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CCI rejects pleas against Google Play Store's billing policy

(GS Paper II: Regulatory Bodies)

- A statutory body established in 2003 under the Competition Act, 2002.
- Headquartered in New Delhi.

Key Objectives

- **Prevent anti-competitive practices:** The CCI investigates activities that have a negative impact on fair competition in Indian markets.
- **Promote and protect competition:** The goal is to foster a healthy competitive environment, promoting innovation and consumer welfare.
- **Ensure freedom of trade:** The CCI works to eliminate barriers to fair trade within India.

Main Functions

- **Anti-Competitive Agreements:** Investigates and takes action against businesses that engage in cartels, price-fixing, bid-rigging, or other anti-competitive agreements.
- **Abuse of Dominance:** Examines cases where a dominant player in the market uses its position to stifle competition or harm consumers.
- **Regulation of Combinations:** Reviews mergers, acquisitions, and other combinations between businesses to ensure they don't create monopolies or reduce competition.
- **Advocacy:** The CCI engages with the government, stakeholders, and the public to promote competition principles and awareness.

Structure

- **Chairperson and Members:** The CCI consists of a Chairperson and six members appointed by the Central Government of India.

- The **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** dismissed four petitions filed by Indian app companies against Google's new Play Store billing policy.
- **Google's new policy involves charging a fee of 11% to 26% on in-app payments**, which Indian app firms allege to be anti-competitive.
- However, the CCI clarified that its decision does not represent a final opinion on the case, and an investigation will be conducted by the Director General without bias.

- The complainants included People Interactive India Pvt Ltd., Mebigoo Labs, the Indian Broadcasting and Digital Foundation, and the Indian Digital Media Industry Foundation.
- **These petitions sought to restrain Google from collecting fees for transactions involving paid downloads or in-app purchases on apps offering digital products or services.**
- The CCI had ordered a probe against Google on March 15 for alleged discriminatory practices regarding its Play Store pricing policy, finding a prima facie violation of competition law.
- While the CCI acknowledges concerns about Google's fee structure, **it also recognizes the costs and responsibilities associated with maintaining app stores.**
- The Alliance of Digital India Foundation (ADIF), representing Indian apps, expressed concern about the **high commissions imposed by Google during in-app purchases.**
- ADIF hopes for reconsideration of the fee rates to support the growth and sustainability of India's digital economy.
- The regulator's decision follows complaints about Google's updated payment policies, alleged to be in violation of competition law, and comes after Google removed and later reinstated some apps from the Play Store over payment issues.

Don't use counselling to turn LGBTQ persons against their identity, says SC

- The Chief Justice emphasized the importance of judges upholding constitutional values rather than imposing their personal beliefs.
- The verdict provided guidelines for courts handling habeas corpus petitions and pleas for protection from family or police interference by LGBTQ+ individuals.
- The case involved a Kerala-based woman filing a habeas corpus petition to locate her same-sex partner.
- The Kerala High Court ordered counselling for the partner, who was found with her parents and expressed a desire to pursue a career rather than live with the petitioner.
- The petitioner appealed to the Supreme Court, which declined to intervene initially.
- However, concerns were raised by advocate Sriram Parakkat that counselling ordered by courts might coerce individuals into conforming to societal norms regarding sexual orientation or chosen partners.
- The Chief Justice acknowledged that the concept of "family" extends beyond biological relatives to include chosen families, which is particularly significant for LGBTQ+ individuals facing violence or lack of safety from their biological families.
- Chosen families often provide support and stability to LGBTQ+ individuals in the face of adversity and discrimination.

As oil sardine catch dwindles, Kerala Fishermen seek crackdown on trawling

- Fishermen in Kerala are concerned about the declining population of oil sardines, a crucial resource supporting a population of at least 70,000 people.
- Antony Kurisinkal, a fisherman from Arthunkal and a member of the Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation, urges the government to address illegal practices harming sardine fisheries.
- Currently, even sardines above the legal size (15 to 16 cm) are not being caught frequently along the Kerala coast.

- Indian oil sardine fisheries historically accounted for 17% to 20% of marine fish landings and were top-ranked in landing volumes, but their availability fluctuates, posing challenges for researchers and managers.
- Oil sardine landings hit a two-decade low in 2019 but saw a significant recovery in 2022, with landings increasing to 1.1 lakh tonnes along the Kerala coast, particularly in the second half of the year.
- Antony urges the government to crack down on illegal practices such as night trawling, light trawling, and pelagic trawling to support the recovery of sardine fisheries.

- IVF involves fertilizing an egg with sperm outside of the body, in a laboratory setting. The fertilized egg, or embryo, is then transferred to the woman's uterus to establish a pregnancy.
- **Stimulation:** Before egg retrieval, the woman undergoes hormonal therapy to stimulate the ovaries to produce multiple eggs. This is typically done using hormone injections over a period of around 10-14 days.
- **Egg Retrieval:** Once the eggs are mature, a minor surgical procedure called egg retrieval is performed. A doctor uses a thin needle to extract the eggs from the woman's ovaries under ultrasound guidance.
- **Sperm Collection:** On the same day as egg retrieval, the male partner provides a semen sample, which is processed in the laboratory to isolate the healthiest sperm.
- **Fertilization:** The retrieved eggs and the processed sperm are combined in a laboratory dish for fertilization. This can be done through conventional IVF, where the sperm is introduced to the eggs, or through intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), where a single sperm is injected directly into each egg.
- **Embryo Culture:** After fertilization, the embryos are cultured in a laboratory for a few days to allow them to develop and grow. During this time, they are monitored for quality and viability.
- **Embryo Transfer:** Typically, one or more of the healthiest embryos are selected for transfer into the woman's uterus. This is done using a thin catheter that is inserted through the cervix into the uterus.
- **Implantation and Pregnancy:** If the embryo successfully implants in the uterine lining, pregnancy can occur. A pregnancy test is usually performed around two weeks after embryo transfer to confirm whether implantation has occurred.
- **Cryopreservation:** Any excess embryos that are not transferred can be frozen (cryopreserved) for future use, allowing couples to undergo additional embryo transfers without the need for repeated stimulation and egg retrieval.

India's voters deserve a bond — of probity

(GS Paper II: Elections)

- Good laws and public policies should be **clear, enforceable, predictable, and accountable**.

- They aim to address public issues and improve situations from the time problems were identified.
- The genesis, design, and demise of the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) are analyzed within this framework.

A 'clean' channel

- In the Budget Speech 2017-18, then Finance Minister stated that the **objective of his government was "to eliminate black money"**.
- The problem statement highlighted the **lack of a transparent method for funding political parties** even 70 years after Independence.
- An attempt was made in the past by amending the provisions of the Representation of Peoples Act, the Companies Act and the Income Tax Act to incentivise donations by individuals, partnership firms, HUFs and companies to political parties.... The situation has only marginally improved since these provisions were brought into force.
- **Political parties still received** most funds through anonymous cash donations, leading to the need to cleanse the political funding system.
- The **problem was attributed to donors' reluctance to use cheque or other transparent methods** due to concerns about **identity disclosure and adverse consequences**.
- The Finance Minister proposed the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) as a reform to bring transparency and accountability to political funding and prevent the generation of black money.
- Political parties were surviving on contributions of less than ₹20,000 each, which did not require disclosure of the contributors' identity, leading to the alleged flow of black money into party accounts that enjoyed income-tax exemption.
- Despite the EBS, large amounts of money were still being spent during elections, indicating a persistent issue.
- The **EBS aimed to create a 'clean' channel for funds** by allowing them **to flow directly from the donor's bank account to the political party's bank account**.
- However, there are concerns about the **presumption that funds used to purchase bonds are 'clean' since they come from designated bank accounts**.
- The Supreme Court noted the **existence of a similar transparent channel** in the form of **Electoral Trusts**, raising questions about the efficacy of the EBS.
- The **State Bank of India has disclosed information** indicating that **many purchasers bought electoral bonds in amounts disproportionate to their business income**, raising questions about the legitimacy of the funding sources.
- There are doubts about whether the funds used to purchase the bonds maintained their 'clean' status when reaching the designated accounts of political parties.
- **Defenders of the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) argue that investigating the sources of funds used for bond purchases would be feasible**. However, concerns arise about the **impartiality of the investigating agencies**, especially if they are linked to the party in power.

- **Section 7(4) of The Electoral Bond Scheme, 2018, mandates confidentiality of buyer information, preventing disclosure to any authority except under specific circumstances like a court order or criminal investigation by law enforcement.**
- The provision of anonymity in the EBS makes it challenging to establish a direct link between the purchaser and the recipient, as the **bank is legally prohibited from keeping records of the bond's secret number issued to the buyer.**
- Similar to **dispensing currency notes to a bank customer**, the State Bank of India (SBI) does not maintain records of the purchaser of a specific electoral bond.
- The alphanumeric number embedded in the bond serves to verify its authenticity and meets audit requirements, rather than identifying the purchaser.
- The electoral bond operates like currency, leading to objections from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) initially, prompting an amendment in the RBI Act.
- That raises a few important questions.

Pertinent questions

- Limited information retained by SBI may reveal the identity of the purchaser to enforcement agencies but may only allow investigation into the sources of funds, not donor-political party links.
- This limitation might hinder probing allegations of quid pro quo.
- Raises concerns about the efficacy and accountability of the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) and the SBI towards the court and law enforcement agencies.
- Questions arise regarding the confidentiality clause and its application to information submitted by the purchaser, which should remain undisclosed until requested.
- The lack of record maintenance by SBI raises doubts about its ability to enforce the law effectively.
- SBI's request for time to collate information on bonds linking both parties raises questions about its previous assertion of maintaining no records.
- The Supreme Court's observation suggests that information on electoral bonds may not be as secure as claimed.
- SBI's affidavit on March 21 will clarify if the law was flawed or if there was a lack of full disclosure.
- **Court-mandated disclosures may lead to allegations of corruption and extensive investigations under the Prevention of Corruption Act.**
- Tax authorities may also probe the sources of funds used to purchase the bonds.
- **Contributors to the ruling party may face allegations of quid pro quo**, while others may face adverse consequences.
- **Lack of disclosure creates an uneven playing field for donors, contrary to the scheme's intention to prevent adverse consequences.**
- **This situation contradicts the idea of a win-win scenario, with political parties benefiting at the expense of others.**
- Reflects the saying that “the road to hell is often paved with good intentions” (good intentions can sometimes lead to undesirable outcomes).

It is for Parliament to work it out

- Many proponents of the EBS have criticised the Court for not suggesting a 'less worse' method of political funding and dragging political parties to the "dark alleys" of black money.
- The responsibility of determining the future of political funding lies with Parliament, as it possesses the authority and wisdom to enact laws.
- A constructive way forward necessitates a consultative process involving all stakeholders, rather than relying on court orders or secretive policymaking.
- The current public discourse focuses on the severity of offenses based on per capita crime rates, raising questions about the direction of the debate.
- Political parties should prioritize accepting clean money instead of relying on funds obtained through dubious means.
- Rather than **holding each other accountable**, political parties should focus on transparency and accountability to avoid deceiving the public.
- Voters aspire for political parties that uphold integrity and distinguish themselves from others, fostering a sense of trust among the electorate.
- It's time to move away from the notion that people deserve the government they get and strive for a more accountable and transparent political system.

Ferocious friends: On certain breeds of dogs and public safety

(GS Paper II: Governance)

- In India, there are complex issues surrounding the **role of dogs in society**.
 - One major issue is the presence of street dogs, which many citizens complain about **invading residential areas**.
 - **Despite these complaints, there hasn't been significant political action to enforce existing municipal laws to control the population of street dogs.**
 - Additionally, there are **concerns about pet dogs**, which have sparked debates at both the **central government ministry level and in two High Courts**.
 - Some of these concerns revolve around whether certain breeds of dogs are inherently more aggressive or "ferocious" than others.
 - To address these concerns, an expert committee formed by the **Department of Animal Welfare and Husbandry, Ministry of Agriculture**, has recommended **banning certain breeds considered "ferocious" from being kept as pets**.
 - This recommendation came after **citizen groups reported incidents of attacks, sometimes resulting in fatalities**, by these dogs, **leading to a petition in the Delhi High Court seeking a ban on specific breeds**.
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- The government is considering banning certain dog breeds, including mixed and crossbreeds like **Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier**, among others.
 - These rules are expected to be enforced by local authorities, and existing pet dogs must be **sterilized to prevent further breeding**.

- However, the **Karnataka High Court** has temporarily halted the government's order due to objections that it was **unilateral and lacked input from a broad spectrum of expert bodies**.
- Organizations like the **Kennel Club of India**, responsible for registering purebred dogs, may be disadvantaged by this decision.
- **Research suggests that a dog's temperament, including ferocity and aggressiveness, is influenced by environmental and behavioral factors, such as age, sex, training, and circumstances.**
- While some countries have **banned certain breeds or have imposed stringent conditions to own or maintain certain dog breeds**.
- None of these countries anyway permits street dogs in the way India does and so the regulations are premised on higher standards of public safety than in India.
- Ultimately, **ensuring responsible ownership and accountability for harm caused by dogs is crucial for public safety, rather than solely focusing on the existence or absence of specific breeds.**
- **While individuals have the right to choose and raise pets**, this right is not unlimited and should be balanced with considerations for public safety.

The lure of lucre: On the 17th edition of the IPL and beyond

The IPL is becoming more attractive than Tests for some players

- **The Indian Premier League (IPL)** is about to start its 17th edition after the successful conduct of the Women's Premier League (WPL).
- The IPL will kick off with a match between Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB).
- **RCB's victory in the WPL's second edition** adds pressure on their male team, known for promising performances but never winning the IPL.
- CSK, led by M.S. Dhoni, is considered a strong team due to Dhoni's leadership and continued athleticism at the age of **42**.
- The fitness and longevity of players like Dhoni and **England's James Anderson** in their **40s highlight advancements in sports medicine and fitness.**
- **Despite challenges like general elections and the COVID-19 pandemic, the IPL has adapted by shifting venues to South Africa or the United Arab Emirates.**
- With another general election approaching, the league's management faces the task of managing the tournament effectively.
- Matches are scheduled until April 7, with the remaining league games extending into May.
- Players, both Indian and overseas, are not only focused on their club's goals in the IPL but also on the **upcoming ICC T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the United States in June.**

- Rishabh Pant, now captain of Delhi Capitals, has recovered from a serious road accident, and his performance in the IPL will likely determine his comeback to the Indian team for the T20 World Cup.
- Mumbai Indians' leadership change, with Hardik Pandya becoming captain, has sparked controversy, especially among fans of the previous captain, Rohit Sharma, and other players like Jasprit Bumrah and Suryakumar Yadav.
- **With 10 teams competing, the IPL is a massive commercial event, leading some players to prioritize it over national team duties.**
- The **BCCI offering monetary incentives for players to participate in Tests highlights the irony of the IPL, which attracts talent away from longer-format cricket.**
- This issue was previously associated with teams like the West Indies but is now impacting Indian cricket as well.

Eliminating diseases, one region at a time

(GS Paper II: Health Sector)

Multisectoral collaboration, encouraging innovation and adopting locally effective solutions which facilitate disease elimination, is more effective at the regional level

RAJEEV SADANANDAN

'The phasing of regional elimination to culminate at the national level has to be planned from the perspective of the entire country' | Photo Credit: Getty Images

- The Carter Center reported significant progress in eradicating **guinea worm disease**, with cases reduced from 3.5 million in 1986 to just 13 in 2023.

Guinea-worm disease

- Dracunculiasis, also known as Guinea-worm disease, is caused by a parasitic infection from the Guinea worm, *Dracunculus medinensis*.
- Infection typically occurs when a person drinks water containing water fleas infected with Guinea worm larvae.
- The larvae enter the body, where they mate and grow over about a year.
- Eventually, the adult female worm migrates to the skin's surface, usually on a lower limb, causing an intensely painful blister.
- The blister bursts, creating a painful wound through which the worm emerges slowly over several weeks.
- The emerging worm can disable the infected person for three to ten weeks, and the open wound can become infected with bacteria, leading to death in about 1% of cases.

- There is no medication to treat or prevent dracunculiasis; instead, treatment involves carefully wrapping the emerging worm around a stick or gauze to encourage its exit.
- Prevention efforts focus on filtering drinking water to remove water fleas and educating the public to avoid soaking emerging worms in water sources.
- Dracunculiasis primarily affects areas with poor access to clean drinking water, making it a disease associated with extreme poverty.

- Guinea worm disease could become the **second disease eradicated, following smallpox**, without any known medicines or vaccines.
- **Disease elimination**, the first step towards eradication, has garnered increased attention, aligning with ending the epidemics of malaria, tuberculosis and Neglected Tropical Diseases by 2030 is one of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations.

On disease elimination, its focus

- **Elimination of transmission aims for zero transmission in a defined region, while eradication permanently stops infection with no risk of reintroduction.**
- **Disease elimination is crucial for improving public health**, especially for vulnerable populations.
- It energizes the public health system and enhances primary healthcare, diagnostics, and surveillance.
- Rigorous certification requirements from international agencies drive improvements in health infrastructure and attract international support.
- Disease elimination efforts foster greater involvement of **field staff and community health workers**, driven by clear goals and objectives.
- **Strong political and bureaucratic commitment**, as well as public support, are essential for successful disease elimination.
- Overall, disease elimination positively impacts the health system and contributes to improved population health.
- Elimination of disease transmission is **challenging and resource-intensive**, potentially diverting attention and resources from other **crucial health functions, particularly in weak health systems**.
- Therefore, **careful analysis of costs and benefits**, along with informed political support, is necessary before planning disease elimination initiatives.
- While elimination is scientifically feasible for targeted diseases in India, **prioritization is crucial based on factors like high population impact and low disease prevalence**.
- Initially, efforts should focus on **reducing disease numbers to a practical level through disease control measures**.
- This approach allows for **understanding elimination processes, assessing costs, and strengthening health systems** before implementing full-scale elimination strategies.

Need for surveillance systems

- The government needs to invest in developing **robust surveillance systems** capable of **tracking every instance** of the disease.
- Strengthening **laboratories for screening** and confirmation of cases is essential.
- Ensuring **availability** of medicines and consumables is necessary for effective disease control.

impact of disease Elimination

Preparation

- Workforce training is crucial to meet the rigorous requirements of an elimination strategy.
- **Continuous surveillance** is needed even after elimination **to detect any reintroduction** of the disease.
- **Achieving elimination for all targeted diseases nationwide within the specified timeframe may be challenging.**
- However, elimination is **feasible for some diseases** in certain parts of the country.
- For example, **kala azar is now limited to five states in India**, primarily prevalent in specific blocks within two states.
- India has a significant burden of lymphatic filariasis, accounting for 40% of global cases.
- The **World Health Assembly** targeted lymphatic filariasis for elimination in a resolution in 1997.
- The disease is **prevalent only in specific states** and can be eliminated through various measures such as surveillance, vector control, drug administration, and morbidity management.
- Some targeted diseases **have long incubation periods** and are widespread across the country, with instances of drug resistance.
- For these diseases, elimination strategies need to be adapted to focus on specific geographical regions, such as states, districts, or blocks.
- **Elimination efforts can be concentrated in defined regions where the disease burden is lower** and where the necessary interventions can be effectively implemented.
- **Once regional elimination is achieved, these areas can be protected or "ring-fenced" to prevent re-introduction of the disease.**
- Surrounding areas with higher disease prevalence can then undergo elimination efforts once they are deemed ready, based on assessment.

Specific target areas then at regional level

From the regional level

- **Multisectoral collaboration** is vital for disease elimination, especially at the **regional level**.
- Regional collaboration allows for the adoption of locally effective solutions and encourages innovation.
- Smaller units can redistribute resources more efficiently to manage the elimination process without neglecting other essential tasks.
- Disease elimination can proceed region by region, with national and state governments taking ownership of the process.
- The **phasing of regional elimination efforts should be planned to ultimately culminate at the national level.**
- Regional implementation requires technical and material support, and progress must be monitored closely.
- The Union government is responsible for managing disease spread across states and at entry points like ports to prevent reintroduction.
- In India, national elimination efforts can be most effectively achieved by **starting at the regional level and scaling up gradually across the country.**

Data marketplaces: the next frontier

(GS Paper II: Governance)

The unprotected inter-flow of Non-Personal Data across government departments, third-parties, and citizens can make sensitive aspects of NPD vulnerable due to privacy breaches

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) released the National Data Governance Framework Policy (NPD Framework) which was touted as the first building block of the digital architecture being conceived to maximise data-driven governance.

- Digitization plays a crucial role in India's goal of becoming a \$5 trillion economy.
 - According to a NASSCOM report, data and artificial intelligence (AI) can contribute approximately \$450-500 billion to India's GDP by 2025.
 - Government digitization efforts lead to an increase in citizen data, which comes in two main types: Personal Data and Non-Personal Data (NPD).
 - Personal Data i.e., data containing identifiers through which an individual can be mapped.
 - **NPD**, which excludes personal information, is **seen as a valuable resource for the government and can be utilized as a 'public good.'**
 - **Integrating NPD into public service delivery is advocated to create synergies and develop scalable solutions.**
 - **Advanced analytics and AI applied to NPD in key sectors can help predict beneficial outcomes in areas like meteorological forecasts, disaster management, infrastructure planning, citizen behavior analysis, mobility patterns, housing trends, and employment forecasts.**
 - Utilizing data-driven insights can enhance governance and public services by providing better-informed decision-making processes.
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- Unlike Personal Data, **Non-Personal Data (NPD) lacks regulation in India.**
 - Efforts have been made at the executive level to establish governance policies for NPD.
 - **An expert committee chaired by Kris Gopalakrishnan** extensively addressed issues related to NPD, such as the **risk of de-anonymization, the need for a central authority, and data ownership and sharing mechanisms.**
 - The **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) introduced the National Data Governance Framework Policy (NPD Framework)** to enhance data-driven governance.
 - However, **neither the expert committee's recommendations nor the NPD Framework provide an enforceable regulatory framework for NPD** in India.
 - Consequently, vast amounts of NPD remain unregulated, with limited guidance on dissemination, use, or exchange.

- The lack of regulation leads to sub-optimal legal and policy decisions and hampers effective strategies at sectoral and national levels.
- **Data exchanges bring together various stakeholders, facilitating advanced analytics for informed decision-making and cost-effectiveness.**
- However, the **unregulated sharing** of Non-Personal Data (NPD) among government departments, third parties, and citizens can **lead to privacy breaches**.
- **This vulnerability may disproportionately benefit large tech companies** and **result in flawed decision-making due to incomplete data analysis**.
- Such data exchanges also lack interdisciplinary collaboration in legislative and policy-making, leading to inefficiencies.
- The **National Data Governance Framework (NPD Framework)** is a significant initiative but has several gaps.
- **It provides abstract principles for NPD governance but lacks practical guidance on implementation.**
- **Key issues such as stakeholder rights, data pricing, and legal structures for data exchange remain unaddressed.**
- Standardized governance tools are absent, exacerbating the challenges in regulating NPD exchanges.
- **Evaluating the National Data Governance Framework (NPD Framework) is crucial to address its shortcomings and improve regulation of Non-Personal Data (NPD).**
- **This evaluation will complement the efforts of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeiTY) to regulate NPD and enhance the effectiveness of data exchanges.**
- Implementing a regulatory framework for data exchanges in India can **facilitate interoperability** of NPD across different sectors.
- **Digitizing and automating public-welfare functions through data exchanges can reduce administrative burdens and promote integration between sectors.**
- It will also **establish safeguards for using and sharing NPD, making civic functions more participatory.**
- Countries like **Australia, the U.K., and Estonia have adopted data exchange frameworks and protocols**, leveraging them for various sectors like housing, employment, aged care, and agriculture.
- These initiatives demonstrate how data exchanges can be tailored to address specific challenges, such as unemployment, in different countries.

Formulating a blueprint

- Telangana State has developed an agriculture data exchange, while the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs and the Indian Institute of Science have collaborated to establish the India Urban Data Exchange.
- The Department of Science & Technology also plans to create data exchanges to implement components of the National Geospatial Policy.
- To regulate these data exchange structures effectively, it's essential to create a blueprint for governance in India.

- This blueprint will align with global discussions on data exchange regulation and complement the initiatives of MeitY, expert committees, and other relevant bodies.
- It aims to operationalize the principles of Non-Personal Data (NPD) governance in India by providing actionable steps and a forward-looking framework for NPD governance within data exchanges.

Question: Evaluate the challenges associated with the regulation of Non-Personal Data (NPD) in India, considering the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework and the implications for governance and policy-making. (250 Words/15 Marks)

ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce the with growing significance of data and artificial intelligence (AI).
- Then bring the challenges associated with the regulation of Non-Personal Data (NPD).
- Further add up with the implications for governance and policy-making due to the absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework.
- Conclude with a suggestive note.

ANSWER

Digitization plays a crucial role in India's goal of becoming a \$5 trillion economy. According to a NASSCOM report, data and artificial intelligence (AI) can contribute approximately \$450-500 billion to India's GDP by 2025. Government digitization efforts lead to an increase in citizen data, which comes in two main types: Personal Data and Non-Personal Data (NPD). **NPD, which excludes personal information, is seen as a valuable resource for the government and can be utilized as a 'public good.'** However, **Non-Personal Data (NPD) lacks regulation in India.**

Challenges associated with the regulation of Non-Personal Data (NPD).

- One of the primary challenges in regulating NPD is the absence of clear definitions and classifications. Unlike Personal Data, which has well-defined identifiers, NPD encompasses a broad spectrum of data types, including metadata, aggregate data, and anonymized data.
- The lack of clarity in defining NPD complicates regulatory efforts, leading to ambiguity in identifying what data falls under its purview.
- Another challenge relates to the governance of NPD, particularly concerning its collection, storage, and dissemination. In the absence of regulations, there is a lack of accountability and transparency in how NPD is managed by government agencies, private entities, and other stakeholders.

Implications for governance and policy-making due

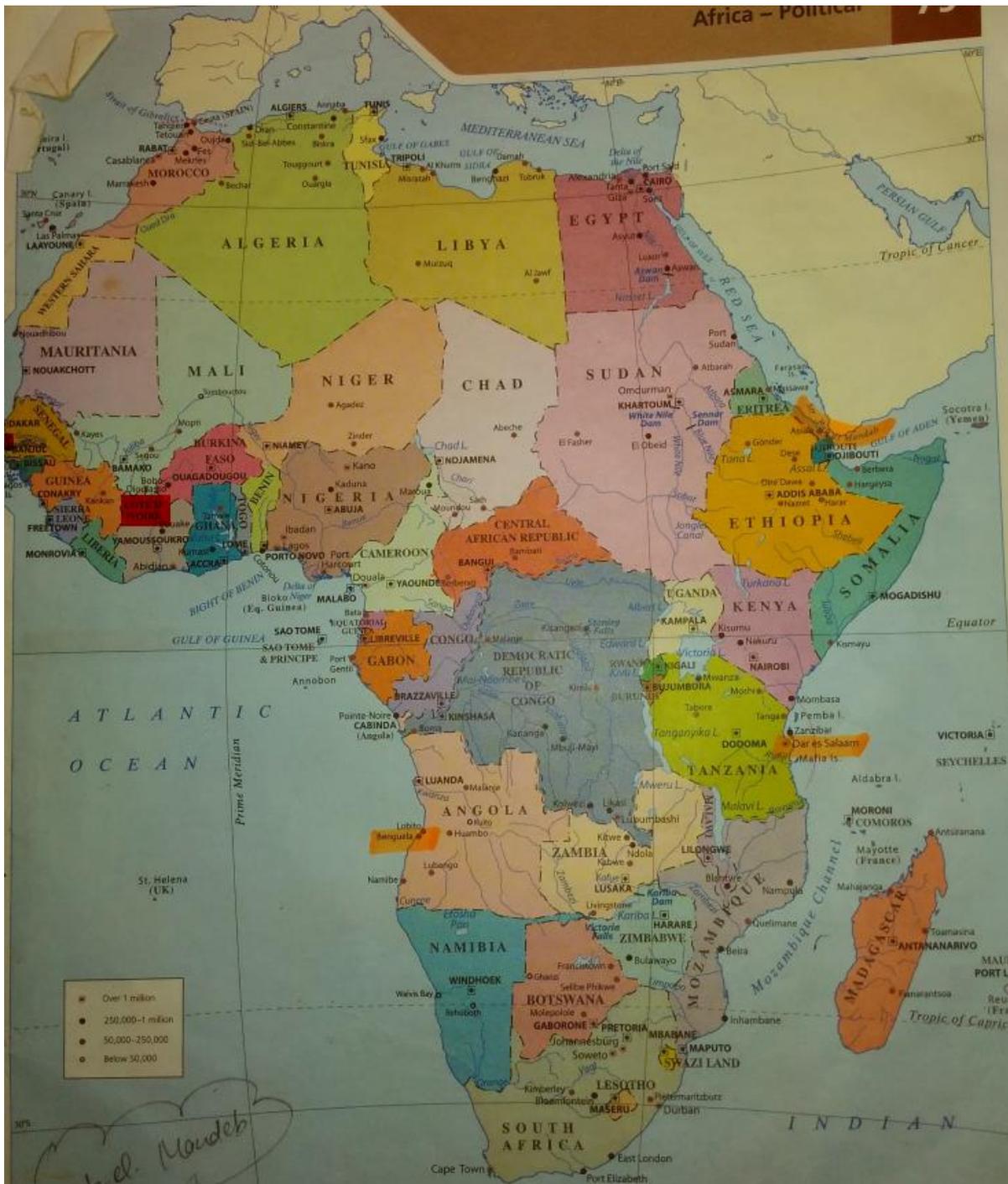
- This governance vacuum hampers effective decision-making, as policymakers lack access to reliable and standardized data for informed policy formulation.
- Moreover, the unregulated flow of NPD across sectors and entities exacerbates concerns about data sovereignty and security.
- Without clear guidelines on data localization and cross-border data transfers, there is a risk of NPD being exploited by foreign entities for their commercial or strategic interests.
- This raises national security concerns and underscores the need for robust regulatory mechanisms to safeguard India's data assets.

- The absence of a regulatory framework for NPD inhibits innovation and economic growth. Data-driven technologies and business models rely on access to high-quality, interoperable data.
- Without clear rules governing data sharing and interoperability, businesses face uncertainty and reluctance to invest in data-driven initiatives.
- This stifles innovation, hampers competition, and undermines India's competitiveness in the global digital economy.
- Without clear guidelines on data sharing, usage, and ownership, there is a risk of unauthorized access, data breaches, and privacy violations.
- Without a comprehensive framework, India risks being marginalized in global data governance discussions and facing trade barriers due to non-compliance with data protection regulations in other jurisdictions.

Thus, addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, regulators, industry stakeholders, and civil society to develop a robust regulatory framework that fosters responsible data governance, protects citizen rights, and promotes innovation and economic development.

On the mass kidnappings in Nigeria

(GS Paper II: IR)



Who is behind the mass abductions in Nigeria and what do they want? What has caused the recent surge in kidnappings? Why do they specially target schoolchildren? What is the government doing to improve the security situation?

- Nigeria is currently facing serious security challenges alongside its worst economic crisis in years.
- There has been a resurgence of kidnappings in Nigeria's troubled northern region.
- **Over 600 people, including at least 300 schoolchildren, have been kidnapped since the end of February in northeastern and northwestern parts of the country.**

What is the latest crisis?

- The kidnappings began with the abduction of over 200 internally displaced people by suspected Boko Haram militants in Borno State on February 29.
- Subsequent incidents included the kidnapping of 287 students from a government school in Kaduna State on March 7, and the abduction of 15 children from a boarding school in Sokoto State on March 9.
- On March 11, 61 people were kidnapped from a village in Kaduna, followed by another abduction of nearly 100 individuals in Kaduna between March 16 and March 17.
- These incidents have drawn condemnation from human rights activists and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk.
- Nigeria experienced a surge in targeted attacks on educational institutions in 2021, with approximately 150 students kidnapped by armed men.
- The 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls by Boko Haram insurgents from a school in Chibok, Borno State, remains one of the worst crimes committed in recent years.
- Boko Haram is the primary suspect behind the mass abductions in Nigeria due to its history of violence and terror tactics, including kidnapping.
- However, no organization has claimed responsibility for the recent abductions, leading to suspicions that local armed gangs, known as bandits, might be involved.
- **Bandits** have emerged as **organized armed groups in Nigeria**, engaging in various criminal activities such as **looting, kidnapping for ransom, and seizing control of valuable assets** like gold mines and farmlands.

What's fuelling the surge?

- The surge in kidnappings in Nigeria is fueled by **economic, security, and political issues**, including a **struggling economy, high unemployment rates, inflation, food insecurity, and instability in the Niger delta**.
- **Ransom payments have become the primary motivation for kidnappings**, as successive governments have struggled to address complex security challenges.
- Nigeria faces security crises across all six geopolitical zones, including threats from **Boko Haram, bandit groups, criminal gangs, sea piracy, and armed separatists**.
- Economic challenges, exacerbated by monetary policies, have led to widespread protests and increased desperation, driving youth to join armed gangs.
- Armed gangs control significant territories and possess a formidable arsenal of weapons, threatening Nigeria's food security by seizing control of vital agricultural areas.
- **Bandits target schoolchildren to evoke public sympathy and mount pressure on the government to meet their demands**.

How has the government responded?

- **President Bola Tinubu of Nigeria has rejected the idea of paying ransom** for the nearly 600 people abducted in separate incidents in March.
- In Nigeria, paying a ransom to free a hostage can lead to at least 15 years in jail, according to a law enacted in 2022 due to the prevalence of kidnappings for ransom.
- Government security forces are working to obtain the safe release of the victims.
- Security operations are expected to last for months as forces navigate the remote forest areas where the victims are being held.

- Activists are urging the government to initiate dialogue with the bandits to resolve the conflict peacefully, expressing concerns over the potential consequences of using force.

Why has Karnataka banned certain colouring agents?

(GS Paper III: S&T)

- **Karnataka has become the third state** in South India to ban the use of certain harmful coloring agents in cotton candy and gobi manchurian.
- This decision follows similar steps taken in **Tamil Nadu and Goa**.
- A survey conducted by the Public Health Department revealed the presence of harmful chemicals in food samples, making them unsafe for consumption.

What did the survey results show?

- The survey collected samples from February 12 and found that out of 25 cotton candy samples, 15 were unsafe due to added colors, while the rest were safe.
- Similarly, out of 171 samples of gobi manchurian, 107 were declared unsafe due to added colors.

What were the harmful chemicals?

- The harmful chemicals found in the unsafe samples include sunset yellow, **tartrazine, rhodamine-b, and carmoisine**.
- Rhodamine-b is already banned due to being a suspected carcinogenic substance.
- Tartrazine, though approved, has restrictions on its usage, particularly in freshly prepared food items.
- The prolonged consumption of snacks containing artificial colors can lead to serious diseases like cancer, according to the Food Safety Commissioner.

What are the penalties?

- According to **Rule 16 of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**, **no artificial colors should be used in the preparation of gobi manchurian**.
- Certain food colors are allowed within approved limits, but non-permitted colors like **rhodamine-b** should not be used in cotton candy.
- Offenders face severe penalties, including cancellation of their commercial license, hefty fines, and imprisonment.
- The Food Safety and Standards Act mandates a fine of **not less than ₹10 lakh and a minimum jail term of seven years**, extendable to life imprisonment, for those using banned chemical substances in food products.

What next?

- The ban on harmful chemicals is immediately effective, and the government plans to raise awareness among manufacturers and consumers.
- Consumers are advised to avoid or minimize the consumption of food items prepared with artificial colors.
- Random checks will be conducted to ensure compliance with the legal provisions.

- Besides gobi manchurian, other popular food products like kebabs, which use coloring agents, are likely to be scrutinized.

The slow and steady rise of mixed reality technology

(GS Paper III: S&T)

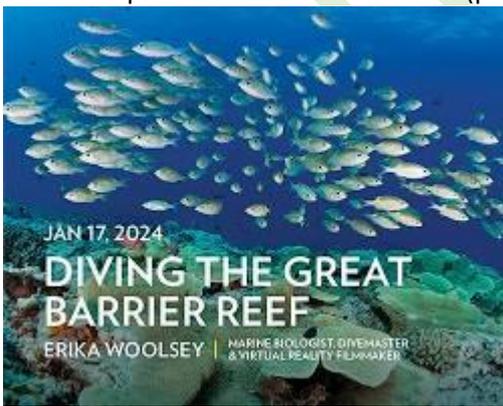
Augmented Reality (AR):

- **Concept:** AR overlays digital elements onto the real world, enhancing your perception. Imagine seeing information about a landmark displayed on your phone screen while looking at it directly.
- **Benefits:** Provides additional information, improves training experiences, and allows for interactive gameplay.
- **Example:** Imagine using a furniture app like IKEA Place to see virtually how a new couch would look in your living room (picture below).



2. Virtual Reality (VR):

- **Concept:** VR completely immerses you in a computer-generated simulation. You wear a headset that blocks out the real world and replaces it with a virtual environment.
- **Benefits:** Creates realistic training simulations, allows for exploration of virtual worlds, and provides immersive entertainment experiences.
- **Example:** Imagine using a VR headset to virtually travel to the Great Barrier Reef and explore the underwater world (picture below).



3. Mixed Reality (MR):

- **Concept:** MR merges real and virtual worlds, allowing for interaction between them. Imagine seeing virtual objects placed in the real world and interacting with them.
- **Benefits:** Offers advantages of both AR and VR, allowing for manipulation of virtual objects in a real-world setting.
- **Example:** Imagine using an MR headset to see a virtual car engine superimposed on a real car engine, highlighting its components for repair or learning purposes.

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Feature	Augmented Reality (AR)	Virtual Reality (VR)	Mixed Reality (MR)
Focus	Enhances the real world	Creates a completely virtual world	Blends real and virtual worlds
User experience	Users see both the real world and digital elements	Users see only the virtual world	Users see and interact with both real and virtual elements
Examples	Furniture placement apps, Pokémon GO	VR games, travel simulations	Medical training simulations, car repair manuals

- Apple introduced its Vision Pro in June 2023, calling it a "revolutionary spatial computer," but it was commonly referred to as a 'mixed reality headset' by tech enthusiasts.
- In February, Apple instructed developers not to use the term "headset" for the Vision Pro and instead referred to their apps as 'spatial computing apps,' avoiding terms like augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), or mixed reality (MR) apps.
- This move by Apple contrasts with its history of breaking conventional norms, as seen in its iconic Super Bowl ad for the Macintosh computer.
- The history of reality-augmenting technology dates back to the late 1960s when computer scientist Ivan Sutherland designed the first head-mounted display (HMD), termed "The Sword of Damocles."
- In the 1990s, companies like Boeing began experimenting with HMDs to improve productivity and reduce training costs.
- While various organizations explored HMD-based products in the 1990s and 2000s, they did not receive significant attention until the early 2010s.
- Google Glass, launched by Google, faced criticism and was eventually re-packaged for business use before being discontinued.
- Oculus, a start-up later acquired by Meta Inc., gained success with its VR headsets, contributing to the development of the metaverse concept.
- Apple's Vision Pro, priced at \$3,500, offers advanced features like hand and eye tracking and introduces a new operating system called visionOS.
- Despite the high price, the Vision Pro sets a new standard in headset technology with its innovative features and capabilities.
- Apple's insistence on calling the Vision Pro a "spatial computer" reflects its attempt to redefine the terminology in the field, although some experts advocate for embracing existing terms like AR, MR, and VR.

Question 1: Which of the following statements about Non-Personal Data (NPD) is/are correct?

1. It includes data that can directly identify an individual.
2. It has the potential to be used as a public good.
3. It is currently governed by a comprehensive regulatory framework in India.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. None of the above

Question 2: The expert committee chaired by Kris Gopalakrishnan was constituted to address issues related to:

- a. Regulation of e-commerce platforms
- b. Non-Personal Data governance
- c. Development of India's 5G infrastructure
- d. Cybersecurity in the banking sector

Question 3: Which of the following potential benefits can be derived from the application of advanced analytics and AI to Non-Personal Data?

- 1. Improved meteorological forecasts
- 2. Better city planning and infrastructure development
- 3. Enhanced disaster preparedness

Select the answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. All of the above

Question 4: Consider the following diseases:

- 1. Dracunculiasis
- 2. Malaria
- 3. Dengue

How many of the above diseases is/are transmitted through contaminated water?

- a. Only one
- b. Only two
- c. All the three
- d. (d) None

Question 5: Which of the following statements about Dracunculiasis is/are correct?

- 1. It is caused by a parasitic worm.
- 2. There is a vaccine to prevent infection.
- 3. a key symptom of Dracunculiasis is painful blister and emerging worm.

Select the answer using the code given below:

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2, and 3

Question 6: In the context of digital technologies for entertainment, consider the following statements: **(UPSC 2019)**

- 1. In Augmented Reality (AR), a simulated environment is created and the physical world is completely shut out.
- 2. In Virtual Reality (VR), images generated from a computer are projected onto real-life objects or surroundings.
- 3. AR allows individuals to be present in the world and improves the experience using the camera of smartphones or PC.
- 4. VR closes the world, and transposes an individual, providing complete immersion experience.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 and 4
- (c) 1, 2 and 3

(d) 4 only

<p>Question 1: Which of the following statements about Non-Personal Data (NPD) is/are correct?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It includes data that can directly identify an individual.2. It has the potential to be used as a public good.3. It is currently governed by a comprehensive regulatory framework in India. <p>Select the answer using the code given below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. 1 and 2 onlyb. 2 onlyc. 2 and 3 onlyd. None of the above	<p>Correct Answer: (b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statement 1 is INCORRECT: NPD specifically <i>excludes</i> information that directly identifies an individual. It may be anonymized personal data or data that was never directly linked to an individual.• Statement 2 is CORRECT: NPD can be a rich resource for governments and businesses. Analysis of NPD can lead to insights that improve services, drive innovation, and inform policy decisions.• Statement 3 is INCORRECT: India <i>does not</i> currently have a comprehensive law dedicated to NPD regulation. There are policy frameworks in place, but no single, enforceable regulatory system.
<p>Question 2: The expert committee chaired by Kris Gopalakrishnan was constituted to address issues related to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Regulation of e-commerce platformsb. Non-Personal Data governancec. Development of India's 5G infrastructured. Cybersecurity in the banking sector	<p>Correct Answer: (b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The expert committee led by Kris Gopalakrishnan was specifically formed to provide recommendations on how India should govern Non-Personal Data. Their report addressed issues like data ownership, sharing mechanisms, and the potential for misuse through re-identification.
<p>Question 3: Which of the following potential benefits can be derived from the application of advanced analytics and AI to Non-Personal Data?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Improved meteorological forecasts2. Better city planning and infrastructure development3. Enhanced disaster preparedness <p>Select the answer using the code given below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">a. 1 and 2 onlyb. 2 and 3 onlyc. 1 and 3 onlyd. All of the above	<p>Correct Answer: (d)</p> <p>Analyzing large datasets of NPD can lead to breakthroughs in various fields:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meteorology: NPD on weather patterns, combined with AI models, can improve the accuracy and timeliness of forecasts.• City Planning: NPD on traffic, housing trends, and resource use can inform urban planners on how to optimize infrastructure and services.• Disaster Preparedness: Analysis of historical disaster data, geographical

	<p>information, and NPD on population movement can help identify vulnerable areas and create better response plans.</p>
<p>Question 4: Consider the following diseases:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dracunculiasis 2. Malaria 3. Dengue <p>How many of the above diseases is/are transmitted through contaminated water?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Only one b. Only two c. All the three d. None 	<p>Correct Answer: (a)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dracunculiasis: Transmitted by drinking water contaminated with water fleas carrying Guinea worm larvae. • Malaria: Transmitted by the bite of infected Anopheles mosquitoes. • Dengue: Transmitted by the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes.
<p>Question 5: Which of the following statements about Dracunculiasis is/are correct?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is caused by a parasitic worm. 2. There is a vaccine to prevent infection. 3. a key symptom of Dracunculiasis is painful blister and emerging worm. <p>Select the answer using the code given below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 1 only b. 1 and 3 only c. 2 and 3 only d. 1, 2, and 3 	<p>Correct Answer: (b)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 1 is CORRECT: Dracunculiasis is caused by the parasitic worm <i>Dracunculus medinensis</i>. • Statement 2 is INCORRECT: There is currently NO vaccine to prevent Dracunculiasis infection. • Statement 3 is CORRECT: A hallmark symptom is the formation of a painful skin blister, followed by the emergence of the worm.
<p>Question 6: In the context of digital technologies for entertainment, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2019)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In Augmented Reality (AR), a simulated environment is created and the physical world is completely shut out. 2. In Virtual Reality (VR), images generated from a computer are projected onto real-life objects or surroundings. 3. AR allows individuals to be present in the world and improves the experience using the camera of smartphones or PC. 4. VR closes the world, and transposes an individual, providing complete immersion experience. <p>Which of the statements given above is/are correct?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 3 and 4 (c) 1, 2 and 3 (d) 4 only 	<p>Statements 1 and 2 are INCORRECT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 1: AR does <i>not</i> completely shut out the physical world. Its key feature is the overlay of digital elements onto the real-world view. • Statement 2: This describes Augmented Reality (AR), not Virtual Reality (VR). VR creates a fully simulated environment. <p>Statements 3 and 4 are CORRECT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 3: AR lets users stay present in the real world while enhancing their experience through digital overlays accessed via devices like smartphones. • Statement 4: VR provides a fully immersive experience where the real world is shut out, and the user is transported into a simulated environment.