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MCQs

THE HINDU

The south's muted voice as political power shifts north

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- The debate over **delimitation** has raised concerns in southern India about its future **political representation** in Parliament.
- It has also brought wider issues of **federalism, fiscal devolution and Centre-State relations** into focus.

Key Highlights

- Indian national politics has historically seen greater dominance of **leaders from northern India**, while southern leaders have often remained influential mainly within their respective States.
- Leaders such as **E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Kamaraj, N.T. Rama Rao and P.V. Narasimha Rao** made significant contributions to national politics, but sustained national leadership from the South has remained limited.
- The major concern today is **delimitation**. If Lok Sabha seats are redistributed mainly on the basis of the **current population**, States

with higher population growth could gain more seats.

- Southern States fear that this could reduce their **relative political representation**, despite their success in **population stabilisation and human development**.
- At the **31st Southern Zonal Council meeting**, Karnataka's D.K. Shivakumar demanded that the **1971 Census** continue to be used for delimitation for another 25 years and that the present strength of **543 Lok Sabha seats** be retained.
- However, southern States have not been able to develop a **common position**. Differences in political interests and dependence on Union funds have weakened their **collective bargaining power**.
- The issue is also connected with the wider debate on **Centre-State relations**. Earlier leaders such as **N.T. Rama Rao** strongly advocated greater State autonomy, contributing to demands for institutional reforms such as the **Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations, 1983**.

Implications

- Delimitation has to balance **representation according to population** with the concerns of States that successfully controlled population growth.
- A significant increase in seats for high-population States could alter the existing **political balance between northern and southern India**.



- Southern States may perceive such changes as a penalty for achieving **demographic transition, population stabilisation and better social development**.
- Differences among southern States have weakened their ability to collectively negotiate issues of **representation, fiscal devolution and federal autonomy**.
- Greater dependence on Union funds can reduce the **political bargaining power of States** and weaken **fiscal federalism**.
- If the issue is handled poorly, it could intensify the **North-South divide** and create tensions within India's **federal structure**.

Way Forward

- The Union and States should build **political consensus** through extensive consultation before making major changes in parliamentary representation.
- Delimitation should balance **population, democratic representation and demographic performance** so that States are not disproportionately penalised for population stabilisation.
- Institutions such as the **Inter-State Council and Zonal Councils** should be strengthened as platforms for resolving Centre-State and inter-State concerns.
- **Fiscal federalism** should be strengthened through transparent and predictable **tax devolution and grants** to reduce excessive dependence on the Union.
- The debate should remain rooted in **constitutional federalism and national unity**, rather than becoming a confrontation between northern and southern India.

Mains Question

The proposed delimitation exercise has raised concerns among southern States regarding political representation and federal balance. Discuss the major concerns and suggest a balanced way forward. (15 marks, 250 words)

The two balance sheets behind every e-waste decision

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- India's growing volume of **discarded electronics and IT equipment** presents both an **environmental challenge** and an opportunity to recover valuable **metals and critical minerals** through **urban mining**.

Key Highlights

- **Urban mining** involves **recovering valuable materials from discarded products** instead of extracting them from natural deposits.
- E-waste contains materials such as **copper, aluminum, gold, silver, palladium, and critical minerals**.
- Recovering these materials requires **advanced recycling technology, secure data destruction, proper processing, and traceable supply chains**.
- Advanced recycling can reduce **virgin mining, import dependence, and environmental risks** while strengthening domestic supplies of critical materials.
 - ◆ **Virgin mining** means extracting **raw minerals directly from the Earth** instead of using recycled materials.
- However, procurement decisions often focus on the **lowest cost or highest resale value**, ignoring long-term strategic benefits.
- Every major decision creates **two balance sheets**: a **financial balance sheet** and a **strategic balance sheet**.
- The **financial balance sheet** records immediate costs, savings, and resale value.
- The **strategic balance sheet** reflects long-term effects on **resource security, sustainability, industrial capability, and supply-chain resilience**.
- Under **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**, rewarding **traceability, recovery efficiency, and technological capability** could encourage investment in advanced recycling.



Implications

- Effective urban mining can reduce India's **dependence on imported critical minerals and raw materials**.
- Poorly managed e-waste can create serious **environmental, public health, and cybersecurity risks**.
- Developing advanced recycling capabilities can strengthen India's **industrial capacity and supply-chain resilience**.
- Decisions based only on immediate costs may create higher **economic and environmental costs in the future**.

Way Forward

- Promote **advanced urban mining and e-waste recycling infrastructure to efficiently recover valuable materials**.
- **Life-cycle costing and value-based procurement** help governments and companies consider **long-term benefits**.
 - ◆ **Life-cycle costing (LCC)** estimates the **total cost of an asset** from acquisition to disposal.
- Strengthen standards for **secure data destruction, traceability, and environmentally safe recycling**.
- Reform **EPR systems** to reward high-quality recycling, efficient material recovery, and technological capability.
 - ◆ Under the **EPR framework**, producers, importers, and brand owners are responsible for the **environmentally safe management of products at the end of their life** and must meet annual **recycling and recycled-content targets**.

Mains Question

Q. Urban mining can transform electronic waste from an environmental liability into a strategic resource for economic and industrial resilience. Discuss the potential and challenges of urban mining in India. **(250 words)**

Untouchability and the idea of 'purity'

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Why in Focus?

- A shuddhikaran (purification) ritual at a Haldwani venue after a Dalit leader's rally has **raised questions about the legal scope of untouchability under Article 17 and whether caste-based notions of purity and pollution can attract legal action**.

Key Highlights

- **Article 17 abolishes untouchability in all forms** and makes enforcement of disabilities arising from it a punishable offence.
- Article 17 is **enforceable not only against the State but also against private individuals and non-State actors**.
- The **Constitution does not specifically define "untouchability"**, allowing courts to interpret its scope according to changing forms of caste discrimination.
- The **Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955** was substantially amended and renamed the **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955** in 1976.
- The **Protection of Civil Rights Act penalises practices such as denying access to places of worship, imposing social disabilities and discriminating in access to public facilities**.
- **Section 7(1)(d) of the Act also covers insulting or attempting to insult a Scheduled Caste person on the ground of untouchability**.
- In **Sukanya Shantha v. Union of India (2024)**, the Supreme Court associated untouchability with caste-based ideas of **"purity and pollution"** and emphasised that no stigma should be attached to a person's touch or presence.
- In **Surya Narayan Choudhary v. State of Rajasthan (1988)**, the Rajasthan High Court held that requiring Dalit devotees to undergo caste-specific purification before temple entry was discriminatory and violated Articles 14, 15 and 17.
- The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act,



1989 separately criminalises certain forms of intentional insult and humiliation of SC/ST persons.

Implications

- **Proving caste-based intent** behind a purification ritual **can be legally difficult**.
- **Distinguishing religious practices from discriminatory practices** can create legal and social challenges.
- **Weak enforcement and lack of awareness** may allow untouchability-related practices to continue.
- **Deep-rooted caste prejudices and social stigma remain difficult** to eliminate despite constitutional safeguards.

Way Forward

- **Strictly enforce Article 17 and the Protection of Civil Rights Act** against untouchability.
- **Conduct fair and evidence-based investigations** to establish caste-based discrimination.
- **Promote social awareness against caste-based notions of purity** and pollution.
- **Strengthen legal literacy about constitutional rights** and anti-discrimination laws.
- **Encourage inclusive social practices to eliminate caste-based stigma** and exclusion.

Mains Question

“Article 17 seeks to eliminate both the practice of untouchability and the caste-based notions underlying it. Discuss the constitutional and legal safeguards against untouchability in India.” (250 Words)

India's data centre boom is colliding with its climate reality

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?

- India is **witnessing rapid expansion of data centres, driven by growing digitalisation and AI**.
- However, **their high demand for electricity and water, heat generation and pressure on the power grid** raise concerns about environmental sustainability.

Key Highlights

- India's data-centre capacity has increased from **520 MW in 2020** to nearly **1.5 GW**, and is projected to reach **6.5 GW by 2030**.
- Data-centre electricity consumption could rise from **13 TWh in 2024** to around **57 TWh by 2030**.

Terawatt-hour (TWh): A unit of energy equal to one trillion watt-hours. It is commonly used to measure large-scale electricity generation or consumption by cities, regions, or countries.

- A **100 MW data centre can consume around 2 million litres of water daily**, mainly for cooling.
- India's data centres consumed an **estimated 150 billion litres of water in 2024–25**, which could rise to 358 billion litres annually by 2030.
- Data centres are **increasingly located in water-stressed cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru**, creating competition with domestic and agricultural water needs.
- **Rising electricity demand could increase dependence on coal-based power** if renewable energy and transmission capacity cannot keep pace.
- **Renewable-energy delays in transmission infrastructure are already creating difficulties** in delivering clean power to data centres.

Implications

- **High water consumption can worsen groundwater depletion** and water scarcity.
- **Growing electricity demand may put additional pressure** on an already stressed power grid.
- **Waste heat from data centres can increase local temperatures** and raise cooling

requirements further.

- **Weak regulations may lead to environmental costs** being shifted to consumers and local communities.
- **Dependence on fossil-fuel electricity could increase** carbon emissions.

Way Forward

- **Develop a national sustainability framework** with minimum standards for energy and water use.
- **Mandate water-use disclosure, grid-impact assessments and thermal-load assessments** for data centres.
- **Increase renewable-energy sourcing and battery storage** to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
- **Encourage data centres in coastal or resource-suitable locations** where sustainable cooling options are available.
- **Introduce energy-efficiency standards and an AI Energy Star rating** to promote efficient data centres and AI systems.

Mains Question

“Data centres are critical infrastructure for India’s digital future, but their rapid expansion poses significant environmental challenges. Discuss the water, energy and climate implications of data-centre growth and suggest measures for sustainable development.” (250 Words)

KEYWORDS

National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA)

- It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** implemented by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)** on a cost-sharing basis between the **Central Government and State/Union Territory Governments**.
- The programme was formally created in **2013** by merging the **National Lake Conservation Plan (NLCP)** and the **National Wetlands Conservation Programme (NWCP)** to avoid overlap and ensure a **unified approach**.
- Its core activities include **interception, diversion and treatment of wastewater** before it enters water bodies, along with **desilting, de-weeding, shoreline protection and biodiversity conservation**.
- **State and UT Wetland Authorities**, constituted under the **Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017**, are responsible for ground-level implementation, including the **identification and notification of wetlands** to be protected.

Places in News

Palau



- **Palau**, officially the **Republic of Palau**, is an **island country** in the **western Pacific Ocean**.
- It gained **independence in 1994**.
- Palau is an **archipelago** consisting of about **340 islands, islets and atolls**.
- Only **eight islands** are inhabited.
- It is the **westernmost island nation of the Micronesia region**.
- The indigenous people of Palau are known as the **Palauans (Rechad er Belau)**.
- The capital of Palau is **Melekeok**, located on **Babeldoab**, the largest island.

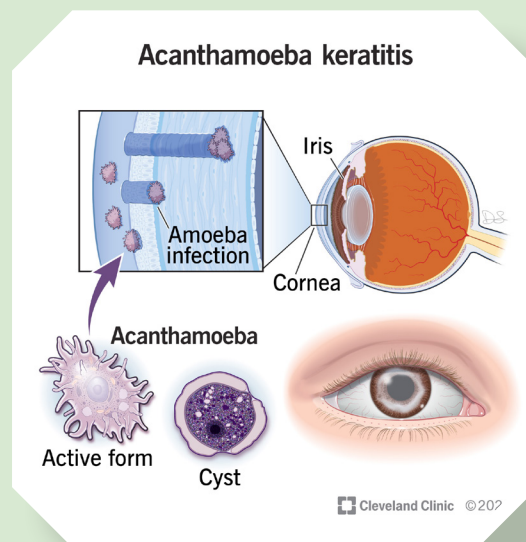
Deir el-Zour



- Deir el-Zour is **located along the Euphrates River** in **eastern Syria** and **shares a border with Iraq**.
- The **Euphrates divides the region into the western Syrian desert (Shamiya)** and the **northeastern agricultural and oil-rich Jazeera region**.
- It has **significant geopolitical importance due to its oil resources and its proximity to the Al-Bukamal border** crossing with Iraq.
- The region **was a major battleground during the Syrian Civil War** and **witnessed a prolonged siege by ISIS**, which was eventually broken by government forces.
- The **IAEA has reported that former Syrian authorities failed to declare nuclear material and activities and confirmed reactor infrastructure at Deir el-Zour**, along with approximately 73 tonnes of natural uranium.

Species In News

Acanthamoeba



- A recent epidemiological study in Kerala identified **Acanthamoeba** as the primary pathogen behind a localized surge in **Amoebic Meningoencephalitis (AME)**, linking infections to the use of **non-chlorinated well water** and exposure to natural water bodies.
- It is a **microscopic, free-living amoeba** widely distributed across the world. It naturally occurs in **soil, freshwater, sewage and domestic tap water**.
- The pathogen can enter the human body through the **nasal cavity, skin wounds or eyes**. The risk increases through **swimming in untreated natural water bodies** or using contaminated water for daily activities.
- **Acanthamoeba** can act as an **opportunistic pathogen** and cause severe diseases, particularly **Granulomatous Amoebic Encephalitis (GAE)**, a potentially fatal infection of the central nervous system, and **Acanthamoeba keratitis**, a serious eye infection often associated with contact lens use.
- The amoeba has a **two-stage life cycle**: the active, feeding **trophozoite stage** and the dormant **cyst stage**.

- The **cyst** has a **double-walled structure**, making it highly resistant to **environmental stress**, **extreme temperatures** and some **standard disinfection methods**.

Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*)



- The **Arabian Oryx** is a **medium-sized antelope** endemic to the **Arabian Peninsula**.
- It has a distinctive **white body** with darker markings on its **face and legs**.
- Both males and females have **long horns**, which are generally **thicker and shorter in males**.
- Its **broad hooves** help it move easily across **soft desert sand**.
- The **UAE** has the **largest population of Arabian Oryx in the world**, with over **6,900 individuals**.
- It plays an important ecological role through **seed dispersal**, **vegetation pruning** and **supporting plant growth** in desert ecosystems.
- The Arabian Oryx is listed as **Vulnerable** on the **IUCN Red List**.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

- The Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) is a **resident passerine** or a **songbird** native to **tropical Asia**.
- It commonly inhabits **light forests**, **scrublands**, **agricultural areas**, **gardens** and **urban parks**.

- It has an **omnivorous/frugivorous** diet, feeding mainly on fruits, berries and small insects.
- The **species is classified as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List** and is listed under Schedule-II of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- It can be identified by its **pointed black crest**, **red patch behind the eye** and **bright red vent** beneath the base of the tail.

