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MCQs

THE HINDU

Why 543 should remain 543

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?

- The debate over **delimitation, Lok Sabha expansion and women's reservation** has gained urgency as Parliament considers changes to the existing system of representation.

Key Highlights

- Articles 81 and 82** link parliamentary representation with population and provide for periodic delimitation, but Parliament has previously modified this principle to protect **federal balance**.
- The **42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976)** froze the inter-State allocation of Lok Sabha seats based on the **1971 Census**.
 - Later extended by the **84th Amendment**, to avoid penalising States that successfully controlled population growth.
- Delimitation does not necessarily require increasing Lok Sabha seats**.
 - Constituencies can be **redrawn within States** based on **updated population**

figures while retaining the existing 543-seat inter-State allocation.

- A **50% increase in seats** could preserve the existing **proportion of representation** among States.
 - However, it could widen the **absolute gap in parliamentary strength** between larger and smaller States.
- Women's reservation** can be implemented within the existing 543-member Lok Sabha.
 - Increasing the size of the House is not essential** for achieving one-third representation.
- Population growth has made constituencies **larger and less accessible**, which can be addressed by **increasing State Assembly seats** rather than expanding Parliament.

Implications

- Population-based expansion could shift **political influence towards high-population States**, potentially weakening the representation of States that successfully achieved **population control**.
- A larger Lok Sabha would not increase **parliamentary time**, further limiting opportunities for MPs to **debate, question the government and scrutinise legislation**.
- Implementing **women's reservation within the existing Lok Sabha** could improve **women's representation** without increasing the total number of seats.



- Retaining **543 seats** could protect the existing **federal balance**, but MPs would continue to represent **very large constituencies**, making access to representatives more difficult.
- Increasing **State Assembly constituencies and MLAs** could bring **elected representatives closer to citizens** without affecting the federal balance.

Way Forward

- Retain the **543-seat Lok Sabha** while redrawing **State constituencies** based on updated **population figures**.
- Preserve the existing **inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats** to protect the federal compact.
- Implement **one-third reservation for women** within the existing parliamentary structure.
- Expand **State legislatures and strengthen local representation** to address the accessibility problems created by population growth.

Mains Question

Q. Delimitation is essential for equitable representation, but its implementation must also safeguard India's federal balance and the quality of parliamentary democracy. Examine. (250 words)

India's return to its Central Asian neighbourhood

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's upcoming visit to **Uzbekistan** and participation in the **SCO summit in Kyrgyzstan** highlight India's growing engagement with **Central Asia**.

Key Highlights

- **Central Asia** is strategically important to India

due to its location between **Russia and China**, security challenges and growing geopolitical competition.

- Central Asian countries are seeking partners beyond **Russia and China**, creating **opportunities for India** to expand economic, technological, defence and cultural cooperation.
- India shares longstanding **civilisational and cultural ties** with Central Asia despite limited direct overland connectivity.
- India's **2015 visit to all five Central Asian countries** marked a shift towards a more active Indian policy in the region.
- India invited all **Central Asian leaders as chief guests for Republic Day 2022** to mark 30 years of their independence and diplomatic ties.
- The event was held virtually due to **COVID-19**, but it led to new cooperation mechanisms, including the **India-Central Asia Dialogue**.
- **Uzbekistan** is important for India because of its growing ties with India, strong counter-terrorism approach and strategic understanding of **Afghanistan**.
- India needs to explore **alternative connectivity routes through Iran and Afghanistan** to strengthen its links with Central Asia.
- India can strengthen its regional role through cooperation in **trade, defence, natural resources, technology, education, health and tourism**.
- India's wider engagement with **Central Asia and the Indian Ocean Region** reflects its broader **continental and maritime geostrategic interests**.

Implications

- Stronger engagement with Central Asia can help India **diversify its strategic partnerships** beyond Russia and China.
- Greater cooperation with Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states can strengthen India's **security interests in relation to Afghanistan and terrorism**.
- Improved connectivity through **Iran and Afghanistan** could expand India's access to Central Asian markets and resources.
- Deeper engagement can enhance India's

geopolitical influence in a region where Chinese influence is expanding and Russian influence is weakening.

Way Forward

- India should strengthen the **India-Central Asia Dialogue** and institutionalise regular cooperation across sectors.
- India should prioritise **alternative connectivity routes through Iran and Afghanistan** to overcome its geographical disadvantage.
- India should expand cooperation in **trade, technology, defence, energy and natural resources** with Central Asian countries.
- India should use its **cultural, educational, health and tourism links** to build stronger people-to-people relations.

Mains Question

Q. Central Asia is emerging as an important component of India's continental neighbourhood policy. Examine the strategic significance of deeper Indian engagement with the region. (250 words)

The changing face of skin lightening practices in India

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

- Skin-lightening practices in India are changing. Traditional fairness creams are being replaced by products and procedures promoted as **brightening, glow, de-tan and even tone**, creating new health, social and regulatory concerns.

Key Highlights

- Skin-lightening is increasingly treated as a **skin-health issue**, rather than only a cosmetic concern.

- People may experience **acne, redness, skin thinning, increased facial hair, pigmentation and infections** due to unsafe products or procedures.
- The practice is now seen among **women, men, teenagers and transgender persons**, showing its wider social influence.
- **Social media, influencers and e-commerce platforms** have expanded the reach of skin-lightening products, supplements and procedures.
- **Filters, photo editing and Artificial Intelligence (AI)** can create unrealistic images and reinforce the idea that lighter or flawless skin is desirable.
- The **International League of Dermatological Societies (ILDS)** has warned about the misuse of potent **topical corticosteroids**, which can cause serious skin and systemic problems.

Implications

- **Colour-based social bias** continues even though direct fairness advertising has become less acceptable.
- New terms such as **brightening and glow** can make harmful or unnecessary products harder to identify and regulate.
- Social media algorithms may repeatedly expose users, especially **young people**, to unrealistic beauty standards.
- People may seek treatment from **salons, spas, online sellers and unqualified providers**, increasing the risk of unsafe practices.
- Aggressive treatment can cause inflammation and **worsen pigmentation**, particularly in darker skin tones.
- Lack of **digital and health literacy** makes it difficult for consumers to distinguish medical advice from commercial promotion.

Way Forward

- Strengthen regulation of **ingredients, product claims, online advertising and influencer marketing** related to skin-lightening.
- Ensure that pigmentary disorders are assessed and treated by **qualified dermatologists** using evidence-based methods.
- Improve public awareness about the dangers



of **unsupervised medicines and repeated cosmetic procedures**.

- Promote **digital literacy** so people can identify manipulated images and misleading online claims.
- Shift the focus from **skin colour to skin health**, while challenging social stereotypes associated with lighter skin.

Mains Question

Skin-lightening practices in India are changing with the growth of digital media and aesthetic skincare. Discuss the health, social and regulatory challenges associated with this trend and suggest suitable measures to address them. (15 marks, 250 words)

Can India build a strategic fuel system?

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 3

Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Why in Focus

- Recent disruptions in **West Asia** have highlighted India's vulnerability to interruptions in imported energy supplies. India needs stronger **strategic fuel storage, transport networks and diversified import sources** to maintain energy security during prolonged crises.

Key Highlights

- The government is considering a **10-year strategic fuel programme** to create about **28 million tonnes (MT) of crude oil, 9 MT of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and 4 MT of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) storage**. These are proposed targets and are not yet committed capacities.

LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) is natural gas, mainly methane, extracted from **underground gas fields** and cooled to about **-162°C** to convert it into a liquid for easier **storage and transport**.

LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) is mainly **propane and butane**, obtained during **natural-gas processing and crude-oil refining**, and stored as a liquid under **pressure** for easier storage and transport.

- India currently has **5.33 MT of underground strategic crude-oil storage** at **Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur**. Another **6.5 MT** has been approved under Phase II.
- India has only about **0.14 MT of underground LPG storage capacity** at Visakhapatnam and Mangaluru. The proposed 4 MT reserve would therefore greatly increase LPG storage capacity.
- India currently has **no operational underground natural-gas storage facility**. Gas security mainly depends on domestic production, LNG imports, import terminals, commercial stocks and pipelines.
- **LNG is stored as a liquid at around -162°C** and requires specialised facilities. It can also be converted into natural gas and stored underground in depleted reservoirs or salt caverns.
- **Storage capacity and actual inventory are different**. During an emergency, India must also have sufficient **withdrawal capacity, pipelines and distribution networks** to quickly deliver stored fuel to consumers.
- India is also trying to improve energy security by **diversifying import sources, increasing shipping capacity and expanding LPG pipeline networks**.

Implications

- **High import dependence** makes India vulnerable to geopolitical conflicts, supply disruptions and sudden increases in international energy prices.
- **Strait of Hormuz dependence** is a major concern because disruption in this important maritime route can affect crude oil and gas supplies to India.
- **Uneven storage capacity** remains a major weakness. India has relatively greater

experience with crude-oil storage but has limited LPG storage and no underground natural-gas storage.

- **Storage alone cannot ensure energy security.** Fuel must be connected to ships, import terminals, pipelines, refineries and distribution networks to reach consumers during a crisis.
- **High financial cost** is involved in constructing storage facilities and purchasing large quantities of fuel. Reserves also need regular replenishment after emergency use.
- **Technical and geographical challenges** make underground storage difficult. Suitable geology, reservoir stability, groundwater conditions, pressure management and pipeline connectivity must be carefully assessed.

Way Forward

- Build an **integrated energy-security system** combining strategic reserves, LNG terminals, underground gas storage, pipelines, refineries and distribution networks.
- Expand **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR - emergency stocks)** and develop additional LPG and natural-gas storage facilities in suitable locations.
- Reduce excessive dependence on a single region by **diversifying energy suppliers, shipping routes and import sources.**
- Establish clear rules for **ownership, financing, minimum stock levels, emergency release and replenishment** of strategic reserves.
- Encourage **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)** and commercial-cum-strategic storage models while ensuring that reserves remain available during emergencies.

Mains Question

Recent geopolitical disruptions have exposed vulnerabilities in India's energy-security system. Discuss the importance of strategic fuel storage and examine measures to strengthen India's energy security. (15 marks, 250 words)

KEYWORDS

Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)

- **Glacial lakes** form at high elevations when **glacial ice, moraines or natural depressions** trap meltwater.
- **Moraine-dammed lakes** are among the most common types of glacial lakes, where moraines act as natural barriers to water.
 - ◆ **Moraine** is a **deposit of rock and soil debris** carried or left behind by a glacier.
- If the **ice or moraine dam fails**, a large volume of stored water can be suddenly released downstream.
- This sudden release causes a **Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF)**, which can produce **flash floods** and severe destruction in downstream areas.
- **GLOFs are common hazards in the Himalayas**, where glacial lakes may also form due to **landslides**.
- The impacts of GLOFs are often **difficult to predict** because of limited data on **rainfall, landslides, lake volume and physical conditions**.

India-Southeast Asia (I-2SEA) Submarine Cable System

- **I-2SEA** is a **3,600-km submarine cable system** connecting **India with Singapore and Malaysia**.
- It will link **Hyderabad and Chennai** with major **cloud and AI infrastructure** in Southeast Asia.
- The cable is being developed by a consortium of **Lightstorm, Microsoft, Singtel and Tata Communications**.
- It will provide a **high-capacity, low-latency data connection**, supporting the growing demand for **AI and digital services**.
- The system will have **two landing points in India** — **Machilipatnam** on the east coast and a new landing location in **South Chennai**.
- **I-2SEA is targeted to be Ready-for-Service (RFS) by Q4 2029**, strengthening India's digital connectivity with **Southeast Asia**.

Places in News

Uzbekistan



- **Uzbekistan** is a **landlocked country** in **Central Asia**.
- It is bordered by **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan**.
- The country has a **dry and arid climate**, with abundant sunshine and average annual rainfall of only about **200 mm**.
- **Vegetation varies with altitude**: western lowlands have **desert vegetation**, while the eastern foothills have **grasslands, forests and brushwood**.
- **Forests cover less than 8%** of Uzbekistan's total area.
- **Uzbeks** constitute more than **four-fifths of the population**, followed by **Tajiks, Kazakhs, Tatars, Russians and Karakalpaks**.
- The President of Uzbekistan is **Shavkat Mirziyoyev**.

Lake Ontario



- In **August 2026**, U.S. President **Donald Trump** signed an executive order directing U.S. federal agencies to rename the water body **"Lake America"** amid escalating trade tensions with Canada.
- It is the **easternmost and lowest in elevation** among **North America's five Great Lakes**, physically divided between the **Canadian province of Ontario** and the **U.S. state of New York**.
- Despite having the **smallest surface area** in the Great Lakes system, it receives outflow from the upper lakes via the **Niagara River** and discharges entirely into the **Atlantic Ocean through the St. Lawrence River**.
- The name derives from the **Indigenous Huron (Wendat) word oniatario**, which translates to **"lake of shining waters"** or **"great lake."**
- It forms a vital **freshwater reservoir and commercial shipping conduit** within the **St. Lawrence Seaway**, supporting major urban and industrial centres such as **Toronto and Hamilton**.

Rasuwa



- It was in the news after **flash floods and landslides** triggered by an **upstream avalanche and glacial lake activity** near the Nepal-Tibet border caused major damage, including the destruction of the **111-MW Rasuwagadhi Hydropower Plant**.
- **Rasuwa** is a highly mountainous **Himalayan district of Nepal**, located north of **Kathmandu** and bordering the **Tibet Autonomous Region of China**.

- It contains the **Rasuwagadhi border crossing**, an important **trade and transit corridor** connecting Nepal with China.
- Major rivers such as the **Bhote Koshi and Trishuli** drain the district and flow southward towards India, eventually joining the **Gandak River**, making downstream areas vulnerable to sudden flood surges.
- Rasuwa contains a large part of **Langtang National Park**, Nepal's first Himalayan national park, which supports important high-altitude species such as the **red panda and snow leopard**.

Species In News

Salmonella enterica

- It was recently in the news due to growing concerns in India over **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** in *Salmonella*, particularly a sharp rise in **fluoroquinolone-resistant *S. Typhi*** isolates.
- It is a **rod-shaped, Gram-negative bacterium** belonging to the **Enterobacteriaceae** family that naturally occurs in the **intestinal tracts of humans and warm-blooded animals**.
- The pathogen mainly spreads through the **fecal-oral route** by consuming **contaminated water or raw and undercooked food**, especially poultry, eggs and meat.
- It is a major cause of **foodborne illness (salmonellosis)**, ranging from **mild gastroenteritis** with diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramps to severe systemic infections such as **typhoid fever**, caused specifically by the ***S. Typhi* serovar**.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** considers antimicrobial-resistant *Salmonella* a significant global health concern, particularly resistance to **fluoroquinolones such as ciprofloxacin**, which can make infections more difficult to treat.