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To The Point

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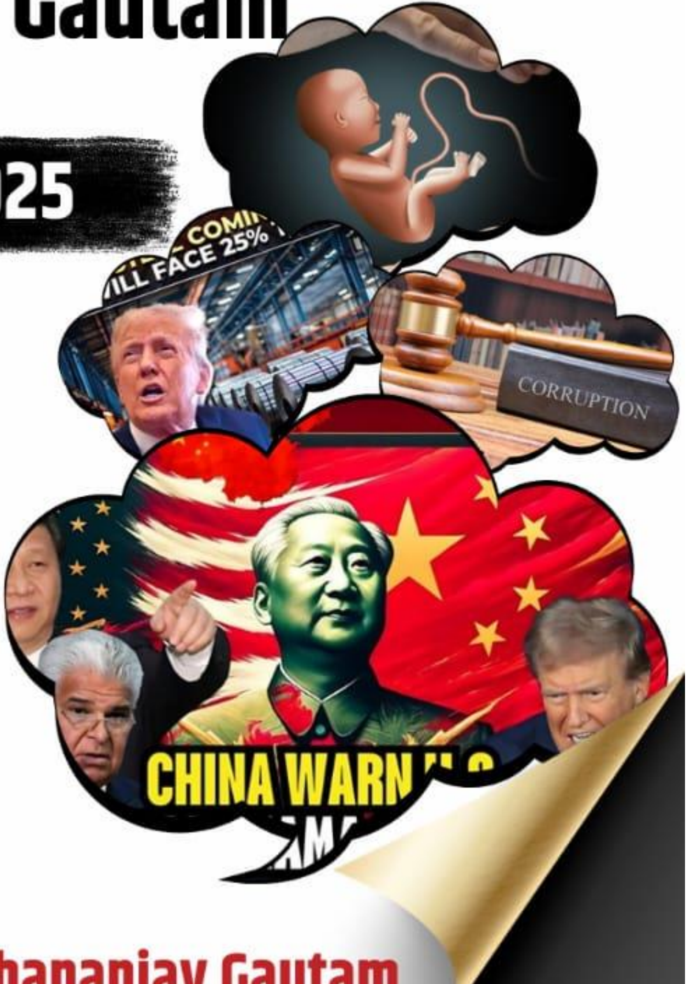

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GS Paper 2 – Polity & Governance

1 India's Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025

Context: The Indian government is set to introduce the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, during the ongoing Budget session of Parliament. This comprehensive legislation aims to modernize and consolidate India's immigration framework by replacing four outdated laws:

- The Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920
- The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
- The Foreigners Act, 1946
- The Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act, 2000

Key Features of the Bill:

1. **Stricter Penalties for Unauthorized Entry and Document Fraud:**
    - Unauthorized entry into India without valid documents may result in imprisonment of up to five years and fines up to 5 lakh.
    - Using forged travel documents could lead to imprisonment ranging from two to seven years and fines between 1 lakh and 10 lakh.
2. **Obligations for Educational and Medical Institutions:**
    - Universities and educational institutions admitting foreign students are required to share their details with designated registration officers.
    - Hospitals, nursing homes, and medical institutions providing lodging to foreigners must maintain and report records to authorities.
3. **Enhanced Visa and Passport Regulations:**
    - The central government is empowered to regulate the entry, exit, and movement of foreign nationals within India.
    - Foreigners overstaying their visas, violating visa conditions, or entering prohibited areas may face imprisonment of up to three years, fines up to ₹3 lakh, or both.
4. **Liability of Carriers and Transport Operators:**
    - Carriers, including airlines and shipping companies, are responsible for ensuring passengers possess valid travel documents before boarding.
    - Transporting foreigners without valid documents can result in fines up to ₹5 lakh. Failure to pay may lead to the seizure or detention of the transport vehicle.

Rationale for the New Legislation:

The existing immigration laws were enacted during the early to mid-20th century, primarily under wartime conditions, and have become outdated in addressing contemporary security challenges and global migration trends. The new Bill seeks to provide a unified and updated legal framework to effectively manage immigration in today's context.

Potential Challenges and Criticisms:

- **Human Rights Concerns:**

- Stricter deportation policies may adversely affect long-term foreign residents and asylum seekers.
- Human rights advocates may raise issues regarding due process and the treatment of deported individuals.

- **Impact on Institutions:**
  - Educational and medical institutions might face challenges in complying with new reporting requirements, potentially leading to bureaucratic hurdles in admitting international students and medical tourists.
- **Enforcement and Implementation:**
  - Effective implementation will require robust coordination among immigration officers, carriers, educational institutions, and security agencies.
  - Ensuring transparency in enforcement is crucial to prevent harassment or wrongful detentions.

Conclusion:

The Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025, represents a significant overhaul of India's immigration laws, aiming to align them with current global standards and security needs. While it introduces stricter regulations and penalties to deter illegal immigration and document fraud, careful consideration must be given to potential human rights implications and the practical challenges of implementation.

GS Paper 3 – Economy & Agriculture

2 Government Revamps Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) to Support Farmers

Context: The **central government** has recently **revised the guidelines** for the **Market Intervention Scheme (MIS)**, aimed at **supporting farmers** by stabilizing prices of perishable agricultural commodities. The updated guidelines aim to **enhance procurement processes** and **expand coverage** to better assist the farming community during market price fluctuations.

What is the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS)?

The **Market Intervention Scheme** is a government initiative designed to help **State/UT governments procure perishable agricultural and horticultural commodities** such as **tomatoes, onions, potatoes**, etc., when their prices fall below reasonable levels. It is used as a tool to address **price volatility** for commodities that do not have a **Minimum Support Price (MSP)**.

Under the scheme, the government intervenes when there is a **price drop of at least 10%** in the prevailing market price compared to the **previous normal year**, ensuring farmers receive fair compensation for their produce.

Revised Guidelines Under the Market Intervention Scheme:

Integration with PM-AASHA:

The **Market Intervention Scheme** has now been made a **component of the integrated PM-AASHA scheme**, which aims to **support agricultural markets and ensure price stability** for farmers across India.

Increased Procurement Coverage:

The revised guidelines have **increased the procurement limit** for crops under MIS from the **existing 20%** to **25%** of the total production quantity. This expansion is aimed at enhancing **farmer protection** during periods of market distress, allowing more crops to be covered under the intervention program.

Direct Payments to Farmers:

In a significant change, **States** can now opt to pay the **difference between the Market Intervention Price (MIP)** and the **selling price** directly into the **bank accounts of farmers**, **eliminating the need for physical procurement**. This move aims to **streamline the process** and ensure farmers receive timely financial support.

Operational Cost Reimbursement:

The **central government** will reimburse **operational costs** incurred in **storage and transportation** of crops from producing States to consuming States. This will be handled by **Central Nodal Agencies (CNA)** like **NAFED** and **NCCF**, ensuring that **farmers do not bear the additional financial burden** of moving their produce across the country.

Conclusion: Empowering Farmers with Enhanced Support

The **revised Market Intervention Scheme** represents a **stronger commitment** by the government to **protect farmers' incomes** and stabilize prices for essential perishable goods. With higher procurement limits, **direct payment options**, and **cost reimbursements**, the updated guidelines are designed to **provide more efficient and timely support** to farmers in times of market distress. By integrating MIS into PM-AASHA, the government is working towards a more **holistic and farmer-friendly approach** to price stabilization and market intervention.

GS Paper 2 – Governance, Ethics & Integrity

3 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024: Key Insights & India's Performance

Context: India ranked **96th out of 180 countries** in the **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024**, highlighting persistent corruption challenges in the public sector.

What is the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)?

The **Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)** is an annual ranking by **Transparency International** that assesses **perceived levels of public sector corruption** worldwide.

How is CPI Measured?

- The index scores countries **on a scale of 0 to 100**:
  - **0 = Highly Corrupt**
  - **100 = Very Clean**
- **Rankings are based on expert assessments and surveys** conducted by international organizations.

Why is CPI Important?

- It **reflects governance quality**, transparency, and the **effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.**
- Corruption **undermines democracy, fuels inequality, and weakens institutions**.
- The 2024 CPI particularly highlights **how corruption is hindering global climate action.**

Key Findings of CPI 2024:

1. Global Corruption Trends:

- **85% of the world's population** lives in countries with **CPI scores below 50**, indicating widespread corruption.
- **Corruption is linked to declining democracy, instability, and human rights violations.**

2. India's Performance:

- **India's CPI score: 38 out of 100** (Dropped 1 point from 2023).
- **India's Rank: 96 out of 180 countries**.
- This indicates **ongoing challenges in tackling public sector corruption**.

3. Least Corrupt Countries (Highest CPI Scores):

- **Denmark**
- **Finland**
- **Singapore**

These countries have **strong institutions, transparency, and strict anti-corruption laws**.

4. Most Corrupt Countries (Lowest CPI Scores):

- **South Sudan**
- **Somalia**
- **Venezuela**

These nations **struggle with weak governance, conflict, and lack of accountability**.

How Corruption is Hindering Climate Action:

1. **Weakens Climate Policies: Powerful corporate interests** often manipulate policies to favor **profit over environmental protection.**
2. **Erodes Governance & Law Enforcement: Poor governance leads to weak implementation** of climate-related laws, reducing accountability.
3. **Misuse of Climate Funds:** Many climate-vulnerable countries **score below 50 on CPI**, indicating **high risks of fund misallocation.**
4. **Worsens Inequality: Corrupt practices** ensure that **marginalized communities** receive fewer benefits from **climate policies and disaster relief efforts.**
5. **Undermines Global Climate Negotiations: Lobbying by fossil fuel companies** and **lack of transparency** in negotiations delay **global climate progress.**

Recommendations for Strengthening Anti-Corruption Measures:

1. **Strengthen Anti-Corruption Policies: Integrate anti-corruption safeguards** into **climate finance and public policies.**
2. **Increase Transparency in Climate Action: Implement lobbying regulations** and **open records for climate finance** to ensure accountability.
3. **Improve Investigations & Protect Whistleblowers: Strengthen enforcement agencies** and **provide protection for environmental activists.**
4. **Promote Public Engagement in Climate Policy: Ensure affected communities** have a voice in **climate action planning and decision-making.**

Conclusion:

India's **CPI rank of 96** reflects **persistent governance challenges**, requiring **urgent anti-corruption reforms.** As **corruption weakens climate action**, the **government must implement stricter transparency measures, improve accountability, and strengthen law enforcement.**

GS Paper 2 – International Relations & Trade Agreements

4 U.S. Tariff Policies on Steel, Aluminium, and Trade Relations with India

Context: U.S. President **Donald Trump** has announced a **25% tariff** on steel and aluminium imports from multiple countries, including **Canada, Mexico**, and **China**. This move is poised to reshape global trade dynamics, potentially drive inflation, and impact bilateral relations with key trading partners, including **India**.

Key Context and Developments:

U.S. Tariffs on Steel & Aluminium:

- **25% Tariff on Steel Imports**: Aimed at reducing steel imports to the U.S. and boosting local steel manufacturing.
- **Aluminium Imports Affected**: Similarly, **aluminium** imports will face new trade penalties, hurting suppliers.
- **Key Suppliers to the U.S.**: **Canada, China, Mexico** are major suppliers of these metals, with potential for major ripple effects across global trade.

Impact of Trump's Steel Tariff Threat on India:

1. Impact on Indian Industries & Exports:

- **Competitiveness Concerns**: Indian steelmakers fear that the U.S.'s tariffs could significantly reduce India's ability to compete in the **U.S. steel market**, a crucial export destination.
- **Export Market Contraction**: India, a major exporter of steel, might face **lost market share** in the U.S. due to increased tariff barriers.

2. Rise in Steel Imports & Dumping Risks:

- **Diversion of Global Steel Trade**: The U.S.'s tariffs might **divert global steel trade** towards countries like **India**, potentially leading to **steel dumping** by producers from **China**, **Japan**, and **South Korea**.
- **Price Pressure**: Steel imports into India surged, with **Chinese steel imports rising by 80%** in 2024, potentially causing **price pressure** and **losses** for Indian manufacturers.

3. Impact on Global Trade & Inflation:

- **Currency Depreciation**: A **weaker rupee** could exacerbate **imported inflation risks**, especially with rising steel prices.
- **Global Trade Tensions**: Countries like **South Korea** are concerned about how U.S. tariffs will affect their industries and exports.
- **Reciprocal Tariffs**: President Trump hinted at **imposing new tariffs** on products from countries that impose **higher tariffs on U.S. goods**, escalating the trade conflict.

India's Response and Trade Concessions:

1. Lowering Import Duties:

India is looking to **reduce import duties on U.S. farm products** to ease **trade tensions**:

- **Pecan Nuts**: India already reduced duties on **pecan nuts** from **100% to 30%** in early 2023 to improve trade relations.
- **Other Farm Products**: Potential further reductions in duties to pacify Trump's tariff stance and smooth trade discussions.

2. Restoring GSP Status:

- **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)**: India will lobby for the **restoration of its preferential trade status under GSP**, which was revoked by the U.S. in 2019.
- **GSP Benefits**: Under GSP, India enjoyed **lower or zero tariffs** on several products, enhancing **market access** for Indian exports to the U.S.

3. Safeguard Measures:

India is considering **safeguard measures** to protect its industries in the event of a **sudden surge in imports**:

- **Anti-Dumping Duty**: Protecting local industries from unfairly low-priced foreign goods.
- **Countervailing Duty**: Addressing **foreign subsidies** that distort competition.
- **Tariffs & Quotas**: Imposing taxes or limits to control the influx of foreign products.

Overview of GSP (Generalized System of Preferences):

What is GSP?

The **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)** is a U.S. trade program aimed at supporting the **economic growth of developing countries** by offering **preferential tariff treatment** for their exports.

Key Features of GSP:

- **Duty-Free & Reduced Tariffs**: Eligible products from **developing nations** can enter the U.S. market with **lower or zero tariffs.**
- **Non-Reciprocal Basis**: Initially offered without requiring reciprocal trade concessions from beneficiaries.
- **Market Access**: GSP has historically helped increase exports from developing nations, fostering economic development and diversification.

Benefits of GSP for India:

- **Enhanced Competitiveness**: **Lower or zero tariffs** on Indian exports to the U.S. make products more competitive in the U.S. market.
- **Stronger Market Presence**: GSP helps Indian exporters **increase their foothold** in the U.S. and **improve profit margins**.

Conclusion:

The **U.S. tariff policies** on steel and aluminium, alongside broader trade dynamics, have significant implications for **India**. The **renewed tariffs** raise **concerns** for Indian steelmakers while also **reshaping trade strategies** for agricultural exports.

India's response, including **reducing import duties on U.S. farm products** and lobbying for **restoration of its GSP status**, reflects an effort to **counterbalance** the impact of U.S. trade policies. However, tensions may continue to rise unless diplomatic solutions, including **safeguard measures** and **cooperative trade agreements**, can be achieved.

GS Paper 2 – Polity & Governance

5 Meghalaya Woman Challenges Age Restriction Under ART Act

Context: Legal Challenge to the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021

A **woman from Meghalaya** has filed a legal challenge against the **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021**, which **restricts women over the age of 50** from undergoing assisted reproductive procedures. The case has drawn attention after the **Meghalaya High Court** criticized an **Assam-based fertility clinic** for failing to follow the court's directive to form a **medical board** to assess the petitioner's eligibility for assisted reproduction.

Overview of the ART Act, 2021:

The **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021** was introduced to **regulate** and **supervise ART clinics and banks** across India, ensuring that **ethical standards** and **safety protocols** are adhered to in the provision of ART services. ART includes a variety of techniques aimed at achieving pregnancy by handling **sperm** or **oocytes** outside the human body, followed by the transfer of the **gamete** or **embryo** into a woman's reproductive system.

Key procedures under ART include:

- **In-vitro fertilization (IVF)**
- **Gamete donation** (sperm or egg)
- **Gestational surrogacy**

The **National Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Board** was established to:

- Advise the **central government** on ART-related policy matters
- **Monitor** the implementation of ART policies
- **Lay down a code of conduct** for ART clinics and banks

State-level boards coordinate the enforcement of these policies at the regional level. All ART clinics and banks must be **registered** under the **National ART and Surrogacy Registry**, which acts as a **centralized database** to track all ART clinics and banks across the country. Registration is contingent upon meeting **specific standards** of infrastructure, staffing, and diagnostic facilities.

Eligibility Criteria Under the ART Act:

The **ART Act** outlines strict eligibility criteria for individuals seeking ART services:

- **For Married Couples**:
  - The woman should be between **21 and 50 years** of age.
  - The man should be between **21 and 55 years** of age.
  - The couple must be **infertile**, defined as the inability to conceive after **one year** of unprotected intercourse or having a **proven medical condition** preventing conception.
- **For Unmarried Women**:
  - Women **over 21 years** can access ART services independently.

- **For Donors**:
  - **Female donors**: Age between **23 and 35 years**; can donate oocytes **only once** in their lifetime.
  - **Male donors**: Age between **21 and 45 years**; can donate sperm **up to seven times**.

Rights of Children Born Through ART:

Children born through ART procedures are recognized as **biological children** of the **commissioning couple** or the **woman** who initiated the procedure. These children are entitled to all the **rights and privileges** available to **natural children** under the law.

The **ART Act** also includes stringent **prohibitions**:

- **Sex selection**
- **Sale of human embryos or gametes**
- **Use of intermediaries** to obtain donors

Violations of these provisions are subject to **penalties**, including **fines** and **imprisonment**, depending on the severity of the offense.

Current Legal Challenge:

The ongoing case has raised concerns over the **age restrictions** imposed by the ART Act, especially its impact on women over 50. This legal challenge could set a significant precedent for the interpretation and future application of the **ART Act**, particularly concerning **age-related eligibility criteria**.

The **Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act** aims to provide a more **regulated** and **ethical framework** for ART procedures in India, but this recent challenge highlights ongoing debates about **age restrictions** and **individual rights** in reproductive technology. As this case progresses, it will be essential to see whether **age-based restrictions** will be reconsidered or revised in future legislation.

GS Paper 2 – International Relations

6 Panama's Withdrawal from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Context: Panama has recently made headlines by **withdrawing** from China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, a strategic development program launched by China in 2013. This marks a significant shift in Panama's relationship with Beijing, as it chose not to renew its **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** with China, signed in **2017**.

In response, China summoned Panama's **Ambassador** to protest this decision, accusing the **United States** of exerting pressure to undermine China's infrastructure projects. This move has raised questions about the growing influence of the U.S. in **Latin America** and the changing dynamics of international trade and geopolitics.

The Trump Factor: A Backdrop of Tension:

U.S. President **Donald Trump** has long expressed concerns over China's growing influence in the region, particularly with regard to the **Panama Canal**. He claimed that **China** was gaining strategic control over the canal, suggesting that it should be **returned** to U.S. control.

Trump alleged that Panama was unfairly charging U.S. ships using the canal and even made claims that **Chinese soldiers** were operating the canal. However, Panama's **President José Raul Mulino** vehemently denied these accusations, affirming that there were no **Chinese soldiers** stationed at the canal and emphasizing that Panama remains open to investments from **all countries**, not just China.

Chinese Influence and Investments in the Panama Canal:

China has been involved in the Panama Canal for years, with **Chinese companies** holding significant stakes in the region's infrastructure. For example:

- **Panama Ports Company (PPC)**, a subsidiary of **Hong Kong-based Hutchison Port Holdings**, has managed two key ports at either end of the canal since **1997**.
- **China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company (COSCO)**, one of the canal's largest users, plays a crucial role in the region's trade. In **2021**, PPC's contract for port operations was **extended** for another **25 years**, although the extension is currently under review by Panama.

This involvement has led to fears in the U.S. that **Chinese control** over strategic infrastructure could provide China with **geopolitical leverage**, especially in times of international conflict. The U.S. sees these **Chinese companies** as being aligned with the **Chinese government's interests**, further escalating concerns.

The Geopolitical Importance of the Panama Canal:

The **Panama Canal**, completed in **1914**, serves as a critical waterway connecting the **Atlantic** and **Pacific Oceans**, significantly reducing the travel time for ships. Originally constructed by the U.S., the canal was under American control until the **Torrijos–Carter Treaties** of **1977**, which paved the way for Panama to take control of the canal by **1999**, although the U.S. retained military defense rights.

The canal remains vital for **global trade**, particularly for **U.S. shipping routes**, increasing its **geopolitical significance**. The U.S. and other Western powers have long been wary of any foreign influence that could disrupt their access to this crucial trade artery.

About the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI):

The **Belt and Road Initiative** (BRI) is a global development strategy spearheaded by **China** to enhance **regional connectivity** and foster **economic cooperation** across **Asia**, **Europe**, and **Africa**. Launched in

2013, the BRI aims to revive the ancient **Silk Road** trade routes through investments in infrastructure and trade.

- To fund BRI projects, China offers **loans** to participating countries, which often come with **commercial interest rates** and a fixed repayment period.
- Critics in the West have accused China of **debt-trapping** countries through **"predatory loans"**, pressuring them to cede valuable assets in return for the funding.

Despite criticism, the BRI continues to expand, with **over 140 countries** joining the initiative by **2024**, covering nearly **75%** of the world's population and over half of its GDP.

Panama's Decision: A Symbol of Changing Global Alliances?

Panama's withdrawal from the BRI is not just a diplomatic decision—it signals potential shifts in **global alliances**. While the **U.S.** and China continue their geopolitical rivalry, Panama's choice reflects broader concerns about **China's expanding influence** in Latin America and the region's need for **balanced partnerships**.

The **U.S.**, through its strategic political and economic influence, appears to be encouraging countries like Panama to reconsider their relationships with China. As geopolitical tensions rise, this shift could have long-term implications for the **BRI**, especially in **Latin America**.

Conclusion: A Changing Landscape

Panama's decision to distance itself from China's BRI marks a key turning point in international trade dynamics, with the U.S. playing a central role in shaping the future of the region. As the **BRI** continues to expand, it remains to be seen how countries like Panama will navigate the pressures from both **China** and the **U.S.**, balancing economic growth with geopolitical considerations.