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1. ‘Mission Antyodaya’ should not fall by the wayside

Background:
In India, **8.88 crore households** are found to be deprived and poor households as per Socio Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 from the **perspective of multi-dimensional deprivations** such as shelterlessness, landlessness, households headed by single women, SC/ST household or disabled member in the family.

These households require targeted interventions under government’s various schemes and programmes in areas such as wage creation, skill generation, social security, education, health, nutrition and livelihood creation.
Therefore, ‘Mission Antyodaya’:

1. In this context, ‘Mission Antyodaya’ seeks to converge government interventions with Gram Panchayats as the basic unit for planning by following a saturation approach by pooling resources - human and financial - to ensure sustainable livelihoods.

2. It is a State-led initiative for rural transformation to make a real difference based on measurable outcomes to the lives of 1,00,00,000 households in 5,000 rural clusters or 50,000 Gram Panchayats in 1,000 days.

3. The ‘Mission Antyodaya’ project of the Government of India launched in 2017-18 (and cast in a convergence framework avowedly to eradicate poverty in its multiple dimensions among rural households) bears great promise to revive the objectives of these great democratic reforms.

4. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Rural Development act as the nodal agents to take the mission forward.

Constitutional provisions:
The Indian Constitution mandates local governments to prepare and implement plans for ‘economic development and social justice’ (Articles 243G and 243W).

Several complementary institutions and measures such as the gram sabha to facilitate people’s participation, the District Planning committee (DPC) to prepare bottom up and spatial development plans, the State Finance Commission (SFC) to ensure vertical and horizontal equity, one-third reservation for women (in most States, now 50%), population-based representation to Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe communities, and so on were introduced to promote this goal.

Even so, India’s decentralisation reforms (with no parallel in federal history) have failed to take the decentralisation process forward in delivering social justice and progress in rural India. Moreover, the revealing statistics brought into the public domain by the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 were ‘demanding’ remedial intervention.

Paradoxically, in a country that spends more than ₹3 trillion every year for the rural poor from the Central and State Budgets and bank-credit linked self-help programmes. Indeed, the ‘Mission Antyodaya’ project was a needed intervention.

Key goal is to identify the gaps in basic needs at the local level:

1. The main objective of ‘Mission Antyodaya’ is to ensure optimum use of resources through the convergence of various schemes that address multiple deprivations of poverty, making gram panchayat the hub of a development plan.
2. This planning process (whose intellectual heritage is traced to the people’s plan of Kerala) is supported by an annual survey that helps to assess the various development gaps at the gram panchayat level, by collecting data regarding the **29 subjects** assigned to panchayats by the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

3. These subjects are broken down into 112 parameters for data collection using detailed questionnaires.

4. Also, data regarding health and nutrition, social security, good governance, water management and so on are also collected.

5. The idea of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to identify the gaps in basic needs at the local level, and integrating resources of various schemes, self-help groups, voluntary organisation and so on to finance them needs coordination and capacity-building of a high order.

6. If pursued in a genuine manner, this can foster economic development and inter-jurisdictional equity.

7. Although two major reports, one on infrastructure and service gaps and the other on a composite index, have been in the public domain, they do not seem to have attracted public discussion.

**Gaps in gram panchayats:**
The ‘Mission Antyodaya’ survey in 2019-20 for the first time collected data that shed light on the infrastructural gaps from 2.67 lakh gram panchayats, comprising 6.48 lakh villages with 1.03 billion population.

The data set updated annually enables development planning sectorally and spatially, from the village level to the State and the country as a whole.

For an insight into the gap report, we may use the State-wise break-up of the score-values. The total number of gram panchayats for all the 18 States that have reported adds up only to 260, constituting only 0.10% of the total 2,67,466 gram panchayats in the country.

If we consider a score range of 70-80 as a respectable attainment level, Kerala tops but accounts for only 34.69% of gram panchayats of the State, the corresponding all-India average is as low as 1.09%. Even for Gujarat which comes next to Kerala, gram panchayats in this bracket are only 11.28%.
Social justice still distant:

1. The composite index data, a sort of surrogate for human development, are also not encouraging.

2. Although only 15 gram panchayats in the country fall in the bottom range below 10 scores, more than a fifth of gram panchayats in India are below the 40 range. All the gram panchayats in Kerala are above this and stand out in contrast to the rest of the States.

3. While in the country as a whole only 7.37% have a composite index in the 70-100 bracket, Gujarat (which tops the list) has 20.5% in the range, followed by Kerala (19.77%) and Karnataka (17.68%).

4. The gap report and the composite index show in unmistakable terms that building ‘economic development and social justice’ remains a distant goal even after 30 years of the decentralization reforms and nearly 75 years into Independence.

5. Government announced the Mission Project in his Budget speech of 2017-18 with the specific target “to make 50,000 gram panchayats poverty free by 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhiji”.

6. Nothing happened but the goal posts have been moved to 2022, to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Independence, on August 15. Removing goal posts is a poor game.

Need of the hour: Rectify these lapses

The scope to reduce the growing rural-urban disparities is tremendous. Given the ‘saturation approach’ (100% targets on select items) of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the possibilities of realising universal primary health care, literacy, drinking water supply and the like are also immense.

But there is no serious effort to converge resources (the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the National Rural Livelihood Mission, National Social Assistance Programme, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, etc.) and save administrative expenses.

Another lapse is the failure to deploy the data to India’s fiscal federalism, particularly to improve the transfer system and horizontal equity in the delivery of public goods in India at the sub-State level. Evidently the Fifteenth Finance Commission has missed it.

Conclusion:

The constitutional goal of planning and implementing economic development and social justice can be achieved only through strong policy interventions.

The government should reduce the growing rural-urban disparities across primary health care,
literacy, drinking water supply and other issues.

The data can be deployed to India’s fiscal federalism. It can improve the transfer system and horizontal equity in the delivery of public goods in India at the sub-State level.

The strong policy interventions can help in the attainment of the constitutional goal of planning and implementing economic development and social justice in India.

2. Disability and the barriers to feminine hygiene

Context:
To create awareness about menstruation, provide safe and hygienic practices to girls, and burst the bubble of taboo, World Menstrual Hygiene Day is celebrated on May 28 all over the world. According to UNFPA, May 28 signifies the menstrual cycle of females.

As a fertility cycle lasts for 28 days, the date is selected to be 28. In the same way, an average period lasts for five days, which gives us the fifth month of the day, May. Therefore, to give it a meaning in itself, May 28 is celebrated to mark the change that occurs in a female body.
Menstruation: Still a taboo:

1. Menstruation is still a taboo in many parts of the world. While it is a natural phenomenon which occurs to every girl after puberty, this has not been addressed as ‘normal’ yet.

2. Many girls do not even have access to sanitary pads, clean toilets, or even safe disposal of used cloth during this time of the month.

3. This not only leads to urinary infections but can cause infertility if not addressed on time.

4. According to the UNICEF, every month, 1.8 billion people across the world menstruate but millions of girls, women, transgender men and non-binary persons among them are unable to manage their menstrual cycle in a dignified, healthy way even in this age.

5. Gender inequality, discriminatory social norms, cultural taboos, poverty and lack of basic amenities like toilets and sanitary products continue to prevent these people from accessing safe menstrual hygiene. And this is where the significance of World Menstrual Hygiene Day lies.

6. Annually the day is marked on 28 May and it seeks to address these problems: cultural, social, infrastructural etc.

7. However, certain groups have been overlooked thus far, including girls and women with disabilities, who face an exceptional burden on account of the intersections between gender and disability.

Census data, The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 ambit:

According to Census 2011, nearly 27 million persons (or 2.2% of the Indian population) are disabled.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 specifies that a person with disabilities has “long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders [her]/his full and effective participation in society equally with others”.

Persons with disability are unable to fully participate in many areas of daily life or may be excluded from doing so as a consequence of impairments/societal barriers or socio-cultural attitudes.

Magnified vulnerabilities:

1. The 2016 Act, while stipulating the rights and entitlements of persons with disability, recognized that women and children are particularly vulnerable, and that certain rights, such as reproductive rights, may be even more neglected or disregarded as compared to others.
2. Despite the intent of the Act and its provisions, the realization of rights and entitlements of persons with disability is poor, especially for those from socially and economically vulnerable groups.

3. In India, girls and women with disabilities from poor households and marginalized communities, bear a **triple burden that exacerbates their vulnerabilities**.

4. **Deeply embedded prejudices and misconceptions** about the reproductive anatomy and abilities of persons with disability result in their being considered asexual, unsuitable for marriage, and incapable of having and raising children.

5. Access to sexual and reproductive health information and services are in turn compromised because of **these social and physical barriers**.

6. Several studies bear testimony to this, and reveal that persons with disability are more likely to be denied information about sexual and reproductive health as compared to those without disabilities.

7. Field experiences reveal compromised menstrual health, a basic physiological aspect of sexual and reproductive health, among persons with disability.

8. For a vast majority of women and girls and persons with gender diverse identities, menstruation is more than a mere physiological process due to preconceived notions about menstruators and menstrual blood being impure or dirty.

9. **Economic and structural factors** create additional hurdles to hygiene management, good health, and health-seeking behaviours.

10. Constraints imposed by limited mobility, cognitive capacities and self-care pose even greater challenges for girls and women with disabilities.

**Collaboration with International bodies for solutions:**

1. The **United Nations Population Fund and WaterAid India** are working together to understand the key challenges and constraints faced by persons with disability with regard to menstrual health and hygiene.

2. The aim is to **identify simple and potentially scalable solutions** based on insights from individuals and organizations working with persons with disability across the country.

3. There are critical areas for improving the menstrual health of persons with disability that have emerged.
a. These include: Accessible and adapted Information, education and communication on menstrual health and hygiene for persons with disability based on their differential needs and capacities, and an enabling socio-cultural environment.

b. For example, while the core messages related to menstruation and menstrual hygiene are the same for all, the manner in which information is communicated will vary depending on the type of disability and extent of impairment.

4. Tactile models accompanied by audio explanations can help people with visual impairment, whereas the same models accompanied by materials with clear step-by-step visuals are useful for people with hearing impairments.

5. The second is appropriate and safe menstrual products and hygiene promotion.

   a. Fewer than two-thirds of girls and women with disabilities aged between 15 to 24 years use hygienic menstrual protection methods (National Family Health Survey 2019-20).

   b. Thus, persons with disability and caregivers need to be educated on the diverse range of products available to enable them to choose the most appropriate product.

6. Persons with intellectual impairments are highly sensitive to materials and may require those that are soft to touch and cause less irritation.

7. Persons with mobility restrictions require products that can be worn for longer as changing them frequently poses a challenge.

8. The third is responsive and inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, including disposal solutions in different settings.

   a. Accessible designs of WASH infrastructure for diverse needs exist and have been created in rural and urban contexts in India and particularly in schools, but need to be scaled up for wider coverage.

9. The fourth is caregivers, both from within the family and institutions are vital for disability focused interventions and must be included as both participants and partners.

   a. From a policy perspective, there is a need to incorporate a disability-inclusive approach within the menstrual health and hygiene work in the country and to implement specific disability focused interventions to facilitate inclusion.
Yes, It is a right:
Globally, more than half of women are currently of reproductive age—and menstruation is a monthly reality for them.

Yet all around the world, many women lack access to menstrual hygiene products or sanitation facilities, either due to limited availability or excessive cost.

Myths and stigmas surrounding menstruation cause some women and girls to miss school or work or go into isolation. Women and men of all ages must be made aware of the importance of menstrual hygiene through an open dialogue and education at home and in school to foster engagement with this often-unspoken issue.

Every menstruating person has the right to menstrual health, irrespective of their gender identity, ability, or socio-economic status.

While India has made significant progress busting stigmas around menstrual health and expanding access to hygiene products, let us not leave anyone behind.

Conclusion:
In the past decade, significant progress has been made in India by government and non-governmental actors with regard to menstrual health and hygiene management (MHHM).

Increased awareness about MHHM, enhanced access to female friendly/gender appropriate sanitation facilities and availability of menstrual products, in particular sanitary pads, are some of the visible outcomes of this progress.

Let us raise the bar to ensure that all menstruating persons — abled or differently abled — enjoy the same dignity and rights every month of the year.

3. India must shift the discourse on abortion rights
Introduction:
Given the **phenomenal expansion in feminist jurisprudence** over the last decade, particularly on the **issue of a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion**.

It now appears quite plain that the central government’s amendment to the abortion laws not only retains the traditional notion that the **state must intervene and decide for women** as to when and in what circumstances abortions may be carried out.

But even the **pathetic measures** set out in the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act 2021 are too little and have come too late. Abortion is a controversial topic in regards to religion, law, politics, etc. **A balanced approach should be taken.**

While abortion is necessary in many cases, but sometimes, it is considered as an **alternative to the contraceptives**.

It should not be seen as a right rather than a necessary evil, as one way or another, a child is dying. So, focus must be on preventing unwanted pregnancies by **ensuring comprehensive sexual education** during childhood and availability of contraceptives.

**Women, pregnant people and transgender persons in India** struggle every day to exert their choice about birthing and their bodily autonomy. Such a self-congratulatory attitude is neither in good faith nor is it factually correct.

About MTP Act, 1971:

1. The idea of terminating a pregnancy cannot originate by choice and is purely circumstantial.

Under the **law (section 3 of the MTP Act 1971)**, the **doctor can perform an abortion in the following situations:**

   a. If the pregnancy would be harmful to the life of the patient or affects her physical or mental health.

   b. The doctor will need to consider the circumstances of the patient to figure out if the pregnancy will harm her **mental health**, on a case-to-case basis.

   c. If there is a good chance that the child would **suffer from physical or mental abnormalities** which would leave him or her seriously handicapped.

   d. If pregnancy occurred as a result of a failure of contraception (but this is only applicable to married women).
e. If pregnancy is a result of sexual assault or rape.

More than half (53%) of abortions in India in the private sector:

1. According to the World Health Organization, six out of 10 of all unintended pregnancies end in induced abortion.

2. Around 45% of all abortions are unsafe, almost all of which (97%) take place in developing countries.

3. As per a nationally representative study published in PLOS One journal in 2014, abortions account for 10% of maternal deaths in India.

4. The recent round of the National Family Health Survey 2019-2021, shows that 3% of all pregnancies in India result in abortion.

5. More than half (53%) of abortions in India are performed in the private sector, whereas only 20% are performed in the public sector — partly because public facilities often lack abortion services.

6. More than a quarter of abortions (27%) are performed by the woman herself at home.

7. In another a fact-finding study published in The Lancet in 2018, 73% of all abortions in India in 2015 were medication abortions, and even though these may have been safe — many of these are illegal as per the MTP Act, if they occur without the approval of a registered medical practitioner.

8. Another 5% of all abortions were outside of health facilities with methods other than medication abortion.

9. These risky abortions are performed by untrained people under unhygienic conditions using damaging methods such as insertion of objects, ingestion of various substances, abdominal pressure, etc.

10. A recent study found that sex-selective abortions in India could lead to 6.8 million fewer girls being born between 2017 to 2030.

Obstacles in the MTP Act, 1971:

1. The MTP Act, first enacted in 1971 and then amended in 2021, certainly makes ‘medical termination of pregnancy’ legal in India under specific conditions.
2. However, this Act is framed from a legal standpoint to primarily protect medical practitioners because under the Indian Penal Code, “induced miscarriage” is a criminal offence.

3. This premise points to a lack of choice and bodily autonomy of women and rests the decision of abortion solely on the doctor’s opinion.

4. The MTP Act also only mentions ‘pregnant woman’, thus failing to recognize that transgender persons and others who do not identify as women can become pregnant.

5. Moreover, the acceptance of abortion in Indian society is situated in the context of population control and family planning.

6. But, most importantly, after more than 50 years of the MTP Act, women and transgender persons face major obstacles in accessing safe abortion care.

The government needs to ensure that all norms and standardized protocols in clinical practice to facilitate abortions are followed in health care institutions across the country.

Access to legal and safe abortion is an integral dimension of sexual and reproductive equality, a public health issue, and must be seen as a crucial element in the contemporary debates on democracy that seeks to provide the just society that abhors all sort of discrimination.

Way Forward:
Reproductive injustice anywhere is a threat to the lives of people everywhere. There is an urgent need in our country to shift the discourse on abortions from just being a family planning and maternal health issue to one of a sexual health and reproductive rights issue.

The situation in India shows that one law alone is insufficient and we must raise the bar on reproductive justice. We must improve our health systems to ensure good quality and respectful abortion care.

As the focus on abortion rights in the U.S. rages, we call upon all to self-reflect and to stand in solidarity with people in the U.S. and other places where reproductive rights are in jeopardy.
4. A concerted effort in re-imagining museums

Context:
On the occasion of International Museum Day on May 18, the Ministry of Culture has made admissions to all museums under its ambit free of cost for a week.

This not only makes our art and culture accessible to all, but also provides us an opportunity to propagate our civilizational heritage.

International Museum Day:
The occasion also gives us an opportunity to look back at the progress that we have made in re-imagining our museums and cultural spaces.

There has been a transformational shift in our perspectives of our heritage and this can be seen in our approach to preserve and promote it.

First, there has been a shift from a museum-centric approach to a cultural spaces approach. Second, we have been able to build museums for specific purposes rather than rely on general purpose museums.

And finally, we have looked at museums with a whole-of-government approach to ensure that museums provide a wholesome experience.

Background of International Museum Day:

1. International Museum Day is an event run by the International Council of Museums (ICOM).
2. Although it began officially in 1977, it can be traced back to 1951 to a meeting called the
Crusade for Museums.

   The ICOM state their mission as:
   a. "The research, conservation, continuation and communication to society of the
      world’s natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible."

3. The participating museums plan events and exhibitions in accordance with a different
theme each year. The **theme in 2022 is 'The Power of Museums'.**

4. The event is a yearly celebration of the role of museums in our society and aims to
engage the public with lots of interesting and creative activities.

5. It also provides a platform to raise awareness of any topics or issues that the museums
feel is important.

6. In 2021, the celebration **amplified its impact by the development of hybrid activities all**
   **around the world**, reaching 89 million Internet users through social media, news articles,
   blog posts, podcasts and more!

**Cultural spaces approach:**
1. India is one of the few continuously inhabited civilisational states that continues to thrive.

2. Therefore, our art, culture and heritage are not just available for viewing in museums but can be **witnessed in our day-to-day activities.**

3. The festivals we celebrate, the deities we worship, the food we eat, and the dance and
   music performances we appreciate are all a testimony to our civilizational ethos.

4. Keeping this in mind, our approach has been to **continuously integrate our culture into our lives** rather than to position them in museums.

5. So, when the Prime Minister brings back stolen heritage from other countries, there is an **attempt to restore it to the place** it was taken from rather than to have it languish in the
   warehouse of a museum.

6. It is with this underlying philosophy that the recently retrieved idol of Goddess
   Annapurna was returned to its rightful place at Kashi Vishwanath temple, Varanasi.

7. There is now a plan to **continue repatriating heritage objects to their original locations**, wherever feasible.

8. Similarly, the attempt to embed art and our civilizational heritage in places such as the
   **new Central Vista Project** also builds on this approach to have cultural spaces that are
   **contiguous and transcend standalone buildings.**
Specific purpose museums:
1. In response to a question in Parliament on the government’s plan to establish a National Tribal Museum in the country, the government at that time responded that there was no such plan.

2. Today, to recognise the role of over 200 tribal freedom fighters across India who participated in about 85 revolts and uprisings against colonial rule, 10 tribal freedom fighter museums are being set up across the country.

3. On the occasion of the first Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas on November 15 last year, the Prime Minister launched the Birsa Munda museum in Ranchi.

4. Similarly, last month on April 14, on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti, PM Modi inaugurated the Pradhan Mantri Sangrahalaya.

5. The museum is a tribute to every Prime Minister of India since independence and showcases the contributions they made and the challenges they faced in their tenure.

6. In tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Prime Minister inaugurated the Statue of Unity in October 2018, which also contains a museum that chronicles the various facets of Patel in great detail.

7. These examples show the transformational journey that has been made in the last eight years.

8. The strategic shift to specific theme-based museums, which have unique content and a definite purpose, also ensures that rich material is on display and the overall experience is wholesome.

Whole-of-government approach:
India is home to over 1,000 museums representing a rich and diverse blend of the cultural, religious and scientific achievements that our civilization has witnessed over the years.

Therefore, the government is taking a whole-of-government approach to provide a wholesome experience to all stakeholders.

This ensures that the spaces are being developed with expertise, fresh ideas and new thought.

The use of digital technology to enhance user experience is not limited to the use of Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, but to widen public access through modernization and digitization of collections and exhibitions.
This is now a work in progress and is visible in the museums that have been recently inaugurated such as the Pradhan Mantri Sangrahalya.

**Challenges that need to be corrected:**
In all these efforts, there are challenges, but none of them are insurmountable.

1. Breaking down silos to forge a **whole-of-government approach** in such a specialized domain requires new skills and perspectives and these are being developed.

2. **Human capacities and domain knowledge** require continued upgradation, and the **new Indian Institute of Heritage** that is being set up as a world class university aims to address these challenges.

3. There are also challenges in modernizing our traditional museums from display spaces of past glory to making them **more interactive, immersive experiences** through technology interfaces, innovative curatorial skills and imaginative storytelling.

4. Compared to new museums, successfully repurposing existing museum spaces needs **more imaginative thinking** and has a different set of challenges.

5. The efforts in digitization and reprography are painstaking processes that can take several years to complete.

**Conclusion:**
With this **renewed mandate of modernization, upgradation, and establishment of new museums**, we are bringing our institutions closer to international standards of museology in the 21st century.

As a firm step in this direction, the Ministry of Culture organised a first-of-its-kind **Global Summit on ‘Reimagining Museums in India’** in February this year.

The learnings from the summit are being incorporated to devise a **blueprint for the development of new museums, nurture a renewal framework, and reinvigorate existing museums**.

It is said that there is nothing more important than an idea whose time has come. **Re-imagining museums in India is such an idea.**
5. In rising heat, the cry of the wilting outdoor worker

Introduction:
More asphalt-melting heatwaves driven by runaway climate change are on the way. The consequences for health and livelihoods are catastrophic, as a third of South Asia’s population depends on outdoor work.

To get to grips with this predicament, India must initiate safety nets — a combination of targeted transfers and insurance schemes to improve the resilience of outdoor workers.

Transfers are best linked to the beneficiaries’ own efforts to build resilience, for example, adapting agricultural practices to the uptick in heatwaves.

Disaster insurance schemes, far too few in India, should enable workers to transfer some of the losses from debilitating heat to public and private insurance providers.

A hotter future in South Asia:
1. The intensity and frequency of heatwaves have soared in South Asia and they are set to worsen in the years ahead.
2. Extreme heat conditions have hit swathes of India, not only in the northern States of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and New Delhi, but now increasingly also in the south.
3. Delhi this month suffered its second warmest April in 72 years, temperatures averaging 40.2°C, and Gurgaon in neighboring Haryana crossed 45°C for the first time.
4. **Labour-intensive agriculture and construction** have become near impossible during afternoons.

5. Over the last 100 years, global temperatures have risen by 1.5°C and, at the current rate, could reach 4°C by 2100 — an unthinkable scenario. **So far in the year, 2022 has been the fifth-warmest year on record.**

6. The prevalence of extreme temperatures around the world suggests that India’s warming is the result not only of local factors but also global warming.

7. In fact, scientists have made clear how greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions exacerbate temperatures in the oceans, leading to soaring temperatures.

8. The culprit in the current plight from intense weather is not Mother Nature but anthropogenic GHG emissions.

9. Crucially, **heatwaves and wildfires are ‘unimaginable’** without human-caused climate change, according to a study done by World Weather Attribution in July 2021.

**High economic losses due to Heat waves and Reversing climate change:**
The impacts are dire across the world. **Heat waves** are proving to be Europe’s deadliest climate disaster.

1. **India faces the largest heat exposure impacts in South Asia.** One study finds that 1,41,308 lives were claimed by acute weather in India during 1971-2019, of which the loss of 17,362 lives was due to unrelenting heat, with mortality rates rising by two-thirds during the time period.

2. Worldwide economic losses, by one estimate, could reach U.S. $1.6 trillion (₹1.6 lakh crore) annually if global warming exceeds 2°C.

3. India, China, Pakistan, and Indonesia, where large numbers of people work outdoors, are among the most vulnerable.

4. India’s outdoor workers, reeling under daily temperatures more than 40°C, are on the frontlines of the climate catastrophe.

5. The **well-being of outdoor workers** will be fundamentally determined by the ability to keep the temperature rise to well below 2°C.

6. **Reversing climate change** is predicated on leading emitters, including India, moving away from carbon-emitting fossil fuels, and replacing them with cleaner, renewable fuels.
7. But such climate mitigation in India and elsewhere is painfully slow, because of a lack of political will in the major emitting countries for decisive action.

Adaptation is essential:
1. In the meantime, hotter temperatures are making outdoor work unbearable, in addition to other dire consequences.

2. Climate mitigation or de-carbonisation of economies on the part especially of the big emitters, such as the United States, the European Union, China, and India remains an imperative.

3. But temperatures are set to rise regardless of mitigation, based on the emission damage already done.

4. That means climate adaptation, or coping with the predicament, is as big a priority as mitigation.

5. A crucial aspect of adaptation is better environmental care that can contribute to cooling.

6. Heatwaves are rooted in degraded land and relentless deforestation, which exacerbate wildfires.

7. Agriculture, being water-intensive, does not do well in heat wave-prone areas.

8. A solution is to promote better agricultural practices which are not water-intensive, and to support afforestation that has a salutary effect on warming.

Health Ministry asks health facilities to be ready for soaring temperatures:

1. Health facilities need to increase resilience to extreme heat by arranging uninterrupted electricity for constant functioning of cooling appliances, installation of solar panels (wherever feasible), measures to reduce indoor heat through cool/green roofs, window shades, shade outside, etc.

2. The Ministry has written to all stakeholders advising that health facilities’ preparedness must be reviewed for availability of adequate quantities of essential medicines, I.V. fluids, ice packs, ORS (oral rehydration solution), and all necessary equipment.

3. Availability of sufficient drinking water at all health facilities and continued functioning of cooling appliances in critical areas must be ensured.
4. It added that rainwater harvesting and recycling plants may also be explored for self-sufficiency in water.

5. Temperatures have already touched 46 degree Celsius at some places, and deviation up to six degrees Celsius from expected normal temperatures has also been reported.

Collaboration for insurance against natural hazards:
1. Insurance schemes can help transfer some of the risks of severe heat faced by industrial, construction and agricultural workers to insurers.

2. Insurance against natural hazards is minimal not only in India but also Asia where less than 10% of the losses are typically covered.

3. Government and insurers need to collaborate in providing greater coverage of losses from extreme weather events, including for calamities from brutal heat.

4. For greater effectiveness, transfers and insurance payments can be tied to investments in resilience made at the local levels, such as restoring the urban environment that has a cooling effect.
   a. Delhi’s Aravali Biodiversity Park is a stand-out example that transformed a barren landscape into forest communities protecting greenery and biodiversity.

5. Transfers could also be linked with mapping of the incidence of heatwaves across locations.

6. The most severely affected areas are also likely to be the most poverty-prone and need stronger insurance packages, including guarantees for crop losses.

7. Incentive schemes could also be tailored to annual changes in the intensity of the hazard.

Way Ahead steps:
1. India offers a range of food and fuel subsidies, but most of them are poorly targeted.
   a. For example, kerosene subsidies provide modest financial benefit to disadvantaged rural households, with only 26% of the subsidy value estimated to reach the poor directly.

2. As the efficiency and the equity of existing subsidies are re-examined, the provision of transfers and insurance linked to building climate resilience should become a priority.

3. The projections of the IMD can guide future scenarios, which the Central government can use to develop subsidies and insurance schemes linked to State and district-level actions for building resilience to climate change.
4. Insurance schemes require public and private sectors to jointly set out risk-sharing mechanisms that outdoor workers can avail of.

5. **Targeted transfers and insurance schemes** can cushion financial hardships, for example, **by improving crop resilience to heatwaves**.

6. Making them part of the Government’s economic programmes is one way to make these safety net policies sustainable and hard to reverse, as international experience with cash transfer programmes shows.

Conclusion:
Response to the current plight of outdoor workers **can be linked to climate adaptation**. Financial transfers can be targeted to help farmers plant trees and buy equipment better suited for the extreme weather.

For example, support for drip irrigation can reduce heavy water usage. **Averting slash and burn agriculture** and **stubble burning** is not only key to cutting air pollution but also **cooling temperatures**.

**Urban green** such as street trees, urban forests and green roofs can help cool urban areas. Workers in cities and villages can benefit from early warning systems and **better preparedness as well as community outreach programmes** during an episode.
1. Joblessness on the rise in India

Context:
After many years of refusing to recognise there is a jobs crisis in India, the government of India, faced with relentless data to the contrary, has now resorted to misinformation.

Regrettably, both pieces show an inadequacy in understanding the jobs situation.

NSO’s Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS):
As compared to the 8% per annum GDP growth in the period 2004-14, and 7.5 million new non-farm jobs created each year over 2005 to 2012 (NSO’s employment-unemployment survey), the number of new non-farm jobs generated between 2013-2019 was only 2.9 million, when at least 5 million were joining the labour force annually (NSO’s Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)).

The NSO itself states clearly that the two surveys provide comparable data; the claim that those two surveys are not comparable is not correct.

Unpaid Family Labour:
1. A claim is made that between 2017-18 and 2019-20, the worker participation rate (WPR) and labour force participation rate (LFPR) is rising, showing improvement in the labour market.

2. The reality is that this rise in WPR and LFPR is misleading. It was caused mostly by increasing unpaid family labour within self-employed households, mostly by women.
3. The claim that manufacturing employment increased between 2017-18 and 2019-20 by 1.8 million is technically correct (based on PLFS).

4. What this ignores is that between 2011-12 and 2017-18, manufacturing employment fell in absolute terms by 3 million, so a recovery is hardly any consolation.

5. **Manufacturing as a share of GDP fell from 17% in 2016 to 15%, then 13% in 2020, despite ‘Make in India’**.

**Stagnation in manufacturing output and employment and contraction of the labor-intensive segment of the formal manufacturing sector:**

1. **Excess rigidity in the formal manufacturing labour market** and rigid labour regulations has created disincentives for employers to create jobs.

2. Industrial Disputes Act has lowered employment in organized manufacturing by about 25% (World Bank Study).

3. Stringent employment protection legislation has pushed employers towards more capital-intensive modes of production than warranted by existing costs of labour relative to capital.

4. **Therefore, the nature of the trade regime in India is still biased towards capital-intensive manufacturing.**

**India seems to be witnessing a joblessness crisis:**

1. The number of new non-farm jobs generated between 2013-2019 was only 2.9 million, when at least 5 million were joining the labour force annually (NSO’s Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)).

2. There has been a massive increase in joblessness of at least 10 million due to COVID-19, on top of the 30 million already unemployed in 2019.

3. There has been a negative growth in manufacturing employment between 2011 and 2020 despite schemes like ‘Make in India’.

4. As against the claim that between 2017-18 and 2019-20, the worker participation rate (WPR) and labour force participation rate (LFPR) was rising, showing improvement in the labour market, this rise was caused mostly by increasing unpaid family labour, mostly by women.
5. MSMEs which are employment-intensive have been hit hard by the pandemic. This does not augur well for non-farm employment generation in India. As against the progressive structural change trend of reducing the proportion of the population indulged in agriculture and allied activities with time, in India between 2019 and 2020, the absolute number of workers in agriculture increased from 200 million to 232 million. This resulted in the depressing of rural wages.

Farm employment:
1. In any case, the recovery of urban employment till March 2021 clearly ignores that urban employment barely captures a third of total employment.
2. Besides, agriculture output may have performed well during COVID, and free rations may have alleviated acute distress.
3. This completely ignores that between 2019 and 2020, the absolute number of workers in agriculture increased from 200 million to 232 million, depressing rural wages — a reversal of the absolute fall in farm employment of 37 million between 2005-2012, when non-farm jobs were growing 7.5 million annually, real wages were rising, and number of poor falling.
4. Rising farm employment is a reversal of the structural change underway until 2014.

Issue of New EPFO data need to look in:
Another dubious argument is offered to supplement the claim that organized formal employment is rising, because new registration in employment provident fund rose in the last two years.

One limitation of EPFO-based payroll data is the absence of data on unique existing contributors.

Employees join, leave and then rejoin leading to large and continuous revisions in EPFO enrolment. There has been a massive increase in joblessness of at least 10 million due to COVID-19, on top of the 30 million already unemployed in 2019.

This happened while the CMIE is reporting the employment rate has fallen from nearly 43% in 2016 to 37% in just four years.

Conclusion:
India needs a new strategy to counter the phenomena of jobless growth. This requires
manufacturing sector to play a dominant role.

“MAKE IN INDIA” initiative a great step forward which will boost the manufacturing.

Decentralisation of Industrial activities is necessary so that people of every region get employment. Development of the rural areas will help mitigate the migration of the rural people to the urban areas thus decreasing the pressure on the urban area jobs.

Complementary schemes like Skill India, Startup India etc. can enhance the skillsets and employment generation

2. Improving cold chain systems

mVacciNation offers last mile supply chain, beneficiary management, & analytics for vaccine distribution

Introduction:
The pandemic has taught us a great deal. We have all become familiar with terms such as variants, waves, vaccine supply chains and quarantine.

It has also encouraged an interest in preventive health technology, especially in vaccines. This interest is understandable, given that India accounts for the second highest caseload of COVID-19 globally.

Once the vaccines were available, the nation had to take on the task of rolling out one of the largest vaccination drives in the world; this of course, is not new to India.

Background of India’s Universal Immunization Programme (UIP):
India’s Universal Immunization Programme (UIP), launched in 1985 to deliver routine immunisation, showcased its strengths in managing large-scale vaccine delivery.
This **programme targets close to 2.67 crore newborns and 2.9 crore pregnant women annually.**

To strengthen the programme’s outcomes, in 2014, **Mission Indradhanush** was introduced **to achieve full immunisation coverage** of all children and pregnant women at a rapid pace — a commendable initiative.

But the pandemic reminded us that vaccines alone do not save lives, vaccination does.

While we have, over the years, set up a **strong service delivery network**, the pandemic showed us that there were weak links in the chain, especially in the **cold chain, which needs to be robust and seamless.**

**Cold chain management:**
The success of any sustainable vaccination programme relies on many factors.

1. A key factor is **cold chain management** because when this fails, the potency or effectiveness of the vaccine is wasted.

2. Nearly half the vaccines distributed around the world go to waste, in large part due to a failure to properly control storage temperatures.

3. In India, close to 20% of temperature-sensitive healthcare products arrive damaged or degraded because of broken or insufficient cold chains, including a quarter of vaccines.

4. Wastage has cost implications and can delay the achievement of immunization targets.

5. Here, **India has strong foundations to build upon.** India’s UIP comprises upwards of 27,000 functional cold chain points of which 750 (3%) are located at the district level and above; the remaining 95% are located below the district level.

6. The **COVID-19 vaccination efforts relied on the cold chain infrastructure** established under the UIP to cover 87 crore people with two doses of the vaccine and over 100 crores with at least a single dose.

7. This effort was supported by the government’s cloud-based digital platform Co-WIN, which helps to facilitate registration, immunizations and appointments, and issues digital vaccine certificates, highlighting the benefits of digitization.

**Digitizing the vaccine supply chain network:**

1. The Health Ministry has been **digitizing the vaccine supply chain network** in recent years through the use of cloud technology, such as with the **Electronic Vaccine Intelligence Network (eVIN).**
2. Developed with support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and implemented by the UN Development Programme through a smartphone-based app, the platform digitizes information on vaccine stocks and temperatures across the country.

3. This supports healthcare workers in the last mile in supervising and maintaining the efficiency of the vaccine cold chain.

4. The role played by supportive infrastructure for cold chain such as a regular supply of electricity cannot be underplayed.

5. In this regard, there is a need to improve electrification, especially in the last mile, for which the potential of solar-driven technology must be explored to integrate sustainable development.

   a. For instance, in Chhattisgarh, 72% of the functioning health centres have been solarized to tackle the issue of regular power outages.

6. This has significantly reduced disruption in service provision and increased the uptake of services.

Building back better and stronger:
COVID-19, which disrupted supply chains across countries and in India too, marks an inflection point in the trajectory of immunization programmes. As we recover from the pandemic, there is an opportunity for us to pivot to newer mechanisms that can help develop unbroken and resilient cold chain systems and thus augment the immunization landscape. Going forward, this will be the only way to ensure access to the last mile with life-saving vaccines, in time.

The integrated solution combines:
Technology: Online real-time information on vaccine stocks and storage temperature to facilitate evidence-based decision-making.

Governance: Systemizing record keeping, upgrading logistics and encouraging good practices to ensure efficient vaccine logistics management.

Human Resources: To empower the state cold chain network by building the capacities of handlers and managers at each stage of vaccine supply.

Conclusion:
As we reflect on the learnings from the pandemic, it is imperative that we look towards a future where the critical arteries that comprise the supply chain of immunization facilities be
strengthened.

India has pioneered many approaches to **ensure access to public health services** at a scale never seen before.

**Robust cold chain systems** are an investment in India’s future pandemic preparedness.

By taking steps towards actionable policies that improve the cold chain, we have an opportunity to lead the way in **building back better and stronger**.

3. Bridging the health policy to execution chasm

![Image of Vision, Mission, and Statement]

**Context:**
In April 2022, the Union government released a guidance document on the **setting up of a ‘public health and management cadre’ (PHMC)** as well as revised editions of the **Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS)** — for ensuring quality health care in government facilities.

For a country where the health focus has traditionally been on medical care or attention on treating the sick, these **two developments to strengthen public health services are welcome**.

**A background, the fallout:**
The **‘public health and management cadre’** is a follow up of the **recommendations made in India’s National Health Policy 2017**.

At present, most Indian States (with exceptions such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha) have a **teaching cadre and a specialist cadre of doctors** involved in clinical services.
This structure does not provide similar career progression opportunities for professionals trained in public health. It is one of the reasons for limited interest by health-care professionals to opt for public health as a career choice.

**Limited interest in Public Health Care: The outcome has been costly for society:**

1. A perennial shortage of trained public health workforce. The proposed public health cadre and the health management cadre have the potential to address some of these challenges.
2. With the release of guidance documents, the States have been advised to formulate an action plan, identify the cadre strengths, and fill up the vacant posts in the next six months to a year.
3. The revised version of the IPHS once again underscores the continued relevance of improved quality of health services through public health facilities.
4. The regular need for a revision in the IPHS is a recognition of the fact that to be meaningful, quality improvement has to be an ongoing process. The development of the IPHS itself was a major step.
5. Nearly two decades ago, in many countries including India, there was limited attention on ensuring quality.
6. Increasing access to health services and improving the quality of care were perceived as a sequential process: first focus on increasing access and then a thought may be given to ensuring quality.

**A continuing role in care:**

A public health workforce has a role even beyond epidemics and pandemics.

1. A trained public health workforce ensures that people receive holistic health care, of preventive and promotive services (largely in the domain of public health) as well as curative and diagnostic services (as part of medical care).
2. A country or health system that has a shortage of a public health workforce and infrastructure is likely to drift towards a medicalised care system.
3. In 2022, there is greater clarity on the role of the public health workforce, which is a remarkable starting point.
4. However, the delay in policy decisions on a public health cadre is also a reflection of a long and tortuous journey of policy making in India.

5. These two new cadres have come up late but the focus now has to be on accelerated implementation.

6. The revised IPHS is an important development but not an end itself. In the 15 years since the first release of the IPHS, only a small proportion — around 15% to 20% — of government health-care facilities meets these standards.

7. This raises a legitimate question on whether development (and revision) of such quality standards is ritualistic practice or whether these are considered seriously for policy formulation, programmatic interventions and for corrective measures.

8. If the pace of achieving IPHS is any criteria, there is a need for more accelerated interventions.

9. Opportunities such as a revision of the IPHS should also be used for an independent assessment on how the IPHS has improved the quality of health services.

About Indian Public Health Standards:

1. **IPHS are a set of uniform standards** envisaged to improve the quality of health care delivery in the country.

2. The IPHS documents have been revised keeping in view the changing protocols of the existing programmes and introduction of new programmes especially for Non-Communicable Diseases.

3. Flexibility is allowed to suit the diverse needs of the States and regions.

4. The IPHS guidelines act as the main driver for continuous improvement in quality and serve as the benchmark for assessing the functional status of health facilities.

5. States and UTs adopt these IPHS guidelines for strengthening the Public Health Care Institutions.

**Imperfect implementation of Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS):**

1. Drafting of well-articulated and sometimes near perfect policy documents, even though in a delayed manner, is a skill which Indian policymakers have mastered well.

2. However, the implementation of most such policies leaves a lot to be desired. The IPHS implementation in the last 15 years is one such example.
3. It is difficult to predict the outcome of the PHMC guidance document; however, the past can guide the process.

4. The **effective part of implementation is interplay**: policy formulation, financial allocation, and the availability of a trained workforce. In this case, policy has been formulated.

5. Then, though the Government’s spending on health in India is low and has increased only marginally in the last two decades; however, in the last two years, there have been a few additional — small but assured — sources of funding for public health services have become available.

6. The **Fifteenth Finance Commission** grant for the **five-year period of 2021-26** and the **Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM)** allocations are available for strengthening public health services and could be used as **catalytic funding** — which should be used in the interim — as States embark upon implementing the PHMC and a revised IPHS.

7. The third aspect of effective implementation, the **availability of trained workforce**, is the most critical.

8. Even the most well-designed policies with sufficient financial allocation may falter because of the lack of a trained workforce.

9. As States develop plans for setting up the PHMC, **all potential challenges in securing a trained workforce should be identified and actions initiated**.

**Helping States in setting up these two new cadres:**

1. One, the **level of interest among States** in implementing the public health and management cadres needs to be explored and a **centre of excellence in every State** should be designated to guide this process.
   
   a. States which are likely to show reluctance **need to be nudged through appropriate incentives**.

2. Two, the **idea of mapping** and an **analysis of human resources** for public health and then scaling up of recruitment are logical.
   
   a. However, it needs to be ensured that in an overzealous attempt to achieve numbers, the **quality of training of the required workforce is not compromised**.
   
   b. **Setting up these two new cadres** should be used as an opportunity to improve and standardise the quality of training in public health institutions.

3. Three, it would take a few years before the PHMC becomes fully functional in the States.
a. However, the implementation process needs to be started in the next few months to avoid the risk of it becoming a low priority.

4. Four, the success of the PHMC would be dependent upon the availability and the equitable distribution of health staff for all other categories at government health facilities.

Therefore, as new cadres are being set, efforts need to be made to fill vacancies of health staff in all other positions as well.

It became clear that ‘epidemic’ and ‘pandemic’ required specialised skills in a broad range of subjects such as epidemiology, biostatics, health management and disease modelling, to list a few.

In the absence of trained public health professionals at the policy and decision-making levels, India’s pandemic response ended up becoming bureaucrat steered and clinician led.

**Conclusion:**

Three years before the COVID-19 pandemic had started, the Indian government had committed, through NHP 2017, to achieve the **goal of universal health coverage** — which envisages access to a broad range (preventive, promotive, curative, diagnostic, rehabilitative) health-care services which meet certain quality standards, at a cost which people can afford.

The **public health and management cadres and the revised IPHS** can help India to make progress towards the NHP goal. To ensure that, State governments need to act urgently and immediately.

Every struggle in the pandemic response was a reminder that a clinician, no matter how skilled in the art of treating a patient, or a bureaucrat, no matter how experienced in administration, could not fulfil the role of the epidemiologists and public health specialists, who are specially trained to make a decision when there is limited information about a pathogen and its behaviour.
4. The technical higher education market dissected

Introduction:
In India, the technical higher education sector — dominated by private players — can be best understood only in market terms: be it the exponential growth in institutions or in enrolment as well the dynamics of the decisions made by the regulatory bodies.

It is no accident that much of the growth in the technical higher education has been after 1991, when the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) became functional in its present avatar.

Supply exceeds demand:
1. During the three decades immediately preceding the present (1961 to 1991), the number of technical higher education institutions had increased five times to go up from 53 to 277.

2. During the same period, enrolment in technical higher education had increased six times — 0.37 lakh to 2.16 lakh. Importantly, most of the growth has been in the government sector.

3. During the past three decades (1991-2020) the institutions have gone up by 40 times (at 10,990), with the intake capacity rising 15 times to touch 32.85 lakh. Much of this expansion has been in the private sector.

4. Going by the number of students who appear for the joint entrance examination and other entrance tests conducted by various agencies and different higher educational institutions, the total demand for technical higher education appears to be no more than 20 lakhs.
5. Clearly, supply far exceeds the demand for technical higher education, probably in the hope that the supply would create its own demand.

6. Declining demand notwithstanding, these institutions have been adding more capacity, though some market corrections seem to have happened during the past few years.

7. The number of institutions and intake capacity in 2021-22 have come down to 8,997 and 30.87 lakh, respectively.

**Student-teacher ratio:**

1. The AICTE prescribes a **minimum specific student-teacher ratio (STR)**, ranging from 7.5 to 20, depending on the type and level of programmes and disciplines under its domain.

2. As an overwhelming majority of the institutions are unable to admit students to capacity, their STR, at least on paper, has gone down from 5.5 in 2012-13 to 3.0 in 2020-21.

3. A lower STR could mean better quality but in their case, this only means higher cost adversely impinging on their economic sustainability.

4. Their revenue models adversely impacted, they are unable to create quality infrastructure and human resources and become trapped in a vicious cycle of mediocrity.

5. In market terms, they are the price takers and should be willing to offer their products and services at the lowest possible prices.

6. In a typical market framework, such businesses would either improve their quality or slash their prices to survive.

7. Apparently, it does not happen in the higher education market, except during the past two years when market corrections led to a drop of 18.3% and 6.01% in the number of institutions and intake capacity, respectively.

**Appealing to the regulator:**

1. They prefer regulators coming to their rescue. In the past they urged doing away with the requirements of a certain percentage of marks in the school board.

2. Recently, they could convince the regulator to abolish the condition of studying science and mathematics at the senior secondary/intermediate level in schools, though the AICTE retracted from the decision quickly.

3. Such suasions have obviously been intended to widen the catchment for admission.

4. Institutions have also been helped by raising the STR — from 15 to 20 in the undergraduate programme in engineering, for example.
The Veblen Effect:
1. These apart, technical higher educational institutions are differentiated and highly hierarchical.

2. Being highly selective, they are the price makers. Left to market forces, they may resort to an exploitative pricing policy. They generally resist capacity expansion ostensibly out of fear of dilution in quality.

3. Artificial scarcity suits them fine and at times enables them to use higher fees as a strategy for brand building.

4. After all, the Veblen Effect (what is expensive is perceived to be excellent), is as applicable to higher education as it is to luxuries.

5. Such institutions hate pricing regulations that limit their ability to charge as much as they wish.

6. They are naturally disappointed with the news that the AICTE is contemplating prescribing a ceiling limit on fees that these institutions can charge from their students.

7. A bulk of poor-quality institutions are happy about the prospect of a certain minimum level of fees being made mandatory.

Process in Higher Education:
1. Process in higher education currently is constrained and driven by traditional requirements for credentialing.

2. These requirements are organized around measurements of student seat time required to get academic credit, and number of credits required to get a certificate or degree.

3. These requirements are major drivers of infrastructure and staffing levels, and the associated time requirements for certification give a level of predictability to the profit formula.

4. However, the rising acceptance of competency-based education and prior learning assessment greatly changes this key organizational principle of Process.

5. Competency based education depends on a demonstration of competencies that have been defined by experts in a field.

6. Students advance when they can demonstrate those competencies, no matter how, when, and where they learned them.
7. Similarly, **prior learning assessment** evaluates college-equivalent knowledge gained through such activities as workplace training.

8. These approaches obviously greatly increase the ways in which the new Resource of off-the-shelf courses can be utilized.

9. Competency based education and prior learning assessment remove "time" from the definition of a credential, and changes the way we look at transfer credits, etc.

10. It also turns attention away from the "inputs" view of quality of education, to a direct focus on "outputs".

11. **Competency based education** and **prior learning assessment** certainly will impact different classes of educational business models differently, but is likely to have some effect on almost all.

12. The **rise of alternative credentialing** e.g., badges and certificates of competency **creates a new aspect of process**.

13. Combined with the new resource of courses discussed above, this could present a major challenge to many traditional business models.

**Steps for the AICTE:**

Technically, the **AICTE** is empowered to take ‘all such steps as it may think fit for the **coordinated and integrated development and maintenance of standards**’.

Specifically, it can “fix norms and guidelines for charging tuition and other fees” as well. Will this move not be construed as helping the institutes bettering their balance sheets, rather than safeguarding the interest of students.

After all, the AICTE Act mandates it “to take necessary steps to prevent commercialisation of (in) technical education”.

The rest could be left to the State-level fee fixation committees. This would be in the **true spirit of federalism** which expects States to be a responsible partner in the process.

**Innovation is also critically linked to organizational strategies: What’s the solution?**

1. **Innovators** should build heavyweight teams to support process changes and autonomous units to support models that risk being perceived as running against the grain of organizational priorities.
2. A heavyweight team is more than just another committee. It’s a group of employees pulled out of their departmental silos that have the authority to put new processes in place.

3. This team can’t just be charged with coming up with recommendations—it must be empowered to design new processes to support an innovative model.

4. Autonomous units need even more separation from the way the rest of the campus does business.

5. Institutions, like Northeastern University and Southern New Hampshire University, have been successful at building out totally new models with different priorities.

6. But they have let those innovations come together in separate office spaces with distinct cultures and practices.

7. The goal is to let the innovation change the university and to avoid having the feedback loop run the other way.

Conclusion:
The changing environment for higher education is exerting increasing pressure on many institutions of higher education.

Change of some type is increasingly inevitable for most institutions. Understanding how the elements of the new and still evolving environment can be utilized best to create greater institutional effectiveness and stability is essential for the successful leader in turbulent times.

The business model approach provides a powerful tool for understanding the nature of the environmental changes and the areas of organizational strength and weakness with respect to those changes. It also can suggest options for effective institutional response.
5. Has Kerala changed its stance on the NEP?

Introduction:
The introduction of the National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP), Kerala has viewed the policy document with serious disagreements. However, two years down the line, the State has begun to warm up to some of the provisions, albeit with considerable hesitance.

What prompted the State’s initial apathy to NEP, 2020?

1. Entrusted by the State Government to study the impacts of NEP, 2020, the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC) had constituted a committee chaired by noted economist Prabhat Patnaik which concluded that the policy is retrograde and presented an exclusionary vision of education.

2. It also raised concerns over the possible challenges that the scheme posed for access, equity, social justice and the reservation system.

3. The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) also felt NEP, 2020 sought to align the country’s education policy with the needs of private investment and techno-capitalism, while ignoring democratic principles and the federal system.

4. Some provisions, including the move to permit multiple entry and exit in academic programmes, were feared to legitimize dropouts.

5. The government also claimed the proposed National Research Foundation and the Board of Governance of Higher Education Institutions would “kill the democratic spirit of universities and their autonomy”.

How has the State altered its position?
1. In 2021, the government felt an urgent need to overhaul the higher education sector that appeared to have stagnated in contrast to school education in the State which has constantly topped national rankings.

2. That it emerged victorious on the poll plank of transitioning Kerala into a knowledge-based economy and arresting brain drain from the State led the government to embark on a series of reforms including relaxing its approach on academic autonomy and privatization.
   a. Example: The kerala State conference approved the ‘Nava Keralam’ vision document presented by CM of kerala which mooted private investments in higher education.

3. The seeds of change were sown, Government had, in 2020, constituted a committee to explore the possibility of establishing an ‘Education City’ in Kerala to offer courses in collaboration with foreign universities.

4. Notably, the panel included an official of one of the largest private universities in the country.

How has the government’s perception about the policy changed?
1. Of late, the government has begun to feel an urge to address the systemic rigidity that hindered multidisciplinary research and inter-university collaborations.

2. Besides, there has been a growing clamor to liberate universities from the clutches of political machinations and free colleges from the overbearing influence of universities.

3. A section of the academic community also called for relieving universities of their affiliation management chores and enabling them to focus on research.

4. In order to address such lacunae, the LDF Government has constituted three commissions to reform the higher education sector, the examination system and the statutory laws that govern universities.

What hinders its implementation?
Despite having adopted a pragmatic stance towards NEP, 2020, the government is yet to frame guidelines on implementing its provisions in the State.

It hoped to customize the reforms to suit its ideals of affirmative action and social justice. Various logistical issues such as creating new posts that would burden the State exchequer amid
the fiscal crunch have also put a spanner in the works.

**Reforms required areas:**

**Multi-modal education:**
*Online, open and multi-modal learning* have been promoted vigorously by both schools and higher education institutions.
This initiative has helped in reducing the learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic and will contribute greatly to achieving education in remote and inaccessible parts of the country.

SWAYAM, DIKSHA, SWAYAM PRABHA, Virtual Labs and other online resource portals have all seen a sharp rise in student registrations.

In addition to the above, UGC has notified Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online Programmes Regulations under which 59 Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are offering 351 full-fledged Online programmes and 86 HEIs are offering 1081 ODL programmes.

The permissible limit of online content in a programme has also been raised to 40%.

**Innovation and start-ups:**
To encourage an *ecosystem of start-up and innovation*, 2,774 Institution Innovation Councils have been set up in HEIs in 28 States and six UTs.

**Promotion of Indian languages:**
Stress is being paid to *multilingualism in education* and testing to ensure that lack of knowledge of English does not impede the educational attainment of any student.

With this objective in mind, states are publishing bilingual/ trilingual textbooks at the foundational level and content on the DIKSHA platform has been made available in 33 Indian languages.
NIOS has introduced *Indian Sign Language (ISL)* as a language subject at the Secondary Level.

However, on a large scale, today remarked that **NEP-2020 has created a suitable platform** in universities and other educational institutions for **translation of research, ideas and innovations into actions** for betterment of society.

**Conclusion:**
While the Union Government has maintained that the NEP, 2020 is advisory in nature, many educationists feel that the State would do well to be mindful of the carrot-and-stick approach of the University Grants Commission.
The universities could be arm-twisted into implementing the provisions to avail themselves of various benefits in the future.

The 2020 NEP is built on ground pillars including access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability. Its amendments aim to look realistic and towards the fast-pacing future.

6. Ujjwala scheme | 90 lakh beneficiaries do not get refills

![Low usage chart]

Introduction:
In the last financial year, 90 lakh beneficiaries of present government’s flagship welfare scheme Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana did not refill their cylinders.

And over 1 crore beneficiaries refilled their cylinders only once. These revelations come in the backdrop of much feted “labharthi” or beneficiary class.

This was revealed in reply to an Right to Information (RTI) application filed by activist to the three oil marketing firms Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL).

About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:
The scheme was originally launched on May 1, 2016 in Ballia, Uttar Pradesh by PM Narendra Modi with a target of releasing 8 crore connections by March 2020.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana is a scheme of the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas for providing LPG connections to women from Below Poverty Line (BPL) households.

So far over 9 crore connections under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has been released. The PMUY 2.0 was launched in financial year 2021-22 making a provision for release of...
additional one crore connections.

Impact of household air pollution:
WHO mentions the impact of household air pollution that is caused by unclean cooking fuel, on health. It mentions that of 3.8 million deaths due to this pollution:
1. 27 percent of deaths are due to pneumonia.
2. 18 percent of deaths are due to stroke.
3. 27 percent of deaths are from ischaemic heart disease
4. 20 percent of deaths are from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
5. 8 percent of deaths are from lung cancer.

Need of launching the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:
1. In India, the poor have limited access to cooking gas (LPG). The spread of LPG cylinders has been predominantly in the urban and semi-urban areas with the coverage mostly in middle class and affluent households.
2. But there are serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuels.
3. According to WHO estimates, about 5 lakh deaths in India alone due to unclean cooking fuels.
4. Most of these premature deaths were due to non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer.
5. Indoor air pollution is also responsible for a significant number of acute respiratory illnesses in young children.
6. According to experts, having an open fire in the kitchen is like burning 400 cigarettes an hour.

Beneficiaries of PMUY enhanced the positive multiplier effect till now:
1. Providing LPG connections to BPL households will ensure universal coverage of cooking gas in the country.
2. This measure will empower women and protect their health. It will reduce drudgery and the time spent on cooking. It will also provide employment for rural youth in the supply chain of cooking gas.
3. According to the RTI replies, Indian Oil Corporation, for the connections released by them up till March 2021, 65 lakh customers have not refilled their connections during the last financial year.
4. The figures for Hindustan Petroleum Corporation and Bharat Petroleum Corporation are 9.1 lakh and 15.96 lakh.

5. Bharat Petroleum Corporation specified that the figure of 15.96 lakh is only for the connections released up to September 2019, which was the first round of the Ujjwala yojana.

6. As per a reply filed by the government in Lok Sabha, in March this year, the LPG consumption under the Ujjwala Yojana remains 3.66 refills per connection annually.

COVID effect: Three free of cost LPG refills to PMUY beneficiaries:
These figures should also take into account the fact that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government provided up to three free of cost LPG refills to PMUY beneficiaries from April 1, 2020 and this was extended up to December 31 2020.

PMUY beneficiaries have availed 14.17 crore free refills under the Scheme, across the country, as per the same reply filed by Union Petroleum Ministry in Lok Sabha.

Critical arguments:
While the scheme was started with a good intent it has inherent flaws which the government has failed to address.

The people are shocked to realise that they have pay the full amount even under the scheme for the subsequent cylinders.

The subsidy is transferred into their accounts by the oil marketing firms. While the firms claim that they have disbursed the subsidy we don’t know whether it reaches the beneficiaries on time.

The cylinders thus end up being used as show piece in their homes or sparingly used.

Ujjwala 2.0 Scheme:
In 2021, the Prime Minister launched the second phase of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) or Ujjwala 2.0 Scheme.
He mentioned plans to promote “gobar dhan” – tapping cow dung for energy on the occasion of World Bio Fuel Day (10th August).

Ujjwala is part of the ambitious agenda for behavioral change that will help India transit to a $5 trillion economy by 2024.

However, the challenges need to be addressed:

Low Consumption of Refills:
Encouraging the sustained usage of LPG remains a big challenge, and low consumption of refills hindered recovery of outstanding loans disbursed under the scheme. The annual average refill consumption on 31st December 2018 was only 3.21.

**System Anomalies:**
There are deficiencies such as the issuance of connections to unintended beneficiaries, and problems with the software of the state-run oil marketing companies for identifying intended beneficiaries and inadequacies in the deduplication process.

**Conclusion:**
The scheme should be extended to poor households in urban and semi-urban slum areas. There is a need for achieving a higher LPG coverage of the population by providing connections to households that do not have LPG.

The positives are ‘Give it up’ campaign, LPG Panchayat etc have been remarkable in bringing in behavioral changes.

**Target beneficiary expansion and identification** must be carried out carefully to eliminate fake accounts and corrupt use of the scheme. Government needs to ensure and provide subsidies refills and that rural households are able and willing to pay for them.

This enhances their health and quality of life, as well as urban air quality. It is a social investment.

### 7. Serving those who serve: On WHO honour for ASHA workers

**Context:**
India’s one million all-women ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist Workers) workers were awarded and honoured by WHO for their ‘outstanding’ contribution to advancing global health,
demonstrated leadership and commitment to regional health issues.

ASHA, which means "hope" in English, comprises more than one million female volunteers.

**Global Health Leaders Awards:**
The World Health Organization Director-General’s Global Health Leaders Awards has recognized ASHA’s “crucial role in linking the community with the health system and ensuring that those living in rural poverty can access primary health care services”.

WHO added that ASHA workers, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, have “ensured living in rural poverty can access primary health care services.”

WHO praised that the all-women workers “provide maternal care and immunization for children against vaccine-preventable diseases; community health care; treatment for hypertension and tuberculosis and core areas of health promotion for nutrition, sanitation and healthy living.”

**Outstanding contribution to protecting and promoting health around the world:**
1. Recognition very often goes to those at the top of the pecking order, and stays there.

2. Credit seldom trickles down to the worker at the bottom. The World Health Organization’s act of recognizing India’s ASHA (accredited social health activists) and the polio workers of Afghanistan is an attempt to right that wrong.

3. It is a rare, and commendable doffing of the hat for workers at the very bottom of the rung, and gives credit where it is due.

4. When WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the names of six Global Health Leader awardees at the opening session of the World Health Assembly, over one million ASHAs and eight volunteer polio workers found themselves being counted amidst people leading from the front.

5. The award recognizes those who have made an outstanding contribution to protecting and promoting health around the world, at a time when the world is facing an unprecedented convergence of inequity, conflict, food insecurity, climate crisis and a pandemic.

**Working of ASHA volunteers even under extreme conditions:**
1. The ASHAs were honoured for their “crucial role in linking the community with the health system, to ensure those living in rural poverty can access primary health care services”.
2. These workers, all women, faced harassment and violence for their work during the pandemic, well documented in the media.

3. While the pandemic rewrote the rules, creating danger where mere routine existed, it must be stressed that in general, their job, which takes them into difficult-to-reach places and hostile communities, confers a measure of privations.

4. Even as they contribute to **better health outcomes**, this workforce continues to protest across the country, for better remuneration, health benefits and permanent posts.

5. The eight volunteer polio workers of Afghanistan (four of them women) were shot and killed by gunmen in Takhar and Kunduz provinces in February 2022.

**How are ASHA workers paid?**

1. The government had started **deploying ASHA workers under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005.**

2. The mission document of the programme had defined ASHA workers as ‘honorary volunteers’, receiving performance-based compensation for their contribution in promoting immunization, construction of household toilets, and other healthcare delivery programmes.

3. As ASHA workers are categorized as volunteers, neither the state government nor the Centre has a legal obligation to pay them a minimum wage.

4. As such, **ASHAs earn money through incentives by delivering 60 tasks set under the National Health Mission.**

5. The states set the **incentives for ASHAs.** Incentives can range from Rs 1 for distributing ORS packets, condoms or sanitary napkins to Rs 5,000 for helping a drug-resistant TB patient with treatment.

6. The Union government in 2018 doubled the incentives to ASHA workers for some tasks from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000.

7. Attempts to eradicate this crippling virus from parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan have been seriously hampered by **deadly targeting of vaccination teams** in recent years by militants, who oppose these drives, claiming that polio drops cause infertility.

**Way Ahead:**
WHO recorded that ASHA volunteers work was crucial in a country where wild polio virus type 1 is still circulating.
Clearly, certain kinds of basic public health work are fraught with perils in several continents across the world. It is the duty of the governmental agencies that employ them to ensure their welfare, safety and security.

While cheerleading about the award is rightfully reaching a crescendo, what matters is how the Indian government serves its last mile health workers who are its feet on the ground, once the dust raised by their unexpected recognition has settled down.

Conclusion:
At a time when the world is facing an unprecedented convergence of inequity, conflict, food insecurity, the climate crisis and a pandemic, this award recognizes those who have made an outstanding contribution to protecting and promoting health around the world.

These awardees embody lifelong dedication, relentless advocacy, a commitment to equity, and selfless service of humanity.

8. Supreme Court puts colonial sedition law on hold

**Hair-trigger cases** | National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report says 356 cases of sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code had been registered and 548 people arrested between 2015 and 2020, with just six convictions. A look at a few recent cases:

- **Disha Ravi:** The 21-year-old Bengaluru-based environment activist was arrested by the Delhi Police on February 14, 2021 for allegedly creating and disseminating a ‘toolkit’ on the farmers’ protests. Granting her bail on February 23, 2021, a Delhi court said “the offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the governments.”

- **Kashmiri students:** Three of them studying in Agra were arrested on October 28, 2021 for allegedly posting a WhatsApp status praising Pakistani players after their victory against India in a T20 cricket match. They were languishing in prison till April 26 this year even after securing bail on March 30 from the Allahabad High Court due to the non-availability of local guarantors, a high-security amount and police verification.

- **Sharjeel Imam:** The JNU student leader had allegedly made inflammatory speeches at Jamia Millia Islamia on December 13, 2019, and at Aligarh Muslim University on December 16, 2019 during the anti-CAA stir. A court has framed charges against Imam, who has been in judicial custody since 2020.

- **Kanhaiya Kumar:** In 2016, a group of students from Jawaharlal Nehru University held a poetry session to mark the third anniversary of the hanging of 2001 Parliament attack case convict Afzal Guru. The Delhi Police later charged the then JNU student union president Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid and others with sedition.

**Context:**
The Supreme Court suspended pending criminal trials and court proceedings under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code, while allowing the Union of India to reconsider the British-era law.

The Supreme Court has ordered that no new FIRs will be filed for Sedition and all the pending cases will be on hold while the Government reconsiders the law.
The Supreme Court was referring to the petitions that challenged the law alleging its misuse in the cases such as in Maharashtra, where it was invoked over the chanting of Hanuman Chalisa.

**Section 124A IPC:**
It **defines sedition as an offence committed** when "any person by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India".

**Disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.** However, comments without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, will not constitute an offence under this section.

It helps in **protecting the elected government** from attempts to overthrow the government with violence and illegal means.

The continued existence of the government established by law is an **essential condition of the stability of the State.**

**Historical Background of Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code:**
1. Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy.
2. The law was **originally drafted in 1837 by Thomas Macaulay,** the British historian-politician, but was inexplicably omitted when the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was enacted in 1860.
3. Section 124A was inserted in 1870 by an amendment **introduced by Sir James Stephen** when it felt the need for a specific section to deal with the offence.
4. Today the Sedition is a crime under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
5. Colonial administrators used sedition to lock up people who criticised the British policies.
6. Stalwarts of the freedom movement such as **Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhagat Singh, etc.**, were convicted for their “seditious” speeches, writings and activities under British rule.

Thus, rampant use of the sedition law recalls the colonial era.
Sedition as a cognizable offense:
Sedition was made a cognizable offense for the first time in history in India during the tenure of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1973, that is, **arrest without a warrant was now permissible.**

In 1962 the Supreme Court of India interpreted the section to apply only if there is, say, “incitement to violence” or “overthrowing a democratically elected government through violent means”.

Recent Developments of Section 124A:
1. In February 2021, the Supreme Court (SC) protected a political leader and six senior journalists from arrest, for allegedly tweeting and sharing unverified news, in multiple sedition FIRs registered against them.
2. In June 2021, the SC while protecting two Telugu (language) news channels from coercive action by the Andhra Pradesh government emphasized on defining the limits of sedition.
3. In July 2021, a petition was filed in the SC, that sought a relook into the Sedition Law,
4. The court ruled that “a statute criminalising expression based on unconstitutionally vague definitions of ‘disaffection towards Government’ etc. is an **unreasonable restriction on the fundamental right to free expression guaranteed under Article 19 (1)(a)** and causes constitutionally impermissible ‘Chilling Effect’ on speech”.
5. The Central Government on May 9, 2022, had announced its decision of reviewing the sedition law, however, it argued today that while it reviews the law, it should not be paused.
6. The Central Government also suggested that for now, a police officer of the level of Superintendent or above could decide whether a Sedition charge should be filed.
7. The Government further added that there may be terrorism charges too in the cases filed under Sedition law. These pending cases are not before the government or police but are before the court.

Present controversy of Sedition Law:
In recent times, the resort to this section is seen as disturbingly frequent.

**Curbing dissent:** Activists, cartoonists and intellectuals have been arrested under this section, drawing criticism from liberals that it is being used to suppress dissent and silence critics.

**Misuse for propaganda:** Authorities and the police who invoke this section defend the measure as a necessary step to prevent public disorder and anti-national activities.
Many of them have also been detained under the National Security Act and UAPA.

**Arguments of Tyranny of the law:**

1. However, Liberals and rights activists have been demanding the scrapping of Section 124A.

2. **Provision is outdated:** It is argued that the provision is “overbroad”, i.e., it defines the offence in wide terms threatening the liberty of citizens.

3. The Law Commission has also called for a reconsideration of the section.

4. It has pointed that Britain abolished it more than a decade ago and raised the question of whether a provision introduced by the British to put down the freedom struggle should continue to be law in India.

5. **Doctrine of severability:** Some argue that a presumption of constitutionality does not apply to pre-constitutional laws as those laws have been made by foreign legislature or bodies.

6. India is the largest democracy of the world and the right to free speech and expression is an essential ingredient of democracy.

7. The expression or thought that is not in consonance with the policy of the government of the day should not be considered as sedition.

8. The word ‘sedition’ is extremely nuanced and needs to be applied with caution. It is like a cannon that ought not to be used to shoot a mouse; but the arsenal also demands possession of cannons, mostly as a deterrent, and on occasion for shooting.

**Conclusion:**

Section 124A of the IPC has its utility in combating anti-national, secessionist and terrorist elements. However, dissent and criticism of the government are essential ingredients of robust public debate in a vibrant democracy. They should not be constructed as sedition.

The higher judiciary should use its supervisory powers to sensitize the magistracy and police to the constitutional provisions protecting free speech.

The definition of sedition should be narrowed down, to include only the issues pertaining to the territorial integrity of India as well as the sovereignty of the country.
9. The court's burden

Context:
A joint conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts was recently inaugurated. The joint conference is an occasion for the executive and the judiciary to come together to create frameworks for simple and convenient delivery of justice and to discuss steps required to overcome the challenges facing the justice system.

National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC):
1. It is unfortunate that the proposal by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) for a national judicial infrastructure corporation with corresponding bodies at the State level, did not find favor with many Chief Ministers at the recent joint conference of Chief Justices and Chief Ministers.

2. A special purpose vehicle, vested with statutory powers to plan and implement infrastructure projects for the judiciary, would have been immensely helpful in augmenting facilities for the judiciary, given the inadequacies in court complexes across the country.

3. However, it is a matter of relief that there was agreement on the idea of State-level bodies for the same purpose, with representation to the Chief Ministers so that they are fully involved in the implementation.

What is National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC)?
1. The idea for such an agency was first proposed by CJI Ramana, even before he took office.

2. Soon after he was sworn in, the CJI commenced work on the NJIC and a survey of 6,000 trial courts in various states was undertaken as part of this exercise.
3. **Only 27 per cent of courtrooms in the subordinate judiciary** have computers on judges’ dias while there are still 10 per cent courts that do not have access to proper internet facilities.

4. These are some of the findings revealed in an all-India survey conducted by the Chief Justice of India’s office, which is part of CJI N.V. Ramana’s proposal to set up a National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation (NJIC) to **develop judicial infrastructure in trial courts**.

5. The survey indicated a **substantial gap in infrastructure and availability of basic amenities in the lower judiciary** such as court halls, residential accommodation, waiting room for litigants in trial courts, especially in smaller towns and rural areas.

6. According to sources familiar with the developments, CJI has already worked out a **model of the NJIC** based on the findings of the survey, which is still underway.

7. CJI had flagged the gulf between the available infrastructure and the justice needs of the people.

8. If his proposal had been accepted, the available funding as a centrally sponsored scheme, with the Centre and States sharing the burden on a 60:40 ratio, could have been **gone to the national authority**, which would allocate the funds through high courts based on need.

9. It is likely that Chief Ministers did not favour the idea as they wanted a greater say in the matter.

**Creating the required infrastructure in Lower Judiciary:**

1. Given the **experience of allocated funds for judicial infrastructure** going unspent in many States, it remains to be seen how far the proposed State-level bodies would be successful in **identifying needs and speeding up implementation**.

2. It will naturally require **greater coordination between States and the respective High Courts**.

3. Union Law Ministry has promised assistance from the Centre to the States for creating the required infrastructure, especially for the lower judiciary.

4. While it is a welcome sign that the focus is on infrastructure, unmitigated pendency, chronic shortage of judges and the burgeoning docket size remain major challenges.

5. CJI Ramana flagged some aspects of the **Government’s contribution to the burden of the judiciary** — the failure or unwillingness to implement court orders, leaving crucial questions to be decided by the courts and the absence of forethought and broad-based consultation before passing legislation.
6. While this may be unpalatable to the executive, it is quite true that litigation spawned by government action or inaction constitutes a huge part of the courts’ case burden.

‘Funding, executing & supervisory agency for development’:
1. While the NJIC will be the nodal agency for infrastructural developments, it will not be involved in judicial appointments in trial courts. Appointments will continue to be made by the state governments and the respective high courts.

2. A third source clarified that the NJIC will be a funding, executing and supervisory agency for development works.

3. According to the CJI’s proposal, both the central and state governments will contribute their share of funds outlined in the centrally-sponsored scheme to the NJIC, which will then release the finances to the high courts according to their requirement.

4. The structure of the corporation is likely to be modelled on the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), a national body based in Delhi that provides free legal services.

5. At the national level, the CJI will be the patron of the NJIC, which will include two senior SC judges, the finance secretary from the central government, two to three senior chief justices of state HCs, and a member of the Niti Aayog.

6. Each state is likely to have a local corporation as well, which will be led by the state HC chief justice along with a senior judge and senior state government bureaucrats.

7. This composition will also ensure regular interaction between the two stakeholders – judiciary and the executive – over improving court infrastructure.

8. The NJIC will not suggest any major policy change but will give complete freedom to HCs to come up with projects to strengthen ground-level courts.

9. It may recommend a model structure of how a court complex, courtroom or a waiting area for litigants should be.

10. However, it will be up to the high courts to adopt and modify the suggestions according to their requirements.

Conclusion:
The conversation between the judiciary and the executive at the level of Chief Justices and Chief Ministers may help bring about an atmosphere of cooperation so that judicial appointments, infrastructure upgradation and downsizing pendency are seen as common concerns.

The modernization of judicial infrastructure did not mean building more courts or filling up
vacancies or ploughing through vacancies.

An efficient “judicial infrastructure” means providing equal and free access to justice. This could be realized through a barrier-free and citizen-friendly environment.

10. Are freebies affecting the economic growth of India?

Context:
In an address delivered at the Delhi School of Economics, N.K. Singh, the chairperson of the 15th Finance Commission, warned about how the race to provide freebies to voters could be a “quick path to fiscal disaster”. He also noted that freebies could be harmful for the long-term economic growth of the country and emphasised the need to distinguish between productive and unproductive forms of welfare spending.

Need to look at the definition of freebies itself:
1. The term “freebies” gives you an impression of something that is a dole or a gift given to the population.
2. Political parties promise to offer free electricity/water supply, monthly allowance to unemployed, daily wage workers and women as well as gadgets like laptops, smartphones etc. in order to secure the vote of the people.
3. The states have become habituated to giving freebies, be it in the form of loan waivers or free electricity, cycles, laptops, TV sets and so on.
4. Certain kinds of expenditure that are done under populist pressures or with elections in mind may be questionable.

5. But given that in the last 30 years there has been rising inequality, some kind of relief to the population in the form of subsidies may not be unjustified but actually necessary for the economy to continue on its growth path.

Is there a trend of deterioration in the financial situation of States? Are freebies the reason for it?
When the argument is framed as freebies versus fiscal stability, a binary answer is often not possible.

Some of them are extremely justifiable, some of them are not. As far as fiscal stability and financial deterioration is concerned, if we see the welfare spending of the States, and if it is sustainable and affordable, then that is fine as it is the prerogative of the political executive.

Freebies versus Fiscal stability:
We must understand what exactly we mean by fiscal stability.
1. Broadly speaking, in common parlance, fiscal stability is a situation in which the government is able to deploy its fiscal policy towards long-term economic objectives, which are high employment and growth rates.

2. That leads us to measures of fiscal stability. If you see the study of the State finances conducted by the Reserve Bank of India, you find that from 2005 onwards, in aggregate, States have adhered to the limit in terms of their gross fiscal deficit, which is the gap between the total revenue of the State and the total expenditure.

3. The mandate is under the ceiling of the fiscal responsibility legislation, which allows them to keep the gross fiscal deficit within an aggregate limit of 3% of GDP.

4. The only years — apart from the pandemic years — when these limits were breached were 2009-10, 2015-16 and 2016-17.

5. 2009-10 was a crisis year and 2015-16 and 2016-17 were years of power sector reforms in which power sector debt was taken over by the state governments.

What is the trajectory of the outstanding debt?
Outstanding debt reduction has actually progressed quite well in the case of the States. From a high of 31% of GDP, it came down by almost 10 percentage points to about 22% of GDP by 2014-15. After that, it has inched up about five percentage points by FY 2020.
If we compare this with the Central government’s track record, the Central government has never been able to adhere to fiscal deficit limits.

Secondly, when it comes to debt reduction, the Central government’s debt-to-GDP limit is supposed to be 40%, but it has now crossed 90% of GDP. So, the problem of fiscal stability is more pressing at the level of the Centre.

**How much of this poverty reduction is due to growth versus the welfare measures taken by the Centre?**

1. We don't have official poverty estimates after 2011-12. The only estimates that we have are from a number of independent studies by private researchers.

2. There is at least one study that concludes that the rate of poverty reduction has slowed down under the Modi government.

3. There is also a consensus that the welfare measures such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the public distribution system, have contributed to poverty reduction.

4. The strengthening of these programmes has definitely contributed to poverty reduction. This does not mean that growth does not have a role to play in reducing poverty.

5. Remember, we are in a slowdown simply because demand in the economy overall has collapsed. And welfare spending has been able to at least prevent consumption demand from falling any further.

**What proportion of spending by States is productive rather than aimed simply at gaining votes in elections?**

1. In a democracy where political parties try and get votes from every section of the population, there is obviously a tendency for State governments to try and provide some kind of relief to voters.

2. For example, the MGNREGA type of spending and subsidy in the form of food ration schemes. These go a long way in increasing the productive capacity of the population. So, they’re not just doles.

3. They build a healthier and a stronger workforce, which is a necessary part of any growth strategy.

4. That is similar to a state spending on education or health. One can call these as an investment for the long-term, for improving the productive capacity of the population.
5. But yes, there are obviously cases where State governments have gone astray and have gone into providing all sorts of freebies or gifts.

6. But when it comes to simply giving away loan waivers, experts are not in favor of these because they have undesired consequences such as destroying the whole credit culture and it blurs the very basic question as to why is it that a large majority of the farming community is getting into a debt trap repeatedly.

**Issue of unproductive and productive spending:**
1. There are always ways to restructure bank loans to medium and small enterprises in the event of a downturn in the business cycle or any kind of extraordinary shock.

2. We can talk about loan waivers in the light of weather and other risks and also the fact that crop insurance has by and large always failed to offset shocks in agriculture.

3. Also, we are in a position where direct benefits transfer can be used to deliver loan waivers directly to distressed farmers and the cost of the waiver is immediately taken on the government’s budget and financial intermediaries are not involved.

4. The tendency towards unproductive spending is not more pronounced at the level of the States as compared to the Centre.

5. If we look at social sector expenditure, there is a rising trend at the level of the States, but then the rising trend at the level of the Centre is extraordinarily high.

6. And if you look at the core sector schemes, then the revenue spending component is as high as 65-68%. So almost two-third of the expenditure is revenue expenditure.

7. The issue of unproductive and productive spending should be looked at in this light and in the light of mounting interest payments.

**Conclusion:**
Fiscal stability is not just about expenditure but also about revenues. And mind you, the Centre also engages in giving out freebies not just to the poor people but also to a large number of corporations. There is a need to understand the impacts of freebies from the economic sense and connect it with the taxpayers money. It is also essential to distinguish between subsidy and freebies as subsidies are the justified and specifically targeted benefits that arise out of demands.
11. The importance of emigrants

Introduction:
According to the Ministry of External Affairs, there are **over 13.4 million Non-Resident Indians worldwide**.
Of them, 64% live in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the highest being in the United Arab Emirates, followed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Almost 90% of the Indian migrants who live in GCC countries are low- and semi-skilled workers, as per International Labor Organization estimates.

Other significant countries of destination for overseas Indians are the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Canada.

**High remittances for India compare to any other country:**
1. Every year, **about 2.5 million workers from India** move to different parts of the world on employment visas.
2. Besides being involved in nation-building of their destination countries, Indian migrant workers also contribute to the homeland’s socioeconomic development, through remittances.
3. According to a **report by the National Statistical Office**, urban and rural households receiving remittances (both international and domestic) have approximately 23% and 8% better financial capacity, respectively, than non-remittance-receiving households.
4. As per a **World Bank Group report (2021)**, annual remittances transferred to India are estimated to be $87 billion, which is the highest in the world, followed by China ($53 billion), Mexico ($53 billion), the Philippines ($36 billion) and Egypt ($33 billion).

5. In 2021, remittances transferred to India had seen an increase of 4.6% compared to 2020.

6. **Remittances in India have been substantially higher** than even Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the flow of remittances is much less fluctuating than that of FDI.

7. Still, remittances’ contribution of 3% in GDP is lower than that of countries such as Nepal (24.8%), Pakistan (12.6%), Sri Lanka (8.3%) and Bangladesh (6.5%), as per a World Bank report.

8. Besides being a win-win situation for both the destination and source country, labour migration is good hedging strategy against unsystematic risks for any economy.

9. Human capital should also be invested in a diversified portfolio akin to financial capital.

10. For many countries, **remittances have been of vital support to the domestic economy after a shock.**

   a. For example, after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, overseas Nepalese increased remittances to an estimated 30% of GDP.

**Can India increase remittances to say 10% of GDP? Can the Philippines’ model of promoting labour mobility be replicated in India?**

1. Both the cost of recruitment of such workers and the cost of sending remittances back to India should come down.

2. The safety and well-being of migrant labour is of top priority for the government.

3. Reducing informal/undocumented migration and formalizing all remittances is being given due focus.

4. Recruitment agencies should also be regulated leveraging information technology for ensuring protection of migrant workers leaving India.

5. An **integrated grievance redressal portal, ‘Madad’,** was launched by the government in 2015.

6. Of the approximately 78,000 grievances registered so far by the Indian migrants, more than 95% have been resolved.
The Emigration Bill 2021:
1. The Bill envisages comprehensive emigration management, institutes regulatory mechanisms governing overseas employment of Indian nationals and establishes a framework for protection and promotion of welfare of emigrants.

2. The bill proposes a three-tier institutional framework:

3. It launches a new emigration policy division in (MEA) which will be referred to as the Central Emigration Management Authority.

4. It proposes a Bureau of Emigration Policy and Planning, and a Bureau of Emigration Administration shall handle day-to-day operational matters and oversee the welfare of emigrants.

5. It proposes nodal agencies under a Chief Emigration Officer to ensure the welfare and protection of the emigrants.

6. It permits government authorities to punish workers by cancelling or suspending their passports and imposing fines up to Rs 50,000 for violating any of the Bill’s provisions.

7. Labor migration is governed by the Emigration Act, 1983 which sets up a mechanism for hiring through government-certified recruiting agents - individuals or public or private agencies.

8. It outlines obligations for agents to conduct due diligence of prospective employers, sets up a cap on service fees, and establishes a government review of worker travel and employment documents (known as emigration clearances).

Provisions of the Emigration Bill:
1. The Indian government proposed a new Emigration Bill in 2021 which aims to integrate emigration management and streamline the welfare of emigrant workers.

2. It proposes to modify the system of Emigration Check Required (ECR) category of workers applying for migration to 18 notified countries.

3. The ECR category mainly comprises those who have not passed Class 10 and face the challenge of risky informal emigration and subsequent hardships abroad.

4. The Bill makes it mandatory for all category of workers to register before departure to any country in the world to ensure better protection for them, support and safeguard in case of vulnerabilities.
5. The proposed **Emigration Management Authority** will be the overarching authority to provide policy guidance.

6. The number of migrant workers need not go up for remittances to increase if the skill sets of workers are improved.

7. Provisions of the Bill such as registration of all emigrants, skill upgradation and training, and pre-departure orientation will enhance protection measures.

8. Besides workers, as about 0.5 million students also migrate for education from India every year, the Bill also covers such students.

9. This will provide a **comprehensive data set for the efficient management of Indian migrants.**

10. **Skilling of migrant workers** has the potential to boost the domestic economy and low-cost interventions such as foreign language training can be of great help for such workers.

**Conclusion:**

Though the phenomenon of Indian-origin executives becoming CEOs of top U.S. companies highlights the contribution of Indian talent to the U.S. economy, the role played by Indian semi-skilled migrant labour in the global economy is no less illustrious.

India needs to formulate migration centric policies, strategies, and institutional mechanisms in order to ensure inclusive growth and development and reduce distress induced migration.

This will increase India’s prospects for poverty reduction and achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

**12. Impact of Russia-Ukraine war on Europe’s demography**
Context:
The European Union has been plagued by a demographic issue for a long time — the region is getting older and more people are dying than being born.

Europe’s median age of 43 is nearly four years older than that of North America, the next-greyest region. The population of the European Union is expected to peak at just shy of 450 million within the next few years, then dip below 424 million by 2070.

Croatia’s prime minister, called declining population “an almost existential problem for some nations”. And the Croatian PM’s concern is well-founded in the fact that the issue of dwindling numbers in the formerly communist countries of eastern Europe is compounded by outmigration.

However, things began to change radically since Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine, with over 5 million people taking shelter in nearby countries.

In the weeks since the start of the invasion, all of Ukraine’s borders, except those with Russia and Belarus, have remained open.

Most refugees used one of the 31 border checkpoints in western Ukraine and entered Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova.

We take a look at countries which have taken in the maximum number of refugees and how that might have an impact on the demography of the continent.

Where are the refugees going?

1. Some 5.6 million people — the bulk of them women and children — have fled Ukraine since the war began, the vast majority to countries bordering it on the west.

2. Poland, which until recently exported more people than it received, has taken in more than half of these.

3. The population of Warsaw expanded by 17 per cent in weeks, according to figures put out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

4. Hungary, whose population had shrunk from 10.7 million in the mid-1980s to 9.8 million in 2020, has received more than 500,000 Ukrainians.

5. For countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and possibly the Baltic states, the crisis is a moment for them to shift from becoming immigration countries rather than outmigration countries.
6. Countries to the west of Ukraine look like demographic gainers, although the influx is putting a strain on some, especially Moldova, which has received more than 400,000 refugees — equivalent to 15 per cent of its population.

7. For Poland, where around 1.4 million Ukrainians lived and worked in 2020, the arrival of millions more turns the demographic clock back to before the second world war, when the country had a large Ukrainian minority.

8. This comes at a time when the ruling Law and Justice Party has been keen to increase the number of Poles.

9. In 2016, it sought to raise the birth rate by giving families 500 zlotys ($115) a month for every child after the first.

10. The effect was mainly to encourage women already planning to have children to have them earlier lest the benefit is withdrawn.

11. The number of births rose in the scheme’s first two years, but dropped in 2020 to the lowest level since 2003. The Ukraine war has, however, added more than a million children to Poland’s population temporarily.

12. Other European countries, especially those with a large Ukrainian diaspora, stand to gain.

13. Around 1.5 million refugees have moved to countries farther west, including Germany, Italy and France, according to an estimate by Gillian Triggs of the United Nations refugee agency.

14. Before the war, about 250,000 Ukrainians lived and worked in Italy, where the median age is four years higher than in Europe overall and the fertility rate is among the lowest.

15. In the first three months of this year, Austria’s population increased by half a percentage point to more than 9 million — 83% of that growth was from Ukrainian immigration.

**Impact on India:**

1. India had decided to abstain on the vote on the United Nations Security Council Resolution which was moved by the United States and its allies against Russia over the Ukraine invasion.

2. But India should surely recognize that BRICS, in its New Delhi Declaration, had resolved that the five BRICS nations were opposed to the unilateral use of force against any state, and wanted all disputes resolved by peaceful means, and categorically ruled out the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.
3. India’s imports of petroleum products from Russia are only a fraction of its total oil import bill and, thus, replaceable.

4. However, getting alternative sources for fertilisers and sunflower oil may not be as easy.

5. Exports to Russia account for less than 1% of India’s total exports, but exports of pharmaceuticals and tea could face some challenges, as will shipments to CIS countries. Freight rate hikes could make overall exports less competitive, too.

6. From this juncture onwards, India must take stock since the apparent goal of India becoming a “Vishwa Guru” is now, at best, a mirage.

7. Since independence, India has failed to become one since it cannot be a reality in the present global dispensation.

8. Instead, India needs friends and collaborators but without bowing before any country.

How does it look for Russia and Ukraine?

1. It’s a demographic disaster, to say the least, for Ukraine which was already fighting a shrink in population thanks to emigration and fewer births.

2. Since February more than a quarter of the population has been forced to move, including 7.7m people displaced within the country.

3. With its birth rate already falling, Russia, too, is bound to suffer. Educated Russians have left the country since the invasion as they believe that the current regime has very little to offer.

4. Putin has been splashing out cash to encourage women to have babies. In 2020, he extended a one-time “maternity capital” payment worth $7,600 to families when they have their first baby.

5. Before this, it was available only to those who already had a child. Putin hoped to boost the fertility rate from 1.5 to 1.7, but the tumult caused by the war will probably push it in the opposite direction.

Is the demographic change long-lasting?

1. Most of the refugees who have fled Ukraine in the face of the war are women and children as men in the age bracket of 18 to 60 have been compelled by the government to remain in the country.

2. Thus, if the war is short, women and children will probably return quickly to Ukraine to reunite with husbands and fathers.
3. However, all of that depends upon how long the war lasts, and on how much damage is inflicted on their home country.

4. During the **Kosovo war of 1999**, when Nato bombed Yugoslavia to prevent the brutalisation of ethnic Albanians who make up Kosovo’s majority, hundreds of thousands fled, or were forcibly moved, to neighbouring Albania and Macedonia.

5. But it lasted 78 days, after which the Kosovars quickly returned. By contrast, during the Bosnian war, which lasted from 1992 to 1995, around 700,000 refugees fled to western Europe and beyond, and far fewer returned.

6. As such, Bosnia’s population now stands at around 3.2 million, down from 4 million before the war.

**Conclusion:**
If the war drags on, and the Ukrainian economy **reaches a point of no return**, it would be just a matter of time before the men of the country head westwards to join their wives and children.

Added to that, if the governments of the countries they move to provide jobs to the newcomers, the **migration might become long-lasting**.

**Ukraine, thus, is on the brink** of where the Balkan states were during the one-year-long war which robbed some of the brightest and best of a generation.

**13. Reforming WHO**

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**The Biggest Financial Contributors To The WHO**
Assessed contributions to the World Health Organization for 2020 (as of March 31, 2020)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$57.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>$28.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>$20.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>$14.6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>$10.6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>$7.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>$7.1m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Assessed contributions are paid for membership and are calculated relative to the country’s wealth and population. WHO also accepts voluntary supplementary assessed contributions. Source: World Health Organization
Context:
In the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, PM Modi once again brought up the much-discussed issue of reforming the World Health Organization while addressing the heads of countries at the second global COVID-19 summit.

PM Mr. Modi has been right in calling for reforms in WHO, the demand for a review of the health agency’s processes on vaccine approvals is far removed from reality.

Reforms needed to maintain better Global Health Body:
1. That reforms are urgently needed to strengthen the global health body and its ability to respond to novel and known disease outbreaks in order to limit the harm caused to the global community is beyond debate.
2. The long delay and the reluctance of China to readily and quickly share vital information regarding the novel coronavirus, including the viral outbreak in Wuhan, and its stubborn refusal to allow the global agency to investigate, freely and fairly, the origin of the virus have highlighted the need to strengthen WHO.
3. But any attempt to build a stronger WHO must first begin with increased mandatory funding by member states.
4. For several years, the mandatory contribution has accounted for less than a fourth of the total budget, thus reducing the level of predictability in WHO’s responses; the bulk of the funding is through voluntary contribution.
5. Importantly, it is time to provide the agency with more powers to demand that member states comply with the norms and to alert WHO in case of disease outbreaks that could cause global harm.
6. Under the legally binding international health regulations, member states are expected to have in place core capacities to identify, report and respond to public health emergencies.
7. Ironically, member states do not face penalties for non-compliance. This has to change for any meaningful protection from future disease outbreaks.

Emergency Use Listing (EUL) of Covaxin:
1. Covaxin is not the first vaccine from India to be approved by WHO, and the manufacturer of this vaccine has in the past successfully traversed the approval processes without any glitch.
2. The demand for a review of the vaccine approval process is based on the assumption that the emergency use listing (EUL) of Covaxin was intentionally delayed by the health agency, which has no basis.

3. That the technical advisory group had regularly asked for additional data from the company only underscores the incompleteness of the data presented by the company.

4. As a senior WHO official said, the timeline for granting an EUL for a vaccine depends “99% on manufacturers, the speed, the completeness” of the data.

5. To believe that the agency was influenced more by media reports than the data submitted by the company is naive;

6. The media were only critical of the Indian regulator approving the vaccine even in the absence of efficacy data.

7. Any reform in WHO should not dilute the vaccine approval process already in place.

India submits 9-point plan for WHO reforms:

1. India has proposed a nine-point plan for reforms of the World Health Organization (WHO), including changes in mechanisms to monitor health emergencies that can cross borders and giving the head of the UN body greater power to declare an international public health emergency.

2. The proposals, which have been formally conveyed to UN and WHO authorities, also include changes and improvements in the body’s funding and governance, transparency in use of funds, and a greater role for the world body in ensuring fair, affordable and equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.

3. The Indian government has repeatedly raised the need to reform WHO at multilateral forums such as the G20 and BRICS this year, and Prime Minister Modi criticized the body for not reflecting contemporary realities.

4. India’s calls for WHO reforms, especially after the body’s initial handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, have been backed by countries around the world.

5. The Indian government’s proposals, contained in the document “Approach on WHO reforms”, call for devising “objective criteria with clear parameters” for declaring a “public health emergency of international concern” (PHEIC) such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
6. The WHO director general currently has to convene a committee of experts, the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee, to declare an international emergency.

7. India has proposed the **WHO chief should be empowered to declare a PHEIC if there is “broad agreement, though not a consensus” within the emergency committee.**

8. The emphasis must be on transparency and promptness in the declaration process.

9. The Indian recommendation is relevant in view of WHO’s regulations which state the emergency committee gives **advice on declaration of a PHEIC** when there is “inconsistency in the assessment of the event” between the WHO chief and the affected country – something that revelations have pointed to in the case of Covid-19.

**Indian government: extra-budgetary contributions:**

1. The Indian government pointed out that most of the financing for WHO’s programmes comes from extra-budgetary contributions earmarked for specific issues.

2. Since WHO has little flexibility in using these funds, voluntary contributions should be “unearmarked to ensure that the WHO has necessary flexibility for its usage in areas where they are required the most”, it recommended.

3. The Indian government also called for efforts to “**ensure fair, affordable and equitable access to all tools** for combating Covid-19 pandemic and, therefore, the need to build a framework for their allocation”.

4. WHO’s work in this direction should be supported, and Covid-19 vaccines are a “**global public good and TRIPS waiver as proposed by India and South Africa would go a long way in effective international and national response**” to the pandemic.

5. It also pointed out that “as a **reflection of vaccine nationalism**, some developed countries have been signing bilateral agreements with vaccine manufacturers, leaving very little space for developing countries to get fair, affordable and equitable access” to vaccines.

6. **India was elected to WHO’s Executive Board** and will chair the body during 2020-21, putting it in a position to suggest key reforms to the body.

7. **Calling for a global framework** for managing infectious diseases and pandemics, including capacities such as testing and surveillance systems, the document highlighted the “**need to establish a system facilitating pan-world surveillance by leveraging innovating ICT tools**”.
Conclusion:
The discussion of WHO’s evolution and efforts to reform it covers a very wide range of topics concerning governance, structure, policies, priorities, financing and management. The intention was to provide background and historical perspective relevant to current discussions of WHO reform.

The current reform process within WHO is in many ways admirably comprehensive but for understandable reasons there are various potential avenues for reform that are not fully addressed.

The current process does not ask fundamental questions about WHO’s place in the international system for health as it has now evolved, nor whether WHO’s governance, management and financing structures need more fundamental change than is currently envisaged.

It is therefore unclear whether the latest reform efforts will be sufficient to enable the organization to fulfil its potential.

14. Lessons from Russia for India

Context:
Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has had many impacts, but one area which merits more attention is whether it has produced effects sufficient to alter our understanding of warfare.
However, there are some key takeaways which have implications for the Indian military, which uses a significant amount of Russian-origin weapons systems.

Key takeaway:
1. The key takeaway for India from Russia’s unimpressive military performance is to invest more in sensors, electronic warfare, greater digitization, satellite communications and unmanned systems not just for reconnaissance and surveillance, but also attack missions.

2. This does not require dispensing with legacy platforms, but rather making them more lethal and effective. India will also need greater missile forces to enhance its offensive capability.

3. The Indian armed forces will need to be proficient at combined arms warfare. No amount of advanced technology can substitute or compensate for low morale and training, weak command, poor tactics and strategy.

4. In the recent budget, the government has created a massive scope in research and development for domestic manufacturers of defence goods by earmarking 68 per cent of the capital.

5. The defence ministry has already rolled out new schemes for promoting research and has been careful about doing it independently and not through the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

6. Modern warfare has more tech-friendly. Therefore, massive investments to boost technology in the country would be one of the essential steps, rather than re-inventing the old wheel.

Three claims by proponents:
There are at least three claims made by proponents that the conflict has heralded a shift in warfare.

1. The first is that the battle tank has been rendered obsolescent, because of the highly effective performance of anti-tank missiles such as the American-built Javelin or Advanced Anti-Tank Weapon System in visiting destruction upon Russian T-90s.

2. A second claim is that emerging technologies such as cyber and digital technology, Artificial Intelligence, remotely piloted systems such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and space-borne capabilities have rendered obsolescent legacy platforms such as fighter planes, warships, and artillery weapons.

3. Emerging technologies cannot be a substitute for legacy platforms; they can at best enhance their performance.
4. If precision firepower is to be delivered against adversary targets, legacy systems will matter for launch of ordinance.

5. Emerging technologies can enable better Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, help optimize situational awareness, reduce decision time for commanders from detecting threats to responding to them, and augment sensor to shooter capabilities.

6. **Infantry plays a key role in providing protection** to any advancing tank column and retaliating when threatened. This doesn’t herald a change in warfare, it is just poor tactics.

7. Finally, the failure of the Russians to effectively apply air power botched the invasion from the outset. This has convinced proponents that air power is not consequential.

8. A corollary to this is the **low morale among Russian soldiers** consisting of a large number of conscripts and poor command.

9. **Military effectiveness** is critically a function of troop morale and command competence. These two vital variables have very little to do with technology or logistics.

**Strategic Lessons for India from Russia-Ukraine Crisis:**
The Russia Ukrainian conflict has been an eye-opener for the rest of the world and India.

1. First and foremost, by now, India must have understood that nobody would come to help India **in case military tensions get out of hand** with our east neighbor China.

2. A similar case is advantageous to India if Pakistan and our western neighbor start acting up, and the West is not likely to enter into war with China for India's sake.

3. While a **lot of international condemnation is expected**, as is happening against Russia, nobody would provide military support or enter into war for another country's sake.

4. On similar lines, even though Russia has been a close ally of India for decades, the growing proximity between Moscow and Beijing is public.

5. Therefore, any possibility of Russia playing the active role of a mediator between India and China is unlikely.

6. Moreover, even though India has succeeded in a neutral global stand until now, it might not be able to continue this for long.

7. US, Russia and China are amongst the most substantial powers, and even if India does not join a bloc, it would have to accept which country it was closer to.
8. After Prime Minister Modi came to power, his vision was a self-sufficient India. In dynamic times, India would reap benefits if it strives for 'Atmanirbharta'.

9. India's wars of tomorrow would have to be fought with Indian equipment only.

10. The Russia-Ukraine crisis has clearly shown the vulnerability of depending upon another nation for military equipment.

Conclusion:
We are heading toward a more divided and unstable world geo-politically and geo-economically. The existing global structures that in any case needed reform are breaking up. A new Cold War has begun. The crippling of Russian power as a result of the crisis which the West is aiming for will create a void that China will fill.

Europe’s ambition to develop a degree of strategic autonomy has been quashed with NATO’s rejuvenation under American pressure and internal European divisions.

The US is reaching out to China to persuade it not to support Russia on Ukraine and if it succeeds- for which China will extract a price- the stage would have been set for a G 2 world that China aspires for.

This can impact on the Indo-Pacific concept and the QUAD. India will now pursue an even more nimble-footed foreign policy to protect its interests in an increasingly challenging external environment.

15. Overcoming differences: On India’s new push for stronger ties with Europe
Context:
Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s **three-nation tour of Germany, France and Denmark** is a fine example of deft timing and substance in conducting diplomacy with a region that holds great strategic and economic significance for India.

This was Modi’s first foreign visit in 2022 and it took place against the backdrop of the continuing war in Ukraine that has rent asunder European security paradigms.

India’s well-considered position against protracted war, its call for immediate cessation of hostilities and advocacy of a peaceful resolution of the dispute stand in contrast to the trans-Atlantic cacophony on sanctioning Russia as well as the West’s vicarious military response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

What was billed a simple “tete-a tete” during a “working visit” turned out to be a comprehensive discussion on bilateral, regional and international issues.

**key highlights of the PM tour:**
1. The India and Germany, two countries’ partnership has been reaffirmed in Germany.
2. In addition, Germany has announced a €10 billion investment in bilateral collaboration.
3. India and Germany also disclosed the details of their next phase of cooperation. Germany has described **India as its "Central Partner" in Asia**, with strong cooperation expected to continue.
4. In Copenhagen, PM Modi attended the 2nd Edition of India-Nordic Summit with leaders of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.
5. The Prime Minister held talks with French President in Paris, who was recently re-elected as president.
6. Both sides discussed issues of Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific Region, Afghanistan and agreed to extend the strategic cooperation in areas of defence, space, nuclear energy and climate change.
7. **Climate change** was another key issue during the stopovers in Berlin and Copenhagen.
8. **France and India**, that worked closely for the success of the Paris climate accord, and co-founded the **International Solar Alliance in 2015**, are ready to take it to the next level setting up industrial partnerships to build integrated supply chains in solar energy production for markets in Europe and Asia.
9. There was also a **bilateral strategic dialogue on space issues**, which will build on their six-decade-long partnership in the field of space a contested area now with China, Russia and the U.S. stepping up hostilities in this frontier.

**India–France Joint Statement:**

1. India and France have been **strategic partners** since 1998. The strategic partnership is anchored on the solid bedrock of deep and consistent mutual trust, abiding faith in strategic autonomy, unwavering commitment to international law; and belief in a **multipolar world** shaped by reformed and effective multilateralism.

2. Both are committed to the **shared values of democracy, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and respect for human rights.**

3. In a post-pandemic word, facing global geopolitical challenges, India and France **reaffirmed their commitment** to prepare for the future together by further deepening their cooperation, expanding it in new domains to meet emerging challenges and broadening their international partnership.

4. The **mutual interest in arts and culture** has significantly grown, and artists from our two countries are more and more eager to collaborate around projects such as festivals and residences.

5. The **75th anniversary of the independence of India** is being celebrated since March 2022 through the Bonjour India festival, with a series of events throughout India.

6. For its part, India is organizing the **Namaste France festival**. India was the Guest of Honour at the **Paris Book Festival 2022** and France will be the Guest of Honour at the next New Delhi World Book Fair.

**Indian Ambitious export target of $400 billion in FY2022:**

India also boasts the world’s fastest growing start-up ecosystem in the world. It is "**raining unicorns**” in India as some have described it.

Having achieved an ambitious export target of $400 billion in FY2022, the Indian economy is now well placed to **build stronger and enduring economic partnerships**, including in innovation, with European partners.

It is little wonder that the agreements between the Indian prime minister and his European counterparts covered a panoply of issues ranging from climate change and the Blue Economy to renewables, and from defence and space to fisheries and the Arctic.
As the Indian prime minister wound his way to Denmark, renewable energy and the environment remained on the agenda, but there were also other areas of interest such as agriculture, food processing, smart urban development and shipping.

Modi particularly focused on the three “Ts” in Denmark — trade, technology and talent, the last being a reference to Denmark’s emergence as a big market for India’s human resources.

Regarding Russiam-Ukraine war:
India has chosen to follow the middle path of peace and non-violence, and this stand is now better appreciated even by the doubting Thomases.

It is indeed an emphatic vindication of Modi’s confident foreign policy that he should be so warmly received by all European leaders.

In a world increasingly defined by geostrategic shifts, ideological rivalry and fractured power, Modi’s India has emerged as an important global player with credibility on all sides.

Way Forward on Indian part towards EU countries:
While India has been in an uncomfortable position since the Russia-Ukraine war began and has continued to not condemn Russia for any of its actions so far, there seems to be a level of comprehension by European countries on India’s stance.

India should keep looking for a global climate that supports its economic progress. It should seek to ensure that the world recognizes its contribution to humanity as a civilization.

Individual European countries, particularly Germany and France, need to concentrate on their own strategic and commercial objectives, including sales of defence equipment.

Conclusion:
Both India and EU members should improve their understanding of one another's security concerns. The European Union, for example, is concerned about Russian aggression in Europe. India is concerned about Chinese aggression in Asia as well.

The "Middle Powers," such as France, Germany, and India, should seek policy space for themselves rather than being compelled to take positions by the "Big Powers," the US, China, and Russia.
1. ‘Holes’ in Biodiversity Bill

To reduce burden on wild medicinal plants and encourage cultivation of medicinal plants

Facilitating an environment for collaborative research and investments

Improved research patent application process

Reduced need for practitioners or companies making medical products to seek permission from the National Biodiversity Authority

Increasing the composition of the National Biodiversity Authority & revising certain positions/responsibilities

Context:
Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh has criticized the provisions of the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that is currently being reviewed by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

The law was introduced in Parliament on December 16, 2021 by the Union Environment Minister and was referred to the JPC.

About Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021:
The Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was tabled in the Parliament. The amendments seek to decriminalize certain provisions and bring more foreign investments in the chain of biological resources, including research, patent and commercial utilisation, without compromising the national interest.

It seeks to decriminalize certain provisions in the chain of biological resources.

These changes were brought in consonance with India’s ratification of Nagoya Protocol (access to generic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilisation) in 2012.

However, opposition parties have cited concerns over the bill and it is being referred to a select committee. They demanded the bill to be referred to the Parliament standing committee.
What do the amendments in the Bill deal with?

1. The Biological Diversity Act, 2002 was framed to give effect to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 1992, that strives for **sustainable, fair and equitable sharing of benefits** arising out of the utilisation of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.

2. To do this, it formulates a three-tier structure consisting of a National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the national level, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) at the State level and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at local body levels.

3. The primary responsibility of the BMCs is to **document local biodiversity and associated knowledge** in the form of a People’s Biodiversity Register.

4. The amended Bill was drafted in response to complaints by traditional Indian medicine practitioners, the seed sector, and industry and researchers that the Act imposed a heavy “compliance burden” and made it hard to conduct collaborative research and investments and simplify patent application processes.

5. The text of the Bill also says that it proposes to “**widen the scope of levying access and benefit sharing with local communities** and for further conservation of biological resources.”

6. The Bill seeks to exempt registered AYUSH medical practitioners and people accessing **codified traditional knowledge**, among others, from giving prior intimation to State biodiversity boards for accessing biological resources for certain purposes.

7. Environmentalist organizations such as Legal Initiative for Forests and Environment (LIFE) have said that the amendments were made to “solely benefit” the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) Ministry and **would pave the way for “bio piracy.”**

8. The modifications will exempt AYUSH manufacturing companies from needing approvals from the NBA and thus will go against one of the core provisions of the Act.

What are critical arguments and objections?

1. Experts contended that the Environment Ministry was drawing a distinction between a registered AYUSH practitioner and a company, and exempting the former from the Act.

2. This was an “**artificial distinction**” as nothing prevented a registered AYUSH practitioner from having informal links with a company structure.

3. These paved the way for potential “**abuse of the law**”. 
4. Multiple provisions of the Bill, were aimed at diluting the authority of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), especially the clause appointing 16 ex-officio officers of the Centre.

5. Another provision, that requires companies to seek the approval of the NBA only at the time of commercialisation, and not when applying for a patent, was of concern.

6. The Bill also decriminalized violations, such as bio-piracy and made them civil offences, and this defeated the Act’s “deterrent powers”.

Are there other shortcomings in the Bill?

1. An analysis by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) and the Down To Earth magazine on how the Biodiversity Act was being practically implemented, pointed out serious shortcomings.

2. There was no data available barring a few States on the money received from companies and traders for access and benefit-sharing from use of traditional knowledge and resources.

3. It was unclear if companies had even paid communities despite commitments. In the case of the Irula Cooperative in Tamil Nadu traditional knowledge holders of the method of collecting snake venom used for pharmaceutical products only one company had agreed to pay, but even that promise remained unfulfilled.

4. State boards told Down to Earth that the money collected has not been disbursed to communities because there was no information available about the knowledge holders.

5. As per law, Indian pharmaceutical companies are required to pay between 3-5% on the extracted bioresources or between 0.01-0.05% on the annual gross ex-factory sales.

6. But companies have resisted paying. In most cases, the courts have held that these companies have to seek prior approval and make payments to the NBA or the State boards.

7. Often, it was not clear who was required to pay, how much or what has already been paid.

8. The proposed amendments didn’t address these issues and so aren’t helpful in solving the current challenges of implementation.

Conclusion:
The new amendments might violate the constitutional provisions of the Right to Environment and the International Environmental Conventions and the Protocols that India is a party of.
India has its own share of experiences and struggles on biopiracy cases, such as for neem and turmeric. So, at no cost should India allow commercial utilisation of traditional knowledge without the benefits accruing to the custodians of the knowledge.

So, all the concerns raised by experts need to be addressed thoroughly.

2. The recent woes of the jute industry in West Bengal

Context:
Member of Parliament (MP) from Barrackpore constituency in West Bengal met Textile Minister to apprise him about issues concerning jute farmers, workers and the overall jute industry.

Mills are procuring raw jute at prices higher than what they are selling them at after processing. A September 30, 2021, notification mandated that no entity would be allowed to purchase or sell raw jute at a price exceeding ₹6,500 per quintal. The cyclone Amphan in May 2020 and the subsequent rains in major jute producing States aggravated the crisis.

The operations of 20 jute mills in Barrackpore constituency, with lakhs of people dependent on them, were adversely affected with many forced to shut down and many others on the verge of
Approximately 60 mills operating in the State, 15 had shut down because of the crisis.

**Climatic Conditions for Jute growth:**
The jute plant needs a plain alluvial soil and standing water. Soft water is necessary for jute production.

**Availability of quality jute:** The Ganga-Brahmaputra delta grows about 90 percent of India’s jute and provides raw material to jute mills.

**Transportation:** Cheap water transportation is available in the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta region. The area is also served by a network of roads and railways.

**Labour:** High density of population is required for abundant cheap labour. The suitable climate for growing jute (warm and wet) is offered by the monsoon climate, during the monsoon season.

Temperatures from 20 to 40 °C (68–104 °F) and relative humidity of 70%–80% are favorable for successful cultivation. Jute requires 5–8 cm (2–3 in) of rainfall weekly, and more during the sowing time.

**What is the problem all about?**
In simple words, mills are procuring raw jute at prices higher than what they are selling them at after processing. Let’s understand the mechanism first.

1. Mills do not acquire their raw material directly from the farmers. There are two reasons for the same.
2. First, because the farmers are far-off from the mills locations and the procurement process is cumbersome.
3. Mills would have to go to multiple farmers to acquire the requisite quantity as no single farmer produces enough to fulfil the requirements of the entire mill.
4. The procurement now flows through middlemen or traders. As a standard practice, the middlemen charge mills for their services, which involves procuring jute from farmers, grading, bailing and then bringing the bales to the mills.
5. The government has a fixed Minimum Support Price (MSP) for raw jute procurement from farmers, which is ₹4,750 per quintal for the 2022-23 season.
6. However, as the executive stated, this reached his mill at ₹7,200 per quintal, that is, ₹700 more than the ₹6,500 per quintal cap for the final product.
7. Though the Union government has come up with several schemes to prevent de-hoarding, the executive believes the mechanism requires a certain “systematic regulation”.
What happened to supply?
What made the situation particularly worrisome recently was the occurrence of Cyclone Amphan in May 2020 and the subsequent rains in major jute producing States.

These events led to lower acreage, which in turn led to lower production and yield compared to previous years.

Additionally, as the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) stated in its report, this led to production of a lower quality of jute fiber in 2020-21 as water-logging in large fields resulted in farmers harvesting the crop prematurely.

Acreage issues were accompanied by hoarding at all levels – right from the farmers to the traders.

Where is jute used?
1. Bulk of the final jute produced is used for packaging purposes. The provisions of the Jute Packaging Material (Compulsory use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987 or the JPM Act mandate that 100% production of foodgrains and 20% sugar production must be packaged in jute bags.
2. The share of jute used for sacks, therefore, increased from 67.9% for the TE (TE: Triennium Ending or three years ending) 2010-11 to 78.3% in TE 2020-21.
3. On the other hand, jute used for manufacturing other products (such as furnishing materials, fashion accessories, floor coverings or varied applications in paper and textile industries) has declined from 15.5% to 9.7% during the same period.
4. As per the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), India is the largest producer of jute followed by Bangladesh and China.
5. However, in terms of acreage and trade, Bangladesh takes the lead accounting for three-fourth of the global jute exports in comparison to India’s 7%.
6. This can be attributed to the fact that India lags behind Bangladesh in producing superior quality jute fibre due to infrastructural constraints related to retting, farm mechanisation, lack of availability of certified seeds and varieties suitable for the country’s agro-climate.
7. What also does not bode well for India is that jute acreage competes with crops as paddy, maize, groundnut, and sesame.
8. The increased availability of synthetic substitutes is further bothering the demand for jute domestically.
9. Further, as the CACP report stated, Bangladesh provides cash subsidies for varied semi-finished and finished jute products.

Hence, the competitiveness emerges as a challenge for India to explore export options in order to compensate for the domestic scenario.

What is at stake?
As the jute sector provides direct employment to 3.70 lakh workers in the country and supports the livelihood of around 40 lakh farm families, closure of the mills is a direct blow to workers and indirectly, to the farmers whose production is used in the mills.

West Bengal, Bihar and Assam account for almost 99% of India’s total production.

Measures taken for the jute industry:

1. Improve quality: Innovative ways of bleaching, dyeing, and finished goods processes the jute industry now provides finished jute products that are softer and have to luster with aesthetic appeal.

2. Today Jute has been defined as eco-friendly natural fiber with utmost versatility ranging from low-value geo-textiles to high-value carpets, decorative, apparel, composites, upholstery furnishings, etc.

3. Efforts in R&D to strengthen the jute industry and implement newer technologies, diversified products, and improved machinery through intensive modernization.

4. These will fetch more profit by reducing cost and has less market competition (synthetic counterpart) due to its eco-friendly property which has good prospects in the coming days.

5. Jute cultivation is being expanded. There has been some dispersion, due to increasing demand from the sugar industry in UP and cement industry MP.

Way Ahead:
The future prospects of the Jute industry, however, is bright due to the following:

1. Diversification of jute products
2. Environmental awareness
3. Ban on polythene and plastic bags
4. Increasing use for oil conservation
5. Construction of bunds, river embankments, landslide protection
6. Along with cotton, jute is also being used for apparel manufacturing.
Conclusion:

**Diversification of jute products** such as clothing items, decorative items, matting of carpet improve durability, packing items, etc. has been done to increase the horizon of Jute Industry.

**Jute is environment friendly and renewable**; hence its use must be encouraged e.g. by making it mandatory to use jute for packaging.

Govt has issued orders like cement, sugar, fertilizer, have to strictly make use of jute production to packing the materials, Food Corporation of India, oilseeds, and tea sector also have to implement this order.

National jute Manufactures Corporation has been formed to boost the jute industry.

3. The grim forewarnings of a global study on birds

Context:

The **State of the World’s Birds**, an annual review of environmental resources published on May 5 by nine natural sciences and avian specialists across the globe, has revealed that the **population of 48% of the 10,994 surviving species of birds is declining**.

The report led by the Manchester Metropolitan University gives an overview of the changes in the knowledge of avian biodiversity and the extent to which it is imperilled.

**What are the key findings of the study?**

1. The study found that 5,245 or about 48% of the existing bird species worldwide are known or suspected to be undergoing population declines.
2. While 4,295 or 39% of the species have stable trends, about 7% or 778 species have increasing population trends. The trend of 37 species was unknown.

3. The study draws from BirdLife International’s latest assessment of all birds for the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List that shows 1,481 or 13.5% species are currently threatened with global extinction.

4. These include 798 species classified as vulnerable, 460 as endangered and 223 as critically endangered while 52 species were considered to be data deficient.

5. About 73% species are estimated to have fewer than 10,000 mature individuals, 40% have fewer than 2,500 mature individuals, and almost 5% have fewer than 50 mature individuals.

6. The bird species are non-randomly threatened across the avian tree of life, with richness of threatened species disproportionately high among families such as parrots, pheasants and allies, albatrosses and allies, rails, cranes, cracids, grebes, megapodes, and pigeons.

7. The more threatened bird species (86.4%) are found in tropical than in temperate latitudes (31.7%), with hotspots for threatened species concentrated in the tropical Andes, southeast Brazil, eastern Himalayas, eastern Madagascar, and Southeast Asian islands.

What is the importance of birds to ecosystems and culture?

1. Birds are a truly global taxon, with one or more species occupying all habitats across the earth’s terrestrial surface including urban environments with no natural analogues.

2. Birds contribute toward many ecosystem services that either directly or indirectly benefit humanity. These include provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services.

3. The functional role of birds within ecosystems as pollinators, seed-dispersers, ecosystem engineers, scavengers and predators not only facilitate accrual and maintenance of biodiversity but also support human endeavours such as sustainable agriculture via pest control besides aiding other animals to multiply.

4. For instance, coral reef fish productivity has been shown to increase as seabird colonies recovered following rat eradication in the Chagos archipelago.

5. Wild birds and products derived from them are also economically important as food (meat, eggs).

6. Approximately 45% of all extant bird species are used in some way by people, primarily as pets (37%) and for food (14%).
7. The cultural role of birds is perhaps more important than any other taxonomic group.

8. Beyond its symbolic and artistic values, birdwatching is a global pastime practised by millions of people.

9. Garden bird-feeding is valued at $5-6 billion per year and growing by four per cent annually.

**What are the threats contributing to avian biodiversity loss?**
The study lists eight factors, topped by land cover and land-use change.

1. The continued growth of human populations and of per capita rates of consumption lead directly to conversion and degradation of primary natural habitats and consequent loss of biodiversity.

2. Although global tree cover increased between 1982 and 2016, including by 95,000 sq. km in the tropical dry forest biome and by 84,000 sq. km in the tropical moist deciduous forest biome, this has been driven by afforestation with plantations (often of non-native species) plus land abandonment in parts of the global North, with net loss in the tropics.

3. The other factors are habitat fragmentation and degradation, especially in the tropics;

4. Hunting and trapping with 11 to 36 million birds estimated to be killed or taken illegally in the Mediterranean region alone;

5. The impact of invasive alien species and disease (971 alien bird species introduced accidentally or deliberately to 230 countries over the centuries have affected the native species);

6. Infrastructure, energy demands and pollution;

7. Agrochemical and pharmaceutical usage (pesticide ingestion kills an estimated 2.7 million birds annually in Canada alone);

8. Global trade teleconnections; and

9. Climate change.

**Can the avian biodiversity loss be stemmed?**
Yes. The study says ornithologists have a good understanding of the spatio-temporal patterns of avian diversity compared to many other taxa and the measures needed to slow down and ultimately reverse avian biodiversity loss.
The growing footprint of the human population represents the **ultimate driver of most threats to avian biodiversity**, so the success of solutions will depend on the degree to which they account for the social context in which they are implemented, and our ability to effect changes in individual and societal attitudes and behaviour.

**Conclusion:**
Emerging concepts of conservation social science can inform efforts to address biodiversity loss and to achieve **more effective and sustainable conservation outcomes**, linking birds to human well-being, **sustainability, climate resilience, and environmental justice**.

The continued degradation of the primary natural habitats of birds due to human activities should be mitigated because birds **contribute towards many ecosystem services** that either directly or indirectly benefit humanity.

**Avian biodiversity needs to be conserved as it has a direct bearing on human wellbeing and sustainability.**

**4. The rise of AI chips**

**Introduction:**
The adoption of **Artificial Intelligence (AI) chips** has risen, with chipmakers designing different types of these chips to power AI applications such as natural language processing (NLP), computer vision, robotics, and network security across a wide variety of sectors, including automotive, IT, healthcare, and retail.

Market leader Nvidia recently announced its **H100 GPU (graphics processing unit)**, which is said to be one of the **world's largest and most powerful AI accelerators**, packed with 80 billion transistors.

**The edge AI chip industry is poised for growth**

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Sources: MarketsandMarkets, Edge AI hardware market by device (smartphones, cameras, robots, automobiles, smart speakers, wearables, and smart mirrors), processor (CPU, GPU, ASIC, and others), power consumption, process, end user industry, and region—global forecast to 2024, April 4, 2019; Deloitte analysis.
Earlier this month, Nvidia’s rival Intel launched new AI chips to provide customers with deep learning compute choices for training and inferencing in data centres.

The increasing adoption of AI chips in data centres is one of the major factors driving the growth of the market.

What are AI chips?

1. AI chips are built with specific architecture and have integrated AI acceleration to support deep learning-based applications.

2. Deep learning, more commonly known as active neural network (ANN) or deep neural network (DNN), is a subset of machine learning and comes under the broader umbrella of AI.

3. It combines a series of computer commands or algorithms that stimulate activity and brain structure.

4. DNNs go through a training phase, learning new capabilities from existing data.

5. DNNs can then inference, by applying these capabilities learned during deep learning training to make predictions against previously unseen data.

6. Deep learning can make the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting enormous amounts of data faster and easier.

7. These chips, with their hardware architectures and complementary packaging, memory, storage and interconnect technologies, make it possible to infuse AI into a broad spectrum of applications to help turn data into information and then into knowledge.

8. There are different types of AI chips such as application-specific integrated circuits (ASICs), field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), central processing units (CPUs) and GPUs, designed for diverse AI applications.

Information about Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Artificial Intelligence (AI) describes the action of machines accomplishing tasks that have historically required human intelligence.

It includes technologies like machine learning, pattern recognition, big data, neural networks, self algorithms etc.

AI involves complex things such as feeding a particular data into the machine and making it react as per the different situations.
It is basically about **creating self-learning patterns** where the machine can give answers to the never answered questions like a human would ever do.

Example: Million of algorithms and codes are there around the humans to understand their commands and perform human-like tasks.

Facebook’s list of suggested friends for its users, a pop-up page, telling about an upcoming sale of the favourite brand of shoes and clothes, that comes on screen while browsing the internet, are the work of artificial intelligence.

**Are AI chips different from traditional chips?**

1. When traditional chips, containing processor cores and memory, perform computational tasks, they continuously move commands and data between the two hardware components.

2. These chips, however, are not ideal for AI applications as they would not be able to handle higher computational necessities of AI workloads which have huge volumes of data.

3. Although, some of the higher-end traditional chips may be able to process certain AI applications.

4. In comparison, AI chips generally contain **processor cores as well as several AI-optimised cores** (depending on the scale of the chip) that are designed to work in harmony when performing computational tasks.

5. The AI cores are optimized for the demands of heterogeneous enterprise-class AI workloads with low-latency inferencing, due to close integration with the other processor cores, which are designed to handle non-AI applications.

6. AI chips, essentially, reimagine traditional chips’ architecture, **enabling smart devices to perform sophisticated deep learning tasks** such as object detection and segmentation in real-time, with minimal power consumption.

**What are their applications?**

1. Semiconductor firms have developed various specialized AI chips for a multitude of smart machines and devices, including ones that are said to deliver the performance of a data centre-class computer to edge devices.

2. Some of these chips support in-vehicle computers to run state-of-the-art AI applications more efficiently.
3. AI chips are also **powering applications** of computational imaging in wearable electronics, drones, and robots.

4. Additionally, the **use of AI chips for NLP applications has increased** due to the rise in demand for chatbots and online channels such as Messenger, Slack, and others. They use NLP to analyse user messages and conversational logic.

5. Then there are chipmakers who have built AI processors with **on-chip hardware acceleration**, designed to help customers achieve business insights at scale across banking, finance, trading, insurance applications and customer interactions.

6. As AI becomes pervasive across different workloads, having a dedicated inference accelerator that includes support for major deep learning frameworks would allow companies **to harness the full potential of their data**.

### What can be expected in the future?

1. AI company Cerebras Systems set a new standard **with its brain-scale AI solution**, paving the way for more advanced solutions in the future.

2. Its CS-2, powered by the Wafer Scale Engine (WSE-2) is a single wafer-scale chip with 2.6 trillion transistors and 8,50,000 AI optimised cores.

3. The **human brain** contains on the order of 100 trillion synapses, the firm said, adding that a single CS-2 accelerator can support models of over 120 trillion parameters (synapse equivalents) in size.

4. Another AI chip design approach, **neuromorphic computing**, utilises an engineering method based on the activity of the biological brain.

5. An increase in the **adoption of neuromorphic chips** in the automotive industry is expected in the next few years, according to Research And Markets.

6. Additionally, the rise in the need for smart homes and cities, and the surge in investments in AI start-ups are expected **to drive the growth of the global AI chip market**, as per a report by Allied Market Research.

7. The Worldwide AI chip industry accounted for **$8.02 billion in 2020** and is expected to reach **$194.9 billion by 2030**, growing at a **compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 37.4% from 2021 to 2030**.

### Conclusion:
The UN Secretary-General’s **Roadmap on Digital Cooperation** is a good starting point: it lays out the need for multi-stakeholder efforts on global cooperation so AI is used in a manner that is
“trustworthy, human rights-based, safe and sustainable, and promotes peace”.

And UNESCO has developed a global, comprehensive standard-setting draft Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence to Member States for deliberation and adoption.

Agreeing on common guiding principles is an important first step, but it is not the most challenging part.

It is where principles meet reality that the ethical issues and conundrums arise in practice, and for which we must be prepared for deep, difficult, multi-stakeholder ethical reflection, analyses and resolve. Only then will AI provide humanity its full promise.

5. The search algorithm in action

Introduction: Algorithms play a crucial role for search engines as they process millions of web searches every day.

With the quantity of information available on the internet growing steadily, search algorithms are becoming increasingly complex, raising privacy and other concerns and drawing the attention of regulators.

Context: Recently, U.K.’s digital watchdog said they will take a closer look at algorithms, seeking views on the benefits and risks of how sites and apps use algorithms, as well as inputs on auditing algorithms, the current landscape and the role of regulators.
How do search algorithms work?

1. An algorithm, essentially, is a **series of instructions**. It can be used to perform a calculation, find answers to a question or solve a problem.

2. Search engines use a number of algorithms **to perform different functions** prior to displaying relevant results to an individual’s search request.

3. Tech giant Alphabet Inc’s Google, whose **flagship product is the Google search engine**, is the dominant player in the search market.

4. Its search engine provides results to consumers with the help of its ranking systems, which are composed of a broad set of algorithms, that **sort through web pages in its search index** to find the most appropriate results in quick time.

5. Its search algorithms consider several factors, including the words and expressions of a user’s query, relevance and usability of pages, expertise of sources, and the user’s location and settings, according to the firm.

6. While Google **captures a significant chunk of the general search market**, there are alternative search engines such as Microsoft’s Bing and DuckDuckGo available for users to explore.

7. The latter, a **privacy-focused search engine**, claims it does **not collect or share users’ personal information**.

8. In January, market leader Google generated 61.4% of all core search queries in the U.S., according to database company Statista.

9. During the same period of time, Microsoft sites handled a quarter of all search queries in the U.S.

How are they developed?

Algorithms are often **built using historical data and for specific functions**.

1. Once developed, they go through frequent updates from the companies to **enhance the quality of search engine results** presented to users.

2. Most large search engine providers also bank on machine learning to automatically improve their users’ search experience, **essentially by identifying patterns in previous decisions** to make future ones.

3. Over the years, Google has developed search algorithms and updated them constantly, with some major updates like Panda, Penguin, Hummingbird, RankBrain, Medic, Pigeon, and Payday, meant to enhance some function or address some issue.
4. In March, it introduced another update to improve the search engine’s ability to identify high-quality product reviews.

5. Search engines exert huge control over which sites consumers can find. Any changes or updates in their algorithms could also mean that traffic is steered away from certain sites and businesses, which could have a negative effect on their revenue.

Negative side: What’s the current state of these algorithms?
1. Manipulate and Change Consumer Perceptions:
   a. These search algorithms can be used to personalize services in ways that are difficult to detect, leading to search results that can be manipulated to reduce choice or artificially change consumers’ perceptions.

2. Additionally, firms can also use these algorithms to change the way they rank products on websites, prioritizing their own products and excluding competitors.

3. Some of these concerns have caught the eye of regulators and as a result these search algorithms have come under their scrutiny.

4. The European Commission has fined Google €2.42 billion for abusing its market dominance as a search engine by giving an illegal advantage to another Google product, its comparison-shopping service.

5. Moreover, under the Commission’s proposal on the Digital Services Act, transparency measures for online platforms on a variety of issues, including the algorithms used for recommending content or products to users are expected to come into force.

6. “Majority of algorithms used by private firms online are currently subject to little or no regulatory oversight,” U.K.’s Competition and Markets Authority has said earlier in a statement, adding that “more monitoring and action is required by regulators.”

What are the concerns?
1. The search giant’s trackers have allegedly been found on majority of the top million websites, as per a DuckDuckGo blog post.

2. This means they are not only tracking what you search for, [but] they’re also tracking which websites you visit, and using all your data for ads that follow you around the internet.
3. According to a **Council of Europe study**, the use of data from profiles, including those established based on data collected by search algorithms and search engines, directly affects the right to a person’s informational self-determination.

4. **Most of Google’s revenues stem from advertisements, such as those it shows consumers in response to a search query.**

5. DuckDuckGo, in addition to providing an alternative to Google’s search engine, offers mobile apps and desktop browser extensions to protect users’ privacy while browsing the web.

6. The privacy-focused firm, in a blog post, said that editorialized results, informed by the personal information Google has on people (like their search, browsing, and purchase history), puts them in a “Filter Bubble” based on what Google’s algorithms think they are most likely to click on.

**Conclusion:**
As the algorithms used to deliver results would vary from one search engine to another, when a user inputs a query, the results would also differ.

Moreover, **results from different users would be rarely similar**, even when searching for the same things, since the algorithms take into account multiple factors, like their location.

Therefore, **Algorithms play a crucial role for search engines as they process millions of web searches every day.**
With the quantity of information available on the **internet growing steadily**, search algorithms are becoming increasingly complex, raising privacy and other concerns and drawing the attention of regulators.
ESSAYS
Write an essay on the following topic in not more than 1000-1200 words:
1. The journey is a reward as well as destination
2. Imagination creates reality
3. The curious paradox is, only if we accept things as they are, things can change
4. The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are so certain of themselves, while wiser people are so full of doubts
5. Loyalty To Country Always. Loyalty To Government Only When It Deserves