freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

Daily Current Affairs
🎯 To The Point
by Dhananjay Gautam

Table Of Content — 04 Dec 2024

Subscribe to our

NEWS

To the Point
Daily Current Affairs

04 **Dec** **2024**

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

1 **Trump Threatens 100% Tariffs on BRICS Over Dollar Replacement Plans**

Context: Recently, former U.S. President Donald Trump issued a stern warning to the **BRICS nations** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), threatening to impose **100% tariffs** if they proceed with plans to replace the **US dollar** as the global reserve currency. His statement underscores the geopolitical tensions surrounding moves to **de-dollarize the global economy**.

Why the Push to Replace the US Dollar?

1. Weaponization of the Dollar
- The U.S. has increasingly leveraged its **financial dominance** as a geopolitical tool, imposing sanctions and restricting countries like **Iran** and **Russia** from systems like **SWIFT** (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication).
- This raises fears that the dollar is being used as a weapon against sovereign nations.

2. Reducing US Dependency
- The **US dollar** dominates global currency markets, accounting for **88% of forex turnover** (BIS 2022).
- Over-reliance on the dollar makes nations vulnerable to **US monetary policies**, which primarily benefit the American economy but can destabilize other economies, especially when **interest rates rise**.

3. Ensuring Economic Sovereignty
- Nations seek to shield their economies from **dollar-induced fluctuations** and **US political pressure** by exploring alternatives.

4. Enhancing Trade Efficiency
- **Local currencies** and alternatives like China's **yuan** or regional payment systems reduce **transaction costs** and bypass the dollar.

5. Multipolar Financial Order
- With the rise of **China, India, and Brazil**, emerging economies advocate for a decentralized financial system reflecting today's **multipolar world**.

6. US Debt and Inflation Concerns
- Growing **US debt** and **inflationary pressures** undermine confidence in the dollar's long-term stability.

7. **Lessons from China-Russia Trade**
- Over **90%** of their **$240 billion bilateral trade** in 2023 was conducted in **roubles** and **yuan**, demonstrating the benefits of bypassing the dollar.

India's Push for Rupee Internationalization

What Is Rupee Internationalization?
- It involves increasing the use of the **Indian Rupee (INR)** in **cross-border transactions** and making it a widely accepted currency for **global trade and investments**.

Steps Taken by India:
- In **July 2022**, the **RBI** introduced mechanisms for settling international trade in **rupees**.
- By **December 2022**, India executed its first trade settlement in **rupees** with Russia.
- Banks from over **19 countries**, including **Germany, UAE, and Malaysia**, now settle transactions in **INR**.

Challenges:
- The rupee constitutes only **1.6% of global forex turnover**, far below the **4%** needed to be recognized as an international currency.
- **Trade imbalance** with Russia leads to excess rupee reserves being underutilized, forcing Russia to invest them in Indian **stocks** and **bonds**.

Trump's Threat: Risks and Implications
What Could Happen?

- Imposing **100% tariffs** on BRICS nations might backfire by shifting imports to third countries, increasing costs for **American consumers** without boosting U.S. manufacturing.
- The U.S. remains less competitive in **labour-intensive goods** due to higher domestic production costs, making tariffs an ineffective strategy.

India's Strategic Balancing Act:
Diplomatic Engagement

India must clarify to the U.S. that its diversification of trade mechanisms ensures **financial stability** and is not intended as a hostile move against the dollar.

Leadership in BRICS

To safeguard its interests, India should:

- Promote the internationalization of its **digital currency (CBDC)**.
- Expand platforms like **UPI** for cross-border transactions.
- Ensure BRICS initiatives do not disproportionately favor **China**, given its economic dominance.

Conclusion

The **US dollar** continues to dominate global finance, but the push for diversification signals a shift toward a more decentralized system. For India, the key lies in maintaining a balance between its **BRICS commitments** and its **strategic ties** with the U.S., ensuring a fair and multipolar financial framework.

NEWS

To the Point
Daily Current Affairs
04 Dec 2024

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

GS Paper 3 – Disaster Management

2 | 40 Years of Bhopal Gas Tragedy: Reflecting on India's Preparedness

Context: Four decades after the catastrophic **Bhopal Gas Tragedy**, the legacy of environmental and public health challenges persists. Toxic waste from the **Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL)** site continues to contaminate **soil** and **water**, causing long-term ecological and human health damage.

Lingering Challenges:

India's Expanding Chemical Industry:
- Despite the lessons from 1984, **India's chemical sector** has grown to become the **sixth largest in the world**.
- From 2020 to 2023, the country witnessed **29 major chemical accidents**, including high-profile incidents like the **Vizag Gas Leak (2020)** and the **Ammonia Gas Leak in Chennai (2024)**, leading to significant loss of life and property.

Toxic Chemicals in Use:
- **Methyl Isocyanate (MIC)**, the gas responsible for the Bhopal disaster, is still in use across India.
- MIC's toxicity makes even brief exposure hazardous, causing **respiratory distress**, **skin damage**, and **long-term health issues**.
- Unregulated agricultural chemicals like **DDT** continue to threaten **human health** and **environmental safety**.

Fragmented Regulations:
- India's chemical safety framework is fragmented, lacking the robustness of international laws like the **US Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)** or the **EU's REACH regulation**.

Reasons Behind Persistent Disasters:
1. **Focus on Economic Growth**: The push for rapid industrialization often comes at the cost of **safety standards** and **environmental safeguards**.
2. **Weak Regulatory Oversight**: Insufficient **resources**, **technical expertise**, and **political will** hinder enforcement of existing safety laws.
3. **Industry Influence**: **Powerful lobbying groups** resist stricter regulations, prioritizing profits over public safety.
4. **Public Awareness Gap**: Limited understanding of chemical hazards reduces **public pressure** on industries and policymakers to prioritize safety measures.

Steps Taken to Prevent Future Disasters:
1. **Strengthened Legal Framework**: India has implemented laws like the **Explosives Act (1884)**, **Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response) Rules (1996)**, and the **Environment Protection Act (1986)** to regulate hazardous industries.
2. **National Green Tribunal (NGT):** The **NGT** provides a platform for addressing **environmental violations**, including industrial accidents, and ensuring accountability.
3. **NDMA Guidelines**: The **National Disaster Management Authority** emphasizes **inspection systems**, **emergency preparedness**, and **community awareness programs** to mitigate risks.

The Way Ahead:
1. **Comprehensive Chemical Policy**: India urgently needs a **unified chemical policy** that aligns with international standards, ensuring **safe handling** and **storage** of hazardous substances.
2. **Corporate Accountability**: Industries must adopt **stringent safety protocols**, invest in **risk management**, and comply with **environmental standards**.
3. **Victim Rehabilitation**: Long-term **healthcare**, **compensation**, and **livelihood support** for affected communities are critical to addressing the human cost of industrial disasters.
4. Environmental Safeguards: Toxic waste must be **safely disposed of** to prevent lasting damage to ecosystems.

Conclusion:
Forty years after the **Bhopal Gas Tragedy**, the need for stronger **regulations**, **corporate responsibility**, and **community awareness** remains urgent. By addressing systemic issues, India can ensure a safer future, protecting both its people and its environment from the devastating impact of industrial accidents.

NEWS

To the Point
Daily Current Affairs

04 **Dec** 2024

Freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

3 Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI)

Context: The **Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI)** platform has emerged as a revolutionary tool for improving the delivery of infrastructure projects in India. Recently, a report by **Oxford University's Saïd Business School** and the **Gates Foundation** highlighted PRAGATI's significant impact on governance and project implementation.

What is the PRAGATI Platform?

A Multi-Modal Solution:

PRAGATI is a **multi-purpose and multi-modal platform** designed to address the **grievances of the common man** while monitoring and reviewing major **government programmes and projects**, including those flagged by state governments.

Core Objectives:

* **Promote e-transparency** and **e-accountability**.
* Enable **real-time interaction** and exchange of information among key stakeholders.
* Strengthen **cooperative federalism** by involving both Central and State officials in decision-making.

Launch and Development:

* Introduced on **March 25, 2015**, PRAGATI was developed **in-house by the PMO team** with support from the **National Informatics Center (NIC)**.
* It leverages cutting-edge technologies like **digital data management**, **video conferencing**, and **geospatial technology**.

Key Features of PRAGATI:

1. Three-Tier System:

PRAGATI operates as a three-tier structure involving:

* The **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)**.
* **Secretaries of the Government of India**.
* **Chief Secretaries of the States**.

2. Monthly PRAGATI Day:

* The Prime Minister conducts a review session on the **fourth Wednesday of every month**, termed as **PRAGATI Day**.
* Issues from **public grievances**, **ongoing programmes**, and **pending projects** are discussed using live data and visuals.

3. Robust Integration:

* PRAGATI integrates with existing systems like:
    o **CPGRAMS** for public grievances.
    o **Project Monitoring Group (PMG)** for project tracking.
    o **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation** databases.

4. Streamlined Workflow:

* Issues are uploaded **seven days prior to PRAGATI Day** for review by the relevant officials.
* **Union Government Secretaries** and **Chief Secretaries** provide updates within **three days**, ensuring the PM has the latest insights.

How PRAGATI Works:

To the Point
Daily Current Affairs
04 Dec 2024
NEWS
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

1. **Issue Identification:** Grievances and pending projects are flagged from various databases, correspondence, and public feedback.
2. **Data Review:** Officials upload updates and visuals to the system by **Monday** preceding the review.
3. **Final Preparations:** On **Tuesday**, the PMO team reviews all inputs, ensuring the Prime Minister has a clear picture of each flagged issue.
4. **PM Interaction:** The PM conducts live video discussions with Central and State officials, reviewing projects and grievances with comprehensive data and geospatial visuals.

Unique Features:

- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Allows dynamic oversight of projects.
- **Transparency:** Enhances public confidence through **e-accountability**.
- **Cooperative Federalism:** Strengthens coordination between Central and State governments.

Conclusion:

The **PRAGATI platform** represents a paradigm shift in governance, blending **technology** with **leadership** to address issues proactively and effectively. By fostering **collaboration**, **transparency**, and **timely implementation**, PRAGATI continues to set benchmarks for modern governance in India.

4 Asia-Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference (AOMSUC)

Context: The **Asia-Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference (AOMSUC)** is a premier event for **meteorologists**, **earth scientists**, **satellite operators**, and **students**. First held in **Beijing, China, in 2010**, it has grown into a significant platform for scientific exchange and collaboration across the **Asia-Oceania region** and beyond.

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav

Asia-Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference (AOMSUC-14) New Delhi, India

AOMSUC 2023: Hosted by India

This year, the conference is organized by the **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** and the **Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES)**. The event includes:

- **High-quality oral and poster presentations**.
- **Panel discussions** on critical meteorological topics.
- **Training workshops** on utilizing satellite data for meteorology and climate studies.

Key Objectives of AOMSUC:

1. **Promote Satellite Observations:** Highlight the vital role of **satellite observations** in understanding and predicting weather and climate patterns.
2. **Advance Remote Sensing Science:** Encourage innovations in **satellite remote sensing technologies** and their applications in meteorology and climatology.
3. **Foster Collaboration:** Provide a platform for interaction between **satellite operators and users**, enhancing mutual understanding and collaboration.
4. **Inform the Global Community:** Share updates on the **current status and future plans** of international space programs, ensuring transparency and global engagement.
5. **Develop New Technologies:** Drive the development of cutting-edge technologies for **weather satellite sensing**, pushing the boundaries of what is possible.
6. **Engage Young Scientists:** Inspire and involve the next generation of scientists by providing opportunities for participation and learning.

Why is AOMSUC Important?

- **Enhances Data Utilization:** Helps optimize the use of satellite data for weather prediction and disaster management.
- **Promotes Regional Cooperation:** Strengthens ties between Asia-Oceania nations in addressing shared meteorological challenges.
- **Drives Innovation:** Encourages advancements in satellite technology and its applications.

Conclusion:

The **Asia-Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference** is more than just an event—it's a platform for innovation, collaboration, and education. By promoting **satellite science** and fostering international partnerships, AOMSUC continues to play a crucial role in advancing global meteorological and climatological capabilities.

5 **India's Fight Against HIV: A Remarkable Journey of Progress and Hope**

Context: On **World AIDS Day**, the Union Health Minister emphasized India's notable success in combating the **HIV epidemic**, showcasing significant declines in **new infections** and **AIDS-related deaths**. These achievements highlight the nation's commitment to prevention, treatment, and awareness campaigns.

Understanding HIV and AIDS:

What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a **lentivirus**, a subtype of retrovirus, responsible for HIV infection. If untreated, it progresses to **Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**, a life-threatening condition marked by immune system failure.

Types of HIV:

1. **HIV-1**:
   o The most prevalent type globally.
   o Divided into four groups: **M (Major), N, O (Outlier), and P**.
   o **Group M** accounts for 90% of cases worldwide.
2. **HIV-2**:
   o Found mainly in **West Africa** but also in **India** and **Europe**.
   o Originates from the **simian immunodeficiency virus** in monkeys.
   o Categorized into eight groups (A to H).

Transmission:

HIV spreads through **blood, breast milk, vaginal fluids, semen**, or **pre-ejaculate**. It exists as free particles or within infected immune cells in bodily fluids.

Without Treatment:

The survival period for someone with HIV is **9 to 11 years**, depending on the subtype.

India's Approach to HIV Treatment:

Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):

- ART involves a combination of drugs to manage HIV infections.
- **Key Benefits**:
  o Suppresses HIV replication and reduces the viral load.
  o Strengthens the immune system and improves the quality of life.
  o Reduces the risk of transmission and prevents progression to AIDS.
  o Enables **viral load suppression**, making HIV undetectable in the bloodstream.

India's Free ART Program:

Under the **National AIDS Control Program (NACP)**:

- Over **680 ART centres** and **1,200 Link ART centres** are operational.
- As of 2024, **88% of identified HIV-positive individuals** are on ART.
- Led to a **79% decline in AIDS-related deaths** since 2010.

TLD (Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate, Lamivudine, Dolutegravir):

A single-pill antiretroviral treatment used as the first line of defence against HIV.

Innovative HIV Drug: Lenacapavir:

- **Lenacapavir**, a twice-yearly injectable drug, has demonstrated **100% effectiveness** in preventing HIV infections in a recent study.
- Developed by **Gilead**, it is sold under the brand name **Sunlenca** for treating HIV in the **US, Canada, Europe**, and other regions.
- Plans are underway to secure authorization for its use in **HIV prevention**.

Challenges of Global Access:

- Generic versions are limited to **120 poorer countries**, excluding most of **Latin America**, where HIV rates are rising.
- Advocacy groups stress the importance of equitable access, especially for marginalized populations like **sex workers** and **young women**.

India's Achievements in HIV Management:

- Steady decline in **new HIV infections**.
- Proactive measures in **awareness** and **treatment programs**.
- Leveraging **innovative therapies** and strengthening healthcare systems.

The Road Ahead:

- Expand access to **groundbreaking treatments** like lenacapavir.
- Enhance **healthcare equity** to ensure no region is left behind.
- Strengthen global collaborations to fight HIV on a united front.

India's success story in combating HIV stands as a testament to the power of **dedicated public health initiatives** and **community engagement**. By building on these achievements, the nation continues to pave the way toward a **future free of HIV and AIDS**.

NEWS
To the Point
Daily Current Affairs
04 Dec 2024
freedom UPSC
TOGETHER WE SCALE HEIGHTS

GS Paper 2 – Governance and Policy

6 Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024: A New Era for India's Maritime Trade

Context: The **Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024**, recently introduced in the **Lok Sabha**, aims to **consolidate** and **amend** the laws governing **coastal shipping** in India. This comprehensive legislation is designed to **standardize regulations**, **boost domestic participation**, and enhance **connectivity** in the coastal trade sector. The bill is a vital step in unlocking the vast potential of **coastal shipping** in India, given the country's extensive coastline of approximately **7,500 km** and its strategic location along key global shipping routes.

Key Highlights of the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024:

1. **Prohibition of Unlicensed Coastal Trade:** The bill mandates the **prohibition of trade** in **coastal waters** by foreign vessels unless they hold a **valid license** issued by Indian authorities.
2. **Inclusion of Inland Vessels:** The legislation **permits inland vessels** to engage in **coastal trading**, thereby expanding the scope of domestic shipping operations.
3. **National Coastal and Inland Shipping Strategic Plan:** The bill calls for the creation of a **National Strategic Plan** aimed at the **development** and **promotion** of coastal shipping, ensuring sustainable growth for the sector.
4. **National Database for Coastal Shipping:** A **National Database** will be established to ensure **transparency** in coastal shipping procedures and improve **information sharing** across stakeholders.
5. **Licensing and Regulation of Chartered Vessels**
   o The **Director-General** will be empowered to issue licenses for chartered vessels, considering critical factors like **citizenship of crew** and **vessel construction requirements**.
   o **Fair hearing provisions** will ensure that no license is suspended or revoked without a reasonable opportunity for defense.
6. **Offenses and Penalties**
   o Provisions for the **compounding of certain offenses** and the **imposition of penalties** by the principal officer have been included.
   o The Director-General will also have the authority to call for **specific information** in relation to certain shipping matters.

Coastal Shipping Industry in India:

Coastal shipping refers to the movement of **goods and passengers** along the **Indian coastline**, within **territorial waters** extending up to **12 nautical miles** from the baseline. The industry plays a crucial role in facilitating trade, reducing congestion on roads and railways, and contributing to **economic growth**.

Regulation of Coastal Shipping in India

- The **Directorate General of Shipping**, under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways**, is the primary authority overseeing coastal shipping regulations in India.
- The **Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) regulations** govern activities in coastal areas, ensuring **environmental protection** while allowing for maritime operations.
- India's **cabotage policy** limits the operations of **foreign-flagged vessels** for the transport of goods within the country's territorial waters, promoting the growth of the domestic shipping industry.
- **Tariffs and charges** related to major ports are regulated by the **Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP)**, which ensures fair pricing for services involved in coastal shipping.

Looking Ahead: Impact of the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2024:

With the introduction of the **Coastal Shipping Bill**, India is poised to enhance the **efficiency** and **sustainability** of its maritime trade, ultimately driving economic growth. By fostering **domestic participation**, enhancing **infrastructure**, and promoting **transparency**, the bill will shape the future of **coastal shipping** in India, ensuring the sector plays a pivotal role in the nation's global trade network.