

04/04/2024

TOPICS COVERED

1. SC to list pleas on verifying count in EVMs before polls (GS Paper II: Electoral Reform)
2. Nuclear power key to India's development, says report (GS Paper III: Environment)
3. National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) (GS Paper III: Disaster Management)
4. Turning the spotlight on the urban poor (GS Paper III: Employment)
5. Fiscal battle: On borrowings and Kerala's suit (GS Paper II: Center-State Relations)
6. Systems science for a better future (Essay)
7. Living wills implementation lags in India (GS Paper II: Die with Dignity)

National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) (GS Paper III: Disaster Management)

- NDRF is a fund managed by the Central Government of India to specifically address situations arising from natural or man-made disasters.
- **Purpose:** It provides financial assistance for emergency response, relief, and rehabilitation activities in the aftermath of disasters.
- **Established:** Previously known as the **National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF)**, it was renamed under the Disaster Management Act of 2005 (Section 46).
- **Funding:** The fund is primarily contributed by the Central Government, with additional contributions allowed from other sources like **state governments or public donations**.
- **Supplements State Funds:** NDRF acts as a **supplementary source for states when their own State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) is insufficient for a large-scale disaster**.

Best case scenario for India's economic development rests on nuclear power: report

India must prioritise investment in this energy sector and expand related infrastructure if it is to be on track to become developed nation by 2047 and achieve net zero by 2070, says IIM-A study

- A study by academics at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, funded by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India, suggests prioritizing investments in nuclear energy and related infrastructure for India to achieve developed status by 2047 and net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2070.
- Currently, nuclear energy comprises only 1.6% of India's energy mix.
- The study explores various scenarios, including high, medium, and low economic growth, and different focuses on energy sources: nuclear energy, fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage, renewable energy (solar, wind), and a combination of all these.
- Mathematical models were used to estimate the energy mix required by 2030 and 2050 to achieve net zero emissions by 2070, considering factors like India's population achieving a human development index comparable to Western European countries and the decreasing cost of energy access.
- The most favorable scenario projects emissions reaching net zero by 2070, with nuclear power increasing five-fold from current levels to 30 GW by 2030 and 265 GW by 2050.
- In this scenario, nuclear power's contribution to India's total energy is projected to rise from 4% in 2030 to 30% by 2050, while the share of solar power decreases from 42% in 2030 to 30% in 2050.

Uranium availability

- Solar energy currently represents 16% of India's installed generation capacity, while coal accounts for 49%.
- Achieving the idealistic figures proposed for nuclear energy would require a doubling of investments and the availability of uranium, a critical fuel restricted by international embargo, in necessary quantities.
- According to Amit Garg, Professor at IIM Ahmedabad and lead author of the study, there is no single solution ("silver bullet") to achieve net zero emissions, emphasizing the need for a variety of technologies in India's energy mix.
- Coal is expected to remain a significant component ("backbone") of India's energy system. If the country aims to phase down coal within the next three decades, it would need to invest in alternative sources like nuclear power, alongside flexible grid infrastructure and storage to support renewable energy integration.
- The transition towards achieving net zero emissions would require an estimated investment of ₹150-200 lakh crore between 2020-2070, as per the report's findings.

India among countries mulling telescopes on, around the moon

- Astronomers are excited about the possibility of **deploying high-resolution telescopes on the moon** and in orbit around it to explore the universe.
- One such proposal is **PRATUSH, initiated by India.**
- **Optical telescopes on Earth collect visible light but face challenges due to atmospheric interference, including pollution obscuring the skies.**
- **Radio telescopes, which detect radio waves, also encounter difficulties such as interference from radio and TV signals, as well as electromagnetic 'hiss' from radar systems, aircraft, and satellites.**
- **Additionally, Earth's ionosphere blocks radio waves from outer space, further complicating observations.**

A pristine desolation

- Scientists faced challenges with radio telescopes in Earth orbit due to increased radio noise from the entire planet.
- **Placing telescopes on the far side of the moon, away from Earth, is being seriously considered.**
- **The moon's far side offers pristine, airless conditions, providing crystal-clear seeing conditions for optical telescopes during its two-week-long lunar night.**
- Radio telescopes on the lunar far side would be shielded from Earth's radio transmissions and electrically charged plasma winds from the Sun by the moon itself.
- In the past, high costs deterred setting up lunar telescopes, but renewed interest in lunar exploration promises to make it feasible.
- This move could provide astronomers with access to "the most radio-quiet location in the solar system," as stated by The Royal Society.

The oldest light in the universe

- Cosmologists believe the universe began as an infinitesimally small, dense blob that exploded in a Big Bang.
- After the Big Bang, the **universe cooled and expanded, with its blinding light fading into darkness.**
- For about **300,000 to half a billion years after the Big Bang, the universe was in a state of darkness, with only traces of hydrogen and helium.**
- This dark period makes it challenging to directly observe this crucial phase in cosmic history.
- **The darkness ended when the first stars ignited, emitting light and continuing the expansion of the cosmos.**
- The **cosmic microwave background (CMB), the oldest light in the universe, is a faint glow resulting from this expansion, detectable by radio telescopes.**

- Following the CMB scattering, the universe entered a "quiet" period known as the Dark Ages, lasting tens of millions of years.
- During the Dark Ages, gravity began to form the first stars and galaxies.
- Neutral hydrogen in the cosmos during the Dark Ages absorbed some CMB radiation, causing a slight dip in the frequency of spreading radio waves.

China may be the first, again

- Instruments on Earth can't detect a very slight drop in frequency, so scientists are using instruments on the moon instead.
- These moon-based instruments are crucial for detecting signals from the "Dark Ages" of the universe, when there were no stars, as they are free from interference from starlight.
- The Lunar Surface Electromagnetic Experiment (LuSEE Night) is a joint project between NASA and Berkeley Lab, set to launch in December 2025. It will land on the far side of the moon near the equator, opposite from Earth, to minimize radio frequency noise.
- Other moon-bound instruments are also being planned by space agencies like NASA and ESA.
- NASA's Long-Baseline Optical Imaging Interferometer will study magnetic activity on stars and galaxies from the moon's far side.
- ESA plans to launch a radio telescope aboard its lunar lander 'Argonaut' by 2030.
- European projects include detectors for gravitational waves and an infrared telescope in a shadowed crater near the lunar south pole.
- China is also involved with a moon-orbiting radio telescope scheduled for launch in 2026.
- China's Queqiao-2 satellite, which includes a 4.2-meter antenna, was likely placed in orbit around the moon on March 24, serving as a communications relay and radio telescope.

PRATUSH radio telescope

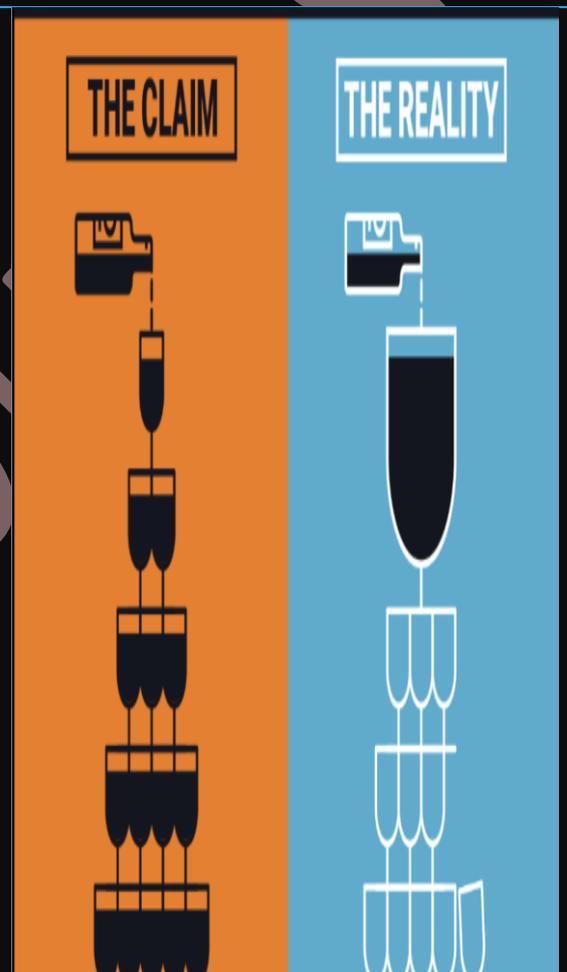
- Deploying instruments on the moon's surface is difficult, so scientists are considering orbiting satellites around the moon instead.
- Dr. Suzuki suggests this alternative approach to orbit the moon and study data when the satellite is behind it.
- Indian scientists plan to use this method with the radio telescope PRATUSH (Probing Reionization of the Universe using Signal from Hydrogen) to study the universe from the moon's far side.
- PRATUSH is being built by the Raman Research Institute (RRI) in Bengaluru with collaboration from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- Initially, ISRO will place PRATUSH into orbit around the Earth before launching it towards the moon.
- Operating in Earth's orbit will have radio frequency interference (RFI), but it offers advantages over ground-based experiments, such as operating in free space and less impact from the ionosphere.
- Once in lunar orbit, PRATUSH will experience ideal observing conditions with minimal RFI and no ionosphere.

- PRATUSH will carry specialized equipment including a wideband antenna, self-calibrating analog receiver, and digital correlator to study radio signals from the Dark Ages.
- As astronomers explore the universe from the moon, they hope to uncover new discoveries about dark energy, primordial black holes, and the fundamental nature of the cosmos.

Turning the spotlight on the urban poor (GS Paper III: Employment)

An analysis of income and employment trends of slum dwellers points to the prospects of economic mobility and decent work for the poor in urban India

- The India Employment Report (IER) 2024, conducted by the Institute for Human Development and International Labour Organization, raises concerns about the trickle-down effect of economic growth on the working class.
- It highlights a 5.4% average real economic growth from 2015-16 to 2022-23 but points out divergent trends between rural and urban areas regarding employment and income.
- Urban areas exhibit a higher unemployment rate of 4.8% in 2000 compared to 1.5% in rural areas, yet urban dwellers earn significantly more, with average monthly earnings being 76% higher for the self-employed, 44% for regular employees, and 22% for casual laborers in urban areas in 2022.



- The coexistence of higher unemployment and wages prompts further investigation into its impact on the urban poor.
- The article explores employment and wage dynamics in areas of deep urban poverty, like slums, and contrasts these findings with the IER 2024 results.
- Despite higher income in urban areas, rural-urban migration has slowed, indicating a decline in migration for economic mobility, particularly among males.

Rural poor households often migrate to slums rather than formal settlements, raising questions about economic mobility and decent work opportunities for the urban poor.



Findings of survey in Kolkata

- The writer and their team conducted surveys in 37 slums across Kolkata in 2012 and again in 2022-23, tracking 29 slums due to redevelopment or eviction.
- The surveys covered 513 slum households in 2012 and 396 in 2021-22, with additional data collected in 2019 to avoid COVID-19-affected years for comparison.
- Unskilled labor remains the most common occupation in Kolkata slums, with a quarter of the working population engaged in such work, mirroring national trends found in the IER 2024.
- Other prevalent occupations include skilled or semi-skilled labor, employment in private organizations, and ownership of petty businesses or small shops.
- However, there has been a decline in the share of employment in skilled and semi-skilled labor by 6% and in private organizations by 3% between 2012-19.
- Conversely, employment in petty businesses or small shops has increased by 9%, while the share of other self-employed has declined by 3%.
- Less popular occupations previously have gained momentum in the last decade, such as truck driving and cleaning (up by 5%) and construction and related work (up by 4%), which had minimal representation in 2012.

Income trends

- The average monthly income in Kolkata slums was around ₹4,900 in 2012, decreasing by 5% at constant prices (2012) in 2019.
- Government employees had the highest income in both periods, but their monthly income decreased by 5% at constant prices in 2019.
- Domestic servants and unskilled workers consistently had the lowest income.
- Construction and related work experienced the highest decline in real income (51%) from 2012 to 2019, followed by petty business or small shop (32%) and government service (32%).
- Medium to large shop owners also lost real income by 26%.

- The popularity of labor work increased, with real income for unskilled labor rising by 33%, while skilled or semi-skilled labor income increased by 12% but with fewer employed in 2019 compared to 2012.
- The IER 2024 reflects similar trends, with an increase in the share of self-employed individuals but a decline in real monthly wages for self-employed and regular workers.
- Casual workers, including laborers, saw an increase in real monthly wages from ₹3,701 to ₹4,364 between 2012-19.
- Despite income declines for higher earners like government servants, there was a doubling of real income for the lowest earners like domestic servants, leading to reduced income inequality in slums.
- Gender composition in Kolkata's occupation categories showed a 3% decline in women's workforce participation in 2021-22 compared to 2012. However, the IER 2024 notes a 1.6% increase in women's workforce participation during 2012-2022, possibly due to increased participation in non-slum areas.

Rise in casual work

- The comparison between the IER 2024 and survey data indicates a rise in casual labor, particularly labor work, due to increasing wages.
- However, casual work often lacks proper working conditions and social security measures.
- Self-employment, such as small businesses, is on the rise but without a proportional increase in income, leading to a large number of low-earning petty business owners in slums.
- Female workforce participation in slums did not mirror the overall rising trend in urban areas, indicating challenges for women in accessing employment opportunities.
- Despite a reduction in income inequality, overall income levels fell, pushing the urban poor deeper into poverty.
- The higher income in urban areas compared to rural India does not necessarily translate to better economic mobility and job quality for the urban poor.
- More public support is needed in urban areas to provide access to affordable food and opportunities for gainful employment.
- The decline in male migration during 2000-08 and 2021 may be attributed to factors such as slow growth in agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors, along with negative employment growth, highlighting the importance of focusing on rural non-farm sectors for economic development.

Fiscal battle: On borrowings and Kerala's suit (GS Paper II: Center-State Relations)

Kerala's suit raises questions on States' right to borrow and the Centre's power to limit it

- The Supreme Court of India referred a suit filed by Kerala regarding the Centre's decision on its borrowings to a Constitution Bench.
- The Court declined to grant an interim order to restore Kerala's borrowing position but opted to examine the extent of the Union government's authority to regulate a State's borrowings.
- The case involves more than just fiscal mismanagement allegations against Kerala's Left Front regime; it's about **constitutional questions on Centre-State relations**.
- At the core of the dispute is **Article 293**, which empowers States to borrow money within limits set by their legislature, with the Union's consent for further loans.

Article 293 of the Indian Constitution deals with the borrowing powers of states within India.

1. **Executive Power of States to Borrow:** This article states that the executive power of a state allows it to borrow money within India, using the Consolidated Fund of the State as security. However, this borrowing is subject to **limits set by the state legislature through laws**. Additionally, states can provide guarantees for loans within these limits.
2. **Government of India's Role:** The central government (Government of India) has the authority to lend money to states or provide guarantees for loans raised by states, as long as certain conditions laid down by Parliament are met. The funds required for such loans are drawn from the Consolidated Fund of India.
3. **Consent Requirement:** A state cannot raise a loan without the consent of the Government of India if there are outstanding parts of loans previously made by the central government to that state or for which guarantees have been provided. This ensures proper coordination between state and central finances.
4. **Conditions for Consent:** If the Government of India grants consent for a state to raise a loan, it may impose certain conditions as it deems necessary.

- Kerala challenges the Union's decision to include borrowings by State-owned enterprises and liabilities on its public account in its **'Net Borrowing Ceiling'**.
- The Union government amended the **Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act in 2018 to cap 'general government debt' at 60% of GDP**, aiming to prevent off-budget borrowings.
- Kerala argues that unlimited State government borrowing will raise borrowing costs and crowd out private sector borrowers.
- Kerala's crisis highlights concerns about revenue distribution and fiscal space, especially for States excelling in social indicators like Kerala.
- **With revenue sources shifting to a GST-sharing system, fiscal space is crucial**, and the Supreme Court will determine the balance between Centre's strictness on borrowing limits and upholding federal norms.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Question: How have the recommendations of the **14th Finance Commission** of India enabled the states to improve their fiscal position? (150 words/10 Marks) (UPSC 2021)

ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce the answer with a briefly define the Finance Commission of India and its role in Centre-State financial relations.

- Then outline the key recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission, particularly those focused on improving states' fiscal position.
- Further explain how each recommendation directly impacted revenue, autonomy, responsibility, and performance, resulting in enhanced fiscal health for the states.
- Conclude by summarizing how the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations strengthened states' fiscal positions.

ANSWER

Finance Commission of India is a constitutional body established under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. Every five years, it recommends the distribution of financial resources between the Center (Union Government) and the States. A state's financial health, encompassing revenue, expenditure, debt, and overall financial sustainability.

Key Recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission

- **Increased Devolution of Tax Share:**
 - Raised the states' share in the Center's divisible pool of taxes **from 32% to 42%**, providing a significant boost to state revenues.
- **Grants-in-aid:**
 - Rationalized grants to States, providing targeted support for specific needs while also increasing fiscal responsibility for the states.
 - Introduced performance-based incentive grants.
- **Restructuring of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS):**
 - Reduced the number of CSS, allowing states more flexibility in implementing development programs.
 - Increased the share of funds untied from central control.

How Recommendations Improved States' Fiscal Position

- **Enhanced Revenue:** The increased share of taxes significantly augmented states' available resources, bolstering their budgets.
- **Greater Fiscal Autonomy:** States gained greater control over resource allocation and spending decisions, promoting efficient and tailored use of funds.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Reduced reliance on central grants and increased devolution encouraged states to improve revenue generation and expenditure management.
- **Focus on Performance:** Incentive structures within grants encouraged states to adopt financially sound practices.
- **Addressing Regional Disparities:** The Commission considered factors like backwardness and fiscal needs in its recommendations, aiming to level the playing field between states.

Thus, the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission have played a crucial role in empowering states to improve their fiscal position. By increasing the share of central taxes, providing untied grants, and strengthening decentralized governance, the Commission has promoted fiscal federalism and empowered states to address their developmental priorities more effectively. However, sustained efforts are required to address remaining challenges and ensure the efficient utilization of resources for sustainable development across states.

2nd Way to write this answer

The Finance Commission proposed a substantial increase in the share of states in the divisible pool of central taxes from 32% to 42%. This augmentation in the share of central tax revenues has provided states with a larger revenue base, thereby enhancing their fiscal capacity.

Key Recommendations and its impact

- With more resources at their disposal, states have been able to undertake a wider range of developmental activities and address pressing socio-economic challenges.
- The Commission advocated for a greater portion of central funds to be transferred to states in the form of untied grants.
- This shift from tied grants to untied funds has provided states with greater flexibility in resource allocation, allowing them to allocate funds based on their specific developmental priorities and needs.
- Consequently, states have been able to exercise greater autonomy in planning and executing development projects, leading to more efficient utilization of resources.
- Furthermore, the Commission recommended an increase in grants to rural and urban local bodies, strengthening decentralized governance and local-level service delivery. By allocating funds directly to local bodies, states have enhanced their capacity to deliver essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure at the grassroots level.
- This has not only improved the quality of governance but also fostered greater citizen participation in decision-making processes.
- Moreover, the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission have contributed to improving the overall fiscal health of states by enhancing their revenue mobilization capacity. With a higher share of central taxes and untied funds, states have experienced a significant increase in their revenue resources, reducing their dependence on central grants.
- This has allowed states to undertake developmental initiatives, invest in critical infrastructure, and address socio-economic challenges more effectively.

Challenges

- However, it is essential to acknowledge that while the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission have provided states with greater fiscal autonomy, challenges and constraints persist. States need to exercise fiscal discipline and prudence to ensure effective utilization of resources and avoid fiscal deficits.
- Additionally, there is a need for capacity building initiatives to enhance states' capacity for efficient financial management, including budget planning, revenue administration, and public expenditure management.

Thus, the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission have played a crucial role in empowering states to improve their fiscal position. By increasing the share of central taxes, providing untied grants, and strengthening decentralized governance, the Commission has promoted fiscal federalism and empowered states to address their developmental priorities more effectively. However, sustained efforts are required to address remaining challenges and ensure the efficient utilization of resources for sustainable development across states.

Dangerous game: On Patanjali Ayurved's claims

Commercial interest should not be allowed to override public health and safety

- The Supreme Court of India issued a contempt notice against Patanjali Ayurved for misleading advertisements violating the **Drugs and Magic Remedies Act** despite assurances not to do so.
- Baba Ramdev, co-founder of Patanjali, faces **perjury proceedings** along with contempt for the misleading ads.

- The Court criticized the government for turning a blind eye to Patanjali's promotion of Coronil as a COVID-19 cure.
- The government was urged to clarify its stance on complicity in allowing false claims.
- Patanjali continued making false claims, including about Coronil and cures for non-communicable diseases, despite warnings and penalties.
- The company's defiance, supported by government inaction, led to a contempt notice from the Court.
- The absence of restraining orders from the government raised suspicions of tacit support for Patanjali.
- Favoritism in health matters can be dangerous, as commercial interests may override public health and safety concerns.

Systems science for a better future (Essay)

Rather than specialised sciences focused on parts, a higher-level science is required — one of holistic, self-adaptive systems

- The Pew Research Center conducted a survey in 2023 across various countries to measure preferences for authoritarian rulers versus multi-party democracy.
- Results from the survey showed significant percentages in favor of authoritarian rulers in both the Global South and the West.

Authoritarianism refers to a system of government characterized by strong central power and limited political freedoms. In such systems, the ruling authority exercises strict control over political processes, civil liberties, and public discourse, often suppressing dissent and opposition.

Examples: North Korea

Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, opposition parties face significant obstacles, and political opponents have been subjected to harassment and intimidation.

China, the government tightly controls the internet and social media platforms

Saudi Arabia, for example, public gatherings and political activism are strictly controlled

- In the Global South, countries like India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Brazil exhibited high percentages favoring authoritarian rulers, with India at 85%.
- Even in the West, significant numbers of citizens in the United Kingdom (37%) and the United States (32%) expressed preference for authoritarian rulers.
- Trust in government economic policies has dwindled globally, with a widening gap between the very rich and the rest of the population.
- Large corporations and financial institutions are influencing governments to enact policies that favor them, often at the expense of labor rights and environmental sustainability.
- The growth of the global economy and population has led to environmental crises, including the overuse of fossil fuels and water scarcity.
- India, despite being highly populous, faces challenges in environmental performance, ranking poorly in global indices like the Environment Performance Index.

- **Inequality in India is increasing**, despite efforts to boost GDP, leading to economic and environmental degradation.

The science of systems

- The text emphasizes the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of various aspects to comprehend how the world operates.
- **It criticizes the fragmentation of sciences into narrow specializations, leading to a lack of cross-disciplinary learning.**
- Scientists often focus deeply on their specific fields without considering broader implications or learning from other disciplines.
- **There's a concern that as sciences advance, experts become knowledgeable about narrower subjects, losing sight of the bigger picture.**
- **Politics and economics are highlighted as integral components of complex social systems, but their interactions are not fully understood.**
- **Economics, which emerged from philosophy and humanities, is criticized for its inability to comprehend societal functioning, often favoring free market ideologies.**
- Specialization in fields like medicine and climate science may lead to advancements in specific areas but can overlook broader implications and impacts on society.
- **High-tech solutions may address specific issues within complex systems but may not consider the overall health and well-being of society.**
- The text suggests that human intelligence, derived from systems like nature, cannot fully understand or control those systems.
- It criticizes the belief that science can conquer nature, warning that such arrogance threatens humanity's existence.
- In times of uncertainty, people seek certainty from leaders, godmen, and technologists who claim to possess knowledge and power.
- **The text highlights the negative consequences when leaders rely on economists and scientists with limited understanding to shape policies, harming both people and the environment.**
- It references **philosopher Isaiah Berlin's classification of thinkers into "hedgehogs" (focused on one big idea) and "foxes" (knowledgeable about many things).**
- Great writers like **Leo Tolstoy, according to Berlin, possess attributes of both hedgehogs and foxes, understanding fundamental truths while appreciating the complexity of existence.**
- Instead of specialized sciences, the text advocates for a higher-level science that considers holistic, self-adaptive systems, including human behavior.
- This proposed science should encompass three components: systems being (humility), systems thinking (recognizing patterns), and systems acting.

Enterprises for cooperation

- Organizations focused on cooperation, rather than competition, are needed to improve the world for everyone.
- It contrasts the purposes of business corporations and armies (profit and power) with that of families (well-being of members).

- Families exemplify cooperation despite natural differences, such as sex and generational abilities, for the benefit of all members.
- **Women's contributions to family and societal well-being are often undervalued and not reflected in economic measures like GDP.**
- While economists highlight low female labor force participation, women historically contribute significantly to their families and communities.
- The text advocates for a shift towards a more caring approach, suggesting that women, as natural family builders and facilitators, can contribute to this change.
- It proposes that men should learn from women's caring ways rather than expecting women to adopt competitive behaviors traditionally associated with men.

Living wills implementation lags in India (GS Paper II: Die with Dignity)

State governments are reluctant to wade in; the area is complex and requires attention from medical and legal experts

- In early March, 30 people in Thrissur, Kerala, executed living wills.
- **Living wills have been legal since 2018, following a Supreme Court decision.**
- The decision **allows terminally-ill patients to withhold or withdraw treatment and die with dignity.**
- Living wills enable patients to make medical care choices for situations where they can't communicate their wishes.
- Despite the legal provision, the process for living wills is unavailable in most of India.
- **Officials are hesitant to implement the procedure without direct orders and guidance from State governments.**

The Court's procedure

- **Initially, the process for executing living wills created by the Supreme Court was overly complex and burdensome.**
- The Court was concerned about potential abuse of the process by individuals with ulterior motives.
- One requirement was that living wills had to be countersigned by a judicial magistrate, which proved to be impractical.
- As a result, few living wills were executed in the first five years after the judgment.
- **In January 2023, the Court recognized the flaws in the process and streamlined it to make it more feasible.**
- **Under the streamlined procedure, living wills must be signed in the presence of two witnesses and attested before a notary or gazetted officer.**
- **They are then handed over to a "competent officer" in the local government who acts as a custodian.**

- If the patient becomes terminally ill and unable to make decisions, the **treating doctor can authenticate the living will** against the copy held by the **custodian or digital health records**.
- However, most local governments have not designated custodians for living wills, and there is no clear protocol for authentication through digital health records yet.
- In Maharashtra, for example, a public interest litigation had to be filed in the High Court of Bombay to appoint custodians.
- Despite making a living will, its implementation is not guaranteed.
- Guidelines mandate that decisions to withhold or withdraw treatment must be certified by a primary medical board and confirmed by a secondary medical board.
- The secondary board requires a doctor nominated by the chief medical officer, making it dependent on hospital infrastructure.
- This setup means terminally-ill patients may not be able to make crucial medical decisions even if they have living wills.
- **Officials, like many individuals, feel uncomfortable with topics like death and end-of-life care, contributing to the implementation challenges.**
- **Ambiguities in guidelines and lack of clear definitions, such as "next of kin," further complicate decision-making.**
- **Disagreements among family members** regarding medical care decisions lack clear legal resolution.
- Officials hesitate to act without clear directives from superiors and detailed processes established by the State government.
- They prefer specific orders and procedures to guide decision-making rather than exercising discretion.

The road ahead for States

- State governments are hesitant to address the complexities of implementing living wills, which require **expertise from medical and legal professionals**.
- **While Haryana issued directions for civil surgeons to follow the Supreme Court judgment, it didn't provide essential guidance or protocols for implementation.**
- In contrast, Odisha is taking a more thorough approach by forming a committee of experts to develop detailed draft orders for implementing the judgment.
- It's hoped that more states will emulate Odisha's approach.
- The Central government could help by creating and publishing model orders and protocols to guide state governments in effectively implementing the judgment.
- **Despite the Supreme Court's ruling six years ago affirming the right to die with dignity, governments have yet to take basic steps to enact it.**
- Without implementation, doctors remain concerned about the **legal implications of honoring patients' wishes, as revealed by a 2023 survey of intensive care doctors.**
- **Effective guidance and consistent action** from all levels of government are necessary to empower doctors to act in the best interests of patients.

India dismisses allegations of abusive conditions at shrimp farms

Asserts all export shipments in compliance with global norms; U.S. human rights group report appears driven by 'vested interests' to dent India's leadership in U.S. shrimp market

- India has become the largest supplier of shrimp to the United States, with seafood exports totaling \$8.09 billion or ₹64,000 crore in 2022-23.
- Shrimp exports accounted for a significant portion of India's total seafood exports, reaching \$5.6 billion.
- India's share in the U.S. shrimp market has increased from 21% to 40% in 2022-23, surpassing competitors like Thailand, China, Vietnam, and Ecuador.
- The Commerce Ministry officials will meet with seafood exporters to address allegations of human rights and environmental abuses raised by a Chicago-based human rights group.
- The allegations, outlined in a report from Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL), focus on working conditions in shrimp hatcheries, growing ponds, and peeling sheds.
- A senior official refuted the allegations, stating that India's shrimp export value chain is certified by the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA), ensuring compliance with standards.
- The official dismissed the allegations as baseless and suggested they may be driven by vested interests aiming to tarnish India's aquaculture sector's reputation in global markets.
- Andhra Pradesh hosts nearly 100,000 shrimp farms, contributing to about 70% of India's total shrimp production.
- Women constitute around 70% of the approximately 8 million jobs in the shrimp sector, with about 200,000 employed in hatcheries and aquaculture farms and the remainder in processing and freezing units.
- The Ministry aims to boost seafood exports to ₹1 lakh crore by 2025-26 and may advise exporters to conduct independent studies on working conditions at shrimp farms to address concerns in key markets like the U.S. and EU.
- The Ministry has urged the Andhra Pradesh government to investigate allegations made in the CAL report, particularly regarding workers facing unsafe and abusive conditions.
- An MPEDA official criticized the CAL report, stating that it selectively highlights isolated incidents without verifying their authenticity and unfairly generalizes practices in India's shrimp farming and processing sector.
- The official emphasized that regulatory agencies in India regularly monitor the shrimp value chain, and audits by entities like the USDA, European Commission, and GAC of China ensure compliance with international regulations.

Cambodia's ex-leader Hun Sen becomes senate president

The position allows Hun Sen to act as acting head of state when the king is overseas.

- Former Cambodian leader **Hun Sen** has been appointed as senate president, a key ceremonial role.
- Hun Sen stepped down from his position in August after ruling Cambodia with an iron fist for nearly four decades, **passing power to his son, Hun Manet.**
- His ruling **Cambodian People's Party (CPP)** secured a landslide victory in national polls held without significant opposition parties.
- In February, the **CPP won 55 out of 58 seats in the senate election**, with the opposition Khmer Will Party securing the remainder.
- Senators unanimously approved Hun Sen as president of the senate during its first meeting **convened by King Norodom Sihamoni.**
- **The position allows Hun Sen to act as acting head of state when the king is overseas.**
- Hun Sen expressed gratitude for the honor and stated his intention to use the ceremonial role to further Cambodia's international diplomacy.
- There are 62 senators, with 58 elected in February and two appointed by the king and the National Assembly, respectively.
- Analysts believe Hun Sen's new role will enable him to maintain dominance in the country, as the senate holds the highest ceremonial role as the political symbol of the nation.
- The appointment is seen as symbolic, particularly due to the king's frequent travels.
- Hun Sen's administration includes several of his relatives, indicating a consolidation of power across the government.
- **Critics highlight issues such as environmental destruction, corruption, and the suppression of political rivals during Hun Sen's rule.**

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTION:

Question 1: Which of the following is used as security when a state government borrows within India?
(A) Consolidated Fund of India
(B) Consolidated Fund of the State
(C) Reserve Bank of India deposits
(D) Public Account of India

Question 2: Which of the following accurately describes the role of the Government of India under Article 293 of the Indian Constitution?
(A) It sets borrowing limits for state governments.
(B) It can lend money to states or guarantee state loans.
(C) It has no role in the borrowing process of state governments.
(D) It approves all loans raised by state governments

Question 3: Identify the primary purpose of Article 293 in the Indian Constitution:
(A) To promote fiscal federalism
(B) To prevent states from accumulating excessive debt.
(C) To ensure central government control over state finances.

(D) To facilitate smooth inter-state financial transactions.

Question 4: Which of the following was the primary aim of the original FRBM Act (2003)?

- (A) Eliminating revenue deficit and reducing fiscal deficit
- (B) Maintaining a specific debt-to-GDP ratio
- (C) Increasing capital expenditure to a certain percentage of GDP
- (D) Eliminating primary deficit

Question 5: Which of the following was introduced by the FRBM Amendment in 2018?

- (A) Complete elimination of fiscal deficit
- (B) Shift of focus to debt-to-GDP ratio
- (C) Strict prohibition on any borrowing by state governments
- (D) Introduction of inflation targeting framework

Question 6: Who publishes the biennial Environmental Performance Index (EPI)?

- (A) World Economic Forum, in partnership with Yale and Columbia Universities
- (B) World Bank, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- (C) International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
- (D) World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

Question 7: Which of the following is NOT one of the key policy objectives that the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) aims to track?

- (A) Climate Change Performance
- (B) Ecosystem Vitality
- (C) Environmental Health
- (D) Trade Agreements and Tariffs

Question 8: The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranks countries based on their performance across various environmental indicators. Which of the following is one of the issue categories considered in the EPI?

- (A) Biodiversity
- (B) Air Quality
- (C) Water Resources
- (D) All of the above

Question 9: In the 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), which country was ranked last?

- (A) China
- (B) India
- (C) United States
- (D) Brazil

Question	Answer and Explanation
<p>Question 1: Which of the following is used as security when a state government borrows within India?</p> <p>(A) Consolidated Fund of India (B) Consolidated Fund of the State (C) Reserve Bank of India deposits (D) Public Account of India</p>	<p>Answer: (B) Consolidated Fund of the State</p> <p>Explanation: Article 293 states that money borrowed by a state government is secured against the Consolidated Fund of that particular state.</p>
<p>Question 2: Which of the following accurately describes the role of the Government of India under Article 293 of the Indian Constitution?</p> <p>(A) It sets borrowing limits for state governments. (B) It can lend money to states or guarantee state loans. (C) It has no role in the borrowing process of state governments. (D) It approves all loans raised by state governments</p>	<p>Answer: (B) It can lend money to states or guarantee state loans.</p> <p>Explanation: The Government of India can extend loans to states or provide guarantees for their loans under conditions specified by Parliament.</p>
<p>Question 3: Identify the primary purpose of Article 293 in the Indian Constitution:</p> <p>(A) To promote fiscal federalism (B) To prevent states from accumulating excessive debt. (C) To ensure central government control over state finances. (D) To facilitate smooth inter-state financial transactions.</p>	<p>Answer : (B) To prevent states from accumulating excessive debt.</p> <p>Explanation: While Article 293 touches on aspects of fiscal federalism and central-state financial relations, its core aim is to introduce checks on state borrowing to prevent unsustainable debt</p>
<p>Question 4: Which of the following was the primary aim of the original FRBM Act (2003)?</p> <p>(A) Eliminating revenue deficit and reducing fiscal deficit (B) Maintaining a specific debt-to-GDP ratio (C) Increasing capital expenditure to a certain percentage of GDP (D) Eliminating primary deficit</p>	<p>Answer: (A) Eliminating revenue deficit and reducing fiscal deficit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminating Revenue Deficit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Revenue deficit occurs when the government's total revenue expenditures exceed its total revenue receipts. This signifies the government is essentially living beyond its means by resorting to borrowing to fund current expenses. ○ Eliminating revenue deficit was a core objective of the FRBM Act, as it sought to ensure the government uses revenue only for meeting its operational expenses and not for financing asset creation. • Reducing Fiscal Deficit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fiscal deficit refers to the difference between the government's total expenditures (both revenue and

	<p>capital) and its total receipts (excluding borrowings).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The FRBM Act aimed to gradually reduce the fiscal deficit – not eliminate it completely – to bring down reliance on borrowing and maintain healthy fiscal balance. • Maintaining a specific debt-to-GDP ratio (Option B): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ While the FRBM Act acknowledged the importance of responsible debt management, it did not have an explicit target for a specific debt-to-GDP ratio. • Increasing capital expenditure to a certain percentage of GDP (Option C): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The FRBM Act did encourage capital expenditure for building infrastructure and other long-term assets, but it didn't mandate a specific percentage of GDP to be allocated. • Eliminating primary deficit (Option D): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary deficit is the fiscal deficit minus interest payments. The FRBM Act targeted fiscal deficit reduction, which would have a consequential impact on primary deficit as well, but eliminating primary deficit was not its sole focus. <p>Why Option (A) is the Primary Aim The FRBM Act, in essence, sought to establish fiscal discipline. Its primary goals of eliminating revenue deficit and reducing fiscal deficit directly align with ensuring:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustainable Public Finances: High revenue deficits and fiscal deficits make government finances vulnerable to debt accumulation and instability. 2. Inter-generational Equity: Borrowing excessively to fund current consumption burdens future generations with debt. 3. Macroeconomic Stability: Large deficits can create inflationary pressure and impact overall economic health.
<p>Question:6 The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act was enacted in: (A) 1998 (B) 2000 (C) 2003</p>	<p>Answer: (C) 2003</p> <p>Explanation: The FRBM Act was enacted in 2003.</p>

(D) 2008	
<p>Question:7 Which of the following was introduced by the FRBM Amendment in 2018?</p> <p>(A) Complete elimination of fiscal deficit (B) Shift of focus to debt-to-GDP ratio (C) Strict prohibition on any borrowing by state governments (D) Introduction of inflation targeting framework</p>	<p>Answer: (B) Shift of focus to debt-to-GDP ratio</p> <p>Explanation: The 2018 FRBM amendment placed greater emphasis on reducing India's debt burden.</p>
<p>Question:8 Under the FRBM framework, which of the following statements is true?</p> <p>(A) It focuses on the Central government without any provisions for States. (B) The Central government sets debt targets for State governments. (C) The FRBM Act has no provisions for flexibility during special circumstances. (D) Both revenue deficit and fiscal deficit targets were removed in 2018.</p>	<p>Answer: (B) The Central government sets debt targets for State governments.</p> <p>Explanation: The FRBM framework and its amendments include provisions for the central government to set debt targets for states based on Finance Commission recommendations.</p>
<p>Question: 9 Who publishes the biennial Environmental Performance Index (EPI)?</p> <p>(A) World Economic Forum, in partnership with Yale and Columbia Universities (B) World Bank, in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (C) International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (D) World Wildlife Fund (WWF)</p>	<p>Answer: (A) World Economic Forum, in partnership with Yale and Columbia Universities</p> <p>Explanation: The EPI is released by the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy and the Columbia University Center for International Earth Science Information Network, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.</p>
<p>Question: 10 Which of the following is NOT one of the key policy objectives that the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) aims to track?</p> <p>(A) Climate Change Performance (B) Ecosystem Vitality (C) Environmental Health (D) Trade Agreements and Tariffs</p>	<p>Answer: (D) Trade Agreements and Tariffs</p> <p>Explanation: While economic factors can influence environmental outcomes, the EPI focuses primarily on environmental indicators related to climate change, ecosystem health, and human health impacts.</p>
<p>Question: 11 The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranks countries based on their performance across various environmental indicators. Which of the following is one of the issue categories considered in the EPI?</p> <p>(A) Biodiversity (B) Air Quality (C) Water Resources (D) All of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (D) All of the above</p> <p>Explanation: The EPI utilizes a wide range of indicators across multiple issue categories, including biodiversity, air quality, water resources, climate change, and others.</p>
<p>Question: 12 In the 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), which country was ranked last?</p> <p>(A) China (B) India</p>	<p>Answer: (B) India</p> <p>Explanation: India was ranked at the bottom of the 2022 EPI, causing discussions and debates on its environmental performance</p>

(C) United States (D) Brazil	
Question 13: Under Article 293, a state government cannot raise loans outside India without the consent of: (A) Reserve Bank of India (B) President of India (C) Government of India (D) State Legislature	Answer: (C) Government of India Explanation: Article 293 specifies that a state cannot raise any loans without the consent of the central government (Government of India) if it already has outstanding loans or guarantees provided by the central government.

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