NEXT IAS

SUMMARY OF
DOWN TO EARTH

[16–31 MARCH, 2025]

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CONTENT

[16–31 March, 2025]

SUBJECTIVE QUESTIONS

MCQS

Transgender Representation in India: Mission For Inclusion

Context

- Transgender individuals in India have a rich cultural history but face significant challenges in contemporary society, despite legal recognition and progressive policies.

Status of Transgender in India

- As per the **2011 Census**, there are **over 0.48 million** transgender people in India.

- **Legal Milestones:**

  - **NALSA Judgment (2014):** The **Supreme Court of India** recognized transgender individuals as the **'third gender'**, affirming their fundamental rights under the Constitution.

  - **Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:** It prohibits discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, and other areas.

    - It provides for the issuance of identity certificates, ensuring access to government schemes and benefits.

  - **National Council for Transgender Persons:** Established in 2020, this council advises the government on policies and programs for the welfare of transgender individuals.

- **Government Initiatives:**

  - The establishment of the **National Council for Transgender Persons in 2020** aims to advise and monitor policies for the welfare of the community.

  - **Schemes like the 'SMILE' initiative** focus on rehabilitation, education, and skill development for transgender individuals.

Case Study

- In 2023, a groundbreaking moment for **inclusivity in Chhattisgarh** as nine transgender individuals **participated in the Republic Day parade for the first time,** as part of the **Bastar Fighter Force**, a specialized police unit formed to tackle the **Naxalite insurgency.**

- Their inclusion is hailed as a significant victory for the transgender community, symbolizing a shift toward acceptance and equality.

Progress in Representation

- **Employment Opportunities:** Initiatives like the recruitment of transgender individuals in the Chhattisgarh police force and their inclusion in municipal boards highlight progress in mainstream employment.

- **Education and Skill Development:** Programs aimed at providing scholarships, vocational training, and skill development have empowered transgender individuals to pursue diverse careers.

- **Political Participation:** Transgender individuals have contested elections and held public office, symbolizing their growing representation in governance.

- **Cultural and Social Inclusion:** Events like pride parades, cultural festivals, and media representation have helped challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance.

Challenges Ahead

- **Social Stigma:** Despite legal recognition, transgender individuals continue to face societal prejudice and discrimination in daily life.

- **Access to Healthcare:** Specialized healthcare services, including gender-affirming treatments, remain limited and inaccessible to many.

- **Economic Disparities:** A significant portion of the transgender community remains unemployed or engaged in informal sectors, highlighting the need for inclusive economic policies.

- **Legal Gaps:** The Transgender Persons Act has faced criticism for its provisions on self-identification and lack of clarity on reservations in education and employment.

Way Forward

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Public awareness initiatives can challenge stereotypes and foster acceptance of transgender individuals in society.

- **Policy Reforms:** Strengthening existing laws and introducing reservations in education and employment can ensure greater inclusion.

- **Community Engagement:** Involving transgender individuals in policy-making and implementation can address their unique needs and challenges.

- **Collaboration with Civil Society:** Partnerships with NGOs and community organizations can amplify efforts to empower transgender individuals.

Backlash Against Women's Rights: UN Women

Context

- According to a new **report by UN Women**, nearly a quarter of governments worldwide reported a backlash against women's rights in 2024.

- The report says that despite **three decades of progress** since the '**Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action'** many societies are witnessing the mainstreaming of misogyny.

About the Backlash: A Global Phenomenon

- According to **UN Women's latest report**, nearly **one in four countries** reported a backlash against women's rights in 2024. It is evident in various forms, including *weakened legal protections, reduced funding for gender equality programs, and rising levels of discrimination.*

  - Economic instability, political pushback, and global crises like pandemic and climate change have further exacerbated these challenges.

- The digital space has become a battleground, with artificial intelligence and social media platforms amplifying harmful stereotypes and misogyny.

  - Women and girls remain underrepresented in technology and digital fields, limiting their opportunities and perpetuating inequalities.

Key Areas of Concern

- **Reproductive Rights:** Attacks on reproductive rights, including access to safe

abortion and contraception, have intensified in many regions, undermining women's autonomy over their bodies.

● **Gender-Based Violence:** Violence against women and girls remains pervasive, with alarming statistics showing that a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by a family member or intimate partner.

● **Economic Inequality:** The gender pay gap persists, and women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care work, limiting their economic independence.

● **Political Participation:** Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles, with only 87 countries having been led by a woman at some point in history.

UN Women's Call to Action

● **Promoting Legal Reforms:** Governments must enact and enforce laws to protect women's rights and eliminate discriminatory practices.

● **Investing in Social Protection:** Expanding access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities is essential for empowering women and girls.

● **Closing the Digital Gender Gap:** Ensuring equal access to technology and addressing online violence and abuse are critical steps in creating a safer digital environment.

● **Supporting Women's Leadership:** Increasing women's representation in politics,

business, and other sectors is vital for achieving true parity.

Conclusion

● The backlash against women's rights is a stark reminder that progress is neither linear nor guaranteed.

● As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres aptly stated, 'When women and girls can rise, we all thrive'.

● It is imperative for governments, civil society, and individuals to stand firm in defending gender equality and ensuring that the rights of women and girls are upheld everywhere.

Draft Policy on Private Investment in Afforestation Projects

Context

● Recently, the Madhya Pradesh forest department released a draft policy on private investment in afforestation projects, in exchange for carbon credits.

● The state has 3.7 million hectares of degraded forest land, which the policy proposes be restored with help from private funds.

About the Policy Framework

● The draft policy, titled **Forest Restoration Using CSR, CER, and Non-Governmental Funds,** outlines the **involvement of private players** in afforestation efforts.

- Madhya Pradesh has identified approximately 3.7 million hectares of degraded forest land out of its total 9.5 million hectares of forest.

Key Aspects

- **Afforestation Costs:** The cost of afforestation is estimated to range between ₹5 lakh and ₹8 lakh per hectare, depending on factors such as location, soil conditions, and climate.

- **Participation Criteria:** Industrial groups, corporate entities, individuals, and voluntary organizations can participate, selecting degraded forest land ranging from 10 to 10,000 hectares for a 60-year period.

- **Carbon Credits:** Investors will have the right to carbon credits for the duration of the agreement, with joint forest management committees (JFMCs) retaining a 10% share in these credits.

- **Compliance with Laws:** The policy mandates adherence to existing laws, including the *Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.*

Benefits of the Initiative

- **Ecological Restoration:** The initiative aims to restore degraded forest ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation.

- **Economic Opportunities:** Local communities stand to benefit from employment opportunities and strengthened forest-based livelihoods.

- **Carbon Sequestration:** By increasing green cover, the policy supports carbon sequestration efforts, aligning with global climate goals.

- **Private Sector Involvement:** The policy encourages contributions from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) funds, fostering public-private partnerships.

Concerns and Challenges

- **Land Ownership:** While private entities will not gain ownership rights, concerns remain about the long-term implications of granting access to state-owned forests.

- **Community Rights:** Ensuring that the rights of local and indigenous communities are protected is critical to the success of the initiative.

- **Monitoring and Accountability:** Effective monitoring mechanisms are needed to prevent misuse of resources and ensure compliance with environmental standards.

Finalise Identification of Forest Areas: Supreme Court of India

Context

- As part of its efforts to enforce the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, more effectively, SC

issued a six-month ultimatum to all states and Union Territories to finalise identification of forest areas.

About the Directive

- The Supreme Court's order mandates the formation of expert committees in each state and Union Territory to identify and consolidate records of forest lands, including unclassified and community forest areas.

- These committees are required to adhere to the provisions of the **Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023,** which emphasize the protection and sustainable management of forest resources.

- It holds chief secretaries and administrators accountable for ensuring timely compliance. Failure to meet the six-month deadline could result in legal consequences, reflecting the Court's commitment to environmental conservation.

Significance of the Order

- **Environmental Protection:** The consolidation of forest land records is crucial for preventing illegal encroachments and ensuring that no forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes without compensatory afforestation.

- **Clarity in Land Use:** Comprehensive records will help resolve disputes related to forest land ownership and usage, promoting transparency and accountability.

- **Alignment with Conservation Laws:** The directive aligns with the amendments to the **Forest Conservation Act, 1980,** and reinforces the principles of sustainable development.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Data Discrepancies:** Inconsistent and outdated records across states pose a significant challenge to the consolidation process.

- **Coordination Among Stakeholders:** Effective collaboration between government agencies, local communities, and environmental experts is essential for the success of this initiative.

- **Time Constraints:** The six-month deadline requires swift action and efficient resource allocation to meet the Court's expectations.

Water Stress in India

Context

- According to the **World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Risks Report 2025**, water scarcity has emerged as the most pressing environmental risk for India and the world over the next two years.

About Water Stress

- Any country is classified as water stress, if an **annual per capita freshwater availability** is below 1,700 cubic meters (m^3).

- The **WEF report** identifies **water scarcity as a top-five risk in 27 countries**, up from just seven in 2024.

○ Nations like **India, Mexico, Morocco, Tunisia, and Uzbekistan** are at the forefront of this crisis.

● **India ranks 132nd in the world** in terms of per capita water availability.

Policy status
States with and without policy on wastewater reuse
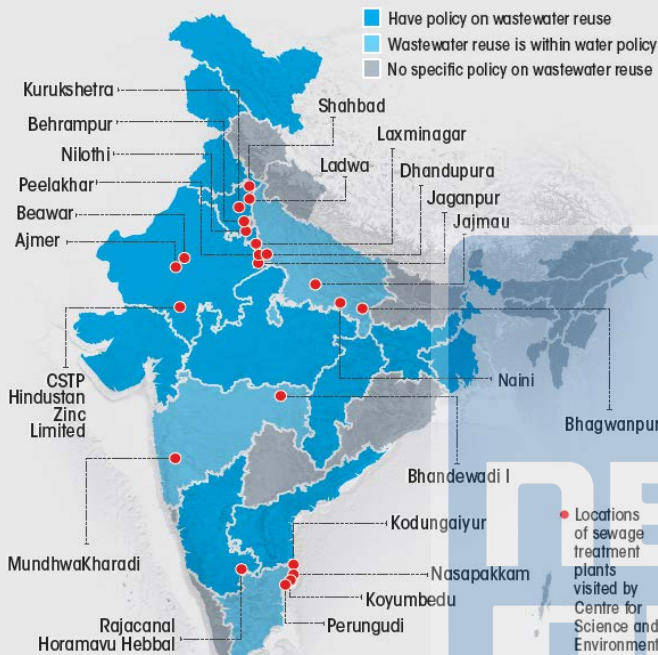
Source:"Waste to Worth: Managing India's Urban Water Crisis Through Wastewater Reuse", Centre for Science and Environment

Declining Water Availability in India

● According to the **India Water Resource Information System**, there has been a **73% decline in per capita surface water** availability **between 1950 and 2024.**

● If immediate corrective measures are not implemented, India risks falling into the 'water scarce' category, where per capita availability drops below 1,000 m³ per year.

Surface water scarcity
Between 1950 and 2024, India has seen a decline of 73 per cent in per capita surface water availability

Source: India Water Resource Information System
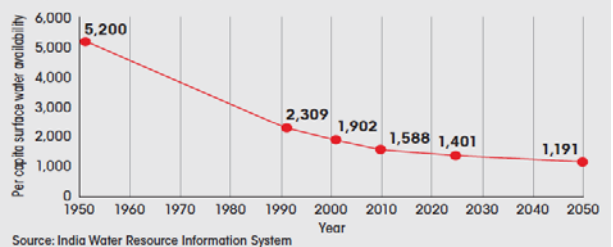
India's Water Challenges

● **Overexploitation of Resources:** India is one of the largest groundwater extractors in the world, with nearly 90% of its groundwater used for irrigation.

○ It has led to alarming depletion levels in states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

Wastewater projections
The total wastewater generation in India will rise by 75-80 per cent in 25 years, reaching an estimated 0.13 million MLD by 2050
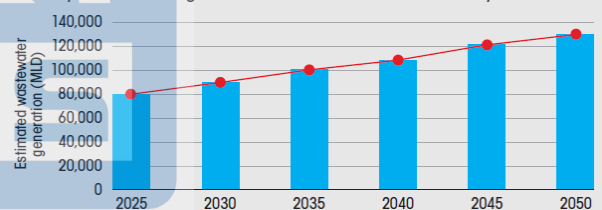
MLD: Million litres a day; Source: NITI Aayog

● **Climate Change Impact:** Erratic monsoon patterns and rising temperatures exacerbate water scarcity, affecting both surface and groundwater availability.

● **Urbanization and Industrialization:** Rapid urban growth and industrial demands have intensified pressure on existing water resources, leading to conflicts over allocation.

- **Pollution:** Contamination of rivers and groundwater by industrial waste, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage further reduces the availability of clean water.

FOCUS ON WASTEWATER
Evolution of national policies and programmes promoting and mandating reuse of treated wastewater

2008
National Urban Sanitation Policy: Promotes the recycle and reuse of wastewater. The policy mandates that treated wastewater should comprise a minimum of 20% of the water used in a city.

2013
Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) Manual on Sewerage and Sewage Treatment Systems: Provides technological options and norms for treated sewage quality for specified activities.

2014
Namami Gange-National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG): Includes initiatives for treatment of sewage and industrial effluents, with emphasis to promote reuse of treated wastewater.

2016
Power Tariff Policy: Mandates thermal power plants to use treated sewage water within 50 km of sewage treatment plants.

2017
National Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) Policy: Focuses on leveraging FSSM to achieve 100% access to safe sanitation.

2021
Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) 2.0: Aims to ensure no untreated wastewater is discharged into environment, and recommends utilisation of used water as much as feasible, but not less than 20%.

AMRUT 2.0: Mandates that all cities with a population of more than 0.01 million recycle used water to meet 20% of the city's water demand and 40% of the industrial water demand at the state level.

2010
Service-Level Benchmark Framework: Encourages the reuse of wastewater in cities.

2012
Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM): Mandates treatment of 100% wastewater in 63 cities, promotes reuse of treated wastewater.

National Water Policy (NWP), 2012: Focuses on reducing water pollution; the draft of the revised NWP, 2020, embraces the imperative of recycling and reuse.

2015
Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT): Encourages reuse of wastewater.

Namami Gange: Memorandums of Understanding signed by NMCG with the Union power, railways and agriculture ministries for reuse of treated wastewater.

2019
Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) issues guidelines for use of treated effluent in irrigation.

2022
National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Wastewater: A guiding document for states to formulate reuse water policies and implement them in a time-bound manner. A draft policy template also developed to aid in states' policy preparation.

2024
CPCB releases national draft guidelines on reuse of treated sewage, which emphasises sectoral prioritisation with certain standards.

Addressing the Crisis

- **Sustainable Water Management:** Adopting practices like rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation techniques, and wastewater recycling can help conserve water resources.

- **Policy Interventions:** Strengthening regulations on groundwater extraction and promoting the use of alternative crops can mitigate overexploitation.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in water storage, treatment, and distribution systems is crucial to address supply-demand gaps.

- **Public Awareness:** Educating communities about water conservation and the importance of sustainable practices can drive collective action.
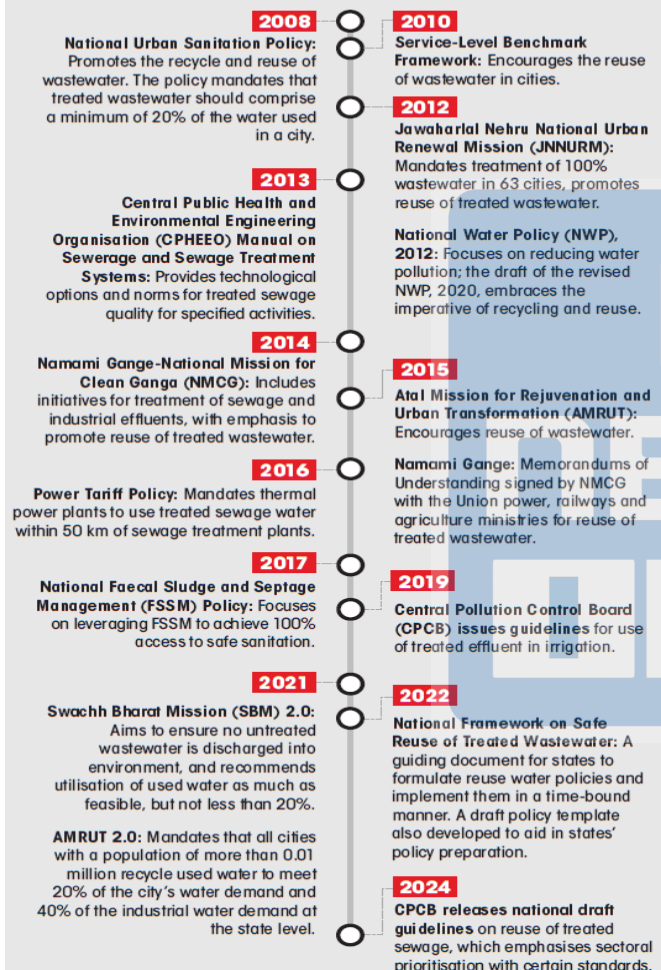
Note: For more details, please follow the link:

https://www.nextias.com/ca/editorial-analysis/04-08-2024/water-crisis-in-india

Women's Poverty of Time: Insights from the Time Use Survey

Context

- Recently, the 'Time Use Survey' found that the women continue to spend more time on unpaid household work and caregiving, as compared to men.

About

- The **concept of 'time poverty'** sheds light on a critical yet often overlooked dimension of inequality — how individuals allocate their time between paid work, unpaid domestic responsibilities, and personal well-being.

- **For women in India**, time poverty is a stark reality, as highlighted by the **National Statistical Office's (NSO) Time Use Survey.**

- It perpetuates gender inequality and limits women's participation in the formal economy and their overall quality of life.

What is Time Poverty?

- It refers to the lack of discretionary time due to the burden of excessive work — both paid and unpaid.

- For women, it means spending a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid domestic chores and caregiving, leaving little room for personal development, leisure, or income-generating activities.

  - This imbalance has far-reaching implications for gender equality and economic growth.

Key Findings from the Time Use Survey

- **Unpaid Domestic Work:** Women spend 81.5% of their time on unpaid domestic services for household members, compared to just 27% for men.

  - It includes cooking, cleaning, and other household chores.

- **Caregiving Responsibilities:** Women dedicate 34% of their time to unpaid caregiving for family members, significantly higher than the 18% spent by men.

- **Paid Employment:** Only 20.7% of women's time is spent on employment and related activities, compared to 61% for men.

  - It highlights the limited opportunities for women to engage in remunerative work.

- **Impact on Economic Participation:** The survey underscores how time poverty excludes women from the formal economy, perpetuating income inequality and limiting their financial independence.

Implications of Time Poverty

- **Economic Costs:** Time poverty among women translates into a loss of potential income and productivity. A 2015 study estimated that this could result in a $9 trillion loss for women and economies in developing countries.

- **Gender Inequality:** The unequal distribution of unpaid work reinforces traditional gender roles and limits women's access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities.

- **Health and Well-being:** The lack of personal time affects women's mental and physical health, contributing to stress and burnout.

Addressing Time Poverty

- **Redistribution of Responsibilities:** Encouraging men to share domestic and caregiving responsibilities can help alleviate the burden on women.

- **Policy Interventions:** Implementing policies such as paid family leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work arrangements can support women in balancing work and family life.

- **Public Awareness:** Campaigns to challenge traditional gender norms and promote shared responsibilities are essential for long-term change.

- **Data-Driven Solutions:** Regular time use surveys can provide valuable insights into gender disparities and inform targeted interventions.

State of States Report

Context

- According to the State of States report, India lags in nine out of the 16 United Nations-mandated SDGs assessed.

Key Findings

- **Limited Progress Across Goals:** Out of the 16 SDGs assessed, India has achieved at least half of the targets in only four:
  - SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being);
  - SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation);
  - SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy);
  - SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).
    - SDG 14 (Life Below Water) was excluded as it applies only to coastal states.
- **Data Gaps and Missing Indicators:** The report identifies significant gaps in India's SDG framework.
  - For instance, under **SDG 1 (No Poverty),** the indicator for eradicating extreme poverty was removed in the 2023-24 assessment.
  - Similarly, SDG 6 lacks measures for water quality, and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) does not include metrics for electronic waste.
- **Regional Disparities:** States like Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu have performed relatively well, meeting more than half of the targets in several SDGs.

- However, populous states such as Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat have achieved less than half of the targets in 30-43% of the indicators.
- **Challenges in Data Collection:** India currently tracks 108 indicators for coastal states and 106 for others.
  - However, data gaps persist in key areas, such as afforestation under SDG 15 (Life on Land) and the impact of extreme weather events under SDG 13 (Climate Action).

Implications

- **Global Impact:** As one of the largest contributors to global development, India's progress on SDGs is critical not only for its population but also for the planet.
- **Policy Shortcomings:** The absence of comprehensive indicators and data hinders targeted interventions and effective policymaking.
- **Need for Holistic Growth:** The report underscores the importance of integrating socio-environmental indices into India's growth model, moving beyond GDP-centric development.

Recommendations

- **Strengthening Data Systems:** Addressing data gaps and including comprehensive indicators for all SDGs is essential for accurate progress tracking.
- **Regional Focus:** Tailored strategies for underperforming states can help bridge regional disparities and accelerate progress.

- **Public-Private Collaboration:** Engaging private entities and civil society in SDG implementation can enhance resource mobilization and innovation.

- **Policy Reimagination:** A shift toward sustainable and inclusive development models is crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard (Saara Hardwickii)

Context

- The **Indian spiny-tailed lizard (Saara hardwickii), India's only herbivorous lizard**, is poached for its meat and to extract an oil believed to have medicinal properties.

About Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard aka Hardwicke's Spiny-tailed Lizard (Saara Hardwickii)

- It is native to the **arid regions of South Asia**, and found **primarily in the Thar Desert** and surrounding areas in **Gujarat.**

- It is **diurnal**, active during the day, and known for its burrowing behavior, creating underground shelters that provide refuge from predators and extreme temperatures.

- Its population declined by 30-35% over the past three generations.

Conservation Status

- IUCN Red List: *Vulnerable*

Measles

Context

- Recently, the United States reported its first measles-related death in a decade, amid an outbreak of the disease across 12 states.

About Measles

- Measles is a highly **contagious and airborne viral disease** that **spreads through respiratory droplets** when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

- It is caused by the **measles virus,** primarily affects children but can infect individuals of all ages.

- Symptoms typically appear 10–14 days after exposure and include high fever, cough, runny nose, red eyes, and a characteristic red rash that spreads across the body.

Global Impact

- **Mortality and Morbidity:** According to the World Health Organization (WHO), measles caused an estimated 107,500 deaths globally in 2023, mostly among unvaccinated children under five years of age.

- **Setbacks Due to COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted immunization programs, leaving millions of children vulnerable to measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

- **Regional Disparities:** Low-income countries with weak healthcare infrastructures bear

the brunt of measles outbreaks, accounting for over 95% of global deaths.

Prevention and Control

- **Vaccination:** The measles vaccine, introduced in the 1960s, is highly effective. Two doses provide immunity to 97% of individuals.

- Routine immunization and mass vaccination campaigns are critical to reducing measles cases.

- **Surveillance:** Robust surveillance systems are essential to identify and address immunity gaps, especially in regions with low vaccination coverage.

COP-16 to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Context

- World leaders at the 1**6th Conference of the Parties (COP16)** to the CBD in Rome finalized a US $200 billion annual biodiversity funding agreement.

About the COP-16 of CBD

- It was held in **two sessions—first in Cali**, **Colombia**, and later **reconvened in Rome** to address critical issues such as biodiversity financing, indigenous rights, and the implementation of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).**

Key Outcomes of COP-16

- **Biodiversity Financing:** Parties agreed to **assess and reform the Global Environment Facility (GEF) over the next three CBD COP sessions,** with the possibility of establishing a **dedicated biodiversity fund.**

  - It reflects the ongoing debate between Global South countries advocating for a new fund and Global North countries favoring reforms to existing mechanisms.

- **Indigenous and Local Community Rights:** A new subsidiary body was established to ensure their full and effective participation in decision-making processes.

  - It highlights the importance of traditional knowledge and practices in achieving global biodiversity goals.

- **Digital Sequence Information (DSI):** The **operationalization of the 'Cali Fund'** was another landmark achievement.

  - It ensures that benefits from the use of digital genetic information are shared equitably, particularly with developing countries and indigenous communities.

  - **Cali fund** aims to support the implementation of the KMGBF and address the self-identified needs of indigenous peoples.

- **Implementation of the KMGBF:** COP-16 reviewed progress on the KMGBF, adopted at COP-15 in 2022.

  - To date, 119 countries have submitted national biodiversity targets aligned with the framework, and 44 have provided National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs).

○ The conference emphasized the need to accelerate action to meet the ambitious targets set for 2030.

Challenges and the Way Forward

● **Resource Mobilization:** While agreements were reached, the lack of consensus on a dedicated biodiversity fund highlights the challenges of balancing diverse priorities among parties.

● **Monitoring and Accountability:** Strengthening mechanisms for planning, monitoring, and reporting is essential to ensure the effective implementation of biodiversity goals.

● **Global Collaboration:** The outcomes of COP-16 demonstrate that multilateralism remains a vital tool for addressing global environmental challenges.

○ Continued dialogue and cooperation will be crucial in the lead-up to COP-17 and beyond.

Table Mountain

Context

● Recently, a fire broke out on the **Table Mountain in Cape Town, South Africa,** which was hosting a meet of G20 officials.

About Table Mountain

● It is a **flat summit** located in Cape Town, South Africa, estimated to be over **300 million years old,** making it one of the oldest mountains on Earth.

● It is part of the **Cape Floral Region**, a **UNESCO World Heritage Site,** and hosts

over 8,200 plant species, 80% of which are endemic.

○ The **fynbos vegetation,** unique to this region, is a key feature of its ecosystem.

○ **Fauna:** Rock hyrax (dassie), porcupines, caracals etc.

First-Ever Comprehensive Survey of India's River Dolphins

Context

● Recently, India has completed its first-ever comprehensive survey of river dolphins, **conducted between 2021 and 2023** under the **Wildlife Institute of India** and the **Union Environment Ministry.**

Key Findings of Survey

● **Population Estimates:** The survey estimated a total of 6,327 river dolphins across India, including **6,324 Gangetic dolphins** and **just three Indus dolphins.**

○ The Gangetic dolphins were primarily found in the Ganga and Brahmaputra river basins, while the Indus dolphins were restricted to the Beas River in Punjab.

● **Regional Distribution: Uttar Pradesh** recorded the **highest number of Gangetic dolphins (2,397)**, followed by Bihar (2,220) and West Bengal (815). Assam accounted for 635 dolphins, while Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh reported smaller populations.

○ The Beas River in Punjab recorded the critically low number of three Indus dolphins.

Gangetic River Dolphin (Platanista Gangetica Gangetica)

- **Habitat:** Found in the **Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna** and **Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems** in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

- **Characteristics**: Known as **'Susu'** these dolphins are **nearly blind** and rely on echolocation to navigate and hunt.

  ○ They are endemic to freshwater and cannot survive in saltwater.

- **Conservation Status:** Listed as **Endangered by the IUCN**, they face threats from habitat fragmentation, pollution, and accidental entanglement in fishing gear.

- **Significance:** Declared **India's National Aquatic Animal in 2009,** they are vital indicators of river ecosystem health.

Indus River Dolphin (Platanista Gangetica Minor)

- **Habitat:** Primarily found in the Indus River in Pakistan, with a small population in the Beas River in Punjab, India.

- **Characteristics:** Similar to their Gangetic counterparts, they are nearly blind and depend on echolocation.

  ○ **Locally known as 'Bhulan'** they are adapted to the murky waters of the Indus.

- **Conservation Status: Endangered** by the IUCN.

- **Habitat and Challenges:** The survey revealed that river dolphins prefer habitats with confluences, meanders, and mid-channel islands.

  ○ However, threats such as pollution, riverbed mining, habitat degradation, and declining prey availability continue to endanger their survival.

Conservation Implications

- **Project Dolphin (2020):** It aims to protect and restore habitats for both river and marine dolphins.

  ○ It underscores the importance of this initiative in addressing the critical threats faced by these species.

- **Role as Bio-Indicators:** River dolphins are considered bio-indicators of healthy river ecosystems.

  ○ It has a cascading effect on the overall health of aquatic habitats and biodiversity.

- **Urgent Attention for Indus Dolphins:** The critically low population of Indus dolphins in India demands immediate conservation efforts, including habitat restoration and stricter protection measures.

Sandalwood and Red Sanders

Context

- Recently, developments in policy and conservation efforts aiming to address issues related to Sandalwood and Red Sanders.

About Sandalwood *(Santalum Album)*

- **Economic Significance:** Indian sandalwood, often **referred to as 'liquid gold'** is prized for its aromatic heartwood and essential oil.

○ It is widely used in perfumes, cosmetics, and traditional medicine.

● **Conservation Status: Vulnerable** (IUCN Red List)

● **Regulatory Challenges:** Historically, the harvesting and trade of sandalwood were monopolized by the government.

○ Even trees grown on private land were subject to strict controls, leaving farmers with little incentive to cultivate them.

● **Policy Shifts:** States like Karnataka have recently relaxed regulations, allowing private cultivation and trade.

○ However, farmers still face challenges such as theft and fluctuating market prices.

About Red Sanders (Pterocarpus Santalinus)

● **Ecological Importance:** Endemic to the **Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh**, Red Sanders is known for its **rich red heartwood,** used in furniture, musical instruments, and traditional medicine.

● **Conservation Status:** Listed as **Endangered on the IUCN Red List,** Red Sanders faces threats from **illegal logging and habitat loss.**

○ Its high market value has made it a target for smuggling.

● **Trade Regulations:** India has **recently been removed from the CITES Review of Significant Trade for Red Sanders,** allowing for its legitimate export.

○ It is expected to benefit farmers while ensuring compliance with conservation laws.

PRIME MINISTER VISITS USA AND FRANCE

PM Modi's Adaptive Strategy with The USA
12-13 February 2025

1

Initialising New U.S.-India COMPACT Initiative for defense, trade, and technology

Defence & Security
- 10-year Framework for **U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership**
- **ASIA alliance** launched for AI-enabled defense tech
- Expanded **Tiger Triumph** Exercise
- Strengthened **Indo-Pacific logistics & intelligence** sharing

Trade & Investment – 'Mission 500'
- **Target to double trade** to $500B by 2030
- **Bilateral Trade Affairs** negotiations set for fall 2025
- **$7.35B in new Indian investments** in the U.S.A.

Technology & Innovation – U.S.-India TRUST Initiative
- **AI** Infrastructure Roadmap
- **INDUS-X** for space, energy, and tech partnerships
- **NASA-ISRO:** First Indian astronaut to ISS & NISAR Earth-mapping mission

2

Optimising Energy & Clean Tech
- U.S. support for India's full **Int. Energy Agency membership**
- Advancing **U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement**

3

Evolving Multilateral & Indo-Pacific Security
- **Strengthening Quad** for regional security & trade
- **Indian Ocean Strategic Venture** for infrastructure & commerce
- U.S. approves extradition of Tahawwur Rana
- Call for Pakistan to act on 26/11 & Pathankot attackers
- **India joins Combined Maritime Forces** to secure sea lanes

4

Reinforcing People-to-People Ties
- **3,00,000 Indian students** contribute $8Bn to the U.S. economy
- **Strengthened higher education ties** through dual-degree programs
- **Streamlined legal mobility** for professionals & tourists
- Enhanced cooperation against trafficking, organised crime, & cyber threats

PM Modi's Diplomatic Upgrade in France
10-12 February 2025

1

Co-chaired AI Action Summit
- Co-chaired with President Macron
- Launched **India-France AI Roadmap** for safe, secure, and trustworthy AI

2

Dynamic Bilateral Cooperation
- PM Modi's **sixth visit** to France
- **Inaugurated India's Consulate General** in Marseille
- India-France Year of Innovation 2026 to be launched in New Delhi
- **France joins India-UAE's Mangrove Alliance** for Climate
- PM Modi paid tribute to Indian soldiers at **Mazargues War Cemetery**

3

Encrypting Defence & Security
- India joins **Eurodrone MALE Programme** as an observer
- Launched **FRIND-X** for defense innovation
- Strengthened **DRDO-ONERA R&D partnership**
- Enhanced **NSG-GIGN counter-terrorism cooperation**
- Focus on **nuclear energy** collaboration

SUBJECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How can India achieve equitable inclusion of transgender individuals in social, economic, and political spheres?

2. What factors contribute to the global backlash against women's rights, and how can governments, communities, and international organizations address these challenges to advance gender equality effectively?

3. What are the key factors driving water stress in India, and how can sustainable water management practices and policy

interventions address the growing challenges of water scarcity and equitable access across regions?

4. How does the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and caregiving responsibilities reinforce gender inequality in India, and what measures can be implemented to address women's poverty of time effectively?

MCQs

1. **'SMILE' initiative, sometimes appeared in the news, is primarily for:**
   (a) Transgender
   (b) Woman & Child
   (c) Senior Citizen
   (d) Daily Wage Earner

2. **Recently 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action' completed its three decades of progress, was primarily launched with the objectives of:**
   (a) Climate Change
   (b) Women Rights
   (c) Nuke Disarmament
   (d) Competition With Cooperation

3. **Which of the following international organizations released the 'Global Risks Report 2025'?**
   (a) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
   (b) World Meteorological Organization (WMO)
   (c) World Economic Forum (WEF)
   (d) World Bank

4. **Which of the following institutions released the 'Time Use Survey'?**
   (a) NITI Aayog
   (b) Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
   (c) Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)
   (d) National Statistical Office (NSO)

5. **Consider the following pairs:**

SDGs	Objectives
1. SDG 3	Good Health and Well-being
2. SDG 6	Clean Water and Sanitation
3. SDG 7	Affordable and Clean Energy
4. SDG 8	Decent Work and Economic Growth

   How many of the above pair(s) is / are correctly matched?
   (a) Only one
   (b) Only two
   (c) Only three
   (d) All four

Answer Key:_____
1. (a) 2. (b) 3. (c) 4. (d) 5. (d)

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