TOPICS COCERED

1. **India to double assistance to Bhutan to ₹10,000 crore over five years, says Modi. (GS Paper II: IR)**
2. **Can Arvind Kejriwal continue to be CM while in custody? (GS Paper II: Polity)**
3. **HC says Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Act 'unconstitutional' (GS Paper II: Polity)**
4. **Two wars, the consequences for America's standing (GS Paper II: IR)**
5. **Blowback: on Pakistan, Afghanistan and insurgency (GS Paper II: IR)**
6. **The CAA, Muslim exclusion and the lens of the right (GS Paper I and GS Paper II)**
7. **A turf war with the wild (GS Paper III: Environment)**
8. **'Inequality dipped over the past decade' (GS Paper III)**
9. **India now eyes Africa for critical minerals (GS Paper I& GS Paper III: Minerals)**

Can Arvind Kejriwal continue to be CM while in custody? (GS Paper II: Polity)

- Questions are being raised about whether Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal can continue to hold his position after being remanded in judicial custody.
- Previous judgments by the Supreme Court and High Courts have emphasized that **holding a public office requires adherence to principles of constitutional morality, good governance, and constitutional trust**.
- A recent case in the Madras High Court, titled **S. Ramachandran versus V. Senthilbalaji**, involved arguments regarding whether a Minister accused of a financial scandal should forfeit their right to hold office requiring high moral standards.
- Mr. Senthilbalaji, a former Tamil Nadu Minister, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on money-laundering charges last year and continued to be a Minister without portfolio while in judicial custody.
- The High Court heard arguments on whether **he "has virtually forfeited his office as a Minister on account of being arrested and detained in prison".**
- The arguments referred to a 2014 Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of **Manoj Narula versus Union of India**, which held that the **basic norm for holding a public office was constitutional morality, avoiding actions contradictory to the rule of law**.
- **It was argued in the Madras High Court that "the government has to rise above narrow private interests or parochial political outlook and aim at doing good for the larger public interest**".

- The **third consideration was constitutional trust, upholding high moral standards attached to a public office**.

Practical difficulties

- The Madras High Court judgment discussed practical difficulties faced by a Minister while in custody.
- Lawyers pointed out that a **Minister in prison cannot access department files** without breaching their oath of office.
- There was a **debate on whether a person should receive a salary from the state while holding a public office without performing any duties**.
- The High Court agreed that **these concerns were based on public morality and constitutional morality**.
- Mr. Senthilbalaji did not face disqualification as a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) under the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- However, **citizens expect persons in power to uphold high standards of moral conduct**.
- The High Court emphasized that political compulsion should not override public morality, good governance, and constitutional morality.

HC says Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Act 'unconstitutional' (GS Paper II: Polity)

State government has no power to create a board for religious education and students must be accommodated in regular schools, says Bench

- The Allahabad High Court declared the **Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Act, 2004** unconstitutional, stating that it violates principles of secularism.
- The **court ruled that the state cannot establish educational boards solely for a specific religion or philosophy, as it goes against secular principles**.
- The decision came in response to a writ petition challenging the **legality of the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Board**.
- The **court emphasized that it is the state's duty to provide secular education to all children up to the age of 18, regardless of their religion**.
- **Providing different types of education based on religion is deemed unconstitutional and divisive to society**, according to the court.
- The **court rejected the notion that traditional education provided by madrasas is sufficient, emphasizing the importance of modern education with universal subjects**.
- **It directed the government to integrate madrasa students into regular schools recognized under the Primary Education Board and High School/Intermediate Education Board** of Uttar Pradesh.

Two wars, the consequences for America's standing (GS Paper II: IR)

To what extent the Ukraine and Gaza wars will be driven by U.S. election-year politics or their own future course, is unclear

MANOJ JOSHI

'The Israel–Hamas and the Ukraine wars are two important global issues which are playing out in unforeseen ways' | Photo Credit: REUTERS

- United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer made a significant speech calling for a new government in Israel, which has strained U.S.-Israel relations.
- Schumer, who is Jewish himself and has had a long-standing relationship with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, criticized Netanyahu for being too tolerant of civilian casualties in Gaza.
- This move by Schumer has caused a political earthquake in U.S.-Israel ties, highlighting growing tensions between the two countries.
- **Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban** revealed details of a conversation with former U.S. President Donald Trump, stating that Trump had intended to suspend military aid to Ukraine upon taking office.
- Orban mentioned that Trump aimed to **swiftly negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war** and believed that **European countries should bear more of the financial burden of the conflict**.
- These revelations shed light on **Trump's foreign policy intentions** regarding Ukraine and his views on the distribution of costs related to the conflict in Europe.

The U.S. and the Ukraine war

- The U.S. has given around $75 billion in aid to Ukraine, mostly for weapons purchases and humanitarian needs.
- Military aid from the U.S. has been used to buy equipment like Stinger missiles and HIMARS weapons systems.
- The outcomes of these conflicts could impact the U.S.' standing in the world, regardless of the election results in November.

- An additional $60 billion assistance for Ukraine has been **held up in the U.S. Congress** since the end of last year.
- The **U.S. Administration and Pentagon** are struggling to secure funds for Ukraine's military equipment **due to the congressional deadlock**.
- The **European Union (EU) has pledged €144 billion in aid to Ukraine**, including <mark>financial, economic, military, and humanitarian support</mark>.

- However, the EU's military assistance falls short compared to the U.S.
- The **U.S. Senate has approved a new aid package for Ukraine**, but it needs to pass the House of Representatives.
- The **U.S. faces a dilemma regarding Ukraine, as it wants to avoid a Russian victory and prevent the war from escalating or prolonging**.
- Speaker Mike Johnson is hesitant to bring the Senate bill to vote in the House, fearing backlash from **Make America Great Again (MAGA) Republicans**, despite support from traditional Republicans.

- **Ukraine is facing challenges on the ground**, highlighted by its **failed summer offensive** last year and subsequent **struggle to devise an effective strategy against Russia**.
- ==Shortages and ineffective tactics have contributed to Ukraine's defeat in Avdiivka==, which has garnered significant attention.

- The Dnieper, also known as Dnipro or Dniapro, is a major river in Europe, originating in the **Valdai Hills near Smolensk, Russia**.
- It flows through **Belarus and Ukraine** before emptying into the **Black Sea**, spanning approximately 2,200 kilometers in length.
- It is the ==longest river in Ukraine and Belarus and the fourth-longest in Europe==.
- Historically, the Dnieper was part of the **Amber Road trade routes** and played a significant role in trade and transportation.
- In the Soviet era, the Dnieper became known for its **hydroelectric dams and reservoirs**, contributing to the region's infrastructure and energy production.
- The **1986 Chernobyl disaster occurred near the Dnieper's tributary, the Pripyat River**, impacting the surrounding environment.
- During the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, certain parts of the river served as defensive lines between Russian and Ukrainian-controlled territories.

- In contrast, **Russia has adapted and improved** since the initial invasion, leveraging its numerical and technological superiority.
- **Russia holds an advantage in electronic warfare and artillery**, employing ==advanced weaponry like the Unified Gliding and Correction Module (UMPK) Glide bombs== with devastating impact.
- Ukraine is grappling with shortages, particularly of key artillery ammunition, some of which was redirected for Israeli use by the U.S. in October.

Israel and its Gaza actions

- The U.S. is one of the main supporters of Israel in its conflict with Hamas.
- However, now U.S. President Joe Biden and others are publicly questioning Israeli strategy in the conflict.
- Former U.S. official Richard N. Haass, who is also Jewish, criticized Israel's actions, stating they have harmed its relationship with the U.S. and caused harm to innocent Palestinians.
- Israeli forces have heavily damaged Gaza and are now targeting the last remaining area, Rafah.
- President Biden has warned against attacking **Rafah** due to the potential for high civilian casualties.

- It is suggested that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's actions are driven by **his own political survival rather than strategic considerations**.
- Israel has shown its military strength but lacks a clear political plan for peace with Palestinians under Netanyahu's right-wing government.
- **A sustainable peace in the region requires Israel to outline a future that includes a Palestinian state, even with limited sovereignty**.
- Netanyahu's past support for Hamas aimed to divide Palestinian opinion and shape Israeli public perception.
- The U.S. approach to foreign policy, including towards Ukraine and Israel, is uncertain due to changes in bipartisan views and shifting demographics.
- Younger Americans are less supportive of Israel compared to older generations, as shown in a recent poll where more 18-29 year olds empathized with Palestinians than Israelis.

The Trump factor

- The U.S. election is still eight months away, and both the U.S. and Ukraine are staying committed to their positions.
- **Ukraine is getting significant support from the U.S**., including **intelligence sharing on Russian movements**, which **helps Ukraine counter Russian aggression**.
- The U.S. believes that Ukraine's resilience weakens Russia's stance, particularly towards NATO.
- If Trump wins the election, it could bring significant changes in U.S. policy towards Ukraine, potentially disrupting current efforts.
- **Trump is known for being a strong supporter of Israel** and made the controversial decision to **recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital during his presidency**.
- A victory for Trump in the U.S. election could lead to changes in how Washington deals with Ukraine and its relationship with NATO.
- **European countries are trying to compensate for any potential reduction in U.S. support**, but their efforts **may not be enough to counter Russian** momentum in the conflict.
- If Ukraine cannot regain momentum and the U.S. steps back, there's a **risk of Ukrainian collapse**.
- This could shake up European security, as the **U.S. is seen as a key guarantor of security in the region**.
- Additionally, American unpredictability could **impact its alliances in the Indo-Pacific**, including **relationships with South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and its partnership with India**.

Editoral-1

AAP trap: on Arvind Kejriwal's arrest and democracy

Arvind Kejriwal's arrest is a reminder of the dangers of misusing enforcement agencies

- Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader, has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), raising concerns about India's democracy and federalism.
- The timing of Kejriwal's arrest, just before the general election, suggests political motives.
- The case against Kejriwal is related to the <mark>Delhi excise policy</mark> and was initiated by the CBI in 2022, followed by an ED money laundering probe.
- Other AAP leaders, including Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, have also been jailed on similar charges.
- **Critics argue** that **if there is evidence of corruption, the case should proceed to trial promptly instead of keeping the accused in jail during ongoing investigations**.
- The arrests of political opponents of the ruling party may be perceived as **selective enforcement of the law, undermining public trust in democracy**.
- The Supreme Court of India has demanded solid evidence from the ED linking accused individuals with alleged crimes and has denied bail in some cases.
- **Central agencies in India have targeted constitutional functionaries, leading to concerns about the potential for democratic politics to be disrupted**.
- The actions of central agencies, such as the ED, in arresting Opposition leaders on corruption charges while **letting off those who align with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party raise questions about selective enforcement**.
- The notion that the law is simply taking its course may not be convincing to many observers.
- There is a pattern of targeting only Opposition leaders for corruption charges, **with leniency shown to those who switch allegiances to the ruling party**.
- The case of Arvind Kejriwal, who initially campaigned against corruption but is now facing legal issues himself, highlights the complexities and contradictions in the current political landscape.
- The **principle that "two wrongs do not make a right" underscores the need for fair and impartial enforcement of the law, regardless of political affiliations**.

Editorial-2

Blowback: on Pakistan, Afghanistan and insurgency (GS Paper II: IR)

Pakistan is paying for its role in supporting Islamists in Afghanistan

- When the Taliban regained control of Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan's Prime Minister at the time, Imran Khan, **praised it as breaking free from oppression**.
- Now, after two and a half years, tensions have risen between Afghanistan and Pakistan **over their shared border**.
- Pakistan recently conducted airstrikes in Afghan provinces, allegedly targeting **Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which Pakistan accuses of launching terror attacks** within its borders.

- In response, the Taliban attacked Pakistani military posts along the border, creating a tense situation.
- **Pakistan, which played a key role in the Taliban's rise in the 1990s, has backed the Sunni Islamist group for years**.
- The close relationship between the **Afghan Taliban and the Pakistani military** has deteriorated, despite Pakistan's historical support for the group, including being one of the few countries to recognize their regime in the 1990s.
- **Pakistan initially turned against the Taliban after pressure from the United States following the 9/11 attacks but maintained a complex relationship, supporting the Taliban while also being an American ally in the War on Terror**.
- During this time, the Taliban leadership was based in Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.
- Pakistan cultivated the Taliban against the U.S.-and India-backed Afghan government.
- After the **collapse of President Ashraf Ghani's government in 2021**, Pakistan expected to increase its influence in South Asia through a friendly regime in Kabul, but the situation turned out differently.
- Afghan governments have had strained relations with Pakistan **due to disputes over their border, the Durand Line**.
- When the Taliban were an insurgency, they needed Pakistan and Pakistan needed them as a counterweight to the government in Kabul.
- While the Taliban were once insurgents, they now govern Afghanistan, altering the dynamic with Pakistan.
- Besides, the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan strengthened the TTP, also known as the **Pakistani Taliban**.
- The Afghan Taliban and the TTP are **two different organisations but ideological brothers** — **both Pashtun**, and who follow the **strident Deobandi interpretation of Islam and believe in the rule of the Sunni Islamic clergy**.
- In other words, what the **TTP wants to achieve in Pakistan is what the Afghan Taliban have already achieved in Afghanistan**.
- The **Afghan Taliban have not severed their ties with the TTP despite Pakistan's calls and threats**, which has put both countries on a collision course.
- The **Afghan Taliban's success has emboldened the TTP, leading to tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan**.
- Pakistan's history of supporting Islamist insurgency is now causing problems as it faces blowback, particularly in Afghanistan.

The CAA, Muslim exclusion and the lens of the right (GS Paper I and GS Paper II)

The issue of Muslim exclusion in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act needs to be seen in the broader context of right wing politics

SHAIKH MUJIBUR REHMAN

A train leaving New Delhi for Pakistan, after Partition | Photo Credit: AP

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah recently discussed reasons for excluding Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019.
- Shah cited Partition and the fact that these countries are officially Islamic states, suggesting that persecution against Muslims wouldn't occur there.

Partition and some truths

- However, the argument that all Muslims are responsible for Partition is flawed. Partition was primarily driven by Muslim elites, particularly landlords in North India.
- The Hindu right's aspiration for a Hindu Rashtra also contributed to alienation among Muslim elites, alongside colonial divide and rule policies.
- Notably, many Indian Muslims opposed Partition and chose to remain in India. Figures like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sheikh Abdullah, and religious leaders from Deoband were against Partition.
- Additionally, leaders like Periyar advocated for Dravidistan, believing that the political freedom sought by India's nationalist elites wouldn't bring genuine freedom to marginalized people in the South.
- Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, a secular Muslim leader, dealt a decisive blow to Jinnah's two-nation theory by leading the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.
- The argument by the Hindu right that Muslim exclusion in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) 2019 is justified due to Partition overlooks the resistance Muslims showed against Partition and their sacrifices for India.
- Many Muslims were uncertain about how to respond to the creation of Pakistan.
- According to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, when he learnt that the Muslim League was inciting all Muslim officials working in the Central Secretariat, New Delhi, to leave for Pakistan, he pushed the government of India to issue a circular that Muslims who would stay back in India would be given their rights.
- Azad's effort was fully backed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Lord Mountbatten.
- This effort led to thousands of Muslim officials and staff opting to remain in India rather than move to Pakistan, highlighting the confusion and complexity many Muslims faced during Partition.

- The enormity of confusion the average Muslim was going through at the time of Partition.

The argument of persecution

- The Hindu right argues that religious minorities in **Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan face severe persecution, including Muslim sects like the Ahmadis**.
- Even <mark>Nobel Prize-winning physicist Professor Abdus Salam faced discrimination due to his Ahmadi heritage in Pakistan</mark>.
- Some leaders in the **Shia community opposed the Pakistan project, seeing it as Sunnistan**.
- India's so-called secular governments have been criticized for not addressing the persecution of religious minorities in neighboring countries urgently.
- While India was partitioned on religious lines, not all Muslims can be blamed for it.
- Ayesha Jalal, in her book "The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan," highlights the complexity of Partition, stating that it was only a partial solution to the minority problem in the subcontinent.
- **Communal tensions have resurged in India**, and there are repercussions in Pakistan and Bangladesh, where minorities are targeted.
- Citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh can only watch helplessly as India's Muslim minority faces challenges.
- The intervention by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the CAA 2019 debate is criticized for **labeling genuine asylum seekers as criminals**, which is **xenophobic** and similar to depicting them as termites.
- Kejriwal's ambivalence towards addressing the Muslim question and secularism may have led him to resort to such xenophobic arguments.

The canvas of the right

- The issue of Muslim exclusion in the CAA 2019 is part of a **broader agenda by the Hindu right for ideological politics**.
- The Bharatiya Janata Party's decision **not to field Muslim candidates, crackdown on madrasas in states like Uttar Pradesh and Assam, and targeting of dargahs and mosques contribute to this agenda**.
- This indicates a comprehensive ideological project aimed at <mark>de-Islamization of India</mark>.
- **Neither the secular political class nor Muslims** have a well-crafted political response to counter this agenda.

A turf war with the wild (GS Paper III: Environment)

Instances of human-animal conflict are on the rise in Kerala with the summer heat, scarcity of food, and loss of habitat forcing wild animals to stray into human habitations for sustenance.

- On March 5, Rajan and his wife Valsala, members of the **Kadar tribe**, ventured into the forest in Kerala's Thrissur district to collect Marottikkuru seeds, used for medicinal oil.

- The Kadars, a forest-dwelling community, **often collect forest produce like honey, tubers, and Marottikkuru,** and construct temporary tents in the forest during summer.
- While collecting seeds, an elephant suddenly appeared and knocked down Valsala with its trunk. Rajan witnessed his wife's death.
- The elephant, known as Manja Komban, has been causing terror in the area and attacked a bus and chased tourists two days after Valsala's death.
- Forest officials stated that the elephant was **in musth**, a period characterized by aggressive behavior due to **increased reproductive hormones**.
- Human-wildlife conflicts are increasing in Kerala due to **significant forest cover and settlements close to wildlife habitats**.
- In 2023-24, human-wildlife conflicts claimed 93 lives in Kerala, with Wayanad district reporting the highest number of deaths.
- **Kerala declared human-animal conflict as a state-specific disaster**, with responsibility now under the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA).
- The government formed a committee headed by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to address the issue, with the **Chief Wildlife Warden appointed as the nodal officer**.

- **The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW)** is the head of the state forest department's wildlife wing, appointed under the **Wildlife Protection Act of 1972**.
- The CWLW is responsible for the control, management, and maintenance of **all sanctuaries and national parks within the state**.
- **Wildlife Conservation:** The CWLW's duties involve implementing wildlife conservation measures, preventing poaching and illegal trade, and resolving human-wildlife conflict.
- **Permits:** The CWLW grants permits for specified activities within Protected Areas, such as research, photography, tourism, and the lawful business of those residing inside.
- **Policy and Legislation:** The CWLW **provides inputs and advises the state government** on matters related to wildlife policy and legislation.

- Neighborhood groups will intensify surveillance on forest fringes, with the recruitment of volunteer groups and forest watchers to strengthen the surveillance network.
- The government also directed the Forest department to **raise more rapid response teams equipped with firearms, surveillance devices, and tranquilizing guns**.
- An **inter-State coordination committee involving Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu** resolved to tackle human-wildlife conflicts through **collaborative action, intelligence sharing, and resource exchange**.

Not elephants alone

- Besides elephants, other wild animals such as **tigers, leopards, bears, wild gaur, wild boars, and monkeys** are causing problems for people in Kerala.
- Abraham Palatt, a farmer, was **gored to death by a wild gaur** in Koorachundu grama panchayat in Kozhikode district, rendering their land uncultivable.
- The region, situated along the **Kuttiyadi Irrigation Project** and contiguous with forest areas, is home to many farmers who cultivate **rubber, coconut, nutmeg, cocoa, and arecanut**.

Nutmeg	Senna Spectabilis	Arrowroot

- Wildlife attacks have led to fear among rubber tappers and made it impossible for farmers to work on their land, causing widespread distress in the area.
- Residents demand measures such as **shooting the gaur and erecting fences to prevent further attacks**, but forest officials find it challenging to identify and manage wild gaurs.
- Another incident involved Indira, who was trampled to death by a wild elephant while harvesting arrowroot with her husband near the Neriamangalam forest range.
- The **government empowered local self-governments to decide on culling wild boars** due to the significant damage they cause to crops.

Temporal and spatial specificities

- **Areas like Periyar Tiger Reserve have fewer conflicts, while regions like Wayanad and Idukki face more incidents due to various reasons**.
- Factors contributing to conflicts **include forest degradation, changes in hydrology, floods, proliferation of resorts near forest areas, behavioral changes in wildlife, and invasion of non-native plant specie**s.
- A study by the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) identified 22 invasive plant species in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, with **Senna spectabilis** **being the most common and harmful**.
- **Fragmentation of wildlife habitats, dense human populations within forest patches, and the availability of food in agricultural lands contribute to conflicts**.
- **Poor waste management in tourist areas like Munnar attracts wild animals, such as elephants, leading to frequent encounters**.
- **Tribespeople note forest degradation after floods, decline in fruit-bearing trees, and blocked streams affecting water sources, driving animals towards human settlements**.
- Plantation Corporation of Kerala's (PCK) oil palm plantations attract elephants, who consume oil palm trees and often camp in the area.
- Workers in the plantation face shortages of food, with elephants waiting for them to cut palm leaves for consumption.
- Elephants also raid houses for food, causing property damage and posing risks to human lives, highlighting the severity of human-wildlife conflicts in the region.

Improving quality of forest

- Need to improve the quality of forests as a lasting solution to human-wildlife conflict.
- Addressing fragmentation and patchiness of forests is crucial to mitigate conflicts.

- Initiating a conservation mission involving tribal communities is urgent.
- Natural forest streams should be rejuvenated, and invasive plants removed to restore the ecosystem.
- Replanting indigenous species, which have declined, is essential, and support from programs like MGNREGS can be utilized for this purpose.
- **Awareness programs** on responsible tourism are necessary to prevent tourist-induced conflicts.
- Effective management of human-wildlife conflicts requires **an institutional framework starting from the grassroots level and involving various levels of governance, including gram panchayats, districts, states, and inter-state cooperation**.
- A collective approach, coordinating different departments and involving local communities, plays a significant role in mitigating conflicts, according to Dr. Sajeev.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION: GS PAPER III

Question: Discuss the factors contributing to the rise in human-wildlife conflict in Kerala and its implications for both wildlife and human populations. Also, suggest measures to mitigate them. (250 words/15 Marks)

ANSWR APPROACH
- Introduce with the contextual background of human-wildlife conflict in Kerala.
- Then bring the factors responsible for it.
- Further discuss the implication.
- Then bring the mitigation strategy.
- Conclude accordingly.

ANSWER

The human-wildlife conflict in Kerala, exemplified by the recent tragic incident involving underscores the pressing need for comprehensive measures to address the escalating conflicts between humans and wildlife.

- Several factors contribute to the rise in human-wildlife conflicts in Kerala, including habitat encroachment, habitat degradation, and human activities such as improper waste disposal and habitat modification.
- **Habitat Encroachment:** Rapid urbanization, agricultural expansion, and infrastructure development encroach upon natural habitats, forcing wildlife to seek food and shelter in human-dominated landscapes.
- **Habitat Degradation**: Deforestation, soil erosion, and land degradation reduce the availability of natural resources within forests, compelling wildlife to venture into agricultural fields and settlements in search of sustenance.
- **Human Activities:** Improper waste disposal, livestock grazing, and habitat modification attract wildlife to human settlements, increasing the likelihood of conflicts.
- Irresponsible tourism practices, such as feeding wild animals or encroaching on their habitats, further exacerbate these conflicts.
- The dense population settlements and agricultural lands adjacent to wildlife habitats exacerbate these conflicts, leading to frequent confrontations between humans and various wildlife species.

Implications
- The implications of such conflicts extend beyond individual incidents, impacting both wildlife and human populations in profound ways.

- For wildlife, the encroachment of human activities into their natural habitats, such as forest fragmentation and habitat loss due to urbanization and agricultural expansion, poses significant threats.
- These disruptions not only lead to habitat loss and fragmentation but also expose wildlife to stress, increased mortality rates, and altered behaviors. Furthermore, the loss of biodiversity and genetic diversity within fragmented habitats can have long-term consequences for ecosystem health and resilience.
- On the other hand, human populations living in close proximity to wildlife habitats face economic losses, safety risks, and social tensions resulting from conflict incidents.
- The loss of crops, property damage, and the threat of wildlife attacks undermine livelihoods and food security, particularly among rural communities dependent on agriculture.
- Additionally, the fear and trauma caused by conflict incidents contribute to heightened tensions between wildlife authorities, local communities, and conservationists.

Mitigation Strategy
- To mitigate human-wildlife conflicts effectively, a multifaceted approach is required.
- First and foremost, habitat conservation efforts must be prioritized to protect and restore natural habitats, create wildlife corridors, and minimize habitat fragmentation.
- Community engagement is essential, involving local communities, indigenous tribes, and farmers in conservation planning, decision-making, and conflict resolution efforts.
- Additionally, the implementation of non-lethal deterrents, such as electric fencing, guard animals, and early warning systems, can help reduce conflict incidents and safeguard both wildlife and human interests.
- Public awareness campaigns on wildlife behavior, conflict mitigation techniques, and responsible tourism practices are crucial to fostering understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.
- Policy interventions, including strict regulations on waste management, land-use planning, and wildlife protection laws, are essential to address the underlying drivers of conflict and promote harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife.
- The recent initiatives by the Kerala government, such as declaring human-animal conflict as a state-specific disaster and forming neighborhood groups for intensified surveillance, are positive steps toward addressing these challenges.

Thus, effective management of human-wildlife conflicts requires a collaborative and holistic approach that integrates ecological, social, and economic considerations. By prioritizing habitat conservation, community engagement, conflict resolution strategies, and policy interventions, stakeholders can work together to mitigate conflict impacts and promote sustainable coexistence between humans and wildlife in the region.

'Inequality dipped over the past decade'

(GS Paper III)

- The Finance Ministry asserted that India has experienced "inclusive growth" over the past decade.
- They cited the "reassuring findings" of the **Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2022-23.**
- The Ministry highlighted **a decline in the rural-urban divide in monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE).**

- **Consumption among the lowest 5% of the MPCE population grew faster than the top 5%, indicating a decline in inequality over the last decade**.
- Juxtaposing MPCE numbers with per capita gross national income reveals an inclusive trend in economic growth.
- The **MPCE/PCI ratio has increased for all consumption classes except the top 5% in rural India and the top 10% in urban India**.

Monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE)

MPCE refers to the average monthly amount of money spent by an individual within a specific area (country, state, etc.). It considers the total consumption expenditure of all households in that area, divided by the total population.

What does it include?

MPCE takes into account all the money spent by individuals on various goods and services they consume in a month. This includes:

- **Food:** This is typically the largest component of MPCE, encompassing all food items consumed by the household.
- **Non-food items:** This includes a wide range of expenses like clothing, footwear, housing (rent or mortgage), utilities, transportation, healthcare, education, entertainment, etc.

India now eyes Africa for critical minerals

(GS Paper I& GS Paper III: Minerals)

- Critical minerals are non-fuel minerals that are essential for modern technologies, but whose supply is at risk due to various factors. They are crucial components in many important sectors like:
  - Clean energy (wind turbines, electric vehicles, solar panels, battery storage)
  - National security (electronics, defense systems)
  - Consumer goods (smartphones, computers)
- **Why are they critical?** Several factors contribute to their criticality:
  - **Limited supply:** These minerals may be geographically concentrated in a few countries, or require complex and energy-intensive extraction processes.
  - **High demand:** Rapid technological advancements and growing global populations are driving up demand for these minerals.
  - **Geopolitical considerations:** Supply chains can be vulnerable to disruptions due to trade tensions or political instability in major producing countries.
- **Examples of critical minerals:** The specific list of critical minerals can vary depending on the source and can change over time. Here are some common examples:
  - **Rare earth elements (REEs):** Used in magnets, lasers, and catalysts.
  - **Lithium:** Essential for battery technology.
  - **Cobalt:** A key component of lithium-ion batteries.
  - **Graphite:** Used in electrodes and other electronic applications.
  - **Nickel:** Critical for electric vehicle batteries and stainless steel.

- India is exploring Africa for minerals like cobalt and other critical minerals.
- It's also in talks with Australia for lithium blocks.

- Zambia, Namibia, Congo, Ghana, and Mozambique are the countries India is looking at for minerals.

- Critical minerals, such as lithium, are essential for making batteries for electric vehicles and supporting India's efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

- Auction rules for offshore mineral blocks are being prepared.
- After the general elections, India plans to sell 10 blocks.
- The results of the first auction round will be known in 10 days.
- **Lithium blocks in Jammu and Kashmir will be auctioned** in the third round due to low bidding interest in the first round.

Question 1: Consider the following countries:
1. Russia

2. Belarus

3. Ukraine

4. Poland

5. Romania

How many of the above countries does the Dnieper River pass through?

a. Only two

b. Only three

c. Only four

d. All the five

Question 2: Consider the following statements about the Dnieper River:
1. It is the longest river in Europe.
2. It flows into the Caspian Sea.
Which of the above statements are correct?
a. 1 only
b. 2 only
c. Both 1 and 2
d. Neither 1 nor 2

Question 3: UMPK (Unified Gliding and Correction Module) Glide Bombs, recently seen in news, are employed by the military forces of:

(a) Ukraine
(b) The United States
(c) NATO
(d) Russia

Question 4: Which of the following pairs of countries is separated by the Durand Line?

(a) India and China
(b) India and Pakistan
(c) Afghanistan and Pakistan
(d) China and Pakistan

Question 5: The Kadar tribe is primarily found in which Indian state?
  a. Madhya Pradesh
  b. Kerala
  c. Odisha

  d. Assam

Question 6: Consider the following crop:

  1. Rubber

  2. Coconut

  3. Nutmeg

  4. Cocoa

  5. Arecanut

How many of the above crops are considered major plantation crops in Kerala?

  a. Only two

  b. Only three

  c. Only four

  d. All the five

Question 1: Consider the following countries: 1. Russia 2. Belarus 3. Ukraine 4. Poland 5. Romania How many of the above countries does the Dnieper River pass through? a. Only two b. Only three c. Only four d. All the five	• The Dnieper River flows through only **Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.** • It originates in Russia, flows southward through Belarus and then through Ukraine before emptying into the Black Sea. • While Poland and Romania are in the general region of Eastern Europe, the Dnieper River does not flow through their territories.

Question 2: Consider the following statements about the Dnieper River: 　　1. It is the longest river in Europe. 　　2. It flows into the Caspian Sea. Which of the above statements are correct? 　　a. 1 only 　　b. 2 only 　　c. Both 1 and 2 　　d. Neither 1 nor 2	• **Statement 1 is incorrect:** The longest river in Europe is the Volga River. • **Statement 2 is incorrect:** The Dnieper River flows into the Black Sea.
Question 3: UMPK (Unified Gliding and Correction Module) Glide Bombs, recently seen in news, are employed by the military forces of: (a) Ukraine (b) The United States (c) NATO (d) Russia	• UMPK stands for "Unified Planning and Correction Module" (or a similar translation from the Russian acronym). • It's a kit developed by **Russia** to convert unguided "dumb" bombs into precision-guided munitions. • These glide bombs have been employed by the Russian military in recent conflicts, including Ukraine.
Question 4: Which of the following pairs of countries is separated by the Durand Line? (a) India and China (b) India and Pakistan (c) Afghanistan and Pakistan (d) China and Pakistan	The correct answer is **(c)** **explanation:** • **The Durand Line:** The Durand Line is an international border established in 1893 between the then British India and Afghanistan. It now serves as the official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. **Incorrect Options:** • **India and China:** The border between India and China has several disputed sections, including the Line of Actual Control (LAC). • **India and Pakistan:** The border between India and Pakistan is marked by the Radcliffe Line and other disputed regions in Kashmir. • **China and Pakistan:** China and Pakistan share a border in the Karakoram mountain range.
Question 5: The Kadar tribe is primarily found in which Indian state? 　　a. Madhya Pradesh 　　b. Kerala 　　c. Odisha 　　d. Assam	The correct answer is **b.** Explanation: • **The Kadar Tribe:** The Kadar are a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) indigenous to India. They have traditionally been forest dwellers, relying heavily on forest resources for their survival.

	• **Geographical Location:** The Kadar tribe is primarily found in the southern Indian state of Kerala. They also have a presence in the neighboring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
Question 6: Consider the following crop: 1. Rubber 2. Coconut 3. Nutmeg 4. Cocoa 5. Arecanut How many of the above crops are considered major plantation crops in Kerala? a. Only two b. Only three c. Only four d. All the five	The correct answer is **d.** **Explanation:** Kerala is known for its plantation agriculture, and all the crops listed are significant plantation crops in the state: • **Rubber:** Kerala is the largest producer of rubber in India. • **Coconut:** Kerala derives its name from "Kera" (coconut) and the state is a major producer. • **Nutmeg:** Primarily cultivated in the hill regions, nutmeg is an important spice crop. • **Cocoa:** Cocoa plantations play a role in Kerala's diverse agriculture. • **Arecanut:** This crop is grown extensively across the state.