



Weekly Current Affairs

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CONTENTS

Polity and Governance 1

Need of Womenomics in India 1

Prelims Questions..... 3

Mains Questions..... 3

Science and Technology 4

Need for Regulation of Artificial Intelligence 4

Atomic Clocks and India 5

World Hepatitis Report..... 7

Prelims Questions..... 9

Mains Questions..... 10

Ecology and Environment 11

Balancing Renewable Energy and Great Indian Bustard Conservation 11

Solar Photovoltaic Cell Manufacturing in India..... 13

One Health Approach 15

Prelims Questions..... 16

Mains Questions..... 16

Economy 17

Decision Regarding Repo Rate in the Meeting of Monetary Policy Committee of Reserve Bank of India 17

Status of Indian Economy (April, 2024) 21

Inflation In India 22

Prelims Questions..... 24

Mains Questions..... 24

Social Issue 25

Youth Suicides in India..... 25

Climate Crisis and Gender Neutrality 26

Prelims Questions..... 28

Mains Questions..... 28

Security 29

Mha Extended AFSPA in Regions of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh..... 29

Prelims Questions..... 31

Mains Questions..... 31

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

NEED OF WOMENOMICS IN INDIA

Why in the News?

The rate of women participating in the workforce in Japan saw a significant boost, climbing by ten percentage points from 2013 to 2023, reaching 75.2%. This surge represents the most rapid increase in Japan's workforce participation in recent years and positions Japan at the top among G7 nations in the past decade. These positive results were achieved through the reforms carried out during Abenomomics (During Shinzo Abe period).

What is Womenomics?

“Womenomics” refers to an economic concept and strategy that focuses on increasing women's participation and advancement in the workforce as a means to drive economic growth and development. Originally popularized in Japan, where it was recognised as a response to the country's ageing population and labour shortages, Womenomics aims to leverage the talents and skills of women to boost productivity and innovation. This approach involves implementing policies and initiatives that support gender equality in employment, such as promoting flexible work arrangements, providing childcare support, and addressing gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

Japan's Womenomics Reforms-

- **Expansion of Creche Capacity:** The Japanese government's investment in increasing daycare capacity from 2.2 million in 2012 to 2.8 million in 2018 effectively reduced lengthy waiting lists for daycare placements. In 2023, Japan announced an additional investment of \$26 billion for childcare initiatives spanning 2023 to 2026.
- **Gender-neutral Parental Leave:** Initially, Japanese parents were entitled to year-long partially paid parental leaves, with women receiving 58 weeks and men 52 weeks. However, in 2022, amendments were made to allow greater flexi-

bility in paternity leave, including shortened notice periods and the option for men to split their paternity leave. Additional measures included mandatory disclosure of paternity leave uptake, promotion of flexible work arrangements, and encouragement for companies to ensure paternity leave does not hinder career advancement. These efforts contributed to a significant increase in paternity leave uptake, rising from 2 per cent in 2012 to 17 per cent in 2023.

- **Effective implementation of Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace, 2016 Act:** This legislation mandated the disclosure of diversity action plans and diversity data, fostering the introduction of the “Eruboshi” certification—a five-star rating system recognising companies committed to workforce diversity. The certification has garnered significant attention among Japanese firms, with the number of certified companies growing from 815 in 2019 to 1905 in 2022.
- **Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care:** In comparison to other G20 countries, India and Japan exhibit the widest gender gaps in unpaid care work. Women in India perform approximately 8.4 times more unpaid work, valued at 15 to 17 per cent of GDP, while in Japan, women perform 5.5 times more unpaid work, valued at about a fifth of GDP.

What India can learn from Japan-

- **Addressing Gender Disparities in Domestic and Care Work:** Interventions aimed at bridging gender gaps in domestic and care responsibilities have a notable impact on Women's Labor Force Participation Rate (WLFPR). Japan witnessed significant increases in WLFPR when it made sustained public investments in care infrastructure and services, particularly in childcare. As per the **PLFS (Periodic labour force survey) report**, the participation rate of women in the labour force in India surged from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37.0% in 2022-23. Despite this

growth, India's female labour force participation rate remains at approximately 25%, significantly lower than the global average of 47%.

- **Shifting Social Attitude:** Altering societal perceptions of traditional social norms is equally crucial alongside the implementation of progressive policies. Japan's experience demonstrates that merely granting legal entitlement to gender-neutral parental leave is insufficient. Encouraging men to take parental leave requires employers to lead initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes associated with caregiving.
- **Investment in Care Infrastructure:** Investing in a diverse range of care infrastructure and services is vital, covering childcare, elder care, domestic assistance, and long-term care for individuals with significant dependencies, ultimately reducing reliance and tapping into the potential of the ageing population. Japan, for instance, has engaged in partnerships with the private sector to invest in affordable senior living and care services.
- **India's Growing Need for Elder Care:** With India's elderly population projected to double by 2050, prioritising investments in elder care infrastructure and services is vital. This will mirror the approach taken by Japan to support women's workforce participation.

Challenges for India-

- **Cultural Barriers:** India faces cultural obstacles wherein traditional gender roles limit women's participation in societal contributions.
- **Relationship between LFPR and Women's Education:** The pattern of Women's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) exhibits a U-shaped relationship with education. Initially, as women attain higher education levels, LFPR declines due to societal constraints that confine them to domestic roles.
- **Absence of Social Welfare:** A considerable number of women engage in low-productivity employment, often devoid of social benefits. Factors such as a scarcity of suitable job opportunities and inadequate marketable skills deter

women from entering the workforce.

- **Inadequate Care Infrastructure:** The burden of childcare, eldercare, and housework often falls on women, hindering their ability to work outside the home.
- **Gender Pay Gap:** Women often receive lower wages than men for similar work, making work less financially attractive. There is a huge wage disparity between the two sexes in India.

Initiatives taken by the Government to bridge Labour Force Participation-

- **Maternity Benefit Act, 2017-** The legislation increased the paid maternity leave entitlement for female employees to 26 weeks, more than doubling the previous duration. Additionally, it introduced the possibility of working remotely after this period, subject to mutual agreement between the employer and the employee. Furthermore, the act mandated the provision of childcare facilities, such as crèches, for organisations employing 50 or more female workers.
- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013-** This act aims to safeguard women from experiencing sexual harassment in their workplace.
- **Stand up India-** The program enables individuals from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women to obtain bank loans for initiating new ventures in manufacturing, services, agricultural-related activities, or trading. It offers loan amounts ranging from INR 10 lakh to 1 crore.
- **Anganwadi centres-** These centres ensure maternal and child nutritional well-being, promote a hygienic and secure environment and offer early childhood education. Consequently, they support women in resuming work after giving birth.

Way Forward-

Five-Pronged Approach to Exploit Business Prospects in India's Care Sector

- Policies ensuring gender-neutral and paternity

leave

- Subsidies to facilitate access to/provision of care services
- Increased investments in care infrastructure and services from both public and private sectors
- Training programs aimed at enhancing the skills of care workers
- Implementation of quality standards to ensure excellence in care services and infrastructure.

A sustained emphasis on the care economy is essential to harnessing **#NariShakti** for the realization of a developed India by 2047.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q1. Consider the following statements with reference to the Female labour force participation rate in India:

1. India's female labour force participation rate is lower than the Global average.
2. It is currently lower than the Male force participation rate.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 Only
- (b) 2 Only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	C

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q1. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of govern-

ment initiatives and policies aimed at increasing the Female Labor Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in India. Discuss the strengths and limitations of existing schemes and suggest innovative strategies to promote women's workforce participation.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

NEED FOR REGULATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Why in the News?

The UN general assembly has taken a significant step by unanimously adopting the first global resolution on artificial intelligence (AI). The resolution, titled "Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure, and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development," aims at bridging the gap in AI regulation for safe, secure use in interest of global good.

WHY IS THERE A NEED TO REGULATE AI?

Bias in algorithm- AI systems are trained on big data which may inherit biases of the creators. For example, An AI system may be better for some demographics than others.

Job losses- every technology has some impact on the livelihood of the people, AI is no different. AI will proliferate automation technology which will lead to a large number of job losses in multiple sectors.

Privacy issues- AI systems either intentionally or unintentionally captures data of the people, sometimes without the consent which raises privacy concerns.

Manipulative content creation- such as deepfakes which can be used to serve narrow interests of certain sections of society. For example, recently there was a deep fake video of a famous actress that got viral which raised attention of the potential misuse.

Ensuring transparency and accountability- It is important to hold companies working on these AI tools accountable for their actions.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN SOME COUNTRIES

THE EU'S APPROACH

The EU uses a risk-based approach, That categoriz-

es systems into four categories, namely unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal risks, prescribing guidelines for each.

The Act prescribes a ban on applications that risk citizens' rights, like manipulation of human behavior, emotion recognition, mass surveillance etc.

It recognizes two things: acknowledging the compliance burden placed on business enterprises and start-ups, and regulating the much-deliberated Generative AI systems such as ChatGPT.

CHINA'S STAND ON AI

Chinese regulatory framework focuses on three subjects content moderation- which includes identification of content generated through any AI system personal data protection- with a specific focus on the need to procure users' consent before accessing and processing their data algorithmic governance,-with a focus on security and ethics while developing and running algorithms over any gathered dataset.

THE U.K.'S FRAMEWORK

The U.K, has a principled and context-based approach

The approach requires mandatory consultations with regulatory bodies to know regulatory loopholes if any. Thus, the U.K. has adopted a decentralized approach. There is a mechanism for consultation which is a bit softer than the Chinese and EU approach.

WHAT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the field of computer science focused on creating systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence. This technology aims to replicate human-like cognitive abilities such as problem-solving, learning, decision-making, and pattern recognition. Today, AI finds applications across diverse industries, ranging from finance to healthcare, due to its capability to analyze vast amounts of data and make

insightful decisions.

The evolution of AI has surpassed its original conception, driven by significant advancements in data processing, computational power, and algorithmic sophistication. These improvements have expanded AI's utility and enabled its integration into various fields.

The applications of AI are extensive and impactful:

- In the realm of e-commerce, AI is employed to enhance user experience through personalized shopping recommendations and AI-powered virtual assistants like chatbots.
- Facial recognition technology, implemented in devices such as mobile phones and computers, utilizes AI algorithms for authentication, security, and user convenience.
- Automobile manufacturers like Audi, Toyota, and Tesla leverage AI to develop self-driving vehicles capable of navigating diverse environments and detecting potential hazards to prevent accidents.
- AI systems, integrated into platforms like Uber and logistics companies, optimize transportation routes, analyze traffic patterns, and enhance operational efficiency.
- In education, AI facilitates personalized learning experiences by monitoring student progress, adapting lesson plans, and providing tailored study materials and reminders.
- In agriculture, AI technologies such as computer vision and machine learning help identify soil defects, nutrient deficiencies, and crop diseases, enabling farmers to optimize yields and resource usage.

Numerous AI startups and private companies contribute to the advancement of this technology, including Tata Elxsi, Bosch, Happiest Mind, Zenzar Technologies, and Oracle. These entities drive innovation across industries, developing AI-driven solutions to address complex challenges and unlock new opportunities for growth and efficiency.

WAY FORWARD FOR INDIA

India has one of the largest populations of internet users in the world which makes the country more vulnerable to such threats posed by AI. Also, considering the potential impact of the livelihoods of people it is crucial for the government to formulate comprehensive regulations which keep in mind different stakeholders.

ATOMIC CLOCKS AND INDIA

Why in the News?

India is strategically distributing atomic clocks nationwide to synchronise the time displayed on digital devices such as watches, smartphones, and laptops with Indian Standard Time. This initiative, initiated over twenty years ago following the Kargil war, aims to ensure accuracy and reliability in time-keeping across the country.

ABOUT ATOMIC CLOCKS

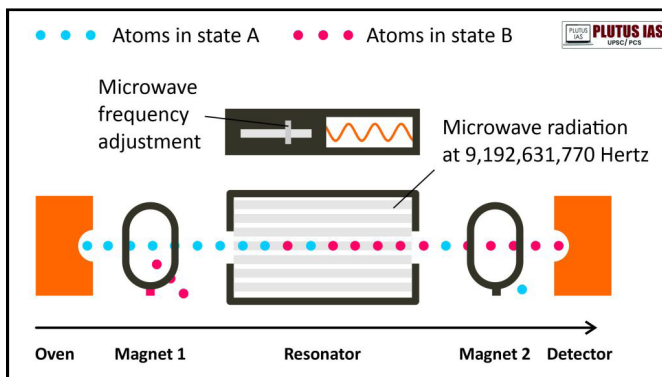
- Atomic clocks are advanced timekeeping devices that utilise the natural vibrations of atoms to measure time with exceptional accuracy.
- These clocks rely on the oscillations of atoms, usually caesium or rubidium, which serve as highly stable timekeeping references.
- By detecting the frequency of these atomic vibrations, atomic clocks can maintain timekeeping precision to within a few billionths of a second per day.
- The atomic clock was developed by Louise Essen in 1955. Presently, India has operational atomic clocks located in Ahmedabad and Faridabad.

HOW DO ATOMIC CLOCKS WORK?

- Atomic clocks operate by employing a specific type of atom known as "**caesium atoms.**" Caesium atoms are **highly stable and exhibit a precise frequency at which their electrons oscillate.** This frequency serves as the fundamental reference for timekeeping in the atomic clock.
- In the process of measuring time using caesium atoms, **an atomic clock utilises a component**

called a “microwave cavity.” This cavity functions as a chamber containing caesium vapour. A microwave signal is introduced into the cavity, prompting the caesium atoms to undergo vibration.

- During this vibration, the caesium atoms emit radiation characterised by a highly specific frequency. **A detector within the atomic clock then captures this emitted radiation and compares it against a predetermined standard frequency.** Any disparity between these frequencies is utilised to make adjustments to the clock’s timekeeping mechanism.



SOME DIFFERENT TYPES OF ATOMIC CLOCKS ARE:

- **Cesium Atomic Clocks:** The most widely used type, caesium atomic clocks, measure the frequency of transitions in the caesium-133 atom, typically using a microwave resonance method. These clocks are highly accurate and serve as the primary standard for defining the second in the International System of Units (SI).
- **Rubidium Atomic Clocks:** Rubidium atomic clocks operate similarly to caesium clocks but use rubidium atoms as the reference instead. They are generally smaller, less expensive, and more portable than caesium clocks, making them suitable for applications where size and cost are important factors.
- **Hydrogen Maser Clocks:** Hydrogen maser clocks are even more precise than caesium clocks. They rely on the hyperfine transition of hydrogen atoms and operate at much higher frequencies, resulting in superior short-term stability and accuracy. These clocks are commonly used in scientific research, satellite navigation

systems, and space missions.

- **Optical Atomic Clocks:** Optical atomic clocks use optical transitions in atoms, such as those of strontium or ytterbium, to achieve even higher precision than traditional atomic clocks. By operating at optical frequencies, they can potentially redefine the second with even greater accuracy. Research in this field is ongoing, with optical clocks showing promise for future applications in areas like fundamental physics research and global positioning systems.

WHAT IS THE RATIONALE BEHIND INDIA GOING FOR ATOMIC CLOCKS?

India started efforts to develop atomic clocks in response to the denial of Global Positioning System (GPS) information during the Kargil War. The establishment of independent timekeeping capabilities is necessary for defence, cybersecurity, and online transactions.

- **National Security and Self-Reliance:** Currently, India relies on foreign atomic clocks, particularly those in the US, for critical infrastructure like the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (NavIC). Developing its own atomic clocks allows India to control its timekeeping infrastructure, reducing dependence on external sources. This is vital during potential conflicts where access to foreign signals could be restricted.
- **Enhanced Accuracy and Reliability:** Atomic clocks offer unmatched precision compared to conventional methods. By deploying them across the nation, India can synchronise all digital devices with Indian Standard Time (IST), ensuring a unified and highly accurate time reference. This translates to improved performance in various sectors:
 - **Telecommunications:** Precise timing is essential for the smooth operation of communication networks, minimising errors and ensuring seamless data transfer.
 - **Financial Systems:** Timestamping financial transactions with atomic clock accuracy minimises errors and safeguards against fraud in high-frequency trading.

- **Navigation Services:** India's NavIC system can benefit from the enhanced timing provided by domestic atomic clocks, leading to more reliable positioning data.
- **Cyber security:** In India's burgeoning digital economy, atomic clocks ensure the accuracy of timestamps for transactions, preventing fraud, ensuring data integrity, and bolstering cybersecurity measures.
- **"One Nation, One Time":** With a network of atomic clocks, India can achieve a unified and precise time standard across the country. This fosters a sense of national coherence and simplifies time-related activities for citizens and businesses alike.'
- **Critical Infrastructure and Power Grids:** Atomic clocks play a vital role in synchronising critical infrastructure, including power grids, transportation systems, and emergency services.

WORLD HEPATITIS REPORT

Why in the News?

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently published the Global Hepatitis Report for the year 2024. According to this report, India bears one of the heaviest burdens of viral hepatitis, which can result in liver inflammation damage and potentially lead to liver cancer.

SIGNIFICANT POINTS HIGHLIGHTED IN THE REPORT

- **High Prevalence in India:**
 - An estimated 29.8 million Indians lived with Hepatitis B in 2022, and 5.5 million with Hepatitis C.
 - These numbers mirror a substantial portion of the global burden of viral hepatitis.

Mortality:

- Both Hepatitis B and C can lead to chronic liver disease, cirrhosis, and cancer, significantly impacting global health.

- Men are disproportionately affected, and a large portion of cases occur among those aged 30-54.
- **Challenges and Gaps:**
 - Despite progress in prevention, diagnosis and treatment remain major challenges.
 - Many infected individuals remain unaware of their status, contributing to the rise in deaths.
- **Need for global efforts:**
 - The World Health Organization (WHO) urges a concerted global effort to address viral hepatitis.
 - Expanding access to testing and treatment, strengthening prevention measures, improving data collection, and engaging communities are crucial.
- **Ending the hepatitis by 2030:**
 - The WHO outlines a public health approach aiming to eliminate hepatitis by 2030.
 - This ambitious goal requires addressing disparities in access to healthcare and funding, as well as ensuring affordable medications and services.

ABOUT HEPATITIS

- Hepatitis is characterised by inflammation of the liver, often stemming from viral infections, although other factors can also trigger it. These may include autoimmune conditions, drug reactions, toxins, and alcohol consumption.
- Autoimmune hepatitis manifests when the body produces antibodies targeting liver tissue. The liver plays a crucial role in processing nutrients, purifying the blood, and combating infections.
- Inflammation or damage to the liver can impair its functions. Viral hepatitis is classified into five main types: hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E, each caused by a distinct virus.

TYPES OF HEPATITIS

Hepatitis A (HAV)

- Primarily spread through ingesting contaminated food or water.
- Symptoms encompass fatigue, nausea, abdominal discomfort, loss of appetite, and jaundice.
- Most instances resolve spontaneously without medical intervention, and vaccination is an effective preventive measure.

Hepatitis B (HBV)

- Transmitted through contact with infected blood, bodily fluids, or from an infected mother to her child during childbirth.
- Symptoms include abdominal pain, fatigue, joint pain, dark urine, and jaundice.
- It may progress to chronic infection, liver cirrhosis, and liver cancer.
- Highly effective vaccination is available for prevention.

Hepatitis C (HCV)

- Mainly transmitted through blood-to-blood contact, such as needle sharing, or from an infected mother to her child during childbirth.
- Often asymptomatic in the initial stages.
- It can lead to chronic hepatitis, liver cirrhosis, and liver cancer.
- Advancements in antiviral medications have led to high cure rates.

Hepatitis D (HDV)

- It occurs solely in individuals already infected with hepatitis B.
- Transmission routes parallel those of hepatitis B.
- It can lead to more severe liver disease compared to hepatitis B infection alone.

Hepatitis E (HEV)

- Typically transmitted through consuming con-

taminated water.

- Symptoms resemble those of hepatitis A but can be more severe, especially in pregnant women.
- Hepatitis E is usually self-limiting but may cause acute liver failure in some cases.
- Prevalent in East and South Asia, transmitted through contaminated water. Although a vaccine is available in China, it is not widely accessible yet.

CAUSES OF HEPATITIS

Causes of hepatitis vary depending on the type of hepatitis:

- **Viral Infections:** Hepatitis can be caused by several types of viruses, including hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E. Each type is caused by a different virus and is transmitted through different means, such as contaminated food or water (hepatitis A and E), blood-to-blood contact (hepatitis B, C, and D), or from an infected mother to her child during childbirth (hepatitis B, C, and E).
- **Autoimmune Hepatitis:** This occurs when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the liver, leading to inflammation and liver damage. The exact cause of autoimmune hepatitis is not fully understood, but genetic and environmental factors may play a role.
- **Alcohol and Drugs:** Excessive alcohol consumption over a prolonged period can cause alcoholic hepatitis, which is inflammation of the liver due to alcohol abuse. Certain medications, drugs, and toxins can also cause hepatitis when they are metabolised by the liver or when the body reacts adversely to them.
- **Metabolic Disorders:** Certain metabolic disorders, such as Wilson's disease and alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency, can lead to the accumulation of harmful substances in the liver, causing inflammation and damage over time.
- **Other Causes:** Hepatitis can also be caused by other factors such as fatty liver disease (non-alcoholic steatohepatitis), infections from parasites or bacteria, exposure to certain chemicals

or toxins, and rarely, by certain inherited disorders affecting liver function.

INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT TO TACKLE HEPATITIS

- **National Viral Hepatitis Control Program (NVH-CP):** Launched in 2018, NVHCP aims to combat viral hepatitis, particularly hepatitis B and C, by providing free testing and treatment services. The program focuses on screening high-risk populations, increasing awareness, and improving access to affordable diagnostics and treatment.
- **Immunisation Programs:** The government has integrated hepatitis B vaccination into its routine immunisation schedule for infants to prevent transmission of the virus from mother to child during childbirth. Additionally, efforts are ongoing to expand vaccination coverage among high-risk groups and healthcare workers.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q1. Which of the Following AI Tools can be Used For Creation of Movies and Documentaries by a Common Man.

- Dall-e
- Sora
- Chatgpt
- gemini

Q2. With reference to the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), consider the following statements: (UPSC-2018)

- IRNSS has three satellites in geostationary and four satellites in geosynchronous orbits.
- IRNSS covers the entire India and about 5500 sq. Km beyond its borders.
- India will have its own satellite navigation system with full global coverage by the middle of 2019.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- 1 only

(b) 1 and 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) None

Q3. What is the primary function of a microwave cavity in atomic clocks?

(a) Generating atomic vibrations

(b) Trapping caesium atoms

(c) Emitting radiation

(d) Comparing frequencies

Q4. Which one of the following statements is not correct? (UPSC-2019)

(a) Hepatitis B virus is transmitted much like HIV.

(b) Hepatitis B, unlike Hepatitis C, does not have a vaccine.

(c) Globally, the number of people infected with Hepatitis B and C viruses is several times more than those infected with HIV.

(d) Some of those infected with Hepatitis B and C viruses do not show the symptoms for many years.

Q5. Consider the following statements:

- Hepatitis D occurs only in individuals who are already infected with Hepatitis B
- Vaccines are available only for Hepatitis B
- The primary method of prevention for hepatitis E is by Boiling or treating water before consumption

How many of the statements above are correct?

(a) Only one

(b) Only two

(c) All three

(d) None

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	A
2.	A
3.	B
4.	B
5.	B

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q1. Highlight the benefits of Artificial Intelligence and also point out some challenges associated to realize its full potential.

Q2. Evaluate the effectiveness of atomic clocks in enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure against cyber attacks, considering their role in maintaining synchronisation for telecommunications networks, power grids, and financial systems.

Q3. Analyse the role of misinformation and disinformation in fueling vaccine hesitancy, especially in the context of social media platforms. What steps can governments and public health authorities take to counteract false information and promote vaccine confidence?

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

BALANCING RENEWABLE ENERGY AND GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD CONSERVATION

Why in the News?

In a notable decision, the Supreme Court has broadened the interpretation of Articles 14 and 21 to encompass protection against the detrimental impacts of climate change. The judgement was given on a petition by environmentalists to protect the Great Indian Bustard.

MORE ABOUT THE CASE

The Supreme Court of India recently navigated a complex case concerning the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB). The bird, found in the arid grasslands of Rajasthan and Gujarat, faces numerous threats, including collisions with overhead power lines.

APRIL 2021 VERDICT OF SUPREME COURT

- In a landmark verdict in April 2021, the Supreme Court prioritised the GIB's survival. Recognising the devastating impact of power lines on these birds, the court imposed restrictions on their construction across a vast area (approximately 99,000 square kilometres) in the GIB's primary habitat.
- This bold decision aimed to create safer airspace for the birds and encourage alternative transmission solutions. The court even suggested converting existing overhead lines to underground cables, a more bird-friendly option but also a significantly more expensive and technically challenging undertaking.

THREATS FROM POWER LINES

- The Great Indian Bustard (GIB) faces a significant threat from power lines criss-crossing its arid grassland habitat in India. A 2020 study by the Wildlife Institute of India revealed a grim statistic – power lines claim the lives of an esti-

mated 84,000 birds of various species annually within and around the Desert National Park in Rajasthan.

- The GIB is particularly susceptible to power line collisions due to its unique physical characteristics. Unlike some birds with a broad field of vision, the GIB, along with other raptors and bustards, has extensive blind spots above its head.
- This limited frontal vision makes it difficult for them to detect oncoming power lines from a distance.
- Additionally, their large size and weight hinder their ability to manoeuvre quickly and avoid collisions at close quarters. These factors combine to make power lines a deadly threat to the already endangered GIB population.

CONCERNS OVER THE IMPACT ON ACHIEVING CLEAN ENERGY GOALS

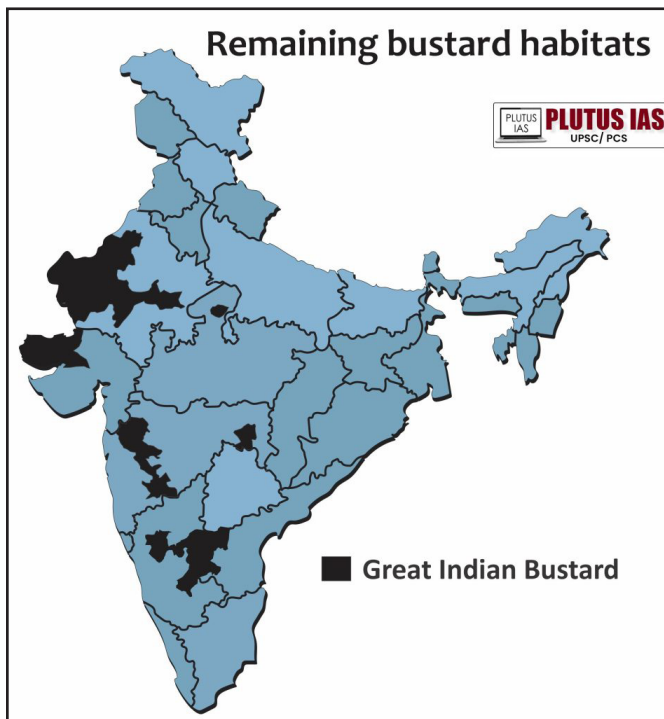
- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, along with the Power and New and Renewable Energy Ministries, challenged the court's order. They argued that the restrictions placed a significant burden on India's clean energy goals.
- Many of the nation's major solar and wind power plants, crucial for reducing the country's carbon footprint, are located within this designated area.
- Additionally, transitioning existing overhead lines to underground cables was deemed technically infeasible in many locations due to factors like complex terrain and soil conditions.

MODIFICATION IN 2021 VERDICT OF SC

- Acknowledging the practical difficulties highlighted by the government, including technical limitations, land acquisition challenges, and high costs associated with underground cables, the Supreme Court modified its original order in March 2024.

- The court's revised approach recognises the importance of climate change action and the need for renewable energy development. It emphasises the need to find a balance that ensures the GIB's conservation alongside broader environmental protection.
- This likely involves exploring alternative solutions like carefully planned rerouting of power lines, implementing bird diverters on existing lines, and investing in research and development of new technologies that minimise bird collisions.

ABOUT GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD



- **Habitat:** The GIB thrives in open, dry, and semi-dry grasslands. These areas are typically dotted with scattered bushes and patches of scrub, providing them with a mix of open space for foraging and some cover for nesting and roosting.
- **Diet:** These adaptable birds are omnivores, meaning they consume both plant and animal matter. Their diet includes insects, grass seeds, berries, small rodents, and reptiles. In areas bordering cultivated lands, they may occasionally feed on exposed groundnuts, millets, and legume pods.

- **Distinctive Appearance:** The GIB's striking appearance makes it easy to identify. A prominent black crown adorns their forehead, contrasting beautifully with their pale neck and head. Males boast a larger crown compared to females, and their plumage colouration further differentiates the sexes.

- **Conservation Status:**

IUCN: Critically Endangered

CITES: Appendix-I

WPA 1972: Schedule-I

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE VERDICT

- The court acknowledged challenges with underground cables, including limited capacity, higher transmission losses, and the need for legal frameworks for land acquisition.
- A 9-member committee of experts was formed to assess the feasibility of undergrounding power lines in specific areas.
- The court recognised India's significant clean energy targets and the importance of transitioning from fossil fuels for environmental, economic, and security reasons.
- The court highlighted the social, economic, and environmental benefits of solar power, emphasising its role in energy security, combating air pollution, and conserving water resources.
- The judgement highlighted the link between climate change and human rights, emphasising states' responsibility to address climate impacts through the lens of rights like a clean environment.
- **Fundamental Rights and Climate Change:**
 - **Article 21** guarantees the fundamental rights to life and personal liberty, while **Article 14** ensures equality before the law and equal protection of the laws for all individuals. **These constitutional provisions serve as significant foundations for the right to a healthy environment and protection against the adverse impacts of climate change.**

- The realisation of the right to life is contingent upon a clean and stable environment free from the disruptions caused by climate change. **Factors such as air pollution, changes in disease vectors, increasing temperatures, and droughts directly affect public health, which falls under the purview of the right to life as stipulated in Article 21.**
- Furthermore, the **inability of marginalised communities to adapt to or mitigate the effects of climate change** constitutes a **violation of both the right to life (Article 21) and the right to equality (Article 14)**. These undeserved populations face disproportionate challenges in safeguarding their health and well-being in the face of environmental degradation and climate-related hazards.

CONCLUSION:

The Supreme Court's judgement in this case highlights the complex challenges at the intersection of environmental protection and sustainable development. Striking a balance between these goals requires careful consideration of ecological needs, technological feasibility, and economic realities. Moving forward, collaborative efforts between government agencies, energy companies, conservation groups, and scientific experts will be crucial in finding innovative solutions that safeguard the GIB and support India's clean energy transition.

SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC CELL MANUFACTURING IN INDIA

Why in the News?

Media outlets have extensively covered recent governmental directives aimed at bolstering the domestic manufacturing of solar modules to bolster India's renewable energy sector. These actions are often portrayed as **'import restrictions'**, following the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's (MNRE) March 29 announcement to reinstate its 2021 notification regarding the 'Approved List of Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic [PV] Modules', commonly referred to as the ALMM list.

WHAT IS THE ALMM LIST? WHY IS IT BEING REIN-STATED?

- The ALMM list comprises **manufacturers eligible for utilization** in various government projects, government-assisted projects, and projects under government schemes and programs.
- However, this notification **was put on hold two years** after its issuance for the past financial year. Although the government did not provide a specific reason for this action, it is believed to have stemmed from concerns raised by renewable power producers.
- These producers had secured sale contracts with the government before the implementation of these rules when solar modules and cells were predominantly imported from China at highly competitive rates. At that time, India's domestic renewable sector was unable to match the sudden surge in demand for solar power production equipment at rates offered by Chinese manufacturers.

The government's decision to reintroduce this regulation is based on the assessment that various measures, such as the **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, have enhanced the production capacities** of India's domestic sector and improved its price competitiveness to meet local demand. It is important to note that this initiative is aimed at import substitution rather than restricting imports.



STATUS OF SOLAR PV CELLS PRODUCTION IN INDIA

- **India heavily relies on imports** to fulfill its demand for solar cells and modules, primarily

sourcing from China and Vietnam. According to data provided by the Minister for New and Renewable Energy in Parliament in February of the previous year, India imported approximately \$11.17 billion worth of solar cells and modules over the past five years.

- As of January in the fiscal year 2023-24, data from the Ministry of Commerce's Import-Export division revealed that **China accounted for 53% of India's solar cell imports and 63% of solar PV module imports**. Ratings agency ICRA has estimated that China dominates over 80% of the manufacturing capacity across polysilicon, wafer, cell, and module production.
- In contrast, **India's manufacturing capacity remains relatively low and is mainly concentrated in the final manufacturing stage**. ICRA noted in its November 2023 report that the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme can address this imbalance, with integrated module units expected to emerge in India within the next 2-3 years.

STEPS TAKEN BY INDIA

Over the past five years, India has taken significant steps to reduce its reliance on imports in the solar energy sector.

It all began with the **introduction of the ALMM order** in January 2019, but the issue gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic when global supply chains were severely disrupted.

Responding to this challenge, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled the ₹19,500 crore **PLI scheme in the Union Budget of 2022-23**. The primary objective of this scheme is **to boost domestic manufacturing** across the entire solar supply chain, covering everything from polysilicon to solar modules.

The government also implemented a **high customs duty** of 40% on PV modules and 25% on PV cells. However, these duties were later reduced as the pace of solar capacity additions slowed down. Reuters reported that developers had bid exceptionally low tariffs to secure power purchase contracts, relying heavily on imports of Chinese equipment.

WAY FORWARD:

- **Policy Support:** Implementing policies that provide incentives and support for domestic manufacturing, such as tax breaks, subsidies, and tariff protection. Continuously reviewing and updating regulations to create a conducive environment for investment and growth in the solar PV cells industry.
- **Financial Incentives:** Offering financial incentives such as grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans to encourage investment in solar PV cell manufacturing facilities. This could include the continuation and expansion of schemes like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.
- **Research and Development (R&D):** Investing in R&D to foster innovation and develop indigenous technology for solar PV cell manufacturing. Collaboration between government, academia, and industry can accelerate technological advancements and improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of solar PV cells.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Developing infrastructure such as industrial parks and special economic zones dedicated to solar PV cell manufacturing. Providing access to reliable power, water, transportation, and logistics infrastructure can attract investments and support the growth of the industry.
- **Skill Development:** Investing in skill development programs to train a skilled workforce for the solar PV cells industry. Developing specialized training programs and partnerships with educational institutions can ensure a steady supply of qualified professionals and technicians.
- **Market Development:** Promoting domestic demand for solar PV cells through incentives such as net metering, feed-in tariffs, and renewable energy targets. Encouraging the adoption of solar PV systems in residential, commercial, industrial, and utility-scale applications can create a stable market for domestic manufacturers.

Finally, we can learn from China's case, where the Government engaged itself in **hand-holdin ap**

proach to support the Industry by providing Cheap electricity which constitutes almost 40% of the cost. Also, Chinese government policies have prioritized solar PV as a **strategic sector**.

ONE HEALTH APPROACH

Why in the News?

The Union Cabinet has given the green light to establish a pivotal role at the Scientist H level, at the **National Institute of One Health** in Nagpur. This individual will play a dual role, serving not only as the Director of the institute but also as the Mission Director for the National One Health Mission.

NATIONAL ONE HEALTH MISSION

The concept of One Health serves as a unifying force, **bringing together various sectors to tackle health, productivity, and conservation challenges**. In the context of India, with its rich biodiversity, vast livestock population, and dense human habitation, the importance of One Health becomes even more pronounced.

The country faces **heightened risks of disease transmission** across different compartments. The COVID-19 pandemic, recent outbreaks like Lumpy Skin Disease in cattle, and the persistent threat of Avian Influenza underscore the need to address health issues not just from a human-centric perspective (zoonosis), but also from the angles of livestock and wildlife.

Embracing One Health presents an opportunity to harness the complementary strengths inherent in each sector, enabling the **development of integrated, resilient, and responsive systems** to effectively combat emerging health challenges.

As part of the mission's initiatives, a nationwide network of high-risk pathogen laboratories, categorized as **Biosafety level 3 (BSL 3) and Biosafety level 4 (BSL 4)**, has been established. This will **enhance the effectiveness of disease outbreak response** efforts across human, animal, and environmental sectors.

By fostering better connectivity, the **network**

will enable more efficient responses to complex disease scenarios, such as Nipah virus outbreaks involving bats, pigs, and humans.

NEED FOR NHOM

- **Health Interdependence:** Human, animal, plant, and environmental health are deeply interconnected. Diseases can traverse species boundaries, affecting both humans and animals, with environmental factors playing a pivotal role in disease emergence and spread.
- **Rise of Infectious Diseases:** The emergence of new infectious diseases and the resurgence of existing ones pose significant threats to public health, food security, and economic stability. Tackling these challenges necessitates a comprehensive, coordinated approach that encompasses all facets of health.
- **Zoonotic Threats:** Infectious diseases like COVID-19, Ebola, and avian influenza often originate in animals before jumping to humans. A One Health strategy is indispensable for early detection, prevention, and control of such zoonotic diseases at their source.
- **Combating Antimicrobial Resistance:** The rampant misuse and overuse of antibiotics in both humans and animals fuel the alarming rise of antimicrobial resistance. Implementing One Health interventions is critical to promoting judicious antibiotic usage and combating the threat of antimicrobial resistance.
- **Environmental Impact:** Environmental degradation, encompassing activities like deforestation, habitat destruction, and climate change, disrupts ecosystems and heightens the risk of disease transmission between animals and humans. Preserving environmental health is pivotal for safeguarding the well-being of both human and animal populations.
- **Food Safety Assurance:** Guaranteeing the safety and security of the food supply chain mandates collaborative efforts across sectors. Addressing issues such as foodborne illnesses, contamination, and unsustainable agricultural practices is essential for protecting human and

animal health alike.

NEED FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

During India's presidency of the G-20, the 'One Health' approach took center stage, garnering widespread support from all member nations. This collaborative effort emphasized specific objectives such as enhancing surveillance capabilities, bolstering analytical capacity, and establishing an international network of 'One Health' institutes.

'One Health' transcends mere disease management; it encompasses broader issues like antimicrobial resistance, food safety, plant health, and the profound impacts of climate change.

Interdisciplinary topics like 'One Health' necessitate active engagement not only from diverse governmental agencies but also from non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector, and citizens alike.

By adopting an actionable framework centered around this approach, we can advance towards the shared vision of 'One Earth, One Health' and the universal aspiration of 'Health for All'.

Twenty first century is marred with challenges such as Climate change, pandemics that are transboundary in nature and require global cooperation. In that context, One health approach is sine qua non for countries in order to solve these problem and can enhance cooperation.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q1. With reference to India's Desert National Park, which of the following statements is correct?

1. It is spread over two districts.
2. There is no human habitation inside the Park.
3. It is one of the natural habitats of the Great Indian Bustard.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only

- (b) 2 and 3 only

- (c) 1 and 3 only

- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q2. The concept of "Public Trust Doctrine" in environmental law implies that natural resources are:

- (a) Owned by the government

- (b) Owned by private entities

- (c) Owned collectively by citizens and the government and must be protected for the common good

- (d) Owned by multinational corporations

Q3. In which case did the Supreme Court of India recognise the "polluter pays" principle?

- (a) MC Mehta v. Union of India

- (b) Indra Sawhney v. Union of India

- (c) Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation

- (d) Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	C
2.	C
3.	A

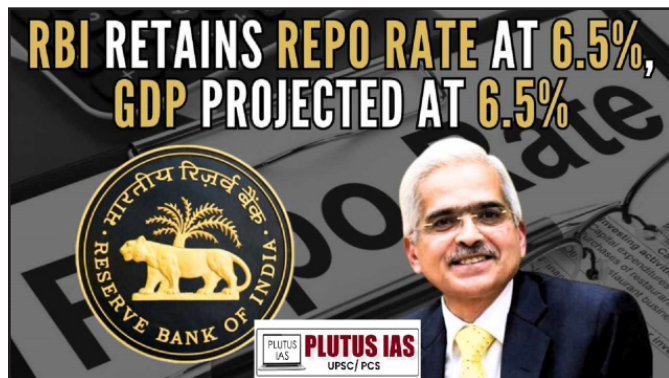
MAINS QUESTIONS

Q1. How can governments, NGOs, and local communities collaborate to leverage traditional knowledge for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development?

ECONOMY

DECISION REGARDING REPO RATE IN THE MEETING OF MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE OF RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

Why in the News?



- Recently in India, on April 5, 2024, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India, in view of the pressure of rising food prices in India, in its meeting has kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 percent for the seventh consecutive time.
- The pressure of rising food prices in India is hampering the RBI's efforts to slow the pace of inflation on a sustainable basis to the target of four per cent.
- In the recently held Monetary Policy Committee meeting of the Reserve Bank of India, the possibility of retail inflation falling below the critical level of four percent in the second quarter (July-September) of the financial year 2024-2025 has also been expressed.

WHAT IS THE MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE OF THE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA?

- The Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India is a committee constituted by the Government of India.
- It was formed in the year 2016 to make interest rate determination in India more useful and transparent.

- The Governor of the Reserve Bank is the ex-officio Chairman of the Committee.
- The Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (RBI Act) has been amended by the Finance Act, 2016 to provide a statutory and institutional framework in India to the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India.
- In India, under Section 45ZB of the RBI Act 1934 as amended, the Central Government has the power to constitute a six-member MPC.
- By amending the Reserve Bank of India Act, monetary policy making in India has been handed over to a newly constituted Monetary Policy Committee (MPC).
- Monetary policy is the measure or tool by which the central bank controls the flow of money in the economy by controlling interest rates, maintains price stability and tries to achieve the goal of high growth rate.
- As per the provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, out of six members of the Monetary Policy Committee, three members are from the Reserve Bank, including the Governor, a Deputy Governor and one other officer.
- The other three members are appointed by the Central Government. Who are selected by a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary. Their tenure is of 4 years, and they are not eligible for reappointment.
- It is mandatory to have 4 meetings of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in a year in which the quorum for the meeting is four members.
- Decisions in this committee are taken on the basis of majority and in case of equal votes, the Governor of the Reserve Bank gives his casting vote.

CURRENT MEMBERS OF MPC :

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has six members, three of whom are from the Reserve

- Banks cannot use the securities held with the Reserve Bank under the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) to borrow under the repo rate.

EFFECTS ARISING AS A RESULT OF INCREASE IN REPO RATE IN INDIA :

- An increase in the repo rate in India means that loans will become costlier and the monthly installment of the existing loan will increase.
- Increasing the repo rate by the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India causes banks to borrow less cash from the Reserve Bank, thereby reducing the money supply in the economy and this process is expected to reduce inflation in India .
- After the increase in repo rate, banks increase the rates of loans like home loan, auto loan, personal loan etc., due to which the expenses of the loan takers increase.
- An increase in repo rate in any economy can affect the consumption and demand of citizens.

CURRENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE OF THE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA :

- In this meeting, it has been decided to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 percent, rejecting any kind of change regarding the repo rate.
- Despite the tightening of liquidity in recent weeks, the RBI has maintained its accommodative policy stance. Holding back housing means reducing the money supply in the economy to control inflation.
- The Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India has retained the GDP growth rate at 7 percent and retail inflation at 4.5 percent for the financial year 2024-25. In February 2024, Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood at 5.09 per cent compared to 5.1 per cent in January 2024.
- Food inflation in India continues to cause considerable instability, hampering the process of disinflation.
- Sustained and strong government capital ex-

penditure; Healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates; The outlook for investment activity remains bright due to rising capacity utilization, which is driven by a continuing widening of the private capital expenditure cycle. However, long-standing geopolitical tensions and increasing disruption to trade routes pose risks to the landscape.

- The Indian rupee remained in a range against other currencies of emerging markets and some advanced economies during the financial year 2023-24. This stability would indicate that India's economy is strong, financially stable and its position in the world market has improved.

NEW MEASURES CURRENTLY ANNOUNCED BY THE MONETARY POLICY COMMITTEE OF THE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA :

- **Proposal to deposit cash in banks through UPI** : Keeping in mind the popularity and convenience of UPI, RBI has proposed to enable UPI for cash deposit facility.
- **UPI access proposed for pre-paid instruments (PPI)** : To provide greater flexibility to PPI holders, RBI has proposed to allow linking of PPIs through third party UPI applications.
- PPI is a type of financial instrument that allows users to load money onto a prepaid account or card for future use. With this, PPI holders will be able to make UPI payments like bank account holders.
- Currently, UPI payments from bank accounts can be made through the bank's UPI app by linking the bank account or by using a third-party UPI application. However, the same facility is not available for PPI.
- PPI can currently be used to conduct UPI transactions only using applications provided by the PPI issuer.
- **Offers for CBDC through non-bank operators** : RBI also decided to distribute Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) through non-bank payment system operators.
- CBDC is legal tender issued in digital form by a

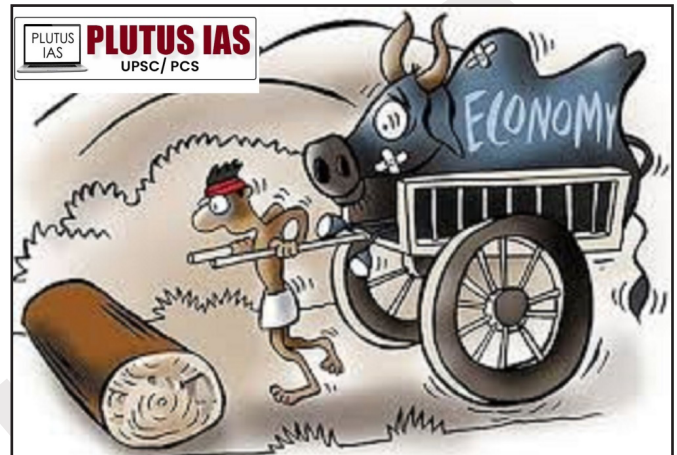
central bank. Digital Rupee (e-Rupee) is a digital currency launched by the RBI.

- RBI has divided the digital rupee into two broad categories:- First general purpose (retail) and second wholesale. This will therefore make CB-DC-retail accessible to a wider range of users.
- **Proposal to facilitate wider non-resident participation in Sovereign Green Bonds (SGRBs)** : RBI is making it easier for non-residents to participate in Sovereign Green Bonds (SGRBs).
- Based on an announcement in the Union Budget for FY 2022-23, the government had released the SGRBs in January 2023. They have decided to allow eligible foreign investors in the International Financial Services Center (IFSC) to invest in these bonds.
- At present, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) registered with SEBI are permitted to invest in SGRBs under various routes available for investment by FPIs in government securities.
- **Introduction of Mobile App for RBI Retail Direct Scheme** : RBI has decided to launch a mobile app for its RBI Retail Direct scheme, which was first introduced in November of the year 2021.
- This app will facilitate individual investors to maintain gilt accounts with RBI and invest in government securities.
- A Gilt account is a savings account for government securities, such as treasury bonds.
- It is similar to a bank account but uses government securities instead of cash.
- The scheme allows investors to purchase securities in the primary auction and trade the securities through the NDS-OM platform.
- **It was decided to review the Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) framework** : Banks included in the LCR framework will have to hold reserves of high quality liquid assets (HQLA) to cover the expected net cash outflow over the next 30 days.
- Some recent developments show that during

stressful times, depositors can quickly withdraw or transfer their deposits, especially by using online banking.

- Such emerging risks may require revisiting some decisions under the LCR framework.
- Therefore, certain amendments are being proposed in the LCR framework to facilitate better management of liquidity risk by banks.

CONCLUSION / WAY FORWARD :



- Monetary policy is a set of tools used by a country's central bank to control the overall money supply and promote economic growth and employ strategies such as modifying interest rates and changing bank reserve requirements.
- Therefore, regarding the economy of India. There cannot and should not be any compromise on price stability.
- According to the monetary policy makers of the Reserve Bank of India, the increase in income of citizens and increase in willingness to spend on non-essential items in the Indian economy is a good sign of strength in private consumption.
- The MPC is much more confident about its economic growth projections in the 12 months to March 2025. Therefore, this year also the GDP is expected to increase by an average of seven percent. For this, many factors are necessary – from the boost in agricultural activities and rural demand due to expectations of normal south-west monsoon to continued momentum in the manufacturing and service sectors.

- The Monetary Policy Committee points out that all five key parameters included in the RBI consumer confidence survey are expected to improve over a one-year period, indicating the Indian economy becoming stronger and growing at a faster pace.
- Therefore, it paves the way for a stronger and brighter future for both India's economy and India's Consumer Price Index (CPI).

STATUS OF INDIAN ECONOMY (APRIL, 2024)

Why in the News?

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), **India's economic outlook remains strong** for the upcoming two years. Despite an anticipated deceleration in headline growth, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slowing from 7.6% in the fiscal year 2023-24 to 7% in the current fiscal year, the economy is projected to rebound, reaching 7.2% growth in 2025-26.

CURRENT STATUS OF INDIAN ECONOMY

GDP growth rate- Asian Development Bank has anticipated strong economic expansion will be fueled by **significant investment demand from both the public and private sectors**, alongside a **steady uptick in consumer spending**. Nonetheless, the growth forecast for the fiscal year 2024-25 falls short of the 7.6% projection recorded for 2022-23.

Inflation trend-As per its Asia Development Outlook report, **retail inflation** will ease to 4.6% this year and 4.5% in 2025-26. India's "persistent" **food inflation is expected to drop** to 5.7% as farm output returns to normal trends this year.

U.S. rate hike impact-The Asian Development Bank (ADB) observed that the recent uptick in inflation reported by the United States in March has **cast doubt on the likelihood of anticipated interest rate reductions from the Federal Reserve**. Consequently, the ADB acknowledged that an extended period of **elevated interest rates could influence inflation trends across Asia**, albeit with a moderated effect on economic growth.

Increased consumer demand-Increased incomes are anticipated to **drive up consumer demand, particularly in urban areas** where confidence levels among consumers have seen a boost. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) foresees a rise in demand from urban centers, caused by declining inflation rates and a gradual enhancement in the labor markets of cities..

Foreign Direct Investment- The report suggested that foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows are **expected to stay subdued in the short run** owing to stringent global financial circumstances. However, an upswing is anticipated in 2025-26, driven by increased investment in industry and infrastructure.

A positive monsoon outlook-An anticipated return to **normal monsoon patterns this year is expected to rejuvenate rural consumption**. Last year, erratic rainfall adversely impacted the farm sector, leading to subdued rural spending. The surge in demand for employment opportunities under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act scheme underscores the strain caused by these conditions.

RISK HIGHLIGHTED BY ADB

The report highlighted that, **exports** are anticipated to remain subdued this year due to sluggish growth in major advanced economies, they are forecasted to rebound in 2025-26.

Regarding **foreign direct investment (FDI)**, the report suggested a muted outlook in the near term due to tight global financial conditions, but expects an upswing by 2025-26, driven by increased investment in industry and infrastructure.

Highlighting the **importance of price and financial market stability** for consumer and business confidence, the ADB underscored that its projections face **downside risks from global shocks, such as a surge in crude oil and energy prices** leading to higher global inflation and tighter financial conditions. Domestically, there's a **risk of underperformance in agriculture** due to weather shocks, potentially affecting demand and inflation.

IMPACT OF U.S. RATE HIKE ON INDIA

The impact of a rate hike by the United States Fed-

eral Reserve on the Indian economy can be multifaceted:

- **Capital Outflows:** A rate hike in the US typically leads to higher returns on dollar-denominated assets, attracting investors away from emerging markets like India. This could result in capital outflows from India, putting pressure on the domestic currency and potentially leading to depreciation of the Indian rupee.
- **Borrowing Costs:** Indian companies that have borrowed in dollars may face higher interest payments as US interest rates rise. This can increase their financial burden and affect profitability, particularly for firms with significant dollar-denominated debt.
- **Foreign Exchange Reserves:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may need to utilize its foreign exchange reserves to stabilize the currency if there is excessive volatility due to capital outflows. Depleting reserves can reduce India's ability to intervene in currency markets and could impact investor confidence.
- **Inflation:** A weaker rupee can lead to higher import costs, potentially increasing inflationary pressures in the Indian economy. This could prompt the RBI to tighten monetary policy to control inflation, which may further dampen economic growth.
- **Trade Balance:** A depreciating rupee may improve India's export competitiveness in the short term, but it could also make imports more expensive, widening the trade deficit.
- **Foreign Investment:** A rate hike in the US could make investments in US assets more attractive relative to Indian assets. This may lead to a slowdown in foreign direct investment (FDI) and foreign institutional investment (FII) inflows into India.

On the positive side, the ADB identified faster-than-expected FDI inflows, especially into manufacturing, as an upside risk that could enhance output and productivity. Additionally, better-than-expected global growth could bolster exports and overall economic growth.

INFLATION IN INDIA

Why in the News?

In March, India's retail inflation eased to its lowest level in 10 months, registering at 4.85%, down from February's 5.1%. However, **food inflation persisted at a high level**, staying nearly unchanged at 8.52% compared to the previous month's 8.66%. This was driven by accelerated price increases in cereals and meat, while double-digit inflation persisted in vegetables, pulses, spices, and eggs.

In March, **urban consumers** saw a significant decrease in inflation, dropping from 4.8% in February to 4.14%. However, rural consumers faced a slight increase, experiencing a higher inflation rate of 5.45% compared to 5.34% in the previous month.

This divergence was also noticeable in food price trends. Food inflation accelerated from 8.3% in February to 8.6% in March for rural India, while urban areas witnessed a decline from 9.2% to 8.35% during the same period.

PRELIMS BITE

IMPORTANT REASONS FOR FOOD INFLATION

There can be several reasons for Food inflation;

- **Supply and Demand Imbalance:** If the demand for food exceeds the available supply, prices tend to rise. Factors such as adverse weather conditions, pest infestations, or disruptions in transportation and distribution channels can lead to a shortage of food supply.
- **Cost of Production:** Increases in the cost of inputs like seeds, fertilizers, labor, and fuel can raise the cost of producing food. These increased production costs are often passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices.
- **Government Policies:** Government policies such as trade restrictions, export bans, import tariffs, and subsidies can influence food prices. For example, restrictions on exports or hoarding of essential commodities can lead to domestic shortages and price hikes.

- **Exchange Rates:** Fluctuations in currency exchange rates can affect the prices of imported food items. A weaker domestic currency can make imported food more expensive, leading to higher prices for consumers. For example rate hikes by U.S.A federal bank has a negative impact on Indian markets
- **Consumer Behavior:** Changes in consumer preferences or dietary habits can affect food prices. For example, increased demand for certain types of food, such as organic or specialty products, can lead to higher prices.
- **Global Factors:** Events or trends in the global economy, such as changes in oil prices, international trade agreements, or geopolitical tensions, can impact food prices worldwide. For example, Russia- Ukraine war.
- **Climate Change:** Long-term shifts in weather patterns and extreme weather events due to climate change can disrupt agricultural production, leading to crop failures and decreased food supply, which in turn can drive up prices.

BASICS OF INFLATION

Inflation is the persistent increase in the general price level of goods and services over time, leading to a decrease in the purchasing power of money. Conversely, deflation represents a decline in prices, while disinflation refers to a slowing down of the rate of inflation.

Creeping inflation is a gradual increase in price levels over time, which is generally considered beneficial for the economy. Bottleneck inflation, or structural inflation, arises from a significant decrease in supply coupled with unchanged demand levels.

Skewflation occurs when the rise in prices primarily affects specific commodities or a small group of goods. Galloping inflation denotes very high inflation rates, often reaching double or triple digits, while hyperinflation involves extremely rapid and accelerating inflation, exceeding 50% per month.

Inflation tax refers to the loss of purchasing power experienced by holding cash during times of high inflation. The Phillips Curve illustrates the inverse relationship between inflation and unemployment,

suggesting that as unemployment declines, inflation tends to rise.

In terms of origin, inflation is categorized into **cost-push and demand-pull**. Cost-push inflation results from increases in the prices of production factors such as raw materials, labor, and utilities. Demand-pull inflation occurs when demand rises due to excess money supply without a corresponding increase in supply.

Inflation rates are typically measured using price indices, which gauge the average level of prices across various goods and services. Inflation is assessed on a point-to-point basis, comparing prices in the current month with those from the corresponding month in the previous year.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX AND WHOLESALE PRICE INDEX

The **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** stands as a crucial indicator for tracking shifts in the prices urban consumers pay for a designated basket of goods and services over time. This index holds significant importance as it offers insights into inflationary patterns within the economy, serving as a key reference point for policymakers, economists, and investors alike to assess changes in the cost of living for citizens.

The computation of the CPI in India falls under the responsibility of the **Central Statistics Office (CSO)**, an integral part of MoSPI. Drawing from a predetermined assortment of essential items, the CPI **reflects the evolving prices of goods and services crucial to daily urban life**. This selection encompasses a diverse range of necessities, spanning from food essentials and housing costs to **transportation expenses**, medical services, educational fees, and other vital expenditures.

WPI:

The **Wholesale Price Index (WPI)** stands as a critical indicator for monitoring changes in the average prices of goods at the wholesale level over time. This index serves as a valuable tool for assessing inflationary patterns within the economy and is extensively utilized by policymakers, economists, and businesses to analyze shifts in production costs and

overall price levels.

Administered by the **Office of the Economic Adviser** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the WPI encompasses a **wide array of commodities traded in bulk**, spanning raw materials, intermediate goods, and finished products. Unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which focuses on retail prices paid by consumers, the WPI primarily **reflects price movements occurring at wholesale level**.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q.1. Consider the following statements regarding the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India.

1. It has been amended by the Finance Act, 2016 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (RBI Act).
2. The tenure of the members of this committee is 4 years, and they are not eligible for reappointment.
3. The Finance Minister of India is the ex-officio chairman of this committee.
4. It is mandatory for this committee to hold 6 meetings in a year during any financial year.

Which of the above statement/ statements is/ are correct?

- (a) Only 1, 2 and 3.
- (b) Only 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) Only 1 and 4
- (d) Only 1 and 2.

Q2. Which index measures changes in the average prices paid by urban consumers for a designated basket of goods and services, providing insights into the cost of living?

- (a) Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- (b) Wholesale Price Index (WPI)
- (c) Producer Price Index (PPI)
- (d) Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Correct answer: A) Consumer Price Index (CPI)

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	D
2.	A

MAINS QUESTION

Q1. Outlining the main functions of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India, discuss how low inflation and stable GDP growth in India affects the Indian economy? Give a logical answer.

SOCIAL ISSUE

YOUTH SUICIDES IN INDIA



Why in the News?

The issue of suicide in India is a concerning matter, India has one of the highest number of suicides in the world. As per NCRB data, In 2022, 1.71 lakh suicides were recorded, in which 41% were committed by the young adults below the age of 30, marking a significant 27% jump from 2018.

But these number are underestimated because of less reporting of suicidal deaths because of inadequate registration system, lack of death certification and the social stigma attached to suicides in India.

A young Indian dies by suicide every 8 minutes which is a loss to family, society and Country at large. This data points out the graveness of situation of mental health of students in India.

REASONS FOR INCREASE IN SUICIDE RATES IN INDIA:

Suicide is a complex human phenomenon which has no single factor, but multiple factors like biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors.

Mental health problems(54%)

Family issues(36%)

Academic stress(23%)

Social and lifestyle factors(20%)

Violence(22%)

Economic distress(9.1%)

Relationship factors(9%)

Other issues- Physical and sexual abuse, exam failures, intergenerational issues, other social-cultural factors such as Caste.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS FOR SUICIDES AMONG WOMEN

There are specific sociocultural factors for suicides of women in such as arranged and early marriages because of **familial pressure, young motherhood, low social status, domestic violence and economic dependence**. Apart from this, **gender stereotypes compelling rigid gender roles and gender based discrimination** have also contributed in suicides among women.

PROBLEMATIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

- An education system just focusses on scoring marks, often through rote learning and less focussing on the overall development of the child.
- The Indian education system poses immense pressure on students which severely affects the mental well being of the students. The **cut throat competition** in some of the competitive exams like IIT JEE, NEET for the students coming from Lower middle class families creates immense pressure.
- These exams are a way to alleviate their socio-economic status. But because of the scant number of seats in these exams only a fraction of students are able to clear them. Others who fail become prey to societal and peer pressure often leading students to take up their lives.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A BANE

Last decade has seen a proliferation of internet users in India. A metaanalysis of 19 states has revealed that almost **20% of college students are net**

addicts, one-third are cyber bullied and one-third of all these are suicidal.

Teens who use social media for 2 hours daily are more suicidal.

Sensational reporting of suicides of popular celebrities has an impact on the psychology of people. After the sensational reporting of death of a famous actor there was increase in searches on google related to “how to commit suicide.

WHAT COULD BE DONE?

Imparting Emotional intelligence- like problem solving , impulse control and emotional regulation along with improving help seeking behavior.

Early identification and care- helps people to work on depression and anxiety and also there are evidences people getting care from friends and family members tend to be less vulnerable to commit a suicide.

Healthy lifestyle- adopting a healthy lifestyle such as a good diet, regular exercising, yoga and meditation improves mental health and reduces suicides in young.

Improving family environment- by reducing domestic violence, decrease in patriarchal norms and alcohol consumption leads to reduction suicidal tendencies.

Providing economic assistance –to economically distressed people

Educational reforms- making education as a means for overall development of a child rather than just for quantitative assessment can create a huge impact.

Societal changes– to reduce stigma on the basis of caste, gender and sexuality of a person.

In this capitalistic, materialistic world where lifestyles are based on **show-off culture**. There is a need of implementing **educational, societal and behavioral changes** among citizens to cope with the mental health pressures and suicidal thought.

CLIMATE CRISIS AND GENDER NEUTRALITY

Why in the News?

Recently, the Supreme court of India in Ranjit Kumar and others v/s Union of India pronounced that people have a right to be free from the adverse impacts of climate change under Articles 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution of India .The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also highlighted that women and children are 14 times more likely than men to succumb to the impacts of a climate induced disaster.

WHAT IS CLIMATE CRISIS?

The climate crisis refers to the significant and rapid changes in Earth’s climate patterns, primarily driven by human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation. These changes result in rising temperatures, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and other environmental disruptions, posing profound threats to ecosystems and human societies worldwide.

HOW THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTING WOMEN:–

- **Vulnerability in Agriculture A Gendered Perspective-**Women living in rural areas of India depend largely on agriculture as their main source of livelihood. Climate change-related issues like unpredictable rainfall, droughts, and floods can drastically decrease crop production, impacting these women’s food availability and earnings. Furthermore, limited access to land, credit, and technology amplifies their exposure to climate-related challenges. This not only leads to physical health issues but also places additional burdens on women, contributing to mental health challenges and emotional distress.
- **Health Impacts: The Silent Crisis**– Rising temperatures and air pollution pose significant health risks, particularly for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children, and the elderly. Exposure to pollutants not only affects women’s respiratory and cardiovascular health but also hampers the physical and cognitive de-

velopment of unborn children. Urgent action is needed to mitigate these risks and protect public health.

- **Linking Extreme Events with Gender-based Violence**—The escalation of extreme weather events due to climate change correlates with increased incidents of gender-based violence against women. Moreover, disruptions in water cycles further compound the issue by impeding access to safe drinking water, intensifying women’s caregiving responsibilities, and limiting their opportunities for productive work and healthcare.
- **Child marriages**— In areas prone to drought, women and girls face a higher risk of malnutrition due to inadequate access to food. NFHS findings reveal that women residing in these drought-prone regions exhibit higher rates of underweight and are more susceptible to early marriages, contributing to the persistence of poverty and gender disparities.



THE IMPERATIVE OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION-

EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR RESILIENCE

Effective climate action demands the active participation of all segments of society. Empowering women with equal access to resources can enhance the effectiveness of climate solutions, as evidenced by the significant increase in agricultural yields when women receive equitable support. Moreover, women, especially in rural and tribal communities, have historically played pivotal roles in environmental conservation efforts.

ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES: HEAT-WAVES AND WATER SCARCITY

Immediate measures are necessary to mitigate the impact of heatwaves on vulnerable groups and ensure access to safe drinking water. Strategies such as heatwave warnings, urban planning for heat resilience, and community-based water management initiatives can significantly reduce risks and enhance resilience at the grassroots level.

LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Community-led initiatives, driven by local knowledge and participation, are crucial for building resilience to climate change. By devolving power and resources to grassroots institutions like panchayats and self-help groups, India can pave the way for inclusive and sustainable adaptation measures.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN CLIMATE POLICY

Efforts to mainstream gender considerations in climate policy are essential for addressing the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of women. State Action Plans on Climate Change must move beyond portraying women as mere victims and adopt gender-transformative strategies that empower women as agents of change.

ENHANCING URBAN RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE IMPACTS

Cities face growing susceptibility to climate-induced risks like heatwaves, floods, and air pollution. Prioritising green infrastructure in urban planning, including parks, vegetated roofs, and tree-shaded streets, can mitigate the urban heat island effect and minimise exposure to extreme heat. Moreover, efforts to enhance air quality, such as curbing vehicle emissions and advocating for clean energy solutions, are critical for safeguarding public health, especially for vulnerable groups like women and children, who are more prone to respiratory and heart ailments.

IMPROVED AVAILABILITY OF POTABLE WATER

Climate-induced disturbances to water reservoirs and supply networks intensify water scarcity, jeopardising public well-being. Immediate actions are imperative to enhance access to safe drinking

water, especially for women and girls, who often shoulder the main burden of water retrieval in numerous societies. Allocating resources to water infrastructure, rainwater collection mechanisms, and purification technologies can alleviate the adverse effects of water scarcity on at-risk communities.

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS ON CLIMATE CRISIS AND GENDER NEUTRALITY

The significance of women's involvement in sustainable development has been recognized in several key global events, including the **International Conference on Population and Development (1994)**, the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**, the **World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)**.

Additionally, the Convention to Combat Desertification (**UNCCD**), which boasted 193 State Parties as of March 2008, acknowledges the crucial contribution of women, especially in rural areas of developing countries affected by desertification and drought. It calls for its Member States to promote women's participation in decision-making policies and programmes that address desertification and drought conditions.

CONCLUSION: WOMEN AS LEADERS IN CLIMATE ACTION

Rather than being passive victims of climate change, women possess valuable insights and capabilities that can drive meaningful progress in climate action. By acknowledging and addressing gender disparities, we can forge a path towards a more equitable and resilient future for all. Addressing climate change is expected to have differential impacts on various social groups, particularly those who are most vulnerable and lack empowerment. It is imperative that global and national strategies, along with sector-specific responses, integrate gender perspectives, conduct thorough analyses, and foster inclusive participation to effectively tackle this challenge.

PRELIMS QUESTION

Q1. Consider the following statements regarding the National Air Quality Index:

1. It is developed by CPCB in collaboration with IIT Kanpur.
2. The index is based on the measurement of the eight pollutants.

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 Only
- (b) 2 Only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	C

MAINS QUESTION

Q1. Evaluate the role of women in climate action and propose strategies for incorporating gender-transformative approaches into national and state-level climate action plans in India.

Q2. India is considered as suicide capital of the world by World health organisation. Highlight the situation of suicides among young Indians, also recommending some measures to solve them. (15 marks /250 words)

SECURITY

MHA EXTENDED AFSPA IN REGIONS OF NAGALAND AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Why in the News?

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has recently announced the extension of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, in certain regions of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh for an additional six months.

REASONS BEHIND THE EXTENSION OF AFSPA

- **Ethnic Clashes:** The state has also been grappling with brutal ethnic violence, particularly between the Meitei and Kuki communities. This conflict, which erupted in May 2023, has claimed over 175 lives, making it the deadliest in Manipur since 1999. Finding a lasting solution to this ethnic conflict requires addressing underlying grievances and fostering dialogue between communities alongside effective policing.
- **Resurgence of Insurgency:** Manipur has witnessed a worrying resurgence of insurgent groups in recent years. These groups, often operating from neighbouring Myanmar, advocate for Manipur's secession from India. This adds another layer of instability to the region and makes a strong case for improved security measures. However, the effectiveness of AFSPA in addressing this specific challenge is a subject of debate.

ABOUT AFSPA

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- On August 15th, 1942, during British colonial rule, the Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance was introduced to quell the Quit India movement.
- This ordinance laid the groundwork for four separate ordinances, including one aimed at

addressing internal security challenges arising from the Partition, specifically in the "Assam disturbed areas," implemented in 1947.

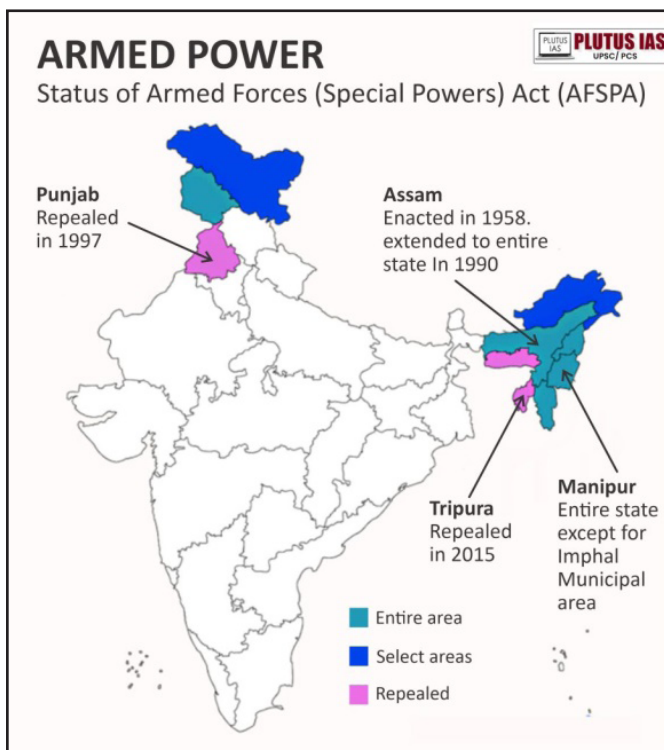
- Subsequently, the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act of 1958 was enacted following the Assam Disturbed Areas Act of 1955 to address the unrest in the Naga Hills and nearby regions.
- This Act was later replaced by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) for broader application. A similar legislation specific to Jammu and Kashmir was introduced in 1990.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS AND POWER

- Under AFSPA, the armed forces and Central Armed Police Forces deployed in designated "**disturbed areas**" are granted extensive authority. This includes the **power to use lethal force against individuals deemed to be acting unlawfully.**
- Additionally, the Act **provides immunity from prosecution and legal actions** without prior sanction from the Central government.
- Notifications concerning **AFSPA can be issued by both State and Union governments.** In the case of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, the Ministry of Home Affairs periodically issues "disturbed area" notifications.
- **Special provisions:**
 - As per **Section 3**, the Central Government, Governor of the State, or administrator of the Union Territory has the authority to designate either the entire area or a portion of the State or Union Territory as a "disturbed area." An area may be **classified as disturbed due to conflicts or disagreements among members of different religious, racial, linguistic, regional, caste, or communal groups.**

- Under **Section 4**, the **Army is granted powers to conduct searches and arrests without warrants**, utilise force up to causing death if necessary, dismantle arms and ammunition storage, fortifications, shelters, or hideouts, and halt, search, and confiscate any vehicle.
- **Section 6** mandates that arrested individuals and confiscated property must be handed over to the police promptly.
- **Section 7** provides protection for individuals acting in good faith within their official capacities.

ARGUMENTS FAVOURING AFSPA



- **Empowering Security Forces:** Proponents argue that AFSPA is essential for effective counter-insurgency operations. They reason that in situations where regular law enforcement fails, the military needs broader authority to restore order. This includes special legal protections for soldiers operating in these high-risk zones.
- **Maintaining National Security:** AFSPA is seen by some as a crucial tool for maintaining order in conflict-ridden regions. They argue that by quelling insurgency and violence, AFSPA safe-

guards national security and territorial integrity.

- **Boosting Morale:** Backers also suggest that AFSPA boosts troop morale. They argue that the threat of legal action against soldiers for actions taken in good faith can be demoralising. AFSPA's legal protections are seen as a way to ensure soldiers can focus on their duties without undue fear of litigation.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST AFSPA

- **Human Rights Violations:** Critics argue that the broad powers granted under AFSPA can lead to human rights abuses. Allegations of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and civilian harassment raise serious questions about accountability and the potential for misuse of power.
- **Strained Civil-Military Relations:** The act's critics argue that it creates a climate of fear and mistrust between the security forces and the local population. They believe that a rights-based approach would be more effective in fostering cooperation and building trust in the long run.
- **Ineffectiveness:** Some argue that despite being in place for decades, AFSPA has not achieved its objective of restoring normalcy in troubled areas. They advocate for addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty and social injustice, alongside security measures.
- **Absence of Accountability:** Section 7 of AFSPA necessitates obtaining prior authorization from central or state authorities for prosecuting a member of the security forces. This regulation results in a deficiency of accountability and transparency concerning instances of alleged human rights violations by security forces, enabling them to operate without fear of consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN BY IMPORTANT COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

- **Jeevan Reddy Committee (2004):** This committee recommended a complete repeal of AFSPA, suggesting its powers be incorporated into a revised Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. They also advocated for grievance cells in areas with

deployed forces.

- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC):** The ARC's 5th report echoed the call for AFSPA's repeal, highlighting the need for alternative approaches to public order.
- **Santosh Hegde Commission:** This commission proposed a more nuanced approach. They suggested:
 - Regular reviews (every 6 months) to assess AFSPA's necessity.
 - Amending the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act to address terrorism concerns.
 - Removing immunity from investigation for security forces accused of misconduct.

PRELIMS QUESTION

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Under AFSPA, the central government has the authority to declare an area as "disturbed".
2. As per the Santosh Hegde Commission, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act should replace AFSPA.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q2. What action can the armed forces take without a warrant under AFSPA?

- (a) Conduct searches
- (b) Make arrests
- (c) Use force
- (d) All of the above

ANSWERS

S. No.	Answers
1.	A
2.	D

MAINS QUESTION

Q1. Evaluate the effectiveness of AFSPA in maintaining law and order in conflict-affected areas. Discuss any alternative approaches that could be considered to address similar challenges.

Q2. Analyse the impact of AFSPA on the right to life and liberty of individuals living in regions where it is implemented. Provide examples and case studies to support your arguments.