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MCQs

THE HINDU

The India-EFTA partnership, one plus one equals three

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- The **India-European Free Trade Association Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)** entered into force on **October 1, 2025**, creating a framework for greater trade, investment, technology transfer and employment between India and the four EFTA countries.

Key Highlights

- EFTA (European Free Trade Association) is an **intergovernmental organisation promoting free trade and economic integration among its member countries**.
- EFTA **comprises Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland**.
- EFTA offered concessions on **92.2% of tariff lines**, covering 99.6% of the value of India's exports.
- India offered concessions on **82.7% of tariff lines**, covering 95.3% of EFTA's exports.

- TEPA is notable for its **dedicated focus on investment and job creation**.
- EFTA states aim to facilitate **\$100 billion investment in India over 15 years** and 1 million direct jobs.
- Iceland can **contribute expertise in geothermal energy, CCUS and sustainable fisheries**.

CCUS (Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage) is a technology that captures CO₂ emissions, either uses them in useful products or stores them permanently underground to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions.

- India can benefit from Icelandic expertise in **direct-use geothermal technology**, particularly in Himalayan regions.
- Iceland's **CarbFix technology demonstrates permanent CO₂ storage by mineralising carbon dioxide** in basaltic rocks.
- India and Iceland are also exploring **e-methanol production**, using captured industrial CO₂ and green hydrogen.
- India has **been an Observer to the Arctic Council since 2013** and released its Arctic Policy in 2022.

The **Arctic Council** is an intergovernmental forum established in 1996 to promote cooperation on issues such as environmental protection and sustainable development in the Arctic.



Implications for India

- Ensuring that increased imports do not adversely affect vulnerable domestic industries.
- Converting tariff concessions into actual increases in exports.
- Developing domestic capabilities to absorb advanced technologies and investment.
- Building adequate infrastructure and skilled manpower for high-tech industries.
- Ensuring that investment commitments translate into sustained employment and domestic value addition.

Way Forward

- Strengthen domestic manufacturing and supplier ecosystems.
- Facilitate technology transfer and joint R&D with EFTA countries.
- Improve logistics, skilling and infrastructure to attract investment.
- Promote cooperation in renewable energy, CCUS, fisheries and Arctic research.
- Monitor implementation of TEPA to ensure balanced gains in trade, investment, technology and employment.

Mains Question

“The India–EFTA TEPA represents a shift from conventional trade agreements towards partnerships centred on investment, technology and employment.” Discuss its significance for India and the challenges in ensuring its effective implementation. (15 marks, 250 words)

Household debt, financing today against tomorrow

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 3

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

Why in Focus?

- India's household debt has increased, raising concerns about the growing dependence on credit for consumption and the sustainability of household finances.

Household debt refers to the total amount of money owed by households to banks, financial institutions and other lenders, including housing loans, personal loans, credit-card debt, consumer loans and other borrowings.

Key Highlights

- India's household debt stood at around 45.5% of GDP in September 2025, up from 39.2% in March 2021.
- Household net financial savings improved to around 6% of GDP in 2024-25, from 5.2% in 2023-24.
- Traditional housing loans differ from consumption loans because they generally create an asset.
- Personal loans, credit cards, digital lending and Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) have expanded access to unsecured credit.
- Productive borrowing for housing, education or investment can support long-term household welfare.
- Borrowing for routine needs such as food, healthcare or rent may indicate inadequate current income or social protection.
- Rising debt-service obligations can reduce disposable income and future consumption.
- The key policy challenge is to distinguish productive credit from distress-driven consumption credit.

Implications

- Rising dependence on unsecured and consumption-oriented borrowing.
- High interest costs can increase repayment burdens for vulnerable households.
- Uneven and uncertain incomes make debt repayment difficult for informal workers.
- Easy digital lending can encourage excessive borrowing.



- **Debt-financed consumption may mask weaknesses** in income growth.
- **Excessive household leverage can weaken consumption** during economic or employment shocks.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen responsible lending** and borrower protection.
- **Improve financial literacy and transparency of digital lending** products.
- **Monitor household debt by income group, loan type and repayment capacity.**
- **Promote stable employment** and sustained income growth.
- **Expand social protection to reduce the need for borrowing** for essential expenditure.
- **Encourage productive and asset-building credit** while preventing distress borrowing.

Mains Question

“Rising household debt in India is not merely a financial issue but reflects deeper concerns related to income growth, consumption and social protection.” Discuss.

The significance of the Cardiff MoU

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- The **Cardiff Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** signed by the leaders of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has brought the issue of **greater autonomy and independence from the United Kingdom (UK)** into focus.

Key Highlights:

- The **UK consists of four nations - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.**

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have their own elected governments and enjoy different levels of **devolved powers**.

- These three nations have their own **languages, cultures and historical identities**. Over time, this has led to demands for more powers to be transferred from **Westminster**, the UK Parliament in London.
- **Northern Ireland:** Its government is based on **power-sharing** between Nationalists, who favour closer ties with Ireland, and Unionists, who support remaining within the UK. The **Good Friday Agreement (1998)** also provides for a possible referendum on Irish reunification under certain conditions.
- **Scotland:** The demand for independence is stronger than in Wales. In the **2014 referendum**, 55.3% voted against independence while 44.7% supported it. The issue gained fresh importance after **Brexit (United Kingdom's decision to leave EU)**, as 62% of Scottish voters had voted to remain in the European Union (EU).
- **Wales:** Support for complete independence has traditionally been lower. However, there has been growing support for more powers. In the **2011 referendum**, 63.49% voted in favour of giving the Welsh legislature greater law-making powers.
- The three governments have now come together through the **Cardiff MoU** to express support for greater **self-determination**. However, the MoU is **not a legally binding agreement** and does not itself make independence possible.
- The UK Government supports decentralisation but has opposed immediate demands for independence or reunification referendums. This has created a debate between **regional demands for greater powers and Westminster's control over constitutional matters**.

Implications:

- Growing demands for independence could create **constitutional uncertainty** and raise questions about the future territorial structure of the UK.
- Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different political situations, so a **common approach to independence** may be difficult.



- Independence could create practical issues related to **currency, public finances, trade, borders and movement of people**.
- In Northern Ireland, constitutional change is closely connected with the sensitive **Nationalist-Unionist divide**, making the issue more complex.
- Brexit has strengthened demands for closer European ties in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but **rejoining the EU would require a separate accession process**.

Way Forward:

- Westminster should maintain **regular dialogue** with the devolved governments and address concerns about the distribution of powers.
- Strengthen **devolution and decentralisation** while clearly defining the responsibilities of the UK Government and regional governments.
- Any referendum on independence or Irish reunification should follow **constitutional provisions, democratic consent and transparent procedures**.
- Conduct independent studies on the **economic, legal and administrative consequences** of possible constitutional changes.
- Improve **intergovernmental cooperation** on public services, trade, infrastructure and other issues affecting all parts of the UK.

Mains Question:

The growing demand for greater autonomy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland reflects the changing nature of the United Kingdom's constitutional structure. Discuss the major challenges associated with this trend. (15 marks, 250 words)

Satisfaction with police remains low among cybercrime victims

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies

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

Why in Focus?

- The **Status of Policing in India Report 2026** highlights a major gap in India's fight against cybercrime. While reporting systems have improved, many victims remain dissatisfied with **police investigation and follow-up**.

Key Highlights

- **Cybercrime** has become a major public safety challenge with the growth of **online financial fraud, identity theft, phishing and investment scams**.
- India has expanded its **cyber policing system** through the **National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal**, cyber helplines and specialised cyber police stations across States.
- Despite better access to reporting, **63% of cybercrime victims are dissatisfied** with the way police handle their complaints. About **one in five** are very dissatisfied.
- Victim satisfaction declines as a complaint moves through the system.
- **Women report higher severe dissatisfaction**. About **26% of women** are very dissatisfied compared with **18% of men**.
- Accessing police services can be time-consuming. **34%** of victims who visited a police station waited **2–3 hours**, while **14% waited for more than four hours**. Only 29% were attended to within an hour.
- Repeated visits are another concern. **23%** of victims had to visit the police station **five or more times**. The figure was higher in **rural areas at 38%** compared with **19% in urban areas**.

Implications

- Reporting cybercrime has become easier, but **effective investigation and timely resolution** remain a major challenge.
- Cybercrime requires specialised knowledge of **digital evidence, cyber forensics, online financial transactions and emerging technologies**. Uneven police capacity can affect investigation quality.
- Delays and repeated visits can increase victims' **financial loss, travel costs and loss of working hours**, and may discourage them from pursuing complaints.



- The higher number of repeated visits among **rural victims** points to gaps in access to efficient cyber policing and institutional support.
- Higher severe dissatisfaction among women highlights the need for more **victim-sensitive and responsive policing**.
- Delays, poor communication and limited follow-up can weaken **public trust in law enforcement**.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **specialised cyber police units** through regular training in digital forensics, financial fraud and emerging cyber threats.
- Improve **case tracking and communication** so that victims receive regular updates without repeatedly visiting police stations.
- Expand **online and remote investigation support**, particularly for victims in rural and remote areas.
- Strengthen coordination between **police, banks, payment platforms and technology companies** for faster tracing and freezing of fraudulent transactions.
- Adopt a **victim-centric policing approach** with faster response, accessible grievance mechanisms and better support for vulnerable victims.

Mains Question

Despite the expansion of cybercrime reporting mechanisms in India, victims continue to face difficulties in investigation and follow-up. Discuss the major challenges in India's cyber policing system and suggest measures to make it more responsive and effective. (15 marks, 250 words)

KEYWORDS

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs

- Ayushman Arogya Mandirs aim to **provide comprehensive primary healthcare, including preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative services**.
- They **were earlier known as Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs)** under the Ayushman Bharat programme.
- The **initiative aims to establish 1.5 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs to provide universal and free comprehensive primary healthcare** closer to communities.
- As of 31 January 2025, **1,76,141 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs had been operationalised across India**.
- **Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana is the second component of Ayushman Bharat**, providing health assurance of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalisation.

Southwest Monsoon

- The Southwest Monsoon is **India's most important rainfall system, contributing nearly 70–75% of annual rainfall**.
- It **results from differential heating of land and sea, with moist winds moving from the Indian Ocean towards the heated Indian landmass**.
- Major factors **include the northward shift of Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), monsoon trough, heating of the Tibetan Plateau, cross-equatorial flow, and moisture from the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal**.
- It **generally reaches Kerala around 1 June and covers most of India by early July**.
- It **has two major branches: Arabian Sea Branch and Bay of Bengal Branch**.
- The Western Ghats cause **orographic rainfall on the windward side and create rain-shadow areas** over parts of the Deccan Plateau.



- The **Bay of Bengal** branch brings **substantial rainfall** to **Northeast India** and the **Indo-Gangetic plains**.
- Southwest Monsoon rainfall is **influenced by El Niño, La Niña, Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), snow cover** and **Indian Ocean warming**.
- The monsoon has **active and break phases**, causing **considerable temporal variation in rainfall**.

CSIR-NEERI Green Crackers

- The **Supreme Court** recently ruled out a **total nationwide ban on firecrackers** for Deepavali and accepted **CSIR-NEERI** recommendations for limited and conditional use of next-generation **green crackers**.
- **Green crackers** are developed by the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI)** and are designed to reduce **PM2.5 and PM10 emissions by 30-40%** compared with conventional fireworks.
- They use modified formulations aimed at reducing harmful emissions and avoiding prohibited substances such as **barium compounds**, thereby lowering the environmental and health impact of fireworks. .
- CSIR-NEERI has developed three main variants **SWAS (Safe Water Releaser)**, which emits water vapour to suppress dust; **STAR (Safe Thermite Cracker)**, which reduces particulate matter; and **SAFAL (Safe Minimal Aluminium)**, which uses less aluminium to reduce sound intensity.

Places in News

CERN

- **CERN** is in the news as a team of five Indian high school students, **“attoPION”**, won the **13th edition of the Beamline for Schools competition** organised by CERN.
- CERN stands for **Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire** (European Council for Nuclear Research). However, it is now commonly referred to as the **European Laboratory for Particle Physics**.
- CERN is located near **Geneva, Switzerland, close to the France-Switzerland border**, and is one of the world's leading **particle physics laboratories**, studying the fundamental building blocks of matter using advanced particle accelerators.
- CERN was originally established by **12 founding member states** and has **Observer status at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)**, allowing it to participate and provide expertise without voting rights.
- It is historically associated with the invention of the **World Wide Web (WWW)** by **Tim Berners-Lee**, an English computer scientist, in 1989.
- In **2004**, India's **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** gifted CERN a statue of **Lord Nataraja**, symbolising the connection between **Indian philosophy and modern scientific exploration**.

