

## June (Week 4)

### INDEX

#### Contents

<b>Prelims</b> .....	3
<b>NATIONAL</b> .....	3
Agnipath.....	3
Are the unemployment numbers reliable? .....	4
The judicial validity of the Talaq-e-Hasan mode of divorce .....	5
Why is single-use plastic being banned in India from July 1? .....	7
What is ‘critical information infrastructure’? .....	8
Open network for digital commerce .....	9
Goa’s Sao Joao festival .....	11
Mo Bus.....	11
TDS on transfer of virtual digital assets .....	12
Eco-Sensitive Zones.....	13
<b>INTERNATIONAL</b> .....	15
The importance of Snake Island .....	15
All about Russia’s re-branded McDonald’s.....	15
Western Sahara dispute.....	16
Indian interests at the WTO Ministerial Conference .....	18
Dutch disease .....	19
What is a Black swan event .....	20
<b>Mains</b> .....	22
<b>GS I</b> .....	22
The choice is narrowing the circle or widening it.....	22
<b>GS II</b> .....	24
Resurrecting a dead law .....	24
<b>GS III</b> .....	26
The problems plaguing thermal power generators.....	26
Pakistan’s economic muddling and the IMF challenge .....	27
At the centre of job creation.....	29
Recognising the ‘compulsory’ woman worker .....	31
The EPI may rankle but India can recast policies.....	33
The advent of ‘app-solute’ chaos in NREGA .....	35
<b>GS IV</b> .....	38

A new global standard for AI ethics .....	38
Current Affairs Quiz .....	40



# Prelims

## NATIONAL

### Agnipath

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Large-scale violence by distressed youth broke out in many parts of India, notably in States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, and Telangana which contribute a sizeable manpower to the armed forces, in the wake of the Centre announcing, on June 14, a new scheme of recruitment of jawans, personnel below officer ranks (PBORs), to the three wings.

#### What is the scheme?

- Agnipath or Tour of Duty will be the only mode of recruitment of soldiers, sailors, and airmen from now on.
- It envisages enlisting youths aged between 17.5 years and 21 years — the upper limit has been extended to 23 years this year after protests — for a period of just four years, also counting their training time.
- At the expiry of their contract, only 25% of these soldiers, to be known as Agniveers, will be re-enlisted for regular military service.
- While the salary package of Agniveers will be around ₹4.76 lakh in the first year which can go up to ₹6.92 lakh in the fourth year, these short-term soldiers will also be offered a contributory severance package besides non-contributory death and disability compensation.
- They will not be eligible for pension or gratuity.
- A day after the scheme was unveiled by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in the presence of the Service chiefs, the Union Ministry of Education said it would offer a three-year degree programme to these enlistees in order to make them employable once out of service.
- As protests rocked the country, the Ministry of Home Affairs, on Saturday, announced its decision to reserve 10% of vacancies in the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and the Assam Rifles to Agniveers.
- The Defence Minister also approved of a proposal to earmark 10% of vacancies in Coast Guard, defence civilian jobs and in the defence PSUs for Agniveers provided they meet the eligibility criteria.

#### What, according to its supporters, are the scheme's benefits?

- Defenders of the scheme, which include the three Service chiefs, have maintained that this 'transformational' initiative will make the forces lean and much younger, with the average age of the soldier brought down to about 25 from the present 32 years.
- It will also ensure the availability of a larger share of budget outlay for capital expenditure for the acquisition of hi-tech equipment and platforms because the outlay for pension payout will drop considerably over time.
- Military training at a young age would make these men returning to the civilian world more disciplined and employable, advocates of the scheme argue.
- They say that the military recruitment procedures in many countries such as the U.S., Russia, the U.K., Israel, France and Germany were extensively studied over the past two years before formulating the scheme for Indian conditions.

#### Why are there protests across States?



- Apprehensions about Agnipath are vast and varied. Scores of veterans have flayed the scheme as an effort to scrimp and save on revenue expenditure at the expense of the forces' operational efficiency or fighting capabilities.
- Four years is too short a time for a conscript to acquire the skills essential for operating sophisticated systems in the technology-intensive Navy and Air Force.
- For the Army, which has a regimental system, it is feared to impair the unit's cohesiveness as the soldier on a short-term contract could remain 'risk-averse'.
- There are also apprehensions about this path leading to the militarisation of society.
- Some say that it's unfair to the potential recruit as well, as the absence of a continued employment guarantee at the expiry of four years when he's still in his 20s and without the skillsets or credentials required to make the cut in the civilian/corporate world, could be demoralising.
- Agnipath cuts at the root of social security and dignity that have lured rural Indian youth to the military fatigue, argue the scheme's detractors.

### What is the way forward?

- Unmindful of the ongoing protests and reservations expressed by a chunk of military veterans — ironically, also including some habitual votaries of the government — the Centre has stated unequivocally its resolve to go ahead with the reform.
- The Army and the Air Force have announced their recruitment plans and the Navy is expected to follow suit. Each year, about 45,000 soldiers will be enlisted in the three Services under this scheme.
- It remains to be seen if amendments such as the extension of their initial service period and mandatory re-enlistment of at least 50% of Agniveers recommended by some veterans would be considered to finetune the scheme.
- Right now, the protests are continuing unabated. A clearer picture will emerge by the time the recruitment process gets underway.

### Are the unemployment numbers reliable?

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3611111.ece) )

**Context:** On June 14, the National Statistical Office (NSO), which functions under the Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, released the annual report on the basis of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted during July 2020-June 2021. Though conducted amid the first lockdown, the survey said unemployment rate saw a decrease from 4.8% in 2019-20 to 4.2% in 2020-21, meaning that 4.2% of adults who looked out for jobs could not get any work in rural and urban areas of the country in 2020-21. In rural areas, the rate is 3.3% while in urban areas the unemployment rate was recorded at 6.7%. This report, which also gave details of internal migration, said 11.8 people out of 100 samples migrated to other States during the period of survey.

### What is the methodology of the PLFS?

- The fieldwork of PLFS was suspended twice during the survey in March, 2020 and in April, 2021 due to COVID-19. A rotational panel sampling design has been used in urban areas, which means each selected household in urban areas is visited four times.
- There was, however, no revisit in rural areas and the samples were drawn randomly in the form of two independent sub-samples.
- The sample size for the first visit during July 2020-June 2021 in rural and urban areas was 12,800 first-stage sampling units (FSUs) consisting of 7,024 villages and 5,776 urban frame survey blocks.

- Out of this, 12,562 FSUs (6,930 villages and 5,632 urban blocks) were surveyed for canvassing the PLFS schedule.
- The number of households surveyed, according to the NSO report, was 1,00,344 (55,389 in rural areas and 44,955 in urban areas) and number of persons surveyed was 4,10,818 (2,36,279 in rural areas and 1,74,539 in urban areas).
- The PLFS gives estimates of key employment and unemployment indicators like the Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR), Worker Population Ratio (WPR) and Unemployment Rate (UR)

#### **Are there problem areas?**

- Experts have raised questions over the approach and methodology of the PLFS. Chairman of the International Institute of Migration and Development S. Irudaya Rajan said the PLFS or any such survey cannot produce decent data on migration.
- According to him, only the 2021 Census, which has been delayed, is the correct method to find out the migration status of people. "Migration is the only thing happening in the country.
- Everyone is moving. To say that there is no change from the previous years is unacceptable," Prof. Rajan says, adding that 60 crore people in the country could be migrants due to changing policy trends favouring urbanisation.
- Another issue which is being flagged is that the PLFS cannot compare a normal year with an abnormal, pandemic-hit year.
- Sridhar Kundu, Senior Research Analyst with the Indian School of Business, argues that a second visit to the rural households could have provided a bigger and larger picture of unemployment that was not captured by the PLFS.
- Dr. Kundu adds that by comparing the lower rate of economic growth during 2020-21 to the PLFS report on unemployment presents a contradiction as according to the Central Statistics Office, India's GDP growth fell over 7.3% during 2020-21.

#### **Why does the data matter?**

- Historically, data collated by the Indian government agencies were well accepted globally. Though, of late, several questions have been posed on the data released by the Centre and various State governments.
- The country needs reasonable good data for evidence-based policies to address issues such as unemployment and farmers' distress. Governments need data to understand economic and social behaviour of the people.
- For example, if the survey says unemployment has decreased, there are chances that the government systems become lethargic in addressing the situation.
- According to researchers, even empirically, the employment and the quality of employment have come down.

#### **What happens next?**

- The data is used basically for planning governmental intervention in various sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, animal husbandry etc. For drafting any policy, data has to be used in a context.
- If the reality is not reflected in data, public may reject such data.
- In classical Keynesian terms, any rate of unemployment below 5% is not considered as unemployment.
- The report raised questions among experts and critics about its efficacy in formulating policies against unemployment and for creating quality employment.

### **The judicial validity of the Talaq-e-Hasan mode of divorce**



(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** A public interest litigation (PIL) seeking to invalidate Talaq-e-Hasan, the prescribed Islamic way of divorce, has been filed in the Supreme Court.

### What is the PIL about?

- The petition filed by Benazir Hina, a Ghaziabad-based woman, through Advocate-on-Record Ashwani Kumar Dubey, seeks to make the prescribed Islamic way of divorce Talaq-e-Hasan unconstitutional as it is violative of Articles 14, 15, 21 and 25 of the Constitution.
- Ms. Hina, who claimed to have been unilaterally divorced through the Talaq-e-Hasan mode by her husband Yousuf, also prayed that Section 2 of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937 that permits Muslims to practise unilateral divorce be declared void.
- The apex court had declined an urgent hearing on the subject in May this year. However, on June 17 a vacation Bench of Justices A.S. Bopanna and Vikram Nath allowed a plea for urgent hearing of the matter.
- It was argued that the aggrieved lady and her child would be left without a remedy if no intervention was made. The first talaq notice was given on April 19 and the second notice was issued on May 19.
- The hearing comes almost five years after the five judge Bench headed by then Chief Justice J.S. Khehar, and including Justice R.F. Nariman, Justice Kurian Joseph, Justice U.U. Lalit and Justice S. Abdul Nazeer had invalidated instant triple talaq in their verdict in the Shayara Bano vs the Union of India and others case in August 2017.
- The invalidation of instant triple talaq where the court held, “What is bad in theology is bad in law as well”, led to the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019.

### How is Talaq-e-Hasan different from instant triple talaq?

- In instant triple talaq a man pronounces multiple divorce in one go. It has no scope for reconciliation between the feuding couple, and often ends a marriage instantly.
- It is, as the judges held, not mentioned anywhere in the Quran which prescribes a code of divorce largely through Surah Baqarah, verses 226 to 237 and the opening six verses of Surah Talaq.
- Incidentally, triple talaq in this manner has been banned in many Muslim countries, including Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Iraq, Malaysia etc.
- Unlike instant triple talaq, Talaq-e-Hasan is pronounced with a gap of at least one month or one menstrual cycle. Only a single revocable divorce takes place through the first pronouncement of Talaq-e-Hasan.
- The husband and wife are supposed to live together after this pronouncement and have the option of rapprochement. If the couple is not able to mend fences in the intervening period and the husband does not annul divorce through word or by establishing intimacy, the talaq stays valid. At the end of this month, the husband has to pronounce divorce for the second time.
- Likewise for the third time. After the second pronouncement too, the divorce is revocable, and the couple may resume their conjugal relationship anytime they so desire. If, however, the third pronouncement is made after at least one menstrual cycle, then irrevocable divorce takes place. Significantly, no divorce can be administered when the woman is undergoing her menstrual cycle.
- Even in the case of pregnancy, no divorce takes place. And if such a pronouncement is made, it remains in abeyance till the end of pregnancy.

### Are there other options of divorce apart from the Talaq-e-Hasan?

- The third option of divorce besides Talaq-e-Hasan and the now repudiated instant triple talaq, is Talaq-e-Ahsan.
- Under this form, a single pronouncement is made.
- Following the pronouncement, a woman has to go through iddat or a waiting period of three months.

- During this period the divorce can be cancelled.
- However, failure to annul divorce during this period results in it being finalised after which a woman is independent, and free to marry another man or stay single, as she may choose.
- Both Talaq-e-Hasan and Talaq-e-Ahsan enjoy legal validity in almost all Muslim countries.
- Interestingly, women too have a right to end an unsuccessful marriage through Khula. Here a woman gives something to the man in return for annulling the marriage.
- In April 2021, the Kerala High Court held this form of divorce valid. The court overruled a 49-year-old verdict in K.C. Moyin vs Nafeesa and Others (1972) that barred Muslim women from dissolving their marriage through non-judicial modes.
- There is some debate among Islamic scholars on the ways of Khula. Some hold that the man's consent is necessary in Khula while most say that he enjoys no such privilege.

### **Why is single-use plastic being banned in India from July 1?**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *The Centre has banned the use of 'single-use plastic' from July 1. The Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change had issued a gazette notification last year announcing the ban, and has now defined a list of items that will be banned from next month.*

#### **What is single-use plastic?**

- As the name suggests, it refers to plastic items that are used once and discarded.
- Single-use plastic has among the highest shares of plastic manufactured and used — from packaging of items, to bottles (shampoo, detergents, cosmetics), polythene bags, face masks, coffee cups, cling film, trash bags, food packaging etc.
- A 2021 report by one of the Australian philanthropic organisations the Minderoo Foundation said single-use plastics account for a third of all plastic produced globally, with 98% manufactured from fossil fuels.
- Single-use plastic also accounts for the majority of plastic discarded – 130 million metric tonnes globally in 2019 — “all of which is burned, buried in landfills or discarded directly into the environment”, the report said.
- On the current trajectory of production, it has been projected that single-use plastic could account for 5-10% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- The report found that India features in the top 100 countries of single-use plastic waste generation – at rank 94 (the top three being Singapore, Australia and Oman).
- With domestic production of 11.8 million metric tonnes annually, and import of 2.9 MMT, India's net generation of single-use plastic waste is 5.6 MMT, and per capita generation is 4 kg.

#### **What are the items being banned?**

- The items on which the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) have announced a ban are earbuds; balloon sticks; candy and ice-cream sticks; cutlery items including plates, cups, glasses, forks, spoons, knives, trays; sweet boxes; invitation cards; cigarette packs; PVC banners measuring under 100 microns; and polystyrene for decoration.
- The Ministry had already banned polythene bags under 75 microns in September 2021, expanding the limit from the earlier 50 microns. From December, the ban will be extended to polythene bags under 120 microns.

- Ministry officials have explained that the ban is being introduced in phases to give manufacturers time to shift to thicker polythene bags that are easier to recycle.
- While manufacturers can use the same machine for 50- and 75-micron bags, the machinery will need to be upgraded for 120 microns.
- According to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, there is also a complete ban on sachets using plastic material for storing, packing or selling gutkha, tobacco and pan masala.

#### **How will the ban be enforced?**

- The ban will be monitored by the CPCB from the Centre, and by the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) that will report to the Centre regularly.
- Directions have been issued at national, state and local levels — for example, to all petrochemical industries — to not supply raw materials to industries engaged in the banned items.
- Directions have also been issued to SPCBs and Pollution Control Committees to modify or revoke consent to operate issued under the Air/Water Act to industries engaged in single-use plastic items.
- Local authorities have been directed to issue fresh commercial licenses with the condition that SUP items will not be sold on their premises, and existing commercial licences will be cancelled if they are found to be selling these items.
- Last week, the CPCB issued one-time certificates to 200 manufacturers of compostable plastic and the BIS passed standards for biodegradable plastic.
- Those found violating the ban can be penalised under the Environment Protection Act 1986 – which allows for imprisonment up to 5 years, or a penalty up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.
- Violators can also be asked to pay Environmental Damage Compensation by the SPCB. In addition, there are municipal laws on plastic waste, with their own penal codes.

#### **How are other countries dealing with single-use plastic?**

- Earlier this year, 124 countries, parties to the United Nations Environment Assembly, including India, signed a resolution to draw up an agreement which will in the future make it legally binding for the signatories to address the full life of plastics from production to disposal, to end plastic pollution.
- Bangladesh became the first country to ban thin plastic bags in 2002. New Zealand became the latest country to ban plastic bags in July 2019. China issued a ban on plastic bags in 2020 with phased implementation.
- As of July 2019, 68 countries have plastic bag bans with varying degrees of enforcement.
- Eight states in the US have banned single-use plastic bags, beginning with California in 2014. Seattle became the first major US city to ban plastic straws in 2018.
- On July 2, 2021, the Directive on Single-Use Plastics took effect in the European Union (EU).
- The directive bans certain single-use plastics for which alternatives are available; single-use plastic plates, cutlery, straws, balloon sticks and cotton buds cannot be placed on the markets of the EU member states. The same measure applies to cups, food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene, and all products made of oxo-degradable plastic.
- Vanuatu and the Seychelles have banned plastic straws outright.

### **What is ‘critical information infrastructure’?**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )



**Context:** The Union Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has declared IT resources of ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and UPI managing entity NPCI as ‘critical information infrastructure’. The notification to this effect was issued on June 16.

### **What is critical information infrastructure?**

- The Information Technology Act of 2000 defines “Critical Information Infrastructure” as a “computer resource, the incapacitation or destruction of which shall have debilitating impact on national security, economy, public health or safety”.
- The government, under the Act, has the power to declare any data, database, IT network or communications infrastructure as CII to protect that digital asset.
- Any person who secures access or attempts to secure access to a protected system in violation of the law can be punished with a jail term of up to 10 years.

### **Why is CII classification and protection necessary?**

- World over governments have been moving with alacrity to protect their critical information infrastructure.
- IT resources form the backbone of countless critical operations in a country’s infrastructure, and given their interconnectedness, disruptions can have a cascading effect across sectors. An information technology failure at a power grid can lead to prolonged outages crippling other sectors like healthcare, banking services.
- In 2007, a wave of denial-of-service attacks, allegedly from Russian IP addresses, hit major Estonian banks, government bodies – ministries and parliament, and media outlets.
- It was cyber aggression of the kind that the world had not seen before, and it came in the wake of Estonia’s decision to move a memorial to the Soviet Red Army to a location of less prominence. The attacks played havoc in one of the most networked countries in the world for almost three weeks.
- On October 12, 2020 as India battled the pandemic, the electric grid supply to Mumbai suddenly snapped hitting the mega city’s hospitals, trains and businesses.
- Later, a study by a US firm that looks into the use of the internet by states, claimed that this power outage could have been a cyber attack, allegedly from a China-linked group, aimed at critical infrastructure. The government, however, was quick to deny any cyber attack in Mumbai.
- But the incident underlined the possibility of hostile state and non-state actors probing internet-dependent critical systems in other countries, and the necessity to fortify such assets.

### **How are CIIs protected in India?**

- Created in January 2014, the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) is the nodal agency for taking all measures to protect the nation’s critical information infrastructure.
- It is mandated to guard CIIs from “unauthorized access, modification, use, disclosure, disruption, incapacitation or distraction”.
- According to its website, NCIIPC will monitor and forecast national-level threats to CII for policy guidance, expertise sharing and situational awareness for early warning or alerts. The basic responsibility for protecting the CII system shall lie with the agency running that CII, it says.
- “In the event of any threat to critical information infrastructure the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre may call for information and give directions to the critical sectors or persons serving or having a critical impact on Critical Information Infrastructure,” the NCIIPC website adds.

**Open network for digital commerce**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The government of India announced the launch of the pilot phase of open network for digital commerce (ONDC) in five cities in late April with an aim to “democratise” the country’s fast growing digital e-commerce space that is currently dominated by the two U.S.-headquartered firms — Amazon and Walmart. The announcement was made by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. “After UPI, another game changing idea to democratise commerce — ONDC soft launch today to select consumers, sellers and logistics providers. Get ready for a world of choice, convenience and transparency,” Mr Goyal had tweeted.*

### What is ONDC?

- As per the strategy paper on ONDC, it is a not-for-profit organisation that will offer a network to enable local digital commerce stores across industries to be discovered and engaged by any network-enabled applications.
- It is neither an aggregator application nor a hosting platform, and all existing digital commerce applications and platforms can voluntarily choose to adopt and be a part of the ONDC network.
- The ONDC aims to enable buying of products from all participating e-commerce platforms by consumers through a single platform.
- Currently, a buyer needs to go to Amazon, for example, to buy a product from a seller on Amazon.
- Under ONDC, it is envisaged that a buyer registered on one participating e-commerce site (for example, Amazon) may purchase goods from a seller on another participating e-commerce site (for example, Flipkart).
- The ONDC model is trying to replicate the success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in the field of digital payments.
- UPI allows people to send or receive money irrespective of the payment platforms they are registered on.
- The open network concept also extends beyond the retail sector, to any digital commerce domains including wholesale, mobility, food delivery, logistics, travel, urban services, etc.

### What led to formation of ONDC?

- The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), under Ministry of Commerce and Industries, conducted an outreach during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to understand its impact on small sellers and hyperlocal supply chain functioning.
- Post which, it found that there is a huge disconnect between the scale of online demand and the ability of the local retail ecosystem to participate.
- Following this, consultations were held with multiple ministries and industry experts and “ONDC was envisioned to revolutionise digital commerce in India,” as per the strategy paper.
- The paper added that ONDC has been envisaged as an entity which should be able to work without the need for day-to-day guidance and advisory from the shareholders/members.
- The independence of the management is linked to the financial independence of the entity, and therefore, the entity will be required to get funding independently and have a self-sustaining financial model.

### What are the likely benefits of ONDC

- The ONDC will standardise operations like cataloguing, inventory management, order management and order fulfilment, hence making it simpler and easier for small businesses to be discoverable over network and conduct business.
- However, experts have pointed out some likely potential issues such as getting enough number of e-commerce platforms to sign up, along with issues related to customer service and payment integration.

## **Goa's Sao Joao festival**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *As in every monsoon, Catholics in Goa will celebrate Sao Joao, the feast of St John the Baptist, on Friday. The celebrations will include revellers sporting crowns made of fruits, flowers and leaves, and the major draw of the feast is the water bodies – wells, ponds, fountains, rivers – in which the revellers take the “leap of joy”. Enjoyed by children and adults alike, the festival also includes playing the traditional gumott (percussion instrument), a boat festival, servings of feni, and a place of pride for new sons-in-law.*

### **What is Sao Joao and where is it celebrated in Goa?**

- In Goa, Catholics celebrate all the feasts of the Roman Catholic Church, which include the feast of St John the Baptist on June 24 (John the Baptist because he had baptised Jesus Christ on the river Jordan).
- Traditionally, there are spirited Sao Joao festivities in the villages of Cortalim in South Goa and Harmal, Baga, Siolim and Terekhol in North Goa.
- However, over the years, pool parties and private Sao Joao parties in Goa have been a “complete package of merriment and joy” for tourists, according to the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC).

### **What does jumping into water bodies symbolise?**

- The festivities also include revellers wearing the *Kopel*, the crown of fruits, flowers and leaves, parading in villages and often well hopping from one place to another as they chant, “Sao Joao! Viva Sao Joao”.
- Villagers gather near the well and cheer for those throwing and dunking themselves into the water. Full-throated renditions of Konkani songs written for the occasion are accompanied by traditional musical instruments like the gumott and *cansaim* (cymbal).
- Rodrigues writes that the revellers are treated with sweets, fruits and a peg of feni.

### **What other events are part of Sao Joao festivities?**

- Among the prominent festivities will be the Sao Joao boat parade in Siolim that usually sees visitors running into thousands.
- The Sao Joao traditional boat festival started in 1992 and is held in front of St Anthony’s Church in the village, now also the pin code for many upscale properties.
- A stage is erected and participants show up in vibrant costumes and prizes are awarded by the best decorated boat, dress and kopel (crown).

### **What is the importance assigned to new sons-in-law?**

- In Goa, Sao Joao is an occasion for the family and the villagers to get to know their newly wed daughters’ husbands a little better.
- Traditionally, the new son-in-law would be crowned with festive headgear of fruits and leaves, taken around the village and would then jump into the well with other revelers.

## **Mo Bus**

**Context:** *The public transport service has been recognised for its role in “promoting gender-responsive public services to achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)”, the UN said.*

### **Recognition for Odisha**

- The UN recognition said the “problem” was that “bus services in the city of Bhubaneswar needed improvement”, as a result of which “the majority of people used private vehicles, two-wheelers and auto-rickshaw to commute instead of taking public transportation”.
- As the “solution”, the Odisha government in 2018 “reorganized the public transit services in the city to provide an integrated, reliable and inclusive public bus service system”.
- Mo Bus, the UN noted, has incorporated “real-time technologies like live tracking, travel planner and e-ticketing”, and an e-rickshaw system called ‘Mo E-Ride’ has been introduced as a last-mile feeder service.
- The “impact” is that 57 per cent of the city’s commuters now use the Mo Bus, the UN said. Mo E-Ride is estimated to reduce pollution by 30-50 per cent.
- Also, “40 per cent of Mo Bus conductors are women and 100 percent of Mo E-Ride drivers are women, transgender people, and people from disadvantaged communities,” the UN noted.

### **The Mo Bus service**

- According to the CRUT website, the Mo Bus service was launched on November 6, 2018 to ensure “transformation of the urban public transport scenario in the city and its hinterland through use of smart technology, service benchmarking and customer satisfaction”.
- CRUT plans to introduce 289 buses in three phases with the induction of 200 new buses and refurbishment of 89 old buses, the website says. The service is proposed to be extended to Cuttack soon, it says.
- The buses are designed to integrate smart technologies such as free on-board Wi-Fi service, digital announcements, surveillance cameras, and electronic ticketing.
- CRUT says that to increase women’s participation in the workforce, and to make women riders feel safer, it is committed to ensuring that 50% of Mo Bus Guides (conductors) are women.
- Airconditioned Mo Bus fares start at Rs 5 and go up to Rs 70; non-AC fares are from Rs 5 to Rs 55.

### **UN Public Service Award**

- The UN describes its Public Service Awards as the “most prestigious international recognition of excellence in public service”.
- It is intended to reward “the creative achievements and contributions of public service institutions that lead to a more effective and responsive public administration in countries worldwide”.
- The UN Public Service Day celebrates the value and virtue of public service to the community, highlights its contribution in the development process, recognizes the work of public servants, and encourages young people to pursue careers in the public sector.
- The first Awards ceremony was held in 2003, and the UN has since received “an increasing number of submissions from all around the world”.

### **TDS on transfer of virtual digital assets**

(Source: [The Indian Express](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tax/tax-on-transfer-of-virtual-digital-assets/article38451211.ece) )





**Context:** The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) on Wednesday (June 22) issued detailed guidelines on the tax deducted at source (TDS) rule for virtual digital assets (VDAs) such as cryptocurrencies, and laid down the various scenarios under which tax would be applicable and on whom the onus of deduction would lie. The Finance Act, 2022 introduced Section 194S in The Income Tax Act, 1961, under which a TDS of 1 per cent will be levied on the transfer of VDAs effective July 1 if the value of transactions exceeds Rs 10,000 in a year.

#### **On whom does the onus to pay TDS on crypto lie?**

- In the guidelines, the Tax Department has defined the responsibilities of deducting the tax in various scenarios.
- For example, in cases where the transfer of VDA takes place on or through an exchange, and the VDA being transferred is not owned by the exchange, tax may be deducted by the exchange making the payment to the seller.
- However, when the payment between the seller and the exchange is being done through a broker, the responsibility to deduct tax shall be on both the exchange and the broker.
- In cases where transfer of VDA takes place on or through an exchange, and the VDA being transferred is owned by this exchange, the primary responsibility to deduct tax remains with the buyer or his broker.
- However, as an alternative, the exchange may enter into a written agreement with the buyer or his broker that in regard to all such transactions the exchange would be paying the tax on or before the due date for that quarter.
- This mainly deals with situations where the transfer of a VDA is being made against money. The tax department has also given examples of cases where the transfer of VDA happens in exchange for another VDA.
- For example, if two different crypto currencies — say, bitcoin and ether — are being exchanged, both the persons would be considered buyers as well as sellers. Therefore, both will need to pay tax with respect to the transfer of cryptocurrency.
- The guidelines also allow the exchanges that are facilitating such transactions to deduct tax in these cases.

#### **How will TDS be levied if the transfer of VDA is in kind, through an exchange or broker?**

- Where VDA is transferred for consideration in kind, or partly in cash and partly in kind, through an exchange, tax may be deducted by the exchange.
- This alternative approach can be exercised based on a written agreement between the exchange and the buyers/ sellers.
- The exchange would be required to deduct tax on both legs of the transaction (buyers/ sellers) and report it as such.

### **Eco-Sensitive Zones**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** Farmers in Kerala continue to protest across several high ranges of the state against the Supreme Court's recent order to establish 1-km Eco-Sensitive Zones around all protected areas, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks.

#### **What are Eco-Sensitive Zones?**



- As per the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016), issued by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, land within 10 km of the boundaries of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries is to be notified as eco-fragile zones or Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ).
- While the 10-km rule is implemented as a general principle, the extent of its application can vary. Areas beyond 10-km can also be notified by the Union government as ESZs, if they hold larger ecologically important “sensitive corridors.”

#### **Why are Eco-Sensitive Zones created?**

- According to the guidelines issued by the Environment Ministry on February 9, 2011, ESZs are created as “shock absorbers” for the protected areas, to minimize the negative impact on the “fragile ecosystems” by certain human activities taking place nearby.
- Furthermore, these areas are meant to act as a transition zone from areas requiring higher protection to those requiring lesser protection.
- The guidelines also state that the ESZs are not meant to hamper the daily activities of people living in the vicinity, but are meant to guard the protected areas and “refine the environment around them”.
- To do so, the guidelines list the activities prohibited in an ESZ, such as commercial mining, saw mills, commercial use of wood, etc., apart from regulated activities like felling of trees.
- Lastly, there are permitted activities like ongoing agricultural or horticultural practices, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, among others.

#### **What is the recent SC judgment that has caused an uproar in Kerala?**

- On June 3, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court heard a PIL which sought to protect forest lands in the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, but was later expanded to cover the entire country.
- In its judgment, the court while referring to the 2011 guidelines as “reasonable”, as reported by Live Law, directed all states to have a mandatory 1-km ESZ from the demarcated boundaries of every protected forest land, national park and wildlife sanctuary.
- It also stated that no new permanent structure or mining will be permitted within the ESZ.
- If the existing ESZ goes beyond 1-km buffer zone or if any statutory instrument prescribes a higher limit, then such extended boundary shall prevail, the court, as per the Live Law report, said.

## INTERNATIONAL

### The importance of Snake Island

(Source: [The Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** *Ukraine has said it has caused “significant losses” to the Russian military in airstrikes on Zmiinyi Island, also known as Snake Island, in the Black Sea. The hit on the island is believed to be the second major military success using missiles given to Ukraine by the West. The Ukrainians had last week claimed their first successful use of Harpoon anti-ship missiles, British Military Intelligence said on June 21, Reuters reported.*

#### **Strategic island**

- Zmiinyi Island, also known as Snake or Serpent Island, is a small piece of rock less than 700 metres from end to end, that has been described as being “X-shaped”.
- It is located 35 km from the coast in the Black Sea, to the east of the mouth of the Danube and roughly southwest of the port city of Odessa.
- The island, which has been known since ancient times and is marked on the map by the tiny village of Bile that is located on it, belongs to Ukraine.
- On February 24, the day Russia launched its invasion, two warships from the Russian Black Sea Fleet, Vasily Bykov and Moskva, attacked Snake Island, followed by Russian troops landing on it.
- Ukraine has claimed to have launched several attacks on the Russian occupiers of Snake Island even before the latest ongoing operation.
- Last week, Ukraine said it had sunk a Russian naval tug called Spasatel Vasily Bekh, which was delivering personnel and military supplies to the island. Earlier in April, it had sunk the Moskva, the 600-foot flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, which had attacked the island on day 1 of the war.

#### **The Black Sea**

- The famed water body bound by Ukraine to the north and northwest, Russia and Georgia to the east, Turkey to the south, and Bulgaria and Romania to the west, which links to the Sea of Marmara through the Bosphorus and then to the Aegean through the Dardanelles, has traditionally been Russia’s warm water gateway to Europe.
- For Russia, the Black Sea is both a stepping stone to the Mediterranean as well as a strategic buffer between NATO and itself.
- Domination of the Black Sea region is a geostrategic imperative for Moscow, both to project Russian power in the Mediterranean and to secure the economic gateway to key markets in southern Europe.
- Russia has been making efforts to gain complete control over the Black Sea since the Crimean crisis of 2014.
- The domination of the Black Sea has been a major Russian objective of the ongoing war, along with the land bridge to connect Russia and Crimea.
- Cutting Ukrainian access to the Black Sea will reduce it to a landlocked country and deal a crippling blow to its trade logistics.

### All about Russia’s re-branded McDonald’s

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )



**Context:** *Fast-food giant McDonald's withdrew from Russia in May amid the country's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, shutting shop at 850 locations. As it exited Russia, it sold its outlets in the country to a local licence holder – Alexander Grovor.*

### **McDonald's in Russia**

- McDonald's first entered Russia in 1990, with its first location opening on January 31 that year in Moscow's Pushkin Square.
- The opening was a grand success with about 38,000 customers queuing up outside the store breaking the company's all time record.
- In the next seven years, the company opened 21 locations across Russia. By the time it decided to fold operations in May this year, it had about 62,000 employees across the country.

### **The Russian makeover**

- 'Vkusno i Tochka' opened their first stores in and around Moscow's Pushkin square, selling about 120,000 burgers on the first day, breaking records set by McDonald's before leaving the country.
- The new chain has completely done away with McDonald's packaging and colours, even changing the staff uniforms. However, most items on the menu remain similar to those served at McDonald's, although with changed names.
- The menu, while lacking McDonald's signature Big Mac and McFlurry, has other similar items.
- Some of the store's burgers are — Grand De Luxe, Double Grand, Grandee, Chicken Premier, single or double fish burger. The store also serves wraps, desserts, fries, muffins, buns along with a wide variety of breakfasts, beverages and sauces.

### **Can McDonald's return?**

- While Russian authorities have stated that McDonald's can buy back its business within 15 years, Grovor disagrees, claiming that the fast-food giant has no intention to do the same.
- The rebranded firm aims to open about a 1000 locations across Russia in the four to five years, expanding from the 850 under McDonald's.
- The biggest challenge 'Vkusno i Tochka' faces is maintaining a steady flow of customers and matching the quality and experience of McDonald's, with CEO Oleg Paroev stating: "Our goal is that our guests do not notice a difference either in quality or ambiance."

### **Others who left Russia**

- McDonalds isn't the only company that has stopped selling its goods in the country.
- Starbucks, Coca Cola, Mothercare, Heineken have stopped supplying to Russia and shut their stores in the country after the Ukraine invasion.
- Imperial Brands, which include companies like Davidoff Cigarettes and JPS, have also stopped production at their factories in the country, with British American Tobacco halting investment as well.
- Netflix and Levi's too have stopped sales in the country.

## **Western Sahara dispute**

(Source: [Indian Express](https://www.indianexpress.com) )

**Context:** *On June 8, Algeria announced that it was immediately suspending its 20-year-old treaty of "friendship, good neighbourliness, and co-operation" with Spain. The blow to the ties, which have proved mutually beneficial for both countries, came after Spain decided to shift its position on the Western Sahara dispute. It was in 2002 that Madrid and Algiers had signed a deal to promote dialogue and co-operation on political, economic, financial, education and defence issues.*

### **What is the Western Sahara dispute?**

- The dispute started with colonisation of the region by Spain in 1884.
- When Spain announced its withdrawal from Western Sahara in 1975, the region descended into a conflict between Mauritania, Morocco and the Polisario Front – with all three trying to control the region.
- The Polisario Front declared the establishment of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Western Sahara on the very day Spain left.
- However, the SADR did not get Western recognition despite going on to become a member of the African Union.
- The matter then came up before the International Court of Justice in 1975 itself, and the court decided neither Morocco nor Mauritania could claim sovereignty over Western Sahara.
- The ICJ called for decolonization of the region. Notwithstanding the ICJ's decision, the Moroccan Sultan began the "Green March" towards Western Sahara causing an influx of thousands of Moroccans in the region.
- The Polisario Front kept fighting both Morocco and Mauritania. The Front signed a ceasefire with Mauritania in 1979. The fighting with Morocco continued and finally ended when both Morocco and the Polisario Front agreed to a UN-proposed peace deal.
- Post this 1991 Agreement, Morocco controls about 80 per cent of the Western Sahara, with the Polisario Front-led SADR operating primarily from the eastern flank of the region and from refugee camps in Algeria.
- In 2007, the Moroccan government proposed limited autonomy under which the Sahrawis would be free to run their government, but under the shadow of overarching Moroccan sovereignty. The Polisario Front rejected it arguing that Morocco would continue to control key areas related to phosphate reserves and fisheries, defence, and foreign affairs.
- The Front continues to push for complete independence with support from Algeria.

### **How has Spain changed its stance and why?**

- Spain's official position for years has been to back a UN-sponsored referendum to settle the region's decolonization.
- A recent statement by Morocco's royal palace, however, said: "Spain considers the autonomy initiative presented by Morocco in 2007 as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for resolving the dispute."
- The Spanish Foreign Ministry confirmed the Moroccan announcement.
- In the run up to this, the relationship between the two countries had hit a historic low after it was revealed that Brahim Ghali, the leader of the Polisario Front, was admitted to a hospital in Spain for Covid-19 treatment in 2021.
- He had after a month's treatment moved to Algeria to continue his recovery.
- But to pressurise Spain amid this diplomatic row, Morocco had reduced border controls to the Spanish city of Ceuta on the coast of North Africa causing about 10,000 immigrants to enter the country.
- The shift in Spain's stance is a likely bid to end for good its long-running dispute with Morocco.

### **What does Spain's new stance mean for the region?**

- Given Spain's standing as a former colonial power, the country has always been expected to maintain a semblance of neutrality on the matter.
- However, Spain siding with Morocco publicly and expressing support for limited autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty has disrupted the delicate balance of power in the region.
- Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has stated that Spain's repositioning was "unjustifiable" and was "contributing directly to the degradation of the situation".



- Algeria has been a committed supporter of the Polisario Front, after it recognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic in 1976. Over 1.7 lakh Sahrawi refugees live in camps in Algeria's Tindouf province after fleeing Moroccan violence.

## **Indian interests at the WTO Ministerial Conference**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** On June 17, member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) wrapped up the Ministerial Conference's twelfth outing (MC12) securing agreements on relaxing patent regulations to achieve global vaccine equity; ensuring food security, according subsidies to the fisheries sector and continuing moratoriums relevant to e-commerce, among others. Together they constitute what WTO's Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala referred to as the "Geneva Package." India saw some successes at the MC12 with respect to the above mentioned sectors.

### **What is the WTO's Ministerial Conference?**

- The MC is at the very top of WTO's organisational chart. It meets once every two years and can take decisions on all matters under any multilateral trade agreement.
- Unlike other organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund or World Bank, WTO does not delegate power to a board of directors or an organisational chief.
- All decisions at the WTO are made collectively and through consensus among member countries at varied councils and committees. This year's conference took place in Geneva, Switzerland.

### **What were the debates around agriculture at the MC?**

- The agreements on the subject are of particular significance to India. Referring to its status as a significant contributor to the World Food Programme (WFP), India had earlier stated that it had never imposed export restrictions for procurement under the programme.
- It put forth that a blanket exemption could constrain its work in ensuring food security back home. In such a situation, it would have to keep its WFP commitments irrespective of its domestic needs.
- Negotiators agreed that member countries would not impose export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for humanitarian purposes of the WFP.
- The decision would however not prevent member countries from adopting measures for ensuring domestic food security.
- Negotiators could not reach agreements on issues such as permissible public stockholding threshold for domestic food security, domestic support to agriculture, cotton, and market access.
- The central premise of the agreements was to ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of food to those in need, especially in humanitarian emergencies.
- It encouraged member countries with available surplus to release them on international markets in compliance with WTO regulations.
- Moreover, it instituted a work programme to come up with measures to help LDCs (least-developed countries) and NFIDCs (Net Food Importing Developing Countries) enhance their domestic food security and bolster agricultural production.

### **What about fisheries related agreements?**

- India successfully managed to carve out an agreement on eliminating subsidies to those engaged in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
- The only exception for continuing subsidies for overfished stock is when they are deemed essential to rebuild them to a biologically sustainable level.





- Overfishing refers to exploiting fishes at a pace faster than they could replenish themselves — currently standing at 34% as per the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- Declining fish stocks threaten to worsen poverty and endanger communities that rely on aquatic creatures for their livelihood and food security.
- Further, the agreements hold that there would be no limitation on subsidies granted or maintained by developing or least-developed countries for fishing within their exclusive economic zones (EEZ).

#### **Have the current moratoriums on electronic transmissions been extended?**

- Member countries agreed to extend the current moratorium on not imposing customs duties on electronic transmission (ET) until MC13 — scheduled to take place in December 2023.
- 105 countries which includes the U.S. , the U.K., Australia, China and Japan among others , had sought an extension of the moratorium, with India and South Africa being in opposition.
- Broadly, ETs consist of online deliveries such as music, e-books, films, software and video games. They differ from other cross-border e-commerce since they are ordered online but not delivered physically.
- Proponents had put forth that the moratorium would help maintain certainty and predictability for businesses and consumers particularly in the context of the pandemic.
- On the other hand, India and South Africa, citing data from the UN Conference on Trade and Development (which calculates the amount of printed matter, music and video downloads, software and video games), submitted that extending duty-free market access due to the moratorium resulted in a loss of \$10 billion per annum globally — 95% of which was borne by developing countries.
- Additionally, they had also sought more clarity on what constitutes electronic transmission.
- Customs duties have been traditionally used to avert an undesired surge in imports, allowing nascent domestic industries to remain competitive.
- Developing countries would need to import sizeable equipment and services for upscaling their digital capabilities. Customs duties provide the necessary capital infusion for capacity building and in turn, attempt to address the digital divide — particularly high in low-income and developing countries, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is in this context that India and South Africa had sought to preserve policy space for the digital advancement of developing countries by letting them generate more revenues from customs and thereby facilitate more investment.

#### **What were the discussions on patent relaxations?**

- Member countries agreed on authorising the use of the subject matter of a patent for producing COVID-19 vaccines by a member country, without the consent of the rights holder.
- Further, it asks member countries to waive requirements, including export restrictions, set forth by WTO regulations to supply domestic markets and member countries with any number of vaccines.
- The agreement, however, comes too little, too late for economically poorer countries.
- Several LDCs have suffered in their efforts to combat the now nearly three-year-old pandemic, owing to factors such as a stressed balance of payments situation , different levels of development, financial capabilities and varying degrees of import dependence on those products.
- Within the next six months, members are expected to decide on increasing the scope of the agreement to cover the production and supply of COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics as well.

#### **Dutch disease**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )



**Context:** While the idea was first proposed by economists Peter Neary and Max Corden in 1982, the term 'Dutch disease' was first coined by The Economist in 1977 to describe the decline of the manufacturing industry in the Netherlands.

### **The origin of the term**

- In the 1960s, the Netherlands discovered gas reserves in the North Sea.
- The subsequent export of oil and the appreciation of the Dutch currency made Dutch exports of all non-oil products less competitive on the world market.
- Unemployment rose from 1.1% to 5.1% and capital investment in the country dropped. Following this, over the years, the country witnessed a downfall in the industrial sector.
- According to a recent research paper titled "40 years of Dutch Disease literature: lessons for developing countries", by Edouard Mien and Michael Goujon, the framework of the model of the phenomenon is based on three sectors: energy (traditionally oil, gas or mining resources), tradeables, and non-tradeables of a small economy. As labour and capital are immobile internationally, the Dutch disease is a "purely domestic phenomenon" which cannot be "exported."
- The model is concentrated on the spending and resource-movement effects. That is, exports of energy generate additional revenue for the factory owner and the government (through taxes), hence increasing the demand for tradeable and non-tradeable products in the country.
- The boom in the energy sector forces labour to move out of trade and service sectors, creating a shortage of manpower in these two sectors.
- This reduces the output in the trade and service sector due to the gap between supply and demand. At the end, output in the trade sector declines and the service sector stagnates, resulting in the downfall of the economy in the long-run.
- However, there are theories that contradict this model.
- For instance, Fredrick van der Pleog in 2011 explained that if the trade or manufacturing sector is more capital-intensive than the service sector, then the boom in the energy sector will be shifted to the trade sector resulting in an absolute fall in the service sector.

### **How to combat the Dutch disease**

- First, the role of fiscal policy can prevent the adverse effects of Dutch disease. According to the researchers, the role of fiscal policy is important to control the boom following the discovery of natural resources. Rising income due to the export of natural resources should be adjusted with cautious spending on public welfare. The study focusses on the efficient use of revenues coming from taxation to compensate for the adverse effects of the Dutch disease.
- The second important move is to promote spending policies. Public spending such as concentrating on imports of tradeables rather than non-tradeables would help slow the impact of the Dutch disease. Private spending in order to improve the productivity of private firms would also help reduce the impact.
- Third is monetary policy. The choice of an appropriate monetary policy is important for macroeconomic management in commodity-exporting countries. With the discovery of natural resources, the country sees a huge inflow of money, especially foreign currency. The export of natural resources tends to affect the equilibrium in the money and exchange rate markets. The Dutch disease can be prevented if the central bank raises the banking system reserve's requirement, which decreases domestic credit.

### **What is a Black swan event**

(Source: [Indian Express](#) )

**Context:** A study by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has spoken about the possibility of **capital outflows to the tune of \$100 billion** (around Rs 7,80,000 crore) from India in case of a major global risk scenario or a “black swan” event.

### **What is a ‘black swan’ event?**

- A black swan is a rare, unpredictable event that comes as a surprise and has a significant impact on society or the world.
- These events are said to have three distinguishing characteristics – they are extremely rare and outside the realm of regular expectations; they have a severe impact after they hit; and they seem probable in hindsight when plausible explanations appear.

### **When did the term originate?**

- The black swan theory was put forward by author and investor Nassim Nicholas Taleb in 2001, and later popularised in his 2007 book – The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable.
- The term itself is linked to the discovery of black swans. Europeans believed all swans to be white until 1697, when a Dutch explorer spotted the first black swan in Australia.
- The metaphor ‘black swan event’ is derived from this unprecedented spotting from the 17th century, and how it upended the West’s understanding of swans.

### **When have such events occurred in the past?**

- Interestingly, Taleb’s book predated the 2008 global financial crisis – a black swan event triggered by a sudden crash in the booming housing market in the US.
- The fall of the Soviet Union, the terrorist attack in the US on September 11, 2001, also fall in the same category.

# Mains

## GS I

### The choice is narrowing the circle or widening it

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *Recent happenings within the country and their reactions in lands far and near tend to pose the problem. The sequencing is relevant and must not be interchanged. The reactions beyond our shores were not autonomous and were induced by what was said to audiences at home, by whom it was said, and why it became critical and induced reactions, immediate and over a passage of time.*

#### Neighbourhood impact

- One aspect of the matter, understandably played up in the domestic media, is the reaction in the Gulf Cooperation Council and Persian Gulf countries with whom India has extensive and diverse political and commercial relations.
- These also provide gainful employment to many million Indian nationals whose remittances are an important source of foreign exchange remittances, in turn sustaining millions of households.
- Each of these has been quantified. In strategic terms, the region is India's extended neighbourhood; so is the case with Malaysia and Indonesia and Brunei in Southeast Asia.
- It is evident that the malaise (while being domestic in its origin) has global dimensions.
- Its external manifestations are aggravated by modern means of communication. By the same logic, the correctives have to emanate in the context of domestic perceptions and practices.

#### An emerging disquiet

- Muslims are our largest religious minority, constituting 14.3% of the total population and numbering over 200 million. If considered along with the populations in Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, they constitute the largest Muslim group anywhere in the world.
- They are spread all over the country and are well integrated, but of late, signs of disquiet have been evident in all segments of the community.
- The reason for this are the remarks uttered in media debates by two spokespersons of the ruling party reflecting on the personality of the Prophet.
- After a lapse of over a week of deafening silence, one of these persons was suspended and the membership of the second dispensed with. Both actions are viewed as inadequate by the community. No reaction has emanated from senior levels of government.
- The silence of institutional bodies such as the National Human Rights Commission of India and of the National Commission for Minorities is intriguing; so is the apparent reticence of the judiciary.

#### Furtherance of hate

- The operative constitutional principle in social behaviour should be the promotion of equality and fraternity. In actual practice it is the contrary; this results in furtherance of hate by denigration. In an earlier period, this used to focus principally on regional types and linguistic expressions.
- This was found to be troublesome since retaliation in kind was often quick and in equal measure. The alternative was to denigrate faiths or socio-religious practices in competitive one-upmanship.
- An easy target in this was the numerous but socially and economically weaker segments that could even be mocked in terms of assumed backwardness.



- And, since most of our fellow citizens have reverence for traditional beliefs, ‘experts’ were soon discovered for these target areas.
- The public’s addiction to popular television and its concocted levels of debate (premised on a preference for the brash and the articulate) invariably produces the desired results sought in some sections.

### **Indic versus non-Indic**

- A categorising segment of recent origin is the differentiation between Indic and non-Indic. This, put together with the existential diversity of faiths, seeks to divide fellow citizens between those who pursue Indic faiths assumed to be of Indian origin and those who subscribe to Christianity and Islam allegedly of external import.
- The argument is premised on a certain reading of Indian history and the sociological issue is sought to be premised on what constitutes Indianness, ignoring that our society is ‘a mosaic in which primordial cleavages both intersect and intermix with contemporary socio-economic segments’.
- This ideological effort in a quest of ‘purifying exclusiveness’ is premised on our reading of history. A relevant question is whose history — of India defined in the period of British rule, or of India traditionally defined as Bharat? The latter would include many segments of southern Asia covered today by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries.
- Furthermore, and in terms of what is sought to be presented as our history would also include parts of Afghanistan and even of Iran since the latter was depicted by M.S. Golwalkar as ‘nothing but the base of Aryabhumi’.
- One consequence of this would be to categorise Ghazni, Khilji, Lodi, etc. not as foreign invaders but as domestic brigands who committed acts of loot and plunder and even succeeded in establishing kingdoms.
- Nor can the landmass of Bharat be described in terms of faith alone since there was a period of several centuries when Buddhism was the dominant religion.
- Furthermore, in the centuries when the rulers were Muslims, no effort seems to have been made to carry out mass conversions; on the contrary, the influence of Sufi saints was more pervasive.
- The Indian reality of migrating groups seeking greener pastures since times immemorial qualifies our nomenclature of a ‘civilisational state’ and is better depicted in Raghupati Rai Firaq’s couplet: Sar zamin-e-hind par aqwam-e-alam ke Firaq/Qafile baste gae hindostan banta gaya (Caravans from nations of the world kept coming and contributed to the formation of Hindostan).
- Linguistically, India has also been called ‘a land of linguistic minorities’. The Linguistic Survey of India and the research of Ganesh Devy bring forth the regional diversity of living languages.
- This lends credence to outbursts against linguistic homogeneity that is attempted periodically in the guise of national unity.
- In multiple senses, our national choice thus lies in an ever-widening circle and in resisting all attempts, however well meaning, in abridging it.
- India is and must remain diverse and inclusive, and continue to build itself on the principles inscribed in the Preamble.



## GS II

### Resurrecting a dead law

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Section 66A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which the Supreme Court had declared unconstitutional in 2015 in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* for having a “chilling effect on free speech”, is back in the news. As part of the ongoing negotiations at the United Nations for a proposed international treaty on combating cybercrime, India made a formal submission for criminalising “offensive messages”. The language in the submission is similar to what was used in Section 66A. Many contend that this amounts to a ‘backdoor’ attempt at legislation — that is, if India’s submission becomes part of the proposed treaty, it would result in Section 66A springing back to life and being used by the state to curb free speech once again. However, it is not so simple.

#### **Is international treaty binding?**

- First, international treaty negotiations are complex. It is premature to believe that India’s suggestion of criminalising “offensive messages” will be readily accepted. The U.K. and many countries in the European Union have reportedly already contested India’s submission because they see this as an undue impediment to the freedom of speech.
- But suppose we assume that India’s proposal is accepted, would that mean that the provision will have a direct effect on the Indian legal system?
- Arguably, India is a dualist state. Therefore, international law does not become a part of the domestic legal system unless it is specifically transformed into domestic law by Parliament, which will be required to enact legislation to implement the international law.
- This is different from the theory of monism, wherein international law is automatically incorporated into the domestic legal system of the country even without Parliament enacting an enabling legislation.
- However, over the years, the Supreme Court of India has moved away from this traditional dualist approach towards monism.
- In cases such as *Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India* (2014), and *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2018), the court followed an approach of judicial incorporation by reading international law into domestic law in the absence of any specific prohibition in municipal law.
- In other words, the emerging principle is that courts will respect international law unless it can be shown that it is inconsistent with municipal law.
- If we do get an international treaty combating cybercrime with a provision similar to Section 66A, the Indian courts will not read this provision as part of domestic law because of the ratio in the *Shreya Singhal* case.
- It will be a classic case of an international law being in conflict with domestic law. Thus, the Indian courts will give primacy to the domestic law, not the international treaty provision criminalising “offensive speech”.

#### **Transforming international treaty**

- However, things may become convoluted if Parliament enacts legislation or amends existing legislation to implement the international treaty that criminalises “offensive messages”.
- The government may get a law passed in Parliament using Article 253 of the Constitution, which states that Parliament has the “power to make any law for the whole or any part of the territory of India for implementing any treaty, agreement or convention”, and place a provision similar to Section 66A back

on the statute book. Legally, such a law can be justified as a necessary action to comply with India's international law obligations.

- It will then give the executive the power to book people for alleged “offensive messages” as was the practice earlier.
- But what if the constitutionality of the re-introduced version of Section 66A is challenged? The courts will then examine the constitutionality of the reintroduced version of Section 66A in light of the fact that it was enacted to comply with India's international law obligations.
- But the constitutional court will still strike down the re-introduced version of Section 66A because the grounds on which this law was pronounced unconstitutional will still be valid in light of the fundamental right to free speech.
- In other words, just because Parliament enacts a law to give effect to an international treaty obligation, that does not mean that the law so enacted will not need to meet the test of constitutionality.
- Therefore, the possibility of Section 66A coming back on the statute book is bleak unless a bigger Supreme Court bench overrules Shreya Singhal.
- But this issue is not just about legal technicalities. The alarming point is that the Indian government proposed the inclusion of a provision in an international treaty which was struck down by its own apex court for breaching fundamental rights.
- This mindset does not augur well for constitutionally protected fundamental freedoms in India.

## GS III

### The problems plaguing thermal power generators

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** On June 10, India's power demand touched a record high of 211 MW even as the coal shortage continued with coal stocks available only for eight days. In the last two months, as temperatures soared and the economy recovered, the power demand breached the 200 MW level on several occasions. But the coal stock position at power plants remained worrisome. Consequently, the Ministry of Power sprang into action. To bridge the gap between shortage in domestic supply and increasing demand, power-generating companies or 'gencos' were directed to use imported coal for 10% of their requirement, failing which their domestic supplies would be cut.

#### How did India get here?

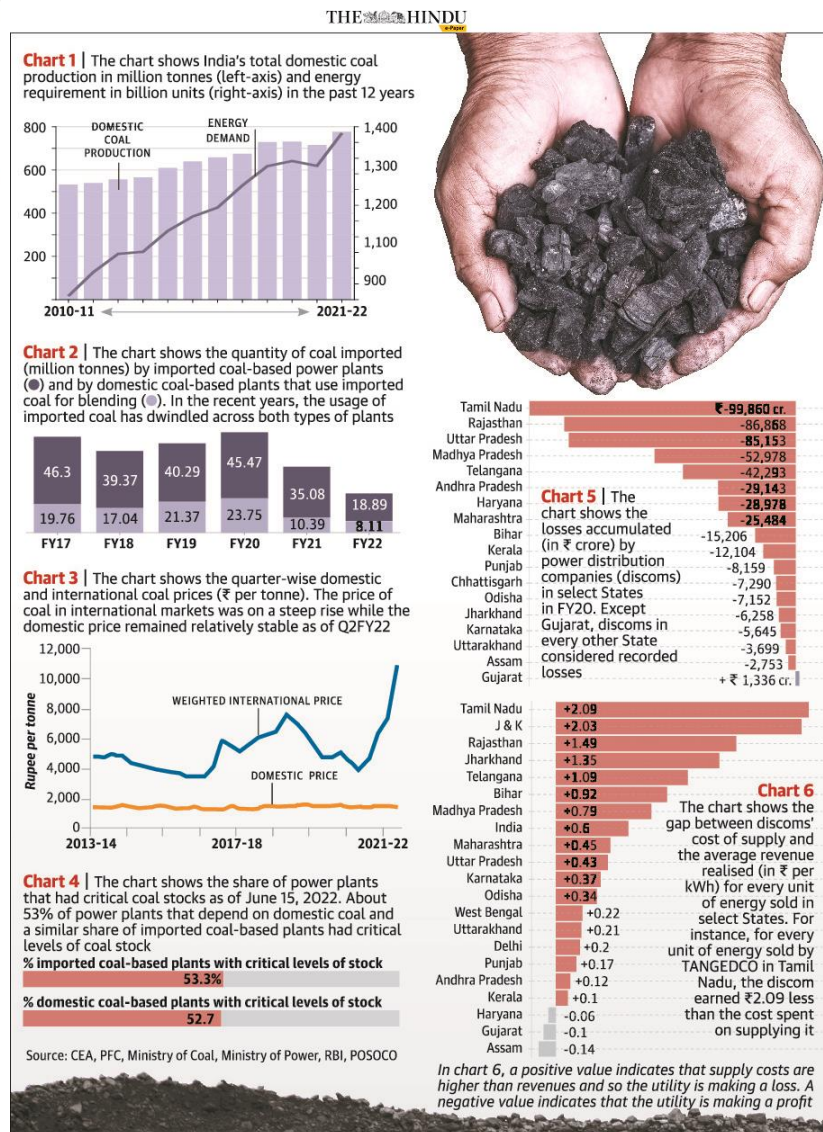
- India is the second largest producer of coal, with reserves that could last up to 100 years. Despite that, year after year, the shortage of coal supplies continues to be an issue.
- Why does India have a recurring power crisis? As seen in chart 1, the domestic production of coal stagnated between FY18 and FY21, but revived in FY22. The power demand too surged owing to economic recovery and hotter weather conditions.
- In a press release published on May 27, the Ministry of Power noted that “despite efforts to increase the supply of domestic coal, there is still a gap between the requirement of coal and the supply of coal.”
- Until FY20, domestic sources contributed to about 90% of the power sector's coal receipts; the remaining was filled by imports.
- But by FY22, the reliance on imports dwindled to 3.8% which built pressure on domestic supplies. As chart 2 shows, the coal imported by power plants declined to 27 MT in FY22 from 66.06 MT in FY17.
- Coal imported for blending purposes by power plants that run on indigenous coal declined to 8 MT in the last financial year, from 19.7 MT in FY17. Past data show that importing coal for blending has always seen few takers.
- A bulk of imports was made by power plants designed for imported coal. Notably, their share of imports too saw a decline of 60% in FY22 since FY17. Out of 15 such import-based power plants in India, five had little or no coal stock as of June 15.
- This dip in imports can be attributed to the skyrocketing prices of coal in the international markets (chart 3). The price of imported coal is nearly 5-6 times higher than domestic supply. It is in this scenario that the Power Ministry asked the gencos to import coal.
- However, States are wary of using imported coal as it would raise the cost of power substantially.
- The shortfall in domestic supplies and the rising cost of imports have put power plants in a precarious situation (chart 4).
- About 79 of the 150 plants that depend on domestic coal had critical stocks (<25% of the required stock) as of June 15. Eight import-based coal plants were also at critical levels.

#### Perennial bottlenecks

- The use of imported coal will also push up the price of power supply to the power distribution companies or 'Discoms,' often dubbed as the weakest link in the power sector chain. Discoms owe long-standing dues to the tune of ₹1.16 lakh crore to the gencos.
- Delays in payments by discoms create a working capital crunch for generating companies which in turn inhibits them from procuring an adequate quantity of coal.



- According to the 2019-20 report by the Power Finance Corporation, discoms had accumulated losses up to ₹5.07 lakh crore and were therefore unable to pay generators on time. Discoms in Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are the most financially stressed (see chart 5).
- Discoms are bleeding because the revenue they generate is much lower than their costs. This is evident from the gap between the average cost of supply and average revenue realised (see chart 6).
- Tamil Nadu, Jammu and Kashmir, and Rajasthan have the widest gap between revenues and expenses of discoms.
- Apart from providing power at cheaper rates, some State governments do not revise tariffs periodically. Further, the delay in getting compensation from the government also compounds the woes of cash-strapped discoms.



## Pakistan's economic muddling and the IMF challenge

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com) )





**Context:** *The Pakistani rupee (PKR) has been falling continuously; from 150 in April 2021 to 213 against the dollar on 21 June, an all-time low. Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have been depleting during the last one year. According to State Bank of Pakistan data, from \$17.2 billion in June 2021, the net reserves with the SBP have come down to \$8.9 billion in June 2022.*

#### **Details:**

- The new government has already increased the fuel price — in late May and early June. Besides, the new budget has proposed resuming the petroleum development levy.
- This would mean increased oil and electricity prices, which has the potential to bring people to the streets.
- Earlier this month, citing “heightened external vulnerability risk” and the “ability to secure additional external financing,” the rating agency Moody’s downgraded Pakistan’s outlook to negative.
- The government-International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks have remained complicated.

#### **Will the IMF bail out Pakistan?**

- The immediate future of Pakistan’s economy would depend on IMF resuming its support. Despite an intense discussion between the two, there has not been a breakthrough until now. Pakistan’s relationship with the IMF has remained complicated.
- Though Islamabad has been negotiating with the IMF repeatedly, there has been an economic nationalism, mostly jingoistic, against approaching the IMF in recent years.
- Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister made statements and fuelled the sentiments against the IMF.
- After becoming the PM in 2018, he preferred approaching friendly countries (China and Saudi Arabia) and avoiding the IMF.
- The new government is now back to the IMF; it expects the IMF to release the payments, expand the support programme, and give a longer rope to repay.
- The IMF is willing to support Pakistan but has some conditions regarding macroeconomic reforms. This was highlighted in the IMF statement after the last meeting in May 2022.
- The IMF wants Pakistan “to address high inflation and the elevated fiscal and current account deficits, while ensuring adequate protection for the most vulnerable.”
- The IMF would also not want any deviations from what has been agreed to, especially concerning fuel and power subsidies. Besides, the IMF wants Pakistan to be transparent about its debt situation, including what Islamabad owes to China, as a part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- Subsidies are politically sensitive; with elections ahead, it would not be an easy decision. The new budget also has proposed resuming the petroleum tax levy. With the above, the new government expects that the IMF will consider resuming its package.
- The IMF may agree to support after a few more promises by the government. But the relief may be less than what Pakistan would hope for. Without macroeconomic reforms, the IMF is less likely to expand its support programme, or provide a longer rope to Pakistan, that Islamabad wants.

#### **Will Pakistan pursue macroeconomic reforms?**

- This has been a million-dollar question. Economists within Pakistan and elsewhere have been arguing for macroeconomic reforms, including the independence of financial institutions.
- It is a political question that the successive governments led by the Pakistan Peoples Party (2008-13), Pakistan Muslim League-N (2013-18) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (2018-22) were unwilling to address. Instead, all governments continued to borrow from global institutions and friendly countries.
- The budgets have remained populist; the economic governance declined due to corruption, lack of financial institutions’ independence, and the export decline. The subsidies in the energy sector — fuel, oil and electricity — remain high.



- With the present government led by the PML-N and PPP combine facing elections, they are less likely to take any further bold decisions. Successive governments, especially the previous one, would instead look for external bailouts and support from “friendly” countries.

#### **Will “friendly countries” support Pakistan without preconditions?**

- Saudi Arabia and China have been supporting Pakistan. Immediately after becoming the Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif visited Saudi Arabia to secure a loan. In early May 2022, Riyadh agreed to provide \$8 billion; in December 2021, Imran Khan secured a \$3 billion support.
- A similar understanding was reached in October 2021. However, Riyadh’s support was not unconditional.
- An editorial in Dawn in November 2021 highlighted that Riyadh can ask Pakistan “to return the money at any time if the two countries have divergent views regarding their relationship or ties with a third country, or some other issue.”
- China has been another significant source for Pakistan. Islamabad has been regularly seeking loans from China within and outside the CPEC projects. While the CPEC projects kept expanding and was projected as a panacea for Pakistan’s economic problems, there are many questions over the hidden costs.
- Pakistan also had to raise the security for the CPEC projects after a series of militant attacks. Pakistan has created a Special Security Division to provide security exclusively for the CPEC projects, increasing the cost further.
- A larger question is whether Pakistan would divert external aid to pay its debts to China? This has been one of the questions raised by the IMF, way back in 2018, and remains relevant even today.
- During the latest Financial Action Task Force (FATF) meeting, there was an understanding that Pakistan has met its requirement. The FATF has agreed to explore the possibilities of removing Pakistan from the grey list.
- However, when Pakistan was on the grey list, the IMF had been holding talks with Islamabad. The big two — China and Saudi Arabia — were not constrained by Pakistan’s listing in the FATF. So, the relaxation is less likely to open gates for big investments.

#### **Will Pakistan go the Sri Lankan way?**

- The situation was similar in Sri Lanka — the falling value of rupee, declining foreign exchange reserves, differences with the IMF, and rising fuel prices.
- All of them led to public protests in Sri Lanka against the government. The economic and energy crises in Pakistan have not snowballed into a political storm as it had happened in Sri Lanka during April-May. Will there be one?
- Politically, unlike in Sri Lanka, there is a coalition at the federal level; the main partners — the PML-N and the PPP — have a strong presence and control over the two big provinces, Punjab and Sindh.
- To conclude, Pakistan’s economic and energy situation is serious and demands bold decisions. The situation will worsen in the short term before it gets better, but this has been Pakistan’s history in the last 75 years.
- With a relief from the IMF, after a protracted negotiation, a few band aids, and the U.S. intervention, Islamabad may muddle through this time as well, until the next crisis.

#### **At the centre of job creation**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** With his announcement that 10 lakh government jobs will be provided over the next 18 months on a “mission mode”, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent four messages. One, the creation of employment is indeed a problem and can no longer be hidden from the public discourse. Two, the private sector, especially



*modern sectors such as the service and manufacturing sectors, which are dominated by multinational companies, have not created many jobs. Even if the Information Technology sector or the modern gig economy have created jobs, these are either very high-skilled jobs or low-skilled ones. Three, the government in the Nehruvian scheme of development occupied an important place in the labour market. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, whose ideology is different and which often attacks the Nehruvian model, is now ironically forced to step in as persistently rising inflation, unemployment and underemployment threaten to politically affect it. And four, the NDA government has blown the 2024 general election bugle.*

### **Employment trends**

- A populist announcement made by any government needs to be critically studied. Let's look at some employment data.
- First, the last year for which we have information on employment in the organised sector from the Directorate General of Employment and Training is 2012. The statistics were provided under the employment market information programme.
- The NDA government is at present relying on the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation/National Pension System/Employees' State Insurance Scheme registrations and exits as indicators of the formal labour market. This could be misleading as companies may be increasing registrations to cross the threshold to become eligible to fall under any of these.
- Hence, this might be more a case of formalisation rather than employment generation. Second, media reports show that more than 85% of those aspiring for those 10 lakh jobs could be consumed by existing vacancies in Central government departments (8,72,243).
- In that sense, the pronouncement possibly does not indicate 10 lakh new jobs. Third, 241 central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) have been shedding jobs in recent years — jobs declined from 10.84 lakh in 2017-18 to 10.71 lakh in 2018-19 and to 9.22 lakh in 2019-20. Mr. Modi did not speak of employment creation by the CPSEs though this downward trend is a cause for concern.
- The 10 lakh jobs creation also needs to be seen in the context of the labour market. Even though the labour force and workforce participation rates have increased marginally, there is a decline in the quality of jobs, viz. there is a rise in the unpaid segment of the self-employed and a rise in the share of the agricultural sector in total employment over the last three Periodic Labour Force Surveys (43% to 47%).
- This is a historical retrogression.
- This huge mass of workers contributes, thanks to low productivity, to about one-sixth of our national income, which does not augur well for a healthy economy. On the other hand, the manufacturing sector's share in national income has declined in 2020-21 (10.9%) compared to that in 2018-19 (12.1%).
- Again, even though the aggregate usual status unemployment rate has slightly declined by a few percentage points (4.8% in 2019-20 to 4.6% in 2020-21), the current daily status unemployment figure (internationally used statistic) is at 7.5% for all persons in 2020-21.
- The educated unemployment rate (secondary school and above) in general and youth unemployment (15-29 years) in particular in the urban areas have very marginally fallen from 2019-20 to 2020-21, but they still high enough to cause concern (in double digits).
- Employment shares in the informal enterprises have increased — for men (71% to 75%), women (55% to 57%) and all persons (68% to 71%) from 2017-18 to 2020-21.
- Even though the share of regular salaried workers who did not have a formal employment contract, paid leave and eligibility for any form social security have declined for both genders, the level is still high. The government could score a point or two by showing that there is a declining tendency in several labour market variables.
- But an honest government would concede that the levels of several variables remained discomfotingly high even after three decades of economic reforms.

### **Role of private sector**

- Even as the Nehruvian model of development is attacked in the current dominant political discourse, we cannot avoid placing the government at the centre of employment creation beyond a certain point.
- The private sector creates jobs in response to market forces and while taking into consideration radically altering technological developments.
- We cannot rely on the projections about employment generation by the gig economy. They are estimates computed by a trade body or by consulting agencies which have vested interests. As they are political economy agents influencing government policies, their predictions need to be read with many pinches of salt.
- The job recovery stories, which are published from time to time in the pink press, based on employment service providers such as Monster Employment Index, need to be seen in the context of a highly job-impooverished economy such as ours.
- Projects in the modern private sector consume a lot of capital to generate very few jobs.
- For instance, recently, there was a report that the Adani Group has invested ₹70,000 crore (or ₹700 million) in Uttar Pradesh to create merely 30,000 jobs. Foreign Direct Investment, which at any rate is highly capital-intensive, goes mostly into the non-manufacturing sectors.

### **Quantity and quality of jobs**

- Employment is not merely about numbers and growth figures. We need to concentrate on enabling the creation of decent work and a sustainable labour market to which India is committed as a member of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization.
- Wittingly or otherwise, the government's role in employment generation has entered into popular discourse and discussions on policy formation.
- While even one job is a miracle, we need millions. The government should play a significant role soon. A lean and mean government, which is often prescribed by the neoliberal project, often results in governance deficit.
- The government should re-establish its role as the principal employment generator through jobs in its ministries and CPSEs and through assured employment generation programmes like MGNREGA.

### **Recognising the 'compulsory' woman worker**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** *The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reported that the labour participation rate of rural women was 9.92% in March 2022 compared to 67.24% for men. This is a cause for concern.*

#### **Context:**

- According to CMIE, millions who left the labour market stopped looking for employment “possibly [because they were] too disappointed with their failure to get a job and under the belief that there were no jobs available”.
- In countries like the U.S., Canada and Australia, such workers who are willing to work but give up searching for work for various reasons are called ‘discouraged workers’ and they are included in the unemployed category.
- This phenomenon, not captured in India by any official labour force surveys, is wrongly described as women “dropping out” or “leaving the labour market” giving the impression that this was a choice made by them, whereas, actually, women are pushed out of employment.
- The CMIE provides valuable inputs for urgently required government intervention in rural India.



- Ground-level realities are worse than what the CMIE suggests and what the government denies. Women who belong to landless households or with meagre landholdings cannot afford the luxury of being “discouraged.” These are the “compulsory” workers.

### **The depths of distress**

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) sites are probably the best places to understand the compulsions of millions of women to work.
- One particular project in Kalaburagi district focuses on creating more than 200 percolation ponds, which are designed to address the declining levels of ground water and to help recharge wells. This project provides a few workdays to an estimated 300 workers from four villages.
- The soil is hard and dry and the project stretches over several kilometres. The women, who outnumber the men, work in women-only pairs. They dig and lift the mud.
- In the searing heat, they have to dig a 10X10X1 tank in a day. An assistant to the officer-in-charge estimated that because the soil is hard and stony, this would mean digging and lifting about 3,000 kg of mud a day.
- Since most of these women are unable to complete this task, they do not get the piece rate of ₹309; they get only ₹280 to ₹285. There was no crèche at the site. There was no water, so women took turns to walk a kilometre to a water source to fill their two-litre bottles. They said their limbs ached. Many said they felt dizzy.
- But despite the difficult conditions, every worker on the site complained about getting only about 40 days of work in a year. They wanted more as they regard MGNREGA work as their savior. The fact that they want to do more of this punishing work reveals the depths of the distress of poor rural households.
- During the agricultural season, all the women worked on the lands of others, earning around the same as on the MGNREGA site. But the mechanisation of agricultural operations has drastically decreased workdays to less than three months a year. Many women therefore become part-time construction workers.
- They are hired by a network of “mistries” working for contractors. They migrate to construction sites for a few months, with their families or with other women from the village. Not one of them I had met had registered as a construction worker.
- They were therefore ineligible for any legal benefits accruing to them from the Construction Workers’ Welfare Board. At a construction site, each of them carried a minimum of 1,000 bricks a day, weighing two kilos each, or other heavy construction material, often climbing to the first or second floor with this load. They were being paid ₹300 a day, less than the men.
- When manual or construction work is unavailable, the women find other work. Some of them make twig baskets and brooms. They walk from village to village, often 25 km a day, to sell the baskets. It takes two days to make 10 baskets for which they make ₹10 per basket.
- Some women provide services such as cleaning or do odd jobs for landholding families for an average of three or four days a month. Some do tailoring work.
- They also do their own housework. So, going by the anecdotal evidence of women at a MGNREGA site, an individual woman in the course of a year is a MGNREGA worker, an agricultural worker, a construction worker, a migrant worker, a self-employed street vendor, a tailor, an odd job domestic worker, and a home-maker doing multiple domestic chores.
- The ‘compulsory’ woman worker’s work never ends. Siddhama, a 45-year-old mother of four from Yadgiri district, stretched out her arms and said: “My arms that labour... this is the property I have, to earn money for my family to survive. When I work, they eat.”
- The high prices of essential commodities have led to a huge cut in women’s consumption of vegetables and pulses. To prove their point, some of the women at the worksite brought out their lunch boxes, which contained rice or rotis and a chilli chutney.
- Two sisters, Sheelawati and Chandamma, said, “We drink water after having the chilli chutney. Then we don’t feel hungry.” Others nodded in agreement. They said that the 10 kg of grain per head from the



Central and State governments' free foodgrains programme was of great help and were afraid it would end.

- The deprivation of nourishment that women face due to high prices and low incomes is another dimension of the 'compulsory' woman worker's life.

### Providing minimum wage

- Almost every woman spoke of being trapped in debt. What the women earn from multiple tasks for which there are no fixed piece rates is in no way equal to the amount of labour they do. The dismantling of labour laws in urban areas has weakened labour departments.
- Implementation of minimum wage in rural India is conceivable only with strong movements of agricultural workers' unions.
- While there should be strict implementation of minimum wages with piece rates fixed for different types of women's labour, it is unfair that landless manual labourers in rural India are denied the pitiful government annual cash transfer of ₹6,000 given to land-owning farmers.
- While rural labourers should also be entitled to a similar cash transfer, the schedule of rates for women at MGNREGA projects based on impossibly high productivity rates must be lowered and the work sites made more worker-friendly.
- With the deep penetration of capitalist processes in rural India, there is a crisis of livelihood options. Poor women adopt various strategies to deal with it. To make a correct analysis of this crisis requires a sensitive lens.
- The invisibility of women's work can be addressed through time use surveys. The village-level time use surveys done by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies, for instance, revealed the extent of women's work.
- In fact, widespread surveys of poor rural women and how they spend their time are an urgent necessity.
- The 'compulsory' woman worker must be recognised and protected by laws and policies that address her issues, while India celebrates the 75th year of Independence.

### **The EPI may rankle but India can recast policies**

(Source: [The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article11111111.html) )

**Context:** For a government acutely sensitive to global rankings, the latest Environmental Performance Index (EPI) placing India last among all 180 assessed countries has naturally touched a raw nerve. The assessment, carried out by Yale and Columbia Universities with an emphasis on climate change mitigation, has become controversial for prioritising the flow of greenhouse gases from countries while reducing the emphasis on the stock of carbon dioxide from industrialised countries that is warming the globe.

Evidently, if countries were assigned a penalty for the stock of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, rather than measure their mitigation actions over a decade, India would fare much better. Less controversially, the EPI dwells on performance on air quality, waste management and ecological conservation measures.

### Government's response

- Unsurprisingly, the EPI ranking and scores have been rejected by the Union Government as based on "unfounded assumptions", "surmises" and "unscientific methods."
- The national rank of 165 on Climate Policy and score of 21.7 in this category — which overall has a 38% weightage in the calculations along with 42% for Ecosystem Vitality and 20% for Environmental Health — has particular significance.
- India is under pressure to raise its ambition and commitment towards the more ambitious 1.5° Centigrade goal for temperature rise under the Paris Agreement, going beyond the less rigorous target of well below 2°C.



- Within the overall climate score, India does better in sub-metrics such as growth rates for black carbon, methane and fluorinated gases, and greenhouse gas emissions based on their intensity and per capita volumes.
- The Index rates the country low on projected green house gas (GHG) emissions for mid-century, a target for Net Zero emissions. The EPI report estimates that China, India, the United States, and Russia are expected to account for over 50% of global residual greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- This projection has met with strong protest from India, which has faulted the EPI for introducing a new metric on climate with increased weight in the calculation compared to the 2020 assessment.
- It stands accused of ignoring the important tenet of equity in global climate policy within the United Nations framework: that India has low per capita GHG emissions, reduced intensity of GHG emissions in its economy, made big strides achieving 40% renewable power generation, supported electric vehicles, launched a major carbon sink initiative, and done a lot for wetland conservation.

### **Claims and low PARI score**

- The country has protested that the new India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 was not factored in as part of the biodiversity metric.
- On the face of it, India scores abysmally low on some of the Ecosystem Vitality variables, such as Marine Protected Areas (0.3 of a possible 100) and Protected Areas Representativeness Index, or PARI (0.5), Terrestrial Biome Protection (TBM) – National (1.2) and TBM – Global (2.1). Wetland loss prevention is among the best scores for India, at 62.
- Given the many biomes that exist in the country, the low PARI score puts pressure on the Government to defend its claim that the EPI scores for biodiversity health are faulty due to weaknesses in collecting species and habitat data.
- The ISFR, on which the Union government relies, ran into trouble for making spectacular claims, because of perceived methodological weaknesses.
- It is faulted for relying on a relaxed definition of forest and claiming expansion of forests when satellite imagery of the same areas showed a decline.
- Ecologist and co-founder of the Nature Conservation Foundation M.D. Madhusudan pointed out that palm trees in private plantations in Tamil Nadu, tea estates in several States and even urban tree agglomerations were found added as forest.
- Researchers have been demanding that the actual maps used for the ISFR estimates be released publicly, not just the report making claims of expansion.

### **Biome protection, air quality**

- The EPI-assigned rating for India in protecting biomes has led to sharp differences too. The Index assigns a ‘laggard’ rank on tropical and subtropical dry broadleaf and coniferous forests, montane grasslands and shrublands and the worst performance on deserts and xeric shrublands.
- The Government’s defence is that national and legal boundaries for protected areas may not match geographical boundaries of biomes, and international classifications may not be optimal to measure conservation.
- A second sensitive area in which India brings up the rear in the EPI is air quality. With a score of 7.8 and a rank of 179, the familiar dispute over data and reliability of several parameters has reopened.
- The Government faults the dataset on pollutant concentration data — covering mainly Particulate Matter (PM2.5), Oxides of Nitrogen, Sulphur Dioxide and Volatile Organic Compounds, because of “higher uncertainty in regions with less extensive monitoring networks and emissions inventories”.
- Although the scores and rank could be contested, there is little doubt that India’s air is widely seen as among the foulest. Data for 2019, when economic activity was unfettered by COVID-19, attribute 1.67 million deaths during the year from air pollution.
- This has been reiterated by recent literature with commentary in The Lancet Planetary Health pointing out that “India has developed instruments and regulatory powers to mitigate pollution sources but there

is no centralised system to drive pollution control efforts and achieve substantial improvements. In 93% of India, the amount of pollution remains well above WHO [World Health Organization] guidelines.”

- There are some aspects of the EPI that the Union government has rejected, blaming the ranking agencies for not “engaging” with India on the climate change mitigation programme, and for not providing a handicap under the United Nations principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC), which forms the basis of the Paris Agreement.
- India’s defence has always been that its current emissions profile may be high, but it has to raise living standards of hundreds of millions with cheap energy. It seeks a significant share of the remaining global carbon budget and climate funds for mitigation actions.

### Green goals

- The national case would be stronger if policies on luxury urban emissions are aimed at helping poorer Indians.
- On transport (about 13% of emissions), prevailing high fuel and vehicular taxes could exclusively drive change and raise a green commons such as clean public transport, cycling and pedestrianisation.
- The national policy of achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070 provides a longer timeline for a coal phaseout, but other areas can benefit from policies that prevent a carbon lock-in effect.
- Emissions from buildings, including embedded carbon in construction materials such as cement and steel, provide scope for reduction.
- India has also not expanded disaggregated rooftop solar power across residential deployments and commercial structures. There cannot also be excessive reliance on carbon sinks in the short term, since tree cover of the right kind takes time to store carbon. Stronger protection for biomes (protected areas represent about 5% of the land) can generate wide-ranging benefits and biodiversity can recover.
- What India needs to adopt is a rigorous dashboard approach to indicators, assigning high weight to the environment, modelled on the proposal made by Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and Jean-Paul Fitoussi in their exploration of development beyond GDP.
- This can generate good data, identify the real beneficiaries of policies, avoid serious environmental deficits and ensure inter-generational equity in the use of natural resources. It can also curb pollution. Distorted rankings from external assessments would matter little.

### **The advent of ‘app-solute’ chaos in NREGA**

(Source: [The Hindu](#) )

**Context:** Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) launched the National Mobile Monitoring Software (NMMS) app, a new application meant for “improving citizen oversight and increasing transparency” in National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) works. It is to be deployed by NREGA Mates, local women at the panchayat level who are selected and trained to monitor NREGA worksites. The main feature of the app is the real-time, photographed, geo-tagged attendance of every worker to be taken once in each half of the day. We spoke to Mates, NREGA workers, and activists across multiple States to understand their experience of the app.

### Conditions affecting workers

- While such an app may be useful in monitoring the attendance of workers who have fixed work timings, in most States, NREGA wages are calculated based on the amount of work done each day, and workers do not need to commit to fixed hours.

- This flexibility has been key to NREGA's widespread demand. However, marking attendance on the app mandates that workers are at the worksite the entire day. This causes significant difficulty for NREGA workers.
- Priya Devi from Rajasthan finishes her NREGA work by 9 a.m., and then sets up a stall in the local haat to sell the produce she grows in her kitchen garden. Since the introduction of the NMMS app, she either needs to be present at the worksite all day or travel twice to mark her attendance.
- Ms. Devi expressed concern about losing customers at her stall in her absence. Another worker from Andhra Pradesh said her daughter was now missing school frequently because she had to take over some of her mother's chores.
- NREGA has historically had a higher proportion of women workers (54.7% in FY 2021-22) and has been pivotal in changing working conditions for women in rural areas. Due to the traditional burden of household chores and care work on women, the app is likely to disproportionately affect women workers.
- The conditions for registering NREGA attendance on the app put them in a dilemma where they may end up foregoing NREGA work.
- Such a sentiment was echoed (to us) by many women workers across the country. Priya Devi, for instance, is afraid she will have to choose between the two — committing to NREGA work that occupies her full day, or staying at the market.

### Other challenges

- There are challenges of implementation with the NMMS as well. A stable network is a must for real-time monitoring; unfortunately, it remains patchy in much of rural India.
- This could lead to workers not being able to mark their attendance, and consequently lose a day of wages.
- Workers in Kerala and Jharkhand are already facing problems in uploading their attendance on the app due to network problems. Further, a recent NewsClick report has also highlighted the problems faced by differently-abled NREGA workers from Tamil Nadu in marking their attendance on the app.
- The app has adversely impacted NREGA Mates as well. The role of a Mate was conceptualised as an opportunity to empower local women to manage attendance and work measurement in their panchayat. But now, to be a Mate, one needs to have a smartphone.
- This new condition disqualifies thousands of women who do not own smartphones from becoming Mates.
- Already women from Jharkhand and Andhra Pradesh have reported being passed over for selection as Mates for this very reason. Now, smartphone-owning men are likely to be given preference as Mates.
- Alternatively, women could become proxy Mates — officially registered, but deferring to men who work and get paid.
- Many selected Mates also reported that they had not been given proper training in using the app. This could lead to errors in recording workers' attendance, that ultimately results in delayed or non-payments.

### Errors in pilot process

- The app had been launched on a pilot basis last year, with States using it voluntarily. Officials and activists confirmed these implementation errors had been evident throughout the pilot process.
- However, there is no information available publicly about the errors found and measures taken to address them.
- Our Right To Information applications have also not yielded any satisfactory responses. Despite the persistent errors, on May 13, 2022, the MoRD released a circular announcing that NMMS would now be mandatory for all NREGA worksites employing more than 20 workers, with no option for manual attendance other than in exceptional circumstances.

- Within a week of the mandate, many States submitted complaints and reports of the same errors that were seen during the pilot stage. The MoRD is yet to offer any solutions, reassurances, or even a response.

### **No physical records**

- Beyond the problems in implementation, the intended purpose of such an application, and its effectiveness remain unclear.
- The app claims to “increase citizen oversight” by “bringing more transparency and ensuring proper monitoring of the schemes, besides potentially enabling processing payments faster”.
- However, it appears to be doing exactly the opposite. With no physical attendance records signed by workers anymore, workers have no proof of their attendance and work done.
- In the district of West Singhbhum, Jharkhand, workers reported having worked on a NREGA project, the attendance records of which do not exist on the NREGA website.
- Since there are no physical records the workers can use as evidence, they have no way of proving their attendance, and will consequently lose out on pay for two full weeks of work. This is a clear erosion of the transparency and citizen oversight the app claims to improve.
- Corruption has been a rising problem in NREGA, with funds being siphoned off by faking attendance records.
- While ostensibly the NMMS’s focus on real-time, geo-tagged attendance could be one way of addressing this corruption, the MoRD has not provided much clarity on either the magnitude of this corruption or the manner in which the NMMS addresses it.
- There are no parameters established to assess the app’s performance, either on transparency, or on quicker processed payments.

### **Strengthen social audits**

- Instead of focusing on this app or introducing other complex technological reforms, we strongly believe social audits must be strengthened. Social audits are citizen-centric institutions, where the citizens of the panchayat have a direct role and say in how NREGA functions in their panchayat.
- Audits have worked well in the past, allowing the local rights holders to be invested in decisions, and hold the administration accountable themselves.
- But instead of strengthening citizen-centric institutions such as social audit units and gram sabhas, the MoRD seems keener on introducing technological reforms that can be complex to understand and fundamentally inaccessible for workers.
- It seems ironic that an application meant to improve citizen oversight and transparency was implemented with no consultation and discussion with NREGA workers, functionaries, or government field officials.
- The NMMS is consequently blind to the actual functioning of NREGA on the ground. The MoRD’s habit of passing reforms with no stakeholder consultation does not fall in line with the principles of transparency and citizen-participation enshrined in NREGA.
- The NMMS has very clear problems that will make it increasingly difficult for workers to continue working under NREGA, eroding the right to work that underwrites the NREGA Act.



## GS IV

### A new global standard for AI ethics

**Context:** Artificial intelligence (AI) is more present in our lives than ever. From predicting what we want to see as we scroll through social media to helping us understand weather patterns to manage agriculture, AI is ubiquitous. AI algorithms can also be partially credited for the rapidity with which vaccines were developed to tackle COVID-19. The algorithms crunched complex data from clinical trials being undertaken in all corners of the world, creating global collaborations that could not have been imagined even a decade ago.

#### Issues in AI

- But AI-related technology cannot be said to always be beneficial. The data used to feed into AI often aren't representative of the diversity of our societies, producing outcomes that can be said to be biased or discriminatory.
- For instance, while India and China together constitute approximately a third of the world's population, Google Brain estimated that they form just 3% of images used in ImageNet, a widely used dataset.
- Similarly, there are problems emerging in facial recognition technologies, which are used to access our phones, bank accounts and apartments, and are increasingly employed by law-enforcement authorities, in identifying women and darker-skinned people.
- For three such programs released by major technology companies, the error rate was 1% for light-skinned men, but 19% for dark-skinned men, and up to 35% for dark-skinned women. Biases in facial recognition technologies have led to wrongful arrests.
- These challenges are not surprising when we look at how AI is developed. Only one in 10 software developers worldwide is a woman. These women come overwhelmingly from western countries.
- These issues are of particular importance to India, which is one of the world's largest markets for AI-related technologies, valued at over \$7.8 billion in 2021.
- Indeed, the National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence released by NITI Aayog in 2018 highlights the massive potential of AI in solving complex social challenges faced by Indian citizens across areas such as agriculture, health, and education, in addition to the significant economic returns that AI-related technologies are already creating.
- To ensure that the full potential of these technologies is reached, the right incentives for ethical AI governance need to be established in national and sub-national policy.
- India has made great strides in the development of responsible and ethical AI governance, starting with NITI Aayog's #AIForAll campaign to the many corporate strategies that have been adopted to ensure that AI is developed with common, humanistic values at its core.
- However, until recently, there was no common global strategy to take forward this importance agenda. This changed last November when 193 countries reached a groundbreaking agreement at UNESCO on how AI should be designed and used by governments and tech companies.
- UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence took two years to put together and involved thousands of online consultations with people from a diverse range of social groups. It aims to fundamentally shift the balance of power between people, and the businesses and governments developing AI.
- Indeed, if the business model of how these technologies are developed does not change to place human interests first, inequalities will grow to a magnitude never before experienced in history; access to the raw material that is data is key.
- Countries which are members of UNESCO have agreed to implement this recommendation by enacting actions to regulate the entire AI system life cycle, ranging from research, design and development to deployment and use.



- This means they must use affirmative action to make sure that women and minority groups are fairly represented on AI design teams. This could take the form of quota systems that ensure that these teams are diverse or the form of dedicated funds from their public budgets to support such inclusion programmes.
- The Recommendation also underscores the importance of the proper management of data, privacy and access to information. It establishes the need to keep control over data in the hands of users, allowing them to access and delete information as needed.
- It also calls on member states to ensure that appropriate safeguards schemes are devised for the processing of sensitive data and effective accountability, and redress mechanisms are provided in the event of harm. All of this takes enforcement to the next level.
- Additionally, the broader socio-cultural impacts of AI-related technologies are also addressed, with the Recommendation taking a strong stance that AI systems should not be used for social scoring or mass surveillance purposes; that particular attention must be paid to the psychological and cognitive impact that these systems can have on children and young people; and that member states should invest in and promote not only digital, media and information literacy skills, but also socio-emotional and AI ethics skills to strengthen critical thinking and competencies in the digital era.
- This is all critical for ensuring accountability and transparency of AI-related technologies, underpinning a strong rule of law that adapts to new digital frontiers.
- In a number of countries, the principles of the Recommendation are already being used in AI regulation and policy, demonstrating their practical viability. Finland provides an example of good practice of this regard, with its 2017 AI Strategy.
- This was the first of its kind in any European country and demonstrated how governments can effectively promote ethical AI use without compromising the desire to be on the cutting edge of new technologies.

#### **A common rulebook**

- The new agreement is broad and ambitious. It is a recognition that AI-related technologies cannot continue to operate without a common rulebook.
- Over the coming months and years, the Recommendation will serve as a compass to guide governments and companies, to voluntarily develop and deploy AI technologies that conform with the commonly agreed principles it establishes – similar moves happened after UNESCO's declaration on the human genome set out norms for genetic research.
- Second, it is hoped that governments will themselves use the Recommendation as a framework to establish and update legislation, regulatory frameworks, and policy to embed humanistic principles in enforceable accountability mechanisms.
- To accompany countries in the realisation of the full potential of AI and with the aim of building the institutional capacity of countries and all the relevant stakeholders, UNESCO is in the process of developing tools to help them assess their readiness in the implementation of the Recommendation and identify, monitor and assess the benefits, concerns and risks of AI system.
- With this agreement, we are confident of putting AI to work where it can have the most impact: hunger, environmental crises, inequalities and pandemics. We are optimistic of having built the momentum for real change.

## Current Affairs Quiz

1) Consider the following statements:

1. Critical Information Infrastructure is a computer resource, destruction of which shall impact national security, economy, public health, or safety.
2. The IT Act 2000, gives the central government the power to declare any data, IT network, or communications infrastructure as CII.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

2) Consider the following statements with respect to Ministerial Conference of WTO:

1. The Ministerial Conference (MC) meets biannually, and according to its rules, any member can exercise a veto.
2. All members of the WTO are involved in the Ministerial Conference and they can take decisions on all matters covered under any multilateral trade agreements.

Which of the above statement(s) is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

The Ministerial Conference is the WTO's top decision-making body and usually meets every two years.

3) Consider the following statements with respect to tropical cyclones:

1. Due to global warming, the tropical Indian Ocean, at the surface, is warming at a faster rate as compared to the rest of the global ocean.
2. Both marine heat waves and tropical cyclones are the extreme events of the ocean-atmosphere coupled system.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

4) Consider the following statements with respect to inflation:

1. Inflation expectation refers to people's or households' expectations of what the inflation rate will be in the future.
2. An economy is said to undergo recession when it contracts for three consecutive quarters where a quarter is a period of four months.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2

d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

The technical definition of a recession requires an economy to contract for two consecutive quarters; a quarter is a period of three months.

5) Consider the following statements with respect to plastic ban in India:

1. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has banned polythene bags under 20 microns.
2. According to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, there is a complete ban on sachets using plastic material for selling gutkha, tobacco, and pan masala.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

The Ministry had already banned polythene bags under 75 microns in September 2021, expanding the limit from the earlier 50 microns.

6) Consider the following statements:

1. Psyche mission is a journey to a unique metal-rich asteroid orbiting the Sun between Mars and Jupiter.
2. It operates with the goal of exploring the building block of planet formation, the iron cores.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

7) Consider the following statements:

1. Prepaid payment instruments facilitate the buying of goods and services, including the transfer of funds, against the value stored within or on the instrument.
2. Both Banks and Non-Banking Financial companies can issue prepaid payment instruments.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

8) Consider the following statements with respect to fiscal deficit and current account deficit:

1. Higher levels of fiscal deficit imply the government consumes the investible funds of the private sector.
2. A widening current account deficit weakens the domestic currency because it implies more foreign currencies are being demanded than rupees.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

9) Consider the following statements with respect to vaccines:

1. The heterologous vaccine is the administration of two different vectors or delivery systems expressing the same or overlapping antigenic inserts.
2. Corbevax is an example of a heterologous vaccine, while Covishield is an example of a homologous vaccine.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

10) Talaq-e-Hasan, an Islamic form of divorce violates-

1. Article 15
2. Article 16
3. Article 19
4. Article 25

Select the correct answer code

- a. 1 and 4 only
- b. 2, 3, 4 only
- c. 2 and 4 only
- d. 1 and 3 only

Answer : a

11) Consider the following statements with respect to corals:

1. Azooxanthellate corals are a group of corals that are able to derive nourishment from the sunlight .
2. These groups of corals are deep-sea representatives, with the majority of species reporting from between 200 m to 1000 m.
3. Their occurrences are not reported from shallow coastal waters and Continental shelves.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 2 only
- d. 2 and 3 only

Answer : a

Azooxanthellate corals are a group of corals that do not contain zooxanthellae and derive nourishment not from the sun but from capturing different forms of plankton.

Their occurrences are also reported from shallow coastal waters.

12) Which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. Quantum diamond microscope has the ability to image magnetic fields that change within nanoseconds.
2. It can measure the biological activity of neurons and dynamics of vortices in superconductors.

Select the correct answer code

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

Researchers from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) at Mumbai and Kharagpur have built a microscope that can image magnetic fields within microscopic two-dimensional samples that change over milliseconds.

13) Consider the following statements:

1. When interest rates rise in the US, Foreign Portfolio Investors withdraw money from India and invest in bonds in their domestic markets.
2. Foreign Portfolio Investors are the largest non-promoter shareholders in the Indian market.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

14) Consider the following statements:

1. When the transfer of Virtual Digital Assets takes place through an exchange, the VDA is not owned by the exchange, the exchange deducts tax.
2. When the payment between the seller and the exchange is being done through a broker, tax is deducted from both the exchange and the broker.
3. When the transfer of VDA takes place through an exchange, the VDA is owned by the exchange, the responsibility to deduct tax remains with the buyer or the broker.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 3 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d

15) NIRYAT portal is associated with-

- a. It will provide information regarding India's foreign trade.
- b. It will provide information regarding India's domestic trade.
- c. It will provide information on all customs procedures in India.
- d. It will provide information on the skill development programmes available for the youths.

Answer : a

16) Consider the following statements with respect to the levallois technique:

1. The Levallois technique is used to chip a side of a stone to make it sharp.
2. The Levallois technique came into use in the Neolithic era with the use of the Acheulean handaxe.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : a

It came into use around the Middle Paleolithic era with the use of the Acheulean handaxe.

17) Consider the following statements with respect to Accredited Investment Funds:

1. Large Value Fund is a scheme for Accredited Investment Funds in which each investor, invests at least Rs 100 crore.
2. Under the AIF rules, LVFs are exempt from filing their placement memorandum with Sebi through merchant bankers and incorporate comments of the regulator.



Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : b

Large Value Fund (LVF) for accredited investors means an AIF or scheme of an AIF in which each investor (other than the manager, sponsor, employees, or directors of the AIF or employees or directors of the manager) is an accredited investor and invests at least Rs 70 crore.

18) Consider the following statements with respect to BepiColombo:

- 1. BepiColombo is the European Space Agency's mission to Mercury, in collaboration with NASA.
- 2. The BepiColombo mission will only fly by in the Mercury's orbit and not land on it.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : c

19) Elvira rat is found in -

- a. Almora Hills
- b. Yercaud Hills
- c. Anantagiri Hills
- d. Narkanda Hills

Answer : b

20) Consider the following statements with respect to Vice Chancellors:

- 1. The appointment of Vice-Chancellors in state government-run universities is among the responsibilities of Governors as Chancellors.
- 2. Chancellors in most states have the power to annul decisions of the decision-making bodies of universities.
- 3. In Telangana and Gujarat, Governors should mandatorily appoint VCs from among the names approved by the state governments.

Select the correct answer code:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

Answer : d