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MONTHLY MAGAZINE – DECEMBER 2024

Si. No.	Topics
OPINION – 50 WORD EDITORIALS	
PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH – Dr MANMOHAN SINGH	
MONTHLY QUOTES & WHAT OTHERS SAY?	
FACTS OF THE DAY	
PICTURE OF THE DAY	
History, Art & Culture	
1	IE Express Network: Under layers of soil, 80 pillars and a slice of Patna's Mauryan-era past (Santosh Singh)
2	IE Explained: What is the debate over alcohol sale at Nagaland's famed Hornbill Festival? (Sukrita Baruah)
3	TH Frontpage: PM Modi to release collected works of Subramania Bharati (The Hindu Bureau)
4	TH Editorial: Vaikom – Two States, two leaders and a tale of reform (Manuraj Sunmugasundaram)
5	IE Explained: Dispute over Kalyan's Durgadi Fort: Why court sided with Govt (Zeeshan Shaikh, Sadaf Modak)
6	IE Explained: One Nation, One Election Bills (Damini Nath & Apurva Vishwanath)
Polity & Governance	
1	SPECIAL COVERAGE: WINTER SESSION OF PARLIAMENT
2	IE Explained: What is a joint committee of Parliament, to be set-up for 'One Nation, One Election' Bills?
3	TH Editorial: Frosty and bitter: On Parliament, the government and the Opposition
4	IE Explained: Prior Sanction: What SC said on ED cases against public officials (Sohini Ghosh)
5	IE The Ideas Page: When court undermines itself (Dushyant Dave)
6	TH Text & Context: The salience of the Places of Worship Act (Aaratrika Bhaumik)
7	TH Frontpage: Reservation must not be based on religion, Supreme Court tells West Bengal (Krishnadas Rajagopal)
8	IE Frontpage: Opp set to submit notice for resolution to impeach Dhankar (Manoj C G)
9	TH Frontpage: Reservation must not be based on religion, Supreme Court tells West Bengal (Krishnadas Rajagopal)
10	IE Explained: Impeachment of Judges (Aparva Vishwanath & Ajoy Sinha Karpuram)
11	TH Text & Context: What is the procedure for removing judges? (Rangarajan R)
12	TH Text & Context: The challenge of holding judges accountable (Kunal Shankar)
13	IE Explained: Religion and Reservation (Ajoy Sinha Karouram)
14	TH Text & Context: The mosque which face survey petitions (Ziya Us Salam)
15	IE Frontpage: SC steps in: Stop all surveys until we decide Places of Worship Act (Ananthakrishnan G)
16	IE Explained: In Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar & Munshi's views on UCC (Rishika Singh)
17	TH Editorial: Section 6A of the Citizenship Act – Why it fails Assam (Ravi Singh Chikkara, Arnav Roy)
18	TH Opinion: Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures? (P D T Achary, M R Madhavan)
19	CNBC TV18: Why 'One Nation One Election' and what happens next?
20	TH Text & Context: What are the new interception rules and safeguards (R K Vij)
21	IE Govt & Politics: Ex-SC judge V Ramasubramanian appointed new NHRC chairperson (Ajoy Sinha Karpuram)
22	TH Editorial: India's 'steel frame' does need a check (Vinod Bhanu)
23	IE Explained: Key questions of religion, society, law (Aparva Vishwanath)
Society & Social Justice	
1	TH Text & Context: Is the caste Census a useful exercise? (Anish Gupta, Shubham Sharma)
2	IE The Editorial Page: Healthcare, more responsive (K Sujatha Rao)
3	TH Opinion: The digital frontier of inequality (Susan Jane Ferguson, Shombi Sharp)
4	IE The Editorial Page: Test, Not Stress
International Relations	
1	IE Explained: BRICS currency, Trump Threat (Ravi Dutta Mishra)
2	TH Opinion: India's strategic focus on West Asia (Harsh V. Pant, Samir Bhattacharjee)
3	IE The Editorial Page: After Assad
4	IE The Ideas Page: Closing the Gulf circle (C Raja Mohan)
5	IE The Editorial Page: President Dissanayake's India visit: Building bridges with Sri Lanka
6	IE Big Picture: Not Without Resistance (Sukrita Baruah)
7	IE Explained: Indians and the H-1B visa (Arjun Sengupta, Aggam Walia & Sukalp Sharma)

Economy & Agriculture	
1	IE Economy: RBI: Home price index rises by 4.3% amid high interest rates, inflation (George Mathew)
2	TH Text & Context: India's 'One Nation, One Subscription' plan (Moumita Koley)
3	IE Explained: Windfall gains tax on oil put to rest: The move and its significance (Sukalp Sharma)
4	IE The Editorial Page: The state strikes back (Surjit S Bhalla and Karan Bhasin)
5	IE Frontpage: RBI holds key rate, lowers growth forecast, moves to boost liquidity (Hitesh Vyas)
6	IE The Ideas Page: Platforms like PRAGATI (Soumitra Dutta, Parameswaran Iyer)
7	IE The Ideas Page: All is not well with soil (Ashok Gulati & Ritika Juneja)
8	IE Explained: Why RBI wants hedge against dollar reliance, but no push for de-dollarisation (Ravi Dutta Mishra)
9	IE Frontpage: 'Calm influence': Revenue Secy Sanjay Malhotra picked as next RBI Governor (Aanchal Magazine)
10	TH Text & Context: On reforms in merchant shipping (Amitabh Kumar)
11	TH Text & Context: On reforms in merchant shipping (Amitabh Kumar)
12	IE Economy: S Africa, Namibia, Turkey back India in opposing China-led WTO pact: Official (Ravi Dutta Mishra)
13	IE Economy: Switzerland suspends MFN status to India in tax avoidance agreement (Ravi Dutta Mishra, Aanchal Magazine)
14	IE The Editorial Page: The wage challenge (Manish Sabharwal)
15	TH Opinion: Green hydrogen and the financing challenge (Amarendu Nandy, Malvika Awasthy)
16	IE Explained: Indian rupee continues to fall against US dollar: What determines exchange rate?
17	IE Explained: Some positives, Some concerns (Anil Sasi)
18	TH Text & Context: India's reliance on China for critical minerals (Rakshith Shetty)
19	IE Frontpage: As rupee hits new lows, real effective exchange rate soars to an all-time high (Harish Damodaran)
Science & Technology	
1	TH Text & Context: What are the toxins of 1984 Bhopal disaster (Vasudevan Mukunth)
2	TH Science: ecDNA challenges law of genetics, groundbreaking new studies find (Manjeera Gowravaram)
3	IE Express Network: ISRO's PSLV places two satellites of European Space Agency into orbit (Anonna Dutt)
4	TH Text & Context: Should AI be blamed for sporadic layoffs in Big tech? (Poulomi Chatterjee)
5	TH Science: Webb telescope confirms the universe is expanding at an unexpected rate (Reuters)
6	IE Explained: How a distant galaxy provides a peek into nascent Milky Way
7	TH Text & Context: The principle behind the working of a speed gun, used for motion tracking (Amartya Srinivasan, Vasudevan Mukunth)
8	IE Frontpage: Space docking takes off, key to India's future missions (Anonna Dutt)
9	IE Explained: Parker probe gets closest-ever to the Sun: Why it matters (Alind Chauhan)
Geography & Environment	
1	TH Text & Context: What's happening in Syria? Explained
2	TH – Sathanur Dam, Pennaiyar River, Tamil Nadu
3	Near the slopes of the Caucasus, a hotel tragedy at a ski resort reveals India-Georgia connection
4	IE – At river-link project site, PM hails Ambedkar role in water works, slams Cong
5	Map of the Day: IE – After 300 km in three states over 21 days, tigress Zeenat finally captured in Bengal
6	IE – Rare species of bat spotted in Yamuna Biodiversity Park
7	IE – Rotterdam's Christmas gift for Darjeeling – To Red Pandas
8	TH Science: In our fight against climate change, could the seas turn the tide? (Pranay Lal)
9	IE Express Network: Now, book an Uber Shikara in Dal (Express News Service)
10	TH Opinion: Takeaways from COP29 (Sumant Sinha)
11	TH Editorial: Preparing For Worst
12	IE Express Network: Two male cheetahs released
13	IE Explained: Why global plastic treaty talks collapsed (Nikhil Ghanekar)
14	IE Explained: Nine years after it was finalised, a critical look at the Paris Agreement (Amitabh Sinha)
15	TH Text & Context: How would a carbon market function? (The Hindu Bureau)
16	TH Text & Context: How does La Nina affect India's climate? (Mohammad Rafiuddin, Shikhar Tiwari, Rishikesh P)
17	IE Explained: Arctic tundra emitting more carbon than it absorbs, confirm study (Alind Chauhan)
18	IE Express Network: MP plans new home for cheetahs, relocate leopards (Anand Mohan J)
19	IE Explained: How global crises are connected (Amitabh Sinha)
20	IE Explained: Why growth of India's overall green cover is not all good news (Jay Mazoomdar)

Internal Security	
1	IE Express Network: Missile frigate INS Tushil inducted into Navy, Rajnath praises India-Russia ties (Press Trust of India)
2	TH Text & Context: Behind the great Indian Internet shutdown (Anandita Mishra)
3	TH News: Centre yet to formally scrap FMR with Myanmar (Vijaita Singh)
Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude	
1	Ethical Lessons from the life of Dr Manmohan Singh
2	President Biden pardons his son: What will it entail?
3	Whistleblower or victim? The death of Suchir Balaji raises alarming questions
4	IE Express Network: For woman who lost family in Wayanad landslide and fiancé in road accident, govt job brings hope
5	Ekalavya's story beyond thumb-cutting ; questions of dharma it raises
6	Should assisted dying be legalised?



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OPINION – 50 WORD EDITORIALS

December 2024



Rajani Sinha on India's economic slowdown: Analyzes India's unexpected GDP slowdown to 5.4% in Q2 2024-25, citing poor industrial performance and moderated consumption. She forecasts 6.5% annual growth, expecting improvement in H2 due to agriculture and government capex. Sinha recommends boosting consumption and job creation, suggesting tax benefits to stimulate domestic demand amid global uncertainties – **A Push for Growth, Indian Express** [Link](#)



Pratap Bhanu Mehta on turmoil in Bangladesh and Pakistan: Warns that India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are at a "precipice," united by the threat of religious nationalism. He criticizes Bangladesh's political instability and rising Islamism, India's "utterly myopic" approach and increasing majoritarianism, and Pakistan's struggle with religious identity. Mehta argues that all three countries are reopening the 1947 settlement, risking conflict. He concludes that state-sponsored religious nationalism inevitably leads to authoritarianism and destroys democracy – **Neighbourhood on Edge, Indian Express** [Link](#)



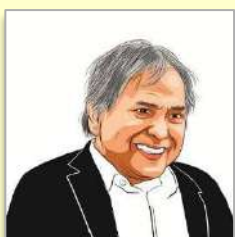
Arul George Scaria addresses GenAI challenges in academia, proposing:

- i. Clear institutional guidelines on permissible AI use
- ii. Oral exams to supplement written submissions
- iii. Mandatory AI usage disclosures
- iv. Expert-led assessments over AI detection tools
- v. Reforms in academic incentives

He emphasizes the need for balanced approaches to integrate AI while maintaining academic integrity – **Let's talk about AI in academia, Indian Express** [Link](#)



C. Raja Mohan analyzes Trump's potential use of tariffs as a foreign policy tool in his second term. He highlights Trump's threat of 100% tariffs on BRICS nations, the broader aim to reshape global trade, and India's need to reassess its US trade strategy. Mohan emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and mutual benefit in India-US trade relations – **Trump's bargaining chip, Indian Express** [Link](#)



Amitabh Kundu critiques Mohan Bhagwat's call for a three-child policy, arguing it's unnecessary for India's projected 1.6 billion population by 2060. He suggests addressing labor shortages through interstate migration and skill development. Kundu dismisses concerns about southern states losing political representation, proposing administrative solutions instead of population growth. He emphasizes that fertility rates are stabilizing and women's workforce participation can increase – **Don't panic on population, Indian Express** [Link](#)



Sarjan Shah analyzes India's "Jaishankar-Modi Doctrine," which shifts from non-alignment to multi-alignment in foreign policy. This approach allows India to actively pursue national interests while maintaining diverse relationships. Shah highlights India's balancing act with Russia, US, Iran, and Israel, questioning whether this strategy can sustain in a potential Cold War 2.0 scenario – **The Modi-Jaishankar Doctrine, Indian Express** [Link](#)



The RBI maintained the repo rate at 6.5% due to persistent inflation concerns, particularly high food prices. Despite slowing economic growth (5.4% in Q2), the central bank remains cautious about inflation, which breached the 6% upper limit in October. The RBI cut the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to release Rs 1.16 lakh crore liquidity, balancing growth and inflation objectives – **Holding Steady by Dharmakirti Joshi, Pankhuri Tandon, Indian Express** [Link](#)



Ashok K. Kantha on India-China Relations: Summarizes External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's statement on India-China relations, highlighting disengagement progress but noting unanswered questions. He emphasizes the need for clarity on patrolling rights, status quo restoration, and potential territorial implications. Kantha calls for greater transparency and a broad political consensus on India's approach to China – **A good beginning but China negotiations must continue, The Hindu** [Link](#)



Rajesh Ranjan on the Right to Disconnect: Advocates for India to legislate the right to disconnect from work. He highlights:

- 1) Lack of specific laws in India
- 2) Global examples (France, Portugal, Australia)
- 3) Research linking disconnection to improved productivity and health
- 4) Need for legislation to protect employees from overwork
- 5) Benefits for both workers and employers

The author argues this right is crucial for India's economic growth and worker well-being - **Indians need the right to disconnect, The Hindu** [Link](#)



Jyoti Panday, Saumya Jain argues the lawsuit between ANI and OpenAI in India highlights key issues in AI development:

- 1) Copyright infringement vs. fair use in AI training
- 2) Territoriality in data storage and processing
- 3) Legal accountability of AI developers



The case will set precedents for AI regulation in India, addressing:

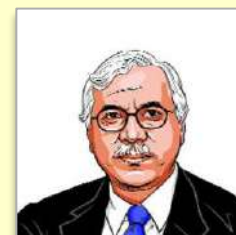
- 1) Balance between innovation and copyright protection
- 2) Data sovereignty in cloud-based services
- 3) AI developers' responsibility for generated content



N.L. Rajah discusses the issue of short tenures for Chief Justices in Indian High Courts. He notes that most recent appointees will serve less than a year, with one retiring after just 24 days. This brevity hinders their ability to understand and reform the institutions effectively, contrasting with longer tenures during British rule – **Chief Justice need longer terms, The Hindu** [Link](#)

S Y Quraishi critiques the "One Nation One Election" proposal, highlighting issues:

- 1) Overshadowing of state and regional politics
- 2) Logistical challenges in implementing three-tier elections
- 3) Potential marginalization of regional parties
- 4) Inconsistencies in election scheduling
- 5) Lack of consensus among political parties
- 6) High costs of additional EVMs and VVPATs
- 7) Questionable sincerity of the proposal



He suggests further debate and possible referral to a Joint Parliamentary Committee – **No One Voice, Please, Indian Express** [Link](#)

Kapil Sibal on Politics in Places of Worship: Argues that recent legal challenges to religious sites violate the Places of Worship Act, 1991, and threaten India's secular fabric. He criticizes attempts to reopen historical grievances, viewing them as politically motivated actions that foster division. Sibal welcomes the Supreme Court's stay on such petitions and emphasizes that using religion as a political tool contradicts the principles of the Republic – **Places of Politics, Indian Express** [Link](#)



Kalpana Kannabiran on Justice S.K. Yadav's speech at the Allahabad High Court: Criticizes as "genocidal street-talk" and a "dog whistle" inciting mob violence. She argues it's not just an attack on minorities but on all Indian citizens. Kannabiran calls for collective action beyond judicial accountability, suggesting civil disobedience as a constitutional route to address this crisis in judicial propriety and affirm constitutional values – **Wounding the spirit of the Constitution of India, The Hindu** [Link](#)

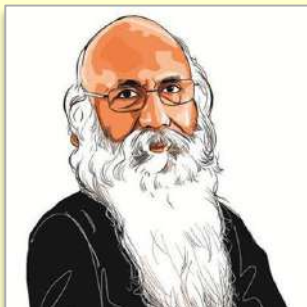


Veena S Rao on India's demographic challenges: Warns of India's demographic crisis, citing NFHS-5 data: only 41% women and 50.2% men (15-49 years) have 10+ years schooling; 57% women and 25% men are anemic. Among children under 5, 35.5% are stunted, and only 11.3% aged 6-23 months receive adequate diet. Without urgent intervention in nutrition, health, and education, India's large population may hinder economic growth rather than drive it – **A crisis in the making, Indian Express** [Link](#)



India's AI surveillance systems raise privacy concerns under Article 21. The DPDPA's broad government exemptions are criticized. India lacks comprehensive AI regulations, unlike the EU's risk-based approach. Delhi and Hyderabad have deployed AI in policing without public guidelines. A balanced framework is needed to protect civil liberties while leveraging AI for governance. Transparency, consent mechanisms, and judicial oversight are crucial. **(Shri Venkatesh, Bharath**

Gangadharan, Aashwyn Singh, and Anuj Nakade) – The legal gaps in India's unregulated AI surveillance, The Hindu [Link](#)



Arun Kumar on Wealth Tax: Argues for implementing a wealth tax in India to boost economic growth and tax revenue. He contends that:

- 1) Current tax collection is low (17% of GDP) due to black income generation
- 2) Wealth tax could target visible assets of the rich
- 3) It would reduce asset overvaluation and redirect investments
- 4) Digital records make implementation easier
- 5) It could fund social sector development
- 6) The main obstacle is lack of political will

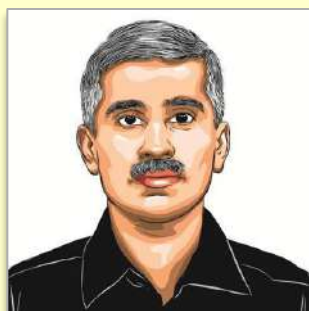
More Money, Less Problems, Indian Express [Link](#)



Samir Saran on India-Russia relations: Outlines five specific ways the India-Russia relationship will shape the world in 2025:

- 1) Bridging Russia with the global order
- 2) Preventing Russia's complete alignment with China
- 3) Stabilizing energy markets through sanctions-compliant trade
- 4) Opening new possibilities in the Arctic region
- 5) Moderating non-Western groupings like BRICS

Saran argues this relationship benefits both countries and the global order by maintaining geopolitical balance. He emphasizes its importance for the West, citing examples like the BrahMos missile's role in preserving the rules-based order – **The bridge to Moscow, Indian Express [Link](#)**



Jabin T Jacob on On India-China ties: Analyzes India-China relations following the 23rd Special Representatives meeting. He highlights India's weakening expectations and China's strategic gains from recent border tensions. Jacob warns against India easing pressure on China for short-term interests, criticizing India's diplomatic approach of oscillating between ceremonial exchanges and endless talks. He argues that China has effectively lowered India's expectations for peaceful boundary resolution, potentially affecting India's standing with other partners facing Chinese pressure. Jacob emphasizes the need for carefully calibrated formal exchanges with China – **Two steps forward, one step back,**

Indian Express [Link](#)


Raseswari Sengupta outlines India's 2025 growth strategy:

- 1) Boost exports from 2% to 3% of global share
- 2) Target 9% annual export growth
- 3) Attract manufacturing FDI, leveraging China exodus
- 4) Implement consistent trade policies
- 5) Reduce protectionism
- 6) Allow market-driven exchange rates
- 7) Ensure policy stability

These measures could add 1+ percentage point to annual GDP growth, crucial for India's development goals. Current FDI and export growth remain disappointing, necessitating urgent policy reforms – **Reversing the Slowdown, Indian Express** [Link](#)

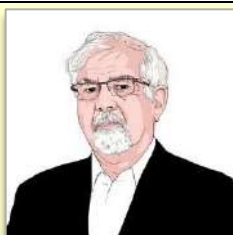
Jagjit Singh Dallewal on legalising MSP: Argues for legally guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) for 23 crops in India. He claims this would:


- 1) Prevent farmer suicides and reduce debt
- 2) Encourage crop diversification, conserving groundwater
- 3) Cut electricity consumption in agriculture by 60%
- 4) Save Rs 2 lakh crore annually on oil and pulse imports
- 5) Protect public health by reducing reliance on harmful imported oils
- 6) Address the Rs 14.72 lakh crore loss farmers faced in 2023 due to low MSP

Dallewal urges immediate government action.



Jayati Ghosh on taxing India's ultra-rich: Advocates for taxing India's ultra-rich to address inequality and boost public spending. She proposes a 2% annual tax on wealth exceeding \$1 billion, potentially extending to \$100 million. Ghosh refutes arguments against wealth taxes, citing improved digital tracking and international precedents. She emphasizes that fair taxation of the wealthy is feasible and necessary, urging the Modi government to implement such measures to increase revenue and reduce economic disparities – **The rich exploit loopholes in system, Indian Express** [Link](#)


Surjit S Bhalla challenges Thomas Piketty's assertions about India:

- 1) Piketty claims India's income inequality is second highest globally (Gini ~0.6), which Bhalla deems implausible.
- 2) Bhalla refutes Piketty's 13% tax-to-GDP ratio, citing IMF data showing 16.7% for 2019-20, potentially 18-19% now.
- 3) He disputes nPiketty's suggestion that higher taxes on the rich would boost growth.
- 4) Bhalla emphasizes the need for accurate data before proposing wealth tax

or economic policies – **Piketty's wrong. We aren't that unequal, Indian Express** [Link](#)



The Hindu on Detention Policy: The Ministry of Education's new policy mandates final examinations for Classes 5 and 8, allowing detention for students who fail after a re-examination. While intended to improve learning outcomes, it contradicts the National Education Policy 2020's focus on formative assessments and holistic evaluation, risking a return to high-stakes testing and complicating implementation in various states – **Letter and Spirit, The Hindu** [Link](#)



Gireesan and Bendre's critique of the ONOE Bill highlights specific concerns:

- 1) 15-day public consultation period, violating the 30-day minimum requirement
- 2) Absence of explanatory notes or background papers
- 3) High-level committee's use of 'yes/no' questions, suggesting predetermination
- 4) Potential constitutional amendments without adequate debate
- 5) Risk of national narratives overshadowing state-specific issues
- 6) Reduced electoral accountability due to less frequent elections
- 7) Possible power centralization, undermining federalism



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PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

December 2024

Dr Singh Walks Into History

Why in News? Former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, passed away on December 26, 2024, at the age of 92.

Legacy as an Economic Reformer

- 1) Architect of India's economic liberalization in 1991 as Finance Minister under P.V. Narasimha Rao's government.
- 2) Implemented landmark reforms including devaluing the rupee, reducing import tariffs, and encouraging private sector growth.
- 3) Transformed India's economy, ending the License-Permit Raj and setting the country on a path of sustained economic development.

Prime Ministerial Tenure (2004-2014)

- 1) Served two consecutive terms as Prime Minister, leading the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.
- 2) Oversaw an average GDP growth rate of 8.5% during his tenure.
- 3) Introduced significant social welfare programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
- 4) Successfully negotiated the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, strengthening India's global standing.



MANMOHAN SINGH'S HISTORIC REFORMS

Major reforms initiated by Dr Manmohan Singh as the Finance Minister between 1991 and 1995 to salvage the economy from bankruptcy and usher in liberalisation

- 1** The famous 1991-92 Budget unveiled by Manmohan Singh was the major event that turned the course of the country's fortunes.
- 2** The rupee devaluation was done in two tranches of 9 per cent and 10 per cent in quick succession in a matter of three days.
- 3** New Industrial Policy Resolution, abolition of most trade licences, providing freedom to enterprises, opening up the country to FDI, thereby deregulating the industrial sector. New industrial policy was presented along with the Budget on July 24, 1991.
- 4** Full convertibility of the rupee on the current account allowed, giving more flexibility to trade
- 5** Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act was repealed to eliminate the need for prior approval for capacity expansion by companies

- 6** Banking reforms announced - Setting of interest rates by lenders were deregulated, new private bank licences issued.
- 7** Public listing of banks and moving to a new framework of recognition of accounts and introduction of capital adequacy norms recommended by Narasimham committee.
- 8** Disinvestment of PSU units to mutual funds. Entry of private mutual funds. Market reforms introduced - NSE was created, paperless trading started, depositories allowed.
- 9** Foreign institutional investors allowed to invest in Indian stock markets for the first time
- 10** Market regulator SEBI was given more powers to regulate the capital market

WHAT LED TO REFORMS?



Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao being seen off at Delhi airport on his departure to Russia on June 29, 1994, Manmohan Singh and Atal Bihari Vajpayee are also seen. Express archive

BY MID-1991, the balance of payments (BoP) crisis turned into a crisis of confidence in the country's ability to manage the BoP. The loss of confidence undermined the Government's capability to deal with the crisis by closing off all recourse to external credit. A default on payments for the first time in Indian history became a serious possibility in June 1991, according to RBI History Volume IV.

SIGNS OF THE PAYMENT crisis became evident in the second half of 1990-91 when the Gulf war led to a sharp increase in the oil prices. Foreign exchange reserves began to decline from September 1990. The reserves declined by 71.2 per cent between the end of August 1990 and January 30, 1991, from a level of US\$ 3.1 billion to US\$ 896.0 million. NRIs pulled out deposits on a massive scale.

IN APRIL 1991, the Government raised US\$ 200.0 million from the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) through a sale (with a repurchase option) of 20 tonnes of gold confiscated from smugglers.

AGAIN, IN JULY 1991, India shipped 47 tonnes of gold to the Bank of England (BoE) to raise another US\$ 405.0 million. This action helped the country repay its international donors and creditors, though it was not sufficient to completely absolve the country of the crisis.

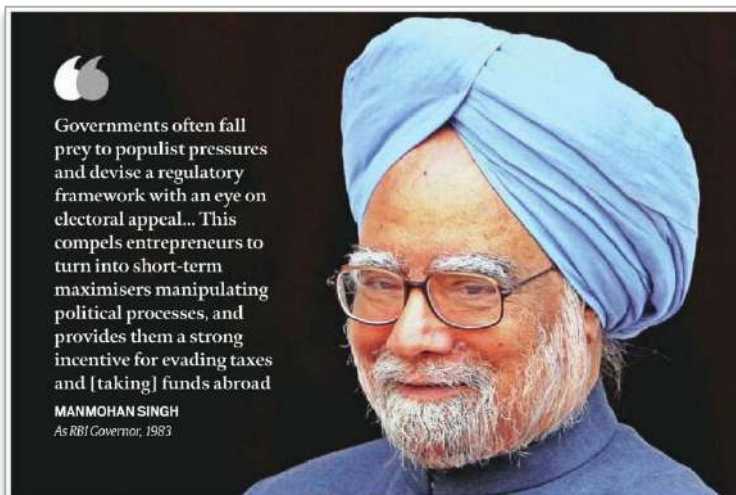
Keyword of the Day: IE Explained – Manmohanomics, in his own words [Link](#)

Manmohanomics refers to the economic policies and reforms initiated by Dr. Manmohan Singh, particularly during his tenure as India's Finance Minister in 1991 and later as Prime Minister.

Key Features of Manmohanomics

- 1) **Market-Oriented Reforms:** Dismantling the "license-permit raj", reducing role of central planning and allowing market forces to guide investment decisions.
- 2) **Trade Liberalisation:** As early as 1962, Singh recognized India's export potential and criticized the "undue export pessimism". Advocated for open trade policies and realistic exchange rates to boost exports.

- 3) **Public Sector Reforms:** Criticised political interference in pricing decisions and advocated de-politicisation of PSUs
- 4) **Balanced Approach to Inequality:** Warned against populist "soak the rich" policies; Recognised need to build trust between government and private industry to encourage productive entrepreneurship.
- 5) **Human Capital Development:** Emphasized the critical role of education, health, and sanitation in boosting India's productive capacity; Advocated for universal primary education and stressed the importance of women's literacy.



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MONTHLY QUOTES & WHAT OTHERS SAY?

December 2024

IE Wordly Wise – Quote of the Day

'When you have exhausted all possibilities, remember this: You haven't' – THOMAS EDISON
'The less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it' – MARK TWAIN
'A 10-pound sack of potatoes lasts a long time' – OCTAVIA E BUTLER
'The digital world is now the real world, and it's time we started treating it that way' – TRISTAN HARRIS
'Even though a number of people have tried, no one has yet found a way to drink for a living' – JEAN KERR
'Medicine heals doubts as well as diseases' – KARL MARX
'I found I could say things with colour and shapes that I couldn't say any other way' – GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
'I can make a general in five minutes, but a good horse is hard to replace' – ABRAHAM LINCOLN
'He is no lawyer who cannot take both sides' – CHARLES LAMB
'Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known' – CARL SAGAN
'We are Indians, firstly and lastly' – B R AMBEDKAR
'In our culture, we have such respect for instruments, they are like part of God' – RAVI SHANKAR
'Comics is a great medium to get a lot of stories out' – SERGIO ARAGONES
'It's not about an over. Each ball delivered is an event' – RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN
'Some people become vandals because they want to make the world a better-looking place' – BANKSY
'Sportsmanship is making sure you have respect for the guy you're playing across from' – WARREN MOON
'Nothing so weakens a government as inflation' – J K GALBRAITH
'Taxation is just a sophisticated way of demanding money with menaces' – TERRY PRATCHETT
'Let us remember: One book, One pen, One child and One teacher can change the world' – MALALA YOUSAFZAI
'Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family' – KOFI ANAN
'When the Prime Minister (Manmohan Singh) speaks the world listens' – BARACK OBAMA
'This world is ruled by violence; But I guess that's better left unsaid' – BOB DYLAN
'That's the beauty of sport. Sometimes you laugh, sometimes you cry' – PEP GUARDIOLA

IE What The Others Say

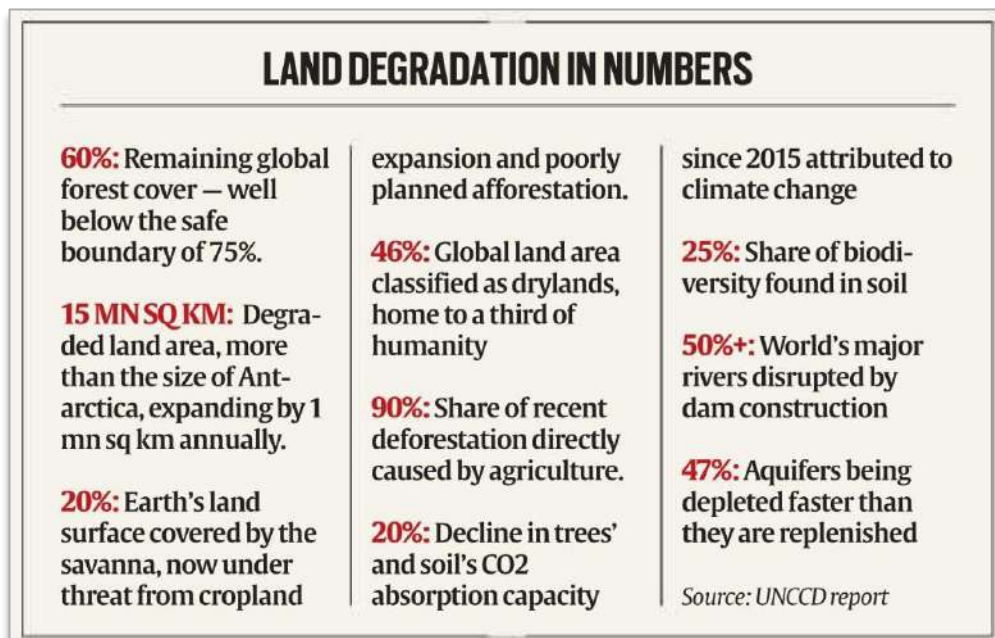
"MPs were right to allow for further detailed scrutiny... to ensure the terminally ill adults (end of life) bill addresses both ethical concerns and practical safeguards effectively. The desire to alleviate suffering is deeply compelling" – THE GUARDIAN
"To counter the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media, the government must develop ways to address deepfakes. Countering false narratives, controlling the propagation of disinformation by forces outside the nation may require thought-out strategies" – THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH
"The rising need for social care in an ageing population is widely recognised to be among the UK's biggest public policy challenges. But that hasn't stopped repeated delays to policies to address it" – THE GUARDIAN
"Presidents have the right to issue pardons for crimes that could be charged by federal prosecutors. But when they use that power on behalf of their loved ones, or their political allies... they erode confidence in ideals that justice is blind, that all are equal before the law" – THE NEW YORK TIMES
"While the Trump transition team complied with the Presidential Transition Act's requirement to lay out an ethics plan for its staff, the document notably provides no provision for Mr. Trump, whose business dealings pose ample ethical quandaries" – THE WASHINGTON POST

<p>“Consensual foreign policy is the need of the hour. Right now, it is worth celebrating that China, which harboured deep suspicions of the Congress, will be more amenable to dealing with Nepal’s biggest party. Their mutual suspicions were poisoning Nepal-China relations” – THE KATHMANDU POST, NEPAL</p>
<p>“The ongoing crisis, playing out against the backdrop of the Malaysian freeze on recruitment of new foreign workers earlier in the year, shows the urgency of addressing procedural bottlenecks and irregularities to better protect the interests of our workers” – THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH</p>
<p>“Amid endless woes – the shifting curbs on free speech, enforced disappearances, the millions of out-of-school children, the climate crisis and its deleterious effects – it is the sheer scale of political vendetta that stands out as reflected in the large numbers of political activists in custody” – DAWN, PAKISTAN</p>
<p>“Even the Biden administration, before reversing course after public outrage, continued pursuing at least some of the surveillance orders against news outlets that the first Trump administration initiated. That’s why, in an age of political polarisation, the Press Act is about as bipartisan as it gets” – THE GUARDIAN</p>
<p>“As Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba is not running for the party’s executive role again, he would perhaps want to bow out as the president who did his bit to strengthen internal democracy and hand over the party’s reins to a competent successor” – THE KATHMANDU POST</p>
<p>“The problem for AI is that we want machines that strive to achieve human objectives but know that the software does not know for certain exactly what those objectives are. Unchecked ambition leads to regret. Controlling unpredictable superintelligent AI requires rethinking what AI should be” – THE GUARDIAN</p>
<p>“The facts prove that the economic interests of China and the US are deeply intertwined, which is the fundamental logic behind why the two countries should not, and cannot, become ‘parallel worlds’” – THE GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA</p>
<p>“Global commodity prices remain low, taking pressure off inflation and the import bill, and growth prospects seem to have improved as industry activity gains traction and downside risks to the crop outlook subside. But that is where the growth story ends and risks start emerging” – DAWN, PAKISTAN</p>
<p>“Given this history and the consistent failure of partisan governments to hold credible elections, it has become evident that the caretaker government system is one of the main safeguards for ensuring free and fair elections in Bangladesh” – THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH</p>
<p>“If the public comes to see that only those without access to power centres get punished while those close to top politicians and other power centres are spared, their faith in the country’s legal process will erode. So will their trust in the political parties” – THE KATHMANDU POST</p>
<p>“The politicians who have applauded Gisle Pelicot must now make good on her demands for change by ensuring justice for other women and addressing the culture that enables such crimes” – THE GUARDIAN</p>
<p>“More sustainable solutions must be found, because even if the Postal Service, in its current incarnation, cannot survive digital world, mail is still a necessary part of the communication mix. Collecting and delivering ballots is one vital purpose the agency is still uniquely suited to fulfil” – THE WASHINGTON POST</p>
<p>“In a city where accessible healthcare is increasingly out of reach, it is unacceptable that these public hospitals offer substandard services. This is a direct result of neglect... from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and the Ministry of Health” – THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH</p>
<p>“Though the KP government has hammered out a seemingly comprehensive ‘roadmap’ to bring peace to Kurram district, the barbaric murder of two men on Monday underscored the fact that implementing these measures will require the state’s full commitment” – DAWN, PAKISTAN</p>
<p>“Mr. Biden’s intervention this week is a nod to the flaws of the death penalty, but also a need for a system that claims human dignity and equal application of the law as its driving values. State and federal lawmakers should finish the job by abolishing the practice” – THE GUARDIAN</p>
<p>“The US was the main architect of the institutional underpinnings of the international order that guided Western liberal democracies after World War II and were ultimately embraced broadly around the world. If Washington decides to leave the scene, Beijing is most likely to... fill the gap” – THE WASHINGTON POST</p>
<p>“When Mr [Narendra] Modi looked like [he was] winning the 2014 general elections, Dr [Manmohan] Singh openly warned that such an outcome would be disastrous for India. In his death, Pakistan has lost a partner for peace, and the world a true statesman” – DAWN, PAKISTAN</p>
<p>“Moving forward, Pakistan must prioritise several key areas. To build climate resilience, it must implement initiatives such as climate-smart agriculture to assist farmers in adapting to changing weather patterns.– DAWN, PAKISTAN</p>

FACTS OF THE DAY

December 2024

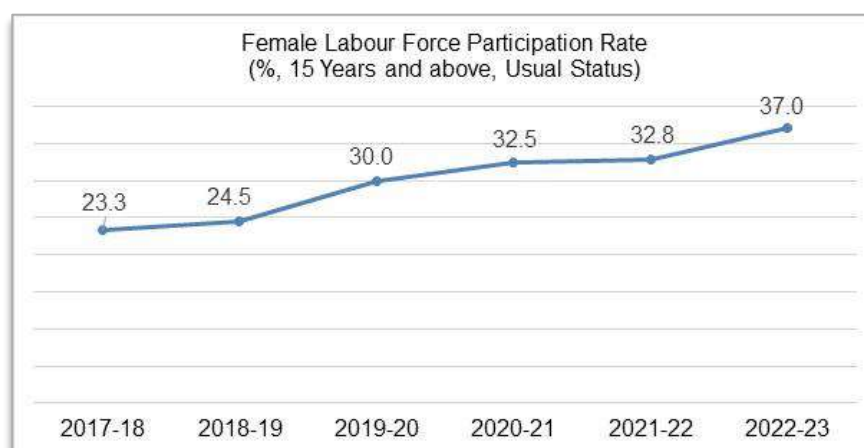
IE Facts of the Day – Land Degradation in Numbers



IE Fact of the Day: Female labour force participation rate rose during 2017-18 to 2022-23 [Link](#)

A new working paper released by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM). The paper cites:

- 1) In 2017-18, the female LFPR for women aged 15 years and above was 23.3%. By 2022-23, this figure had risen to 37.0%. A 13.7 percentage points increase.
- 2) Female labour force participation rate (LFPR) increased in most Indian states from 2017-18 to 2022-23.
- 3) Rural areas saw larger gains in female LFPR compared to urban areas.
- 4) Rural female LFPR rose from 24.6% to 41.5% (~69% growth) during this period.
- 5) Urban female LFPR increased from 20.4% to 25.4%.
- 6) Bihar, Punjab, and Haryana consistently reported very low levels of female LFPR.
- 7) Married men exhibit higher LFPR across states and age groups, while marriage significantly reduces female LFPR, especially in urban areas.
- 8) Northeastern states, particularly Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, have shown improvement in rural female LFPR.
- 9) Government schemes like Mudra loans, Drone Didi scheme, and Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana have focused on women-led development.



Facts of the Day: PwC's Global Economic Crime Survey 2024

PwC: Over half of surveyed entities faced financial frauds

Many Indian organisations faced financial frauds in the past 24 months where procurement fraud emerged as the top threat, as per PwC's Global Economic Crime Survey 2024



59% of the Indian organisations surveyed said that they had faced financial or economic fraud in the past 24 months

18% higher than the global average of 41%

7% higher in India when compared to the results of the 2022 edition of the same survey

■ The survey indicates that procurement fraud is now a predominant issue for Indian businesses, with 50% of respondents identifying it as a major problem, marking a significant 21% increase compared to the global sentiment

■ In contrast, in 2022, customer

fraud was reported as the top concern by 47% of businesses

■ Globally, 44% of leaders highlight cybercrime as their top concern, the survey said

■ The survey analysed the responses of 2,446 heads of organisations across the world, of which 91 were from India, on the most disruptive economic crimes affecting their sector and ways of mitigating risks of fraud and non-compliance

■ More than 50% of the respondents held top positions and comprised board members, CEOs, MDs and presidents, PwC said

■ The survey also revealed that about 33% of all economic crimes are related to corruption and bribery



While Indian companies are using data analytics to combat procurement fraud with 52% analysing transactions pre-deal and 46% post-deal, only 37% employ real-time payment monitoring with the capacity to block suspicious transactions

Source: PwC's
Global Economic Crime
Survey 2024/PTI

Facts of the Day: Smartphone exports from India [Link](#)

Why in News? India's smartphone exports are set to cross Rs 1.70 lakh crore in the current financial year, marking a 31% increase from FY24.

Key Details

- 1) Exports reached Rs 1.10 lakh crore in April-November 2024, 45% higher than the same period last year
- 2) iPhones account for 70% of smartphone exports
- 3) Samsung, Pudget Electronics (Dixon), and other merchandise make up the remaining 30%
- 4) November 2024 saw record monthly exports of Rs 20,000 crore

Major Contributors

- 1) Foxconn's Tamil Nadu factory is the largest exporter, employing nearly 42,000 workers
- 2) Tata Electronics is the second-biggest contributor in the iPhone ecosystem
- 3) Pegatron, potentially being acquired by Tata Group, is also a significant player

Impact of PLI Scheme

- 1) Total PLI disbursement of Rs 5,800 crore from 2021-2024
- 2) Smartphone industry contributed Rs 1.10 lakh crore in incremental GST and component duties



- 3) Created over 300,000 direct and 600,000 indirect jobs
- 4) Added exports worth Rs 2.87 lakh crore during this period
- 5) Domestic value addition increased to nearly 20%

Fact of the Day: IE - After 2 years of India-Australia trade deal, export utilisation reaches 79% Link

Why in News? The Ministry of Commerce and Industry reported that export utilisation under the India-Australia ECTA has reached 79% after two years of implementation, while import utilisation stood at 84%.

Trade Performance:

- 1) Goods exports to Australia (April-September 2024): \$3.99 billion, down 18% year-on-year
- 2) Imports: \$6.7 billion, also down 18% year-on-year
- 3) Resulted in a narrower trade deficit
- 4) Significant growth in textiles, chemicals, and agriculture
- 5) New export categories emerged, including gold studded with diamonds and turbojets
- 6) Imports of essential raw materials like metalliferous ores, cotton, and wood products have strengthened Indian industries

Future Prospects:

- 1) Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA): Progressing with 10 formal rounds and inter-sessional discussions completed.
- 2) Bilateral Trade Target: Both nations committed to achieving AUD 100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030.



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PICTURE OF THE DAY

December 2024

Picture of the Day: TH – Snowed Up [Link](#)

Snowed up



White town: Vendors pitch umbrellas to protect their wares as the season's first snowfall blankets Srinagar on Friday. Hundreds of vehicles are stranded on the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway. Many passes connecting the Valley are shut. IMRAN NISSAR (REPORT ON PAGE 8)

Prelims Pointers: Why rainfall in North India and snowfall in the higher Himalayas during December?

- 1) Primarily caused by Western Disturbances (WDs)
- 2) **About Western Disturbances:**
 - a) Extra-tropical storm systems that originate in the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, and Caspian Sea regions
 - b) Low-pressure systems that travel eastward, bringing moisture-laden winds towards the Indian subcontinent
 - c) Typically occur 4-6 times during the winter months (November to March)
- 3) **Orographic Effect:** Cause for snowfall in Himalayas
 - a) The Himalayas act as a barrier to these moisture-laden winds.
 - b) As the air is forced to rise over the mountains, it cools and condenses, leading to precipitation.
- 4) **Temperature Gradient:** Driving rain in plains
 - a) The cold air associated with WDs meets the warmer air over the Indian plains, causing instability and precipitation.

Significance of Winter rains

- 1) Crucial for agriculture, particularly for Rabi crops like wheat, barley, and peas.
- 2) Replenishing groundwater and maintaining soil moisture.
- 3) Replenishing Himalayan glaciers, which are crucial water sources for major rivers.
- 4) Contributes to the formation of seasonal snowpack, which melts gradually and feeds rivers during spring and summer



TH – Dhimsa, a folk dance in Andhra Pradesh

Setting the stage



In sync: Tribal women performing dhimsa, a folk dance in Andhra Pradesh, at the opening ceremony of the All India Public Bus Transport Athletic Meet on the Police Parade Ground in Visakhapatnam on Friday. V. RAJU

Picture of the Day – IE – New Year Celebrations

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Gurung community people in traditional attire dance at a parade to mark their New Year known as 'Tamu Loshar' in Kathmandu. AP

Why in News? The Gurung community in Nepal and India is celebrating Tamu Lhosar festival on December 30, 2024, marking their New Year with traditional attire, cultural performances, and festivities as they transition from the Garuda year to the Snake year in their 12-year zodiac cycle.



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History, Art & Culture

December 2024

IE Express Network: Under layers of soil, 80 pillars and a slice of Patna's Mauryan-era past
 (Santosh Singh)
 Syllabus: Prelims – History, Art & Culture [Link](#)

Why in News? The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has decided to uncover 80 sandstone pillars at the Kumhrar site in Patna, believed to be part of a Mauryan-era Buddhist assembly hall, after being covered for 20 years due to rising water levels.

Site Information

- 1) Location: Kumhrar, 5 km from Patna railway station
- 2) Structure: 80-pillar assembly hall (39m x 32m)
- 3) Era: Mauryan period (321-185 BCE)



Fragments of sandstone pillars on display at the Kumhrar archaeological site in Patna.

Historical significance

- 1) Possible venue for Emperor Ashoka's third Buddhist Council
- 2) Links ancient Pataliputra to modern Patna
- 3) Affirms Pataliputra as Mauryan empire's power center
- 4) Among oldest structures in India

IE Explained: What is the debate over alcohol sale at Nagaland's famed Hornbill Festival?
 (Sukrita Baruah)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Art & Culture [Link](#)

Why in News? The Nagaland government is considering repealing the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition (NLTP) Act 1989, while relaxing rules on Indian-made liquor during the ongoing 25th Hornbill Festival.



Background

- 1) The Hornbill Festival, started in 2000, is Nagaland's largest public event showcasing Naga heritage and culture.
- 2) It attracts significant tourism, with over 1.54 lakh visitors in 2023, including foreign and domestic tourists.
- 3) The festival is unique for allowing the sale and consumption of local rice beer (Thutse) with government consent, despite Nagaland being a dry state.

Liquor Prohibition in Nagaland

- 1) The NLTP Act was introduced in 1989, backed by the Church and the Naga Mothers' Association.
- 2) Prohibition has roots in the arrival of American Baptist missionaries in the 1870s, who viewed alcohol consumption as sinful.
- 3) Despite 87% of the population being Christian (mostly Baptist), rice beer production and consumption have continued.

Current Debate

- 1) The government is considering repealing the NLTP Act due to:
 - a) Ineffectiveness in curbing alcohol consumption
 - b) Prevalence of liquor smuggling and bootlegging
 - c) Health hazards from spurious alcohol
 - d) Loss of excise revenue
- 2) The Church, particularly the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), strongly opposes any relaxation of the prohibition law.
- 3) Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along has allowed the use of Indian-made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) at the festival venue, sparking controversy.

TH Frontpage: PM Modi to release collected works of Subramania Bharati (The Hindu Bureau)

Syllabus: Prelims – History, Art & Culture [Link](#)

Why in News? Prime Minister Narendra Modi will release a 23-volume compendium of the complete works of Tamil poet and freedom fighter Subramania Bharati on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, at 1 PM in New Delhi.

Key Details about Subramania Bharati

- 1) **Birth and Death:** Born on December 11, 1882, in Ettayapuram, Tamil Nadu; died on September 12, 1921, in Madras (now Chennai)
- 2) **Titles:** Known as "Mahakavi Bharati" (Great Poet Bharati) and considered the father of modern Tamil poetry



3) **Professions:** Tamil writer, poet, journalist, Indian independence activist, social reformer, and polyglot

4) **Literary Contributions:**

- a) Pioneered modern Tamil poetry
- b) Notable works include "Kuyil Pattu", "Panchali Sapatham", and "Kannan Pattu"
- c) Translated Vedic hymns, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, and Bhagavad Gita into Tamil

5) Nationalism and Activism:

- a) Wrote fiery patriotic songs during the Indian Independence movement
- b) Forced into exile in Pondicherry (1910-1919) due to his nationalist activities

6) Social Reforms:

- a) Advocated for women's rights, gender equality, and eradication of the caste system
- b) Opposed child marriage and supported widow remarriage

7) Linguistic Abilities:

Proficient in about 32 languages, including Sanskrit, Hindi, and English

TH Editorial: Vaikom – Two States, two leaders and a tale of reform (Manuraj Sunmugasundaram)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – History, Art & Culture [Link](#)

Why in News? The centenary of the Vaikom Satyagraha (1924–1925), a landmark socio-political movement against caste-based discrimination, is being celebrated jointly by Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with Chief Ministers M.K. Stalin and Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurating events and memorials on December 12, 2024.

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Historical Background of Vaikom Satyagraha

What was it? A non-violent protest initiated on March 30, 1924, in the princely state of Travancore (present-day Kerala), aimed at abolishing untouchability and caste-based restrictions on temple roads surrounding the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple.

Key Leaders:

- 1) Leaders such as T.K. Madhavan, K. Kelappan, K.P. Kesava Menon, and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy played pivotal roles.
- 2) Mahatma Gandhi supported the movement in 1925, mediating partial concessions.

Outcomes and Legacy

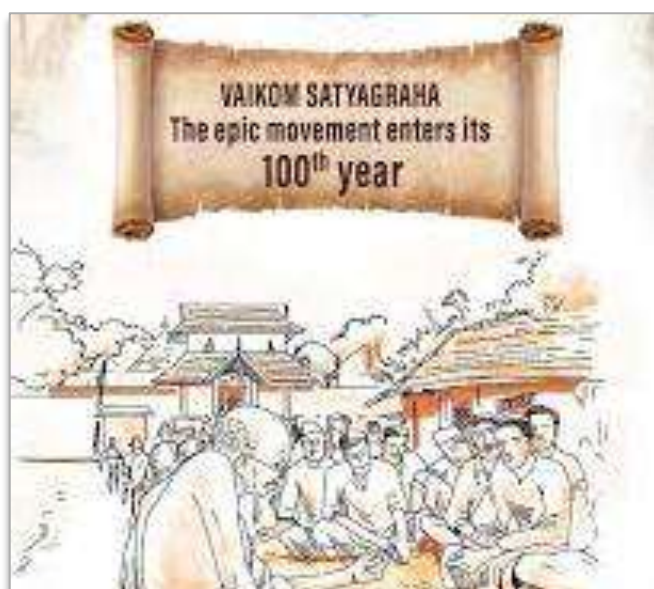
1) Immediate Impact:

- a) It was the first major temple entry movement in India.
- b) The satyagraha lasted over 600 days, leading to the opening of three out of four temple-adjacent roads to oppressed communities in November 1925.
- c) Inspired subsequent movements for temple entry and social justice across India

2) Long-Term Reforms:

- a) Culminated in the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, which allowed all Hindus access to temples.
- b) Set the stage for legislative reforms like the Madras Temple Entry Authorization Act (1947)

3) Periyar's Role:



- a) Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's involvement earned him the title "Vaikom Veerar" (Hero of Vaikom). He criticized the partial outcomes and continued advocating for complete equality

IE Explained: Dispute over Kalyan's Durgadi Fort: Why court sided with Govt (Zeeshan Shaikh, Sadaf Modak)
 Syllabus: Prelims – History, Art & Culture [Link](#)

Why in News? A Kalyan civil court has ruled in favor of the Maharashtra government, rejecting the Muslim community's claim to the disputed site at Durgadi Fort, rekindling a long-standing legal battle.

Historical Background

16th Century Origins:

- 1) Durgadi Fort dates back to 1570, built during the Adil Shahi Sultanate rule
- 2) Originally housed a Muslim tomb, prayer place, and other buildings
- 3) Spread over 70 acres near the Ulhas River in Kalyan

Maratha and British Periods:

- 1) Marathas captured Kalyan in 1760, renaming it Durgadi Killa
- 2) Built a small wooden temple dedicated to Durgadevi inside the premises
- 3) British took control in 1818; by late 19th century, the temple ceased to be a place of worship

Modern Controversy

1960s Tensions:

- 1) Muslim community claimed centuries-old rights to offer Eid prayers at the fort
- 2) Hindu community questioned Muslim control and demanded prayer rights
- 3) Maharashtra government attempted to assert control in 1966, facing resistance

Shiv Sena Involvement:

- 1) Bal Thackeray unfurled a saffron flag at the fort in 1968
- 2) Marked Shiv Sena's first prominent foray into Hindu revivalism

IE Explained: One Nation, One Election Bills

(Damini Nath & Apurva Vishwanath)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian government introduced two Bills in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024, to implement the "One Nation, One Election" initiative, aiming to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.

THE 129TH CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT BILL

PROPOSES to amend three Articles of the Constitution, and insert a new one, viz., Article 82A(1-6).

NEW PROVISION provides for simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state legislative Assemblies. Proposed to be added after Article 82, which pertains to delimitation.

ALL ASSEMBLIES elected after the appointed date and before the expiry of the full term of Lok Sabha "shall come to an

end on the expiry of the full term of the House of the People". This means some state Assemblies will have their five-year terms curtailed in order to pave the way for simultaneous elections.

HOWEVER, the Election Commission of India has the option of not holding any particular Assembly election along with the election to Lok Sabha, and recommend to the President to order that the election to that Assembly may be postponed.



Key Aspects of the Proposed Bills

- 1) **Constitutional Amendment**
 - a) Introduces a new **Article 82A** to facilitate simultaneous elections
 - b) Proposes amendments to **Articles 83, 172, and 372** of the Constitution
 - c) Requires a "special majority" in both houses of Parliament to pass
- 2) **Implementation Timeline**
 - a) Earliest possible implementation: 2034 election cycle
 - b) President to issue notification on the first sitting day of the new Lok Sabha
- 3) **Scope and Provisions**
 - a) Applies to Lok Sabha and state Assembly elections only, excluding municipal polls
 - b) Allows for adjusting state Assembly terms to align with Lok Sabha elections
 - c) Provides flexibility for the Election Commission to defer certain state elections if necessary
- 4) **Handling Mid-Term Dissolutions**
 - a) In case of early Lok Sabha dissolution, the next term would be for the remaining period only
 - b) Similar provisions for state Assemblies dissolved before full term
- 5) **Union Territories and Delhi:** Separate bill to amend relevant Acts for Union Territories and Delhi to enable simultaneous polls

Polity & Governance

December 2024

SPECIAL COVERAGE: WINTER SESSION OF PARLIAMENT

ONLY BUSINESS ON LAST DAY: 39-MEMBER PANEL FOR BILLS ON JOINT POLLS

The cold, bitter end



The winter session of Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die amid pandemonium in the House Friday. PTI

A note on types of adjournment that can occur in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha:

Adjournment

An adjournment suspends the work of a sitting for a specified time, which may be hours, days or weeks. The key features of a regular adjournment are:

- 1) It terminates only a sitting, not an entire session of the House
- 2) The time of reassembly is specified
- 3) The power to adjourn lies with the presiding officer of the House (Speaker/Deputy Speaker in Lok Sabha; Chairman/Deputy Chairman in Rajya Sabha)

Adjournment Sine Die

This type of adjournment terminates a session for an indefinite period. Key points about adjournment sine die:

- 1) It occurs when the House is adjourned without specifying a date for reconvening.
- 2) The presiding officer has the authority to reconvene the House before the appointed time or at any time after sine die adjournment.

Adjournment Motion

While not strictly a type of adjournment, this is an important parliamentary device related to adjournments:

- 1) It is introduced only in the Lok Sabha to draw attention to a matter of urgent public importance.

- 2) It requires support from 50 members to be admitted.
- 3) If admitted, it leads to setting aside normal business to discuss the urgent matter.
- 4) The discussion should last for at least two hours and thirty minutes.
- 5) It involves an element of censure against the government.

Prorogation

While not technically an adjournment, prorogation is related and important to understand:

- 1) It terminates a session of Parliament, not just a sitting.
- 2) The President issues a notification for prorogation, usually a few days after the House is adjourned sine die.
- 3) All pending notices lapse upon prorogation, but bills are not affected.

IE Explained: What is a joint committee of Parliament, to be set-up for 'One Nation, One Election' Bills?

Syllabus: Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal will move a motion in Parliament to refer the 'One Nation, One Election' Bills to a joint committee for further examination.

What is a JPC?

- 1) A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is an ad-hoc committee set up by Parliament for a specific purpose, such as scrutinizing a bill or investigating a particular issue.
- 2) It includes members from both Houses of Parliament and from both ruling and opposition parties.
- 3) The JPC is dissolved after completing its assigned task or when its term ends.

Formation and Composition

- 1) A JPC is established when one House of Parliament passes a motion, and the other House agrees to it.
- 2) The number of members can vary, but typically there are more members from the Lok Sabha than the Rajya Sabha.
- 3) For the 'One Nation, One Election' Bills, the proposed JPC will have 39 members: 27 from the Lok Sabha and 12 from the Rajya Sabha.


Powers and Functions

- 1) JPCs have significant investigative powers, including the ability to summon individuals, demand documents, and collect evidence.
- 2) The committee's mandate depends on the motion that establishes it.
- 3) After completing its inquiry, the JPC submits a report to Parliament with recommendations.


Impact and Limitations

- 1) While JPC recommendations have persuasive value, they are not binding on the government.
- 2) The government is required to report on actions taken based on JPC recommendations.


JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE (JPC)




About: An **adhoc-body** (dissolved after its term) usually set up for a specific object and duration




Members: Total members of JCP is decided by parliament. Members are from **both Houses** and from **both ruling parties and opposition**.



Power: JPC has power to **scrutinise documents and summon people for questioning** submits a report and makes recommendations to government.



Other Features: There recommendation are **not binding on government**.



Major JPC

- Joint Committee on **Bofors Contracts**
- Joint Committee to enquire into **irregularities in securities and banking transactions**
- Joint Committee on **stock- market scam**
- Joint Committee on **pesticide residues in and safety standards for soft drinks**



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3) JPC proceedings are generally confidential, except for matters of public interest.

TH Editorial: Frosty and bitter: On Parliament, the government and the Opposition

Syllabus: Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The first winter session of the 18th Lok Sabha concluded on December 20, 2024, marking one of the least productive and most acrimonious sessions in recent history.

Key Developments

Low Productivity

- 1) Rajya Sabha functioned for only 40% of scheduled time (43 hours 27 minutes)
- 2) Lok Sabha productivity was slightly better at 54.5% of scheduled time
- 3) Only one bill, the Bharatiya Vayuyan Vidheyak, 2024, passed in both houses

Heightened Acrimony

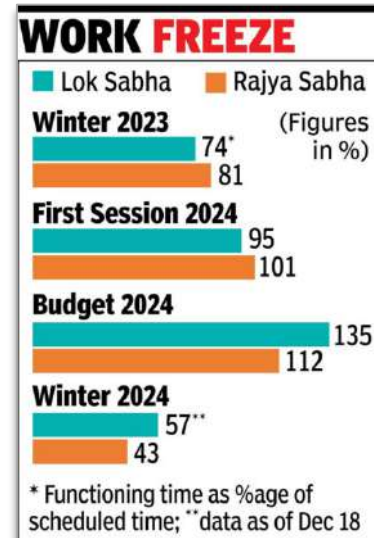
- 1) Physical scuffle broke out between MPs on the penultimate day
- 2) Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against Rajya Sabha Chairman, which was rejected
- 3) Controversy erupted over Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks about Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Legislative Business

- 1) 16 bills were scheduled, but only a handful were passed
- 2) Constitution amendment bill for simultaneous elections introduced and referred to a joint committee
- 3) Statements made on India-China relations by External Affairs Minister

Outlook

The winter session highlighted the urgent need to restore parliamentary norms and improve decorum in political discourse to ensure more productive functioning of the legislature.



IE Explained: Prior Sanction: What SC said on ED cases against public officials (Sohini Ghosh)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Supreme Court ruled on November 6, 2024, that prior government sanction is required to prosecute public servants under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), impacting ongoing cases against politicians like Arvind Kejriwal and P. Chidambaram.

Key Points of the Ruling

Applicability of CrPC Section 197 to PMLA Cases

- 1) The SC held that Section 197(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), which requires

prior sanction to prosecute public servants, applies to PMLA cases.

- 2) This provision aims to protect public servants from unnecessary prosecution for actions taken in the course of their official duties.

Reasoning Behind the Decision

- 1) The court found no inconsistency between Section 197(1) of CrPC and PMLA provisions.
- 2) It cited Section 65 of PMLA, which makes CrPC provisions applicable to PMLA proceedings unless inconsistent.

Implications for ED Cases

Impact on Ongoing and Future Prosecutions

- 1) Cognizance of chargesheets against public servants for money laundering related to

official duties may be invalidated without prior sanction.

- 2) Accused public servants can challenge convictions on grounds of lack of sanction, even after trial completion.

Procedural Changes for Enforcement Directorate

- 1) The ED must now obtain prior government sanction before prosecuting public servants under PMLA.
- 2) This adds a layer of scrutiny and potentially slows down PMLA proceedings against public servants.

Critics: It could potentially shield corrupt officials and delay proceedings

IE The Ideas Page: When court undermines itself (Dushyant Dave) [Link](#)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity, Society & Social Justice

Why in News? Four innocent lives were lost in Sambhal, arguably due to judiciary's actions or inaction regarding cases involving religious places of worship.

Legal Framework

Places of Worship Act, 1991

- 1) Prohibits conversion of places of worship
- 2) Preserves religious character as of August 15, 1947
- 3) Bars new legal proceedings on conversion of religious places

Supreme Court's Stance

- 1) Upheld the Act in 2019 Ram Janmabhoomi case
- 2) Declared the Act enforces constitutional commitment to secularism
- 3) Ruled that historical wrongs cannot be remedied by people taking law into their hands

Current Judicial Approach

Contradictory Actions

- 1) Courts, including Supreme Court, entertaining suits concerning mosques across India
- 2) District and high court judges intervening in cases prohibited by law

- 3) Potentially undermining secularism and previous court rulings

Consequences

- 1) Widening divide between majority and minority communities
- 2) Compromising peace and harmony
- 3) Loss of innocent lives, as seen in Sambhal incident

Way Forward

- 1) Need for social, economic, and political development without violence
- 2) Importance of peace for prosperity
- 3) Call for those in power to realize their duties towards all citizens

TH Text & Context: The salience of the Places of Worship Act (Aaratrika Bhaumik)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? A court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, triggered violence resulting in four deaths, highlighting concerns about suits challenging the religious character of mosques despite the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

Places of Worship Act, 1991

- 1) Enacted to preserve religious harmony after Babri Masjid demolition
- 2) Freezes religious character of places of worship as of August 15, 1947
- 3) Prohibits conversion of places of worship
- 4) Exempted Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute

Supreme Court's Stance

- 1) 2019 Ayodhya verdict upheld the Act's constitutionality
- 2) Barred similar suits for other religious places
- 3) Challenge to Act's constitutionality pending since 2022
- 4) Centre yet to file response on its stand

Gyanvapi Controversy

- 1) Justice Chandrachud's 2022 oral remarks suggested Act doesn't bar inquiries into status as of 1947
- 2) Departure from Ayodhya verdict stance
- 3) Led to similar suits being entertained by lower courts
- 4) Sparked political controversy with Congress claiming it "opened Pandora's box"

Expert Opinion

- 1) Oral remarks have no binding legal value
- 2) 1991 Act remains the law of the land
- 3) Lower courts bound to enforce it
- 4) Delay in hearing constitutional challenge emboldening lower courts to disregard Act
- 5) Authoritative Supreme Court pronouncement crucial to preserve social fabric

TH Frontpage: Reservation must not be based on religion, Supreme Court tells West Bengal
(Krishnadas Rajagopal)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Supreme Court orally observed that reservation must not be based on religion while hearing West Bengal's appeal against a Calcutta High Court judgment striking down its policy to include several castes, mostly Muslim communities, in the State's OBC list.

Key Points

Court's Observations:

- 1) Reservation cannot be based solely on religion
- 2) The bench questioned whether misuse of a provision for reservation grounds could be to set it aside

West Bengal's Defence:

- 1) Senior advocate Kapil Sibal argued that the criterion for including Muslim communities in the OBC list was based on backwardness, not religion
- 2) The state government claims to have quantifiable data to support the inclusion

High Court Judgment:

- 1) The Calcutta High Court had concluded that religion was the "sole criterion" for declaring these communities as OBC
- 2) It struck down portions of the West Bengal Backward Classes Act, 2012, affecting about 500,000 OBC certificates issued since 2010

Next Steps

- 1) The Supreme Court has scheduled a detailed hearing for January 7, 2025
- 2) The court will consider whether interim relief can be granted to the 77 communities for admissions this year

Legal Provisions for Reservations

Constitutional Basis

- 1) **Article 15(4):** Allows special provisions for advancement of socially and educationally backward classes, SCs, and STs
- 2) **Article 16(4):** Permits reservation in appointments/posts for any backward class not adequately represented in state services
- 3) **Article 46:** Directs the state to promote educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly SCs and STs

Key Amendments

- 1) **77th Amendment (1995):** Inserted Article 16(4A) to enable reservation in promotions for SCs and STs
- 2) **81st Amendment:** Allowed treating backlog reserved vacancies as a separate group not subject to 50% ceiling
- 3) **103rd Amendment (2019):** Provided 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) in the general category

Judicial Interpretations

- 1) **Indra Sawhney case (1992):** Set 50% cap on reservations, excluded "creamy layer" from OBC quota
- 2) **M. Nagaraj case (2006):** Upheld validity of reservation in promotions, but required states to show:
 - a) Backwardness of the class
 - b) Inadequacy of representation
 - c) Overall administrative efficiency
- 3) **Jarnail Singh v. Lachhmi Narain Gupta (2018)**

- a) Upheld the application of the "creamy layer" concept to SCs and STs in promotions
- b) Clarified that states need not collect quantifiable data to show backwardness of SCs and STs
- c) Reaffirmed the need to show inadequacy of representation and maintain efficiency
- 4) **Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India (2022)**
 - a) Upheld the constitutional validity of the 103rd Amendment providing 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)
 - b) Ruled that the 50% cap on reservations is not inviolable
 - c) Held that economic criteria alone can be the basis for affirmative action
- 5) **State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024)**
 - a) Allowed sub-classification within SC/ST categories for reservation purposes
 - b) Overruled the earlier E.V. Chinnaiah judgment that prohibited such sub-classification
 - c) Held that states have the power to sub-classify SCs and STs based on relative backwardness

- 2) Upset over Dhankhar naming Congress MP Abhishek Singhvi in a controversy
- 3) Dissatisfaction with Chair allowing discussion on alleged Congress links to George Soros



Impeachment of Vice President of India

Constitutional Provisions

- 1) Article 67(b) governs the removal process of the Vice President.
- 2) No formal impeachment procedure exists, unlike for the President.
- 3) No specific grounds for removal are mentioned in the Constitution.

Initiation of Removal

- 1) Resolution can be introduced only in the Rajya Sabha.
- 2) Requires at least 14 days' advance notice before moving the resolution.

Voting Process

- 1) Rajya Sabha must pass the resolution with an effective majority (majority of all then members).
- 2) Lok Sabha must then agree to the resolution with a simple majority.

Key Points

- 1) No impeachment charges or grounds need to be specified.
- 2) Supreme Court can also remove the Vice President for electoral malpractices or not fulfilling Rajya Sabha membership eligibility (Article 71(1)).
- 3) Process is less stringent compared to Presidential impeachment, which requires a special majority in both houses.
- 4) No Vice President of India has ever been impeached or removed from office through a resolution.

IE Frontpage: Opp set to submit notice for resolution to impeach Dhankar (Manoj C G)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The INDIA bloc parties have decided to submit a notice for a no-confidence or impeachment resolution against Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar.

Key Points

Motivation and Timing:

- 1) The move is planned as a political signal, despite lacking numbers for actual impeachment
- 2) Opposition aims to submit the notice "very soon"
- 3) This is the second such attempt this year

Reasons for the Move:

- 1) Opposition accuses Dhankhar of partisanship

Aftermath

- 1) If removed, election to fill the vacancy should be held as soon as possible.
- 2) During any vacancy, the Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha performs the duties of the Vice President as Rajya Sabha chairperson.

TH Frontpage: Reservation must not be based on religion, Supreme Court tells West Bengal
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Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

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IE Explained: Impeachment of Judges (Apurva Vishwanath & Ajoy Sinha Karpuram)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Opposition parties are preparing to move a motion to impeach Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court due to his controversial remarks against minorities.

What Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court said?



On Majority Rule: "I have no hesitation in stating that this is 'Hindustan', and this country will function according to the wishes of the majority living here. This is the law.

On Law and Majority: "It is not about speaking as a High Court Judge; rather, the law operates in accordance with the 'bahusankhyak' (majority). Consider this in the context of a family or society - only what ensures the welfare and happiness of the majority will be accepted."

On Uniform Civil Code: "UCC isn't something that VHP, RSS, or Hinduism advocates... I am speaking here, among them... Not just saying. I am taking an oath that this country will definitely bring a single law, and it will bring it very soon."

On Religious Practices: "You can't claim the right to have four wives, perform Halala, or practice Triple Talaq. You say,... we have the right to say 'triple talaq,' and not give maintenance to women. This right will not work."

On India's Future: He allegedly said that only a Hindu could make this country a 'Vishwa Guru', and if that spirit died, it wouldn't take long for this country to become like Bangladesh or Taliban.

On Community Differences: Justice Yadav reportedly stated that children in one community were taught values of kindness and non-violence, while in another community, young people were growing up witnessing animal slaughter.

Grounds for Impeachment

A judge can be impeached on the following grounds:

- 1) **Proved Misbehaviour:** This includes any conduct that is deemed improper or unethical, potentially involving corruption or moral turpitude.
- 2) **Incapacity:** This refers to a judge's inability to perform their duties effectively, which may include mental incapacity or other significant impairments.

Impeachment Process

The impeachment process for judges in India is governed by **Articles 124(4) and 218** of the Constitution, along with the **Judges Inquiry Act, 1968**. The steps involved are as follows:

- 1) **Initiation of Motion:**
 - a) A motion for impeachment must be signed by at least 100 members in the Lok Sabha or 50 members in the Rajya Sabha.
 - b) The motion can be introduced in either House of Parliament.

- 2) **Admission of Motion:** The Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha) reviews the motion and decides whether to admit it.
- 3) **Formation of Inquiry Committee:**
 - a) If admitted, a three-member committee is formed, consisting of:
 - i) A Supreme Court judge,
 - ii) The Chief Justice of a High Court,
 - iii) A distinguished jurist.
 - b) This committee investigates the allegations and frames charges.
- 4) **Investigation and Reporting:**
 - a) The committee conducts its inquiry, which may involve collecting evidence and hearing testimonies.
 - b) After concluding its investigation, it submits a report to the Speaker/Chairman.
- 5) **Parliamentary Vote:**
 - a) If the committee finds the judge guilty, the motion is debated in the House where it was introduced.
 - b) For removal, the motion must be passed by:
 - i) A majority of the total membership of that House,
 - ii) A two-thirds majority of those present and voting.
- 6) **Presidential Order:** Once both Houses pass the motion, it is sent to the President of India, who issues an order for removal.

Historical Context

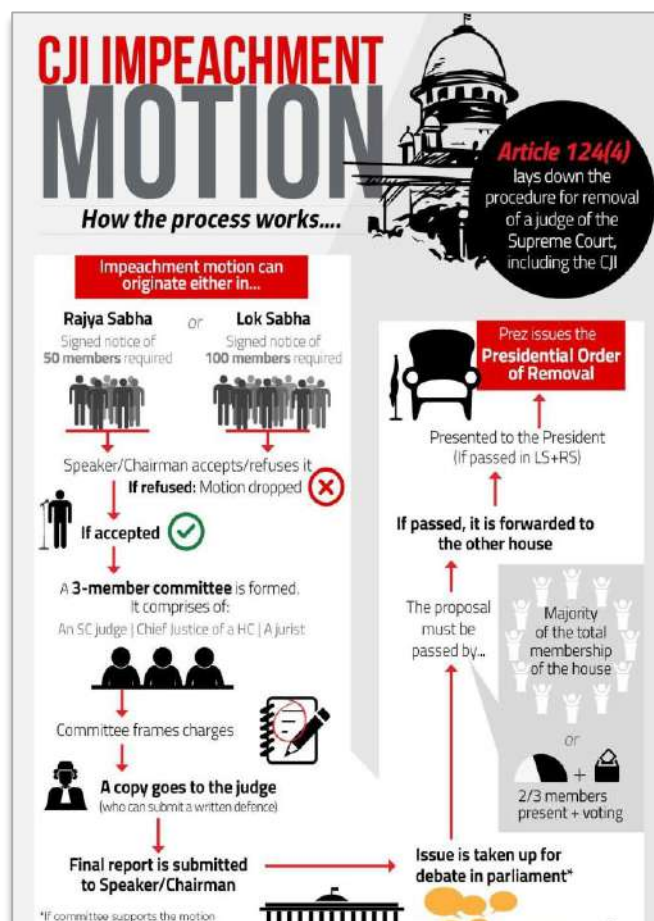
Impeachment attempts in India have historically faced challenges:

- 1) There have been six attempts at impeachment since Independence, none of which have successfully led to a judge's removal.
- 2) Notable cases include:
 - a) **Justice V Ramaswami (1993)** faced impeachment for financial impropriety but was not removed.
 - b) **Justice Soumitra Sen (2011)** resigned before a scheduled vote after being impeached by Rajya Sabha.

This rigorous process aims to protect judicial independence while ensuring accountability among judges. However, it also highlights the political nature of such proceedings, often influenced by party dynamics within Parliament.

TH Text & Context: What is the procedure for removing judges? (Rangarajan R)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Fifty-five Rajya Sabha MPs have moved a motion seeking the removal of Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court, citing his controversial remarks at a Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) event.



Constitutional Provisions

Grounds for Removal:

- 1) As per **Articles 124(4) and 217** of the Constitution, a judge can be removed only on two grounds:
 - a) Proved misbehaviour.
 - b) Incapacity.
- 2) These terms are not explicitly defined in the Constitution but have been interpreted to include corruption, lack of integrity, or medical incapacity.

Role of Parliament and President:

- 1) A judge's removal requires an address by both Houses of Parliament, supported by:
 - a) A majority of the total membership.
 - b) At least two-thirds of members present and voting (special majority).
- 2) The motion must be presented in the same session to the President, who then issues the removal order.

IMPEACHMENT PROCEEDINGS

- A **removal motion** signed by 100 members (in case of Lok Sabha) or 50 members (in case of Rajya Sabha) is to be given to the Speaker/Chairman.
- If the motion is admitted, then a **three-member committee to investigate** into the charges is constituted.
- If the committee finds the judge to be guilty of the charges (**misbehaviour or incapacity**), the House in which the motion was introduced, can take up the consideration of the motion.

Special majority: Majority of total membership of the House & majority of not less than two thirds members present and voting.

- Once, the House in which removal motion was introduced passes it with **special majority**, it goes to the second House which also has to pass it with a special majority.
- After the motion is passed, an **address** is presented to the President for removal of the judge. The President then passes an order removing the judge.



Procedure for Removal Under Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968

Initiation

- 1) A motion must be signed by at least:
 - a) 100 Lok Sabha MPs.
 - b) 50 Rajya Sabha MPs.
- 2) The Speaker (Lok Sabha) or Chairman (Rajya Sabha) decides whether to admit the motion.

Investigation

- 1) If admitted, a three-member committee is constituted to investigate. It includes:
 - a) A Supreme Court judge.
 - b) A Chief Justice of a High Court.
 - c) A distinguished jurist.

- 2) The committee examines evidence and provides a report.

Parliamentary Debate:

- 1) If the committee finds the judge guilty, Parliament debates and votes on the motion.
- 2) Both Houses must pass it with a special majority.

Presidential Order: If approved by both Houses, an address is sent to the President for issuing a removal order.

Challenges in Judge Removal

- 1) **Stringent Process:** The requirement for a special majority in both Houses makes it difficult to remove judges even if found guilty by the inquiry committee.
- 2) **Independence of Judiciary:** The rigorous process ensures judicial independence but also limits accountability in cases of ethical violations not amounting to removal.

The case against Justice Yadav highlights concerns about judicial ethics and impartiality. While impeachment is rare due to its stringent requirements, it underscores the need for mechanisms that maintain public confidence in the judiciary while safeguarding its independence.

TH Text & Context: The challenge of holding judges accountable (Kunal Shankar)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? A speech by Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court, displaying apparent bias against the Muslim community, has reignited discussions on the difficulties in holding judges of higher judiciary accountable in India.

Current Review Mechanism

- 1) Requires "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" to be determined by a three-member committee under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.
- 2) Committee functions like a trial court but is activated only after a successful impeachment attempt in either the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha.

- 3) Impeachment process must be approved by the presiding officer of the respective House.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

- 1) Provisions stem from Articles 124 (4), (5), 217, and 218 of the Constitution of India.
- 2) Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 provides additional guidelines.
- 3) 'Restatement of Values of Judicial Life' adopted by the Supreme Court in 1997 serves as a code of conduct for judiciary.

Notable Cases and Challenges

- 1) **Justice V. Ramaswami:**
 - a) First judge found guilty by the three-member committee.
 - b) Impeachment motion failed in Lok Sabha due to abstentions.
- 2) **Justice Soumitra Sen:**
 - a) First judge voted to be removed by Rajya Sabha.
 - b) Resigned before Lok Sabha vote, avoiding formal removal.
- 3) **Chief Justice P.D. Dinakaran:**
 - a) Resigned on the day of the committee's first sitting.
 - b) Highlighted the issue of judges retaining benefits post-resignation.

Ongoing Debates

- 1) Questions raised about continuing investigations after a judge's resignation.
- 2) Concerns about the current system allowing judges to potentially avoid accountability through resignation.
- 3) Discussions on the need for reforms in the judicial accountability framework.

IE Explained: Religion and Reservation (Ajay Sinha Karouram)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Supreme Court recently made oral observations that "Reservation cannot be on the basis of religion" while hearing a challenge to the Calcutta High Court's decision to strike down OBC reservations for predominantly Muslim classes.

OBC Reservations and Religion

- 1) No express bar exists against identifying religious groups as OBC reservation beneficiaries
- 2) Several states, including Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, have provided OBC reservations for Muslim groups
- 3) The Indra Sawhney v Union of India (1992) judgment stated that religion alone cannot be the sole criteria for OBC reservations
- 4) In May 2024, the Calcutta High Court struck down OBC reservations for 77 classes (75 from the Muslim community) due to lack of objective criteria.

SC on Reservations and Religious Conversion

- 1) **The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950** limits SC status to Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists
- 2) **The Supreme Court, in Soosai v. Union of India (1985)**, held that religious converts must prove continued caste-based discrimination to access SC benefits
- 3) **The Ranganath Mishra Commission (2007)** recommended that religious conversion should not affect SC status, but the Centre has disputed these findings.

Ongoing Deliberations

- 1) The Supreme Court is considering whether OBC reservations can be provided to a religious group as a whole

A commission chaired by former Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan is examining whether religious converts should retain their SC status, with the report due in October 2025.

TH Text & Context: The mosque which face survey petitions (Ziya Us Salam)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – History, Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Former Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud's 2022 oral observation that the Places of Worship Act does not bar ascertaining religious character of structures has led to a surge in petitions seeking surveys of mosques and dargahs.

Key Developments

Rising Survey Petitions

- 1) Multiple district and sessions courts in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have admitted petitions to "ascertain religious character" of medieval-era mosques and ordered surveys.
- 2) Notable sites facing survey calls include Ajmer Dargah, Adhai Din ka Jhonpra, Shahi Jama Masjid (Sambhal), Gyanvapi Mosque, and Shahi Eidgah (Mathura).

Ajmer Dargah Controversy

- 1) Petition filed claiming Ajmer Dargah was originally a Hindu temple.
- 2) Sparked uproar as the dargah is frequented by all communities and receives official recognition.

Adhai Din ka Jhonpra Dispute

- 1) 12th century mosque facing claims of being originally a Sanskrit college and temple.
- 2) ASI maintains it was built as a mosque by Qutubddin Aibak around 1200 AD.
- 3) Conflicting historical accounts exist regarding its origins.

Legal and Social Implications

Places of Worship Act Provisions

- 1) The 1991 Act prohibits changing religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947.
- 2) Lower courts appear to be disregarding these provisions while admitting survey petitions.

Concerns Raised

- 1) Retired bureaucrats and army personnel have written to the Prime Minister about the "ideological assault on India's civilisational heritage".
- 2) All India Muslim Personal Law Board has appealed to the Supreme Court to take suo moto notice and restrict lower courts from entertaining such petitions.

IE Frontpage: SC steps in: Stop all surveys until we decide Places of Worship Act (Ananthakrishnan G)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Supreme Court has barred registration of new suits and ordered a stay on proceedings in existing cases related to places of worship until it decides on the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT: A TIMELINE	
1991: Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act enacted; said "religious character" of a place of worship will remain as it was on August 15, 1947. Only exception: "Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid". The Ayodhya agitation was raging at the time; Babri Masjid was still standing.	the Gyanvapi mosque.
Oct 2020: First petition filed challenging the Act; five more filed subsequently – on grounds of arbitrariness on date, and the fact that it takes away judicial review.	May 2022: After case reached SC, then CJI D Y Chandrachud orally observed that a survey "may not necessarily fall foul" of the Places of Worship Act.
Aug 2021: Five women filed suit in Varanasi seeking permission to pray at	2022-2024: At least six suits were filed claiming past existence of a Hindu temple at the site of a mosque or dargah. Surveys were ordered in three of these cases.
Dec 2024: SC barred further survey orders, further "effective" orders, and the registering of fresh suits.	Dec 2024: SC barred further survey orders, further "effective" orders, and the registering of fresh suits.
— AJAY SINHA KARPURAM	

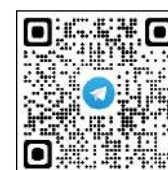
Key Developments

- 1) **Freeze on New Cases:** No fresh suits challenging ownership or title of places of worship can be registered across India.
- 2) **Stay on Existing Cases:** Courts cannot pass any effective interim or final orders, including survey orders, in pending suits.
- 3) Effectively halts proceedings in high-profile cases like Gyanvapi mosque (Varanasi), Shahi Idgah (Mathura), and Jama Masjid (Sambhal).
- 4) **Centre's Response Sought:** The government has been given 4 weeks to file its reply on petitions challenging the Act's validity.
- 5) **Next Hearing:** The matter will be heard again on February 17, 2025.



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PENDING SUITS ON MOSQUE-TEMPLE DISPUTES



Gajendra Yadav

SHAHI JAMA MASJID, SAMBHAL

Case: Suit filed on November 19 claiming mosque was built on ruins of an ancient temple that was dedicated to Lord Kalki.
Status: Civil Judge (Senior Division), Sambhal ordered survey, which triggered violence on November 24, in which several people were killed. On November 29, SC asked court not to proceed with suit for now.



Wikimedia Commons

ATALA MOSQUE, JAUNPUR

Case: Suit filed in May 2024 seeking declaration that Atala Devi temple existed at site; possession of property; restraining order against non-Hindus.
Status: Survey ordered; Jaunpur court was to hear plea for security to surveyors on December 16. Petition filed at Allahabad HC challenging registration of suit.



Wikimedia Commons

KAMAL MOULA MOSQUE, BHOJSHALA COMPLEX, DHAR

Case: Petition filed before MP HC in 2022 challenging 2003 ASI order allowing Muslims to offer *namaz* on Fridays.
Status: In March 2024, HC sought "scientific survey". In April, SC disallowed digging that changes character of premises.



Remika Puri

GYANVAPI MOSQUE, VARANASI

Case: Suit filed on behalf of Adi Vishveshwar in 1991. In 2021 five Hindu women sought permission to worship there.
Status: Sessions Judge ordered ASI survey; upheld maintainability of 2021 suit in 2023. Maintainability of 1991 suit was also upheld in 2022.



Wikimedia Commons

SHAMSI JAMA MASJID, BUDAUN

Case: Suit filed in 2022 by Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha claiming temple to Neelkanth Mahadev stood at site; seeking permission to pray.
Status: Fast-track court in Budaun is currently hearing arguments on maintainability of the suit.



Wikimedia Commons

QUWWAT-UL-ISLAM MOSQUE, DELHI

Case: In 2020, suit filed seeking restoration of Hindu and Jain deities inside mosque in Qutub Minar complex.
Status: Civil Judge rejected suit in 2021 stating it was barred by provisions of Places of Worship Act, 1991. Challenge to this order is pending.



Apurva Vishwanath

SHAHI IDGAH MOSQUE, MATHURA

Case: Several suits filed since 2020 seeking removal of mosque; also question validity of 1968 "agreement" that allowed mosque and a new temple to co-exist.
Status: In August 2024, Allahabad HC rejected challenge to maintainability of suits. Mosque committee has gone to SC.



Wikimedia Commons

TEEL WALI MASJID, LUCKNOW

Case: In 2013, suit filed by Hindus seeking survey of mosque allegedly built after Aurangzeb demolished temple.
Status: Maintainability of suit pending before Allahabad HC; suit seeking injunction to allow Hindu devotees to pray pending before Civil Judge.



Wikimedia Commons

AJMER SHARIF DARGAH, AJMER

Case: Suit filed in September 2024 claiming there is evidence of a temple to Lord Shiva at the site.
Status: Civil Judge issued notices to Union Ministry of Minority Affairs, ASI, and the Ajmer Dargah Committee on November 27.



Express

MALALI JUMA MASJID, MANGALURU

Case: Suit filed in 2022 by VHP claiming "temple like" structure was found beneath the mosque during renovation; requested survey of premises.
Status: On January 31, 2024 Karnataka HC ordered trial court to first decide on maintainability of suit.



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IE Explained: In Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar & Munshi's views on UCC (Rishika Singh)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Prime Minister Narendra Modi renewed his pitch for a nationwide Uniform Civil Code (UCC) on December 14, 2024, recalling the views of Dr. BR Ambedkar and KM Munshi from the 1948 Constituent Assembly debates.

Key Points from the 1948 Debate

KM Munshi's Stance:

- 1) Supported UCC as essential for national unity and modernization
- 2) Argued against the notion of UCC being tyrannical to minorities
- 3) Emphasized the need to restrict religion to appropriate spheres and unify the rest of life
- 4) Pointed out that UCC was necessary for ensuring equality, especially for women

BR Ambedkar's Position:

- 1) Advocated for Article 35 (later Article 44) on UCC
- 2) Challenged the idea that Muslim personal law was immutable and uniform across India
- 3) Stressed the importance of state power to legislate on religious matters for social reform
- 4) Acknowledged the need to reconcile legislation with community sentiments

Outcome and Constitutional Status

- 1) Article 35 (later Article 44) on UCC was passed and included in the Directive Principles of State Policy
- 2) The article states: "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India"
- 3) As a Directive Principle, it is not legally binding but serves as a guiding principle for policymaking

TH Editorial: Section 6A of the Citizenship Act – Why it fails Assam (Ravi Singh Chikkara, Arnab Roy)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Supreme Court of India, in a 4:1 majority ruling in October 2024, upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which establishes a framework for migrants from former East Pakistan (Bangladesh) to acquire Indian citizenship in Assam.

Key Issues with the Ruling

Constitutional Concerns

- 1) The judgment overlooks potential violations of Article 29, which protects distinct cultural and linguistic identities
- 2) The Court's reasoning appears contradictory, acknowledging the impact of migration on Assam while dismissing its effect on Assamese culture

Demographic Shift

- 1) Research indicates a significant increase in the Bengali-speaking population and a decline in the Assamese-speaking population in Assam between 1951 and 2011
- 2) This shift represents a cultural and linguistic displacement that undermines the distinct identity of the Assamese people

Temporal Unreasonableness

- 1) Section 6A lacks a temporal limitation, allowing indefinite applications for citizenship
- 2) The law remains in force over 40 years after its cut-off date, rendering it ineffective in addressing its original purpose

Flaws in Implementation

Identification Mechanism

- 1) The process for identifying migrants under Section 6A(3) is flawed, placing the burden on the state without means for voluntary self-identification
- 2) The absence of deadlines for referrals allows the law to remain operational indefinitely

Overburdened Tribunal System

- 1) Foreigners' tribunals, responsible for determining citizenship status, are overwhelmed by the volume of cases
- 2) The process is slowed down by individuals claiming to fall under Section 6A, even if they don't qualify

The Supreme Court's ruling fails to address key constitutional concerns, particularly regarding the cultural and demographic impact on Assam's indigenous population and overlooks the provision's temporal unreasonableness.

TH Opinion: Should legislatures in India have fixed tenures? (P D T Achary, M R Madhavan)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17, 2024, proposes fixed five-year terms for the Lok Sabha and aligned State Legislature elections.

Key Provisions of the Bill

- 1) **Fixed Terms:** Mandates a five-year term for the Lok Sabha and aligns State Assembly elections with this cycle.
- 2) **Mid-term Elections:** If a legislature is dissolved before completing its full term, elections will be held only for the remainder of the five-year term.
- 3) **Alignment:** Standardizes the timing of all elections to a common date, affecting both central and state legislatures.

Potential Impacts

Governance and Accountability

- 1) **Reduced Disruptions:** May promote better governance by reducing frequent elections
- 2) **Political Accountability:** Frequent elections currently enhance accountability, compelling representatives to engage regularly with the electorate

Federalism and Political Plurality

- 1) **State Autonomy:** Critics argue it may undermine the principles of federalism by

making State Assembly tenures contingent on Parliament

- 2) **Voter Choices:** Proponents believe voters can make distinct choices for central and state governments, even in simultaneous elections

Political Stability

- 1) **Deterring Destabilization:** May discourage attempts to destabilize governments, though its effectiveness is uncertain
- 2) **Shortened Terms:** Could result in legislatures with very short tenures if mid-term elections occur late in the five-year cycle

Considerations and Alternatives

- 1) **German Model:** The constructive vote of no-confidence was considered but deemed unfeasible for India
- 2) **UK Experience:** Lessons from the UK's Fixed-term Parliaments Act (2011-2022) highlight potential risks of constitutional crises and policy paralysis

Concluding Thoughts

The bill introduces significant changes to India's electoral system, aiming for synchronization but raising concerns about federalism and political flexibility. Its long-term impacts on governance and political stability remain to be seen.

Special Coverage:

CNBC TV18: Why 'One Nation One Election' and what happens next?

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)



The two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections in the country were introduced in Lok Sabha on Tuesday, December 17, after a fiery debate, with the opposition terming the move "anti-constitutional" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states.

THE ONOE BILLS

Two bills, which aim to achieve One Nation One Election (ONOE), were introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 17:

- The Constitution 129th Amendment Bill 2024**
Seeks to hold simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.
- The Union Territories Laws Amendment Bill 2024**
Proposes to make amendments in the Government of Union Territories Act 1962, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act 1991 and the J&K Reorganisation Act 2019, to align their electoral cycle with the Lok Sabha polls.

Together the two bills aim to achieve simultaneous elections across states and UTs with the General polls.

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The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill:

The first bill introduces Article 82A to synchronize Lok Sabha and state assembly elections and amends Articles 83, 172, and 327. It allows the Election Commission to recommend delayed assembly polls if simultaneous elections are unfeasible.

Second Constitutional Amendment Bill:

The second bill introduces Article 324A, empowering the central government to align municipal and panchayat elections with Lok Sabha and assembly polls. As local body elections fall under the State List, this bill requires ratification by at least half the states under Article 368.

NOT A NEW IDEA

Simultaneous elections were the norm from India's first election in 1951 until 1967.

- The first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52. The practice continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967.
- This cycle was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of some State Legislative Assemblies. The Fourth Lok Sabha was also dissolved prematurely in 1970.

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Simultaneous elections were the norm in India until 1967. The cycle was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to premature dissolution

on some State Legislative Assemblies. The initiative seeks to bring back the simultaneous election cycle to address issues such as financial expenditure, administrative burden, and developmental disruptions caused by frequent elections.

BEHIND INDIA'S STAGGERED POLLS

Premature dissolutions and term extensions disrupted the cycle of simultaneous elections, leading to the current pattern of staggered electoral schedules across the country.

Lok Sabha	Year of constitution of Lok Sabha	Overall term
1st	1952	5 years
2nd	1957	5 years
3rd	1962	5 years
4th	1967	3 years, 10 months
5th	1971	5 years, 10 months*
6th	1977	2 years, 5 months
7th	1980	5 years
8th	1984	5 years
9th	1989	1 year, 3 months
10th	1991	5 years
11th	1996	1 year, 6 months
12th	1998	1 year, 1 month
13th	1999	4 years, 4 months
14th	2004	5 years
15th	2009	5 years
16th	2014	5 years
17th	2019	5 years

*Extended due to emergency

Year of constitution of various Lok Sabhas and their overall terms

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One Nation, One Election is a concept aimed at synchronising elections for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, as was the norm in India from 1951-52 to 1967. The ONOE proposal aims to bring back this practice, reducing election-related costs, improving administrative efficiency, and minimising the frequency of election-related disruptions.

HOW WILL IT BE IMPLEMENTED

In March 2024, the High-Level Committee (chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind) on 'One Nation, One Election' submitted its report.

The Kovind Committee...

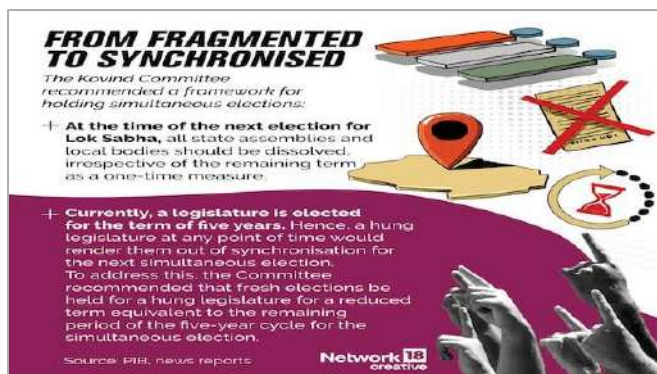
- Engaged in 65 meetings with a range of stakeholders to gather feedback.
- Took 191 days of extensive consultations to complete the report.

The committee recommended a two-step approach to lead to the simultaneous elections.

- Step 1** Simultaneous elections to be held for the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies.
- Step 2** The elections to the municipalities and the panchayats to be held within 100 days of holding the Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

Network 18 creative

Once passed in both Houses of Parliament and ratified where necessary, the bills will be sent to the President for assent. After receiving the President's approval, an implementation group will execute the changes. The bills also propose a single electoral roll for all elections within a constituency, requiring an amendment to Article 325. This provision will similarly require state ratification.



The Law Commission is expected to recommend holding simultaneous elections across three tiers of government—Lok Sabha, state assemblies, and local bodies—beginning in 2029. Additionally, the Commission may suggest provisions for a unity government to ensure governance stability in cases of a hung legislature.

TH Text & Context: What are the new interception rules and safeguards (R K Vij)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian government notified new rules for lawful interception of messages on December 6, 2024, superseding Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951.

Key Provisions of the New Rules

1) Authorized Authorities

- Union Home Secretary and State Home Secretaries are the primary competent authorities to order message interception
- In urgent cases, Joint Secretary-level officers can issue interception orders
- Heads of authorized agencies can issue orders in remote areas or for operational reasons

2) Duration and Oversight

- Interception orders valid for up to 60 days, extendable to 180 days maximum
- Review committees at central and state levels to examine interception orders
- Records of interceptions must be destroyed every six months, unless required for functional needs or court directions

3) Safeguards and Procedures

- Interception allowed only if information cannot be acquired through other means
- Orders issued in remote areas must be confirmed by competent authority within seven days
- Intercepted messages cannot be used if confirmation is not received within the stipulated period

Concerns and Criticisms

- Lack of independent oversight, as review committees consist solely of executive members
- No specified penalties for unauthorized interceptions or misuse of powers
- Unclear coverage of online messaging services like WhatsApp and Signal
- Potential impact on privacy rights and transparency in surveillance activities

IE Govt & Politics: Ex-SC judge V Ramasubramanian appointed new NHRC chairperson (Ajoy Sinha Karpuram)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? Former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian has been appointed as the 9th Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) for a three-year term until December 2027.

Key Details

- Appointment Process:** Appointed by the President of India based on recommendation from a selection committee.
- Previous Role:** Retired as Supreme Court judge on June 29, 2023, after serving for over 3 years.
- Notable Cases:** Part of benches that upheld demonetization and set aside RBI circular on cryptocurrency services.

Selection and Appointment of NHRC Chairperson

Appointed by the President of India based on recommendations from a high-level committee.

Selection Committee Composition

- Prime Minister (chairperson)

- 2) Home Minister
- 3) Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha
- 4) Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha
- 5) Speaker of the Lok Sabha
- 6) Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha

Eligibility Criteria

- 1) Must be a former Chief Justice of India or a Judge of the Supreme Court.
- 2) The 2019 amendment allows both retired Chief Justices of India and retired/serving judges of the Supreme Court to be eligible.

Tenure and Age Limit

- 1) Holds office for a term of three years or until attaining the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.
- 2) Eligible for reappointment after completing the term.
- 3) 2019 amendment reduced the term from five years to three years.

Removal Process

- 1) Can be removed by the President under specific circumstances like insolvency, outside employment, incapacity, or criminal conviction.
- 2) Removal for proven misbehaviour or incapacity requires an inquiry by the Supreme Court.

TH Editorial: India's 'steel frame' does need a check (Vinod Bhanu)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance [Link](#)

Why in News? India's governance challenges and persistent issues within the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) have highlighted the urgent need for administrative reforms to modernize the bureaucracy and unlock the country's economic potential.

Challenges of the IAS

- 1) Political interference in transfers, suspensions, and promotions
- 2) Lack of specialization due to frequent rotations across departments
- 3) Outdated personnel practices

- 4) Corruption and inefficiency plaguing the bureaucracy
- 5) Moderate ranking in World Bank's measure of government effectiveness
- 6) Centralized decision-making leading to bottlenecks in policy implementation
- 7) Risk of undermining autonomy of senior bureaucrats due to power centralization in PMO

Challenges to Reform

- 1) Resistance from within IAS to changes in seniority-based progression
- 2) Political interference complicating reform efforts
- 3) Limited impact of judicial interventions due to lack of enforcement
- 4) Proposals like Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010) stalled

Push for Reforms

- 1) Over 50 commissions and committees since independence to reimagine administrative apparatus
- 2) Recent government initiatives:
 - a) Curbing politicized transfers
 - b) Enhancing bureaucratic accountability
 - c) Introducing lateral entry for domain experts (57 officers appointed by 2023)
 - d) UPSC advertised 45 posts for lateral entry in 2024

Way Forward

- 1) Multifaceted approach needed:
 - a) Merit-based recruitment and promotions
 - b) Protection from politically motivated transfers
 - c) Fostering specialization in policymaking roles
 - d) Investing in data infrastructure to track bureaucratic performance
- 2) Reform essential for India's economic aspirations and effective governance

IE Explained: Key questions of religion, society, law (Apurva Vishwanath) [Link](#)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Polity & Governance, Society

Why in News? The Supreme Court of India is poised to address significant legal issues in 2025, following a year of notable judicial interventions and upcoming legislative changes.

Judicial Landscape Changes:

- 1) The Supreme Court has shifted from "judicial evasion" to actively intervening in politically significant cases.
- 2) **Key verdicts include:**
 - a) Striking down the electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional.
 - b) Issuing guidelines against illegal demolitions.
 - c) Granting bail to jailed opposition leaders.
 - d) Reversing the Gujarat government's remission for convicts in the Bilkis Bano case.

Upcoming Legal Challenges:

- 1) **Places of Worship Act:** Challenges regarding the law's constitutionality and its implications on religious sites will continue.
- 2) **Hijab Ban:** A three-judge bench will reassess the legality of restrictions on wearing headscarves in educational institutions.

- 3) **Essential Religious Practice Test:** The Supreme Court will review its previous rulings related to religious practices, impacting various communities.
- 4) **Citizenship Act:** Ongoing challenges to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which excludes Muslims from certain citizenship provisions, are expected to be addressed.
- 5) **Marital Rape:** The legality of the marital rape exemption is under scrutiny, with a review pending.
- 6) **Enforcement Directorate's Powers:** The Supreme Court is set to reassess the powers of the Enforcement Directorate following recent rulings that mandated procedural safeguards.

Legislative Reforms on the Horizon:

- 1) Significant bills are expected, including:
 - a) Proposals for simultaneous elections ("One Nation, One Election").
 - b) Laws on sub-classification within Scheduled Caste quotas
- 2) New criminal laws aim to modernize the justice system but face challenges regarding certain provisions that may infringe on rights.
- 3) The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will be implemented in BJP-ruled states, raising questions about personal freedoms and state intervention.



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Society & Social Justice

December 2024

TH Text & Context: Is the caste Census a useful exercise? (Anish Gupta, Shubham Sharma)
 Syllabus: Mains – Society & Social Justice [Link](#)

Why in News? The demand for a caste census has become a heated political issue in India, with calls from opposition leaders, NGOs, and recently the RSS.

Key Issues with Caste Census Historical Challenges

- 1) First detailed caste census in 1871-72 faced issues with arbitrary classifications and regional variations
- 2) 1931 census identified 4,147 castes, with groups claiming different identities across regions
- 3) 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census found over 46.7 lakh castes/sub-castes with 8.2 crore errors

Data Accuracy Problems

- 1) Upward mobility claims: Communities report belonging to higher castes for perceived prestige
- 2) Downward mobility claims: Some claim lower caste status for reservation benefits
- 3) Caste misclassification: Similar surnames lead to confusion and incorrect categorization
- 4) Sensitivity around caste discussions may lead to assumptions based on surnames

Issues with Proportional Representation Impracticality for Individual Castes

- 1) With ~6,000 castes, average population per caste is ~2.3 lakh
- 2) For least populous caste (10,000 people), 1,40,845 positions needed for one vacancy
- 3) Using UPSC example: 141 years needed to provide one vacancy to smallest caste

Regressive Outcomes

- 1) Disproportionately excludes least populous castes from reservation benefits
- 2) With 46.7 lakh castes/subcastes (SECC 2011), over 7,000 years needed for smallest caste to get one UPSC vacancy

The caste census faces significant challenges in data collection and accuracy. Implementing proportional representation at the individual caste level would be impractical and lead to regressive outcomes, excluding the smallest castes from benefits.

IE The Editorial Page: Healthcare, more responsive (K Sujatha Rao)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Society & Social Justice [Link](#)

Why in News? K. Sujatha Rao, former health secretary of India, argues that Universal Health Coverage (UHC) must focus on guaranteeing care through robust health systems, not just providing insurance.

Challenges in Achieving UHC in India

- 1) **Political and Social Barriers**
 - a) Lack of political traction for ideas of equality
 - b) Fractured and unequal society
- 2) **Resource Constraints**
 - a) Public health spending at 1-1.3% of GDP, far below WHO norm of 3%
 - b) High out-of-pocket expenditure (45-54% of total health spending)
- 3) **Human Resource Issues**
 - a) Lopsided incentive structures
 - b) Shortage of skilled personnel (e.g., 80% vacancy for specialists in Community Health Centers)
- 4) **Private Sector Concerns**
 - a) Trend towards corporatization and commercialization
 - b) Increasing foreign investment leading to steep care costs

Necessary Actions for Effective UHC

- 1) **Increased Funding:** Double health funding for comprehensive primary healthcare
- 2) **Holistic Approach:** Ensure universal access to social health determinants (nutrition, water, hygiene, education)
- 3) **Workforce Development:**
 - a) Deploy appropriately trained and skilled human resources
 - b) Implement accountability measures for health providers
- 4) **Governance Improvements**
 - a) Enhance oversight of the private sector
 - b) Build state capacity to enforce health-related laws and regulations
- 5) **System Reorientation**
 - a) Shift focus from episodic to long-term care
 - b) Invest in community-based primary healthcare

TH Opinion: The digital frontier of inequality
 (Susan Jane Ferguson, Shombi Sharp)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Society & Social Justice
[Link](#)

Why in News? India's digital transformation has created opportunities for empowerment, but the rise of tech-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) poses significant challenges to women's safety online.

India's Digital Revolution and Gender Divide

India has achieved remarkable digital growth:

- 1) 1.18 billion mobile connections, 700 million Internet users, and 600 million smartphones.
- 2) Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana have increased financial inclusion, with women holding 55.6% of accounts.

Despite progress, the digital gender divide persists, particularly in rural areas where societal norms and lack of digital literacy hinder women's full participation.

A definition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence:

Action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation.



Tech-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

- 1) **Forms of TFGBV:** Includes cyberstalking, trolling, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, impersonation, fraud, voyeurism, and grooming.
- 2) **Impact:** Many women retreat from digital spaces due to harassment and lack of awareness about their rights or reporting mechanisms.
- 3) **Urban women in public-facing roles** (e.g., journalists, politicians) are frequent targets, while rural women face compounded challenges due to limited skills and societal constraints.

Government and Legal Interventions

India has implemented several measures to combat TFGBV:

- 1) **Legal Frameworks:** The Information Technology Act (2000) and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2024) address digital violence.
- 2) **Reporting Mechanisms:** Platforms like the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal allow anonymous reporting.
- 3) **Awareness Programs:** Campaigns such as 'Ab Koi Bahana Nahi' and initiatives like Digital Shakti empower women with tools for online safety.

Internationally, India is committed to agreements like the Global Digital Compact and UN-led initiatives promoting safe online environments for women.

Challenges and Gaps

- 1) **Enforcement of laws remains inconsistent**, with delays in justice for survivors.
- 2) **Social media platforms often lack robust mechanisms** to prevent or address abuse effectively.
- 3) **Limited access** to survivor support systems such as counselling and legal aid hampers recovery.

Recommendations for Safer Digital Spaces

Strengthen Legal Measures:

- 1) Enforce stricter penalties for perpetrators of online violence.
- 2) Ensure swifter justice delivery for survivors.

Enhance Digital Literacy:

- 1) Expand programs targeting rural areas.
- 2) Integrate online safety into school curriculums and community workshops.

Engage Men as Allies: Nationwide campaigns challenging societal norms can foster inclusive digital environments.

Collaborate with Tech Industry:

- 1) Improve safety features on platforms using AI for detecting abusive content while ensuring human oversight.
- 2) Develop user-friendly reporting mechanisms for abuse cases.

Support Systems for Survivors:

- 1) Strengthen helplines like TechSakhi for timely assistance.
- 2) Provide accessible counselling, legal aid, and rehabilitation services.



Ensuring women's safety online is not only a moral imperative but also critical for India's progress. A collaborative effort involving governments, tech companies, civil society groups, and international organizations is essential to create inclusive and secure digital spaces. As emphasized by the campaign "Ab Koi Bahana Nahi," there is no room for excuses in addressing this pressing issue.

IE The Editorial Page: Test, Not Stress

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Society/Social Justice [Link](#)

Why in News? The Radhakrishnan panel's recommendations for improving national entrance examinations in India have been welcomed as a necessary step to address longstanding issues in the higher education system.

Key Recommendations of Radhakrishnan Panel

- 1) **Infrastructure and Security Improvements**
 - a) Enhance exam infrastructure and security protocols
 - b) Implement a "digi-exam" system with biometric verification
 - c) Migrate to computer adaptive testing for personalized question selection

2) Restructuring the National Testing Agency (NTA)

- a) Reduce dependence on NTA by limiting its role to entrance exams only
- b) Decrease reliance on third-party service providers to minimize vulnerabilities

3) Collaborative Approach

- a) Establish tiered collaboration between Centre and states for exam security management
- b) Develop a comprehensive review process for the entire examination system

Significance

1) Addressing Systemic Issues

- a) Acknowledges problems plaguing higher education entrance exams
- b) Aims to reduce paper leaks, postponements, and result delays

2) Enhancing Fairness and Efficiency

- a) Improved security measures to maintain exam integrity
- b) Streamlined processes for more efficient exam administration

Implementation Challenges

1) Digital Divide Concerns

- a) Ensure new systems don't create unintended inequalities
- b) Develop intuitive interfaces accessible to all candidates

2) Preparation and Support

- a) Meticulous planning required for successful tech-driven overhaul
- b) Adequate support systems needed for candidates to navigate new processes

The panel's suggestions represent a positive step towards creating a more transparent, efficient, and stress-free examination system for students across India.



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International Relations

December 2024

IE Explained: BRICS currency, Trump Threat

(Ravi Dutta Mishra)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations

[Link](#)

Why in News? US President-elect Donald Trump has threatened BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) with 100% tariffs if they create a new currency or support any alternative to replace the US dollar as the world's reserve currency.

Background and Context

- 1) **US Dollar Dominance:** The US dollar accounts for 88% of global forex turnover, while the Indian rupee accounts for 1.6%
- 2) **Weaponization of Financial Systems:** The US has used its influence over global financial systems, such as SWIFT, to impose unilateral sanctions on countries like Iran and Russia



- 3) **Gradual Shift:** The IMF reports a gradual decline in the dollar's share of central bank and government foreign reserves
- 4) **Rise of Non-Traditional Currencies:** There's an increase in the use of non-traditional reserve currencies, including the Chinese renminbi
- 5) **BRICS Response:** Countries are seeking to reduce dependence on the US dollar and US-led global financial system

India's Position and Actions

- 1) **Rupee Internationalization:** In 2022, the Reserve Bank of India allowed invoicing and payments for international trade in Indian rupees
- 2) **Diplomatic Stance:** India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar stated that avoiding the use of the US dollar is not part of India's economic policy
- 3) **Trade with Russia:** India-Russia trade in domestic currency remains low due to fears of US sanctions and an unbalanced trade relationship

Implications and Expert Opinions

- 1) **Potential Backfire:** Experts suggest that a 100% tariff on BRICS countries could increase costs for American consumers without bringing manufacturing jobs back to the US
- 2) **China's Role:** There are concerns about China's potential dominance in any new financial framework among BRICS nations
- 3) **Balanced Approach:** India is advised to support financial reforms within BRICS while maintaining strong ties with the US

TH Opinion: India's strategic focus on West Asia (Harsh V. Pant, Samir Bhattacharjee)

Syllabus: Mains – International Relations [Link](#)

Why in News? Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a strategic visit to Nigeria last month,

marking the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the country in 17 years.



Significance of the Visit Strengthening Strategic Partnership

- 1) Modi reiterated India's high priority to its strategic partnership with Nigeria
- 2) Expressed interest in boosting ties in defense, energy, technology, trade, health, and education
- 3) Emphasized cooperation on security issues, including counterterrorism against groups like Boko Haram

Recognition of India's Global Stature

- 1) Modi received Nigeria's second-highest national award, the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger
- 2) Only the second foreign dignitary to receive this honor since 1969, after Queen Elizabeth II

India-Nigeria Relations

Economic Ties

- 1) Bilateral trade declined from \$14.95 billion in 2021-22 to \$7.89 billion in 2023-24
- 2) Decline primarily due to India's increasing oil imports from Russia
- 3) Over 200 Indian companies have invested about \$27 billion in Nigeria

Development Partnership

- 1) India offers developmental assistance through concessional loans (\$100 million)
- 2) Provides capacity-building training programs

Nigeria's Strategic Importance

- 1) Largest economy and democracy in Africa
- 2) Regional hegemon in West Africa with significant influence in the African Union
- 3) Regarded as a democratic role model in the continent

China's Growing Influence in Nigeria Economic Presence

- 1) Nigeria is China's largest export market and second-largest trading partner in Africa
- 2) Over 200 Chinese companies operate in Nigeria
- 3) China has funded over \$47 billion for 22 large-size infrastructural projects

Technology and Infrastructure

- 1) Huawei has a significant presence, training Nigerian youth and civil servants
- 2) China is active in Nigeria's mining sector, including lithium processing

India's Strategic Focus

- 1) Modi's visit aims to counterbalance growing Chinese influence in West Africa
- 2) Enhanced bilateral relationship between India and Nigeria could benefit the larger Global South
- 3) Sustained effort required to convert goodwill into concrete deliverable outcomes

IE The Editorial Page: After Assad

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations
[Link](#)

Why in News? Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime has fallen after a swift 11-day offensive by rebel groups, ending over half a century of Assad family rule in Syri.

Impact on Regional Dynamics

Iran's Setback

- 1) Iran emerges as the biggest loser, with Assad's fall puncturing a significant hole in its "axis of resistance" against Israel.
- 2) Tehran loses access to Syria and Lebanon, severely diminishing its regional influence

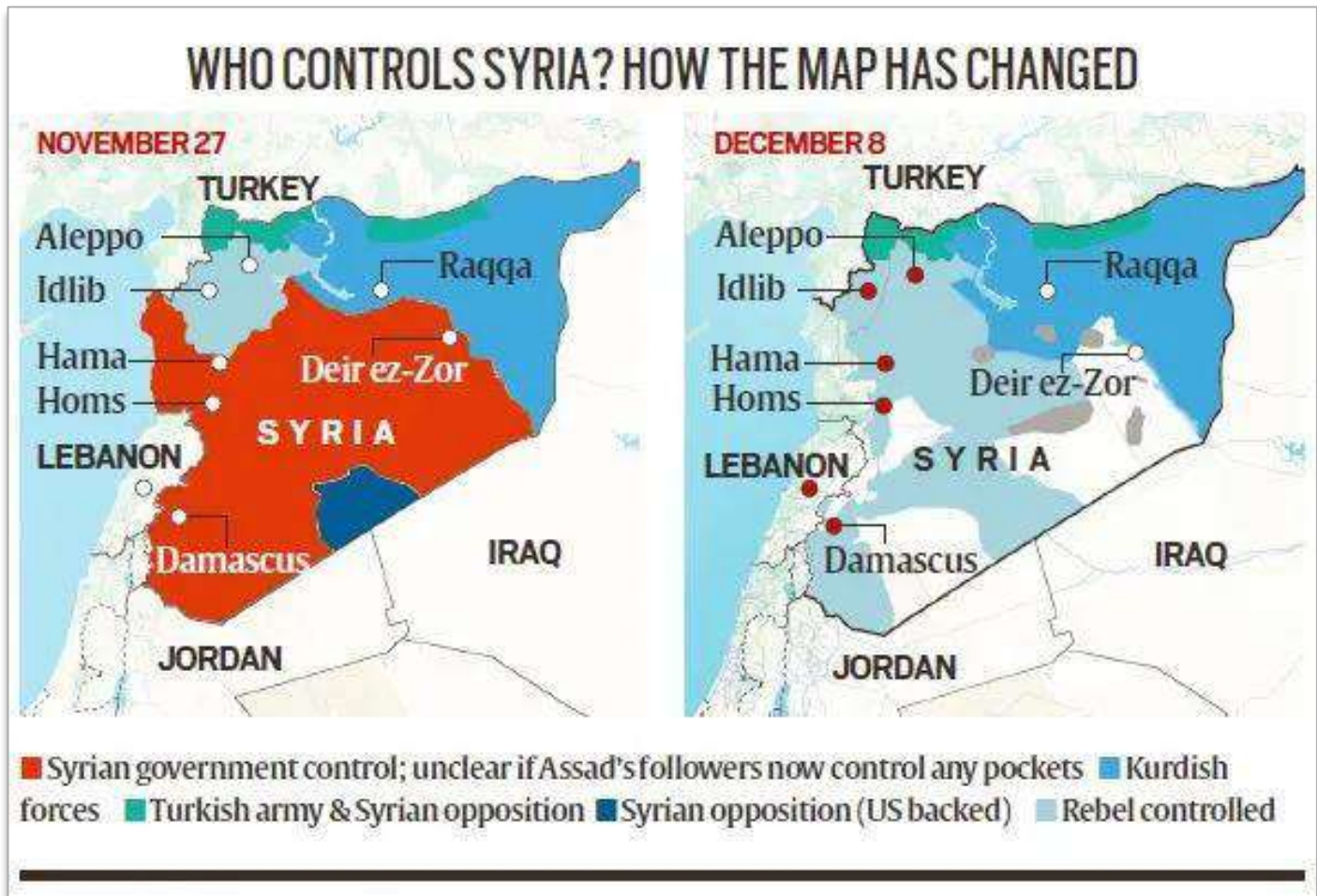
Turkey's Ascendancy

- 1) Turkey stands to gain significant influence, having backed rebel forces in Syria

- 2) Ankara may play a central role in shaping Syria's future government

- 3) **Extremism Fears:** Concerns about the rise of extremist groups, given the background of some rebel leaders

Russia's Uncertain Position



- 1) Russia risks losing its Mediterranean naval base and air bases in Syria
- 2) Moscow's ability to project power in the region may be significantly reduced

Israel's Mixed Outlook

- 1) While pleased with Assad's departure, Israel remains wary of potential extremist groups taking control in Syria
- 2) The weakening of Iran's influence benefits Israel, but new security challenges may arise

Regional Stability Concerns

- 1) **Refugee Situation:** Neighbouring countries hope for the return of Syrian refugees, particularly Turkey, which hosts over 3 million
- 2) **Sectarian Tensions:** Risk of increased sectarian tensions and potential "Balkanization" of Syria along ethnic and religious lines

International Response

- 1) **US and Western Allies:** Cautiously optimistic, viewing Assad's fall as an opportunity for Syria but wary of potential instability
- 2) **Arab States:** Gulf countries and moderate Arab states are apprehensive about a potentially Islamist regime in Syria

Outlook for Syria

- 1) Uncertainty looms over Syria's future governance and stability
- 2) The international community hopes for a more pluralistic framework respecting minority rights and diversity

Economic challenges and potential continuation of sanctions may hinder Syria's recovery

IE The Ideas Page: Closing the Gulf circle (C Raja Mohan)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations
[Link](#)

Why in News? Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to visit Kuwait this weekend, marking the first visit by an Indian PM to the country in over four decades.

Significance of the Visit

- 1) **Closing Diplomatic Gaps:** The visit completes India's expanded diplomatic engagement with the Gulf region, crucial for the country's security and prosperity.
- 2) **Transforming Relations:** The past decade has seen a qualitative transformation in ties between India and Gulf monarchies, including:
 - a) Strong personal rapport between PM Modi and Gulf rulers
 - b) Intensified commercial engagement
 - c) Enhanced security partnerships
 - d) Development of connectivity projects

Historical Context

- 1) **Past Challenges**
 - a) India's relationship with Kuwait was previously strained due to Delhi's stance during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990
 - b) India's foreign policy traditionally favoured Ba'athist leaders and radical nationalist Arab Republics, complicating relations with Gulf monarchies
- 2) **Shift in Priorities**
 - a) The Modi years have seen a definitive change, with frequent visits to Gulf countries
 - b) The Arab Gulf has emerged as one of the highest strategic priorities for Delhi

Regional Implications

- 1) **Middle East Restructuring:** The visit coincides with the fall of the Assad dynasty in Syria, potentially leading to a radical restructuring of the regional order.
- 2) **Partnerships with Moderate Arab States:** India's partnership with moderate Arab states, including Gulf nations, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, gains new importance in the changing Middle East landscape.

Future Considerations

- 1) **Reassessing Regional Dynamics:** India needs to better appreciate the core concerns of moderate Arab states and reassess its premises about the region
- 2) **Balancing Regional Powers:** Delhi must consider the hierarchy of contradictions between moderate Arab states and non-Arab powers like Iran, Israel, and Turkey
- 3) **Promoting Stability:** India should encourage flexibility from Israel to facilitate cooperation between moderate Arab states and the Jewish state for regional stability.

IE The Editorial Page: President Dissanayake's India visit: Building bridges with Sri Lanka
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations
[Link](#)

Why in News? Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's first overseas visit to India since taking office marks a crucial moment in bilateral relations, potentially heralding deeper economic and strategic ties.

Positive Developments

- 1) Dissanayake's broad domestic mandate, with his National People's Power (NPP) coalition winning decisive majorities in recent elections, provides a stable foundation for bilateral engagement
- 2) The NPP government has shown pragmatism by continuing with the IMF program for economic recovery, albeit with increased welfare spending
- 3) Both countries recognize the potential of digital public infrastructure in Sri Lanka's development, including Aadhaar-like identity systems and UPI payment interfaces
- 4) **Strategic Assurances**
 - a) Dissanayake pledged not to allow Sri Lankan territory to be used against India's interests
 - b) His evocation of a "free, open, safe and secure Indian Ocean Region" signals a potential alignment with India's regional vision



Key Challenges

1) Fisheries Issues:

- Addressing the problem of fishermen crossing maritime borders and overfishing requires diplomatic finesse
- A coordinated fishing model may offer a potential solution

2) Tamil Minority Rights:

- Prime Minister Modi urged implementation of Sri Lanka's constitution and provincial council elections
- The issue requires sensitive handling, considering the NPP's Sinhala nationalist leanings and the emotive nature of the topic in both countries

3) China Factor: Sri Lanka's growing economic ties with China, particularly through large infrastructure projects like the Hambantota Port,

Path Forward

- Resume dialogue on a Free Trade Agreement and focus on energy supply, trade, technology exchange, and Indian FDI in Sri Lanka
- Establish clear communication and red lines regarding Sri Lanka's relations with other powers, particularly China
- Work towards elevating the India-Sri Lanka relationship to one of the most significant in the subcontinent

IE Big Picture: Not Without Resistance

(Sukrita Baruah)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations, Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? India is pushing for a large hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh as a counter to China's plan to build the world's

largest dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river.

Project Details and Significance

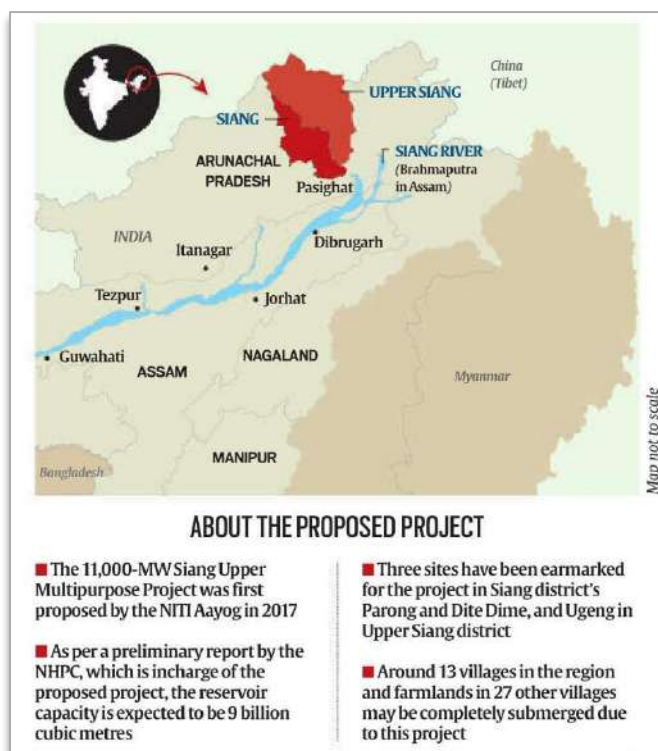
- Scale:** Proposed 11,000-MW project with a 9 billion cubic meter reservoir capacity.
- Location:** Three potential sites in Siang and Upper Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- Strategic Importance:**
 - Counters China's dam-building activities upstream in Tibet
 - Aims to mitigate potential water diversion and sudden water release by China

Local Opposition and Concerns

- Impact on Agriculture:** Fears of submerging farmlands and homes, affecting livelihoods



- Displacement:** Estimated 13 villages at risk of complete submersion, 27 others partially affected
- Cultural Significance:** Siang river revered as 'Aane' (mother) by local Adi tribe
- Limited Alternatives:** Lack of other economic opportunities in the region



IE Explained: Indians and the H-1B visa (Arjun Sengupta, Aggam Walia & Sukalp Sharma)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – International Relations
[Link](#)

Why in News? A public row has erupted among Donald Trump's supporters regarding the H-1B visa program, triggered by the appointment of Chennai-born Sriram Krishnan as Trump's top AI adviser.

H-1B Visa Program

- 1) Allows American employers to hire foreign workers for specialized occupations
- 2) Requires a high level of skill and at least a bachelor's degree
- 3) Annual cap of 65,000 visas, with an additional 20,000 for those with advanced US degrees

Indian Dominance

- 1) Indians account for over 70% of all H-1B petitions approved annually since 2015
- 2) Chinese nationals come second at 12-13% since 2018

Controversy

- 1) Critics argue the program is misused to hire low-to-mid level workers at lower salaries
- 2) Nearly 70% of H-1B approvals for Indian professionals in FY 2023 were for salaries below \$100,000
- 3) Supporters claim it's crucial for bridging the skills gap in the US

Government's Stance and Actions

- 1) **Security Measures:** Deployment of Central Armed Police Forces to manage potential resistance
- 2) **Outreach Efforts:** Chief Minister's appeal to locals, emphasizing project's necessity
- 3) **Compensation Promise:** Government claims to offer "India's best compensation" to affected people

Ongoing Developments

- 1) **Local Protests:** Demonstrations and rituals conducted by villagers against the project
- 2) **Dialogue Attempts:** Government's efforts to engage with locals, facing challenges from activists
- 3) **Next Steps:** Plans for surveys and environmental impact assessments before project approval

Pratibimb PYQ Mentorship Program 2025



What is Pratibimb Mentorship?

Pratibimb Mentorship Program 2025 is designed to guide and support students aiming for success in the UPSC CSE 2025. Our program adopts a strategic, outcome-focused approach, providing continuous guidance from experienced mentors and UPSC toppers. We help students identify and strengthen their foundational skills, build their knowledge base, and focus on areas for growth by making them solve PYQs.



Highlights of the Program



Mentorship Program is designed to assist aspirants in making notes & Answer Writing



Essay + Ethics GS-I to III complete syllabus coverage in 6 months



Kalam Golden Pages (KGP) Thematic coverage of Mains syllabus of specified Topics



Marks Improvement Booklet (MIB) to enrich your Mains answer writing.



Face 2 Face Evaluation for Internalization of Personal Feedback



Self-Assessment Report (SAR) is a TOOLKIT for objective assessment of answer on self-basis



Answer Sheet Points (ASP) from Model Answer



Workshop: Learning by doing approach

PYQ Answer Writing | Model Answer | Face-to-Face Evaluation



SECTIONAL & FLT TESTS

18-Prelims Sectional Tests
34-Mains Sectional Tests
5-Mains Full Length Tests



Detailed Test Syllabus & Reference Study Material

Other Details

- Course Duration: 8 Months (Feb 2025)
- Mode: Online/Offline
- Validity: Till Mains 2025
- Test Timing: 5 PM - 6:30 PM

Fee
₹8000/-
Including of GST

Concession Details

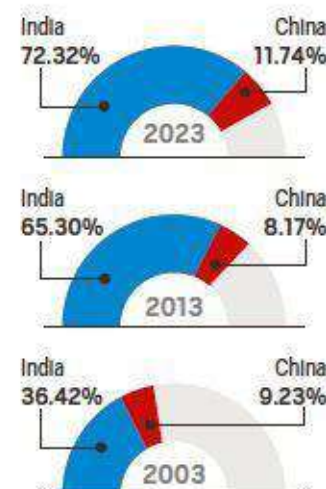
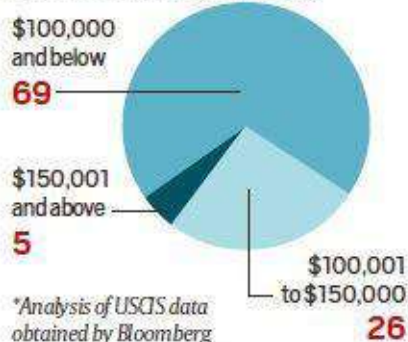
Kalam IAS Students: 20%

UPSC Interview Student: 30%

Selected Students: 50%

How many H-1B petitions are being approved? For whom?

CHART 1: NUMBER OF H-1B PETITIONS APPROVED BY USCIS (2003-23)

CHART 2: BIRTH COUNTRY OF SUCCESSFUL PETITIONERS

CHART 3: %AGE OF INDIA-BORN BENEFICIARIES (FY 2023)


Source: US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Department of Homeland Security

■ 65% of H-1B petitions approved in 2023 were for "Computer Related" occupations.

■ Consequently, the biggest employers onboarding foreign professionals under the program included the largest tech corporations in the US (and world), including the top four Indian IT majors with a US presence in the US – Infosys, TCS, HCL, and Wipro.

TABLE: BENEFICIARIES BY EMPLOYER (FY 24)

Employer (petitioner)	H-1B beneficiaries (approved numbers)	Share (%) in top 10
Amazon.com	9,265	17.3
Infosys	8,140	15.2
Cognizant	6,321	11.8
Google	5,364	10.0
TCS	5,274	9.8
Meta platforms	4,844	9.0
Microsoft	4,725	8.8
Apple	3,873	7.2
Hcl america	2,953	5.5
IBM	2,906	5.4
TOTAL	53,665	100.0

Proposed Reforms

- 1) Elon Musk suggests raising the minimum salary and adding yearly costs for maintaining H-1B visas
- 2) Aim to make it more expensive to hire from overseas than domestically

Economy and Agriculture

December 2024

IE Economy: RBI: Home price index rises by 4.3% amid high interest rates, inflation
 (George Mathew)

Syllabus: Prelims – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Reserve Bank of India's All-India Home Price Index (HPI) increased by 4.34% to 322 in September 2024, compared to 308.6 in September 2023, despite high interest rates and inflation.

About House Price Index (HPI)

- 1) HPI measures the changes in residential housing prices over time, reflecting the percentage change from a specific start date.
- 2) HPI is a quarterly report published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- 3) The base year for HPI calculation is 2010-2011.

TH Text & Context: India's 'One Nation, One Subscription' plan (Moumita Koley)

Syllabus: Prelims – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian government approved the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme on November 25, 2024, aiming to provide equitable access to scholarly journals in all public institutions.

ONOS Overview

- 1) Goal: Democratize knowledge access across institutions regardless of prestige or financial capacity
- 2) Aims to provide nationwide access to scholarly research articles and journals.
- 3) Provides access to over 13,000 e-journals from 30 major international publishers.
- 4) Covers approximately 6,300 government-run higher education institutions and research facilities.
- 5) Benefits nearly 1.8 crore students, faculty, and researchers.

- 6) Set to launch on January 1, 2025.

ONE NATION ONE SUBSCRIPTION

- **Cabinet Approval:** Central Sector Scheme to provide nationwide access to scholarly research and journals
- **Budget:** ₹6,000 crore allocated for 2025, 2026, and 2027
- **Digital Access:** Fully digital process managed via a unified "One Nation One Subscription" portal
- **Target Beneficiaries:** Nearly 1.8 crore students, faculty, and researchers in 6,300 institutions, including HEIs and central R&D institutions
- **Coordination:** Managed by INFLIBNET, an autonomous UGC centre

education.gov.in | f | X | YouTube | Instagram | @EduMinOfIndia

- 7) Coordinated by Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET), an autonomous body under UGC.

Challenges and Concerns

Subscription Model vs. Open Access

- 1) Global trend: Increasing shift towards Open Access (OA) publishing
- 2) Current OA landscape: Over 53% of scientific papers worldwide are open access
- 3) International policies: U.S. and EU mandating free access to publicly funded research by 2026
- 4) ONOS approach: Invests in subscription-based model, potentially becoming obsolete

Commercial Publishing Issues

- 1) Dominance: Western publishers control the scholarly publishing system
- 2) Exploitation: High subscription fees and profit margins exceeding 30%
- 3) Open Access challenges: High Article Processing Charges (APCs) for gold OA
- 4) Missed opportunity: India's potential to innovate in publishing workflow

Copyright and Preservation

- 1) Copyright transfer: Researchers lose rights to their work
- 2) Digital preservation: 28% of articles with DOIs not preserved
- 3) Case study: Heterocycles journal discontinuation highlighting preservation risks

Potential Improvements

Rights Retention and Open Access

- 1) Policy example: Harvard University's non-exclusive rights model
- 2) Green Open Access: Enabling immediate self-archiving in institutional repositories
- 3) Enforcing existing policies: Implementation of India's 2014 Open Access Policy

Self-Reliance in Publishing

- 1) Developing Indian journals to world-class standards
- 2) Investing in infrastructure, editorial processes, and global visibility
- 3) Incorporating preprinting and data sharing in the publishing workflow

ONOS, while ambitious, overlooks critical issues in scholarly publishing. A reevaluation is necessary to address systemic challenges and ensure long-term relevance and cost-effectiveness.

IE Explained: Windfall gains tax on oil put to rest: The move and its significance (Sukalp Sharma)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian government has withdrawn the windfall gains tax on domestic crude oil production and exports of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF), effective December 2, 2024.

Windfall Gains Tax

- 1) Tax imposed on unexpected, above-average profits due to external factors
- 2) Aimed at capturing extraordinary gains from industries benefiting from unforeseen events

- 3) Intended to ensure fairness and redistribute windfall profits for public benefit

Implementation in India

- 1) Introduced: July 1, 2022
- 2) Reason: Surge in global oil prices post-Russia-Ukraine conflict
- 3) Applied to: Domestic crude oil production, exports of diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF)
- 4) Form: Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) and Road Infrastructure Cess (RIC)

Reasons for Removal

- 1) Stabilization of global oil prices
- 2) Robust domestic fuel supply
- 3) Declining revenue generation:
 - a) FY23: ₹25,000 crore
 - b) FY24: ₹13,000 crore
 - c) FY25: ₹6,000 crore (so far)

IE The Editorial Page: The state strikes back (Surjit S Bhalla and Karan Bhasin)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains - Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor's growth prediction of 7% for Q2 FY2024 missed the mark, with actual growth coming in at 5.4%.

Growth Challenges and Policy Concerns

Macroeconomic Factors:

- 1) Growth rates are not fixed and can be influenced by policy decisions
- 2) Policies affecting outcomes include exchange rates, tariffs, and Minimum Support Prices (MSPs)

Current Economic Roadblocks:

- 1) High taxation rates and tax collection
- 2) Rapid decline in foreign investment
- 3) Tight monetary policy with high real interest rates compared to other non-advanced economies

Policy Missteps:

- 1) Withdrawal from Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), deterring foreign investors

RBI @ DECEMBER POLICY

"With regard to de-dollarisation, there is no step which we have taken. All that we have done is that we have permitted opening of vostro accounts and we have entered into agreement with two countries by now to do local currency denominated trades..."

"Our forex reserves are quite robust even now. The depletion which has happened in the last few months, a good part of it is because of valuation losses."

SHAKTIKANTA DAS
RBI GOVERNOR,
ON ON DE-DOLLARISATION
AND FOREX RESERVES

"We continue to engage with the entities wherever we see any outlier behaviour. At the system level it is still not a big concern. About 20-30 bps uptick in stress is something which we are confident that the entities will be able to handle."

"In certain entities where these particular numbers are little outlier, we deal with them on a bilateral basis, examining as to the steps they are taking to ensure that the stress is not widespread."

SWAMINATHAN J
RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR,
ON STRESS IN MFI SEGMENT

- 2) Retrospective tax changes, including removal of indexation benefits on real estate assets
- 3) Restrictions on certain credit card expenditures

Path to Viksit Bharat 2047

Infrastructure and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):

- 1) Recognized as critical components for development
- 2) Praise for infrastructure focus under PMs Vajpayee and Modi
- 3) Need for urgent rethink on BITs to attract foreign investment

Policy Recommendations:

- 1) Move away from command-and-control economic policies
- 2) Limit the role of state in citizens' lives, as advocated by the Prime Minister
- 3) Shed remaining influences of Nehruvian socialism in policymaking

To achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat, India must overcome policy errors dampening growth prospects and align its economic governance with its ambitions as an emerging global economic power.

IE Frontpage: RBI holds key rate, lowers growth forecast, moves to boost liquidity (Hitesh Vyas)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5% for the 11th consecutive time while reducing the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4% to boost liquidity.

Monetary Policy Decisions

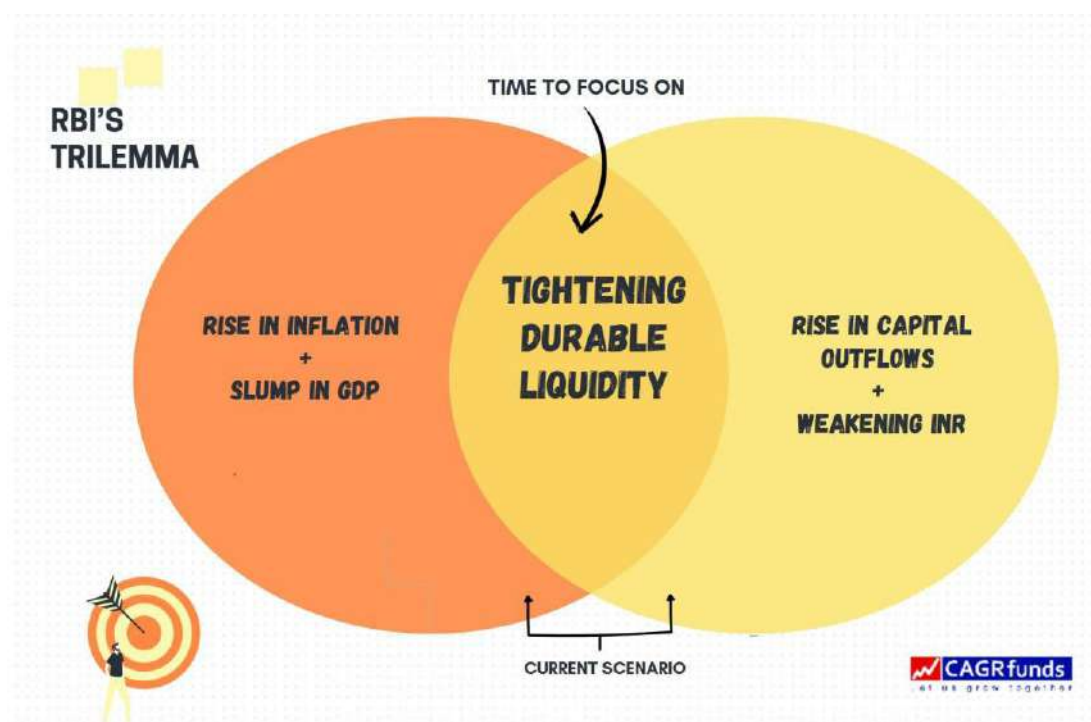
- 1) **Repo Rate:** Maintained at 6.5% with a 4:2 majority vote
- 2) **CRR Cut:** Reduced from 4.5% to 4% in two 25 bps tranches on December 14 and 28, 2024
- 3) **Liquidity Injection:** CRR cut expected to release Rs 1.16 lakh crore into the banking system

Economic Projections

- 1) **GDP Growth Forecast:** Lowered to 6.6% for FY2025 from earlier 7.2% projection
- 2) **Inflation Outlook:** CPI inflation forecast for FY2025 raised to 4.8% from 4.5%

Rationale and Outlook

- 1) High inflation remains a concern, reducing disposable income and impacting consumption
- 2) MPC aims to balance inflation control with economic growth support
- 3) Rural demand showing improvement, while urban demand moderates
- 4) Government consumption and investment activity expected to improve



Concept Review: Repo Rate vs CRR vs SLR			
Parameter	Repo Rate	Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR)	Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR)
Description	Rate at which RBI lends money to commercial banks RBI accepts collateral in the form of government securities	Percentage of a bank's total deposits that must be maintained as liquid cash with the RBI Maintained in the form of cash only	Percentage of deposits banks must maintain in liquid assets Maintained in the form of – cash, gold or government securities
Current Rate	6.5%	4%	18%
Maximum Limit	NA	NA	40%
Impact	Affects borrowing costs for banks and influences overall economic activity	Determines the liquidity available in the banking system and impacts credit growth	Regulates credit flow and ensures bank solvency
Purpose	To control inflation and regulate money supply in the economy	To ensure banks have sufficient liquidity and to control money supply	Maintain financial stability and regulate credit
Effect of Increase	Reduces liquidity, curbs inflation, may slow economic growth	Reduces liquidity in the banking system, helps control inflation	Restricts lending, curbs inflation
Effect of Decrease	Increases liquidity, stimulates economic growth, may increase inflation	Increases liquidity in the banking system, promotes lending	Increases lending, stimulates growth

IE The Ideas Page: Platforms like PRAGATI
 (Soumitra Dutta, Parameswaran Iyer)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? Oxford University's Saïd Business School and the Gates Foundation have released a case study highlighting the success of India's PRAGATI platform in transforming infrastructure project delivery.

Key Features of PRAGATI

- 1) Launched in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi
- 2) Combines digital data management, video conferencing, and geospatial technology
- 3) Enables direct oversight of critical infrastructure projects by the Prime Minister
- 4) Facilitates collaboration between central and state officials
- 5) Utilizes real-time project monitoring and drone feeds

Impressive Achievements

- 1) Accelerated over 340 major infrastructure projects worth \$205 billion
- 2) Reduced project delays from decades to months
- 3) Completed long-delayed projects like:
 - a) Segments of National Highway 8 in Maharashtra
 - b) Chenab Bridge in Jammu and Kashmir (world's highest rail bridge)
 - c) Bogibeel Bridge in Assam

Impact on Governance and Development

- 1) Drives accountability at senior levels
- 2) Fosters unprecedented federal and regional collaboration
- 3) Injects urgency into bureaucratic processes
- 4) Bridges political divides to accelerate projects across all states
- 5) Extends beyond physical infrastructure to social development programs

Economic Benefits

- 1) Studies estimate a 2.5 to 3.5-rupee GDP gain for every rupee spent on infrastructure
- 2) Contributes to India's projected rise as the world's third-largest economy by 2027

Lessons for Global Infrastructure Development

- 1) Sustained top-level leadership is crucial for successful implementation
- 2) Digital platforms must facilitate cross-government collaboration
- 3) Combining various technological tools creates powerful project oversight synergies

Future Outlook

- 1) PRAGATI will need to evolve to handle increasingly complex projects
- 2) Offers a powerful template for nations seeking to transform infrastructure development approaches
- 3) Could be valuable for initiatives like the African Union's Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA)

IE The Ideas Page: All is not well with soil
 (Ashok Gulati & Ritika Juneja)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy & Agriculture
[Link](#)

Why in News? World Soil Day was observed on December 5, 2024, highlighting the critical importance of soil health for food production and sustainable agriculture.

Current State of Indian Soils and Fertilizer Use

Nutrient Deficiencies

- 1) Less than 5% of Indian soils have sufficient nitrogen
- 2) Only 40% have sufficient phosphate
- 3) 32% have sufficient potash
- 4) Just 20% are sufficient in organic carbon
- 5) Moderate to severe deficiencies in micronutrients like sulphur, iron, zinc, and boron

Imbalanced Fertilizer Application

- 1) Overuse of nitrogen (N) compared to recommended doses in most major agricultural states
- 2) Underuse of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K)
- 3) Example: Punjab uses 61% more N, 89% less K, and 8% less P than recommended

Issues with Current Fertilizer Subsidy Policy

Distorted Pricing and Consumption

- 1) Urea prices controlled at artificially low levels (~\$70/tonne)
- 2) Disproportionate subsidy allocation to urea (about two-thirds of total)
- 3) Nutrient-Based Subsidy scheme excludes urea, leading to price distortions

Environmental and Economic Consequences

- 1) Low Nutrient Use Efficiency (35-40%)
- 2) Excess nitrogen released as nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas
- 3) 20-25% of urea diverted to non-agricultural uses or smuggled to neighbouring countries

Proposed Solutions

Deregulation and Direct Transfers

- 1) Deregulate fertilizer sector from price controls
- 2) Provide farmers with direct income transfers via digital coupons for fertilizer purchases

Balanced Nutrient Application

- 1) Promote balanced use of N, P, K, and micronutrients
- 2) Improve soil health and agricultural productivity

IE Explained: Why RBI wants hedge against dollar reliance, but no push for de-dollarisation (Ravi Dutta Mishra)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy & Agriculture
[Link](#)

Why in News? RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das clarified that India is not pursuing de-dollarisation but is focused on de-risking its trade.

RBI's Approach to Dollar Reliance De-risking, Not De-dollarisation

- 1) RBI's focus is on de-risking Indian trade, not replacing the dollar
- 2) Measures like opening Vostro accounts and local currency trade agreements aim to diversify risk

Gold Purchases as a Hedge

- 1) RBI has increased gold purchases, adding 27 tonnes in October 2024
- 2) This aligns with global central banks' strategy to diversify away from dollar-dominated financial systems

Promoting Domestic Currency Trade

- 1) India is pushing for trade in domestic currencies with countries like Russia and UAE
- 2) This aims to reduce dollar dependence in international trade

Reasons for Cautious Approach Geopolitical Considerations

- 1) India is wary of the rise of Chinese yuan as a challenger to the US dollar
- 2) BRICS nations lack geographical contiguity, making a common currency challenging

Economic Realities

- 1) India has bilateral trade deficits with most countries except the US
- 2) Low foothold in international goods and services trade limits rupee internationalization

Global Financial Stability

- 1) Abrupt abandonment of the dollar could lead to financial instability
- 2) Many commodities are still priced and exchanged in dollars

Future Outlook – Balanced Approach

- 1) India aims to complement de-risking with gradual rupee internationalization
- 2) Focus on enhancing domestic currency trade without abandoning dollar-based transactions

IE Frontpage: 'Calm influence': Revenue Secy Sanjay Malhotra picked as next RBI Governor (Aanchal Magazine)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra has been appointed as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a three-year term starting December 11, 2024.

He succeeds Shaktikanta Das, whose tenure ends on December 10, 2024

Appointment of RBI Governor

Appointment Process

- 1) RBI Governor is appointed by the President of India based on the recommendation of the central government.
- 2) The appointment is primarily a political decision, with the Prime Minister's Office making the final choice after consulting the Finance Ministry and the outgoing governor.
- 3) The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointments Search Committee (FSRASC), headed by the Cabinet Secretary, formally proposes candidates for the position.

Tenure and Eligibility

- 1) The governor is typically appointed for a fixed term of three years, which can be extended.
- 2) There are no specific qualifications mentioned in the RBI Act for the governor's position.
- 3) Traditionally, governors have been selected from either the civil services or the field of economics.

TH Text & Context: On reforms in merchant shipping (Amitabh Kumar)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian Government is preparing to introduce the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 and the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024, aimed at driving significant reforms in the shipping industry.

Need for New Legislation

Outdated Existing Laws

- 1) The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, and the Coasting Vessels Act, 1838, have become obsolete and fail to address contemporary needs of the merchant marine sector
- 2) Significant regulatory gaps exist, particularly for vessels in the offshore sector

Inadequate Regulatory Framework

- 1) No legal framework to effectively regulate private maritime training institutions

- 2) Restrictions on seafarers' welfare provisions to Indian-flagged ships, despite 85% of Indian seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels
- 3) Lack of enabling provisions for implementing certain international conventions

Key Features of the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024



Ease of Registration

- 1) Reduces ownership threshold for Indian citizens/entities from 100% to 51%
- 2) Allows LLPs, NRIs, and OCIs to own and register Indian vessels
- 3) Permits foreign entities to hold shares in Indian vessels
- 4) Introduces provisions for temporary registration of vessels destined for demolition

Expanded Scope of Vessels

- 1) Broadens the definition of 'vessels' to include various crafts, enhancing regulatory oversight in the offshore sector
- 2) Aims to strengthen coastal security by empowering authorities to issue instructions to all types of vessels

Marine Pollution Prevention

- 1) Incorporates international conventions like CLC, LLMC, Bunker Convention, MARPOL, and Wreck Removal Convention

- 2) Aligns India's maritime regulatory framework with global standards

Seafarers' Welfare

- 1) Extends welfare measures to Indian seafarers working on foreign-flagged ships
- 2) Seeks to extend protections and benefits outlined in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) to all Indian seafarers

Maritime Training Regulation

- 1) Introduces clear legal provisions for regulating maritime training
- 2) Aims to eliminate illegal maritime training institutes and associated fraudulent practices

Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024

- 1) Separates technical regulation of ships from commercial utilization of Indian coastal waters
- 2) Incorporates provisions for licensing, permissions for operations, creation of a coastal plan, and integration of inland and coastal shipping
- 3) Aligns with the Government's 'Sagarmala' program to promote coastal shipping

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IE Economy: S Africa, Namibia, Turkey back India in opposing China-led WTO pact: Official (Ravi Dutta Mishra)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy, International Relations [Link](#)

Why in News? India, along with South Africa, Namibia, and Turkey, is opposing the China-led Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Background: Proposed in 2017 by China and nations reliant on Chinese investments, the IFD aims to improve the global investment climate and facilitate foreign direct investment flows among WTO members.

Support and Opposition: The IFD has gained support from 128 out of 166 WTO members, including Pakistan. However, India and three other nations are opposing it, while the US has opted to stay out of the agreement.

Concerns: India believes the agreement could undermine the policy space of weaker nations. The official emphasized that many supporting countries may be under the wrong impression about its benefits.

Timing: This opposition comes as investment flows are shifting away from China due to potential US-China trade tensions and weakening Chinese consumer demand.

India's Stance on Fisheries Subsidies

- 1) **Per Capita Subsidy Proposal:** India has advocated for a "per capita distribution of subsidies" criterion to address overfishing and overcapacity concerns within the WTO framework.
- 2) **Subsidy Comparison:** India informed the WTO that its annual fisheries subsidy amounts to \$35 per fisher, significantly lower than the \$76,000 provided by some European nations.

- 3) **Document Submission:** India has submitted a document titled 'Designing Disciplines for the Overcapacity and Overfishing Pillar: A Case for Intensity-Based Subsidies Approach' for discussion at the upcoming WTO General Council meeting.

IE Economy: Switzerland suspends MFN status to India in tax avoidance agreement

(Ravi Dutta Mishra, Aanchal Magazine)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? Switzerland has suspended the Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) clause in its Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with India, effective January 1, 2025, following a 2023 Indian Supreme Court ruling.

Key Developments

- 1) **Suspension of MFN Status:** Switzerland will no longer apply the MFN clause unilaterally, citing lack of reciprocity from India
- 2) **Tax Rate Increase:** The dividend tax rate for Indian entities in Switzerland will rise from 5% to 10% starting January 1, 2025
- 3) **Supreme Court Ruling Impact:** The decision follows an Indian Supreme Court judgment that overturned a Delhi High Court order, stating that DTAA benefits require specific notification under the Income-Tax Act

Key Points of the Supreme Court Judgment

- 1) **Case Background:** The case involved Nestlé SA and other multinational companies seeking tax benefits under the Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) clause
- 2) **Overturned Decision:** The Supreme Court reversed a Delhi High Court order that had previously favoured Nestlé
- 3) **MFN Clause Interpretation:** The court ruled that the MFN clause in Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs) does not apply automatically
- 4) **Notification Requirement:** The judgment stated that the MFN clause is not directly applicable without a specific notification under Section 90 of the Income Tax Act
- 5) **OECD Membership Consideration:** The court decided that for the MFN clause to apply, the third countries involved in tax rate

agreements must have been OECD members at the time of the agreement

- 6) **Impact on Tax Rates:** As a result of this ruling, Swiss companies like Nestlé face higher taxes on dividends in India
- 7) **Broader Implications:** The judgment has led to Switzerland suspending the MFN status granted to India in their bilateral tax treaty, effective from January 1, 2025

Potential Consequences

- 1) **Investment Impact:** The move could affect Swiss investments in India and increase tax liabilities for Indian companies operating in Switzerland
- 2) **EFTA Investment Commitment:** The decision poses a risk to the \$100 billion investment commitment made by the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, including Switzerland, over a 15-year period
- 3) **Broader Implications:** This development may influence how India handles similar clauses in agreements with other trading partners, potentially affecting outbound investments

IE The Editorial Page: The wage challenge
 (Manish Sabharwal)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? India's wage challenge has transitioned from a chronic issue to an immediate concern. The focus is now on creating private, productive, formal non-farm jobs that offer higher wages through policy reforms such as digitization, decriminalization, and rationalization of regulations.

Current Challenges

- 1) **Economic Disparities:** Despite economic growth, wage disparity remains high, with the top 1% owning a significant portion of the country's income. The current minimum wage often fails to meet basic living costs, leading to employed poverty.
- 2) **Regulatory Burdens:** India's regulatory framework is seen as overly complex and punitive, discouraging entrepreneurship and business growth. This "regulatory cholesterol" needs streamlining to foster a more conducive environment for job creation.

- 3) **Sectoral Shifts:** Manufacturing now creates fewer jobs per investment unit than before, and global trade challenges are impacting job creation. The focus needs to shift towards urbanization, factory development, financialization, formalization, and improving human capital.

Proposed Solutions

Policy Reforms

- 1) **Rationalization:** Simplify and reform civil service processes to shift from a restrictive to a supportive framework for businesses. This involves reducing unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that stifle business operations.
- 2) **Digitization:** Implement a National Open Compliance Grid (NOCG) for seamless compliance processes using digital infrastructure. This would ensure paperless, presence-less, and cashless compliance for employers.
- 3) **Decriminalization:** Revise laws to eliminate excessive criminal provisions for employers. Focus on removing penalties that do not meet specific criteria related to physical harm, fraud, or significant societal impact.

Wage Structure Reforms

- 1) **Living Wage Implementation:** Transition from minimum wages to living wages by 2025 to address regional cost disparities and improve workers' standard of living. This involves setting a universal wage floor that accounts for living costs across different regions.
- 2) **Enhancing Human Capital:** Invest in education and skill development to prepare the workforce for modern job requirements. This includes upgrading skills rather than just repairing them.

Encouraging Private Sector Growth

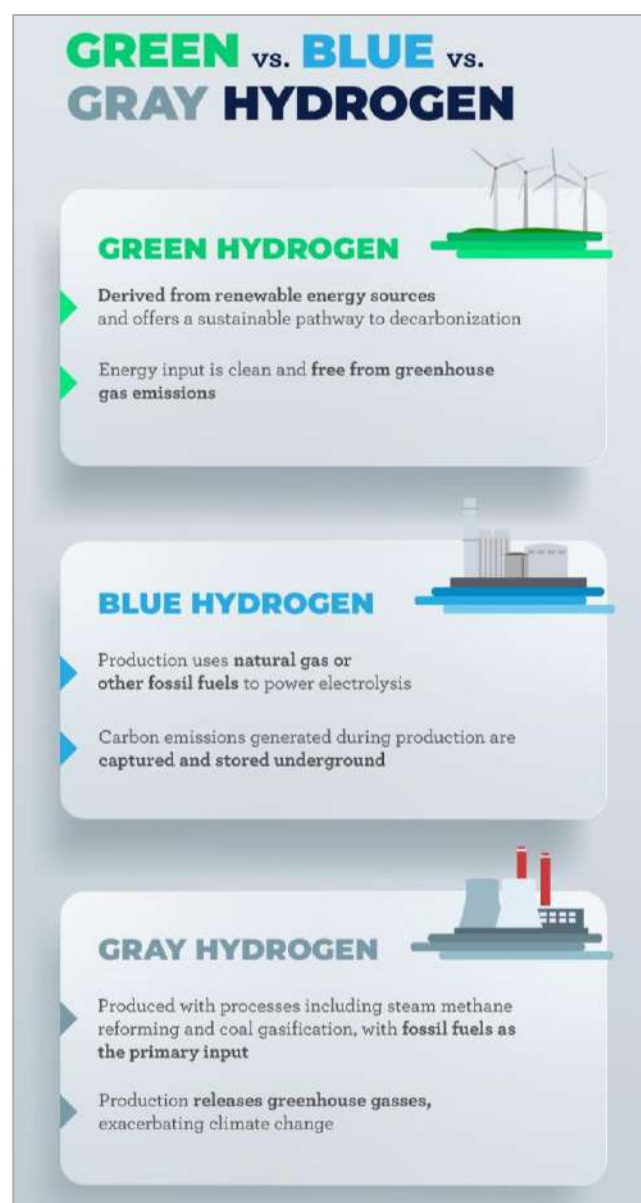
- 1) **Supportive Environment:** Create policies that encourage private sector growth by reducing the compliance burden and fostering innovation. This includes tax incentives and streamlined processes for startups and SMEs.
- 2) **Infrastructure Development:** Focus on urban infrastructure to support economic activities and attract investments. Improved infrastructure can lead to better job opportunities in urban areas.

Addressing India's immediate wage challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving regulatory reforms, wage structure improvements, and enhanced human capital development. By focusing on these areas, India can create a more equitable and prosperous economic environment that supports higher wages and better quality jobs.

TH Opinion: Green hydrogen and the financing challenge (Amarendu Nandy, Malvika Awasthy)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? India aims to produce 5 million metric tonnes of green hydrogen annually by 2030, but financing challenges threaten to derail this ambitious goal.



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Methods of Hydrogen Energy Production

Grey Hydrogen

Byproduct of industrial processing including processing of petrochemicals & hydrogen produced by reforming natural gas

*Emits carbon dioxide into atmosphere

· Byproduct hydrogen: Generated as a byproduct in the industrial processes of petrochemicals or steel (oil, chemical process)

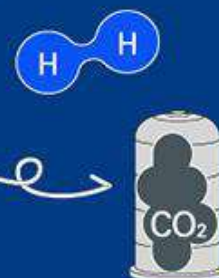


· Extracted hydrogen: generated by the process of natural gas reforming



Blue Hydrogen

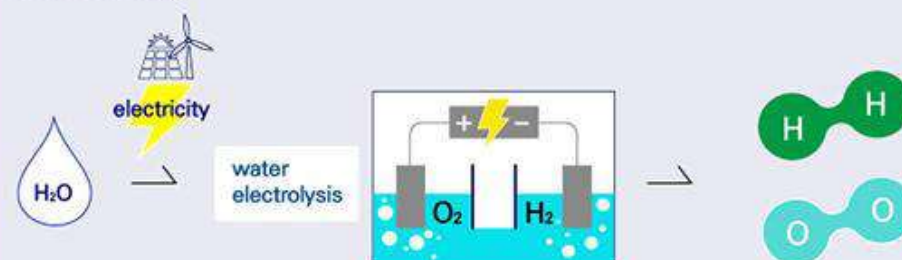
Hydrogen generated with capturing carbon dioxide in the process of producing grey hydrogen



Green Hydrogen

Hydrogen generated with renewable energy, including solar and wind, and water electrolysis technology

· Water electrolysis hydrogen: produced by electrolysis with water and electricity obtained with renewable energy



Current Status

- 1) Progress is slow, with the country on track to meet only 10% of its 2030 target.
- 2) Green hydrogen production costs (\$3.5-5 per kg) significantly exceed traditional grey/blue hydrogen costs (\$1.9-2.4 per kg).
- 3) Only 27.6% of announced large-scale clean hydrogen projects globally have reached final investment decisions.

Challenges

1) Economic Barriers:

- a) High weighted average cost of capital (WACC) in India increases production costs.

- b) Electrolyzer costs remain high, ranging from \$500-1,800/kW depending on technology.
- c) Market deadlock: Scaling production is necessary to reduce costs, but current economics hinder investment and domestic demand.

2) Financing Hurdles:

- a) Higher perceived risks in emerging markets like India lead to increased borrowing costs.
- b) Long development timelines, uncertain demand, and complex value chains complicate traditional project financing.

- c) Levelised cost of electricity (LCOE) and electrolyzer costs are crucial determinants of overall production costs.

Proposed Solutions

1) Policy Framework:

- Implement long-term hydrogen purchase agreements and partial loan guarantees.
- Create "regulatory sandboxes" for business model experimentation.
- Develop green hydrogen industrial clusters near renewable energy sources.

2) Innovative Financing:

- Develop modular project financing and "anchor-plus" financing models.
- Introduce equipment-leasing structures for electrolyzers.
- Utilize blended finance and green bonds to provide initial momentum.

3) International Collaboration:

- Establish standardized carbon intensity and hydrogen origin certification.
- Develop key trade corridors to provide demand certainty for large-scale investments.

4) Strategic Focus:

- Concentrate on early projects in industrial hubs like Odisha, Maharashtra, and Gujarat.
- Integrate financial structuring from the outset of green hydrogen projects.
- Leverage India's abundant renewable resources through efficient project execution, access to low-cost capital, and strategic investments.

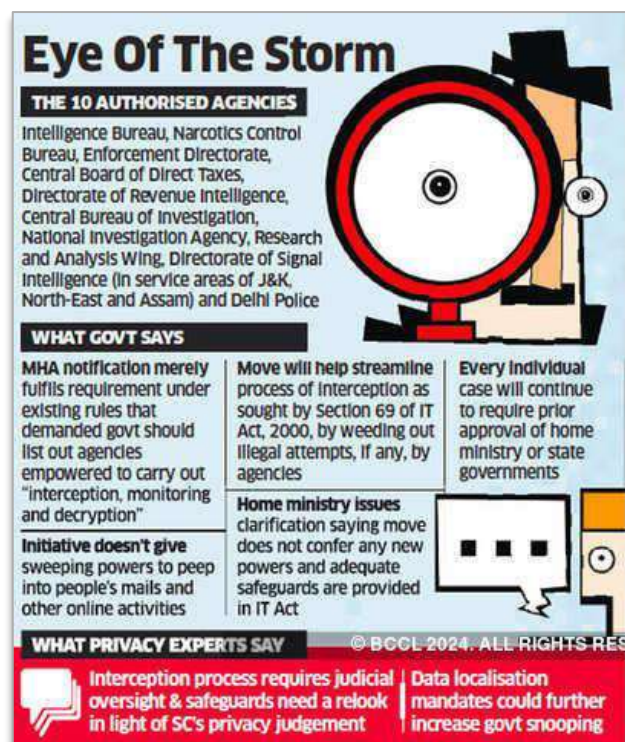
IE Explained: Indian rupee continues to fall against US dollar: What determines exchange rate?

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian rupee has fallen to a new all-time low of 85 against the US dollar in December 2024.

Key Factors Driving the Rupee's Decline

1) Strengthening US Dollar



- The US dollar has been strengthening globally due to robust US economic data and a hawkish Federal Reserve stance
- The US Fed now projects only two rate cuts in 2025, down from four estimated earlier, signalling prolonged higher interest rates

2) Domestic Economic Challenges

- India's economic growth has slowed to its lowest in seven quarters
- The country faces a widened merchandise trade deficit, which reached \$37.84 billion in November 2024

3) Capital Outflows

- Foreign investors have been net sellers of Indian equities, leading to outflows from domestic markets
- This reduced demand for the rupee has contributed to its depreciation.

4) Global Risk Sentiment

- Uncertainty around potential US trade policies under the new administration has increased risk aversion
- This has led to a flight to safe-haven assets like the US dollar.

Rupee's pace of decline has quickened amidst persistent headwinds

— USD/INR



Source: LSEG

Impact and Outlook

- 1) **Imported Inflation:** A weaker rupee increases the cost of imports, potentially leading to higher domestic inflation.
- 2) **RBI Intervention:** The Reserve Bank of India has been actively intervening in forex markets to curb volatility, but these are seen as short-term measures.
- 3) **Future Projections:** Some analysts expect the rupee to potentially weaken further to 86 per dollar in the coming months.

IE Explained: Some positives, Some concerns

(Anil Sasi)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman describes the Q2 growth slowdown as a "temporary blip," while the RBI has reduced its GDP growth forecast for 2024-25 from 7.2% to 6.6%.

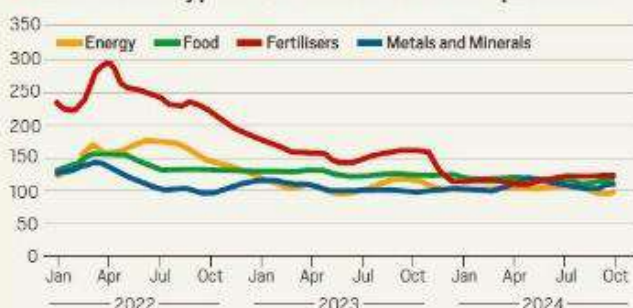
Positive Indicators

1) Government Spending and Investment:

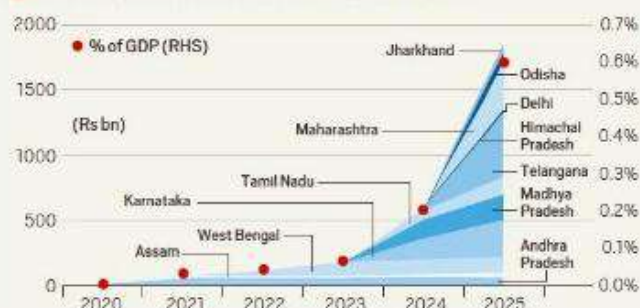
- a) Fiscal spending expected to rise post-elections
- b) Capital expenditure cycle restarting in some sectors
- c) Monetary easing anticipated to support growth

State of the economy: Some indicators

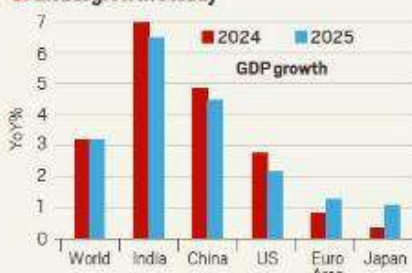
1. Stable commodity prices as reflected in World Bank price indices



2. Income transfer schemes in FY25: Rs1.9 trillion



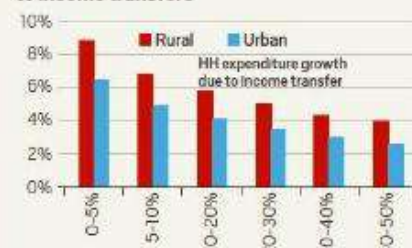
3. Global growth steady



4. Monetary policy tracker indicating that most countries loosening policy



5. 1.5% higher demand just due to income transfers



Sources: 1. World Bank Pink Sheet; 2. State Budget documents, media articles, Axis Bank Research; 3. IMF WEO Oct 2024, Axis Bank Research; 4. Council for Foreign Relations (CFR); 5. FICIS 2022-23, Axis Bank Research

2) Economic Normalization:

- GDP slowdown partly attributed to normalization after pandemic-induced anomalies
- Projected growth rate of 6.5% over the next five years, keeping India as the fastest-growing large economy

3) Potential MSME Recovery:

- Signs of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises bouncing back
- Consumption recovery observed in rural areas
- Improvement in salaried employment, possibly due to MSME growth

4) Services Sector Strength:

- India's services surplus as a share of GDP reached a new high in October 2024
- Services trade exports surpassed goods exports in November

- Scaling down of salary outlays by corporations

2) Savings and Credit:

- Decline in household financial savings rate to 5.3% of GDP in FY23
- Sharp increase in household debt
- Falling credit growth, particularly in household borrowing

3) Fiscal Management:

- Competitive loosening of purse strings by states
- Increase in state expenditure on subsidies and cash transfer schemes
- Potential impact on food prices due to increased demand without corresponding supply increase

TH Text & Context: India's reliance on China for critical minerals (Rakshith Shetty)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Challenges and Concerns

1) Investment and Consumption:

- Sluggish private investments despite corporate tax cuts
- Softening urban demand reported by major companies

Why in News? The Ministry of Mines identified 30 critical minerals essential for India's economic development and national security in 2023, highlighting the country's

import dependency and raising concerns about reliance on China.

China's Dominance in Critical Minerals Unparalleled Control Across the Value Chain

- 1) World's largest mining nation with 173 types of minerals discovered
- 2) Controls 87% of rare earth processing, 58% of lithium refining, and 68% of silicon processing
- 3) Strategic investments in overseas mining projects and midstream refining capabilities

Factors Contributing to China's Success

- 1) Aggressive expansion in clean energy technologies creating massive domestic demand.
- 2) Long-term policies including subsidies and financial support for rare earth companies.
- 3) "Going Out Strategy" promoting foreign investments to secure large resource deals.

Strategic Export Controls

- 1) Targets minerals critical for Western nations, especially for semiconductors and batteries.
- 2) Balances restrictions against domestic industrial needs and export-dependent sectors.
- 3) Examples include rare earth embargo against Japan (2010) and recent restrictions on antimony, gallium, and germanium exports.

India's Dependency on China

Critical Minerals with High Import Reliance

- 1) Six minerals with over 40% dependency: bismuth (85.6%), lithium (82%), silicon (76%), titanium (50.6%), tellurium (48.8%), and graphite (42.4%)
- 2) Each mineral crucial for specific industries like pharmaceuticals, EV batteries, semiconductors, and aerospace

Reasons for Import Dependency

- 1) Structural challenges in India's mining and processing ecosystem
- 2) Deep-seated minerals requiring high-risk investments in exploration and mining technologies

- 3) Limited processing capabilities, especially for newly discovered resources like lithium in Jammu and Kashmir

Challenges in Lithium Extraction in Jammu and Kashmir

Technical and Environmental Hurdles

- 1) Lithium found in clay deposits; a form not yet commercially proven for extraction globally
- 2) Ecologically sensitive location in seismic zone V, complicating industrial intervention
- 3) Resource-intensive mining process with potential for water and soil pollution

Investment and Security Concerns

- 1) Unproven reserves at G3 exploration stage deterring private investment
- 2) Proximity to Line of Control and potential for political volatility
- 3) Threats from terrorist organizations complicating access to resources

India's Strategy to Reduce Dependency Diversification and Partnerships

- 1) Establishment of KABIL to secure overseas mineral assets
- 2) Joining initiatives like Minerals Security Partnership and Critical Raw Materials Club

Domestic Capacity Building

- 1) Investing in research through institutions like Geological Survey of India
- 2) Promoting recycling and circular economy practices
- 3) Production-linked incentives for critical mineral extraction through recycling

IE Frontpage: As rupee hits new lows, real effective exchange rate soars to an all-time high (Harish Damodaran)
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian rupee has hit new lows against the US dollar while simultaneously reaching an all-time high in real effective terms.

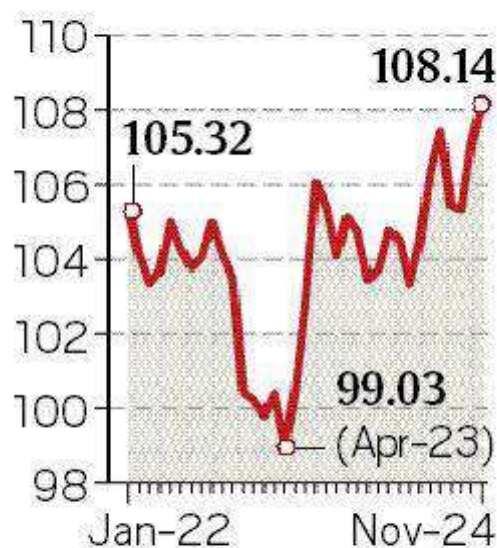
Key Developments

- 1) **Record REER:** The real effective exchange rate (REER) index of the rupee touched a

record 108.14 in November 2024, strengthening by 4.5% during the calendar year.

- 2) **Dollar Strength:** The US dollar has strengthened significantly against major currencies, particularly after the US presidential elections in November 2024.
- 3) **US Economic Policies:** Expectations of potential tariff hikes, tax cuts, and immigration policies under the new US administration are

₹ REAL EFFECTIVE EXCHANGE RATE



**Trade-weighted against 40-currency basket; Base: 2015-16 = 100; Source: Reserve Bank of India*

driving up US bond yields and attracting capital from other countries, including India.

Implications

- 1) **Export Competitiveness:** A REER value above 100 signifies overvaluation, making imports cheaper but exports less cost competitive.
- 2) **Inflation Factor:** The rupee's REER increase is partly due to higher inflation in India relative to its major trading partners.

- 3) **RBI's Strategy:** The Reserve Bank of India is likely allowing the rupee to fall against the dollar to address the overvaluation issue.

Concept Note: NEER vs REER

Nominal Effective Exchange Rate (NEER)

NEER is an unadjusted weighted average rate at which one country's currency exchanges for a basket of multiple foreign currencies.

It serves as an indicator of a country's international competitiveness in the foreign exchange market.

Key Features

- 1) Measures relative value of domestic currency against multiple foreign currencies
- 2) Unadjusted for inflation
- 3) Calculated using a weighted average based on trade shares

Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER)

REER is the NEER adjusted for inflation differentials between the home country and its trading partners.

It provides a more accurate measure of a currency's real value in terms of purchasing power.

Key Features

- 1) Adjusts NEER for inflation
- 2) Reflects trade competitiveness more accurately
- 3) Considers both exchange rates and relative price levels

Interpretations

- 1) A rising REER indicates declining trade competitiveness, as exports become more expensive and imports cheaper.
- 2) A falling REER suggests improving trade competitiveness, with exports becoming more affordable and imports more expensive.



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Science and Technology

December 2024

TH Text & Context: What are the toxins of 1984 Bhopal disaster (Vasudevan Mukunth)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? December 2-3, 2024 marks 40 years since the Bhopal gas tragedy, with toxic waste still present at the Union Carbide plant site despite government efforts.



Lingering Toxins Remaining Waste

- 1) Several hundred tonnes of toxic waste remain around the plant
- 2) The site contains about 11 lakh tonnes of contaminated soil, one tonne of mercury, and nearly 150 tonnes of underground dumps.

Toxic Compounds

Chemical analyses have revealed elevated concentrations of:

- 1) Hexachlorobutadiene
- 2) Chloroform
- 3) Carbon tetrachloride
- 4) Trichlorobenzene
- 5) Heavy metals (chromium, copper, lead, mercury, and nickel)

Health and Environmental Impacts

Heavy Metal Toxicity

- 1) Mercury can damage multiple organs even at low concentrations
- 2) Chromium, arsenic, and nickel compounds are associated with various cancers
- 3) Lead can damage chlorophyll in plants and disrupt cellular energy production in animals

Organic Compound Hazards

- 1) Hexachlorobutadiene: Possible carcinogen, affects liver, kidneys, and brain
- 2) Chloroform: Impacts central nervous system, possibly carcinogenic
- 3) Carbon tetrachloride: Acute toxin, damages liver and can cause cancer
- 4) Trichlorobenzene: Damages liver and kidneys, accumulates in fatty tissues

Ongoing Challenges

Water Contamination

- 1) Supreme Court ordered drinking water supply to affected communities due to contamination
- 2) Indian Institute of Toxicology Research found higher than permitted concentrations of nitrate, chloride compounds, and heavy metals in water samples

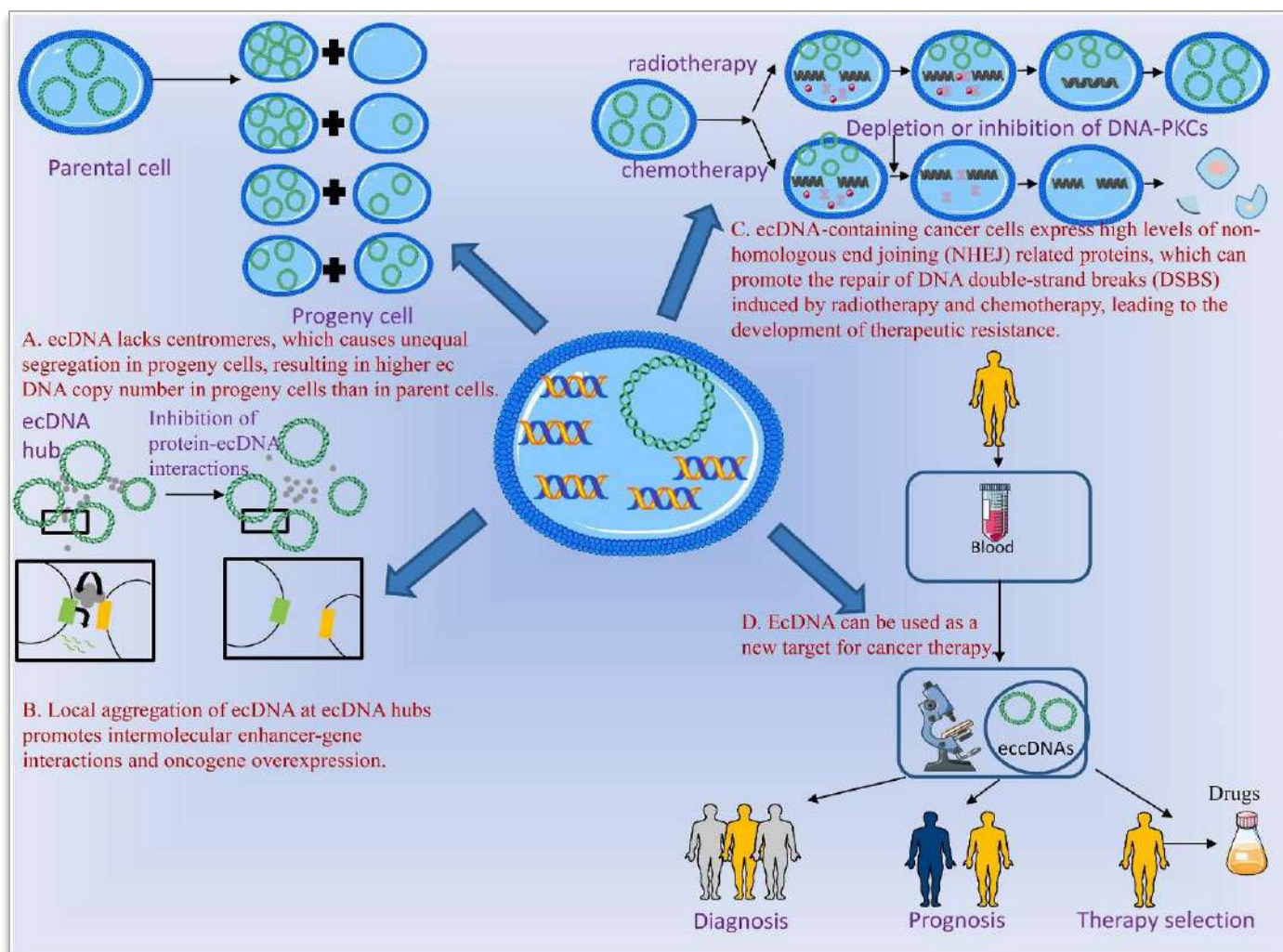
Disposal Efforts

- 1) Madhya Pradesh received ₹126 crore to incinerate 340 tonnes of aboveground material
- 2) Concerns raised about potential release of poisonous fumes during incineration

TH Science: ecDNA challenges law of genetics, groundbreaking new studies find (Manjeera Gowravaram)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? Three papers published in Nature on November 6, 2024, reveal groundbreaking findings about extrachromosomal DNA (ecDNA) and its role in cancer progression, challenging a fundamental law of genetics.

Understanding ecDNA



- 1) **Definition:** ecDNA is circular DNA that exists outside chromosomes, formed when small DNA fragments break away from chromosomes.
- 2) **Prevalence:** Initially thought to be rare, ecDNA is now known to be present in nearly 40% of cancer cell lines and up to 90% of patient-derived brain tumor samples.

- 3) **Formation:** Environmental factors like smoking, exposure to certain substances, and genetic mutations can trigger DNA damage leading to ecDNA formation.

Impact on Cancer

- 1) **Oncogene Amplification:** ecDNA often contains multiple copies of oncogenes, accelerating tumor evolution and drug resistance.
- 2) **Enhanced Gene Expression:** ecDNA forms hubs where oncogenes are expressed four times more than chromosomal DNA.

- 3) **Prevalence in Tumors:** Found in about 17% of tumor samples, with higher prevalence in liposarcomas, brain tumors, and breast cancers.
- 4) **Treatment Resistance:** ecDNA prevalence increases after treatments like chemotherapy and correlates with metastasis and worse patient outcomes.

Challenging Genetic Laws

- 1) **Violation of Mendel's Third Law:** ecDNA is passed on in clusters to daughter cells during cell division, contradicting the law of independent assortment.
- 2) **"Jackpot Effect":** This clustering allows cancer cells to enhance gene interactions and preserve favorable genetic combinations over multiple life-cycles.

Potential for New Cancer Treatments

- 1) **Vulnerability Discovery:** The unusual structure of ecDNA increases specific gene activity, leading to conflicts in cellular machinery.
- 2) **CHK1 Protein Dependence:** Cancer cells with ecDNA heavily rely on the CHK1 protein to fix DNA damage.
- 3) **Targeted Therapy:** A drug called BBI-2779, which blocks CHK1, selectively killed cancer cells with ecDNA in mice with stomach cancer.
- 4) **Clinical Translation:** Boundless Bio, a biotechnology company, is working to develop treatments targeting ecDNA-driven cancers.

IE Express Network: ISRO's PSLV places two satellites of European Space Agency into orbit (Anonna Dutt)

Syllabus: Prelims– Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the European Space Agency's (ESA) Proba-3 mission on December 5, 2024, using its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C59).



Launch Details

- 1) The launch took place at 4:04 PM IST from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- 2) The mission was initially scheduled for December 4 but was postponed due to an anomaly detected in the satellite's propulsion system.
- 3) PSLV-C59, on its 61st flight, placed two satellites into a highly elliptical orbit.

Mission Objectives

- 1) Proba-3 aims to demonstrate precise formation flying of two spacecraft.
- 2) The mission will study the Sun's corona by creating artificial solar eclipses in space.
- 3) It consists of two satellites: Coronagraph (310 kg) and Occulter (240 kg).

Technological Advancements

- 1) The satellites will maintain a precise formation, flying 150 meters apart.
- 2) This configuration allows for up to six hours of continuous solar corona observation per orbit.
- 3) The mission showcases ISRO's capability to place satellites in highly elliptical orbits.

TH Text & Context: Should AI be blamed for sporadic layoffs in Big tech? (Poulomi Chatterjee)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Economy, Science & Tech
[Link](#)

Why in News? Tech giants like Google, Meta, Amazon, and Microsoft are implementing sporadic layoffs and cost-cutting measures amid AI investments and investor pressure.

Factors Driving Layoffs

AI Investment and Restructuring:

- 1) Companies are overhauling business processes with AI while facing investor pressure
- 2) Tech firms are reallocating resources and rethinking priorities to accommodate AI specialists

Cost-Cutting Measures:

- 1) Alphabet (Google's parent company) aims to tamp down costs, potentially through headcount efficiencies
- 2) Meta has made cuts across various segments, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and Reality Labs
- 3) Amazon plans to restructure, increasing the ratio of individual contributors to managers

Market Pressures:

- 1) Accountability is catching up with young tech companies that sold themselves on potential but struggle to monetize it
- 2) Investors are grappling with high AI expenditures and a long road to profitability

Impact and Scale

Layoff Numbers:

- 1) Nearly 100,000 tech workers in U.S.-based companies lost jobs last year
- 2) Google laid off over 200 employees from core engineering teams in May 2024
- 3) Microsoft cut around 2,000 employees in its gaming unit post-Activision Blizzard acquisition

Capital Expenditure Increases:

- 1) Microsoft plans to spend over \$80 billion in the current fiscal year on AI and infrastructure
- 2) Meta raised its capital expenditures guidance for 2024 to \$38-40 billion

- 3) Amazon expects to spend \$75 billion on capex in 2024, with an increase anticipated for 2025

Future Outlook

- 1) While the rate of tech layoffs has slowed, they haven't fully stopped as companies continue to optimize their workforce
- 2) The industry faces a balancing act between shareholder value, consumer value, and the need to invest in AI technologies

TH Science: Webb telescope confirms the universe is expanding at an unexpected rate (Reuters)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? NASA's James Webb Space Telescope has validated the Hubble Space Telescope's earlier finding that the universe is expanding about 8% faster than expected, confirming the "Hubble Tension" phenomenon.

Key Findings

- 1) **Expansion Rate Discrepancy:** Webb's data shows the universe expanding at a rate of about 73 km/s/Mpc, compared to the 67-68 km/s/Mpc predicted by the standard cosmological model.
- 2) **Ruling Out Instrument Error:** The alignment between Webb and Hubble measurements effectively eliminates the possibility of instrument error as the cause of the discrepancy.
- 3) **Challenge to Cosmological Models:** This faster expansion rate challenges current understanding of the universe's physics and evolution.

Implications and Theories

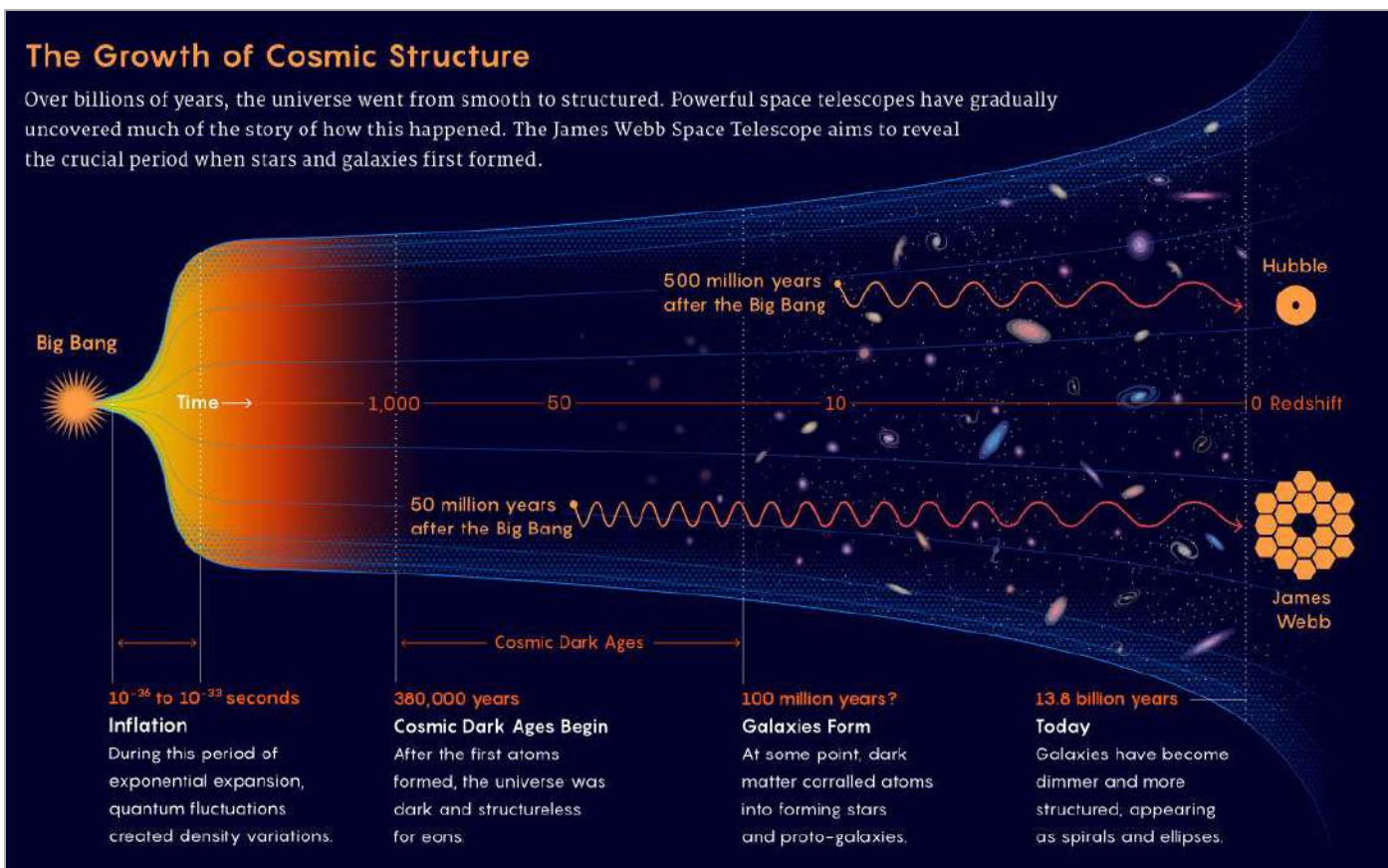
- 1) **Dark Energy and Dark Matter:** The discrepancy may be related to unknown properties of dark energy and dark matter, which comprise 96% of the universe.
- 2) **Early Dark Energy:** Some theories propose a brief surge of "early dark energy" in the universe's infancy as a potential explanation.
- 3) **Other Hypotheses:** Exotic properties of gravity, dark radiation, or neutrinos are among other proposed explanations for the anomaly.

Next Steps

- 1) Further data collection is needed to refine the size and scope of the discrepancy over cosmic time.
- 2) Scientists are exploring various theoretical models to explain the Hubble Tension,

potentially leading to a revised understanding of the universe's evolution and composition.

Properties	Dark Energy	Dark Matter
Definition	A hypothetical form of energy responsible for the accelerated expansion of the universe, acting as a repulsive force counteracting gravity.	A form of matter that does not emit, absorb, or reflect light, detectable only through its gravitational effects
Contribution to the Universe	Constitutes about 68% of the universe's total energy density	Accounts for about 27% of the universe's total mass-energy content and 85% of all matter
Properties:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Exhibits strong negative pressure, causing a gravitationally repulsive effect 2) Evenly distributed across space and time, meaning its effects are global rather than local 3) Does not dilute as the universe expands 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Accounts for about 27% of the universe's total mass-energy content and 85% of all matter 2) Likely "cold" (slow-moving) particles, crucial for structure formation in the early universe 3) Observed through galaxy rotation curves, gravitational lensing, and cosmic microwave background (CMB) anisotropies 4) Provides additional gravitational pull necessary to hold galaxies and clusters together
Role in Cosmic Expansion:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Drives the accelerating expansion of the universe, observed since about 5 billion years ago 2) Its effects became dominant several billion years after the Big Bang, transitioning the universe from deceleration to acceleration 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Acts as a "backbone" for galaxy formation by creating gravitational wells that attract ordinary matter 2) Distributed in a halo-like structure around galaxies, unlike luminous matter which is more concentrated
Theoretical Explanations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) May be linked to Einstein's cosmological constant or a dynamic field like "quintessence" 2) Its origin and exact nature remain unknown, but it is associated with the vacuum energy of space 	Possible particles include WIMPs (Weakly Interacting Massive Particles), axions, or particles from a "dark sector"



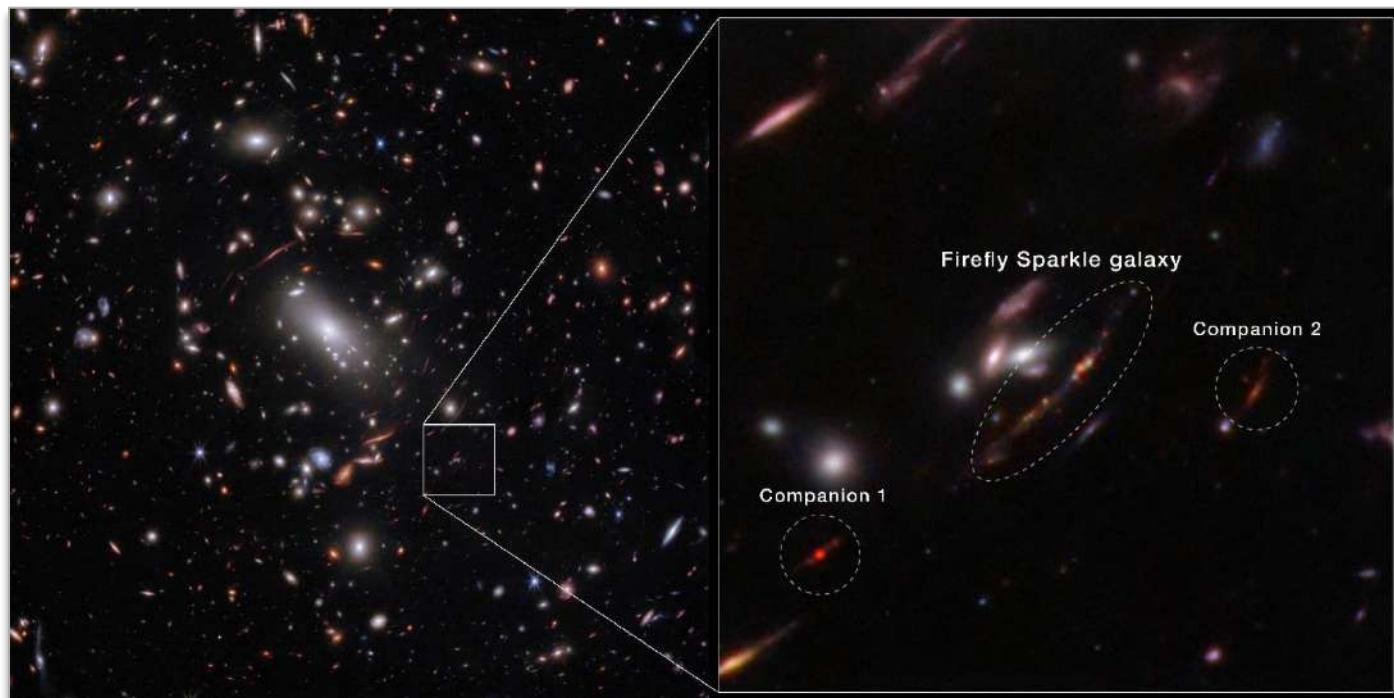
IE Explained: How a distant galaxy provides a peek into nascent Milky Way

Syllabus: Prelims – Science & Technology [Link](#)

galaxy named Firefly Sparkle, offering insights into what our Milky Way may have looked like in its early stages of formation.

Firefly Sparkle's Characteristics

Why in News? NASA's James Webb Space



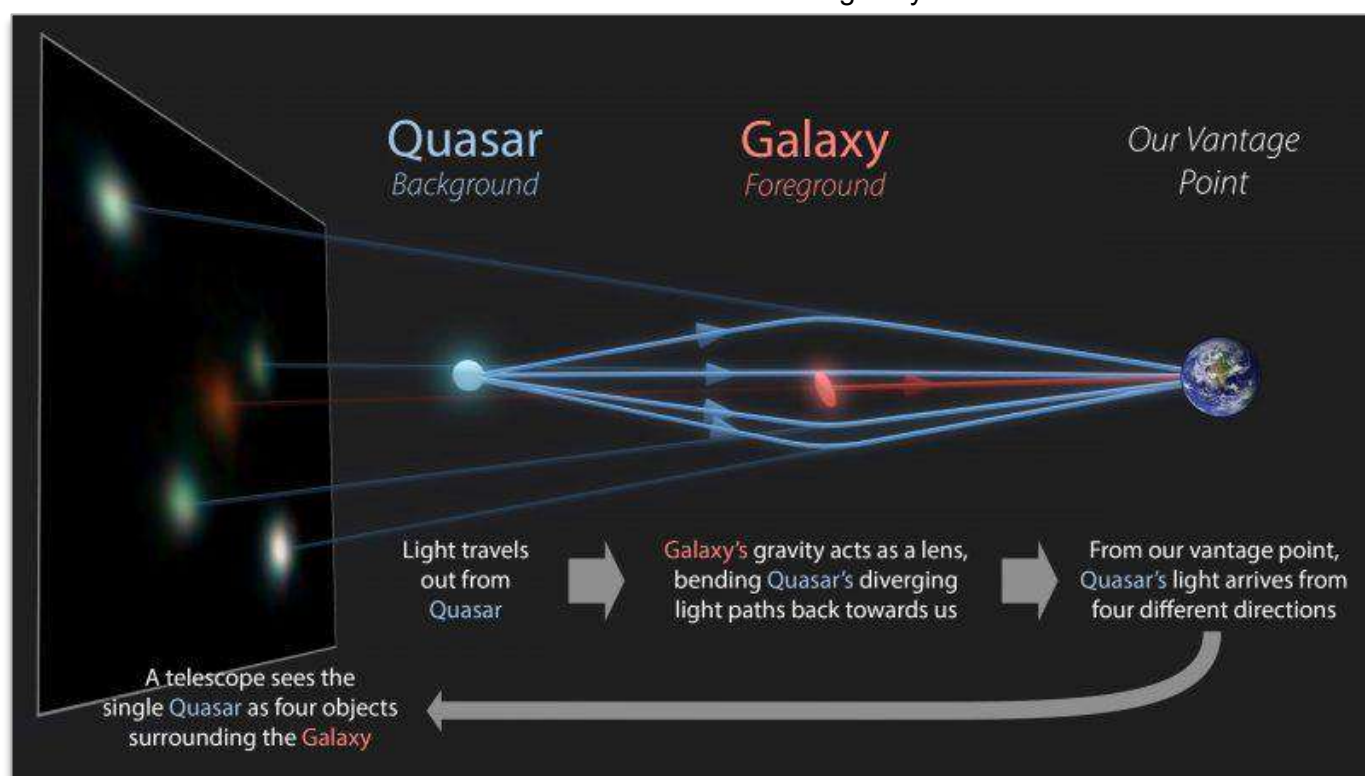
Telescope (JWST) has discovered a distant

- 1) Located approximately 13 billion light-years away
- 2) Formed about 600 million years after the Big Bang
- 3) Mass equivalent to about 10 million sun-sized stars
- 4) Comprises 10 densely packed star clusters in a diffuse arc of stars
- 5) Main visible portion spans about 1,000 light-years across
- 6) Has two smaller neighbouring galaxies: Firefly-Best Friend and Firefly-New Best Friend

- 2) This phenomenon, known as gravitational lensing, magnified the galaxy's light by 16-26 times
- 3) Allowed astronomers to observe details that would otherwise be too faint to detect

James Webb Space Telescope's Role

- 1) JWST's advanced capabilities enabled the observation of this distant, early galaxy
- 2) The telescope's high-resolution infrared imaging provided unprecedented data about the galaxy's contents



Comparison to the Milky Way

- 1) Firefly Sparkle represents a potential ancestor of galaxies like the Milky Way
- 2) Its mass is consistent with expectations for a Milky Way progenitor at that early epoch
- 3) Currently about 10,000 times less massive than the present-day Milky Way
- 4) Provides a direct look at the infant stage of Milky Way-like galaxies

Observation Techniques

Gravitational Lensing

- 1) A cluster of galaxies between JWST and Firefly Sparkle acted as a natural magnifying glass

Significance

- 1) Offers a glimpse into galaxy formation processes in the early universe
- 2) Provides valuable data for understanding the evolution of galaxies like our Milky Way
- 3) Demonstrates the power of combining JWST's capabilities with natural phenomena like gravitational lensing to study the distant cosmos

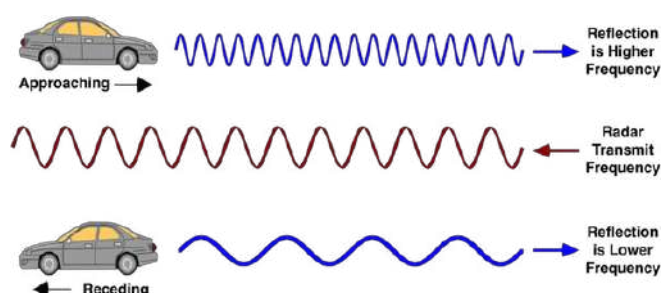
TH Text & Context: The principle behind the working of a speed gun, used for motion tracking (Amartya Srinivasan, Vasudevan Mukunth)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? Traffic police in Puducherry and many parts of the country have started using speed guns to crack down on speeding vehicles since September 2023.

What is a Speed Gun?

- 1) A device that measures the speed of moving objects without physical contact
- 2) Uses electromagnetic radiation and the Doppler effect to calculate speed
- 3) Widely used in law enforcement, sports, and industries requiring motion tracking



How Speed Guns Work The Doppler Effect

- 1) Named after Austrian physicist Christian Doppler
- 2) Explains change in wave frequency based on relative motion
- 3) Example: Train horn sounds higher pitched when approaching, lower when receding

Speed Gun Mechanics

- 1) Contains a radio transmitter and receiver
- 2) Transmitter emits radio waves towards the target object
- 3) Receiver collects waves reflected back from the object
- 4) Calculates speed based on frequency difference between emitted and received waves

Shortcomings of Radar-based Speed Guns

- 1) Radio waves diverge, potentially causing inaccurate readings from multiple vehicles
- 2) Continuous-wave radar may produce errors due to multiple reflections

LIDAR Speed Guns

- 1) Use laser light instead of radio waves
- 2) Offer better targeting due to low divergence of laser light
- 3) Increasingly replacing traditional radar speed guns

IE Frontpage: Space docking takes off, key to India's future missions (Anonna Dutt)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? ISRO successfully launched the SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment) mission on December 31, 2024, using the PSLV-C60 rocket from Sriharikota.

Key Details

- 1) Two satellites, SDX01 Chaser and SDX02 Target, were placed in a 475-km circular orbit
- 2) The docking manoeuvre is expected to occur on January 7, 2025
- 3) This mission aims to demonstrate space docking technology, crucial for future space endeavours

Significance

- 1) Success will make India the fourth country globally to possess space docking capability
- 2) Essential for future missions including:
 - a) Sample return from the Moon (Chandrayaan-4)
 - b) Sending an Indian to the Moon
 - c) Building and operating the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)

IE Explained: Parker probe gets closest-ever to the Sun: Why it matters (Alind Chauhan)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Science & Technology [Link](#)

Why in News? NASA scientists announced on December 28, 2024, that the Parker Solar Probe successfully completed its closest-ever approach to the Sun, passing just 6.1 million km from the solar surface.

Mission Details

- 1) Purpose: Part of NASA's Living With a Star program to explore aspects of the Sun-Earth system affecting life and society on Earth
- 2) Launch: 2018
- 3) Size: Comparable to a small car
- 4) Orbits: Completed 21 orbits around the Sun

Recent Milestone

- 1) Closest Approach: December 24, 2024
- 2) Distance: 6.1 million km from the solar surface
- 3) Speed: 692,000 km/h
- 4) Temperature Endured: Up to 1,377°C

Technological Innovations

- 1) Heat Shield: 4.5-inch-thick carbon-composite shield
- 2) Cooling System: Circulates a single gallon of water through solar panels
- 3) Temperature Management: Front side reaches 2,500°F (1,371°C), while instruments remain at 85°F (29.4°C)

Scientific Significance

- 1) Corona Study: Aims to solve the mystery of the corona's extreme heat
- 2) Solar Wind Research: Seeks to understand the origins and effects of solar winds
- 3) Data Collection: Expected to provide crucial information about the Sun's behavior and its impact on Earth
- 4) Data Transmission: Detailed telemetry data expected on January 1, 2025



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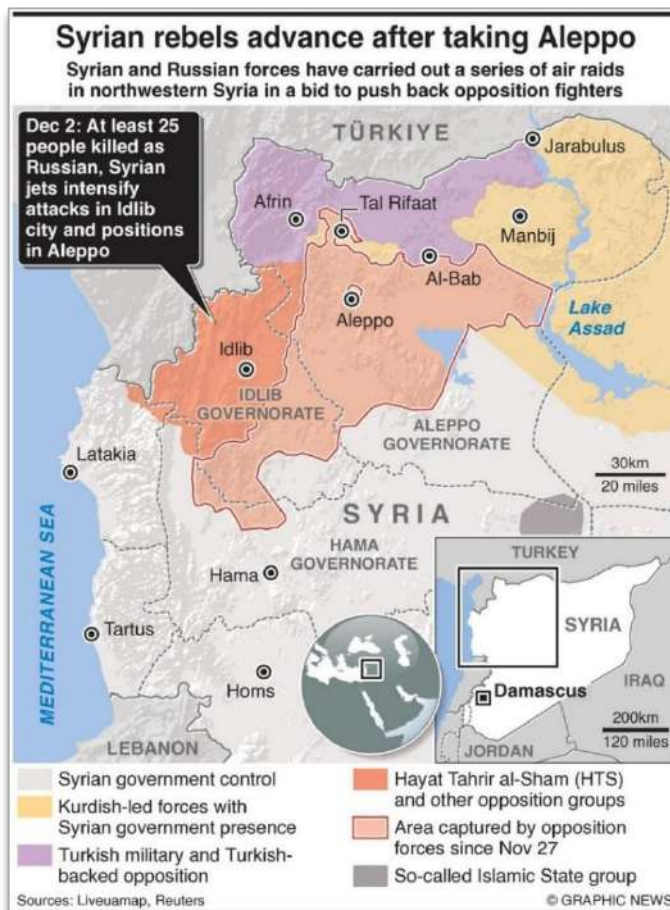
Geography and Environment

December 2024

Map in News for Prelims 2025

TH Text & Context: What's happening in Syria? Explained [Link](#)

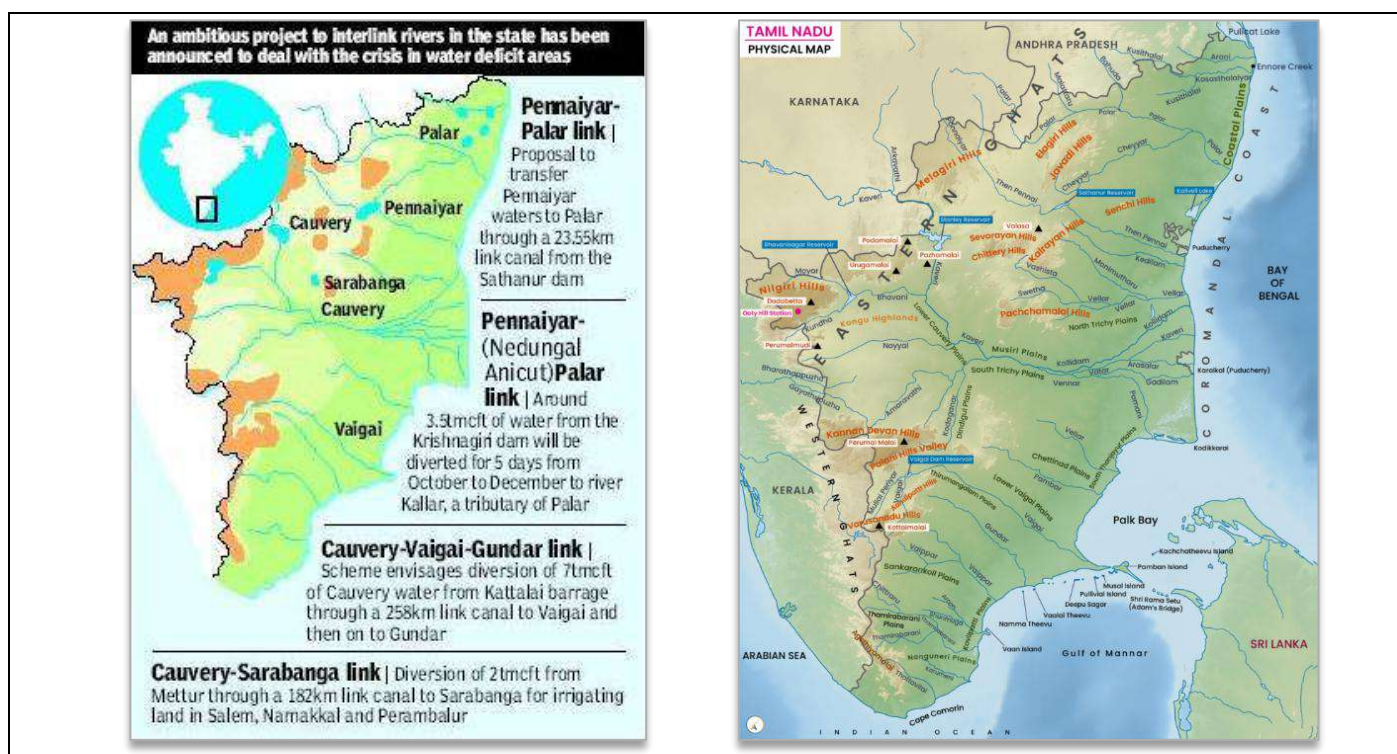
- 1) Islamist militants launched a surprise attack from Idlib, capturing Aleppo and parts of Hama within a week, more than doubling their territory.
- 2) The main actors are the Assad regime (supported by Russia, Iran, and Shia militias), the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)
- 3) HTS, led by Abu Mohammad al-Joulani, is the primary anti-government force controlling Idlib
- 4) The militants' offensive was likely due to Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine, reduced Iranian support, and weakened regime positions from Israeli airstrikes
- 5) The Assad regime lost Aleppo in just four days, a significant setback compared to the four years it took to recapture it in 2016
- 6) The regime is now facing a full-blown civil war, with smaller rebel groups attacking government positions in other parts of the country
- 7) While it's too early to rule out Assad, the regime's inability to stop militant advances is concerning, and Syria appears to be heading towards another prolonged period of conflict.



TH – Sathanur Dam, Pennaiyar River, Tamil Nadu

Why in News? A political controversy has erupted in Tamil Nadu over the sudden release of 1.68 lakh cusecs of water from Sathanur Dam in Tiruvannamalai district, causing widespread flooding in four districts and sparking debate over the adequacy of flood warnings.





Why in News? Eleven Indians, including three women, tragically died in a restaurant in the Georgian ski resort of Gudauri due to suspected carbon monoxide poisoning from a generator used during a power outage caused by a snowstorm.

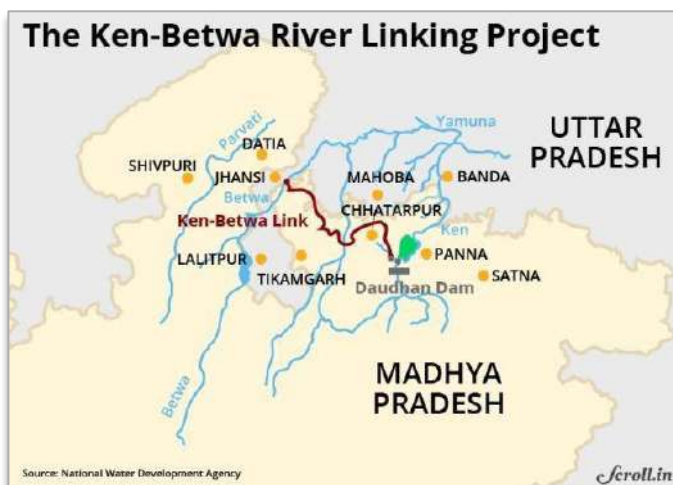


Maps in News for Prelims 2025: IE – At river-link project site, PM hails Ambedkar role in water works, slams Cong [Link](#)

Why in News? Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the Ken-Betwa River linking project in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, while criticizing the Congress for neglecting water resource initiatives.

Project Details:

- 1) First river interlinking project under the National Perspective Plan of 1980
- 2) Aims to transfer water from Ken River to Betwa river, both Yamuna tributaries
- 3) Estimated cost: ₹44,605 crore
- 4) Benefits: Irrigation, drinking water, and hydropower for Bundelkhand region
- 5) Coverage: 12 districts in Madhya Pradesh and 10 in Uttar Pradesh


IE – Pakistan airstrikes in Afghanistan kill 46 people, say Taliban [Link](#)

Why in News? Pakistani airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan's Paktika province have reportedly killed 46 people, mostly women and children, according to Taliban officials.

Target: Pakistani officials claim the operation aimed to dismantle a training facility and neutralize insurgents


Map of the Day: IE – After 300 km in three states over 21 days, tigress Zeenat finally captured in Bengal [Link](#)

Why in News? Zeenat, a three-year-old tigress that escaped from Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve, was sedated and captured in West Bengal's Bankura district after a 21-day search spanning three states.

Zeenat's 21-Day Journey

- 1) Starting Point: Similipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha
- 2) December 8, 2024: Left Similipal and entered Jharkhand
- 3) Spent about a week in Chakulia area, Jharkhand
- 4) December 20, 2024: Entered West Bengal through Belpahari in Jhargram district
- 5) Moved to Purulia district, West Bengal
- 6) Entered Bankura district, West Bengal
- 7) December 29, 2024: Captured near Gosaindih village, Ranibandh block, Bankura district

The tigress will then be returned to Similipal Tiger Reserve.



Species in News

IE – Rare species of bat spotted in Yamuna Biodiversity Park [Link](#)

Why in News? A highly rare Wroughton's free-tailed bat has been sighted at Delhi's Yamuna Biodiversity Park, marking the first record for Delhi-NCR and northern India.

About Wroughton's free-tailed bat (*Otomops wroughtoni*)

- 1) Large size with huge ears extending beyond the muzzle
- 2) Bicoloured velvet fur
- 3) Powerful flier capable of foraging long distances
- 4) Habitat:
 - a) Typically roosts in caves or dark, damp, and slightly warm places
 - b) Forms moderate-sized colonies



Conservation Status

- 1) Previously considered critically endangered until 2000
- 2) Now classified as "Data Deficient" on the IUCN Red List due to limited information
- 3) Listed on Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972

Significance of Sighting

- 1) Extends the known range of the species, previously mainly found in the Western Ghats
- 2) Adds to Delhi's bat diversity, bringing the total to 15 species
- 3) Highlights the success of ecological restoration efforts in creating specialized habitats
- 4) The sighting underscores the importance of urban biodiversity conservation

Species in News for Prelims 2025: IE – Rotterdam's Christmas gift for Darjeeling – To Red Pandas [Link](#)

Why in News? West Bengal welcomed two male red pandas from Rotterdam Zoo, Netherlands, as a Christmas gift for the Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNZP) in Darjeeling.

Key Details

- 1) New Arrivals: Two male red pandas, named Vishal and Koshi, both 2.5 years old.
- 2) Journey: Arrived at Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport and are en route to PNZP in Darjeeling.
- 3) Purpose: To enhance genetic diversity in the zoo's conservation breeding program.
- 4) Significance: First red panda acquisition from a foreign zoo in nearly a decade.



About Red Panda

- 1) Found in Nepal, India, Bhutan, Myanmar, and southern China
- 2) Inhabits temperate mountain forests at elevations of 2,000-4,300 meters
- 3) Range in India: States of Sikkim, West Bengal (Darjeeling), and Arunachal Pradesh
- 4) Key habitats include Khangchendzonga National Park, Singalila National Park, and Neora Valley National Park
- 5) Conservation Status:
 - a) IUCN Status: Endangered
 - b) Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I
 - c) CITES: Appendix I



TH Science: In our fight against climate change, could the seas turn the tide? (Pranay Lal)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

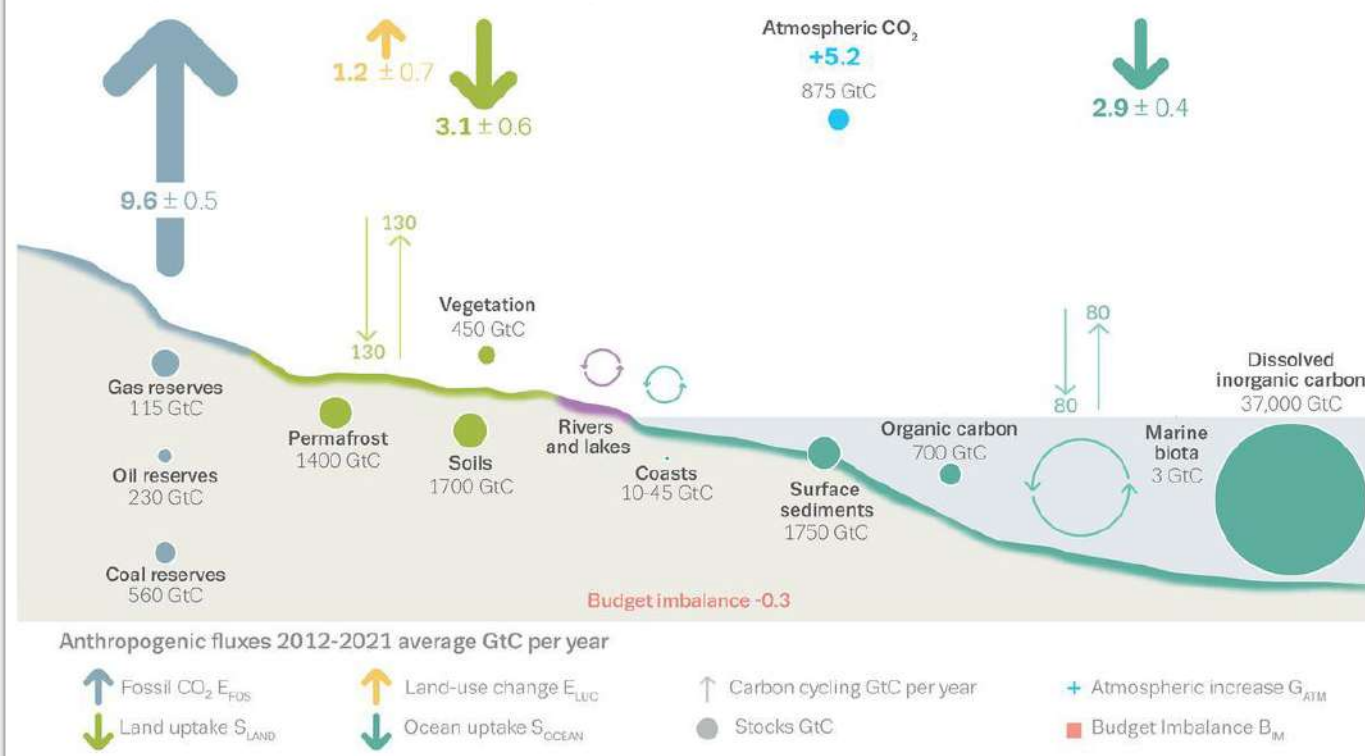
Why in News? The ocean's potential for carbon dioxide removal (CDR) is gaining attention as a crucial strategy in the fight

against climate change, offering immense opportunities if implemented correctly.

Ocean's Role in Climate Regulation

- 1) Oceans have absorbed 25% of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions and over 90% of excess heat from greenhouse gases.
- 2) This absorption has mitigated climate change impacts but at a cost to marine ecosystems.

The global carbon cycle



- 3) Ocean acidification disrupted biogeochemical cycles, and harm to marine life are consequences of this absorption.



Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal (mCDR) Approaches

Biotic Methods

- 1) Utilize living systems like mangroves and macroalgae for carbon sequestration.
- 2) Offer modest carbon capture potential, typically less than 1 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually.
- 3) Storage duration limited to hundreds or thousands of years.

Abiotic Methods

- 1) Manipulate physical or chemical properties of the ocean.
- 2) Include techniques like ocean alkalinity enhancement (OAE).
- 3) Offer greater scalability and permanence compared to biotic methods.
- 4) Potential to sequester 1-15 billion tonnes of CO₂ per year through OAE.

Challenges and Considerations

- 1) Uncertainties and potential side effects of mCDR techniques.
- 2) Public scepticism and regulatory challenges.
- 3) Need for extensive energy inputs for some abiotic approaches.
- 4) Difficulty in measuring carbon capture and storage in vast, turbulent oceans.

Future Outlook

- 1) mCDR is not a substitute for emissions reduction but a complementary strategy.
- 2) Success depends on rigorous science, robust governance, and societal trust.

- 3) The Indian Ocean holds significant potential for deep carbon burial.
- 4) Harnessing natural systems could provide a critical edge in climate change mitigation.

IE Express Network: Now, book an Uber Shikara in Dal (Express News Service)
 Syllabus: Prelims – Geography & Environment
[Link](#)

Why in News? Uber has introduced its first water transport service in Asia, allowing tourists to book traditional Kashmiri shikaras on Dal Lake through its app.

Key Facts about Dal Lake

- 1) Located in Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir
- 2) Second largest lake in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (Largest – Wular lake)
- 3) Often referred to as the "Jewel in the crown of Kashmir" or "Srinagar's Jewel"
- 4) Part of a natural wetland, including floating gardens known as "Rad" in Kashmiri
- 5) Situated in the Zabarwan mountain valley, surrounded by Shankracharya hills on three sides
- 6) Covers an area of 18 square kilometers
- 7) Divided into four basins: Gagribal, Lokut Dal, Bod Dal and Nagin
- 8) Contains two islands: Rup Lank (or Char Chinari) in Lokut Dal and Sona Lank in Bod Dal
- 9) Dal Lake is not a Ramsar site.

TH Opinion: Takeaways from COP29 (Sumant Sinha)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? COP29, the UN Climate Change Conference, concluded in Baku, Azerbaijan, with a focus on climate finance and carbon markets, though falling short of expectations.

Key Takeaways from COP29 Climate Finance Deal

- 1) Developed nations agreed to provide \$300 billion annually by 2035 for climate action in developing countries
- 2) This falls short of the \$1.3 trillion goal set by developing nations

- 3) The deal includes funding from public, private, and multilateral development bank sources

Carbon Markets Agreement

- 1) Rules for global carbon markets under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement were finalized
- 2) This enables bilateral carbon trading (Article 6.2) and creates a UN-regulated marketplace (Article 6.4)
- 3) The agreement is expected to benefit countries like India in attracting climate finance

Emission Reduction Commitments

- 1) Several countries, including the EU, Canada, and Brazil, announced new emission reduction pledges
- 2) Mexico set a net-zero goal for 2050, while Indonesia plans to retire all coal and fossil fuel plants by 2040

Disappointments and Concerns

- 1) The climate finance deal was criticized as inadequate by developing countries, including India
- 2) Lack of progress on fossil fuel phase-out at both COP29 and the G20 Summit
- 3) Uncertainty about meeting the 1.5°C global temperature rise limit

Looking Ahead

- 1) A roadmap from Baku to Belém (COP30) was established to assess progress towards the \$1.3 trillion climate finance goal
- 2) The swift adoption of carbon market rules by individual countries is crucial for implementation
- 3) Debate continues on whether to maintain or adjust the 1.5°C temperature goal

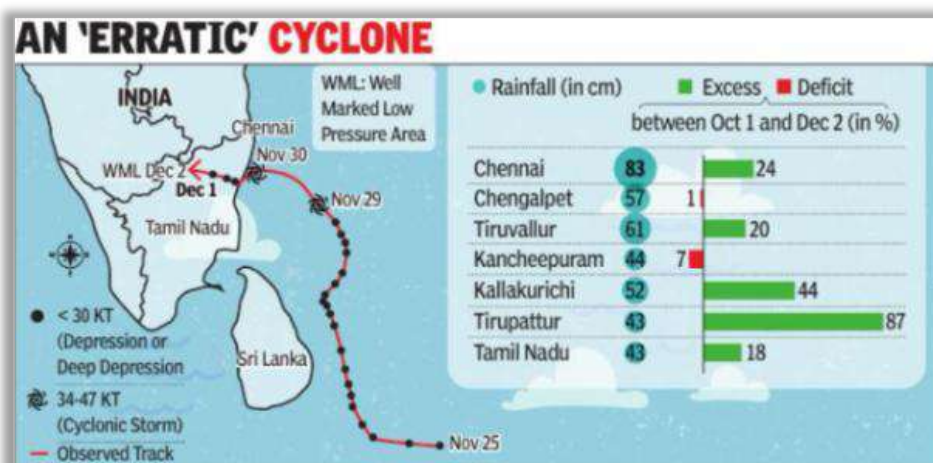
TH Editorial: Preparing For Worst

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Geography & Environment
[Link](#)

Why in News? Cyclone Fengal caused widespread devastation in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, highlighting the need for better preparedness against extreme weather events.

Extent of Damage

- 1) Nearly 7 million families and 15 million individuals affected in Tamil Nadu
- 2) 16 fatalities reported, including 4 in Puducherry
- 3) Over 2.21 lakh hectares of farmland submerged, including 10,000 hectares in Puducherry
- 4) Unusually heavy rainfall (40-50 cm) recorded in many areas on a single day
- 5) South Pennai river experienced a flow of 2.4 lakh cusecs, exacerbating flooding



Future Preparedness

- 1) Anticipate increased frequency of extreme weather events
- 2) Implement long-term mitigation strategies beyond routine relief efforts
- 3) Strengthen infrastructure:
 - a) Reinforce bunds
 - b) Regularly remove silt from water courses
 - c) Combat encroachment of water bodies
- 4) Utilize scientific data:
 - a) Consider IMD's prediction of four depressions or cyclonic storms affecting the southern peninsula each season
 - b) Make public the report on flood risk management in Chennai Metropolitan Area

IE Express Network: Two male cheetahs released back into the wild at Kuno (Express News Service)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Geography & Environment

[Link](#)

Why in News? Two male cheetahs, Agni and Vayu, were released into the wild at Kuno National Park on International Cheetah Day, marking a significant milestone in India's cheetah reintroduction project.

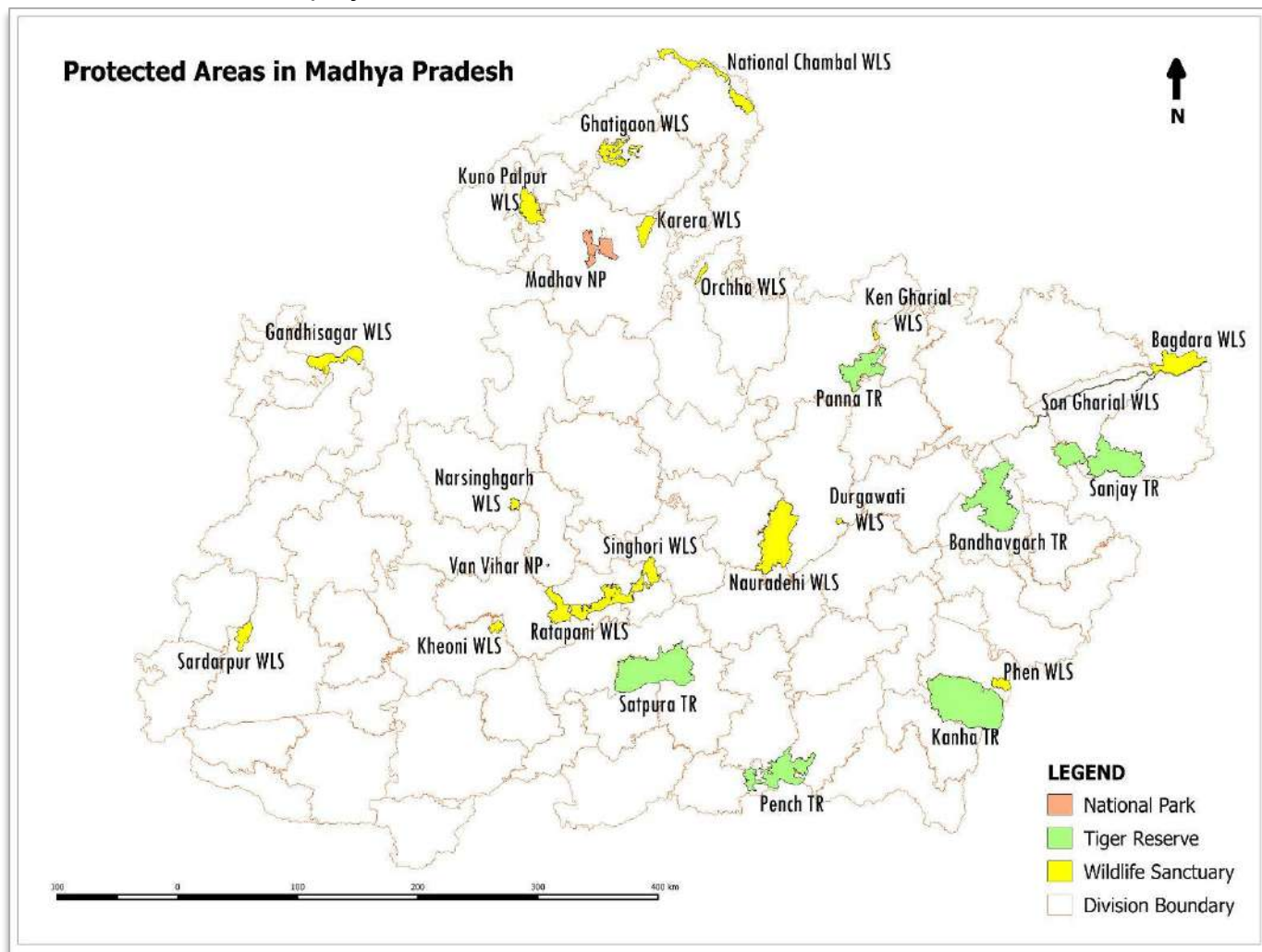
Current Status

Cheetah Population:

- 1) Total: 24 cheetahs (12 adults, 12 cubs)
- 2) Initial imports: 8 from Namibia (September 2022), 12 from South Africa (February 2023)

Mortality:

- 1) 10 adult cheetahs died since project inception
- 2) 3 out of 4 cubs born in India died



Cheetah Reintroduction Project Overview

- 1) Officially launched: September 17, 2022
- 2) Aim: Reintroduce cheetahs to India after being declared extinct in 1952
- 3) Location: Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh
- 4) Implementing agencies: National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, Wildlife Institute of India (WII)

Project Challenges

- 1) High mortality rate (40% loss in functional adult population)
- 2) Adaptation issues to Indian climate and environment
- 3) Septicemia infections due to maggot infestation
- 4) Limited experience of captive cheetahs in wild conditions

Future Plans

- 1) Phased release of remaining cheetahs
- 2) Development of 17,000 sq km cheetah corridor across three states
- 3) Continued import of cheetahs from African countries

IE Explained: Why global plastic treaty talks collapsed (Nikhil Ghanekar)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? The week-long global talks in Busan, South Korea, on curbing plastic pollution ended Sunday without reaching an agreement on a legally binding treaty to regulate plastic production.

1) High ambition coalition

- a) African nations, Latin American countries, most of EU
- b) Supported production caps and chemical regulations

2) Opposing coalition

- a) Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, Iran
- b) Focused only on waste management
- c) Argued production cuts beyond 2022 mandate

3) India and China

- a) Aligned with opposing coalition
- b) Did not support production caps

India's Position

1) Emphasized:

PLASTIC POLLUTION IN NUMBERS

430 million tonnes of plastic are produced annually, two-thirds of which are short-lived products, which soon become waste

10% of the plastic ever produced has been recycled so far

11 million tonnes of plastic are

currently entering the ocean annually

46% of plastic waste is landfilled and 17% is incinerated

20 million tonnes of plastic litter end up in the environment every year

Source: UN & IUCN

Key Issues

1) Production caps

- a) Over 100 countries pushed for limits on plastic production
- b) Oil-producing nations opposed production cuts

2) Elimination of harmful chemicals/products

- a) Many countries wanted clear language on this
- b) Petrochemical producers resisted

3) Scope of treaty: Debate over including production vs. only waste management

- a) Differentiated responsibilities

- b) Right to development

- c) Need for technical/financial assistance

2) Opposed:

- a) Production caps

- b) Polymer production targets

- c) Pollution fee on primary polymers

3) Called for:

- a) Focus on reducing pollution, not production

- b) Balance between pollution prevention and development

Next Steps

- 1) Negotiations to continue in 2025

- 2) Current draft to serve as basis for future talks

Major Divisions

IE Explained: Nine years after it was finalised, a critical look at the Paris Agreement (Amitabh Sinha)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? The Paris Agreement, finalized on December 12, 2015, is facing criticism for its ineffectiveness in addressing climate change as it approaches its ninth anniversary.

Key Challenges

Rising Emissions and Temperatures

- 1) Global emissions have increased by 8% since 2015, from 49 to 53 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent
- 2) Average global temperatures have risen from 1.1°C to 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels
- 3) 2024 is expected to be the first year to breach the 1.5°C warming threshold

Weakened Global Action

- 1) The Paris Agreement's "nationally-determined" approach has led to minimal efforts from countries
- 2) Global climate action is no longer aligned with emission reductions needed to limit warming

Insufficient Climate Finance

- 1) Developed countries agreed to raise climate finance to only \$300 billion per year by 2035, far below the trillions needed annually
- 2) This lack of adequate finance hinders ambitious climate action from developing countries

Dwindling Trust and Alternative Approaches

- 1) Small island nations are exploring alternative approaches for more effective climate action
- 2) Vanuatu led an initiative seeking ICJ advice on countries' climate obligations beyond existing treaties
- 3) The United States is likely to exit the Paris Agreement again under Donald Trump's presidency

The Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C or 2°C above pre-industrial levels appears increasingly unattainable, raising concerns about its effectiveness in addressing the climate crisis.

TH Text & Context: How would a carbon market function? (The Hindu Bureau)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? The COP29 climate conference in Baku has endorsed standards for establishing an international carbon market, potentially operational by next year.

What is a Carbon Market?

Definition: A carbon market is a system where carbon credits, representing the right to emit a certain amount of carbon dioxide or equivalent greenhouse gases, are bought and sold.

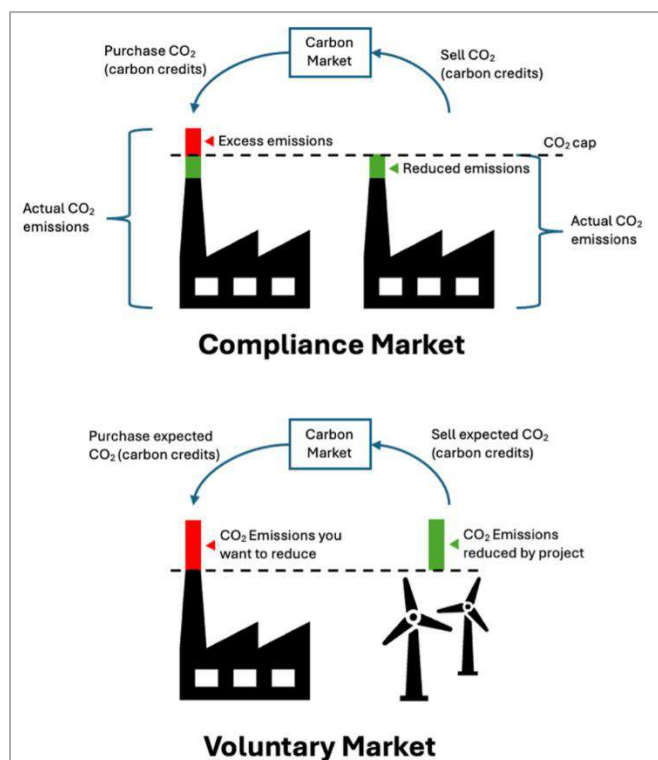
Functionality: Governments set emission limits and issue carbon credits to entities, which can trade these credits based on their emission needs.

Types

- 1) **Compliance Markets:** Regulated by governments to enforce emission limits.
- 2) **Voluntary Markets:** Allow entities to trade credits voluntarily to offset emissions.

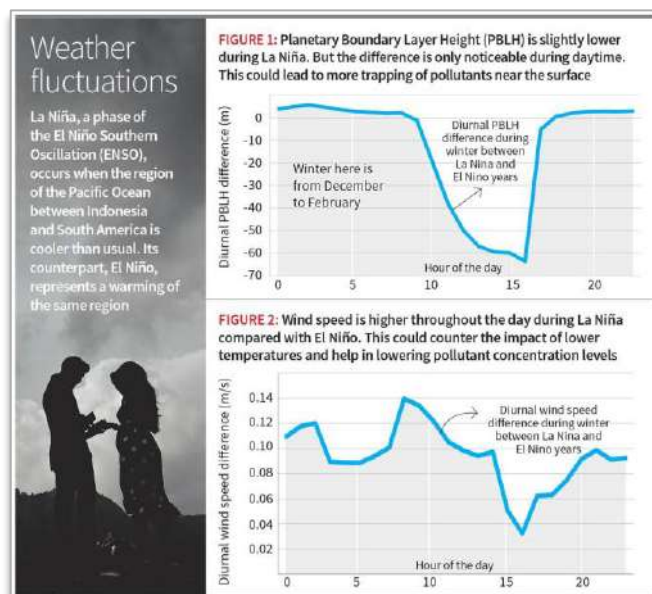
Carbon Credits and Trading

- 1) **Carbon Credits:** Permits allowing the emission of one ton of CO₂ or equivalent gases. They are part of cap-and-trade systems designed to reduce emissions by creating a financial incentive for companies to lower their emissions.
- 2) **Trading Mechanism:** Companies with excess credits can sell them to those exceeding their emission limits, facilitating a market-driven approach to emission reduction.



TH Text & Context: How does La Nina affect India's climate? (Mohammad Rafiuddin, Shikhar Tiwari, Rishikesh P)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Geography [Link](#)

Why in News? The India Meteorological Department now expects a La Niña to set in by late 2024 or early 2025, potentially affecting India's upcoming winter and subsequent seasons.



Corporations and Government Involvement

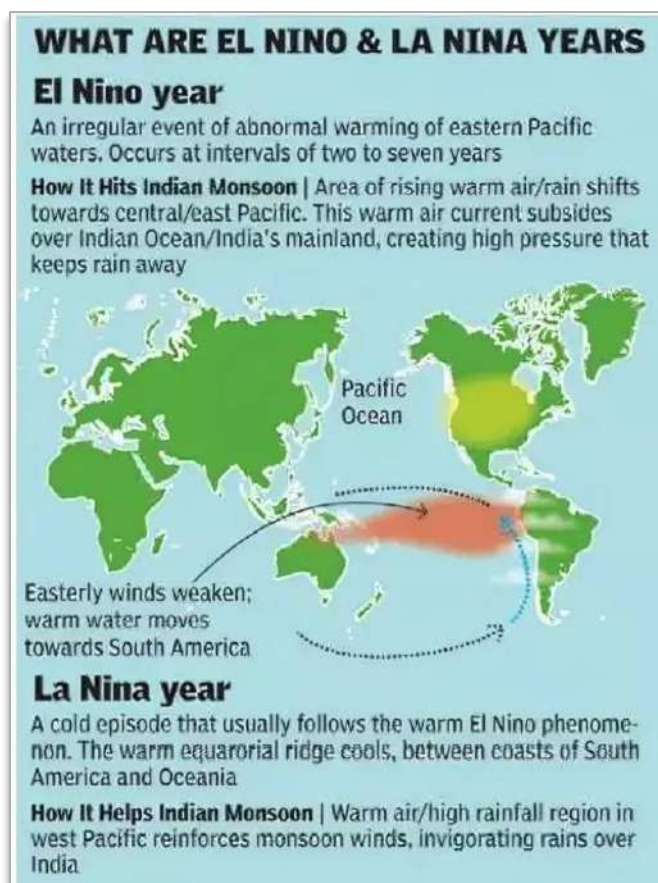
- 1) Preference for Voluntary Systems:** Corporations often prefer voluntary reporting systems over government-imposed limits due to concerns about increased costs and operational restrictions.
- 2) Efficiency Argument:** Corporations argue that market-based trading allows for more efficient allocation of carbon credits compared to government mandates.

Criticisms of Carbon Offsets

- 1) Effectiveness Concerns:** Critics argue that carbon offsets can be ineffective, with some projects failing to deliver genuine emission reductions or being used as a "license to pollute".
- 2) Integrity Issues:** There are concerns about the integrity and verification of carbon offsets, with reports of projects not achieving promised environmental benefits.
- 3) Market-Based Criticism:** Some experts criticize the reliance on market mechanisms for addressing environmental issues, arguing they may not adequately address the root causes of emissions.

Current Situation (2024)

- 1) La Niña has not emerged as expected
- 2) Only 57% chance of forming in 2024
- 3) If it forms, it's predicted to be weak but could still affect global weather



- Lower temperatures may increase biomass burning, worsening pollution
- Higher wind speeds could help disperse pollutants

Summer

- El Niño summers are usually harsher, with intense heat waves
- La Niña may offer relief from high heat if it persists into summer

Triple Dip La Niña

- Refers to three consecutive La Niña events (2020-2022)
- Rare occurrence that can lead to prolonged climate impacts

Climate Change and ENSO

- Climate change may increase frequency and intensity of both La Niña and El Niño events
- Rising temperatures could disrupt Pacific Ocean's balance
- Potential for more extreme La Niña events, leading to harsher winters in India

Understanding La Niña and El Niño

- La Niña and El Niño are phases of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle
- La Niña: Cooler than usual temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean
- El Niño: Warmer than usual temperatures in the same region
- Both phenomena significantly influence global atmospheric circulation and weather patterns

Impact on India's Climate Monsoon

- La Niña typically brings normal or above-normal rainfall during monsoon season
- El Niño often disrupts monsoons, leading to below-average rainfall

Winter

- La Niña winters in India generally feature:
 - Colder nights compared to El Niño
 - Higher daytime temperatures
 - Higher average wind speeds
 - Slightly lower planetary boundary layer height (PBLH)
- Impact on air quality: La Niña winters feature:

IE Explained: Arctic tundra emitting more carbon than it absorbs, confirm study (Alind Chauhan)

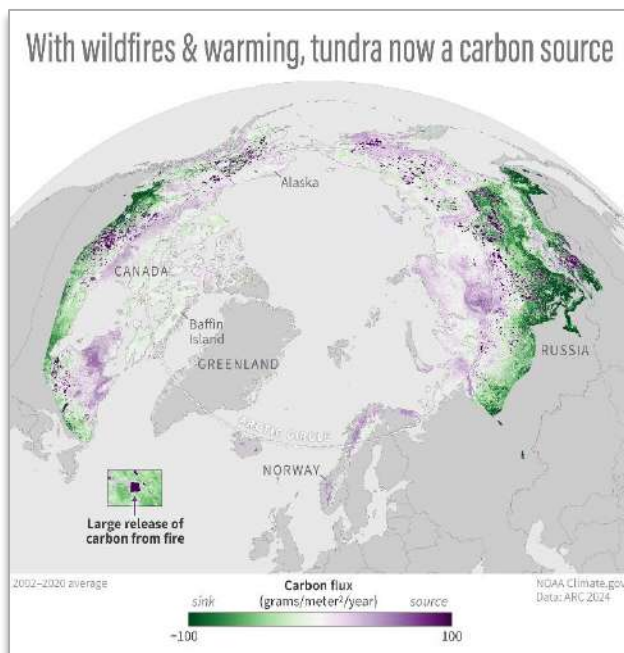
Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Geography & Environment
[Link](#)

Why in News? The Arctic tundra has become a net source of carbon dioxide and methane emissions, according to NOAA's 2024 Arctic Report Card.

Key Factors Driving the Change

- Rising Temperatures:**
 - Arctic warming at four times the global rate
 - 2024 recorded second-warmest surface air temperatures since 1900
 - Thawing permafrost activates soil microbes, releasing stored carbon
- Increased Wildfires:**
 - More frequent and intense wildfires in recent years
 - 2024 ranked as second-highest year for wildfire emissions within Arctic Circle

c) Wildfires release carbon and accelerate



permafrost thaw

Impact and Implications

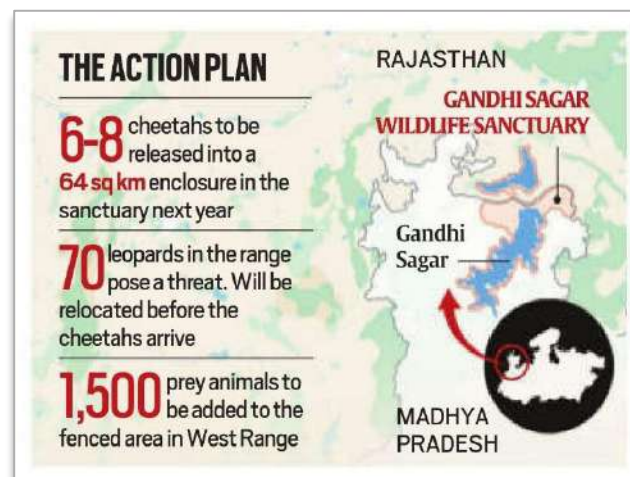
- 1) Arctic tundra now emits more carbon than it stores
- 2) Circumpolar wildfire emissions averaging 207 million tons of carbon annually since 2003
- 3) Shift exacerbates climate change, creating a feedback loop
- 4) Threatens global climate stability due to vast carbon stores in Arctic soils

Future Outlook

- 1) Potential to reverse trend through aggressive global emissions reductions
- 2) Current global emissions trends suggest continued challenges
- 3) Urgent need for adaptation strategies and community-led research

IE Express Network: MP plans new home for cheetahs, relocate leopards (Anand Mohan J)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Geography & Environment
[Link](#)

Why in News? Madhya Pradesh is planning to introduce cheetahs to Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in 2025, which requires relocating



leopards from the area.

Key Points of the Action Plan

Habitat Preparation

- 1) Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary spans 2,500 sq. km across Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan
- 2) Features a mix of grasslands, dry deciduous forests, and riverine evergreen patches
- 3) Initial release planned for 6-8 cheetahs in a 64 sq km predator-proof enclosure

Prey Base Management

- 1) Current prey availability: 475 animals
- 2) Plan to augment with 1,500 additional prey animals (chital, blackbuck, nilgai)
- 3) Annual requirement: 1,560-2,080 prey animals for 6-8 cheetahs

Leopard Relocation

- 1) Estimated 70 leopards in the West Range pose a threat to cheetahs
- 2) All leopards within the fenced area will be captured and relocated
- 3) 10 leopards to be fitted with GPS collars for movement monitoring

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Cheetah Introduction Strategy

- 1) Import 12-14 wild cheetahs from African countries
- 2) Selection criteria: genetically diverse, disease-free, reproductively viable
- 3) Genetic analysis to establish a wide gene pool and avoid inbreeding

Monitoring and Research

- 1) 200 infrared camera traps to be deployed
- 2) Individual identification and profiles of cheetahs maintained
- 3) Radio-collaring of prey animals to study adaptation to new predators

Long-term Vision

- 1) Gandhi Sagar to serve as a cheetah source area for future expansion
- 2) Potential sites identified in Rajasthan for population growth
- 3) Part of a decade-long strategy to stabilize cheetah population in India

Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)

- 1) Fastest land animal, capable of reaching speeds up to 70 mph (112 km/h)
- 2) Requires large home ranges, typically 600-1,000 km², but can exceed 3,000 km²
- 3) Range:
 - a) Currently found in only 9% of their historical range
 - b) Main populations in Southern and Eastern Africa
 - c) Estimated global population: 6,500-7,000 mature individuals
- 4) **Conservation Status**
 - a) IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - b) CITES: Appendix I
 - c) Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972: Schedule I

African Cheetah	Asian Cheetah
IUCN STATUS	IUCN STATUS
Vulnerable	Critically Endangered
CITES STATUS	CITES STATUS
Appendix - I	Appendix - I
DISTRIBUTION	DISTRIBUTION
Africa (Northwest Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa)	Only few left in Iran
FOOD INTAKE	FOOD INTAKE
Diverse diet due to bigger habitat	Limited sources, medium sized prey like Chinkara, Gazelle etc.
PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS	PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS
Bigger in size as compared to asiatic cheetah, slightly bigger build and sturdy legs and neck	Slightly smaller and slender than the African Cheetah, their neck is much smaller and slender. Their legs are slender

Leopard (Panthera pardus)



- 1) Adaptable to various habitats, from dry forests to grasslands
- 2) Estimated 61% reduction in range between 2008 and 2016 assessments
- 3) Range: Widely distributed across Africa and Asia, but populations have become reduced and isolated
- 4) Conservation Status:
 - a) IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
 - b) CITES: Appendix I
 - c) Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972: Schedule I
- 5) Some subspecies, like the Amur leopard, are critically endangered

IE Explained: How global crises are connected (Amitabh Sinha)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

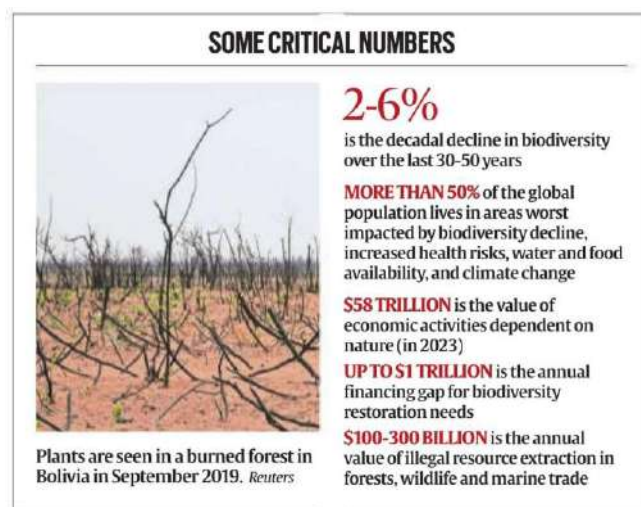
Why in News? A new scientific report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) highlights the strong interlinkages between major global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and hunger.

Interconnected Global Challenges

- 1) The report examines five major challenges: climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, water scarcity, and health risks.
- 2) These challenges interact, cascade, and compound each other, making separate efforts to address them ineffective and counterproductive.
- 3) Current economic activities have significant negative impacts on biodiversity, climate change, food production, water, and health, with unaccounted costs estimated at \$10-25 trillion annually.

Economic Implications

- 1) More than half of the global GDP (about \$58 trillion in annual economic activity) is moderately to highly dependent on nature.
- 2) Biodiversity decline has been occurring at a rate of 2-6% on average every decade over the last half-century.
- 3) Trillions of dollars in incentives are still offered annually for actions that negatively impact biodiversity and natural ecosystems.



Key Recommendations

- 1) **Integrated Approach:** The report emphasizes the need for adopting an integrated approach to address these interconnected issues.
- 2) **Synergistic Solutions:** Over 70 response options that produce positive outcomes across all five elements have been identified.
- 3) **Examples of Synergistic Approaches:**
 - a) Restoration of carbon-rich ecosystems like forests, soils, and mangroves
 - b) Effective management of biodiversity to reduce risks of zoonotic diseases
 - c) Promotion of sustainable healthy diets

Reliance on nature-based solutions where possible

IE Explained: Why growth of India's overall green cover is not all good news (Jay Mazoomdar)

Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Environment [Link](#)

Why in News? India's latest State of Forest Report (ISFR-2023) shows an increase in overall green cover, but reveals concerning trends in the loss of dense natural forests.

CHANGE IN DENSE FOREST COVER 2003-2023				
	2021-23	2003-2013	2013-2023	2003-2023
LOST				
VDF to NF	295	288	1277	1565
MDF to NF	3362	6714	15086	21800
VDF to scrub	24	5	65	70
MDF to scrub	313	144	1153	1297
Disappeared	3994	7151	17581	24732
VDF to OF	228	134	1128	1262
MDF to OF	5166	6414	22249	28663
Total loss	9388	13699	40958	54657
GAINED				
NF to VDF	56	43	483	526
NF to MDF	839	3631	7554	11185
Scrub to VDF	1	0	54	54
Scrub to MDF	102	105	1043	1148
OF to VDF	496	124	2567	2691
Plantations	1494	3903	11701	15604
OF to MDF	8610	6122	34301	40423
Total gain	10104	10025	46002	56027
NET CHANGE	716	-3674	5044	1370
VDF: Very Dense Forest (canopy over 70%) MDF: Moderate Dense Forest (canopy 40-70%)				
OF: Open Forest (canopy 10-40%) Shrub (canopy under 10%) NF: Non-Forest (no canopy)				

Headline Numbers

- 1) Total forest and tree cover increased to 25.17% of India's geographical area
- 2) Marginal gain of 156 sq km in forest cover since 2021
- 3) Significant increase of 1,289 sq km in tree cover since 2021

Concerning Trends

- 1) **Loss of Dense Forests:**
 - a) 24,651 sq km (6.3%) of dense forests disappeared between 2003-2023
 - b) 3,913 sq km of dense forests lost in just two years since 2021
 - c) Rate of dense forest loss accelerating: 7,151 sq km lost in 2003-2013 vs 17,500 sq km in 2013-2023
- 2) **Replacement with Plantations:**
 - a) 15,530 sq km of non-forested land rapidly transformed into dense/very dense forests (2003-2023)
 - b) 1,420 sq km of plantations became dense forests since 2021
 - c) Experts attribute this rapid growth to plantations, not natural forest regeneration
- 3) **Implications**
 - a) Plantations are less biodiverse and ecologically valuable than natural forests
 - b) Old natural forests store more carbon than plantations
 - c) UNFCCC flagged India's assumption that plantations reach carbon stock levels of existing forests in just 8 years
 - d) While plantations may achieve short-term carbon targets, their frequent harvesting can defeat long-term climate goals
- 4) **Data Discrepancies**
 - a) Official data shows 21,601 sq km (6%) increase in dense forest cover (2003-2023)
 - b) However, 20,232 sq km of this increase is due to unexplained data revisions in previous reports
 - c) Actual increase based on "change matrix" data is only 1,370 sq km over 20 years

Internal Security

December 2024

IE Express Network: Missile frigate INS Tushil inducted into Navy, Rajnath praises India-Russia ties (Press Trust of India)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Internal Security [Link](#)

Why in News?

- 1) INS Tushil, a guided missile frigate, was commissioned into the Indian Navy on December 9, 2024, at Kaliningrad, Russia.
- 2) The 3,900-tonne warship is the seventh multirole stealth frigate in the Project 1135.6 series and the first of the additional follow-on class ships.
- 3) Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi attended the commissioning ceremony at the Yantar Shipyard.



Capabilities and Features

- 1) INS Tushil is designed for operations across the spectrum of naval warfare in air, surface, underwater, and electromagnetic dimensions
- 2) The 125-meter long frigate is equipped with advanced weapons systems, including:
 - a) Supersonic cruise missiles (BrahMos)
 - b) Surface-to-Air Missiles with enhanced ranges
 - c) Upgraded medium-range anti-air and surface guns
 - d) Optically controlled close-range rapid-fire gun system
 - e) Anti-submarine torpedoes and rockets
 - f) Advanced electronic warfare and communication suite

- 3) The ship can achieve speeds exceeding 30 knots and features improved stealth characteristics

Significance

- 1) INS Tushil represents a collaborative effort between Russian and Indian industries, with 26% indigenous content and 33 made-in-India systems.
- 2) The commissioning marks a significant milestone in India-Russia defence cooperation and strengthens India's maritime capabilities.
- 3) The frigate will join the Western Fleet of the Indian Navy, enhancing its operational flexibility in the region.

TH Text & Context: Behind the great Indian Internet shutdown (Anandita Mishra)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Internal Security [Link](#)

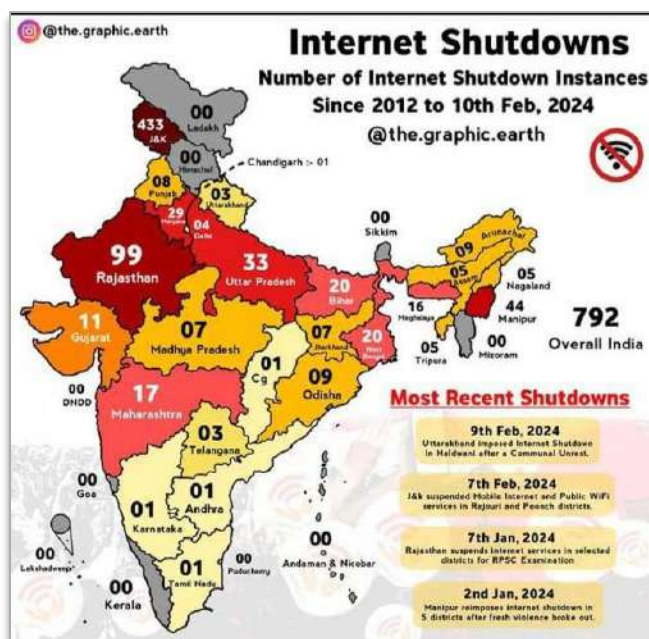
Why in News? India continues to be known as the "Internet shutdown capital of the world" despite Supreme Court guidelines aimed at limiting such restrictions.

Background and Legal Framework

- 1) In January 2020, the Supreme Court of India ruled that access to information via the Internet is a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution.
- 2) The Court mandated that Internet restrictions must be temporary, limited in scope, lawful, necessary, and proportionate.
- 3) Government orders restricting Internet access are subject to review by Courts.

Current Situation

- 1) India has seen more instances of Internet shutdowns in the year following the Supreme Court decision than in the previous year
- 2) Recent examples include:
 - a) Restrictions on mobile data in Kashmir following the death of a separatist leader
 - b) Internet shutdowns in five districts of Haryana due to farmers' protests



TH News: Centre yet to formally scrap FMR with Myanmar (Vijaita Singh)
 Syllabus: Pre/Mains – Internal Security. International Relations [Link](#)



Non-Compliance and Transparency Issues

- 1) Many government orders for Internet suspensions are not published, violating the Supreme Court's guidelines
- 2) Jammu and Kashmir government frequently fails to upload suspension orders on official websites
- 3) Non-publication of orders prevents affected individuals from challenging the legality of restrictions in court

Economic and Social Impact

- 1) In 2020, India's economy suffered losses of \$2.8 billion due to 129 instances of Internet suspension.
- 2) These shutdowns affected 10.3 million individuals.
- 3) Internet restrictions disproportionately affect those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as 97.02% of Internet users rely on mobile data services.

Conclusion

- 1) More faithful compliance with Supreme Court guidelines is needed to address the issue of frequent Internet shutdowns in India.
- 2) Transparency in publishing restriction orders and limiting shutdowns to genuine emergencies are crucial steps towards fulfilling Digital India's potential.

Why in News? The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has issued new guidelines to regulate cross-border movement between India and Myanmar, despite earlier announcements of scrapping the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

Current Status of FMR

- 1) FMR has not been formally scrapped yet
- 2) Ministry of External Affairs yet to notify the end of the bilateral agreement
- 3) Stricter regulations introduced instead of complete termination

New Guidelines

- 1) Movement limit reduced from 16 km to 10 km on either side of the border
- 2) 43 designated entry and exit points established
- 3) "Border pass" system introduced for cross-border travel
- 4) Seven-day stay limit for border crossings
- 5) Biometric data collection and QR code-based passes to be implemented



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Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

December 2024

Ethics News of the Day: Ethical Lessons from the life of Dr Manmohan Singh

- 1) **Prioritising national benefit over personal gain:** In 1991, following rupee devaluation, he voluntarily contributed the difference in the rupee value of his foreign assets to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.
- 2) **Principles above Position:** Readiness to resign over ethical issues during Harshad Mehta Stock market scam in 1992. Shows commitment to ethical leadership.
- 3) **Humility and Simplicity:** Known to drive Maruti 800 despite wielding significant power.
- 4) **Transparency and Accountability:** Passing of Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005.
- 5) **Long-term vision over political gains:** Push for Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Deal risking his government's stability.
- 6) **Respect for democratic values:** Dignified approach to political setbacks in 2014
- 7) **Compassion and Inclusive Growth:** Implementation of MNREGA and Right to Education.
- 8) **Intellectual Honesty:** Example of fact-based leadership.

GLOBAL LEADERS REMEMBER 'OUTSTANDING STATESMAN'



Manmohan Singh was an outstanding statesman. As Prime Minister and when serving in other high-ranking positions,

he accomplished a lot in promoting India's economic development and asserting its interests on world stage. He also made a major personal contribution to strengthening friendly ties between our two countries

VLADIMIR PUTIN
RUSSIAN PRESIDENT

India has lost a great man, and France a true friend, in the person of Manmohan Singh. He had devoted his life to his country. Our thoughts are with his family and the people of India

EMMANUEL MACRON
FRENCH PRESIDENT

... His leadership in advancing US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement signified a major investment in the potential of US-India relationship... We mourn Dr Singh's passing...

ANTONY BLINKEN
US SECRETARY OF STATE



India has lost one of its most illustrious sons. Dr Manmohan Singh was an unwavering ally and friend to the people of

Afghanistan. I profoundly mourn his passing and extend my deepest condolences to his family, the government, and the people of India. May his soul find eternal peace

HAMID KARZAI
FORMER PRESIDENT OF AFGHANISTAN

Ethics News of the Day: President Biden pardons his son: What will it entail? [Link](#)

Why in News? President Joe Biden issued a full and unconditional pardon for his son Hunter Biden on Sunday, December 1, 2024, reversing his previous stance on not interfering with his son's legal cases.

Cases Against Hunter Biden

- 1) **Gun Charges:** Convicted in June 2024 for illegally purchasing and possessing a firearm while addicted to drugs. Potential Gun charges: Up to 25 years in prison.
- 2) **Tax Evasion:** Pleaded guilty in September 2024 to nine tax-related charges, including failure to pay \$1.4 million in taxes between 2016 and 2019. Potential Tax charges: Up to 17 years in prison.

President Biden's Justification

- 1) Claimed Hunter was "selectively and unfairly prosecuted"
- 2) Argued that similar cases typically receive non-criminal resolutions

- 3) Cited political motivation behind the charges



Ethical Issues in Joe Biden's Pardon of Hunter Biden

- 1) **Conflict of Interest Concerns**
 - a) **Nepotism concerns:** Pardoning a family member raises questions about favouritism and abuse of power.
 - b) **Appearance of impropriety:** Using presidential powers for personal benefit.

- 2) **Breach of Public Trust**
 - a) **Contradicting previous promises:** Biden had repeatedly stated he would not pardon his son.
 - b) **Undermining rule of law:** Perception that political connections can override judicial processes.
- 3) **Violation of Separation of Powers**
 - a) **Executive overreach:** Interfering with judicial branch decisions.
 - b) **Checks and balances:** Potential erosion of constitutional safeguards.
- 4) **Political Implications:**
 - a) **Weaponization of justice:** Accusations of politically motivated prosecution and pardon.

- b) **Double standards:** Comparisons to treatment of other cases and individuals
- 5) **Transparency and Accountability Concerns:**
 - a) **Lack of clear justification:** Limited public explanation for the decision.
 - b) **Timing concerns:** Pardon issued in final weeks of presidency.
- 6) **Precedent Setting:**
 - a) **Future abuse:** Potential for other presidents to misuse pardon power for personal gain.
 - b) **Erosion of norms:** Departure from established clemency practices.

Ethics News of the Day: Whistleblower or victim? The death of Suchir Balaji raises alarming questions [Link](#)

Why in News? Suchir Balaji, a 26-year-old former OpenAI researcher and whistleblower, was found dead in his San Francisco apartment, with authorities ruling the death a suicide.

Balaji's Background and Contributions

- 1) Graduated with a Computer Science degree from UC Berkeley, excelling in programming competitions.
- 2) Worked at OpenAI for four years, contributing to data collection for ChatGPT and GPT-4.
- 3) Played a crucial role in gathering and organizing data for AI model training.



Ethical Concerns Raised

- 1) Criticized OpenAI's use of copyrighted material for AI training without proper authorization.
- 2) Argued that AI technologies could create substitutes competing with original content.
- 3) Questioned the applicability of "fair use" defence for generative AI products.

Whistleblowing and Its Aftermath

- 1) Left OpenAI in August 2024, citing ethical concerns about the company's practices.
- 2) Became a vocal critic of OpenAI's data practices and copyright infringement.
- 3) His name was mentioned in a copyright lawsuit against OpenAI just a day before his death.

Industry-Wide Implications

- 1) Highlighted the lack of robust whistleblower protections in the tech industry.
- 2) Raised questions about data ethics, privacy, and intellectual property in AI development.
- 3) Sparked debates on the need for stronger accountability and transparency in AI companies.

OpenAI's Response and Future Challenges

- 1) Expressed devastation at Balaji's death and extended condolences to his family.
- 2) Faces pressure to address broader ethical concerns and improve transparency.
- 3) The incident has intensified scrutiny on AI companies and their practices.

Ethics News of the Day: IE Express Network: For woman who lost family in Wayanad landslide and fiancé in road accident, govt job brings hope [Link](#)
News in Short

- 1) Sruthi, a 24-year-old woman from Wayanad, Kerala, joins government service as a clerk in the Revenue Department at Wayanad Collectorate.
- 2) Tragic background:
 - a) Lost her entire family (parents and sister) in July landslides
 - b) Lost her fiancé in a road accident a month later
 - c) Their newly constructed home and savings were washed away in the landslides
- 3) Government support:
 - a) Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan announced the fulfilment of the promise to support Sruthi
 - b) The job was promised by the state government after her back-to-back tragedies


Ethical arguments in support of Government's decision

- 1) **Social responsibility:** The government has a duty to support citizens in times of extreme hardship, demonstrating compassion and solidarity.
- 2) **Financial security:** Offering employment provides long-term stability for Sruthi, helping her overcome the immediate economic challenges caused by her losses.
- 3) **Emotional support:** A job gives Sruthi a sense of purpose and routine, which can be crucial for mental health recovery after trauma.
- 4) **Community resilience:** By supporting individuals affected by disasters, the government strengthens the overall resilience of the community.
- 5) **Mitigation of suffering:** The job offer helps to alleviate the immediate distress and provides a path forward for Sruthi.

Ethical arguments against Government's decision

- 1) **Fairness:** Offering preferential treatment to one individual may be seen as unfair to others who have also faced hardships or are more qualified.
- 2) **Merit-based hiring:** Bypassing standard recruitment processes undermines the principle of meritocracy in public service.
- 3) **Efficiency:** Hiring based on circumstances rather than qualifications may lead to inefficient allocation of human resources in government departments.
- 4) **Corruption risk:** Such discretionary appointments may increase the risk of nepotism or favouritism in government hiring practices (Slippery slope).
- 5) **Dependency:** Offering a job as a form of aid may create dependency rather than fostering self-reliance and resilience.
- 6) **Long-term consequences:** While addressing immediate needs, this approach may not consider the long-term career implications for the individual or the organization.

Ethics News of the Day: Ekalavya's story beyond thumb-cutting ; questions of dharma it raises [Link](#)

Why in News? Congress leader Rahul Gandhi invoked the story of Eklavya in Parliament to criticize the government's policies towards youth, small businesses, and farmers.

The Basic Story

- 1) Eklavya, a Nishad (tribal) boy, sought archery training from Dronacharya, the royal teacher
- 2) Refused by Drona, Eklavya practiced on his own using a clay idol of Drona
- 3) Became an exceptional archer, surpassing even Arjuna, Drona's star pupil
- 4) Drona demanded Eklavya's right thumb as "guru dakshina" (teacher's fee)
- 5) Eklavya complied without hesitation, effectively ending his archery career.


Eklavya's Life After the Incident

- 1) Continued to be a formidable warrior, fighting with "leathern gloves"
- 2) Served as a general in the army of Jarasandha, an enemy of Lord Krishna
- 3) Eventually killed by Krishna before the Kurukshetra War

Questions of Dharma (Duty) Raised

- 1) **Dronacharya's Dilemma:**
 - a) Duty to the royal family vs. ethical teaching
 - b) Maintaining social order vs. nurturing talent regardless of caste
- 2) **Eklavya's Devotion:**
 - a) Exemplary discipleship vs. potential misuse of acquired skills
 - b) Personal ambition vs. societal norms
- 3) **Caste and Knowledge:**
 - a) Gatekeeping of knowledge by upper castes
 - b) Punishment for lower castes acquiring skills outside the established system
- 4) **Ethical Use of Skills:**
 - a) Importance of proper guidance in using acquired abilities
 - b) Potential dangers of unchecked power without ethical training

Ethics News of the Day – Should assisted dying be legalised?

Why in News? The UK House of Commons voted in favour of legalizing assisted dying for terminally ill adults in England and Wales, signalling a significant shift on this ethically complex issue.

Arguments in Favour	Arguments Against
1) Autonomy: Respects individual choice in end-of-life decisions	1) Sanctity of Life: Violates fundamental moral principle
2) Suffering Relief: Alleviates unbearable pain when palliative care falls short	2) Abuse Risk: Potential for non-voluntary or involuntary euthanasia
3) Dignity Preservation: Allows control over manner and timing of death	3) Palliative Care Impact: May undermine efforts to improve end-of-life care
4) Quality of Life: Prioritizes life quality over quantity in terminal cases	4) Vulnerable Groups: Risk of societal pressure on elderly or disabled
5) Compassionate Option: Offers merciful alternative for imminent death	5) Medical Ethics: Could compromise physician integrity and patient trust

- | | |
|---|---|
| 6) Public Support: Backed by majority of public opinion (75% in UK) | 6) Coercion Concerns: Difficulty ensuring truly voluntary decisions
7) Religious Opposition: Conflicts with some religious beliefs |
|---|---|

India's Stance

- 1) Allows passive euthanasia through withdrawal of life support
- 2) Based on "right to die with dignity" under Article 21
- 3) Does not permit active assistance in dying.



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