REGENT EDUCATION &RESEARCH FOUNDATION

GENERAL STUDIES - I

Social Issues

The case for a caste census

Peter Drucker's quote, "Only what gets measured gets managed," highlights the necessity of collecting data on group identities to address discrimination effectively. This approach is essential for informed policymaking and inclusive development.

For example, Germany's census does not record racial data, disadvantaging Black communities. In response, Black people initiated the Afrozensus survey in 2020, revealing widespread, institutional anti-Black racism in Germany.

Census in India -
- **About —**
  - Population Census provides basic statistics on state of human resources, demography, culture and economic structure at local, regional and national level.
  - Beginning in the year 1872, when the first census was conducted non-synchronously, the census enumeration exercise in India is carried out in every 10 years.
    - The first synchronous census was taken under British rule in 1881, by W.C. Plowden, Census Commissioner of India.
  - The responsibility of conducting the decadal census rests with the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, Ministry of Home Affairs.
- **Legal/Constitutional basis of Census in India —**
  - Population census is listed in Union List (entry 69) of Seventh Schedule in Indian Constitution.
  - Census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.
- **Caste census —**
  - Caste was enumerated in British India Censuses (1881-1931).
  - Post-Independence, the 1951 Census excluded caste enumeration except for SCs and STs, who continue to be counted.
  - In 1961, the GOI recommended states conduct their own surveys for state-specific OBC lists, as there were no central reservations for OBCs at that time.
  - Though Census is a Union subject, the Collection of Statistics Act, 2008 allows States and local bodies to gather necessary data, as seen in Karnataka (2015) and Bihar (2023).

Need for caste Census -
- **Social Imperative —**
  - Caste remains a key social structure in India, evidenced by low inter-caste marriages, prevalent caste surnames and marks, residential segregation, etc.
  - Choices of candidates for elections and ministers for Cabinets continue to be dictated by caste considerations.
- **Legal Imperative —**
  - Constitutionally-mandated social justice policies, including reservations in various sectors, require detailed caste data.
  - Although the Constitution mentions class instead of caste, the Supreme Court has ruled caste as a significant criterion for defining backward classes and supporting reservation policies.
- **Administrative Imperative —**
  - Detailed caste data —
    - helps correct wrongful caste inclusions/exclusions,
    - prevents dominant castes within reserved categories from monopolizing benefits,
    - aids in sub-categorizing castes, and
    - determines the creamy layer income/wealth criterion.
- **Moral Imperative —**

. Lack of caste data has allowed elites among upper castes and dominant OBCs to disproportionately control national assets, income, and power.

Argument against caste census -
• **Socially Divisive —**
. Critics say it could deepen social divisions.
. However, it should be noted that India has had deep social divides for nearly 3,000 years. Census counts of SCs and STs since 1951 haven't led to conflicts among these groups.
. Additionally, the Census already includes potentially divisive categories like religion, language, and region.
. Casteism will not wither away by not counting caste in the Census, any more than communalism, and regionalism will disappear by not enumerating religion, language and region.
• **Administrative Nightmare —**
. Many opponents claim that that it is an administrative nightmare.
. Despite concerns, caste enumeration is feasible.
. Unlike the fuzzy concept of race, caste identity is clear.
. The GOI has successfully enumerated 1,234 SC castes and 698 ST tribes.
. Counting the 4,000-odd other castes, mostly state-specific, should not be overly problematic.
• **Fueling Demands for Increased Reservations —**
. Opponents say that it would fuel demands for increased reservations.
. Rather than fueling demands, detailed caste data could help curb arbitrary reservation demands. It would allow for objective policymaking and informed debates on reservation claims from groups like Marathas, Patidars, and Jats.
. Governments often prefer vague data, allowing them to implement reservations arbitrarily for electoral gains.

The case for OBC inclusion in Census -
• **Reservations for OBCs in education and public employment —**
. The Constitution permits reservations for OBCs in education and public employment (Articles 15(4) and 16(4)), similar to SCs and STs.
. Following the Mandal Commission, OBCs also have reservations in the Central government.
. The Supreme Court's Indra Sawhney case (1992) ruling requires periodic revision of the OBC list, which is based on the 1931 Census.
• **No reservation in electoral constituencies for MPs and MLAs —**
. While OBCs lack reservations in MP and MLA constituencies, the 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) mandate reservations in panchayats and municipalities for SCs, STs, and OBCs (Articles 243D(6) and 243T(6)).
. Accurate caste-wise data of OBCs is needed for this, which the GOI should have collected in the 2001 Census but did not.
• **Judiciary demands caste-wise data to uphold reservations —**
. States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Odisha, and Jharkhand have faced judicial stays on OBC reservations in local elections due to the absence of caste-wise data.
. While the judiciary demands this data, the executive has avoided collecting it.

Attempt at caste Census failed -
• In 2010, after significant lobbying, the Parliament unanimously resolved to include caste enumeration in the 2011 Census.
. The last caste enumeration in the 1931 Census identified 4,147 castes.
• However, the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC)-2011, which was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948, failed due to poor design and execution, resulting in an implausible figure of 46 lakh castes.
• The SECC-2011's failure was because of the fact that it was not conducted under the Census Act, 1948 as the Act was not amended to include caste as a parameter.

- It was conducted through the Union Ministries of Rural Development and Urban Development which did not have prior experience of conducting sociological/anthropological surveys.

- Additionally, the questionnaire was poorly designed and asked open-ended questions about caste.
  . The enumerators couldn't distinguish between genuine castes, alternative caste names, larger caste groups, sub-castes, surnames, clan names, gotras, etc.

Way forward -
- To address the failures of SECC-2011, the Census Act, 1948, should be amended to mandate caste enumeration, removing the discretion of the Union executive.
- Caste data should be collected during the regular Census by the Census Commissioner, with relevant questions added to the questionnaire.
- Sociological and anthropological experts should draft state-specific caste lists, publish them online for public input, and finalise them before providing them to enumerators.
- The questionnaire should include questions about sub-caste, caste, larger caste group, and caste surname.
- Using internet-enabled devices with preloaded details would simplify and ensure accurate data collection.

Source - **The Hindu**

QUESTION - Effective policymaking requires comprehensive data collection on various social identities. Discuss the necessity of conducting a caste census in India. Highlight the legal, social, and administrative imperatives for collecting caste data, and address the arguments against it. Evaluate the implications of the failed attempt at caste enumeration in the 2011 Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) and suggest a way forward. Use relevant examples to support your arguments.

Karnataka Gig Workers' Bill

On June 29, the Karnataka government published the draft of the **Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill**, making it the second Indian State to initiate such a move, the first being Rajasthan.

Details -
- On June 29, the Karnataka government published the draft of the **Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill**.
- The Bill seeks to **regulate the social security and welfare of platform-based gig workers** in the State and is expected to be placed in the monsoon session of the Assembly.

Key Features of the Draft Bill -
- According to the draft Bill, the **contract between the aggregator and the worker should contain an exhaustive list of grounds on which the contract would be terminated** by the aggregator.
  . It also stipulates that the aggregator shall not terminate a worker without giving valid reasons in writing and prior notice of 14 days.
  . Arbitrary terminations have been a major complaint raised by gig workers for many years now.
  . Instances of blacklisting workers or terminating them from work without hearing out their side have been aplenty.
- Also, the draft **mandates aggregators to make payments at least every week** and to inform the worker about the reasons for payment deductions if any.
- As per the new draft, a worker will have the right to refuse a specified number of gigs per week with 'reasonable cause' without any adverse consequences.
- **Welfare Fund —**
  . A welfare fee will be charged either on each transaction between the worker and the company, or based on the company's total revenue.

- This fee, along with contributions from the Union and State governments, will go into a fund.
- All gig workers must be registered, and the companies must provide the government with a database of these workers.

- The aggregator must also provide reasonable and safe working conditions for workers, although the draft does not delve into what constitutes as 'reasonable.'

What is Gig Economy?

- A gig economy is a free market system in which organisations hire or contract workers for a short span of time.
- Simply put, the positions are temporary to meet the company's requirements by having short- term engagements.
- Startups like Ola, Uber, Zomato, and Swiggy have established themselves as the main source of the gig economy in India.

Who is a Gig Worker?

- According to the Code on Social Security, 2020 (India), "**A gig worker is a person who performs work or participates in work arrangements and earns from such activities, outside of the traditional employer-employee relationship**."
- They are independent contractors, online platform workers, contract firm workers, on-call workers and temporary workers.

What is the size of Gig Economy in India?

- A NITI Aayog study on "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy" has estimated that at present, about 47 per cent of the gig work is in medium-skilled jobs, about 22 per cent in high skilled, and about 31 per cent in low-skilled jobs.
- These figures clearly indicate the importance of the gig working community in the Indian economy.
- Ensuring the comfort and security of this community is investing in a more progressive and prosperous future.
- Research studies by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have indicated that participation in the gig economy is higher in developing countries(5-12 percent) versus developed economies(1-4 percent).
  - Most of these jobs are in lower-income job-types such as deliveries, ridesharing, microtasks, care and wellness.
- These studies further estimate that in 2020-21, **77 lakh workers were engaged in the gig economy**.
- The gig workforce is expected to **expand to 2.35 crore workers by 2029-30**.

What is the Average Age/Income of Gig Workers in India?

- The **median age of Indian gig workers is 27 and their average monthly income is Rs 18,000**.
- Of these, about 71 per cent are the sole breadwinners of their families. Additionally, gig workers operate with an average household size of 4.4.

Challenges Faced by Gig Workers -

- While platform companies have created avenues of employment, it has often been marred by **low wages**, **unequal gender participation**, and a **lack of possibility for upward mobility** within an organisation.
- This has triggered protests from workers at companies like Swiggy, Zomato, Ola, Uber, and Urban Company, among others.
- Gig workers are typically **hired by companies on a contractual basis** and are not considered their employees.
- As a result, they do not receive some of the benefits that an on-roll employee of the company may have.
  - This means they often do not receive benefits like paid sick and casual leaves, travel and housing allowances, and provident fund savings, among other things.

What needs to be done in order to Improve the Living Standards of these Gig Workers?

- **Fiscal Incentives —**
  - NITI Aayog in its report "India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy" has said that fiscal incentives such as tax-breaks or startup grants may be provided for businesses that provide livelihood opportunities where women constitute a substantial portion of their workers.

- **Retirement Benefits —**
  - The report also recommended firms adopt policies that offer old age or retirement plans and benefits, and other insurance cover for contingencies such as the Covid-19 Pandemic.
  - Such plans and policies may be envisaged under the **Code on Social Security, 2020**.
  - Businesses should consider **providing income support to workers as it would be a "critical step in providing assured minimum earnings and social security from income loss in the wake of uncertainty or irregularity in work".**
  - It also suggesting offering paid sick leave to workers apart from insurance cover.
- **The Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023 —**
  - Recently, the Rajasthan State Assembly passed the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023.
  - Under the Act, a board will be established to ensure gig workers' registration and welfare, addressing their vulnerabilities and providing a platform for collective bargaining and negotiations.
  - The board can serve as an independent **grievance redress mechanism**.
  - The Act also has a provision of establishing a **social security fund** funded through a fee on every transaction.

Source - **The Hindu**

QUESTION - Discuss the significance of the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill in addressing the challenges faced by gig workers. How does the Bill propose to regulate the relationship between aggregators and gig workers, and what measures does it introduce to ensure the social security and welfare of gig workers? Critically analyse the potential impact of these provisions on the gig economy and the broader labor market in Karnataka.

Family Planning in India

On this World Population Day, it is time to reflect on India's journey in family planning and reaffirm our commitment to addressing the challenges that lie ahead.

As endorsed in the UN International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) in May, **India has not only provided leadership to the ICPD agenda but has also demonstrated progress through improved family planning services.**

Therefore, it is **important to have an assessment of evolution of family planning programmes and their impact on growth and development.**

An Overview of Shifts in India's Family Planning Trends -
- In India, a **significant trend has emerged: people are opting for smaller families**, averaging just two children.
- This **shift reflects a notable change over the past decade**, during which more than half of women (57 percent) in their reproductive age (15 to 49 years) have actively used modern contraceptives.
- The **widespread use of contraceptives underscores the success of India's family planning programme**.
- However, **family planning extends beyond contraception; it is integral to the health and well-being of communities** and empowers women by providing them with rights and choices.
- With **369 million young people aged 10-24, India stands on the brink of a transformative demographic shift.**

Evolution of Family Planning Programmes in India -
- Early Beginnings and Clinic-Based Approaches **—**
  - India was **one of the first countries to launch a national family planning programme in 1952**.

- Initially, **the programme was predominantly clinic-based,** focusing on providing contraceptive services through established healthcare facilities.

- This **phase marked the beginning of government-led efforts to address population growth** and promote family planning to improve public health and economic stability.
- Shift Towards Target-Oriented Methods **—**
  - In the subsequent decades, **the programme shifted towards more aggressive, target-oriented methods.**
  - The **government set specific numerical targets** for contraceptive acceptance and sterilisation, aiming to rapidly reduce birth rates.
  - **While this approach succeeded in increasing the adoption of family planning methods, it also faced criticism** for its coercive tactics and lack of emphasis on voluntary participation and informed choice.
- Voluntary Adoption and Rights-Based Approach **—**
  - **Responding to the criticisms** of the target-oriented phase, **India's family planning programme began to emphasise voluntary adoption** of contraceptive methods.
  - The **shift towards a rights-based approach focused on respecting individuals' reproductive rights** and providing a broader range of contraceptive options.
  - This **transition underscored the importance of informed choice and aimed to empower women** and couples to make decisions about their reproductive health.
- Integration with Health Initiatives **—**
  - **In 2012, the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) approach was introduced,** integrating family planning with other health initiatives.
  - This **holistic approach recognised that family planning is intricately linked with broader health outcomes.**
  - **By combining efforts to improve maternal and child health with family planning services, the programme aimed to create synergies** that would enhance overall health outcomes and reduce maternal and child morbidity and mortality.
- Family Planning (FP) Campaigns in 2020 and 2030 **—**
  - **India's commitment to global family planning initiatives was further solidified** with its participation in the **FP2020 and subsequent FP2030 campaigns.**
  - These initiatives focused on expanding access to family planning information and services, particularly for marginalized and underserved populations.
  - **They aimed to ensure that more women and girls could exercise their reproductive rights** and have access to a full range of contraceptive methods.
- Expanding Contraceptive Choices and Quality Assurance **—**
  - The **evolution of India's family planning programme has also seen an expansion in the range of contraceptive choices** available to the population.
  - **Modern reversible contraceptives, such as condoms, intrauterine contraceptive devices (IUCDs),** oral pills, and injectable contraceptives, **are now widely available.**
  - **Pilot programmes are also introducing subdermal implants** and subcutaneous injections to further broaden the options.
  - **Ensuring the quality of these services has become a priority**, with efforts to provide comprehensive training to healthcare providers and implement robust quality assurance mechanisms.

Family Planning Impact on Growth and Development -
- The **growth and development of a country** are **linked to population dynamics.**
- The **aim is to maintain and achieve replacement levels of fertility** both nationally and sub- nationally.
- **India has already achieved a replacement level of fertility at the national level (TFR 2.0),** and 31 states/UTs have already achieved this milestone as per NFHS-5 (2019-21).
- **Family planning has also been recognised globally** as reducing maternal and child morbidity and mortality.

Mission Parivar Vikas, Its Expansion and Innovation in Family Planning Services -

- <u>Mission Parivar Vikas (MPV)</u> **—**
  - This is **one of the flagship family planning programmes of the government,** was launched in 2016.

- The **aim is to increase access to contraceptives and family planning services in 146 high fertility districts** across seven states (Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, UP, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Assam).
- **The approach uses awareness campaigns such as Saarthi Vaahans (awareness on wheels) and Saas Bahu Sammelens** to address social barriers for young women accessing contraceptives, **and providing Nayi Pahel kits to newly married couples to sensitise them about responsible parenthood practices.**
- Expansion and Innovation in Family Planning Services —
  - **Improvements in the uptake of modern contraceptives in the MPV districts led to the government's decision** to scale up this programme to all districts of the seven states and in six Northeastern states in 2021.
  - Currently, **the National Planning programme offers a variety of reversible modern contraceptives,** including condoms, intrauterine contraceptive devices, oral pills, MPA injections, and more.
  - **In 10 states, covering two districts each, subdermal implants and subcutaneous injections are in the rollout stage**, with plans for further extension.

Way forward -
- As India commemorates World Population Day 2024, themed "**Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancy for the Health and Well-being of Mother and Child,**" India acknowledges the efforts of state counterparts and the relentless dedication of our health workforce.
- This **includes ANMs, ASHAs, and other ground-level functionaries** who are at the forefront of delivering crucial services.
- The **government should reaffirm its commitment to overcoming barriers related to access, misconceptions about contraceptive methods**, lack of awareness, geographical and economic challenges, and restrictive social and cultural norms.
- **Substantial investments are being made to improve family planning service delivery**, including ensuring the availability of both temporary and long-term contraceptive methods.
- Additionally, **family planning services are being extended to the last mile through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.**
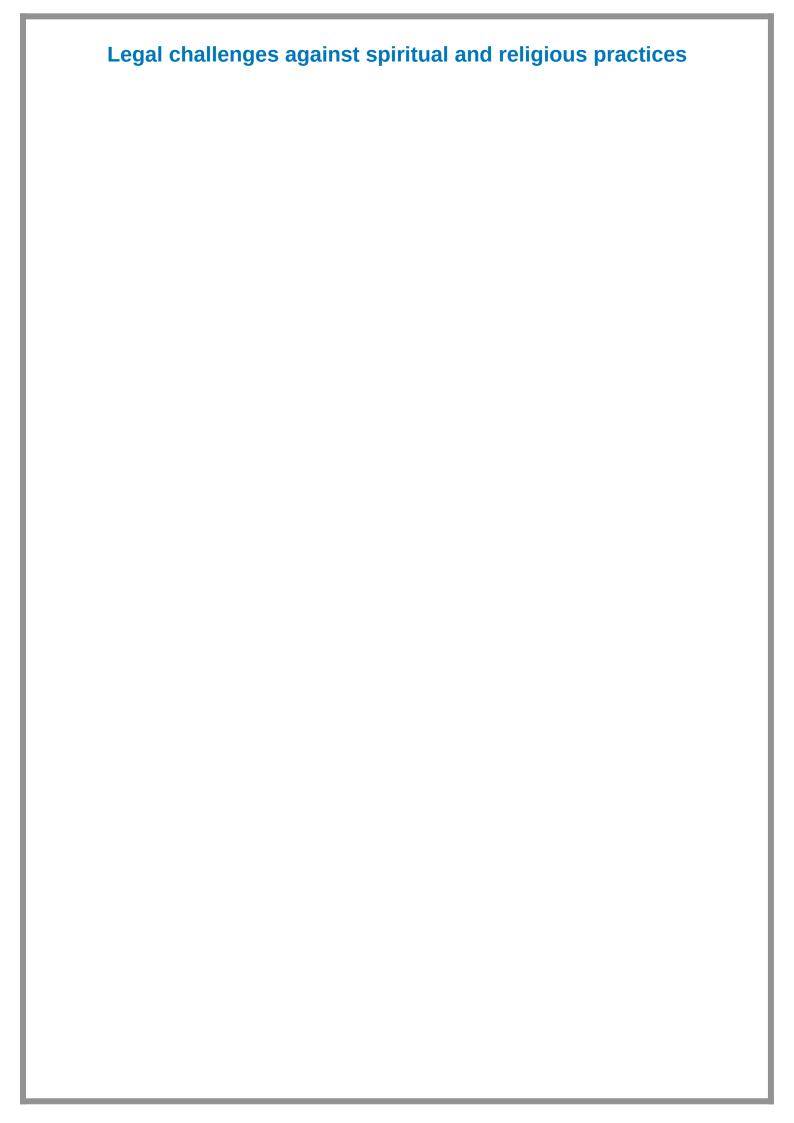
Conclusion -
- **India's demographic dividend must navigate the complexities** of sustainable development, urbanisation, and migration.
- **Integrating these factors into our policies ensures that demographic growth translates into a sustainable future** and inclusive prosperity and successful interventions must go together with niche strategies.
- **India should strive for a future where India's demographic dividend is fully realised, where every citizen has access to quality healthcare**, and where the health and well-being of our people are the foundation of our nation's progress and prosperity.

Source - **The Indian Express**

QUESTION - Discuss the evolution of India's family planning programmes since their inception in 1952. How have these programmes impacted India's growth and development, and what challenges remain? Reflect on the shift towards a rights-based approach and its significance.

GENERAL STUDIES - II

Polity

Legal challenges against spiritual and religious practices

The **constant debate over the intersection of religion and law** often brings to the forefront the
complexity and sensitivity involved in adjudicating religious practices.
In the Indian context, **religion has been a cornerstone of societal existence**, with a pronounced religiosity among its population.
Therefore, **it is important to examine the judicial order in** Navin Kumar (2024) **by Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madras High Court**, which permitted the religious practice of angapradakshinam, and the broader implications of judicial intervention in religious practices.

Angapradakshinam and the Court's Ruling -

• **Angapradakshinam is a ritual that involves devotees rolling over banana leaves on which others have partaken food,** specifically in the context of the Sri Sadasiva Brahmendral temple in Tamil Nadu.
• This practice, **previously restricted by a 2015 order from Justice S. Manikumar due to concerns of caste discrimination.**
• **Recently it was allowed by Justice Swaminathan, who argued that the ritual did not exclusively involve Dalits** but included participants from various castes.
• **Justice Swaminathan's decision relied heavily on constitutional provisions**, asserting that the petitioner's right to practice his religion (**Article 25**) and his right to privacy and human dignity (**Article 21**) were upheld by this practice.

Implication of the Order -

· The order has **reignited debates on several fronts**: the definition of religion, the criteria for determining essential religious practices, and the judiciary's consistency in such determinations.
• **Justice Swaminathan, in his detailed judgment, cited several Supreme Court rulings** to assert that angapradakshinam was an established religious practice.
• **However, unlike similar cases, the court did not rigorously scrutinise whether the practice was essential** and integral to Hinduism or merely a superstitious act.
• This **lack of scrutiny raises questions about the judiciary's approach** to defining essential religious practices.

An Analysis of Judicial Consistency and the Essential Practices Doctrine -

• <u>Origin and Early Application</u> **—**
  · The doctrine was first articulated in the landmark case of The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras v. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt **(1954).**
  · The **Supreme Court of India held that Article 25 protects not only religious beliefs but also the outward expressions** of those beliefs through rituals and ceremonies.
  · The **Court stated that what constitutes an essential part of religion should be determined with reference** to the doctrines of that religion itself.
  · This **case set a precedent for future determinations** of essential religious practices.
  • **Despite the clear principles laid out in the** Shirur Mutt **case, subsequent judgments have often deviated** from this standard, leading to inconsistent applications of the Essential Practices Doctrine.
• <u>The Durgah Committee, Ajmer v. Syed Hussain Ali (1961)</u> **—**
  · In this case, **the Supreme Court took a more restrictive approach** and the Court ruled that only those practices which are essential and integral to the religion are protected under Article 25, and not every practice that claims religious significance.
  · **The Court differentiated between practices that are superstitious and those that are essential,** marking a shift from a broad to a narrower interpretation of protected religious practices.
• <u>Gramsabha of Village Battis Shirala (2014)</u> **—**

- In Gramsabha of Village BattisShirala, **a sect claimed that capturing and worshipping a live cobra during the festival of Nag Panchami was an essential religious practice.**
- The Court, however, relied on more general texts of the Dharmashastra, which did not mention such a practice, and ruled that it was not an essential practice.
- This **decision demonstrated the Court's willingness to interpret religious texts broadly** rather than deferring to specific sectarian claims.

- Mohammed Fasi v. State of Kerala (1985) —
  - The **Kerala High Court in** Mohammed Fasi **faced the question of whether a Muslim policeman could grow a beard as part of his religious practice.**
  - The **Court dismissed the claim, noting that some Muslim dignitaries do not sport beards**, and the petitioner himself had not always worn a beard.
  - The **Court did not examine Islamic texts in depth to determine the essentiality of the practice,** relying instead on empirical observations.
  - This **case highlighted the Court's reliance on practical considerations** over religious doctrines.
- Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta v. Commissioner of Police, Calcutta (2004) —
  - In this case, the **Calcutta High Court initially ruled that the tandava dance was an essential practice of the Ananda Margi faith.**
  - The **Supreme Court, however, overruled this decision**, noting that the dance was adopted into the faith only in 1966, despite the faith itself being established in 1955.
  - The **Court's reasoning suggested that a practice could not be considered essential if it was not part of the religion from its inception**, thus freezing religious practices in time and ignoring their evolutionary nature.
- Ismail Faruqui v. Union of India (1995) —
  - The Faruqui **case dealt with the acquisition of land where the Babri Masjid once stood.**
  - The **Supreme Court held that while offering prayers is an essential Islamic practice, doing so in a mosque is not,** unless the mosque holds specific religious significance.
  - **This judgment overlooked the central role of congregational prayers in Islam and the significance of mosques in facilitating these prayers**, showcasing the Court**'**s inconsistent application of the essential practices test.

Way forward -
- Avoid Theological Judgments **—** The court **should focus on legal and constitutional principles** rather than delving into theological interpretations, thus maintaining judicial impartiality and respect for religious autonomy.
- Consider Evolution of Practices **—** Judges **should recognise that religious practices can evolve over time and that contemporary practices may hold significance** even if they were not present at the religion's inception.
- Uphold Constitutional Values **—** The **court should ensure that all religious practices, even those deemed essential, conform to constitutional values** such as public order, health, and morality, balancing religious freedom with other fundamental rights.

Conclusion -
- **The Essential Practices Doctrine remains a crucial yet contentious aspect of judicial adjudication in India** and a balance is essential for maintaining the secular and pluralistic fabric of Indian society.
- **While it aims to protect genuine religious practices, its inconsistent application has led to confusion** and controversy.
- **A more coherent and principled approach is needed to ensure that religious freedoms are protected** without compromising constitutional values.

Source - **The Hindu**

QUESTION - Discuss the broader implications of judicial intervention in religious practices, highlighting the need for consistency and balance in the judiciary's approach to defining essential religious practices.

Governance

Draft Digital Competition Bill

In February 2023, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) formed the Committee on Digital Competition Law (CDCL) to explore the necessity of a separate law addressing competition in digital markets.

Details -
• After a year of discussions, the CDCL concluded that the existing Competition Act, 2002, which operates on an **ex-post framework** (addressing issues after they occur), needed to be supplemented with an **ex-ante framework** (preventive measures to address issues before they occur). <u>Ex-ante competition regulation is unusual. The European Union is the only jurisdiction</u> where a comprehensive ex-ante competition framework, under the <u>Digital Markets Act, is</u> currently in force.
• This led to the creation of the draft Digital Competition Bill, which outlines the ex-ante framework designed to enhance the current regulatory system for digital markets.

Growing need for an ex-ante framework -
• Due to the complex world of digital markets, regulating for market abuse after it takes place (as in an ex-post framework) is not optimal.
• This is due to following reasons —
  . Digital enterprises enjoy economies of scale and economies of scope.
    . i.e., reduction in cost of production per unit as the number of units increase and reduction in total costs of production with increase in number of services respectively.
    . This propels them to grow rather quickly as compared to players in the traditional market.
  . This growth is aided by network effects — utility of the digital services increases with the increase in the number of users.
• A forward-looking, preventive, and presumptive law (an ex-ante framework), which foresees the potential harms that can arise out of antitrust issues and prescribes pre-determined no-go areas is considered as the way forward.
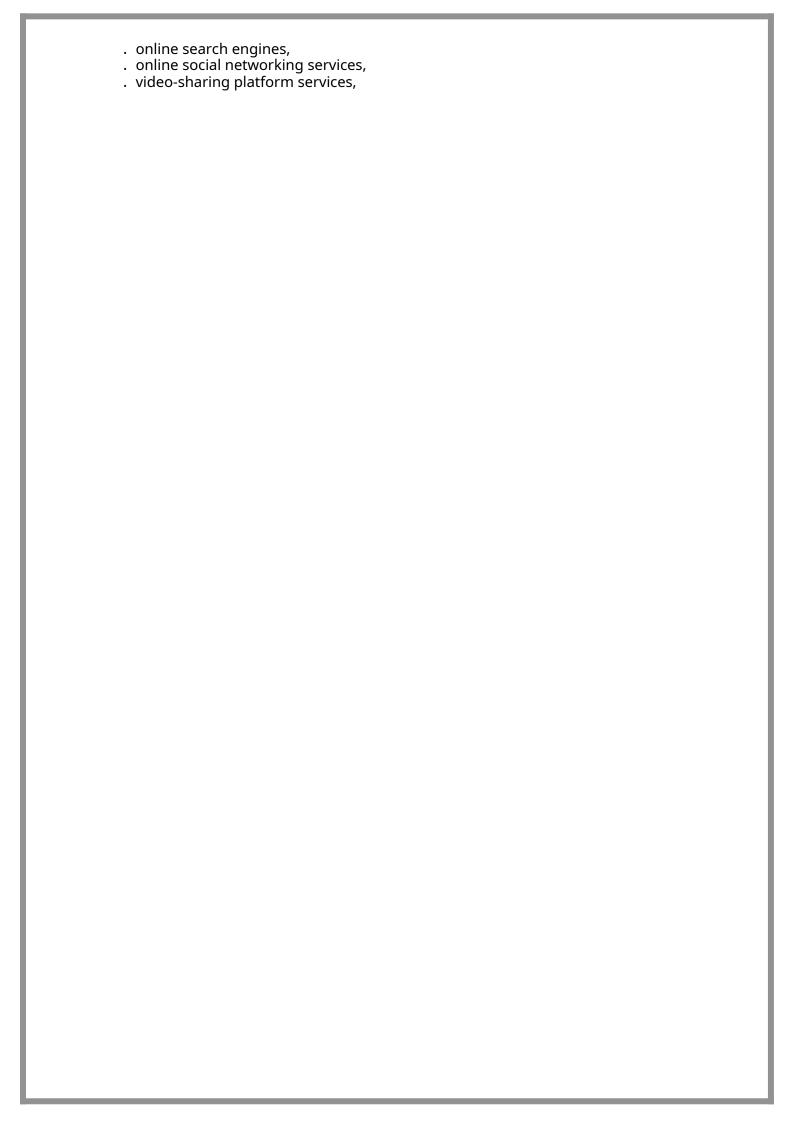
Digital Competition Bill, 2024 -
• **About —**
  . The bill seeks to further regulate large digital enterprises, including news aggregators, as part of efforts to ensure a level-playing field and fair competition in the digital space.
    . It was proposed in March 2024.
  . The new law could prevent big tech companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon from favoring <u>their own services</u> or using data collected from one of their businesses to help another one of their businesses.
  . It has provisions to set presumptive norms to curb anti-competitive practices before they actually take place.
  . It promises to impose heavy penalties — which could amount to billions of dollars — for violations.
• **Similarity with EU's Digital Markets Act (DMA) —**
  . DMA went into complete effect earlier this year.
  . DMA requires large tech firms like Alphabet, Amazon and Apple to open their services, and not favour their own at the expense of rivals.
. **Nodal ministry —** The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) is handling the draft.

Key proposals of the draft digital competition Bill 2024 -
• **List of Core Digital Services (CDS) —**
  . The list of core digital services has been mentioned under Schedule I of the bill.
  . It consists of —

- online search engines,
- online social networking services,
- video-sharing platform services,

- interpersonal communications services,
- operating systems, web browsers, cloud services, advertising services,
- online intermediation services (includes web-hosting, service providers, payment sites, auction sites, app stores, e-commerce marketplaces and aggregators, etc.)

- **Significant entities —**
  - The Bill proposes to designate certain enterprises as **Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs)**.
    - SSDEs are those enterprises that provide core digital services in India and have a significant presence and financial strength in the country.

- **Parameters to determine whether the enterprise may be designated as SSDE —**
  - If an enterprise is engaged in a CDS, the Bill proposes two tests – the financial strength test and spread test (user base test) to determine whether the enterprise may be designated as SSDE.
  - The **quantitative parameters** for a company to be designated a SSDE are:
    - If in the last 3 financial years, its turnover in India is not less than Rs 4,000 crore; or its global turnover is not less than $30 billion; or
    - Its gross merchandise value in India is not less than Rs 16,000 crore; or
    - Its global market capitalisation is not less than $75 billion; or
    - The core digital service provided by these companies should also have at least 1 crore end users, or 10,000 business users.
  - Entities that donot fall under these parameters can still be designated as SSDEs if the CCI believes that they have a significant presence in any given core digital service.

- **Obligations imposed on SSDE —**
  - Entities which are designated as SSDEs, have been prohibited from engaging in practices such as self-preferencing, anti-steering, and restricting third party applications.
  - If they violate these requirements, they can be fined up to 10% of their global turnover.

- **Associate Digital Enterprises —**
  - The Bill proposes to designate associate digital enterprises (ADEs) to understand the role that data collected by one company of a major technology group can play in benefiting other group companies.
  - If an entity of a group is determined to be an associate entity, they would have the same obligations as SSDEs.
    - However, this will depend on the level of their involvement with the core digital service offered by the main company.
  - For example, Google Maps could be seen as an associate entity because Google Search directs users to it.
  - The same goes for YouTube, depending on how much data is shared between Google Search and YouTube, affecting the video recommendations YouTube makes to users.

Criticism of the digital competition Bill 2024 -
- **Significant compliance burden —**
  - An ex-ante framework with its strict prescriptive norms could lead to significant compliance burden for big tech companies.
  - It may lead to shift of focus from innovation and research to ensuring that companies do not presumptively engage in an anti-competitive practice.
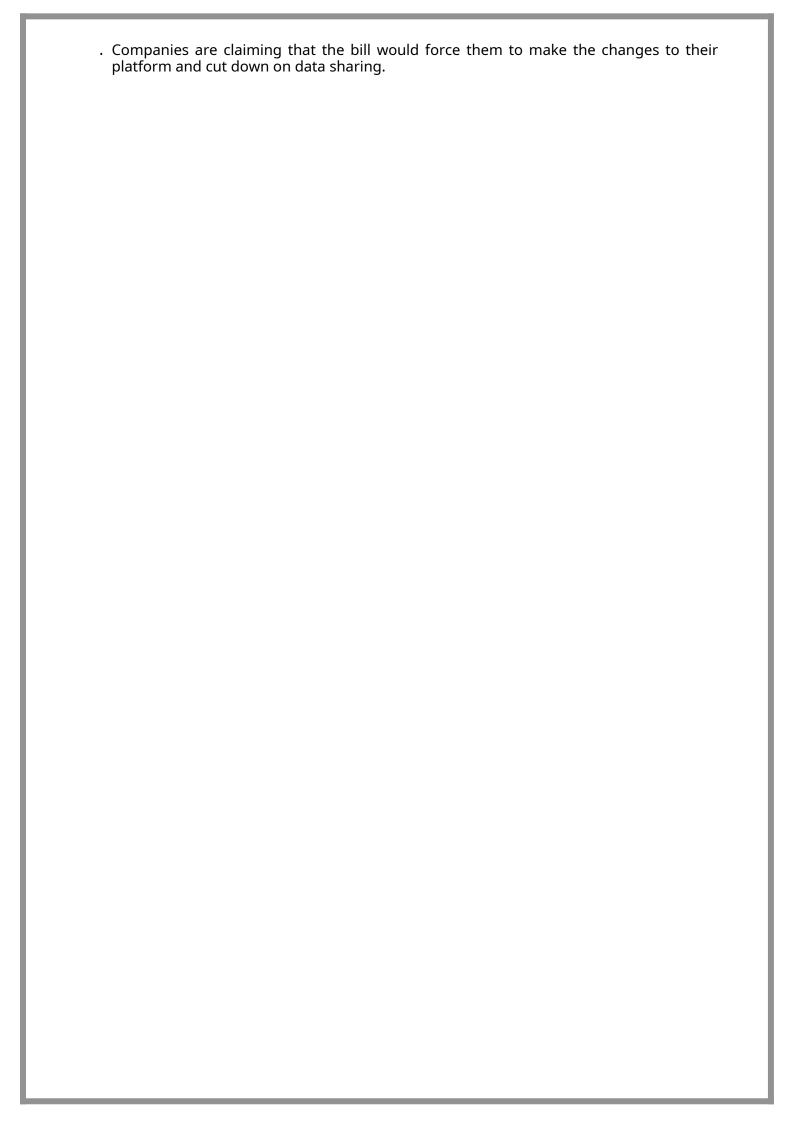- **Stringent requirements of the EU's DMA and associated impact**
  - Experts have highlighted that there has been a significant increase in the time it takes to find things via Google search.
- **Broad definition of who a significant platform —**
  - Companies are concerned about the broad definition — both quantitative and qualitative — of who a significant platform could be.
  - Unlike EU's DMA which specifically names the 'gatekeeper' entities, that decision in India's draft law has been left to the discretion of the CCI.
    - Companies believe that could lead to arbitrary decision making, which could potentially also impact start-ups.
- **May affect smaller businesses —**

. Companies are claiming that the bill would force them to make the changes to their platform and cut down on data sharing.

.   It could also impact smaller businesses who rely on their platforms to reach a big target audience.

Source - **The Hindu**

Anusandhan National Research Foundation

In 2023, the Indian Parliament passed the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Bill, a landmark move aimed at revitalising research in India, particularly within its universities and colleges.
This initiative seeks to develop an environment where academic research can flourish free from bureaucratic constraints, bolstered by enhanced funding and collaboration with industry partners.
Despite the promise, the initial steps of the ANRF have revealed significant shortcomings, particularly in its governance structure and representation.
Therefore, it is important to delve into these challenges and outlines the necessary reforms to fulfil the ANRF's ambitious vision.

Objectives of the ANRF -
- Enhancing Research Infrastructur**e —**
  - This **includes upgrading laboratories, providing access to advanced research tools,** and creating an environment conducive to high-quality research.
  - **The foundation is particularly focused on state universities, where the majority of Indian students are enrolled,** recognising that these institutions have traditionally been underfunded and lack the necessary resources to conduct cutting-edge research.
- Reducing Bureaucratic Hurdles **—**
  - A **major objective of the ANRF is to create a more efficient and less bureaucratic system** for research funding and administration.
  - The **traditional processes involved in securing research grants in India have been criticised** for being slow and cumbersome, often stifling innovation.
  - The **ANRF seeks to streamline these processes,** making it easier and faster for researchers to obtain the necessary funding and support for their projects.
- Fostering Industry-Academia Collaboration **—**
  - **Another critical goal is to enhance collaboration** between academic institutions and industry.
  - **By facilitating partnerships with industry, the ANRF aims to ensure that academic research is not only theoretical but also practical** and applicable to real-world problems.
  - **This collaboration is expected to drive innovation** and make Indian research more competitive on a global scale.
- Increasing Research Funding **—**
  - The **ANRF is tasked with increasing the overall funding available** for research in India.
  - This **includes not only government funding but also raising significant amounts** from non-governmental sources, including industry and private sector contributions.
  - **By expanding the funding base, the ANRF hopes to provide a much-needed financial boost** to the research ecosystem in India.
- Building a Robust Research Ecosystem **—**
  - Ultimately, **the ANRF aims to build a robust and sustainable research ecosystem in India**

- **This involves nurturing young researchers, supporting interdisciplinary research, and ensuring that research findings are effectively translated** into practical applications and policies that benefit society.

Initial Enthusiasm Surrounding ANRF -

- Positive Reception by the Scientific Community —
  - The **scientific community in India welcomed the ANRF with open arms.**
  - **Researchers saw it as an opportunity to conduct their work without the usual bureaucratic constraints**, allowing them to focus more on their scientific pursuits.
  - The **promise of increased funding and better infrastructure was seen as a major step forward** in creating a more conducive environment for research.
- Potential for Academic Excellence —
  - **Educators and administrators in universities and colleges were optimistic that the ANRF would help raise the standard** of academic research in India.
  - With better facilities and more funding, it was anticipated that Indian institutions could produce research that would be competitive on an international level.
  - **This, in turn, would enhance the global reputation of Indian universities** and attract more international collaborations and partnerships.
- Industry Interest —
  - The **industry also showed interest in the ANRF**, seeing it as a bridge to connect with academic institutions for collaborative research projects.
  - The **possibility of working closely with universities was viewed as an opportunity to drive innovation** and develop new technologies that could have commercial applications.
- Government Support —
  - The **government's backing of the ANRF was seen as a strong signal** of its commitment to improving the research ecosystem in India.
  - The **establishment of the ANRF was viewed as a strategic move to address long-standing issues in research funding and administration**, aligning with the broader goals of economic development and technological advancement.

Critical flaws in the Implementation of ANRF -

- Governance and Representation Issues —
  - However, **nearly a year after its inception, the ANRF's structure has revealed significant flaws**.
  - The **announcement of a 15-member Governing Board and a 16-member Executive Council has sparked criticism** due to the absence of representatives from central and state universities or colleges.
  - **Despite the fact that over 95% of students in India attend state institutions, these bodies are instead populated by high-ranking government officials,** directors of premier institutes like the Indian Institute of Science, and international experts.
- Exclusion of Ground Level Educators —
  - This **exclusion of ground-level educators and researchers is a glaring oversight.**
  - Effective governance requires members who understand the systemic bottlenecks and can implement practical solutions.
  - **Furthermore, the multiplicity of committees can lead to confusion and inefficiency, underscoring the need for a streamlined, single committee** focused on strategy formulation and implementation.
- Lack of Industry and Diverse Representation —
  - **A critical omission** in the current board and council is the **lack of adequate industry representation.**
  - The **ANRF's vision includes raising over 70% of its funding from non-government sources,** primarily the industry.
  - Yet, **the sole industry representative is Romesh T. Wadhwani, an Indian-American**

businessman based in Silicon Valley, with no Indian industry representatives or entrepreneurs on the committee.

- The **representation of women is also inadequate,** with the only female member being the Secretary of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR).

- Funding and Operational Challenges —
  - . **India's underfunding of research and development is a well-documented issue**, with the R&D budget needing to increase to 4% of GDP to make Indian innovations globally competitive.
  - . **The ANRF must address several operational challenges** including adequate staffing and robust grant management systems, an internal peer-review system incentivising reviewers.
  - . The **ANRF must work on timely disbursal of research grants and fellowships**, flexibility in spending, free from stringent government financial rules, freedom from bureaucratic hurdles at both the funding body and grantee institutions.

Future Directions for the ANRF -

- Broadening Representation —
  - . The **ANRF must diversify its governing bodies** to include representatives from a wider array of backgrounds.
  - . This **includes incorporating more voices from state and central universities, industry leaders based in India,** practicing natural and social scientists, and entrepreneurs.
  - . **Such diversity will ensure that the foundation's decisions are informed by a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges** and opportunities within India's research ecosystem.
- Reducing Bureaucratic Hurdles —
  - . **Minimising bureaucratic obstacles** at both the funding body and **grantee institutions is critical.**
  - . The **ANRF should streamline administrative processes to allow researchers to focus on their work** rather than navigating complex bureaucratic procedures.
  - . This **includes simplifying reporting requirements and providing clear**, consistent guidelines **for compliance.**

Conclusion -

- **The ANRF holds the potential to transform India's research landscape**, but only if it addresses its current governance and operational shortcomings.
- **By ensuring diverse and inclusive representation, streamlining its committee structure,** and reforming funding and operational practices, **the ANRF can create a vibrant research ecosystem that propels India to the forefront of global innovation.**

Source - The Hindu

QUESTION - Discuss the objectives and initial promise of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) established in 2023. Critically examine the governance and operational challenges it has faced in its initial phase. Suggest reforms necessary for the ANRF to achieve its vision of revitalising research in India.

International Relations

Dealing with Pakistan after J&K Attacks

In recent days, Jammu and Kashmir have witnessed a tragic escalation in violence, with seven security personnel losing their lives to terrorism.

This resurgence of terror, closely following a series of four attacks in June, **underscores the persistent and unresolved issue of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the region.**
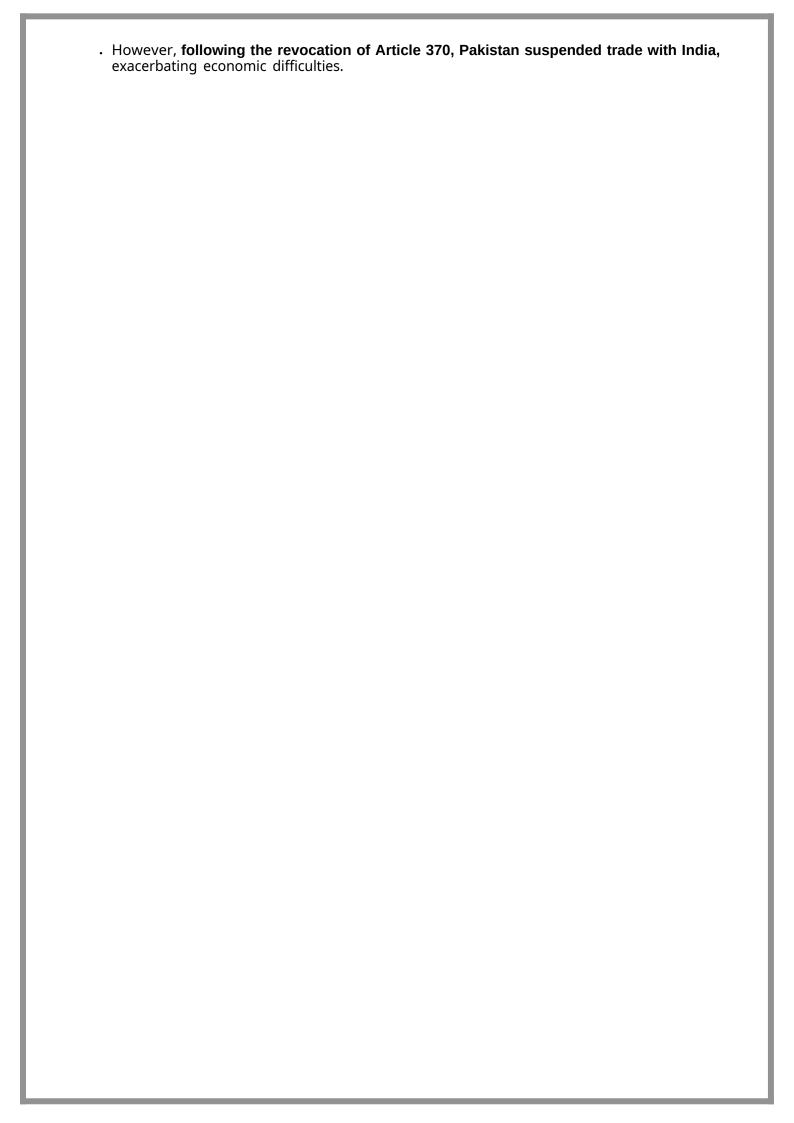
Despite various peace initiatives and a decade of aggressive strategies, **India's efforts to eradicate this menace remain unfulfilled.**

The Reality of Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir -
- Historical Context —

- **The conflict** over Jammu and Kashmir **dates to the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.**
- **Pakistan has consistently questioned the legitimacy of Jammu and Kashmir's accession** to India, and this dispute has been a central element of its foreign and domestic policy.
- **Over the decades, Pakistan has supported various militant groups to wage a proxy war against India**, aiming to destabilise the region and internationalise the Kashmir issue.

- Persistent Support for Terrorism —
  - Despite facing significant internal challenges and international scrutiny, **Pakistan's support for terrorism has remained steadfast.**
  - The **Pakistani state has been known to provide training, funding, and logistical support to terrorist organisations** operating in Jammu and Kashmir.
  - Groups such as **Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) have carried out numerous attacks with the backing of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).**
  - These **groups not only receive material support but also benefit from the strategic depth and safe havens** provided within Pakistan's borders.

- The Strategic Objective —
  - **Pakistan's strategic objective** in supporting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is not something new.
  - Firstly, it **aims to keep the Kashmir issue alive internationally**, drawing attention to what it frames as an unresolved territorial dispute.
  - Secondly, **by fomenting unrest, Pakistan seeks to weaken India's control over the region**, thereby attempting to force India into negotiations under terms favourable to Pakistan.

The Challenge of Reducing Tensions between India and Pakistan -
- Historical Animosities and Distrust —
  - The long-standing animosity between India and Pakistan dates to the partition in 1947, which led to violent conflicts and mass migrations.
  - This **historical backdrop has developed deep-seated distrust and hostility**, manifesting in multiple wars and skirmishes over the decades, most notably over the contested region of Jammu and Kashmir.
  - **Each nation views the other's intentions with suspicion**, making genuine dialogue and reconciliation exceedingly difficult.

- Political Constraints and Public Sentiment —
  - In India, **the slogan terror and talks cannot go together has resonated deeply with the public,** especially in light of repeated terror attacks attributed to Pakistani-backed groups.
  - This **sentiment restricts the Indian government's ability to engage in dialogue without appearing to compromise** on national security or public anger.
  - **In Pakistan, political instability and polarisation further complicate the situation.**
  - The former Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, for instance, adopted a hardline stance following **India's revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019.**
  - **Khan's call for India to reverse this move** as a precondition for dialogue has **created a diplomatic deadlock.**

- The Role of the Military and Strategic Calculations —
  - The **Pakistani military plays a crucial role in shaping the country's policy towards India.**
  - Historically, **the military has maintained an adversarial posture**, viewing India as a primary threat.
  - **This perspective influences Pakistan's support for non-state actors** as strategic assets to counterbalance India's conventional military superiority.

- Economic and Trade Dynamics —
  - **Trade between India and Pakistan has the potential to build mutual dependencies** and foster better relations.

- However, **following the revocation of Article 370, Pakistan suspended trade with India,** exacerbating economic difficulties.

- The **pressure from Pakistani industries to resume trade highlights the potential benefits**, but political and military considerations have so far outweighed economic incentives.
- External Influences and Geopolitical Factors **—**
  - The **growing China-Pakistan economic and military partnership adds another layer of complexity.**
  - **China's strategic interests in the region**, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), **influence Pakistan's policies towards India.**
  - Conversely, **India's closer ties with the United States and other Western countries impact its approach towards Pakistan.**

Way forward -
- Enhanced Security Infrastructure **—**
  - Strengthening the security infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir is paramount.
  - This **includes improving intelligence-gathering capabilities, modernising equipment, and increasing the presence of well-trained security forces.**
  - **Utilising advanced technology such as drones, surveillance systems, and cyber intelligence can provide a strategic advantage** in pre-empting and thwarting terrorist activities.
- Community Engagement **—**
  - **Building trust with the local population is critical**. Effective counter-terrorism strategies must involve community engagement programs that encourage cooperation with security forces.
  - **Providing avenues for local employment, improving infrastructure, and ensuring access to education and healthcare can reduce the appeal of militancy** and create a more stable environment.
- Targeted Operations **—**
  - **Conducting targeted operations** against known terrorist operatives and **their networks is crucial.**
  - These operations must be precise to minimise collateral damage and avoid alienating the local population.
  - **Special forces and counter-insurgency units should be employed to carry out these missions** with surgical precision.
- Bilateral Dialogue **—**
  - Despite the challenges, sustained diplomatic efforts to engage Pakistan in dialogue are necessary.
  - **This involves both formal and informal channels**, where confidence-building measures can be explored.
  - **Addressing Pakistan's security concerns and economic interests may provide a foundation** for reducing hostilities and fostering cooperation.
- Leveraging International Forums **—**
  - Utilising international forums such as the United Nations, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and other multilateral organisations **can help exert pressure on Pakistan to curb its support for terrorism.**
  - **Diplomatic efforts should aim to highlight Pakistan's involvement in cross-border terrorism** and seek international support for India's counter-terrorism initiatives.
- Regional Cooperation **—**
  - Engaging with neighbouring countries and regional powers such as China, Afghanistan, and **Iran can help isolate the sources of terrorism**.
  - **Regional cooperation mechanisms can be established to enhance intelligence sharing, coordinate counter-terrorism operations**, and address the broader security dynamics in South Asia.
- Track-II Diplomacy **—**
  - **Encouraging back-channel or Track-II diplomacy involving former diplomats**, military

officers, and influential civil society members from both countries can help create a conducive environment for official dialogue.

- **These informal interactions can address sensitive issues**, build mutual understanding, and lay the groundwork for formal negotiations.

Conclusion -
- **Pakistan's involvement in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is a deeply entrenched** policy shaped by historical, political, and strategic factors.
- **Despite facing international pressure** and internal challenges, **Pakistan has not fundamentally altered its support for militant groups.**
- **This reality underscores the complexity of the issue and the need for a multifaceted approach that includes both robust security measures and sustained diplomatic efforts** to address the root causes of the conflict and achieve long-term stability in the region.

Source - **The Indian Express**

QUESTION - In recent years, Jammu and Kashmir have experienced a tragic resurgence of terrorism, highlighting the persistent challenge of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in the region. Discuss the historical context, the current state of this conflict, and the strategic objectives of Pakistan in supporting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

GENERAL STUDIES - III

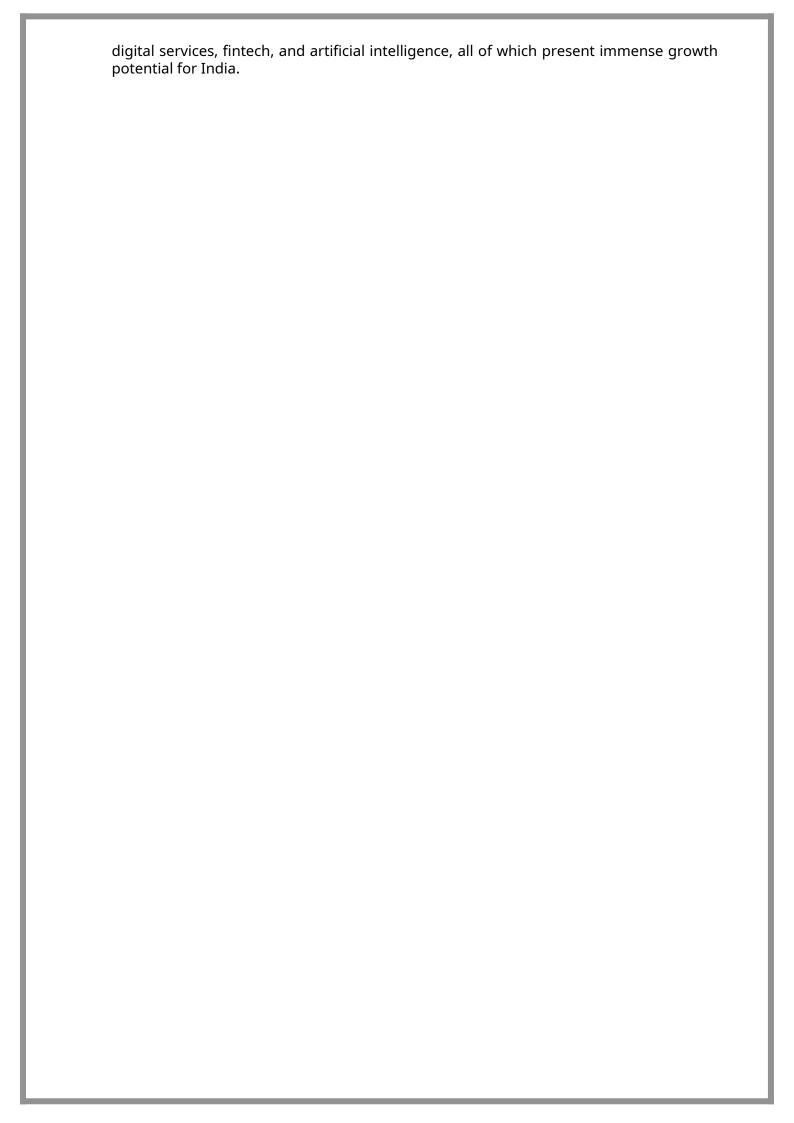# Economy

Why India needs to reset its trade policy?

India's resistance to expanding the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) negotiation agenda, particularly in e-commerce, trade, climate change, and investment facilitation, **has sparked significant debate.**

The **country's stance is primarily rooted in preserving policy flexibility** for its economic development strategies.

While this approach suits traditional sectors like agriculture and fisheries, **it may hinder seizing new opportunities in emerging fields** such as the digital economy and high-tech manufacturing, which are the signature strategies of its Vikas Bharat vision.

Reason behind India's Resistance to WTO Expansion and Its Drawbacks -
- To Maintain Policy Flexibility **—**
  - India's resistance to the expansion of the WTO's negotiation agenda is **primarily driven by a desire to maintain policy flexibility for its economic development strategies.**
  - This **cautious approach is particularly beneficial for traditional sectors such as agriculture and fisheries**, where preserving policy autonomy is essential to protect the livelihoods of millions of small farmers and fishermen.
  - These **sectors are highly sensitive to international competition and volatile global markets,** necessitating a protective stance to ensure food security and sustainable rural development.
- Drawbacks of India's Resistance **—**
  - This resistance to liberalising trade policies c**an have significant drawbacks, particularly when it comes to capitalising on emerging opportunities in the digital economy** and high-tech manufacturing.
  - These sectors are **rapidly transforming the global economic landscape,** driven by advancements in technology, innovation, and the increasing integration of digital platforms in business operations.
  - **The digital economy encompasses a broad range of activities**, including e-commerce,

digital services, fintech, and artificial intelligence, all of which present immense growth potential for India.

. Therefore, **India's resistance to WTO's expansion can have impact on India's Vision 2047 document.**

Key Components of India's Vision 2047 -
• Digital Infrastructure Development **—**
  . Building robust digital infrastructure, including widespread internet connectivity, advanced data centres, and secure digital payment systems, is **crucial for supporting the digital economy.**
  . This **infrastructure will enable businesses to operate efficiently**, facilitate e-commerce, and provide digital services to a broader population.
• Innovation and R&D **—**
  • **Investing in innovation and R&D is essential for developing cutting-edge technologies** and maintaining a competitive edge in high-tech manufacturing.
  • This **involves fostering a culture of innovation**, providing incentives for research institutions and private enterprises, and creating an ecosystem that supports startups and technological advancements.
• Skilled Workforce **—**
  • **Developing a highly skilled workforce is critical** for the growth of the digital economy and high-tech manufacturing.
  • This **requires comprehensive educational reforms**, vocational training programs, and initiatives to upskill the existing workforce in emerging technologies.
• Regulatory Reforms **—**
  . Implementing regulatory reforms that promote ease of doing business, ensure data protection, and create a conducive environment for digital enterprises is vital.
  . **These reforms should align with global standards to attract foreign investment** and facilitate international trade.
• Sustainable Development **—**
  • **Integrating sustainability into economic growth strategies is essential** for long-term development.
  • This **includes promoting green technologies, reducing carbon emissions, and adopting practices** that ensure environmental sustainability.

Why India needs to reset its policy?
• To Navigate Global Economic Governance Effectively **—**
  • The **global economic governance landscape is evolving**, influenced by geoeconomics, emerging technologies, resilient global value chains, and environmental sustainability.
  . **As a rising economy, India has substantial stakes in this new paradigm.**
  . While achieving a new global equilibrium will not be without friction, **India's growing global stature necessitates that it plays a constructive role and asserts its distinct personality** in managing differences amidst these changes.
• To Sustain Technology-Driven Economic Growth **—**
  • **India's evolving domestic policy reforms aim to promote global integration** by developing technology-driven and environmentally sustainable economic growth.
  • The **country is a favoured destination for global investors**, securing the third position in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2022, after the US and China.
  . **India aims to boost goods exports to $1 trillion by 2030**, positioning itself as a manufacturing powerhouse.
  . Concurrently, **its e-commerce market is expected to surge to $350 billion by 2030.**
  . **Despite the current e-commerce routed exports constituting only 1 percent of total exports,** the global e-commerce routed exports are predicted to reach $2 trillion by 2030, offering **India substantial opportunities for export growth.**
• To Leverage E-Commerce Opportunities **—**
  • The **aspiration to leverage e-commerce opportunities has driven regulatory reforms in India,** promoting digitisation, transparency, and operational efficiency in the business

landscape.
- **These initiatives have led to significant reforms** in data protection, consumer rights, competition, and taxation, nurturing a conducive ecosystem for e-commerce enterprises.

- **India's data protection regulations aim to align with global standards.**
- **The country is committed to a low-carbon, resilient, and equitable transition, targeting net zero carbon emissions by 2070** and making significant strides in improving energy access and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Way forward -

- Shift from Defensive to Proactive Engagement **—**
  - In India's evolving export-led economic growth model, **the emphasis on maintaining the unrestricted right to pursue domestic policies should shift towards seeking policy predictability in key destination markets like the US, the EU,** and Japan, particularly in high-tech sectors.
  - **India must shed its hesitancy and actively participate in WTO negotiations concerning e-commerce, trade,** climate change, and investment facilitation.
- Move Towards Present Imperatives **—**
  - The **historical context that initially shaped India's strategy has significantly changed since the 1991 economic crisis**.
  - This prompted policy reforms that dismantled trade barriers, attracted foreign investments, and spurred economic expansion.
  - **In the present context, India must adeptly manage its growth trajectory by emphasising digitisation,** sustainable development, and resilient value chains to bolster its manufacturing sector.
  - **Seeking international consensus on rules and disciplines related to emerging economic** issues and navigating the evolving geo-economic landscape **is in the country's best interest.**
- Active Global Participation **—**
  - **India's active participation in WTO discussions is crucial** for successful bilateral engagement with major markets.
  - **Participation in these discussions will also enable India to build a leadership position** in the Global South.
  - The **country's lack of engagement has not deterred other nations from forging consensus among major economies regarding new regulations** in disruptive technologies or unilateral carbon border adjustment measures that could harm Indian business interests.
- Abandon Traditional Defensive Approach **—**
  - Going forward, **it is time for India to break away from its traditionally defensive positions.**
  - Between 2000 and 2007, India's trade-to-GDP ratio surged from 12 percent to 23 percent, stabilising at this level.
  - **To achieve ambitious export targets and accelerate GDP growth, the country aims for a higher trade-to-GDP ratio**, ideally between 30-35 percent.

Conclusion -

- **India's forward-looking approach** to shaping multilateral disciplines in trade and investment has been **demonstrated through its active participation in G20 forums and bilateral trade and investment negotiations** with economically advanced nations.
- A **similar proactive engagement strategy should extend to WTO negotiations,** pivotal for achieving national economic development objectives.

Source - **The Indian Express**

QUESTION - India's resistance to expanding the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) negotiation agenda has significant implications for its economic development strategies. Discuss the reasons behind India's stance on maintaining policy flexibility, particularly for traditional sectors like agriculture and fisheries.

Environment

Shape of a Five-Year Climate Agenda for India

As the new government settles in, **its actions on climate change will significantly impact** every ministry and sector.

The new government has the opportunity to elevate India's global climate leadership over the next four to five years.

Decisions made now will shape India's economic path towards sustainability, position it as a leader for the Global South, and determine its fight for climate finance and justice over the next five years.

An Overview of India's Climate Transformation: A Decade of Progress and Leadership -
- **Establishing Global Institutions —**
  - International Solar Alliance (ISA) **—**
    - Launched in 2015, the **ISA aims to promote solar energy utilisation** and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.
    - **By bringing together solar-rich countries, India has facilitated collaboration on solar energy projects**, research, and policy development.
    - **This initiative highlights India's leadership in promoting renewable energy** and addressing energy security concerns.
  - Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) **—**
    - Established in 2019, **the CDRI focuses on building resilient infrastructure** to withstand the impacts of climate change.
    - **This initiative underscores the importance of preparedness and adaptation**, particularly in the face of increasing climate-related disasters.
    - **By creating international cooperation, India is helping to build a more resilient global infrastructure landscape.**
  - Global Biofuels Alliance **—**
    - This **alliance aims to promote the use of biofuels** as a sustainable energy source.
    - By **advocating for biofuel adoption, India is addressing both energy security and environmental sustainability,** reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and promoting cleaner alternatives.
  - Green Development Pact **—**
    - **During its G-20 presidency, India championed the Green Development Pact,** which emphasises sustainable and inclusive growth.
    - **This pact underscores India's commitment to integrating sustainability** into global economic policies and fostering international cooperation on climate action.
- **Setting Ambitious Targets —**
  - 2070 Net-Zero Target **—**
    - India's announcement of its goal to achieve **net-zero emissions by 2070 is a landmark commitment.**
    - This **target signifies a long-term vision** for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.
    - **By setting this goal, India is aligning itself with global efforts to limit temperature rise** and mitigate climate change impacts.
  - Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) **—**
    - **India's NDCs under the Paris Agreement outline its plans for reducing emissions** and enhancing climate resilience.
    - **These contributions include targets for increasing renewable energy capacity,** improving energy efficiency, and reducing emissions intensity.
    - **India's ambitious NDCs reflect its proactive stance** on climate action and its commitment to achieving measurable progress.
- **Integrating Sustainability into Domestic Economic Policies —**
  - Indian Emissions Carbon Trading Scheme **—**

- The **establishment of a carbon trading scheme represents a significant step towards market-based mechanisms** for reducing emissions.
  - This **scheme allows for the trading of carbon credits**, **incentivising businesses** to adopt cleaner technologies and reduce their carbon footprint.
  - **Designed to operate for several decades, this institution is a cornerstone** of India's long-term climate strategy.
- Renewable Energy Expansion —
  - India has made **remarkable progress in expanding its renewable energy capacity**, particularly in solar and wind energy.
  - **Government policies and initiatives**, such as the National Solar Mission, **have facilitated large-scale deployment of renewable energy projects.**
  - This **shift towards renewables not only reduces emissions but also enhances energy security** and provides economic opportunities.
- Sustainable Development Initiatives —
  - India has **launched various initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development**, including efforts to enhance energy efficiency, promote green transportation, and support sustainable agriculture.
  - These **initiatives align with global sustainability goals and contribute to India's broader climate objectives.**

The Impact of India's Climate Transformation -
- Enhanced Global Leadership —
  - By establishing global institutions and setting ambitious targets, **India has positioned itself as a leader in the global climate discourse.**
  - This **leadership role enables India to influence international climate policies** and advocate for the needs and priorities of developing countries.
- Economic and Social Benefits —
  - Integrating sustainability into economic policies has yielded numerous benefits for India.
  - The **expansion of renewable energy has created jobs, improved energy access**, and reduced energy costs.
  - **Sustainable development initiatives have enhanced resilience**, reduced environmental degradation, and improved quality of life for communities.
- Climate Resilience and Adaptation —
  - **India's focus on disaster-resilient infrastructure** and climate adaptation measures has
  strengthened its capacity to withstand climate impacts.
  - This **resilience is crucial for protecting vulnerable communities** and ensuring sustainable development in the face of climate change.

A Five-Year Climate Plan Sheet for India -
- Go Higher: India's Global Leadership —
  - India's **leadership on the global stage should be enhanced.**
  - **Hosting major international climate summits**, such as the United Nations Conference of Parties in 2028, **would solidify its status.**
  - To achieve this, **India must start building consensus on key issues like halting new investments in oil and gas by 2030** and securing adaptation finance for developing countries.
  - This **requires proactive diplomacy and forming strategic alliances.**
  - Additionally, **India should continue advocating for equity in international forums** and positioning itself as a leader in securing climate finance.
- Go Wider: Sectoral Emission Reduction Targets —
  - India **needs to broaden its emission reduction targets** beyond the power sector.
  - **Significant progress has been made in the power sector**, but other sectors, such as private mobility, need clear zero-carbon goals.

- **Expanding these targets will benefit not just urban areas but also rural India**, driving job creation in clean energy and sustainability, and promoting economic growth.
- **Credible policy goals have previously spurred industries into action**, and the upcoming NDC for 2035 presents an opportunity to set broader energy transition targets.

- Go Deeper: Sub-National Climate Action —
  - **Sub-national climate action and resilience must be prioritised**. Initiatives like those by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), which supports state-level net-zero plans, are crucial.
  - **Collaborations with states such as Tamil Nadu and Bihar on their net-zero transition plans are positive steps.**
  - To enhance this, **a Centre-State coordination group should be established**, incentivising state-level climate actions through mechanisms like the Sixteenth Finance Commission.
  - **Integrating scientific modelling capabilities into policymaking and creating a unified data measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) architecture are essential** for coordinated and effective state-level actions.

Conclusion -
- **The new government has the opportunity to elevate India's global climate leadership** in its new term.
- Looking ahead to the next four to five years, **India must leverage its position at international forums to demonstrate its prowess in climate action.**
- **By going higher, wider, and deeper, India can achieve a sustainable economic path** and solidify its role as a global climate leader.

Source - **The Hindu**

QUESTION - Discuss the strategies and initiatives taken by India in the past decade to enhance its global leadership in climate action. Evaluate the impact of these actions on India's economic, social, and environmental landscape. Additionally, propose a five-year plan for the new government to further strengthen India's role in global climate leadership, focusing on key areas such as international diplomacy, sectoral emission reductions, and sub-national climate action.

Security

What is the role of India's National Security Advisor?

The recent changes to India's National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) raise questions about the effectiveness and future direction of national security management.

What are the issues?
- Unclear Role of NSA and ANSA — The new structure **creates confusion regarding the division of responsibilities** between the NSA, ANSA, and other security officials.
  - The appointment of **an Additional National Security Advisor (ANSA)** creates **an extra layer of bureaucracy**. It is unclear whether the ANSA will be a gatekeeper for communication between lower-level staff and the NSA, potentially causing delays in critical information reaching the top decision-makers.
  - The NSA's role seems to have shifted towards a more advisory and less operational one. This raises questions about who will be responsible for taking concrete actions based on security assessments.
- Communication Bottlenecks — The introduction of the ANSA position adds **an extra layer of bureaucracy**, potentially **delaying communication between the PM and those monitoring security threats**.
  - The current structure creates uncertainty about who will brief the PM on daily security matters – the NSA, the ANSA, or both. This lack of clarity could lead to confusion and delays in decision-making.

- The relationship between intelligence chiefs, the military leadership, and the PM is also unclear. Will they continue to have direct access to the PM, or will all communication flow through the NSA and ANSA?

· Underline Chain of Command **—** The reporting structure for intelligence chiefs, military leadership, and the CDS remains unclear.
  • The new structure **doesn't specify how the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) will interact with the NSA and the PM**. Ideally, the CDS should report directly to the PM for faster and more effective decision-making on military matters.
· Lack of Defined Criteria for NSA Selection **—** The **absence of clear qualifications** for the NSA position creates uncertainty about who is best suited for the role.
  • There is **no set criteria for selecting the NSA**, leading to debate about whether someone with a diplomatic, bureaucratic, military, police, or intelligence background is best suited for the role.
  • This **lack of clarity can lead to political considerations** influencing the selection process over qualifications.
· Integration of National and Defence Management **—** The **merging of national security and defence management** under the NSA is an experiment with unknown long-term effects.
  • Elevating the NSA to cabinet minister rank and giving them control over both national security and defence management is a significant change. The effectiveness of this new structure in the long term remains to be seen.
· Limited Public Information **—** The **lack of publicly available information hinders informed discussion** about these critical issues.
  • The limited information available about the NSCS and its functioning makes it difficult to have an open and informed public debate about these important national security issues.

Way forward -
· **Clearly Defined Roles —** A clear division of responsibilities between the NSA, ANSA, and other officials is essential for efficient national security management.
· **Streamlined Communication —** The communication chain between the PM and security personnel should be streamlined to avoid delays.
· **Transparent Chain of Command —** A well-defined chain of command for intelligence agencies, the military, and the CDS is necessary for effective decision-making.
· **Defined Criteria for NSA Selection —** Establishing clear criteria for selecting the NSA will ensure the appointment of the most qualified candidate.
· **Comprehensive Review —** A comprehensive review of the new national security architecture is needed to assess its effectiveness.
· **Increased Transparency —** Greater public transparency about the roles and responsibilities of the NSCS would facilitate informed debate.

Conclusion -
The recent restructuring of the NSCS raises concerns about the clarity, efficiency, and effectiveness of India's national security management. Addressing these issues through clearly defined roles, streamlined communication, a transparent chain of command, and a comprehensive review is crucial for ensuring India's security in a complex and challenging world.

Source - **The Indian Express**

QUESTION - The recent restructuring of the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) in India has generated significant debate. Critically examine the key issues associated with the new structure and suggest measures to ensure effective national security management.