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MCQs

THE HINDU

Fiscal federalism, efficiency versus equity concerns

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Why in Focus?

- The **16th Finance Commission (2026-31)** has changed how funds are shared, raising concerns about **equity** (fairness according to need) **vs efficiency in fiscal federalism**.

Key Highlights:

- The **Finance Commission (Article 280)** ensures fair sharing of resources between **Centre and States**.
- It works through:
 - ◆ **Tax Devolution** → share of central taxes to States
 - ◆ **Grants-in-aid (Article 275)** → extra support given when tax share is not enough
- A key grant was **Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs)** → **given when a State's income is less than its expenditure** to fill the gap.

What FC-16 has done :

- ◆ **No change in tax share:** States continue to get **41% of central taxes**, despite demand for increase.
- ◆ **Reduced direct support: Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs)** and other need-based grants are removed, affecting weaker States.
- ◆ **Shift in grant system:** Most grants are now **performance-based and tied** (with conditions), meaning funds are given only if States meet targets (e.g., water, sanitation, audits).
- ◆ **Change in distribution approach:** Moves from **equity (helping poorer States)** to **performance (rewarding stronger States)**, which may favour economically developed States.
- ◆ **Cesses & surcharges unchanged:** These **non-shareable taxes remain largely with the Centre**, as only gradual reform is suggested

Implications:

- Removal of **Revenue Deficit Grants (RDGs)** reduces support for fiscally weak States.
- Shift from **equity to performance-based allocation** may disadvantage less developed States.
- Formula changes favour **richer States (GDP)** over **poorer States (income distance)**, increasing regional inequality.



- Some States face a **double disadvantage** of lower devolution and loss of grants.
- **Cesses and surcharges** keep more funds with the Centre, increasing **vertical imbalance**.
- **Tied grants** reduce States' **fiscal autonomy**.

Way Forward:

- **Reintroduce RDGs** for States facing genuine revenue deficits.
- Use **grants-in-aid as equalisation tools**, not just incentives.
- **Include cesses & surcharges** in divisible pool (shareable portion of central taxes) for fair sharing.
- Balance **efficiency and equity** in formula (increase weight to poorer States).
- Provide a mix of **untied + performance-based grants**.

Mains Question:

"The 16th Finance Commission shifts fiscal transfers from need-based support to performance-based allocation." Examine its impact on fiscal federalism and regional equity in India. (250 words)

A climate resilience pathway between India and China

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

India and its neighborhood- relations.

Why in Focus?

- Increasing **extreme weather events (floods, heatwaves)** in India and China highlight the need for **climate resilience and possible cooperation**.

Key Highlights:

- **El Niño (warming of Pacific Ocean affecting monsoon)** delayed rainfall in India, followed by **high-intensity rainfall**, causing floods in

States like Assam and Odisha.

- Similar extreme events are seen in China, showing a **common climate challenge due to climate change (global warming)**.
- Rapid **urbanisation** has replaced natural systems (wetlands, forests), worsening **flooding and waterlogging**.
- Both countries face risks like **heatwaves, droughts, flash floods, sea-level rise**, affecting **economy, food security, and health**.
- There is past cooperation through **agreements and MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding)** on disaster management, data sharing, and sustainable urban planning.
- India's strength lies in **community-based adaptation (heat action plans, early warning systems)**, while China focuses on **data-driven urban planning (sponge cities concept-Cities designed to absorb, store, and reuse rainwater like a sponge)**.
- Climate cooperation (especially in **disaster management and urban resilience**) is seen as a **low-risk area** to rebuild India-China relations.

Implications

- Increasing **frequency of extreme events** threatens economic growth, infrastructure, and public health.
- **Weak urban planning** and outdated infrastructure increase vulnerability to floods and heatwaves.
- **Geopolitical tensions** limit cooperation in areas like technology and resources.
- **Climate finance gap** remains a major barrier, with limited private sector participation.
- Lack of **data sharing and institutional coordination**, especially in the Himalayan region.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen **India-China cooperation** in low-risk areas like disaster management and urban resilience.
- Promote **joint research, data sharing, and early warning systems**.
- Improve **urban planning** using concepts like **sponge cities and nature-based solutions**.



- Expand **climate finance** through tools like **municipal bonds and blended finance (public + private funds)**.
- Enhance cooperation in **Himalayan ecosystem management and water resources**.

Mains Question:

"Climate change impacts transcend national boundaries and require cooperative solutions." Examine the potential for India-China cooperation in building climate resilience. (15 mark, 250 words)

How police excesses turn peaceful demonstrations into medical crises

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- The use of **less-lethal weapons** by security forces during the **Jantar Mantar student protests** has raised concerns over **human rights, proportional use of force**, and **crowd-control practices**.
- The article highlights the **health risks, regulatory gaps**, and the need for greater **transparency and accountability** in the use of such weapons.

Key Highlights

- **Less-lethal weapons** include **tear gas, lathis (batons), pellet guns, shock-batons**, and other **kinetic impact projectiles** used for crowd control.
- Under Indian law, the use of such weapons should **escalate gradually** and only if a crowd **does not disperse or turns violent**.
- **Tear gas** contains chemicals such as **CS gas** and **PAVA**, which can cause **eye irritation**,

breathing difficulties, skin irritation, and other health problems.

- ◆ **Pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA)** is a **synthetic pepper spray**.
- ◆ **CS gas** contains the active chemical **2-chlorobenzalmalononitrile (CS)** and is dispersed as a **cloud of fine particles** when **canisters are burned**.
- **Pellet guns** and **kinetic impact projectiles** can cause **serious injuries**, including **permanent vision loss**, fractures, and head injuries.
 - ◆ Kinetic impact projectiles are **plastic or rubber bullets with metal fragments**, and include those fired by pellet guns.
- **Lathis** should be used only after adequate warning and should avoid striking **vital body parts** such as the **head, neck, spine**, and **abdomen**.
- The **UN Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement** recommends using these weapons only when **necessary, proportionate**, and after **de-escalation measures** have failed.

Implication

- Lack of clear regulations on the **design, deployment**, and **accountability** for less-lethal weapons.
- Excessive or improper use of force can result in **permanent disability, psychological trauma**, or even **death**.
- Limited **transparency** regarding the types of crowd-control devices used by security forces.
- Inadequate **training** of security personnel increases the risk of indiscriminate use of force.
- Weak **monitoring, independent investigation**, and **public disclosure** of injuries caused during crowd-control operations.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **legal guidelines** governing the use of **less-lethal weapons**.
- Ensure that force is used only when **necessary, proportionate**, and after **de-escalation efforts** have failed.
- Improve **training** of law enforcement personnel on crowd-control practices and human rights standards.



- Conduct **regular audits** of crowd-control equipment and ensure compliance with **quality and safety standards**.
- Ensure **independent investigation, transparency, and accountability** in cases involving serious injuries or deaths.

Mains Question

“The use of less-lethal weapons for crowd control raises important concerns regarding human rights and proportional use of force.” Discuss the challenges associated with their use and suggest measures to ensure accountable and rights-based law enforcement. (250 Words)

The road ahead for the Asiatic lion

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 discusses **the conservation success of the Asiatic lion while highlighting emerging threats from habitat fragmentation, proposed limestone mining, disease outbreaks**, and the need for landscape-level conservation beyond Gir.



Key Highlights

- The **only free-ranging population of the Asiatic lion survives in and around Gir National Park and Sanctuary**, but nearly half of the population now lives outside protected areas.

- Lions have **expanded into Girnar, Mitiyala, Savarkundla-Liliya, Jafrabad and Bhavnagar**, using forests, grasslands, agricultural lands and wildlife corridors for dispersal.
- The **Babarkot–Jafrabad corridor is officially recognised as both a lion movement corridor** making it vital for maintaining habitat connectivity.
- A **proposal to divert 75 hectares of reserved forest for limestone mining could fragment habitats**, isolate coastal lion populations, increase human-lion conflict and require the felling of nearly 5,000 mature trees.
- Over six decades, **the Asiatic lion population has recovered from about 100–150 individuals to over 1,000**, making it one of the **world’s greatest wildlife conservation success stories**.
- The **IUCN Red List has upgraded the Asiatic lion from Critically Endangered to Endangered**, although the IUCN Green Status indicates the species remains far from fully restored across its historical range.

IUCN Green Status of Species is a complementary assessment to the IUCN Red List that measures how close a species is to full ecological recovery across its natural range and evaluates the impact of conservation actions

Implications

- The **entire wild population remains confined to a single landscape, increasing vulnerability to catastrophic events**.
- **Disease outbreaks such as Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and babesiosis** highlight the risks of maintaining a geographically concentrated population.

Babesiosis is a tick-borne parasitic disease caused by Babesia species that infect red blood cells and can cause fever, anemia, and fatigue.

- **Habitat fragmentation** due to mining and other land-use changes threatens wildlife corridors essential for dispersal and genetic connectivity.
- **Delays in establishing a second free-ranging population** continue to pose long-term conservation risks.



A **second free-ranging population** is a separate, self-sustaining wild population of a species established in another suitable habitat outside its original range, so that the species is not entirely dependent on a single location for survival.

Way Forward

- **Protect critical lion habitats and movement corridors** from developmental pressures.
- **Establish a second free-ranging population** to reduce extinction risks.
- **Strengthen disease surveillance, wildlife health monitoring** and rapid response mechanisms.
- **Continue landscape-level conservation through community participation**, habitat connectivity and science-based management.

Mains Question

“The recovery of the Asiatic lion is one of India’s greatest conservation successes. Discuss the emerging challenges to its long-term survival and suggest measures to ensure sustainable landscape-level conservation.” (250 Words)

KEYWORDS

Canine Distemper

- Canine Distemper is a highly contagious viral disease caused by the **Canine Distemper Virus (CDV)**, affecting the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems of animals.
- The **virus spreads through direct contact and airborne droplets**.
- CDV is a **multi-host pathogen that also infects wildlife, including Asiatic lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, foxes, hyenas, and some marine mammals**.
- The disease **has emerged as a major conservation concern, with recent cases reported in Asiatic lions in Gujarat’s Gir landscape**, raising fears for the endangered population.
- There is **no specific cure for canine distemper; vaccination of domestic dogs and disease surveillance are the most effective measures** to reduce transmission to wildlife.

Repo rate

- Repo rate is the **interest rate at which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lends short-term funds to commercial banks** against government securities.

- The repo rate is **decided by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to regulate inflation, liquidity, and economic growth**.
- A **higher repo rate makes borrowing costlier, helping curb inflation**, while a **lower repo rate encourages borrowing, investment, and consumption**.
- Changes in the repo rate influence bank lending rates, EMIs, deposit rates, and overall credit availability in the economy.
- Recently **MPC kept the repo rate unchanged at 5.25% and retained a neutral policy stance**, citing global uncertainties, food and fuel inflation risks, and resilient domestic economic growth.

Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA)

- DGMA is an **attached office** under the **Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways**, established in **September 1949**.
- It deals with all **executive matters** related to **merchant shipping** and **Maritime Administration**.



- It is responsible for implementing **national shipping policy** and **maritime legislation**.
- It oversees **Maritime Education and Training** in coordination with the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** and supports the development of the **shipping industry**.
- It regulates the **employment and welfare of seafarers**, the **sailing vessel industry**, and **ocean freight rates** in **overseas trade**.

Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan (CAP)

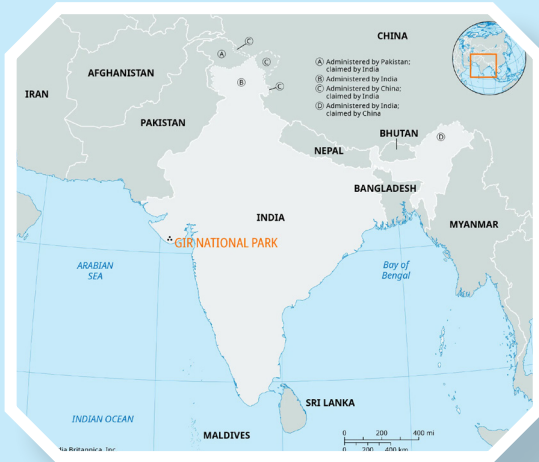
- The **Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan (CAP)** was launched by the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** on **International Clouded Leopard Day (August 4)**.
- It was prepared under the **Government of India-Global Environment Facility (GEF)-UNDP initiative**.
 - ◆ Released during the **91st Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL)** meeting.
- The plan focuses on **habitat protection**, **forest connectivity**, and the conservation of **14 priority landscapes** across **Northeast India**.
- It promotes **scientific monitoring** through **camera traps**, **occupancy surveys**, **genetic analysis**, and **environmental DNA (eDNA)** analysis, along with stronger **anti-poaching measures**.
- The **Clouded Leopard** has been included under the **Species Recovery Programme** of the **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH)** scheme.
- The plan encourages **community-based conservation**, **sustainable livelihoods**, and **transboundary cooperation** with neighbouring countries.
- It also integrates **climate resilience** and **adaptive management** to strengthen the long-term conservation of the species and its habitats.

Neutrinos

- Recently in the news because **scientists in France found a way to detect tiny particles (antineutrinos) coming from used nuclear fuel**, which helps **monitor nuclear reactors from a distance without physically inspecting them**, making it easier to **prevent misuse for nuclear weapons**.
- **Neutrinos**, often called **“ghost particles,”** are **extremely light subatomic particles** that interact so weakly with matter that **billions pass through the human body every second undetected**.
- They are produced during **radioactive decay in nuclear reactors** (isotopes like **Pr-144 and Rh-106**) and also originate from **natural sources** such as the **Sun**, **cosmic rays**, and **supernovae**.
- They exhibit **“neutrino oscillation,”** a quantum phenomenon in which they **change types (flavors) as they travel**, proving that **neutrinos possess mass**.
- **India’s contribution:** Detection of **atmospheric neutrinos in 1965 at Kolar Gold Fields**, and the proposed **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)** in **Tamil Nadu** aims to **revive this scientific legacy**.

Places in News

Gir National Park



- **Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary**, located in Gujarat, is the **only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion** (*Panthera leo persica*) in the world.
- The **park is drained by seven major rivers: Hiran, Shetrunji, Datardi, Shingoda, Machhundri, Ghodavadi, and Raval**, which provide perennial water sources for wildlife.
- It was **established as a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1965**, and its core area was declared a National Park in 1975.
- Gir comprises dry deciduous forests, thorn scrub, grasslands, and rocky hills, supporting rich biodiversity.
- **Besides Asiatic lions, Gir is home to leopards, striped hyenas, marsh crocodiles, chital, sambar, nilgai, and over 300 species of birds.**

Yanbu



- **Yanbu** was recently in the news after **Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis** claimed to have launched a **missile attack on a Saudi oil tanker** off its coast.
- It is a **major port and industrial city** located in the **Medina Province of western Saudi Arabia**, on the **Red Sea coast**.
- Strategically, it is the **second-largest Red Sea port after Jeddah** and serves as the **primary maritime gateway for the holy city of Medina**.
- Economically, Yanbu is a **crucial hub for petroleum refining, petrochemical industries, and global export logistics**, developed extensively since the **1970s** to **diversify Saudi Arabia's industrial base**.
- It is the **western terminus of the East-West Crude Pipeline (Petroline)**, providing a **vital alternative oil export route** that **bypasses the geopolitically sensitive Strait of Hormuz**.

Species In News

Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*)

- The **Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*)** is a **medium-sized wild cat** found in the **Himalayan foothills, Northeast India**, and parts of **Southeast Asia**.
- It is listed as **Vulnerable** on the **IUCN Red List** and is the **State Animal of Meghalaya**.
- It is known for its **exceptional climbing ability** and spends much of its time in **trees in dense tropical forests**.
- Its **secretive nature** makes it one of **Asia's most elusive predators**, and it is **rarely seen in the wild**.
- The **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)** has launched the **Clouded Leopard Conservation Action Plan (CAP)** to strengthen its **conservation**.

