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GENERAL STUDIES 1.

ART AND CULTURE

THE SAHITYA AKADEMI MUST DO MORE TO PROMOTE INDIAN LITERATURE.

CONTEXT:

- ❖ The Sahitya Akademi Awards, celebrating linguistic diversity in 24 Indian languages, offer writers encouragement and translation opportunities.
- ❖ Despite its significance, the awards lack prominence due to underutilized promotional efforts and weak online presence.

Diversity Recognition:

- ❖ **Sahitya Akademi awards honor writers in 24 Indian languages**, celebrating linguistic diversity.
- ❖ Recognizes literary contributions in Dogri, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Manipuri, Odia, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Santali, and others.

Encouragement and Opportunities:

- ❖ **Acknowledges the vast linguistic landscape of India**, offering encouragement to writers.
- ❖ **Sahitya Akademi award provides a platform for writers to pursue their craft.**
- ❖ Winners may experience increased book sales, inclusion in school curricula, and university teachings.

Possibilities for Translation:

- ❖ Awardees, including Neelum Saran Gour, have opportunities for translation into other regional languages and English.
- ❖ **Translation enhances accessibility and promotes literary exchange.**

Lack of Prominence:

- ❖ **Despite being established in 1954, Sahitya Akademi awards lack widespread recognition.**
- ❖ **Not as prominent as international literary awards like the Booker Prize or the Pulitzer.**

Underutilized Promotional Efforts:

- ❖ Sahitya Akademi's **promotional efforts fall short**, impacting its visibility.
- ❖ **Weak social media presence and an outdated website** hinder awareness about literary activities.

Additional Awards:

- ❖ Sahitya Akademi presents other awards such as Bal Sahitya award, Yuva Puraskar, and Bhasha Samman (translation prize) – which have little recognition.

Room for Improvement:

- ❖ Calls for enhanced promotion of Sahitya Akademi's activities to foster greater awareness.
- ❖ Emphasizes the need to leverage its extensive network to promote India's literary heritage, especially among younger generations.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Sahitya Akademi Awards, though instrumental in celebrating linguistic diversity, face challenges in recognition.
- ❖ Improved promotion is crucial for preserving India's literary heritage and encouraging wider appreciation.

GENERAL STUDIES 2.

POLITY AND CONSTITUTION

BROADCAST REGULATION 3.0, COMMISSIONS AND OMISSIONS

Context:

There are numerous apprehensions that arise from the Broadcasting Bill's manifest scope as well as its noteworthy silences.

Introduction

- ❖ The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill released in November by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) is part of an arc of endeavours to regulate broadcasting in an integrated manner. The last initiative to take on this ambitious task was back in 2007, in the form of the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill.
- ❖ The recent rendition of a Broadcasting Bill comes on the heels of a pre-consultation paper on 'National Broadcasting Policy' by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), a document initiated following a reference from the MIB.

Salient features of the bill

- ❖ The Bill essentially provides regulatory provisions for various broadcasting services under a single legislative framework.
- ❖ It seeks to replace the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995 and other policy guidelines currently governing the broadcasting sector in India.
- ❖ The Bill extends its regulatory purview to encompass broadcasting OTT content, digital news and current affairs currently regulated through the IT Act, 2000.
- ❖ The Bill provides comprehensive definitions for contemporary broadcasting terms along with other important technical terms to be defined in the statute for the first time.
- ❖ It introduces 'Content evaluation committees' for self-regulation and 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to "advise the central government on programme code and advertisement code violations."
- ❖ The Bill provides statutory penalties like advisory, warning, censure, or monetary penalties, for operators and broadcasters. Provision for imprisonment and/or fines is also there, but only for very serious offences, such as obtaining registration with a false affidavit.

Positive propositions in the Bill

- ❖ It obliges broadcasting network operators and broadcasters to maintain records of subscriber data, and subject this to periodic external audits, as is the international norm.
- ❖ The Bill seeks to stipulate a methodology for audience measurement, and the sale of ratings data. Both mechanisms will bring the much-needed transparency in the opaque value chain of the cable and satellite television business in our country.
- ❖ The Bill completely lacks any guardrails to shield the privacy of subscribers and audiences in such practices of data collection.
- ❖ The provision to permit private actors in terrestrial broadcasting will encourage competition to Doordarshan, the state broadcaster, as is in many G-20 countries.

Concerns in the Bill

- ❖ A major concern is the Bill including Over-the-Top (OTT) content suppliers in the definition of broadcasting services — as also proposed in TRAI's 'National Broadcasting Policy'.
- ❖ Intriguingly, both moves come amidst intense discussions catalysed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) (hitherto mandated to deal with the online media) on licensing OTT players.

Now, the MIB appears to poach on MEITY's jurisdiction — a territorial slugfest typical in countries with a fragmented regulatory architecture.

- ❖ The Bill's expanded definition of broadcasting constricts the conditions in which journalists and news outlets that are not a part of large, multi-lingual television networks can continue their professional pursuits.
- ❖ While it is fruitful for a news outlet to have an oversight body, warranting a 'Content Evaluation Committee' takes the Bill in a questionable direction: mandating an internal body to self-certify news programming. The issue is not only of feasibility and costs but also of desirability. Since the role of an internal oversight mechanism is to maintain the accuracy of news and quality of journalism, its design is best left to individual news outlets.

Silent on some areas

- ❖ The Bill is mum on issues of ownership. While the Bill is keen to stipulate a methodology for audience measurement, there is no desire to measure the extent of cross-media and vertical ownership. Both these forms of media power thwart the diversity of suppliers, and perhaps, consequently, that of viewpoints, in the marketplace of news.
- ❖ The Bill is equally silent on creating an independent broadcast regulator, as hinted in TRAI's paper. This was first mooted in the 'airwaves' judgment of 1995, subsequently in the 1997 Broadcasting Bill, and reiterated in the 2007 iteration of the Bill. Instead, this Bill plans a 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to examine viewers' grievances and violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code.
- ❖ This raises two concerns: first, the capacity of such a Council to track and address grievances, genuine or motivated, raised by over 800 million TV viewers; and second, the lack of autonomy accorded to this body, since the Bill empowers the Central government to ultimately decide on the Council's advice.

Some more concerns

- ❖ In addition, the Bill empowers the government to inspect broadcasters without intimating them in advance, and to impound their equipment, presumably including those issued to their employees.
- ❖ Furthermore, violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code attract deleting or modifying content, in addition to existing measures such as ceasing transmissions for durations.
- ❖ Finally, the Bill grants tremendous leeway to government to curtail broadcasting and its distribution in "public interest", a term that is distressingly left undefined. All these intrusive mechanisms augment the vulnerabilities of professional news suppliers to external pressure groups. This should worry those who will deliberate over legislating the Bill, irrespective of which benches they occupy in Parliament.

Conclusion

- ❖ As the latest extension of the arc of endeavours to devise an integrated regulatory framework for broadcasting, this Bill must not lose the opportunity to protect press freedom and diversity. To do so, it has to will its way to incorporate some startling omissions, review its intrusive commissions, and fine-tune potentially positive provisions.

INDIA, DISABILITY INCLUSION AND THE POWER OF 'BY'

Context: The inclusion of persons with disabilities into the economy can help boost global GDP between 3% to 7%.

Introduction

- ❖ Globally, 1.3 billion people (which is equivalent to nearly the entire population of India) live with some form of disability. Of them, 80% live in developing countries; further, 70% of them live in rural areas.
- ❖ Current systems are designed for persons without disabilities and end up being exclusionary to people with disabilities, resulting in them experiencing higher instances of poverty, lack of access to education and opportunities, informality, and other forms of social and economic discrimination.

Disability

- ❖ A disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions).
- ❖ Disability results from the interaction between individuals with a health condition, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and depression, with personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support.
- ❖ Disability as an identity and entity exists at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities — social, economic and gender — with each facet requiring careful consideration when conceptualising action for equity.

‘For and By’

- ❖ According to the English dictionary, “For” is often used when a person is receiving something and “By” is to “identify the agent performing an action”. This difference is crucial when it comes to disability inclusion, as the approach is completely different if it is “by” persons with disabilities being a part of the process and not “for” them, without them in the process.

A case for inclusion

- ❖ At the outset, the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the economy can help boost global GDP between 3% to 7%, as per the study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), “The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work”.
- ❖ We believe that everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities at work, agnostic of any attributes other than the ability to do the job. The reality, however, is mixed. The current employment scenario is limited, providing fewer jobs for persons with disabilities and perpetuating stereotypes that create further barriers for people with disabilities to access the labour market.
- ❖ It is also in direct contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which advocates changing attitudes and perceptions towards persons with disabilities and viewing inclusion from a social development dimension. Disability inclusion is rooted in assuring the rights of persons with disabilities and recognising the economic benefits of inclusion.

Challenges in rural areas

- ❖ In India, the Central and State governments have various schemes for persons with disabilities and a unique id for persons with disabilities (UDID) card, established as part of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016).
- ❖ The first step is awareness to ensure last-mile connectivity of the benefits enumerated for people with disabilities by the government, which begins with the capacity-building of community leaders who can advocate for this at the grass-roots level.
- ❖ This is especially important in rural areas, where persons with disabilities tend to face greater challenges when compared to their urban counterparts, with even more limited access to education and employment. Some developmental schemes, too, exclude them.
- ❖ They are viewed as objects of charity and not as persons with agency with an ability to participate in decision-making processes.
- ❖ Rural areas also have high agricultural dependence and face the heightened risk of climate calamities arising from rising sea levels, reduced access to clean water and food, hurricanes, heatwaves, and floods, with rural people at the frontlines of these challenges.
- ❖ A bottom-up approach to disability inclusion is crucial to build productive pathways out of poverty and ensure that persons with disabilities are recognised as active members of society and the economy.
- ❖ The private sector holds a key in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. In addition to a robust legal framework, experience shows the importance of engaging the private sector and building the confidence of companies to hire and retain workers with disabilities.
- ❖ Additionally, engagement of employers’ federations, including those representing small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as with trade unions, has shown to have great potential to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.

The SPARK project.

- ❖ The ILO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra, are implementing the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK) project.
- ❖ Through this project, persons with disabilities were put in the lead, being identified from the villages, and trained as Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs). The DIFs engage with the community, persons with disabilities, caregivers of persons with disabilities, women from self-help groups and other stakeholders to raise awareness about disability inclusion and barriers to inclusion.
- ❖ The DIFs identify women with disabilities and mainstream them in existing self-help groups for social and economic development, where these women have been able to access funds to start an enterprise. The SPARK project has been able to bring an attitudinal shift towards persons with disabilities, right from the societal to administrative levels.

Conclusion

- ❖ The goal of social justice cannot be achieved without the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all spheres of development, starting with rural areas and rural resilience.
- ❖ Evidence shows a bi-directional link to poverty, nutrition, and hunger, and as a consequence, there needs to be more inclusive opportunities and employment in rural areas.
- ❖ Given the historic marginalisation of persons with disabilities and the backsliding of the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, a fundamental shift in commitment, solidarity, financing, and action is critical. It is about time that the voices and needs of persons with disabilities be prioritised at the centre of the global development agenda.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO THE FEDERAL STRUCTURE

Context:

The Supreme Court has recently ruled that a governor cannot unreasonably delay or refuse to ratify a bill passed by a state legislature, highlighting the fact that doing so compromises the legitimacy of elected officials and the legislative process.

Introduction

- ❖ The 27-page judgment in the State of Punjab v Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab and Another ruled that the governor, who is chosen by the President, only acts as a symbolic head and cannot indefinitely withhold action on bills.
- ❖ The Supreme Court's decision has clarified that should the governor choose not to sign a bill, they must send the bill back to the legislature, along with a statement outlining their reasons for not accepting it.
- ❖ This ruling becomes even more significant in the context of the recent disputes between governors and elected governments in several states. Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Punjab have all petitioned the Supreme Court to request orders concerning their individual governors.

Clarification of Article 200 of the Constitution

- ❖ The main point of contention in this case was that the Punjab governor had detained four bills that were passed by the Punjab legislative assembly in June 2023. The ruling offers a definitive clarification of Article 200 of the Constitution, which deals with "Assent to Bills" in the states.
- ❖ According to Article 200, after a bill has been approved by the legislative assembly, or by both houses in a bicameral legislature, it shall be sent to the governor.
- ❖ There are three choices available to the governor when a bill is presented to them. The governor can declare:
 - ❖ his assent to the bill;
 - ❖ his withholding of assent; or

- ❖ his reserving of the bill for the President's consideration.
- ❖ The Supreme Court judgment heavily emphasised the words "shall declare" and "as soon as possible" in Article 200 to suggest that the governor cannot indefinitely keep the bills pending without any action whatsoever.

Two major takeaways from the Judgment

- ❖ The ruling unambiguously affirms that the governor, as a constitutional but unelected authority, does not have the right to virtually veto the functioning of an elected legislature. The constitutional powers of the governor to grant their assent to the bills passed by the legislature must operate in such a way that they do not obstruct the "normal course of lawmaking." According to the Supreme Court, indefinitely withholding assent amounts to a violation of the "fundamental principles of a constitutional democracy based on a Parliamentary pattern of governance."
- ❖ The judgment also cited *S R Bommai v Union of India* to emphasise that the constitutional powers of the governor cannot disregard the principles of federalism, which forms a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. In the course of India's legal-political history, one has seen umpteen instances where the position of the governor has been misused for furthering the dominance of the union government over state governments ruled by opposition parties. The many disputes between governors and select state governments in contemporary India also bear witness to this contestation between different political parties.

Not only a legal dispute

- ❖ Thus, it is not merely a legal dispute between the governor and the union government on the one hand, and certain state governments, on the other. It is also a political dispute between different ruling and opposition parties.
- ❖ In effect, the Supreme Court ruling in this case has pointed towards the dangers posed by such political disputes to the constitutional cause of federalism in India.
- ❖ Although the constitutional concept of a federal polity with a power-balance favouring the union was an institutional arrangement, the majority of federal disputes observed in recent times are not indicative of institutional misalignment but are rather instances of party dominance.

Conclusion

- ❖ The position of the governor is subject to what this Supreme Court judgment terms as "the tuning fork of democracy and federalism." Through this judgment, the Court has sought to reaffirm the dignity and composure required for fulfilling the constitutional obligations expected from governors. More importantly, it carries a strict warning against the partisan misuse of the post of the governor in contemporary India.

(IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY, E-GOVERNANCE APPLICATIONS, MODELS, SUCCESSES, LIMITATIONS, AND POTENTIAL; CITIZENS CHARTERS, TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER MEASURES.)

Context: As both the State and Central government were perceived to be corrupt, the Congress benefited

Introduction

- ❖ We define corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development, and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis.
- ❖ Exposing corruption and holding the corrupt to account can only happen if we understand the way corruption works and the systems that enable it.

Prevention of Corruption act, 1988.

- ❖ On September 9, 1988, the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (henceforth abbreviated as PCA) became operative. Its goal was to increase the overall effectiveness of anti-corruption statutes by broadening their scope and fortifying their provisions.

- ❖ Features of the act:
- ❖ With minor modifications to the original language, it combines the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1952, the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, and Sections 161 to 165-A of the Indian Penal Code.
- ❖ The definition now includes terms like "public servant" and "public duty."
- ❖ As stated in the CrPC, it has moved the burden of proof from the prosecution to the person facing charges.
- ❖ The Act's provisions make it very clear that an officer, not a person lower in rank than Deputy Superintendent of Police, must conduct the investigation.
- ❖ Bribery, misappropriation, gaining a financial advantage, having assets that are out of proportion to one's income, and similar corrupt practices are all covered by the Act.

Impact on electoral politics

- ❖ The political atmosphere during the Telangana Assembly elections was marked by accusations from the Congress and the BJP against the BRS government. The K. Chandrashekar Rao-led government was alleged to be involved in corruption throughout its tenure. The findings of the CSDS-Lokniti post-poll study indicate that corruption emerged as a prominent source of dissatisfaction for the voters.
- ❖ Approximately half the voters in the State felt that corruption had increased over the past five years. Only about a quarter believed that there was a decrease in corruption. Two in 10 voters felt that there was no change in corruption in the last five years. Public discontent can also be gleaned from the fact that the issue of corruption was ranked as the second most unacceptable action of the BRS government. One in 10 voters identified this issue as a significant concern.
- ❖ This has an impact on voter choices. The perception of corruption in the BRS and BJP governments, coupled with the attribution of anti-corruption efforts to the Congress, played a significant role in shaping voters' preferences towards Congress.

The Representation of the People Act (RPA),1951

- ❖ Important features:
- ❖ It controls how elections and by-elections are actually conducted.
- ❖ It offers the administrative tools needed to hold elections.
- ❖ It has to do with political party registration.
- ❖ It outlines the requirements as well as the exclusions from House membership.
- ❖ It has measures to stop other offenses and corrupt behaviour.
- ❖ It establishes the process for resolving questions and disagreements following elections.

Conclusion

- ❖ This has an impact on voter choices. The perception of corruption in the BRS and BJP governments, coupled with the attribution of anti-corruption efforts to the Congress, played a significant role in shaping voters' preferences towards Congress.

RESTORATION OF STATEHOOD AND POLLS IN J&K SHOULD NOT BE DELAYED FURTHER.

Introduction

- ❖ It has been more than five and a half years since an elected government collapsed and Governor's rule was imposed in Jammu & Kashmir amidst the suspension of the elected Assembly — a step that heralded dramatic changes in the erstwhile State.
- ❖ Subsequently, Article 370 that provided for special status for the erstwhile State was removed, the State bifurcated with the region encompassing Jammu and the Kashmir Valley made into a new Union Territory and Ladakh hived off into another.

Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019

- ❖ The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act divides the Indian-administered state into two Indian-administered union territories, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

- ❖ Whereas the former, Jammu and Kashmir, will have a legislative assembly, the latter, Ladakh, will be administered by a lieutenant governor alone.
- ❖ The union territory of Ladakh will include the districts of Leh and Kargil, while all other districts will be accorded to Jammu and Kashmir.
- ❖ Of six Lok Sabha seats allocated to the former state, one will be allocated to Ladakh and five to the Jammu and Kashmir union territory. The High Court of Jammu and Kashmir will function as the High Court for both the union territories.
- ❖ The act provides that the administration of the Jammu and Kashmir will be as per Article 239A of the Indian constitution. Article 239A, originally formulated for the union territory of Puducherry, will also be applicable to Jammu and Kashmir.
- ❖ A lieutenant governor appointed by the president will administer the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which will have a legislative assembly of 107 to 114 members. The legislative assembly may make laws for any of the matters in the state list except "public order" and "police", which will remain as the law-making powers of the union government.

Constitutionality of these changes

- ❖ The constitutionality of these changes is still under question and the Supreme Court has reserved its verdict on it. But this has not deterred the Union government from bringing about legislation that will change the make-up of the UT's prospective Legislative Assembly beyond the completion of the delimitation exercise.

Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

- ❖ On Wednesday, the Lok Sabha passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.
- ❖ These Bills do not necessarily bring about any significant change.
- ❖ The first increases the total number of Assembly seats from 107 to 114, with reservation of nine seats for Scheduled Tribes (a first), besides empowering the Lieutenant-Governor to effect some nominations.
- ❖ The second seeks to replace the term "weak and underprivileged classes (social castes)" in the J&K Reservation Act, 2004, enacted by the State legislature, to "Other Backward Classes" as declared by the UT.

Feeling of Alienation

- ❖ Propriety would have demanded that even these changes could have waited for the Supreme Court's verdict, which is due soon, on the legality of the abrogation of special status besides the bifurcation of the erstwhile State and the procedure adopted to do so.
- ❖ Without the involvement of elected representatives from J&K in the process, the changes proposed in the Lok Sabha would only seem to be acts that are presented as fait accompli to the UT's citizens.
- ❖ This should also be taken together with the fact that the last five and a half years have seen the suspension of political and civil liberties of politicians; arbitrary arrests and detentions; communication shutdowns; a chilling effect on the media; and, more recently, long power cuts. Any change to the political life of J&K, citing its status as a region affected by separatism and terrorism, should not be done in a way that the citizens feel alienated.

Conclusion

- ❖ The first order of business in J&K has to be the restoration of the democratic process by holding popular elections and the restoration of its Statehood. This should help not just fill a glaring void in public life in the region in the immediate but also set the stage for addressing the long-pending issues that have led to the persistence of militancy.

WELCOME DIRECTION.

Context:

As with elections, SC should have given a deadline for restoration of statehood.

Introduction

In its conclusion in the judgment that upheld the decision to abrogate the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court expressly directed that the Election Commission of India (ECI) must conduct elections to the Legislative Assembly of J&K by September 30, 2024.

What is welcoming, and what is the issue?

- ❖ It is welcome that the Court has set a deadline to conduct the long-delayed elections in J&K, which has been under spells of Governor's Rule and President's Rule since June 20, 2018, and without a Legislative Assembly.
- ❖ But it is also incongruous that the judgment does not press the government to restore statehood to the bifurcated Union Territory, a promise that has been conveyed by the Solicitor General but has yet to gain fruition.

Constitution bench

- ❖ Constitution bench is the name given to the benches of the Supreme Court of India which consist of at least five judges of the court which sit to decide any case "involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation" of the Constitution of India or "for the purpose of hearing any reference" made by the President of India under Article 143.
- ❖ This provision has been mandated by Article 145 (3) of the Constitution of India.
- ❖ Also, matters related to the Amendment of an Act of the Indian Parliament are referred to the Constitution Bench by the Supreme Court under the same act.
- ❖ The Chief Justice of India has the power to constitute a Constitution Bench and refer cases to it.

Direct election and statehood.

- ❖ The Bench remarks that direct elections cannot be put on hold until statehood is restored but it could have directed the Union government to restore statehood and conduct elections by a specified date, as there remains no reason for the continuance of J&K as a Union Territory.
- ❖ Restoration of statehood is an important measure as this guarantees a degree of federal autonomy to the province, that should allow the elected government to be able to better address the concerns of the electorate than depend on the representatives of the Union government.

Conflict prone region and voting behaviour.

- ❖ J&K remains among India's most conflict-prone regions partially due to historical reasons related to integration of the erstwhile princely State into the Indian Union and later due to accumulated grievances over the conduct of democratic processes in the erstwhile State.
- ❖ Even when periodic and regular elections were conducted during the height of the militancy, participation was limited in many parts of the Valley, denoting the disenchantment with the political system.
- ❖ But things took a change for the better since the early-mid 2000s when electoral participation improved, and J&K's citizens began to partake in the democratic process to get their concerns addressed before agitations and protests — including by separatists — over security policies and the later steps taken by the government led to the current state of affairs.

Local level elections

- ❖ In the last five and a half years, local government elections have been held with varying levels of participation indicating that the mood in the Valley has been against the measures that have been implemented since 2018.
- ❖ India's unique selling proposition as a leader in the Global South remains its robust conduct of formal democratic process and which in itself is important for conflict resolution in places such as Kashmir.

Conclusion

- ❖ Without political processes, a contestation of ideas and a sense that elected representatives can address the grievances of citizens, there cannot be any normalcy.

ARTICLE 370 JUDGMENT IS A CASE OF CONSTITUTIONAL MONISM.

Context: Such a judicial reading in a context that defies monism also affects federalism and constitutional democracy.

Introduction

- ❖ More than four years after the abrogation of Article 370, the Supreme Court of India, on Monday, unanimously upheld the actions of the Indian government.

- ❖ While much of the discourse around the judgment has focused on the question of statehood, it is important to remember that the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was really at the heart of the matter.
- ❖ To arrive at its conclusions, the Court employs a historical, textual, and structural interpretation of the Constitution of India, and all three approaches are deeply informed by constitutional monism.

Federalism and constitutional sovereignty

- ❖ The monism that is reflected in the judgment imagines the Union Constitution as the sole bearer of internal and external sovereignty. While this may be true, Article 370 laid down an elaborate framework for the distribution of powers and authority between the Union and the State governments.
- ❖ By focusing more on the particular concept of sovereignty 'which requires no subordination to another body', the Court ends up refusing to recognise the shared sovereignty model of Article 370.
- ❖ After all, sovereignty in federal constitutions is not a binary concept restricted to a simple 'is' or 'isn't' classification. Rather, it encompasses various dimensions and exists along a spectrum of degrees.

The contingency of the presidential power

- ❖ Another site where the Court's monism operates is in its reading of Clause 3 of Article 370. The Court rejects the argument that Article 370 had gained permanence after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly as this 'is premised on the understanding that the constitutional body had unbridled power to alter the constitutional integration of the State with the Union'.
- ❖ In a constitutional democracy, no body or institution has unbridled powers. Further, Clause 3 of Article 370 is primarily concerned with the relationship of two powers and not just the status or the relationship of the power-bearing entities. The proviso to Clause 3 makes it clear that the presidential power to abrogate Article 370 was contingent on the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly.
- ❖ As it is in the nature of the presidential powers under Clause 3 to be contingent on the Constituent Assembly, this limitation does not die with the dissolution of the Assembly.
- ❖ The relation of powers here does not mean that the President becomes 'subordinate' to the Constituent Assembly but that power as a federal arrangement has been distributed across multiple axes under Article 370.
- ❖ Holding that the President has the untrammelled power to abrogate Article 370 and order a total application of the Indian Constitution to the State to the effect that the State's Constitution becomes inoperative is an 'unbridled power' that defies the logic of federalism and constitutional democracy.

State's views on its future

- ❖ The judgment's monism imagines popular sovereignty as a monolith where since the views of an individual State for the purposes of reorganisation are not binding on Parliament, Parliament, therefore, is well placed to speak for the state.
- ❖ Justice Sanjay Kaul holds that 'views are to be taken from the entire nation via the Parliament, as the issue leading to the reorganisation affects the nation as a whole'.
- ❖ There are many sites within the Constitution where a recommendatory power is vested in a body. Merely because that power may not be binding does not mean that the power can be taken over by another body or that power need not be exercised because at its heart lies the question of agency.

Conclusion

- ❖ The inevitable conclusion that one arrives at is that the popular sovereignty of a State's people vis-à-vis the State becomes subordinate to the popular sovereignty of the entire nation vis-à-vis the Union as well as the States.
- ❖ This is particularly worrying in the context of J&K where the threshold for reorganising the State was historically much higher compared to the other States

THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT (FRA) OF 2006 AIMED TO ADDRESS HISTORICAL INJUSTICES IN INDIAN FOREST GOVERNANCE, RECOGNIZING INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY RIGHTS.

However, implementation challenges, political opportunism, and bureaucratic resistance hinder its transformative potential, limiting its impact.

- ❖ **Background:** Historic Injustices in Forest Governance
- ❖ **Pre-Colonial Era:** Local communities had customary rights over forests.
- ❖ **Colonial Takeover (1878):** Indian Forest Act disrupted traditions, prioritizing timber resources.
- ❖ **Post-Independence Injustices:** Forest lands declared state property, displacements, exploitation continued.
- ❖ **Acts Contributing to Injustice:** Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 exacerbated injustices.
- ❖ **The Forest Rights Act (FRA):** A Revolutionary Approach
- ❖ **Enactment (2006):** Rajya Sabha endorsed FRA, aimed at addressing historical injustices.

Three Forms of Redress:

- ❖ **Individual Forest Rights (IFRs):** Recognition of habitation, cultivation, or activities pre-December 2005.
- ❖ **Conversion of Forest Villages:** Transforming them into revenue villages after full rights recognition.
- ❖ **Community Rights:** Recognizing village communities' rights to access, use, and manage forests.
- ❖ **Challenges in FRA Implementation**
- ❖ **Political Opportunism:** Some states focused only on individual rights, framing it as an 'encroachment regularisation' scheme.
- ❖ **Shabby Implementation of IFRs:** Compromised by Forest Department resistance, apathy, and misuse of technology.
- ❖ **Incomplete Recognition of Community Rights (CFRs):** Forest bureaucracy vehemently opposes, leading to slow and incomplete recognition.
- ❖ **Lacuna in Addressing 'Forest Villages':** Many states have not adequately addressed the issue.

Distortions and Lacunae

- ❖ **Faulty Recognition Processes:** Arbitrary rejections and partial recognition, imposing digital processes in areas with poor connectivity.
- ❖ **Resistance to CFRs:** Forest bureaucracy opposes community forest rights, hindering decentralized forest governance.
- ❖ **Selective State Recognition:** Maharashtra, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh recognized CFRs, but Maharashtra alone enabled activation.
- ❖ **Convenient Non-Recognition of Community Rights**
- ❖ **Convenient for Conservationists and Development Lobby:** Non-recognition of community rights makes communities vulnerable for rehabilitation and allows forest handovers for mining without consent.
- ❖ **Call for Understanding FRA's Intent**
- ❖ **Emerging Calls for Shutdown:** With changing political regimes, calls to shut down FRA implementation have emerged.
- ❖ **Mission Mode Implementation:** In some states, mission mode implementation led to distorted rights recognition and technocratic control.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **Need for Appreciation:** Political leaders, bureaucrats, and environmentalists need to appreciate the spirit and intent of the FRA for addressing historical injustices and realizing the potential for community-led forest conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

A BLOW FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE LEGISLATURE, IN LAW MAKING

Context:

In a landmark judgment, CJI Chandrachud creatively interprets Article 200, limiting Governor's power to withhold assent.

Supreme Court emphasizes timely decisions, while potential exploitation in reserving Bills for the President is examined.

Governor's discretion restricted by constitutional principles.

Landmark Judgment (November 10, 2023):

- ❖ **Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, interprets Article 200** creatively in State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary case.

New Interpretation of Article 200:

- ❖ **CJI's interpretation links withholding of assent with sending the Bill back for reconsideration.**
- ❖ Governor has no option but to give assent after reconsideration.

Clarity on Governor's Powers:

- ❖ **Judgment clarifies confusion about Governor's power** to withhold assent.
- ❖ Protects legislative rights and constitutional system from unelected Governors.

Emphatic on Timely Decisions:

- ❖ **Supreme Court emphasizes Governors cannot delay decisions on Bills.**

Reserving Bills for President's Consideration:

- ❖ Governor's absolute option available.
- ❖ Second provision to Article 200 mentions Bills mandatorily reserved for President's consideration.

Areas of Potential Exploitation:

- ❖ **Governors can still frustrate state law-making by reserving Bills for President's consideration.**
- ❖ Supreme Court examines the issue of what Bills can be sent to the President.

Constitutional References:

- ❖ Constitution indirectly refers to reserving Bills for President's consideration in Articles 213 and 254.

Governor's Discretion Limited:

- ❖ Governor cannot send Bills exclusively on State subjects to the President.
- ❖ Bills on concurrent subjects need President's assent only if they conflict with central laws.

Constitutional Duty of Governor:

- ❖ Governor's duty is not to send Bills to the President for assent if they pertain exclusively to State subjects.
- ❖ Constitutional validity of laws is decided by the court.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Governor's discretion limited; cannot send Bills to President arbitrarily.
- ❖ Constitutional scheme restricts Governor's powers to ensure adherence to federal principles.

THE DEEP IMPORT OF THE ARTICLE 370 VERDICT.

Context:

- ❖ The Supreme Court's judgment on the 2019 presidential orders in Jammu and Kashmir has wide-reaching implications.
- ❖ Overlooked aspects include varied regional impacts, security concerns' acceptance, human rights violations, and the neglect of peacemaking.
- ❖ Moving forward, a new peace process and a return to the A.B. Vajpayee blueprint are suggested for resolution.

Background:

- ❖ Supreme Court judgment on August 2019 presidential orders discussed.
- ❖ Focus on implications for Jammu and Kashmir's autonomy and division into Union Territories.

Key Points:

- ❖ Commentaries highlight impact on national issues, statehood, and presidential powers.
- ❖ **Neglect of three crucial aspects: Ground impact, Court's view on peace/security, and democratic implications.**

On the Ground Impact:

- ❖ **Varied reactions in different regions**—ambiguity in Jammu, disappointment in Kargil, cautious welcome in Ladakh, and ominous sentiment in the Valley.
- ❖ Economic dispossession concerns in Jammu, majority Shia wishes in Kargil, and a desire for elected administration in Ladakh.
- ❖ **Severe impact on the Valley, reinforcing a belief of resentment and silencing of Kashmiris' voices.**

Security Concerns and Court's View:

- ❖ **Draconian circumstances during President's August 2019 orders not adequately acknowledged.**
- ❖ **Blanket acceptance of security concerns criticized;** potential danger in unwarranted arrests and limiting policy debates.
- ❖ Neglect of the importance of peacemaking in resolving internal conflict.

Human Rights and Violence:

- ❖ **Justice Kaul's 'epilogue' acknowledges human rights abuses** but overlooks violations since August 2019.
- ❖ **Rise in violence post-2019 contrasts with the decline during the 2002-13** peace process.
- ❖ **Lack of emphasis on the lesson that peacemaking offers a better solution** to internal conflict.

Moving Forward and Blueprint:

- ❖ Suggestion for the Union administration to **initiate a new peace process.**
- ❖ Recommendations include **restoring statehood, holding elections, and returning freedom of expression.**
- ❖ **Acknowledgment of potential anger and the need for compassionate responses.**
- ❖ Reference to the A.B. Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh blueprint for disarmament, demilitarization, soft borders, and autonomy.

Concluding Thoughts:

- ❖ The Supreme Court's Jammu and Kashmir judgment holds vast implications, urging a critical examination of its constitutional, regional, and security dimensions.
- ❖ The neglected aspects underscore the need for comprehensive reevaluation and future considerations.

REGULATION OF NET WORLD MUST ADDRESS PRIVACY CONCERNS, SIMPLIFY PROCEDURES.

Telecommunications Bill, 2023 Overview:

- ❖ **Aims to consolidate laws for wireless networks and Internet service providers.**
- ❖ 46-page statute maintains existing regulatory structures and simplifies bureaucratic procedures.
- ❖ **Digitization of licensing processes and new mechanisms** for non-compliance with license terms.

Local Authority Access:

- ❖ Telecom operators granted access to district- and State-level authorities for permissions and dispute resolution.

Satellite Internet Industry:

- ❖ **Exempted from bidding for spectrum**, aligning with global practices.
- ❖ **Welcomed by industry bodies for streamlining regulations and promoting ease of doing business.**
- ❖ Potential to provide regulatory stability for the next phase of telecom expansion in India.

Concerns and Challenges:

- ❖ **Broad definition of telecom raises privacy and surveillance concerns.**
- ❖ **State authority implications for privacy and potential compromises** in proposed solutions.
- ❖ **Urgent need for transparent handling of public responses** during consultation and rule-making processes.
- ❖ Subordinate legislation required for the Act's provisions, emphasizing the evolving digital landscape since the 19th century.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The Telecommunications Bill, 2023, while streamlining regulations, poses challenges with privacy and state authority concerns.
- ❖ Transparent rule-making is crucial for its successful implementation amid evolving digital dynamics.

QUESTIONABLE SEARCHES UNDER THE MONEY LAUNDERING ACT

CONTEXT:

The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002, interpreted by the Supreme Court, focuses on “proceeds of crime” related to scheduled offences.

BACKGROUND:

- ❖ Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (**PMLA**) enacted to combat drug and terrorism financing.
- ❖ Supreme Court's interpretation in Vijay Madanlal Choudhary case limits PMLA to “wrongful and illegal gain” related to scheduled offences.

KEY SUPREME COURT RULING:

- ❖ Application limited to “proceeds of crime” under Section 2(1)(u) of the PMLA.
- ❖ **Only triggered if property derived from criminal activity related to a scheduled offence.**
- ❖ Undisclosed income, regardless of volume, not covered unless linked to criminal activity

ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE CRITICISM:

- ❖ **Media reports reveal ED actions beyond its powers**, leading to Supreme Court criticism.
- ❖ Damning observations on ED's conduct, emphasizing the need for probity, dispassion, and fairness.

RECENT JUDICIAL DEVELOPMENTS:

- ❖ In Pavana Dibbur vs The Directorate of Enforcement, **Court reinforces the importance of “proceeds of crime”** for PMLA offences.
- ❖ Instances of procedural violations and changes in notice-issuing Bench raise concerns.

SELECTIVE TARGETING AND FEDERALISM:

- ❖ **Instances of ED targeting Opposition-governed States** for inquiries not related to scheduled offences.
- ❖ Abuse of authority and court processes noted in Jharkhand case, raising questions about federalism erosion.
- ❖ **ED's inactivity in BJP-governed States with serious illegal mining cases** raises disturbing questions.

CONCERNS AND IMPLICATIONS:

- ❖ **Violation of constitutional principles and abuse of authority** by central investigating agencies.
- ❖ Courts permitting investigations not related to scheduled offences or proceeds of crime in certain States.

- ❖ **Federalism foundation eroding;** calls for curbing such abuses to preserve democracy.

CONCLUSION:

- ❖ The recent legal developments highlight concerns over the limited scope of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, potential misuse by investigating agencies, and the erosion of federalism, underscoring the need for corrective measures to preserve constitutional principles and democratic integrity.

NEW LAWS HAVE POSITIVE FEATURES, BUT BRING NO PATH-BREAKING CHANGE.

CONTEXT:

- ❖ Three Bills replacing India's criminal laws passed in Parliament with limited deliberations.
- ❖ Content retention, questionable inclusions, procedural changes, and lack of systemic vision raise concerns about the legislative process's efficacy.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND OPPOSITION CONCERNS:

- ❖ Three Bills replacing India's criminal laws passed in Parliament amid the absence of over 140 members.
- ❖ Despite scrutiny by a Parliamentary Standing Committee, the absence of robust legislative deliberations limited the discussion on crucial implications.

CONTENT RETENTION AND MINISTERIAL CLAIMS:

- ❖ **Revised codes retain much of the language and content of original laws,** challenging the claim of a purely Indian legal framework by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.
- ❖ **Concerns raised regarding the potential lack of path-breaking changes** in policing, crime investigation, and trial procedures.

KEY REVISIONS IN BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA (BNS):

- ❖ **Removal of outdated sedition section and inclusion of mob lynching** as a separate offense.
- ❖ Positive aspects include the exclusion of the Supreme Court-struck adultery law and the incorporation of hate crimes based on race, caste, etc.
- ❖ Questionable inclusion of 'terrorism' in general penal law instead of relying on special legislation.

PROCEDURAL CHANGES AND AMBIGUITIES:

- ❖ Introduction of provisions allowing FIR registration by any police officer regardless of the offense location.
- ❖ **Emphasis on the use of forensics in investigations** and videography of searches and seizures.
- ❖ **Ambiguity regarding the extension of police custody** beyond the 15-day limit, requiring clarification for legal clarity.

CRITICAL EVALUATION AND SYSTEMIC VISION:

- ❖ Critique of the legislative process's failure to adequately address inadequacies in the criminal justice system.
- ❖ It is important to give emphasis on the need for revisions to align with a comprehensive vision for an improved legal framework.

CONCLUSION:

The rushed passage of criminal law bills without thorough deliberation raises apprehensions about potential flaws in India's legal framework. This issue demands critical attention and reform for a robust system.

TELECOM LAW UPGRADES FOR A DIGITAL AUTHORITARIAN STATE.

Context:

- ❖ The Telecom Bill 2023 **raises concerns about privacy, Favors select corporations, and lacks democratic scrutiny.**
- ❖ Nationalistic rhetoric obscures its shortcomings, contributing to an erosion of democratic principles.

Introduction:

- ❖ Tweet by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav announces parliamentary passage of Telecom Bill, 2023.

Digital Bharat Nidhi and the Digital Divide:

- ❖ The Telecom Bill introduces **“Digital Bharat Nidhi,” renaming the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF).**
- ❖ Despite the name change, little structural change in addressing the digital divide.
- ❖ Nationalistic rhetoric distracts from the lack of fresh ideas or solutions for improving connectivity.

Innovation and State Control:

- ❖ **Provisions favoring select private firms** under the guise of national champions.
- ❖ **Allocation of satellite spectrum without auctions raises concerns,** benefiting specific corporations.
- ❖ **Regulatory sandboxes and dispute resolution systems likely to favor large corporations,** maintaining an oligopoly.

Modern Authoritarianism:

- ❖ Telecom Act retains colonial architecture with clever rewording of phrases.
- ❖ Changes, like **replacing “licensing” with “authorization,”** result in increased severity.
- ❖ **Vague definitions** allow licensing of OTT messaging apps and email services, compromising user privacy.
- ❖ Interception, surveillance powers, and Internet shutdowns lack safeguards, expanding government control.
- ❖ **“National security” remains undefined, enabling broad government powers without clear limits.**
- ❖ Biometric-based identification and penalties for non-compliance further contribute to a surveillance state.

Constitutional Concerns:

- ❖ **Passage of the Telecom Bill in haste** without referring it to a Standing Committee.
- ❖ Criticism of the parliamentary process as a constitutional veneer for an unconstitutional concentration of power.

Impact on Ordinary Citizens:

- ❖ **Lack of avenues for ordinary citizens to voice concerns** or question the government.
- ❖ The bill raises questions about the erosion of democratic principles.
- ❖ The Telecom Bill exemplifies a move away from democracy under the guise of progress.

ARTICLE 370 ISSUE CLOSED, BUT TERROR VICTIMS NEED CLOSURE.

Context:

- Justice Kaul recommends a truth and reconciliation commission for Kashmir, aiming to address human rights violations during the insurgency.
- Challenges include careful mandate definition and reparation for victims, especially Kashmiri Pandits.

Background:

- **Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul recommends a truth and reconciliation commission in the judgment on Article 370 concerning Kashmir.**
- **Aim is to address human rights violations during the insurgency,** particularly in 1989-90.

Purpose of Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

- **Facilitate reconciliation in divided societies after violence and human rights abuses.**
- Investigates patterns of events over a period, engaging with affected populations.
- **Temporary body, concludes with a final report**, officially authorized or empowered by the state.

Parameters for a Commission in Kashmir:

- **Composition crucial** for impartiality and objectivity.
- **Careful definition of parameters needed if constituted** by the Central government.
- **Reference can be made to the South African truth and reconciliation commission.**

Challenges and Mandate:

- **Potential controversy regarding uniform application of amnesty**, especially for state and non-state actors.
- **Caution required to fix a mandate that doesn't adversely impact the credibility of security forces.**
- **Reparation for victims**, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition, crucial.

Case of Kashmiri Pandits:

- **Involuntary migration of Kashmiri Pandits in 1989-90 awaits rightful redress.**
- Truth and reconciliation commissions, **if constituted without delay, have limited utility.**
- Victims reserve the right of reparation, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition.

Closure for Victims:

- **Acknowledgement and closure needed for Kashmiri Pandit victims of mass exodus.**
- Despite delays, relief can still be given within each parameter to rebuild their lives.
- Justice Kaul's recommendation aims to address the grievances of all victims, particularly the Kashmiri Pandits.

Conclusion:

- Justice Kaul's call for a truth and reconciliation commission in Kashmir underscores the imperative for addressing historical human rights violations. This resonates with government's emphasis on governance, protection of human rights, and societal healing.

MAKING HEALTH OUR TOP PRIORITY IN 2024.

Context:

- The **article discusses the alarming rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in India**, emphasizing the shift in disease burden.
- It highlights behavioral risk factors, government initiatives, and calls for individual commitment to healthier lifestyles through micro-habits.

NCDs Dominance and Global Comparisons:

- A WHO report, 'Invisible Numbers,' reveals that **66% of deaths in India in 2019 were due to NCDs.**
- The probability of individuals **aged 30 or older succumbing to NCDs before 70 is 22% in India, surpassing the global average of 18%.**

Behavioral Risk Factors:

- **NCDs are fueled by rising behavioral risk factors** such as unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption.

- **Genetic predisposition, sedentary lifestyles, stress, anxiety, and depression** contribute to the silent epidemic.

Health Statistics and Economic Impact:

- **India has 101 million diabetics, making it the diabetes capital**, and cardiovascular diseases top mortality charts.
- **Cancer incidence is projected to rise by 57.5% by 2040.**
- The **economic burden** of NCDs and mental health conditions in India is estimated to be **\$4.58 trillion between 2012 and 2030.**

Government Initiatives and Individual Responsibility:

- **Government initiatives like the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke are in place.**
- However, individuals must take charge of their health as India aims to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2027.

Micro-Habits for Health Improvement:

- Integrate natural movement into daily life, like walking instead of using vehicles, for at least 30 minutes daily.
- **Choose 'slow food' over fast food**, emphasizing the connection between food and overall health.
- **Prioritize comprehensive health check-ups annually** to adopt a proactive attitude.
- Normalize health discussions at dinner tables and water coolers to stay ahead of potential health issues.

Resolution 2024 – A Call to Action:

- **Embrace sustainable healthy habits as a collective commitment** to shaping a healthier, more prosperous India.
- Recognize that small, consistent actions, multiplied across millions, can bring about a significant shift in the health landscape.
- The resolution transcends personal improvement, representing a dedication to the collective well-being of society.

Conclusion:

- The article emphasizes that the power to transform the nation lies in the daily choices of its citizens.
- Committing to Resolution 2024 reflects a profound understanding that individual well-being directly impacts the well-being of society.
- It calls for a collective effort in shaping a brighter, healthier future for India and future generations.

GROWTH CHARTS — WHO STANDARDS VERSUS INDIA CRAFTED.

Context:

- Persistent child undernutrition in India prompts debate on WHO Growth Standards' suitability.
- Concerns include potential overestimation, genetic factors, misdiagnosis risks, and the need for improved interventions and overall development.

Background:

- **Child undernutrition persists as a significant issue in India.**
- Determinants of undernutrition include food intake, dietary diversity, health, sanitation, women's status, and poverty.
- **Common measures include height-for-age (stunting) and weight-for-height (wasting).**

Favorable Environment in Child Growth:

- **Definition:** Refers to conditions supporting healthy child growth, encompassing nutrition, healthcare, sanitation, and socio-economic factors.
- **MGRS Approach:** Multicentre Growth Reference Study (MGRS) aimed to establish growth standards based on children in favorable environments.

Sampling Concerns:

- **Misleading Comparisons:** Some argue that comparisons with other datasets may be misleading due to sampling issues.
- **Representation in Surveys:** Large-scale surveys in India might lack samples reflecting a truly favorable environment for growth.

Genetic and Environmental Factors:

- **Influence on Growth:** Genetic growth potential and maternal height are considered non-modifiable factors influencing child growth.
- **Maternal Height as an Indicator:** Maternal height is seen as a reflection of the intergenerational transmission of poverty and a measure of deprivation.

Concerns about Misdiagnosis:

- **Potential Overestimation:** High growth standards may lead to misdiagnosis and potential overfeeding, contributing to overweight and obesity concerns.
- **Balancing Interventions:** Despite concerns, the article suggests the need for improved quality in government programs addressing undernutrition.

Recommendations and Interventions:

- **Urgent Action:** Implementation of recommendations like including eggs in meals and incorporating pulses in the Public Distribution System.
- **Dietary Gaps:** Emphasis on improving the quality of meals to ensure they are nutrient-rich and contribute to dietary diversity.

ICMR Recommendation:

- **Committee Formation:** Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) forms a committee to revise growth references, suggesting a detailed nationwide study.

Conclusion:

- While acquiring newer information is welcomed, sticking to WHO-MGRS standards is logical for international comparisons and intra-country trends.

INTERNATIONAL

MAKING THIS ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN WAR THE LAST.

Context:

The United Nations says 1.3 million of the 2.3 million residents of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip have been displaced, and almost half of all homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed.

Introduction

- ❖ All wars end. The Israeli-Hamas war will also end. When and how are still to be determined. But doing so is urgent. One outcome of a war is when both sides gain something of value to them. The Israeli-Hamas war is likely to end in that kind of scenario.
- ❖ Israel will win in military terms, no doubt about that. But Hamas is likely to win in terms of a greatly increased following among Arab populations everywhere, including, especially, in the occupied West Bank.

Failing Palestinian authority

- ❖ The Palestine Authority, which has been ruling there for the past 30 years, has become vastly unpopular and corrupt. Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, the most moderate Palestine leader Israel could have ever hoped for, has failed singularly in making any progress towards the objective of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank.

Emergence of Hamas

- ❖ The year 1987 saw the founding of Hamas, a violent wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt that wanted to use violent jihad to further its goals.
- ❖ The U.S. government views Hamas as a terrorist organization. The Palestinian Authority held legislative elections in 2006, which Hamas won. In 2007, it drove Fatah out of Gaza and split the Palestinian movement geographically.
- ❖ 1987: The First Intifada (Palestinian Uprising) began as tensions in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank reached a breaking point. Between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army, it developed into a minor conflict.

U.N. Charters, and the rights

- ❖ Under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Israel has the inherent right of self-defence. The same article lays down that after acting in self-defence, the state concerned must report the action taken by it to the UN Security Council (UNSC). This does not seem to have been done.
- ❖ In any case, self-defence does not authorise the disproportionate or indiscriminate use of force against civilians. It has been reported that Gaza's rate of death during Israel's assault has few precedents in this century — almost 15,000, most of them women and children. This goes well beyond the prevailing customary law of self-defence.

Feasibility of two-state solution

- ❖ Meanwhile, the proposal for a two-state solution, long pushed aside, has come alive. Everyone seems to be repeating the two-state mantra. But how feasible is the two-state concept today?
- ❖ The 1993 Oslo Accord envisaged Palestine to be based in the West Bank.
- ❖ Today, the West Bank is heavily populated by Israeli settlers, 4,50,000 at latest count. No Israeli government will succeed in persuading the settlers to return. Force would be required. The land is like Swiss cheese, having settler roads and innumerable settlements, with more planned. The current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, will never agree to a Palestinian state, however truncated.
- ❖ What is needed, as soon as conditions permit, is to have a reality check of the two-state proposal — what is feasible and what is not. Painful concessions will be required, including land swaps, and a monitoring mechanism established to hold each side to the commitments they make.

- ❖ The only lasting solution is for Israel to vacate its occupation of the West Bank and let a viable Palestinian state emerge.

Importance of Abraham Accords

- ❖ To ensure Israel's legitimate concern for the safety of its people, the new state should be demilitarised. Other measures can be thought of to assure the Israelis of their safety. Israel's neighbouring Arab states should all be engaged in this process. The Abraham Accords provide a foundation.
- ❖ If Israel has the vision of living in harmony in the region with its Arab neighbours, this is the only way. When that happens, Iran will lose its proclaimed reason for its anti-Israel tirades; Hezbollah will, likewise, lose its most important plank for threatening Israel.

Conclusion

- ❖ For decades, Israeli-Palestinian relations have been locked in a never-ending cycle of death, destruction, and misery. The war in Gaza is the latest iteration. It should be the last. The Middle East could, finally, enjoy stable peace and security.

INDIA'S GROWING NEIGHBORHOOD DILEMMAS.

Context:

Most South Asian states are sceptical of India's primacy in their own ways.

Introduction

- ❖ The proverbial Achilles heel of Indian foreign policy continues to be its neighbourhood. Contemporary Indian foreign policy has an ambitious vision — from being the leader of the global South, to be an arbiter in global geopolitical contestations, to making a serious claim to be a pole in world politics.
- ❖ But South Asia is not only not keen to jump on the bandwagon of the India story, but it is also seemingly holding India back, albeit indirectly. Neighbourhoods are difficult for any major power, but contemporary India is faced with an exceptionally hard one, complicated by a rising superpower in its neighbourhood, for the first time in its history.

Types of dilemmas that India faces in the neighbourhood.

- ❖ The rise of politically anti-India regimes in South Asia such as the one in the Maldives where the new government is effectively asking Indians to pack up and leave. While the Maldives is anti-India in an instrumental sense, a Khaleda Zia-led government in Dhaka, which goes to the elections early next year, could turn out to be ideologically anti-India.
- ❖ The second type of dilemma India faces in the neighbourhood is structural, resulting from Beijing's growing influence in South Asia.
- ❖ The growing entanglement of the region's smaller states in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other Chinese projects.
- ❖ Beijing's assiduous outreach to South Asian states when the rest of the international community abandons or avoids them for normative or other reasons — as was the case with Taliban-led Afghanistan, military-ruled Myanmar and crisis-hit Sri Lanka. India does too, but the overall impact of China's outreach is far higher than that of India primarily as a function of deeper pockets.
- ❖ Finally, China's desire to settle border disputes with its neighbours (minus India), as seen in the case of Bhutan, is also a strategy to win over the region.

Causes behind the dilemmas.

- ❖ The first is the regional geopolitical architecture characterised by five overlapping elements.
- ❖ Contemporary South Asia is characterised by a diminishing presence of the United States, which, for a long time, was a geopolitical constant in the region. For New Delhi, Washington's presence in South Asia was not always advantageous, but its departure is disadvantageous, in particular given how China has filled the power vacuum created by Washington's departure.
- ❖ The aggressive and stupendous rise of China has come as a 'geopolitical buffer', at least for now, for the smaller states in the region which have become adept at using the 'China card' in their foreign policy

assertions. While our neighbours are keen to practise strategic autonomy with us, there is little appetite to do so vis-à-vis China.

- ❖ Third, in one of the least interconnected regions in the world, and poor, it is natural that the inhabitants of the region will tilt towards a power with the ability to cater to their material needs. With India's ability to meet those needs being limited, China is that power.
- ❖ Fourth, India, for the most part, has had a normative and political approach towards the region, with the states in the region acquiescing, rebelling, and falling in line given the absence of choices. Beijing has changed that India-centric calculus by offering itself as the no-frills non-normative alternative. For the first time in modern South Asian history, the region is a 'norms-free-zone'.
- ❖ Finally, for much of its independent existence, New Delhi enjoyed unrivalled primacy in the region. Today, the downside of being the resident power in South Asia — with all its attendant cultural, ethnic, refugee and other spillovers — is felt more sharply than being the primary power. China, on the other hand, is the region's non-resident power which benefits from the absence of complications — ethnic, linguistic, religious — arising out of being a resident power.
- ❖ The second cause behind India's regional dilemma is related to its policy stance which exhibits a deep-seated status quo bias when it comes to dealing with the region's domestic politics and the multiplicity of actors/power centres therein.
- ❖ Furthermore, India's dilemmas are also caused by two mistaken assumptions that we have long held.
- ❖ For one, there has, for some time, been a strong belief in India that South Asia minus Pakistan would be amenable to Indian geopolitical reasoning which prompted an attempt to deal proactively with South Asia without Pakistan. However, in retrospect, one has to admit that this policy has not exactly panned out that way India imagined.
- ❖ The second (mistaken) assumption that New Delhi approached the neighbourhood with was that India's special relationship with the region rooted in culture, soft power, history and ethnicity would help the country deal with the neighbourhood better than those without intimate knowledge of the region, namely China.

What can be done?

- ❖ It is the time in which India should make a mental switch and acknowledged that South Asia and its balance of power have changed fundamentally.
- ❖ Old South Asia where India enjoyed primacy no longer exists. 'Southern Asia' which has pretty much replaced South Asia is a space where China has emerged as a serious contender for regional primacy.
- ❖ India's neighbours and periphery are China's too, even if we do not like it.
- ❖ Such a realistic and pragmatic framing would help India deal with the reality as it is rather than working with the mental frame of Indian primacy which is long gone.
- ❖ New Delhi must proactively pursue the involvement of friendly external actors in the region. That is the only way to deal with the impending possibility of the region becoming Sino-centric.
- ❖ Indian diplomacy must be flexible enough to engage multiple actors in each of the neighbouring countries. The art of diplomacy is not about hating the anti-India elements in the neighbourhood, but, instead, lessening their anti-India attitude.
- ❖ Finally, here is the highlighting of an issue that has been spoken of ad nauseum — India needs more hands for its diplomatic pursuits. The glaring shortage of sufficient diplomats to implement the foreign policy of a country of 1.4 billion people will prove to be India's single most crucial challenge going forward.

Conclusion

- ❖ The more India's role in world affairs grows, the more the shortage of personnel will be felt by us and others. If the current state of affairs continues, there will be no one to show up with the Indian flag when opportunities beckon, or crises emerge.

DECODING PUTIN'S DRAMATIC VISIT TO THE GULF.

Context: Vladimir Putin's recent interactions with Gulf leaders have brought Russia into the mainstream of West Asian affairs and affirmed that the Sino-Russian alliance will challenge U.S. hegemony.

Introduction

- ❖ Russian President Vladimir Putin, largely confined to the Kremlin due to western restrictions, on December 6 dramatically set out on whirlwind tours to Abu Dhabi and Riyadh in one day.
- ❖ The next day, he received Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Moscow. And on December 8, Mr. Putin announced that he would be standing for elections in 2024, affirming that he would be leading Russia at least up to 2030 and possibly beyond.

Talks in the Gulf

- ❖ A Russian spokesman described the talks in the Gulf capitals as “a concentrated shot”. The agenda was self-evident: continued cooperation among “OPEC +” members on oil policy; exchange of views on the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts; increasing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians trapped in Gaza; and enhancing bilateral-political-economic ties.
- ❖ Cooperation among “OPEC +” countries led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, for instance, has ensured that the agreed production cuts are adhered to and oil prices, much to the U.S.’s chagrin, remain at levels that serve the producers’ interests.
- ❖ Despite their long-standing alliance with the U.S., both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have in recent years been asserting “strategic autonomy” and have prioritised expanding ties with China and Russia. The UAE is now Russia’s most important trade partner in the Gulf. Neither the UAE nor Saudi Arabia have supported the U.S.-sponsored sanctions on Russia or criticised the latter for the Ukraine war.
- ❖ In fact, thousands of Russians have set up alternative homes, businesses, and investments in the UAE. Cooperation is thriving between the two countries in the technology sector. As a result, the West has placed the UAE under scrutiny to ensure that restrictions on export of hi-tech products to Russia are complied with.
- ❖ Russia has also conveyed it is standing by to support Saudi Arabia’s civilian nuclear programme at the opportune moment.
- ❖ Iran and Russia, as targets of increasingly onerous western sanctions, challenge the West’s global strategic leadership and seek the realisation of a multipolar world order. Flowing from this, they have built substantial bilateral relations in the energy and military areas: in March this year, the Russian, Chinese and Iranian navies carried out joint exercises in the Gulf of Oman.
- ❖ In November, it was reported that Iran would get Sukhoi Su-35 aircraft from Russia, as also training aircraft and attack helicopters. Iran has boosted Russia’s military prowess in Ukraine with supplies of drones, ammunition and body armour.

Putin’s agenda

- ❖ Putin was signalling that Russia was not isolated and that it had some close friends, such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, that, till recently, had been the U.S.’s closest allies in the region. But beyond this, Mr. Putin would have had a more ambitious agenda.
- ❖ On the basis of Russia’s close ties with Iran, he would have told the UAE and the Kingdom that the Gaza war will not spread across the region, conveying the assurance that Iran will restrain the Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen in the interests of regional stability.
- ❖ Putin would have sought a deeper strategic and political alignment between the Gulf Cooperation Council states and Iran, presenting Russia and China as guarantors of regional peace.
- ❖ Putin would have sought the support of his Gulf interlocutors to the consolidation of this regional alignment so that, in the post-Gaza war scenario, they would act unitedly with Russia and China in managing regional political and diplomatic challenges, while excluding the U.S. from this arrangement.
- ❖ Above all, Mr. Putin would have assured his Gulf interlocutors that there would be continuity in Russia’s regional approach, by giving them advance notice that he will be seeking re-election in March 2024 and lead Russia at least till the end of this decade.
- ❖ Above all, Mr. Putin would have assured his Gulf interlocutors that there would be continuity in Russia’s regional approach, by giving them advance notice that he will be seeking re-election in March 2024 and lead Russia at least till the end of this decade.

Conclusion

Mr. Putin's recent interactions with Gulf leaders have brought Russia into the mainstream of West Asian affairs and affirmed that the Sino-Russian alliance will challenge U.S. hegemony and seek to redefine the regional political order.

END THE UNCERTAINTY.

Centre's proactive approach to resolve issues of Sri Lankan repatriates is must.

Introduction

The Madras High Court has demonstrated how the judiciary can provide succour to a person waiting for over 40 years to get Indian citizenship. In *T. Ganesan vs The Government of India & Others*, the Madurai Bench of the High Court, in its judgment on November 30, directed the authorities to treat the petitioner and his family as Indian citizens, thus extending to them relief measures that the Tamil Nadu government provides to repatriates from Sri Lanka.

What was the case?

- ❖ The 69-year-old petitioner, now a resident of a refugee camp in Karur, reached India in 1990 after having been issued an Indian passport in Kandy in August 1982 on repatriation under two bilateral treaties that concerned hill country Tamils or Indian Origin Tamils (IOT).
- ❖ He had approached the court as the authorities treated him only as a Sri Lankan refugee even though he is an Indian citizen.
- ❖ The government accepted the genuineness of his passport but doubted his identity because the photograph was the image of a "far younger" person. But the court rejected this position.
- ❖ Ganesan is not the only such person. The court has recorded that around 5,130 applicants (IOT category) have sought citizenship.

Important data point

In official data of March 2023, Tamil Nadu had about 91,000 refugees, with around 58,000 in camps.

Judiciary, rescuing those in camps.

- ❖ This is not the first time that the Bench, especially Justice G.R. Swaminathan, has gone to the rescue of those in the camps.
- ❖ In the last 15 months, the judge had established that the petitioners concerned were Indian citizens, interpreting provisions of the Citizenship Act, and should be issued passports.

Legal position of the Union government.

- ❖ Otherwise, the general legal position of the Union government is that every refugee is an illegal migrant though entitled to benefits. A DMK State government study found that nearly 8,000 refugees are eligible for Indian citizenship as they do not come under exclusions of the law.
- ❖ The Union government's stand has been that despite not being a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, it adheres to the principle of non-refoulement. The government also favours the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Sri Lanka. This was a reason why the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 did not include Sri Lankan refugees.

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019

- ❖ The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955. The Citizenship Act, 1955 provides various ways in which citizenship may be acquired. It provides for citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation and by incorporation of the territory into India.
- ❖ The Bill amends the Act to provide that the Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who entered India on or before December 31, 2014, will not be treated as illegal migrants.
- ❖ These provisions on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

What the Union government should do?

- ❖ The Centre should ensure follow-up action on the DMK government's study. It should first identify those eligible for citizenship under the legal framework and ascertain their consent.
- ❖ For those who wish to pursue higher studies or go abroad for a livelihood, permission can be granted if the applicant has no criminal record. The Union government should initiate talks with Sri Lanka on voluntary repatriation and a structured assistance programme worked out.

Conclusion

A proactive approach should be followed to ensure that those tagged as refugees are able to lead a life of dignity.

INDIA MUST TAKE A MORE VOCAL POSITION ON GAZA WITH ISRAEL.

Introduction

- ❖ Two months after Israel's bombardment of Gaza residents in retaliation for the October 7 terror attacks by Hamas began, India joined its voice to the global call to stop the bombing, voting in favour of a resolution at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) along with 152 other nations.

Resolution, and India's shift

- ❖ The resolution demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, an observance of international humanitarian law, the unconditional release of all hostages, as well as "ensuring humanitarian access".
- ❖ India's vote was a shift from its previous vote at the last such UNGA resolution on October 27, when despite the death of 8,000 Gazans, India had decided to abstain from voting for a resolution that called for a ceasefire.
- ❖ The government and the MEA explained this to be a matter of principle, as part of India's "zero-tolerance" approach towards terrorism, as the earlier resolution did not contain an "explicit condemnation" of the October 7 attacks.
- ❖ However, while the UNGA resolution passed on December 12 bears no direct mention of the terror attacks, India has voted in favour.

Possible reasons for such shift.

- ❖ There could be several reasons:
- ❖ Casualty figures have risen relentlessly, with 18,000 dead and the highest such toll of nearly 90 journalists. More than 80% of the entire population is homeless. Even the U.S., Israel's biggest ally, estimates that nearly half of the 29,000 air-to-ground munitions deployed by Israel thus far are "unguided" or indiscriminate missiles.
- ❖ Second, Israeli Defence Forces have gone far beyond their original mandate of eliminating Hamas capacity and freeing the hostages to a large-scale flattening of Gaza and forced occupation of more territory. More than 100 Israeli hostages remain in Hamas custody.
- ❖ Third, global opinion, including Indian public opinion, has moved decidedly from sympathy with Israel, to horror at the unfolding aftermath, and New Delhi could not have been immune to entreaties by Palestine and the Gulf States to take a relook at its vote, even as India stood isolated in South Asia and the Global South for its previous abstention.

India's role

- ❖ It may be too early to see India's UNGA vote as a reversal of its earlier position and a reversion to its original position in the conflict, where it has traditionally called for peace.
- ❖ Much will depend on the role India chooses for itself in ensuring the ceasefire is affected and holds, given that Israel has already rejected the UNGA resolution.

Conclusion

Having proven its credentials as a friend to Israel following the terror attacks, as well as the odium of enabling the civilian deaths, the Modi government must be more vocal in helping the Netanyahu government out of the

strategic cul de sac it has bombarded its way into, one which could cause regional instability and insecurity for decades.

A TIME-HONORED CONNECT THAT WILL HELP BRIDGE THE GULF.

Context:

Oman has a pivotal role to play in India seeking deeper engagement and collaboration in West Asia.

Introduction

- ❖ The Sultan of Oman, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, is visiting India from December 16 on a state visit. This is his first visit to India after taking over in January 2020 following the passing of Sultan Qaboos.
- ❖ The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, had visited Oman in February 2018 in his first visit to Oman as Prime Minister. In what proved to be a landmark visit, key agreements on trade, defence and security were agreed upon, making it a milestone in diplomatic relations between India and Oman.

Geography of Oman.

- ❖ Oman is the closest neighbour to India in the Arabian Gulf region.
- ❖ With key Omani ports abutting the coastline along the Arabian Sea as well as the Gulf of Oman leading into the Persian Gulf and towards the Gulf of Aden, Oman's location is of utmost strategic importance to India. Along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman completes the trio of key strategic partners of India in the Gulf region.

Strong connection with India

- ❖ The ruling family of Oman has always had a strong connection with India. Sultan Qaboos was always favourably disposed towards India and invited Indian companies and professionals to undertake projects apart from sourcing supplies from India. At the people-to-people level too, India and Oman enjoy close ties. There is a large Indian community of almost seven lakh people which has contributed to the constantly evolving vibrant relations.

During the Cold war era, and thereafter.

- ❖ During the Cold War era, and even thereafter, when the Arab world was largely ambivalent towards India and was often soft and supportive of Pakistan, it was Oman which kept its doors open to India. In a conflict-prone region, Oman has always been an island of peace.
- ❖ It has pursued a foreign policy which is based on the twin strands of moderation and mediation, including a policy of deliberate neutrality in dealing with regional issues and conflicts.
- ❖ It has carefully balanced its close relations with the western powers and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a pragmatic approach to neighbouring Iran, maintaining that the Straits of Hormuz will not be closed.
- ❖ Even during the Persian Gulf crisis in 1990, when the United States and Iran were on the brink of a military conflict, it was Oman which played a key role in diffusing tensions.
- ❖ Oman's key role in the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015 is well documented and acknowledged too. During the GCC-Qatar diplomatic stand-off, Oman refused to join Saudi Arabia and other countries in breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017.
- ❖ Much before the Abraham Accords were signed between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain in September 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had made a surprise visit to Oman in October 2018, once again confirming the importance of Oman in the region.

India-Oman strategic partnership

- ❖ Oman is a crucial pillar of India's West Asia policy, with their multi-faceted engagement increasingly taking on a more strategic shape in recent decades.
- ❖ The India-Oman strategic partnership was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Oman in November 2008 and is based on twin pillars of mutual trust and shared interests. Oman was one of the few countries to have been invited by India to its G-20 presidency as a guest nation earlier this year.

Key pillars

- ❖ Defence and security engagement form a key pillar of this strategic partnership and are governed by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2005.
- ❖ Oman is the first Gulf country with which all the three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises. Since 2012-13, an Indian naval ship has remained on duty in the Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy operations.
- ❖ During the Persian Gulf crisis in June 2019, the Indian Navy launched 'Operation Sankalp' to ensure the safe passage of Indian flagged ships which most often operated off the coast of Oman.
- ❖ The MoU on Duqm Port during Mr. Modi's visit is a historic landmark in our security cooperation, providing basing facilities, Operational Turn Round and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships operating in the region.
- ❖ Trade and commerce forms yet another important pillar of engagement. Bilateral trade during FY2022-23 reached \$12.388 billion. There are over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman, with an estimated investment of over \$7.5 billion.
- ❖ India was the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China. In October 2022, India and Oman launched the Rupay debit card in Oman, a key footprint of India's initiative of promoting digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world.

Looking forward to increased engagement.

- ❖ India and Oman are looking forward to increased engagement in strategic areas such as space cooperation — an MoU on this was signed during Mr. Modi's visit.
- ❖ The possibility of an agreement on joint exploration of rare earth metals, vital to modern electronic equipment, could add strength to the partnership.
- ❖ The proposed India-Middle East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project to link India to Europe across West Asia could also see Oman playing an important role.
- ❖ There is a proposal from the South Asia Gas Enterprise (SAGE), a private consortium based in India, to lay a 1,400 km long deep-sea pipeline from Oman to India for the transfer of gas. With IMEEC too looking at similar undersea connectivity, there could be convergence on it with Oman in the future.

India's gateway to West Asia

- ❖ The list of convergence and shared interests is thus long and limitless. As a part of its broader global outlook and its outreach in the extended neighbourhood, India is seeking deeper engagement and collaboration in West Asia, of which Oman is an important pillar.
- ❖ Security challenges in the region have a ripple effect in India and, therefore, any instability in the region has a direct bearing on the safety and security of millions of Indians working there, India's energy security and its steadily growing trade relations.
- ❖ Apart from being India's oldest strategic partner in the region and closest neighbour, Oman is an integral part of all important groupings in the region; the GCC, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League.
- ❖ Its ability to manage rival ideologies and power games in the region makes it vitally important to India.

Conclusion

- ❖ Both countries consider themselves as ambassadors of peace and enjoy goodwill across ideologies in the world. Oman is, therefore, India's gateway to West Asia. And with the ongoing Israel-Hamas war testing the region to its limits, the visit of Oman's Sultan is timely and very important for India and the region.

THE STORMY RED SEA, THE COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBAL EVENTS

Context:

Hamas' attack led Houthi militia to join, affecting the Red Sea's strategic waterways.

Houthi aggression, US military deployment, and calls for a multinational task force highlight rising tensions.

Asian economies face global impacts, emphasizing the evolving role of non-state actors in regional security.

Escalation of Tensions:

- ❖ In October, Hamas' attack on Israel led Yemen-based Houthi militia, supported by Iran, to join, impacting the Red Sea waterways.
- ❖ Suez Canal, vital for global trade (15% of West-East trade), now central to the conflict.

Houthi Aggression in the Red Sea:

- ❖ Houthis attacked a cargo vessel with Israeli links, highlighting Red Sea vulnerability.
- ❖ Increasing incidents of Houthi aggression against commercial vessels pose a threat to the region's stability.
- ❖ **US Response and Call for Multinational Task Force:**
- ❖ The US deploys military capacity in the Red Sea to counter Houthi threats, including drones and missiles.
- ❖ Calls for a multinational task force around Bab al-Mandab Strait to address rising tensions.

Geopolitical Complexities and Saudi Stance:

- ❖ Riyadh calls for restraint by the US in direct military action against Houthis, signaling geopolitical complexities.
- ❖ Saudi-Houthi talks amid the ongoing conflict and Saudi-Iran détente brokered by China.

Global Impact and Asian Economies:

- ❖ Depletion of security in the Red Sea affects global interests, especially Asian economies like India, Japan, South Korea, and China.
- ❖ Asian nations, as stakeholders in West Asian security, face challenges in securing their interests.

Role of Non-State Actors:

- ❖ Non-state militant actors gain political and military strength, impacting global geopolitics.
- ❖ Red Sea's strategic importance necessitates a progressive, nimble, and practical approach to address evolving security challenges.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The Red Sea's escalating tensions demand a nuanced approach.
- ❖ The involvement of non-state actors underscores the need for a collaborative, agile strategy to safeguard global interests and stability.

THE OUTLOOK FOR 2024, FOR THE WORLD AND INDIA.

Context:

- Global risks rise in 2024, challenging the existing order. Geostategic tensions, Ukraine conflict impact on U.S. elections, and Middle East turmoil pose threats.
- India faces uncertainties in Sino-Indian relations, neighbourhood dynamics, and internal political challenges. Improved central-state relations crucial for stability.

Global Risks and Uncertainties in 2024

- **Increasing Global Risks:** The new year brings heightened global risks and uncertainties, indicating a time of great peril.
- **Challenges to the International Order:** The existing international order faces challenges from both advocates and critics, creating further instability.
- **Geostrategic Contradictions:** Ongoing conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, may escalate, posing threats to global stability.
- **Impact of Ukraine Conflict on U.S. Election:** The outcome of the war in Ukraine could influence the U.S. presidential election, with a potential impact on Biden's chances.
- **Middle East Tensions:** Recent events, like Hamas's assault on Israel, have the potential to escalate tensions in the Middle East, reshaping geopolitics in the region.
- **Shifts in West Asia Alliances:** The West's hypocrisy and changing alliances in West Asia may challenge U.S. leadership, affecting the strategic balance.

- **Caution for the West in Other Regions:** Given the evolving geopolitics, the West, **especially in the Indo-Pacific, should act cautiously to maintain the existing strategic balance.**

India's Outlook in 2024

- **General Election in Mid-2024:** India faces a pivotal year with a general election scheduled, where the ruling party expresses confidence despite potential challenges.
- **Sino-Indian Relations:** Stalemate persists, with China perceiving India as part of an anti-China alliance, raising concerns about possible adventurist actions.
- **Russia-China Axis Impact:** Strengthening Russia-China ties could impact India's relations with Central Asia, requiring careful navigation.
- **Neighborhood Dynamics:** India faces uncertainties in its immediate neighborhood, with pressure from China affecting ties with Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the Maldives.
- **Diminishing Influence in West Asia:** India's influence in West Asia may be diminishing as countries in the region align more with China and Russia.

Internal Dynamics in India

- **Election Preparations:** Internal political dynamics indicate a charged atmosphere as ruling and opposition forces gear up for a competitive electoral battle.
- **Social Fragmentation:** Factors like **caste loyalties, social engineering, and fragmentation are influencing the political landscape.**
- **Unitary vs. Federal Aspects:** There's a growing bias towards unitary aspects of India's Constitution, with a **trend towards increased centralization of authority.**
- **Parliamentary Disarray:** Parliament is expected to continue in disarray throughout 2024, with limited room for improvement.
- **Centre-State Relations:** The relationship between the central and state governments needs careful consideration, as the recent Supreme Court judgment on Article 370 may fuel conflicts.
- **Need for Political Rethink:** Incumbent political parties need to reconsider their approaches, recognizing the importance of improved Central-State relations for a stronger and more cohesive nation.

INDIA AND RUSSIA SEEM KEEN ON RENEWING TIES IN A CHANGED WORLD.

Context:

- Jaishankar's five-day Russia visit, unusual for its duration and Putin's unprecedented meeting, addresses concerns in India-Russia relations.
- Agreements indicate positive momentum, highlighting geopolitical convergence amid global shifts.

Significance of Jaishankar's Russia Visit

- **Unusual Duration:** The five-day visit by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Russia signifies the special effort made by India and Russia for successful and productive meetings.
- **Unprecedented Putin Meeting:** Russian President Vladimir Putin meeting a lower-ranking foreign official is unusual, emphasizing the significance of the visit.
- **Concerns over India-Russia Relations:** Speculation arose due to Prime Minister Modi's absence from the annual leadership summit, raising concerns about the health of India-Russia relations post the Ukraine war.

Mission Objectives and Achievements

- **Addressing Perceptions:** A major part of Jaishankar's mission was to address concerns and perceptions of differences between India and Russia.
- **Resultant Agreements:** **Agreements on nuclear power projects, connectivity, trade, and talks for the Eurasian Economic Union-India free trade agreement** indicate positive momentum.

Multilateral Cooperation and Geopolitical Significance

- **Continued Multilateral Cooperation:** Plans for the expanded BRICS summit, coordination at the UN and SCO, and affirmation of annual leadership summit in 2024 highlight continued multilateral cooperation.
- **Strategic Convergence:** Jaishankar's statement on India-Russia relationship as the 'only constant in world politics' underscores geopolitical and strategic convergence amid global rebalancing.

Geopolitical Implications

- **Global Perception:** Jaishankar's words on geopolitical convergence in a multipolar world gain attention, impacting global perceptions, especially in Washington and Beijing.
- **Observations on India-U.S. Relations:** Notable in the context of India-U.S. relations, marked by friction over the Pannun investigation and Biden's refusal of India's Republic Day invitation.

Key Concerns and Future Prospects

- **Pending Issues:** Attention remains on unresolved matters like the rupee-rouble payment mechanism and the delayed delivery of S-400 air system
- **Overall Import:** Jaishankar's visit highlights the efforts to eliminate static in the relationship, emphasizing the enduring strength of ties amid global geopolitical shifts.

Conclusion

- Foreign Ministers' extensive Russia visit signifies a deliberate effort to strengthen ties amid global uncertainties.
- The agreements and affirmations underscore enduring India-Russia relations, crucial in navigating geopolitical complexities.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

SOCIAL ISSUES

MP INDEX REDUCTION UNDER THE NDA IS FLAWED.

Context: The Multidimensional Poverty Index exaggerates the National Democratic Alliance's success in fighting deprivation.

Introduction

Samuel Johnson, a profound literary critic, and essayist, wrote, "Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable, and others extremely difficult." In sharp contrast, conventional measures of poverty in terms of income are limited and narrowly focused on scarcity of resources to eke out a bare subsistence. But there is much more to poverty than a bare subsistence, as emphasised by Johnson and others.

Concept of capability

- ❖ Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen pioneered a rich, innovative, and broader perspective on well-being, focusing on capabilities and functioning's. While capabilities are abilities to do this or that in a free and fair environment, functioning reflect achievements.
- ❖ An ability to live a healthy life, for example, is not necessarily related to affluence as it could result in obesity and vulnerability to non-communicable diseases.
- ❖ Achievements such as being healthy, on the other hand, require a nourishing diet and physical exercise.
- ❖ Professor Sen has, however, resisted aggregation of concepts such as capabilities into an overall measure of well-being as he believes that each capability is important in itself.

The MPI story

- ❖ Unfortunately, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seized upon capabilities to construct an overall measure of human development with uniform weights of the three components: health, education and standard of living and their sub-indices.
- ❖ Following this methodology, NITI Aayog and the UNDP released recently a National Multidimensional Poverty Index/MPI: A Progress Review 2023, also replicated in the UNDP Report, Making Our Future: New Directions for Human Development in Asia and the Pacific, released on November 7, 2023.
- ❖ Hence, these reports suffer from the same flaws as the UNDP human development index: aggregation with uniform weighting. But, the MPI story is further distorted, as elaborated on below.
- ❖ Astonishingly, the MPI 2023 estimates show a near-halving of India's national MPI value and a decline from 24.85% to 14.96% between 2015-16 and 2019-21. This reduction of 9.89 percentage points implies that about 135.5 million people have exited poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.
- ❖ Besides, the intensity of poverty, which measures the average deprivation among the people living in multidimensional poverty, reduced from 47.14% to 44.39%.

Estimates, misleading and ill-informed.

- ❖ The MPI relies upon National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 4 and 5, which are not detailed enough for its estimation. Moreover, NFHS 5 is blocked as its estimate of open defecation contradicted exaggerated official claim of its complete elimination.
- ❖ Ideally, NFHS 4 and 5 should have been combined with the 75th Round of the NSS on household consumption expenditure. Unfortunately, this was abandoned too, as leaked poverty estimates indicated a rise.
- ❖ What casts further doubts is the havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21. Millions lost their livelihoods, thousands died in reverse migration and from a lack of access to vaccines and medical care.

- ❖ In fact, as a consequence of this epidemic, there was a huge economic shock from which the Indian economy has been struggling to recover. To illustrate, GDP growth has declined from 8% in 2015-16 to 3.78 % in 2019-20 and slumped -6.60 in 2020-21, as also per capita income.

Focus on covariates

- ❖ Our recent analysis focuses on covariates of the MPI that include per capita state income, its square, share of criminals among State MPs, share of urban population, and health and education expenditure and unobserved state fixed effects (e.g., how progressive a State is).
- ❖ If we compare elasticities of MPI with respect to each covariate (i.e., proportionate change in MPI due to a proportionate change in a covariate such as State per capita income), the largest reduction in MPI is due to higher State per capita income. But since income decreased drastically, MPI spiked.
- ❖ The next in order of importance is urban location. A 1% increase in urban location results in a 0.90% increase in MPI. This is not surprising as rural-urban migration is associated with growth of slums and sub-human living conditions.
- ❖ However, reverse migration during COVID-19 may explain why the effect on MPI is less than proportionate.
- ❖ Both health care and education expenditure are associated with lower MPI — the elasticity of the latter is higher (in absolute value), implying that a 1% increase in the latter reduces MPI more than the same increase in the former.
- ❖ As State-level estimates suggest a decline in educational expenditure, a rise in MPI is likely. Although State-level health expenditure rose to combat COVID-19, it fell far short of what was needed.
- ❖ If the share of Members of Parliament with criminal cases in total State MPs exceeded 20%, the higher was the MPI. This is not surprising as criminal Members of the Legislative Assembly and MPs are notoriously corrupt and siphon-off funds allocated for social safety nets and area development programmes.
- ❖ Indeed, what is alarming is their rising share — 24% of the winners in the Lok Sabha election in 2004 had a criminal background; it rose to 30% in the 2009 general election, 34% in the 2014 election, and 43% in the 2019 election.

Reduction between 2015 and 2019-21 is considerably lower than the official estimate.

- ❖ If we go by our estimates of MPI, the reduction between 2015 and 2019-21 is considerably lower than the official estimate: 4.7 percentage points compared with 9.89 percentage points.
- ❖ Our selective review of MPI estimates shows that poverty rose in India's most populous State, Uttar Pradesh, by over seven percentage points.
- ❖ Of the States that went to the elections in November (Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Telangana), we find that the MPI fell in Chhattisgarh (by over six percentage points), in Rajasthan (by two percentage points) and, most strikingly, in Madhya Pradesh (by about eight percentage points).

Conclusion

In conclusion, not only does the MPI exaggerate the NDA's success in fighting deprivation but also perhaps more seriously obfuscates conventional measures of it which may unravel a contradictory story of poverty.

A CALL FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION THAT MUST BE NEEDED.

Context:

- The article highlights the need for innovative solutions in neuropsychiatry, focusing on rehabilitation services.
- It emphasizes a holistic approach, professional empowerment, and the impact of scientific advances to enhance the lives of individuals with neuropsychiatric disorders globally.

Introduction:

Reflects on the **importance of International Day for Persons with Disabilities (December 3)** and emphasizes the need for innovative solutions in neuropsychiatry.

Global Neuropsychiatric Disorders Landscape:

- Range across the lifespan from childhood (autism, ADHD, intellectual disability) to adolescence and adulthood (anxiety, depression, addiction, schizophrenia) to old age (Alzheimer's, Parkinson's).
- **Significant impact on global population with millions affected, emphasizing the need for effective interventions.**

Rehabilitation Challenges and Opportunities:

- **WHO reports 2.41 billion individuals needing rehabilitation, contributing to 310 million Years of Living with Disabilities (YLD).**
- **Rehabilitation often overlooked, considered disability-specific,** leading to under-resourcing.
- Awareness needed that disablement can be treated, even reversed, in many cases.
- **Call to prioritize rehabilitation as an essential service** and encourage multidisciplinary approaches.

Multidisciplinary Approach to Rehabilitation:

- Rehabilitation services **must address a wide spectrum of neurological and mental health problems.**
- Beyond doctors and nurses, professionals like physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and caregivers crucial.
- Emphasis on enhancing professional profiles, **improving training, and creating opportunities for career development.**

Scientific Advances in Neuropsychiatry:

- Non-invasive Brain Stimulation (**NIBS**) procedures like rTMS and FMS have proven effectiveness in various conditions.
- Transcranial Electrical Stimulation (TES) shows promise in improving memory, cognition, mood, and behavior.
- Transcutaneous Auricular Vagus Nerve Stimulation (tA-VNS) gains importance post-COVID-19 era, investigated for depression, migraine, and dysautonomia.

Collaborative Solutions for Inclusion:

- **UN's call for disability inclusion aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.**
- **80% of people with disabilities reside in developing countries.**
- Collaboration between governments, public and private sectors crucial for finding innovative solutions, making the world more accessible and equitable.

Conclusion:

- It is high time to make global commitment to making the world more accessible and equitable for the one billion people with disabilities, especially in developing countries.

GENERAL STUDIES 3.

ECONOMY

PATCHY EXPANSION

Context:

The latest provisional estimates of GDP for the quarter ended September 30, released by the National Statistical Office, project real economic growth at 7.6%, a slight deceleration from the 7.8% logged in the preceding three months.

Introduction

Gross Value Added (GVA) across the eight broad sectors of the economy reflected a marginal slowing, with second quarter GVA registering a 7.4% expansion, 40 basis points slower than the April-June period's 7.8%.

Robust double-digit expansions in manufacturing, mining, utilities and construction offset the loss of momentum across the other four sectors and helped ensure that the year-on-year growth in GVA comfortably exceeded the 7% pace for a second straight quarter.

Gross Value Added (GVA)

- ❖ Gross Value Added (GVA) is the value that producers have added to the goods and services they have bought. When they sell their wares, producers' income should be more than their costs, and the difference between the two is the value they have added.
- ❖ For example, a brewer will buy barley, hops, and yeast and turn it into beer which they will sell for more than they paid for the ingredients. They will also have overheads for their brewery like heat, light, and insurance. The difference between all these costs and ingredient costs and what the brewer receives in payment for their goods is their Gross Value Added.
- ❖ Gross Value Added can be calculated in two ways. First, as we said, by subtraction like this:
- ❖ Total Output (similar to turnover)
- ❖ Minus total Intermediate Consumption (cost of goods and services).
- ❖ Gross Value Added can also be calculated by addition like this:
- ❖ Gross Operating Surplus and Gross Mixed Income (like profit)
- ❖ Plus, Compensation of Employees (like wages and salaries).

Growth in different sectors

- ❖ Manufacturing, buoyed by a favourable base effect due to the contraction in the year-earlier period, was the strongest performer by registering growth of 13.9%, a nine-quarter high.
- ❖ Construction witnessed its best showing in five quarters, expanding 13.3%. Of the four other sectors, the crucial ones of agriculture and the two services sectors of trade, hotels, transport and communication, and financial, real estate and professional services saw the pace of growth almost halving from the fiscal first quarter.
- ❖ While year-on-year growth in the agriculture, livestock and fishing sector slowed sharply to an 18-quarter low of 1.2%, the sector also experienced a sequential contraction for the third straight quarter, underscoring the precarity plaguing large portions of those earning from farming and allied activities in the rural hinterland.
- ❖ The slowdown in two key components of the services economy — trade, hotels, transport, and communication saw growth slide to 4.3%, from 9.2% in the June quarter, and the expansion in financial and realty services more than halved from the preceding period to 6% — also merits a closer watch as the post-pandemic rebound in services appears to have lost steam.

Eight Core Sectors

- ❖ Coal, crude oil, natural gas, products from refineries, fertilizer, steel, cement, and electricity are the eight main sectors.
- ❖ Of the weighted items in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), these make up 40.27%.
- ❖ The eight core sector industries are listed in decreasing weight order as follows: Products from Refineries; Energy; Steel; Coal; Crude Oil; Natural Gas; Cement; Fertilizers.

Role of Demand side

- ❖ Adding to the need to view the headline growth number with circumspection is the fact that the lynchpin private final consumption expenditure, the single-largest component of demand in the economy, is struggling for traction.
- ❖ Growth in private consumption spending slowed appreciably to 3.1% in the September quarter, from 6% in the preceding three-month period, as rural demand remained affected by the vagaries of a below-average monsoon.
- ❖ The NSO data also reveal that the recent economic momentum owes its fillip in large measure to front-loaded government spending, both in terms of consumption demand and asset-creating capital investments.

Conclusion

The challenge for policymakers will be to help broaden the growth base so as to ensure that all boats are lifted equally, both to sustain the momentum and reduce inequality.

CREATING CERTAINTY

Context: Healthier inflows from GST offer policy makers the bandwidth to fix its flaws.

Introduction

- ❖ The Goods and Services Tax (GST), which turns six and a half years old this month, has yielded almost ₹3.4 lakh crore through October and November. While revenues in October marked the second highest monthly collections, November's kitty is the third highest.
- ❖ Both these months also recorded accelerated revenue growth after a sequence of slowing upticks that culminated with September recording a 27-month trough of 10.2%.

Goods and services tax (GST)

- ❖ GST is a unified tax system that replaced multiple indirect taxes levied by both the Central and State Governments. Under GST, both the Central and State Governments share the authority to levy and collect taxes on goods and services. This has led to greater harmonization and uniformity in the tax structure across States, promoting economic integration.
- ❖ The GST system follows a dual structure, comprising Central GST (CGST) and State GST (SGST), levied concurrently by the Central and State governments, respectively. Additionally, an Integrated GST (IGST) is levied on interstate supplies and imports, which is collected by the Central Government but apportioned to the destination state.

Festive fervour

- ❖ Festive fervour surely bolstered last month's nearly ₹1.68 lakh crore of GST revenues, which were based on transactions in October, and that trend may persist this month as well on the back of anticipated last-minute Deepavali spending.
- ❖ Prior to this two-month spike, GST revenues had crossed ₹1.65 lakh crore on only three occasions, which were typically driven by year-end compliances.
- ❖ Now, the average monthly collection so far in 2023-24 stands at ₹1.66 lakh crore, and economists believe central GST receipts may surpass Budget estimates even if one factors in a relative slowdown in the final quarter of this year.

GST Council

- ❖ The process for creating GST Council started in India when the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-second Amendment) Bill 2016, for the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) was accorded assent by the President on 8th September 2016. As per Article 279A (1) of the amended Constitution, the president should approve to constitute within 60 days of the commencement of Article 279A.
- ❖ The GST Council, consisting of the Union Finance Minister and representatives from all States and Union Territories, was established to make decisions on various aspects of GST, including tax rates, exemptions, and administrative procedures. It played a crucial role in shaping the GST framework in India.
- ❖ The GST Council will make recommendations on:
 - ❖ GST shall include taxes, cesses, and surcharges;
 - ❖ Goods and services which possibly will be subject to, or exempt from GST;
 - ❖ The threshold maximum value of turnover for the function of GST;
 - ❖ Rates of GST;
 - ❖ GST laws, principles of levy, apportionment of IGST and principles associated with place of supply;
 - ❖ Special provisions with respect to the eight northeastern states, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand; and other associated matters.
- ❖ Other matters pertaining to the implementation and regulation of GST in India.

Moving from “uncertainty to certainty”

- ❖ With revenues buoyant, in no small part due to tighter compliance and a crackdown on tax evaders, the government must consider resetting its ambitions and work towards making the GST a truly good and simple tax, as it was promised to be.
- ❖ At a recent industry interaction, responding to concerns about the manner in which a spate of GST demand notices and investigations have unfolded in recent months, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the GST is still at a stage of moving from “uncertainty to certainty” on some grounds and those aspects are being sorted out now.
- ❖ That certainty needs to be pursued at a broader level to provide genuine comfort to investors about India’s tax regime being stable and predictable. For one, pending taxpayer appeals against central GST levies have risen by a quarter this year to hit nearly 15,000 cases by October and it is necessary that appellate tribunals cleared by the GST Council become operational at the earliest to unwind this pendency and set clear precedents for future tax treatment disputes.
- ❖ It is equally critical to lay down a road map to bring in excluded items such as petroleum and electricity into the GST framework as well as the rejig of its complicated multiple rate structure.

Conclusion

With the general election ahead, some dithering on such reforms may be understandable, but the GST Council must not lose focus of the unfinished agenda and keep deliberating on its to-do list, so that these steps can be fast-tracked after the Lok Sabha election.

FALLING BEHIND

Context:

Dissonance in RBI’s inflation messaging.

Introduction

The Monetary Policy Committee’s decision to hold benchmark interest rates level, while raising its forecast for full-year GDP growth by 50 basis points and flagging food price shocks-induced volatility in inflation, is replete with the risk of policymakers falling behind the curve on anchoring inflation expectations.

Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

- ❖ The Finance Act of 2016 amended the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (RBI Act) to establish a statutory and institutionalized framework for an MPC.

- ❖ A six-member MPC may be constituted by the central government in accordance with Section 45ZB of the amended RBI Act, 1934.
- ❖ The responsibility for setting the benchmark policy rate, or repo rate, needed to keep inflation within the designated target range falls on the MPC.
- ❖ MPC will have six members - the RBI Governor (Chairperson), the RBI Deputy Governor in charge of monetary policy, one official nominated by the RBI Board, and the remaining three members would represent the Government of India.
- ❖ The external members hold office for a period of four years.

Uncertainties in food prices

- ❖ After observing that “uncertainties in food prices along with unfavourable base effects are likely to lead to” headline inflation quickening in November-December, and that “recurring food price shocks are impeding the ongoing disinflation process”, the MPC has rather surprisingly opted to keep the RBI’s repo rate unchanged at 6.5% for a fifth straight bi-monthly meeting.
- ❖ To be sure, retail inflation has moderated since the MPC last met in early October, with the headline reading softening by almost two percentage points, from August’s 6.83% to 4.87% in October.
- ❖ But, by the MPC’s own reckoning, that moderation may be fleeting, as price gains accelerate yet again in November and December, and with volatility in oil prices and financial markets, amid heightened global uncertainty, there are added risks to the outlook on prices.

Households’ Inflation Expectations Survey’

- ❖ The RBI’s latest ‘Households’ Inflation Expectations Survey’, undertaken in November, reveals that most households expect faster inflation in the three-months-ahead and one-year-ahead time horizons, and at median levels of 9.1% and 10.1%, respectively, unequivocally underlining the fact that price gain expectations are still far from durably anchored.

Upgrading its projection for real GDP growth

- ❖ The dissonance in messaging from the central bank is exemplified in the MPC’s decision to upgrade its projection for real GDP growth in the fiscal year ending in March 2024 to 7%, from 6.5% as recently as in October.
- ❖ For this, it cites robust investment, besides continued strengthening in manufacturing, buoyancy in construction and a gradual rural recovery that it sees helping ‘brighten the prospects of household consumption’.
- ❖ If the RBI’s cumulative 250 basis points increase in the benchmark interest rate since May 2022 through to February 2023 and the subsequent retention of the 6.5% rate have not damped the growth impulses barring consumption, then it would indicate that consumption is still struggling to gain traction largely because, as Deputy Governor Michael D. Patra observed at the MPC’s last meeting, “people are not increasing discretionary spending in view of high inflation”.

Conclusion

- ❖ This seems to be borne out in the RBI’s November round of its bi-monthly ‘Consumer Confidence Survey’, which showed consumers retained negative sentiments on both current and future price conditions. With policymakers only too well aware that sans price stability, as Mr. Patra noted, “the benefits of expanding GDP and employment will be frittered away by the erosion of purchasing power”, the MPC has its task cut out.

CALIBRATING A STRATEGY FOR INDIA’S FUTURE GROWTH

Context:

India’s growth in 2023-24 is currently projected by the Reserve Bank of India at 7% while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have pegged it at 6.3%.

Introduction

With a growth of 7.8% and 7.6% in the first two quarters of 2023-24, respectively, and a broad-based recovery in the second quarter, India is likely to realise the RBI’s currently projected growth of 7% in this fiscal year.

- ❖ In the medium term, the IMF has projected an annual growth of 6.3% up to 2028-29. India's future growth strategy needs to be calibrated in view of the changing global conditions.

Movement towards deglobalisation

- ❖ There is a movement towards deglobalisation. Many ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas war have created a climate of sanctions, leading to breaks in supply chains as well as disruptions in international settlements due to non-access to systems such as SWIFT for the sanctioned countries.
- ❖ World real GDP growth has also fallen, leading to reduced demand for global exports. Many countries including India want to reduce their dependence on imported petroleum due to supply uncertainties and price volatility.
- ❖ In India's case, exports experienced a sharp acceleration in the share of GDP during 2003-04 to 2008-09. This peaked at 25% in 2013-14. In 2022-23, it was 22.8%, having fallen to a trough of 18.7% in 2019-20 and 2020-21. The erstwhile export-led growth strategy may not be available to India anymore. It must evolve its own future growth strategy.

Investment rate in medium term: Importance of savings

- ❖ India will have to rely relatively more on domestic growth drivers. To achieve and sustain a 7% plus real growth in particular, domestic savings will be critical. We estimate the nominal saving rate in 2022-23 to be about 29%.
- ❖ One area of concern relates to the recently noted fall in the household sector's savings in financial assets which declined to 5.1% of GDP in 2022-23 from an average of 7.8% during the pre-COVID-19 period of 2015-16 to 2019-20 — a fall of 2.7% points.
- ❖ This fall consisted of 2.2% points of increase in change in gross household financial liabilities and 0.5% points fall in change in gross household financial assets. These changes may be temporary post-COVID-19 responses.
- ❖ However, if these trends persist, it will pose a significant risk to India's growth potential since it is the surplus household sector financial savings that become available to the government and the corporate sector to draw resources from to meet their investment demand in excess of their own savings.
- ❖ Savings are converted into gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) by adding net capital inflows and deducting change in stocks, valuables, and discrepancies. The estimated nominal investment rate, that is GFCF relative to GDP was 29.2% in 2022-23.
- ❖ However, the deflator of capital goods is lower than that of all goods. The movement of the relative deflator of capital goods is somewhat volatile. Using the five-year average of the relative magnitude of the two deflators, the nominal investment rate of nearly 29% would provide a real investment rate of about 33%.
- ❖ This needs to be increased by 2% points to provide investible resources amounting to 35% of GDP, enabling a growth of 7% at an Incremental Capital-Output Ratio (ICOR) of 5, which was its value in 2022-23. If the ICOR is lower, achievable growth would be higher.

Strategizing enhanced employment

- ❖ India would find itself in a unique position in the next three decades with a large potentially employable population seeking jobs in the presence of progressively more labour-saving innovations and technologies.
- ❖ According to United Nations population projections, the share of India's working age population is projected to peak at 68.9% in 2030 while its overall dependency ratio would be at its lowest at 31.2%. These patterns call for increased allocation of resources for training and skilling India's growing working age population.
- ❖ Employment growth is critically dependent on GDP growth and the structure of output. The growth rate of the working age population is projected to progressively fall from 1.2% in 2023-24 to 0% in 2048-49.
- ❖ In 2022-23, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the worker population ratio, showing the number of employed persons in the population above 15 years of age, increased to 51.8% from 44.1% in 2017-18, depicting an average increase of 1.5% points per year.
- ❖ Going forward, non-agricultural growth will have to be high enough to absorb labour released from agriculture which is estimated at 45.8% in 2022-23 by the PLFS.

- ❖ It should also be able to absorb the labour-substituting impact of new technology. Facilitating absorption of productivity-enhancing technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI would add to overall growth.

Environment angle

- ❖ India has committed to certain targets to reduce carbon emissions in view of global climate concerns. In the COP26 Summit, in 2021, India had committed to reducing total carbon emissions by one billion tonnes between 2021 to 2030 and achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2070.
- ❖ India's own initiatives include the Green Grids Initiative (GGI) and One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG). It is also placing an emphasis on the use of electric vehicles and ethanol-based and hydrogen fuels.
- ❖ Climate-promoting technological changes may reduce the potential growth rate. This adverse impact can be minimised by emphasising service sector growth which is relatively climate friendly.

Fiscal responsibility

- ❖ To sustain growth close to its potential, it is important to ensure that the combined fiscal deficit and debt to GDP ratios are brought down to 6% and 60%, respectively, so that the burden of interest payments relative to revenue receipts is kept within acceptable limits.
- ❖ This would enable achieving a balance or surplus on the revenue account of the central and State governments, which in turn would reduce government dissavings and augment the overall savings rate of the economy.

Way forward

- ❖ In the next two years, a growth rate of 6.5% seems feasible. This represents, partially, a recovery from the low growth rate in the COVID-19 period.
- ❖ Over the medium term, India's growth performance will be adversely affected by many factors, both domestic and external.
- ❖ Raising the savings and investment rates, improving the skill acquisition of the young entrants to the labour market and adopting a technology mix which is employment friendly are issues on which the country must focus to achieve a growth rate of 7% to 7.5%

ACCELERATION FORETOLD.

Context: If inflation is not tamed, there is risk to consumption and growth

Introduction

November's resurgence in headline retail inflation, while clearly not unexpected after the RBI just last week predicted a likely 'uptick', is a stark reminder of the risks volatile food prices pose.

Rise in Consumer price index

- ❖ While the National Statistical Office's provisional reading of headline inflation shows the Consumer Price Index rose by 5.55% year-on-year to a three-month high, from October's 4.87%, food price gains measured by the Consumer Food Price Index accelerated by a steep 209 basis points to 8.7% last month.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- ❖ A comprehensive tool for estimating price changes in a basket of goods and services that is representative of consumption expenditure in an economy is the Consumer Price Index.
- ❖ One of the most significant economic statistics, it provides an estimate of the cost of living and is typically based on the weighted average of commodity prices.
- ❖ The amount of inflation during a given period, or the rise in the prices of a representative basket of consumed goods, is indicated by the percentage change in this index over time.
- ❖ Four kinds of CPI are as follows:
- ❖ CPI for Industrial Workers (IW).
- ❖ CPI for Agricultural Labourer (AL).
- ❖ CPI for Rural Labourer (RL).
- ❖ CPI (Rural/Urban/Combined).

- ❖ The first three are compiled by the Labour Bureau in the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Fourth is compiled by the NSO in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- ❖ Consumer Food Price Inflation is a specific measure of inflation that focuses exclusively on the price changes of food items in a consumer's basket of goods and services.
- ❖ It calculates the rate at which the prices of food products consumed by the average household are increasing over time.
- ❖ CFPI is a sub-component of the broader Consumer Price Index (CPI).

What caused the rise?

- ❖ Propelling the upsurge in food prices were cereals and vegetables, constituents of the 'food and beverages' subgroup, that logged 10.3% and 17.7% inflation, respectively.
- ❖ Cereals, that account for almost one-tenth of the CPI and logged double-digit inflation for a 15th straight month, also saw a month-on-month acceleration in inflation with rice, wheat, and the coarse cereal of jowar, a rural hinterland staple, all registering palpable sequential price gains.
- ❖ Vegetable prices were back on a boil with the year-on-year inflation rate surging by almost 15 percentage points from October's 2.8%.
- ❖ While price gains in the perishable tomato swung from two straight months of sizeable deflation to a more than 11% year-on-year rate of inflation last month, the extent of increase could be truly gauged from the fact that prices surged a steep 41% from the preceding month's levels, as per data aggregated on the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy's website.
- ❖ And the key masala essentials of ginger and garlic registered more than 100% rates of inflation for the seventh and third months, respectively.

The biggest source of concern

- ❖ From the TOP or tomato, onion and potato triumvirate of India's most widely consumed vegetables, onion prices remained the biggest source of concern as year-on-year inflation ballooned to 86%, from October's 42% pace, and the sequential pace swelled to 48%.
- ❖ With reports that inclement weather and depleting groundwater are likely to cause a near 25% shortfall in onion output during the key rabi season, the outlook for prices of the nutrient-dense bulb moderating in the near future appears bleak, the government's move to impose a ban on its exports notwithstanding.

Other things

- ❖ Only potato prices, which continued to remain in deflationary territory, offered some respite. Pulses and sugar are other areas of concern, with the first witnessing more than 20% inflation and the sweetener also experiencing an uptick in the pace of price gains to 6.55%.
- ❖ With sugar production also expected to take a hit due to lower rainfall, the number of supply-related challenges policymakers face to rein in price gains is rising.

Conclusion

With the RBI having opted to refrain from raising rates for now, the onus is squarely on the government to help temper inflation, or risk suffering an erosion in broader consumption and economic growth.

A NEW ECONOMICS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH.

Context:

- **Shift** in India's economic policies, emphasizing inclusive growth through local economic activity, learning adjacencies, and cautioning against shortcuts.

The Challenge of Economic Policies

- **Manufacturing Policies:** India should shift from manufacturing to exporting high-end services, challenging past 30 years' policies.

- **Job and Income Challenges:** India faces economic challenges with inadequate jobs and incomes, reflected in farmer demands and the classification of 60% as economically weaker sections.

Growth Hindrance: Mismatch and Learning Process

- **Mismatch in Growth:** India's growth hindered by a mismatch between skills, jobs, and incomes, deviating from traditional development paths.
- **Learning Process Ignored:** Economists often overlook the learning process vital for development, **hindering citizens' skill acquisition and nations' capability development.**

Importance of Adjacencies and Local Economic Webs

- **Learning Adjacencies:** Rural areas' economic growth best achieved through "adjacencies" in work and location, allowing a gradual climb up the skill-income ladder.
- **Local Economic Activity: Manufacturing and value-added services can thrive in small, labor-intensive enterprises** around farms, creating dense economic webs.

Inclusive and Sustainable Growth

- **Inclusive Growth: Economic growth patterns must change for inclusive and sustainable development, emphasizing local economic activity** and small-scale manufacturing.
- **Financial Constraints:** The Indian state faces financial constraints, **requiring prudent spending** to benefit the masses.

Reimagining Economic Growth

- **Break from Past Models:** Policymakers must break from 20th-century economic models and reimagine India's growth path for inclusive economic development.
- **Utilizing Global Opportunities:** India should leverage global interest in its unmet needs, making more products within the country to boost jobs and incomes.

Caution Against Shortcuts

- **No Shortcuts:** There are no shortcuts to inclusive growth; policymakers must focus on the basics and avoid expecting benefits to trickle down from incentives and reduced taxes.

Conclusion

There is a need to think about a fundamental shift in India's economic approach, urging policymakers to prioritize inclusive growth, local economic activity, and strategic utilization of global opportunities for development.

INDIA'S STATIONARY COURSE IN THE SHIPPING VALUE CHAIN.

Context:

- The article discusses the historical significance of China's Yangtze River, contrasting India and China's trajectories in the maritime industry.
- It highlights India's challenges in shipbuilding and the strategic importance of a robust maritime sector for economic and military strength.

Yangtze River as China's Lifeline:

- **Yangtze River as China's Lifeline: The Yangtze River holds cultural, historical, and economic significance for China, with the Three Gorges project** adding to its importance.
- **Modern Dynamics of the Yangtze:** Today, the Yangtze serves as a crucial trade route, witnessing a blend of traditional cultural elements and modern industrial activities.
- **Shipping Marvels on the Yangtze:** Unlike conventional convoy systems in global waterways, the Yangtze often sees multiple convoys of merchant ships navigating in parallel, showcasing logistical expertise and piloting skills.

- **Economic Impacts:** Merchant ships on the Yangtze play a pivotal role in transporting raw materials from global sources to Chinese industries and exporting finished products worldwide.

India and China's Maritime Trajectories: A Comparative Analysis

- **India's Early Advantage:** Until the late 1980s, India was ahead of China in merchant shipping, boasting a tradition of ship-owning and contributing significantly to the International Maritime Organization.
- **Shift in Dynamics:** India's shipyards showed promise in building ships competitively for the global market, with a focus on skilled English-speaking seafarers.
- **Labour as a Driving Force:** Similar to other sectors, India's growth in the shipping industry relied on supplying skilled labor, with a substantial presence of Indian seafarers globally.
- **Evolution into Ship Management:** Indian talent in value engineering and bargaining led to the growth of ship management companies, contributing significantly to foreign exchange earnings.

Challenges in India's Maritime Growth: A Critical Assessment

- **Lack of Vertical Integration:** India has struggled to move up the shipping value chain, facing limitations in ship owning, chartering, financing, and shipbuilding.
- **State of Indian Shipyards:** The state-owned Shipping Corporation of India's challenges and a lack of focus on shipbuilding have impacted the order books of Indian shipyards.
- **Contrast with China's Approach:** China, propelled by a dedicated government plan, became a global leader in shipbuilding by 2020, with a substantial share in ship manufacturing.

Policy Initiatives and Future Prospects: A Glimpse

- **Maritime Agenda 2020:** The UPA government aimed to increase India's share in global shipbuilding, but by 2020, the share had dropped significantly.
- **Maritime India Vision 2030:** The current government's vision emphasizes logistics, environment, and seafarer growth but lacks specific plans for shipbuilding and owning.
- **Strategic Significance:** Shipbuilding holds strategic importance for India, offering a seat at the global maritime table and enhancing international trade presence.
- **Military and Industrial Integration:** Shipbuilding not only contributes to industrial might but is integral to naval strength, positioning India strategically in global maritime dynamics.

Conclusion

The article underscores India's historical advantage in shipping, challenges in shipbuilding, and the imperative for strategic focus.

It emphasizes the need for a concerted effort to elevate India's maritime industry globally.

SECURITY

A DARK SHADOW ON NEW DELHI'S CREDIBILITY

Context:

The lasting impact of the episode of the American indictment against an Indian national will lie in the image India wishes to project to the world.

Introduction

In the shadowy world of espionage, intelligence and covert operations, the only rule is to never get caught carrying out a mission. In the more visible world of public diplomacy, the only rule is to never get caught telling a lie or denying what might turn out to be true.

- ❖ The recent publication of a United States Department of Justice indictment against an Indian national for targeting wanted Khalistani separatists in North America, at the behest of a government official who may or may not have been acting alone, is as yet an unproven allegation that must stand trial, but is one that has nonetheless cast a dark shadow on New Delhi's credibility in terms of both covert capacity and public messaging, which must be addressed.

Other operations in the limelight

- ❖ The indictment also comes on the heels of a number of intelligence operations that have been challenged in courts in other friendly countries in recent years: from the forcible return of a United Arab Emirates princess, Latifah, by the Indian Coast Guard in international waters in 2018 that has been criticised by a court in the United Kingdom, to the "attempted kidnap" of businessman-on-the-run Mehul Choksi from Antigua to Dominica by British nationals alleged to have been working for Indian agencies in 2021, and the conviction of eight former Indian naval officers in Qatar for espionage, which is now in appeal.
- ❖ While the extra-judicial military court trial against former Indian naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav in Pakistan since 2016 has been challenged by India at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the fact that he was operating his business from Iran, a friendly neighbour, has no doubt been noted.
- ❖ Meanwhile, the circulation of a list of alleged operations against wanted Khalistani and Pakistani operatives not just in Pakistan but also in Nepal, Italy, the United Kingdom and Thailand, has been hailed in the media as proof of the Indian security establishment's global reach.

Troubling questions thrown up.

- ❖ It is in this context that the government must engage with the troubling questions thrown up by the latest allegations — by the U.S. of a conspiracy to murder Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York, that also indicates a link to the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, and the direct allegation by Canada, made by its Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the Nijjar killing.
- ❖ To begin with, the text of the American indictment unravels two conspiracies — one carried out by the Indian who has been indicted, Nikhil Gupta, who was allegedly directed by a senior government intelligence official, and the other carried out by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Drug Enforcement Administration, to entrap him by providing an undercover officer to him as the hitman.
- ❖ The fact that the U.S. government did not share all that it knew with India questions the claims made otherwise that the two countries have, between them, reached the pinnacle of security cooperation this year.

Trust is still an issue.

- ❖ For the U.S., it is also obvious that it does not trust the information India has shared on Mr. Pannun, Nijjar and the Khalistani separatist movement, and hence is more focused on the plot against them than it is on curbing their activities. For India, given India's deep concerns with Mr. Pannun's radical rhetoric, even broadcasting a threat against Air India flights, and threats to diplomats and embassies, the U.S.'s actions are a breach of trust.

- ❖ The actions hark back to the nature of intelligence sharing in 2008, when the U.S. warned India about the impending 26/11 terror threat (November 2008 Mumbai attacks), but did not divulge that the source of the information was Lashkar-e-Taiba operative David Coleman Headley, who even re-entered India with another diabolical plan in 2009.
- ❖ What this indicates is that while bilateral ties and strategic ties are growing in different spheres, trust between both countries has not kept pace. While much commentary is focused in the short term on whether Mr. Biden will confirm his attendance at the Republic Day parade and the Quad summit (Australia, India, Japan and U.S.) in January, it is the impact on the longer arc of the relationship that both sides must focus on.
- ❖ By extension, South Block must also look at the impact of its actions among western allies including the “Five Eyes” intelligence partnership (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S.). By rejecting Canadian allegations outright, expelling diplomats and suspending visas, while accepting the U.S.’s allegations more calmly and setting up a high-level inquiry to investigate them, New Delhi has demonstrated a double standard in its international engagements.

Impact on the neighbourhood

- ❖ Further afield, India must address the impact of the case on the neighbourhood. Countries such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh stood with India on the Canada issue, but as details of the U.S. indictment are revealed, South Asian capitals, and not just Islamabad, will be studying the footprint of Indian agencies in their countries as well.
- ❖ South Block and its embassies in the neighbourhood will have to go the extra mile to assure the neighbours, especially in Kathmandu, Dhaka, Male and Colombo, where reports about India’s “hand” in domestic politics is often discussed in exaggerated tones.

Conclusion

- ❖ Eventually, the lasting impact of the episode will lie in the image India wishes to project to the world — as a “hard power” that is willing to risk international ire and ties in pursuing those it considers a threat in any corner of the world in any manner it deems fit.
- ❖ Or that of an adherent to international law that builds its case through its diplomats, turning global opinion in its favour to achieve its ends, albeit at the risk of being seen as a “soft power”. The Ministry of External Affairs has said categorically that covert, extra-judicial assassinations are not this government’s policy and that the allegations will be investigated. A deeper investigation would reveal whether India’s actions align with its values and interests.

GRASS-ROOT DEMOCRACY AS A BULWARK AGAINST MAOISTS.

Tribal Vote Significance:

- Tribal votes crucial in Chhattisgarh elections, constituting 34% of the state’s vote share.

Maoist Insurgency Context:

- **Maoist insurgency prevalent in tribal regions, particularly in Bastar.**
- Tribals form the primary cadre base for the Maoist movement.

Election Violence in Maoist Strongholds:

- Elections in Schedule Five areas affected by violence and Maoist boycott calls.
- **Low voter turnout, particularly in Bijapur and Konta, reported as 3% to 4%.**

Challenges in Resolving Maoist Conundrum:

- **Elections lacked a focused approach to addressing the Maoist challenge.**
- Lack of resolution for the Maoist insurgency remains a significant issue.

Democracy’s Connotations for Tribals:

- **Maoists discourage tribal participation in the democratic process** through boycotts.
- **Insurgents force people to shun empowerment through voting, questioning Maoists' claims.**

Disillusionment and Trend Shift:

- **Voter turnout decline suggests potential tribal disillusionment** with the democratic process.
- **Trend contrasts with past where locals often ignored Maoist boycotts.**

Tribal Aspirations and Awareness:

- **Increasing tribal awareness leads to assertiveness for constitutional rights.**
- **Pathalgadi movement** in Jharkhand reflects tribal assertions and demands for dignity.

PESA Act Implementation:

- **Political parties raise PESA Act implementation**, but modalities remain unclear.
- **PESA Act envisages empowering gram sabhas** for tribal socio-economic governance.

Maoist Exploitation of PESA Gap:

- Maoists exploit PESA Act implementation gap, running parallel 'jantana sarkar' in strongholds.
- **PESA, if implemented correctly, could mainstream tribal communities and make Maoists irrelevant.**

Need for Tribal Leadership Nurturing:

- Tribal leadership needs acknowledgment and a voice at the grassroots level.
- Resolving Maoist challenge involves enabling democracy at the grassroots, recognizing tribal aspirations.

Beyond Security and Development:

- Resolving Maoist challenge not only about security and development but also empowering democracy.
- Recognizing tribal aspirations crucial for a comprehensive solution.

Conclusion:

- Chhattisgarh elections underline the challenge of Maoist insurgency in tribal regions.
- A comprehensive solution requires dispelling Maoist myths, nurturing tribal leadership, and empowering democracy at the grassroots to address long-standing issues.

A SECURITY BREACH THAT MUST LEAD TO SWEEPING CHANGES.

Context: On December 13, 2023, two men breached security in India's Lok Sabha, exposing lapses despite enhanced measures since 2001.

The incident highlights the need for advanced technology. Leadership vacancies, political debates, and pass issuance issues compound the problem.

Urgent calls for a high-level inquiry and comprehensive security reforms are essential to protect democratic institutions.

BACKGROUND

- ❖ On December 13, 2023, two young men breached Lok Sabha, vocalizing slogans against dictatorship and releasing canisters emitting yellow smoke.

Security Measures in Parliament:

- ❖ Parliament underwent fortification after the 2001 terrorist attack, featuring spike barriers, bollards, drop gates, scanners, RFID devices, and anti-explosive checks.
- ❖ **Central police forces, plainclothes personnel, and Delhi police are strategically placed in inner and outer precincts.**

Security Breach Details:

- ❖ The breach unfolded across various security layers intended for personal screening.
- ❖ Door frame and handheld metal detectors were utilized but failed to detect plastic or rubber concealed in shoes, a vulnerability given that shoes are not routinely checked.

Importance of Technology:

- ❖ **There's an emphasis on advanced technology in security measures**, referencing backscatter and millimetre wave scanners used abroad.
- ❖ Questioning whether the Ministry of Home Affairs advocated for technology upgrades.

Responsibility and Leadership Vacancies:

- ❖ **The Joint Secretary, Security, post is vacant, as are the positions of chiefs of Central Reserve Police Force and Central Industrial Security Force.**
- ❖ The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) chief is entrusted with the inquiry, and the Ministry of Home Affairs manages Parliament's security needs.

Political Fallout and Responsibility:

- ❖ **Calls for responsibility regarding security and technology upgrades.**
- ❖ Criticism of political debates on jurisdiction, urging acknowledgment of the access control failure.
- ❖ Urgency for a high-level inquiry and acknowledgment of the breach's severity.

Youngsters' Actions and National Security:

- ❖ The incident caused no harm but exposed security gaps.
- ❖ Recommendation for legal action due to unauthorized entry, even though the charge of terrorism may not stick.
- ❖ Emphasis on the breach's gravity for national security.

Recommendations for Improvement:

- ❖ **Call for sweeping changes in the security set-up through out-of-the-box thinking.**
- ❖ Suggestion to have the Secretary, Security, in the Cabinet Secretariat supervise Parliament security.
- ❖ **Formation of a committee comprising MPs** from various parties to regularly monitor security.

Conclusion:

- ❖ A reminder that security arrangements can be breached, necessitating constant monitoring and upgrades.
- ❖ MPs are urged to cooperate with enhanced security measures to safeguard democratic institutions.

INDIA'S DEFENCE BUDGETING AND THE POINT OF DETERRENCE.

Context:

The Indian defense landscape faces challenges with depleting squadron strength, budget constraints, and the need for modernization.

The debate between 'affordable defense' and 'affordable effectiveness' is crucial. With a live threat on northern borders, India must balance indigenous efforts, research, and defense budgeting to ensure a robust deterrence posture.

Overview of MMRCA Program:

- ❖ **Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) program** dubbed the 'mother of all procurements' for Indian Air Force (IAF).
- ❖ Original cost estimated at \$10 billion in 2007, later reduced to the purchase of 36 Rafale jets.

Squadron Strength Concerns:

- ❖ **IAF faces squadron strength depletion**, currently at 32, with a target of reaching 35 squadrons in 10 years.
- ❖ **Concerns raised by various IAF chiefs about the limited value of the Rafale purchase.**

Concerns Across Forces:

- ❖ Indian Army and Indian Navy also reported to have deficiencies.
- ❖ Budget constraints and electoral sops may impact defense allocations in Budget 2024-25.

Affordable Defense vs. Affordable Effectiveness:

- ❖ **Debates whether 'affordable defense' or 'affordable effectiveness' should drive defense Budget allocation.**
- ❖ Example of IAF opting for 97 more Tejas Mk1A fighters despite the initial plan for 114 multi-role fighter aircraft.

Northern Border Threat and Election Mode:

- ❖ **Live threat on northern borders necessitates preparedness.**
- ❖ **Concerns that defense allocation** may be influenced by electoral considerations.

Assessment of War Preparedness:

- ❖ Urgent need for a judicious assessment of India's approach to the next war.
- ❖ Importance of evaluating defense potency versus budget constraints.

Sea Power and Modernization Needs:

- ❖ **Call for accretion in sea power to deter China.**
- ❖ **Need for modernization in the Army**, considering its size and associated budget requirements.

Extended War Scenario and Industrial Base:

- ❖ Leadership visualizing an extended war scenario, as seen in Ukraine.
- ❖ Importance of considering the industrial base available for war scenarios.

Indigenous Drive and R&D:

- ❖ **Emphasis on technological modernization.**
- ❖ Realities of the armament supply chain and balance between imports and indigenous accretions.

Budgetary Constraints and Research & Development:

- ❖ **Stagnant defense budget in real terms.**
- ❖ **Decline in defense expenditure** as a percentage of central government expenditure.
- ❖ **Global Innovation Index 2022 highlights India's low research and development expenditure (0.7% of GDP).**

Indigenization Efforts and Challenges:

- ❖ Government's **emphasis on indigenization through iDEX scheme** and service-specific projects.
- ❖ Restructuring of Ordnance Factory Board and promulgation of negative lists for imports.
- ❖ Acknowledgment of the long gestation period for indigenization efforts.

Importance of Bipartisan Statesmanship:

- ❖ Need for sustained momentum in policy-making and defense budgeting.
- ❖ Emphasis on making defense budgets election-proof in a democratic setup.

National Security Imperatives vs. Electoral Imperatives:

- ❖ **Caution against prioritizing electoral imperatives over national security imperatives.**
- ❖ Instances of other countries responding to China's belligerence with increased defense budgets.

Conclusion:

The necessity of giving due consideration to the defense budget and not compromising national security for electoral considerations.

AGRICULTURAL

HARVEST THE ODISHA STORY TO ENSURE FOOD SECURITY.

Context: With climate change threatening global food productivity, Odisha's efforts in climate-proofing its agricultural system have resulted in a unique development model.

Introduction

As the world's leaders are in a huddle for COP28, or the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (November 30 to December 12, 2023), in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, the worsening impact of the climate crisis paints a grim picture for the planet, peace and prosperity.

- ❖ As the world witnesses a worsening global food crisis precipitated by the mounting climate crisis, spiralling conflicts and distressed livelihoods, Odisha's transformational journey is increasingly being cited as a model and a source of ideas for creating food security that is built around equity and sustainability.
- ❖ Odisha's story has three specific themes in the current scenario: how the State strengthened food security by transforming agriculture through a community-driven approach and built resilience to climate impact.

Agricultural transformation

- ❖ In the past two decades, Odisha has moved from importing rice from other States and making ends meet in the pre-2000s to, in 2022, producing 13.606 million tonnes of food grains, its highest production on record.
- ❖ There are two notable aspects: a majority of farmers are small/marginal, and productivity has increased despite stable crop area. The average rice yield, which is Odisha's main crop, has tripled in two decades. In 2000-01, the average yield was 10.41 quintals per hectare, but by 2020-21, it had increased to 27.30 quintals per hectare.
- ❖ Kalahandi district was known as the "land of hunger," but has now been transformed into Odisha's rice bowl. Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik shared this at the United Nations World Food Programme headquarters, where he addressed Odisha's commitment towards achieving the 'Zero Hunger' goal of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.
- ❖ The focus is on small and marginal farmers and increasing their income. This has directly contributed to strengthening their food security and creating resilient livelihoods.
- ❖ Implementing flagship schemes such as Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) and disseminating scientific crop management practices through conventional and digital extension have increased non-paddy crop cultivation, while paddy cultivation has decreased. Schemes such as the Odisha Millet Mission have also helped diversify crops and promote climate resilience.

Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme

- ❖ The Odisha government launched the "Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation" (KALIA) scheme to support farmers.
- ❖ The program's objectives are to decrease poverty in the agricultural sector and boost agricultural prosperity by increasing state payments to support farming and related activities.
- ❖ The program is thought to be a good substitute for waivers of farm loans.
- ❖ As part of the scheme, landless agricultural laborers and cultivators will receive financial assistance totaling approximately Rs. 10,180 crores over three years, until 2020-2021.
- ❖ Small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural household, vulnerable agricultural household, landless agricultural laborers and sharecroppers (actual cultivators) are eligible under different components of the scheme.

Resilience and sustainability

- ❖ Due to its geographical location and physical conditions, Odisha is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. This phenomenon can disrupt current growth strategies and exacerbate poverty, as it may lead to a loss of life, livelihoods, assets, and infrastructure. Odisha has proactively developed a comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan to address these concerns.

- ❖ This plan covers various sectors, including agriculture, coastal zone protection, energy, fisheries and animal resources, forests, health, industries, mining, transport, and urban and water resources.
- ❖ The approach towards climate resilience is being developed from the bottom up. The Crop Weather Watch Group conducts weekly meetings, sees field visits by officers, and has video conferences to monitor the crop programme.
- ❖ This helps the authorities to take necessary measures during adverse weather conditions such as cyclones, floods, and droughts, which are frequent in the State.
- ❖ Crop planning is done at the district level by officials of allied departments, considering the agro-climatic zone. Farmers are adopting climate-resilient cultivation practices, that include integrated farming, zero-input-based natural farming, non-paddy crops, better water management, water-saving devices, e-pest surveillance, and large-scale farm mechanisation with women-friendly drudgery-reducing farm implements.
- ❖ Training farmers in crop-specific techniques, including integrated nutrient and pest management, has boosted food grains production.

Social protection

- ❖ The consistent improvement of the agricultural sector has made Odisha a surplus State for paddy production. It is the fourth most significant contributor to the paddy pool of the Food Corporation of India.
- ❖ According to the available statistics for 2020-21, Odisha produces 9% of the total rice in India and accounts for 4.22% of the total food-grain production of the country.
- ❖ The partnership between the United Nations World Food Programme and the Government of Odisha has seen innovation for pilots on improving food and nutrition security schemes, such as the application of biometric technology in the Targeted Public Distribution System in remote Rayagada district back in 2007, or rice fortification in Gajapati district, to name a few.
- ❖ In the State Ranking Index for the National Food Security Act by the Department of Food and Public Distribution, Government of India, for 2022, Odisha emerged as the top-ranked State in the entire country. The WFP collaborates with the Government of Odisha on its food security, livelihood and climate resilience initiatives.

Conclusion

Odisha's transformative journey, from food grains scarcity to the generation of surplus, sustained efforts in climate-proofing its agricultural system, crop diversification, protection of the interest of the smallholders, and food and nutrition security for the vulnerable presents a unique development model for other States in the context of the challenges of global climate change.

CivilsTap Hlmachal

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

GAME-CHANGER

Context: Gene therapy offers new hope for those with sickle cell disease.

Introduction

Less than a month after the U.K. drug regulator approved Casgevy, the gene therapy to treat people above 12 with sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia, the U.S. FDA has approved two gene therapies — Casgevy and Lyfgenia — to treat sickle cell disease in patients over 12. Its decision on approving Casgevy gene therapy for treating beta thalassemia is expected by March 2024.

Gene therapy

- ❖ Gene therapy is a technique that uses a gene(s) to treat, prevent or cure a disease or medical disorder. Often, gene therapy works by adding new copies of a gene that is broken, or by replacing a defective or missing gene in a patient's cells with a healthy version of that gene.
- ❖ Both inherited genetic diseases (e.g., hemophilia and sickle cell disease) and acquired disorders (e.g., leukemia) have been treated with gene therapy.
- ❖ It is a direct way to treat genetic conditions as well as other conditions. There are also other related approaches like gene editing. There are many different versions and approaches to gene therapy and gene editing.
- ❖ It all rests on understanding how genes work and how changes in genes can affect our health. Researchers all over the world are studying many different facets of gene therapy and gene editing.

Sickle cell disease

- ❖ Sickle cell disease is an inherited blood disorder. It is marked by flawed haemoglobin. That's the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to the tissues of the body. So, sickle cell disease interferes with the delivery of oxygen to the tissues.
- ❖ Red blood cells with normal haemoglobin are smooth, disk-shaped, and flexible, like doughnuts without holes. They can move through the blood vessels easily. Cells with sickle cell haemoglobin are stiff and sticky.
- ❖ When they lose their oxygen, they form into the shape of a sickle or crescent, like the letter C. These cells stick together and can't easily move through the blood vessels. This can block small blood vessels and the movement of healthy, normal oxygen-carrying blood. The blockage can cause pain.
- ❖ Normal red blood cells can live up to 120 days. But sickle cells only live for about 10 to 20 days. Also, sickle cells may be destroyed by the spleen because of their shape and stiffness. The spleen helps filter the blood of infections.
- ❖ Sickled cells get stuck in this filter and die. With less healthy red blood cells circulating in the body, you can become chronically anaemic. The sickled cells also damage the spleen. This puts you at greater risk for infections.

Beginning of gene therapy using the CRISPR-Cas9 tool

- ❖ These landmark decisions mark the beginning of gene therapy using the CRISPR-Cas9 tool to treat diseases that could otherwise be cured only through bone marrow transplantation.
- ❖ While Lyfgenia uses a disabled lentivirus as a vector to introduce into the blood stem cells a new gene for haemoglobin that mimics the healthy version, Casgevy uses the gene-editing tool of CRISPR-Cas9 to disable a particular gene (BCL11A) that turns off foetal haemoglobin production in blood stem cells.
- ❖ While about 10% of adults continue to produce foetal haemoglobin, in others, the BCL11A gene prevents the production of foetal haemoglobin. By disabling the BCL11A gene, foetal haemoglobin that is produced, which does not have the abnormalities of adult haemoglobin, helps treat patients with sickle-cell disease or beta thalassaemia.
- ❖ In clinical trials, 28 of 29 sickle-cell disease patients who received Casgevy gene therapy were relieved of the debilitating effects of the disease for a year; for beta thalassaemia, 39 of 42 patients did not require blood

transfusion for one year, and in the remaining three the need for blood transfusion reduced by more than 70%.

- ❖ In the case of clinical trials involving Lyfgenia, 30 of 32 sickle cell disease patients did not suffer from severe blocked blood flow caused by sickle cells, while 28 of 32 patients did not experience any blocked blood flow events six to 18 months post-infusion.

Huge potential and huge expenditure

- ❖ Since both gene therapies use patients' own blood cells for gene editing, the number of patients who can potentially be treated will be huge as these treatments do not rely on matching bone marrow donors.
- ❖ But in reality, these treatments would be exorbitantly expensive. Also, much like bone marrow transplantation, only certain hospitals will be equipped to extract a patient's blood stem cells and use the genetic editing tool to the stem cells before reinjecting them, thus limiting the number of beneficiaries.

Way forward

With clinical trials evaluating the therapies in a very small number of patients and for shorter duration, the compulsion to continuously monitor their safety and efficacy through real world data cannot be overemphasised: the possibility of unintended genetic modifications and their resultant side effects are real when the CRISPR–Cas9 tool is used.



CivilsTap Hlmachal

ENVIRONMENT

FINDING FUNDS

Context:

A healthy loss and damage (L&D) fund, a three-decade-old demand, is a fundamental expression of climate justice.

Introduction

Loss and damage refer to the negative consequences that arise from the unavoidable risks of climate change, like rising sea levels, prolonged heatwaves, desertification, the acidification of the sea and extreme events, such as bushfires, species extinction and crop failures.

- ❖ The L&D fund is a corpus of money and technologies that will be replenished by developed countries and used by the rest to respond to the more unavoidable effects of climate change.
- ❖ On the first day of the COP28 climate talks under way in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), representatives of the member-states agreed to operationalise the L&D fund.

Steadfast efforts of the G-77 bloc

- ❖ The announcement was dearly won at the end of the COP27 talks in Egypt last year, member-states agreed to launch such a fund, thanks largely to the steadfast efforts of the G-77 bloc of countries plus China, led by Pakistan. Four meetings of the Transitional Committee (TC) were to follow to determine how its money would be disbursed.

Advantages of Loss and Damage Fund

- ❖ In addition to financial losses, loss and damage also refers to human casualties, ecosystem and cultural heritage degradation, and ecosystem degradation. As a result, the fund will fully compensate for all losses brought on by climate change.
- ❖ The fund guarantees climate justice to the most developing countries and small island nations' vulnerable communities, who have paid the price without even causing environmental pollution.
- ❖ Climate finance has till now focused only on mitigation and adaptation. Two-third of the finance has gone into climate change mitigation and one third has gone into adaptation. The LDF draws the focus of climate finance towards reparations for the loss and damage.

Major issues

- ❖ It will be hosted by the World Bank for an interim period of four years and will be overseen by an independent secretariat. The Bank is expected to charge a significant overhead fee.
- ❖ While some countries have committed amounts to the fund — from \$10 million by Japan to \$100 million each by Germany and the UAE — whether they will be periodically replenished is not clear.
- ❖ The committed amounts are also insufficient, totalling \$450 million (for now) against an actual demand of several billion dollars. This shortfall, though it is premature to deem it so, comes against the backdrop of developed countries missing their 2020 deadline to mobilise a promised \$100 billion in climate finance and managing to deliver only \$89.6 billion in 2021.
- ❖ The contributions are voluntary even as every country has been invited to contribute.
- ❖ Finally, the World Bank will have to meet some conditions on managing the fund, including a degree of transparency it has not brooked so far, and submit a report to the Parties to the Paris Agreement. If its stewardship is determined to be unsuitable, the fund can 'exit' the World Bank.

Ensuring effectiveness

- ❖ It is important that a Loss and Damage Fund tackles the gaps that current climate finance institutions such as the Green Climate Fund do not fill.
- ❖ Combined adaptation and mitigation finance flows in 2020 fell at least US\$17 billion short of the US\$100 billion pledged to developing countries.

- ❖ The Transitional Committee will provide recommendations for the set up and operations of the fund. The Committee will also recommend which countries should receive funding and who should be paying into the fund. All that needs to be decided upon.
- ❖ But for the fund to be effective, the root cause of climate change must be tackled – and that involves reducing emissions. Unless emissions are drastically reduced, more and more countries will face the devastating effects of climate change. The world urgently needs to find more resources for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage so that climate change will not erode humanity's chances to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Way forward

- ❖ The L&D fund's contents need to be easily accessible to those who need it most, in timely fashion, sans pedantic bureaucratic hurdles, and in sufficient quantities. As things stand, there is little guarantee that any of these requirements will be met. While the L&D fund is finally online, a lot more needs to be done.

HONEST RECKONING

Context: Major world economies seem unwilling to move away from fossil fuel.

Introduction

The boundary wall enclosing discussions around global climate is 1.5°C, or the average increase in global temperatures since pre-industrial times. Now that 1°C is crossed, all the wrangling under way at the climate summit in Dubai is to cap the half-degree rise.

Fossil Fuels

- ❖ Fossil energy sources, including oil, coal and natural gas, are non-renewable resources that formed when prehistoric plants and animals died and were gradually buried by layers of rock. Over millions of years, different types of fossil fuels formed -- depending on what combination of organic matter was present, how long it was buried and what temperature and pressure conditions existed as time passed.
- ❖ Today, fossil fuel industries drill or mine for these energy sources, burn them to produce electricity, or refine them for use as fuel for heating or transportation. Over the past 20 years, nearly three-fourths of human-caused emissions came from the burning of fossil fuels.

Insufficiency of Global pledges

- ❖ Global pledges to cut emissions are insufficient to achieve this. Current estimates are that to limit warming to 1.5°C, the world requires three times more renewable energy capacity by 2030, or at least 11,000 GW.
- ❖ That there is wide global consensus on the need for this tripling was first formally articulated in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration at the G-20 summit in Delhi in September.

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – UNFCCC

- ❖ The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) sets out the basic legal framework and principles for international climate change cooperation with the aim of stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) to avoid “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”
- ❖ To boost the effectiveness of the 1992 UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol was adopted in December 1997. It committed industrialized countries and countries in transition to a market economy to achieve quantified emissions reduction targets for a basket of six GHGs.
- ❖ The Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period took place from 2008 to 2012. The 2012 Doha Amendment established the second commitment period from 2013 to 2020. In December 2015, parties adopted the Paris Agreement, which requires all parties to determine, plan, and regularly report on the nationally determined contribution (NDC) that it undertakes to mitigate climate change.
- ❖ Parties also submit aggregate progress on mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation, which are reviewed every five years through a Global Stocktake.

Run up to the Dubai summit.

- ❖ In the run-up to the Dubai summit, it was perceived that this would be widely endorsed by the larger group of about 190 countries signatory to the UN convention on climate. It turns out that, so far, 118 countries have endorsed the pledge and two major countries, i.e., India and China, have so far abstained from signing.
- ❖ The Global Renewables and Energy Efficiency Pledge, while still a draft text, says that in their pursuit of tripling renewable energy capacity, signatories should also commit to “...phase down of unabated coal power, in particular ending the continued investment in unabated new coal-fired power plants”. This is a major red line for India.

India's stand

- ❖ While India has positioned itself as a champion for renewable energy — its 2030 targets as articulated in its formal, nationally determined contributions (NDC) speak of tripling renewable energy capacity to 500 GW from the current 170 GW — it has reiterated several times that it could not be forced to give up certain fuels. Coal-fired plants are responsible for nearly 70% of India's greenhouse gas emissions.

Other Developed countries stand.

- ❖ Developed countries that have made commitments to give up coal often have other large, fossil-fuel resources as back-up. The United States joined 56 other countries at Dubai in a commitment to completely eschew coal for its energy use, by 2035. However, the U.S. only draws about 20% of its energy from coal and at least 55% from oil and gas, with plans to produce more of it in 2030 than at present.

Conclusion

The paradox of the world's major economies' commitment to renewable energy is that it is not, as of now, actively geared to replace fossil fuel. Till there is an honest commitment to actually replace existing and future fossil capacity with clean energy, pledges and declarations are worth little more than the paper they are drafted on.

AN ICY WARNING

Context:

Threats from contracting glaciers should be in the same category of risk as cyclones and earthquakes.

Introduction

Few barometers measure the climate crisis as evocatively as the state of glaciers, a key component of the cryosphere. The World Meteorological Organization's recent report, The Global Climate 2011-2020, gives a broad view of the planet's response to greenhouse gas emissions.

Cryosphere

- ❖ The cryosphere contains the frozen parts of the planet. It includes snow and ice on land, ice caps, glaciers, permafrost, and sea ice.
- ❖ This sphere helps maintain Earth's climate by reflecting incoming solar radiation back into space.
- ❖ As the world warms due to increasing greenhouse gases being added to the atmosphere by humans, the snow and ice are melting. At sea, this exposes more of the dark ocean below the ice, and on land, the dark vegetation below.
- ❖ These dark surfaces then absorb the solar radiation causing more melting. This creates a positive feedback loop, which exacerbates the impacts of climate change.

Section on the state of glacier health

- ❖ In the section on the state of glacier health, it points out that, on average, the world's glaciers thinned by approximately a metre a year from 2011 to 2020.
- ❖ When compared across decades, there is significant regional variability, but the overall pattern remains that glaciers in all regions of the world are becoming smaller. In fact, some of the reference glaciers, which are used to make long-term assessments of glacier health, have already melted away as the nourishing winter snow is completely melting away during summer.
- ❖ In Africa, glaciers on the Rwenzori Mountains and Mount Kenya are projected to disappear by 2030, and those on Kilimanjaro by 2040.

- ❖ The report points to the rapid growth of pro-glacial lakes and the likelihood of glacier lake outburst flood (GLOF), posing additional threats to ecosystems and livelihoods.

Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

- ❖ A Glacial Lake Outburst Flood, or GLOF, is sudden release of water from a lake fed by glacier melt that has formed at the side, in front, within, beneath, or on the surface of a glacier.
- ❖ GLOF can be impounded by moraine complexes, glacial ice or even bedrock and, as a result of breaching, slope failure, overtopping or other failure mechanisms, lead to catastrophic phenomena in the high mountains that threaten people's lives, livelihoods and regional infrastructure.

Fury of Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

- ❖ The fury of a GLOF event was brought home this year by the destruction of the Chungthang dam in Sikkim after the South Lhonak Lake flooded from a melting glacier, triggering catastrophe downstream.
- ❖ Earlier this year, a separate report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development found that the disappearance of glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayas was "65% faster in the 2010s than in the previous decade".
- ❖ At the current rate of global greenhouse gas emissions, which is expected to see temperatures increase by 2.5°-3°C by the end of the century, the volume of glaciers is forecast to decline anywhere from 55% to 75%.
- ❖ This means sharp reductions in freshwater supply in the immediate vicinity of 2050. The sensitivity of glacier systems to warming underlines the need for their careful monitoring. Despite awareness of the risks posed by Himalayan glaciers there is no early warning system for the likelihood of GLOF events.

Conclusion

Much like warnings before cyclones, floods and earthquakes, authorities must elevate threats from contracting glaciers to the same category of risk. Correspondingly, there is a need to make comprehensive risk assessments, map regions of vulnerability and commission infrastructure development with the highest standards of care.

INDIA'S ALARMING 'FIXED DOSE COMBINATION' PROBLEM

Context:

That many of these unapproved or banned FDCs contain antibiotics is cause for concern given the growing antibacterial microbial resistance in India.

Introduction

A group of academics from India, Qatar and the United Kingdom recently published a worrying new study in the Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice (2023, 16:39) on the volume of unapproved and even banned fixed dose combination (FDC) of antibiotics that are being sold in India.

- ❖ Using sales data of the pharmaceutical industry, the study documents that in the year 2020, 60.5% FDCs of antibiotics (comprising 239 formulations) were unapproved and another 9.9% (comprising 39 formulations) were being sold despite being banned in the country.

What is fixed dose combination (FDC)?

- ❖ FDCs are combinations of one or more known drugs and can be useful in the treatment of some diseases since the combination can improve patient compliance.
- ❖ For instance, if a patient has to take three different medications for a particular treatment, she may forget to take one. But if all three medications are combined into one tablet or one syrup, the chance of her forgetting to take one or two of the drugs is reduced. For diseases such as AIDS, it is well documented that FDCs have proven to be very useful in improving patient compliance, which at the end of day improves treatment outcomes.

Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)

- ❖ The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of

India. Its headquarter is located at FDA Bhawan, Kotla Road, New Delhi 110002 and also has six zonal offices, four sub zonal offices, thirteen Port offices and seven laboratories spread across the country.

- ❖ Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for approval of New Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country and coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice with a view of bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

The pharmaceutical industry's love for FDCs

- ❖ Pharmaceutical companies in India use these FDCs to escape liability under multiple laws without much concern for public health.
- ❖ One such law is the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO), under which the government fixes the prices of individual drugs. Since drug combinations were traditionally not covered under the DPCO, the pharmaceutical industry decided that making FDCs provided an easy way to escape the remit of the DPCO.

Bewildering variety of FDCs

- ❖ Driven by this cold logic of the market, and not public health, the Indian pharmaceutical industry introduced an astounding variety of FDCs that lacked any medical rationale.
- ❖ For example, anti-inflammatory drugs were combined with vitamins, antihistamines were combined with anti-diarrhoeal agents, penicillin was combined with sulphonamides, and vitamins were combined with analgesics. These were combinations not found in any other country.

Advantages for the pharmaceutical company

- ❖ The first, the fact that because of the bewildering variety of FDCs being sold in the market, there were no standards set by bodies such as the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission for testing these drugs for quality of manufacture.
- ❖ The second advantage of going down the FDC route is that it gives individual companies a reason to charge higher prices for their drugs. For example, if 20 different pharmaceutical companies were manufacturing and selling a drug such as azithromycin, they would have to compete furiously and reduce prices to capture a larger share of the market.
- ❖ But if they combine azithromycin with another drug, for example, cefixime to create a FDC, they can claim it as a new unique product catering to a specific need, thereby allowing them to charge a higher price until others introduce similar products, at which point the first mover may try to create a new FDC.

On the regulatory radar since 1978

- ❖ The FDC problem has been on the regulatory radar since 1978 when the first government committee studied the issue and admitted that we had a problem on our hands.
- ❖ At the time, there was no system under the colonial-era Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 to vet drugs for safety and efficacy prior to their sale in India.
- ❖ This meant that each State drug controller could hand out manufacturing licences for any drug formulation and there was little that the central government could do to stop their sale.
- ❖ In 1982, Parliament changed the law to give the central government the power to "prohibit" the manufacture of specific drugs that lack therapeutic value or justification.
- ❖ Later in that decade, in 1988, the central government amended the rules to introduce a new requirement for manufacturers of all "new drugs", including FDCs, to submit proof of safety and efficacy to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) who heads the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO).

Anti-microbial resistance

- ❖ Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) threatens the effective prevention and treatment of an ever-increasing range of infections caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses and fungi.
- ❖ AMR occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death. As a result, the medicines become ineffective and infections persist in the body, increasing the risk of spread to others.
- ❖ Antimicrobials - including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals and antiparasitics - are medicines used to prevent and treat infections in humans, animals, and plants. Microorganisms that develop antimicrobial resistance are sometimes referred to as "superbugs".

Unabated licensing

- ❖ Despite the law being crystal clear on the issue, State drug controllers have simply ignored the law to continue issuing manufacturing licences for FDCs not approved by the DCGI with impunity.
- ❖ The manufacturers selling these FDCs that have not been approved by the DCGI can technically be prosecuted by the Central government for violating the law.
- ❖ Instead of ordering criminal prosecutions, the Ministry of Health is playing a game of whack-a-mole by constantly invoking its powers under Section 26A to prohibit the manufacture of specific FDCs.
- ❖ It has issued 444 orders under this provision since 1983, banning mostly FDCs. Many of these orders have been embroiled in complex litigation, with the courts muddying the waters with inconsistent decisions.

Conclusion

- ❖ The fact that these academics have discovered 239 unapproved FDCs being sold in 2020 in just one category of FDCs (their previous studies have revealed similar unapproved FDCs in other therapeutic categories), more than 42 years after the problem was first flagged is an astonishing indictment of the incompetence of the drug regulatory framework in India. As they point out in their paper, unregulated FDCs may end up contributing to the AMR problem in India. It is vital for the Ministry of Health to take immediate action.

COP MEETINGS MUST USE CLIMATE SCIENCE TO PROMOTE JUSTICE AND EQUITY.

Introduction

Since 1995, when the first of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP) was organised, it has undergone a remarkable shift in character. From stuffy, closed-door meetings peopled by bureaucrats and technocrats, they have morphed into a carnival.

Growth of Officialdom

- ❖ Officialdom has of course grown, with the UN climate secretariat bursting at the seams with reams of subsidiary bodies, 'working groups' and intricately convoluted agenda items. But this has been accompanied by the burgeoning of activist groups, indigenous groups, big and small business, consultancies, traders, and a vast media presence.
- ❖ It is on the one hand fair to conclude that this is a welcome development and due to the growing awareness of how anthropogenic climate change, amplified by centuries of industrialisation, poses an existential threat to humanity.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

- ❖ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) established an international environmental treaty to combat "dangerous human interference with the climate system", in part by stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere.
- ❖ It was signed by 154 states at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), informally known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992.
- ❖ Its original secretariat was in Geneva but relocated to Bonn in 1996. It entered into force on 21 March 1994.
- ❖ The treaty designed to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

Faith in the Climate assessment

- ❖ Climate denialists, vociferous and significant in power corridors even until a decade ago, are now relegated to the obscurity of the darknet, along with Flat Earthers, and their ranks filled by parvenus and the pivoting merchants of the fossil fuel era who see opportunity in the messianic espousal of renewable energy.
- ❖ There is no country today that will not publicly affirm its faith in the scientific assessment — that greenhouse gas emissions must be contained drastically to cap the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C — and yet it has never inspired any sense of urgency to cut fossil fuel use, the dominant source of GHGs.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

- ❖ The IPCC prepares comprehensive Assessment Reports about the state of scientific, technical and socio-economic knowledge on climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for reducing the rate at which climate change is taking place.
- ❖ It also produces Special Reports on topics agreed to by its member governments, as well as Methodology Reports that provide guidelines for the preparation of greenhouse gas inventories.
- ❖ The latest report is the Sixth Assessment Report which consists of three Working Group contributions and a Synthesis Report. The Working Group I contribution was finalized in August 2021, the Working Group II contribution in February 2022, the Working Group III contribution in April 2022 and the Synthesis Report in March 2023.

Acknowledging the fact, Dubai consensus

- ❖ That it has taken nearly three decades for COP to acknowledge this fact, as laid out in the Dubai Consensus, suggests that political expediency and strategic second-guessing has unfortunately weaponised even climate science.
- ❖ Thus, countries responsible for most of the human-emitted carbon point to record temperatures and their links to rising emissions when arguing for reining in emissions from developing countries. However, they are loathe to accept this link when developing and island nations demand funds as reparations for devastations already wreaked by climate change.

Loss and Damage fund

- ❖ The Loss and Damage Fund, which received commitments worth \$750 million, and therefore cheered as a COP28-success, has only been approved on the condition that it not be considered as compensation for historical carbon pollution.
- ❖ Related to this is the larger concern that COP meetings are deemed as 'historic' only when they insert new verb phrases — phase out, phase down, transition — on cutting emissions but are banal when they consider how little money and technology have been channelled for fossil fuel de-addiction.

Conclusion

It is time that future meetings use the science to promote justice and equity and strengthen faith in what is now one of the few working multilateral processes.

GLOBAL GOAL ON ADAPTATION AND THE ROAD FROM DUBAI.

Context:

- COP28 marked a pivotal shift in prioritizing global adaptation efforts through the **adoption of the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)**.
- Challenges include measuring progress, disparities in climate financing, and GGA's limitations in treating adaptation equally with mitigation.

COP28 and Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA):

- **COP28 marked a shift in addressing the lackadaisical approach to adaptation concerns in climate change.**
- Adoption of the framework for Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) aimed at prioritizing adaptation efforts globally.

Challenges in GGA Implementation:

- **GGA framework sets targets for assessing climate hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities by 2030.**
- Questions arise about the influence of the framework on prioritizing adaptation actions and its potential effectiveness.

Measuring GGA Progress:

- **Adaptation lacks a universal metric**, making progress assessment complex.
- **The GGA framework initiates a two-year work program** on indicators but lacks details on development and implementation.

Climate Financing Disparities:

- COP28 Draft Decision expresses concern about the widening adaptation finance gap.
- **Mitigation bias in climate financing persists, with a 95:5 split favoring mitigation over adaptation.**
- **Developed countries fall short of the annual \$100 billion climate finance commitment, with a gap highlighted.**

Bias in Climate Financing:

- Climate financing favors mitigation due to the regime's historical emphasis on it.
- **Rich countries benefit less from adaptation, which has local benefits, compared to the global benefits of mitigation projects.**

GGA's Impact and Limitations:

- GGA is a positive step but falls short in treating adaptation equally with mitigation.
- Emphasis on temperature control and mitigation levels challenges the parity of adaptation efforts.
- GGA's encouraging aspects contrast with the persisting bias and challenges in climate financing.

Conclusion:

- COP28's focus on adaptation and the GGA framework signifies progress but requires addressing disparities in financing and ensuring effective implementation for global climate resilience.

A PATCHY CLIMATE REPORT

Context:

- There were numerous pledges made at the **COP28 summit in Dubai**, but **India decided not to sign any legally-binding agreements** and instead to support statements of intent that were centred around low-carbon hydrogen and financial accessibility.
- But because nations are reluctant to codify these endorsements into legally enforceable agreements, **questions are raised about these endorsements' efficacy.**

Global Temperature Projections:

- Even if all of this year's commitments are fulfilled, the UN projects a rise in temperature of 2.5 to 2.9 degrees Celsius.
- Given that the **world is expected to rise above the 1.5 degree Celsius limit set at COP21 in Paris eight years ago**, this presents a serious issue.

Per Capita Emissions and Country Contributions:

- Sharp differences can be seen when per capita emissions from the Rio Earth Summit are analysed.
- **Between 1992 and 2019, the average American produced around 700 tonnes of greenhouse gases**, which is more than three times the amount produced globally.
- **China must deal with growing emissions from ongoing coal-fired power plant building**, while the US must surpass its carbon reduction promises in order to reach climate targets.

Global Emission Contributions:

- With varying degrees of commitment, **the G20 countries accounted for 74% of world emissions in 2021.**
- Russia hasn't taken any major steps to reduce emissions, but the EU, Japan, Canada, South Korea, and the UK are actively working to reduce pollution.

Unique Challenges of India, Brazil, and Indonesia:

- With 19% of GHG emissions coming from Brazil, Indonesia, and India, these countries confront particular difficulties because of their relatively small historical contributions to global warming.

- It is unjust to expect these nations to drastically reduce their use of fossil fuels.
- It is recommended that strong nations set high goals and encourage others to do the same.

Economic Viability of Coal and the Role of Natural Gas:

- The cost-competitiveness of renewable energy sources is making coal less economically viable.
- The COP28 language, however, highlights natural gas as a vital bridge fuel while ignoring the substantial role that methane—the main ingredient in natural gas plays in the present warming trend.
- **India can contribute to the urgent need to reduce methane emissions by using technology advancements and better water management practices.**

India's Role and Achievements:

- India has made a substantial contribution to the development of the climate discourse by **highlighting issues of energy availability, equity, and climate justice.**
- The nation has met its 2030 targets ahead of schedule and has **cut its emission intensity by 33 percent.**
- Aligning policy with sustainable development is still difficult, though.

Hope Amid Challenges:

- There is optimism for the future of COP conferences in the form of global financial support, technical improvements, and national moral pressure.
- But even these might not be enough to prevent a global climate catastrophe, which is why international leaders must work towards stronger pledges.

Conclusion:

- In order to address the approaching climate problem, states are urged to take meaningful action rather than just symbolic gestures, as the analysis highlights the intricacies and difficulties underlying global climate obligations.

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