

24 to 26 DEC. 2023

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Date: 24 to 26 Dec. 2023

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Important News Articles

GS II

1. Japan passes record military budget, eases postwar ban on export of lethal weapons - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- Japan has announced a **significant policy overhaul, loosening arms export restrictions** to allow the shipment of domestically produced missiles and artillery to select countries, including the United States.

Patriot Missiles to the US

- The new measures permit Japan to send Patriot air defense missiles to the United States
 - It marked a departure from its longstanding policy of not allowing exports of deadly weapons.

Defence Spending Increase

- The Japanese cabinet approved a record increase in defense spending for the next year, exceeding 16 percent in 2024.

Focus on Indo-Pacific Security

- The policy shift aims to **strengthen the Japan-US alliance** and enhance security in the wider Indo-Pacific region amid increasing security risks.

Concerns and Motivations

- Japan's move is prompted by concerns over China's military ambitions**, Russia's actions in Ukraine, and the potential threat to Taiwan.
- North Korea's missile launches and the prospect of nuclear tests** also contribute to Tokyo's decision to boost defense spending.

Break from Post-WWII Principles

- The reinforcement of strike capability represents a departure from Japan's post-World War II principle of limiting the use of force to self-defense.

Export Rule Changes

- Japan can now export completed arms products** to countries where patent holders are based, a departure from previous restrictions allowing only component exports.
- Re-exports** to third countries require **Tokyo's permission**.
 - The developments signify Japan's strategic response to evolving security challenges, **reflecting a departure from its historical defense posture**

Prelims Takeaway

- WWII
- Map based question

2. Cash transfers help Bengal women take financial decisions, says study - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

- A study by Amartya Sen's Pratichi Trust evaluates the impact of **Lakshmir Bhandar, a flagship scheme of the West Bengal government**, focusing on women beneficiaries.

Positive Financial Decision-Making

- Cash incentives from Lakshmir Bhandar have **increased women beneficiaries' ability to make financial decisions**.
- 85.55% of women report** deciding how to spend the money themselves, showcasing a positive impact.

Enhanced Position in the Family

Prelims Takeaway

- Lakshmir Bhandar
- Kanyashree

- **Lakshmir Bhandar has elevated the position of women in their families**, with 61.07% acknowledging an improvement.
- **Social groups generally perceive positive effects**, though the study suggests further exploration, particularly regarding Scheduled Tribes (STs).

Lakshmir Bhandar Overview

- Lakshmir Bhandar provides **financial assistance to women aged 25-60** from economically weaker sections.

Policy Implications and Challenges

- Despite positive impacts, the study emphasizes the **need for awareness about persisting challenges** like child marriage and domestic violence.
- **Child marriage remains a challenge** despite schemes like Lakshmir Bhandar and Kanyashree.

Increasing ST Participation

- The study calls for concerted efforts to enhance **ST participation in the scheme**, citing low enrollment compared to their population.
- **Duare Sarkar outreach programs** are suggested to address spatial isolation in tribal settlements.

Pratichi Trust's Role

- Pratichi Trust, founded by Amartya Sen, has conducted studies on various government programs, including Duare Sarkar and the grievance redressal cell in West Bengal.

3. Tribunals cannot direct govt. to frame policy: SC judgment - The Hindu

Relevance: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

News:

- The Supreme Court recently clarified that **tribunals**, governed by specific legislations, lack the authority to **direct the government to formulate policies**.
- Making policy decisions **falls outside the judiciary's domain**, and tribunals, being **quasi-judicial bodies**, must operate within legislative parameters.

Prelims Takeaway

- Tribunals
- Writ Jurisdiction
- Separation of Powers

Judicial Authority of AFT

- The clarification arose in the context of the **Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT)** directing the government to establish a policy for filling the post of the Judge Advocate General (Air).
- The AFT, despite having the **powers of a civil court**, does not possess the authority of the Supreme Court or High Courts.

Judicial Authority

- The judgement emphasised that even **High Courts**, under Article 226, face limitations in directing policy creation, especially in matters related to **fundamental rights**.
- The creation or sanctioning of schemes or policies related to **defense personnel services or regularization** is deemed the exclusive prerogative of the government.
- The judgement reaffirms the **separation of powers** and the distinct roles of the judiciary and the executive in matters of policy formulation.

4. With no basic facilities, district courts struggling to conduct hybrid hearings - The Hindu

Relevance: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

News:

- Legal proceedings in Delhi's district courts are facing hindrances due to a **shortage of equipment** for hybrid hearings and infrastructure.
- This is leading to judges conducting **hearings on mobile phones**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Public Interest Litigation (PIL)
- Hybrid Hearing System

Background

- A **PIL** was filed in 2021 addressing the need for **appropriate infrastructure** for smooth functioning of hybrid hearings.
- Despite the Delhi High Court issuing guidelines on hybrid hearings, **deficiencies in equipment persist**.

Hybrid Hearing System

- Hybrid hearings allow one party to **join virtually** while the other is **physically present**.
- The High Court directed district courts to **permit any party to appear physically or via videoconferencing**, but the lack of essential equipment remains a challenge.
- The **deficiency includes** microphones, speakers, cameras and video display units, hindering effective communication.
- Some district courts **lack basic amenities** like Wi-Fi, aggravating the situation.

5. India-ASEAN to rejig 15-year trade pact in early 2024 - The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

News:

- **India and the ten-member ASEAN** will begin negotiations in February to "modernise" their decade-and-a-half-old **free trade agreement (FTA)**
- new areas such as labour, environment, SMEs and gender are likely to be kept out, sources have said.

Key Highlights

- **"There will be a complete re-look** at the entire FTA with the broad objective of bringing down the trade deficit for India.
- New elements such as **product specific rules and trade remedies** will be brought in to make the FTA more efficient
- The first round of negotiations for reviewing the FTA, officially known as the **ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA)**
- The negotiations will follow a quarterly schedule to **wrap up the exercise by 2025**.
- India has been **long pressing for a review of the AITGA**, which was signed in August 2009 and implemented in January the following year
 - as the pact resulted in disproportionate benefits for ASEAN.
- **Sectors that need propping up** include chemicals and alloys, plastics and rubber, minerals, leather, textiles, gems and jewellery, per an industry analysis.
- **India will also need to make some concessions for the ASEAN** as the review will have to benefit both but the objective of bringing balance has to be central

Revamping AITGA

- Modernising the AITGA will include incorporating **changes in the Rules of Origin (ROO)**
 - It can work in favour of India by increasing market access for some items
 - blocking possible re-routing of goods by China through the ASEAN countries
- ROO are the criteria to **determine the origin of a product** and establish if it qualifies for duty cuts under an FTA.
- **"PSRs will be introduced in the ROO chapter** which can help India have relaxed rules for certain items to increase exports.
- **A chapter on trade remedies** will seek to provide a safety net for domestic industry against unfair trading practices or unforeseen surges in imports of goods

Prelims Takeaway

- ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA)

6. Govt. targets documents' saturation in PVTG villages in one week - The Hindu

Relevance: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

News:

Prelims Takeaway

- Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)
- Jan Dhan account

- The Union government has set a target of one week to **achieve Aadhaar, caste certificate, and Jan Dhan account saturation** across 15,000 PVTG habitations in 100 districts.

Key Highlights

- The package brings together 11 key interventions already being **implemented by nine Ministries**
- It was pointed out that **several PVTG families in these areas do not have any basic form of documentation.**
- The campaign also intends to produce **awareness material like pamphlets, videos, wall paintings, jingles.**
- These efforts will be **supervised by district-level officers**, who have been assigned one district each.
- **The State-level officers will coordinate** with the respective line departments of their State governments to ensure the project's implementation.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

- In India, **tribal population makes up for 8.6%** of the total population.
- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
- Due to this factor, **more developed and assertive tribal groups** take a major chunk of the tribal development funds
 - because PVTGs need more funds directed for their development.
- In 1973, the **Dhebar Commission** created **Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) as a separate category**, which are less developed among the tribal groups.
- In 2006, the Government of India renamed the PTGs as PVTGs.
- In this context, in 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a separate category called PVTGs
- In 1993 a total of **75 PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes** were identified.
- PVTGs have some basic characteristics
 - They are mostly homogenous, with a small population]
 - Relatively physically isolated
 - Absence of written language
 - Relatively simple technology and a slower rate of change etc.
 - Among the **75 listed PVTG's the highest number** are found in Odisha.

7. UNHCR thanks India for taking care 142 Rohingyas intercepted in Andaman - The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

News:

- The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** expressed gratitude to Indian authorities at Andaman and Nicobar Islands for taking care of 142 Rohingya refugees

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

- **UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency**, is an international organisation working to save lives, safeguard the rights and provide a better future for refugees
- **The organisation's target audience** includes refugees, people who are forcibly displaced from their homes, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless people.
- **The UNHCR was established in 1950** in the wake of the mass displacements caused due to the Second World War in Europe.
- Since then, **it has provided relief to thousands of refugees** and displaced persons in many parts of the world.
- The UNHCR has also won the **Nobel Prize for Peace twice** (1954 and 1981).
- The chief legal document that governs the work of the UNHCR is the **1951 Refugee Convention.**
- The organisation works in 135 countries and in India, **has offices in New Delhi and Chennai.**
- It first established **its presence in India in 1981.**

Prelims Takeaway

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

- The UNHCR is headed by the **High Commissioner for Refugees**.
- Its parent organisation is the **United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**.

8. Women participation in NREGS continues to rise, 59% this fiscal - Indian Express

Relevance: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

News:

- **Women participation** in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (**MGNREGS**) was the **highest in 10 financial years**
- the **proportion of women person-days in the total touching 59.25%** till December 24 during the current financial year 2023-24

Prelims Takeaway

- Periodic Labour Force Survey
- Labour Force Participation Rate

Key Highlights

- The rates of participation of women in the MGNREGS, **defined as women person-days out of the total in percentage**, stood at 57.47% in 2022-23 and 54.82% in 2021-22.
- The lowest percentage of women participation in the NREGS over the **last 10 financial years was recorded in 2020-21 at 53.19%**.
- The broad trends indicate a steady rise in the women participation in the **rural job guarantee scheme**.
- the southern states like Kerala (89%), Tamil Nadu (86%), Puducherry (87.16%) and Goa (72%) **have recorded women participation rate of over 70%**
- **it has been hovering around 40% or below in northern states** like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh over the years.
- In 2023-24, 5 states/UTs with the lowest women participation rate under NREGS are: **UTs of Jammu and Kashmir (30.47%)**
- An uptick has been reported in 3 of them during the current financial year: **Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Lakshadweep**.

Periodic Labour Force Survey

- As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey (**PLFS**), published by **the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**, the female Labour Force Participation Rate has increased in the country in recent years.
- The rise was sharp in rural areas.
- In rural areas, the female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR), defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force among the persons in the population, increased to 30.5% in 2022-23 (July-June) from 18.2% in 2017-18.
- The **female unemployment rate has declined to 1.8% in 2022-23** from 3.8% in 2017-18.

GS III

9. Two drone-dropped packets with arms, cash seized near LoC in Jammu- The Hindu

Relevance: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

News:

- **Two drone-dropped packets** containing arms and cash were seized in a joint operation by the Army and the police from a village **near the Line of Control in Akhnoor sector in Jammu**

Drones as an Emerging Threat

- The **potential use of drones in a terrorist incident** or attack against a critical infrastructure and soft targets is a growing concern for law enforcement agencies worldwide

Prelims Takeaway

- Rustom-II
- Indigenous MALE UAV development program

- **The attack was meticulously planned**, and a drone was used to drop bullets and an improvised explosive device (IED) for the attack

Indigenous drone development

- **Nishant was one of the DRDO's first tactical UAV projects**, later upgraded to a wheeled version, Panchi.
- The **indigenous MALE UAV development program** of the DRDO reached a milestone in March 2022
- **the Rustom-II crossing at an altitude of 27,500 ft** with 18 hours of endurance

10. At least 85% of power from VGF-funded Battery Energy Storage Systems projects to be first offered to Discoms before making it available for others: Union Power and New & Renewable Energy Minister - PIB

Relevance: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization, of resources, growth, development and employment.

News:

- The Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy, has announced the **approval of a scheme for Viability Gap Funding (VGF)**

Objective:

- to facilitate the development of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) with a capacity of 4,000 megawatt-hours (MWh).

VGF Provision

- The **Central Government will provide VGF up to 40%** of the capital cost for BESS.
- Selection of public and private sector entities through a bidding process conducted by Implementing Agency(ies) following Scheme and Bidding Guidelines.

Project Approval Timeline

- Projects under the scheme will be approved over a **three-year period (2023-24 to 2025-26)**.

Power Distribution

- At least 85% of power from **VGF-funded BESS projects will be offered to Distribution Companies** (Discoms) before making it available to others.
- The scheme aims to **benefit consumers** through efficient power distribution.
- The Cabinet has previously approved the **Viability Gap Funding Scheme for BESS development**.
- The cost of energy storage discovered in bids is **10.18 rupees per kilowatt-hour**.
- **VGF and Production Linked Incentive (PLI)** for battery energy storage are expected to reduce the overall cost of storage.

Prelims Takeaway

- VGF
- Production Linked Incentive

11. 'India's Russian crude imports averted havoc in global oil market' - Indian Express

Relevance: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

News:

- In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, **India significantly increased its imports of Russian crude oil**
- **The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas** emphasised the crucial role played by Indian refiners in absorbing 1.95 million barrels per day of Russian oil.

Key Points

- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas highlighted the **significance of India's role in stabilising** the crude oil market amidst geopolitical tensions.
- The ministry representative warned that if **India had not absorbed Russian oil**, the deficiency in the market could have led to a significant increase in crude oil prices, possibly by \$30-40 per barrel.
- **India, as the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil**, relies on imports for over 85% of its requirements.

Prelims Takeaway

- crude oil
- Russia

- **The country's refining capacity exceeds 250 million tonnes** per annum, highlighting its substantial role in the global energy landscape.
- **Russia**, initially a marginal player in India's oil imports, became **the top supplier as Western nations boycotted Russian oil** post the Ukraine invasion.

Impact of western sanction on India

- **Indian refiners took advantage** of deep discounts offered by Russia, leading to a shift in supplier dynamics.
- India asserted its sovereignty, stating that it pursued oil imports based on what was **economically beneficial for the country and the world**.
- The move to buy discounted Russian crude irked Western nations **aiming to isolate Russia economically**.
- **Western sanctions on Russia** posed challenges for Indian refiners in terms of payments, logistical arrangements, and insurance for oil shipments.
- The ministry highlighted difficulties faced by Indian banks in processing payments for Russian oil purchases in dollars.
- **Indian refiners faced challenges** with banks seeking proof that the oil price, excluding delivery-related costs, adhered to the imposed price cap.

12. Railway officers to be trained in disaster management; academy, institute to give training - The Hindu

Relevance: Disaster Management

News:

- Following the **Odisha train tragedy**, the Ministry of Railways has introduced **mandatory disaster management training** for railway officers.
- **Objective:** To enhance disaster response and address shortcomings identified in the investigation of the Odisha incident.

Training Incorporation

- **Disaster management** is now an **integral part of the training module** for railway officers at the induction/foundation course level.
- It is also included in refresher or mid-career training programs for continuous skill development.
- Following organisations will **collaborate** to impart the comprehensive training program.
 - The National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR) in Vadodara
 - The Indian Railway Institute of Disaster Management (IRIDM) in Bengaluru

Enhanced Emphasis on Disaster Management

- The decision follows recommendations from the **Commissioner of Railway Safety**, who investigated the Odisha train accident.
- He emphasized the need for **faster initial responses to disasters**.
- He also called for a **review of the railway's coordination** with disaster management agencies.

The Concerns

- The Railway Board has instructed NAIR to **transfer all its assets**, including buildings and infrastructure, to the **Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV)**.
- It has led to **confusion** among training institutes' Directors-General/ Directors.
- It also raises **questions about the approval process** for training programs and the role of the Vice-Chancellor of GSV.

Current Railway Response Focus

- The railways have **Accident Relief Trains** stationed at major junctions across the network.
- They are equipped with **manpower** and **resources** to reach accident sites promptly.
- However, the primary focus has traditionally been on **restoring rail traffic**, with reliance on state and central agencies for **relief and rescue operations**.

Prelims Takeaway

- Gati Shakti Vishwavidyalaya (GSV)
- Disaster Management Training

13. Risk of stagflation receding: RBI officials - The Hindu

Relevance: Economy

News:

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials believe that the **risk of stagflation** in India has **decreased** from 3% in August to 1% based on available data, using two approaches.

Prelims Takeaway

- Stagflation
- Inflation

Stagflation

- A situation characterized by simultaneous **increase in prices** and **stagnation of economic growth**.
- It is described as a **situation in the economy** where
 - the growth rate slows down
 - the level of unemployment remains steadily high
 - the inflation or price level remains high at the same time.
- It is **dangerous** for the economy.
 - In a usually low growth situation, central banks and governments try to stimulate the economy, but they tend to elevate prices and cause inflation.
 - So, it cannot be adopted when inflation is already running high, which makes it difficult to break out of the low growth-high inflation trap.

The Approaches

- First Approach:** Stagflation risk was assessed based on phases of **lower economic growth** coinciding with **high inflation**.
- Second Approach:** Used the '**at-risk**' frameworks i.e. "Inflation at Risk" (IaR) and "Growth at Risk" (GaR) by employing **quantile regression** to assess the likelihood of stagflation.

Historical Context

- Major determinants of stagflation risk in India:** Supply-side shocks coupled with tighter financial conditions and relatively higher depreciation of the domestic currency.
 - This is based on data from Q1:1996-97 to Q2:2023-24
- Stagflation risks were **higher during specific episodes** like the Asian Crisis, Global Financial Crisis, taper tantrum and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Tight domestic monetary policies** and **sluggish global growth** led to economic slowdowns in certain periods.
- Stagflation risks post-COVID-19 have subsided due to **eased financial conditions, contained currency depreciation, and stable domestic fuel prices**.
- Latest estimates, assign a **very low probability** of only 1% to the risk of stagflation

Global Context

- Globally, **higher commodity prices** and the **US dollar's appreciation** post-pandemic raised concerns of stagflation.
- Delays in monetary normalization** post-pandemic also raised worries about potential costly stagflation.

Factors Contributing to Lower Stagflation Risk in India

- Commodity Prices:** Recent commodity price shocks are not as severe and persistent as in historical episodes.
- Central Bank Focus:** Global central banks' focus on maintaining price stability and healthier financial positions of institutions contribute to well-anchored long-term inflation expectations.
- Macroeconomic Conditions:** Favourable macroeconomic conditions, including eased financial conditions, moderate currency depreciation, and stable crude oil prices, have helped reduce the risk of stagflation.

14. First rupee payment for oil to UAE: India looks for more deals, no targets, say officials - Indian Express

Relevance: Economy

News:

- India's recent **payment in rupees for crude oil** purchased from the UAE marks a significant step in India's efforts to **make rupee a global player**.

•

- India is exploring similar deals with other suppliers, aiming to **cut transaction costs** by settling trades in rupees.

The Background

- With over **85% dependence on oil imports**, India pursues a **three pronged strategy** of
 - sourcing from the cheapest available suppliers
 - diversifying the sources
 - not breaching any international obligation
- India has already signed a **rupee settlement agreement with the UAE** and made payments to the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) in Indian rupees.

Rupee's Role and Encouraging Oil Exporters

- The **US dollar** has been the **default currency** for crude oil imports for decades, offering liquidity and lower hedging costs.
- However, to **boost the rupee's role in cross-border payments**, RBI allowed banks to settle trades in rupees with 18 countries.
- India is encouraging major oil exporters like the UAE and Saudi Arabia to accept the Indian currency for trade settlements.
- India aims to **reduce dollar demand** and make its economy **less vulnerable to global currency shocks**.

Challenges and Caution

- The **internationalization of the rupee** is a gradual process and should not lead to **increased costs** or be **detrimental to trade**.
- While smaller trades in rupees pose fewer challenges, larger transactions require careful consideration.

Parliamentary Committee Report

- It noted that there were **not many takers** for the Indian rupee in the preferred currency.
 - During FY 2022-23, no crude oil imports by oil PSUs were settled in Indian rupee.
- Crude oil suppliers expressed concerns about **fund repatriation**.
- They also highlighted **high transactional costs** associated with currency conversion and exchange fluctuation risks.

Prelims Takeaway

- Internationalisation of Rupee

Editorials, Gists and Explainers

1. India's jobs crisis, the macroeconomic reasons - The Hindu

Relevance: Economy

Context:

- India faces a **persistent jobs crisis**, pointed by the official data and on-the-ground reports.

Wage employment vs Self-employment

- The **distinction** between wage employment and self-employment that prevail in India is **crucial**.
- The first is **wage employment** which is a result of **labour demanded by employers** in their pursuit of profits.
- The second is **self-employment** where labour supply and labour demand are **identical**, i.e. the worker employs herself.
- The crisis primarily pertains to **inadequate labour demand** particularly for regular **wage work**.

Symptoms of Low Labour Demand

- The Indian economy is historically marked by **open unemployment** and high levels of **informal employment**.
- The **employment growth rate of salaried workers** in the non-agricultural sector over four decades is **stagnant**.
- Lack of opportunities** reflected in disguised unemployment, indicate a **deficit** in formal sector employment.

Determinants of Labour Demand in Formal Sector

- Labour demand is influenced by two factors viz. **output growth** and **labour productivity growth**.
- In India, the **employment growth rate** of the formal and non-agricultural sector remained **unresponsive** despite rising GDP growth rate.
- The lack of responsiveness of employment growth rate to changes in output growth rate reflects a phenomenon of **jobless growth**.
- It indicates a **strong connection** between labour productivity growth rate and output growth rate.

Jobless Growth with Indian Characteristics

- Economies generally become **more productive** as they grow due to **economies of scale**.
- Economies experiencing jobless growth are **classified** based on the tightness of the connection between **output growth** and **labour productivity growth**.
- In India, the **responsiveness** of labour productivity growth rate to output growth rate is **high**.
- The extent to which labour productivity growth rate responds to output growth rate is reflected by what is termed as the **Kaldor-Verdoorn coefficient**.
- India's non-agricultural sector is characterised by a **higher than average Kaldor-Verdoorn coefficient**, as compared to other developing countries.

Macroeconomic Policy Framework

- Traditional macroeconomic policy focused on **increasing output growth rate** as a means to boost employment growth.
- Current evidence suggests the need for a **separate policy focus on employment**, distinct from GDP growth.
- Employment policies should encompass **both demand and supply side components**, addressing skill gaps and ensuring demand-side measures like public job creation.

Way Forward

- Financing employment policies requires **reorienting the macroeconomic framework**.
- Suggestions include** increasing direct tax to GDP ratio, reducing exemptions, improving compliance and using macro-policy for a constructive employment agenda.

2. The evolving role of the Colombo Security Conclave - The Hindu

Relevance: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Context:

- Recently, India's National Security Advisor (NSA), participated in the sixth NSA meeting of the **Colombo Security Conclave (CSC)**.

Evolution of CSC

- Established in **2011** with **India, Maldives** and **Sri Lanka** for trilateral maritime security.
- It welcomed **Mauritius** as a fourth member at the fifth meeting of national security advisers.
- The CSC aims to **promote a safe, secure, and stable Indian Ocean**.
- Stalled after 2014** due to tensions between India and the Maldives.
- Revived in 2020, **India proposed its expansion** to Mauritius, Seychelles and Bangladesh.
- Reflects India's **evolving strategic vision for the Indian Ocean** amid changing dynamics.

India's Strategic Vision

- The **Indian Ocean** is at the **heart of an evolving multipolar world** today, with extra-regional powers competing for influence.
- CSC offers India an opportunity to **strengthen leadership, security architecture** and **address emerging threats**.
- Since its independence, India has played an increasing role in **promoting security in the Indian Ocean**.

China's Influence

- China's Belt and Road Initiative (**BRI**) **investments** in the Indian Ocean raise **security concerns**.
- China aims to **control sea lines of communication** and **limit India's influence**.
- China is strengthening its **naval capabilities**, maintaining **strong defence relationships** with states in the IOR and also conducting **regular maritime exercises**.
- It continues to use **scientific ships** to map the Indian Ocean bed.
- India's **strategic accommodation and flexibility** is contributing to the security of the Indian Ocean.

CSC's Pillars of Cooperation

- Five Pillars:** maritime security, countering terrorism, trafficking and transnational crime, cyber-security and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- Since 2021, the **CSC has investigated** terrorism and terror financing, narcotics trafficking, cybercrime and security, marine pollution, maritime law, and coastal security.
- In 2022, for the first time, the organisation held a **conference of oceanographers and hydrographers** and another **conference on coastal security**.

Progress and Vulnerability

- The CSC, as a young institution, remains **vulnerable to domestic political changes** in its member-states.
- The **Maldives's absence** from the recent meeting is an **example** of this vulnerability.
- The **use of nationalist and pro-China sentiments** in member-states can impact regional collaboration.

Conclusion

- Despite challenges, the CSC will remain **crucial for India** to help it **consolidate its regional leadership**

3. Unpacking the first ever COP 'Health Day' - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context:

- The recently concluded COP28 reinforced the **urgency to address the climate crisis**.

Climate Crisis as a Public Health Crisis

- Severe temperatures, floods, and vector-borne diseases highlight the **threat to health security**.
- Therefore, the WHO declared **climate change** the **greatest threat to global health** in the 21st century.
- Marginalized communities face the worst impacts**, and climate change could push over **100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030**.
 - Much of this reversal would be due to the "negative impacts on health".

Health Day at COP28

- The inaugural Health Day at COP28 emphasized the link between climate and health, asserting that **combating climate change is vital for global health**.
- Over 46 million health professionals urged an **accelerated, just, and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels** as the decisive path to health for all.

Key Events and Declarations

- COP28 UAE Declaration on Climate and Health signifies global commitment to **address climate-related health impacts**, supported by 143 countries.
- The **first-ever climate-health ministerial** brought together ministers to address the growing burden of climate change on healthcare systems.
 - It was hosted by the COP28 Presidency, WHO, the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention and a group of champion countries.

India's Position

- India was **not represented** on Health Day at COP28.
- Over the last two decades, India has witnessed a **significant rise** in extreme temperatures, heat stress events, cyclones, floods, droughts, and malnutrition.
- India **witnesses disasters almost daily**, causing loss of lives, affecting crop areas, and damaging infrastructure.
- In 2019 it ranked **seventh** globally for the severe impact of climate change, as in the **Global Climate Risk Index**.
- The Reserve Bank of India warns of a potential **4.5% GDP loss by 2030** due to extreme heat's impact on labour hours.
- Air pollution in India led to 1.6 million premature deaths in 2019.

Public Health Challenges

- Malaria, malnutrition, and diarrhoea, coupled with weather-related disasters, **strain India's public health infrastructure**.
- Climate change poses a significant threat to the **vulnerable population**, relying on climate-sensitive sectors for livelihoods.

Need for Health-Centric Climate Planning

- Over 700 million individuals in India depend on **climate-sensitive sectors for livelihoods**, necessitating plans addressing their health needs.
- Prioritising health in climate planning safeguards both **immediate and long-term well-being** in the face of climate change impacts.
- **Integrating health into climate planning** is economically prudent, reduces healthcare costs, and enhances overall effectiveness and sustainability of climate actions in India.

4. How an AI tool can make weather forecasts more accurate and help tackle climate change - Indian Express

Relevance: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Context:

- At the COP28, NASA and IBM introduced an AI tool called **watsonx.ai** on the open-source AI platform **Hugging Space**.
- The tool helps users **monitor Earth from space**, while also **estimating past and future environmental changes**.

AI in Weather Forecasting

- A key factor in understanding and combating climate change rests in our **ability to predict weather patterns**.
- Weather models today base their predictions on **massive computing simulations** that run on interpreted data.
- However, **access to that data** is hard to come by and **analysing the data** is an ever-harder task.
- AI, specifically deep-learning models, helps **interpret massive climate data sets**, making predictions more **accurate** and **faster**.

watsonx.ai Functionality

- The tool utilizes **NASA's data** and **IBM's AI technology** to understand and estimate environmental changes.
- Beta tests showed a **15% improvement** in mapping flood and burn scars over the continental United States with half the labelled data.
- Designed to be **user-friendly**, it requires users to **select a location and date**.
- And the model will **highlight changes** in floodwater, reforestation efforts and other relevant factors.

watsonx.ai Potential

- Potential to minimise **data cleaning** and labelling for **deep-learning models**, speeding up **geographical analysis** by three to four times.
- May enhance weather **forecasting accuracy**, aiding in **anticipating** hurricanes, droughts, and **catastrophic weather occurrences**.
- **Applications include** disaster response, infrastructure development, and environmental safeguarding.
- **Applicability extends** to businesses, helping disaster response teams and supply chain logistics companies.

AI's Role in Climate Change Strategies

- **BCG AI Survey Report:** 87% of private and public sector CEOs believe that AI is an essential tool in the fight against climate change
- In **transportation**, AI-enabled vehicles can **minimise energy use** through efficient route mapping.
- In **agriculture**, AI optimises crop irrigation, reducing water wastage and increasing productivity.
- AI may also be used to
 - assess emissions at the macro and micro levels
 - cut emissions and the impacts of greenhouse gases
 - remove already-existing emissions from the environment
- According to BCG's experience, AI may be utilised to help **cut greenhouse gas emissions by five to 10%** of an organisation's carbon footprint.

Conclusion

- AI, exemplified by tools like **watsonx.ai**, emerges as a **valuable ally in addressing climate change**.
- This offers **faster and more accurate insights** into environmental changes and **supports a range of applications** from disaster response to sustainable agriculture.

5. A dive into sanitation solutions: processing, managing and treating used water - The Hindu

Relevance: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Context:

- The significance of **proper sanitation systems** goes beyond the basic understanding of water usage.
- It underscores the requirement for systems that can contain, convey, treat, and either dispose of or reuse used waste.
- This is essential not only for **safeguarding public health** but also for **mitigating environmental pollution**.

Types of Sanitation Systems

- The type of sanitation system **depends on the location**.

1. Rural Areas

- In rural areas, **twin pits or septic tanks are common**, serving as **on-site sanitation systems**.
- **Other on-site systems include** bio-digester toilets, bio-tanks, and urine diversion dry toilets.
- These systems collect and store used water, treating it passively, with the residue known as faecal sludge.
- **Twin Pits**
 - Twin pits (separated by at least one metre), used alternatively, have porous walls.
 - Liquid waste soaks into the ground, while solids collect and degrade at the pit's bottom.
 - After reaching capacity, one pit is left unused for two years, ensuring safe reuse.

- **Septic Tanks**

- In areas with less suitable soil, septic tanks are used.
- These watertight tanks separate solids from liquid waste, and the cleared liquid is disposed of in the surrounding soil.
- Regular removal of accumulated faecal sludge and scum is necessary.

- 2. **Urban Areas**

- Densely populated urban areas often use an **underground network of pipes** (sewers) to transport used water to treatment facilities.
- Sewage is conveyed to **sewage treatment plants (STPs)** through interconnected pipes, where pollutants and contaminants are removed.

Treatment Facilities

- 1. **Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs)**

- It uses **mechanical or gravity-based systems** to treat solids and liquids separately.
- **Treated solids** can be reused in **agriculture**, and **treated water** may be reused in **landscaping**.
- This process of containing, conveying and treating faecal sludge is also called **faecal sludge management (FSM)**.
- In many small and medium towns or villages, **OSS-FSM** is the **predominant form** of the sanitation system.

- 2. **Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs)**

- STPs use a **series of physical, biological, and chemical processes** to remove pollutants and contaminants from used water.
- To facilitate the reuse of used water, advanced systems use additional treatment such as **membrane filtration**.
- STP technology can be of several types, either **mechanised** and **non-mechanised**.
- It is often chosen based on **techno-managerial** and the **financial capacities** of a city's government.

FSTPs vs STPs

- FSTPs are **generally smaller** than STPs and can be **colocated** with municipal solid waste management sites.
- They can also be **decentralised** and located closer to the sources of faecal sludge.
- In contrast, STPs are much **larger, centralised installations** designed to serve entire communities or large urban areas.
- They require **substantial infrastructure** and are typically **located near water bodies** so they can discharge treated water.

Complexity Sanitation Systems

- The complexity of sanitation systems is necessary to **remove impurities accumulated** during water usage, including organic matter, pathogens, and pollutants.
- These systems aim to **prevent pollution** and **safeguard public and environmental health**.
- **Universal access to well-managed sanitation services** is identified as a challenge, requiring **improvements** in system design, construction, and maintenance practices.

6. Safety and cybersecurity - Indian Express

Relevance: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context:

- In October, a US company, Resecurity, revealed the availability of **Indians' personal data on the dark web**.
- The data set included **sensitive information** of approximately **815 million citizens** (55% of the population).
- It highlights the **persistent problem of data breaches** in India and points out the deficiencies in the government's handling of the situation.

The Issues

- **Magnitude of Data Breach**

- The breach exposed **personally identifiable information**, making individuals susceptible to various types of fraud.
- The information includes names, phone numbers, Aadhaar numbers, passport details and addresses.
- **Government Response to Data Breach**
 - It is characterized by denials, semantic evasions, and a lack of clear communication to citizens.
 - There is an absence of a **comprehensive and efficient cybersecurity strategy** by the Indian government.
 - It **contrasts this with other countries, like the US**, where incident response teams promptly address breaches, inform affected users, and implement short-term and long-term plans.
- **Aadhaar Registration Concerns**
 - The **mandatory nature of Aadhaar registration** despite a Supreme Court prohibition has been **criticised**.
 - The linkage of Aadhaar to various services creates unmanaged risks.
 - The government's ability to ensure **foolproof security** has also been questioned.
- **Normalization of Data Breaches**
 - The continuous news about data breaches is **normalizing massive losses of personal data**.
 - Despite claims of Aadhaar's success, there's a lack of information on how the government is managing the harms resulting from breaches.
- **Data Protection Act Critique**
 - The recently introduced **Data Protection Act** in India is criticized for not addressing **sensitive health information** adequately.
 - The government is **exempt** from data retention and erasure provisions.
 - The act also **lacks provisions** for correction, completion, and updation.

Recommendations

- **Priority on Cyber Incident Management:** The government is urged to prioritize the prevention, detection, assessment and remediation of cyber incidents.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Transparency and accountability in the state's digital infrastructure should be increased.
- **Establish Cybersecurity Board:** Form a cybersecurity board with government and private sector participants to analyze and recommend improvements post-cyber incidents.
- **Adopt Zero-Trust Architecture:** Implement a zero-trust architecture and mandate standardized playbooks for responding to cybersecurity vulnerabilities and incidents.
- **Defend and Modernise State Networks:** Execute a plan for defending and modernizing state networks and update incident response policies urgently.
- **People-Centric Approach:** Put people at the centre of policies, ensuring immediate and transparent communication, assistance and remediation in the event of cyber incidents.

Conclusion

- There is a need for a **robust cybersecurity strategy** in India, particularly in safeguarding sensitive data like Aadhaar.
- A **proactive** and **people-centric approach** is crucial to address the challenges posed by cybersecurity threats and breaches.

Quick Look

1. Pantoea Tagorei

- Recently, a team of researchers identified a new species of bacteria which has been named Pantoea Tagorei in homage to Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore.
- Pantoea Tagorei was discovered from soil samples collected in the Jharia coal mines.
- It has unique properties beneficial for plant growth.
- It not only solubilizes potassium but also replenishes nitrogen.
- This bacteria marks a significant stride toward fostering environmentally friendly agricultural methods.

2. Project PRAYAS

- Recently, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launched Project PRAYAS.
- Promoting Regular Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals (PRAYAS) was launched in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- Objective: To help Indian workers and students migrate in a secure, orderly, and regular manner.
- It is one of the first attempts to consolidate all the state-level initiatives for safe, orderly, and well-managed international migration.
- It aims to undertake a study, capturing the key migration trends, the needs and aspirations of migrants, and the major international migration and mobility initiatives taken by the union, as well as the state governments sharing the analysis with the ministry.

3. Pappathi Chola

- Known for its high butterfly population, it derived its name from the Tamil word Pappathi meaning butterflies and Chola means shola land.
- It is also regarded as a hub of balsams (*Impatiens balsamina*) and rare varieties of orchids.
- It is located right in the middle of the Chathurangappara hills and Mathikettan shola.
- This area is covered with eucalyptus trees.
- Many butterflies reach the area during their migratory course from the rain shadow forests of Tamil Nadu back to the higher elevations of Munnar.

4. BRAHMA (Braided River Aid: Hydro-Morphological Analyzer) - 2D

- Recently, the researchers at the IIT Guwahati developed an indigenous river model, BRAHMA-2D.
- It was developed in collaboration with the Brahmaputra Board under the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- BRAHMA-2D is a mathematical model to gauge the flow of large braided rivers like the Brahmaputra.
- It is a quasi-3D river flow model which helps to understand how fast the water moves at different depths inside a river and its circulation around a structure like a spur.
- It can help engineers in the design of sustainable hydraulic structures and other river bank protection measures in order to check river bank erosion.
- It was successfully validated on the Brahmaputra River near Majuli Island, in Assam, which is prone to river bank erosion.
- It integrates a two-dimensional model of water movement with a theory about entropy, a measure of disorder or randomness.
- Specifically, it observes a dip phenomenon near spurs where the flow of water underneath increases, a phenomenon absent at points away from these structures.
- It has also been applied to understand the habitat suitability of aquatic species, especially endangered species, based on the availability of the required depth and flow velocity

5. Bad Cholesterol

- A novel vaccine aimed at reducing "bad" cholesterol has been created.
- Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance that's found in all the cells in the human body.
- Human liver makes cholesterol, and it is also in some foods, such as meat and dairy products.
- Human body needs some cholesterol to work properly.
- Two types of lipoproteins carry cholesterol throughout the body viz. LDL (low-density lipoprotein) and HDL (high-density lipoprotein).
 - LDL cholesterol, sometimes called "bad" cholesterol, makes up most of the body's cholesterol.
 - A high LDL level leads to a buildup of cholesterol in arteries.
 - HDL cholesterol is sometimes called "good" cholesterol, because it carries cholesterol from other parts of the body back to the liver, which then removes the cholesterol from the body.

6. Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)

- It consists of securities and other financial assets passively held by foreign investors.
- It does not provide the investor with direct ownership of financial assets and is relatively liquid depending on the volatility of the market.
- FPI is more liquid, volatile and therefore riskier than FDI.
- FPI is often referred to as "hot money" because of its tendency to flee at the first signs of trouble in an economy.
- It is part of a country's capital account and is shown on its Balance of Payments (BOP).
- Examples: Stocks, bonds, mutual funds, exchange traded funds, American Depository Receipts (ADRs) and Global Depository Receipts (GDRs).

7. Disinvestment

- It involves the sale of government stake in public sector enterprises to strategic or financial buyers.
- This can be done either through the sale of shares on stock exchanges or through the sale of shares directly to buyers.
- Purpose
 - To finance various social and infrastructure projects
 - To reduce the government's fiscal deficit.
- In India, the disinvestment process is conducted by the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) under the Ministry of Finance.
- The National Investment Fund (NIF) was constituted in 2005 into which the proceeds from disinvestment of Central Public Sector Enterprises were to be channelized.

8. Leprosy

- Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by a type of bacteria, Mycobacterium leprae.
- The disease predominantly affects the skin and peripheral nerves.
- Left untreated, the disease may cause progressive and permanent disabilities.
- It is more common in tropical and subtropical areas.
- It is a neglected tropical disease (NTD) which still occurs in more than 120 countries.
- It is known to occur at all ages ranging from early childhood to old age.
- It is transmitted via droplets, from the nose and mouth, during close and frequent contact with untreated cases.
- The main symptom of leprosy is disfiguring skin sores, lumps, or bumps that don't go away after several weeks or months.
- It is curable with multidrug therapy (MDT) and treatment during early stages can prevent disability.

9. Indian Ocean Naval Symposium

- Recently, the 8th edition of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs (CoC) was conducted.
- The 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) is a voluntary initiative.
- Objective: To increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues.
- It was conceived by the Indian Navy in 2008 as a forum which seeks to enhance maritime cooperation among Navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.

10. Strait of Gibraltar

- Iran has recently threatened to close the Strait of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean Sea unless Israel stops bombing Gaza.
- The Strait of Gibraltar is a narrow waterway separating Europe from Africa and connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.
- Until the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Strait of Gibraltar served as the only access point to the Mediterranean Sea.
- It is bordered by Spain and the British Overseas Territory of Gibraltar in the north, and by the African country of Morocco and the Spanish exclave of Ceuta in the south.
- It forms a significant gap between the high plateau of Spain and the Atlas Mountains of Northern Africa.
- Geological studies have revealed that the strait was formed due to the northward movement of the African Plate towards the European Plate.
- It is one of the busiest waterways in the world.
- An important port located on the strait is the Moroccan port of Tanger-Med, near Tangier.



Mentorship
India

Prelims Track Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Japan

1. Japan recently approved a record increase in defence spending of over 16 percent for the year 2024, aiming to accelerate the deployment of long-range cruise missiles.
2. The Japanese government's goal is to double defence spending to the NATO standard of 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027.
3. Japan's decision to ease arms export restrictions includes plans to export 155mm artillery shells manufactured under a licence from BAE Systems to the United Kingdom.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding "Kanyashree," a program often mentioned in the news:

1. Kanyashree is a social welfare scheme initiated by the Indian government to provide financial assistance to pregnant women.
2. The primary objective of Kanyashree is to promote education among girls and prevent child marriage.
3. The Kanyashree scheme is implemented in the state of West Bengal.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q3. With reference to Tribunals in India, consider the following statements

1. Tribunals in India are composed only of judicial members appointed by the central government.
2. They are bound by the strict rules of procedure and evidence set out in the CPC.
3. The decisions of tribunals can be appealed to a higher court.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

1. PIL allows any individual or organization to file a lawsuit on behalf of the public interest, even if they are not directly affected by the issue.
2. PIL is a legal mechanism primarily found in common law countries, with its origin in England.
3. PIL cases are typically initiated by the government to address issues of public concern.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding "Nishant," a program often mentioned in the news

1. Nishant is an indigenous unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) developed by India.
2. It is primarily designed for high-altitude, long-endurance surveillance missions.
3. Nishant is a satellite launched by ISRO to study Earth's atmosphere.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q6. Consider the following statements regarding Viability Gap Funding (VGF)

1. VGF is a financial tool used by the government to support infrastructure projects that are economically viable but may not be financially attractive to private investors.
2. Under the VGF scheme, the government provides funding to cover up to 50% of the total project cost.

3. Viability Gap Funding is primarily applicable to social welfare schemes and does not extend to commercial projects.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q7. What is a Kaldor-Verdoorn coefficient seen in the news recently?

- A. An economic theory that inflation and unemployment have a stable and inverse relationship.
- B. A graphical representation of income or wealth circulating in the economy.
- C. A coefficient indicating the relationship between output growth and labour productivity growth.
- D. A coefficient to measure the distribution of income across a population.

Q8. Consider the following countries

- 1. India
- 2. Myanmar
- 3. Mauritius
- 4. Sri Lanka

How many of the countries mentioned above are members of the Colombo Security Conclave?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

Q9. With reference to COP 28, consider the following statements

- 1. Countries agreed to operationalize the Loss and Damage (L&D) fund.
- 2. A Declaration to triple global nuclear energy capacity by 2050 was adopted.
- 3. India joined the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q10. Consider the following statements with reference to watsonx.ai, seen in the news recently

- 1. It is an Artificial Intelligence tool built by ISRO in collaboration with NASA
- 2. It helps in monitoring the Earth from space and measuring environmental changes.
- 3. It can only be used by scientific agencies because of its complex interface.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Prelims Track Question

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA):

1. The first round of negotiations for reviewing the FTA, officially known as the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA)
2. AITGA aims to promote trade in goods, eliminate tariff barriers, and enhance economic cooperation between the member countries of ASEAN and India.
3. Under AITGA, India has committed to the elimination of tariffs on all products traded with ASEAN countries, leading to a completely tariff-free trade environment.
4. The agreement covers areas beyond trade in goods, including services, investment, and intellectual property rights, fostering a comprehensive economic partnership.

How many of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

- E. Only one
- F. Only two
- G. Only three
- H. All four

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India:

1. PVTGs are identified based on the criteria of pre-agricultural level of technology, stagnant or declining population, and a distinct cultural identity.
2. There are currently no PVTGs in the northeastern states of India, as these regions have a lower tribal population compared to central and southern parts of the country.
3. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal authority responsible for the welfare and development of PVTGs in India.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):

1. The UNHCR is a specialized agency of the United Nations mandated to protect and assist refugees and displaced persons globally.
2. The UNHCR operates solely in conflict zones and is not involved in addressing issues related to internally displaced persons (IDPs).
3. The High Commissioner for Refugees is appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General and serves a renewable five-year term.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- B. Only one
- C. Only two
- D. All three
- E. None

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in India:

1. MGNREGS guarantees 100 days of wage employment per year to every rural household, aiming to enhance livelihood security in rural areas.
2. The scheme primarily focuses on providing employment opportunities in urban areas to address the issue of unemployment among the urban poor.
3. The wages under MGNREGS are indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Laborers (CPI-AL) and are revised annually.
4. Women participation in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was the highest in 10 financial years

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. Only three
- D. All four

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding India's crude oil imports and their impact on global oil prices:

1. India, as the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil, recently reduced its dependence on oil imports in response to geopolitical tensions.

2. India's increased imports of Russian oil in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict played a crucial role in stabilizing global crude oil prices.
3. Indian refiners faced minimal challenges in importing Russian oil, and the process was smooth despite Western sanctions, ensuring a consistent supply at competitive prices.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- E. Only one
- F. Only two
- G. All three
- H. None

Q6. Consider the following statements

1. Disaster management training has been made mandatory for railway officers.
2. IIT Bombay will impart the comprehensive training program to the officers.
3. The railways have Accident Relief Trains stationed at major junctions across the network to reach accident sites promptly.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Q7. Which of the following statements most aptly define the term "stagflation"?

- A. A situation characterized by high economic growth with low inflation.
- B. A situation characterized by low economic growth with high inflation.
- C. A situation characterized by high economic growth with high inflation.
- D. A situation characterized by low economic growth with low inflation.

Q8. With reference to Internationalisation of Rupee, consider the following statements

1. Internationalisation of rupees is a process that involves increasing use of

the local currency in cross-border transactions.

2. When a currency is internationalized, its exchange rate tends to stabilize.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- E. Only 1
- F. Only 2
- G. Both 1 and 2
- H. Neither 1 nor 2

Q9. Consider the following statements with reference to Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs)

1. FSTPs are generally larger, centralised installations to treat faecal sludge.
2. They are typically located near water bodies so they can discharge treated water.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only 1
- B. Only 2
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

Q10. Consider the following statements about Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in)

1. It is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.
2. It is a functional organisation of the Ministry of Information & Electronics Technology.
3. One of its functions include forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. Only one
- B. Only two
- C. All three
- D. None

Prelims Track Answer

Answer 1 Option C is correct

Explanation

- Japan has recently approved a record increase in defense spending of over 16 percent for the year 2024, with a focus on deploying long-range cruise missiles. Hence, statement 1 is correct
- The Japanese government indeed aims to double defense spending to the NATO standard of 2 percent of GDP by 2027, as part of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's goal. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- Japan is considering exporting 155mm artillery shells to the United Kingdom under the eased arms export restrictions. These shells are manufactured under a license from BAE Systems. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

Answer 2 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Kanyashree is not focused on pregnant women. It is a social welfare scheme primarily designed to promote the education of girls and prevent child marriage. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect**
- The primary objective of Kanyashree is indeed to promote education among girls and discourage child marriage by providing financial assistance. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- Kanyashree is implemented in the state of West Bengal. It was launched by the Government of West Bengal to empower girls through education. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

Answer 3 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Tribunals in India are quasi-judicial adjudicatory bodies that serve as an alternative to the traditional court system.
- Tribunals were established to provide swift, cost-effective, and decentralized resolution of disputes across various issues.
- A significant part of tribunals is composed of members who have specialized expertise in the subject matter over which they have jurisdiction. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- Unlike traditional courts, they are not bound by the strict rules of procedure and evidence set out in the CPC. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**

- Tribunals in India follow the principle of natural justice.
- The decisions of tribunals can be appealed to a higher court.
- The decision of tribunals in the first instance can be appealed to the appellate authority and, later, to the High Courts and/or Supreme Court. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

Answer 4 Option B is correct

Explanation

- Public Interest Litigation (PIL) allows any individual or organization to file a lawsuit on behalf of the public interest, providing access to the legal system for matters affecting the public, even if the petitioner is not directly affected. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- Correct. PIL has its origins in common law countries, and its development is often traced back to England. It has since been adopted and adapted in various legal systems globally. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- PIL cases are not typically initiated by the government. Instead, they are often filed by individuals, social activists, or non-governmental organizations to address issues of public concern. The government may be a respondent in such cases. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect**

Answer 5 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Nishant is indeed an indigenous UAV developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) for reconnaissance and surveillance missions. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- Nishant is designed for high-altitude, long-endurance surveillance missions, making it suitable for military applications where extended operational duration is crucial. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- Nishant is not a satellite; it is an unmanned aerial vehicle. Satellites are deployed in space for various purposes, while Nishant operates in the Earth's atmosphere. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect**

Answer 6 Option A is correct

Explanation

- Viability Gap Funding (VGF) is indeed a financial tool used by the government to

support infrastructure projects that are economically viable but may not be financially attractive to private investors. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**

- The percentage of the total project cost covered by VGF can vary. It is not fixed at 50%, and the extent of funding depends on the project and the sector. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect**
- Viability Gap Funding is applicable to infrastructure projects, including those in sectors like transportation, energy, and social infrastructure. It is not limited to social welfare schemes and can be used for commercial projects as well. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect**

Answer 7 Option C is correct

Explanation

- The extent to which labour productivity growth rate responds to output growth rate is reflected by what is termed as the Kaldor-Verdoorn coefficient. **Hence, option C is correct.**
- India's non-agricultural sector is characterised by a higher than average Kaldor-Verdoorn coefficient, as compared to other developing countries.

Answer 8 Option C is correct

Explanation

- Colombo Security Conclave was formed in 2011 as a trilateral maritime security grouping of India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.
- It welcomed Mauritius as a fourth member at the fifth meeting of national security advisers. **Hence, option C is correct.**
- Bangladesh and Seychelles attended as observers and have been invited to join the group.
- The CSC aims to promote a safe, secure, and stable Indian Ocean.

Answer 9 Option B is correct

Explanation

- The COP28 to the UNFCCC was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
- COP28, member countries reached an agreement to operationalize the Loss and Damage (L&D) fund aimed at compensating countries grappling with climate change impacts. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- The fifth iteration of the Global Stocktake (GST) text was released at COP28 and adopted with no objection.

- The declaration launched at COP28 aims to triple global nuclear energy capacity by 2050. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA) was launched at COP 28, led by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- India launched the Green Credit Initiative, to create a participatory global platform for exchange of innovative environmental programs and instruments.
- COP28 UAE Declaration on Climate and Health was adopted signifying global commitment to address climate-related health impacts, supported by 143 countries.
- But India refused to sign the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**

Answer 10 Option A is correct

Explanation

- At the COP28, NASA and IBM introduced an AI tool called watsonx.ai on the open-source AI platform Hugging Space. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- The tool helps users monitor Earth from space, while also estimating past and future environmental changes. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- Designed to be user-friendly, it requires users to select a location and date and the model will highlight changes in floodwater, reforestation efforts and other relevant factors. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect.**
- Beta tests showed a 15% improvement in mapping flood and burn scars over the continental United States with half the labelled data.

Answer 1 Option A is correct**Explanation**

- The first round of negotiations for reviewing the FTA, officially known as the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA) **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA) indeed aims to promote trade in goods, eliminate tariff barriers, and enhance economic cooperation between the member countries of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and India. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- While AITGA aims to reduce and eliminate tariffs on various products, it doesn't necessarily lead to a completely tariff-free trade environment. The agreement involves negotiations on tariff reductions, and complete elimination might not apply to all products. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect**
- AITGA covers areas beyond trade in goods and includes services, investment, and intellectual property rights. This broader scope fosters a comprehensive economic partnership between ASEAN countries and India. **Hence, statement 4 is correct**

Answer 2 Option B is correct**Explanation**

- PVTGs are identified based on specific criteria, including a pre-agricultural level of technology, stagnant or declining population, and a distinct cultural identity.
- These criteria help in recognizing tribes that are particularly vulnerable and in need of special attention for their welfare. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- PVTGs exist in various regions of India, including the northeastern states. The distribution of PVTGs is not solely based on the tribal population but on specific vulnerability criteria. **Therefore, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is indeed the nodal authority responsible for the welfare and development of Scheduled Tribes, including PVTGs.
- The ministry formulates policies and programs for the overall development of tribal communities. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

Answer 3 Option B is correct**Explanation**

- The UNHCR is indeed a specialized agency of the United Nations, and its mandate is to protect and assist refugees and displaced persons globally.
- The agency works to find durable solutions for refugees, including voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- The UNHCR is involved in addressing issues related to both refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- It operates in conflict zones and other situations of displacement to provide assistance, protection, and find solutions for those forced to flee their homes. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect**
- The High Commissioner for Refugees is appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General and serves a renewable five-year term.
- The High Commissioner is responsible for overseeing the UNHCR's work and advocating for the rights and well-being of refugees. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**

Answer 4 Option C is correct**Explanation**

- MGNREGS indeed guarantees 100 days of wage employment per year to every rural household.
- The primary objective is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing sustainable employment opportunities. **Hence, statement 1 is correct**
- MGNREGS primarily focuses on rural areas, not urban areas. It aims to address the issues of unemployment and underemployment in rural India, providing a safety net for rural households. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect**
- The wages under MGNREGS are indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Laborers (CPI-AL) and are revised annually.
- This indexing helps in adjusting wages to account for inflation and ensures that the real wages of the workers are maintained. **Hence, statement 3 is correct**
- Women participation in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was the highest in 10 financial years the proportion of women person-days in the total touching

59.25% till December 24 during the current financial year 2023-24. **Hence, statement 4 is correct**

Answer 5 Option A is correct

Explanation

- India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and increased its imports of Russian oil in response to geopolitical tensions. There is no indication of a recent reduction in oil dependence. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect**
- The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas emphasized that India's increased imports of Russian oil, amounting to 1.95 million barrels per day, played a crucial role in preventing a potential surge in global crude oil prices. **Hence, statement 2 is correct**
- challenges faced by Indian refiners in importing Russian oil, including issues with payments, logistical arrangements, and insurance due to Western sanctions. **Hence, statement 3 is incorrect**

Answer 6 Option C is correct

Explanation

- The Ministry of Railways has introduced mandatory disaster management training for railway officers. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Objective: To enhance disaster response and address shortcomings identified in the investigation of the Odisha incident.
- Disaster management is now an integral part of the training module for railway officers at the induction/foundation course level.
- The National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR) in Vadodara and The Indian Railway Institute of Disaster Management (IRIDM) in Bengaluru will collaborate to impart the comprehensive training program. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**
- The railways have Accident Relief Trains stationed at major junctions across the network, equipped with manpower and resources to reach accident sites promptly. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**

Answer 7 Option B is correct

Explanation

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials believe that the risk of stagflation in India has decreased from 3% in August to 1%.
- Stagflation is a situation characterized by simultaneous increase in prices and

stagnation of economic growth. **Hence, option B is correct.**

- In a usually low growth situation, central banks and governments try to stimulate the economy, but they tend to elevate prices and cause inflation.
- So, it cannot be adopted when inflation is already running high, which makes it difficult to break out of the low growth-high inflation trap.

Answer 8 Option C is correct

Explanation

- Internationalisation of rupees is a process that involves increasing use of the local currency in cross-border transactions. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- It involves promoting the rupee for import and export trade and then other current account transactions followed by its use in capital account transactions.
- It will improve the demand for the rupee in international trade.
- This can lead to increased convenience and reduced transaction costs for businesses and individuals dealing with India.
- When a currency is internationalized, its exchange rate tends to stabilize. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- It can strengthen economic ties with other countries, facilitate bilateral trade agreements, and promote diplomatic relations.

Answer 9 Option D is correct

Explanation

- Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants (FSTPs) use mechanical or gravity-based systems to treat solids and liquids separately.
- Treated solids can be reused in agriculture, and treated water may be reused in landscaping.
- FSTPs are generally smaller than STPs and can be colocated with municipal solid waste management sites.
- They can also be decentralised and located closer to the sources of faecal sludge. **Hence, statement 1 is incorrect.**
- In contrast, STPs are much larger, centralised installations designed to serve entire communities or large urban areas.
- They require substantial infrastructure and are typically located near water bodies so they can discharge treated water. **Hence, statement 2 is incorrect.**

Answer 10 Option C is correct**Explanation**

- CERT-In is a functional organisation of the Ministry of Information & Electronics Technology. **Hence, statement 2 is correct.**
- It is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur. **Hence, statement 1 is correct.**
- Objective: To secure the Indian cyberspace.
- CERT-In has been operational since January 2004.
- Functions
 - Collection, analysis and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
 - Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
 - Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents.
 - Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
 - Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers relating to information security practices, procedures, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.



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