

REGENT EDUCATION & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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GENERAL STUDIES - I

Social Issues

Witchcraft in India

In July 2021, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks (HPAWR).

This resolution brought attention to a global issue, with data compiled by the UN documenting

20,000 cases of HPAWR between 2009 and 2019 in 60 countries.

The data highlights the presence of HPAWR in regions such as the USA, Europe, and India, challenging the perception that this is solely an African issue.

The Scope of Witchcraft-Related Crimes in India -

- India has its own history and ongoing issues with witchcraft-related violence.
- **The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a standard source of crime data in India since 1953, categorises motives for murder, which includes witchcraft.**
- **In 2022, there were 85 documented murders with witchcraft as the motive**, primarily in the states of Chhattisgarh, MP, Jharkhand, and Odisha, with additional cases in Assam, Bihar, and Telangana.
- Although there has been a slight decline in numbers, **the annual count still hovers around 100 murders.**
- **This figure only represents the murders explicitly motivated by witchcraft**, indicating a broader, possibly underreported problem.

Perception and Gender Dynamics in Witchcraft Accusations -

- The term **witch** is etymologically gender-neutral, yet societal perceptions often differ.
- While **wizard (wicca)** is commonly associated with males, **witch tends to be female.**
- According to author Ipsita Roy Chakraverti, although **witchcraft can be sometimes perceived as good**, in reality it is **primarily recognised as evil.**
- This **negative perception is frequently used to justify crimes against women**, not always leading to murder but often resulting in severe social and physical harm.
- **Ignorance and lack of education contribute to these accusations**, with mental health issues or disease outbreaks sometimes leading to individuals being labelled as witches.
- More **sinister motives include targeting widowed or single women for their property**, as well as childless women and educated young women who threaten local vested interests.

Legislative Measures and their Efficacy -

- **Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act (1993) in Bihar —**
 - One of the earliest pieces of legislation aimed at addressing the problem of witch-hunting in India.
 - **This law was enacted to curb the atrocities committed against women accused of being witches.**
- **Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act (2001) in Jharkhand —** This law was introduced to protect women from being branded as witches and subjected to violence and social ostracism.
- **Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act (2005) in Chhattisgarh —** This act specifically targets the practice of witch-hunting and aims to provide justice to the victims.
- **Prevention of Witch Hunting Act (2013) in Odisha —** This comprehensive law seeks to prevent witch-hunting and provide protection and rehabilitation to the victims.

- **Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act (2013) in Maharashtra** — This law not only addresses witch-hunting but also covers other inhuman practices like human sacrifice and black magic.

- **Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act (2017) in Karnataka** — Similar to Maharashtra's law, this act targets a broader range of harmful practices, including witch-hunting.
- **Prevention of Witch Hunting Act (2015) in Rajasthan** — This act aims to protect individuals from being branded and persecuted as witches.
- **Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act (2015) in Assam** — This legislation focuses on preventing witch-hunting and providing protection and rehabilitation to the victims.

Challenges in Implementation -

- Low Rates of Prosecution and Conviction —
 - One of the major issues with these laws is the **low rate of prosecution and conviction**.
 - **Many cases of witch-hunting do not result in legal action**, and when they do, the conviction rates are often low.
 - This is **due to various factors, including insufficient evidence, lack of witnesses, and societal pressures**.
- Lenient Penalties —
 - In some states, the **penalties for witch-hunting are not stringent** enough to act as a deterrent.
 - For instance, **in Jharkhand, the penalties under the 2001 Act are criticised for being too lenient** and this undermines the law's effectiveness in preventing such crimes.
- Ambiguous Legislative Intent —
 - The **intent and scope of some of these laws are not always clear**. For example, **Odisha's law penalises both witch-hunting and the practice of witchcraft**.
 - This **dual focus can create confusion** and may even lead to the persecution of individuals who practice witchcraft as part of their cultural or religious beliefs.
 - Similarly, **Assam and Rajasthan's laws also punish alleged witches**, which can be counterproductive and further victimise those accused.
- Broad and Generalised Provisions —
 - Many state laws are broad and generalised, **often resembling holdalls with various provisions lumped together**.
 - This **lack of specificity can make it challenging to enforce the laws** effectively and consistently.
 - For example, **Maharashtra's law targets black magic in general, which includes witch-hunting** but also covers a wide range of other practices.
- Inadequate Police and Judicial Reforms —
 - **Legislation alone is not sufficient if the police and judicial systems are not reformed** to handle such cases efficiently.
 - The **lack of specialised training for police officers and judicial personnel in dealing with witch-hunting cases results in poor investigation** and prosecution.
 - Additionally, the slow pace of the criminal justice system further exacerbates the problem.

Recommendations for Improvement in Addressing the Issue of Implementation -

- Refinement of NCRB Reporting —
 - The **NCRB should refine its reporting system to include separate categories for witch-hunting** and witchcraft-related crimes.
 - This will help in accurately assessing the extent of the problem and formulating targeted interventions.
- Specific Sections in the IPC —
 - The **Indian Penal Code (IPC) and its modern replacements should include specific sections addressing witch-hunting** and related crimes.
 - Clear and distinct provisions will aid in better enforcement and prosecution of such cases.
- Increased Penalties and Stringent Enforcement —

- **Penalties for witch-hunting should be increased** to act as a stronger deterrent.
- Additionally, there should be stringent enforcement of these laws, with a focus on ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and convicted.
- Clarity of Legislative Intent —

- **Laws should clearly distinguish between the practice of witchcraft and the crime of witch-hunting.**
- Penalising the practice of witchcraft can lead to further victimisation and should be avoided.
- **Instead, the focus should be on preventing and punishing acts of violence and persecution.**
- Awareness and Training Programs —
 - **Comprehensive awareness campaigns** and training programs for police officers, judicial personnel, and the public **are essential.**
 - **These programs should focus on the legal provisions**, the rights of the victims, and the importance of combating superstitions and harmful practices.

Conclusion -

- **While India has made significant strides** in addressing witchcraft-related violence through state-specific legislation, **challenges remain in terms of implementation and enforcement.**
- **To effectively combat this issue, it is essential to refine existing laws, enhance reporting mechanisms, increase penalties,** and focus on awareness and community engagement.
- By taking these steps, **India can ensure better protection for victims and work towards eradicating these harmful practices,** contributing to its progress as a developed nation.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - Examine the prevalence of witchcraft-related violence in India, with reference to the historical and socio-cultural context. Critically analyse the effectiveness of existing state-level legislation aimed at combating these practices. What challenges persist in implementing these laws, and what measures can be taken to improve their enforcement and effectiveness?

Supreme Court verdict on SC/ST sub-classification

The recent Supreme Court ruling permitting the subdivision of reservation quotas for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) marks a significant shift in India's approach to social justice policies.

This 7-judges bench decision has not only allowed state governments to sub-divide these reservation quotas but also opened the door for identifying and excluding the creamy layer within SC and ST categories from the benefits of affirmative action.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine the implications of this landmark judgment, its legal background, and its potential impact on social justice policies in India.

An Overview of the Constitutional Framework of Reservation and States' Power -

- The foundation of the reservation system in India lies in the Indian Constitution, specifically in Articles 15(4), 16(4), 46, and 341.
- **Article 15(4) empowers the state to make special provisions** for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes or for the SCs and STs.
- **Article 16(4) allows the state to make provisions for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens** that, in the opinion of the state, is not adequately represented in the services under the state.
- **Article 46 promotes the educational and economic interests of SCs, STs,** and other weaker sections.
- **Article 341 defines and provides the procedure for the classification of SCs.**
 - According to Article 341(1), the President, after consultation with the Governor of a state, specifies the castes and classes as SCs in relation to that state or union territory.
 - **Article 341(2) states that Parliament may by law include or exclude from the list of SCs**

specified in a notification under Article 341(1).

Historical Context and Legal Background -

- The E V Chinniah Judgment (2004) —

- In **2004**, the **Supreme Court** addressed the issue of **sub-classification** within the SC category in the **E V Chinnaiiah** case.
- The case arose from **Andhra Pradesh**, where the state government had created **sub-quotas within the SC reservation** to address the varying levels of disadvantage among different SC communities.
- The **five-member bench of the Supreme Court** ruled **against this move**, holding that SCs are a homogeneous class and should not be subdivided.
- The **Court's ruling was based on a strict interpretation of Article 341**, arguing that any sub-classification would violate the intent of the constitutional provision, which treated SCs as a single, unified group.
- The **judgment emphasised legal formalism**, stating that **allowing sub-categorisation would lead to administrative complexities** and potential inequalities within the SC category.
- Criticisms of E V Chinnaiiah Judgment —
 - The **E V Chinnaiiah judgment** faced **significant criticism** for its lack of consideration of the social realities faced by different SC communities.
 - Critics argued that **the judgement failed to recognise the inherent inequalities within the SC category**.
 - Historically, **different SC communities have experienced varying degrees of social and educational disadvantage**, often based on their traditional occupations and geographical locations.
 - For example, **educational attainment among SC communities varies widely**. Data from caste surveys in states like Bihar and Tamil Nadu reveal stark disparities.
 - **In Bihar, higher education attainment among SC communities like Dhobis was significantly higher** compared to the Musahar community.
 - **In Tamil Nadu, the Arunthathiyars, despite constituting a significant portion of the SC population, were grossly underrepresented** in government employment.
- The Path to the Davinder Singh Case —
 - In response to the criticisms and the apparent need for a more nuanced approach to affirmative action, **state governments continued to advocate for the ability to sub-classify SCs**.
 - The **State of Punjab vs. Davinder Singh** case emerged as a critical legal battle, representing the culmination of efforts to revisit and potentially overturn the E V Chinnaiiah ruling.
 - **In 2014, Chief Justice R.M. Lodha observed the need for a reconsideration of the sub-classification issue**, and in 2020, a five-member bench referred the matter to a seven-member bench for final adjudication.
 - The **legal discourse surrounding this issue emphasised the necessity of aligning constitutional interpretation** with social realities and the principles of distributive justice.
- The Supreme Court's Progressive Judgment —
 - **The 7-judges bench**, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, **delivered a landmark judgment that overturned the E V Chinnaiiah ruling**.
 - The **Court held that state governments have the authority to sub-classify SCs** to identify and provide more focused benefits to the most disadvantaged groups within the category.
 - This **decision was rooted in the recognition that SCs are not a homogeneous group** and that equitable affirmative action requires addressing internal disparities.
 - The **judgment emphasised the principle of distributive justice**, arguing that equal protection under the law must account for the varying degrees of disadvantage faced by different SC communities.
 - **By prioritising substance over form, the Court demonstrated a commitment to social justice** and the need for evidence-based policies.

Impact of Supreme Court's Judgement on Social Policies in India -

- **Addressing Intra-Category Inequality —**

- The judgment acknowledges that the SC and ST categories are not homogeneous and that there are significant disparities within these groups.

- **By allowing the subdivision of reservation quotas, the Court has paved the way for more granular and equitable distribution of benefits.**
- Enhancing Policy Formulation and Implementation —
 - **By advocating for the subdivision of quotas and the potential exclusion of the “creamy layer,” the Court has emphasised the need for policies grounded in empirical data.**
 - This approach can lead to more effective and targeted interventions.
- The Creamy Layer Concept and its Extension —
 - Historically, **the exclusion of the creamy layer**, those members of the OBC category who are relatively better off, has been applied to ensure that the **benefits of affirmative action reach the truly disadvantaged within the OBCs.**
 - Extending this concept to SCs and STs is a contentious but potentially transformative idea.

Potential Challenges and Political Ramifications -

- Despite its progressive stance, **the judgment is likely to face challenges both legally and politically.**
- **Critics may argue that sub-classifying SCs and STs and excluding the creamy layer could dilute the affirmative-action regime.**
- **There may be concerns that these changes could create divisions within the SC and ST communities or be used for political manoeuvring.**
- Politically, **the judgment could be seen as aligning with the current regime's efforts to refine and perhaps limit the scope of affirmative action.**
- **Some political factions may interpret the decision as an attempt to fragment the Dalit community or weaken the overall impact of reservation policies.**

Way forward -

- For the judgment to achieve its intended impact, **it is crucial that state governments and policymakers adopt a transparent and evidence-based approach.**
- This **involves conducting comprehensive surveys and detailed socio-economic surveys** to identify disparities within SC and ST communities.
- The **government would need to establish clear and context-specific criteria** for sub-classification and the exclusion of the creamy layer.
- **Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is crucial** to assess the impact of these changes and make necessary adjustments.
- The **government should ensure that affected communities are aware of these changes** and have a voice in the implementation process.

Conclusion -

- **The Supreme Court's recent judgment on subdividing reservation quotas for SCs and STs represents a pivotal step** in refining India's social justice policies.
- By acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of these categories and advocating for data-driven, equitable affirmative action, **the Court has paved the way for more nuanced and effective social justice measures.**
- As India continues to grapple with the complexities of caste-based inequalities, **this judgment offers a robust framework for ensuring that the benefits of affirmative action reach those who need them the most.**

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - The Supreme Court's recent ruling permitting the subdivision of reservation quotas for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) marks a significant shift in India's approach to social justice policies. Discuss the key aspects of this judgment, its historical and legal background, and its potential impact on social justice policies in India. Critically analyse the possible challenges and political ramifications of this judgment. Suggest ways to address these challenges while ensuring effective implementation of the

new policies.

Substantive Equality of Opportunity

Giving states the power to sub-classify Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for reservation in jobs and education, the Supreme Court said the move would provide “substantive equality of opportunity for the backward classes”.

A 7-judge bench (in a 6:1 order) overruled a 2005 five-judge bench verdict in the E.V. Chinnaiah case that outlawed the Andhra Pradesh government’s notification to sub-categorise SC/STs in the state.

A History of the SC's Past Interpretations on Affirmative Action -

- Formalistic reading - Reservations as an exception to the principle of equal opportunity —
 - **In the State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan (1951)**, it was held that reservation of seats in educational institutions was unconstitutional.
 - There was no express provision that allowed this, like Article 16(4) of the Constitution did for public employment.
 - This led to Parliament enacting **the first amendment to the Constitution in 1951**, which inserted Article 15(4).
 - **Article 15(4)** (which is essentially an exception to Article 29) enables the State to make special provisions for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the SCs and the STs.
 - **In Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)** (Mandal judgment), the court observed that Articles 15(4) and 16(4) are **special provisions or an exception to the principle of equality**.
- Substantive reading of the equality code —
 - **In M R Balaji v State of Mysore (1962)**, the court for the first time prescribed a 50% ceiling for reservation. With the exception of the 10% EWS quota, this limit is disputed but has persisted.
 - **In State of Kerala v. N M Thomas (1975)**, the SC upheld a Kerala law in which the qualifying criteria for government jobs was relaxed for SC and ST candidates.
- Limiting efficiency —
 - **Article 335 of the Constitution**, which provides for reservation for SCs and STs in services and posts, states that the reservation **must be taken consistently with the maintenance of efficiency of administration**.
 - **In the 1992 Indra Sawhney judgment**, the SC held that reservations in promotions would dilute efficiency in administration.

What is the Chinnaiah Judgment (2005)?

- The Supreme Court had observed that SCs form **a class by themselves** and any further classification would **violate the doctrine of reasonableness**, amount to “**discrimination in reverse**”, and would run **contrary to Article 14** (right to equality).
- Because the **Indra Sawhney case** (1992) clearly stated that it was ruling exclusively on the sub-classification of OBCs, the apex court decided that the principle of sub-classification of OBCs in that case will not apply to SCs.
- Since SC/STs are notified by the President, the top court had said that the objective of the notification was to afford special protection to **SCs as a homogeneous group**.
- **In 2020**, a reference made by a 3-judge bench to a larger bench held that it was not convinced by the Chinnaiah decision.
 - This 3-judge bench was hearing an appeal arising from the Punjab and Haryana HC, which quashed a Punjab legislation, which reserved 50% vacancies for Valmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs (within a quota of 25% for SCs).

SC's Verdict in the State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh Case (2024) -

- Underlining substantive equality —

- **The Chief Justice of India (CJI)** underlined the concept of substantive equality - the principle that the law must account for the different backgrounds and historical injustices faced by persons or groups.
- **Declaring SC/STs to be a heterogeneous group**, the majority verdict said its sub-categorisation is a constitutional requirement to secure substantive equality.

- The State can employ a range of means (including subclassification within the SCs) under the Constitution to secure substantive equality, **provided it does not lead to the exclusion** of one of the categories in the class.
- This is to **expand the sphere and the scope of the reservation** and to ensure that the **benefits trickle down** to those who need it the most.
- Reframed the quota-versus-efficiency question —
 - The CJJ has argued that securing higher marks in an examination does not contribute to higher efficiency.
 - The stereotype that reservation leads to inefficiency in fact makes promotions inaccessible to SC/ST candidates.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - Assess the Supreme Court's rationale for allowing the sub-categorisation of SCs and STs as per the 2024 verdict. How does this ruling align with the principle of substantive equality? Evaluate the Court's perspective on the balance between reservations and administrative efficiency. What are the implications of this ruling for future reservation policies and administrative practices?

GENERAL STUDIES - II

Governance

Budget for Youth in India

Swami Vivekananda said, “Give me 100 energetic young men and I will transform India” and this statement underscores the power of skill and energy in achieving transformative change.

History offers several instances where skill has triumphed over sheer numbers **but what if skill and scale could be combined.**

The 2024-25 Budget envisions just that, proposing measures to merge skill and scale, particularly through the empowerment of India's youth.

The Demographic Dividend and its Challenges -

- India stands on the brink of a demographic dividend with a median age of 28, as highlighted in the Economic Survey 2023-24.
- This youthful workforce presents an unparalleled opportunity for economic growth. However, a significant challenge remains: employability.
- While 51 percent of Indian graduates are currently deemed employable, this is an improvement from 34 percent in 2017-18, owing to government-led skill development initiatives.
- Despite these advancements, vocational training still struggles for societal acceptance, often perceived as a fallback for those who do not excel in formal education.
- The Ministry of Skill Development's 2022-23 report underscores this issue, indicating that vocational training is still seen as a last resort.

Budget Initiatives to Bridge the Skill Gap and Employability Among India's Youth -

- Financial Incentives for Internships —
 - By offering financial incentives, the government aims to make internships more appealing to graduates, thereby encouraging them to pursue skill development opportunities.
 - This helps in shifting the perception of internships from being an unpaid, often

undervalued experience to a lucrative and valuable career step.

- The **training expenses for these internships will be covered by the CSR funds** of participating companies.

- **This not only alleviates the financial burden on the government but also encourages companies to actively participate in the nation-building process** by investing in the future workforce.
- Enhancing the Social Perception of Vocational Training —
 - **Efforts are being made to integrate vocational training** with mainstream education systems.
 - **This includes creating pathways where students can pursue vocational training alongside their regular studies**, thereby normalizing it as a viable and respectable career option.
 - **Introducing standardised certification processes for vocational training ensures that skills acquired are formally recognised**, making it easier for graduates to demonstrate their competencies to potential employers.
- Collaboration with Industry —
 - By creating partnerships between industry leaders and educational institutions, **the Budget seeks to ensure that the curriculum is aligned with industry needs.**
 - **This helps in keeping the training programs relevant and up-to-date** with current market demands.
 - **Encouraging companies to offer on-the-job training programs as part of their hiring process** ensures that **new employees are not only theoretically knowledgeable but also practically skilled.**
 - **This reduces the training burden on companies** and enhances productivity from the get-go.
- Skill Development Through Digital Infrastructure —
 - **Investment in online learning platforms enables a wider reach**, allowing students from remote and rural areas to access quality education and training.
 - **These platforms can offer a variety of courses**, from basic skills to advanced technical training.
 - **Developing e-learning resources** and modules tailored to various industries and skill levels **helps in providing flexible learning options.**
 - This is **particularly beneficial for working professionals looking to upgrade their skills** without taking a break from their careers.
- Incentivising Employment and Industrial Growth —
 - To boost employment and industrial productivity, **the Budget announces three new schemes related to the Employee Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO).**
 - These **schemes offer direct benefit transfers of one month's salary, up to Rs 15,000, to first-time employees** in three instalments, and reimburse employer EPFO contributions up to Rs 3,000 per month for new hires.
 - **Such incentives are designed to encourage industries to prioritise hiring, manufacturing, and expansion.**
- Skill Development with a Focus on Emerging Sectors —
 - With the global economy increasingly relying on digital services, **there is a strong focus on training graduates in IT, cybersecurity, data analysis, and other related fields.**
 - This prepares them for the high-demand jobs of the future.
 - **In line with global sustainability goals, there is an emphasis on training in green technologies**, renewable energy, and environmental management.
 - This **not only addresses the employability gap but also supports the country's environmental objectives.**
 - Post-pandemic, the healthcare sector has seen an increased demand for skilled professionals.
 - **Training programs for medical technicians, healthcare workers, and support staff are being prioritised to meet this demand.**

Some Other Key Announcement of Budget 2024-25 -

- Agricultural Innovations and Climate Resilience —

- The **Budget also emphasises agricultural resilience** in the face of climate change.
- It **proposes developing climate-resistant varieties of 32 crops and supports Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)** through the National Policy for Co-operation for FPOs.

- **Other measures include promoting self-sufficiency in oilseeds and vegetables, encouraging natural farming among one crore farmers, and developing digital infrastructure for agriculture.**
- **These initiatives aim to safeguard the agricultural sector against climate-induced disruptions and ensure food security.**
- **Housing, Healthcare, and Social Welfare —**
 - **The Budget makes significant allocations for housing, aiming to construct 3 crore houses under the PM Awas Yojana (Rural) and 1 crore houses in urban areas for the poor and middle class.**
 - **The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana aims to provide free electricity up to 300 units to one crore households.**
 - **In healthcare, essential cancer medicines are exempted from customs duty, making them more affordable for millions of patients.**
 - **Women's empowerment receives a substantial boost with a 218.8 percent increase in funding compared to a decade ago, alongside the establishment of women's hostels to increase female workforce participation.**
 - **The middle-class benefits from a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act 1961, with the standard deduction increasing from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000, enhancing savings for middle-class families.**
- **Regional Development and Cultural Promotion —**
 - **Prime Minister's focus on developing eastern states is reflected in the new Purvodaya Scheme, which includes initiatives to develop Odisha as a tourist destination.**
 - **It will attract tourists to historical sites like Nalanda, Rajgir, Bodh Gaya, and the Vishnupad temple.**

Conclusion -

- **The 2024-25 Budget presents a visionary approach to combining skill and scale and by focusing on employment and providing opportunities for the youth to lead, the Budget sets a pathway for India's growth.**
- **The integration of comprehensive skill development, agricultural resilience, industrial incentives, social welfare measures, and regional development initiatives collectively aims to harness the full potential of India's demographic dividend, positioning the country for a prosperous future.**

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - In light of Swami Vivekananda's statement, "Give me 100 energetic young men and I will transform India," and the recent 2024-25 Budget proposals, discuss how the Indian government's initiatives aim to merge skill and scale to address the challenges of employability and maximise the demographic dividend.

International Relations

Five Years after the end of Article 370

On 5th August 2019, India made a significant constitutional change regarding the status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by abrogating Article 370 and Article 35A.

This move has had profound implications for the region and its relations with Pakistan. Therefore, it is important to examine whether this change rendered the Kashmir issue irrelevant to the engagement between India and Pakistan.

The Aftermath of Abrogation of Article 370 -

- **India's Definite Stand on J&K's Status —**

- By ending the ambiguity surrounding J&K's relationship with India, **Delhi has firmly buried the notion that the internal status of the region is open-ended and negotiable.**

- This **decisive action has established a clear stance that J&K is an integral part of India, non-negotiable in any discussions.**
- **India's strengthening partnerships with Western nations have further blunted efforts by Pakistan and China to internationalise the Kashmir question, making it less salient on the global stage.**
- However, **this does not mean the issue has disappeared from the bilateral conflict template between India and Pakistan.**
- Continued Cross-Border Tensions —
 - Despite the constitutional change, **Pakistan's capacity to meddle in Kashmir remains undiminished.**
 - The **surge in cross-border terrorism, especially noticeable since the day Narendra Modi was sworn in for his third consecutive term as Prime Minister, underscores the ongoing threat.**
 - **Delhi is acutely aware of the difference between legal formalism on Kashmir and the practical reality of Pakistan's continued interference.**
- Political Gains and Persistent Challenges —
 - Post abrogation of Article 370, **parliamentary elections in Kashmir have demonstrated significant political gains for Delhi, yet they also reveal the persistence of separatist sentiments.**
 - **There is little room for complacency in Delhi, as the domestic tasks in Kashmir remain substantial.**
 - **While India can take credit for significantly reducing the global salience of the Kashmir question, the issue still poses challenges that require careful management.**

International Dimensions and Historical Context of the Kashmir Issue -

- Cold War Era and Geopolitical Alignments —
 - **During the Cold War, Kashmir was not just a bilateral issue but also a significant element in the broader geopolitical alignments.**
 - India, with its non-aligned stance, and Pakistan, as a key ally of the United States, found their Kashmir policies influenced by the global power dynamics.
 - **The strategic rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union often played out in the subcontinent, with each superpower supporting its respective ally.**
- Shimla Agreement and Bilateralism —
 - **The 1971 war, which led to the creation of Bangladesh, was a turning point in the Kashmir conflict.**
 - The **subsequent Shimla Agreement in 1972 between India and Pakistan aimed to resolve issues bilaterally and refrain from altering the Line of Control (LoC) unilaterally.**
 - While this agreement was intended to limit third-party intervention, **it did not eliminate international involvement.**
 - The **Pakistan Army's disowning of the Shimla Agreement highlighted the fragility of bilateral resolutions and the persistent international dimension of the Kashmir issue.**
- Insurgency and Internationalisation in the 1980s and 1990s —
 - The **late 1980s and 1990s saw a renewed insurgency in Kashmir, which Pakistan supported both overtly and covertly.**
 - This **period also witnessed a shift in the global environment post-Cold War, with a heightened focus on human rights and the diminishing sanctity of state sovereignty.**
 - **Pakistan leveraged these global trends, pushing for international intervention by framing the Kashmir issue in terms of human rights abuses and self-determination.**
 - **The frequent military crises during this period, particularly those involving cross-border terrorism, raised international alarm due to the risk of nuclear escalation between two newly nuclear-armed states.**
 - The **narrative of Kashmir as the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoint gained traction, drawing significant attention from global powers and international**

organisations.

- US-India Relations and the Changing Global Order —

- The **turn of the millennium brought a significant shift in the international dimension** of the Kashmir issue, primarily due to the evolving US-India relationship.

- The administration of President George W. Bush played a pivotal role in de-emphasising Washington's activism on Kashmir and instead focused on building a strategic partnership with India.
- This shift was crucial in resolving long-standing issues, such as the nuclear dispute with India, and reducing international pressure on Kashmir.
- Post-2019 Scenario and China's Role —
 - **The abrogation of Article 370** in August 2019, which revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, was a decisive move by India that further complicated the international dimensions of the Kashmir conflict.
 - **Pakistan's immediate reaction was to seek international intervention**, particularly from China, a close ally.
 - **China's interest in Kashmir is partly strategic, given its own territorial claims and its investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, which runs through Gilgit-Baltistan, a part of the larger Kashmir region claimed by India.

Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Shift in India -

- Economic and Diplomatic Shifts —
 - **India's steady economic growth** and improved relationship with the US in the 2000s helped overcome many challenges.
 - The **George W. Bush administration put an end to Washington's Kashmir activism** and resolved the nuclear dispute with India.
 - However, **Pakistan's cross-border terrorism and its capacity to create political trouble in Kashmir remained significant problems.**
 - The **NDA government, coming to power with a clear objective** to renegotiate terms with Pakistan on Kashmir, aimed to enhance military deterrence, end engagement with militant groups, and **insist that talks and terror cannot coexist.**
 - Changing the constitutional status quo in August 2019 was the capstone of this strategy.
 - **Pakistan's outrage led it to turn to China to put the Kashmir question on the UNSC agenda**, but Delhi, with support from Washington and Paris, blocked the move.
 - **Support from the UAE and Saudi Arabia also helped prevent Pakistan from making it a significant issue** in the Islamic world.
- India's Strategic Position —
 - **India's new partnerships in the West and the Islamic world have neutralised long-standing international support bases for Pakistan.**
 - The **steady evolution of the economic balance of power in favour of India**, whose GDP is nearly ten times that of Pakistan, has further diminished Rawalpindi's challenge.
 - **Pakistan's deepening political divisions and economic weakness have made its position less tenable.**

Way forward -

- Despite these developments, **Delhi should not assume it can ignore Rawalpindi or that the Kashmir question is irrelevant.**
- The Pakistan army, though down, is not out. **Renewed political trouble in Kashmir will inevitably draw international attention.**
- Thus, **accelerating efforts at internal reconciliation in Kashmir, countering renewed cross-border terrorism, and engaging with diverse elements of the Pakistan polity should be the top priorities** for India's national security strategy.

Conclusion -

- **The constitutional change in Kashmir has significantly altered the dynamics of India-Pakistan relations.**
- Though it has rendered some aspects of the Kashmir issue less relevant, it remains a critical factor in the bilateral engagement.
- Hence, the complex **interplay of domestic and international dimensions necessitates a**

nuanced and proactive approach from Delhi.

Source - The Indian Express

QUESTION - Critically analyse the impact of the abrogation of Article 370 on the Kashmir issue in the context of India-Pakistan relations. How has this constitutional change influenced the bilateral engagement between the two countries and the international dimensions of the Kashmir conflict? Discuss the political, economic, and strategic shifts in India and Pakistan post-2019.

India-Africa partnership in food security

India is hosting the 32nd International Conference of Agricultural Economists (ICAE) from August 2-7 in Delhi.

This event marks a significant moment, not only because of its high-profile attendees but also because it reflects India's deep historical and ongoing commitment to agricultural economics and food security.

Also, it provides an opportunity to cement India-Africa partnership in food security and the two can learn much from each other's experience, especially in ensuring quality nutrition to children under five.

Historical Significance of ICAE -

- The **history of ICAE is profoundly linked with India**. The last time India hosted the ICAE was in Mysore in 1958, with Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister, as the chief guest.
- The **roots of ICAE trace back to the early 20th century** when Rabindranath Tagore, a visionary Indian poet and thinker, invited British agronomist Lord L.K. Elmhirst to India.
- **In 1921, Tagore reached out to Elmhirst**, who was then at Cornell, **to address the pressing issues faced by villages around Santiniketan**.
- **Tagore's vision was to create a model of rural development** that could inspire the entire nation.
- Elmhirst, motivated by this vision and supported by his wife-to-be Dorothy Straight, joined Tagore's efforts and **this collaboration laid the groundwork for the establishment of ICAE**.
- **Tagore's approach to rural development was holistic**. He emphasised not just the economic aspects but also the social and cultural dimensions of rural life.
- **He believed in freeing villages from ignorance and weakness through education, joy, music, and scientific training**.
- **This foundational philosophy of combining scientific agricultural practices with cultural and educational initiatives remains relevant today** as we confront modern challenges in agricultural economics.

The Contemporary Role of ICAE -

- Platform for Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration —
 - **ICAE serves as a crucial platform for agricultural economists, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners** from around the world to exchange knowledge and collaborate on innovative solutions to global agricultural issues.
 - **The conference facilitates the sharing of research findings, best practices, and policy insights** that can help shape effective strategies for sustainable agricultural development.
- Addressing Global Food Security and Nutrition Issues —
 - **One of the primary goals of ICAE is to tackle the complex issues of food security and nutrition**.
 - The conference brings together experts **to discuss strategies to ensure a stable food supply and improve nutritional outcomes**, especially in vulnerable regions.
 - This is **particularly important in the face of challenges such as climate change**, which threatens agricultural productivity and food availability.

- Climate Change and Agricultural Sustainability —

- **ICAE emphasises the importance of sustainable agricultural practices** in mitigating the impacts of climate change.
- The **conference addresses how agricultural systems can adapt to changing climatic conditions**, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance resilience.

- This **includes discussions on innovative farming techniques, sustainable land use, and the role of technology in promoting sustainable agriculture.**
- Economic Development and Poverty Reduction —
 - Agriculture is a critical sector for economic development and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries.
 - **ICAE explores how investments in agriculture can drive economic growth, create jobs, and improve livelihoods.**
 - The conference highlights the role of agriculture in reducing poverty and enhancing economic stability, particularly in rural areas.
- Public Policy and Agricultural Economics —
 - ICAE plays a significant role in shaping public policy related to agriculture.
 - **The conference provides a forum for discussing policy interventions that can support agricultural development, such as subsidies, trade policies, and rural development programs.**
 - By bringing together policymakers and economists, **ICAE helps ensure that agricultural policies are informed by sound economic principles** and empirical evidence.
- Technological Advancements and Innovation —
 - The **rapid advancement of technology has profound implications** for agriculture.
 - **ICAE focuses on how technological innovations, such as precision farming, biotechnology, and digital agriculture, can enhance productivity, reduce environmental impacts, and improve food security.**
 - **The conference encourages the adoption of cutting-edge technologies** to modernise agricultural practices and address emerging challenges.

The Purpose of ICAE's Special Session -

- High Debt Service Ratios — Both regions **struggle with high debt service ratios**, which limit agricultural spending relative to social protection.
- Underfunding Agriculture — African countries consistently underfund agriculture compared to Indian states, hindering productivity and efforts to combat child malnutrition.
- Need for Investment in R&D — There is a **crucial need to enhance public spending on agricultural research and development (R&D)** and extension services, areas with high returns on investment.
- Reform and Reallocation — The **study suggests that both regions could benefit from reforming subsidies and reallocating resources towards infrastructure and R&D** to boost agricultural growth and improve child nutrition outcomes.

An Overview of Global Perspective on Hunger and Food Security -

- Globally, the fight against hunger remains a daunting challenge.
- **Recent developments**, including growing conflicts, the climate crisis, and economic slowdowns, have **made the United Nations' goal of zero hunger by 2030 seem increasingly unattainable.**
- A **study by the University of Bonn and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)** estimates that an **additional \$21 billion in annual investments in agriculture and rural areas is needed to end global hunger by 2040.**
- **India's leadership in the G20**, along with Brazil's current presidency, **has significantly impacted the global agenda on food security.**
- **For the first time, a strategy paper on bioeconomy has been presented to the G20.** This initiative aims to foster sustainable agricultural practices and enhance food security.
- **China's recent launch of its bioeconomy strategy further underscores the importance of global collaboration in this domain.**

Way forward -

- **South-South collaboration is vital** for addressing food and nutritional security challenges.
- The **G20 developed countries can play a pivotal role by supporting resilience against**

climate change and sharing innovations for transforming food systems.

- **South Asia and Africa, home to nearly 3 billion people, must call for increased investment** in climate resilience, adaptation, mitigation, and system transformation.

- This transformation, facilitated by building the bioeconomy, would benefit from global investments, including the Global Climate Fund.
- The sequence of G20 presidencies from 2022 to 2025 – Indonesia, India, Brazil, and South Africa – indicates a shift in the governance of food systems.
- A well-functioning global food system primarily benefits the Global South, particularly when they are in leadership positions.

Conclusion -

- The 32nd ICAE in Delhi highlights the importance of global collaboration in agricultural economics.
- As India hosts this significant event, it is an opportunity to advance the agenda of food security and foster stronger agri-food relations between Africa and India.
- This collaboration holds the potential to benefit nearly one-third of humanity, addressing critical issues of food and nutritional security and paving the way for a more sustainable and resilient future.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the historical significance of International Conference of Agricultural Economists (ICAE) and its contemporary role in addressing global agricultural challenges. How can the conference facilitate India-Africa partnerships in ensuring quality nutrition for children under five? Evaluate the potential impact of such collaboration on global food security.

GENERAL STUDIES - III

Economy

Powering up to \$30 trillion economy point

The commentary on India's growth story often conveys premature optimism, with a focus on impressive statistics such as a 7%-plus GDP growth rate. This enthusiasm suggests that the 21st century could be 'India's century,' driven by inevitable economic growth.

However, this optimism must be tempered with caution, given that many countries have reached a similar juncture without transitioning to developed nation status. For India to avoid a similar fate and achieve its goal of becoming a \$30-trillion economy by 2047, it must adhere to liberal economic policies and harness the private sector effectively.

What are the challenges that India needs to address?

- Economic Growth and Poverty Alleviation —
 - **Pre-Liberalisation Era** — From Independence until 1991, India's poverty rate remained around 50%, despite socialist policies.
 - **Post-Liberalisation Progress** — Post-1991, the poverty rate dropped to approximately 20% by 2011, lifting 35 crore people out of poverty.
 - **Current Inequality** — While income inequality remains a concern, the data shows that many Indians, particularly those at the bottom of the pyramid, are better off than before.
- Labor Force and Economic Disparities —
 - **Labour Force Composition** — 46% of India's labor force remains in agriculture, contributing only 18% to GDP.
 - **Female Labor Force Participation** — The participation rate stands at 37%, a significant improvement from 26% in 2019 but still low compared to other countries like China and Japan.

- Economic Policies and Export Orientation —

- **Historical Successes** — South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam achieved rapid growth through low-skilled, export-oriented manufacturing.
- **Current Strategy** — India must leverage the "China+1" strategy to attract global manufacturers and resist the temptation to impose high tariffs that could hurt domestic industries.
- **Middle-Income Trap** -
 - **Challenges** —
 - . Only 23 of 101 middle-income economies from 1960 achieved high-income status by 2018.
 - . India faces a unique challenge: inability to leverage surplus labor in low-end manufacturing and limited scope for growth in the IT sector.
 - **Avoiding the Trap** — India must maintain a market-led economy, encourage private enterprise, and improve the 'ease of doing business.'

Way forward —

- **Cluster-Led Industrial Model** —
 - **Infrastructure Development** — Build industrial clusters with comprehensive infrastructure, including education, health care, and entertainment, to attract employers and workers.
 - **Cost and Compliance Issues** — Address cost disabilities in power, logistics, and financing, and reduce the compliance burden to foster industrial growth.
- **Enhancing Labor Market Dynamics** —
 - **Focus on Low-Skilled Manufacturing** — Develop sectors such as electronics assembly and apparel to create employment opportunities.
 - **Inter-State Migration and Urbanisation** — Promote migration and urbanisation as indicators of progress in reducing agriculture's share of employment and improving female labor force participation.

Conclusion -

India's path to becoming a \$30-trillion economy by 2047 is paved with both significant opportunities and formidable challenges. The nation must navigate these challenges with a focus on liberal economic policies, infrastructure development, and effective utilisation of its labor force. By embracing reforms and avoiding pitfalls such as the middle-income trap, India can transform its economic potential into sustainable prosperity and fulfil its destiny as a global economic leader.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - Analyse the potential pitfalls that may prevent India from transitioning from a lower-middle-income to a high-income economy. In your discussion, consider factors such as income inequality, labor force composition, and the middle-income trap.

Yen Carry Trade

Sensex and Nifty 50 witnessed a heavy sell-off on 5th August, 2024 as the rout in global equities intensified amid US recession concerns and panic in the Japanese Yen Carry Trade.

What is Yen Carry Trade?

- The Yen Carry Trade is a financial strategy used by investors to take advantage of the low-interest rates in Japan. Here's a breakdown of how it works:
- **Borrowing in Yen** — Investors borrow money in Japanese yen, benefiting from the country's historically low-interest rates.
- **Investing in Higher-Yield Assets** — The borrowed yen are then converted into another currency and invested in assets or instruments with higher yields, such as bonds, stocks, or real estate in countries with higher interest rates.

- **Profit from Interest Rate Differential** — The key to this strategy is the difference between the low borrowing costs in Japan and the higher returns on investments elsewhere. Investors aim to profit from this interest rate differential.
- **Currency Risk** — One significant risk in the yen carry trade is the **fluctuation in exchange rates**.

- If the yen appreciates significantly against the currency in which the investments are made, the cost of repaying the yen-denominated loan can increase, potentially offsetting the gains from the investment.
- **Market Impact** — The yen carry trade can influence global financial markets.
 - Large-scale unwinding of these trades can lead to significant movements in currency exchange rates and affect market stability.
- Overall, the **yen carry trade is a strategy that leverages low-interest rates in Japan to seek higher returns abroad**, but it comes with risks, particularly related to currency fluctuations.

Recent Yen Carry Trade Blowback -

- Japan kept interest rates ultra-low for decades following the implosion of an asset bubble in the 1990s that contributed to persistent deflation.
- Japan's central bank, the Bank of Japan, surprised markets by raising its interest rate from near-zero to 0.25%.
- This unexpected move has caused the Japanese yen to strengthen significantly.
- The rapid strengthening of the yen has resulted in substantial losses for those engaged in yen carry trades. As the cost of borrowing in yen has increased, the profitability of these trades has diminished.

Impact on Global Market -

- The Nikkei 225 index, Japan's primary stock market benchmark, plummeted by over 12% in a single day, marking its worst decline since the 1987 Black Monday crash.
- The Reverse carry trade was a major cause of concern for the US too as the S&P 500 declined by 1.8%.
- South Korea's Kospi and Taiwan's Weighted Index experienced significant declines, with both indices falling by more than 8%.

Impact on India's Market -

- Despite the global market volatility, the Indian markets have remained resilient as the Sensex closed 2.74% down, while the Nifty 50 crashed 2.68% on 5 August
- The Indian Markets are now more balanced than before as the markets have also gone through recent major events such as Elections and Union Budget 2024.

Way forward for Investors -

- **Shift to High-Quality Stocks** — Investors should focus on companies with strong fundamentals and sustainable growth, moving away from low-growth, low-quality segments.
- **Orientation Towards Large Caps** — Prioritise large-cap stocks for their stability and resilience, especially during market volatility.
- **Selective Exposure to Midcaps and Small Caps** — While large caps should dominate your portfolio, also consider quality midcaps and small caps with strong fundamentals and growth prospects.
- **Monitor Global Events** — Be aware of global factors like the Yen Carry Trade unwinding, US recession fears, and Middle East conflicts that may cause market volatility.
- **Rebalancing Portfolios** — Reassess and rebalance your portfolio to emphasise quality and growth-oriented investments amid potential underperformance of certain sectors and global market volatility.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the impact of the Yen Carry Trade on global financial markets. How should Indian investors navigate such global market volatilities? Provide suggestions based on recent market trends and economic indicators.

Insurance premiums for health and life policies have increased this year, and with an 18% Goods and Services Tax (GST) added, many people in India are finding insurance less affordable.

Opposition leaders protested at Parliament, demanding the removal of GST on these premiums. Recently, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari wrote to Finance Minister, arguing that GST on insurance premiums taxes life's uncertainties and hampers industry growth.

Life and health insurance market in India -

- In fiscal 2023-24, the general insurance industry collected Rs 1,09,000 crore in health premiums, while life insurance companies collected Rs 3,77,960 crore, with LIC alone contributing Rs 2,22,522 crore.
- Five states—Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Delhi—accounted for 64% of the total health insurance premium in 2022-23, with the rest of the states contributing 36%.
- A Swiss Re Sigma report noted a decrease in insurance penetration in India's life insurance sector from 3.2% in 2021-22 to 3% in 2022-23, while non-life insurance penetration remained at 1%.
- Overall, India's insurance penetration dropped to 4% in 2022-23 from 4.2% in the previous year.

GST on health and life insurance premiums -

- GST, introduced on July 1, 2017, replaced all indirect taxes, including service tax and cess.
- Currently, **GST on health and life insurance policies is fixed at 18%.**
 - Prior to GST, life insurance premiums were subject to 15% service taxes, comprising Basic Service Tax, Swachh Bharat cess, and Krishi Kalyan cess.
- Since GST encapsulates service tax, which applies to the insurance industry, its introduction has resulted in an increase in premium amounts.
- This rise, combined with high medical inflation estimated at 14% last year, has made medical and term insurance less affordable for many.
- The government acknowledged in Parliament that it received requests for an exemption or reduction in GST rates on life and health insurance.

Rationale behind imposing the GST on health and life insurance premiums -

- **Role of GST Council —**
 - The GST rates and exemptions on services, including health insurance premiums, are set by the GST Council, which includes the Union Finance Minister and state/UT ministers.
- **Revenue earning segment for the government —**
 - GST is applicable to all insurance policies since insurance is a service, and policyholders pay tax on their insurance premium.
 - This segment fetched Rs 21,256 crore in GST during the last three financial years, and another Rs 3,274 crore from the re-issuance of health policies.
- **Certain deductions allowed while computing income tax —**
 - Insurance premiums are eligible for tax deductions under Sections 80C and 80D of the Income Tax Act, 1961, with deductions up to Rs 1.5 lakh, including GST, and additional deductions for medical riders.

Need for withdrawing the GST on the premium -

- **Large increases in premium on health insurance policies —**
 - The main issue is the large increases in premium on health insurance policies this year — a leading public sector insurer has hiked the premium by 50%.
- **GST on insurance in India is the highest in the world —**
 - Many experts have pointed out that the GST on insurance in India is the highest in the world.
 - This step might create challenges for IRDAI's goal of "Insurance for All by 2047".
- **Report by Standing Committee on Finance —**
 - The Standing Committee on Finance in its 66th report, submitted to Parliament in February 2024, recommended rationalisation of the GST rate on insurance products, especially health and term insurance.
 - It said that the high rate of GST results in a high premium burden, which acts as a

deterrent to getting insurance policies.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the implications of the current Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime on health and life insurance premiums in India. Analyse the rationale behind imposing GST

on these premiums and the arguments for and against its withdrawal. How does this impact the penetration and affordability of insurance in the country?

Environment

Wayanad Tragedy is a Warning

In recent days, **Wayanad**, a district known for its breathtaking landscapes, has been hit by a **catastrophic landslide** that has resulted in profound loss and devastation.

The landslide, **triggered by a cloudburst**, ravaged the regions of **Meppadi, Mundakkai, and Chooralmala** leading to the collapse of a crucial bridge in Mundakkai and resulting in the death of over 300 people, with an equal number still missing.

This **tragedy underscores the severe consequences of both natural and human-induced factors** on fragile ecosystems.

Environmental and Climatic Factors Behind Wayanad Landslide -

- According to climate experts, **the immediate cause of the landslide was the exceptionally heavy rainfall** linked to the warming of the Arabian Sea.
- This **phenomenon has caused atmospheric instability over large parts of the Western Ghats**, including Kerala, resulting in rain-laden clouds moving southward and causing excessive rainfall.
- **The warming of the Arabian Sea, indicative of broader climate change patterns, has intensified weather anomalies**, making regions like Wayanad increasingly vulnerable to such disasters.

Human Induced Factors Behind Wayanad Tragedy -

- Unchecked Development and Tourism —
 - **Wayanad's scenic beauty has made it a popular eco-tourism destination**, attracting numerous tourists annually.
 - To cater to this influx, **there has been rampant construction of resorts, hotels, and other infrastructure**.
 - **This development, however, has often been carried out without proper environmental assessments** or adherence to sustainable practices.
 - **Resorts have sprung up in fragile areas**, roads have been carved into steep hillsides, and tunnels have been bored through mountains, **all contributing to the destabilisation of the terrain**.
- Quarrying Activities —
 - The **demand for construction materials has led to extensive quarrying in the Western Ghats**, including Wayanad.
 - **Quarrying involves the removal of large amounts of rock and soil, which not only alters the landscape** but also affects the structural integrity of the land.
 - The **removal of vegetation and topsoil increases the risk of soil erosion** and reduces the land's ability to absorb and retain water.
 - **During heavy rains, these areas become prone to landslides** as the destabilised ground cannot withstand the increased water pressure.
- Inadequate Land Use Planning —
 - **Construction and development projects** have often been executed **without considering the region's carrying capacity** and ecological sensitivity.
 - The **Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, led by Madhav Gadgil, had demarcated the region as an ecologically sensitive area (ESA)** and recommended restrictions on construction, mining, and quarrying.

- However, **these guidelines were not adequately implemented**, and development continued unchecked, ignoring the potential environmental impact.
- Deforestation and Plantation Expansion —

- A study from 2022 revealed that **62% of the district's green cover disappeared between 1950 and 2018**, while plantation cover increased by around 1,800%.
- The **dense forests, which once provided stability to the soil and regulated water flow, have been replaced by plantations**, particularly rubber.
- **Rubber trees, unlike the native forest vegetation, have shallow root systems** that are less effective in preventing soil erosion.
- This **change in land cover has reduced the soil's ability to retain water**, increasing the likelihood of landslides during heavy rainfall.
- Outdated Infrastructure and Practices —
 - **Infrastructure development in Wayanad and other parts of Kerala has often relied on outdated data and practices** that do not account for current rainfall patterns and intensities.
 - The **construction of roads, bridges, and culverts has not been designed to handle the increased water flow** during heavy rains, leading to blockages and flooding.
 - These **inadequacies in infrastructure design and maintenance have contributed to the severity of the landslides** and the resulting destruction.
- Ignoring Expert Warnings —
 - **Despite repeated warnings from climate experts and environmentalists, the recommendations to curb construction and implement sustainable practices have been largely ignored.**
 - The **2011 Gadgil Committee report highlighted the need for stringent measures to protect the Western Ghats**, but the continued neglect and prioritisation of economic gains over environmental sustainability have led to repeated disasters.
 - **The failure to heed these warnings has resulted in significant loss of life and property** and has further degraded the region's ecological balance.

Broader Implications for Kerala -

- Recurring Climate-Induced Disasters —
 - **Kerala has experienced a series of devastating climate-induced disasters** over the past decade.
 - The **2018 floods, which killed more than 400 people** and caused widespread destruction, were followed by similar events in subsequent years.
 - **In 2019 and 2020, landslides in Idukki district claimed many lives**, including numerous tea plantation workers.
 - The **cycle continued in 2021 and 2022, with landslides and flash floods striking again.**
 - These **recurring disasters indicate that Kerala is increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events**, exacerbated by climate change.
- Impact on Biodiversity and Ecosystems —
 - The environmental degradation in Kerala has severe implications for biodiversity and ecosystems.
 - The **Western Ghats are home to numerous endemic species of flora and fauna.**
 - The **destruction of forests and natural habitats** due to unplanned development and plantation agriculture **threatens these species' survival.**
 - The **loss of biodiversity not only impacts the ecological balance but also affects the livelihoods of communities** dependent on these natural resources.
- Socio-Economic Consequences —
 - The **recurring natural disasters have significant socio-economic consequences for Kerala.**
 - The **destruction of homes, infrastructure, and agricultural land leads to massive financial losses** and displaces thousands of people.
 - The **tourism industry, a major contributor to the state's economy, also suffers as natural beauty spots become disaster-prone**
 - Additionally, the cost of disaster relief and rehabilitation strains the state's resources, diverting funds from other essential services.

Way forward -

- Need for Climate-Resilient Infrastructure —

- To mitigate the impact of climate-induced disasters, **Kerala must invest in climate-resilient infrastructure.**
- This includes constructing roads, bridges, and buildings designed to withstand extreme weather conditions.
- Incorporating scientific precision and environmental considerations into development projects is essential.
- Such infrastructure should accommodate current and future rainfall patterns, ensuring that drainage systems can handle heavy downpours without causing blockages or floods.
- Sustainable Land Management Practices —
 - Promoting sustainable land management practices is crucial to maintaining hillside stability and reducing soil erosion.
 - Reforestation, controlled deforestation, and sustainable agriculture can help restore the ecological balance in the Western Ghats.
 - Planting native tree species and maintaining natural vegetation cover can enhance the soil's ability to retain water and prevent landslides.
 - Sustainable agricultural practices can minimise land degradation and ensure long-term productivity without compromising the environment

Conclusion -

- The recent tragedy in Wayanad is a stark reminder of the fragile balance between nature and human activity.
- To prevent future tragedies, it is imperative to integrate scientific precision in development activities, respect ecological warnings, and prioritise sustainable land management practices.
- Only through such measures can we hope to safeguard our environment and the lives that depend on it.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the environmental and human-induced factors that contributed to the recent landslides in Wayanad. Additionally, analyse the broader implications for Kerala and suggest sustainable measures to mitigate the impact of such climate-induced disasters in the future.

Security/Disaster Management

The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs introduced the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024, in the Lok Sabha.

Need for the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 -

- There was a need to amend the **Disaster Management Act (DMA) 2005.**
 - The main purpose of the DMA was to put in place necessary institutional mechanisms –
 - For drawing up and monitoring the implementation of disaster management plans,
 - Ensuring measures by various wings of Government for prevention of and mitigating the effects of disasters and
 - For undertaking a holistic, coordinated and prompt response to any disaster or threatening disaster situation.
 - To achieve this purpose, **certain Authorities and Committees** were established at the national level, state level and district level.
- The Act has been reviewed **learnings from past disasters and experience** and in

consultation with all stakeholders including State governments.

- The Bill seeks **to mainstream disaster management in the development plans**, aligning with the recommendations of the **15th Finance Commission**.

Salient provisions of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 -

- **Defines disaster management —**
 - Disaster management is **inclusive of disaster risk reduction** — the practice of reducing disaster risk through systematic effort.
 - This is to analyse and manage the causal facts of disaster through —
 - Reduced exposure to hazard;
 - Reduced vulnerability of people, property, infrastructure, economic activity, environmental and natural resource; and
 - Improved preparedness, resilience and capacity to manage and respond to adverse events.
- **Disaster database at national and State level —** The database will include —
 - Disaster assessment,
 - Fund allocation detail,
 - Expenditure,
 - Preparedness and mitigation plan,
 - Risk registers according to type and severity of risk, etc.
- **Constitution of UDMA —** The Bill provides for the Urban Disaster Management Authority (UDMA) for State capitals and large cities having municipal corporations, except the UTs of Delhi and Chandigarh.
- **State Disaster Response Force —** It provides for the constitution of the State Disaster Response Force by the State government.
- **Empowers the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) —** To take stock of the entire range of disaster risks in the country periodically, including emerging disaster risks, which include —
 - Risks of those disasters that may not have taken place, but may occur in future due to extreme climate events.
- **Empowers the NDMA and the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) —** To prepare the disaster plan at national level and State level respectively instead of the plans made by the National Executive Committee and the State Executive Committees earlier.
- **Provides statutory status to certain organisations —** The Bill also provides statutory status to certain pre-Act organisations like the National Crisis Management Committee and the High- Level Committee.
- **Empower the Central and State governments —** To direct any person to take any action or refrain from taking any action for reducing the impact of a disaster and to impose a penalty not exceeding ₹10,000.

Significance of the Bill -

- It aims to bring **more clarity and convergence** in the roles of authorities and committees working in the field of disaster management.
 - This is relevant in the context of the recent **Wayanad tragedy**, as there is a conflict between the Kerala government and the Union Home Ministry regarding early warning, due to multiplicity of authority.
- **This initiative marks a transformative step** toward enhancing the nation's capacity for disaster risk reduction and environmental sustainability.
- **A comprehensive, centralised disaster database** at both national and state levels will significantly build resilient communities by improving their ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.
- The creation of this disaster database will facilitate **more efficient resource allocation, better coordination among stakeholders, and timely, informed decision-making during crises**.

Criticism of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 -

- **Creates several authorities —** Multiplicity of authority will give rise to confusion and the bureaucratic/ procedural mess may hamper rescue and relief work
- **Encroaches upon the functions of the State governments —**
 - The Bill grants excessive rule-making power to the Central government through

delegated legislation, which could potentially overlap with the legislative powers reserved for the States.

- Such an overlap and the legislative competence of the Lok Sabha may encroach upon the domain of State legislatures.

Government's Clarification on the DM (Amendment) Bill 2024 and Way Ahead -

- **Government's clarification** — The Bill was being introduced under Entry 23 in the **Concurrent List** ("social security and social insurance, emplaned unemployment") and the Bill followed a report by a task force in 2013.
- **Way forward** — An examination of the Bill is required to prevent any potential conflicts with the federal structure of our nation.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill 2024 has been introduced to address the shortcomings of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. Discuss the key provisions of the new bill and evaluate its significance in enhancing disaster management capabilities in India. Critically analyse the potential challenges and criticisms associated with the bill. Suggest ways to address these challenges while ensuring the effective implementation of disaster management strategies.