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THE HINDU

The stark reality of the missing jobs for India's Gen Z

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Economic and Social Development- Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector Initiatives, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- India has one of the world's largest **youth populations**, with around **371 million young people** in 2025, offering the potential for a major **demographic dividend**.
- However, **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24** data highlight high unemployment, gender gaps, and insecure employment among **Gen Z**, raising concerns about India's ability to convert its young population into productive human capital.

Key Highlights:

- Gen Z** refers to those born between **1997 and 2012**. India has an estimated **29.94 crore working-age Gen Z population (15-26 years)**.
- A large share of Gen Z is still pursuing education, with **41.7% of young males** and **38.4% of young females** studying, partly delaying their entry into the labour market.

- The **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)** among Gen Z is **41.7%**, compared with **75% among Millennials**.

◆ **Gen Z labour force participation** is higher in **rural areas (44.1%)** than in **urban areas (37.2%)**, as rural youth enter the workforce earlier while urban youth spend more time in **education and training**.

- Unemployment among Gen Z with **graduate-level education or above** is particularly high at **29% for males** and **36.9% for females**, pointing to a mismatch between education and available jobs.

- The quality of employment is also a concern: only **20.1% of Gen Z workers have social security coverage**, while only **17.3% have any form of contractual employment**.

Challenges / Issues / Implications:

- A weak transition from **education to employment** could prevent India from fully benefiting from its **demographic dividend**.
- The gap between educational qualifications and available jobs indicates a growing **skill and labour-market mismatch**.
- A wide **gender gap** exists in Gen Z employment participation, with male participation much higher than female participation in both **rural (59.3% vs. 28%)** and **urban areas (51.3% vs. 21.1%)**.
- Widespread **informal and insecure employment** leaves many young workers without adequate contracts or social security protection.



Way Forward:

- Expand **labour-intensive sectors** to generate more employment opportunities for young people.
- Build stronger **school-to-work pathways** and link skill training more closely with the needs of employers.
- Promote **apprenticeships, formal hiring incentives, and expansion of urban employment opportunities.**
- Improve women's participation in paid employment through **safe transport and childcare support.**

Mains Question:

India's demographic dividend can be realised only through productive and secure employment opportunities for its youth. Discuss the major challenges facing Gen Z in India's labour market and suggest suitable measures. (250 Words).

Much more than 'Melbourne meets Modi'

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

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?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Australia from **July 8-10, 2026**, holding talks with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.
- The visit resulted in new agreements covering **defence, maritime security, critical technologies, energy, investment, education, and sports**, further strengthening the **India-Australia strategic partnership.**

Key Highlights:

- A new **Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation** was agreed to deepen bilateral cooperation and promote stability in the **Indo-Pacific.**

- A new partnership on **cybersecurity, critical technologies, and supply chains** aims to strengthen cyber capabilities and build more resilient supply chains.
- The two countries adopted a **Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap** to expand cooperation in the **Indian Ocean.**
- A new agreement on **energy security** seeks to strengthen energy supply chains and enable **Australian uranium exports to India for peaceful purposes.**
- Australia's largest pension fund, **AustralianSuper**, announced an investment of about **₹3,360 crore** in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).
- Educational ties are expanding, with **eight Australian universities** planning to establish branch campuses in India.

The **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)** was created to attract **domestic and foreign investment** for **commercially viable infrastructure projects**, including **greenfield, brownfield, and stalled projects.** NIIF is registered with SEBI as a **Category II Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)** and is managed by **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund Limited (NIIFL).**

Challenges / Issues / Implications

- Growing geopolitical uncertainty in the **Indo-Pacific** increases the importance of **sustained strategic and security cooperation between India and Australia.**
- Deepening cooperation **requires effective implementation of agreements** across diverse sectors, including defence, technology, energy, and investment.
- Maintaining resilient **supply chains** and strengthening **maritime security** remain important shared priorities.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen **defence and maritime cooperation** to support peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean.
- Expand collaboration in **critical technologies, cybersecurity, energy, and resilient supply chains.**

- Leverage the complementary strengths of the two economies, particularly Australia's capabilities in **energy, mining, and education** and India's growing **manufacturing sector**.
- Deepen **people-to-people ties** through education, culture, sports, and the growing **Indian diaspora in Australia**.

Mains Question:

India-Australia relations have evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership driven by growing geopolitical and economic convergence. Discuss with reference to recent developments in bilateral relations. (250 Words).

On the second phase of U.S.–Iran war

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 **United States (U.S.)-Iran conflict** has entered a second phase, now centred on the **Strait of Hormuz**, a crucial global oil transit route, where disagreements over control, navigation rights, and possible tolls have led to renewed hostilities.

Key Highlights:

- After a **ceasefire in June**, both sides signed a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** allowing ships to pass freely for 60 days. However, there was no real agreement on long-term control.
- Iran soon moved to assert authority by creating the **Persian Gulf Strait Authority (PGSA)** and proposed that ships must take permits and approved insurance-indicating a future plan to **charge transit fees**.
- The **U.S. and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** countries opposed this, arguing that **international straits cannot be controlled or monetised by one country**, as it would set a

global precedent.

The **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** is a **regional organisation established in 1981 comprising six Gulf countries to promote economic, political, and security cooperation in West Asia**.

- The **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**, with Oman, suggested an alternative shipping route (Omani corridor), but Iran rejected it, insisting only its route was valid.

The **International Maritime Organization (IMO)** is a **United Nations (UN) specialised agency established in 1948 (came into force in 1959)** responsible for regulating global shipping, ensuring maritime safety, security, and prevention of marine pollution.

- Talks in Doha failed because the U.S. refused to accept any **formal Iranian role in managing the strait**, leading to collapse of negotiations.
- Soon after, **Iran attacked** ships (including an India-bound LNG carrier) that **disobeyed** its orders, and the **U.S.** responded with counter-measures to which Iran responded in kind, effectively ending the ceasefire and **restarting** the conflict.

Challenges / Issues / Implications:

- The crisis challenges **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** norms, which guarantee **free transit passage** through straits used for international navigation.
- There is increasing **militarisation of a critical chokepoint**, raising risks of accidents (e.g., LNG tanker explosions).
- Iran is also targeting **alternative routes** (Red Sea, pipelines), widening the conflict regionally.
- Shipping companies face **high insurance costs and uncertainty**, leading to reduced traffic and economic disruption.

Way Forward:

- Ensure strict adherence to **UNCLOS** principles of free navigation.
- Promote **multilateral dialogue** involving Iran, U.S., Gulf countries, and international bodies like IMO.



- Avoid unilateral control and move toward **shared maritime governance mechanisms**.
- Develop **alternative trade and energy routes** to reduce dependence on chokepoints like Hormuz.
- Focus on **diplomatic solutions instead of military escalation** to maintain global trade stability.

Mains Question:

"The Strait of Hormuz remains central to global energy security and geopolitical stability." Examine the challenges posed by competing claims over maritime control and discuss the role of international law in resolving such conflicts. (15 mark, 250 Words)

What is the legal tussle surrounding the Taj Mahal?

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 1

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Why in Focus?

- The **Allahabad High Court (HC)** has sought responses from the **Union Government** and the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** on a petition claiming that the **Taj Mahal** is not a Mughal tomb but a Hindu temple ("Tejo Mahalaya") and seeking permission for religious practices.

Key Highlights:

- The controversy began with a plea challenging a lower court's refusal to order a **survey of the Taj Mahal**, similar to disputes seen in other religious sites.
- The petition argues that the Taj Mahal is actually a **Hindu temple**, and seeks legal permission for Hindus to offer prayers inside the monument.
- Historically, the Taj Mahal was built in the **17th century by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan** as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, under

architect **Ustad Ahmed Lahori**.

- Over time, several alternative claims about its origin have emerged (foreign architects, Rajput palace, Hindu temple), but **none have been supported by credible historical evidence**.
- The most prominent claim was made by **P.N. Oak (writer)**, who argued that the Taj was originally a Hindu structure; however, **historians rejected this due to lack of evidence**, and the **Supreme Court dismissed such claims in 2000**.
- Repeated legal challenges (2005, 2015, 2022) have been **dismissed by courts**, which found no basis to alter the established historical understanding.

Challenges / Issues / Implications:

- Raises concerns about **misinterpretation of history** and attempts to reinterpret well-established historical facts without evidence.
- Risk of **communalisation of heritage monuments**, which can disturb social harmony.
- Frequent litigation leads to **judicial burden and misuse of legal processes** for ideological purposes.
- Undermines the authority of expert bodies like the **ASI (Archaeological Survey of India)** and professional historians.
- Could affect India's global image, as the Taj Mahal is a **UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site**.

Way Forward:

- Rely on **evidence-based history and archaeological findings** rather than unverified claims.
- Strengthen the role of institutions like **ASI** in protecting historical integrity.
- Courts should discourage **frivolous or repetitive litigation** on settled matters.
- Promote **heritage awareness and scientific temper** among the public.
- Ensure that cultural monuments remain **symbols of shared heritage, not conflict**.

Mains Question:

“Discuss the challenges posed by historical revisionism in India. How can institutions and legal mechanisms ensure the protection of evidence-based history and cultural heritage?” (15 mark, 250 Words)

KEYWORDS

Flash floods



- **Flash floods** are **sudden floods** that occur within **6 hours**, and often within **3 hours**, of **heavy rainfall** or another triggering event.
- They are mainly caused by **very heavy rainfall**, but can also result from **dam or levee failures** and **mudslides**.
- Their severity depends on factors such as **rainfall intensity**, **topography**, **land use**, **vegetation**, **soil type**, and **soil moisture**.
- **Urban areas** are highly vulnerable because **concrete surfaces** prevent water from **soaking into the ground**, causing **rapid runoff and flooding**.
- Flash floods are particularly **dangerous** because they occur **suddenly** and can produce **fast-moving water**, giving people **little time to react**.

15th Finance Commission

- **Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar** has called for a **special inquiry into developmental grants in Telangana**, alleging diversion of funds for **administrative expenses (salaries, electricity bills)**.
- Chaired by **N. K. Singh**, it is a **constitutional body under Article 280** tasked with recommending **Centre-State tax devolution** for the period **2021–2026**.

- It recommended **41% share of the divisible tax pool** (the portion of the **Union government's gross tax revenue** that is shared with **States as per Finance Commission recommendations**), reduced from **42%** due to the creation of **Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh**.
- It is the **first Finance Commission to use 2011 Census data exclusively**, replacing **1971 population figures**, ensuring **more realistic allocation**.
- It used a **weighted formula**: **Income Distance (45%)**, **Population (15%)**, **Area (15%)**, **Demographic Performance (12.5%)**, **Forest & Ecology (10%)**, **Tax Effort (2.5%)**, and emphasized **grassroots governance & healthcare** through **performance-based grants** and **>8% state budget allocation for health**.

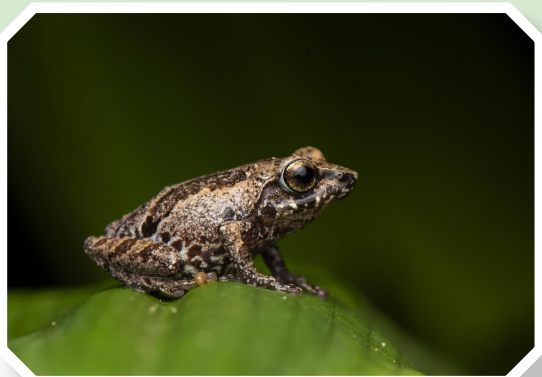
Embodied AI

- **Embodied AI** means integrating **artificial intelligence (AI) into physical systems** that can interact with the real world.
- It moves AI beyond the **digital world** and allows it to **perform physical tasks**.
- Examples include **humanoid robots, autonomous vehicles, factories, warehouses, and smart buildings**.
- It combines technologies such as **machine learning, sensors, computer vision, and generative AI**.
- These technologies enable physical systems to **perceive their surroundings, make decisions, and take actions** in real-world environments.

Species In News

Agasthyamalai Bushfrog (*Raorchestes agasthyaensis*)

- The **Agasthyamalai Bushfrog**, an amphibian of the **Western Ghats**, was previously believed to be confined to the **Agasthyamalai Hills**, south of the **Shencottah Gap**.
- It has now been recorded in the **high-elevation shola forests of Devikulam near Munnar**, extending its known distribution by over **120 km northwards**.
- This is the **first confirmed record** of the species from the **Munnar landscape**, challenging earlier assumptions about its geographical range.
- **Genetic analysis** found the Devikulam frogs to be genetically identical to those in the Agasthyamalai Hills, suggesting that the **Shencottah Gap may not be an absolute geographical barrier** for all species.
- The species remains **highly localised** and is vulnerable to **habitat degradation, tourism-related development, forest fragmentation, and climate change**.
- The **Agasthyamalai Bushfrog** is listed as **Near Threatened** on the **IUCN Red List**.



Places in News

Gao

- **Gao in Mali** reported attacks on a **Malian army convoy that was targeted** in a **deadly rebel and jihadist attack** while en route to the city, where **Russian paramilitaries (Africa Corps)** supporting the army are stationed.
- **Gao is a major city in eastern Mali**, located along the **Niger River**, within the **Sahel region** (the transitional zone between the **Sahara Desert** and the **savannas**).
- **Historically, Gao was a prosperous trans-Saharan trade hub** and the **capital of the Songhai Empire**, one of the **largest and most powerful empires in African history**.
- The city is home to the **Tomb of Askia (1495)**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, placed on the **endangered list in 2012** due to **armed conflicts**.
- **Mali** is currently witnessing a **three-sided conflict** - The Malian military government (junta) is fighting its geographical integrity against **FLA (Tuareg separatists)** who want autonomy for **Azawad** in northern Mali and **JNIM (jihadists)** who seek to establish their version of **Islamic law across Mali**.

