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MCQs

THE HINDU

Gen Z's voice must lead to a humane education system

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in Focus?

- Growing concerns over **student suicides, paper leaks, and coaching-driven pressure** have highlighted the need to reform India's entrance examination system.
- There is increasing demand for a **fair, humane, and holistic assessment framework**.

Key Highlights:

- India's education system produces skilled professionals, but its **exam-centric admission culture** creates stress and narrow definitions of merit.
- Heavy reliance on **single high-stakes exams (NTA - National Testing Agency)** reduces evaluation to marks, ranks, and speed.
- There is a need for **multi-dimensional assessment** combining school performance, aptitude, analytical skills, interviews, and portfolios.
- Exams should shift focus from **rote learning to application, reasoning, and higher-order thinking**.

- The **coaching industry expansion** has increased commercialisation, inequality, and dependence on exam patterns.
- A **decentralised admission system** under UGC (University Grants Commission) norms can better reflect diverse academic needs.
- Strengthening **exam integrity** through encryption, biometric verification, randomised question banks, and strict penalties is essential.

Implications:

- Intense competition creates **stress, anxiety, and student suicides**, indicating a growing mental health crisis.
- Unequal access to coaching, language barriers, and the **digital divide distort merit and opportunity**.
- Rapid growth of coaching centres has led to **commercialisation and exploitation of students**.
- A **single exam model cannot capture diverse talents, aptitude, and socio-economic contexts**.
- Overemphasis on entrance exams leads to **decline of school education and conceptual learning**.
- Weak regulation and oversight result in **paper leaks, unfair practices, and lack of accountability**.

Way Forward:

- Introduce a **holistic and continuous**



assessment system combining exams with projects, interviews, and practical evaluation.

- Enforce **strict regulation of coaching centres** on fees, advertising, and student welfare.
- Promote **decentralised admissions** by universities within a broad national framework (UGC guidelines).
- Strengthen **mental health support** through counselling systems and awareness programmes.
- Expand **career guidance and industry linkage** via internships, mentorships, and exposure to diverse career paths.

Mains Question:

"The current entrance examination system in India promotes stress and inequality while narrowing the concept of merit. Discuss the need for a holistic reform of the system and suggest suitable measures." (15 marks, 250 words)

Western Ghats conservation with science and dialogue

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 3

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Why in Focus?

- The **editorial examines the prolonged efforts to finalise the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) notification for the Western Ghats**, highlighting the need to balance biodiversity conservation with the concerns of local communities and States.

Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA): A geographically delineated region notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, where developmental activities are regulated to protect ecologically fragile ecosystems and biodiversity.

Key Highlights

- The **Western Ghats extend for about 1,600 km across Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu**, covering nearly 1.64 lakh sq. km.
- Recognised by **Conservation International as one of the world's eight 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity**, it was inscribed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012**.
- The **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), chaired by Prof. Madhav Gadgil (2010)**, recommended declaring 142 talukas in 44 districts as ESA, divided into ESZ-1, ESZ-2 and ESZ-3.

An **Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ)** is a buffer or transition area surrounding protected areas such as National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries, notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, to regulate and manage activities that could adversely affect wildlife and ecosystems.

- The **Kasturirangan Committee (2012) reduced the proposed ESA to 59,940 sq. km (~37% of the Western Ghats)** by excluding plantations and human settlements.

The **Kasturirangan Committee** (High-Level Working Group) was constituted in 2012 to review the Gadgil Committee report and recommend a balanced approach to conservation and development in the Western Ghats.

- The **ESA notification is proposed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**, to regulate environmentally harmful activities such as mining, quarrying, thermal power plants and red-category industries.
- Between 2015 and 2026, five draft notifications were issued.
- The **2024 draft introduced the option of State-wise/phased implementation**.
- **Karnataka has opposed the proposal, with around 20,668 sq. km identified as ESA**, citing concerns over agriculture, plantations, mining, infrastructure and livelihoods.

Implications

- **Delays in finalising the ESA notification may accelerate deforestation, habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss.**



- **Balancing ecological conservation with the livelihood needs of farmers,** plantation owners and forest-dependent communities remains a major challenge.
- **Dependence on satellite imagery instead of field verification has raised concerns** over inaccurate ESA demarcation.
- **Fear of restrictions on agriculture, forest rights, infrastructure development and possible displacement** has fuelled resistance among local communities.
- **Lack of consensus between the Centre and States has delayed effective implementation** of conservation measures.

Way Forward

- **Finalise ESA boundaries through ground surveys** complemented by satellite mapping.
- **Strengthen consultation with State governments, Gram Sabhas** and local communities before implementation.
- **Ensure protection of the rights of indigenous** and forest-dwelling communities under the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- **Adopt a phased, State-specific implementation strategy** with safeguards.
- **Promote sustainable development by regulating ecologically harmful activities** while supporting eco-friendly agriculture, plantations and tourism.

Mains Question

“The Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) notification for the Western Ghats highlights the challenge of balancing ecological conservation with developmental needs. Discuss the issues involved and suggest a balanced approach.” (250 Words)

A healthy tax: On taxing foods high in fat, sugar and salt

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in Focus?

- The **Parliamentary Standing Committee and the Indian Council of Medical Research–National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR–NIN)-led “Let’s Fix Our Food” consortium** have recommended **Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL)** and health taxes on High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) foods to curb rising obesity and diet-related diseases.

ICMR–NIN: India's premier nutrition research institute under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), headquartered in Hyderabad, which conducts research and provides scientific guidance on nutrition and public health.

Let's Fix Our Food (LFOF) Consortium: It was launched in 2023 as an ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR–NIN)-led multi-institutional initiative to promote healthier food environments and prevent diet-related non-communicable diseases among children and adolescents.

Key Highlights

- India faces a double burden of malnutrition: **persistent undernutrition alongside rising overweight, obesity and diet-related metabolic disorders.**
- **National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data show declining undernutrition** but increasing adult overweight and obesity.
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution recommended:
 - ◆ **Mandatory Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL) for foods high in sugar, salt and fat.**
 - ◆ **Mandatory disclosure of sugar content in baby foods.**
- The ICMR–NIN-led “Let’s Fix Our Food” consortium recommended:
 - ◆ **Health tax on High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) foods.**
 - ◆ **Stricter regulation of HFSS food advertisements.**
 - ◆ **Healthier school food environments.**
 - ◆ **Mandatory FOPNL.**



- ICMR–NIN estimates 17 million+ Indian children and adolescents have obesity; the figure may exceed 27 million by 2030.
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 133 countries have introduced or increased health taxes since 2017.
- Colombia (2023) introduced a junk food tax, increasing from 10% → 15% → 20%.
- Similar taxes exist in Norway, Hungary, Denmark, Bermuda, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Navajo Nation (U.S.).

Implications

- Rising obesity is increasing the burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- High consumption of HFSS foods, especially among children, is a major public health concern.
- Misleading marketing and poor nutrition awareness encourage unhealthy diets.
- Industry resistance may delay regulatory reforms.

Way Forward

- Implement mandatory Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL).
- Levy health taxes on High Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) foods.
- Regulate advertisements targeting children.
- Promote healthy school food environments.
- Strengthen nutrition awareness through POSHAN Abhiyaan and the Eat Right India Movement.

Mains Question

“India is increasingly facing a double burden of malnutrition. Discuss the role of fiscal and regulatory measures such as health taxes and Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling in promoting healthier diets.” (250 Words)

KEYWORDS

Blue Straggler Stars (BSS)

- Blue Straggler Stars (BSS) are unusually hot, blue, bright, and more massive stars that appear younger than other stars in the same old stellar population.
- They are primarily observed in old, dense stellar systems such as globular clusters, but are also found in open clusters, dwarf galaxies, and the Galactic field.
- The most accepted formation mechanisms are mass transfer in a binary system and stellar mergers/collisions, which rejuvenate the star by supplying fresh hydrogen fuel.
- A binary star system is a system of two stars orbiting each other due to their mutual gravitational attraction.
- Recently, Indian astronomers reported the rare discovery of an actively forming Blue Straggler Star in the binary system TIC 327546480, providing direct observational evidence for the mass-transfer origin of these stars.

Dhimsa Dance



- Dhimsa is a traditional tribal folk dance of Andhra Pradesh, especially associated with the Araku Valley.
- It is performed by tribal communities such as the Bagata, Gadaba, Poraja, Valmiki, Khond, Kondadora, Mukadora, and Kotia.
- The dance is performed during festivals, weddings, and the annual hunting festival.

- **Men and women perform the dance together in a circular formation**, holding each other around the waist or shoulders.
- **Dhimsa is accompanied by traditional musical instruments** such as dappu, tudumu, mori, kidgi, gilka, and jodukommulu.

National Offshore Exploration Scheme ('Samudra Manthan')

- The **Union Cabinet** recently approved a **₹84,084-crore outlay** for the **National Offshore Exploration Scheme ('Samudra Manthan')** under the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas**, to be implemented until **FY 2030-31**.
- It aims to strengthen **India's energy security** by discovering and catalysing **hydrocarbon reserves of over 600 MMTOE (Million Metric Tonnes of Oil Equivalent)**.
- Its largest allocation of **₹43,200 crore** is for **drilling 60 deepwater exploration wells**, with **government support up to 50% of eligible drilling costs per well**.
- Beyond drilling, the scheme focuses on **offshore data acquisition, common offshore infrastructure hubs, and domestic oil & gas manufacturing zones**.
- By **de-risking high-cost deepwater drilling** and generating **seismic data**, it aims to reduce **geological uncertainties**, attract **private investment**, and offset **declining output from aging fields**.

Species In News

Bubulcus ibis

- Bubulcus ibis is the **scientific name of the Cattle Egret**, a widely distributed heron species found across Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, and the Americas.
- It is **commonly associated with grazing animals** such as cattle, buffaloes, and elephants, feeding on insects and other small animals disturbed by their movement.
- Unlike most herons, **the Cattle Egret frequently forages in grasslands, agricultural fields, and wetlands** rather than primarily in aquatic habitats.
- During the breeding season, **adults develop distinctive buff-orange plumes on the head, breast, and back, while the bill and legs also change colour**.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies the Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis) as **Least Concern (LC)** due to its large population and extensive global distribution.



Places in News

Kali Tiger Reserve (KTR)



- Kali Tiger Reserve (KTR) is located in **Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka** and comprises the **Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary and Anshi National Park in the Western Ghats**.
- The reserve is traversed by the **Kali River** and is dominated by **semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests**, with bamboo and grassland patches.
- It **shares ecological connectivity with Bhimghad Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka** and several protected areas in Goa and Maharashtra, forming an important wildlife corridor.
- The reserve supports diverse fauna, including **Tiger, Leopard, Asian Elephant, Gaur (Indian Bison), Dhole (Wild Dog), Sloth Bear**, and one of the highest populations of the **Great Indian Hornbill** in the Western Ghats.
- **Black panthers found in Kali Tiger Reserve are melanistic leopards** (*Panthera pardus fusca*), not a separate species; their black coat is caused by melanism, while the characteristic leopard rosettes remain visible under certain lighting conditions.

Tiruvallikeni Divya Desam

- It is located in the neighborhood of **Triplicane in Chennai, Tamil Nadu**, a place historically known as "**Allikeni**," translating to **pond of lilies**, from which the modern name Triplicane is derived.

- Originally constructed by the **Pallava king Narasimhavarman I** between the **6th and 8th centuries CE**, the shrine is a classic example of **Dravidian architecture** that later received significant expansions under the **Chola** and **Vijayanagara empires**.
- The primary deity is **Lord Krishna** in the form of **Parthasarathy (Arjuna's charioteer)**, who is uniquely depicted sporting a **mustache** and holding only a **conch** rather than his famous weapons, honoring his vow to remain unarmed during the **Mahabharata war**.
- It is one of the rare temples in India that houses **five distinct forms of Lord Vishnu** within a single complex: **Krishna as Parthasarathy, Yoga Narasimha, Rama, Gajendra Varadaraja, and Ranganatha**.



Ceuta

- **Ceuta** recently made international headlines in **late July 2026** due to a severe **border crisis**, where an estimated **60,000 migrants** crossed from **Morocco** into the enclave by land and sea, resulting in **dozens of casualties** and prompting **Spain to deploy military personnel**.
- It is a **Spanish autonomous city** situated on the **northern coast of Africa**, directly sharing a **land border with Morocco** and separated from the Spanish mainland by the **Strait of Gibraltar**.
- Positioned at the boundary where the **Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean**, its location has historically made it a **highly strategic maritime and naval gateway**.

- Along with **Melilla** (another Spanish enclave), Ceuta represents the **European Union's only land border with Africa**, making it a major **flashpoint for migration issues**.
- The region remains a **persistent territorial dispute** between **Spain and Morocco**; Spain considers Ceuta an **integral part of its territory**, while **Morocco claims sovereignty** over both **Ceuta and Melilla**.

