

FWD

FORTUNE WEEKLY DIGEST



› ASHA Crisis

› Accelerating Gender Equality

› Obesity Challenge in India

03rd MARCH, 2025 - 09th MARCH, 2025

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EDITOR'S NOTE

As UPSC aspirants, it is essential to stay updated on current affairs to excel in the examination. This **Fortune Weekly Digest (ForWarD)** brings you the latest news and developments from around the world, carefully curated and analyzed to help you prepare for the Civil Services (Main) Examination.

We understand that time is precious, and we have made sure to present the information in a concise and easy-to-understand manner.

The magazine is divided into different sections. Mains relevant topics have been covered in detail with a UPSC previous year question perspective. The jot downs are examples and interesting facts to enrich your answer writing. Cherrypicks has some key words from the week, helpful again in answer writing and essay. We have also included essay topics and sample questions to help you gauge your preparation.

We have designed this magazine to best supplement the daily current affairs notes we have launched by the name of **FIND (Fortune IAS News Daily)** and **FINDER (Fortune IAS News Daily Explainer)** and the **Fortune Prelims Precise** monthly compilation. This magazine will be explained in detail and your queries addressed in a live class we conduct.

At a time when there is no dearth of current affairs materials, our hope is help you get a one-stop solution for all your current affairs needs.

This magazine is a work in progress and your feedback will be appreciated.

We hope that this magazine will serve as a valuable resource for your exam preparation and contribute to your success in the UPSC examination.

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**FIRST ATTEMPT TOPPERS FROM
OUR PRELIMS CUM MAINS BATCH**



WOMEN IN POWER

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ASHA CRISIS

Syllabus: GS I - Role of women and women's organization

PYQ MAPPING

Q1 Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India. (2021)

SHORT TAKES

- **Code on Social Security 2020:** A legislation that consolidates nine existing labour laws related to social security, including provisions for employees' provident fund, insurance, gratuity, and maternity benefits. It extends coverage to gig and platform workers but excludes many informal workers like ASHAs from key social security benefits.
- **Honorarium:** A payment given for professional services that are rendered voluntarily or without a formal obligation of compensation. It is typically provided as a token of appreciation rather than as a fixed wage or salary.

INTRODUCTION

Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) form the **backbone of India's community healthcare system**, bridging the gap between rural populations and formal medical services. Despite their critical role, they face systemic neglect, including lack of formal recognition, inadequate pay, and absence of social security.

WHY IN NEWS

For weeks, in Kerala, tens of thousands of **Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA)** have been fighting for fair remuneration, retirement benefits, and formal recognition of their occupation. Their work forms the cornerstone of primary health care and health-care rights in India, and the last-mile delivery of health schemes and policies.

KEY FACTS ABOUT INDIA'S ASHA PROGRAM

- ➡ **Origins in Chhattisgarh (2002):**
 - o The **Mitanin programme was launched in Chhattisgarh** to provide community-based healthcare, particularly for resource-deficient and marginalised communities.
 - o In the Chhattisgarhi dialect, '**Mitanin**' translates to '**friend**', signifying the compassionate and trust-based role they played in their communities.
- ➡ **Launch and Objective:** The success of the Mitanin model led to the creation of the ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) programme in **2005** under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)
- ➡ **Eligibility Criteria:** ASHA must be a married, widowed, or divorced woman resident of the village, preferably aged 25-45 years.
- ➡ **Educational Qualification:** She should be **literate**, preferably with at least 10th standard education, though relaxations are allowed if no suitable candidates are available.
- ➡ **Selection Process:** ASHA is chosen through a rigorous selection process involving community groups, self-help groups, Anganwadi institutions, village health committees, and the Gram Sabha.
- ➡ **Scale and Workforce:** Comprises **one million female health workers**, making it the world's largest community volunteer programme.
- ➡ **Key Responsibilities:**
 - o ASHAs ensure the implementation of health schemes, provide maternal and child healthcare services, conduct immunisation drives, promote hygiene and sanitation.
 - o ASHA stores and distributes essential healthcare supplies like ORS, iron folic acid tablets, chloroquine, disposable delivery kits, oral pills, and condoms.
 - o Acts as a link between communities and the formal health system, **ensuring last-mile delivery** of healthcare services.
- ➡ **COVID-19 Response:** Played a critical role in vaccination drives, disease prevention, and community health awareness, ensuring healthcare access for rural and marginalised populations.
- ➡ **Global Recognition:** Awarded the WHO Global Health Leaders Award in 2022 for their significant contributions to public health and primary healthcare access.
 - o A **PLOS Global Public Health study** found that women connected with ASHAs are 1.6 times more likely to access maternal healthcare and institutional delivery.

Triple Burden of ASHA Workers

- ♣ **Home Responsibilities:** As women, ASHAs are expected to fulfil their traditional domestic roles, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and managing household responsibilities.
- ♣ **Community Work:** ASHAs are deeply involved in local healthcare delivery, conducting health awareness campaigns, assisting with vaccination drives, managing disease surveillance, and performing home visits.
- ♣ **Institutional Work:** They liaise with health centres, assist in hospital admissions, document health data, conduct surveys, and coordinate with government officials for implementing health schemes.

Due to these overlapping roles, ASHAs work long hours without adequate rest, pushing them into physical and mental exhaustion.

ISSUES FACED BY ASHA WORKERS

- ▼ **Lack of Formal Recognition:** Despite being part of a state programme, ASHAs are classified as 'volunteers,' denying them labour rights like minimum wage, sick leave, and pensions.
- ▼ **Heavy Workload Without Fair Compensation:** Initially expected to work a few hours per week, ASHAs often work full days due to increased responsibilities, including surveys and documentation.
- ▼ **Gendered Exploitation and Social Disadvantage:** ASHAs, mostly from marginalised backgrounds, are seen as 'natural caregivers,' leading to systemic undervaluation of their labour.
- ▼ **Low and Irregular Pay:**
 - o Their fixed monthly incentive is only ₹2,000, with additional earnings based on performance-based incentives, which are often lower than MGNREGA wages.
 - o Many ASHAs have faced non-payment of stipends since the pandemic, increasing their financial instability.
 - ASHAs in Bhopal spent up to 63% of their income on job-related expenses, such as transport and mobile recharges, with no reimbursement.
- ▼ **Lack of Social Security and Health Insurance:**
 - o ASHAs are excluded from the Code on Social Security 2020, despite recommendations from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour.
 - o Unlike other government healthcare workers, they are excluded from the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS).
- ▼ **Severe Exploitation During the COVID-19 Pandemic:** ASHAs worked 8-14 hours daily, including weekends, without protective gear, extra resources, or hazard pay.
- ▼ **Weak Institutional Support:** The rural healthcare system relies on ASHAs for critical service delivery but does not provide adequate training, resources, or recognition
- ▼ **Health and Well-Being Concerns:**
 - o A significant proportion of ASHAs suffer from **anaemia** due to inadequate iron intake, overwork, and a lack of access to regular healthcare.
 - o Stress, lack of sleep, and continuous physical exertion contribute to diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases among ASHA workers.
 - 30% of ASHAs surveyed in Phanda, Bhopal, reported skipping breakfast; 13% do not eat all day.
- ▼ **Social and Gender-Based Challenges:**
 - o ASHAs belong to marginalised communities (SC/ST groups) and face caste and gender hierarchies in the health system.
 - o Reports of abuse, harassment, and assault are underreported, with ASHAs lacking redressal mechanisms.
- ▼ **Policy Gaps and Demands:**
 - o The **2011 National Health Systems Resource Centre report** on ASHAs did not mention working conditions or systemic challenges.
 - o **Interim Budget 2024** provided free health insurance under Ayushman Bharat for ASHAs, but implementation gaps exist.



Recent Strikes

- ☀️ **Kerala:** ASHA workers have been currently on strike for over a month, demanding an increased honorarium of ₹21,000 per month and a ₹5 lakh retirement benefit. The protest was triggered by irregular payments, as their current ₹7,000 honorarium remains below the state's minimum wage for unskilled labour.
- ☀️ **Odisha:** ASHA workers in Odisha began their protest on March 10, demanding a fixed salary of ₹10,000, an additional ₹3,000 for facilitators, government employee status, timely incentives, and social security. With no consensus reached in talks, they announced an indefinite strike.
- ☀️ **Karnataka:** ASHA workers ended their strike in January 2025 after the government announced a fixed honorarium of ₹10,000 per month from April, along with incentives, three months of paid medical leave, and monthly leaves. The government also promised to review retirement compensation and involve workers in pre-budget discussions.

WAY FORWARD

- ✳️ **Grant Formal Worker Status:** ASHAs should be recognised as government employees with corresponding wages, rights, and protections.
- ✳️ **Ensure Fair Compensation:** Implement a fixed salary between ₹18,000-₹21,000 per month, with additional incentives for extra duties.
- ✳️ **Provide Social Security Benefits:** Include ASHAs under the Code on Social Security 2020 for pensions, health insurance, and maternity benefits.
 - A 2018 ASHA benefit package provides accident, death, and disability coverage, but does not include regular employment benefits.
- ✳️ **Reduce Workload and Provide Better Support:** Clearly define their tasks and allocate additional staff for non-health-related duties.
- ✳️ **Timely Payment of Wages and Incentives:** Establish a transparent payment system to prevent delays in disbursing stipends.
- ✳️ **Improve Training and Working Conditions:** Provide better training, essential resources, and protective gear to ensure safe and effective service delivery.
- ✳️ **Strengthen Collective Bargaining and Representation:** Encourage ASHA unions and integrate them into policy discussions to ensure their voices are heard.
- ✳️ **Address Gendered Labour Exploitation:** Recognise ASHAs' contributions beyond traditional caregiving roles and acknowledge them as essential healthcare providers.
- ✳️ **Ensure Political Will and Policy Action:** Mobilise national and state-level resources to institutionalise ASHAs' rights and create sustainable reforms in community healthcare.
- ✳️ **Leverage International Recognition for Systemic Change:** WHO's Global Health Leaders Award should be used as momentum to push for policy changes ensuring ASHAs' dignity and fair treatment.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring **fair wages, social security, and institutional support** for ASHAs is crucial for strengthening India's healthcare system and addressing **gendered labour exploitation**. Without urgent reforms, their invaluable contributions will remain unrecognised, perpetuating cycles of overwork and financial instability.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Critically analyse the role of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) in India's primary healthcare system. How can their working conditions be improved to enhance healthcare delivery? **(10 marks) (150 words)**

ACCELERATING GENDER EQUALITY

Syllabus: GS I - Role of women and women's organization

PYQ MAPPING

Q1 How does patriarchy impact the position of a middle class working woman in India? **(2014)**

Q2 What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? **(2019)**

SHORT TAKES

➤ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

- **About:** A comprehensive global blueprint for advancing women's rights, adopted by 189 countries, including India.
- **Key Areas of Concern:** Covered 12 critical issues, including poverty reduction, education, health, violence against women, economic empowerment, and decision-making influence.
- **India's Participation:** Over 200 Indian women, along with the Government of India, attended the 1995 conference, contributing to shaping the action plan.

➤ Matilda Effect

- Refers to the systematic undervaluation or denial of recognition to women's scientific contributions, where their work is often attributed to male colleagues.
- Named after feminist Matilda Joslyn Gage, this phenomenon highlights gender bias in academia, limiting women's visibility and career advancement in STEM fields.

INTRODUCTION

International Women's Day highlights the urgent need to accelerate action for gender equality, recognising both progress and persistent challenges. India has advanced through inclusive policies and women's empowerment initiatives, yet systemic barriers and societal norms continue to hinder full equality.

WHY IN NEWS

March 8, International Women's Day 2025, themed "**Accelerate Action**," urged global progress towards women's rights, equality, and empowerment, especially significant given rising inequalities and the upcoming **30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration**.



ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

➤ Proposal for International Women's Day (1910):

- **Clara Zetkin**, a German socialist and women's rights activist, proposed the idea of International Women's Day at the Second International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen in 1910.
- The proposal was unanimously accepted, and the day continues to be celebrated worldwide more than a century later.

➤ Contributions of Clara Zetkin

- She believed suffrage was essential for women's social and economic emancipation.

- Criticised bourgeois women for not supporting universal women's suffrage.
- She edited the socialist women's magazine **Die Gleichheit (Equality)** from 1892 to 1917, providing a platform for socialist feminist discourse.
- After German women won the right to vote in 1918, Zetkin continued her political career and was **elected to the Reichstag (German Parliament) in 1932**, becoming its oldest member.
- Delivered a 40-minute speech condemning Hitler and the Nazi party.

International Women's day

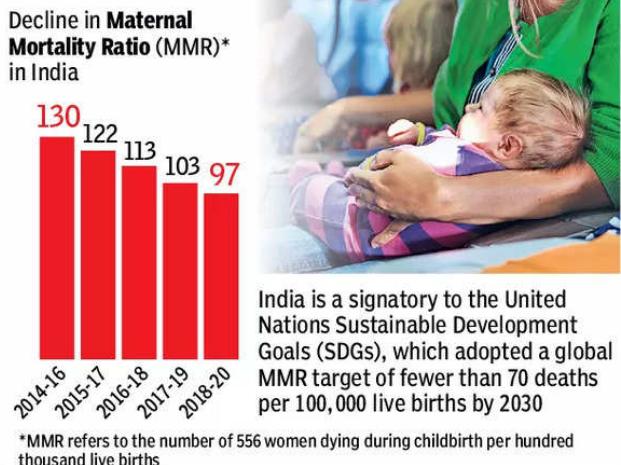


Women and Health

Areas of Progress

- » **Maternal Health Improvement:**
 - o Institutional deliveries have increased to 95% under schemes like Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.
 - o Maternal mortality has declined from 130 to 97 deaths per 1,00,000 births (2014-2020, Sample Registration System data).
- » **Reproductive Health Choices:** 56.5% of married women use modern contraceptives, improving control over reproductive health.
- » **Healthcare Access:** Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, the world's largest government-funded healthcare scheme, has provided millions of women with free critical medical treatment.

STEADY IMPROVEMENT



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Areas to Improve

- » **Underrepresentation in Medical Research:** Women have been historically excluded from clinical trials, leading to higher risks of adverse drug reactions—women are twice as likely to experience them.
- » **Caregiving:**
 - o Women play a disproportionate role in unpaid caregiving, shouldering nearly three quarters of global caregiving responsibilities.
 - o This invisible labour significantly impacts their ability to engage in formal economic activities.
- » **Healthcare leadership:** While women constitute nearly 70% of the global health-care workforce, they hold less than 30% of leadership roles.
- » **Challenges:** Insufficient research funding for their specific conditions and underrepresentation in clinical trials, resulting in biased treatment, societal biases and discrimination often limit the access to and quality of care.
- » **Way Forward:**
 - o Expanding routine screenings, early detection, and education campaigns for diseases such as cervical and breast cancer is crucial.
 - o Addressing maternal health issues, such as postpartum haemorrhage, can reduce mortality and improve workforce participation.

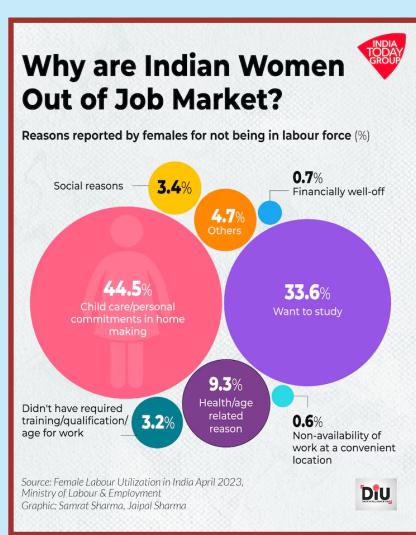
Increased funding for women's health research, mandatory inclusion of women in clinical trials, and addressing societal biases are crucial

Women in Employment

- » **Increase in Female Labour Participation:** The 2024 Time Use Survey (TUS) shows an increase in women's employment-related participation from 21.8% (2019) to 25% (2024).
- » **Gender Disparities in Time Spent on Work:** Women's domestic workload only slightly reduced (**299 to 289 minutes**), and caregiving responsibilities increased (**134 to 137 minutes**), while men's contribution to domestic work declined from **97 to 88 minutes** and care work stagnated (**76 to 75 minutes**).
- » **Statistical Invisibility of Women's Work:**
 - o The **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** underestimates female workforce participation by excluding unpaid domestic and care work.
 - o Studies using **UN System of National Accounts (UN-SNA) frameworks** found that rural women's labour

force participation is **1.5 times higher** than PLFS estimates, leading to policy invisibility of women's work.

- » **Women's Economic Empowerment:** National Rural and Urban Livelihood Missions have connected nearly 100 million women to financial networks via self-help groups.
- » **Challenges:** The gender pay gap, limited access to leadership positions, and workplace discrimination, including sexual harassment, struggle with balancing work and family responsibilities and lack of adequate support like affordable childcare.
- » **Way forward:** Implementing pay transparency, enforcing anti-discrimination policies, providing affordable childcare, promoting flexible work arrangements, and fostering inclusive leadership are crucial steps.



Women in Education

Women Reformers and Their Contributions

- » **Savitribai Phule (Maharashtra):** Established India's first school for girls (1848), fought against untouchability and widow remarriage.
- » **Fatima Sheikh (Maharashtra):** First Muslim woman educator, worked with Phule in promoting education for lower-caste girls.
- » **Pandita Ramabai (Karnataka):** Founded Arya Mahila Samaj (1882) to promote women's education and fight child marriage.
- » **Chandraprabha Saikiani (Assam):** Established a girls' school at 13, removed gender barriers at Assam Sahitya Sabha (1925), and fought against opium use.
- » **Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (Bengal):** Founded schools for Muslim girls (1909, 1911) and wrote Sultana's Dream, envisioning gender equality.
- » **Sarala Ray (Bengal):** Founded Gokhale Memorial Girls' School (1920) and College (1938), promoting multilingual education.

Areas of Progress

- » **Free education** is provided up to high school in all 28 States and Union Territories, benefiting 12 crore girls.
- » Beti Bachao Beti Padhao has improved the child sex ratio and increased school enrolment for girls
- » Improved sanitation has reduced menstruation-related absences, with UNICEF supporting broader linkages.

- » The Department of Science and Technology (DST) launched the **Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI)** pilot in 2020 to foster an inclusive environment for women and gender-diverse individuals in STEM.
- » Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan has trained over 35 million rural women in **digital literacy**, aiding their participation in the digital economy.
- » The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has enabled more women to engage in digital transactions and investments.

Representation in STEM

- » **Underrepresentation in STEM:** Only 20% of students in premier STEM institutions (IITs, AIIMS, CSIR) and faculty members are women, reflecting gender disparity in science and technology.
- » **Challenges**
- » Women's contributions remain overshadowed (**Matilda Effect**) and overlooked in academic settings.
- » Women struggle to return after career breaks due to **age restrictions on grants and lack of structured mentorship**.
- » Women in STEM experience **biased hiring, fewer promotions and unequal funding** leading to higher attrition rates and restricted professional growth.
- » **Way Forward**
- » Early intervention, engaging parents, educators,

and the broader social environment, is the key to lasting impact.

- » Remove **age barriers for grants**, establish **mentorship programmes**, and **increase women's leadership roles** in decision-making.
- » Implement **flexible work policies, affordable childcare, and work-life balance measures** to improve retention.
- » Promote **successful women in STEM** while exposing **biases**

Women in Corporate Leadership

- » **Women's Workforce Participation:** Women comprise about 35.9% of India's worker population ratio, but their representation in senior and middle management roles is only 12.7% as of 2024.
- » **Legal Mandates for Gender Diversity:** The Companies Act, 2013, mandated at least one woman director on the boards of certain public limited companies, and SEBI's 2015 regulation required at least one independent woman director in the top 1,000 listed companies.
- » **Increase in Women Directors:** The proportion of women directors on NSE 500 listed companies' boards has grown from 5% in 2011 to 18% in 2023, largely due to regulatory mandates.
- » **Benefits of Women in Leadership:**
 - o Research shows that women in leadership improve corporate governance, strategic oversight, risk management, stakeholder engagement, and accountability.
- » **Challenges in Achieving Real Impact:** Women are often appointed to leadership roles to meet regulatory quotas rather than given real decision-making power, and gender pay gaps persist despite increasing representation.
- » **Future Action:**
 - o True gender diversity is achieved when women hold top executive roles (C-Suite/ KMPs), independent directorships, and board committee chair positions.
 - o Despite progress, companies and regulators must strengthen gender diversity beyond tokenism and ensure lasting structural change.

Women in Public Spaces

- » **Gendered Spatial Control and Mobility Restrictions:** According to NFHS-4 (2015-16), only 54% of women could visit markets alone, 50% could access healthcare independently, and 48% were allowed to travel outside their village unaccompanied, showing deep-rooted restrictions on their mobility.
- » **Low Female Workforce Participation:** The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24 shows that India's **female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is 35.6%**, indicating that a large section of women remains outside the workforce, limiting their interaction with public spaces.
- » **Initiatives in Addressing Gender-Based Violence:**
 - o 770 one stop centres provide medical, legal, and psychological support to survivors of violence.
 - o Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita enforced in July 2024, strengthens legal protections and improves women's safety and justice.
- » **Challenge**
 - o Women use public spaces primarily for transit between home and work, **avoiding recreational activities** due to fear of harassment and violence.
 - o Public areas like footpaths, bus stops, and narrow streets remain unsafe, while malls and cafes offer relatively safer curated spaces.
 - o Perpetrators of public harassment and gender-based violence often secure bail and repeat crimes due to **low conviction rates**.

- o Women **regulate their body language and behaviour** in public spaces to conform to the male gaze..

» **Way Forward**

- o Governments must improve **street lighting, public toilets, street furniture (benches), and recreational areas for women** while enforcing strict laws against harassment in public spaces.
- o Women should be encouraged to **use public**

spaces for leisure, challenging societal norms.

- o Society must **stop blaming women** for being in "wrong places at the wrong time" and instead focus on creating a culture where women can freely navigate public spaces **without fear or restriction**
- o A truly inclusive space allows women to **move freely without urgency or fear**, asserting their right to exist without justification.

Women in Politics

» **Political Representation:**

- o The Women's Reservation Bill guarantees 33% legislative representation, building on local governance successes.
- o Nearly 1.5 million women hold leadership positions in local governance, forming the largest cohort of women political leaders globally.

» **Challenges:** The patriarchal attitude of the society,

relentless attack on women in politics, systematic barriers, etc contribute to the widening disparity in women in the political sphere.

- » **Way Forward:** Implementing women's reservation in legislatures, enforcing political party quotas, providing leadership training and ensuring protection against harassment can enhance women's participation in politics.

GENDER INDICES AND INDIA'S PERFORMANCE

⌚ **Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (2024)**

- o Published by **UNDP**, it assesses gender disparities in human development.
- o According to the **World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024**, India ranked **129 out of 146 countries**, dropping **two places from 2023 (127th)**.
- o Estimated time to achieve full gender parity: **134 years**.

⌚ **Women, Peace, and Security Index (2023-24)**

- o India ranked **128 out of 177 countries**, highlighting the urgent need for safer public spaces.

⌚ **Gender Inequality Index (GII) (2022)**

- o Developed by **UNDP**, it measures gender disparity across **reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation**.
- o India's score: **0.437**, ranking **108 out of 193 countries**.

⌚ **Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) Report 2023**

- o GSNI is published by UNDP with a focus on understanding the role of social beliefs in

India Ranks 128th in Women Safety Index



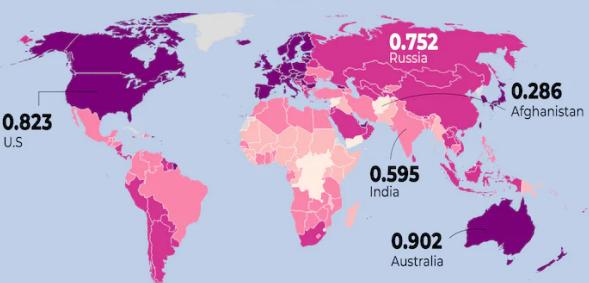
India rebounds in 2023 in the Women Peace and Security Index after ranking dropped to 148 during the previous period

Ranking rebound with a surge in 2023



The Women Peace and Security Index around the World

● Less than 0.42 ● 0.42 to 0.54 ● 0.54 to 0.67 ● 0.67 to 0.8 ● More than 0.8
 Poor ← Index score → Good



Source: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
 Graphic: Jaipal Sharma & Subham Singh

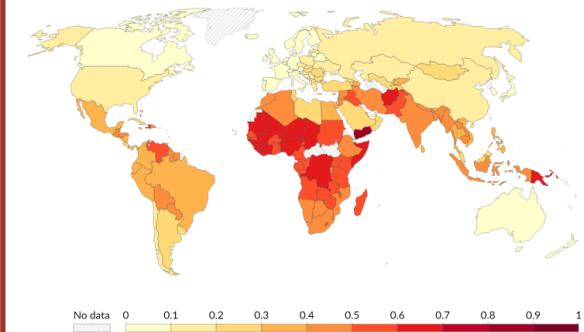


obstructing gender equality along four dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity.

- The report highlights that over **99.22% of people in India hold at least one bias against women**, with 92.39% justifying intimate partner violence or restricting reproductive rights.

Gender Inequality Index, 2022

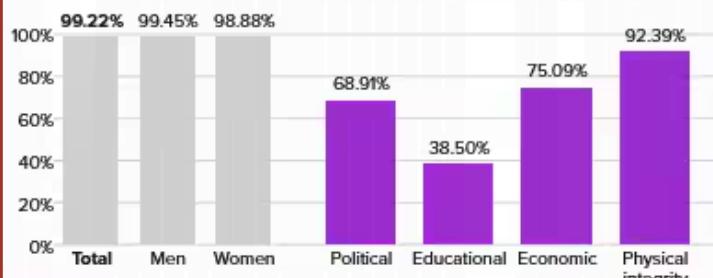
This index covers three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. Scores are between 0-1 and higher values indicate higher inequalities.



India

Percent of people with bias 99.22%

Percentage of people with bias by gender and dimension



CONCLUSION

Achieving gender equality requires sustained policy commitment, social transformation, and structural reforms to dismantle barriers faced by women. **India's Gender Budget share has risen** from 6.8% (2024-25) to 8.8% (2025-26), with \$55.2 billion allocated to gender-focused programmes, reflecting a stronger commitment to women's empowerment. However, true progress will be realised only when these financial commitments translate into equal opportunities, representation, and agency for women in all spheres of life.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Examine the socio-economic and political barriers that hinder women's empowerment in India. Suggest policy measures to overcome them (15 marks) (250 words)

EGYPT'S PROPOSAL AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRUMP'S GAZA PLAN

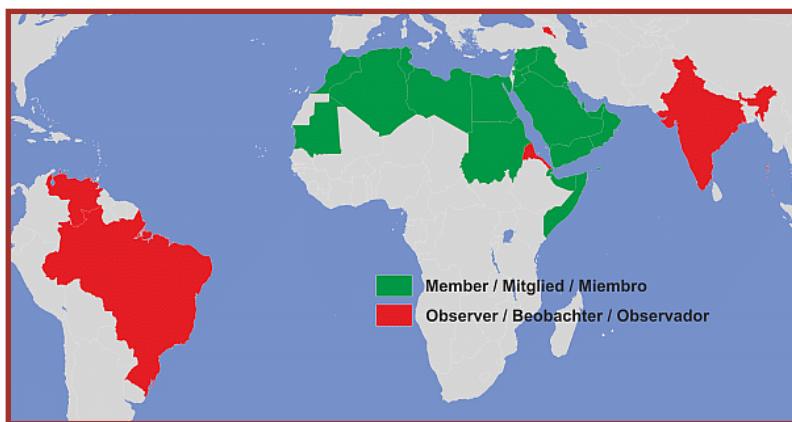
Syllabus: GS II - International Relations

PYQ MAPPING

Q1 The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyze India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian Countries. **(2017)**

Q2 'India's relations with Israel have, of late, acquired a depth and diversity, which cannot be rolled back.' Discuss. **(2018)**

Q3 A number of outside powers have entrenched themselves in Central Asia, which is a zone of interest to India. Discuss the implications, in this context, of India's joining the Ashgabat Agreement, 2018. **(2018)**



WHY IN NEWS

The Arab League adopted a **\$53-billion Egyptian plan** for Gaza's reconstruction as a "comprehensive Arab strategy" to rebuild infrastructure, provide humanitarian aid, and strengthen regional unity.

INTRODUCTION

The **Cairo Declaration**, adopted at the **Arab League Emergency Summit** in Cairo, outlines a **\$53-billion Arab-led plan** for Gaza's reconstruction, emphasizing **Palestinian rights** and a **two-state solution**. It rejects **forced displacement** and **US control**, proposing **transitional governance** until Palestinian administration resumes. This is the **first collective Arab proposal** for Gaza's future, contingent on **full ceasefire implementation**, especially by **Israel**.

SHORT TAKES

Arab League

- o It was established in **Cairo, Egypt, in 1945**, following the adoption of the **Alexandria Protocol in 1944**.
- o It comprises **22 member states** from **North Africa** and the **Arabian Peninsula**. Each member holds **one vote** in the **League Council**, and decisions are **binding only on those members that vote in favor**.
- o Additionally, the Arab League has **seven observer states**: Armenia, Brazil, Chad, Eritrea, Greece, India, and Venezuela.

TRUMP'S VISION OF GAZA

- ➡ Former US President Donald Trump proposed a controversial plan for Gaza's future, advocating for the US to "take over" and "own" Gaza to ensure stability.
- ➡ His proposal involved the relocation of Gaza's **2.3 million residents to Egypt and Jordan, claiming they would be "better off."**
- ➡ He also envisioned transforming Gaza into a luxury destination, branding it the "Riviera of the Middle East."
- ➡ **Trump blames Hamas for Gaza's** turmoil and implied that Palestinians were incapable of governing themselves.

BACKLASH AND CRITICISM

The proposal sparked intense criticism:

- **Accusations of Ethnic Cleansing:** Human rights organizations condemned the plan as **ethnic cleansing**, arguing that **forcibly displacing civilians** is a **war crime under international law**.
- **Historical Sensitivities:** Palestinians have a **deep-rooted connection to Gaza**, making the idea of
- displacement reminiscent of the **1948 Nakba** when **hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly expelled** during Israel's creation.
- **Logistical and Moral Concerns:** Experts labeled the plan **impractical and morally indefensible**, given the **enormous humanitarian, logistical, and financial challenges** involved in uprooting millions of people.

WHY TRUMP'S PLAN IS UNFEASIBLE

- ❖ **No Legal Authority:** The **US lacks jurisdiction** over Gaza, making any direct control impossible.
- ❖ **Mass Relocation Challenges:** Forcing over **two million Palestinians** to leave their homes is both **logistically unrealistic** and widely **rejected by the Palestinian people**.
- ❖ **Breach of International Law:** Involuntary displacement of civilians constitutes a **serious violation of international humanitarian law**.
- ❖ **Regional Rejection:** Key neighboring countries like **Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia** have **firmly opposed** the plan, leaving the US with **no regional backing**.

THE EGYPTIAN PLAN FOR GAZA

The Egyptian plan focuses on **early recovery and long-term reconstruction** of **Gaza** over a period of **three to five years**, with an estimated cost of **\$53 billion**. The initial recovery phase alone requires **\$2 billion**. The plan is structured around several key initiatives:

● Immediate Recovery:

- **Rubble Removal and Mine Clearing:** Clearing debris and unexploded ordnance.
- **Temporary Housing:** Providing shelters for displaced residents.

● Infrastructure Rebuilding:

- **Utilities and Permanent Housing:** Restoring water, electricity, and essential infrastructure.
- **Public Services:** Establishing healthcare, education, and other necessary services.

● Economic Development:

- **Industrial and Technological Growth:** Creating **industrial zones** and a **technology hub**.
- **Trade and Tourism:** Developing a **seaport, airport, and beach hotels** to stimulate trade and tourism.

● Governance and Political Framework:

- **Transitional Administration:** Establishing a "**Gaza administration committee**" of **qualified Gazans** to manage governance until the **Palestinian Authority (PA)** resumes unified control over **Gaza and the West Bank**.
- **Path to Elections:** Laying the groundwork for potential **future elections** under PA leadership.

● Commitment to Palestinian Rights:

- **No Forced Displacement:** Rejecting any **forcible removal** of Palestinians from Gaza.
- **Two-State Solution:** Reaffirming the vision of a **Palestinian state** with **East Jerusalem** as its

ISRAEL'S WAR ON GAZA

Egypt's Gaza reconstruction plan

Arab leaders have adopted a \$53bn plan to rebuild Gaza, after Israel's genocidal war. It comes after Arab countries rejected US President Trump's suggestion of ethnically cleansing Gaza to build a "Riviera" there.

Phase 1 - Interim measures \$3bn

- Managed by a committee of technocrats under the Palestinian Authority
- Clearing and construction operations begin - 200,000 homes to be built, 60,000 buildings restored within six months

Phase 2 - Reconstruction \$20bn

- Clearing and construction continues - 400,000 homes to be built
- Restore services - water, waste, telecom and electricity
- Provide housing for the entire population by 30 months
- Build an industrial zone, fishing port, commercial port and airport

Phase 3 - Governance \$30bn

- Technocratic committee oversees humanitarian aid and governance
- A Steering and Management Council - a fund supporting the technocrats - would support the process throughout
- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said an election could take place next year if conditions allow

 Source: Al Jazeera, Reuters, Al-Ahram | March 5, 2025



capital, coexisting peacefully with Israel, based on **pre-1967 borders**.

● Financial and Political Support:

- **Trust Fund:** Egypt will set up a **trust fund** to manage contributions.
- **Arab and International Collaboration:** Mobilizing financial, material, and political backing from **Arab nations** and the **global community**.

This plan, outlined in the **Cairo Declaration**, presents a **unified Arab initiative** with **Egypt leading coordination** alongside Palestine and other Arab states, offering a comprehensive roadmap for **Gaza's recovery and future stability**.

- o Create partnerships for setting up industrial capacity in the region, fostering local employment and skills.

 **Geopolitical Balance:**

- o Maintain diplomatic neutrality, supporting Palestinian reconstruction while respecting Israel's security concerns.
- o Leverage India's historical support for the Palestinian cause and its growing ties with Israel to mediate dialogue.

 **Global Positioning:**

- o Counterbalance China's Belt and Road Initiative by offering an alternative development model focused on self-sufficiency.

- o Align with Japan and other nations to prevent monopolization of the reconstruction process by any single power.

 **Strategic Benefits:**

- o Enhance India's global standing as a peace-builder and humanitarian actor.
- o Secure long-term goodwill and trade opportunities in the Middle East.

CONCLUSION

The Egyptian plan for Gaza offers a balanced approach, focusing on Palestinian self-determination, infrastructure rebuilding, and economic growth. It emphasizes a two-state solution and broad Arab-led support. However, challenges like security concerns, lack of global consensus, and geopolitical complexities threaten its implementation. Success depends on sustained cooperation and political will.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Compare the key features of the Egyptian and Trump plans for Gaza's reconstruction. Analyze the challenges faced by the Egyptian plan in its implementation. **(15 marks) (250 words)**

OBESITY CHALLENGE IN INDIA

Syllabus: GS II - Health

PYQ MAPPING

Q1 In order to enhance the prospects of social development, sound and adequate health care policies are needed particularly in the fields of geriatric and maternal health care. Discuss (2020)

Q2 Identify the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are related to health. Discuss the success of the actions taken by the Government for achieving the same. (2013)



WHY IN NEWS

A pair of studies published in *The Lancet* on March 3, 2025, estimate that by 2050, over **380 crore adults (50% of the global population)** and **74.6 crore children (33%)** will be overweight or obese. India ranks among the top countries witnessing a rapid rise in obesity rates and may even surpass China in absolute numbers in some categories.

INTRODUCTION

According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)**, obesity is defined as an abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. The commonly used metric to classify obesity is **Body Mass Index (BMI)**, where a **BMI of 25 or above** is considered overweight, and a **BMI of 30 or above** is classified as obese. In **India**, a person is considered **overweight** if their BMI is between **23.0 and 24.9 kg/m²**, and **obese** if their BMI is **25 kg/m² or higher**. **Morbid obesity** occurs when a person's BMI is **35 or more**.

What is BMI?

- * **Body Mass Index (BMI)**, formerly known as the **Quetelet index**, is a simple measure to assess whether an adult has a healthy weight. It is calculated by dividing a person's **weight (kg)** by the **square of their height (m²)**.

Healthy BMI Range

- * According to **World Health Organization (WHO)** guidelines, a **normal BMI** falls between **18.5 and 24.9**.

Global Obesity Trends

- * The prevalence of **overweight and obesity** has been increasing globally across all age groups. Between **1990 and 2022**, the percentage of **children and**

adolescents (aged 5–19 years) with obesity quadrupled from **2% to 8%**, while the proportion of **adults (aged 18 and above) with obesity** more than doubled from **7% to 16%**.

Obesity in India

- * As per the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 (2019-21)**, **24% of Indian women** and **23% of Indian men** are either overweight or obese.
- * Among individuals aged **15-49 years**, **6.4% of women** and **4.0% of men** are classified as obese.

The proportion of **overweight children under 5 years** (based on weight-for-height) increased from **2.1% in NFHS-4 (2015-16)** to **3.4% in NFHS-5 (2019-21)** at the national level.

KEY FACTORS DRIVING THE RISE OF OBESITY IN INDIA

High calorie, Low-nutrient Diets:

- o Increased consumption of refined carbohydrates and saturated fats.

Easy access to processed foods:

- o Widespread availability of packaged, ready to eat meals.

Growing culture of eating out:

- o Frequent dining at restaurants where food is often cooked in unhealthy oils

Use of genetically modified crops:

- o Altered food composition impacting metabolism and weight gain.

Physical inactivity:

- o Declining engagement in sports, exercise and outdoor activities

Sedentary lifestyle:

- o Long hours of sitting, excessive screen time and minimal movement in daily routine.

KEY FACTORS RISING THE OBESITY AMONG WOMEN

- **Cultural, Socioeconomic, and Biological Factors** – A mix of societal norms, financial constraints, and biological changes contribute to higher obesity rates in women.
- **Limited Physical Activity & Healthy Food Access** – Traditional roles and lifestyle restrictions hinder exercise and access to nutritious food.
- **Family Prioritization Over Self-Care** – Women often prioritize family nutrition over their own, leading to

unhealthy eating habits.

- **Healthcare & Education Gaps** – Limited awareness and access to healthcare further exacerbate obesity risks.
- **Biological Influences** – Pregnancy, menopause, and hormonal shifts contribute to weight gain.
- **Rise in Sedentary Lifestyles** – Sedentary activity in rural women surged from 34% (1975-79) to 74% (2012), fueling obesity growth.

CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASING OBESITY

❖ Health Risks

- Higher risk of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes.
- Increased chances of stroke and respiratory issues.
- Greater likelihood of joint pain, arthritis, and mobility problems.

❖ Mental Health Impact

- Higher risk of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.
- Increased social stigma and discrimination.

❖ Economic Burden

- Higher healthcare costs for obesity-related diseases.

- Reduced productivity due to frequent illness and absenteeism.

❖ Impact on Children & Youth

- Rising childhood obesity leads to early-onset diabetes and heart disease.
- Poor academic performance due to reduced energy levels and focus.

❖ Strain on Healthcare Systems

- Increased demand for medical care and obesity treatments.
- Higher pressure on public health infrastructure.

❖ Reduced Life Expectancy

- Obesity-related diseases contribute to a shorter lifespan.

CHALLENGES POSED BY RISING OBESITY IN INDIA

● Healthcare System Overload

- India is projected to have **44.9 crore overweight or obese individuals by 2050**, accounting for nearly **one-third of the population** (Lancet study).
- **Obesity contributes to 5% of total healthcare costs** in India and is expected to increase.

reach **1.69 crore by 2050**.

● Food Industry and Dietary Shifts

- **Ultra-processed food sales in India grew rapidly between 2009-2019**, making it one of the top three countries in consumption growth.
- Consumption of **sugar, salt, and fat-rich processed foods** is driving obesity rates, especially in urban areas.

● Urbanization and Lifestyle Changes

- **Sedentary activity in rural areas increased from 34% (1975-79) to 74% (2012)**, worsening obesity prevalence.
- Urbanization has led to **reduced physical activity, longer commutes, and desk-bound jobs**, contributing to weight gain.

● Policy and Awareness Gaps

- Only **40% of countries have operational obesity control policies**, but in **low and middle-income countries like India, coverage drops to just 10%**.

- o Weak regulations allow **multinational food chains to aggressively market processed foods** in India.
- **Double Burden of Malnutrition**
- o While **14% of India's population is undernourished**,

KEY GUIDELINES TO FIGHT OBESITY

① Diet Control & Healthy Eating

- o Reduce sugar, salt, and processed foods; prefer home-cooked meals.
- o Cut oil consumption by 10% to lower calorie intake.
- o Increase fibre intake for better digestion and satiety.

② Physical Activity & Exercise

- o Avoid prolonged sitting; engage in 45-60 minutes of exercise daily.
- o Include resistance training (push-ups, squats, planks) to improve muscle strength.
- o Exercise regularly to boost good cholesterol (HDL) and manage weight.

③ Weight Management at All Ages

- o obesity is also surging.
- o Childhood malnutrition **increases the risk of adult obesity**, as early undernutrition leads to metabolic changes that store excess fat later in life.

- o Encourage children to eat balanced meals and exercise daily.
- o Adults should monitor weight, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels regularly.
- o Elderly individuals should focus on light activity and balanced nutrition.

④ Sustainable Lifestyle Changes

- o Increase protein intake for better metabolism and muscle repair.
- o Use household items for strength training if gym access is limited.
- o Follow a simple 12-hour fasting routine to aid fat burning and insulin regulation.
- o Make small, consistent changes like meal prepping and staying hydrated.

INDIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES ON NUTRITION, FITNESS, AND FOOD SAFETY

● **POSHAN Abhiyaan (2018) – Preventing Childhood Obesity**

(Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment)

- o Flagship nutrition initiative improving outcomes for **children, adolescents, pregnant women, and lactating mothers**.
- o Focuses on **Poshan Vatikas (Nutri-Gardens), fortified foods, and dietary diversity**.
- o Strengthens **Anganwadi services** under **Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0 (2021)**.

● **Fit India Movement (2019) – Fostering a Fitness Culture**

- o Encourages daily fitness through **Fit India School Certification** and **Fit India Sundays (cycling, walking)**.
- o Community-driven programs like **mass yoga sessions, running clubs, and workplace fitness challenges**.

● **Khelo India Programme (2016-17) – Promoting Sports Excellence**

- o Supports young athletes with **top-class training and infrastructure**.
- o Ensures **equal sports opportunities** across **rural and urban India**.

● **Eat Right India Movement (FSSAI) – Ensuring Food Safety & Healthy Diets**

- o **Food Safety Training and Certification (FoSTaC)** to improve food safety standards.
- o **DART Book (Detect Adulteration with Rapid Test) & Magic Box** for food adulteration detection.
- o **Food Safety on Wheels** (mobile testing units) and **fortified staple promotion** for better nutrition.

● **'Aaj Se Thoda Kam' & HFSS Food Regulations (FSSAI)**

- o **Campaign to reduce High Fat, Sugar, and Salt (HFSS) intake** through public awareness.
- o **Mandatory front-of-pack labeling on HFSS foods** for informed consumer choices.

CONCLUSION

India's obesity crisis is escalating, with nearly **one-third of the population projected to be obese by 2050**, straining healthcare and economic systems. Rising **processed food consumption, urbanization, and sedentary lifestyles** are key drivers. Recognizing obesity as a **major health threat** and integrating it into public health strategies is crucial for a healthier future.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q)The rising obesity epidemic in India poses significant public health and economic challenges. Analyze the key factors driving this trend and suggest comprehensive policy measures to address the crisis. **(15 marks) (250 words)**

THE DELIMITATION CONUNDRUM

Syllabus: GS II - Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure

PYQ MAPPING

Q1 Though the federal principle is dominant in our Constitution and that principle is one of its basic features, but it is equally true that federalism under the Indian Constitution leans in favour of a strong Centre, a feature that militates against the concept of strong federalism. Discuss **(2015)**

Q2 How far do you think cooperation, competition and confrontation have shaped the nature of federation in India? Cite some recent examples to validate your answer. **(2020)**

Q3 While the national political parties in India favour centralisation, the regional parties are in favour of State autonomy." Comment. **(2022)**

INTRODUCTION

Delimitation, a crucial process in representative democracy, **determines the allocation of parliamentary and assembly seats based on population**. With the upcoming revision after 2026, debates have intensified over its impact on federal balance and equitable representation.

WHY IN NEWS

The debate on delimitation has resurfaced after Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister raised concerns about its implications. The exercise, scheduled after the first Census post-2026, remains uncertain as the 2021 Census was postponed due to COVID-19 and subsequent delays by the Central government.

SHORT TAKES

➤ Delimitation Commission:

- A high-power body created by the Act of parliament but **appointed by the President**, responsible for redrawing parliamentary and assembly constituencies.
- It has been constituted four times (1952, 1963, 1973, 2002) under respective Delimitation Acts.
- The Commission functions **independently of the government**.
- Its orders have the force of law, **cannot be challenged in court**, and take effect on a date specified by the President.
- While its orders are laid before Parliament and State Assemblies, **no modifications** are allowed.

○ Members:

- A retired Supreme Court judge(Chairperson).
- The Chief Election Commissioner or a nominated Election Commissioner.
- State Election Commissioners (of concerned states).
- **Associate Members:** MPs (appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha) and MLAs (appointed by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly) from the respective states/UTs under delimitation.
- They provide **inputs and advice** but **do not have decision-making powers** or voting rights.

ABOUT DELIMITATION

➤ Definition:

- Delimitation refers to the process of determining the number of seats and boundaries of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- It also determines the number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses.

the allocation of Lok Sabha seats and division of constituencies be readjusted as per a law enacted by Parliament.

- **Article 170(3):** Requires readjustment of total seats and territorial constituencies in State Legislative Assemblies after each Census.

➤ Authority and Process:

- The Delimitation Commission, established by an Act of Parliament, is responsible for conducting this exercise.

- o **Census data** help in redrawing constituencies, ensuring geographical contiguity, balanced population distribution, and socio-economic considerations.
- o The Delimitation Commission **publishes draft proposals**, seeks **feedback from stakeholders**,

HISTORY OF DELIMITATION

Delimitation was carried out based on the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Census.

Past Lok Sabha Seat Fixation:

- o 1951 Census: 494 seats (Population: 36.1 crore, 7.3 lakh per seat).
- o 1961 Census: 522 seats (Population: 43.9 crore, 8.4 lakh per seat).
- o 1971 Census: 543 seats (Population: 54.8 crore, 10.1 lakh per seat).

Freeze on Seats:

- o The Lok Sabha seats were frozen at 543 based on the 1971 Census (population: 54.8 crore) to promote population control.
- o The 42nd Amendment Act (1976) froze it until 2000.

PROPOSED SCENARIOS OF DELIMITATION

Two scenarios are being discussed: one is retaining 543 seats with redistribution among States, and the other is increasing the number of seats to 848 with proportional allocation.

ISSUES

Uneven Population Growth and Disadvantage to Southern and Smaller States :

- o States like **UP, Bihar, MP, and Rajasthan** have witnessed higher population growth than **Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh** over the last five decades.
- o The potential increase in seats based on the new Census may favour States with higher population growth, affecting representation.

Disadvantage to Southern and Smaller States:

Southern States, smaller northern States (Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand), and northeastern States may lose relative representation compared to high-growth northern States.

Threat to Federalism:

Reduction in representation for States that successfully controlled population may violate the **basic structure** doctrine of federalism

and **incorporates revisions** before finalising the delimitation plan.

- o Once **published in the official Gazette**, the new electoral boundaries take effect in the next election.

- o The 84th Amendment Act (2001) extended the freeze until 2026.

Future Adjustments:

- o Readjustment of seats will happen based on the first Census after 2026.
- o Territorial constituency boundaries and SC/ST seat reservations were last adjusted based on the 2001 Census and will be revised after 2026

Uncertainty Due to Delayed Census:

- o Normally, the 2031 Census would have determined the next delimitation.
- o With the 2021 Census postponed and 2026 approaching, debates have emerged about the impending delimitation exercise.

Proportional representation

The number of seats in the Lok Sabha, based on the 1971 Census, was fixed at 543, when the population was 54.8 crore. However, since then, it has been frozen in order to encourage population control measures

Exhibit 1: If seats are retained at 543 and reapportioned among States based on 2026* population

Exhibit 2 : If the number of seats is increased to 848 based on the 2026* population

State	Number of seats at present	Number of seats projected	Net Gain/ (Loss)	State	Number of seats at present	Number of seats projected	Net Gain
Uttar Pradesh	80	91	11	Uttar Pradesh	80	143	63
Bihar	40	50	10	Bihar	40	79	39
Rajasthan	25	31	6	Rajasthan	25	50	25
Madhya Pradesh	29	33	4	Madhya Pradesh	29	52	23
Tamil Nadu	39	31	-8	Tamil Nadu	39	49	10
Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	34	-8	Andhra Pradesh + Telangana	42	54	12
Kerala	20	12	-8	Kerala	20	20	-
Karnataka	28	26	-2	Karnataka	28	41	13
Punjab	13	12	-1	Punjab	13	18	5
Himachal Pradesh	4	3	-1	Himachal Pradesh	4	4	-
Uttarakhand	5	4	-1	Uttarakhand	5	7	2
Northeastern States (excluding Assam)	11	11	-	Northeastern States (excluding Assam)	11	11	-

*projected figures

Source: Based on Vaishnav et al, Carnegie endowment

Political Disenchantment: Southern States, currently holding **24% of Lok Sabha seats**, may see a **5% decline**, leading to concerns over **diminished political weight**.

Policy Implications: Rewarding high population growth with more seats could **discourage future population control efforts**

International Examples of Seat Allocation in Legislatures

- » **United States (House of Representatives):**
 - o Capped at **435 seats** since **1913**, despite population increasing from **9.4 crore (1911) to 33.4 crore (2023)**.
 - o Seats redistributed after each **Census** using the **method of equal proportion** to maintain balance.
 - o Minimal seat changes: **2020 Census** led to no change for **37 States**, Texas gained **2 seats**, five States gained **1 seat each**, and seven States lost **1 seat each**.
- » **European Union (EU Parliament):**
 - o **720 members** allocated among **27 member countries** based on '**degressive proportionality**'.

- o **Degressive proportionality** is a principle used in electoral systems where larger entities (e.g., countries, states, or political groups) get **more representatives** than smaller ones, but **with diminishing returns**.
 - This means that smaller entities are **overrepresented relative to their population**, while larger ones are **underrepresented** compared to a strictly proportional system
- o **Germany (largest population)** gets more seats than **Malta (smallest population)**, but **Malta has more seats per capita** than Germany.
- o This ensures **representation for smaller states** while maintaining a balance in voting power.

WAY FORWARD

- ✿ **Balancing Democracy and Federalism:** The delimitation process should ensure fair representation while upholding the federal structure to prevent regional disenchantment.
- ✿ **Maintain Status Quo on Lok Sabha Seats:**
 - o Capping the number of MPs at 543 would uphold federalism and prevent the dilution of representation for States that controlled population growth.
 - o Since MPs primarily legislate on Union matters and oversee the central government, increasing their number may not be necessary.
 - o Tamil Nadu CM Stalin has demanded to freeze the seats at 543 (based on 1971 census) for another 30 years.
- ✿ **Regional Political Safeguards:** MPs and leaders from southern States, smaller northern States, and northeastern States should advocate for retaining the current number of seats to protect their political influence.
- ✿ **Preserving Rajya Sabha Composition:** Maintaining the current number of Rajya Sabha seats ensures the Upper House retains its role in federal equilibrium.
- ✿ **Address Representation at State Level:** Instead of

increasing Lok Sabha seats, the number of MLAs in State Assemblies can be expanded to improve local governance.

- o Employ the **Delimitation within the states (intra-state)** based on latest census data.
- ✿ **Strengthening Local Governance:** Empowering Panchayats and Municipalities through greater financial and administrative autonomy will enhance grassroots democracy.
- ✿ **Learn from Global Practices:** Exploring models like the U.S. 'equal proportion' method or the EU's 'degressive proportionality' can offer solutions to balance representation.
- ✿ **Balanced Approach for Population Growth:**
 - o India's population has increased from 55 crore to 145 crore in the last five decades and is projected to peak at 165-170 crore before declining.
 - o As India's population is expected to peak and then decline, long-term planning should focus on governance efficiency rather than just numerical representation.
- ✿ **Ensuring Equitable Resource Allocation:** States with better population control should not be penalised in political representation or fiscal devolution.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring a fair and balanced representation model without penalising States that have successfully implemented population control measures is crucial to upholding India's federal structure. Strengthening local governance and maintaining the existing Lok Sabha composition while adjusting State Assembly seats can provide a viable solution.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Q) Discuss the rationale behind freezing the number of Lok Sabha seats based on the 1971 Census. What are the challenges and possible solutions for ensuring equitable representation in the upcoming delimitation exercise? **(10 marks) (150 words)**

WEEKLY DOSSIERS

ELECTROCHEMICAL URINE TREATMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Agriculture relies on synthetic urea, but its production is energy-intensive and polluting. Meanwhile, nitrogen-rich human waste burdens wastewater systems. A new electrochemical process converts urine into percarbamide, a slow-release fertilizer, offering a sustainable solution for both agriculture and wastewater management.

INNOVATION

A research team developed an electrochemical method that uses an activated graphitic carbon catalyst to extract percarbamide from urine. The key aspects of this process include:

- ◆ **High Purity Extraction** – Achieves nearly 100% pure percarbamide through hydrogen bonding with hydrogen peroxide.

IMPLEMENTATION & POTENTIAL IMPACT

- ◆ **Agriculture & Food Security**

- Percarbamide provides a slow-release nitrogen source, improving crop yields and soil health.
- Reduces the need for energy-intensive synthetic fertilizers, lowering production costs for farmers.

- ◆ **Wastewater Management & Environmental Benefits**

- Reduces nitrogen pollution from untreated urine in urban wastewater.

- ◆ **Sustainable Fertilizer Production** – Converts urine into a useful nitrogen-rich fertilizer, reducing dependency on industrially produced urea.
- ◆ **Dual Benefit Approach** – Treats urban wastewater while simultaneously recovering nutrients for agricultural use.

- Addresses a critical gap in the nitrogen cycle by reintegrating human waste into agricultural use.

- ◆ **Climate & Sustainability Impact**

- Lowers carbon footprint by minimizing emissions from conventional urea production.
- Supports a circular economy by transforming waste into a valuable resource.

CONCLUSION

This innovation converts human waste into fertilizer, promoting sustainability by reducing pollution and dependence on synthetic fertilizers. Its adoption can revolutionize wastewater treatment and agriculture globally.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SPACE DEBRIS ACCUMULATION

AND SATELLITE OPERATIONS

Climate change is primarily associated with rising temperatures, extreme weather, and environmental degradation on Earth. However, recent studies highlight an emerging consequence—its impact on the sustainability of low Earth orbit (LEO). The greenhouse effect, while warming the lower atmosphere, cools the upper atmosphere, reducing its density. This decrease in atmospheric drag slows down the natural process of pulling space debris back to Earth, allowing it to accumulate, thereby increasing the risks of satellite collisions and space congestion.

KEY FINDINGS

- ◆ **Reduction in Atmospheric Drag:**

- Cooling of the upper atmosphere reduces air resistance at satellite altitudes.

- Debris that would naturally deorbit and burn up remains in orbit for longer.
- MIT researchers estimate that available orbital

space for satellites could shrink by 33% to 82% by 2100, depending on carbon emissions.

◆ Increase in Space Junk:

- Millions of fragments from old satellites, rocket stages, and space collisions exist in LEO.
- Debris as small as 3mm can cause significant damage upon impact.
- The 2009 Iridium-Cosmos satellite collision alone

CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

- ◆ **Space Sustainability:** With increasing congestion, long-term sustainability of LEO becomes uncertain.
- ◆ **Economic Costs:** More frequent satellite replacements and need for advanced shielding increase mission costs.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- ◆ **Active Debris Removal:** Developing technologies like robotic arms, nets, or lasers to clear debris.
- ◆ **Better Satellite Design:** Making satellites with self-deorbiting capabilities.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of climate change and space sustainability presents a new challenge that requires urgent attention. If unaddressed, it could significantly impact space-based infrastructure, affecting daily life on Earth. Proactive measures, combining climate action with space governance, are essential to ensure safe and sustainable use of LEO for future generations.

produced thousands of additional debris pieces.

◆ Threats to Satellite Operations:

- Currently, 11,905 satellites orbit Earth, with 7,356 in LEO, serving crucial functions like communication, navigation, and weather forecasting.
- Rising collision risks could damage active satellites, disrupt global networks, and increase operational costs.

- ◆ **Policy Gaps:** Lack of global regulations to manage space debris effectively.
- ◆ **Security Concerns:** Risk of debris damaging military or strategic satellites.

- ◆ **International Regulations:** Enforcing stricter guidelines for responsible satellite deployment and end-of-life management.
- ◆ **Emission Reductions:** Tackling greenhouse gas emissions to slow atmospheric cooling.

THE HIGH MORTALITY OF HORSESHOE CRABS ALONG THE ODISHA COAST

Horseshoe crabs, often referred to as "living fossils," have survived for over 445 million years without significant morphological changes. These marine arthropods are critical for medical research due to their blue blood, which is used to produce rapid diagnostic reagents for detecting bacterial toxins in injectable drugs. Odisha's Balasore coast is one of the few places in the world that hosts two species of these crabs. However, recent observations of mass fatalities have raised serious conservation concerns.



KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

◆ High Mortality Rates Due to Fishing Practices

- Hundreds of horseshoe crabs have been found dead along Odisha's Balasore coast, particularly at Gudpahi Beach.
- A study recorded **6,546 entangled individuals** over two years, of which **5,138 were found dead**

and only **1,408 were rescued alive**.

- Discarded fishing nets are a major cause, as crabs get entangled and die.

◆ Loss of Breeding Population

- Horseshoe crabs visit Odisha's coast for breeding, laying **8,000–10,000 eggs per female**.

- o A high mortality rate among breeding adults disrupts reproduction cycles, reducing future population numbers.
- o The recorded sex ratio of entangled crabs (59.8% females and 40.2% males) indicates a disproportionate loss of females, further threatening species survival.

◆ Environmental and Economic Significance

- o The species plays a **vital ecological role** in maintaining marine biodiversity.
- o Its medical value is immense, yet no structured

conservation program exists to protect it.

◆ Challenges in Conservation

- o Most breeding grounds are located in the **prohibited zones** of the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, limiting conservation efforts.
- o Lack of awareness among fishermen leads to indiscriminate dumping of damaged fishing nets, inadvertently causing large-scale deaths.
- o Absence of stringent regulations to protect the species from bycatch mortality.

IMPLICATIONS

- ◆ **Biodiversity Loss:** If unchecked, Odisha's coast may soon become a graveyard for this species, leading to its extinction from the region.
- ◆ **Impact on Medical Research:** The loss of horseshoe crabs could affect biomedical industries that rely on

their blood for drug safety tests.

- ◆ **Threat to Coastal Ecosystems:** Horseshoe crabs play a role in nutrient cycling, and their decline could disrupt local marine food chains.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

◆ Regulating Fishing Practices

- o Implementing **fishing restrictions** during the breeding season.
- o Banning the disposal of **damaged fishing nets** at sea.
- o Promoting **sustainable fishing gear** that minimizes bycatch.

◆ Government and Policy Interventions

- o Enforcing **wildlife protection laws** to include horseshoe crabs as an endangered species.
- o Coordinating with **the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)** to integrate conservation efforts within restricted zones.

◆ Community Engagement and Awareness

- o Educating fishermen on the ecological and economic importance of horseshoe crabs.
- o Encouraging **eco-tourism and conservation programs** that provide alternative livelihoods.

CONCLUSION

The rapid decline of horseshoe crabs along the Odisha coast is a pressing environmental concern that demands immediate intervention. Without targeted conservation strategies, this ancient species faces the risk of local extinction. A combination of **policy enforcement, sustainable fishing, and community involvement** is necessary to safeguard these unique marine creatures for future generations.

ETHICS - CASE STUDY

Q) A major terrorist attack has occurred in a densely populated city. The media is broadcasting live updates, including police movements and rescue operations. Authorities fear that this real-time coverage could compromise security efforts and endanger lives, as the attackers might be monitoring the news.

As a senior government official, you are tasked with balancing the public's right to information and ensuring public safety. Media channels argue that restricting coverage violates freedom of the press, while security agencies stress the need for operational secrecy.

Questions:

- What are the ethical dilemmas involved in this situation?
- Discuss the principles of transparency, public safety, and media responsibility in such scenarios.
- What immediate actions would you take to handle this situation responsibly?

ETHICS - EXAMPLES

- Lack of Integrity:** An assistant professor in Chennai, Parasuraman, was arrested by the Tamil Nadu Cyber Crime Wing for his alleged involvement in a 'digital arrest' scam, where a victim was defrauded of ₹3.84 crore. Police investigations revealed that he engaged in suspicious account operations for two years, receiving ₹1.20 lakh per transaction.
- Social Responsibility:** CybageKhushboo, a CSR initiative by Cybage Software, provides scholarships and mentorship to underprivileged students pursuing STEM education, focusing on both financial aid and skill development. It has awarded over ₹6.66 crore in scholarships in 2024-25, benefiting 1,200 students, and aims to expand further by collaborating with NGOs and colleges.
- Gender Equality:** Justice B.V. Nagarathna, heading a Supreme Court Bench, directed the Centre to include moral and ethical training on gender equality in school curricula, emphasising early education to combat patriarchal attitudes. The court also sought details on government initiatives and supported awareness campaigns to instill respect for women and deter crimes through legal education.
- Inclusivity:** The Samagra Shiksha Kerala (SSK) programme has developed 30 audio-visual texts in the Cholanaikkan language to provide home-based education to 12-year-old Meenakshi, a bed-ridden tribal girl from Malappuram, Kerala, ensuring inclusivity in education after her father's death.
- Ethics in Public Administration:** The Kota district administration in Rajasthan, led by District Collector Ravindra Goswami, launched the 'Kota Cares' initiative to implement comprehensive student welfare reforms, including the removal of security deposits in 4,000 hostels, enhanced safety measures like CCTV and biometric systems, mandatory anti-hanging devices, improved recreational facilities, and a city-wide student support network.
- Environmental Ethics/ Empowerment:** Sopna Kallingal, a former IT professional, transformed her late husband's 15-acre plantation in Thrissur, Kerala, into a model of sustainable farming, earning accolades like the SPICE Award and Karshaka Thilakam Award. Her model farm, blending diverse crops and livestock, serves as a learning hub for eco-friendly agriculture while she advocates for farmer empowerment, especially for women.
- Human Rights/Social Justice:** The Kerala Human Rights Commission registered a suo motu case and sought a report after tantris at Koodalmanikyam temple refused pujas in protest against the appointment of Balu, an Ezhava (OBC), as Kazhakam staff. The post was subsequently reassigned to a Pisharody community member.
- Empowerment:** Nine women are among the 20 operators handling automated Cantilever Rail-Mounted Gantry (CRMG) cranes at Vizhinjam international port, India's first automated port. Trained under the Adani Skill Development Centre, they manage container loading and unloading remotely, marking a breakthrough in the male-dominated sector and contributing to the port's high cargo handling efficiency.



MODEL ESSAY

"In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change"

Introduction

- Quote by Vietnamese monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh
- Define dialogue as an open, reciprocal exchange of ideas.
- Emphasise that true dialogue requires flexibility, mutual respect, and a willingness to reconsider one's stance.

Characteristics of True Dialogue

- **Active Listening:** Understanding the other perspective rather than just waiting to respond.
- **Empathy and Mutual Respect:** Recognising the validity of different experiences and viewpoints
- **Openness to Constructive Criticism:** Accepting feedback and refining one's views instead of reacting defensively.
- **Avoiding Assumptions and Stereotypes:** Engaging with individuals rather than preconceived notions about their group or ideology.

Importance of Willingness to Change in Dialogue

- **Avoiding Stagnation:** Rigid positions lead to conflict and deadlock.
- **Fostering Cooperation:** Adaptability promotes consensus and problem-solving.
- **Encouraging Growth:** Intellectual and moral progress stem from openness to change.
- **Builds Trust and Respect:** Acknowledging valid points from different viewpoints strengthens relationships and credibility.

Examples of Productive Dialogue Leading to Change

- **End of Apartheid (South Africa):** Negotiations between Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk led to a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy.
- **Camp David Accords (1978):** Productive discussions between Egypt and Israel, mediated by the U.S., resulted in a historic peace treaty.

- **Paris Climate Agreement (2015):** Global discussions led to a landmark accord on reducing carbon emissions and tackling climate change.
- **Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage:** Ongoing societal debates and court decisions led to recognition of LGBTQ+ rights in multiple countries.

Consequences of Unwillingness to Change

- **Polarisation:** Entrenched views lead to deepening divisions (e.g., political deadlocks).
- **Lack of Progress:** Scientific and social advancements hindered by resistance to new ideas (e.g., Galileo's conflict with the Church).
- **Escalation of Conflicts:** Inflexibility leads to prolonged disputes, worsening tensions in communities and nations (e.g., Cold War stalemates).
- **Erosion of Relationships:** Personal and professional relationships suffer when individuals refuse to adapt or understand differing perspectives.
- **Breakdown of Democratic Discourse:** Societies become less tolerant and democratic processes weaken when people refuse to reconsider their views.

Conclusion

- Emphasise that willingness to change is not a weakness but a strength that leads to collective growth.
- Advocate for fostering a culture where dialogue is approached with an open mind and a readiness to adapt.

Sample Quotes

- *You can no more win a war than win an earthquake* - Jeannette Rankin
- *It is easier to prevent bad habits than to break them* - Benjamin Franklin
- *The only thing we have to fear is fear itself* - Franklin D Roosevelt

MAINS JOT DOWN



GS- II -EDUCATION

- ➡ The Ministry of Education has launched **PM-YUVA 3.0 (Young, Upcoming, and Versatile Authors)**, an author mentorship program aimed at nurturing young writers under 30, in line with the **National Education Policy 2020**.
- ➡ **Objective:** To promote reading, writing, and book culture while showcasing Indian writings on a global stage.
- ➡ **Implementing Agency: National Book Trust (NBT)**
 - » **Selection:** 50 authors will be chosen through a contest on themes such as:
 - Contribution of Indian Diaspora in Nation Building
 - Indian Knowledge System
 - Makers of Modern India (1950–2025)
 - » **Publication:** Selected works will be published by NBT and translated into various Indian languages, fostering cultural exchange and supporting the vision of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.



GS- III -DEFENSE

- ➡ The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) has successfully test-launched the **ASTRA missile, a Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM) developed by DRDO**.
- ➡ It has a range of **80–110 km**, a top speed of **Mach 4.5**, and features advanced guidance and navigation systems.

- ➡ The 6th India-Japan joint military exercise **"Dharma Guardian"** concluded at the East Fuji Training Area, Japan.
- ➡ It focused on **counter-terrorism in urban terrain** and included **UN peacekeeping operations** like **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**.
- ➡ The first edition was held in **November 2018** at **CIJWS, Vairengte, Mizoram**.



GS- II -INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- ➡ India has supported Mauritius's claim over the **Chagos Archipelago**, which has been under British control since 1814 when it was ceded along with Mauritius.
- ➡ Even after Mauritius gained independence in 1968, the islands remained part of the **British Indian Ocean Territory**, created in 1965.
- ➡ In 2024, the **UK and Mauritius** signed an agreement to return the archipelago's sovereignty to Mauritius.



GS- II -SOCIAL JUSTICE

- ➡ UNICEF, in collaboration with district authorities and NGOs, is addressing family-based childcare through its **Kinship Care and Building Caregivers' Capacities Programme (KCBCP)** in areas like drought-prone **Jalna, Maharashtra**.
- ➡ KCBCP is part of India's shift from institutional care to family-based solutions, promoting practices like strengthening families, foster care, and kinship care to prevent child separation.
- ➡ It focuses on keeping children in their communities under the care of relatives or community members, supporting better brain development.
- ➡ Initiatives like **Mission Vatsalya** also emphasize non-institutional support, ensuring no child is left behind.

- ➡ The **KHANJAR-XII** edition of 2025 is set to take place in **Kyrgyzstan**.
- ➡ **Khanjar** is an annual **India-Kyrgyzstan Joint Special Forces Exercise**, conducted alternately in both countries.
- ➡ It aims to enhance cooperation by sharing experiences and best practices in **Counter-Terrorism and Special Forces Operations**.



GS- II - HEALTH

- According to the Ministry of Health, over 6.1 lakh TB patients were identified during the 100-day intensified TB elimination campaign in 2024.
- Tuberculosis (TB) is a contagious bacterial infection caused by ***Mycobacterium tuberculosis***, spreading through the air via coughs, sneezes, or close contact with an infected person.
- Drug-resistant TB occurs when bacteria mutate, making them resistant to first-line antibiotics.
- Multi-Drug Resistant TB (MDR-TB) is resistant to Isoniazid (INH) and Rifampicin (RIF), while Extensively Drug-Resistant TB (XDR-TB) is a more severe form, resistant to first-line drugs, fluoroquinolones, and at least one second-line injectable drug.
- India bears the highest TB burden globally, accounting for over **27% of cases**.



GS- III - POLLUTION

- The 7th annual World Air Quality Report 2024, released by IQAir, assesses global air quality for the year 2024.
- **Key Findings:**
 - Only seven countries met the WHO's annual PM2.5 guideline of $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$: Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Estonia, Grenada, Iceland, and New Zealand.
 - The five most polluted countries were: Chad, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, and India.
 - Delhi remained the world's most polluted capital city.
 - Byrnihat (Assam), India, was the most polluted metropolitan area in 2024.
 - Oceania emerged as the cleanest region globally.

- As of now, the **75/25 Initiative** has achieved **89.7%** of its target, providing treatment to **42.01 million** individuals with hypertension and **25.27 million** with diabetes. Launched on **World Hypertension Day 2023**, the initiative aims to deliver standardized care to **75 million** people with hypertension and diabetes by **December 2025** through **Primary Health Centres (PHCs)**.
- It operates under the strategies of the **National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD)**.

- India has imposed an anti-dumping duty on water treatment chemicals from China and Japan.
- Anti-dumping duty (ADD) is a tax on imported goods to counteract unfair pricing, known as dumping, where products are exported below their normal market value to gain market share.
- It aims to protect local producers from such practices and is enabled by **Article VI of GATT, 1994**. In India, the **Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR)** under the **Ministry of Commerce** recommends the duty, while the **Ministry of Finance** imposes it.

CHERRYPICKS OF THE WEEK

CHILLAI KALAN

- Chillai Kalan is the coldest 40-day period of harsh winter in the Jammu and Kashmir region.
- It is traditionally defined as a seasonal period of harsh winter accompanied by a change in increase in both frequency and quantity of precipitation, usually snow.
- It begins from December 21 and ends on January 31 next year.

ZOMBIE ICE

- It is also referred to as dead or doomed ice.
- Zombie ice is one that is not accumulating fresh snow even while continuing to be part of the parent ice sheet. Such ice is committed to melting away and increasing sea levels.

BIOBLITZ

- It is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time.
- A Bioblitz is also known as a biological inventory or biological census.

MYCELIUM BRICKS

- They are made from the root-like fibers of fungi, are biodegradable, fire-resistant, insulating, and offer a sustainable alternative to traditional construction materials.
- However, they face challenges like lower strength, higher cost, and moisture susceptibility.

PLASTIC ICE VII

- It is a unique phase of ice that forms under high pressure (>3 GPa) and temperature (>450 K), allowing water molecules to rotate freely within a rigid crystalline structure.
- **Importance:**
 - **Planetary Science:** Helps simulate interiors of ocean worlds and exoplanets.
 - **Exoplanet Habitability:** May influence alien life potential by aiding nutrient transport in deep oceans.

This discovery reshapes our understanding of water in space.