways transport more than 1400 million tonnes of freight, every year. **Indian Railways have a long history**; established **by the British to manage their Indian Empire**, the Railways soon became a uniquely Indian enterprise.

- At the time of Independence, **different sections of the rail network** were run profitably by different private companies; for example, the **GIP Railway preceded the Central Railway**, and Bombay Baroda and Central India Railway was the precursor of Western Railway. **Post-Independence**, from a **profitable commercial enterprise, Indian Railways** changed into a **Government department**, mutating, in no time, to a meal train for politicians.

- **Armies of youth were given jobs in the railways on political considerations**, trains were started from the **Rail Minister's constituency**, ticketless travel was ignored, hardly any investment was made for proper maintenance of tracks and rolling stock or for improvement of railway infrastructure. Hardly any new routes were commissioned. The result was a creaky and outdated railway system, with a poor record of safety and punctuality.

- A comparison with China is instructive. **In 1949**, **China had only about one-third of our track length**, but today China's track length is double of ours. **China has 25,000 km of High-Speed tracks** where trains run at 350 km per hour. China is now running freight trains up to Madrid, while we don't run trains even up to Nepal. Poor upkeep of the Rail Museum at Delhi reflects the callous attitude and lack of vision of the Indian Railways. **Iconic train engines**, which are an invaluable national heritage, are stabled in the open at the mercy of the elements. **Marketed better**, the Rail Museum could be a **big draw for train enthusiasts.**

- With the **elite not travelling by trains any longer**, railways have lost much of their glamour. The Railway Budget has now been subsumed in the General Budget and railways are hardly in the news, except for some momentous event like the launch of a new train or some railway accident. It would appear that **railways have been relegated to a minor department of the Government** ~ which is ill-advised, given the complexity and vastness of the operations of Indian Railways.

- **Bureaucratic control over railway** means continuing with policies like **prioritising passenger traffic**, particularly of premium classes ~ which is a losing proposition ~ over goods traffic. Presently, on most days, Rajdhani AC 2 Tier or AC First Class fares between metro cities are higher than airfares, making trains the last option for premium passengers. It could be much better for both passengers and railway finances if trains are run with only AC- 3 Tier and Sleeper Class coaches.

- The **unfortunate three-train accident at Bahanaga Bazar station**, in Odisha, which resulted in around 300 casualities has highlighted the **neglect of safety considerations** in the railways. Though the exact cause of the mishap will only

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be revealed by a **statutory inquiry**, by the Commissioner of Railway Safety, contributory causes are, however, manifest. Reports indicate that there is a **huge shortage of 3.15 lakh frontline employees in the railways**, which is around 30 per cent of the working strength ~ a large percentage of the vacant posts being in safety staff.

■ **KAVACH**, an **Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system**, earlier known as the Train Collision Avoidance System, indigenously developed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in 2011-12, has been deployed on **only 2 per cent of the railway network**, though the cost of KAVACH is only Rs. 50 lakh per kilometre. Incidentally, **KAVACH is a Safety Integrity Level 4 (SIL-4) certified technology** with the probability of error being one in 10,000 years.

■ According to the CAG Report "**Performance Audit on Derailment in Indian Railways**" (tabled in Parliament in December 2022) "**maintenance of tracks**" is the major factor in most derailments. The Report goes on to state how track maintenance has been neglected, with allotment of funds for track renewal works declining over the years, and such funds remaining largely unspent. The Report goes on to mention that derailments accounted for 75 per cent of the total "**consequential accidents**." Incidentally, the recent train accident also involved the derailment of Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express.

■ Thankfully, **massive relief and rescue efforts have prevented further agony** for the survivors. After the Bahanaga Bazar train accident, PM Modi has vowed the strictest possible action against those responsible for the mishaps. Mr. Modi's views have been echoed by Mr. Pradhan, the Union Minister from Odisha. Probably, ignoring the rot in the railway system, the enquiry into the recent accident will find some lower-level functionary, driver, guard, signal maintainer or linesman responsible for the mishap and public conscience will have to be satisfied by his removal, or even imprisonment.

■ A point, missed by most, is the **antiquated and dilapidated infrastructure of the railways.** Replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha on 13 December 2019, the Railway Minister informed that there were **38,850 railway bridges**, which were more than 100 years old. Recently, **there were a series of railway overbridge collapses;** a horrific bridge collapse in Mumbai in 2019 left 22 passengers dead, consequent to which the Railways promised a complete audit of all foot overbridges.

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<u>**Will rupee trade gain currency globally?**</u>

In the realm of global trade, the **US dollar has long reigned supreme,** acting as the dominant currency **for foreign exchange transactions,** trade invoicing, and **reserve holdings.**

India"s ongoing efforts to promote the **use of the rupee in international trade** represent a step towards **de-dollarisation and currency diversification.** While challenges remain, the **combination of export growth, capital account convertibility**, and **sustained economic development** may pave the way for the rupee to gain currency globally.

The journey to reduce dollar dominance **requires concerted efforts, and success will depend on India"s resilience and adaptability** in a rapidly evolving global economic landscape.

However, an increasing number of countries are recognizing the **inherent risks that come with an overreliance on the dollar,** including exposure to **US politics, sanctions, and exchange rate volatility.** As a response to these concerns, many emerging economies are actively pursuing efforts to de-dollarize their trade and diversify their currency usage.

Trends in Currency Usage
- **Use of Local Currencies in International Payments:**
  - **SWIFT**data **indicates a rise in the usage of local currencies** in international transactions between 2013 and 2019.
- **Non-Dollar-Denominated Trade on the Rise:**
  - The **Triennial Bank Survey of 2022**shows a marginal increase in the share of dollars in daily turnover, but emerging economies are increasingly engaging in non-dollar-denominated trade.
- **Rise of the Chinese Renminbi:**
  - In 2022, the **Chinese renminbi became the fifth most traded currency globally,**with over 70% of China-Russia trade settled in yuan and roubles.
- **Growth of Local Currency Bond Markets:**
  - Emerging market**local currency bond markets** expanded significantly from **2015 to 2021**, presenting an alternative to dollar-denominated assets.

India"s Efforts to Strengthen the Rupee
- **Establishment of the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC):**
  - India"s first IFSC in **GIFT City, Gujarat**, aimed to promote the use of the rupee in **international financial transactions.**
- **Liberalization of Capital Markets:**
  - India increased the availability of rupee-denominated financial instruments, such as **bonds and derivatives, to enhance the rupee"s appeal.**
- **Promotion of Digital Payment Systems:**
  - Initiatives like the **Unified Payments Interface**(UPI) have facilitated digital transactions in rupees.
  - Recently, France and Singapore have adopted UPI.
- **Introduction of Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs):**

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- ■ India permitted**authorized banks from 18 countries to open SVRAs** for settling payments in rupees at market-determined exchange rates.
- ■ Objectives of the Mechanism are lower transaction costs, greater price transparency, faster settlement time, and overall promotion of international trade.

Opportunities for the Rupee''s Global Standing

- ■ **Export Growth as a Catalyst:**
  - ■ India''s ambitious **export target of $2 trillion by 2030**could contribute to improving the rupee''s international standing.
- ■ **Full Capital Account Convertibility:**
  - ■ Achieving**full convertibility of the rupee would enhance its attractiveness** for international trade and investments.
- ■ **Sustained Economic Growth:**
  - ■ Higher and sustained **economic growth would strengthen India''s position**in the global trade market.
- ■ **Reducing US monetary Policy Influence:**
  - ■ By reducing the use of the US dollar, countries **can reduce the influence of US monetary policy**on their own economies.
- ■ **Improved Monetary Policy Effectiveness:**
  - ■ Internationalisation **can enhance the effectiveness of India''s monetary policy.**
  - ■ With a broader international reach, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**can use the exchange rate as a tool to manage inflation and stimulate economic growth.
  - ■ It provides greater **flexibility in managing monetary conditions**and responding to economic challenges.

Challenges and Limitations of Trade in Rupee

- ■ **High Dependency on Dollar Invoicing:**
  - ■ Despite efforts, a **significant portion (86%) of India''s imports is still dollar invoiced,**limiting the impact of de-dollarisation.
- ■ **Non-Convertible Currency Concerns:**
  - ■ Partner **countries may hesitate to engage in local currency trade**due to the rupee''s lack of convertibility, leading to potential trade challenges.
- ■ **Ballooning Rupee Reserves:**
  - ■ Accumulation of rupees in partner countries'' **reserves without adequate avenues**for its use may pose issues.
- ■ **Exchange Rate Volatility:**
  - ■ Internationalising the rupee exposes it to greater**exchange rate volatility**.
  - ■ Fluctuations in the value of the rupee**can impact trade competitiveness, foreign investment flows**, and financial market stability.
  - ■ Managing exchange rate risks becomes crucial in order to mitigate potential adverse effects.
- ■ **Capital Flight and Financial Stability:**

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- ■ Opening up the rupee to international markets may lead to capital flight if **investors lose confidence in the currency or anticipate unfavourable** economic conditions.
        - ■ This can strain the country''s foreign exchange reserves, impact financial stability, and create challenges for monetary policy management.
    - ■ **Capital Controls:**
        - ■ India **still has capital controls in place that limit the ability of foreigners to invest** and trade in Indian markets.
        - ■ These restrictions make it difficult for the rupee to be used widely as an international currency.
    - ■ **Competing Currencies:**
        - ■ The rupee faces competition from established international currencies like the **US dollar, euro, and yen,** which enjoy widespread acceptance and liquidity.
        - ■ Gaining market share and displacing these dominant currencies **can be a significant challenge.**

Looking ahead

- ■ **Strengthening Currency Convertibility:**
    - ■ India should **focus on achieving full capital account convertibility** for the rupee.
    - ■ This will **enhance its attractiveness** as a viable currency for international trade and investments.
    - ■ Efforts to **liberalize capital flows and ease foreign exchange** controls are crucial in this regard.
- ■ **Encouraging Bilateral Currency Arrangements:**
    - ■ India can explore **bilateral currency swap agreements** with partner countries to promote the use of the rupee in trade settlements.
    - ■ Such arrangements **can reduce dependence on the dollar** and foster stronger economic ties with other nations.
- ■ **Leveraging Regional Initiatives:**
    - ■ India can collaborate with other countries in the region to **promote regional trade settlements** in local currencies.
    - ■ Participating in initiatives like the **Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization (CMIM)** can strengthen the use of Asian currencies in trade and reduce reliance on the dollar.
- ■ **Diversifying Trade Partnerships:**
    - ■ India should **diversify its trade partnerships to reduce the concentration of imports** and exports with specific countries.
    - ■ Engaging with a broader range of trading partners will create opportunities for increased usage of the rupee in global trade.
- ■ **Building Trust in Currency Stability:**
    - ■ Demonstrating prudent fiscal and monetary policies and maintaining currency stability will **instil confidence in the rupee as a reliable and stable currency** for international trade.

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Iran-Taliban water conflict

Iran and Afghanistan are locked in a **long-standing dispute** over the **sharing of water from the Helmand River**. Clashes broke out recently along the border.

Iran and the Taliban exchanged heavy gunfire on the Islamic Republic's border with Afghanistan, killing and wounding troops while sharply intensifying rising tensions between the countries. **Both sides accused each other of shooting first**.

The clash came amid an escalating dispute between **Kabul and Tehran** over the **Helmand River**, which is a **vital source of water for both sides**, supporting agriculture, livelihoods and ecosystems in the region. Afghanistan and Iran have been at loggerheads over the **sharing of river water for over a century.**

The **Helmand is Afghanistan's longest river.** It **originates near Kabul** in the western **Hindu Kush mountain range** and flows in a **southwesterly direction** through desert areas for a total of about **1,150 kilometers (715 miles)** before emptying into **Lake Hamun**, which straddles the Afghanistan-Iran border.

Lake Hamun is the largest freshwater lake in Iran. It used to be **one of the world's largest wetlands**, straddling 4,000 square kilometers (1,600 square miles) between Iran and Afghanistan, fed by the Helmand. But it has since **dried up**, a trend experts blame on drought and the impact of dams and water controls. The lake is of great importance for the **regional environment** and **economy.**

Tehran and Kabul accuse each other of

Afghanistan and Iran signed an agreement — the **Helmand River Treaty** — in 1973 to regulate the **allocation of river water.** But the accord was neither ratified nor fully implemented, causing disagreements and tensions to persist. **Iran has accused Afghanistan** of **violating its water rights for years**, arguing that far less water than the amount agreed to in the **1973 treaty flows into Iran**.

"Last year, **Iran received only 4% of its share of the river water**," Hassan Kazemi Qomi, Iran's ambassador to Afghanistan, said in an interview with the state-run Tasnim

news agency. Afghanistan has rejected Iran's accusations, underlining that climatic factors like a **shortage of rainfall**, resulting in **reduced river water volumes**, are to blame for the situation.

A major source of concern for Iran is **Afghanistan's construction of dams**, **reservoirs** and **irrigation systems** along the **Helmand River.** Tehran fears that these projects reduce water flow into Iran. But Kabul argues that it is within its rights to **expand water storage** and **irrigation capacities within Afghanistan.**

State of Tehran-Taliban ties

Iran and Afghanistan share a **950-kilometer land border**. Both countries have **no major territorial disputes**. **Tehran had cultivated good ties with the Taliban** before the **Islamic fundamentalist group captured Kabul** in August 2021 as **US and NATO troops** were in the final weeks of their pullout from Afghanistan. Both sides were united in their opposition to the US's presence in the region.

Even though **Iran has so far refrained** from **formally recognizing the Taliban government,** it has been pragmatic and maintained relations with Afghanistan's current rulers. A close relationship with Kabul is essential for Tehran to achieve goals such as the **preservation of Lake Hamun.** But, since the **Taliban seized power**, there have been repeated incidents at the border.

"Six months before the **Taliban seized power**, Tehran received a **Taliban delegation,** in part to reach agreements on **water rights.** The Taliban now seem unwilling to honor those agreements," said Najib Agha Fahim, an environmental expert from Afghanistan. Fahim served as a minister responsible **for combating natural disasters** in President Ashraf Ghani's government, which collapsed in August 2021. He stressed the need for a sustainable solution to resolve the water dispute.

"To achieve this, officials and subject matter experts from both countries **need to work more closely together** and **share information** to determine how much water is available and how much has flowed into Iran."

'Both sides are looking for short-term solutions'

Nik Kowsar, an Iranian environmental expert based in the United States, said **both Tehran and the Taliban** were showing no interest in addressing **the mismanagement of water resources** and **tackling the environmental problems** in the region.

"Both sides are looking for **short-term solutions** and want to solve their own internal problems," he said. "The Taliban want **to promote agriculture**," he added. "And the government in Tehran is acting as if it suddenly cares about the disadvantaged province of **Sistan-Baluchistan** after the nationwide protests last year."

The expert was referring to the **widespread demonstrations** and political unrest following the death of **21-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini** in police custody. Despite a brutal clampdown, demonstrators in **Sistan-Baluchistan** continue to gather in the streets to protest the political system. Water resources from **Lake Hamun** are critical to the **drought-stricken province**, one of the poorest areas in the country.

According to Iran's parliament, **25% to 30% of the population has left the region over the past two decades** because of the water shortages and moved to the suburbs of cities in other regions.

Current situation

Public anger in the **eastern Iranian region** has already been mounting amid water shortages and other economic and social problems. And the **latest clash** between **Iranian and Taliban troops** increased the tensions. On 28 May 2023, the commander

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of the Iranian army's ground forces and the deputy chief of the Iranian police traveled to **Sistan-Baluchistan**, and said the situation was under control.

Tehran and Kabul have also agreed to **set up a commission of inquiry** to find out what happened in the border shootout. In Iran, many people are angry, given that three Iranian soldiers have lost their lives.

Dilemmas of India's great power ambitions

- The **Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs (2022-23)** has observed that despite an **increase** in the **overall Union budget** allocation, the allocation made to the Ministry of External Affairs in **percentage terms** has been decreased to **0.44%** in **2022-23**.
- India ranks **180** out of **180** in the Environmental Performance Index 2022, **126** out of **136** in the **World Happiness Index 2023** and **132** in the Human development index **2022**.
    - With **so low ranking** in each sphere of the development, India cannot become an example for other countries to follow.
- India is an **import dependent country** for **majority** of its **sector** such as energy, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, electricals, and solar PV cells among others.
    - With so many sectors depending upon import, India cannot become **self-reliant** and hence an **economic power**.

Shall India strive to become a world power?
- **India** shall **aspire** to be a **great power** and assert its growing **power internationally** as a nation with World's **largest** population and an **emerging market.**
- However, **India** shall also **focus** on the upliftment **of millions** of its people above the poverty line, **improve governance** and **reconciliation** within the country before venturing to make a better world.
- Both **hyper-nationalist** and **pessimistic narratives** on this issue must be **proactively** and **critically engaged** before devising any strategy.
- Because the kind of power India would become will **not** only **define** the **future** of the **world** but will also shape the **destiny** of its **citizens.**

Rise of India:
India in 1991:
Economic condition:
- India was a country in a **very difficult situation**, with a **foreign exchange reserve** of **$5.8 billion** and a **nominal gross domestic product (GDP)** of $**270.11 billion**.
    - **Nominal gross domestic product (GDP)** is GDP given in current prices, by taking into account factors such as **inflation**, **price changes**, **interest rates**, and **money supply**.
- Almost **50%** of its **population** was **poor**.

Defense and Security concerns:
- There were fears of a **nuclear war** between **India-Pakistan**, and **violence** in **Kashmir** was at its peak.

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- **Collapse** of the **Soviet Union** who was India's trusted partner, and **strained relations** with the **United States** further weighed on the Government.
- **American officials** used to keep **close watch** on **India's nuclear plans**.

India in 2023:

Economic condition:
- India's **foreign exchange reserve** has grown to around $**600 billion**.
- India's nominal GDP is about to touch **$4 trillion**.
- The **reforms** initiated after the **1991 economic crisis** has **not** only led to **higher GDP growth** but also led to significant **poverty reduction**.

Defense and Security concerns:
- War with **Pakistan** is not much of a concerned, but **China** has taken its place.
- India has one of the **largest militaries** in the world with over a **hundred nuclear weapons**.

Geopolitical arena:
- The **U.S.** is **now** one of **India's closest allies**.
- India enjoys **strong relationships** with several powerful states around the world.
- India is also one of the **pivotal swing powers** of the **contemporary international system**, **strategically located**, and often playing **neutral** sides with great enthusiasm.
- The **great power politics** around the Ukraine war has brought **renewed** focus on **India's role** in the world politics.
    - The **U.S.** and **the West** wants India to be on their side.
    - **Russian Federation** is doing everything to ensure India does **not** turn its back on them.
    - India is in a position where it can help **mediate between Russia** and **Ukraine.**
- India uses the **language** of **mediation** in **global crises.**
- India can act as a **bridge** between the **northern** and **southern, eastern** and **western** countries due to its **neutral position**, indicating that India is a **major 'pole'** in **world politics**.

What is holding India back from becoming a great power?

Weak domestic economy:
- The presence of a **weak economy** tempers the India's appetite for **external engagement**.
- India can only allocate **limited attention** to **foreign** and **security** policies if the country is economically weak and large sections of the population are living in **poverty**.
- **Weak domestic economy** prevents government from allocating **adequate resources** for **foreign policy** objectives.

Poverty:
- India despite being the **fifth largest economy** in the world, its **GDP per capita** in **2021** was **less** than **Bangladesh**, even though **Bangladesh** is the **40th largest military** in the **world**.
    - **GDP** and **military strength** do not equal the well-being of India.
- If **India** focuses **reduce poverty** and **improve** the **well-being** of **millions** of **Indians** living under the poverty line, it has the potential to **divert its attention** to serious **external engagements**.

Infrastructural concerns:
- ■ India is also beset with a major **infrastructural** and **governance issues**.
    - ■ **Ease of doing business** may have been improved, but starting a business in India **without a bribe** is still **not** easy.
- ■ India's **domestic challenges** will continue to **distract** the **attention** of its **political leaders** from attending to **global problems**.

Even though **India's domestic inabilities** will **continue** to **moderate its ability** to influence the world order befitting of its size and ambition, being **unwilling** to engage and shape it, would be a **strategic blunder.** If you are not a **rule shaper**, you are a **rule taker**. India has no choice but to **influence** and **shape** the global order to **meet** its **foreign policy objectives** which would have **significant impact on its economic growth**, **security environment** and **geopolitical** and **geo economic interests**. India's impact on the world order is a given, and, in a globalized world, the relationship between a state's global influence and domestic growth is an unavoidable one. India's ability to **shape international politics** must also be a **reflection** of its **domestic context**, and its **global engagement** must necessarily be geared towards the **well-being** of its **people**. Neither is **strategic isolation** from the world an option nor is **India's assertiveness** on the global stage a matter of nationalistic pride.

Inter-state river water disputes

- ■ The **Pennaiyar river dispute**, the **Mahadayi dispute**, the **Sutlej Yamuna linking canal**, and water-sharing **dispute** between **Punjab and Haryana** among others even after many **years** of **formation** of **tribunal** to resolve the disputes is a matter of huge concern.
- ■ Each year **Tamil Nadu** faces severe **drought** in many regions of the state as **Pennaiyar river dispute** is yet not resolved.
    - ■ Even the **Karnataka** is facing the **water shortage** due to its **huge population** and urbanisation needs due to unresolved **Pennaiyar river dispute.**
- ■ Most parts of water of **Sutlej River**, majority of which has been flowing in **Pakistan**, could have been used by India's **agricultural** activities if the **Sutlej Yamuna linking canal** project had been completed.

Inter-State River Water Disputes:
- ■ The Inter-State River Water Disputes arises when a river flows from more than one state and all of them have **unresolved issues regarding distribution** and **cost managements of river projects.**
- ■ Inter-State Water Sharing Disputes in India arise over the **use, distribution,** and **control of waters** of inter-state river basins.
- ■ Many **inter-state river water disputes tribunals** have been constituted to resolve water problems between states.

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LONG-STANDING CONFLICTS

Tribunals have been set up to mediate in eight inter-state water disputes across India.

DISPUTE	STATES INVOLVED
Ravi and Beas water dispute	Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan
Vansadhara river water dispute	Odisha and Andhra Pradesh
Mahadayi/Mandovi river dispute	Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra
Krishna river water dispute tribunal	Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh
Cauvery water dispute	Tamil Nadu and Karnataka
Indirasagar (Polavaram) project (Andhra Pradesh)	Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh
Babhali barrage issue	Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra
Mullaiperiyar dam Issue	Kerala and Tamil Nadu

Source: Mint research

Constitutional Provisions for Inter-state Water Disputes:
- **Entry 17 of the State List:** It deals with water i.e., water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.
- **Entry 56 of the Union List:** It **empowers** the **Central Government** for the regulation and development of inter-state rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.
- **Article 262 of the Indian Constitution:** In case of disputes related to waters, Parliament may by law provide:
  - The **adjudication** of **any dispute or complaint** concerning the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State River or river valley.
  - **Neither** the **Supreme Court nor** any **other court** shall **exercise jurisdiction** in respect of any such dispute or complaint as mentioned above.

Under Article 262, Parliament has enacted:
- **River Board Act, 1956**:
  - The Act **empowers** the **Central Government** to establish boards for Interstate Rivers and river valleys in consultation with **State** Governments.
- **Inter-State Water Dispute Act, 1956**:
  - If State Government(s) approach the Central Government for the **constitution of the Tribunal,** the Centre may form a **Tribunal** after trying to resolve the dispute through **consultations**.
- The **Union government** with parliament approval can also **make laws** on **regulation** and **development** of **interstate rivers** and **river valleys** to the extent such water resources are directly under its control when expedient in the public interest.
- When public interest is served, **President** may also **establish** an **interstate council** as per **Article 263** to **inquire** and **recommend** the **dispute** between the states of India.

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Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:
- The **Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (IRWD Act, 1956)** is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted under **Article 262** of Indian Constitution.
    - **Article 262** of the Indian Constitution provides a **role** for the **union government in adjudicating conflicts surrounding interstate rivers** that arises among the state/regional governments.
- It was enacted during **reorganization** of **states** on **linguistic basis** to **resolve** the **water disputes** that would arise in the use, control and distribution of an interstate river or river valley.
- It had been amended and its most recent amendment took place in the year **2002**.
- It is **applicable only** to **interstate rivers**/river valleys.
- An **action** of **one state** should affect the **interests** of one or more **states**.
- It can be divided into **two independent** parts under **IRWD** Act:

Actions of a downstream state affecting the interest of an upstream state:
- A **downstream** state"s action can affect the **upstream** state"s interest **only in one case**. i.e., when a **downstream state** is **building a dam/barrage near its state boundary** and **submerging** the territory of an upstream state on permanent/temporary basis.
- **No** other action of a downstream state could affect the **upstream** state"s economic, ecological and spiritual/ religious interest.

Actions of an upstream state affecting the interest of a downstream state:
- **Construction** of **water storage reservoirs** and using water for any **beneficial** use such as irrigation, drinking water, industrial, recreation, recharging groundwater, groundwater use, enhanced evaporation losses.
- Other beneficial use includes enhancing rainwater use efficiency, obstructing non-flood flows of the river, transferring water to outside the river basin.
- Quality of water can also be diminished/altered/ controlled in the action of using water by **accumulating** the **dissolved salts in the remaining water** after its use.

Inter-state River Water Dispute (Amendment) Bill, 2019:
- The Centre had introduced the **Interstate River Water Dispute (Amendment) Bill, 2019** based on **Sarkaria Commission's report**.
- It binds the Centre to set up **Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC)** to amicably resolve the issue by negotiations in one year.
- If the DRC **cannot** settle the dispute, the Centre must refer it to the **interstate tribunal within three months.**
- It prescribes timelines while a **permanent tribunal** with multiple benches is proposed to be set up after **dissolving** all existing tribunals.
- The tribunal would be appointed on the recommendation of a selection committee comprising the **Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India** and **ministers** from the **Law and Justice,** and **Jal Shakti (water) ministries**.
- There are currently **five existing inter-state river water disputes tribunals** constituted under Inter-State River Water Disputes (ISRWD) Act, 1956:
    - Ravi and Beas Water Tribunal
    - Vansadhara Water Disputes Tribunal
    - Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal

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■ Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal – for resolving **Odisha and Chhattisgarh** water disputes.
■ Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal

RESOLVE DISPUTES DIFFERENTLY

PROPOSED LAW

FIRST LEVEL
➤ Try to resolve it without Tribunal
➤ Set up Disputes Resolution Committee (DRC) by the Centre
➤ Members of the DRC will be taken from relevant fields
➤ Time limit to resolve dispute by DRC: Max. 18 months

SECOND LEVEL
➤ To be referred to Tribunal if dispute remains unresolved
➤ There'll be single Tribunal with multiple Benches
➤ Tribunal will consist of chairperson, vice-chairperson and maximum six members
➤ Chairperson will assign dispute to a Bench
➤ Chairperson, vice-chairperson and max. six members will be selected on recommendation of a selection committee
(Selection committee consists of PM or his\her nominee; CJI or his\her nominee; Union law minister and Union Jal Shakti minister)

TIME LIMIT:
MAX. FOUR-AND-A-HALF YEARS
➤ Decision of the Bench will be final and binding on the states concerned

PRESENT LAW

➤ A separate Tribunal has to be established for each inter-state river water disputes
➤ There is no time limit for adjudication by a Tribunal
➤ No upper age limit for chairperson or a member
➤ States can move Supreme Court if not accept awards of Tribunal

TRIBUNALS FUNCTIONING UNDER PRESENT LAW
TIME TAKEN

Ravi-Beas 33 years till now
STATES: PUNJAB, HARYANA AND RAJASTHAN

Krishna 15 years (sub-judice)
MAHARASHTRA, KARNATAKA, TELANGANA & AP

Vansadhara | 9 years (sub-judice)
ODISHA AND ANDHRA PRADESH

Mahadayi | 8 years till now
GOA, KARNATAKA AND MAHARASHTRA

Mahanadi | 1 year till now
ODISHA AND CHHATTISGARH

Suggestions:
Fair, equitable and reasonable use:
■ **Use** of water shall be determined by the **assessment** of many **factors** that depend on **history**, present **circumstances**, and **social conditions** in the regions of interest.
■ The **equitable shares** are to be decided such that each party derives the **largest benefit** by using water and causes the **minimum harm** to others.
■ A particular water **use** is **beneficial** if it is **economically** or **socially valuable** and is **not** detrimental to others.
■ **Article IV** of the **Helsinki Rules** (1966) has stated on the issue of equitable utilisation of the waters of an international drainage basin.

- The **share** of a **party** shall depend upon the **factors** considered under **Article V** of **Helsinki Rules** and **weights** assigned to various factors.
- In **2018** case on **the Cauvery Water Tribunal Award 2007**, the Supreme Court of India had invoked the **principles** of the **Helsinki Rules**, **Berlin Rules** and the **Campione Rules** related to the **groundwater** (recognising the **surface water-groundwater connection**) to give the judgement.
    - **Campione Rules** hold that **basin States** in their respective territories shall manage the waters of an **international drainage basin** in an **equitable** and reasonable manner.

Berlin Rules on Water Resources 2004:
- It had superseded the **Helsinki Rules.**
- It **emphasises** on:
    - Appropriate **management** of all **freshwater sources** within the nations
    - Climate-related issues
    - Minimisation of environmental harm
    - Preference to meet vital human needs
    - Individual's **right of access** to adequate quantity of safe drinking water

The Helsinki Rules:
- The Helsinki Rules describes the relevant factors to be considered in such matter.
- The **first set** of factors includes the **drainage area** within **each basin state**, **hydrology** and **climate** in the basin.
    - These factors determine **basin water resources** within each state and their **variability**.
- The **second set** of factors determines the **utilisation** of water by each party and covers the **past** and current **utilisation**, and the population **dependent** on the waters of the basin in **each basin state**.
    - These factors are to be considered along with the **relative costs** of meeting the needs by **alternative means**.
- It is important to **assess** whether **each party state** is using water most **efficiently**.
    - **Weightage** shall be assigned to **commensurate** each factor with its relative importance.
- The **Helsinki Rules** were **limited** in their scope to international drainage basins and connected groundwater sources.

Steps to be taken towards State Governments:
- There shall be constitution of **river basin boards** for integrated river basin management (**IRBM**), in line with the **National Water Policy of 2012**.
- The **IRBM** mechanism will ensures **flood protection**, **rejuvenation** and **protection** of water bodies, **wastewater** and **solid waste management**, and **water allocation** to each sector in the **basin** to benefit all sections of society.
- Each **board** of **IRBM** may be constituted of **experts** from water and associated **domains** and **civil society** representatives from the concerned states.
- With **IRBM** mechanism, disputes can be addressed at the **nascent stage** and may not grow big.

Inter State water disputes in India have been longstanding and critical issue that require collaborative approach for solution. Scientific determination of equitable distribution is difficult because the available data may be inadequate. The water distribution should

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be done with fairness and according to the need of involved states. Union and state governments should have effective discussions and water sharing agreements to promote equitable water distribution across the country. Adaptation of innovative water technologies can play important role in resolving the problems.

Elusive Consensus: On Transparency and the State of India-China Ties

Recently, in Johannesburg, South Africa, a **meeting was held between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and top Chinese diplomat and Politburo member Wang Yi** to share their concerns and move ahead for positive ties.

Discussed Points of the Meeting
- **Situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC):** Concern over the situation along the LAC was discussed.
- **Need for Trustable Ties:** India claimed that China's actions had eroded the public and political basis of ties and now it's a time to build and maintain trust in ties.
- **Need to restore Normalcy in Relations:** There is a need to restore peace and tranquility in the border areas to bring normalcy in bilateral relations.
- **Healthy & Stable Development:** China emphasized for the early return of ties to the track of healthy and stable development.
- **Following Bali Consensus:** China called to follow the Bali Consensus of last year to stabilize bilateral ties.

Areas of Cooperation between India and China
- **Diplomatic Relations:** India became the first non-socialist bloc country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1950.
- **High-Level Visits:** The exchange of visits by top leaders have contributed to improving bilateral relations.
- **Dialogue Mechanisms:** Both countries have established various dialogue mechanisms at different levels to discuss political, economic, consular, and regional issues.
- **Bilateral Trade:** It has grown significantly. Trade with China boomed to record levels in 2020 and 2021 led by imports of Chinese machinery
- **Investments:** It also has been increasing, particularly in sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles.
- **Joint Research Workshops:** Both countries have organized joint research workshops to foster collaboration and innovation in the field of science and technology.
- **IT Corridors:** It has been done in promoting cooperation in information technology and high-tech sectors.
- **Cultural Exchanges:** India and China have a long history of cultural exchanges dating back centuries. Cultural events, performances, and agreements to establish institutions like the Yoga College in China reflect the cultural cooperation between the two countries.
- **Educational Cooperation:** A high number of students of both countries studying in each others' educational institutions.

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- **People-to-People Exchanges:** There are various mechanisms to facilitate exchanges and cooperation in various fields, including art, media, sports, tourism, traditional medicine, etc.
- **Defense Cooperation:** Joint military exercises like 'Hand in Hand' have been conducted to enhance mutual understanding and counterterrorism capabilities.
- **Multilateral Cooperation:**
    - **BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)**
    - **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**
    - **Russia-India-China Trilateral (RIC)**
    - **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**
    - **BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China)**

Challenges between India and China

- **Border Disputes:**
    - **Western Sector:** The Aksai Chin region is a territorial dispute where both countries claim it as part of their own territory.
    - **Middle Sector:** China stakes claim over an area in Uttarakhand, creating a border dispute.
    - **Eastern Sector:** The McMahon Line, the boundary between India and Tibet, is disputed by China.
    - **Johnson Line vs. McDonald Line:** India and China hold different positions on the demarcation of the border.
- **Water Dispute:**
    - China's construction of dams in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra River without a formal water-sharing treaty poses a threat to India, leading to concerns over water availability and flooding.
- **Arunachal Pradesh and Stapled Visa:**
    - China is issuing stapled visas to residents of Arunachal Pradesh members, which is affecting India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- **Belt and Road Initiative:**
    - India opposes China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through Indian territory claimed by Pakistan.
- **Indian Ocean Region:**
    - China's increasing presence in countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, raises concerns for India in the region.
- **Doklam and Galwan Valley Standoff:**
    - Both incidents have led to tensions in the relations.
- **Opacity and defensiveness:**
    - It has marked the government's responses since tensions began in April 2020 to any questions about the border or its broader approach to China, which appears increasingly rife with contradictions.
- **Banning of Apps:**
    - The government has banned more than 200 Chinese apps, including TikTok.
- **Rounds of Talks, but no clarity:**

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- ■ Meanwhile, after 18 rounds of talks, there remains little clarity on the LAC situation and the continuing ingress by China in Demchok and Depsang, the last two remaining friction points.

Looking ahead
- ■ **Diplomatic Engagement:** It is crucial to maintain open channels of communication to avoid any further escalation of tensions.
- ■ **Ready to Talk, Be Prepared for Conflict:** With China, India can try for every level of communication, while on the other hand, there is a need to be well prepared with our defense forces if conflict arises.
- ■ **Adequate Funding for Defence:** For better updation and advancement, funding should be increased.
- ■ **Adequate Infrastructure Development:** Development of infrastructure along the border, such as roads and bridges, can help both countries access remote areas and reduce the possibility of any misunderstandings or conflicts.
- ■ **Informed Public:** As both sides continue to find a way to stabilize ties and restore peace, the public should be kept informed.

Forest Conservation Amendment Bill 2023

Recently, the **Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023** has been passed by the Lok Sabha, and it aims to bring significant changes to **the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**, which is **a crucial central statute** for the conservation of forests in India.
- ■ After Independence, vast areas of forest land **were designated as reserved and protected forests.**
    - ■ However, many forested areas were left out, and areas without any standing forests were included in "forest" lands.
- ■ In **Godavarman case**, 1996, the **Supreme Court suspended the felling of trees** across the country, and ruled that the FC Act would apply to **all land parcels** that were either recorded as "forest" or resembled the dictionary meaning of forest.
- ■ In **June 2022**, the government amended the **Forest Conservation Rules** to propose a mechanism to allow developers to raise plantations "over land on which the (FC) Act is not applicable" and to swap such plots against subsequent requirements of compensatory afforestation.

Key Provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023
- ■ **Scope of the Act:**
    - ■ The Bill broadens the scope of the Act by **inserting a Preamble.**
    - ■ The Act''s name was changed to **Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan)** Adhiniyam, 1980 to reflect the potential of its provisions.
- ■ **Applicability on Various Lands:**
    - ■ The Act, which was initially **applied to notified forest land,** was later extended to revenue forest land and lands recorded as forest in government records.
    - ■ The amendments seek to **streamline the application of the Act to recorded forest lands**, private forest lands, plantations, etc.

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- **Exemptions:**
  - The Bill proposes certain **exemptions to encourage afforestation**and plantation outside forests.
  - 10 ha of forest land has been proposed to provide connectivity for habitation and establishments located on the side of roads and railways, up to 10 ha of land proposed for security related infrastructure and up to 5 ha of forest land in Left Wing Extremism Affected Districts for public utility projects.
  - These exemptions include **strategic projects**related to national security within 100 km of the International Borders, **Line of Actual Control (LAC), Line of Control (LoC)**
- **Provisions for Development:**
  - The Bill extends existing provisions of the **Principal Act**relating to assignment of forest land, on lease to private entities, to Government companies as well.
  - This will facilitate development projects and ensure uniformity in the implementation of the Act.
- **New Forestry Activities:**
  - The amendments add new activities such as infrastructure for frontline forest staff, ecotourism, zoo, and safari into the array of forestry activities for the conservation of forests. **Surveys and investigations in forest areas will not be considered non-forestry activities.**
- **Climate Change Mitigation and Conservation:**
  - It aims to ensure that such areas **contribute to India''s efforts in combating**climate change by being recognized as part of its forest conservation efforts and contribute to India's international commitments like **Net Zero Emission by 2070**
- **Empowering Local Communities:**
  - The Bill encourages activities like **establishment of zoos, safaris, and ecotourism**, which will be owned by the government and set up in approved plans outside Protected Areas.
  - These activities not only raise awareness about forest conservation and wildlife protection but also **create livelihood opportunities for local communities**, integrating them with overall development.

Concerns w.r.t. Bill
- **Objection on Hindi Name:**
  - There were objections to the **Act's new name (which is now in hindi)**on the grounds that it was **"non-inclusive"** and left out many among the "(non-Hindi speaking) population both in South India and also in the North-East.
- **Impact on Ecologically Sensitive Areas:**
  - The proposed exemptions in the Bill, particularly those related to strategic projects near international borders, have raised concerns about the **potential clearance of forests in ecologically sensitive areas**, such as the Himalayan, trans-Himalayan, and northeastern regions.
    - Bill, 2023 (FCA) will **erase the rights of indigenous communities**living on India's borders.

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- ■ Without appropriate "assessment and mitigation plans," such clearances could threaten biodiversity and trigger extreme weather events.
- ■ **Limited Applicability:**
  - ■ The Bill restricts the legislation"s ambit only to areas recorded as forests on or after October1980. This exclusion may result in leaving out significant sections of forest land and biodiversity hot spots from the Act"s purview, allowing them to be potentially sold, diverted, cleared, and exploited for non-forestry purposes.
- ■ **Concurrent List and Center-State Balance:**
  - ■ Some State governments have **argued that forest conservation falls**under the Concurrent List, which means **both the Center and States have** a role in the matter.
  - ■ They believe that the **proposed amendments could tilt the balance towards the Center**and may impact the rights and authority of the State governments in forest conservation matters.

Looking ahead

- ■ There is a need to conduct a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the **proposed amendments and their potential impacts**on forests, biodiversity, and local communities.
- ■ This assessment should consider ecological, social, and environmental factors and involve input from diverse stakeholders, including experts, NGOs, tribal communities, and State governments.
- ■ Continue engaging in meaningful consultation and dialogue with all stakeholders to understand their perspectives and address their concerns. This will promote transparency, inclusivity, and better decision-making.

Strengthening the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

- ■ SCO is the **world"s largest regional organization** in terms of geographic scope and population, covering over **60% area** of Eurasia and **40%** of the **world's population**.
  - ■ The combined GDP of SCO is around **20%** of **global GDP.**
- ■ The SCO provides a platform for India to enhance **economic cooperation** with the **Central Asian** countries, who owns vast reserves of **natural resources** and to **counter-terrorism** through the **RATS** mechanism, which even other organisations has **failed** to provide**.**
- ■ SCO allows India to be **part** of an **alternative economic structure** in the world, especially as sanctions on Russia and Iran make it difficult for normal trade.
- ■ With the withering influence of **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation** (**SAARC)** as the **regional block** of Asia, the **SCO** will help provide its members including India to have a greater **economic** and **security** cooperation among others.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

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- The **SCO** is a **nine-member Eurasian** multilateral organization that aims for mutual **cooperation, prevent confrontation** and **conflict**, and maintain **security** in changing **geopolitical scales.**
- The SCO has mainly **focused** on **regional security issues,** the **fight against regional terrorism, ethnic separatism** and **religious extremism.**
- The **SCO** is a **political, economic, international security** and **defence organization** established by **China** and **Russia** in **2001**.
- The SCO was established in **Shanghai** by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- These countries, except for **Uzbekistan**, were members of the **Shanghai Five group (1996),** who together has signed the **Treaty on Deepening Military Trust** in **Border Regions.**
- The other countries were added consecutively beginning from Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan with **Iran** being the **latest** member.
- The **SCO Charter** extended the organization's **purposes, principles, structures**, and forms of operation, and established it in **international** law.
- The Organisation has **two permanent bodies**- the **Secretariat in Beijing** (China) and the **Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)** in **Tashkent** (Uzbekistan).

India's Role in SCO

- India was given an observer status to SCO in **2005**.
- India has gained full membership at the **Asthana Summit** of **2017** along with **Pakistan**.
- Since its inception as a full member, India has supported strengthening the core agenda of SCO on terrorism and radicalism and **reinforced commitment** to regional connectivity, **stability, territorial integrity** and **sovereignty**.
- India has steadfastly used its diplomatic capital to campaign for strengthening cooperation and used the SCO platform to collaborate with regional counterparts.
- In **2018, India coined** the acronym **SECURE** to highlight the **pressing regional challenges** faced by the SCO.
  - S- security of citizens
  - E- economic development for all
  - C- connecting the region
  - U- uniting the people
  - R- respect for sovereignty and integrity
  - E- environmental protection
- India has successfully hosted the **23rd Meeting** of the **Council of Heads of State** of the SCO.
- Leaders of member-states signed the **New Delhi Declaration** against terrorism and four other joint statements on **de-radicalization, sustainable lifestyle** (to tackle climate change), **production** of **millets** and **digital transformation.**
- The summit granted Iran full SCO membership, and members have signed the memorandum of obligations of **Belarus** to join as a **member-state**.
- It adopted SCO's **economic development strategy** for the period until **2030.**
- These significant outcomes have demonstrated the vitality of the **SCO members.**

The changing Geopolitical scenario

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- The world is grappling with geopolitical tensions, an **economic slowdown, energy crises, food shortage** and **climate change.**
  - These challenges require the joint response of all countries.
- The major risks to world peace and development are power **politics, economic coercion, technology decoupling** and **ideological contest.**
- The **dilemmas** like unity or split; peace or conflict; cooperation or confrontation need to be answered by the international community.
- The SCO is moving towards a community with a shared future for mankind, firmly supporting each other in upholding their core interests and synergizing their national development **strategies** and **regional cooperation initiatives.**
- Member-states have carried forward the spirit of **good neighborliness** and **friendship**, and built partnerships featuring dialogue instead of confrontation, and **cooperation** instead of **alliance.**
- These achievements manifest the common aspirations of all countries so that there is peace, development and win-win cooperation.
- The SCO's leading and exemplary role can help **strengthen unity** and **cooperation**, seize development opportunities, and **address risks** and **challenges.**

How to strengthen SCO?
- Areas of reinforcement include:
  - **Strategic** communication
  - Deepen **practical cooperation**
  - Support each other's **development and rejuvenation**
  - Enhance **solidarity and mutual trust** for common security
- The changes in external elements like the **new Cold war** and **bloc confrontation** must be addressed with high vigilance and firm rejection.
- There is a need to **upgrade security cooperation**, decisive approach to **terrorism, separatism and extremism,** and **transnational organized crimes.**
- The SCO should cooperate in **digital, biological** and **outer space security**, and facilitate political **settlement** on international and regional hot-spot issues.
- It should address protectionism, **unilateral sanctions,** and **decoupling** that undermine people's well-being all over the world.
- It is imperative for the SCO to generate stronger momentum for **collaboration** in trade, investment, technology, climate actions, infrastructure and people-to-people engagement.
- SCO should contribute to the **high-quality** and resilient economic growth of the region, collective efforts to **scale up local currency settlement** amongst SCO members.
- **Economy**: expand cooperation on sovereign digital currency, and promote the establishment of an SCO development bank.

Need for multilateralism
- To engage more with its **observer states, dialogue partners,** and other regional and international organisations like the United Nations (UN)
- To uphold the UN-centered international system and the international order based on international law
- To promote world **peace, common security, drive global development,** and **safeguard** the **international order**
- To act as a progressive force for world **fairness** and **justice**

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- To voice loud and clear **against hegemony, unilateralism, a Cold War mentality,** and **bloc confrontation**
- To **reject illegal unilateral sanctions** and long-arm jurisdiction measures
- To lead by example in safeguarding the development rights and legitimate interests of the developing world
- To counter **security** challenges in conventional and non-conventional domains in a holistic manner

China's stand on SCO

- China is committed to working with **India, South Africa** and other partners from the South to put into action the **Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative** and **Global Civilization Initiative.**
- It would contribute to world peace, security, and prosperity.
- It would engage in **dialogue** and **diplomacy** to address international disputes by peaceful means.
- There is a need to forge a **united, equal, balanced** and **inclusive global** development partnership, promote values of peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom.
- The evolution of global governance to a fairer and more reasonable direction.

The SCO's success story is part of **the broader global partnership** of emerging economies and developing countries. As changes in the global landscape unfold, collective rise with greater cohesion and global weight is to be aimed. SCO should advocate **multilateralism** to **shape** the **common destiny** for its members. It would play a role to shape the **multi-polar world order,** promote **inclusive global development,** and **improve international governance architecture**. We need to pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, respect each country's independent choices and abide by the purpose and **principles** of the **UN Charter.**

India's Debt Dilemma

The elevated levels of India's fiscal deficit and public debt have been a matter of concern for a long time in India. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, debt levels were among the highest in the developing world and emerging market economies. The pandemic pushed the envelope further and relative to GDP, the fiscal deficit in 2020-21 increased to 13.3% and the aggregate public debt to 89.6%. As the economy recovered after the pandemic, the deficit and debt ratios have receded to 8.9% and 85.7%, respectively.

Fiscal Deficit
It is the difference between a government's total expenditure and its total revenue in a given fiscal year.
It represents the amount by which the government's total spending exceeds its total income (revenue). In other words, it is the shortfall that the government needs to bridge through borrowing.

Public Debt -
It refers to the total amount of money that a government owes to its creditors, both domestic and foreign. It includes both Internal debt (owed to domestic lenders) and external debt (owed Definition to foreign lenders and institutions). Public debt is

accumulated over time due to budget deficits and borrowing to finance various expenditures and projects. It is a key component of a country's national debt.

- **Components of the Public Debt:**
  - Components Public debt comprises two main components:
  - **Internal Debt:** Debt owed to domestic creditors, such as individuals, banks, financial institutions, and the central bank. This debt is denominated in the local currency.
  - **External Debt:** Debt owed to foreign creditors, including foreign governments, international organizations, and investors. This debt Is denominated in the foreign currencies.

COVID Phases & Debt Levels:
- **Pre-COVID Phase:** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, debt levels were among the highest in the developing world and emerging market economies.
- **COVID Phase:** The pandemic pushed the envelope further and relative to GDP, the fiscal deficit in 2020-21 increased to 13.3% and the aggregate public debt to 89.6%.
- **Post-COVID Phase:** As the economy recovered after the pandemic, the deficit and debt ratios have receded to 8.9% and 85.7%, respectively.
- **Essence of the data:** The projections show that even without any serious disruptions to the economy, the debt level is unlikely to return to the pre-pandemic trajectory in the medium term.

Interventions by the Central Bank of India:
- **The statutory liquidity ratio (SLR):** Through SLR, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) requires the banking system to **hold 18% of their demand and time liabilities in government securities.**
- **Open Market Operations (OMOs):** Through OMOs, RBI by way of sale/purchase of government securities to/from the market with an objective to regulate money supply in an economy.

Concerning Facts:
- **Debt is declining but the Financial market is Destroying:** When the interest rate on government debt is lower than the growth of GDP, the debt may decline but the financial market gets distorted.
- **Sustainable Debt without Threat but Heavy Consequences:** Even when the sustainability of debt may not be threatened in the medium term, the costs of carrying high deficits and debt to the economy are heavy.

Concerns of a Country with a High Public Debt
- **High Debt, less Revenue:** On average, interest payments constitute over 5% of GDP and 25% of the revenue receipts, this is more than the government expenditure on education and health care put together.
- **Concerning Data of States:** The issue is of concern in Punjab, Kerala, Rajasthan, and West Bengal.
- In Punjab, the Debt to GSDP ratio is 48.9%, in West Bengal, 37.6%, Rajasthan 35.4%, and in Kerala close to 33%.
- **Constraining the Ability to Respond in Emergency:** High levels of debt make it difficult to counter-cyclical fiscal policy and constrain the ability of the government to respond to shocks.
- **Reserve Ratios:** The reserves by the commercial banks and insurance companies resulting in less liquidity in the market.

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- **Less Credit Availability to Manufacturing Sector:** With a cash reserve ratio (CRR) of 4.5% and SLR of 18% of net demand and time liabilities, the resources available for lending to the manufacturing sector slows down, resulting in an increase in the cost of borrowing of the sector.
- **Effect on Ratings & Borrowings:** The rating agencies keep the sovereign rating low when deficits and debt are higher, and this increases the cost of external commercial borrowing.
- **Continuing Debt:** 'Today's borrowing is taxing tomorrow' and the burden of large deficits and debt will have to be borne by the next generation.
- **Individual Debt:** As per data, every individual in the country bears a debt burden of ₹ 1,64,000.
- **High Primary Deficit:** With the high primary deficit of 3.7% of GDP in 2022-23 and budgeted at over 3% in 2023-24, we will have to contend with elevated debt levels in the medium term.
    - **In short, the concerns are:** Default, Credit Rating Downgrade, Loss of Investor Confidence, Financial Market Turmoil, Raise Taxes, Austerity Measures, Recession and Economic Crisis, International Bailouts & Debt Restructuring

- **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003:**
    - It is regulated by the **Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.**
    - It aims to **promote fiscal discipline, transparency, and accountability** in the management of India's finances.
    - It ensures **fiscal management and long-term macro-economic stability** by reducing fiscal deficit.
    - It also ensures **effective conduct of monetary policy and prudential debt management** consistent with fiscal sustainability.
- **Targets for Budget 2023:**
    - **Reduction of Fiscal Deficit:** In Budget 2022 the government aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to **below 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26.**
    - **The estimated fiscal deficit target** for 2023-24 is **5.9% of GDP.**
    - It indicates borrowings done by the government are to finance its expenditure.
    - **The estimated revenue deficit** for 2023-24 is **2.9% of GDP.**
    - It tells about the government's need to borrow funds to meet expenses and it may not provide future returns.
    - As per the budget 2023-24, **interest payments as a percentage of revenue receipts is expected to be 43% in 2022-23.**

Number of Factors that could Threaten the Sustainability of Debt in India:
- **A Slowdown in Economic Growth:** If economic growth slows down, it will be more difficult for the government to generate revenue to repay its debts.

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- **An Increase in Interest Rates:** If interest rates increase, it will become more expensive for the government to borrow money. This could make it difficult for the government to service its debts.
- **A Decline in the Value of the Rupee:** If the value of the rupee declines, it will make it more expensive for the government to repay its foreign debts.

Number of Factors that could help to Ensure the Sustainability of Debt in India:
- **The Country's High Growth Potential:** India's economy has the potential to grow at a high rate in the coming years. This could help the government to generate more revenue to repay its debts.
- **The Country's Large Pool of Savings:** India has a large pool of savings that could be used to finance the government's debt.
- **The Government's Commitment to Fiscal Consolidation:** The government has committed to reducing the fiscal deficit in the coming years. This could help to reduce the debt burden and make it more sustainable.

Looking ahead
- **Stabilizing & Helping Technology:** As the technology platform has stabilized, it is expected to maintain high buoyancy in the medium term.
    - The technology has helped and will help in future to improve tax administration and improved compliance.
- **Need of Policy Interventions:** This is the time to rethink the role of the state and vacate activities that should really belong to the market rather than competing with it.
- **Investment rather than Disinvestment:** Rather than dispensing with activities such as telecom to the private sector, the government continues to pour money into Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited.
- **Arranging of Employment Melas:** Focus should be made on employment melas to fill vacant posts.
- **Check on Old Pension Scheme:** At the State level, it is important to guard against the return to the old pension scheme and indulge in large-scale giveaways for electoral reasons.
- **Redistribution rather than Subsidies:** Redistribution is a legitimate government activity, and that is best done through cash transfers rather than subsidizing commodities and services.
    - **Concern with Subsidy:** Giving subsidies alters relative prices, resulting in unintended resource distortions.
- **Imposing Hard Budget Constraints:** It is equally important to impose hard budget constraints by enforcing Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management rules in allowing States to borrow.
- **Stabilization of Macroeconomy by the Union Government:** Macroeconomic stabilization is predominantly a Union government responsibility. Therefore, the Union government should follow the rules it makes, and enforce the rules on the States effectively.

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De-dollarisation of international trade

- Any volatile changes in the **exchange rate** between countries' domestic currencies may have wide implications on their **interest rates**, **forex** as well as **trade**.
    - To shield economies from such **exchange rate volatility**, many countries have been looking to **De-dollarise** their **trade** and for **currency diversification**.
- The **US** has **shut** Russia **out** of the **SWIFT** (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, 2013) **system** and **freezed** its **dollar assets in US banks** as part of the **sanctions**.
    - This has led many **economies** to rethink about **de-dollarisation** in order to avoid such conditions happening to them in future.
- **US Legislation** such as the **International Emergency Economic Powers Act**, the **Trading With the Enemy Act** and the **Patriot Act,** allows US to weaponize **payment flows** and use dollar for their **political leverage** and motives.

Dominance of the US Dollar:
- US Dollar has a **safe value** and an almost **global acceptance,** which make it accounts for about **90%** of all **foreign exchange transactions**.
- **50**% of all global trade **invoicing** are done in US dollar.
    - This is despite the **US accounting** for just **12**% of the global trade.
- US Dollar comprises of **60%** of **foreign exchange reserves** worldwide.
- The **increasing** dependency on the **dollar** exposes countries to **risks** from **US international politics** and **sanctions.**

Condition of other currencies in International Trade:
- As per the **SWIFT**, the use of **local currencies** in international payments has increased between **2013** to **2019**.
- The **Triennial Bank Survey** of **2022** of the Bank of International Settlements (**BIS**) suggested that while the percentage share of dollars in daily turnover has increased from **2013** to **2022**, the share of **non-dollar-denominated trade** from emerging economies is also **increasing**.
- In 2022, the **Chinese renminbi** became the **fifth most traded currency** in the world, accounting for about **7%** of **global foreign exchange** trading.
    - Over **70%** of the **China-Russia trade** was settled in **yuan** and **roubles**.
- Alongside local currency usage increase, even **local currency bond markets** are **growing** rapidly.
- The **Asian Development Bank** states that the emerging market **local currency bond markets** grew, from **$17.3 trillion** in **2015** to **$25.9 trillion** in **2021**.

De-Dollarisation:
- De-dollarisation can be defined as the process of **reducing dominance of dollars** in international trade market and increasing strength of local currency.
- The Russia-Ukraine war is considered the **beginning** of **de-dollarisation**.

Need for De-Dollarisation:
- To decrease dependence on US Dollar.
- To strengthen local currency for international trade.
- Direct trade in local currency can reduce exchange costs.
- More financial stability and less risk.

Improving rupee's stand:

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- India has always explored the use of **rupee** through various arrangements such as **currency swap** and **bilateral trade.**
- India has established its first **International Financial Services Centre** (IFSC) in **GIFT City, Gujarat in 2015** to promote **use** of **rupee** in **international financial transactions**.
- The government has **gradually liberalised** India's capital markets by increasing the availability of **rupee**-denominated **financial instruments**, such as **bonds** and **derivatives**.
- The government has also undertaken initiatives to **promote digital payment systems** such as the **Unified Payments Interface**.
- In 2022, the government has announced **International Trade Settlement Mechanism** to promote the use of **rupee** in settling **international trade**.
- The mechanism involves setting up of **Special Vostro Rupee Accounts** (SVRAs) by authorised Indian banks and their corresponding banks in partner countries, for settling payments in **rupees** at **market-determined** exchange rates.
- The RBI has permitted banks of **18 countries** to open such accounts in India for **rupee-based trade**.
  - It is done to **lower transaction costs**, have **greater price transparency**, **faster settlement time** and promotion of overall international trade.
- India has also signed agreements with the **UAE** for the **settlement** of **cross-border transactions** in **local currencies** and **interlinking** payment and messaging systems of the two countries.

Drawbacks of rupee based international trade
- **86**% of India's **imports** is still done in **dollar**, while only **5%** of India's **imports** originate in the **US**, shows that the de-dollarisation effort is **not** much impactful.
- The partner countries often tend to move away from **local currency trade** to avoid **rupee accumulation** as the **currency** is **not** convertible.
  - **Russia** has pressurised India to pay for **oil imports** in **renminbi**.

Some experts state that dollar will **not** be overtaken as the world's leading reserve currency anytime soon. In addition to accounting for the majority of global reserves, the dollar remains the currency of choice for international trade. Major commodities such as **oil** are primarily bought and sold using U.S. dollars. Many countries do not have their own currency but use US Dollar as their currency. So, it is simply said than done to **curb** growth of **Dollar** from international trade. **Foreign Trade Policy 2023** has also suggested increased focus on rupee settlement of India's trade. India's ambitious **export** target of **$2 trillion** by **2030**, up from the **present $447 billion**, may lend **support** in improving the **rupee's** global standing; full **capital account convertibility** of the rupee would certainly help, along with **higher** and **sustained economic growth**.

Child, law, and consensual sex

The recent High Court decisions have brought to the forefront the complexities surrounding consent and the age of consent under POCSO. In recent months, several High Courts have either quashed FIRs or acquitted accused persons under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, citing consensual sex as the reason. These decisions raise critical questions about the interpretation of consent and the age of consent, necessitating a thorough examination to ensure the best interests of the child.

Defining consent and the age of consent

- **Consent:**
- In the context of sexual relationships, consent is an explicit and voluntary agreement between individuals to engage in sexual activity. It must be given without any form of coercion, manipulation, or pressure.
- The concept of consent is crucial in promoting healthy and respectful relationships and preventing sexual misconduct.
- **Age of Consent:**
- The age of consent is a legal designation that specifies the minimum age at which an individual is considered capable of providing informed and lawful consent to engage in sexual activities.
- In the case of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, a child is defined as any person below the age of 18 years.
- Acts of penetrative sexual assault committed on children are considered criminal offenses under this act, regardless of their consent.

Recent High Court decisions regarding cases related to the POCSO Act

- **Delhi High Court (July 12):** The court granted bail to a 25-year-old accused, reasoning that the 15-year-old girl had eloped with him on her own and did not support the prosecution's claim of sexual assault.
- **Bombay High Court (July 10):** The court quashed the conviction of a 25-year-old man under POCSO, stating that he had engaged in consensual sex with a 17-year-old girl. The girl had terminated her pregnancy after the accused was arrested.
- **Madras High Court (July 7):** The court quashed an FIR registered under POCSO and all related criminal proceedings. Furthermore, it directed the Director General of Police to produce reports of all such pending cases before the Court.
- **Madhya Pradesh High Court (June 27):** The court quashed an FIR registered under POCSO and all criminal proceedings, stating that the sexual relationship was consensual. The judgment did not mention the age of the accused, who happened to be the coach of the victim. Additionally, the Court recommended that the Indian government consider reducing the age of consent of the prosecutrix from 18 to 16 years.

Challenges and concerns over the recent High Court decisions

- **Interpretation of Consent:** One of the significant challenges lies in the interpretation of consent in cases involving minors. While the age of consent is legally defined as 18 years in India under POCSO, some High Courts acquitted accused individuals based on the premise of consensual sex, even when the victims were below the age of 18.

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- **Age Disparity:** In some of the cases, there was a considerable age difference between the prosecutrix (the victim) and the accused. Despite this age disparity, the courts did not take it into account while delivering their judgments.
- **Deterrence Factor:** The harsh minimum imprisonment terms under POCSO for sexual offenses against minors, such as 10 years and 20 years for penetrative sexual assault and aggravated penetrative sexual assault, respectively, may have influenced the reluctance of courts to convict accused individuals in consensual sex cases.
- **Legal Presumption:** POCSO includes a mandatory legal presumption in favor of the victims. However, in some of the recent judgments, the High Courts did not consider this presumption, leading to questions about the application of the law in protecting the interests of the child victims.
- **Child Welfare:** The primary objective of POCSO is to safeguard children from sexual offenses, irrespective of consent. The recent decisions have sparked debates about whether these judgments truly serve the best interests of the child, or if they may unintentionally undermine the protective intent of the law.
- **Need for Judicial Consistency:** Inconsistencies in judgments by different High Courts create uncertainty in the legal system. Ensuring consistency in interpreting the law is essential for upholding the 'Best Interests of the Child' and maintaining public trust in the justice system.

Role of the Supreme Court in resolving the discrepancies

- As reducing the age of consent falls under the jurisdiction of Parliament, the Supreme Court must play a crucial role in resolving the discrepancies between the laid-down law and the various interpretations by different High Courts.
- This is particularly relevant given the Supreme Court's previous judgment in Independent Thought v. Union of India (2017) wherein it held that even sexual intercourse with a minor wife is rape

Steps to address these gaps quickly

- **Analyze Cases**: The Bureau of Police Research and Development should analyze cases of consensual sex, age-wise, across different states. This analysis can help the Central government make informed decisions regarding the age of consent and its potential reduction.
- **Reduce Harsh Minimum Imprisonment:** The minimum imprisonment terms for sexual offenses under POCSO should be re-evaluated. Instead of acting as a benefit to the accused, the punishment should act as a deterrent and ensure justice for child victims.
- **Judicial Leeway in Age of Consent:** Consider granting some leeway to the judiciary in interpreting consent in cases where the victim is of lower age based on the child's understanding of consequences. This would allow for a more nuanced approach to cases involving minors.
- **Uphold the Best Interest of the Child:** The 'Best Interests of the Child' principle should be a guiding factor in all decisions related to POCSO cases. The welfare and well-being of the child victims should be the paramount consideration.
- **Supreme Court Intervention:** The Supreme Court must intervene promptly to address the gap between the laid down law and the different interpretations by the High Courts. Its role is crucial in ensuring consistency and uniformity in the application of the law.

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- **Legislative Review:** The Parliament should consider reviewing the age of consent in light of the recent High Court decisions and expert analyses. Any potential reduction in the age of consent should be done thoughtfully, with the 'Best Interests of the Child' as the primary concern.
- **Public Awareness:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the importance of protecting children from sexual offenses and the legal rights of child victims.
- **Specialized Training:** Provide specialized training to judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on child protection laws and the Best Interests of the Child principle to enhance their understanding of the unique needs and vulnerabilities of child victims

Striking a balance between protecting children from sexual assault and considering their understanding of consent is essential. It is imperative for the Supreme Court and the legislature to address this issue promptly to ensure the welfare and safety of children across the country.

Women's commissions in India

The recent cases of molestation and rape of women in Manipur, which is one of cruel disregard and contempt for human dignity and human rights, have brought the Women's Commissions into the focus.

National Commission for Women
- **Establishment:** The National Commission for Women (NCW) is a statutory body established in India under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- **Primary Objective:** To safeguard and promote the rights and interests of women across the country.
- **Apex Organization:** The NCW serves as the apex organization at the national level, responsible for addressing various women's issues and advocating for gender equality.

Objectives of the Women's Commissions
- **Safeguarding Women's Rights:**
  - The primary goal of Women's Commissions is to protect and promote the rights of women.
  - This includes ensuring gender equality, addressing discrimination, and advocating for women's empowerment.
- **Empowering Women:**
  - Women's Commissions work towards empowering women by supporting initiatives that enhance their economic, social, and political status.
- **Eliminating Gender-Based Violence:**
  - Another crucial objective is to combat gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking.
- **Advocacy and Policy Formulation:**
  - These commissions engage in advocacy to influence policymakers and government bodies to implement measures that benefit women.

- They play an important role in formulating policies and guidelines related to women's welfare.
- **Raising Awareness:**
- It often conducts awareness campaigns to educate the public about women's rights, gender equality and relevant legal provisions.

Functions of the Commissions

- **Inquiry and Investigation:**
  - Women's commissions are responsible for investigating and examining all matters related to the safeguards provided for women under the Indian Constitution and other laws.
- **Redressal and Support:**
  - These commissions provide support and assistance to women who have experienced discrimination or violence.
  - They can help in accessing legal aid, counseling, and other forms of support.
- **Public Hearings and Recommendations:**
  - Women's Commissions may hold public hearings to understand and address the issues faced by women in various contexts.
  - Based on their findings, they can make recommendations to the government and other relevant bodies for necessary action.
- **Reviewing Legislation:**
  - Women's Commissions play a role in reviewing existing laws and policies to ensure they are in line with women's rights and advocate for necessary amendments when required.
- **Collaboration and Coordination:**
  - Women's Commissions collaborate with NGOs, government agencies, and other stakeholders to maximize their impact and reach in supporting women's welfare.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - These commissions continuously monitor the implementation of policies and programs related to women's issues and evaluate their effectiveness.
  - Overall, Women's Commissions aim to create a more gender-equitable society where women can live with dignity, safety, and equal opportunities.

Challenges Faced by Women's Commission

- **Inadequate Resources:**
  - Women's Commissions often struggle with limited financial and human resources, which can hinder their ability to effectively carry out their functions and respond to the vast array of women's issues.
- **Lack of Authority:**
  - In certain cases, Women's Commissions may lack sufficient authority or autonomy to enforce their recommendations or decisions, making it difficult to ensure timely and appropriate action on women's rights violations.
- **Political Interference:**
  - Political influence can sometimes hinder the impartial functioning of Women's Commissions.

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- The appointment of commission members with political affiliations may compromise their independence and ability to take unbiased decisions.
- **Insufficient Awareness:**
    - Many women in marginalized communities may not be aware of the existence and functions of Women's Commissions.
- **Social Stigma:**
    - Women often face social stigma and fear of retaliation when reporting incidents of harassment or violence.
    - Overcoming this stigma and encouraging more women to come forward is a significant challenge for Women's Commissions.
- **Slow Legal Processes:**
    - The legal system's slow pace and complex procedures can delay justice for women who have experienced violence or discrimination, leading to frustration and disillusionment among survivors.
- **Intersectional Challenges:**
    - Women's Commissions must recognize and address the unique challenges faced by women from different socio-economic, cultural, and regional backgrounds, as the issues they encounter may vary significantly.
- **Changing Societal Norms:**
    - Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and traditional societal norms can hinder progress in achieving gender equality and may pose resistance to the initiatives of Women's Commissions.

Looking ahead

- **Strengthening Legal Framework:**
    - Ensure that Women's Commissions have adequate legal backing and authority to take action on women's rights violations.
    - This may involve amending existing laws or enacting new legislation to grant them more powers and autonomy.
- **Adequate Funding:**
    - Allocate sufficient financial resources to Women's Commissions to enhance their capacity to carry out their functions effectively.
- **Collaboration with NGOs:**
    - Establish partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on women's issues. Collaborating with experienced NGOs can expand the reach of the Women's Commissions and facilitate better support for women in need.
- **Focus on Accessibility:**
    - Ensure that Women's Commissions are easily accessible to women across various regions, including remote and rural areas.
    - Setting up regional offices or using technology for virtual interactions can help overcome geographical barriers.
- **Empowering Survivors:**
    - Support and empower survivors of gender-based violence through counseling, legal aid, and skill development programs.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:**

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- ■ Establish a robust system for collecting and analyzing data on women's rights violations.
  - ■ This data can help identify trends, assess the impact of interventions, and inform evidence-based policy recommendations.
- ■ **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - ■ Regularly monitor the performance and impact of Women's Commissions to identify areas of improvement and measure their effectiveness in achieving their objectives.
- ■ **Intersectional Approach:**
  - ■ Recognize the diverse experiences of women from different backgrounds and ensure that the strategies and services offered by Women's Commissions are inclusive and cater to the needs of all women.
- ■ **Engaging with the Government:**
  - ■ Build strong connections with relevant government bodies and policymakers to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and ensure the implementation of the commission's recommendations.
- ■ **Research and Advocacy:**
  - ■ Conduct research on emerging women's issues and advocate for policy changes based on evidence and the evolving needs of women in society.

Resource efficiency and circular economy

- ■ More than **40%** of **internal armed conflicts** over the last 60 years have been linked to **natural resources**.
- ■ The world generates **2 billion tonnes** of **municipal solid waste** annually, and at least **33%** of it is **not managed** in an **environmentally** safe manner.
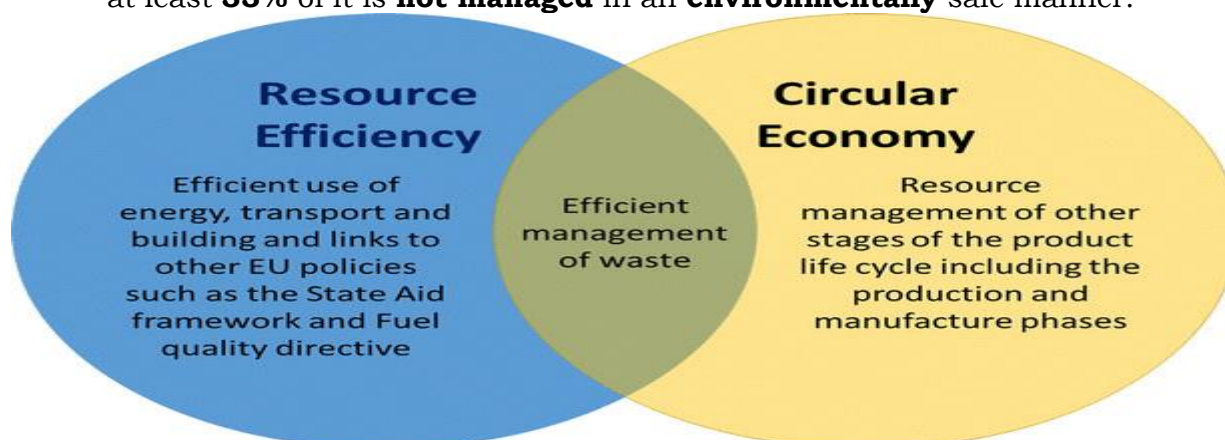
- ■ Circular economy strategies can help reduce **global GHG emissions** by **40%** by **2050** as it is estimated to be worth **$4.5 trillion** globally by **2030.**
- ■ About **7%** of **energy sector** across the GHG emission is attributed to **iron** and **steel production.**

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■ Transitioning towards a **circular steel sector** will help tackle **steel sector emissions**.

Resource Sharing

■ It refers to the **sharing** of **library resources** by certain participating libraries among themselves on the basis of the **principle of cooperation.**

■ It involves sharing of **resources, human, financial** and **material,** with other organisations and Local Government bodies.

■ This is applicable in **sharing documents, manpower, services, space,** and **equipment** among others.

Circular Economy

■ A **circular economy** or **circularity** is a model of **production** and **consumption**, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling **existing materials** and products for a long time.

■ It aims to tackle **climate change** and other global challenges like **biodiversity loss, waste,** and **pollution,** by decoupling economic activity from the consumption of **finite resources**.

Priority areas for India:

■ There is a heightened recognition of resource efficiency and circular economy strategies within the **G-20 community**.

■ India has embraced **four priority** areas for the circular economy during its G-20 presidency:

- ■ Circularity in the steel sector;
- ■ Extended producer responsibility (EPR);
- ■ Circular bioeconomy and establishing an industry-led resource efficiency;
- ■ Circular economy industry coalition.

Moving to a circular steel sector:

■ Transitioning towards a **circular steel sector** is a key strategy to tackle steel sector emissions.

■ The **presidency document** for knowledge exchange on the **'Circular Economy in Steel Sector'** is a potential blueprint for a **net zero pathway** for the steel industry.

■ It can aid in **reducing resource utilization** and **minimizing wastage.**

■ In order to ensure **growing resource consumption** in an environmentally responsible manner, there is a need to raise the current **recycling rates of 15%-25%**.

■ Most G-20 member countries have committed to **net zero ambitions** and are working to **mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**.

■ The demand for **steel** is expected to grow in growing economies such as India.

■ Achieving a circular steel sector requires:

- ■ **Improved material and process efficiency**
- ■ **Increased steel recycling**
- ■ **Adoption of renewable energy sources** for steel production.

■ India should ensure **collaboration** among the G-20 member countries for knowledge **sharing, technology co-development and technology transfer.**

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):

■ EPR is a policy tool that extends the producer's **financial** and **operational responsibility** for a product and management of the **post-consumer stage.**

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- Under India's G-20 presidency, there is an emphasis on the significance of the EPR framework in **integrating circularity** throughout the **value chain.**
- Effective implementation of EPR plays a pivotal role in promoting the growth of the **recycling infrastructure** and **establishing** a **streamlined waste collection system.**
- The Indian government implemented EPR in **2012** to handle **electronic waste.**
- EPR was extended to plastic waste manufacturers by **plastic waste management rules** in **2016.**
- In India, EPR promotes a circular economy by recycling waste generated by businesses.
- It is reused and **not disposed** of in **landfills** or pollutes the environment.
- The waste is to be **collected, segregated,** and **recycled** for **reuse.**
- India has one of the largest frameworks for EPR where **Producers, Importers, Brand Owners (PIBOs)** and **plastic waste processors** are registered on the centralized **EPR portal.**
- The combined EPR obligation of registered PIBOs has crossed **3.07 million tons**.

Recycling- a bioeconomy and biofuels:
- Biowaste such as **municipal** and **industrial waste** and **agricultural residue** has become a global issue as it causes **pollution, biodiversity loss,** and **global warming**.
- The consumption of biological resources in G-20 member countries has **risen** by **2.5 times.**
- Biowaste can serve as **valuable primary raw materials** and viable **substitutes** for mineral resources when it is combined with **crops suitable** for **degraded lands.**
- Adopting a circular bioeconomy approach will **reduce** the **need** for **extracting virgin resources** and provide an effective **waste disposal solution**.
- India has notified comprehensive rules for e-waste and battery waste management.

Industry coalition:
- The coalition will aim to achieve **enhanced technological collaboration**, build advanced capabilities across sectors, **mobilise de-risked finance**, and facilitate proactive **private sector** engagement.
- It can address problems affecting **environmental** and **social sustainability** with stakeholders.
- It can aid to find **unique** and powerful opportunities to help **advance values** in the larger economic and political system.

Government initiatives to adopt biofuel

Pradhan Mantri Jaiv Indhan Vatavaran Anukool fasal awashesh Nivaran (JI-VAN) Yojana (2019):
- It provides financial support to integrated bio-ethanol projects to set up **second-generation (2G) ethanol** projects.
- 2G bioethanol technology produces bioethanol from **waste feedstock** such as crop residues and municipal solid waste that would otherwise have no value.
- India has made it **mandatory** for **coal-burning thermal** power plants to use **5%** blend of **biomass pellets** along with **coal**.

The Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources (GOBAR) Dhan scheme (2018):

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- It was launched to **convert cattle dung** and other organic waste into **compost, biogas,** and **biofuels** to promote **sustainable agriculture** and reduce pollution.
- The scheme has helped to create **rural livelihoods** and ensured **improved sanitation** with over **500 functional biogas plants**.

The Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Scheme (2018):

- It was launched to promote the use of **Compressed bio-gas (CBG)** as an alternative **green transportation fuel**.
- It has aided the bioenergy sector by accelerating the development of infrastructure for the **production, storage,** and **distribution** of CBG.

Global platforms such as the G-20 play an important role in addressing key issues and presenting solutions by adopting a **collaborative approach.** Resource efficiency and circular economy have emerged as key solutions in collective efforts in **tackling triple planetary challenges**- **Climate Change, Air Pollution, and Biodiversity Loss**. It can effectively **minimize dependence** on natural resources, **curtail waste** and **encourage sustainable design** practices. Decoupling **resource utilization** from economic growth is the key to ensure sustainable development and realize the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).** It is necessary to recognize the **need to switch** from the **take-make-dispose** to the **reduce-reuse-recycle model. India's G-20 presidency** has focused extensively on these approaches which offer promising pathways towards a more **sustainable and resilient future.**