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Daily Current Affairs

To The Point

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GS Paper 3 – Polity and Governance

1 Internet Shutdowns in India: Balancing Security and Freedom

Context: A recent report by the **advocacy group 'Access Now'** highlights that **India recorded the second-highest number of internet shutdowns in 2024**, accounting for **28% of global disruptions**.

Global and National Trends in Internet Shutdowns:

- ✓ **Global Scenario**: A total of **296 internet shutdowns** occurred worldwide in 2024.
- ✓ **India's Position**: With **84 shutdowns**, India was second only to **Myanmar**, which had **one more disruption**.
- ✓ **Comparative Decline**: India saw **fewer shutdowns** in 2024 compared to the previous year. **Affected Regions**: **16 States and Union Territories** experienced disruptions.
- ✓ **Most Shutdowns**:
  - **Manipur** – 21 shutdowns
  - **Haryana** – 12 shutdowns
  - **Jammu & Kashmir** – 12 shutdowns
- ✓ **Primary Reasons:**
  - **41 shutdowns** were imposed due to **protests**.
  - **23 shutdowns** were linked to **communal violence**.

Legal Framework Governing Internet Shutdowns:

1. **Grounds for Imposing Shutdowns:**
   - The **Indian Telegraph Act** allows the **temporary suspension of internet services** in cases of **"public emergency"** or **"public safety."**
   - However, the **law lacks a clear definition** of what qualifies as an **emergency or safety concern**.
2. **Earlier Use of Section 144 of CrPC:**
   - Before 2017, authorities imposed internet shutdowns under **Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**.
   - **Section 144** grants powers to the **police and District Magistrate** to prevent **unlawful gatherings** and restrict specific activities.
3. **Introduction of Suspension Rules (2017):**
   - In **2017**, the government introduced the **Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency or Public Safety) Rules**.
   - These **rules set guidelines** for **imposing shutdowns** and require a **review by an advisory board within five days**.
4. **Landmark Case: Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020): The Supreme Court ruled that indefinite internet shutdowns** are **unconstitutional**.

Key Takeaways from the Verdict:

- **Internet access is a fundamental right under Article 19**.
- **Shutdowns must be temporary, not indefinite**.
- The **government must publish orders** imposing restrictions under **Section 144**.
- Any shutdown order is **subject to judicial review**.

Arguments in Favor of Internet Shutdowns:

- **National Security**: Helps curb **misinformation**, **prevent unlawful activities**, and **neutralize security threats**.
- **Temporary and Targeted**: Shutdowns are used as a **short-term measure**, not a **permanent restriction**.
- **Preventing Unrest and Violence**: Helps prevent **riots, protests, or organized unrest**.
- **Combating Fake News**: Stops the **spread of misinformation** and **rumors** during crises.

Arguments Against Internet Shutdowns:

- **Violation of Freedom of Expression**: Restricts the **right to speech and information**, guaranteed by the **Constitution**.
- **Negative Impact on Global Reputation**: Frequent shutdowns affect **India's image**, discouraging **foreign investors**.
- **Human Rights Concerns**: Hinders access to **information, free speech, and peaceful assembly**.
- **Economic Disruptions**: Affects the **digital economy**, causing **financial losses**.
- **Educational Setbacks**: Interrupts **online learning**, affecting **students** across the country.
- **Lack of Transparency**: Governments must **clearly communicate** the **reasons and duration** of internet restrictions.

Conclusion:

In a **democracy**, restricting internet access should be **justified and transparent**. **Indiscriminate shutdowns** not only affect **social and economic activities** but are often **ineffective** in addressing security concerns. India needs a **more accountable and balanced approach** to **internet governance**, ensuring both **public safety and fundamental rights** are upheld.

GS Paper 3 – Energy Security & Infrastructure

2 India's Growing LNG Imports: A Key Driver in the Energy Transition

Context: India's **liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports** from the **United States** reached a record **7.14 billion cubic meters (BCM)** in the first **11 months of 2024**, reflecting a **71% year-over-year surge**. This marks a significant shift in India's energy landscape as it strengthens its reliance on LNG.

Understanding LNG:

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is natural gas cooled to **-162°C (-260°F)**, converting it into a **liquid form** for easier storage and transportation. Primarily composed of **90% methane**, LNG is **odorless, colorless, non-toxic, and non-corrosive**.

India's LNG Landscape:

As the **third-largest energy consumer** globally, India is witnessing an **unprecedented rise in energy demand** due to **rapid economic growth**. LNG has emerged as a **strategic energy source** to meet these expanding needs.
India's **LNG infrastructure** includes **import terminals, pipelines, and distribution networks**, supplying **power plants, industries, and city gas networks**. However, the sector faces **congestion issues** and **supply chain inefficiencies**, limiting its full potential.

US Overtakes UAE as a Key LNG Supplier:

- In **2023**, the **United States** surpassed the **UAE** to become India's **second-largest LNG supplier**, while **Qatar** remains the **top supplier**.
- In **2024**, India's **LNG imports from the US** rose by **53.5%**, highlighting a growing preference for American gas.

Why is India Increasing LNG Imports?

1. **Energy Diversification:** India's transition from **coal-based power** to **cleaner fuels** is driving its LNG imports.
2. **Net-Zero Commitment:** To achieve its **net-zero target by 2070**, India is prioritizing **low-emission energy sources**, with LNG playing a crucial role.
3. **Industrial Growth:** Industries demand **clean and efficient energy**, making LNG a **viable alternative** to traditional fuels.
4. **Urbanization & City Gas Networks:** Expanding **city gas distribution (CGD)** networks and increasing reliance on **Piped Natural Gas (PNG)** are improving **urban living standards**.

Challenges Hindering LNG Growth:

1. **Infrastructure Deficiencies:** Although India aims to **increase natural gas's share** to **15% of its energy mix by 2030**, **congested LNG terminals** and **inadequate infrastructure** pose major obstacles.
2. **Limited Pipeline Network:** A **lack of pipelines** restricts **LNG access** to remote areas, slowing nationwide distribution.

3. **Storage Constraints:** India has **limited LNG storage capacity**, making it **vulnerable to global price volatility** and **supply disruptions**.

Government Initiatives to Strengthen LNG Infrastructure:

1. **Energy Transition Policy:** The government is focused on **increasing the share of natural gas** to **15% by 2030** to reduce dependence on coal.
2. **National Gas Grid Expansion:** Expanding the **LNG pipeline network** aims to **enhance supply efficiency** and **improve accessibility**.
3. **Expansion of City Gas Distribution (CGD):** Accelerating access to **Piped Natural Gas (PNG) and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)** for urban households and transport.
4. **Development of New LNG Terminals:** New **import and storage facilities** are being planned to **meet rising demand**.
5. **Liberalization of Gas Pricing:** Providing **market and pricing freedom** for **deepwater, high-pressure, and coal seam gas sources**, with a **ceiling price mechanism**.
6. **Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT):** Promoting **Bio-CNG** as an **eco-friendly transportation fuel** to reduce reliance on traditional fuels.

The Road Ahead: Building a Robust LNG Ecosystem:

1. **Encouraging Investments:** The government must introduce **investment-friendly policies** to attract **private and foreign capital** into LNG infrastructure.
2. **Regulatory Simplification:**
3. **Fast-tracking approvals** for LNG projects can **accelerate infrastructure expansion**.
4. **Small-Scale LNG Development:** Supporting **small-scale LNG plants** will facilitate **decentralized energy supply** to underserved regions.
5. **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** A **collaborative approach** between the **government, private players, and financial institutions** is essential to build a **resilient and efficient LNG ecosystem**.

With strategic investments, policy reforms, and infrastructure expansion, India is well on its way to becoming a **global leader in LNG consumption**, ensuring **sustainable and secure energy** for its growing economy.

GS Paper 2 – International Relations

3 The Ancient Tea Horse Road: A Historic Trade Link Between India and China

Context: China's **Ambassador to India, Xu Feihong**, recently highlighted the historical **Tea Horse Road**, a trade route spanning over **2,000 km**, connecting **China to India via Tibet**. This ancient pathway played a crucial role in fostering commerce and cultural exchanges between the two nations.

Unraveling the Tea Horse Road:

The **Tea Horse Road** was a significant **trade network** that linked **China, Tibet, and India** for centuries. Though less known than the **Silk Road**, it was essential for the exchange of **tea, horses, and other valuable commodities**.

On **February 25, 2025**, China's ambassador emphasized its **historical importance**, showcasing how this route strengthened **India-China ties** through trade and cultural interactions.

Origins of the Tea Horse Road:

The **Tea Horse Road** dates back to the **Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE)** when trade between **Southwest China, Tibet, and India** flourished.

- **Buddhist monk Yijing (635-713 CE)** documented these early exchanges, mentioning trade in **sugar, textiles, and rice noodles** from China, while Tibet and India provided **horses, gold, saffron, and medicinal herbs**.
- By the **10th century (Song Dynasty, 960-1279 CE)**, official markets were established to **regulate the exchange** of **tea and horses**, the two dominant commodities.

A Network of Roads Through Challenging Terrains:

The **Tea Horse Road** was not a **single route** but a **complex network of trails** stretching from **Southwest China to India, Nepal, and Bangladesh**.

Key Features of the Route:

- **Total Distance:** Over **2,000 km**
- **Major Trade Centers: Dali, Lijiang (Yunnan Province), and Lhasa (Tibet)**
- **Extreme Elevations:** Peaked at **10,000 feet** in the Himalayas
- **Difficult Conditions:** Traders faced **harsh terrains, extreme weather, and high altitudes**

Despite these hardships, merchants carried **tea from Sichuan** to **Tibet and India**, returning with **horses and other essential goods**.

Tea and Horses – The Backbone of the Trade:

- **Tea:** A daily necessity for **Tibetan nomads**, particularly in **cold and harsh climates**. **Yak butter tea** became a staple, offering **warmth and energy**.
- **Horses:** Essential for **China's military**. The **central plains of China lacked horses**, making **Tibetan and Yunnan steeds highly valuable**, especially during conflicts against **Mongolian tribes**.
- To **regulate trade**, the **Song Dynasty government** set up **official markets**, ensuring a controlled and stable exchange of **tea and horses**.

The Tea Horse Road in Modern History:

Expansion of Trade in the Early 20th Century:

With the **fall of the Qing Dynasty (1912)**, the **Tea Horse Road** gained importance as **Yunnan's tea industry expanded**, integrating China further into the **global market**.

World War II: A Strategic Supply Route:

During **World War II**, when Japan occupied **China's eastern ports**, the **Tea Horse Road** became a **critical alternative supply route** for transporting **goods and military supplies** to **China's resistance forces**.

Post-1949 Decline:

With the establishment of the **People's Republic of China in 1949**, the **Tea Horse Road lost its significance**.

- **Mao Zedong's land reforms** altered **traditional trade patterns**.
- **Modern transportation networks** gradually replaced the ancient route.
- However, **historical sites like Lijiang** retained their cultural relevance, with **Lijiang becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997**.

Reviving the Tea Horse Road: A Cultural Renaissance:

China is actively promoting **tourism along the ancient route**, showcasing its **rich history and cultural significance**.

- **Lijiang, a former trade hub**, has been transformed into a **cultural heritage site**, attracting global visitors.
- **UNESCO recognizes Lijiang** as a key **trade distribution center** where **Sichuan, Yunnan, and Tibet intersected** with the **Southern Silk Road**.

Conclusion: A Timeless Legacy:

The **Tea Horse Road** was more than just a **trade route**—it was a **lifeline** connecting **China, Tibet, and India** for centuries. Though its **economic importance has faded**, it remains a **symbol of historical trade and cultural exchange**. Efforts to **preserve its legacy** through **tourism, research, and heritage conservation** highlight its role in shaping **regional economies and cross-border interactions**. This renewed focus serves as a **reminder of the deep historical ties between India and China**, emphasizing the **enduring legacy of this ancient trade corridor**.

GS Paper 3 – Agriculture

4 India's Fertilizer Strategy

Context: India is taking decisive steps to **reduce its reliance on imported fertilizers**, particularly **Urea, Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), and Muriate of Potash (MOP)**. The government is focusing on **alternative solutions** to ensure **sustainable agriculture**, improve **soil health**, and **lower import costs**.

India's Heavy Dependence on Imported Fertilizers:

MOP – 100% Imported:

India lacks **potash reserves**, making it completely reliant on imports from **Canada, Russia, Jordan, Israel, Turkmenistan, and Belarus**.

Urea – Domestic Production Dependent on Imports:

While **85% of urea demand** is met through **domestic production**, manufacturing is heavily dependent on **imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG)** from **Qatar, the US, UAE, and Angola**.

DAP – A Complex Import System:

India imports DAP in multiple forms::

- **Finished Fertilizer** – Mainly from **Saudi Arabia, China, Morocco, Russia, and Jordan**.
- **Raw Materials** – **Rock phosphate** from **Jordan, Morocco, Togo, Egypt, and Algeria**; **sulphur** from **UAE, Qatar, and Oman**.
- **Intermediate Chemicals** – **Phosphoric acid** from **Jordan, Morocco, Senegal, and Tunisia**; **ammonia** from **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and Indonesia**.

Why India Needs to Reduce Urea, DAP & MOP Usage:

1. High Import Dependence & Rising Costs:

- India's reliance on imports for **MOP and DAP** puts pressure on **foreign exchange reserves**.
- The **rupee's depreciation** further increases fertilizer import costs.

2. Nutrient Imbalance & Soil Health Issues:

- **Urea (46% nitrogen), MOP (60% potash), and DAP (46% phosphorus + 18% nitrogen)** are high-analysis fertilizers.
- **Excessive use** of these fertilizers **disrupts soil health**, leading to **inefficient nutrient absorption and wastage**.
- Crops need a **balanced mix of nutrients**, including **macronutrients (N, P, K), secondary nutrients (sulphur, calcium, magnesium), and micronutrients (zinc, iron, copper, boron, manganese, molybdenum)**.

3. Ensuring Efficient Resource Utilization:

- Reducing the use of **high-analysis fertilizers** allows better utilization of **imported raw materials**.
- Balanced fertilization improves **crop yields** while **lowering fertilizer expenses**.

Ammonium Phosphate Sulphate (APS): A Sustainable Alternative to DAP:

What is APS?

- **APS (20:20:0:13)** contains **20% Nitrogen (N), 20% Phosphorus (P), and 13% Sulphur (S)** but **no Potassium (K)**.

- Although APS has **lower phosphorus content** than **DAP (46% P)**, its **balanced nutrient composition** makes it an **effective alternative**.

Advantages of APS Over DAP:

- **Reduces dependence on costly phosphoric acid**, making fertilizer production more **economical and resource-efficient**.
- **Sulphur enrichment improves soil health** and **boosts crop productivity**.
- Ideal for **oilseeds, pulses, maize, cotton, onion, and chilli**, which require **high sulphur content**.
- **DAP should be reserved for wheat, rice, and sugarcane**, where it is most essential.
- **Higher sales potential** – Companies can **sell twice the number of APS bags** compared to **DAP using the same amount of phosphoric acid**, making APS a **financially viable alternative**.

The Road Ahead: Shaping India's Fertilizer Future:

1. Rapid Growth in NPKS Complex Fertilizers:

- Sales of **NPKS fertilizers** in **2024-25** are projected to reach **14 million tonnes (mt)**, nearly **double** the **7.3 mt recorded in 2013-14**.
- The rapid growth is driven by **APS (20:20:0:13)**, which is steadily **replacing DAP**.

2. Promoting Balanced Fertilization:

- Other **complex fertilizers** like **10:26:26:0, 12:32:16:0, 15:15:15:0, and 14:35:14:0** need **stronger marketing efforts**.
- Direct **MOP application should be minimized**, with its usage **integrated into balanced fertilizers**.

3. Reducing Dependence on High-Analysis Fertilizers:

- The long-term goal is to **limit or gradually reduce Urea, DAP, and MOP usage**.
- **Farmers must be encouraged** to adopt **efficient nutrient application techniques** for better yields **while conserving foreign exchange reserves**.

Conclusion: A Sustainable Fertilizer Revolution:

India's fertilizer strategy is undergoing a **major transformation** to ensure **long-term agricultural sustainability**.
By **reducing dependence on costly imports**, **promoting balanced fertilization**, and **adopting sustainable alternatives like APS**, India is paving the way for a **more resilient and self-reliant agricultural sector**.

Encouraging **nutrient-efficient farming practices** will not only **enhance soil health** but also **boost crop productivity**, ensuring a **prosperous future for Indian agriculture**.

GS Paper 3 – Environment & Ecology

5 India to Announce Emission Intensity Targets by Month-End

Context: The **Union government** is gearing up to unveil **emission intensity targets** for **nine key industrial sectors** by the **end of February 2025**. This marks a **major milestone** in India's journey towards launching a **carbon credit trading scheme**, which will help industries transition towards a **low-carbon economy**.

Implementation Timeline:

- Industries will be given **one year** to align with the new **compliance measures**.
- **Carbon credit trading** is expected to commence by **October 2026**.

Background: India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme

The **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)**, under the **Union Ministry of Power**, announced India's **carbon credit trading system** in **June 2023**.

- **March 2024:** Follow-up regulations made **compliance mandatory** for certain industries.
- **Current Status: Emission intensity targets** are yet to be defined, delaying the **generation and trading of carbon credits**.

Objective: Why Is India Introducing Carbon Credit Trading?

The initiative aims to:

- **Reduce, remove, or prevent greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions**.
- **Encourage industries to improve efficiency** rather than impose absolute emission cuts.
- **Create a financial incentive** for businesses to adopt **cleaner technologies**.
- The scheme operates on a **carbon credit certificate trading system**, ensuring that **industries can monetize their sustainability efforts**.

How Does India's Carbon Credit System Compare Globally?

European Model (Absolute Cap-and-Trade System):

- Each **carbon credit** represents **one tonne of CO_2 prevented** from being released.
- **Industries with emission limits** can buy or sell credits based on their compliance levels.

Indian Model (Efficiency-Based Approach):

- Industries are **not required to reduce overall emissions** but must **improve efficiency**.
- **Emission intensity targets** focus on **reducing emissions per unit of production**.
- Example: A **steel plant** can **burn less coal** or **reuse heat** to manufacture the same amount of steel more efficiently.

Emission Intensity Targets: Key Sectors Affected:

The **emission intensity targets** will apply to **nine major industrial sectors**:

- **Iron & Steel**
- **Aluminium**
- **Chlor-Alkali**

- **Cement**
- **Fertilizers**
- **Pulp & Paper**
- **Petrochemicals**
- **Petroleum Refineries**
- **Textiles**

Additionally, India is also exploring **voluntary carbon offset markets**, such as **afforestation projects**, which may begin **trading later this year**.

India's Climate Commitment: A 2030 Goal

India is on a mission to **cut its emissions intensity by 45%** from **2005 levels by 2030**. The **upcoming emission intensity targets** will be a **crucial step** in achieving this ambitious goal while supporting industries in making a **smoother transition to sustainability**.

By introducing this **market-driven approach**, India is positioning itself as a **global leader in carbon efficiency**, balancing **economic growth** with **environmental responsibility**.

GS Paper 2 – Governance & Social Justice

6 India's Social Protection Coverage Doubles to 49%: ILO Report

Context: According to the **ILO's World Social Protection Report 2024-26**, the proportion of **India's population covered by at least one social protection benefit** (excluding healthcare) has **risen from 24% in 2021 to 49% in 2024**. This marks a **significant milestone** in India's efforts to strengthen **social security and economic resilience**.

What is Social Protection?

Social protection refers to **benefits provided to individuals** based on the **risks they face throughout their life**—such as **unemployment, disability, old age, and economic hardships**. It also supports those suffering from **poverty and social exclusion**.

Why is Social Protection Important?

- **Building an Inclusive Society** – Ensures **security for children, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities**.
- **Tackling Climate Change and Social Inequality** – Helps combat **poverty, inequality, and social exclusion**, making societies more resilient to climate and economic shocks.
- **Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth** – Encourages **transition to greener jobs and sustainable economic practices**, fostering long-term stability.

Challenges in India's Social Protection System:

- **Limited Coverage for Informal Workers** – A vast segment of India's **informal workforce** remains outside the scope of **comprehensive social security programs**.
- **Gender Disparity in Benefits** – Only **26% of Indian women** are covered by at least one **social protection scheme**, compared to **39% of men**.
- **Low Public Spending on Social Protection** – India allocates just **5% of its GDP** to social protection (excluding healthcare), significantly below the **global average of 13%**.
- **Impact of Automation & AI** – According to **McKinsey**, automation and **artificial intelligence (AI) could disrupt around 12 million jobs in India by 2030**, making **social protection** even more crucial.

The Road Ahead: Strengthening Social Protection in India:

- **Expanding Coverage for Informal Workers** – Strengthening **unemployment insurance and pension schemes** to **extend coverage to informal sector workers**.
- **Bridging the Gender Gap – Enhancing maternity benefits, pension access, and financial security programs** for women.
- **Better Data & Monitoring** – Improving **data collection and tracking systems** to ensure **social benefits reach the right beneficiaries**.
- **Reskilling for the AI Era** – Implementing **workforce upskilling initiatives** to help workers **adapt to automation and emerging job sectors**.

With **rising social protection coverage**, India is taking **significant steps towards a more inclusive and resilient economy**, but **further reforms** are essential to **achieve universal social security**.