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To The Point

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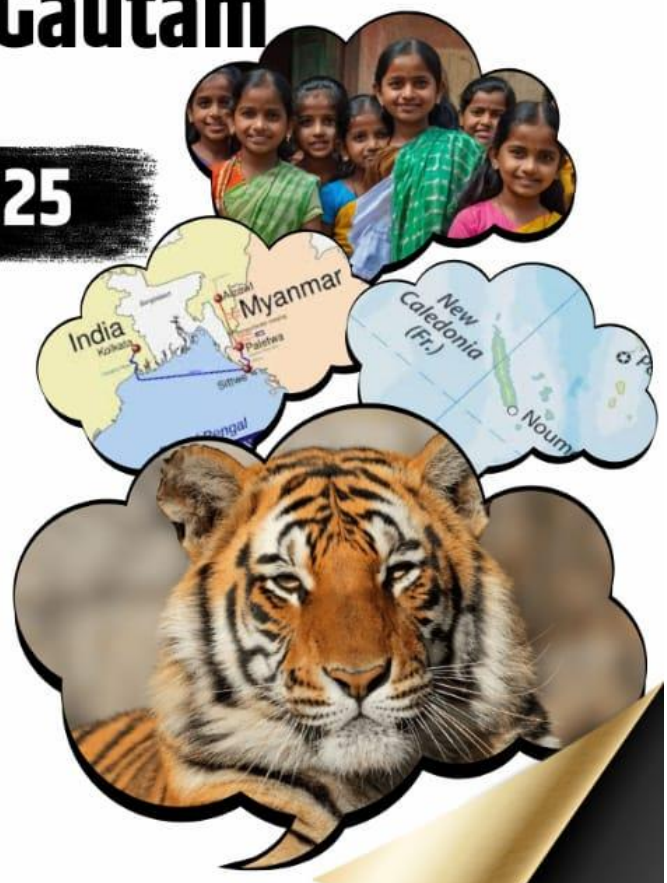

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GS Paper 3 – Infrastructure, Economy

1 India Charts Strategic Northeast–Kolkata Route Through Myanmar, Sidesteps Bangladesh

Context: In a **bold geopolitical move**, India has advanced efforts to connect its **Northeast region with Kolkata** via **Myanmar**, bypassing traditional routes through **Bangladesh**. This shift not only addresses diplomatic friction but also strengthens India's strategic foothold in Southeast Asia and enhances regional autonomy.

Myanmar: India's Crucial Eastern Gateway

India shares a **1,643 km-long land border** with **Myanmar**, connecting the northeastern states of **Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur**, and **Mizoram**. Myanmar plays a pivotal role in **India's Act East Policy**, serving as a bridge between **South Asia and Southeast Asia**.

Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP): A Game Changer

The **Kaladan Multimodal Project** is central to this strategic vision. Designed to create a **seamless corridor** from **Kolkata to Mizoram** via **Myanmar**, it integrates **sea, river, and road transport** to drastically reduce logistical dependence on the narrow **'Chicken's Neck' corridor**.

Project Phases and Status:

- **Kolkata to Sittwe (Sea)** – *539 km*: **Completed**
- **Sittwe to Paletwa (Inland Waterways)** – *158 km*: **Completed**
- **Paletwa to Zorinpui (Road)** – *108 km*: **Partially complete** (Delayed by conflict in Rakhine State)
- **Zorinpui to Aizawl & Shillong (Road link)** – **Under development** via **Shillong–Silchar–Zorinpui Corridor**

Once operational, this route will **cut travel distance and time**, enhance **regional logistics efficiency**, and support **India's East-West Industrial Corridor** plans.

Why This Shift Matters:

1. **Reducing Dependency on Bangladesh:** India's earlier transit routes to the Northeast relied heavily on Bangladesh. However, **Dhaka's recent remarks** labeling India's Northeast as "landlocked and dependent" triggered a strategic response. India aims to secure **self-reliant routes**, minimizing **transit fees, delays**, and **geopolitical vulnerability**.
2. **Empowering the Northeast:** Improved connectivity through Myanmar will:
   - Stimulate **trade, tourism, and local industries**
   - Enhance **logistics** for **manufacturing and agriculture**
   - Draw **investment into the Northeast**, traditionally isolated
3. **Reinforcing India's Act East Vision:**

The Myanmar route aligns with the **India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway** and strengthens links to **ASEAN economies**, boosting **regional integration**.

Security & Strategic Implications:

- The route allows India to **counterbalance China's expanding presence** in western Myanmar (e.g., **Kyaukpyu port**, CMEC).
- India's infrastructure investments **stabilize border zones**, especially in insurgency-prone areas like **Chin and Rakhine States**.
- It affirms **India's role as a regional power** investing in peace, connectivity, and inclusive development.

Challenges Along the Myanmar Route:

Despite its promise, the corridor faces obstacles:

- **Insurgent activity** by groups like the **Arakan Army**
- **Challenging terrain** slowing construction
- **Geopolitical rivalry** with **China's Belt and Road projects** in the same region

Yet, India's persistence reflects a **long-term strategic vision** rooted in self-reliance and regional leadership.

India's Countertrade Measures: Shifting Dynamics with Bangladesh

Amid tensions, India has **banned Bangladeshi ready-made garments** from entering through land ports in **Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya**, and **Mizoram**. These exports must now go through **Kolkata and Mumbai sea ports** where **stringent inspections** are in place.

This move is seen as a **reciprocal response** to Bangladesh's restriction on **Indian yarn exports**, previously limited to sea routes only. As **93% of Bangladesh's apparel exports to India** used land routes, this policy shift could significantly **alter trade balances** and **increase operational costs** for Dhaka's exporters.

The Road Ahead: Toward a Self-Reliant, Globally Connected Northeast

With enhanced infrastructure, strategic intent, and growing geopolitical awareness, **India is rewriting the connectivity script** for its Northeast. The **Myanmar corridor** is more than a logistics route—it represents **resilience, regional integration**, and **India's emergence as a decisive actor in Indo-Pacific geopolitics**.

GS Paper 2 – Education

2 Alarming Drop in Government School Enrolment Across 23 States

Context: A recent review by the **Ministry of Education (MoE)** has revealed a **significant decline in student enrolment** in **government schools across 23 states** for the academic year 2024–25. The trend, first highlighted in the **UDISE+ 2023–24 report**, continues to deepen, triggering renewed concern over the future of public schooling in India.

States with the Steepest Decline:

Among the worst-affected states:

- **Uttar Pradesh** tops the list with a staggering fall of **21.83 lakh** students
- **Bihar** follows with **6.14 lakh**
- **Rajasthan** with **5.63 lakh**
- **West Bengal** with **4.01 lakh**

In southern and northeastern India, the trend is also evident:

- **Karnataka**: Drop of **2 lakh**
- **Assam**: **1.68 lakh**
- **Tamil Nadu**: **1.65 lakh**
- **Delhi**: **1.05 lakh**

Midday Meal Participation Also Declines:

The **PM-POSHAN scheme**—formerly the **Midday Meal Scheme**—has also seen **a sharp fall in coverage**, particularly in the same states:

- **Uttar Pradesh**: Meal participation dropped by **5.41 lakh**
- **Rajasthan**: **3.27 lakh**
- **West Bengal**: **8.04 lakh**
- **Delhi**: **97,000** fewer students availed the scheme in 2024–25

Reports from various states indicate a **growing trend of students bringing their own food**, raising concerns over the quality or coverage of school-provided meals.

Possible Causes Behind the Downturn:

1. **Data Cleansing & Methodology Shift** : The government has moved from **school-wise aggregated data** to **student-level Aadhaar-based reporting**. This transition has likely eliminated duplicate or "**ghost entries**," revealing more accurate but lower enrolment figures.
2. **Shift to Private Schools Post-Pandemic**: Several states have noted that parents are increasingly choosing **private schools** in the post-COVID period, **reversing the pandemic-era return** to government institutions.
3. **Declining Trust in Public Services**: Inadequate facilities, staffing shortages, and inconsistent implementation of schemes like **PM-POSHAN** may be driving families away from public schools.

Implications of Declining Enrolment:

- **Nutritional Deficiency Risk**: Reduced participation in **school meal schemes** may impact **children's health, learning, and attendance**.
- **Administrative Gaps**: The shift to **digital, Aadhaar-based tracking** may cause **temporary disruptions**, affecting data accuracy and fund allocation.
- **Policy Review Needed**: The fall calls for **urgent introspection** of existing **education and welfare strategies** to retain children in public education systems.

Ministry of Education's Response:

The MoE has termed the drop a matter of **"deep concern"** and has:

- Asked all states to **submit detailed reports by June 30**
- Urged officials to **enhance the coverage and quality** of school meals
- Directed **re-investigation of enrolment figures** to validate the data

Understanding PM-POSHAN: A Vital Welfare Initiative

- **PM-POSHAN (Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman)** is a **centrally sponsored scheme** under the Ministry of Education.
- It provides **hot, cooked meals** to **11.20 crore children** from **Balvatika to Class 8** in **10.36 lakh government and government-aided schools**.
- Operates on a **60:40 funding split** between Centre and states (90:10 for NE states).
- Covers **material costs** (pulses, oil, vegetables, etc.) and **100% of grain supply** via **FCI (Food Corporation of India)**.
- Aims to improve **child nutrition**, **school attendance**, and **cognitive development**.

The Road Ahead: Urgent Reforms Required:

The enrolment drop in government schools cannot be viewed in isolation. It reflects broader issues of **trust, delivery, and governance** in India's public education system. Strengthening **infrastructure**, ensuring **teacher availability**, upgrading **digital tools for monitoring**, and **reinvigorating PM-POSHAN** are essential to reversing this trend.

GS Paper 3 – Science & Technology

3 India Receives 70 Proposals Under Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme

Context: The Government of India has received **70 applications**, with nearly **80% from small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**, under its flagship **Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme**, signaling growing industry interest in **building a resilient domestic electronics ecosystem**.

About the Scheme: A Strategic Leap Towards Self-Reliance

The scheme, with an outlay of **22,919 crore**, is designed to:

- **Attract major investments**—both domestic and global—into **component-level manufacturing**.
- Enhance **Domestic Value Addition (DVA)** by strengthening India's **technological and manufacturing capabilities**.
- Facilitate the integration of Indian firms into **Global Value Chains (GVCs)**.

Key Features of the Scheme:

- Offers **differentiated incentives** based on component categories to bridge manufacturing disadvantages.
- Has a **six-year implementation period**, including a **one-year gestation period**.
- **Performance-linked payouts** are tied to **employment generation targets**, promoting both job creation and industrial growth.

Component Categories Eligible for Incentives:

1. **Category A**: High-tech subassemblies such as **display modules** and **camera modules**.
2. **Category B**: Critical base components like **multi-layered PCBs**, **lithium-ion cells**, and **non-surface mount devices**.
3. **Category C**: **Flexible PCBs** and **SMD passive components** that support miniaturization and efficiency.
4. **Category D**: **Capital equipment** and components used in the production of the above categories.

India's Electronics Sector: From Aspiration to Acceleration

- **Domestic production** has jumped from **1.90 lakh crore in FY15** to **9.52 lakh crore in FY24**, clocking a **CAGR of over 17%**.
- **Exports** have grown from **38,000 crore to 2.41 lakh crore** in the same period—a **20% CAGR**.

This rapid growth showcases India's rising prominence in global electronics markets, especially in areas like **mobile phones, LED lighting, and consumer electronics**.

Challenges on the Road to Global Leadership:

Despite the progress, India still faces several hurdles:

- **Fierce competition** from established players like **China, Taiwan, South Korea, USA, and Vietnam**.
- **Shortage of skilled manpower** for advanced electronics manufacturing.
- High **capital costs**, **technological complexity**, and **long payback periods** deter quick scalability.

Government Initiatives Supporting the Sector:

- **Make in India**: Focus on domestic production and reducing imports.
- **Digital India**: Expands digital infrastructure, increasing demand for electronic devices.
- **Startup India**: Encourages innovation in electronics and embedded systems.
- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme**: Offers lucrative benefits for manufacturing **mobile phones and critical components**.
- **National Policy on Electronics 2019 (NPE 2019)**: Envisions India as a **global manufacturing and export hub**.
- **EMC 2.0 (Electronics Manufacturing Clusters)**: Supports shared infrastructure and logistics for efficient manufacturing.

Way Forward: Toward a $500 Billion Electronics Vision

India has set an ambitious goal of achieving **$500 billion in electronics manufacturing by 2030**. To meet this target, the country must:

- **Localize the production of advanced components** such as semiconductors, sensors, and chipsets.
- **Strengthen research and design capabilities** through robust **R&D investment**.
- **Form strategic global alliances** with technology leaders in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and the U.S.
- **Upskill the workforce** with specialized training in areas like **semiconductor design, robotics, and precision electronics**.

GS Paper 1 – Geography

4 New Caledonia in Crisis: Political Talks Collapse Amid Rising Tensions

Context: A recent high-level effort by **France's Overseas Minister** to establish a **new political framework** in **New Caledonia** has failed, leaving the territory in **deep political uncertainty**. The breakdown comes amid growing tensions over independence and governance in this **strategically vital French overseas territory**.

New Caledonia: An Overview

Located in the **Southwestern Pacific Ocean**, about **1,500 km east of Australia**, **New Caledonia** is a **French overseas territory** comprising:

- The **main island of Grande Terre** (home to the capital **Nouméa**)
- The **Loyalty Islands** (Ouvéa, Lifou, Tiga, and Maré)
- The **Belep Archipelago**, the **Isle of Pines**, and several smaller islets

With a population of just over **270,000 (2019 census)**, approximately **39% are Indigenous Kanaks**, while the rest include communities of **European, Polynesian, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Algerian descent**.

Status: New Caledonia is considered one of the **European Union's Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs)**, though it is **not part of the EU**, the **Eurozone**, or the **Schengen Area**.

Historical Background: From Colonization to Referendums

- Originally inhabited by the **Kanak people**, the territory was **annexed by France in 1853**.
- Post-World War II, **Kanaks gained French citizenship**, but a wave of **French migration in the 1960s** turned them into a **minority in their own land**, fueling a strong **pro-independence movement**.
- Violent unrest in the 1980s led to peace agreements:
  - **Matignon Agreements (1988)**
  - **Nouméa Accord (1998)**, which laid out a roadmap for **three independence referendums**.

Referendum Results:

- **2018 & 2020**: Majority voted to **remain with France**.
- **2021**: Held amid **COVID-19 concerns**, the vote again favored France, but was **boycotted by pro-independence Kanak groups**, deepening the divide.

Why New Caledonia Matters to France:

1. Strategic Geopolitical Footprint:

New Caledonia gives France a **critical military and diplomatic presence** in the **Indo-Pacific**, a region witnessing growing influence from **China, the U.S., and Australia**. It strengthens France's:

- **Maritime domain** in the Pacific
- **Regional influence** through strategic alliances

2. Rich in Natural Wealth:

- Holds **25% of the world's nickel reserves**, essential for industries like **batteries, electric vehicles, electronics, and stainless steel**.

- Resource control is central to both **local economic aspirations** and **French industrial strategy**.

3. Environmental Importance:

- Its **lagoons and coral reefs** are designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site (2008)**, recognized for exceptional **marine biodiversity** and ecological value.

Current Challenges and the Road Ahead

With the failure of recent talks, the region faces:

- **Rising separatist sentiment** among Kanak communities
- **Economic instability**, particularly in the nickel industry, which is facing price volatility and environmental pressure
- A possible **constitutional crisis** if France pushes ahead with reforms without local consensus

Looking Forward:

- **Dialogue and trust-building** between French authorities and Kanak leaders will be crucial.
- France may need to revisit the terms of autonomy and **consider broader self-governance models**, including **shared sovereignty** or **a phased transition**.

GS Paper 3 – Environment and Ecology

5 The New Conservation Crisis: Tigers Raised with Human Help Now Pose a Danger

Context: A troubling case in **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve** has brought the controversial practice of **live baiting** back into the spotlight. A young tigress named **Kankati**, just 23 months old, has killed **two people within a month**, alarming both wildlife officials and conservationists. The reason? She was raised on **live bait provided to her injured mother, Arrowhead**, making her **less fearful of humans** — and more dangerous.

What is Live Baiting?

A Colonial Hangover with Modern Risks

Live baiting refers to the practice of offering a **live animal (like a goat or buffalo calf)** as prey to large carnivores such as tigers. Once a tool of **British-era trophy hunters**, it evolved into a **tourism tactic** post-independence — allowing tourists to witness tiger kills in parks like **Sariska**, until it was **officially banned in 1982** by **Prime Minister Indira Gandhi**.

Still Practiced: Feeding the Old and the Injured

Though banned for tourism, live baiting **continues unofficially** — particularly for **injured or aging tigers** who can no longer hunt. **Buffalo calves** are commonly used in reserves like **Ranthambhore** and **Tadoba**, with feedings every **7–10 days**.

Despite **NTCA's (National Tiger Conservation Authority)** guidelines promoting **minimal human interference**, the practice persists. The **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** label artificial feeding as **"not advisable,"** but not explicitly **illegal** when used for non-hunting tigers.

How It Harms: Breaking the Wild Spirit of the Tiger:

Experts argue that artificial feeding**:**

- **Disrupts natural selection**
- Makes tigers **dependent on humans**
- Causes them to **lose hunting instincts**
- Increases **risk of human-wildlife conflict**

Fact: Habituated tigers are more likely to approach villages or attack people and livestock, mistaking them as easy prey.

Veteran conservationists insist that if baiting is ever used, it should be:

- Only during **genuine emergencies**
- Limited to **biweekly feeding**
- Not continued beyond **three months**

Case Studies: When Kindness Backfires:

The Guda Cubs (2008): Orphaned by poisoning, they were **fed buffalo calves** instead of being taught to hunt. One male, **T36**, died in a territorial fight. His sister, **T37**, survived — but remained less independent than wild-born tigers.

Simba's Sad End:

Another hand-raised cub, **Simba**, died after suffering injuries from a porcupine — a result of **poor hunting skills** developed due to early dependence on bait.

Machhli — A Tiger on Life Support:

Known as the "**Queen of Ranthambhore**," **Machhli** was fed bait for **seven years**. Though she gained celebrity status, her **unnaturally long survival** raised questions about the **ethics of wildlife care**.

A Growing Culture of Over-Intervention:

Live baiting is just one symptom of a larger issue: a shift from **preservation** to **pampering** in India's tiger reserves.

Examples of Overreach:

- **Transporting prey animals** into reserves
- **Tranquilising tigers** for minor injuries
- **Creating artificial waterholes** in summer
- **Tourist-driven treatment demands** for limping or aging tigers

This trend is seen in major reserves like **Corbett**, **Bandipur**, **Kanha**, and **Pench**, where **emotional decisions** are replacing **scientific wildlife management**.

The Ethical Dilemma: Compassion vs. Natural Law

While public sentiment often demands saving every tiger, conservationists remind us:

In nature, not every animal survives — and that's essential to ecosystem health.

Feeding and rescuing every weak or injured tiger can:

- Create **artificial population pressures**
- Prevent natural **population turnover**
- Increase **competition and territorial conflicts**
- Lead to **more human-tiger encounters**

What Experts Say: Respect Nature's Wisdom

Leading biologists and ecologists emphasize a return to **core conservation principles**:

- Let wild tigers **hunt, fight, and survive** naturally
- Avoid **turning reserves into zoos**
- Focus on **protecting habitats and prey base**
- Limit human involvement to **critical interventions only**

Extra Insight: India's success in tiger conservation — with over **3,100 tigers as of 2022**, the highest in the world — depends not just on numbers, but on ensuring these apex predators **remain truly wild**.

Conclusion: Preserve, Don't Interfere

Live baiting, though sometimes well-intentioned, risks **undermining the very essence of wildness** that conservation strives to protect. India's majestic tigers deserve more than survival — they deserve the **dignity of the wild**.

GS Paper 3 – Energy and Economy

6 India's Nuclear Power Makeover: Paving the Way for Private and Global Investment

Context: In a game-changing development, the **Indian government is set to introduce two major amendments** to reshape its nuclear energy sector during the upcoming **Monsoon Session of Parliament**. This move signals a strategic shift — allowing **private and foreign players** to finally participate in the country's nuclear power generation.

A New Era for India's Atomic Energy Sector:

India stands at a critical juncture in its **energy transformation journey**. With increasing electricity demand and global climate commitments, the government is looking to **modernize the nuclear sector** — an area long dominated by **state-run entities** such as the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**.

These reforms follow a significant boost from the **United States**, clearing a longstanding barrier to bilateral civil nuclear cooperation and unlocking long-delayed opportunities from the historic **Indo-US nuclear deal**.

Key Legislative Reforms: Unlocking the Sector:

1. Overhaul of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010)

Currently, the **liability for nuclear accidents** lies heavily with equipment vendors — a major deterrent for companies like **Westinghouse, GE-Hitachi, and Framatome**. The proposed amendment will:

- **Cap the vendor's liability** to the original value of the contract.
- Introduce a **defined liability window**, post which vendors are no longer accountable.

This is designed to **de-risk foreign investment** and address long-standing industry concerns around **financial exposure and legal uncertainty**.

2. Amendment to the Atomic Energy Act (1962):

The second key change would:

- Allow **private Indian players** — and potentially **foreign partners** — to **operate nuclear power plants**.
- Enable **public-private partnerships** in atomic energy.
- Allow **minority equity stakes** for foreign firms in upcoming projects.

These steps would invite **greater investment**, **competition**, and **technology innovation**, catalyzing the next wave of growth in India's nuclear power industry.

US Regulatory Green Light: A Turning Point

In **March 2025**, the **US Department of Energy** granted **Holtec International** permission to **transfer Small Modular Reactor (SMR) technology** to Indian partners, including **Tata Consulting Engineers** and **Larsen & Toubro**. This **Part 810 clearance** is significant because:

- It lifts a **long-standing restriction** on US firms participating in India's nuclear development.
- It enables **technology co-production**, empowering India to **localize SMR manufacturing**.

This move aligns US and Indian strategic interests while enabling India to emerge as a **regional nuclear technology hub**.

Geostrategic and Trade Implications:

These reforms are not isolated. They form part of a broader push to deepen **Indo-US strategic and trade ties**, potentially paving the way for:

- A **comprehensive trade pact** with nuclear energy as a key pillar.
- **Expanded clean energy collaboration**, especially in **climate-resilient technologies**.
- Greater **strategic trust**, solidifying India's role as a **critical partner** in the Indo-Pacific.

India could also become a **key export base** for advanced nuclear technologies, particularly **SMRs**, in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Boosting India's Energy Security and Climate Ambitions:

With a target of **net-zero emissions by 2070**, India's energy basket must shift toward **low-carbon baseload solutions**. Nuclear power provides:

- A **stable, carbon-free alternative** to coal.
- The potential for **large-scale energy deployment** with **minimal land and water footprint**.
- A chance to **decarbonize industrial sectors**, including **steel and hydrogen production**.

India currently lags behind in nuclear capacity — contributing less than **2%** of total electricity generation. These reforms could change that narrative.

The Road Ahead: Challenges to Navigate:

While the proposed reforms promise transformation, they face several hurdles:

- **Public safety concerns** and **political resistance**, especially over private participation in sensitive sectors.
- **Legislative delays**, particularly in amending the liability framework.
- Need for **robust safety protocols** and **transparent regulatory oversight** to manage private operations.

Yet, successful implementation could place India among **top-tier nuclear innovators**, leading the charge in **advanced reactor technologies**.

Conclusion: A Strategic Shift With Global Impact

India's decision to **reform its nuclear laws** and embrace **private and foreign participation** marks a **historic policy evolution**. It reflects a forward-looking approach to:

- **Modernize energy infrastructure**
- **Strengthen strategic global alliances**
- **Accelerate clean energy goals**

With **US collaboration**, **industry confidence**, and **parliamentary will**, India is poised to unlock a new era in nuclear energy — not just as a power source, but as a symbol of **technological self-reliance and global leadership**.