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Weekly Current Affairs

🎯 To The Point

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24th BIMSTEC Senior Officials Meeting: Strengthening Regional Ties

Context: India actively participated in the **24th Senior Officials Meeting of BIMSTEC**, reaffirming its commitment to fostering regional growth and cooperation.

India's Strategic Vision for BIMSTEC:

India emphasized its dedication to building a **robust, vibrant, and prosperous Bay of Bengal region**. Its commitment aligns with:

- **Neighbourhood First Policy**
- **Vision SAGAR** (*Security and Growth for All in the Region*)
- **Act East Policy**

Key Meeting Highlights:

- Reviewed progress since March 2023.
- Discussed critical areas like **sustainable development**, **connectivity**, **security**, and **people-to-people exchanges**.
- Finalized plans for **regional cooperation**, new mechanisms, and external partnerships.

About BIMSTEC:

Establishment and Evolution:

- **Founded**: June 6, 1997, through the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- **Original Name**: BIST-EC (*Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation*).
- **Members**: Began with four members (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand). Later expanded to include **Myanmar** (1997) and **Bhutan and Nepal** (2004).
- **Focus Areas**: Started with six sectors—**trade**, **technology**, **energy**, **transport**, **tourism**, and **fisheries**—later expanded to include **public health**, **counter-terrorism**, **climate change**, and more by 2008.

Objective:

To foster **economic cooperation** among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.

Significance of BIMSTEC:

Reviving Regional Cooperation

Once a highly integrated region, the **Bay of Bengal** lost its connectivity post-independence. BIMSTEC aims to rekindle this shared integration.

Sector-Based Collaboration:

Unlike SAARC or ASEAN, BIMSTEC adopts a **sector-driven approach**, with cooperation areas divided among members.

- **India's Role**: Leads initiatives in **transportation**, **tourism**, and **counter-terrorism**.

Alignment with India's Policies:

- Aligns with India's **Act East Policy** and Indo-Pacific objectives.
- Became India's primary regional platform after shifting focus from **SAARC** post the 2016 Uri attack.

Trade and Connectivity Potential:

- Significant potential for **land and maritime trade**.
- Challenges exist in developing **transborder trade**, **maritime shipping**, and a **shared coastal framework**.

Challenges and Roadblocks:

Slow Progress:

- **Lack of Efficiency**: Delayed implementation of initiatives.
- **Financial Constraints**: BIMSTEC Secretariat faces resource and manpower limitations.

Political Instabilities:

- Internal conflicts like the **Rohingya crisis**, **India-Nepal border tensions**, and **Myanmar's political turmoil** hinder cooperation.

Underutilized Maritime Resources:

- The **Bay of Bengal**, critical for livelihoods, has seen limited collaboration on **coastal shipping** and **fisheries management**.

The Road Ahead for BIMSTEC:

The organization's progress mirrors the **complex geopolitical landscape** of the region. While challenges persist, BIMSTEC's:

- **Sector-driven model**
- **Growing institutional strength** position it as a vital player in shaping the region's future.

With **sustained cooperation** and **dedication**, BIMSTEC could lead the Bay of Bengal region toward a **prosperous**, **secure**, and **stable future**, contributing significantly to the larger Indo-Pacific framework.
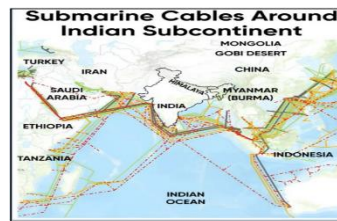
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GS Paper 3 – Infrastructure and Economic Development

India's Expanding Undersea Cable Network: Bridging Continents

Context: The launch of the **India Asia Xpress (IAX)** and **India Europe Xpress (IEX)** undersea cables marks a significant milestone in India's digital journey. These advanced cables aim to bolster connectivity across **Asia** and **Europe**, catering to the country's rising data demands and digital ambitions.

Submarine Cables Around Indian Subcontinent

Key Connections:

- **India Asia Xpress (IAX)**: Links **Chennai** and **Mumbai** with **Singapore**, **Thailand**, and **Malaysia**.
- **India Europe Xpress (IEX)**: Connects **Chennai** and **Mumbai** with **France**, **Greece**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Egypt**, and **Djibouti**.

What Are Undersea Cables?

- **Definition**: These are **fiber optic cables** laid along the ocean floor to enable international **internet** and **telecommunication** connectivity.
- **Global Backbone**: Carry approximately **99% of international internet traffic**, forming the backbone of the global digital ecosystem.
- **Installation**: Laid using specialized ships that ensure cables avoid obstacles and are robust against environmental conditions.
- **UNGA Recognition**: Recognized as **"critical communication infrastructure"** in 2010.
- **Threats**: Prone to damage from fishing, anchoring, natural disasters like **earthquakes** and **tsunamis**, and even marine animals.

Significance of India's Network Expansion:

1. **Geopolitical Influence**:
   o Strengthens India's strategic presence in the **Indo-Pacific region**.
   o Enhances regional influence in the **Bay of Bengal** and **South China Sea**.
2. **Security and Stability**:
   o Proactive in addressing the vulnerability of undersea cables to **physical damage** and **cyberattacks**.
3. **Emerging Leader**:
   o Positions India as a key player in the global undersea cable ecosystem, fostering connectivity and resilience.

Challenges and Solutions:

- **Disruptions**: Recent cable failures highlight the need for **alternative routes** and **redundant systems**.
- **Choke Points**: Dependence on critical locations like the **Malacca Strait** exposes vulnerabilities.
- **Domestic Resilience**: Strengthening internal infrastructure ensures uninterrupted services during international outages.

Understanding Optical Fibers:

- **Definition**: Thin strands of pure glass or plastic used for transmitting data as **light pulses**.

- **Working Principle**: Operates on **Total Internal Reflection (TIR)**, where light is continuously reflected within the fiber, ensuring minimal data loss.

Advantages of Optical Fibers:

- **High Bandwidth**: Transmits vast amounts of data compared to copper wires.
- **Low Signal Loss**: Enables long-distance data transmission with minimal loss.
- **Lightning Speed**: Utilizes the speed of light for fast communication.
- **Interference-Free**: Immune to electromagnetic disturbances, ensuring signal clarity.

Applications of Optical Fibers:

- **Telecommunications**: Backbone of **high-speed internet** and telephony.
- **Medical Imaging**: Used in **endoscopes** for internal body examinations.
- **Data Centers**: Integral to server and storage device connectivity.
- **Sensors**: Utilized for measuring **temperature**, **pressure**, and other variables.

Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany: Father of Fiber Optics:

- **Pioneer**: Demonstrated how light could be transmitted through **curved glass fibers**.
- **Legacy**: His groundbreaking work laid the foundation for today's advanced fiber optic technology.

India's ambitious undersea cable projects reflect its determination to strengthen global digital connectivity while emerging as a strategic hub in the evolving digital world. With innovations in optical fiber technology and a focus on resilience, India is set to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of global communication networks.
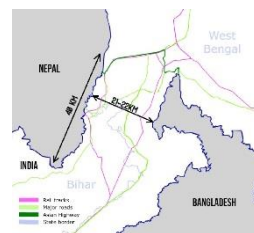
Siliguri Corridor: India's Strategic Lifeline

Context: The **Union Home Minister** has emphasized the importance of the **Siliguri Corridor** as a critical link connecting Northeast India to the rest of the country. The presence of the **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)** in this area reinforces national security and instills confidence across the nation.

Understanding the Siliguri Corridor

The **Siliguri Corridor**, often referred to as the **Chicken's Neck**, is a slender stretch of land located in **West Bengal**.

- It connects India's **Northeastern States** to the mainland.

- Geographically, it lies between the **Mahananda River** and the **Teesta River**.

- Strategically, it is of immense importance due to its proximity to the international borders of **China**, **Nepal**, and **Bangladesh**.

Significance of the Siliguri Corridor

1. **Geopolitical Importance:**
   o Acts as the **only land bridge** between mainland India and the Northeast.
   o Ensures connectivity and regional integration.

2. **Military and Security:**
   o Vital for **defense operations** and the movement of armed forces.
   o Provides a strategic edge due to its location near international borders.

3. **Trade and Transportation:**
   o Serves as a crucial route for transporting goods and people between the **Northeast** and the rest of India.
   o Facilitates **cross-border trade** with neighboring countries like **Bangladesh** and **Bhutan**.

4. **Strategic Vulnerability**: With a width of just **22 kilometers** at its narrowest point, the corridor is susceptible to blockades, making it a focal point for **infrastructure and security enhancements**.

Why Securing the Siliguri Corridor is Critical:

1. **Strategic Connectivity:** Any disruption could isolate the **Northeast**, severely affecting the supply of goods, services, and military aid.

2. **Military Considerations**
   o Its proximity to the borders with **China**, **Nepal**, and **Bangladesh** demands robust defense measures.
   o Ensures **unhindered movement** of troops during conflicts.

3. **Geopolitical Sensitivity**
   o The corridor's narrow geography makes it a potential target for adversaries.
   o Protecting it prevents foreign powers from exploiting the region.

4. **Economic Stability**: The corridor supports economic activities like **cross-border trade**, ensuring access to vital resources.

5. **Internal Security**: Safeguarding the corridor deters external influences from destabilizing the **Northeast** and upholds **national unity**.

Conclusion : The **Siliguri Corridor** is more than just a geographic link; it is a strategic asset that upholds **India's sovereignty**, **economic stability**, and **national integration**. Strengthening its security and infrastructure remains paramount for safeguarding India's interests in the **Northeast** and ensuring resilience against potential threats

GS Paper 2 – Governance and Polity

Centre Tightens Rules to Restrict Access to Election Documents

Context: The **Central Government** has amended **Rule 93 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**, limiting public access to specific election-related documents. This move, initiated by the **Ministry of Law and Justice** at the request of the **Election Commission of India (ECI)**, aims to safeguard voter privacy and prevent misuse of sensitive electronic data. However, it has sparked debates over its impact on transparency in the electoral process.

Key Changes in the Rules:

1. **Restricted Access to Documents:**
   - **Old Rule**: Allowed public access to all election-related "papers."
   - **New Rule**: Limits access to documents explicitly mentioned in the rules, excluding **electronic records** such as **CCTV footage**, **webcasting clips**, and **video recordings**.

2. **Scope of Exclusions:**
   - Essential records like **nomination forms**, **results**, and **election account statements** remain accessible.
   - Sensitive electronic materials are excluded to prevent potential misuse.

Reasons Behind the Amendment:

1. **Legal Context:** The change was prompted by a **Punjab and Haryana High Court** order that directed the provision of all election-related documents, including electronic data, during a case.

2. **Preventing Misuse:**
   - **Election Commission of India** raised concerns over the misuse of **electronic records**, especially through emerging technologies like **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**.
   - Risks include breaches of voter privacy and potential intimidation, particularly in sensitive regions such as **Jammu and Kashmir** and **Naxal-affected areas**.

3. **Candidate Safeguards:** Candidates retain access to critical election materials, including **CCTV footage**, ensuring fairness in contestation. Non-candidates, however, must obtain court permission for access.

Criticism and Concerns:

1. **Reduced Transparency:**
   - Critics argue that limiting access to documents like **observer reports** and **Presiding Officer diaries** undermines public oversight of the electoral process.
   - Activists, including **Venkatesh Nayak**, emphasize the importance of transparency for ensuring election fairness.

2. **Political Allegations:**
   - Opposition parties have accused the government of diluting electoral integrity.
   - **Congress leader Jairam Ramesh** labeled the amendment as anti-democratic and called for legal action to restore transparency.

Significance of the Move:

1. **Enhanced Security:** Protects voter anonymity and reduces risks in politically sensitive areas.

2. **Transparency Trade-offs:** While it prioritizes security, the amendment raises questions about maintaining trust in the electoral process.

Legal Frameworkand Impact:

1. **Conduct of Election Rules, 1961**

   o Governs election-related processes and transparency.

   o The amendment redefines the scope of accessible election documents.

2. **Challenges to Cooperative Federalism**: The move has implications for maintaining credibility in elections across central and state levels.

3. **Potential Legal Challenges:** Opposition parties and activists plan to contest the changes in court, citing transparency as vital to democratic principles.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

The amendment reflects the government's efforts to **modernize election security** while addressing concerns over **transparency**. Striking a balance between these two priorities is essential to foster trust in the electoral system. Introducing mechanisms such as **outcome-based transparency measures** could ensure both voter privacy and public confidence in the electoral process.

Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AIMC) System

Context: The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) is set to deploy **intelligent machines** for constructing **National Highways** to ensure faster, more durable, and efficient road infrastructure. With a current highway network spanning **1.46 lakh km**, and plans to add **45,000 km by 2047**, the government aims to revolutionize road construction with the **Automated & Intelligent Machine-aided Construction (AIMC) System**.

What is AIMC?

The **AIMC System** represents an innovative step toward smarter road construction by integrating **automated machinery** and **real-time data sharing**. This cutting-edge system is designed to tackle inefficiencies in traditional road construction methods, enhance productivity, and improve the quality and longevity of roads.

Objectives of AIMC:

1. **Boost Productivity**: Streamline construction processes with modern technologies.
2. **Improve Durability**: Build roads that are **long-lasting** and require minimal maintenance.
3. **Reduce Post-Construction Delays**: Minimize the need for traditional surveys and reduce project timelines.
4. **Address Current Challenges**: Overcome inefficiencies such as outdated tools, lack of data coordination, and subpar contractor performance.

Types of AIMC Machines:

1. **GPS-Aided Motor Grader (3D Machine Control Technology):**
   o Equipped with **Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS)** technology and angle sensors.
   o Ensures precision by aligning the grader's blade with **digital design plans**.
   o Processes data in **real-time** for accurate and efficient road alignment.
2. **Intelligent Compaction Roller (IC Roller):**
   o Reduces the risk of post-construction issues like **air pockets** or **water voids** in materials.
   o Prevents structural damage to roads and enhances their durability.
3. **Single Drum/Tandem Vibratory Roller**: Ensures proper **soil and base layer compaction**, which is essential for stable and robust roads.

Why AIMC Matters:

- **Faster Project Completion**: Accelerates the pace of highway construction, crucial for meeting future infrastructure demands.
- **Enhanced Road Quality**: Creates highways that can withstand heavy usage and adverse conditions.
- **Technological Advancement**: Brings India's highway construction on par with global standards by integrating modern machinery.

The Road Ahead:

The **AIMC System** signifies a transformative approach to infrastructure development, ensuring that **India's highways** are not just **longer**, but also **smarter and stronger**. By embracing **automation** and **intelligent machines**, the government is paving the way for a **resilient and sustainable road network** that will drive India's growth for decades to come.

Why is the Indian Rupee Weakening Against the US Dollar?

Context: The **exchange rate** is the value of one currency compared to another. For example, if **Rs. 85 = $1** today, it shows how much one US dollar is worth in Indian rupees. In 2014, the exchange rate was Rs. **61 = $1**, highlighting how currencies fluctuate based on various factors.

What Influences Currency Exchange Rates?

Currencies behave similarly to commodities—their value is determined by **demand** and **supply**. When demand for a particular currency exceeds supply, its value rises, and vice versa.

Key Factors Driving the Value of the Indian Rupee

1. **Higher Demand for USD:**
   o When **Indians** need more **US dollars** than **Americans** need Indian rupees, the US dollar strengthens, and the Indian rupee weakens.
   o **Daily fluctuations**: Consistently higher demand for USD results in the continued **depreciation of the INR**.

2. **Trade Imbalance:**
   o If India imports more goods from the US than it exports, the demand for USD rises, weakening the rupee.
   o Similarly, if Indians purchase more **US services** (e.g., tourism) than Americans buy from India, the demand for INR decreases, further weakening the currency.

3. **Investment Flows:**
   o **More US investments in India** cause the INR to appreciate.
   o **Indian investments in the US** tend to weaken the INR as more rupees are exchanged for dollars.

Other Factors Affecting the INR/USD Exchange Rate:

- **Trade Imbalances**: For example, **high US tariffs on Indian goods** reduce demand for the INR, pushing the rupee lower.
- **Inflation**: If inflation is higher in India compared to the US, the rupee's purchasing power decreases, leading to depreciation.
- **Capital Outflows**: Investors pulling their money out of India, attracted by better returns in the US (such as higher interest rates or lower inflation), lead to a weaker INR.

Current Scenario: What's Behind the Rupee's Decline?

The Indian rupee has recently breached **85/$1**, compared to **83 in April 2024**. Contributing factors include:

- **Trade Deficits**: India is importing more than it exports, increasing demand for USD.
- **Rising Inflation**: Inflation in India is higher than in the US, eroding the rupee's value.
- **Capital Flight**: Investors are pulling funds out of India, preferring the stability of US markets.

Conclusion: A Complex Issue

The decline in the Indian rupee reflects a mix of **trade imbalances**, **inflation disparities**, and **capital outflows**. To stabilize the rupee, India must address these underlying issues by boosting exports, controlling inflation, and attracting more foreign investments.

Types of Exchange Rates:

Type	Features	Importance
Fixed Exchange Rate	Set by central banks; less volatile.	Provides stability but lacks flexibility.
Floating Exchange Rate	Determined by market forces; highly volatile.	Reflects real-time economic conditions.
NEER (Nominal Effective Exchange Rate)	A weighted average of exchange rates; no inflation adjustment.	Measures currency strength relative to trading partners.
REER (Real Effective Exchange Rate)	Adjusts NEER for inflation differences.	Indicates trade competitiveness.

Difference Between Appreciation, Depreciation, and Devaluation:

Aspect	Appreciation	Depreciation	Devaluation
Definition	Currency value increases.	Currency value decreases.	Central bank deliberately reduces value.
System	Floating exchange rate.	Floating exchange rate.	Fixed/semi-fixed exchange rate.
Cause	Driven by market forces (demand/supply).	Driven by market forces (demand/supply).	A policy decision by the central bank.
Impact on Exports	Makes exports more expensive.	Makes exports cheaper.	Makes exports cheaper.
Impact on Imports	Makes imports cheaper.	Makes imports more expensive.	Makes imports more expensive.

The **Indian rupee's weakness** against the US dollar underscores the need for strategic measures to restore balance in trade, investments, and inflation.

India-Kuwait Ties Elevated to Strategic Partnership

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a **historic milestone** in the bilateral relations between the two nations. This landmark event not only elevated the partnership to a **strategic level** but also highlighted India's growing influence in the Gulf region amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics.

Why is this Newsworthy?

- **Historic Visit:** PM Modi's visit is the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Kuwait in **43 years**, since Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981.

- **Strategic Upgrade:** The partnership between the two nations has now been officially elevated to a **strategic partnership**, signifying closer cooperation in **trade**, **defence**, and other key areas.

- **India's Rising Role:** This move underscores India's growing importance in the Gulf region.

India-Kuwait Relations: A Snapshot

Historical Ties:

- **Rooted in History:** India and Kuwait share a **long-standing friendship** that predates Kuwait's independence in 1961.

- **Trading Partners:** India was a **natural trading partner**, with the **Indian Rupee** once serving as legal tender in Kuwait.

Current Dynamics:

- **Energy Partnership:** Kuwait is India's **sixth-largest crude oil supplier**, meeting **3% of India's energy needs**.

- **Bilateral Trade:** Exports from India to Kuwait exceeded **$2 billion** for the first time, with total trade valued at **$10.47 billion (2023-24)**.

- **Investment Links:** The **Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA)** has invested over **$10 billion** in India.

- **Indian Diaspora:** With over **1 million Indians**, the Indian community is the **largest expatriate group** in Kuwait, contributing significantly to its economy.

Key Highlights of PM Modi's Visit:

Landmark Achievements:

1. **Historic Recognition:**
   - PM Modi was awarded Kuwait's highest civilian honour, **'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer,'** for his efforts in strengthening bilateral ties.

2. **Bilateral Engagement:**
   - Meetings with top Kuwaiti leaders, including:
     - **Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah**
     - **Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah**

▪ **Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah**

3. **Strategic Agreements:**

   o A **comprehensive defence agreement** covering:

      ▪ **Training** and exchange of personnel.

      ▪ **Joint military exercises.**

      ▪ Collaboration in **defence technology and supply chains**.

   o **Economic Cooperation:**

      ▪ Modi invited KIA to explore opportunities in India's **energy**, **pharma**, **food parks**, and **infrastructure sectors**.

   o Signing of three MoUs in **sports**, **culture**, and **solar energy**.

Strategic Alignment:

- **Vision 2035:** PM Modi lauded Kuwait's developmental roadmap and emphasized **collaboration** to achieve shared objectives.

- **Expanded Focus Areas:** Strategic cooperation to grow in sectors such as **pharmaceuticals**, **IT**, **FinTech**, **infrastructure**, and **security**.

Impact on Bilateral Relations:

Strengthened People-to-People Ties:

- Acknowledgment of the **1 million-strong Indian diaspora**, celebrated for their **contributions** to Kuwait's development.

Regional and Global Implications:

- **Closer GCC Collaboration:**

   o India seeks to enhance ties with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** under Kuwait's presidency.

   o Push for concluding the **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement**, which could further boost bilateral trade volumes, currently at **$184.46 billion (2022-23)**.

- **Shared Vision for West Asia:**

   o Joint emphasis on **peace, stability**, and **prosperity** in the volatile West Asia region.

   o Unified stance on **condemning terrorism** and dismantling terror networks.

Conclusion:

PM Modi's visit has paved the way for a **dynamic and robust partnership** between India and Kuwait. By strengthening **defence ties**, expanding **economic cooperation**, and aligning on strategic goals, this partnership promises substantial benefits for both nations and the broader Gulf region.

Rann Utsav: A Celebration of Culture and Heritage

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has extended an invitation to the public to witness the enchanting **Rann Utsav**, an annual cultural festival that continues until **March 2025**. This vibrant event showcases the rich cultural and artistic heritage of the **Great Rann of Kutch**, attracting visitors from across the globe.

About Rann Utsav:

- **Annual Cultural Extravaganza:** Organized by the **Gujarat Tourism Department**, the Rann Utsav takes place in the **Great Rann of Kutch**, India's largest **salt desert**.

- **Celebrating Heritage:** It highlights the diverse traditions, art, crafts, music, and dance of the **Kutch region**, offering an immersive experience for tourists.

The Great Rann of Kutch: An Overview:

Location and Divisions:

- **Geography:**

  o The **Rann of Kutch** is a vast expanse of **salt marshes**, located in **Gujarat**, India, and partially extending into **Sindh, Pakistan**.

  o It lies close to **sea level**, connected to the **Arabian Sea** through the **Kori Creek** (west) and the **Gulf of Kutch** (east).

- **Divisions:**

  o **Great Rann of Kutch:** The larger section, stretching east to west, bordered by the **Thar Desert** to the north and **Kutch Hills** to the south.

  o **Little Rann of Kutch:** Situated southeast of the Great Rann, extending to the **Gulf of Kutch**.

Climate:

- **Summers:** Temperatures average around **44°C**, often reaching up to **50°C**.

- **Winters:** The region experiences **freezing temperatures**, showcasing an extreme desert climate.

Ecological Significance:

Flora and Fauna:

- **Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary:** The **Little Rann of Kutch** is home to the endangered **Indian Wild Ass (Khur)** and forms part of India's largest wildlife sanctuary.

- **Ecosystems:**

  o The region supports **mangroves**, **desert vegetation**, and grass patches known as **baits**, which sustain diverse wildlife.

  o It is a unique ecological zone where **desert and marine ecosystems** coexist.

Biodiversity Hotspot:

- The **Rann of Kutch** hosts rare species of plants and animals, making it an **ecological treasure** within the **Indomalayan biogeographic realm**.

Historical and Cultural Legacy:

- **Ancient Settlements:** The Rann was home to **Neolithic communities** and later became an important center of the **Indus Valley Civilization**.

- **Historical Empires:** It has been part of major empires like the **Mauryas** and **Guptas**, reflecting a rich historical and cultural lineage.

The Kutch Desert: A Land of Natural Wonders:

Geographical Borders:

- The **Kutch Desert** is flanked by:

  - **Sindh (Pakistan)** to the northwest.

  - The **Arabian Sea** to the southwest.

  - **Rajasthan** to the northeast.

Geological Significance:

- The desert is a prime example of **Holocene sedimentation**, showcasing the dynamic interaction between geological and environmental factors.

Experience the Magic of Rann Utsav:

With its **mesmerizing landscapes**, **unique biodiversity**, and **rich cultural heritage**, the Rann Utsav offers an unforgettable experience. Don't miss the chance to explore the vibrant traditions of **Kutch** and witness the spectacular **salt desert** under the moonlight.

Vice President Removal: Process and Key Constitutional Provisions

Context: In a significant political development, opposition parties under the **INDIA bloc** have proposed a **no-confidence resolution** against Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice President **Jagdeep Dhankhar**. This move brings attention to the constitutional provisions governing the removal of the Vice President and the broader implications of this high-ranking office.

About the Vice President of India:

Constitutional Status:

- The Vice President is the **second-highest constitutional office** in India, after the President.
- **Article 63** of the Constitution mandates the establishment of the office of the Vice President.
- The Vice President performs a **dual role**, similar to the **American Vice President**:
    o Acts as the **ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**.
    o Steps in as the **acting President** during the President's absence or inability to perform duties.

Eligibility Criteria:

As per **Article 66**, a candidate must fulfill the following conditions to be eligible for the Vice President's office:

- Must be an **Indian citizen**.
- Should be at least **35 years old**.
- Must be qualified to be elected as a **member of the Rajya Sabha**.
- Should not hold any **office of profit** under the Union, state government, or any local/public authority.

Election Process:

- The Vice President is elected by an **electoral college** comprising:
    o **Elected and nominated members** of both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.
    o Unlike the Presidential election, state legislative assemblies do not participate.
- The election follows the **proportional representation system** with a **single transferable vote**, conducted via **secret ballot**.
- Any disputes regarding the election are resolved by the **Supreme Court**, whose decision is final and binding.

Tenure and Removal:

Tenure:

- The Vice President serves a **five-year term** from the date of assuming office.
- Can continue in office beyond the term until a **successor assumes charge**.
- Eligible for **re-election** for subsequent terms.

Resignation:

- The Vice President can resign by submitting a formal letter to the **President of India**.

Removal Process:

- **Article 67(b)** outlines the procedure for removal:
    o A resolution for removal must be passed in the **Rajya Sabha** with an **effective majority** (majority of all then members).
    o The resolution must then be approved by the **Lok Sabha** with a **simple majority**.
    o A **14-day prior notice** is mandatory before introducing the resolution.

Conclusion:

The Vice President's office holds immense **constitutional and political significance**, acting as a crucial bridge between the executive and legislative branches. The ongoing no-confidence resolution highlights the importance of adhering to the **constitutional framework** in addressing political disagreements. It remains to be seen how this development will unfold in India's political landscape.

Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX): A Revolutionary Step by ISRO

Context: The **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)** is gearing up for a historic mission under the **SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)** program. With **24 scientific experiments** on board the **POEM satellite**, this mission aims to achieve a significant breakthrough in **autonomous space docking technology**—a crucial capability for future space exploration.

About the SpaDeX Mission:

Mission Goals:

The **Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX)** is an ambitious initiative designed to:

- Develop **autonomous in-space docking technology**.
- Pave the way for critical projects like the **Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS)** and advanced **lunar missions**.

Key Features:

- **Launch Vehicle: PSLV-C60** will serve as the carrier for the mission.
- **Spacecraft Involved:**
  - **Chaser (SDX01)**
  - **Target (SDX02)**
- **Technology Demonstration:**
  - Achieving precise **in-orbit docking**.
  - Demonstrating **power transfer** between docked spacecraft.

Mission Details:

Launch and Orbit:

- **Orbit Details:**
  - Circular orbit at **470 km** altitude.
  - Inclination of **55 degrees**.

Docking Process:

- **Separation Dynamics:**
  - The Chaser and Target will separate with a controlled **velocity difference**, maintaining a **10-20 km distance** initially.
  - Propulsion systems will guide the spacecraft into alignment, leading to a **Far Rendezvous** phase.
- **Docking and Operations:**
  - After successful docking, the mission will showcase **electrical power transfer**.

o Post-demonstration, the spacecraft will undock to conduct additional payload operations.

What is POEM?

PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM)

The **POEM** is an innovative platform created by the **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC)** to utilize the fourth stage of the PSLV as an **orbital science station**.

Key Features:

- **First Used:** In the **PSLV-C53 mission (2022)** to reduce **space debris**.

- Equipped with a **Navigation Guidance and Control (NGC)** system for precise stabilization.

- Provides a cost-effective solution for conducting **scientific experiments** in orbit.

Historical Context:

- The concept of **space docking** dates back to **1967**, when the Soviet Union successfully docked **Kosmos 186** and **Kosmos 188**.

- If successful, **SpaDeX** will position India as the **fourth nation** globally to master this complex technology, joining the ranks of space giants.\

Conclusion:

The **SpaDeX mission** represents a monumental step for ISRO, showcasing India's growing expertise in cutting-edge **space technologies**. By mastering **autonomous space docking**, India is poised to play a pivotal role in **global space exploration** and ensure its presence in **future space stations and lunar missions**.

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SMILE Programme: Transforming India's Logistics Ecosystem

Context: In a significant move to revolutionize India's logistics sector, the **Indian government** and the **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** have signed a **$350 million policy-based loan** under the second subprogramme of the **Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE)** initiative. This groundbreaking partnership aims to bolster **supply chain resilience** and enhance the **manufacturing sector** in India.

What is the SMILE Programme?

Programme Overview:

The **Strengthening Multimodal and Integrated Logistics Ecosystem (SMILE)** is a strategic initiative designed to implement comprehensive reforms in India's logistics sector.

- **Objective:** To streamline **multimodal logistics** and support the growth of India's **manufacturing** and **trade operations**.

- **Collaborators:**

    o **Department of Economic Affairs (DEA)** under the Ministry of Finance.

    o **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

    o **Asian Development Bank (ADB)**.

- **Structure:** The programme follows a **programmatic policy-based loan (PBL)** approach, comprising two subprogrammes for phased implementation.

Key Pillars of the SMILE Programme:

1. Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:

- Developing robust **logistics capacities** at the **national**, **state**, and **city levels**.

- Focusing on seamless integration of **multimodal logistics infrastructure** to support efficient transportation.

2. Standardising Warehousing:

- Establishing **uniform standards** to optimize warehousing operations.

- Encouraging **private investment** by streamlining **supply chains** and improving their reliability.

3. Enhancing Trade Logistics:

- Improving the efficiency of **external trade operations** to boost India's competitiveness in global markets.

- Simplifying processes to reduce **logistical bottlenecks** in export and import activities.

4. Promoting Smart and Low-Emission Systems:

- Adopting **advanced technologies** to enhance logistics efficiency.

- Focusing on **environmentally sustainable practices** to minimize the carbon footprint of the logistics ecosystem.

Conclusion:

The **SMILE Programme** is a pivotal step in **modernizing India's logistics sector**, fostering economic growth, and ensuring **sustainable development**. By strengthening **institutional frameworks**, standardizing warehousing, improving trade logistics, and promoting smart systems, this initiative is set to position India as a global leader in **logistics and supply chain management**.

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"Agritech for Women Farmers: A Business Case for Inclusive Growth" - A Report by WEF

Context: The **World Economic Forum (WEF)** has released a landmark report titled **"Agritech for Women Farmers: A Business Case for Inclusive Growth"**, shedding light on the transformative potential of **gender-inclusive AgriTech**. This report highlights how integrating women farmers into the **AgriTech ecosystem** can unlock their full potential, contributing to a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural future.

Need for Gender-Inclusive AgriTech for Women Farmers:

Feminization of Agriculture:

- In **India**, women account for nearly **50% of the workforce** in key agricultural value chains, including **cotton**, **sugarcane**, **tea**, **coffee**, and **cashews**.

- Despite their significant role, women earn up to **60% less** than their male counterparts and face **limited access to essential resources** like **finance**, **training**, and **technology**.

Efficiency Gains through AgriTech:

- **Data-driven planning** through AgriTech can dramatically reduce **food loss** and **waste**, making supply chains more efficient and **resilient** to external shocks.

- Transitioning to **AgriTech solutions** can not only empower women farmers but also improve **productivity** and **profitability** in the agricultural sector.

Business Imperative: Gender-inclusive **AgriTech** is not just a social responsibility but a **strategic business imperative** for the **private sector**. Supporting women farmers can unlock new opportunities, boost agricultural output, and contribute to **inclusive growth**.

Challenges Faced by Women Farmers in Adopting AgriTech:

Demand-Side Challenges:

1. **Sociocultural Barriers:**
   o **Gender norms** and societal biases limit women's mobility and access to agricultural opportunities.
   o Safety and security concerns also restrict their ability to fully engage with AgriTech innovations.

2. **Limited Access to Resources:**
   o **Land ownership** restrictions prevent women from accessing **formal credit**, which is crucial for adopting AgriTech solutions and improving farm productivity.

3. **Literacy Barriers:**
   o Low levels of **education** and **digital literacy** hinder women's ability to fully benefit from **AgriTech** tools and services, limiting their awareness and adoption of new technologies.

Supply-Side Challenges:

1. **Access to Gender-Disaggregated Data:** The **lack of gender-specific data** prevents a clear understanding of the unique challenges that women farmers face in utilizing **AgriTech services**.

2. **Support System Gaps:** Women farmers often lack **mentorship**, **peer learning opportunities**, and access to well-coordinated **agricultural research and extension services**, which are essential for maximizing the potential of AgriTech.

Framework for Agritech Solutions for Women Farmers:

The report proposes a **framework** for designing **Agritech solutions** that cater to women farmers, built around the **4Ps of marketing—Product**, **Price**, **Promotion**, **Place**, with an additional focus on **People**.

- **Product:** Tailored to meet the needs of women, focusing on **affordable** and **intuitive** designs.

- **Price:** Ensuring **affordability** and equitable access.

- **Promotion:** Strategic initiatives to **raise awareness** and challenge existing gender biases.

- **Place:** Creating **accessible platforms** for women farmers to engage with AgriTech.

- **People:** Empowering women through **training**, **capacity building**, and expanding their **role** in agricultural innovation.

Conclusion:

The **Agritech sector** holds immense potential for empowering women farmers, improving agricultural productivity, and driving **inclusive economic growth**. However, overcoming sociocultural barriers, improving access to resources, and addressing **gender-specific challenges** in AgriTech adoption are crucial steps toward realizing this potential. By prioritizing **gender-inclusive AgriTech** solutions, we can unlock new opportunities for **women farmers** and accelerate progress towards a more **equitable** and **sustainable agricultural future**.

GS Paper 2 – Governance

BharatNet: Connecting Rural India to a Digital Future

Context: BharatNet, the world's largest rural broadband connectivity initiative, has connected over **2.14 lakh Gram Panchayats** using technologies like **optical fibre**, **radio**, and **satellites**. This transformative project is bridging the digital divide, bringing the power of the internet to the remotest corners of India.

Genesis of BharatNet:

- **Launched** in **October 2011** by the **Government of India** under the Ministry of Communications.

- The project aims to provide **affordable high-speed internet** to every **Gram Panchayat** across the country.

- BharatNet is a cornerstone of the government's mission to create a **digitally empowered India**.

Amended BharatNet Program (ABP) 2023:

In 2023, the government introduced the **Amended BharatNet Program (ABP)** with an outlay of ₹**1,39,579 crores**, enhancing its scope and efficiency.

Key Highlights:

1. **Extensive Connectivity**:
   o Optical Fibre (OF) connections to **2.64 lakh Gram Panchayats** in **ring topology**.
   o Provision for connecting approximately **3.8 lakh non-GP villages** on a demand basis.

2. **Maintenance and Monitoring**:
   o **Operation and maintenance** for 10 years, monitored by a **Centralized Network Operating Centre (CNOC)**.
   o Payments to Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) based on Service Level Agreements (SLAs).

3. **Advanced Infrastructure**:
   o **Power backups** at Gram Panchayats and Block levels.
   o Deployment of **Remote Fibre Monitoring Systems (RFMS)** for efficient network oversight.

Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN): The **Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN)** is a fund established to improve telecommunications services in India, replacing the **Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**. It supports BharatNet by ensuring better accessibility and service quality in rural areas.

Phased Implementation of BharatNet:

1. **Phase I (Completed):** Connected **1 lakh Gram Panchayats** using **existing infrastructure** with **optical fibre cables**.

2. **Phase II (Completed):** Extended coverage to an additional **1.5 lakh Gram Panchayats** using a mix of **optical fibre**, **radio**, and **satellite technologies**.

3. **Phase III (Ongoing):**
   - Aims to **future-proof** the network with:
     o **5G technology integration**.
     o Enhanced **bandwidth capacity**.
     o Improved **last-mile connectivity** to ensure reliability and accessibility.

Transformative Impact of BharatNet:

1. **Digital Inclusion**
   o Rural villages now have access to **high-speed internet**, enabling **e-governance**, **online education**, and **telemedicine services**.
   o Supports initiatives like **Digital India**, fostering inclusivity.

2. **Economic Empowerment**
   o Internet connectivity has unlocked opportunities for **digital commerce**, **financial inclusion**, and **entrepreneurship** in rural communities.

3. **Education and Healthcare**
   o Facilitates **digital classrooms**, bridging the education divide.
   o Enables **telehealth services**, improving rural healthcare accessibility.

4. **Strengthening Governance**
   o Empowers **Gram Panchayats** to implement **e-governance** projects, enhancing **transparency**, **efficiency**, and citizen engagement.

Conclusion: BharatNet is more than just a connectivity project—it is a **lifeline for rural India**, empowering millions to access opportunities far beyond their physical reach. With continued investment, robust execution, and a sustained focus on inclusion, BharatNet is set to transform rural India into a **digitally empowered and economically vibrant society**, bridging the digital divide one village at a time.

India's Path to a Developed Nation by 2047

Context: India envisions a transformative journey to become a **developed nation** by 2047, fueled by the energy, innovation, and determination of its **youth**. As the nation celebrates its centenary of independence, its focus lies on **inclusive growth**, **sustainable progress**, and **effective governance**, positioning youth at the heart of this mission.

Vision: Viksit Bharat @2047

- The **Viksit Bharat @2047 initiative** aims to create a **prosperous and inclusive India** with a focus on empowering youth as both **drivers** and **beneficiaries** of change.

- Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** emphasized that the youth are critical agents for steering the nation toward this goal.

Strategic Roadmap:

The **Union Budget 2024-25** outlines a nine-pronged strategy to realize the dream of **Viksit Bharat**:

1. **Agriculture**: Boosting productivity and ensuring resilience.

2. **Employment and Skilling**: Expanding opportunities and workforce capabilities.

3. **Human Resource Development**: Promoting social justice and inclusive growth.

4. **Manufacturing and Services**: Enhancing competitiveness and innovation.

5. **Urban Development**: Creating smart, sustainable cities.

6. **Energy Security**: Focusing on green and renewable energy sources.

7. **Infrastructure**: Building world-class infrastructure.

8. **Research and Innovation**: Driving cutting-edge advancements.

9. **Next-Gen Reforms**: Implementing transformative policies for future growth.

Key Initiatives for Viksit Bharat:

Skilling and Empowerment:

- **National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (NPSDE)**: Bridges skill gaps and promotes apprenticeships.

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY)**: Trained over **1.42 crore individuals** since 2015.

- **Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS)**: Provides vocational training with a focus on **female participation**.

- **PM Vishwakarma Initiative**: Upskills traditional artisans and craftsmen.

Digital Transformation:

- **Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP)**: Enhances transparency and resolves land disputes.

- **APAAR ID**: A digital academic identity streamlining educational transitions and prior learning recognition.

- **5G Connectivity**: Extends digital inclusion to remote areas, boosting sectors like **agriculture**, **healthcare**, and **retail**.

Innovative Platforms:

- **PRAGATI Platform**: Real-time tracking of projects worth ₹**18 lakh crore**, ensuring timely execution.

- **Aspirational Districts Program**: Addresses regional disparities using digital tools for **inclusive development**.

Youth Engagement:

- **Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue**: Transformed from the **National Youth Festival**, empowering young leaders to contribute holistically.

Challenges on the Path to Viksit Bharat:

1. **Economic Inequality**: Persistent income and regional disparities hinder equitable progress.

2. **Skill Development and Education**: Insufficient infrastructure and training leave youth unprepared for future job markets.

3. **Environmental Concerns**: Rapid industrialization and urbanization exert pressure on natural resources, exacerbating climate change issues.

4. **Governance and Corruption**: Inefficiencies and corruption delay essential reforms.

5. **Technological Disruptions**: While **AI** and advancements enhance productivity, they also risk labor displacement and inequality.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

India's journey to **Viksit Bharat by 2047** is a shared vision involving **citizens, industries, and institutions**. By addressing challenges, leveraging its **youth potential**, and fostering **transparent governance**, India is well-positioned to achieve its ambitions.

This mission isn't just about development—it's about creating a **thriving, inclusive, and sustainable nation** where every individual contributes to and benefits from the nation's progress. Together, we can realize the dream of a **brighter and prosperous India**.

GS Paper 2– Governance and Social Justice

Government Ends No-Detention Policy in Central Schools

Context: The Central Government has officially abolished the **no-detention policy** in schools under its administration, including **Kendriya Vidyalayas** and **Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas**.

About the New Decision:

- The move impacts nearly **3,000 Central schools**, including:
    - **Sainik Schools**, managed by the Ministry of Defence.
    - **Eklavya Model Residential Schools**, overseen by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Understanding the No-Detention Policy:

- **Introduced under Section 16 of the Right to Education Act, 2009**, the policy prohibited schools from detaining students up to **Class 8**.
- **Objective**: The policy aimed to minimize dropouts and ensure all children received a **basic level of education**.
- **Criticism**:
    - States reported that students were becoming **less serious about academics**.
    - In 2016, the **Central Advisory Board of Education** recommended abolishing the policy due to declining academic standards.
- **2019 Amendment**:
    - Allowed governments to hold back students in **Class 5**, **Class 8**, or both if they failed a **re-examination**.
    - Gave States the discretion to implement or scrap the no-detention policy.
    - Following this, **18 States and Union Territories** abolished the policy.

New Policy Framework:

The **abolition of the no-detention policy** allows schools to:

- **Hold back students** who fail their **annual examinations**.
- Provide **additional support mechanisms** for struggling students to ensure they catch up academically.

Why the Change?

- **Academic Standards**: The policy was linked to **compromised learning outcomes**, especially in higher grades.
- **Fear of Failing**: The prospect of being held back is expected to motivate students to focus on **learning fundamental concepts** and excelling in exams.
- **Improved Outcomes**: This shift aims to raise **academic and educational standards** across India.

Conclusion:

Scrapping the no-detention policy marks a significant step towards addressing **declining academic rigor** in schools. By reintroducing accountability, the move is expected to help students grasp **core concepts**, build a solid educational foundation, and contribute to **enhancing the nation's academic standards**.

India's Dependence on China for Critical Minerals: Challenges and the Road Ahead

Context: In 2023, the Ministry of Mines identified **30 critical minerals** vital for **India's economic growth** and **national security**.

- The report highlighted **complete import dependence** for 10 of these minerals but didn't address India's **dependence on China**, the global leader in critical minerals.

- This dependency exposes India to **strategic vulnerabilities**, emphasizing the urgency of exploring alternatives.

Understanding Critical Minerals:

Critical minerals are essential raw materials for **economic stability** and **national security**, often used in **advanced technologies** and **renewable energy solutions**.

- **Rare and Non-Substitutable**: These minerals are difficult to mine, challenging to replace, and prone to **supply chain disruptions**.

- **Rising Demand**: Driven by global technological progress and the transition to **green energy**, ensuring a steady supply of critical minerals is a strategic imperative for nations worldwide.

China's Stronghold in Critical Minerals:

China dominates the global market for critical minerals due to:

1. **Extensive Resources:** China has identified **173 types of minerals**, including:
   - 13 energy minerals
   - 59 metallic minerals
   - 95 non-metallic minerals

2. **Strategic Investments:** In 2023, China invested **$19.4 billion** in exploration, discovering **132 new deposits**, including **34 major ones**.

3. **Processing Leadership:** Controls a major share of mineral refining:
   - **Rare Earths**: 87%
   - **Lithium**: 58%
   - **Silicon**: 68%

4. **Global Investments**: China holds strategic stakes in **overseas mining projects**, strengthening its grip on supply chains.

China's Export Tactics: China uses its dominance to strategically control the export of critical minerals:

- **Notable Measures**:
  - 2010: **Rare earth embargo** on Japan.
  - Recent restrictions on **Gallium**, **Germanium**, and **Antimony** exports.
  - 2023: **Ban on rare earth technologies** to safeguard domestic interests.

- **Calculated Approach**: China avoids drastic moves that could disrupt its **export-driven industries** or affect its reliance on imported raw materials.

India's Reliance on China:

India heavily depends on Chinese imports for six critical minerals (2019–2024 data):

1. **Bismuth (85.6%)**: Essential for **pharmaceuticals and chemicals**.
2. **Lithium (82%)**: A key component in **EV batteries** and **energy storage systems**.
3. **Silicon (76%)**: Used in **semiconductors** and **solar panels**.
4. **Titanium (50.6%)**: Crucial for **aerospace** and **defense**.
5. **Tellurium (48.8%)**: Integral to **solar and thermoelectric devices**.
6. **Graphite (42.4%)**: Vital for **EV batteries** and **steel production**.

China's dominance in these minerals exposes **India's supply chain vulnerabilities**.

Why Does India Rely on Imports?

Despite abundant resources, India faces several structural challenges:

1. **Technological Barriers:** Limited ability to extract minerals like **lithium** from **Jammu & Kashmir's 5.9 million tonnes of deposits**.
2. **Investment Challenges: High risks** deter private investments in exploration.
3. **Policy Gaps:** Lack of incentives and advanced technologies hinder domestic production.

The Strategic Path Forward:

To reduce dependence on China, India is implementing several strategies:

1. **Securing Overseas Assets**: Establishing **Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)** to acquire international mineral resources.
2. **Fostering Collaborations**: Joining initiatives like the **Minerals Security Partnership** and **Critical Raw Materials Club** to diversify supply sources.
3. **Investing in R&D**: Leveraging institutions like the **Geological Survey of India** and **CSIR** for innovative mining and processing technologies.
4. **Promoting Recycling**: Encouraging a **circular economy** and offering production-linked incentives to reduce dependency.
5. **Policy Reforms**: Updating mining regulations and introducing incentives to attract private investments.

Conclusion:

India's heavy reliance on China for critical minerals poses significant risks to its **economic security** and **development goals**.

- **Overcoming these challenges** requires a long-term commitment to **investment**, **technology development**, and **global partnerships**.
- With proactive policies and sustained efforts, India can secure a **self-reliant future**, reducing its dependency and ensuring robust supply chains for critical minerals.

Quick Insight: What is an Ore in Mining?

Ore is a natural rock or sediment containing **valuable minerals** at concentrations that make extraction profitable. The **grade of ore** refers to the proportion of the desired material present.

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Bangladesh's Extradition Request for Sheikh Hasina: Implications and Challenges

Context: Bangladesh has formally requested **India** to extradite its former Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina**, who sought asylum in India on **August 5** after mass protests led to the end of her **16-year rule**.

- **Diplomatic Note**: Bangladesh has sent an official request to India, citing the need for Hasina to face **judicial processes** for alleged crimes, including **genocide** and **crimes against humanity**.

- **Legal Action**: The **International Crimes Tribunal (ICT)** in Dhaka has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and some of her former ministers and officials.

The India-Bangladesh Extradition Treaty:

Overview of the Treaty:

- **Signed in 2013** to address cross-border criminal activities, particularly involving **Indian insurgents** in Bangladesh and **Bangladeshi militants** hiding in India.

- It provides a legal framework for extradition but does not make compliance mandatory in every case.

Key Provisions:

1. **Extraditable Offences**:

   o The treaty mandates extradition for individuals charged with, convicted of, or wanted for committing offences punishable by at least **one year of imprisonment** in both countries.

   o This includes **financial crimes**, **murder**, and attempts to commit or assist in such crimes.

2. **Dual Criminality**:

   o The offence must be recognized as a crime in **both countries**.

3. **Provisions for Refusal**:

   o **Political Offences**: Extradition can be denied if the offence is of a **political nature**, except for crimes like **murder**, **enforced disappearance**, or **torture**.

   o **Good Faith**: Refusal is possible if the accusations are not made in **good faith** or are seen as unjust.

   o **Military Offences**: Acts classified solely as military offences are not subject to extradition under the treaty.

2016 Amendment:

- Simplified the process by removing the requirement for evidence.

- Now, only an **arrest warrant** from a competent court is required.

- Sheikh Hasina's multiple arrest warrants make her case eligible for extradition under this amendment.

Details of Bangladesh's Extradition Request:

Bangladesh's Diplomatic Note:

- The request asks **New Delhi** to send back **Sheikh Hasina** to face judicial processes.

India's Response:

- The **Ministry of External Affairs** has acknowledged receiving the request but has not provided an official statement.
- Indian officials are evaluating the **legal and diplomatic grounds** before deciding.

Strained Bilateral Relations:

- Sheikh Hasina's asylum in India and her public remarks have **strained India-Bangladesh ties**.
- **Hasina's Allegations**:
  - She accused the interim government of **genocide** and **minority persecution**, including attacks on **Hindu**, **Buddhist**, and **Christian** communities.
  - She called for **justice** and investigations into violence during the protests.
- **Bangladesh's Concerns**:
  - Interim leader **Prof. Muhammad Yunus** has expressed discontent over Hasina's statements, claiming they create **tension** between the nations.
  - Yunus urged India to help resolve these issues to maintain bilateral harmony.

Regional Implications:

- The extradition request and the political situation surrounding **Hasina's asylum** could significantly impact **India-Bangladesh relations**, necessitating cautious and strategic diplomacy.

Can Sheikh Hasina Be Extradited?

India's Right to Refuse:

India has grounds to deny extradition based on the treaty's provisions:

- **Good Faith Concerns**: India can argue that the charges lack **good faith** or are politically motivated.
- **Political Offences**: If the charges are deemed **political**, extradition may be refused.
- **Military Offences**: Accusations related solely to military laws are not extraditable.

Potential Impact of Refusal

Refusing the request could further **strain bilateral relations**, but compliance must align with **India's legal framework** and **diplomatic interests**.

Conclusion: The extradition of Sheikh Hasina presents a complex challenge for **India-Bangladesh relations**. While the **extradition treaty** provides a legal framework, political sensitivities and bilateral ties will play a crucial role in determining India's response.

For India, balancing its commitment to **justice** with preserving regional **diplomatic harmony** will be key to navigating this delicate issue.

MHA Reimposes Restrictions in Three Northeast States: What You Need to Know

Context: The **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has reintroduced the **Protected Area Regime (PAR)** in the northeastern states of **Manipur**, **Nagaland**, and **Mizoram**. This move places new restrictions on the movement of **foreigners**, requiring them to obtain prior **permission** and **Protected Area Permits (PAP)** to visit these regions.

- The **relaxation** previously granted to these states under the **Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958** has been **withdrawn** with immediate effect.

What is the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958?

Under this order, **foreign nationals** cannot enter or remain in a **protected area** without a permit issued by the **Central government** or an authorized office. The permit specifies entry points, residence, and stay duration.

- This order covers areas located between the **inner line** and the **international border** of certain states, including **Manipur**, **Mizoram**, **Nagaland**, and regions in **Himachal Pradesh**, **Jammu and Kashmir**, **Ladakh**, **Rajasthan**, **Uttarakhand**, and part of **Sikkim**.

- Additionally, the **Andaman & Nicobar Islands** and parts of **Sikkim** are designated as **restricted areas**.

Relaxation of the Protected Area Regime:

In **2010**, the **MHA** relaxed the **PAR** for **Manipur**, **Mizoram**, and **Nagaland** due to improved security conditions and efforts to boost tourism.

- **Relaxation Timeline**: The initial relaxation, meant to last one year, was extended multiple times. By **2022**, the exemption was extended until **December 31, 2027**.

- However, on **December 17, 2024**, the relaxation was **withdrawn** due to rising **security concerns**.

Reasons Behind the Withdrawal of the Relaxation:

The **growing security issues** in the region, particularly in **Manipur**, have prompted the MHA to reimpose the **PAR**.

- **Ethnic Violence**: Since May 2023, **Manipur** has been grappling with violent ethnic clashes.

- **Myanmar Refugees**: The **influx of refugees** from **Myanmar** following the military coup in 2021 has escalated tensions along India's **1,643 km border** with Myanmar, which passes through the northeastern states of **Manipur**, **Nagaland**, and **Mizoram**.

- The **Free Movement Regime (FMR)**, which allowed people living within 16 km of the international border to move freely, was **suspended** by the MHA in January.

How to Obtain a Protected Area Permit (PAP):

Foreigners wishing to visit **Manipur**, **Nagaland**, and **Mizoram** must now follow the PAP procedure.

- **Application Process**: The PAP can be obtained through Indian **embassies**, **consulates**, the **Ministry of Home Affairs**, or **Foreigners Regional Registration Offices (FRRO)**.

- Foreign nationals from countries such as **Afghanistan**, **China**, and **Pakistan** must also seek **prior approval** from the MHA.

- **Registration Requirements**: Foreign visitors must now **register with the Foreigners Registration Officer (FRO)** within **24 hours** of arrival in any district or state.

- **Myanmar Nationals**: Previously exempt from PAP requirements, **Myanmar nationals** must now also **register** within 24 hours of arrival, regardless of the type of visa held.
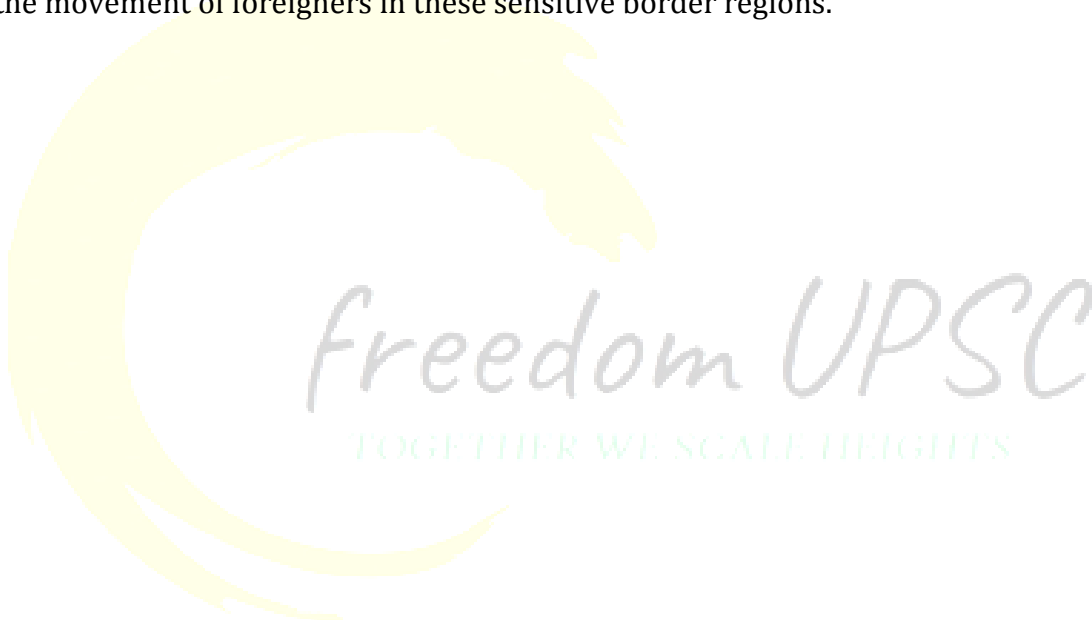
The Inner Line and its Significance:

The **Inner Line** (IL) is a colonial-era concept designed to protect the indigenous tribes of the **Northeast** from external exploitation.

- It **separates** the tribal-majority **hills** from the plains and requires visitors to obtain an **Inner Line Permit (ILP)** for entry and stay in these areas.

Conclusion: Addressing Security Concerns and Monitoring Movement:

By reimposing the **Protected Area Regime (PAR)**, the **MHA** aims to address **growing security challenges** in **Manipur**, **Nagaland**, and **Mizoram**, especially in the wake of ethnic violence and the **Myanmar refugee crisis**.

While the **restrictions** might impact tourism, the government's priority is to **safeguard national security** and control the movement of foreigners in these sensitive border regions.

Supreme Court Restrains ED from Accessing Seized Digital Devices

Context: In a **landmark ruling**, the **Supreme Court (SC)** has prohibited the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** from accessing or copying data from electronic devices seized during raids on **Santiago Martin**, widely known as the "lottery king," his associates, and employees.

This judgment underscores the **protection of fundamental rights**, including the **right to privacy**, and could shape future guidelines on how digital devices are handled during investigations.

What is the Enforcement Directorate (ED)?

Background:

- The **ED** originated in **1956** as an **Enforcement Unit** under the Department of Economic Affairs to address violations of the **Foreign Exchange Regulation Act, 1947**.

- In **1957**, it was renamed the **Enforcement Directorate**, and by **1960**, its control shifted to the **Department of Revenue**.

About the ED:

- The ED is a **specialized financial investigation agency** under the **Ministry of Finance** tasked with enforcing:

  o The **Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA)**, a **civil law**.

  o The **Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA)**, a **criminal law**.

- **Headquarters**: New Delhi

- **Governance**: Operates under the **Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act, 2003**.

Composition:

- Staffed by officers from the **Indian Revenue Service (IRS)**, **Indian Police Service (IPS)**, and **Indian Administrative Service (IAS)**.

- The Director of Enforcement, appointed by the **Central Government**, serves a **two-year term** as mandated by the **CVC Act**.

Background of the Case:

The ED's Operation:

- In **November**, the ED conducted raids at **22 locations** across six states following a complaint by the **Meghalaya Police**.

- Allegations targeted **Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt Ltd** for monopolizing the lottery business in Meghalaya.

- Raids uncovered **12.41 crore** in cash.

Political Contributions by Future Gaming:

- The company was a major purchaser of electoral bonds, contributing **1,368 crore** between 2019 and 2024.

  o **Trinamool Congress**: 542 crore

- o **DMK**: 503 crore
- o **YSR Congress**: 154 crore
- o **BJP**: 100 crore

Supreme Court's Order:

Key Directives:

- A two-page order by Justices **Abhay S Oka** and **Pankaj Mithal** barred the ED from accessing data from devices seized from **Santiago Martin** and his associates.
- The order also **stayed summons** under the **PMLA**, which required individuals to appear for data extraction.
- The case is now being heard alongside similar petitions from **Amazon India** and **Newsclick** regarding digital device seizures.

Petitioners' Arguments:

- The plea emphasized **violations of privacy** and constitutional rights due to unregulated access to sensitive **personal** and **business data**.
- It called for safeguards against **indiscriminate data collection** during investigations.

Implications for ED Investigations:

ED's Response:

- Senior ED officials acknowledged the SC's decision as "unprecedented" but assured it would not impact their investigations.
- The agency highlighted its reliance on other evidence and property attachments worth ₹**622 crore**.

Legal Implications:

- The ruling establishes a precedent emphasizing the **right to privacy** and the need for structured guidelines on handling **digital evidence**.
- Lawyers, including former Attorney General **Mukul Rohatgi**, highlighted concerns about data misuse and the lack of procedural safeguards.

Broader Concerns:

Nature of Seized Devices:

- The ED seized **17 mobile phones**, **hard drives**, **pen drives**, and **email backups** containing sensitive financial, medical, and business records.

Tax Compliance:

- **Future Gaming** reported paying **28,205 crore in GST** for state lottery operations, asserting its compliance with tax laws.

Call for Clear Guidelines:

- The petition urged the need for procedural standards to protect **privacy rights** and prevent unwarranted data access during investigations.

Conclusion: The **Supreme Court's order** reinforces the significance of safeguarding **digital privacy** in legal proceedings. As this case unfolds, it may pave the way for new **legal frameworks** that balance investigative needs with the protection of **constitutional rights** in an era where sensitive data is predominantly digitized.

A Beginner's Guide to Quantum Computing

Context: Quantum computers are **revolutionary devices** that utilize the principles of **quantum mechanics** to solve problems far faster than traditional computers. First proposed by physicist **Richard Feynman in 1982**, the idea arose from the observation that **classical computers struggle to simulate quantum systems** effectively.

Basics of Quantum Computing:

Classical Computers:

- Operate using **bits**, which represent **0 or 1**.

- Use the **binary system** to process and store information.

Quantum Computers:

- Operate using **qubits** (quantum bits), which can exist in states of **0, 1, or both simultaneously** (a phenomenon known as **superposition**).

- Leverage two core principles of **quantum mechanics**:

1. **Superposition**

   o **Qubits can hold multiple states at the same time.**

   o Analogy: A spinning coin is both **heads and tails** until it stops spinning (or is measured).

2. **Entanglement**

   o **Links two or more qubits so their states are connected**, regardless of the distance between them.

   o Example: Opening one glove box instantly tells you the type of glove in another box.

These properties enable quantum computers to process vast amounts of data simultaneously, providing a significant speed advantage over classical computers.

Milestones in Quantum Computing:

- **1994: Shor's Algorithm:** Proved quantum computers can factor large numbers efficiently, challenging traditional cryptographic methods.

- **2019: IBM's Q System One:** The **first commercial quantum computer**, utilizing quantum gates to manipulate qubits.

- **Google's Sycamore Processor:** Achieved **quantum supremacy**, solving a problem in **200 seconds** that would take a supercomputer **10,000 years**.

- **2023: Google's Willow Quantum Chip:**

   Introduced **error-corrected qubits**, allowing scaling improvements.

   o Completed a calculation in **5 minutes** that would take a supercomputer **10 trillion trillion years**.

Current Challenges in Quantum Computing:

1. **Cost and Complexity:**

o Building quantum computers is **expensive** and requires cutting-edge technology.

2. **Stability Issues:**

   o **Qubits are prone to errors** due to environmental noise, causing them to lose their superposition (a problem called **decoherence**).

3. **Error Correction:**

   o Developing reliable error-correction mechanisms is a **major hurdle** for scalability.

4. **Scale Requirements:**

   o Practical applications, such as **drug discovery** or **climate modeling**, require millions of qubits, which remain unfeasible with current technology.

India's Quantum Mission:

India launched the **National Quantum Mission (NQM)** in 2023, with an allocation of ₹**6,000 crore over eight years** to drive advancements in quantum technologies.

Key Objectives:

1. **Development of Quantum Technologies:**

   o Build quantum computers with **50 to 1,000 physical qubits** over the next eight years.

   o Focus on **scalable quantum hardware** and **error correction mechanisms**.

2. **Quantum Communication:**

   o Establish a **secure quantum communication network** for strategic locations.

   o Develop **satellite-based Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)** systems to enhance data security.

3. **Quantum Materials and Sensors:**

   o Design and fabricate **quantum materials** for specialized applications.

   o Develop sensors for precision tasks like **meteorology**, **healthcare**, and **navigation**.

4. **Quantum Algorithms and Applications:**

   o Research quantum algorithms for **optimization problems**, **cryptography**, and **artificial intelligence**.

   o Apply quantum technologies to areas such as **drug discovery**, **climate modeling**, and **financial forecasting**.

Conclusion:

Quantum computing represents the next frontier in technological innovation, with the potential to revolutionize fields from **cryptography** to **healthcare**. While significant challenges remain, the global race to harness quantum capabilities is well underway, with countries like **India making significant investments** to lead in this transformative domain.

Khel Ratna Award Controversy

Context: The exclusion of **Manu Bhaker**, a double Olympic medallist in shooting, from the list of nominees for the **Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award** has sparked a significant controversy. Following public outcry, both Bhaker and the **Sports Ministry** issued clarifications to address the situation.

About the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award:

Named After:

- The award honours **Major Dhyan Chand** (1905–1979), one of India's greatest field hockey players.

Established:

- **Inception:** Introduced in **1991–1992**, originally called the **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award**.
- **Renamed:** In **2021**, the award was renamed to celebrate the legacy of Major Dhyan Chand.

Significance:

- Recognized as **India's highest sporting honour**, it is presented annually by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**.

Eligibility Criteria:

1. **Outstanding Performances:**
   - Awarded to athletes who excel at **international competitions**, such as the **Olympics**, **Asian Games**, **Commonwealth Games**, **World Championships**, and **World Cups**, over the preceding four years.
   - Special consideration is given to achievements during major global events in their respective years.

2. **Exclusions:**
   - Athletes involved in **doping charges** or under **investigation** are ineligible.

General Rules and Conditions:

- **One-Time Recognition:**
   - The award can be conferred **only once** to an individual.
- **Annual Selection:**
   - Typically, only **one award** is presented each year, except in exceptional circumstances.
- **Posthumous Awards:**
   - The award can be given **posthumously** when necessary.
- **Revocation:**
   - The government reserves the right to **cancel or annul** the award for violations, including doping.

Award Benefits:

1. **Cash Prize:**
   - A sum of **25,00,000**, exempt from **income and wealth tax**.

2. **Certificate of Honour:**
   - A **recognition certificate** presented to the awardee.

3. **Medal:**
   - A **prestigious medal** symbolizing excellence in sports.

Conclusion:

The controversy surrounding Manu Bhaker's exclusion has brought attention to the **selection process and criteria** for the Khel Ratna Award. It highlights the need for **transparency and fairness** to uphold the credibility of India's **highest sporting honour**.

GS Paper 3 – Economic Development

The Popcorn Tax Debate: GST Controversy in India

Context: The **GST Council** has introduced varying tax rates on **popcorn**, sparking debate over its rationale and implications:

1. **Non-branded, salted/spiced popcorn:** 5% GST
2. **Pre-packaged and branded popcorn:** 12% GST
3. **Caramel popcorn (sugar confectionery):** 18% GST

The Rationale:

- According to **Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman**, products with added sugar attract higher tax rates.

Criticism of the Popcorn Taxation:

Unnecessary Complexity:

- Differentiating tax rates based on **content and branding** complicates the **GST framework**, undermining the intent of a simplified tax system.

Minimal Revenue Impact:

- **Former Chief Economic Advisers** argue that the negligible revenue generated does not justify the inconvenience caused to businesses and consumers.

Compliance Challenges:

- Classifying popcorn varieties, such as **salted caramel popcorn**, adds confusion and enforcement difficulties.

Public Backlash:

- Media and critics have ridiculed the **three-tier tax structure** for a basic snack, calling it excessive and unnecessary.

Understanding GST: The Backbone of India's Indirect Tax System:

Introduced by the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act (2017):

The **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** replaced multiple indirect taxes, streamlining the taxation system in India.

Key Features of GST:

1. **One Nation, One Tax:**
   - GST unified various taxes like **excise duty, VAT, and service tax** under a single framework.
2. **Dual Tax Structure:**
   - **CGST:** Collected by the Central Government.
   - **SGST:** Collected by State Governments.
   - **IGST:** Levied on inter-state transactions, apportioned between the Centre and states.
3. **Destination-Based Tax:**
   - GST is applied at the **point of consumption**, not at the source of origin.
4. **Tax Slabs:**
   - Tax rates range from **0%, 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%**, based on the type of goods/services.
5. **Governance:**
   - **GST Council:** The apex body for decision-making on GST matters.

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o **GST Network (GSTN):** IT infrastructure for managing GST operations.

Achievements of GST:

- **Broader Taxpayer Base:** Increased registration and compliance among businesses.
- **No Cascading Effect:** Taxes are levied on **value addition**, with input tax credit reducing double taxation.
- **Simplified Compliance for Small Businesses:** Initiatives like the **Composition Scheme** lower the tax burden.
- **Efficient Commerce: E-way bills** have streamlined inter-state and intra-state trade.

Challenges in GST Implementation:

Multiplicity of Tax Slabs:

- Classification issues, such as the **popcorn controversy**, highlight GST's complexity.

Excluded Products:

- Items like **alcohol and petroleum** remain outside the GST framework.

Reduced Tax Powers for States:

- States face limitations in imposing independent indirect taxes.

Revenue Shortfalls:

- **Delayed compensation** for states' revenue losses has hindered fiscal planning.

Conclusion:

The **popcorn tax controversy** reflects the broader challenges within India's GST system, from **complex tax slabs** to **compliance difficulties**. Simplifying the framework and ensuring fair practices are essential for maintaining public trust and achieving the goals of **"One Nation, One Tax."**

Report on Domestic Migration: Changing Trends in India

Context: A recent report titled **'400 Million Dreams'**, released by the **Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM)**, provides insights into the evolving patterns of **domestic migration** in India since the **2011 Census**.

What is Domestic Migration?

Internal migration refers to the movement of people within a country, often driven by:

- **Push Factors:** Lack of jobs, natural disasters, poor education, and inadequate healthcare.
- **Pull Factors:** Better economic opportunities, higher living standards, and peaceful environments.

Key Findings of the Report:

Decline in Domestic Migrant Numbers:

- Migration numbers have dropped by **12%**, from **45.57 crore** in 2011 to **40.20 crore** in 2023.
- The **migration rate** has declined from approximately **38%** to an estimated **29%** in 2023.

Migration Dynamics:

- **Short-distance migration** dominates, as **distance negatively impacts labour mobility**.
- Migration originates mainly from regions surrounding **urban hubs** like **Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Kolkata**.

Major Migration Routes:

- **Top corridors:** Uttar Pradesh to Delhi, Gujarat to Maharashtra, Telangana to Andhra Pradesh, and Bihar to Delhi.

Shifts in Migrant Distribution:

- **States with Increased Share of Migrants:** West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Karnataka.
- **States with Decreased Share of Migrants:** Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Reasons for Decline in Migration Numbers:

Improved Infrastructure:

- Enhanced **roads, education, healthcare, and public transport** at the place of origin reduce the need for migration.

Localized Economic Growth:

- Growth in rural economies has generated **job opportunities closer to home**, minimizing migration.

Government Initiatives for Domestic Migrants

Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act, 1979:

- Protects migrants from **exploitation** and ensures fair **employment conditions**.

Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY:

- Offers **5 lakh health coverage** for secondary and tertiary care, benefiting migrant workers and their families.

One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC):

- Ensures **nationwide portability** of ration cards, enabling migrants to access **subsidized food grains** anywhere in India.

Conclusion:

The report underscores a significant shift in **domestic migration patterns**, influenced by **better infrastructure**, localized growth, and targeted government initiatives. While migration has reduced, continued focus on improving living standards and providing equitable opportunities across regions remains crucial for fostering inclusive growth.

Ministry of Environment Introduces Draft Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2024

Context: The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has unveiled the **Draft Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2024**, aimed at tackling the adverse impacts of **unmanaged solid waste**. Set to come into effect from **1st October 2025**, the new rules focus on implementing the principles of **circular economy**, strengthening the monitoring process, and addressing waste management challenges in both **urban** and **rural areas**.

Key Highlights of the Draft SWM Rules, 2024:

1. **Waste Segregation and Disposal:**

   o All **waste generators** must **separately store** construction and demolition waste on-site and dispose of it in line with the **Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016**.

2. **Bulk Waste Generators' Responsibilities:**

   o Bulk waste generators are required to **obtain Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility Certificates** from the local bodies to ensure **environmentally sound** collection and transportation of waste, including **sanitary waste**.

3. **Restrictions on Landfill Disposal:**

   o Non-recyclable waste with a **calorific value** of **1500 Kcal/kg** or higher must **not** be disposed of in landfills, pushing for better recycling and energy recovery practices.

4. **Centralized Online System by CPCB:**

   o The **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** will implement a **centralized online system** for the **registration** and **annual returns** of all obligated entities under the SWM rules.

5. **Registration for Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facilities:**

   o Operators of **Treatment, Storage, Disposal Facilities (TSDFs)** must register on the centralized online portal to enhance transparency and accountability in waste management.

6. **Ban on Agricultural Waste Burning:**

   o Local bodies will be required to **prevent the open burning** of **agriculture and horticulture waste**, with stringent penalties for individuals caught violating the ban.

Challenges in Solid Waste Management:

While these new rules aim to improve the overall waste management process, several challenges persist:

- **Lack of proper collection and segregation** at the source of waste generation.
- **Indiscriminate disposal** of **electronic waste**.
- **Financial constraints** affecting the efficient collection, transportation, and disposal of waste.

Conclusion:

The **SWM Rules, 2024** represent a significant step towards improving solid waste management in India by integrating sustainability practices and strengthening monitoring mechanisms. However, successful implementation will require overcoming significant logistical, financial, and behavioral challenges. The shift towards a **circular economy** and responsible waste management is crucial for the country's long-term environmental health.

Ken-Betwa River Linking Project: A Step Towards Water Sustainability

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently **laid the foundation stone** for the **Ken-Betwa River Linking Project**, a significant initiative aimed at addressing water scarcity in India's **Bundelkhand region**.

Ken-Betwa River Linking Project Overview:

Project Details:

- This project will transfer water from the **Ken River** to the **Betwa River**, both tributaries of the Yamuna.

- It includes the construction of the **221 km-long Ken-Betwa Link Canal**, which features a **2 km tunnel**.

- The project is divided into two phases:

   1. **Phase I:** Construction of the **Daudhan Dam Complex** and subsidiary units.
   2. **Phase II:** Development of the **Lower Orr Dam**, **Bina Complex Project**, and **Kotha Barrage**.

Region Benefited:

- The project will primarily benefit the **Bundelkhand region**, which spans 13 districts across **Madhya Pradesh** and **Uttar Pradesh**, alleviating its **water scarcity** problems.

Timeline:

- The project is expected to be completed in **eight years**.

National Perspective Plan for Interlinking Rivers (ILR)

The project is a part of the **National Perspective Plan (NPP)**, introduced in **1980** by the Ministry of Water Resources and the Central Water Commission. The **National Water Development Agency (NWDA)** oversees this program.

Key Components of the NPP:

1. **Himalayan Rivers Development:**

   o Construction of storage reservoirs on the **Ganga** and **Brahmaputra tributaries** in India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

   o Linking canals to transfer surplus water from the eastern Ganga tributaries to the western regions.

2. **Peninsular Rivers Development:**

   o Interlinking rivers like the **Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna**, and **Cauvery**.

   o Developing west-flowing rivers near Mumbai and south of Tapi.

   o Linking rivers such as **Ken and Chambal**.

Significance of River Linking Projects:

1. **Tackling Water Scarcity:** Transfers surplus water from water-rich areas to **water-deficient regions**.

2. **Agricultural Boost:** Increases **water availability** for irrigation, improving **agricultural productivity**.

3. **Flood Mitigation:** Helps in **distributing excess water** during heavy rains, reducing flood risks.

4. **Hydropower Generation:** Reservoirs and canals create opportunities for **renewable energy**.

5. **Employment Opportunities:** Construction and maintenance generate jobs, boosting **local economies**.

6. **Dispute Resolution:** Equitable distribution of water reduces **inter-state conflicts** over resources.

Challenges of River Linking Projects:

1. **Environmental Impact:** Altering river courses disrupts ecosystems, leading to **biodiversity loss** and habitat destruction.

2. **Community Displacement:** Dams and reservoirs displace populations, causing **social and economic hardships**.

3. **Inter-State Conflicts:** Disagreements over water sharing can lead to prolonged **legal disputes**.

4. **Financial Constraints:** High costs of construction and operation often exceed initial estimates, raising concerns about **economic viability**.

5. **Seismic Risks:** Large dams in earthquake-prone areas increase the risk of **catastrophic failures**.

6. **Maintenance Challenges:** Poor upkeep can result in system breakdowns and inefficiencies.

7. **Resistance from Communities:** Opposition from locals and environmentalists due to potential **livelihood** and **cultural losses**.

Conclusion:

The **Ken-Betwa River Linking Project** is a bold step toward addressing water scarcity and fostering development in underprivileged regions. However, to ensure long-term success, the government must address environmental, social, and financial concerns through:

- **Comprehensive planning** and **impact assessments**.

- **Engaging local communities** in decision-making.

- Adopting **sustainable practices** and modern technologies.

Striking a balance between development and sustainability is essential for the success of such projects, ensuring both human and ecological well-being.

Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) 2023-24

Context: The **Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI)** has released the **Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE)** for the year **2023-24**, covering the period from **October 2023 to September 2024**. This survey provides vital insights into the performance of the unincorporated non-agricultural sector in India.

Scope of ASUSE:

1. **Geographical Coverage:** The survey encompasses both **rural** and **urban** areas across India, excluding **villages in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

2. **Sectoral Coverage:** It focuses on **unincorporated non-agricultural establishments** in three key sectors:

   - **Manufacturing**

   - **Trade**

   - **Other Services** (excluding construction).

3. **Economic Characteristics Analyzed:** Metrics such as **number of workers**, **Gross Value Added (GVA)**, **emoluments paid**, **fixed assets owned**, and **outstanding loans**.

Key Findings from ASUSE 2023-24:

1. **Growth in Establishments:** The number of establishments rose significantly from **6.50 crore in 2022-23** to **7.34 crore in 2023-24**, reflecting a robust **12.84% growth**.

2. **Enhanced Economic Contribution:**

   - **Gross Value Added (GVA):** GVA increased by **16.52%**, driven by a **26.17% rise** in the **other services sector**.

   - **Labour Productivity:** GVA per worker grew by **5.62%**, reaching ₹**1,49,742 in 2023-24**, compared to ₹**1,41,769 in 2022-23**.

   - **Gross Value of Output (GVO):** GVO per establishment rose from ₹**4,63,389** to ₹**4,91,862**, highlighting improved **enterprise efficiency**.

3. **Strong Labour Market Performance:**

   - **Female Entrepreneurship:** The share of **female-owned proprietary establishments** increased from **22.9%** in 2022-23 to **26.2%** in 2023-24.

   - **Wage Growth:** Average **emoluments per hired worker** grew by **13%**, indicating better **wage levels**.

4. **Improved Digital Adoption:** The percentage of establishments using the **internet** surged from **21.1%** in 2022-23 to **26.7%** in 2023-24, reflecting **enhanced digital penetration**.

Conclusion: The **ASUSE 2023-24** highlights the **dynamic growth and productivity** of India's unincorporated sector. With a surge in establishments, increased female entrepreneurship, higher wages, and improved digital adoption, the data provides valuable insights for:

- **Policymaking**

- **National Accounts Statistics**

- Supporting key ministries such as **MSME**, **Textiles**, and **Labour & Employment**.

These findings empower stakeholders to make **informed, data-driven decisions**, ensuring the continued growth and resilience of the unincorporated sector.

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Celebrating 100 Years of the Belagavi Session of the Indian National Congress

Context: The **Indian National Congress (INC)** is commemorating the **100th anniversary** of its historic **Belagavi Session** with a series of events, including a **two-day extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) session** and a public rally themed **'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan.'**

The Belagavi Session of 1924: A Turning Point in History:

When and Where:

- The **39th session** of the **INC** was held in **Belagavi (then Belgaum)**, Karnataka, on **December 26-27, 1924**.
- This period marked significant political activity and growing momentum in India's struggle for independence.

Mahatma Gandhi's Leadership:

- It was the **only time Mahatma Gandhi presided** as the Congress president.
- His leadership emphasized **unity, non-violence**, and **collective action**, which became the bedrock of India's freedom movement.

Participants:

- The session was attended by eminent leaders such as **Jawaharlal Nehru**, **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**, **Sarojini Naidu**, and **Khilafat leaders Muhammad Ali Jauhar** and **Shaukat Ali**.

Key Decisions and Highlights:

1. Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience:

- Gandhi reaffirmed his dedication to **non-cooperation** and **civil disobedience** as effective strategies against British oppression.
- These principles inspired major movements like the **Salt March** and the **Quit India Movement**.

2. Promotion of Khadi:

- The session emphasized **Khadi** as a symbol of **self-reliance** and resistance to British economic exploitation.
- This initiative aimed to rejuvenate **indigenous industries** and reduce dependency on British goods.

3. Communal Harmony:

- Gandhi advocated for **communal unity**, stressing the importance of harmony among India's diverse religious and ethnic communities.
- This was crucial in countering the **divisive policies** of the colonial regime.

Significance of the Belagavi Session:

1. Gandhi's Leadership Legacy:

- The session showcased Gandhi's unwavering commitment to **non-violence**, **communal harmony**, and **Swaraj** (self-rule).
- His strategies laid the foundation for future anti-colonial movements.

2. Strengthened Freedom Movement:

- The session fostered **peasant awareness**, promoted **Khadi**, and encouraged **village industries**, particularly in Karnataka.

- It mobilized greater participation from peasants in Congress-led initiatives.

3. Unity in Diversity:

- Prominent leaders like **Lala Lajpat Rai**, **C. Rajagopalachari**, **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, and **Sarojini Naidu** participated, symbolizing the collective resolve to achieve independence.

4. Cultural Resonance;

- The event featured cultural highlights like the song **'Udayavagali Namma Chaluva Kannada Nadu,'** performed by noted vocalist **Veene Seshanna**, which became an anthem for Karnataka's unification.

Conclusion:

The **Belagavi Session of 1924** was a defining moment in India's freedom struggle. It reflected **Gandhi's visionary leadership**, **unity among leaders**, and the integration of **cultural expressions** in the fight against colonialism. This centenary celebration honors the indomitable spirit and resolve that brought India closer to independence.

India and Saudi Arabia: Advancing Defence Cooperation Through Joint Ventures

Context: India and Saudi Arabia are strengthening their **defence collaboration** by exploring **joint ventures** and industrial partnerships aimed at **localizing defence production** and achieving mutual growth in the sector.

India-Saudi Arabia Defence Collaboration:

A Shared Vision for Self-Reliance:

- Both nations are committed to enhancing **defence manufacturing** under **Vision 2030** (Saudi Arabia) and **Make in India** (India).
- **Saudi Arabia** aims to localize **50% of its defence spending**, aligning with India's goal of boosting indigenous defence production.

Key Initiatives and Contracts:

- Saudi Arabia signed a **$250 million deal** for ammunition with **Munitions India Limited**, a Defence PSU.
- The kingdom also procured the **155mm Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)** from **Bharat Forge**.

Joint Military Exercises:

- **Sada Tanseeq**: The inaugural **Army exercise** held in Rajasthan in January 2024.
- **Tarang Shakti**: Saudi Arabia participated as an observer in **India's largest air exercise**.
- **Al Mohed Al Hindi**: A bilateral **naval exercise** launched in 2022.

India-Saudi Arabia Relations: A Broader Perspective:

1. Political Relations:

- Diplomatic ties were established in **1947**.
- The **Delhi Declaration (2006)** and **Riyadh Declaration (2010)** elevated bilateral relations to a **strategic partnership**.
- In **2019**, the **Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) Agreement** created a high-level mechanism to deepen ties.

2. Economic Relations:

- India is Saudi Arabia's **second-largest trade partner**, while Saudi Arabia ranks as **India's fourth-largest trade partner**.
- **Bilateral trade** reached **$43.3 billion** in 2023-24.
- Saudi investments in India totalled **$3.15 billion**, with **2,783 Indian companies** operating in Saudi Arabia as of 2022.

3. Energy Cooperation:

- Saudi Arabia was India's **third-largest source** of crude oil in FY23, supplying **39.5 MMT**, which accounted for **16.7%** of India's total crude imports.
- India's **LPG imports** from Saudi Arabia stood at **7.85 MMT** in FY23.

4. Indian Diaspora:

- As of 2023, **2.6 million Indians** live in Saudi Arabia, forming the **second-largest foreign workforce** in the kingdom after Bangladesh.

Future Outlook: A Partnership for Growth:

- The shared goal of reducing reliance on **defence imports** and boosting **domestic production** offers immense opportunities for both nations.

- **Collaboration in advanced technologies** such as **AI** and **cybersecurity** can further bolster their **strategic autonomy**.

- Aligning objectives under **Vision 2030** and **Make in India**, India and Saudi Arabia are well-positioned to emerge as global leaders in **defence innovation**.

- Continued cooperation will ensure the success of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia, fostering greater **economic stability** and **development** for both countries.

Conclusion:

The evolving defence partnership between India and Saudi Arabia is a testament to their shared vision of **self-reliance, innovation, and economic growth**. By working together on defence localization and technological advancements, both nations can significantly impact the **global defence landscape** while deepening their bilateral ties.

Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi Initiative: Strengthening Grassroots Governance

Context: On **Good Governance Day**, the Union Minister of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions launched the **Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi Initiative**, marking a significant step toward empowering **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** and fostering participatory governance at the grassroots level.

About the Initiative:

Empowering Panchayati Raj Institutions:

- Focused on enhancing the effectiveness of **PRIs** through **innovative tools** and **capacity-building frameworks**.

- Piloted in **Odisha**, **Assam**, **Gujarat**, and **Andhra Pradesh**.

- Utilizes **e-learning platforms**, **AI-powered chatbots**, and **mobile applications** to bridge knowledge gaps and improve **service delivery**.

Aligned with Decentralized Governance Goals:

- Part of the broader **'Prashasan Gaon Ki Aur' campaign**, aimed at decentralizing governance and promoting **citizen participation** in decision-making.

- Seeks to equip **elected representatives** and **officials** with the knowledge and tools needed for **effective governance** and **inclusive planning**.

Driving Sustainable Development:

- Aims to create scalable models of **citizen-centric governance**, enabling PRIs to lead **equitable** and **sustainable development** across rural India.

Other Key Initiatives Launched:

1. iGOT Karmayogi Platform Dashboard:

- Designed to empower **ministries, departments**, and **state administrators** with advanced tools for monitoring progress in capacity building.

- Features include:

  o Tracking **user registrations** and **course completions**.

  o Providing customizable views and robust data filtration for better insights.

- Enhances decision-making and optimizes **training initiatives** through detailed progress analysis.

2. CPGRAMS Annual Report 2024:

- Offers a comprehensive review of the **Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS)**.

- Highlights achievements such as:

  o Resolution of over **25 lakh grievances annually**.

  o Implementation of the **Grievance Redressal Assessment and Index (GRAI)** for improved grievance handling.

Significance:

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- The **Viksit Panchayat Karmayogi Initiative** reflects the government's commitment to enhancing **grassroots governance**.

- By leveraging technology and capacity-building programs, it aims to create a robust system for **participatory decision-making**, ensuring sustainable growth and development in rural areas.

Conclusion:

The initiative, along with complementary programs like the **iGOT Karmayogi dashboard** and **CPGRAMS enhancements**, underscores the government's vision of **empowering institutions** and fostering **good governance**. These efforts collectively pave the way for a more **responsive, inclusive, and efficient governance framework** at all levels.

Transforming Tsunami Science: Key Lessons from the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake

Context: The year **2024** marks the **20th anniversary** of the devastating **2004 Indian Ocean earthquake** and tsunami, one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. This anniversary serves as a crucial moment to reflect on the remarkable progress made in **tsunami science**, **disaster preparedness**, and **mitigation strategies** that have been inspired by the events of that tragic day.

The 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake: A Catastrophic Event:

The Earthquake's Origins:

- The earthquake struck **30 km beneath the ocean floor** in the **Sunda Trench**, where the **Indo-Australian plate** subducts beneath the **Burma microplate**.

- It spanned a staggering **1,300 km** from **Sumatra** to the **Coco Islands**, and was the third-largest earthquake globally since 1900.

Devastating Impact:

- The tsunami affected **multiple countries**, including **Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka**, and **Thailand**, causing immense damage.

- Approximately **227,000** people lost their lives, with **1.7 million displaced**.

- Although tsunamis had struck the region in the past, none had been as catastrophic as the 2004 disaster.

Understanding Tsunamis:

What is a Tsunami?

- The term **tsunami** (Japanese for "harbour wave") refers to a series of **giant ocean waves** triggered by sudden movements beneath the ocean, such as **earthquakes**, **volcanic eruptions**, or even **meteorite impacts**.

- **Earthquakes** cause large portions of the ocean floor to move, displacing vast volumes of water and creating waves that travel across the ocean at speeds akin to **jet planes**. These waves are not immediately dangerous in deep water, but become **extremely destructive** when they approach coastal areas.

Tsunami Wave Characteristics:

- **Wave height** increases as the wave enters shallow coastal waters, a phenomenon known as **shoaling**. This results in a dangerous increase in the tsunami's force.

- The **shape of the ocean floor** and the **distance of the earthquake's epicenter** determine the severity and characteristics of the tsunami.

Tsunami Warning Systems: A Lifesaving Advancement:

India's Tsunami Warning Efforts:

- The **Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre (ITEWC)** was established in **2007** under the Ministry of Earth Sciences at **INCOIS**, Hyderabad.

- It uses **seismological stations**, **bottom pressure recorders**, and **tidal stations** to monitor and issue tsunami alerts within **10 minutes** of detecting a potential earthquake.

- India has become the **fifth** country globally to develop advanced tsunami warning systems, joining **Japan**, the **U.S.**, **Chile**, and **Australia**.

Global Vulnerabilities and Case Studies:

At-Risk Regions:

- **Makran Coast**: A potential **threat** to India's **west coast**, including cities like **Mumbai**.

- **Myanmar Coast**: A significant risk for the **Northern Indian Ocean** regions.

The Kalpakkam Nuclear Plant Case Study:

- The **2004 tsunami** caused a **shutdown** at the **Kalpakkam nuclear plant**, though it resumed operations without any **radioactive leaks**.

- **Lessons from Fukushima (2011)** emphasized the need for robust **safety protocols**, as radiation leaks can have long-lasting and widespread consequences.

Key Lessons and Future Directions:

- The **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami** was a wake-up call that highlighted gaps in **disaster preparedness** and **tsunami science**.

- Over the past two decades, countries have significantly improved their **tsunami warning systems**, allowing for faster response times and saving countless lives.

- **Global cooperation**, **technology**, and **scientific advancements** have made it possible to mitigate the risks posed by these devastating natural events.

By continually evolving and strengthening these systems, we can better prepare for future **tsunamis**, minimizing the impact on human lives and infrastructure.

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GS Paper 3 – Infrastructure

China's $137 Billion Brahmaputra Hydropower Dam: Impacts on India and the Environment

Context: China has approved the construction of the **world's largest hydropower dam** on the lower stretches of the **Yarlung Tsangpo River** (Brahmaputra). This ambitious project, with an estimated cost of **$137 billion**, aims to produce a staggering **300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh)** of electricity annually, dwarfing the capacity of the **Three Gorges Dam**, the current global leader in hydropower.

Course of the Brahmaputra River:

- Originating in Tibet as the **Yarlung Tsangpo**, the river flows through **Arunachal Pradesh** and **Assam** in India before entering **Bangladesh** and emptying into the **Bay of Bengal**.

- A **perennial river**, it supports livelihoods through **irrigation**, **fisheries**, and **inland transport**.

- While it deposits **fertile alluvial soil** crucial for agriculture, its lower course often causes **devastating floods**, particularly in **Assam** and **Bangladesh**, due to geographic and climatic factors.

China's Brahmaputra Dam Project:

Project Details:

- The dam is being constructed in **Medog County**, Tibet Autonomous Region, where the **Yarlung Tsangpo** drops by **2,000 meters**, creating ideal conditions for hydropower generation.

- Part of China's **14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025)** and **Long-Range Objectives through 2035**, the project aims to support **renewable energy goals** and promote **regional development** in Tibet.

- The dam's projected capacity is **60 gigawatts**, triple that of the Three Gorges Dam, generating an annual output of **300 billion kWh** of renewable energy.

Significance:

- Contributes to **China's carbon neutrality** goal by **2060**.

- Strengthens **water security** and supports economic growth, generating **20 billion yuan** ($3 billion) annually for Tibet.

Concerns and Implications for India:

Agricultural Impact:

- The dam could **retain silt**, essential for maintaining the fertility of agricultural lands downstream.

- Reduced silt deposits may **adversely affect farming** in India's Brahmaputra basin.

Water Resource Challenges:

- China describes the project as a **run-of-the-river hydropower dam**, but experts warn of reduced **water flow** during dry seasons and increased flooding during monsoons if excess water is released.

- Such changes could lead to **disasters in Assam**, impacting local communities.

Water as a Geopolitical Weapon:

- China's upstream control gives it significant leverage over the **Brahmaputra's flow**.

- During events like the **2017 Doklam standoff**, China withheld **hydrological data**, highlighting the potential for **weaponizing water resources** during conflicts.

Seismic and Ecological Risks:

- The **Himalayan region's seismic activity** poses significant risks to the dam's infrastructure, potentially endangering downstream populations.

- The project could **disrupt fragile ecosystems**, home to critically **endangered species**, exacerbating the effects of **deforestation**, **soil erosion**, and **climate change**.

India's Response:

Safeguarding Interests:

- India has urged China to **protect downstream interests** while expressing concerns about the dam's potential impact.

Countermeasures:

- India plans to construct a **10 GW hydropower project** in the **Dibang Valley**, Arunachal Pradesh, to counterbalance China's influence on the river.

Data Sharing Agreements:

- India and China rely on the **Expert Level Mechanism (ELM)**, established in **2006**, to exchange data on **trans-border rivers**. This remains vital for **flood forecasting** and disaster management.

The Way Forward:

The construction of the **Brahmaputra hydropower dam** reflects China's push toward **renewable energy leadership**, but it raises critical concerns for **India's water security** and the **fragile Himalayan ecosystem**. India must continue to prioritize **regional cooperation**, strengthen its **disaster preparedness**, and leverage international platforms to ensure sustainable and equitable management of trans-boundary rivers.

Yarlung Tsangpo River:

The **Yarlung Tsangpo River**, often referred to simply as the **Tsangpo**, is **Tibet's longest river** and the **fifth longest in China**. Its upper section is also known as **Dangque Zangbu**, meaning **"Horse River"**. This river holds immense geographical and cultural significance, flowing through the Tibetan plateau before becoming the **Brahmaputra River** in India and eventually emptying into the Bay of Bengal.

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Tiger Translocation from Madhya Pradesh: A Conservation Initiative

Context: The Madhya Pradesh government has unveiled plans to translocate **15 tigers** to the states of **Rajasthan**, **Chhattisgarh**, and **Odisha**. This ambitious move is aimed at enhancing tiger populations in regions with low densities and is subject to **Central Government approval**.

Details of the Translocation:

- The initiative will involve **12 tigresses** and **3 tigers**, sourced from the renowned **Bandhavgarh**, **Pench**, and **Kanha Tiger Reserves** in Madhya Pradesh.

- The program aims to ensure a balanced ecosystem in the recipient states by boosting their predator-prey dynamics.

About Kanha Tiger Reserve (KTR):

Location and History:

- Kanha, the **largest national park** in Madhya Pradesh, is located in the **Mandla** and **Balaghat districts**, nestled within the **Maikal range of Satpuras**.

- Established as a **national park in 1955**, it was declared a **Tiger Reserve in 1973**.

Highlights:

- **Cultural Reference**: Kanha inspired **Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book"**.

- **Mascot**: Introduced **Bhoorsingh the Barasingha**, India's first official wildlife mascot.

- **Flora**: Dominated by **sal trees** and **tropical moist deciduous forests**, interspersed with bamboo and grassy meadows.

- **Fauna**: Home to **Royal Bengal Tigers**, leopards, and sloth bears, and internationally recognized for saving the **Barasingha (Swamp Deer)** from extinction.

About Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve:

Location and Historical Significance:

- Situated in the **Umaria district**, Bandhavgarh lies between the **Vindhyan** and **Satpura ranges**.

- Declared a **national park in 1968** and a **Tiger Reserve in 1993**.

- **Cultural Significance**: Hosts the ancient **Bandhavgarh Fort**, believed to have been gifted by **Lord Rama** to his brother **Lakshmana**, giving the fort its name (**"Brother's Fort"**).

Flora and Fauna:

- **Vegetation**: Predominantly **tropical moist deciduous forests**, with species like **Sal**, **Tendu**, and **Amla**.

- **Fauna**: Known for the **highest density of Royal Bengal Tigers** globally. Also houses leopards, wild dogs, wolves, jackals, and deer species.

About Pench Tiger Reserve:

Location and Name:

- Spanning the **Seoni** and **Chhindwara districts** in Madhya Pradesh and extending into Maharashtra, the reserve is named after the **Pench River**, which flows through it.

- Includes the **Indira Priyadarshini Pench National Park**, **Pench Mowgli Sanctuary**, and buffer zones.
- **Cultural Connection**: The inspiration behind **Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book"**.

Biodiversity:

- **Flora**: Comprises **teak forests**, mixed vegetation, and grassy patches.
- **Fauna**: Hosts predators like **tigers**, **leopards**, and **wolves**, along with herbivores such as **Chital**, **Sambar**, and **Gaur**.
- **Birdlife**: Over **325 avian species**, including the **Malabar Pied Hornbill, Indian Pitta**, and **Grey-Headed Fishing Eagle**.

Conservation Significance:

This tiger translocation initiative not only bolsters **tiger conservation efforts** but also emphasizes **ecosystem restoration** and **wildlife management**. By relocating tigers to areas with lower populations, Madhya Pradesh is setting a precedent for **biodiversity enhancement** and sustainable conservation practices in India.

Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh:

Madhya Pradesh is home to several renowned tiger reserves that play a crucial role in the conservation of the **Royal Bengal Tiger**. The notable tiger reserves in the state are:

1. **Kanha Tiger Reserve**
2. **Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve**
3. **Panna Tiger Reserve**
4. **Pench Tiger Reserve**
5. **Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve**
6. **Satpura National Park**

These reserves, spread across the state, are part of India's ongoing efforts to protect tigers and preserve biodiversity. Each of these reserves has unique landscapes, rich flora, and fauna, making them significant both for wildlife conservation and ecotourism.

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NHRC Addresses Alarming Tribal Suicides in Kerala

Context: The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has taken **suo motu cognizance** of a disturbing rise in **suicides among the tribal population** in **Peringammala Panchayat**, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

- **Recent Statistics**:
    - **23 suicides reported in 2024**.
    - **138 suicides occurred between 2011 and 2022**.

This escalating crisis highlights the urgent need for focused intervention to safeguard the **human rights and mental well-being** of the tribal communities.

About the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):

Establishment and Purpose:

- The **NHRC** is an **independent statutory body** founded on **October 12, 1993**, under the **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993**.
- It functions as a **guardian of human rights**, addressing violations related to **life, liberty, equality, and dignity**, as guaranteed by the **Indian Constitution** and **international covenants**.

Global Compliance:

- The NHRC adheres to the **Paris Principles** on Human Rights, ensuring **transparency, accountability**, and alignment with global standards.

Definition of Human Rights:

As per **Section 2(1)(d)** of the **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993**, **human rights** refer to rights associated with:

- **Life, liberty, equality, and dignity**,
- Protected under the **Constitution** or enforced through **international treaties** in Indian courts.

NHRC Composition:

Full-Time Members:

1. **Chairperson**: A **retired Chief Justice of India** or a **Supreme Court judge**.
2. **Members**:
    - One **Supreme Court judge** (sitting or retired),
    - One **Chief Justice of a High Court**,
    - Three **human rights experts**, including at least **one woman**.

Ex-Officio Members:

Chairpersons of:

- **National Commissions** for Minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women, and Backward Classes,
- **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights**,
- **Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities**.

NHRC Appointment Process:

Members are appointed by the **President of India** based on recommendations from a **six-member committee**:

- **Prime Minister** (Chairperson),
- **Speaker of the Lok Sabha**,
- **Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha**,
- **Leaders of Opposition** in both Houses of Parliament,
- **Union Home Minister**.

For judicial members, consultation with the **Chief Justice of India** is mandatory.

NHRC Tenure and Service Conditions:

- **Tenure**: Members serve for **3 years** or until the age of **70**, whichever is earlier.
- **Reappointment**: Permissible after term completion.
- **Restrictions**: Post-tenure, members cannot accept employment with **Central or State governments**.

Salaries and Allowances:

- Determined by the **Central Government**, but **cannot be altered to their disadvantage** after appointment.

NHRC Removal Process:

The **President of India** can remove members for reasons including:

- **Insolvency**, employment outside office, physical/mental incapacity, or criminal conviction.
- For **misconduct or incapacity**, the matter is referred to the **Supreme Court**, and removal is based on its recommendation.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What is the tenure of NHRC members?

Members, including the Chairperson, serve for **3 years** or until they reach **70 years of age**, whichever comes first, ensuring stability and experienced leadership.

2. How many members are in the NHRC?

The NHRC comprises:

- **1 Chairperson**,
- **5 full-time members**, and
- **7 ex-officio members**, all collaborating to uphold and protect **human rights** across India.

Conclusion:

The **NHRC's proactive intervention** in addressing the suicide crisis among Kerala's tribal population underscores its commitment to protecting vulnerable communities. Strengthening mental health support and human rights advocacy remains critical to resolving such challenges.

Israel's Expansion in Golan Heights Sparks Mixed Reactions

Context: Israel has recently intensified efforts to expand its presence in the **Golan Heights**, a region of strategic importance and international controversy. This move follows the ousting of **Syrian President Bashar al-Assad**, who had held power for nearly 25 years.

Israel's Actions in the Golan Heights:

Military Movements:

- After Assad's removal, **Israeli tanks** entered the **Golan Heights' demilitarized buffer zone** in Syria, established under the **1974 ceasefire agreement** between Israel and Syria.

- Israel claims this incursion was a **temporary measure** to strengthen border security.

Settlement Expansion Plan: Israel has approved a **$11 million plan** to **double the population of Israeli settlers** in the Golan Heights.

Legal Status of the Golan Heights:

- The **international community** views the **Golan Heights** as **occupied Syrian territory**.

- In **2019**, the **United States** became the only nation to officially recognize Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights, a decision condemned by many other countries.

- The **United Nations** continues to regard Israeli settlements in the region as **illegal under international law**.

Demographics of the Golan Heights:

Current Population:

- The Golan Heights is home to approximately **50,000 people**:
  o Half are **Israeli settlers**.
  o The other half are **Arab Druze**, an **ethnic and religious minority**.

The Druze Perspective:

- Many Druze in the Golan Heights identify as **Syrians under Israeli occupation**.

- While some have accepted **Israeli residency**, most have resisted taking full **Israeli citizenship**.

What is a Kibbutz?

- A **kibbutz** (plural: kibbutzim) is a **collective community** in Israel, traditionally centered on **agriculture** and founded on principles of:
  o **Shared ownership**,
  o **Equality**,
  o **Communal living**.

- Originating in the early 20th century, kibbutzim were established by **Jewish immigrants** aiming to create **socialist, self-sufficient communities** in Israel.

The Conflict of Emotions: While Israel views the Golan Heights expansion as a step towards bolstering security and infrastructure, the move has ignited **conflicting emotions**:

- **Supporters** see it as essential for Israel's sovereignty and safety.

- **Critics**, including the international community and many Druze residents, view it as a violation of **international law** and **Syrian sovereignty**.

This complex situation continues to fuel debate on the future of the Golan Heights and its impact on regional stability.

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Over 10,000 Migrants Perished in 2024 While Attempting to Reach Spain by Sea

Context: In a tragic statistic for 2024, over **10,000 migrants** lost their lives attempting to reach **Spain** by sea, according to a report by the Spanish migration rights organization **Caminando Fronteras (Walking Borders)**. This marks a shocking **58% rise** in fatalities compared to the previous year, with an average of **30 deaths per day** recorded.

Key Findings of the Report:

The Atlantic Route:

- The majority of these deaths occurred along the treacherous **Atlantic route** leading to the **Canary Islands**, a significant entryway into **Europe** from **West Africa**.

- **Mauritania** has emerged as a primary **departure point** for migrants heading toward the Canary Islands.

Migration Routes to Europe via Sea:

1. Western Mediterranean Route:

- Migrants traveling this route often depart from **Morocco** and **Algeria**.

- Their primary destinations include the **Strait of Gibraltar** and the Spanish enclaves of **Ceuta** and **Melilla**.

2. Atlantic Route:

- This dangerous path sees migrants leaving from **West African nations** like **Senegal** and **Mauritania**, aiming to reach the **Canary Islands**.

- Known for its **perilous conditions**, the **Atlantic crossing** involves journeys of **1,000–1,500 km** in **small, overcrowded boats** like fishing vessels or inflatable rafts, which are ill-equipped for the high seas.

Why the Atlantic Crossing Is Especially Dangerous:

- **Extreme weather** and **strong ocean currents** add to the risks.

- The **increased border controls** along these routes push migrants to take more **hazardous paths**, further increasing fatalities.

About the Canary Islands:

Geographical Location:

- The **Canary Islands** are a Spanish archipelago located off the **northwest coast of Africa**, approximately **100 km west of Morocco** in the Atlantic Ocean.

Composition:

- The archipelago consists of **seven main islands**:
  - **Tenerife**, the largest.
  - **Fuerteventura**, **Gran Canaria**, **Lanzarote**, **La Palma**, **La Gomera**, and **El Hierro** (the smallest).

- Formed millions of years ago by **volcanic eruptions**, the islands have distinct geological and cultural features.

A Growing Crisis:

The alarming increase in **migrant fatalities** highlights the urgent need for **international cooperation** and **comprehensive policies** to address the challenges faced by those seeking safety and better opportunities. While Europe grapples with its migration policies, the **Atlantic and Mediterranean routes** remain grim reminders of the human cost of migration.

Dr. Manmohan Singh: The Visionary Behind India's Economic Transformation

Context: Dr. Manmohan Singh, serving as **India's Finance Minister from 1991 to 1995**, played a pivotal role in reshaping the nation's economic destiny. At a time when India faced one of its gravest financial crises, his bold reforms not only stabilized the economy but also set the foundation for sustained growth and globalization.

The Crisis That Sparked Change:

Balance of Payments (BOP) Crisis:

- By mid-1991, India was grappling with a **severe Balance of Payments crisis**, leading to dwindling confidence in the country's economic management.
- **Foreign exchange reserves** plummeted to just **$896 million** in January 1991—barely enough to cover a few weeks of imports.
- The **Gulf War** exacerbated the situation by causing a spike in oil prices.

Gold Reserves Sale:

- In April 1991, **20 tonnes of confiscated gold** were sold to UBS, raising $200 million.
- In July 1991, **47 tonnes of gold** were shipped to the **Bank of England** to secure $405–$450 million, temporarily averting default.

Game-Changing Economic Reforms:

1. 1991-92 Budget: A Landmark Vision

Dr. Singh presented a historic budget that laid the foundation for **economic liberalization**.

2. Rupee Devaluation:

- The rupee was devalued in **two phases** (9% and 10%) over three days, making **exports more competitive** and attracting **foreign capital**.

3. New Industrial Policy:

- Announced on **July 24, 1991**, this policy dismantled the **License Raj**, significantly reducing bureaucratic red tape.
- Opened multiple sectors to **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** and reduced the dominance of public-sector enterprises.

4. Currency Convertibility:

- Introduced **full convertibility** of the rupee on the current account, simplifying **international trade and investment**.

5. Repeal of the MRTP Act:

- The **Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act** was repealed, enabling companies to expand capacity without prior approvals.

6. Banking Sector Overhaul:

- **Interest rate-setting** by banks was deregulated.
- Licenses for **private banks** were introduced, and public-sector banks were listed on stock exchanges.

- Adopted **capital adequacy norms** as recommended by the **Narasimham Committee**.

7. Disinvestment in PSUs:

- Encouraged **privatization** by allowing mutual funds and private investors to invest in **Public Sector Units (PSUs)**.

8. Financial Market Reforms:

- Launched the **National Stock Exchange (NSE)** and introduced **paperless trading**, enhancing transparency.

- Allowed **Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)** to invest in Indian stock markets, attracting global capital.

9. Empowering SEBI:

- The **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** was strengthened to ensure efficient regulation of capital markets.

Impact of the Reforms:

Dr. Singh's visionary policies transformed India from a **state-controlled economy** to a more **market-oriented system**. His reforms not only **averted economic collapse** but also positioned India as a significant player in the global economy.

Through his leadership, Dr. Manmohan Singh laid the groundwork for **inclusive growth**, fostering innovation, investments, and a brighter future for India.