# REGENT EDUCATION & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

# GENERAL STUDIES - I

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# Geography

## Heatwaves as 'notified disasters'

The current extreme heatwave across the country has reignited discussions about including heatwaves as a notified disaster under the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005. If this inclusion occurs, states will be able to use disaster response funds to provide compensation, relief, and manage the effects of heatwaves. At present, states must use their own funds for these activities.

**Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005 -**
- **About —**
  - It is a comprehensive legal framework to establish and manage disaster management policies and procedures by defining roles and responsibilities at the national, state, and district levels.
- **Key features —**
  - **Establishment of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) —**
    - Chaired by the Prime Minister.
    - Responsible for laying down policies, plans, and guidelines for disaster management.
  - **State and District Disaster Management Authorities —**
    - States — Chaired by the Chief Minister, responsible for implementing national policies and plans.
    - Districts — Chaired by the District Magistrate, responsible for disaster management at the district level.
  - **National Executive Committee (NEC) —**
    - Comprises secretaries of various ministries.
    - Assists the NDMA in performing its functions and coordinates disaster response and relief measures.
  - **National Plan and State Plans —**
    - The act mandates the preparation of a National Plan for disaster management by the NDMA and State Plans by State Disaster Management Authorities.
  - **Disaster Response and Mitigation Funds —**
    - Establishment of the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for immediate relief and response efforts.
    - National Disaster Mitigation Fund and State Disaster Mitigation Funds for long-term disaster risk reduction and mitigation.
  - **Community Participation —**
    - Encourages community-based disaster management and awareness programs.
    - Involvement of local bodies and communities in disaster preparedness and response activities.

**What are notified disasters?**
- **About —**
  - Notified disasters are specific types of disasters that have been officially recognised and listed by the government for special consideration and management under the DM Act, 2005.
  - These disasters are formally acknowledged to ensure systematic and structured response and relief efforts, often involving the allocation of dedicated funds and resources.
- **Categories of notified disasters under DM Act 2005 —**
  - The Act includes 12 categories of notified disasters, which are: Cyclone, Drought, Earthquake, Fire, Flood, Tsunami, Hailstorm, Landslide, Avalanche, Cloudburst, Pest attack, Frost and cold waves
  - These are eligible for relief assistance under the SDRF and NDRF.

- The states first utilise the funds available in the SDRF, and only if the magnitude of the disaster is unmanageable with the SDRF, states seek the money from the NDRF.
- While the <u>entire money of the NDRF comes from the central government, states contribute 25% of the money in the SDRF</u> (10% in case of special category states), the rest comes from the Centre.

## Heatwaves - not included as notified disasters -
- **Heatwaves - a common occurrence during summer —**
  - Though heatwaves are not a new phenomenon in India, these were not viewed as a disaster when the Act came into being in 2005.
  - It was because heatwaves were a common occurrence during summer, and not really an unusual weather event.
- **Increasing demand for including heatwaves as notified disaster —**
  - Over the years, both the severity and frequency of heatwaves have increased.
    - Due to increased economic activity, there is a far larger number of people who have to remain outdoors for their livelihoods or other reasons, exposing them to the risk of a heat-stroke.
  - 23 states are vulnerable to heatwaves. These states as well as several vulnerable cities have now prepared heat action plans (HAPs) to deal with the impacts of extreme heat.
    - HAPs involve activities like creation of shaded spaces, ensuring availability of cool water in public places, distribution of simple oral solutions, and reorganising the schedules of schools, colleges and office working hours.
  - These measures require expenditure but state governments have not been able to use the SDRF for them. This is the reason for the demand for inclusion of heatwaves as a notified disaster in the DM Act.

## Why is the Centre not adding heatwaves as a notified disaster now?
- **Reluctance of Finance Commission —**
  - The 15th Finance Commission, whose recommendations are currently in effect, stated that the existing list of notified disasters already largely meets the needs of the states and did not support including heatwaves.
  - Nevertheless, it endorsed an enabling provision created by the previous Commission that allows states to <u>use up to 10% of their SDRF for local disasters such as lightning or heatwaves, which states can notify themselves</u>.
    - Using this provision, **at least four states — Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, and Kerala** — have classified heatwaves as local disasters.
- **Practical Difficulties —**
  - The main reason behind the reluctance to add heatwaves as a notified disaster is the significant financial implications.
    - The government would have to provide Rs 4 lakh compensation for every life lost due to a notified disaster, along with compensation for grievous injuries.
    - Heatwaves claim many lives annually, and the recorded number of deaths has been increasing, with over 500 heat-related deaths reported this year.
    - Mandating compensation could reveal even more deaths.
  - Additionally, attributing deaths to heatwaves is challenging because most deaths are due to pre-existing conditions exacerbated by extreme heat, making it hard to ascertain the direct impact of heat.
    - This differs from other disasters where victim identification is straightforward.
- **Fund allocated by Finance commission and associated challenges —**
  - 15th Finance Commission recommended allocating Rs 1,60,153 crore to various State Disaster Response Funds (SDRFs) for 2021-26.
  - States like Uttar Pradesh received about Rs 11,400 crore, while Maharashtra received the maximum, about Rs 19,000 crore.
  - This money is intended for all types of disasters during this period.
  - There is a concern that these funds could become insufficient if heatwaves and lightning are added to the list of notified disasters.

**Source** - **The Indian Express**

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# Art and Culture

## Telugu's cultural revivalism and identity

**Chandrababu Naidu's return as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh**, supported by the charismatic support of Pawan Kalyan along with the BJP, **signifies a pivotal moment for the state.**

10 years after bifurcation, **there is an eagerness in Andhra Pradesh to resume a journey that was harshly interrupted.**

And therefore, **this alliance holds promise not only for political and economic rejuvenation but also for a profound cultural revival** that could re-establish India as a global cultural leader.

**The Emergence of Telugu Hindutva -**
- Historically, **Hindutva has been predominantly associated with the Hindi and Gujarati speaking regions of India.**
- However, **Naidu's leadership heralds the emergence of a distinctive Telugu Hindu identity.**
- This **shift could redefine what it means to be Hindu in a Telugu context**, an aspect relatively unknown to many Indians.
- For years, **Andhra Pradesh has witnessed cultural erosion through the removal of Telugu language from schools**, aggressive proselytization, and attacks on temples.
- This **election marks a hopeful end to this cultural destruction**, aiming to revive and preserve the Telugu heritage.

**Understanding the Cultural and Historical Significance of Andhra Pradesh -**
- Historical Legacy —
  - The **Telugu heartland is rich in historical records and monuments** that highlight its significance as a cultural and religious centre and the **Vilasa copper plate inscriptions of 1325 are a prominent example.**
  - **Discovered in Pithapuram, these inscriptions document both the atrocities committed by the Turushka invaders** and the resilient **Hindu resistance.**
  - Such records are not merely historical artifacts; **they are testimonies to the enduring spirit and cultural fortitude** of the Telugu people.
  - **These inscriptions, found in what is now Pawan Kalyan's constituency, underscore a continuity of cultural and religious traditions** that date back centuries.
  - **The Telugu people have maintained their cultural heritage through generations,** despite facing numerous challenges.
- Religious and Cultural Practices —
  - **Andhra Pradesh is home to numerous sacred institutions** and temples that are integral to its cultural landscape.
  - The **twin temples of Narasimha Swamy in Mangalagiri and the historic Srikakula Andhra Mahavishnu temple** near Vijayawada are **prime examples.**
  - These **temples are not just places of worship; they are repositories of ancient traditions,** rituals, and community practices.
  - The **Srikakula Andhra Mahavishnu temple**, associated with one of the earliest Satavahana kingdoms, **serves as a living testament to the region's rich religious history.**
  - **The recent diya ceremony held there**, reflecting the broader Ayodhya pranpratishtha celebrations, **demonstrates how these ancient sites continue to be vibrant centres of spiritual and cultural activity.**

**Role of local narratives in shaping Andhra Pradesh's Cultural Heritage -**
- The **narratives and stories passed down through generations in Andhra Pradesh villages also contribute** significantly to its cultural heritage.
- These **local narratives often highlight the struggles and triumphs of the Telugu people**, their resistance against cultural erosion, and their efforts to preserve their heritage.
- For instance, **during a visit to Duggirala, the childhood village of the actor and former member of Parliament Jamuna, locals recounted tales of political struggles** and cultural perseverance.
- **These stories are not just personal or regional anecdotes; they are part of a larger tapestry of cultural memory** that binds the Telugu people together.
- They **reflect the collective consciousness of a community** that has consistently strived to protect its cultural identity against external pressures.

**Key steps required for Andhra's Cultural Revival -**
- Significant Investment in Education and Culture —
  - To nurture this cultural revival, the **new government should prioritise investment in education and culture.**
  - **Establishing a new humanities university in or near the new capital, Amaravati, could restore the region's ancient prestige** and complete the vision that earlier governments had attempted with Nalanda.
  - **Such an institution could harness the region's rich cultural and intellectual heritage,** integrating traditional knowledge systems with modern humanities education.
  - **This approach aligns with scholar D. Venkat Rao's concept of biocultural formations,** emphasising the importance of **intergenerational cultural continuity.**
- Combining Ancient Wisdom with Contemporary Cultural Expression —
  - Andhra Pradesh **has the potential to become a global cultural powerhouse**, attracting bright students, artists, and writers from across India and the world.
  - This **vision includes partnerships with the thriving Telugu film industry**, which has already achieved global recognition through films like Baahubali and RRR.
  - **By combining ancient wisdom with contemporary cultural expression, Andhra Pradesh can significantly influence global youth culture**, especially in a time of intergenerational crises.

**The Legacy of Telugu Political and Cultural Identity -**
- The **unique sensibility of Telugu-ness has often remained invisible to the rest of India,** epitomised by figures like India's only Telugu Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao.
- Despite this cultural reticence, **Telugu politics have had a profound impact on national politics.**
- From **Potti Sriramulu's fast unto death in 1953, leading to the linguistic reorganisation of states, to N.T. Rama Rao's campaign for Telugu pride in 1983**, Telugu leaders have consistently shaped the national political landscape.

**Challenges and the Path Forward -**
- Administrative and Political Challenges —
  - One of the primary challenges is the **political instability that has plagued Andhra Pradesh.**
  - The **bifurcation of the state in 2014 into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was a contentious process** that left deep divisions and unresolved issues.
  - **Chandrababu Naidu's tenure as the first Chief Minister of the newly bifurcated Andhra Pradesh was marked by efforts to stabilise and rebuild**, but the journey has been fraught with difficulties.
  - **Building a cohesive and stable government** that can implement long-term cultural and educational policies **requires navigating these political dynamics effectively.**
  - **Naidu's alliance with Pawan Kalyan and the BJP provides a stronger political base**, but maintaining this coalition and ensuring it works towards common goals is essential.
- Economic Constraints —

- **The bifurcation left Andhra Pradesh without its former capital, Hyderabad**, a major economic and technological hub.
- The **creation of a new capital, Amaravati, was a bold vision, but the project has faced significant delays** and funding issues.
- **Restarting and completing this ambitious project is vital** for providing the state with a central hub **for economic and cultural activities.**
- The **government must attract both domestic and international investors, promote local industries,** and leverage the state's strengths in areas like agriculture, technology, and cinema.
- Social and Cultural Integration **—**
  - Cultural revival in Andhra Pradesh **must be inclusive and considerate of the state's diverse social fabric.**
  - The **state is home to various communities with distinct cultural practices and traditions.**
  - **Ensuring that the cultural policies are inclusive and representative of this diversity is crucial** for fostering social harmony and unity.
- Environmental and Sustainable Development **—**
  - The development of cultural and educational infrastructure **must also consider environmental sustainability.**
  - Andhra Pradesh's rich **natural heritage and sacred sites need to be protected** from the adverse effects of rapid development.
  - **Implementing eco-friendly practices and ensuring that tourism and cultural projects do not harm the environment is essential** for sustainable development.

**Conclusion -**
- Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, supported by Pawan Kalyan and the BJP, can transform Andhra Pradesh into a beacon of cultural renaissance.
- By investing in education, preserving cultural heritage, and leveraging the global reach of Telugu cinema, Andhra Pradesh can play a crucial role in India's broader cultural revival.
- This journey, deeply rooted in Telugu traditions, holds the promise of a brighter, culturally rich future for the state and the nation.

**Source** - **The Indian Express**

**QUESTION - The recent political developments in Andhra Pradesh signify a potential revival of Telugu cultural identity and heritage. Analyse the historical, cultural, and socio-political factors contributing to this movement. Discuss the potential challenges and strategies for ensuring a sustainable cultural renaissance in the state.**

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# Social Issues

## The Ageism Debate

Age discrimination is a double-edged sword in the Indian workplace. A recent study by Randstad reveals that bias based on age is prevalent, affecting both younger and older employees. This article explores the current situation and the future implications of India's changing demographics.

**Current Scenario: Widespread Age Bias** -
- **Randstad Study Findings —** A survey of nearly 1,000 Indian workers by recruitment agency Randstad paints a concerning picture.
  - **40% of respondents —** This significant portion of employees reported experiencing or witnessing age-based discrimination at work.
  - **Younger vs. Older Workers —** The study revealed an asymmetry in how employees are valued. Over half (around 51%) of those under 55 felt undervalued compared to 63% of

those over 55. This suggests a perception that younger workers are less appreciated despite their qualifications.
- **Compensation Disparity —** The feeling of being undervalued extends to compensation. A concerning 32% of employees under 35 reported feeling unfairly compensated due to their age.
- **Job Advertisement Bias —** Age bias creeps into the hiring process itself. A substantial 61% of respondents noted job advertisements specifying age or extensive experience requirements. This can unfairly limit opportunities for qualified younger applicants.
- **Gender Gap in Ageism —** Interestingly, the study found a gender disparity. Women (42%) reported experiencing or witnessing age discrimination more frequently than men (37%).

## Reverse Ageism vs. Growing Ageism -
- **India's Young Demographics —** India's youthful population, with over 65% below 35, might contribute to a perception of "reverse ageism." Traditional societal views often equate age with wisdom and ability, potentially favouring older workers.
- **Shifting Focus: The Growing Concern —** While reverse ageism exists, the bigger concern is the increasing ageism against older workers. This trend is likely to intensify due to India's rapidly ageing population.

## Future Challenges: A Greying India -
- **Rapid Ageing —** Two interrelated demographic facts will significantly impact the workplace in the coming years.
  - The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) projects a sharp rise in the elderly population's growth rate.From 2011-21, it was 35.5%, and this is expected to jump to 41% by 2021-31.
  - The percentage of elderly people in India's population is projected to double to over 20% by 2046. Furthermore, the UNPF suggests that by then, the elderly population will outnumber children (aged 15 and below).
- **Low Retirement Age, High Dependency —** This rapid ageing, coupled with India's low national retirement age (between 58 and 60), will create a large dependent elderly population relying on savings.

## Global Comparison: Raising the Bar -
- **Developed Countries Lead the Way —** Many developed nations facing similar aging populations are proactively addressing the issue by raising retirement ages. Countries like Iceland, Australia, Spain, and Italy have set the bar at 66-67 years old.
- **The French Example —** France, known for its early retirement culture (often in the fifties), provides an example of public resistance. Proposals to raise the pension age from 62 to 64 met with strong opposition. However, this highlights the challenges of adjusting to demographic shifts.
- **Singapore's Approach —** A more recent example comes from Singapore, which raised its retirement age from 63 to 64 and the re-employment age from 68 to 69. These adjustments demonstrate a proactive approach to managing an ageing workforce.

## Way Forward for India: Leveraging Experience -
- **Considering the Demographic Shift —** Given India's projected demographic changes, raising the retirement age could be a beneficial policy shift.
- **Benefits of Raising Retirement Age** —
  - **Addressing Skill Shortage —** India currently faces a shortage of skilled workers. Retaining experienced older workers can bridge this gap and ensure continuity of knowledge.
  - **Leveraging Experience —** Older workers bring valuable experience and expertise to the table. Raising the retirement age allows companies to benefit from this accumulated wisdom.

## Conclusion -
Age discrimination, in both directions, is a complex issue in the Indian workplace. While India tackles current biases, it also needs to prepare for the challenges of an ageing population. Raising the retirement age, as many developed nations are doing, could be a solution to ensure a more sustainable and productive workforce in the years to come.

**QUESTION - The issue of age discrimination in the workplace has two facets: bias against younger workers and concerns about the employability of older workers in a rapidly ageing India. Discuss these challenges and analyse the potential impact of demographic shifts on the Indian workforce. Suggest policy measures to address age discrimination and promote a more inclusive work environment for all age groups.**

# GENERAL STUDIES - II

## Polity

### First Past the Post v/s Proportional Representation

The results of the Lok Sabha elections were declared on June 4. The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has won 293 seats with a 43.3% vote share while the Opposition bloc INDIA has secured 234 seats with a 41.6% vote share. Other regional parties and independents received about 15% of the votes but only won 16 seats in total. As a result, many experts are now advocating for India to switch to a proportional representation system.

**First Past the Post (FPTP) system -**
- **About —**
  - The FPTP system, also known as the simple majority voting system, is an electoral method where the candidate with the most votes in a constituency wins the election.
  - This system is widely used in countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and India for legislative elections.
- **Working**
  - **Single-Member Districts** — Each constituency elects one representative.
  - **Plurality Wins** — The candidate who receives the highest number of votes wins, regardless of whether they achieve an absolute majority (more than 50% of the votes).

- **Simplicity —**
  - Easy for voters to understand and participate in.
  - Straightforward counting process.
- **Strong and Stable Governments —**
  - Often produces a clear winner, which can lead to strong and stable governments.
  - Under this system, the ruling party/coalition can enjoy a majority in the Lok Sabha/ Legislative assembly without obtaining majority of the votes ( more than 50 %) across constituencies. This increases stability of the govt.
- **Direct Representation —**
  - Provides direct representation of constituencies, ensuring that each geographic area has a dedicated representative.
- **Accountability —**
  - Representatives are directly accountable to their constituents, as they can be easily voted out in the next election if they do not perform well.

- **Disproportionality —**
  - Can lead to a significant mismatch between the percentage of votes received and the percentage of seats won.
  - Smaller parties may be underrepresented, while larger parties may receive a disproportionate number of seats.
- **Wasted Votes —**
  - Votes for losing candidates do not contribute to the overall election result, which can discourage voter participation.
  - Can lead to strategic voting, where voters choose not their preferred candidate, but the one they think has the best chance of winning.
- **Minority Rule —**
  - A candidate can win with a minority of the votes if the opposition is divided among multiple candidates.
  - This can result in a government that does not reflect the majority preference of the electorate.
- **Geographic Concentration —**
  - Parties with geographically concentrated support can win more seats than parties with evenly distributed support, even if they receive fewer overall votes.
- **Encourages Gerrymandering —**
  - The system can incentivise the **drawing of constituency boundaries** to favour one party over another, known as gerrymandering.

### Proportional Representation (PR) -
- **About —**
  - PR is an electoral system designed to allocate seats in the legislature in proportion to the number of votes each party receives.
  - This system contrasts with the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins.
  - PR aims to create a more accurate reflection of the voters' preferences across the entire electorate.
- **Working —**
  - **Party Lists** — Voters typically cast their vote for a party rather than an individual candidate.
    - The party then allocates seats to candidates from their list based on the proportion of votes received.
  - **Multi-Member Districts** — Each district elects multiple representatives, which allows for proportional allocation.
  - **Thresholds** — Often, a minimum percentage of votes (threshold) is required for a party to gain representation, to prevent excessive fragmentation.
- **Types of Proportional Representation —**
  - **List PR** — Voters choose a party, and parties receive seats based on their share of the vote. Seats are filled by candidates from the party's list.
  - **Mixed-Member PR** — Combines elements of FPTP and PR. Voters cast two votes: one for a candidate and one for a party.
    - Some seats are filled by individual candidates, while others are allocated to parties based on their share of the vote.

- **Single Transferable Vote (STV)** — Voters rank candidates in order of preference.
  - Seats are allocated based on the proportion of votes each candidate receives, with surplus votes and eliminated candidates' votes transferred according to voter preferences.

| Advantages of PR | Disadvantages of PR |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>**Fair Representation —** Parties receive seats in proportion to their share of the vote, leading to a more accurate reflection of electorate's preferences.</li><li>**Minority Inclusion —** Smaller parties and minority groups have a better chance of gaining representation, promoting diversity in the legislature.</li><li>**Reduced Wasted Votes —** Fewer votes are wasted as most votes contribute to the election of a candidate, increasing voter satisfaction and participation.</li><li>**Encourages Voter Turnout: —** Voters may feel their vote has more impact</li></ul> | <ul><li>**Coalition Governments —** While coalitions can be a strength, they can also lead to unstable governments if coalition partners frequently disagree, resulting in inefficiency or frequent elections.</li><li>**Complexity —** PR systems can be more complex for voters to understand and for electoral authorities to administer compared to simpler systems like FPTP.</li><li>**Fragmentation —** Can lead to a fragmented legislature with many small parties, making it difficult to achieve a majority consensus.</li><li>**Weaker Constituency Links —** Representatives may be less accountable to specific geographic constituencies since they are elected on a party list basis rather than as individuals.</li><li>**Influence of Party Leadership —** Party leaders often have significant control over candidate lists, which can centralize power within the party and reduce individual accountability of representatives.</li></ul> |

**What are international practices?**
- **Presidential Democracies like Brazil and Argentina —** Party list Proportional Representation (PR) system.
- **Parliamentary democracies like South Africa, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain —** Also use the party list PR system.
- **Germany: Bundestag Structure —**
  - Out of 598 seats, 299 seats (50%) are filled from constituencies under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system.
  - The remaining 299 seats (50%) are allocated to parties that secure at least 5% of the votes, based on their vote share.
- **New Zealand: House of Representatives Structure —**
  - Out of 120 seats, 60% are filled through the FPTP system from territorial constituencies.
  - The remaining 40% are distributed among parties that secure at least 5% of the votes, based on their vote share.

**Way forward for India -**
- **Law Commission's Recommendation (170th report, 1999) —**
  - The Law Commission in its report, 'Reform of the electoral laws', recommended the introduction of the **Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMPR)** system on an experimental basis.
  - It suggested that 25% of seats could be filled through a PR system by **increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha.**
- **Upcoming Delimitation Exercise and associated challenges —**
  - A delimitation exercise to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats is due after the first Census conducted post-2026.
  - The population growth in the last five decades has been uneven across regions.

- Determining the number of seats in proportion to population alone may conflict with federal principles.
  - It could lead to disenchantment in States that might lose representation through such a method.
- **Way out through MMPR System —**
  - Introducing the MMPR system for incremental seats or at least 25% of the total seats from each State/UT during the delimitation exercise could balance representation.
  - This approach could mitigate concerns of southern, northeastern, and smaller northern States by preventing domination of larger States solely through the FPTP system.

**Source** - **The Hindu**

**QUESTION - Examine the First Past the Post (FPTP) system and the Proportional Representation (PR) system in the context of India's electoral framework. Discuss the potential benefits and drawbacks of each system. Evaluate the international practices of electoral systems and suggest how India could reform its electoral system to ensure fairer representation, taking into account the recommendations of the Law Commission and upcoming delimitation challenges.**

# Coalition Politics

The **resurgence of coalition politics in India is poised to bring issues of federalism** and Centre-state relations back into sharp focus.
The **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s increasing dependence on regional allies and its expanded presence in southern India presents an opportunity** for a federal reset.
It is **important to analyse BJP's greater electoral stake in south India (and the Opposition's in the north) and whether trust and balance could be restored** in matters of federalism.

**Centre-State Relations in the Past Decade -**
- Since the BJP's ascendancy in 2014, **significant changes have been introduced in Centre-state relations.**
- **During Modi's first term (2014-2019), the government abolished the Planning Commission** and replaced it with the Niti Aayog, aimed at enhancing cooperative federalism.
- The **implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) marked a pivotal reform** in fiscal federalism since the Constitution's inception.
- In **Modi's second term (2019-present), the abrogation of Article 370 signalled a shift towards greater centralisation**, as the government leveraged its parliamentary majority to push "one-nation" policies, often sidelining state interests.
- The **proposal for One nation, one election was a continuation** of this centralising agenda.

**Areas of Concern for the New Coalition Government -**
- **Delimitation and North-South Divide —**
  - One of the **most contentious issues is the pending delimitation exercise**, which aims to redraw the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies based on the latest population data.
  - This **exercise has the potential to deepen the existing north-south divide.**
  - **Northern states**, which have seen significant population growth, **stand to gain more parliamentary seats,** while southern states, which have implemented more effective population control measures, risk losing representation.
  - This **redistribution could fundamentally alter the balance of power in the Lok Sabha,** India's lower house of Parliament.
  - **Southern states**, which are generally more economically prosperous and opposition-dominated, **fear a loss of influence and resources.**
  - The **resulting shift could exacerbate regional disparities and fuel resentment**, destabilising the federal equilibrium.
- **Fiscal Federalism and Resource Allocation —**
  - The **existing model involves the redistribution of taxes** collected from wealthier states to poorer ones, primarily in the north.

- **This system, while aimed at achieving equitable development**, has sparked **discontent among southern and western states.**
- These **states argue that their higher economic contributions are not adequately recognised** and that the redistributive model undermines their fiscal autonomy.
- **The BJP-dominated central government's policies are often perceived as favouring its strongholds in the north**, leading to accusations of political bias in resource allocation.
- **Centralisation vs. Regional Autonomy —**
  - Since 2014, **the BJP's centralising policies have also been a source of contention.**
  - The abrogation of Article 370, which granted special autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir, is a prime example.
  - **This move was seen as an assertion of the Centre's dominance** over state autonomy.
  - Similarly, **the push for "One nation, one election" seeks to synchronise state and national elections,** potentially undermining the autonomy of states to govern according to their unique political timelines and priorities.
  - **Such centralising tendencies raise concerns about the erosion of federal principle**s and the concentration of power in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).
- **Coalition Dynamics and Regional Party Interests —**
  - The **dynamics of coalition politics further complicate the federal landscape**.
  - Regional parties, crucial for forming national coalitions, prioritize their local interests and demands.
  - While this can lead to greater attention to regional issues, **it often results in fragmented and inconsistent federal policies.**
  - **For instance, the demand for special status by Andhra Pradesh and Bihar reflects regional aspirations** that may not align with national priorities.
- **The Challenge of Building Consensus —**
  - **Building consensus on federal matters** in such a politically fragmented environment is **inherently challenging.**
  - The **process of delimitation, fiscal redistribution, and policy formulation requires a delicate balance** of competing interests and priorities.
  - The **lack of a robust institutional framework for inter-governmental dialogue exacerbates** this challenge.
  - **Existing bodies like the Inter-State Council have not been effectively utilised** to foster cooperation and resolve disputes.

**The Role of Regional Parties in Coalition Government in Advancing Centre-State Relations -**
- **Regional parties in a national coalition typically focus on advancing their interests** and those of their states.
- Issues like special status for Andhra Pradesh and Bihar and calls for a caste census highlight their agenda.
- However, **there is little indication of a comprehensive vision for Centre-state relations** or federalism.
- **If coalition politics simply translates into regional parties** seeking resources for their states, **it could undermine a broader federal consensus** and perpetuate partisan resource distribution.
- The BJP's "one nation" vision has found some resonance among coalition partners.
- **For example, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) welcomed the abrogation of Article 370 as a move towards a unified nation**, and the **Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)] supported the one nation, one election concept.**
- Thus, **the presence of regional parties does not automatically guarantee a strengthened federalism.**

**Opportunities Before the Coalition Government Towards Renewed Federalism -**
- **Institutional Reforms: Empowering the Inter-State Council —**
  - A critical step towards renewed federalism is the **empowerment of the Inter-State Council (ISC).**

- Established based on the recommendations of the **Sarkaria Commission in the late 1980s,** the **ISC was intended to be a forum for dialogue and cooperation between the Centre and the states.**
- However, **its potential has largely remained untapped due to its placement within the Ministry of Home Affairs** and the lack of independent authority.
- To revitalise the ISC, **it should be granted greater independence and statutory responsibilities.**
- **This would involve repositioning the ISC as an autonomous body** with its own secretariat, budget, and authority to convene regular meetings.
- Enhancing Dialogue and Consensus Building —
  - A renewed federalism **must prioritise dialogue and consensus-building processes.**
  - **The pending delimitation exercise**, which has the potential to deepen regional divides, **underscores the need for an inclusive approach to decision-making.**
  - Instead of imposing decisions from the Centre, **a process of genuine consensus-building involving all states is essential.**
  - **This process could draw inspiration from the consensus-building efforts** that preceded the introduction of theGST.
- Fiscal Federalism: Fairness and Equity —
  - Reforming the fiscal federal structure is another crucial aspect of renewed federalism.
  - **The current model of fiscal redistribution**, where taxes collected from wealthier states are allocated to poorer regions, **has led to discontent among contributing states.**
  - To address this, **the redistributive model should be re-evaluated to ensure fairness** and equity.
  - **A more transparent and formula-based approach to resource allocation can help mitigate perceptions** of bias and partisanship.

**Conclusion -**
- **Harnessing this political moment to offer a renewed vision for federalism**, where the Centre and states collaborate and build trust, **is in the long-term interest of all parties.**
- **A pan-India federal bargain would help stabilise Centre-state relations**, ensuring a balanced distribution of power and resources.
- As India looks to the future, **a strengthened federal framework could support its diverse and dynamic polity.**

**Source - The Indian Express**

**QUESTION - Discuss the resurgence of coalition politics in India and its implications for Centre-state relations and federalism. Highlight the challenges faced by the new coalition government in addressing issues such as delimitation, fiscal federalism, centralization versus regional autonomy, and coalition dynamics. Finally, assess the role of regional parties in advancing Centre-state relations and federalism and suggest measures to enhance inter-governmental dialogue and cooperation for a renewed vision of federalism in India.**

# A step backwards for women's representation

The **2024 Lok Sabha elections in India have marked a significant moment** in the country's political history.

Yet, **despite the numerous milestones, the representation of women in parliament remains a glaring issue** with only 74 women elected out of 543 members, making up just 13.6% of the 18th Lok Sabha.

This **decline occurs in a context where women's participation should have seen significant progress,** especially following the historic passage of the Women's Reservation Bill.

**The Context and Reality of the 2024 Elections -**

- The **2024 elections were held in a landscape marked by heightened expectations for women's political empowerment.**
- The **Women's Reservation Bill,** passed with much fanfare, **symbolised a commitment to increasing women's legislative representation** but the **reality fell short.**
- Despite political parties publicly endorsing the bill and highlighting women in their campaign strategies, **women were largely viewed as voters and beneficiaries rather than as potential leaders.**
- According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), **only 9.6% of the total candidates in the 2024 elections were women.**
- This **slight increase from the 9% in 2019 is insufficient,** reflecting systemic barriers and societal attitudes that continue to hinder women's political participation.

**Reasons for the Low Women Political Participation -**
- Superficial Support from Political Parties **—**
  - When the bill was passed, political parties across the spectrum expressed unanimous support, showcasing a united front in favour of gender equality.
  - **This support, however, appears to be more performative than substantive.**
  - Despite their public endorsements, **political parties have not significantly increased the number of women candidates** they field.
  - **Even among candidates contesting on a party ticket, only 11 percent were women** and this minimal progress underscores the gap between legislative intent and practical implementation.
- Campaign Environment and Cultural Barriers **—**
  - Beyond the numbers, **the election campaign environment itself presents substantial barriers to women's participation.**
  - **Several female candidates reported facing misogynistic remarks and jibes from their peers, reflecting deep-seated gender biases** that discourage women from entering and staying in politics.
  - **These cultural and social barriers are formidable** and cannot be dismantled by legislation alone.
  - They **require a concerted effort to change societal attitudes** and norms that traditionally view politics as a male-dominated arena.
- Structural and Institutional Challenges **—**
  - **Structural challenges within political parties** also contribute to the ineffectiveness of reservation alone.
  - **Many parties lack internal policies and mechanisms to promote gender equality** and support female candidates.
  - **The selection processes within parties are often opaque** and influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms, which marginalize women.
  - **Without systemic changes** within political institutions, the impact of the **Women's Reservation Bill remains limited.**

**Global Comparison and Lessons from Mexico -**
- India's Lag in Gender Parity in Politics **—**
  - Comparatively, **India's representation of women in parliament is notably low** on the global stage.
  - Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicates that in 2023, **women made up 27.6% of elected representatives globally.**
  - Before the 18th Lok Sabha elections, **India was ranked 143rd out of 185 countries for women's parliamentary representation.**
  - The **drop in women's representation in the latest elections will likely further diminish India's standing** by several positions.
  - **This international perspective underscores India's lag in gender parity** in politics, highlighting the need for more robust measures and reforms.
- Lessons from Mexico **—**
  - An instructive example of successful gender parity in politics comes from Mexico. In its recent elections, Claudia Sheinbaum became the country's first female President.

- **This achievement is the culmination of decades of feminist activism** and legislative reforms aimed at ensuring gender parity in politics.
- **Mexican law mandates gender parity in all spheres of government** and requires political parties to present candidate lists with equal representation of men and women.
- **This legal framework has resulted in gender parity in both houses of Mexico's Parliament** and significant female representation in political offices.
- **Despite ongoing challenges such as political and gender-based violence, Mexico's progress demonstrates the potential of deliberate and sustained reforms** to transform political representation.

## Way Forward for India -

- Implementation of Women's Reservation Bill **—**
  - The Women's Reservation Bill, which reserves one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women, is a critical legislative reform.
  - **The government should fast-track the implementation of the bill** to ensure that reserved seats are available in the upcoming elections.
  - Also, **the government should establish transparent guidelines on how the reservation will be executed,** ensuring there are no loopholes that can be exploited.
  - **Conducting regular reviews to assess the impact of the reservation policy** and making necessary adjustments **to address any emerging challenges will be useful.**
- Strengthening Political Will and Party Commitment **—**
  - **Political parties should commit to fielding an equal number of male and female candidates**, not just in reserved seats but across all constituencies.
  - **Parties must promote women within party hierarchies**, providing them with significant leadership roles and decision-making positions.
  - The **parties must establish mentorship and support networks for female candidates**, helping them navigate the challenges of political campaigns and leadership.
- Learning from International Best Practices **—**
  - **India can benefit from examining successful models of gender parity** in politics from other countries.
  - **Policymakers should study countries like Mexico, Rwanda, and the Nordic nations** that have made significant strides in women's political representation.
  - **Based on learnings, policymakers should adapt successful strategies** and policies to the Indian context, taking into account cultural, social, and political nuances.

## Conclusion -

- **Achieving gender parity** in India's political representation is a **complex but attainable goal.**
- It **requires concerted efforts** from the government, political parties, civil society, and the broader community.
- **By implementing comprehensive legislative reforms**, creating a supportive environment for women, and challenging societal norms, **India can pave the way for a more inclusive and representative democracy.**

**Source - The Indian Express**

**QUESTION - Discuss the representation of women in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India in light of the Women's Reservation Bill and the challenges hindering women's political participation. Examine the reasons for the low representation of women and suggest measures to enhance their political empowerment, drawing lessons from international examples.**

# Governance

## Health Regulations need a base-to-top approach

In the last week of May, **a devastating fire in a private neonatal care nursing home in New Delhi shocked the nation.**

The **aftermath saw intense media coverage and political blame games**, while the grief-stricken parents of the affected infants faced the tragic loss.

This incident underscores the critical issue of systemic failures in health-care regulations and **therefore it is crucial to explore the complexities of health-care regulations in India, the challenges faced by both the private and public sectors**, and the necessary reforms to ensure effective and equitable health services.

### Overview of Health-Care Regulation in India: A Systemic Issue -

- **India's health-care regulation** system is characterised **by an excess rather than a lack of regulation.**
- **Some states require over 50 approvals** under various regulations for health-care facilities.
- Despite this, **there is a widespread belief that the private health sector is under-regulated.**
- **This paradox arises from the unrealistic standards** set by these regulations.
- The **Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, 2010, though well-intentioned, has seen limited adoption** due to its impractical provisions.
- Similarly, **the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS), established to ensure quality in government health-care facilities, are met by only 15-18%** of primary health-care centres even after 17 years.

### The Mixed Health-Care System in India: Contributions and Dynamics -

- Public Health-Care Sector **—**
    - The public health-care sector in India comprises **government-run facilities at various levels, including primary health centres (PHCs), community health centres (CHCs), district hospitals**, and specialised tertiary care hospitals.
    - These **facilities are intended to provide free or highly subsidised health services** to the population.
    - The **public sector is primarily responsible for public health initiatives**, maternal and child health services, and managing communicable diseases.
    - **Government health facilities are distributed across rural and urban areas**, aiming to make health services accessible to the most remote and underserved populations.
- Private Health-Care Sector **—**
    - The **private health-care sector in India includes a diverse range of providers**, from single-doctor clinics and small nursing homes to large, multi-specialty corporate hospitals.
    - **Private facilities cater to a significant portion of the health-care needs in India**, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas.
    - **Many private hospitals offer high-quality services**, advanced medical technologies, and efficient care delivery and this attracts patients seeking timely and specialised treatments.
    - **Private clinics and nursing homes are often more accessible to patients**, offering services with shorter wait times and personalised care.

### The Interaction between Private and Public Health-Care -

- Patient Choices **—**
    - **Patients often prefer private facilities over public ones**, despite the higher costs.
    - This **preference is driven by perceptions of better quality**, shorter wait times, and personalised care in the private sector.
- Complementary Roles **—**
    - In some regions, **public and private sectors complement each other.**
    - **For instance, public health campaigns and preventive care initiatives are often supported by private providers** who handle more complex and specialised treatments.
- Health Indicators **—**

- **States with robust private health sectors**, such as Maharashtra and Kerala, **often report better health indicators.**
- **This is not solely due to exceptional public health services** but because the private sector fills critical gaps in service delivery.
- Regulatory Challenges **—** Effective regulation of the mixed system is challenging. **Private facilities may face more rigorous enforcement of regulations**, leading to perceptions of unfair treatment compared to government facilities.

**Challenges faced by Private Health-Care Providers -**
- Regulatory Burdens **—**
  - **Some states impose over 50 different approvals under various regulations**, which must be followed by every health-care facility.
  - This **creates a cumbersome process** that is difficult to manage.
  - **Applications for necessary permits** and renewals **often experience significant delays.**
  - Facilities that apply well in advance can wait months for approval, disrupting operations and planning.
  - **Regulatory enforcement is often inconsistent**, with private facilities feeling targeted more than their public counterparts.
  - This **discrepancy leads to perceptions of unfair treatment** and regulatory bias.
- Financial Constraints **—**
  - **Maintaining and upgrading health-care facilities** to meet regulatory standards and patient expectations **requires significant financial investment.**
  - This **includes costs for advanced medical equipment**, infrastructure, staff salaries, and compliance with safety norms.
  - **Smaller private facilities often struggle to secure funding** and loans needed for expansion or upgrading their services.
  - **Banks and financial institutions may be hesitant to lend to small health-care providers** due to perceived risks.
- Operational Challenges **—**
  - **Recruiting and retaining qualified health-care professionals** is a **persistent challenge.**
  - Many providers face shortages of skilled doctors, nurses, and support staff, which affects the quality of care.
  - **The extensive paperwork and administrative tasks required for compliance and operational management can divert time** and resources away from patient care.
  - Smaller facilities may lack dedicated administrative staff to handle these tasks efficiently.

**Case Study of Challenges Faced by Private Health-Care Providers: The Delhi Fire Tragedy -**
- **The fire tragedy in a private neonatal care** nursing home in New Delhi **underscores the challenges faced by private health-care providers.**
- The **incident highlighted issues related to safety compliance**, regulatory oversight, and the subsequent response by authorities.
- The **private facility faced severe regulatory action**, including a temporary suspension of its license, **whereas similar incidents in public hospitals often result in less stringent consequences**, such as the formation of inquiry committees.
- This **discrepancy illustrates the regulatory pressures and operational difficulties** unique to private providers.

**Necessary Reforms for Effective Health-Care Regulation -**
- Streamlining Regulations **—**
  - **Simplifying and harmonising health-care regulations** can reduce the administrative burden on private providers.
  - **A single-window clearance system** for approvals and renewals **can expedite processes and minimise delays.**
  - **Financial Support —** Providing financial assistance, such as **subsidies, low-interest loans, and grants, can help smaller private facilities** meet regulatory standards and improve infrastructure.
- Capacity Building **—**

- Investing in training and capacity building for health-care professionals can address staffing shortages and improve the quality of care.
  - **Support for technology adoption and digital health initiatives can also enhance operational efficiency.**
- Equitable Enforcement **—**
  - Ensuring fair and consistent regulatory enforcement across both public and private sectors can build trust and encourage compliance.
  - **Creating a transparent and accountable regulatory framework is essential** for equitable treatment.
- Focus on Primary Care Providers **—**
  - **Supporting single-doctor clinics and small nursing homes**, which are vital for providing affordable and accessible primary care, **can help bridge the urban-rural divide** and ensure comprehensive health service delivery.
  - These are what deliver primary care and contribute to **keeping the cost of health care low.**

**Conclusion -**
- **The New Delhi fire tragedy is a stark reminder of the need for reform in India's health-care** regulation system.
- **Simplified, realistic, and inclusive regulations are essential** for promoting accessible, affordable, and quality health services.
- **By supporting primary care providers** and ensuring fair enforcement, **India can move towards achieving the goals of the National Health Policy, 2017.**

**Source - The Hindu**

**QUESTION - Discuss the contributions and challenges of the public and private healthcare sectors in India. How does the interaction between these sectors impact patient choices and health indicators?**

# Fatty Liver Disease

Fatty liver disease, also known as metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD), is a growing threat to liver health. Unlike traditional liver diseases caused by excessive alcohol consumption, MASLD is linked to metabolic health.

**The silent pandemic** -
- **Silent Threat —** MASLD is a silently progressing disease with no symptoms in the early stages. Early diagnosis is crucial to prevent severe complications.
  - MASLD can progress for years without any noticeable signs or symptoms. This makes early detection challenging but critical. Early intervention can help prevent the disease from progressing to more severe stages.
- **Shifting Paradigm —** The understanding of fatty liver disease has evolved. It's now recognised as a metabolic condition closely linked to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.
  - Previously, fatty liver disease was primarily associated with alcohol abuse. However, recent research shows a strong connection between MASLD and metabolic health problems. People with conditions like obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure have a significantly higher risk of developing MASLD.
- **Alarming Prevalence —** The global prevalence of MASLD is estimated to be 25-30%. In India, studies show a high prevalence among adults and obese children.
  - The number of people diagnosed with MASLD is rising worldwide. Studies in India indicate a particularly high prevalence, affecting a significant portion of the adult and obese child population.
- **Metabolic Link —** Excessive sugar and refined carbohydrates intake contribute to insulin resistance, leading to fat storage in the liver.
  - Consuming excessive amounts of sugars and refined carbohydrates can disrupt our body's ability to properly use insulin. Insulin is a hormone responsible for regulating blood sugar levels. When insulin resistance occurs, the body struggles to absorb glucose from the

bloodstream, leading to high blood sugar and increased fat production. This excess fat gets stored in the liver, causing fatty liver disease.
• **Progression of the Disease —** Over time, fat accumulation in the liver can lead to inflammation, scarring (cirrhosis),and potentially liver failure.
    • If left untreated, MASLD can progress through several stages. Initially, fat builds up in the liver cells. Over time, this can trigger inflammation, a condition known as steatohepatitis. In severe cases, persistent inflammation can lead to scarring (cirrhosis) and eventually liver failure. Liver failure is a life-threatening condition where the liver can no longer function properly.

**Way Forward** -
• **Early Detection is Key —** Regular health screenings with blood tests, physical exams, and abdominal ultrasounds are crucial for early diagnosis.
• **Integrated Approach —** A combination of ultrasound, metabolic screening, and elastography provides a comprehensive assessment of liver health.
• **Personalised Management —** Screening frequency and tests should be tailored to individual risk factors like family history and lifestyle.

**Conclusion** -
MASLD is a serious public health concern. By adopting healthy lifestyles, regular screenings, and personalised management plans, we can effectively prevent and manage this disease. Taking control of our health through informed choices and preventive measures is the foundation for a healthy life.

**Source** - **The Hindu**

**QUESTION - Metabolic Dysfunction-associated Fatty Liver Disease (MASLD) is emerging as a significant public health concern in India. Discuss the risk factors, complications, and preventive strategies associated with MASLD.**

# GENERAL STUDIES - III

# Economy

## Economic policies in a coalition government

The **recent general elections in India have culminated in the formation of a coalition government at the Centre**, marking a significant shift from the single-party majority that has been in place for the past decade.
This **transition has sparked concerns** among certain quarters **regarding its potential impact on the country's economic trajectory.**
Amid this change **it is important to explore the implications of coalition politics on India's economy.**

**India's Economic Performance under Past Coalition Governments -**
• **India's economic reforms**, initiated in 1991, coincided with a period **marked by coalition governments.**
• **Despite the fragmented political landscape**, these coalitions **managed to implement significant reforms and maintain high growth rates.**
• The past decade's single-party majority was an exception rather than the norm in Indian politics.
• **Historical data indicates that coalition governments have been effective in driving economic reforms** and sustaining growth.

- For instance, **the total factor productivity (TFP) growth in India has risen over the past decade, standing at approximately 2.2 percent**, compared to -0.3 percent for emerging markets in the previous decade.
- This **trend underscores the resilience and adaptability of India's economy** under various political configurations.

**The Importance of Continued Reforms and Challenges Under a Coalition Government -**
- The Issue of Pace and Intensity **—**
  - While the coalition government is poised to continue India's economic growth trajectory, **the pace and intensity of reforms will be critical.**
  - **Reforms are essential for addressing structural issues** and for ensuring long-term economic stability and growth.
  - The **nature and scope of reforms have varied under different governments**, reflecting their respective political priorities and economic philosophies.
  - **Nonetheless, certain fundamental reforms have been pursued consistently**, contributing to a robust economic framework.
- Enhancing Productivity **—**
  - Reforms in areas such as **manufacturing, ease of doing business, digitisation, and skilling are likely to continue** under the new government.
  - These **reforms are crucial for enhancing productivity,** improving competitiveness, and creating jobs.
  - **For instance, initiatives to streamline business regulations and enhance digital infrastructure have already yielded significant benefits**, making it easier for businesses to operate and thrive.
- Challenging Under the Coalition Government **—**
  - **Some reforms may face greater challenges** under a coalition government.
  - Reforms **related to agriculture, land, and labour—often referred to as factor market reforms—are particularly contentious** and may be more difficult to implement.
  - Similarly, **privatisation and asset monetisation**, which are essential for improving efficiency **and reducing the fiscal burden on the government**, may encounter resistance.

**Key Steps to Maintain India's Economic Resilience and Reform Continuity -**
- Infrastructure Development and Private Sector Involvement **—**
  - Infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of India's growth strategy.
  - **Continued investment in critical infrastructure projects is necessary to support economic activity** and improve the quality of life for citizens.
  - While **the government has been the primary driver of infrastructure development**, there is a growing recognition of the **need for increased private sector involvement.**
  - This **shift is expected to take place gradually**, with private capital expenditure playing a larger role in the future.
- Continuation of PLI Schemes **—**
  - **The Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme**, aimed at boosting the manufacturing sector, is **another key initiative that is likely to continue.**
  - The scheme is designed to create jobs and enhance manufacturing capabilities, aligning with the global trend towards industrial policy and the China+1 strategy.
  - **By incentivising manufacturing, the PLI scheme aims to reduce dependence on imports** and strengthen domestic production capabilities.
- Balancing Supply-Side and Demand-Side Measures **—**
  - While the government has predominantly focused on supply-side measures, such as improving infrastructure and business conditions, **there is an increasing need to address demand-side issues.**
  - **Stimulating demand is crucial for ensuring that economic growth** is inclusive and benefits all segments of society.
  - This **includes measures to support agriculture**, rural incomes, social welfare, job creation, and consumption.
- Accommodative Government Spending **—**

- **Government spending must be more accommodative** of the needs at the bottom of the economic pyramid.
- This **means allocating resources to areas that directly impact the lives of the poor and marginalised,** such as health, education, and social welfare programs.
- The **additional fiscal space of Rs 1.2 trillion (0.35 percent of GDP) available for FY25 provides an opportunity to address these needs** without jeopardising fiscal stability.
- Fiscal Discipline and Macroeconomic Stability **—**
  - **Maintaining fiscal discipline is essential** for ensuring macroeconomic stability.
  - The **institutionalisation of reforms, such as the inflation targeting mandate, has provided a framework for fiscal discipline** and has helped keep inflation in check.
  - The **moderation of global crude prices and the reduced oil intensity of the economy are also positive factors** that will help control the current account deficit.
  - With twin deficits; **fiscal and current account under control**, and the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) focusing on inflation targeting, **India's macroeconomic stability is unlikely to be jeopardised.**
  - The upcoming budget will be a critical indicator of the new government's economic direction, impacting interest rates and the trajectory of the rupee.

**Conclusion -**
- **India stands at a pivotal moment in its economic history, facing both domestic and global challenges**, including geopolitical shifts, technological advancements, and the imperative of decarbonisation.
- **The new coalition government must navigate these complexities without compromising** on economic logic and priorities.
- **Historical evidence suggests that coalition governments can be just as effective as single-party majorities in driving reforms** and, therefore, **apprehensions about the return to coalition politics disrupting India's economic trajectory are largely unfounded.**

**Source - The Indian Express**

**QUESTION - Discuss the impact of coalition governments on India's economic policies and performance. Highlight key economic reforms implemented under past coalition governments and the challenges that such governments may face in continuing these reforms.**

# Environment

## Fixing Urban India's water crisis problem

India faces a severe water crisis due to reduced river flows and falling water tables. This article discusses the current situation, existing policies, and the need for a long-term solution.

**Current Situation: Water Emergencies** -
- **Early Summer and Drought** — Several parts of India, including Karnataka and Delhi, are experiencing water scarcity due to early summers and droughts.
- **Dispute over Water Allocation** — Delhi's water shortage has reignited an old dispute with neighbouring states over water allocation from the Yamuna river.
- **Supreme Court Intervention** — The Supreme Court has directed Himachal Pradesh to release water to Delhi, but challenges remain in ensuring its flow through Haryana.

**Government Policies: Focus on Supply-Side Management** -
- **Focus on Tap Water Connections** — The Modi government prioritises providing tap water connections, but this neglects the long-term health of aquifers.

- **Inventory of Water Bodies** — The government seeks to prevent encroachment by creating inventories of water bodies.

**Challenges and Gaps** -
- **Lack of Coordination** — There is poor coordination between departments managing surface water, groundwater, irrigation, and drinking water.
- **Fragile Water-Sharing Agreements** — Existing water-sharing agreements between states break down during shortages.
- **Ineffective Rainwater Harvesting** — Rainwater harvesting remains largely theoretical despite frequent floods and droughts.
- **Limited Demand-Side Management** — While agricultural water usage programs exist, there's a lack of data and strategies for household and industrial water use.

**Way forward** -
- **Efficient Irrigation Practices —** Optimising irrigation practices in agriculture is crucial.
- **Demand-Side Management —** Analyse household and industrial water usage to promote conservation, reuse, and recycling.
- **Incentivise Conservation —** Imposing fines is reactive; encourage conservation through incentives.
- **Climate-Resilient Strategies —** Develop policies considering climate change's impact on aquifers.
- **Immediate Action by the New Government —** The new government needs to prioritise addressing the water crisis.

**Conclusion** -
India needs a long-term water management plan considering both supply and demand, with a focus on conservation and sustainable practices. The new government must act swiftly to tackle this growing crisis.

**Source** - **The Indian Express**

**QUESTION - India is facing a severe water crisis due to factors like reduced river flows, falling water tables, and erratic rainfall patterns. Analyse the challenges highlighted in the passage regarding water scarcity in India. Discuss the limitations of the current government policies in addressing this issue. Suggest a comprehensive water management strategy that incorporates both supply-side and demand-side management practices.**

# Remoulding the Global Plastics Treaty

**As discussions continue for an international legally binding treaty on plastic pollution**, it becomes **crucial to consider how it can support a fair transition for individuals who collect and recycle waste informally.**
These **informal waste pickers play a significant role in global waste management systems**, yet they often remain marginalised and vulnerable.
The **proposed Global Plastics Treaty presents an opportunity to acknowledge their contributions** and integrate them into formal waste management processes, ensuring a just transition that promotes social justice and sustainability.

**The OECD Global Plastic Outlook -**
- According to the **OECD Global Plastic Outlook**, global production of plastic waste reached 353 million tonnes in 2019, more than doubling since 2000, with projections indicating a tripling by 2060.
- Of this vast amount, **only 9% was recycled, 50% was sent to landfills, 19% was incinerated**, and 22% was disposed of in uncontrolled sites or dumps.
- Alarmingly, **the United Nations Environment Programme reports that 85% of the recycled plastic was processed by informal recycling workers.**

• These **workers, who collect, sort, and recover recyclable materials from general waste, play a crucial role in alleviating the financial burden on municipal budgets** and subsidising environmental responsibilities of producers, consumers, and governments.

**<u>An Analysis of the Vital Contributions of Informal Waste Workers</u> -**
• **Environmental Impact —**
  • **By collecting, sorting, and recovering** recyclable materials from general waste streams, **they directly reduce the volume of waste** that ends up in landfills and uncontrolled dump sites.
  • This is **critical in preventing plastic leakage into the environment**, including terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, where plastic pollution can cause severe harm to wildlife and degrade natural habitats.
  • Furthermore, **by promoting the recycling of plastics, informal waste workers help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions**.
• **Bringing Economic Efficiency —**
  • The **activities of informal waste workers also bring substantial economic benefits.**
  • By **alleviating the financial burdens on municipal waste management systems**, these workers enable cities to allocate resources more efficiently.
  • **Municipal budgets are often strained by the high costs associated with waste collection**, transportation, and disposal.
  • **Informal waste workers effectively subsidise these costs** by providing low-cost or even unpaid labour for waste recovery activities.
• **Critical Role in Social Equity and Inclusion —**
  • **Informal waste work provides livelihoods for millions of people** worldwide, particularly in developing countries.
  • **This sector often includes marginalised groups who might otherwise have limited access** to formal employment opportunities.
  • **By offering a source of income, informal waste work plays a critical role in poverty alleviation** and social inclusion.
• **Contribution to the Circular Economy —**
  • **Informal waste workers are essential players** in the transition towards a circular economy, where the focus is on minimising waste and maximising the reuse, refurbishment, and recycling of materials.
  • **They promote circular waste management solutions** by recovering materials that would otherwise be lost in the waste stream, **thereby ensuring that these materials can be reprocessed and reintroduced** into the production cycle.
• **Enhancing Waste Management Systems —**
  • In many cities, particularly in the Global South**, informal waste workers are responsible for a significant portion of waste recovery.**
  • According to the UN-Habitat's Waste Wise Cities Tool (WaCT), **the informal sector accounts for 80% of municipal solid waste recovery in many cities.**
  • This **highlights their indispensable role in waste management systems** that might otherwise struggle to cope with the volume of waste generated.

**<u>Challenge Faced by Informal Waste Workers Despite Their Critical Contribution</u> -**
• **Marginalisation and Vulnerability —**
  • Informal waste workers **often operate under precarious conditions**, lacking legal recognition and protection.
  • This **marginalisation leaves them vulnerable to exploitation**, health risks, and economic instability.
  • They **typically work without contracts, social security, or access to healthcare,** exposing them to occupational hazards such as exposure to toxic materials, physical injuries, and respiratory issues from handling waste.
• **Social Exclusion —**
  • Moreover, **informal waste workers are frequently stigmatised and discriminated against** due to the nature of their work.

- This **social exclusion compounds their vulnerabilities**, limiting their opportunities for social and economic advancement.
- Without formal recognition, **these workers struggle to assert their rights and advocate for better working conditions.**
- **Increasing Privatisation —**
  - The **increasing privatisation** of waste management services **poses a significant threat to the livelihoods of informal waste workers.**
  - **Privatisation often leads to the consolidation of waste management services under large companies**, which can marginalise small-scale informal workers.
  - These **companies may prioritise efficiency and profit over inclusive practices**, resulting in the exclusion of informal workers from the waste management value chain.

**The Global Plastics Treaty: Towards Inclusion and Justice -**
- **A Significant Effort —**
  - The **Global Plastics Treaty represents a significant effort** to establish a legally binding agreement aimed at reducing and eliminating plastic pollution.
  - The process, initiated in **2021 during the fifth UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, has seen active participation from various stakeholders**, including the International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP).
  - The **IAWP emphasises the importance of formalising and integrating informal waste pickers into discussions on plastic waste management** and including their perspectives at every stage of policy and law implementation.
- **Acknowledgement of the Contribution of Informal Waste Pickers —**
  - **These measures aim to acknowledge the historical contributions of waste pickers**, protect their rights, and promote effective and sustainable plastic waste management practices.
  - However, **the lack of universally agreed-upon terminology** for a just transition and the absence of a formal definition of the informal waste sector and its workforce **pose significant challenges.**
  - **Clarifying these definitions is crucial** for ensuring that the treaty adequately addresses the needs and contributions of informal waste workers.

**Significance of India's Voice in Global Plastic Treaty -**
- **As a key representative from the Global South**, India advocates for an approach that enhances repair, reuse, refill, and recycling without necessarily eliminating plastic use.
- **India emphasises the importance of adopting strategies tailored to country-specific circumstances** and capacities.
- Consequently, **India's informal waste pickers remain central to these discussions**, given their indispensable role in waste management.
  - **Therefore, the formulation of EPR norms must be reconsidered to integrate the informal worker cohort** into the new legal framework effectively.
- As the final round of negotiations for the Global Plastics Treaty approaches the INC-5, a critical question emerges.
  - And **the question is how can a global instrument to end plastic pollution enable a just transition for nearly 15 million people who informally collect and recover up to 58% of global recycled waste.**

**Conclusion -**
- To shape a sustainable future, **the Global Plastics Treaty must incorporate the perspectives of informal waste workers and ensure their livelihoods are protected.**
- **By embodying principles of social justice and equity, the treaty can leave no one and no place behind,** thereby fostering a just transition and a more sustainable approach to managing plastic waste globally.
- **Recognising and integrating the efforts of informal waste workers is not just a matter of social justice but also a practical necessity** for achieving comprehensive and effective plastic waste management.

**Source** - **The Hindu**

**QUESTION - Discuss the importance of informal waste workers in the global waste management system and the potential impact of the Global Plastics Treaty on their livelihoods. Evaluate how the treaty can support a fair transition for these workers, considering their contributions and challenges.**