



VAJIRAO IAS ACADEMY

India's Premier Coaching Institute for Civil Services (IAS/PCS)



WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

10th MAR - 15th MAR 2025

[f](#) vajiraoiasacademyofficial [i](#) vajiraoiasacademy [y](#) vajiraoiasacademyPvtLtd [t](#) 8800533352/02

www.vajiraoiasacademy.com

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



“Civil Service is not just a job; it is an opportunity, to do your bit for society and to contribute to nation-building. It is an opportunity to realise your potential and make a meaningful contribution in the emancipation of masses.”

Mr. Dilip Kumar

Director, Vajirao IAS Academy

Good Civil Servants ensure efficient and smooth governance. They are the backbone of the country and they have the power to make a difference in people's life.

We have set up extremely tough targets for ourselves. Now a day's, most of the students are well aware and focused about their aim. They just need a streak of guidance. We feel that we have done our bit in providing that blue streak of guidance and we are honoured to be a reason of smile on certain lips, proud to be your teacher, friend and guide.

1. Simplified Editorials

1.1	Regulating Vulgarly in the Digital Age.....	1
1.2	India and Europe Trade Diplomacy	3
1.3	Tackling Obesity in India: Need for Food Regulations	5
1.4	Streamlining Business: Tackling Corruption & Bureaucracy	7

2. Daily Current Affairs

2.1	Declining status of Seagrass.....	10
2.2	Debate on the shift from 'Democracy to Emocracy'	11
2.3	Iran declined to negotiations on nuclear programme with the US.....	13
2.4	US withdrawal from Loss and Damage Fund.....	15
2.5	Spices Market In India.....	17
2.6	Platform Workers to Register on e-Shram Portal.....	18
2.7	India's participation in UN peacekeeping operations.....	20
2.8	STEM Labs Established in Government Schools.....	22
2.9	World Air Quality Report 2024	23
2.10	69th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women	25
2.11	Geo-Mapping of Rubber Plantations	26
2.12	India's Decision to Increase U.S. Oil Imports	28
2.13	Government's Modified Ethanol Scheme.....	30
2.14	India-Mauritius: Strengthening Long-Standing Ties	32
2.15	Addressing Gender Disparities in the Judiciary.....	34
2.16	Developing Climate-Resilient Foods: Smart Proteins.....	35
2.17	India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement	37
2.18	Digital Tools Transforming Women's Role in Farming	39
2.19	Habitual Offender Laws in India	41
2.20	Rising Consumer Credit in India.....	43
2.21	India's Wheat Production Rises in 2024-25.....	44
2.22	Report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India, 2024.....	45
2.23	Deliberate Disruptions in Parliament and State Assemblies.....	48
2.24	New indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity.....	50
2.25	Compassion and Primary Health Care.....	51
2.26	Rethinking Affirmative Action for Muslims.....	53
2.27	Panel Recommends Reforms for Farmers' Welfare	55
2.28	Crackdown on Digital Arrest Scams	57



I. SIMPLIFY EDITORIAL

[1.1] Regulating Vulgarity in the Digital Age

Syllabus: Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

The intersection of humour and perversity has become a contentious issue in the digital age, particularly with the rise of online platforms. The Supreme Court of India has recently emphasized the need for regulatory measures to curb vulgarity while protecting freedom of expression.

Background: The Supreme Court's Stance

The Supreme Court has urged the central government to develop a regulatory mechanism to address vulgarity on online platforms like YouTube. This move follows concerns over content that crosses the line from humour to perversity, potentially harming societal moral standards and vulnerable audiences. The court's approach aims to prevent censorship while ensuring that online platforms do not become "free-for-all" environments.

Existing Legal Framework

India has a robust legal framework to deal with obscenity, which includes several laws and regulations.

Key Legislation

- **Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 292:** Prohibits the sale, advertisement, or public display of obscene content. This section has been updated in the BNS (Bharat New Series) as Section 294, which maintains similar provisions.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000, Section 67:** Punishes publishing or transmitting obscene material electronically, with harsher penalties than the IPC.
- **Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986:** Focuses on prohibiting indecent depiction of women that is derogatory or harms public morality.
- **POCSO Act, 2012:** Strictly prohibits creating, storing, sharing, or accessing child sexual content online.

Challenges with Existing Laws

While these laws provide a foundation for addressing obscenity, they often face challenges in application. The distinction between vulgarity and humour can be subjective, leading to inconsistent enforcement and potential misuse of laws to restrict freedom of expression. Moreover, the rapid evolution of digital content makes it difficult for static laws to keep pace with emerging issues.

Regulatory Measures: Balancing Freedom and Decency

The Supreme Court's call for regulatory measures highlights the need to balance freedom of expression with societal decency norms.

Proposed Regulatory Framework

- **Draft Regulatory Mechanism:** The Supreme Court has asked the central government to draft a regulatory mechanism that does not lead to censorship but ensures some level of control over online content.
- **Public Consultation:** The proposed regulations will be placed in the public domain to invite suggestions from stakeholders, including media and content creators.
- **Self-Regulatory Bodies:** Establishing self-regulatory bodies similar to the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) for television could be a viable approach for digital platforms.

Challenges in Implementation

Implementing these measures poses several challenges:

- **Defining Vulgarity:** The subjective nature of vulgarity makes it difficult to establish clear guidelines that apply universally.
- **Protecting Freedom of Expression:** Ensuring that regulations do not impinge upon the right to free speech is crucial. The Supreme Court has emphasized the importance of protecting this fundamental right while preventing misuse.
- **Technological and Social Evolution:** Regulations must be flexible enough to adapt to changing societal norms and technological advancements.

Impact on Creativity and Responsibility

The regulatory measures must strike a balance between allowing creative humour and preventing offensive content.

Role of Content Creators

- **Ethical Standards:** Encouraging content creators to adopt ethical standards and self-regulation can help differentiate between humour and vulgarity.
- **Age-Appropriate Content:** Implementing content advisories and age ratings can safeguard vulnerable audiences.

Examples of Responsible Humour

- **Bollywood and Stand-Up Comedy:** Indian comedians often use creative humour without crossing decency norms, demonstrating that talent can be showcased without resorting to vulgarity.

Conclusion

Regulating online content to prevent vulgarity while preserving freedom of expression is a complex task. While existing laws provide a foundation, new regulatory measures must be carefully crafted to address emerging challenges without stifling creativity. The Supreme Court's approach of inviting public consultation and emphasizing self-regulation offers a promising path forward. Ultimately, striking the right balance between societal decency and individual rights will be crucial in shaping India's digital landscape.

Way Forward

- **Clear Guidelines:** Developing transparent and balanced guidelines that differentiate between humour and vulgarity is essential.
- **Public Engagement:** Engaging with stakeholders to understand societal readiness for different types of content will help tailor regulations effectively.
- **Technological Adaptation:** Regulations must be adaptable to technological advancements and evolving societal norms.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

[1.2] India and Europe Trade Diplomacy

Syllabus: International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

India and the European Union (EU) are on the brink of finalizing a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the end of 2025. This development marks a pivotal moment in their bilateral relations, with significant implications for trade, investment, and strategic cooperation. Below is an analysis of the opportunities, challenges, and potential gains for India in this renewed push for trade diplomacy with Europe.

The Context of India-EU Trade Relations

- **Historical Evolution:** Negotiations for an FTA between India and the European Union began in 2007 and fell into stagnation in 2013, due to the polarizing issues of market access, tariff on automobiles and wines, and intellectual property rights. Talks resumed in 2021 after an eight-year lull, underlining the renewed commitment to deepen economic ties.
- **Current Trade Dynamics:** The EU is said to constitute India's largest trading partner, accounting for 12.2% of India's foreign trade. The total bilateral trade was assessed at \$137.5 billion for FY 2023-24, with Indian exports worth \$76 billion and imports worth \$59 billion. European investments in India exceed \$117 billion while Indian investments are around \$40 billion in the EU.

Strategic Importance of the FTA

- **Geopolitical Considerations:** With an era of increasing global fragmentation and protectionism, India and the EU have stronger reasons than ever to cooperate. The two sides want to jointly reduce economic risks deriving from geopolitical tensions that may involve U.S. tariffs and growing Chinese influence.
- **Value Chain Diversification:** The FAT wants to create diversification of significant value chains ranging from the pharmaceuticals sector to semiconductors and clean energy (green hydrogen) to defense. This would dovetail into India's ambition of being a manufacturing hub globally, under "Make in India".
- **Shared Democratic Values:** The partnership is based on mutual trust and shared democratic principles, which, according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, solidify their ideological alignment and their strategic partnership.

Opportunities for India

- **Boosting Exports:**
 - The FTA will give an edge to Indian goods such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products by establishing preferential access to the European markets. It will also mean a reduction in tariffs on items exported from India, including automobiles and machinery.
- **Attracting Investments:**
 - With 6,000+ European companies already functioning in India, more investments may be attracted to areas such as renewable energy, AI, and high-performance computing. The investment protection treaty, which is now being negotiated, will boost investor confidence further.
- **Technology Transfer:**
 - Cooperation among nations in emerging technologies such as semiconductors, AI, and space exploration can assist India in closing its technological gaps. The proposed Green Hydrogen Forum and Offshore Wind Energy Business Summit will assist India in meeting its renewable energy aspiration.
- **Strengthening the Strategic Autonomy:**
 - By diversifying its trade partners to include other nations rather than just China and the United States, India is able to offset its dependency on any one country or bloc. Connectivity and trade efficiency will be augmented through IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor).

Challenges Ahead

- **Market Constraints:**
 - Agriculture is a sensitive issue as far as subsidy and standard level negotiators differ.
 - The pharmaceutical export from India encounters regulatory challenges in Europe.

- **Tariff Reduction:**
 - The EU wants to reduce tariffs on auto and wine exports, while India is unwilling to compromise its domestic industry interests.
- **Geographical Indication (GI):**
 - GI tag negotiations for commodities such as basmati rice and Darjeeling tea have posed an uphill task, and are important in preserving India's cultural heritage credence.
- **Digital Trade Barriers:**
 - With all these issues, data localization requirements and the digital sovereignty debate may further entrench divergence in the e-commerce and digital trade chapters.

Strategic Implications for Europe

In Europe, a strategic embrace of India serves as a counter to the power China wields across Asia. This also complements the broader European strategy for the Indo-Pacific, which seeks to establish peace, security, and stability in the region. Access to India's vast consumer market therefore provides significant economic opportunities for European companies.

Way Ahead

The two sides have committed to a "mutually beneficial" agreement by the end of 2025. The key areas of focus will be investment protection, geographical indications, cooperation in green energy, and trade facilitation measures in the digital economy. Regular high-level meetings—such as recently by von der Leyen with EU commissioners—demonstrate that this is being taken very seriously.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

[1.3] Tackling Obesity in India: Need for Food Regulations

Syllabus: Health [GS Paper-2]

Context

Obesity is a chronic health condition characterized by excessive body fat that negatively impacts overall health. India is witnessing a worrying rise in obesity, with statistics from the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) indicating that one in four Indian adults is obese. Additionally, a similar proportion of the population is either diabetic or pre-diabetic. The increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) is a major contributor to this growing health crisis.

Challenges in Regulating Food in India

- **Weak Implementation and Enforcements:** Since 2017, the enactment of a clear labeling and food advertising law has been poorly implemented by the FSSAI and

various ministries. Although some laws exist, their application is vague and favors industry over public health.

- **Ineffective Front-of-Pack Labelling:** One of the sweeping regulatory gaps is that unhealthy food products do not have front-pack warning labels. This allows unlimited marketing of unhealthy foods and misleading advertisements, helping to entrench misinformation about unhealthy foods among consumers.
- **Faulty Nutrition Rating System:** The FSSAI rolled out a perverse 'health star' system in September 2022, dubbed INR, which was meant to help people make healthy choices. This heavily industry-influenced model follows Australia's failed model. HFSS foods such as biscuits and soft drinks can still get two stars under the scheme, therefore failing in consumer protection. Even the cornflakes containing sugar and sodium receive a three-star rating that leads consumers to be misled into believing they are being offered a healthy option.
- **Effect of Industries on Food Regulations:** The FSSAI is drawing questionable inference from the almost uncriticised study by IIM Ahmedabad with hardly any transparency and accountability. The Scientific panel members, for the great part, have been excluded from decision-making, and the proposed 2021 warning label, entitled the 'traffic light', was junked under industry pressure.
- **Weak Regulations Regarding Disinformation and Advertisement Protection:** Misleading advertisements in India are governed by several laws, including the Consumer Protection Act (2019). Implementation of laws, however, remains weak. The National Multisectoral Action Plan (2017) recommended restricting ads for junk food, but it has not yet been enforced. Unclear legal definitions for HFSS foods and UPFs create additional hurdles for effective regulation.

Health Impact of Poor Food Regulations

Unregulated advertising on unhealthy food products has given rise to increasing cases of obesity and diabetes in India. Research shows a significant reduction in childhood obesity with restriction of junk food advertisement. Without strict regulations, the prevalence of lifestyle diseases is bound to increase massively and this will cause a great burden to Indian healthcare.

A Roadmap for Effective Food Regulation

- **Learning from Global Best Practices:** Countries such as Chile have implemented effective front-of-pack warning labels-for example, with 'high in'-black labels on unhealthy foods that account for a 24% reduction in UPF consumption. India should use this example instead of the effectiveness of the 'health star' system for regulation.
- **Align with WHO and ICMR Guidelines:** India should subscribe to WHO's guidelines on food classification as well as those of ICMR-NIN. The introduction of stringent nutritional thresholds of sugar, salt and fat quantities in packaged foods would surely improve consumer awareness leading to healthier choices.
- **Strengthening Food Regulations and Advertising Laws:** Close up loopholes with exhaustive laws that specifically target marketing of HFSS and UPFs, particularly that aimed at children. Improve current food labeling laws by appropriate consumer packaging for clearer and more accurate nutritional information.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Education of the consumer is very vital for the fight against obesity. National awareness campaigns are required to make the citizen

aware of the health risks involved with UPFs. Such campaigns should be made open to access for all languages and demographic groups to achieve great impact.

Conclusion: Prioritizing Public Health Over Corporate Interests

India's obesity crisis is not a failure of individual choices but a result of inadequate policy measures. Tackling this crisis requires a strong regulatory framework that prioritizes public health over corporate profits. The Prime Minister's call for a healthier India and the Economic Survey 2025's recommendation for a 'health tax' on UPFs are commendable steps. However, without stringent food regulations, clear labelling, and robust enforcement mechanisms, India's battle against obesity will remain an uphill task.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically examine the role of regulatory failures in India's rising obesity crisis while assessing the challenges in controlling ultra-processed foods. Suggest comprehensive policy measures to ensure effective public health outcomes. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

[1.4] Streamlining Business: Tackling Corruption & Bureaucracy

Syllabus: Economy [GS Paper-3]

Context

- Even when significant efforts are made to combat corruption, bribery and unnecessary bureaucracy, the problem remains for companies trying to set up in India. The India Business Corruption Survey 2024 discovers two thirds (66%) of businesses have given bribes – some 54% claim it was done because they had been coerced into doing so in order to obtain quicker government services, to obtain licenses or in defiance of rules.
- This problem is much more severe in the regulated sectors such as taxation, pollution, property registration, health and pharmaceuticals. It should be accepted that the effect of corruption happens on the economy, the obstacles to compliance adoption, the stimulation for the digital transformation and how these factors impact India's occasion by emerging as a growth competitor on a global level.

The Economic Impact of Corruption

- **Increased Cost of Doing Business**
 - Corruption adds to the costs of businesses, inefficiently preventing more efficiently the functioning of the companies, particularly of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

- Many business organizations have to give bribery time and time again in order to operate rationally and come to a rough time financially every time.
- **Corruption will chase away foreign direct investment (FDI)**
 - As per EY-FICCI survey, 80% of respondents hold corruption responsible for hindering FDI in the country.
 - Foreign investors would like to get their money heisted in countries that are transparent and also fair minded to the corporate world because India's issues of corruption certainly creates the discomfort of hesitation among foreign investors.
- **Impact on Entrepreneurs**
 - New companies fail because of bureaucracy and corruption.
 - Rather too many start-ups leave an entry attempt on the drawing board because regulations / and/or bribery is unbearably expensive.
- **Fewer Jobs and Economic Growth**
 - Otherwise, bribing officials, overcoming connections in the government can be spent for hiring of staff, training of staff, to increase production.
 - Corruption results in the misuse of the resources which result in a loss of productivity of various sorts of businesses.
- **Negative Impact on India's Reputation**
 - Corruption comes as a barrier in front of India's role as an emerging economy.
 - Countries with fewer regulatory hurdles and accountability get the most investment and talented employees.

Challenges of Constantly Changing Compliance Regulations

- **Complex and Ever-Changing Rules**
 - Businesses are plagued by the endless incremental variances of the regulations with a habit of change.
 - In this year so far, India has witnessed 9,420 compliance updates--9 changes every day.
 - This controversial development is either a sign of bad governance or provides scope for getting bribes.
- **Bureaucratic Manipulation**
 - Government officials may utilize compliance rules to blackmail officials for licenses in spite of full compliance elsewhere.
 - This issue was addressed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) by passing a regulation to drop down the number of changes allowed to be made in food label regulations to happen once a year, making it more predictable.
- **Labour Law Reforms Remain Stalled**
 - India has integrated 29 obsolete Labour laws into four modern labour codes however the codes are yet to get implemented.
 - This alteration is important in simplifying compliance regulations as well as sentences in prison that are governed by compliance.

The Need for a Digital-First Compliance System

- **Inefficiency in Business Registration**

- Starting a business in India means 40+ Govt department instrument.
- This defunct system contributes to corruption and delays to job interrogators.

- **Solution: A Unified Digital System**

- An Unique Business ID accompanying a secure digital storage (such as DigiLocker) will bring in compliance.
- This would then allow regulators to obtain validated documents digitally on the go, which would be processed in days as opposed to months.
- India offers businesses a herd of identification documents such as PAN, GSTIN, CIN and plenty of others which every need to be renewed distinctively individually.
- One Business One National India ID can merge all of them to one identity vehicle, Simplifying laws and eliminating corruption.

- **Global Best Practices**

- Countries in US are using business ease through governance reform such as Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)
- India must also take similar steps to remain in one and attract investors.

Conclusion

India requires a transition from a small fix to a big thing – essentially simplify compliance, stamp out corruption and bring regulatory stability.

- Jan Vishwas 2.0 is a starting step, much more, is needed reform.
- Outmoded imprisonment clauses should be revised out, and conformity processes reeling into a virtual framework.
- A business-friendly and transparent and low hanging regulation would help India be attractive to the investors and to its indigenous entrepreneurs.

The window of opportunity is available –India has to focused towards efficiency, transparency & growth, and for it to be a globally recognized economic power.

Source: [*The Hindu*](#)



2. DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

[2.1] Declining status of Seagrass

Syllabus - Environment [GS Paper-3]

Context

A current evaluation posted in Nature Reviews Earth & Environment highlights the declining status of seagrass worldwide because of human activities at a rate of 1-2% per year.

About Seagrasses

- Seagrasses are submerged, flowering plants that form dense underwater meadows. They developed from terrestrial plants and adapted to marine environments.
- Unlike seaweed (that's algae), seagrasses have roots, stems, and leaves and can produce plants and seeds.

Importance of Seagrass Ecosystems

- **Carbon Sequestration and Climate Action:** Known because the “lungs of the sea,” seagrasses can save carbon as much as 35 cases quicker than tropical rainforests.
- **Biodiversity and Marine Life Protection:** Seagrass meadows offer habitat and nurseries for fish species and refuge for threatened & endangered marine species.
- **Coastal Protection:** Acting as natural limitations, seagrasses shield coastal groups from storms and erosion, thereby reducing disaster risks.
- **Economic Values:** Seagrass meadows provide colossal financial advantages, valued at US \$6.4 trillion annually. They support coastal economies by maintaining fisheries, tourism

Seagrass in India

- India, with a recalculated coastline of 11,098 km (2023-24), has tremendous seagrass meadows, particularly in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep Islands, and the Gulf of Kutch.

Threats to Seagrass Ecosystems

- Anthropogenic Activities like urbanization, pollutants and agricultural activities.
- Weak Enforcement of Laws for defensive coastal ecosystems
- Biodiversity Loss and unregulated fishing and boating activities.

Global and Indian Restoration Efforts

- **Global Success Stories:**
 - **Seagrass Watch:** A collaborative citizen technology application that trains volunteers, NGOs, and research corporations to reveal, document, and conserve seagrass habitats worldwide.
 - **Blue Carbon Initiative:** A global venture that specializes in carbon sequestration in coastal ecosystems, including mangroves, salt marshes, and seagrasses.
- **Indian Conservation Initiatives:**
 - **National Policy on Marine Fisheries (2017):** Recognizes seagrass meadows as vital coastal marine ecosystems alongside mangroves and coral reefs.
 - **Climate Resilience Project:** Implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Odisha. Supported by a grant from the Global Climate Fund (GCF).
 - Seagrass Restoration in Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay.

Source: [The ToI](#)

- A current evaluation posted in Nature Reviews Earth & Environment highlights the declining status of seagrass worldwide because of human activities at a rate of 1-2% per year.
- Seagrasses are submerged, flowering plants that form dense underwater meadows. They developed from terrestrial plants and adapted to marine environments.
- Unlike seaweed (that's algae), seagrasses have roots, stems, and leaves and can produce plants and seeds.

[2.2] Debate on the shift from 'Democracy to Emocracy'

Syllabus - Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

Recently, the Vice-President of India is known for a national debate on the shift from 'Democracy to Emocracy', emphasizing that emotion-driven regulations and debates threaten the foundational ideas of democracy.

What is Emocracy?

- Traditionally, democracy is built upon logical reasoning, debate, and informed citizenry.
- In an excellent democratic setup, regulations are formulated and debated primarily based on evidence, professional insights, and rational decision-making.
- However, in an emocracy (fusion of 'emotion' and 'democracy'), decision-making is increasingly more dictated by public emotions, viral narratives, and psychological persuasion techniques.
- It is seen worldwide—from the rise of leaders like Donald Trump in the U.S. To Brexit in the U.K. And the nationalist surge in numerous European nations.

Drivers of the Shift from Democracy to Emocracy

- **Digital Revolution and Social Media Influence:** Social Media Platforms expand sensationalism over substance, permitting emotionally charged narratives to head viral.
- **Role of Political Messaging and Propaganda:** Political events across the spectrum have followed emotionally charged rhetoric to mobilize citizens.

- **Identity Politics and Group-Based Mobilization:** Political leaders have found out that appealing to organization identities—religion, caste, region, and ethnicity—can steady mass help.
- **Affirmative Action vs. Appeasement:** Provisions for marginalized communities, as mentioned in Articles 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution, are justifiable and necessary for social equity.

Threats to Good Governance from Emotionally Driven Policies

- **Populism and Fiscal Prudence:** Populist leaders appeal to mass feelings rather than policy-based governance.
- **Legal and Constitutional Conflicts:** Emotionally driven guidelines frequently bypass due process, leading to poorly drafted legal guidelines with constitutional or legal loopholes.
- **NSSO Data (2018):** 1.5 million jobs have been lost in the casual region due to cash shortages. The Supreme Court of India (2023) upheld demonetization's legality but acknowledged its incorrect implementation.
- **Economic Disruptions and Resource Misallocation:** Policies based on emotions frequently forget about monetary feasibility, leading to wasteful expenditure.
- **CAG Report (2021):** Free energy schemes in Delhi and Punjab have caused growing energy sector debts, affecting infrastructure investments.
- **Social Polarization and Policy Paralysis:** Policies framed under emotional strain frequently cause divisive politics. Lack of consensus amongst stakeholders outcomes in implementation failures.
- **Reactionary vs. Long-Term Policy Making:** Crisis-driven policies regularly lack long-term vision. Immediate measures overshadow structural reforms.
- **CMIE Data (2021):** 75 million people lost jobs due to loss of making plans for monetary disruptions.

Why Emotionally Driven Policies Are Still Important?

- **Social Justice and Correcting Historical Wrongs:** Some regulations want to be emotionally pushed to cope with beyond injustices and ensure equity.
- **NITI Aayog Report (2023):** The literacy charge amongst SCs and STs has progressed drastically due to reservation guidelines in education.
- **Quick Decision-Making During Crises:** Emotional responses are regularly essential in instances of catastrophe or battle to ensure speedy authorities intervention.
- **Strengthening National Unity & Identity:** Some emotionally driven policies are designed to foster national cohesion and fortify common identification.
- **UNICEF Study (2021):** Open defecation decreased by using 60% in rural India due to behavioral changes.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Data-Driven Governance:** Policies need to be framed by financial, medical, and social studies instead of sentiment.
- **Regulating Social Media Narratives:** While loose speech ought to be covered, systems ought to adopt stricter policies to prevent misinformation and hate speech.
- **Reviving Rational Public Debates:** Institutions like universities, think tanks, and civil society companies need to take the lead in restoring logic-based totally discussions in public boards.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Fiscal policies ought to undergo rigorous scrutiny via parliamentary committees to evaluate long-term effect.
- **2nd ARC Recommendation:** Institutionalize Impact Assessment Committees earlier than rolling out main rules to avoid reactionary decision-making.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Prelims PYQ

1. Which one of the following factors constitutes the best safeguard of liberty in a liberal democracy? (2021)

- (a) A committed judiciary
- (b) Centralization of powers
- (c) Elected government
- (d) Separation of powers

- Recently, the Vice-President of India is known for a national debate on the shift from ‘Democracy to Emocracy’, emphasizing that emotion-driven regulations and debates threaten the foundational ideas of democracy.
- Traditionally, democracy is built upon logical reasoning, debate, and informed citizenry.
- In an excellent democratic setup, regulations are formulated and debated primarily based on evidence, professional insights, and rational decision-making.
- However, in an emocracy (fusion of ‘emotion’ and ‘democracy’), decision-making is increasingly more dictated by public emotions, viral narratives, and psychological persuasion techniques.
- It is seen worldwide—from the rise of leaders like Donald Trump in the U.S. To Brexit in the U.K. And the nationalist surge in numerous European nations.

[2.3] Iran declined to negotiations on nuclear programme with the US

Syllabus - International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

Iran declined to resume negotiations on its nuclear programme with the USA.

Key Highlights

- Trump’s administration has levied sanctions against Iran – such as on the country’s oil network – as part of his “maximum pressure” method.
- Trump wrote to Iran, urging negotiations on the nuclear deal or risk military action.
- Iran’s Foreign Minister stated they might only negotiate with other JCPOA members (Europe, Russia, China), not the U.S.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015

- **Participants:**
 - Iran
 - P5+1: Five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, UK, U.S.) plus Germany.
 - EU: Participated in negotiations.

- **Iran's Commitments:**
 - **Nuclear Restrictions:** Iran agreed not to produce enriched uranium or plutonium for nuclear weapons and to ensure its nuclear centers (Fordow, Natanz, Arak) are aware of civilian purposes.
 - **Centrifuge Limits:** Iran confined the quantity, type, and degree of its centrifuges, and reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium.
 - Uranium enriched to 5% is for nuclear energy; 20% for research or scientific use; 90% for weapons.
 - **Monitoring and Verification:** Iran agreed to allow the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#) unfettered access to nuclear centers, including undeclared sites.
 - A Joint Commission monitors the deal's implementation and resolves disputes, which include granting IAEA access to suspicious sites.
- **What Other Signatories Agreed To:**
 - **Sanctions Relief:** The EU, UN, and U.S. Agreed to lift nuclear-related sanctions on Iran, however U.S. Sanctions on ballistic missiles, terrorism assist, and human rights remained.
 - The U.S. Lifted sanctions on oil exports but stored regulations on financial transactions.
 - UN palms and missile bans on Iran were lifted after 5 years, and the IAEA confirmed Iran's nuclear activities remained civilian.
 - **Violation of the Deal:** If any signatory suspects Iran is violating the deal, the UN Security Council can vote on whether or not to keep sanctions alleviation.
 - This "snapback" mechanism remains in impact for ten years, and then the UN sanctions are set to be completely removed.
 - **Trump's Withdrawal:** In 2018, President Trump withdrew the U.S. From the deal, leading Iran to resume nuclear activities.
 - **Iran's Nuclear Activity:** In 2023, Iran enriched uranium to close to weapon-grade ranges, elevating global issues.

Goals of the JCPOA

- **Delay Iran's Nuclear Weapon Development:** The purpose was to postpone Iran's capacity to make a nuclear weapon by at least 12 months, compared to a few months without the agreement.
- **Prevent Regional Crisis:** Fears that Iran's nuclear program ought to result in preemptive military action through Israel or a nuclear arms race in the region.

Challenges in Negotiation

- **Mistrust between the U.S. and Iran:** Past betrayals avert diplomatic progress.
- **Diverging Interests:** U.S. desires a broader deal; Iran seeks JCPOA recovery.
- **Domestic Political Constraints:** Hardliners in both nations resist compromise.

Source: [The TOI](#)

Prelims PYQ

1. In India, why are some nuclear reactors kept under “IAEA safeguards” while others are not? (2020)

(a) Some use uranium and others use thorium

(b) Some use imported uranium and others use domestic supplies

(c) Some are operated by foreign enterprises and others are operated by domestic enterprises

(d) Some are State-owned and others are privately owned

Ans: (b)

- Iran declined to resume negotiations on its nuclear programme with the USA.
- Trump’s administration has levied sanctions against Iran – such as on the country’s oil network – as part of his “maximum pressure” method.
- Trump wrote to Iran, urging negotiations on the nuclear deal or risk military action.
- Iran’s Foreign Minister stated they might only negotiate with other JCPOA members (Europe, Russia, China), not the U.S.

[2.4] US withdrawal from Loss and Damage Fund

Syllabus - Environment [GS Paper-3]

Context

The US has withdrawn from the board of the Loss and Damage Fund.

Trump Administration’s Climate Disengagement

- The decision displays the Trump management’s ongoing disengagement from international climate agreements, including pulling out of the Paris Agreement, halting US scientists’ participation within the IPCC, and cancelling the budget for the Green Climate Fund.

Loss and Damage Fund (LDF)

- It was established at the 2022 UNFCCC Conference (COP27) in Egypt to provide financial aid to regions struggling with both monetary and non-monetary losses resulting from climate change.
- These encompass severe climate activities and gradual-onset processes, along with rising sea levels.
- The LDF is overseen by a Governing Board that determines how the Fund’s sources are allotted, with the World Bank serving because the period in-between trustee.

Objectives

- The reason of the Fund is to help growing nations which can be particularly susceptible to the unfavourable outcomes of climate change in responding to economic and non-monetary loss and damage associated with the destructive effects of climate change, inclusive of excessive climate occasions and slow onset occasions.

Concerns

- Climate funds are often too slow to be reachable straight away after a disaster, in particular for local communities on the sub-national level.
- It is expected that the LDF may also face similar challenges.
- Without drastic emissions discounts, more countries will suffer from climate trade's devastating results, making additional resources for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage essential to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The US withdrawal undermines international climate justice and has to be held chargeable for its position in climate damage and reparations.

India's Approach

- Despite suffering over \$56 billion in damages from climate-associated disasters between 2019 and 2023, India has targeted more on mitigation efforts in place of adaptation, leading to confined participation in Loss and Damage dialogues at COP conferences.
- The creation of a climate finance taxonomy in India's Union Budget 2024 has raised hopes for expanded international climate finance. However, without clear steps on getting access to LDF funds, vulnerable communities will remain uncovered.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- The effectiveness of the Loss and Damage Fund depends on addressing gaps left via existing climate finance establishments just like the Green Climate Fund.
- However, for the fund to certainly be effective, the foundation cause of climate trade—emissions—ought to be tackled.
- India needs a clear legal and policy framework to streamline climate finance for model and loss and harm, in line with domestically led adaptation ideas critical for inclined groups.

Source: [The ToI](#)

Prelims PYQ

1. "Momentum for Change: Climate Neutral Now" is an initiative launched by (2018)

(a) The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

(b) The UNEP Secretariat

(c) The UNFCCC Secretariat

(d) The World Meteorological Organisation

Ans: (c)

- The US has withdrawn from the board of the Loss and Damage Fund.
- The decision displays the Trump management's ongoing disengagement from international climate agreements, including pulling out of the Paris Agreement, halting US scientists' participation within the IPCC, and cancelling the budget for the Green Climate Fund.
- It was established at the 2022 UNFCCC Conference (COP27) in Egypt to provide financial aid to regions struggling with both monetary and non-monetary losses resulting from climate change.
- These encompass severe climate activities and gradual-onset processes, along with rising sea levels.

[2.5] Spices Market In India

Syllabus - Environment [GS Paper-3]

Context

The World Spice Organisation (WSO) is working with FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations) to enhance safety, quality, and sustainability in spice cultivation through training farmers in quality control.

World Spice Organisation (WSO)

- It is a not-for-profit organisation registered under the Travancore Cochin Literary, Scientific And Charitable Societies Act, 1956 with the first objective of facilitating the Spice Industry in coping with problems of “Food Safety & Sustainability”.
- It includes all its stakeholders—the overall public, the industry, the academia and the end-users.

Spices Market In India

- India is called the ‘Spice Bowl’ of the world. It produces a number of fine, rare and medicinal spices.
- India is the world’s biggest spice producer. It is likewise the most important customer and exporter of spices.
- India holds only 0.7% of the \$14 billion global seasoning market in 2024, as compared to China’s 12% and the USA’s 11%.
- India exports 1.5 million tonnes of spices worth \$4.5 billion, capturing a sector of the \$20 billion international spice market.
- Only 48% of India’s spice exports are cost-introduced merchandise and to fulfill the Spices Board of India’s \$10 billion export goal by 2030, the share of value-added spices have to rise to 70%.
- The biggest spice-producing states in India are Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Assam, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Challenges in the Spices Sector

- **Impact of Climate Change on manufacturing:** Erratic rainfall, droughts, and growing temperatures have an effect on spice manufacturing. India’s contemporary spice production is inadequate for meeting export needs.
 - **Example:** Cardamom cultivation in Kerala has suffered because of irregular monsoons and excessive warmness.
- **Pests & Diseases:** Spices are enormously prone to fungal infections, pests, and viral diseases.
 - **Example:** Black pepper vines in Karnataka have been laid low with short wilt sickness, reducing yield.
- **Quality Control & Adulteration:** Adulteration in spices reduces export credibility and poses health risks.
 - **Example:** Turmeric adulteration with metanil yellow (a poisonous dye) has raised food protection issues.
- **Export Restrictions & Global Standards:** Stricter pesticide residue limits (MRLs) by nations just like the EU & US avert exports.
 - **Example:** Chili exports to the EU confronted rejection due to excessive pesticide residue stages.

- **Low Farmer Income & Market Fluctuations:** Price volatility and middlemen dominance lessen farmers' income.
 - **Example:** Cumin farmers in Gujarat warfare with price crashes because of oversupply.

Suggestions

- India ought to explore the nutraceutical and pharmaceutical price of spices, which are already used in Ayurveda and different kinds of medicine.
- To increase exports, production wishes to increase, and consciousness ought to be on reducing manufacturing costs, improving quality, and growing cost-brought spice exports.
- There is a need to increase high-yielding and climate-resistant spice varieties, with agencies like ICAR and National Research Centre on Seed Spices already operating in this.

Source: The ToI

Prelims PYQ

1. In making the saffron spice, which one of the following parts of the plant is used? (2009)

- (a) Leaf
- (b) Petal
- (c) Sepal
- (d) Stigma

Ans: (d)

- The World Spice Organisation (WSO) is working with FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations) to enhance safety, quality, and sustainability in spice cultivation through training farmers in quality control.
- India is called the 'Spice Bowl' of the world. It produces a number of fine, rare and medicinal spices.
- India is the world's biggest spice producer. It is likewise the most important customer and exporter of spices.
- India holds only 0.7% of the \$14 billion global seasoning market in 2024, as compared to China's 12% and the USA's 11%.
- India exports 1.5 million tonnes of spices worth \$4.5 billion, capturing a sector of the \$20 billion international spice market.

[\[2.6\] Platform Workers to Register on e-Shram Portal](#)

Syllabus - Economy [GS Paper-3]

Context

The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has urged gig and platform workers to register on the e-Shram portal for formal reputation and access to services under the **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)**.

Key Highlights

- India is witnessing a gig economy revolution because of its big workforce, speedy urbanization, smartphone penetration, and digital technology adoption.
- Recognizing the contribution of the gig and platform workers to the nation's financial system, the Union Budget 2025-26 has made the announcement for the provisions of
 - registration of on-line platform people on e-Shram portal,
 - trouble of identity playing cards, and
 - healthcare coverage under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).
- AB-PMJAY affords a cover of Rs.5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization throughout over 31,000 public and private empanelled hospitals in India.

What is Gig and Platform financial system?

- **Definition:** The Gig Economy refers to a labor market characterised by brief-time period, flexible jobs wherein workers are employed on a contractual or freelance foundation as opposed to conventional full-time employment. These workers, called gig workers, take up tasks (gigs) on-demand without long-term commitments.
 - The Platform Economy is a subset of the gig economy in which digital systems (web sites, apps like Zomato, Ola and so forth) join workers with clients or employers.
- **Projected Growth:** NITI Aayog has projected that the gig financial system in India will employ over 1 crore workers in 2024-25, finally achieving 2.35 Crores by 2029-30.
- **Trend:** Medium-professional jobs are reducing, whilst low and high-professional jobs are increasing.

Challenges for Gig workers

- **Lack of process security:** no fixed salary or lengthy-term contracts.
- **Limited social safety advantages:** Not blanketed below EPFO, ESIC, or other welfare schemes.
 - No health insurance, paid departure, or retirement benefits.
- **Unregulated work conditions:** Long hours, inconsistent pay, and capacity exploitation.
- **Dependence on platform algorithms:** Earnings and visibility rely upon platform regulations.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Gig & Platform Economy

- **Boosting Platform Economy:** Launch "Platform India" initiative for investment, skilling, and economic inclusion.
 - Connect street companies, small companies to digital structures.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Provide loans without collateral for gig workers.
 - Priority lending for first-time gig marketers.
- **Skill Development:** Government & platform collaboration for training.
 - Skill certification & skill development for gig workers.
- **Social Security:** Health coverage, accident insurance, paid sick leave.
 - Retirement plans, profits support all through low work periods.

Initiatives for Gig and Platform Workers

- **Legal Framework for Gig Workers:** Code on Social Security, 2020 officially described:
 - Aggregator
 - Gig Worker

- Platform Worker

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Mains PYQ

1. Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India. (2021)

- The Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has urged gig and platform workers to register on the e-Shram portal for formal reputation and access to services under the **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)**.
- India is witnessing a gig economy revolution because of its big workforce, speedy urbanization, smartphone penetration, and digital technology adoption.
- Recognizing the contribution of the gig and platform workers to the nation's financial system, the Union Budget 2025-26 has made the announcement for the provisions.
- AB-PMJAY affords a cover of Rs.5 lakhs per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization throughout over 31,000 public and private empanelled hospitals in India.

[2.7] India's participation in UN peacekeeping operations

Syllabus - International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

India actively participates in UN peacekeeping operations, emphasizing dialogue, international relations, and cooperation as key pillars of its foreign policy.

About UN Peacekeeping

- UN Peacekeeping is a key mechanism utilized by the **United Nations** to maintain global peace and security.
- It operates alongside different UN efforts, which includes warfare prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding.
- The UN Peacekeepers, called Blue Helmets, get their name from the light blue of the United Nations flag.

History of UN Peacekeeping

- UN Peacekeeping started out in 1948 with the established order of the **United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)** within the Middle East to screen ceasefires.
- During the Cold War, missions remained confined because of geopolitical tensions, but the end of the Cold War within the Nineties noticed a good sized enlargement in both the number and scope of peacekeeping operations.

India's Contribution to UN Peacekeeping

- India's UN peacekeeping position started out with the Korea operation in 1953.
- It has been a key contributor to global peace and security, with over 2,90,000 peacekeepers serving in more than 50 UN missions.

- Currently, over 5,000 Indian peacekeepers are deployed in nine energetic missions, running in tough situations to promote global peace.
- This commitment stems from India's historical precept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the entire world is my family).

Women in Peacekeeping

- In 2022, women made up 7.9% of all uniformed personnel in field missions – up from just 1% in 1993.
- This included 5.9% in military contingents, 14.4% in police forces, and 43% in justice and corrections roles. Among civilian personnel, 30% had been women.
- Recognizing the need for more gender inclusivity, the UN has set formidable goals under its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, aiming for 15% women in military contingents and 25% in police gadgets with the aid of 2028.
- **Indian Contribution:** India pioneered female peacekeeping with deployment of women medical officers to Congo in the 1960s.
- In 2007, India deployed the first-ever all-woman Formed Police Unit (FPU) to Liberia.
- As of February 2025, India maintains this legacy with over 150 women peacekeepers serving throughout six vital missions, such as those in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Lebanon, Golan Heights, Western Sahara, and Abyei.

Achievements of India

- In 2023, India obtained the UN's most peacekeeping honour, the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal, posthumously offered to Shishupal Singh and Sanwala Ram Vishnoi and civilian UN worker Shaber Taher Ali.
- Major Radhika Sen has been named the "Military Gender Advocate of the Year 2023" by the UN Headquarters.
- India's Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), mounted through the Indian Army in New Delhi, serves as the nation's focal factor for UN peacekeeping schooling.
- In February 2025, CUNPK hosted the 'Conference on Women Peacekeepers from the Global South' at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.

Conclusion

- India's role in UN peacekeeping reflects its deep commitment to international peace, security, and multilateralism.
- From its early involvement in the Korean War to its ongoing deployments in warfare zones worldwide, India has consistently upheld the concepts of the UN Charter.

Source: [The PIB](#)

Mains PYQ

1. Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in UN Security Council. (2015)

- India actively participates in UN peacekeeping operations, emphasizing dialogue, international relations, and cooperation as key pillars of its foreign policy.
- UN Peacekeeping is a key mechanism utilized by the **United Nations** to maintain global peace and security.

- It operates alongside different UN efforts, which includes warfare prevention, peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peacebuilding.
- The UN Peacekeepers, called Blue Helmets, get their name from the light blue of the United Nations flag.

[2.8] STEM Labs Established in Government Schools

Syllabus - Education [GS Paper-2]

Context

In Arunachal Pradesh's East Kameng district, government schools have established **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** labs to enhance educational experiences.

About STEM Labs

- STEM labs are dedicated spaces in schools where school students can interact in experiments, simulations, and assignment-based gaining knowledge of the usage of modern equipment and technology. They offer access to:
 - 3-D printers for prototyping
 - Robotics kits for coding and automation
 - Engineering tools for layout and testing

Importance of STEM Labs in Rural Education

- These labs assist them visualize concepts better, leading to deeper expertise and retention of knowledge.
- **For example:** The STEM lab at Government Higher Secondary School, Balijan, permits interactive, realistic mastering through experiments & models.
- Reduces the urban-rural divide in access to satisfactory education.
- Encourages innovation, coding, engineering, and medical studies skills.
- Prepares students for STEM-related jobs and higher education.

Government Initiatives and Policy Support

- **Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) under NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission:** Provides investment and mentorship for schools to increase innovation labs.
- **PM SHRI Schools Initiative:** Centrally sponsored scheme focuses on integrating STEM studying in government schools. It aligns with the National Education Policy (2020), falls under the **Samagra Shiksha scheme**.

Challenges in Implementation

- Teachers need upskilling in STEM pedagogy and lab control.
- Encouraging school students to actively take part in STEM activities remains a mission.
- Many government schools lack adequate facilities.

About East Kameng district of AP

- It shares an international border with China in the north.
- Located in western Arunachal Pradesh

- The name 'Kameng' has been derived from the Kameng river, a tributary of the strong Brahmaputra. Referred to because the "Jia Bharali" in Assam's higher reaches.
- Pakke Tiger Reserve is in this district.
- Major tribes: Monpa, Sherdukpen, and Aka tribes

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Mains PYQ

1. How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate on your answer. (2020)

- In Arunachal Pradesh's East Kameng district, government schools have established **Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)** labs to enhance educational experiences.
- STEM labs are dedicated spaces in schools where school students can interact in experiments, simulations, and assignment-based gaining knowledge of the usage of modern equipment and technology. They offer access to:
 - 3-D printers for prototyping
 - Robotics kits for coding and automation
 - Engineering tools for layout and testing

[2.9] World Air Quality Report 2024

Syllabus - Environment [GS Paper-3]

Context

According to the World Air Quality Report 2024, 13 of the world's top 20 most polluted cities are in India, with Byrnihat at the Assam-Meghalaya border being the most polluted.

Key Highlights

- India is the 5th most polluted country in the world, with a mean Air Quality Index (AQI) of 50.6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ – 10 times higher than the [World Health Organization's](#) (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline value of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- In 2023, India was the 1/3 most polluted country.
- Delhi continues to be the most polluted Capital city in the world with an average PM 2.5 concentration of 91.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- Out of the 138 countries and areas, 126 (91.3%) passed the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline value of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- Only 17% of world cities met WHO air pollution hints.
- PM2.5 concentrations are reduced in every country in Southeast Asia, although trans-boundary haze and lingering El Niño conditions remain fundamental elements.

Air Pollution and Its Concerns

- When harmful substances (pollutants) – particles, gases, or count – are released into the air and reduce its fine, the air is polluted.

- **Common air pollutants include:** Particulate Matter (PM), Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂), Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂), Ozone (O₃), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), Lead and many others.
- **Concerns:**
 - **Health Related:** Respiratory issues, cardiovascular issues, decreased lung feature.
 - **Environmental:** Ecosystem damage, Biodiversity loss, Water pollutants, climate exchange, crop harm.
 - **Healthcare Costs:** The health effects of air pollution result in multiplied healthcare expenses, which include expenses related to the remedy of breathing and cardiovascular diseases.

Steps Taken by Government of India to combat Air Pollution

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):** Launched in 2019, NCAP is a comprehensive initiative with the purpose of lowering air pollutants in recognized cities and regions across India.
 - The application focuses on improving air high-quality tracking, imposing stricter emission requirements, and promoting public awareness.
- **Bharat Stage VI (BS-VI) Emission Standards:** The government implemented BS-VI emission standards for vehicles nationwide in 2020.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** The PMUY scheme aims to provide smooth cooking fuel to families by promoting using liquefied petroleum gasoline (LPG) as an opportunity to use traditional biomass-based cooking methods.
- **FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles) Scheme:** The FAME scheme promotes the adoption of electrical and hybrid motors to lessen air pollution as a result of vehicular emissions.
- **Green Initiatives for Sustainable Habitat (GRIHA):** GRIHA is an initiative to sell sustainable and environmentally friendly practices within the creation and operation of homes.
- **Commission for Air Quality Management:** The Commission was established for Air Quality Management within the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas for higher coordination, studies, identity, and backbone of issues surrounding the air quality index.
- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** It is a set of emergency measures that kick in to prevent further deterioration of air quality once it reaches a certain threshold within the Delhi-NCR location.
- **Promotion of Public Transportation:** Encouraging the use of public transportation, inclusive of buses and metro systems, facilitates reducing the range of character automobiles on the street, therefore decreasing vehicular emissions.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

Mains PYQ

1. Describe the key points of the revised Global Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) recently released by the World Health Organisation (WHO). How are these different from its last update in 2005? What changes in India's National Clean Air Programme are required to achieve revised standards? (2021)

- According to the World Air Quality Report 2024, 13 of the world's top 20 most polluted cities are in India, with Byrnihat at the Assam-Meghalaya border being the most polluted.
- India is the 5th most polluted country in the world, with a mean Air Quality Index (AQI) of 50.6 µg/m³ – 10 times higher than the [World Health Organization's](#) (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline value of 5 µg/m³.

- In 2023, India was the 1/3 most polluted country.
- Delhi continues to be the most polluted Capital city in the world with an average PM 2.5 concentration of 91.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
- Out of the 138 countries and areas, 126 (91.3%) passed the WHO annual PM2.5 guideline value of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

[2.10] 69th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Syllabus: International Relation [GS Paper-2]

Context:

The 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) is a pivotal event in the global effort to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Scheduled to take place from March 10 to 21, 2025, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, this session marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark document adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

Background of the Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women began with a mandate from ECOSOC in 1946, making it the world's global intergovernmental machinery charged with the task of advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. It provides a platform where representatives from Member States, UN entities, and civil society organizations converge to discuss and take up issues pertaining to women's rights and empowerment.

Key Objectives of CSW69

- **Revisiting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:** CSW69 is to analyze and assess the state of the implementation of the most memorable and far-reaching - and still the most extensive and comprehensive - agenda for gender equality worldwide: the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This review will investigate current challenges in implementing the Platform for Action and what it brings to the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030.
- **Addressing Present Challenges:** Although much progress has been made since adoption of the Beijing Declaration, challenges remain: progress with gender equality has been slow and uneven, violence against women is on the rise, and emerging technologies are weaponized against women and girls. CSW69, through its policy recommendations and agreed conclusions, will meet these challenges in preparation for action to come.
- **Moving Towards Gender Equality and Empowerment:** An acceleration of efforts towards achieving gender equality will be amongst the themes of this session: equal political and economic participation, combating violence against women, and promoting women's rights, inter alia, will be in focus in the face of emerging global challenges such as climate change.

Participation and Engagement

- **Global Representation:** CSW69 will bring together thousands of participants from governments, civil society organizations, experts, and activists worldwide. The session will be chaired by Saudi Arabia, with vice-chairs representing different regions.
- **Civil Society and NGOs:** ECOSOC-accredited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in CSW69 by providing diverse perspectives and advocating for women's rights. Organizations like Public Services International (PSI) will advocate for recognizing care as a human right and promoting trade union rights as women's rights.

- **Side Events and Parallel Sessions:** In addition to the main sessions, numerous side events and parallel sessions will be organized. For example, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) will host a session on "Women at the Agriculture-Nutrition Nexus". France will organize a side event focusing on combating sexual and gender-based cyber violence.

Expected Outcomes

- **Political Declaration and Multi-Year Programme of Work:** CSW69 will adopt its political declaration on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a multi-year programme of work that will outline themes for future sessions. This will chart the course of much of global effort over the next four years towards achieving gender equality.
- **Agreed Conclusions:** Member States will agree on conclusions that outline common positions and recommendations on gender equality issues. These conclusions are intended to encourage government and other stakeholders' concrete actions to promote women's rights.

Conclusion

The 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women is a critical moment for reaffirming global commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. As the world marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, CSW69 offers a platform for assessing progress, addressing challenges, and charting a path forward towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The session's outcomes will have significant implications for women's rights and empowerment globally, shaping policies and actions for years to come.

Source: [UN Women](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment globally. Discuss its mandate, key initiatives, and challenges in achieving gender parity.

[2.11] Geo-Mapping of Rubber Plantations

Syllabus: Geography [GS Paper-1]

Context

The Rubber Board of India is set to initiate a significant project by launching the geo-mapping of rubber plantations in Kerala. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance market access for rubber growers and ensure they receive better prices for their produce. Geo-mapping involves the digital documentation of plantation details such as land ownership, area, and boundaries, which will help in aligning with international sustainability standards.

Background of Rubber Plantations in India

Rubber cultivation in India began in 1895 on the hill slopes of Kerala, with commercial-scale production starting in 1902. Today, India is the third-largest producer of natural rubber globally, with Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka being major production centers. Natural rubber is preferred over synthetic rubber due to its superior properties like high tensile strength and vibration-dampening capabilities, making it crucial for industries such as construction and automobiles.

Objectives of Geo-Mapping

- **Enhancing Market Access:** One of the prime objectives for the geo-mapping is to enhance market access by rubber growers. It aims to ensure insurers provide access to plant and plantation mapping to allow the creation of a clear and traceable supply chain against which the prices paid by growers can be assessed internationally as relevant for their product.
- **Provide Compliance:** Geo-mapping is equally relevant for fulfilling the Deforestation Regulation of the European Union (EUDR), mandating that commodities entering into the EU market should be deforestation-free after December 31, 2020. By geo-mapping the origin of rubber, India can claim that its natural rubber exports are free from these conditions and still are within the purview of the EU market.
- **Development of Traceability Systems:** The initiative includes development of such an effective traceability system, which guarantees the origin of rubber. The basis of due diligence certification further strengthens the credibility of Indian rubber compared to international markets through risk assessment and legality analysis.

Benefits for Growers

- **Improved Prices:** Complying with such sustainable development requirements opens the door for a better price from the end of the grower. Because the sustainability standards themselves will be verified by the traceability and certification process, buyers will have confidence in the quality and sustainability of the rubber with time, which will lead to increasing demand and higher prices.
- **Indian Sustainable Natural Rubber (iSNR) Accreditation II:** The iSNR accreditation framework provides free certification for farmers and growers with natural rubber meeting all sustainability requirements. This is compulsory for rubber products that are to be marketed in accordance with EUDR and thus provides an edge in the international market for growers.

Technical Aspects of Geo-Mapping

- **GIS-Based Mapping:** Geo-mapping involves using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to create detailed maps of plantations. This technology allows for precise documentation of land use, ownership, and boundaries. GIS-based soil fertility mapping, as seen in Mizoram, also helps in optimizing fertilizer application, reducing costs for growers.
- **Soil Fertility Mapping:** In addition to geo-mapping, soil fertility mapping is another critical aspect of improving rubber cultivation efficiency. By analyzing soil samples for various nutrients, growers can apply fertilizers based on specific needs, avoiding overuse or underuse. This approach not only reduces costs but also enhances environmental sustainability by minimizing chemical inputs.

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Challenges:** There are several challenges geo-mapping and certification bring with them. Major is the capital investment required to cover costs associated with installation of equipment, technology and training requirements. Other challenges are the continuous monitoring and regular updating to conform to new regulations.
- **Opportunity:** Geo-mapping presents great opportunities for Indian rubber growers. India has opened many opportunities by aligning itself with international standards and thus being a big player in the trade that serves most of the world's rubber needs. Sustainability and growing awareness create a whole new range of consumers wanting "green" products in their lives and will end up being buyers in the global market of Indian natural rubber.

Conclusion

The Rubber Board's initiative to geo-map rubber plantations in Kerala is a strategic move to enhance the competitiveness of Indian natural rubber in the global market. By improving market access, ensuring compliance with international regulations, and promoting sustainable practices, this initiative is poised to benefit both growers and the environment. As India continues to play a

significant role in the global rubber industry, such initiatives will be crucial in maintaining its position as a major producer and exporter of natural rubber.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Rubber Plantations in India:

1. Rubber cultivation in India is primarily confined to the northeastern states.
2. Kerala is the largest producer of natural rubber in India.
3. Rubber is classified as a commercial crop and grows well in humid tropical climates.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (b)

[2.12] India's Decision to Increase U.S. Oil Imports

Syllabus: International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

India, as the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, relies heavily on imports to meet its energy needs. The country's commitment to purchasing more U.S. oil is part of a broader strategy to diversify its energy sources and strengthen bilateral trade relations with the United States.

Context of India-U.S. Energy Trade

Among these many attempts, energized by countries from the Middle East to Russia, India had recently turned toward the United States—an excitingly emerging country in crude oil and liquefied natural gas production—to meet its energy requirements. This proves beneficial to both nations, thereby improving the bilateral cooperation even further in PM Modi's near conversations with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Reasons for Increased U.S. Oil Imports

- **Diversification of Energy Sources:** India's dependence on imported oil is substantial, with over 85% of its crude oil requirements being met through imports. Diversifying energy sources is crucial for ensuring stable supplies and mitigating risks associated with geopolitical tensions. The U.S. offers a reliable alternative to traditional suppliers like Russia and the Middle East, helping India reduce its vulnerability to price fluctuations and supply disruptions.
- **Greater Bilateral Trade:** Concerning the trade with the U.S., currently, quantified in India's favor, it is just highly skewed against India. More energy imports from the U.S., thus, are part of the broader trading agenda to balance this relationship. The bilateral goal is for trade to increase to \$500 billion over the next five years, and such purchases are key to this.

- **Retaliatory Tariffs are Avoided:** America's worry about trade with India is now at the stage of discussing retaliatory tariffs. By agreeing on imports for crude oil and LNG, India would mitigate such risks of retaliation and involve new trade barriers that might apply to its exports to the U.S.

Benefits of U.S. Energy Imports

- **Strengthening Energy Ties:** The agreement to ramp up energy imports from the United States will solidify energy ties between the two countries. This effort is not just limited to trade but includes investment in oil and gas infrastructure and strengthening partnerships among energy companies.
- **Diversification of LNG Supplies:** India aims to raise the share of gas in its energy mix to 15% by 2030. U.S. LNG offers diversification that enables India to balance its gas sourcing portfolio between crude oil-linked prices and Henry Hub prices. This diversification is important in managing price risks and ensuring energy security.

Challenges and Considerations

- **Logistical and Cost Factors:** While intent to raise U.S. oil imports is clear, its effective realisation will rest on several factors, namely freight costs, types of crude available, and discounts offered by U.S. producers. Indian refiners will have to weigh all these factors so that imports from the U.S. are economically viable against other suppliers.
- **Competition from Other Suppliers:** India's energy market is highly competitive with suppliers from Russia, the Middle East, and the rest of the world that have terms of their own. U.S. suppliers, therefore, must be ready to compete in price and logistics to protect their shares. Trends indicate that India had favored Russian oil purchases in recent times due to the discounts offered, but these discounts have narrowed, prompting exploration of other alternatives.

Conclusion

India's decision to increase its oil and gas imports from the U.S. reflects a strategic approach to energy security and trade diplomacy. By diversifying its energy sources and strengthening ties with the U.S., India aims to achieve multiple objectives: enhancing energy security, balancing trade relations, and avoiding potential trade disputes. As the global energy landscape continues to evolve, India's commitment to U.S. energy imports will play a significant role in shaping its future energy strategy.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. The United States has emerged as a significant crude oil supplier to India, diversifying India's energy imports. Discuss the factors driving this trend and analyze its implications for India's energy security and strategic relations.

[2.13] Government's Modified Ethanol Scheme

Syllabus: Government Schemes [GS Paper-2]

Context

The Ministry of Food and Public Distribution, on the other hand, very recently brought up the introduction of a path-breaking initiative in the modified Ethanol Interest Subvention Scheme for transforming cooperative sugar mills. The scheme was opened for converting ethanol plants from sugarcane-based to multi-feedstock facilities to enable year-round production on alternative raw materials, such as maize and damaged food grains (DFG). It would also help rectify operational inefficiencies along the, besides aligning itself with the biofuel targets of India as set under the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme for 20% ethanol blending with petrol by the year 2025 as a way forward.

Objectives of the Scheme

The modified ethanol scheme has been launched with the following goals:

- **Year-round operations:** Overcoming the seasonal limitations of sugarcane crushing by introducing alternative feedstocks.
- **Support for biofuel targets:** Contributing to India's goal of achieving 20% ethanol blending with petrol by 2025.
- **Improved financial viability:** Enhancing the operational and financial stability of cooperative sugar mills.
- **Reduction in fossil fuel imports:** Promoting biofuel production to reduce dependency on imported crude oil.

Key Features of the Scheme

- **Multi-Feedstock Conversion:** The scheme facilitates the conversion of existing sugarcane-based ethanol plants into multi-feedstock facilities. These plants will now be able to process grains like maize and DFG, ensuring year-round production even when sugarcane is unavailable.
- **Interest Subvention Benefits:** To support cooperative sugar mills financially, the government offers:
 - Interest subsidies of 6% per annum or 50% of bank interest rates, whichever is lower.
 - The subsidy is applicable for a period of five years, including a one-year moratorium period.
 - Loans under this scheme will be provided by banks and financial institutions.
- **Alignment with National Biofuel Goals:** The scheme directly supports the EBP Programme, which aims to reduce fossil fuel dependency and greenhouse gas emissions by promoting ethanol as a renewable energy source.

Addressing Challenges in Sugar Mills

- **Limited Duration of Operations:** Historically, sugar mills are characterized by only about four to five months of operations due to an exceedingly limited sugarcane-crushing season. This affects the productivity and profitability of the mills. By maintaining the operation of sugar mills as a multi-feedstock plant, the scheme involves a continuous year-round operation.
- **Financial Unviability:** Because of their seasonal operation, cooperative sugar mills are often under pressure with their finances, which improves cash inflow due to round-the-year operationality from multi-feedstock facilities and reduces the overdose reliance conveniently on a seasonal revenue base.

- **Concerns Over Energy Security:** India's economic and environment issues stem from the huge dependence on fossil fuel imports. The scheme promotes energy security by increasing domestic ethanol production, thus reducing import dependency.

Benefits of Multi-Feedstock Ethanol Plants

- **Uninterrupted Operations:** Multi-feedstock facilities provide for uninterrupted production of ethanol throughout the year, regardless of season.
- **Improved Efficiency:** Diversified feedstock increases the rate of plant operations and efficiency.
- **Economic Certainty:** Round-the-year operation secures uninterrupted cash flow for cooperative sugar mills.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Increased biofuel production reduces carbon emissions in line with India's climate goal.
- **Farmer Support:** Increased demand for alternative crops like maize gives farmers another avenue for income.

Implementation Strategy

- **Financial Support Mechanism:** The government shall provide interest subvention through the banks and other financial institutions to make the loans for conversion affordable. The cooperative sugar mills will source such loans with minimal financial burden for the conversion of the plants.
- **Collaboration of Stakeholders:** The project will depend on successful collaboration among the government, cooperative sugar mills, banks, and other stakeholders. This will ensure smooth implementation through regular consultation and addressing challenges encountered.
- **Monitoring of Progress:** The government will monitor the conversion of plants with respect to increased capacity for ethanol production, operational efficiency, and financial returns.

Source: [ET](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the Government's Modified Ethanol Scheme:

1. The scheme aims to promote ethanol production from food grains and sugarcane to boost biofuel adoption in India.
2. It is implemented under the National Bio-Energy Mission.
3. The scheme provides financial assistance for setting up ethanol production plants.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only

[2.14] India-Mauritius: Strengthening Long-Standing Ties

Syllabus: International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

India and Mauritius share a deep-rooted relationship built on historical, cultural, and people-to-people ties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Mauritius on March 11-12, 2025, underscores the importance of this partnership in today's uncertain global environment. The visit, which coincides with Mauritius' 57th National Day celebrations, aims to deepen bilateral cooperation across various sectors.

Historical and Cultural Bonds

- The relationship between India and Mauritius is unique, with nearly 70% of Mauritius' population being of Indian origin. This shared heritage forms the foundation of their close ties.
- Cultural exchanges and festivals have been pivotal in maintaining these bonds, reflecting India's soft power influence in the region.

Key Highlights of PM Modi's Visit

- **Participation in the National Day Celebrations:**
 - Modi will be the chief guest at the National Day of Mauritius on March 12, indicating the respect which India holds for the island-nation's sovereignty and historical linkages.
 - Indian defense forces and an Indian naval ship will also be participating, symbolizing goodwill and solidarity.
- **Inauguration of India-Funded Projects:**
 - Modi will inaugurate major infrastructure projects like the Civil Service College and the Area Health Centre, both financed through India's grant assistance.
 - Over 20 projects supported by India focusing on community development and capacity building will be inaugurated.
- **Bilateral Discussion:**
 - With the Mauritian Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam and President Dharambeer Gokhool, he will discuss strengthening cooperation in maritime security, financial crime prevention, and civil service training.
 - Several MoUs are expected to be signed in areas such as trade, small and medium enterprises, and cross-border financial crime management.
- **Engagement with the Indian Diaspora:**
 - Modi will meet members of the Indian-origin community in Mauritius, solidifying the people-to-people aspect of the relationship.

Strategic Importance of Mauritius

- **Vision SAGAR:**
 - Mauritius serves as an important part of India's Vision SAGAR, which strives to ensure maritime security and sustainable development in the Indian Ocean region, promising work together for security and growth for all in the region.
 - In India's case, the island country serves as a source of strength in countering the threats posed by non-regional players and enables economic growth in its area.

- **Economic Ties:**
 - Since 2005, India has been an important trading partner of Mauritius. Bilateral trade, which has been increasing, has now reached USD 554 million in terms of trade in 2022-23.
 - Indian exports comprise pharmaceuticals, textiles, machinery, while Mauritius fuels its exports with sugar and seafood.
- **Maritime Security Cooperation:**
 - The visit shall focus much on the strengthening of maritime security through agreements on fighting piracy, illegal fishing, and several such issues in the Indian Ocean.

Significance of the Visit

- **Reinforcement of commitment:**
 - Through it, India formally reaffirms its commitment to its long-standing bilateral relationship with Mauritius while relooking into other new avenues for collaboration.
 - An evident step forward, it shows India's role as a trustworthy partner for small nations in their quest for sustainable development.
- **Geopolitical Implications:**
 - Strengthening ties with Mauritius is crucial for India at a time when the Chinese presence is increasingly manifest in the Indian Ocean region.
 - By building infrastructure and capacity, India makes itself a development partner rather than an extension of its debt-driven power with the money-tagged projects.

Challenges Ahead

- While relations remain strong, challenges such as balancing trade deficits, addressing financial crime concerns, and countering external influences need continuous attention.
- Ensuring that projects funded by India deliver tangible benefits to local communities is essential for sustaining goodwill.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius is a testament to the enduring partnership between the two nations. By focusing on areas like maritime security, economic cooperation, and cultural ties, this visit seeks to adapt their relationship to contemporary challenges while honoring their shared history. As global uncertainties persist, strengthening such alliances becomes vital for regional stability and growth.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically analyze the strategic and economic significance of India-Mauritius relations. How has the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) impacted bilateral ties? Also, discuss the role of Mauritius in India's Indian Ocean strategy.

[2.15] Addressing Gender Disparities in the Judiciary

Syllabus: Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

The injustice of gender disparity in India's higher judiciary has become an age-old issue, despite both much development and increased participation in the legal profession by women.

Current Status of Women in the Judiciary

Women have made substantial progress in the legal field since Cornelia Sorabji became the first woman lawyer in India in 1924. Today, women constitute a growing number of lawyers and judges, but their representation in the higher judiciary remains disappointingly low.

- **High Courts:** Women constitute a mere 14.27 percent of judges, out of which just 109 are women out of 764 judges. State High Courts, such as Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Tripura, etc., do not have a single judge woman.
- **Supreme Court:** Currently, the Supreme Court comprises only two women judges, Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Bela Trivedi, and then there will be just one woman remaining when Justice Bela Trivedi retires in June 2025. There hasn't been placement of any women judges in the Supreme Court since 2021.

Challenges Faced by Women in the Higher Judiciary

Several structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers contribute to the low representation of women in the higher judiciary.

- **Systemic Gender Bias and Stereotypes:** Women often face deep-rooted biases within the legal profession, being perceived as less capable of handling complex legal matters or leadership roles. This stereotype requires women to work harder to prove their competence compared to their male counterparts.
- **Opaque Collegium System:** The selection process by collegium system is not transparent, and does not favor gender diversity. This opaqueness becomes an obstacle for the appointment of women judges as clear criteria to be followed for eligibility and merit do not exist.
- **Very limited number of senior women advocates:** Since very few women reach the level of Senior Advocate, this decreases the number of potential candidates for entry to the higher judiciary. In its entire history, only Justice Indu Malhotra has been elevated from the Bar directly to the Supreme Court.
- **Delay in Age:** Women are appointed later than the male counterparts at an average appointment age of 53 years as compared to 51.8 years for men. This limits the tenure and chances of becoming Chief Justices.
- **Selective Confirmation by Government:** Names of women recommended by the collegium are likely to be delayed or rejected by the government. Since 2020, nine women were recommended to fill appointments to the High Court, but five of these names were rejected.

Steps to Improve Gender Equality in the Judiciary

Some of the reforms that can be undertaken to reduce gender imbalance in the higher judiciary include the following:

- **Establish Clear Processes:** Clear and transparent processes are quite important for judicial appointments. This should also entail clearly defined criteria for eligibility and merit with the selection being based on qualifications and integrity.
- **Commit to Gender Diversity:** Such an arrangement would ensure that a minimum of one-third of judges in the higher judiciary are women, thus DH performing legitimacy and public trust in the higher courts.

- **Counter Cultures of Systemic Bias:** One of the major steps in countering profound biases against women in law is internalizing the process for appointment of women judges, without special scrutiny, thus ensuring that women are not subjected to tougher standards than men.
- **Increase Government Accountability:** It makes the government accountable for denying women recommended by the collegium as part of the solution to the problem of selective confirmations. As of 2020, nine names of women were recommended but none confirmed; of these, five were the only names rejected.

Conclusion

The gender gap closure in higher judiciary is necessary for the perspective of constitutional values of equality, inclusion, and justice. The first step toward gender parity is the removal of systemic discrimination, transparent appointment processes, and a balanced representation policy. By normalizing women's appointments and providing equal opportunities, India will move toward a more representative and inclusive judiciary.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Despite constitutional principles of equality, women remain underrepresented in India's higher judiciary. Examine the structural, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers responsible for this gender gap and suggest comprehensive reforms to ensure greater judicial diversity. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

[2.16] Developing Climate-Resilient Foods: Smart Proteins

Syllabus: Science and Technology [GS Paper-3]

Context

The Indian government is exploring innovative approaches to address food security, climate change, and nutritional deficiencies through the development of "smart proteins." These alternative protein sources are designed to mimic the taste and texture of traditional proteins while being derived from sustainable sources like microorganisms, plants, and lab-grown animal cells. This initiative aligns with global efforts to create sustainable food systems and reduce environmental impacts.

What Are Smart Proteins?

Smart proteins are alternative protein sources that replicate the sensory experience of conventional proteins such as meat, fish, and dairy. They are derived from:

- **Microorganisms:** Edible fungi and microbial biomass.
- **Plants:** Protein-rich crops like lentils, chickpeas, quinoa, and fava beans.
- **Lab-Grown Animal Cells:** Cultured animal proteins produced in controlled environments.

These proteins aim to provide a sustainable and nutritious alternative to traditional protein sources while addressing challenges like resource overuse, climate change, and food insecurity.

Why Are Smart Proteins Needed?

- **Environmental Sustainability:**
 - Conventional food systems emit massive amounts of carbon, destroy land and forests, and create water imbalances.

- Smart proteins save water, land, and energy compared to regular livestock farming.
- **Addressing Protein Deficiency:**
 - India has a severe protein deficiency largely due to the unavailability of affordable protein foods.
 - Smart proteins could work toward bridging the nutritional gap by serving as cheaper sources of protein.
- **Climate Resilience:**
 - With rising global warming and erratic weather patterns, the threat to traditional agriculture has grown.
 - Smart proteins are a climate-resilient solution that can take away some of the pressure from vulnerable agricultural systems.
- **Food Security:**
 - With the human population increasing exponentially, food systems are expected to meet the never-ending demands.
 - Alternate proteins will ensure steady supply and nutritious food for the generations yet to come.

The Indian Government's Initiative

Under the recently launched BioE3 initiative, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) is spearheading efforts to develop smart proteins. Key aspects of this initiative include:

- **Funding Research:** Grants have been invited for research on developing and scaling up smart protein production.
- **Building Ecosystems:** Efforts are underway to create a safe, affordable, and efficient manufacturing ecosystem for these proteins.
- **Driving Innovation:** The DBT aims to foster innovation in biotechnology to enable large-scale adoption of alternative proteins.

Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary of DBT, has emphasized that ongoing research under the BioE3 policy will drive growth in this field.

Global Efforts in Smart Protein Development

India is not alone in its pursuit of sustainable protein solutions. Global initiatives include:

- **EU Horizon 2020 Program:**
 - The European Union's SMART PROTEIN project concentrates on the development of plant and microbial biomass protein using side streams from industries like pasta, bread and beer.
 - These initiatives want to create worthwhile alternatives to options that are resource-efficient, but at the same time promote biodiversity and build consumer confidence.
- **Good Food Institute (GFI):**
 - GFI started a \$10.5 million project aimed at plant-based meats, seafood, cheese, and other goodies from exciting new protein sources like fungi and byproducts.

Such international collaboration speaks volumes for the growing recognition of smart proteins as a critical component of sustainable food systems.

Challenges in Scaling Up Smart Proteins

Despite their potential, several challenges must be addressed for large-scale adoption:

- **Cost Efficiency:**
 - At present, production of lab-grown and plant-based proteins is an expensive process.
 - Investments in research are needed to make these alternatives more bankable.

- **Consumer Acceptance:**
 - It is imperative to build consumer trust with safety aspects and taste of smart proteins.
 - Awareness campaigns would help decrease public skepticism.
- **Regulatory Frameworks:**
 - There should be regulatory guidelines for production and commercialization of alternative proteins.
 - Governments should ensure regulatory approval, being mindful not to stifle innovation.
- **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Infrastructural advancements in fermentations, cultivation, and processing are needed to scale production up.
 - The cooperation of the public and private sectors would ease this transition.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Discuss the importance of developing climate-resilient foods in ensuring global food security. What strategies can India adopt to promote such food systems? (250 words)

[2.17] India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement

Syllabus: International Relations [GS Paper-2]

Context

The decision by India and the United States to negotiate a multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by the fall of 2025 is a significant step in strengthening economic ties between the two nations. However, this agreement must align with international trade law, particularly the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and World Trade Organization (WTO) principles.

Understanding Free Trade Agreements under WTO Law

- **The MFN Principle:** The WTO is based on the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle, which demands equal treatment for all trading partners with one another. This principle, enshrined in Article I of GATT, ensures that any preferential treatment granted to one country must also be extended to all WTO members.
- **FTAs as Exceptions to MFN:** FTAs bring exceptions to the MFN principle under Article XXIV.8(b) of GATT. FTAs require countries to abolish tariffs and barriers on "substantial all the trade" between the countries. Though this term has not been defined clearly, it generally means to have covered around 90% or more of trade.
- **Implications for the India-U.S. BTA:** Scope of the proposed BTA remains questionable as it does not quite epitomize itself as an FTA. If it does not bring down tariffs on quite a range of goods and services, it would be against WTO law unless justified under some provisions.

Legal Considerations for the India-U.S. BTA

MFN Compliance: Noncompliance with one of the serious legal issues for BTA is the MFN principle. If India and the US agree to reduce tariffs with reference to one another's products, and give no such treatment to other WTO members, this could amount to a violation of WTO rules.

Structure of the BTA: FTA or Interim Agreement?

- **FTA Requirement:** As per GATT Article XXIV, an FTA must eliminate barriers to trade on "substantially all trade". If the BTA does not meet this threshold, it cannot claim qualification as an FTA.
- **Interim Agreements:** Article XXIV.5 brings in the possibility of countries entering into interim agreements, as steps toward formation of an FTA. Such a provision is available to phased tariff reductions, spreading over a reasonable timeframe (normally within 10 years). It is hence possible to structure BTA as interim agreements, while India and the US are working toward comprehensive FTA.

Potential WTO Violations and Political Challenges

- **Risk of Discrimination:** If BTA focuses on tariff reductions limited to a small number of goods or services and makes no wider commitments, then this most probably will be interpreted as discrimination against other members of the WTO and hence may lead to a legal challenge from excluded countries.
- **Political Considerations:** India has internal bilateral commitments to fulfill while at the same time keeping its promises multilaterally under WTO rules. Politically, India has to face pressure to see to it that any agreement does not impinge on India's trade policy or compromise its negotiating position in the global trade process.

Strategic Importance of Compliance

- **Role of India in Maintaining WTO Norms:** India has been a proponent of rules-based international trading systems, and this prospective BTA will be an avenue through which India can demonstrate how serious it is about WTO principles even as it pursues economic prosperity.
- **Policy Changes:** The U.S. under the present administration has adopted a policy of aggressive trade measures through such means as reciprocal tariffs that violate WTO norms such as Most Favored Nation Status and Special and Differential Treatment. For India, making its way through these while still keeping the multilateral rules would be essential.

The Way Ahead

Designing a Legally Sound Agreement

To ensure compliance with WTO principles:

- The BTA should either qualify as an FTA by eliminating barriers on "substantially all trade" or be structured as an interim agreement under Article XXIV.
- Tariff reductions should be phased in a manner that aligns with GATT requirements.

Balancing Bilateral and Multilateral Commitments: India must remain vigilant against any attempts to dilute core WTO principles such as MFN and S&DT. A balanced approach will ensure that the BTA strengthens global trade frameworks rather than undermining them.

Conclusion

The proposed India-U.S. BTA presents both opportunities and challenges. While it could enhance economic ties and promote trade, careful structuring is essential to ensure compliance with WTO regulations. By adhering to international norms and strategically negotiating terms, India can leverage this agreement to boost its economic growth while maintaining its commitment to a fair and transparent global trading system.

Source: [Financial Express](#)

Q. Discuss the key aspects of the India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement and analyze its impact on various sectors of the Indian economy. What are the major challenges in strengthening trade ties between the two countries? Suggest measures to enhance bilateral trade relations. (250 words)

[2.18] Digital Tools Transforming Women's Role in Farming

Syllabus: Economy [GS Paper-3]

Context

India's agri-food systems, encompassing agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and agroforestry, heavily depend on women's labor. Despite their significant contributions, women face systemic barriers that limit their productivity and decision-making capacities. These challenges are exacerbated by gendered norms that assign women labor-intensive, low-paying tasks while denying them access to resources and technology. However, targeted technological interventions have begun to address these inequities, empowering women and transforming their roles in agriculture and allied sectors.

Challenges Faced by Women in Agriculture

- **Limited Access to Resources:** The independence of women to control productive resources such as land, credit, and farm machinery is curtailed.
- **Time-Consuming Work:** Women are often assigned to very hard work like weeding, threshing, and dehulling. These heavy and laborious activities drain out the energy of women and consume much time.
- **Impact of Mechanization:** The mechanization of agriculture often tends to favor men, thus leaving behind women in paid agricultural work.
- **Intersectional Barriers:** Gender, alongside caste and class, further deepens the inequalities in labor division and resource allocation.

Role of Technology in Empowering Women

Technological innovations tailored to women's needs can significantly enhance their productivity, decision-making capabilities, and economic independence.

Interventions-Agricultural Interventions

- The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has made efforts to re-introduce the cultivation of small millets among indigenous communities in the Koraput district of Odisha. The introduction of machines for women to undertake threshing- and dehulling-related work has reduced their workload and enhanced productivity.
- Digital tools in the form of mobile applications and helplines help women farmers in marketing information, inventory management, and sustainable agriculture practices.

Digital Empowerment in Fisheries

- Women fish workers in Tamil Nadu have benefited much through digital tools including mobile phones and advisory tools. This has improved their access to fish markets, reduced their operational costs, and enhanced their resilience against economic vulnerabilities.
- Also, programs such as PlantwisePlus provide women with plant health management information through digital learning platforms and empower them to practice climate-smart agriculture.

Breaking Stereotypes Through Technology

- **Challenging Gender Norms:** Tractors and other farm machinery are often seen as symbols of masculine power. Training women to operate these tools challenges patriarchal stereotypes and increases their agency in farming operations.
- **Leadership Roles in Agritech:** Agritech is knocking about the doors of women managerial roles in post-harvest arenas such as processing, sales, and marketing. The shift towards that is drawing women higher along the social ladder.

Case Studies of Impact

- **Rejuvenating Koraput Millets:** The empowering women that MSSRF has practiced in Koraput has also engaged them in making decisions regarding sowing and selection, thereby managing resources.
- **Fisheries Sector in Tamil Nadu:** The digital tools linked with the MSSRF initiative enable female fish vendors in crossing associated barriers such as better market access and high cost of transport.

Challenges in Scaling Gender-Responsive Technologies

- **Digital Divide:** Poor access to smartphones and restricted internet coverage further constraints women's access to digital tools.
- **Patriarchal Resistance:** Investments made towards gender-responsive technology are often critiqued by families and communities who are steeped in traditional norms.

Way Forward

- **Policy Support:** Governments must prioritize gender-inclusive policies that promote women's access to resources and technology.
- **Capacity Building:** Training programs should focus on equipping women with skills to operate advanced machinery and use digital tools.
- **Community Engagement:** Interventions must involve men, families, and local communities to create an enabling ecosystem for women's empowerment.

Conclusion

Technological interventions tailored to women's needs can bridge the gender gap in agriculture, enhancing productivity and fostering economic independence. However, these efforts must be accompanied by systemic changes that address deep-rooted patriarchal structures. By investing in gender-responsive technologies and creating inclusive ecosystems, India can unlock the full potential of its female workforce in agriculture and allied sectors.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Women play a crucial role in Indian agriculture, yet they face multiple challenges in terms of access to land, credit, and technology. Discuss the significance of women in agriculture and suggest measures to enhance their participation and empowerment. (250 words, 15 marks)

[2.19] Habitual Offender Laws in India

Syllabus: Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

Habitual offender laws, operational in 14 states and Union Territories (UTs) in India, have been a subject of constitutional and social debate. These laws aim to monitor and control individuals classified as "habitual offenders," but critics argue that they disproportionately target marginalized communities, particularly denotified tribes. The Supreme Court has urged states to reconsider these laws, citing their constitutional validity and redundancy.

States and UTs with Habitual Offender Laws

- **States/UTs in Operational Mode:** Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Goa, Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Telangana, and others.
- **Gujarat:** Gujarat has specifically stated that it opposes the repeal of the law, since it hurts no particular community.
- **Telangana:** A preventive rather than punitive law.
- **Goa:** As no denotified tribes are present in the state, Goa deems it unnecessary to repeal the law.

States Without Habitual Offender Laws

- **No Law:** West Bengal, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Bihar, and Sikkim.
- **Those Repealed:** Haryana and Ladakh have repealed their habitual offenders laws.

Supreme Court's Perspective

In a landmark decision (2024), the Supreme Court indeed put in question the constitutional validity of habitual offenders' enactments. Notable observations were:

- **Targeting Denotified Tribes:** Such laws have always acted against entire communities that were labeled "criminal tribes" by the British.
- **Vague Definitions:** The definition of the habitual offender is vague.
- **Constitutional Vulnerability:** The laws were struck down as violative of Articles 14 (equality), 15 (non-discrimination), and 21 (right to life and dignity).

The court insisted the states reconsider the framework of such laws and bring them in consonance with constitutional principles.

Impact on Prison Populations

According to NCRB data, 2022:

- 1.9% of all convicts in India (1.29 lakh) are habitual offenders.
- Delhi has the highest rate of 21.5% of convict population.

Responses from States

- **Punjab:** No registration of habitual offenders; no orders have been passed for five years.
- **Andhra Pradesh & Odisha:** No registration of cases under these laws in recent years.
- **Uttar Pradesh:** Provisions already covered under U.P. Control of Goondas Act, 1970.
- **Telangana:** Repealed as redundant but viewed as preventive.

Amendments to Prison Manuals

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) amended the Model Prison Manual (2016) and Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act (2023) to address caste-based discrimination in prisons:

1. Prohibition of caste-based segregation or discrimination among prisoners.
2. Redefinition of "habitual offender" to exclude caste-based biases:
 - A habitual offender is now defined as someone convicted more than twice within five years for separate offenses.

These changes aim to ensure compliance with constitutional mandates on equality and dignity.

Constitutional Challenges

The Supreme Court has declared provisions enabling caste-based discrimination unconstitutional. It criticized practices like assigning menial tasks to marginalized castes while reserving skilled jobs for higher castes. This judgment emphasized:

1. Equal treatment for prisoners irrespective of caste or community.
2. Deletion of caste references from prison records.

The court also directed states to revise prison manuals within three months.

Arguments Against Habitual Offender Laws

- **Redundancy:** Most of the states argue that the Goondas Act, which were enacted many years back, already accounts for the provisions regarding habitual offenders.
- **Targeted Niche Communities:** These laws aim at a minority of denotified tribes and lesser marginalized groups.
- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** Critics say the above laws violate the constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.

Arguments Supporting Habitual Offender Laws

- **Preventive Value:** Some states argue that the law is preventive from committing the same offense again.
- **Public Safety Concern:** Proponents are of the view that deter the seeming habitual manner in which this becomes criminal behavior.

Conclusion

The debate over habitual offender laws underscores a tension between public safety and individual rights. While some states defend their utility, others find them redundant or harmful to vulnerable communities. The Supreme Court's intervention has brought constitutional scrutiny to these laws, emphasizing equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Moving forward, a balanced approach is needed—one that ensures public safety without stigmatizing specific communities or violating fundamental rights.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically analyze the impact of Habitual Offender Laws in India. Do these laws align with the principles of justice and reformatory jurisprudence? Suggest measures to ensure a balance between crime prevention and individual rights.

[2.20] Rising Consumer Credit in India

Syllabus: Economy [GS Paper-3]

Context

Rising consumer credit in India has become a significant concern, as highlighted by recent reports from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). While the shift towards healthy and prime borrowers indicates a maturing credit market, the increasing reliance on loans for consumption rather than asset creation poses potential macroeconomic risks. This trend is particularly concerning among lower-income households, where financial stress is more pronounced.

Increasing Household Debt: A Cause for Concern

- **Household debt at a Glance:** Household debt in India rose by large margins: from about 36.6% of GDP in June 2021 to 42.9% in June 2024 according to the RBI Financial Stability Report 2024. Although lower than among many emerging economies, it reflects a change and its rapid growth may indicate some weakness in potential macroeconomic terms.
- **Change in Borrowing Trends:** The RBI report gives a mixed picture of consumer credit trends. Despite a large share coming from healthy prime borrowers-new loans tend to be taken away, thereby reducing the subprime borrowing share- reliance on debt for consumption rather than asset creation has increased, particularly concerning low-income groups. The consumption loans are becoming common for lower-income groups to meet daily expenses.

Consumption Loans: A Red Flag for Financial Stability

- **Types of Consumption Loans:** Consumption loans, which include personal loans and credit card debt, have seen a sharp rise mainly among the lower-income households. These kinds of households were not hoarding debt for wealth accumulation, but use this unsecured credit for essential expenses. Data also prove that nearly half of the loans taken by subprime borrowers are for consumption factors, while 64% of super-prime borrowings are directed towards asset creation.
- **Impact on Financial Stability:** It all points to the fact that many households may borrow for essential expenses having no hope of investment or asset accumulation. The increase in consumption loans speaks of the financial stress that lower-income groups are possibly facing. The delinquency rates in personal loans and credit card debts are increasing-the latest indication of financial strain borne by these households.

The Multiplier Effect of Rising Debt

Economic Impact: The impact of household debt on economic growth is multifaceted. Households with lower incomes generally have a higher income multiplier, meaning they spend a larger portion of their income on goods and services. However, if they are burdened with debt repayments, their disposable income shrinks, reducing overall consumption and potentially slowing down economic growth.

Potential Causes of Increased Borrowing: Several factors contribute to the rise in consumption borrowing:

- **Income Insecurity:** Post-pandemic income challenges may push households to rely on credit to bridge consumption gaps.
- **Financial Innovations:** The proliferation of credit instruments like credit cards and Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) schemes may enable easier access to debt, potentially exposing households to financial fragility.

RBI's Response: Curbing Unchecked Credit Growth

- **Regulatory Measures:** In response to the rise in unsecured loans, the RBI has introduced measures to slow down consumer credit growth since September 2023. These include tighter lending norms for personal loans and credit card borrowing, encouraging banks to focus on prime borrowers, and monitoring financial institutions to prevent reckless lending practices.
- **New Credit Reporting Rules:** Additionally, from January 1, 2025, the RBI mandated lenders to update credit bureau records every 15 days. This change aims to enhance credit score accuracy, improve lender risk assessments, and promote responsible borrowing habits.

Conclusion

The increasing reliance on loans for consumption rather than asset creation is a growing concern for India's financial stability. While the rise in borrowing among prime borrowers is a positive sign, the financial stress among lower-income groups could pose challenges for economic growth. Policymakers must balance credit growth with financial prudence to ensure that India's expanding consumer credit market remains sustainable.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. With reference to Consumer Credit in India, consider the following statements:

1. Consumer credit refers to loans given to individuals for personal use rather than business or investment purposes.
2. Credit card loans and personal loans are examples of unsecured consumer credit.
3. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has no regulatory role in monitoring consumer credit in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only

[2.21] India's Wheat Production Rises in 2024-25

Syllabus: Agriculture [GS Paper-3]

Context

India is on the cusp of achieving a historic milestone in wheat production, with estimates suggesting a record high of 115.3 million metric tonnes for the 2024-25 crop year. This marks a significant increase from the previous year's production of 113.3 million metric tonnes, reflecting a growth of about 2%. This achievement is crucial for India, which is the second-largest wheat producer globally, following China.

Historical Context of Wheat Production in India

Over the years, India has consistently improved its wheat production through advancements in agricultural practices, better irrigation systems, and the adoption of high-yielding varieties of wheat. The country's wheat production has seen fluctuations due to factors like weather conditions and government policies. For instance, in 2022, India faced a significant challenge when it had to impose a ban on wheat exports due to a heatwave that affected crop yields.

Factors Contributing to Record Wheat Production

There are several important factors that worked towards making such record production:

- 1. Increased Sowing Area:** Wheat has so far covered an area of 32 million hectares in the current season as against 31.56 million hectares in the previous year due to favorable weather and government incentive schemes. One such major area expansion could be attributed to the very favorable weather conditions and government incentives.
- 2. Higher Guaranteed Prices:** The increased minimum support price (MSP) for wheat announced by the government, which encouraged farmers to plant more high-yielding varieties, has become effective from the Rabi Marketing Season (RMS) 2025-26 for Rs 2,425 per quintal, an increase of 6.59% from the previous year.
- 3. Advancements in Agricultural Practices:** Higher yields per hectare have also been due to advanced agricultural technology and improved practices of crop management.

Impact of Record Wheat Production

As we analyze the different impacts of record wheat production, we come across several aspects related to India's economy and food security:

Economic Impact

- **Price Stabilization:** Increase in production will enable stabilization of wheat prices despite the increase due to demand and supply mismatches in supply. Wheat inflation in January 2025 was at 8.8%, showing potential instability in supplies.
- **Export Potential:** India could potentially export some wheat and generate foreign exchange earnings even with the current prohibition on wheat imports as a good surplus is at hand. This possibility is hampered, though, by an export ban for now due to local needs and strategic stock.

Food Security

- **Buffer Stocks:** The increase in production also keeps India's buffer stock in good health. By the beginning of March 2025, wheat stocks in the central pool numbered 14.41 million tonnes, which is quite above the buffer norm of 7.46 million tonnes.
- **Procurement Targets:** The government is targeting 31 million tonnes of wheat procurement for the rabi marketing season 2025-26, more than that procured in the previous season at 26.6 million tonnes.

Challenges Ahead

Despite the positive outlook, there are challenges that India needs to address:

- 1. Weather Risks:** Above-average temperatures in March could pose risks to the wheat harvest, as seen in previous years⁴.
- 2. Sustainability:** The long-term sustainability of high production levels depends on maintaining soil health, managing water resources efficiently, and adapting to climate change.
- 3. Market Dynamics:** Fluctuations in global wheat prices and demand can impact India's export potential and domestic market stability.

Conclusion

India's projected record wheat production of 115.3 million metric tonnes in 2024-25 is a significant achievement that underscores the country's agricultural prowess. However, sustaining this growth while addressing environmental and economic challenges will be crucial for ensuring food security and economic stability in the future.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. India is one of the largest producers of wheat in the world. Discuss the factors influencing wheat production in India and the challenges faced by wheat farmers. Suggest measures to enhance wheat productivity in the context of climate change and sustainability. (250 words)

[2.22] Report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India, 2024

Syllabus - Economy [GS Paper-3]

Context

National Housing Bank (NHB) has released the Report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India, 2024.

Key Highlights

- Banks dominate the housing finance market, accounting for 81% of overall housing loans whereas the Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) make contributions 19%.
- As on 30-09-2024, Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) & Low-Income Groups (LIG) accounted for 39%, Middle-Income Groups (MIG) accounted for 44% and HIG accounted for 17% of exceptional person housing loans.
- Only 5% of homes in India are labeled as 'green'.

Government Initiatives Driving Housing Sector Growth

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G)**: Aims for rural housing development with a focus on less costly housing.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U)**: Supports low-cost housing projects in urban regions.
- **Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF)**: Boosts infrastructure financing for cheaper housing.
- **Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs)**: Focuses on housing answers for migrant workers and urban poor.

Challenges in Housing Finance

- **Regional Disparities in Credit Flow**: Western, Southern, and Northern states get hold of the best housing finance disbursements.
 - Eastern and Northeastern states revel in low credit penetration, proscribing housing accessibility in those areas.

- **Limited Reach of Housing Finance Companies (HFCs):** HFCs play an essential function through supplying flexible loan eligibility standards and efficient service.
 - However, HFCs have a restrained branch network in rural and underdeveloped areas, restricting their capacity to bridge the housing finance gap.
- **Low Adoption of Green Buildings:** Challenges continue to be there like higher initial costs of eco-friendly creation, loss of incentives for developers, and restrained recognition of sustainability.

Opportunities for Growth

- Technological improvements in construction like use of AI, facts analytics, and predictive modelling, 3-D Printing and the digitization of land facts are identified as elements that could facilitate growth in the sector.
- Increase in investment and growing demand for smart cities and cheap housing in metro and Tier-II & Tier-III towns causing demand to move up.

About National Housing Bank (NHB)

- **Founded:** In 1988, beneath the National Housing Bank Act, 1987.
- **Objective:** To regulate, promote, and develop the housing finance market in India.
- **Ownership:** 100% owned by the Government of India.
- **Regulation:** NHB supervises HFCs, even as the [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) is the primary regulator.
- **Functions:** Encourages financial inclusion by improving access to housing loans for the middle-class and low-income groups.
 - Bridges the housing finance gap by expanding credit centers to underdeveloped regions.
- **Headquarter:** New Delhi.

Source: [The PIB](#)

Mains PYQ

1. With a brief background of quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the 'Smart City Programme.' (2016)

- National Housing Bank (NHB) has released the Report on Trends and Progress of Housing in India, 2024.
- Banks dominate the housing finance market, accounting for 81% of overall housing loans whereas the Housing Finance Companies (HFCs) make contributions 19%.
- As on 30-09-2024, Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) & Low-Income Groups (LIG) accounted for 39%, Middle-Income Groups (MIG) accounted for 44% and HIG accounted for 17% of exceptional person housing loans.
- Only 5% of homes in India are labeled as 'green'.

[2.23] Deliberate Disruptions in Parliament and State Assemblies

Syllabus - Polity & Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

Recently, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla voiced his concerns over the growing trends of deliberate disruptions in Parliament and State Assemblies, describing them as adverse to the spirit of democracy.

Key Highlights

- Parliamentary disruptions have become a routine issue in India, raising issues about legislative productivity, governance, and democratic accountability.
- It has witnessed disruptions since the early decades of independence, but the frequency and intensity have grown in the last three decades.
- The 1970s and 1980s noticed occasional disruptions over significant issues along with the Emergency (1975-77) and financial regulations.
- However, the 1990s marked a turning point, with coalition politics leading to common disruptions and strategic obstructionism.
- State assemblies of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka Legislative have all confronted extreme disruptions, on occasion leading to bodily altercations amongst members.

Data on Legislative Productivity

- **Reduced Sitting Days:** For example, the 16th Lok Sabha (2014-2019) had 331 sitting days, the lowest for any full-term Lok Sabha.
- **Decreased Working Hours:** The Winter Session of 2024 exemplified this trend:
 - **Lok Sabha:** Functioned for most effective 52% of its scheduled time.
 - **Rajya Sabha:** Operated at 39% performance.
- **Frequent Disruptions:** For instance, at some point of the Winter Session of 2024, the Lok Sabha misplaced over 65 hours because of interruptions.
- **Impact on Question Hour:** In the Winter Session of 2024:
 - **Rajya Sabha:** Question Hour was non-purposeful for 15 out of nineteen days.
 - **Lok Sabha:** It did not feature for more than 10 mins on 12 out of 20 days.
- **Legislative Backlog:** During the Winter Session of 2024, only one bill, the **Bharatiya Vayuyan Vidheyak, 2024**, was surpassed, marking the bottom legislative output within the ultimate six Lok Sabha terms.

Causes of Disruptions

- **Political Strategies and Protest Culture:** Sometimes political parties use disruptions strategically to avoid debates on touchy issues.
- **Contentious Issues and Lack of Consensus:** Key policy subjects along with financial reforms, minority rights, and constitutional amendments regularly result in walkouts and protests.
- **Weak Enforcement of Rules:** Rules of process in Parliament and State Assemblies provide mechanisms to govern disruptions, but enforcement is regularly weak.
- **Media Attention and Public Perception:** Lawmakers once in a while use disruptions as a tactic to gain visibility in the media.
- **Decline in Constructive Debate:** There is a substantial decline in structured debates, with disruptions replacing meaningful discussions.

- **Ethnic & Regional Issues:** Issues inclusive of caste-based rules, federal conflicts, and local needs often result in disruptions.
- **Suspension of MPs:** Several sessions noticed mass suspensions of MPs, similarly intensifying political standoffs.

Impact of Disruptions

- **Legislative Paralysis:** Frequent disruptions result in the suspension or delay of essential bills and policies.
- **Erosion of Public Trust:** Citizens lose religion in legislative institutions while lawmakers interact in disorderly conduct.
- **Economic and Administrative Costs:** Wastage of taxpayers' money due to unproductive parliamentary classes.

Key Reforms to Minimize Disruptions in Parliament & State Assemblies

- **Stricter Enforcement of Rules:** Implementation of Rule 374A (Lok Sabha) and Rule 255 (Rajya Sabha) to droop members accomplishing disorderly conduct.
- **Code of Conduct for Legislators:** Proposals for a mandatory code of conduct that penalizes repeated disruptions.
- **Increased Use of Technology:** Live monitoring and documentation of disruptions to keep members accountable.

Source: *The Hindu*

Mains PYQ

1. Rajya Sabha has been transformed from a 'useless stepney tyre' to the most useful supporting organ in past few decades. Highlight the factors as well as the areas in which this transformation could be visible. (2020)

- Recently, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla voiced his concerns over the growing trends of deliberate disruptions in Parliament and State Assemblies, describing them as adverse to the spirit of democracy.
- Parliamentary disruptions have become a routine issue in India, raising issues about legislative productivity, governance, and democratic accountability.
- It has witnessed disruptions since the early decades of independence, but the frequency and intensity have grown in the last three decades.
- The 1970s and 1980s noticed occasional disruptions over significant issues along with the Emergency (1975-77) and financial regulations.
- However, the 1990s marked a turning point, with coalition politics leading to common disruptions and strategic obstructionism.

[2.24] New indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity

Syllabus - Health [GS Paper-2]

Context

A new indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity has been followed by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

Key Highlights

- FAO and UNICEF share custodianship of the new SDG indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD).
- MDD indicator addresses a key gap in monitoring progress towards SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and the 2030 Agenda.
- The indicator was followed by the United Nations Statistical Commission during its 56th consultation.
- MDD inclusion is part of the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework.

United Nations Statistical Commission

- It was established in 1946.
- It is the highest body of the global statistical system bringing collectively the Chief Statisticians from member states.
- It is the only decision making body for global statistical activities, responsible for putting statistical standards and the development of principles and strategies, including their implementation.

About Indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity

- **MDD-C & MDD-W:** The new MDD indicator measures dietary diversity for children (MDD-C) and women of reproductive age (MDD-W).
- **Indicator Definition:** MDD-W is a simple yes/no measure based on whether women have consumed at least 5 out of 10 described food groups in the past 24 hours.
- **10 Food Groups:** Include grains, pulses, nuts, milk, meat, eggs, dark leafy vegetables, vitamin A-rich culmination/greens, different greens, and other culmination.
- **Importance of Diversity:** Dietary range is critical for stopping malnutrition and assisting overall health, growth, and well-being.
- **Focus on Quality:** MDD emphasizes the type of foods consumed, not just calorie consumption, highlighting the significance of nutritious diets for health, growth, and well-being.
- **FAO & UNICEF Roles:** FAO oversees MDD-W, even as UNICEF is accountable for MDD-C.
- **Higher MDD Scores:** A higher proportion of women meeting MDD thresholds indicates higher vitamin and mineral intake.

Significance

- **Quality of Diets:** MDD provides an essential measure of nutritional quality to present food security and vitamins signs.
- **Dietary Impact:** MDD presents a tool for coverage-making, program evaluation, and target-putting, focusing on inclined organizations.
- **Critical Step Forward:** MDD facilitates tune progress on attaining SDG 2.

- **Future Impact:** Elevates the significance of dietary variety and food structures transformation, making sure its region in publish-SDG weight-reduction plan monitoring.

India's Progress in SDG2

- Improvement in normal composite score of Goal 2 transferring from Aspirant category in SDG India Index three (2020-21) to Performer class in the SDG India Index 4 (2023-24)
- 99.01% of beneficiaries covered under National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013.
- Improvement in productivity of rice and wheat from 2995.21 kg/ha in 2018-19 to 3052.25 kg/ha in TE 2021-22.
- Increase in Gross Value Added (GVA) (steady costs) in agriculture per worker from ₹ 0.71 lakhs in 2018-19 to ₹ 0.86 lakhs in 2022-23.

Sustainable Development Goals

- The [United Nations General Assembly](#), all through its 70th Session in 2015, followed the record titled “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”
- This outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated objectives.
- The SDGs, also called the Global Goals, came into force from 2016.

Source: [The DTE](#)

Mains PYQ

1. There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on non-food essential items squeezing their food-budget. Elucidate. (2019)

- A new indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity has been followed by the United Nations Statistical Commission.
- FAO and UNICEF share custodianship of the new SDG indicator on Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD).
- MDD indicator addresses a key gap in monitoring progress towards SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and the 2030 Agenda.
- The indicator was followed by the United Nations Statistical Commission during its 56th consultation.
- MDD inclusion is part of the 2025 Comprehensive Review of the SDG indicator framework.

[2.25] Compassion and Primary Health Care

Syllabus - Health [GS Paper-2]

Context

Recently, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) released a landmark report titled “Compassion and Primary Health Care,” spotting compassion as a transformative force in health care.

Key Highlights

- Compassion in health care isn't always merely an ethical responsibility but a strategic necessity.
- It enhances patient recovery rates, improves mental well-being, strengthens patient-provider relationships, and decreases burnout amongst health-care professionals.
- The incorporation of compassionate care practices can revolutionize health care transport, making it more patient-centric, sustainable, and powerful.

Benefits of Compassionate Health Care

- **Faster Recovery and Shorter Hospital Stays:**
 - Research by Stanford University's CCARE shows that sufferers treated with compassion recover faster and require shorter hospitalization.
- **Benefits for Health-Care Providers:**
 - Studies advise that working towards compassionate care ends in reduced stress, progressed job delight, and stronger affected person relationships.
- **Compassion, Sympathy and Empathy**
 - **Sympathy:** A short-term, pity based reaction that doesn't always result in movement.
 - **Empathy:** Involves deep emotional immersion in others' issues, that may sometimes lead to emotional fatigue and tension in caregivers (called empathy fatigue).
 - **Compassion:** A balanced, trouble-solving technique, in which health-care vendors apprehend and sense the pain in their patients but keep emotional balance. This ensures sustained, superb health care services without personal exhaustion.
- Thus, compassion gives a sustainable version for scientific professionals, allowing them to effectively help patients at the same time as safeguarding their own mental and emotional well-being.

Strategies for Implementing Compassionate Health Care

- **Embedding Compassion in Health-Care Leadership & Policy:**
 - Health-care decision-making should prioritize compassion in place of simply operational performance.
 - Industry leaders, hospitals, and coverage assume tanks must combine compassion as a foundational principle in health-care governance.
- **Training Health-Care Providers in Compassionate Practices:**
 - Doctors, nurses, and paramedical workforce have to be taught in compassion-based verbal exchange and differentiating empathy from compassion to keep away from burnout.
 - Medical curriculums need to encompass compassionate care training, ensuring that future health professionals recognize the importance of patient-centric care.
- **Ensuring Equitable and Inclusive Health Care for All:**
 - Accessible to rural populations via better health-care outreach programs.
 - Inclusive for marginalized communities (caste, gender, financial reputation).
 - Integrated into public health regulations to ensure less expensive and dignified remedy for all.
- **Strengthening Mental Health Care with a Compassionate Approach:**
 - Mental health experts have to gain knowledge of trauma-sensitive and compassionate care.
 - Community-based mental health applications need to be elevated to reduce the stigma around mental health issues.

Global Perspectives and Best Practices

- **United Kingdom (NHS):** Emphasizes “compassionate management” in public health care.
- **Japan’s Universal Health Care System:** Integrates holistic restoration and compassionate patient care.
- **Scandinavian Countries:** Have affected person-first health-care rules that contain mental well-being as a fundamental health-care principle.
- India can undertake and customize those quality practices in its [Ayushman Bharat](#) and AIIMS-led education programs.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Mains PYQ

1. Besides being a moral imperative of a Welfare State, primary health structure is a necessary precondition for sustainable development.” Analyse. (2021)

- Recently, the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) released a landmark report titled “Compassion and Primary Health Care,” spotting compassion as a transformative force in health care.
- Compassion in health care isn't always merely an ethical responsibility but a strategic necessity.
- It enhances patient recovery rates, improves mental well-being, strengthens patient-provider relationships, and decreases burnout amongst health-care professionals.
- The incorporation of compassionate care practices can revolutionize health care transport, making it more patient-centric, sustainable, and powerful.

[2.26] Rethinking Affirmative Action for Muslims

Syllabus: Society [GS Paper-1]

Context

A recent report titled *"Rethinking Affirmative Action for Muslims in Contemporary India"* provides a comprehensive assessment of the socio-economic and educational status of Muslims, as well as the effectiveness of government policies aimed at their upliftment. This report, the first of its kind in a decade, sheds light on the challenges faced by India's Muslim community and proposes a roadmap for inclusive development.

Historical Context: Evolution of Policies for Muslims

Early Initiatives

The issue of Muslim backwardness gained prominence with the Sachar Committee Report (2006) and the Ranganath Misra Commission (2007). These reports highlighted the marginalization of Muslims, placing them below Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in terms of socio-economic indicators. Key recommendations included:

- Establishing an Equal Opportunity Commission.
- Linking madrasas to mainstream education.
- Increasing Muslim representation in public services like IAS and IPS.

Shift in Policy Post-2014

The BJP-led government adopted a broader framework under *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas*, restructuring affirmative action programs to focus on all marginalized communities rather than exclusively on Muslims. This marked a shift from religion-specific policies to a more generalized welfare approach.

Educational Status of Muslims

Key Findings

- 1. Low Participation in Higher Education:** Muslim youth have the lowest participation rates in post-secondary education among all socio-religious groups (SRGs). The share of Muslim graduates remains significantly smaller compared to other groups.
- 2. Access to Private Schools:** While slightly better than SCs/STs, Muslim students lag behind Hindu Forward Castes (HFCs) and Hindu Other Backward Classes (HOBCs) in accessing private education.
- 3. Limited Enrollment in Professional Courses:** Muslim students are less likely to pursue technical, professional, or management courses compared to other SRGs.

Challenges

- Persistent gaps in educational attainment despite improvements.
- Socio-economic factors and location disparities exacerbate these challenges.

Economic Status and Employment

Job Market Position

- 1. Material Deprivation:** Many Muslims continue to face significant economic hardships, with limited upward mobility compared to other disadvantaged groups.
- 2. Underrepresentation in White-Collar Jobs:** Despite higher education levels improving access to salaried jobs, Muslims remain underrepresented in white-collar occupations.
- 3. Declining Workforce Participation:** The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and Worker Population Ratio (WPR) among Muslims are the lowest among all religious groups.

Consumption and Asset Ownership

Muslims exhibit lower levels of consumption and asset ownership compared to other communities, reflecting deeper economic disparities.

Recommendations for Affirmative Action

The report emphasizes two guiding principles for rethinking affirmative action for Muslims:

- 1. Secularization of Social Policy:** Policies should avoid religion-based quotas but focus on rational sub-categorization within the OBC framework.
- 2. Non-Discriminatory Representation:** A positive portrayal of Muslim cultural identity is essential for fostering inclusivity.

Specific Recommendations

1. Avoid religion-based quotas; instead, adopt secular sub-categorization within OBCs.
2. Include Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians in the SC category.
3. Reassess the 50% cap on reservations to accommodate new backward communities.
4. Converge programs like the Transformation of Aspirational District Programme (TADP) with Minority Concentration Districts (MCDs) for localized development.

Broader Implications for Policy Reform

The report underscores the need for nuanced policies that address both statistical data and lived experiences. It advocates a space-centric approach to affirmative action, focusing on local-level interventions tailored to specific needs.

Conclusion

The status of Muslims in India reflects deep-rooted socio-economic challenges despite decades of policy interventions. While there have been incremental improvements in education and employment, significant gaps persist. The proposed roadmap offers a pragmatic approach to addressing these disparities through secular, inclusive, and targeted policies. For India to achieve true social equity, it must prioritize the empowerment of its marginalized communities, including Muslims.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. Critically analyze the need for affirmative action for Muslims in India. Discuss the socio-economic and educational challenges faced by the community and evaluate the effectiveness of existing government policies in addressing these issues.

[2.27] Panel Recommends Reforms for Farmers' Welfare

Syllabus: Agriculture [GS Paper-3], Governance [GS Paper-2]

Context

A parliamentary standing committee on agriculture, chaired by Charanjit Singh Channi, has presented a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the welfare of farmers and farm laborers in India. These proposals include increasing budgetary allocations for agriculture, renaming the Ministry of Agriculture, and implementing policies to support sustainable farming practices.

Key Recommendations

- **More and More Budgetary Allocations:** The committee noticed, while it continues to explain how budgetary allocations have continued to decrease for the agriculture sector during the last few years, from 3.53 percent of the central plan outlay in 2021-22 to a measly 2.51 percent in 2025-26, urging the government to reverse this trend and earmark a precious chunk of budgetary resources into rural development and promoting agricultural productivity.
- **Renaming the Ministry:** The panel recommended renaming the "Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare" to "Department of Agriculture, Farmers and Farm Labourers Welfare." This is the official recognition of farm workers' vital importance to agriculture.
- **Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Organic Produce:** To promote sustainable farming practices and fair remuneration of organic farmers, the committee also recommended extending MSP to cover organic crops. However, it cautioned that such a measure should not interfere with the larger MSP reform based on the Swaminathan formula.
- **Crop Residue Management:** The panel proposed a direct payment of ₹100 per quintal of paddy to farmers as crop residue management assistance to control stubble burning. The formation of a market mechanism was recommended for crop residues in order to facilitate their use in bio fuel and other industries.
- **Universal Crop Insurance:** A universal crop insurance scheme was proposed by the committee to insulate small farmers from losses brought about by natural calamities or market fluctuations.
- **Extension of PM-Kisan Benefits to Farm Workers:** The panel has recommended extending PM-Kisan benefits to the farm labourers so that everyone in agriculture receives fair treatment in terms of support.

- **Establishment of a National Commission:** It, therefore, proposed the setting up of a National Commission on Minimum Living Wages for Farm Labourers to look into the wide disparities and enhance the quality of living.

Policy Reforms for Sustainable Agriculture

- **Promoting Organic Farming:** By providing MSP for organic crops, the committee aims to incentivize farmers to adopt sustainable practices, despite initial challenges like lower yields.
- **Crop Residue Utilization:** Creating a market for crop residues can help reduce environmental damage from stubble burning and provide additional income streams for farmers.
- **Enhancing Market Access:** The panel suggested transforming Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) into "Village Supermarkets" under the PM Kisan Samridhi Kendras initiative to improve market access for farmers.
- **Market Intervention Scheme Expansion:** Increasing the procurement limit under the Market Intervention Scheme from 25% to 50% of total estimated production could provide better price support to more farmers.

Implementation Challenges and Opportunities

Implementing these recommendations will require coordinated efforts between the Union and State governments, financial institutions, and rural governance bodies. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems are necessary to ensure that budget allocations meet their intended objectives.

Conclusion

The parliamentary panel's recommendations reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. By focusing on inclusivity, sustainability, and economic security, these proposals aim to create a more equitable and productive agricultural landscape in India. However, successful implementation will depend on the government's ability to allocate sufficient resources and ensure policy coherence across different levels of governance.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following recommendations made by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture:

1. Increasing budgetary allocations for agriculture
2. Renaming the Ministry of Agriculture
3. Implementing policies for sustainable farming

Which of the above recommendations aim to enhance farmers' welfare?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (d)

[2.28] Crackdown on Digital Arrest Scams

Syllabus: Security [GS Paper-3]

Context

Indian authorities have launched a significant crackdown against cybercrime, focusing on digital arrest scams and other fraudulent activities that exploit digital platforms. This initiative has resulted in the blocking of a large number of online accounts and SIM cards used by cybercriminals.

Scale of the Crackdown

The campaign against cybercrime has led to the following actions:

- WhatsApp Accounts Blocked: 83,668
- SIM Cards Blocked: 781,000
- Skype IDs Blocked: 3,962

These numbers indicate the scale of the problem and the government's commitment to curb digital fraud.

Focus on Digital Arrest Scams

A key focus of this crackdown is on "digital arrest" scams. These scams typically involve fraudsters impersonating law enforcement or government officials. They contact victims via phone or online platforms, claiming that the victim is implicated in a crime. The scammers then coerce the victim into transferring money or sharing sensitive information to avoid a fabricated arrest.

Modus Operandi of Cyber Criminals

Cybercriminals often use various tactics to deceive their victims:

- **Impersonation:** Posing as police officers, government officials, or bank representatives.
- **Threats and Intimidation:** Creating a sense of urgency and fear to pressure victims into compliance.
- **Technical Manipulation:** Using technology to spoof phone numbers or create fake websites to appear legitimate.

Impact of the Crackdown

The blocking of these accounts and SIM cards is aimed at disrupting the operations of cybercriminals. By eliminating the tools they use to communicate and transact, authorities hope to significantly reduce the number of successful scams.

Public Awareness and Prevention

In addition to law enforcement actions, public awareness campaigns are crucial in preventing cybercrime. Educating the public about the common tactics used by scammers can help individuals recognize and avoid these traps. Key prevention measures include:

- **Verifying Identity:** Always independently verify the identity of anyone claiming to be a government official or law enforcement officer.
- **Protecting Personal Information:** Never share sensitive information such as bank account details or passwords with unknown individuals.
- **Being Skeptical:** Be wary of unsolicited calls or messages demanding immediate payment or personal information.

Future Strategies

To effectively combat cybercrime, a multi-pronged approach is needed that involves:

- **Strengthening Cybersecurity Infrastructure:** Investing in robust cybersecurity infrastructure to detect and prevent cyberattacks.
- **Enhancing International Cooperation:** Collaborating with international law enforcement agencies to track down and prosecute cybercriminals operating across borders.
- **Raising Public Awareness:** Educating the public about cyber threats and how to protect themselves from becoming victims of cybercrime.
- **Promoting Cyber Hygiene:** Encouraging individuals and organizations to adopt good cyber hygiene practices, such as using strong passwords, keeping software updated, and being cautious of suspicious emails and links.

Conclusion

The crackdown against cybercrime is a welcome step in the fight against digital fraud. By taking decisive action to block fraudulent accounts and SIM cards, authorities have sent a strong message to cybercriminals that their activities will not be tolerated. However, continued vigilance and a multi-faceted approach are needed to stay ahead of the evolving cyber threat landscape and protect citizens from falling victim to these crimes. Public awareness, international collaboration, and technological advancements are key to creating a safer and more secure digital future for all.

Source: ndtvprofit.com

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Q. Consider the following statements regarding Digital Arrest Scams:

1. Digital arrest scams involve cybercriminals impersonating law enforcement officials to extort money from victims.
2. These scams typically use fake digital arrest warrants and threats of legal action to create panic.
3. The victims are often asked to make payments through official government portals to resolve the issue.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, and 3

Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only