

REGENT EDUCATION & RESEARCH FOUNDATION

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GENERAL STUDIES - I

Social Issues

Dispelling Population Myths

The discourse surrounding the religious demography of India has often been clouded by **sensationalism and misinterpretation**, particularly by media and political figures.

A recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), titled "Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)," has become a focal point of such misinterpretations.

Therefore, it is important to critically examine the findings and interpretations of the EAC-PM's working paper, contextualising them within broader socio-economic dynamics and demographic trends.

The Core Misinterpretation -

- **The crux of the misinterpretation** lies in the portrayal of the **Muslim population growth as a significant threat to the Hindu majority**.
- **The EAC-PM paper acknowledges its limitations**, stating that the factors influencing religious demography are multifaceted and complex.
- Despite this, it **makes a flawed assertion** that an increase in the Muslim population signifies thriving minorities in India, a claim that lacks substantive evidence.
- **Fertility rates alone are not indicative of a flourishing community**; rather, they reflect underlying socio-economic conditions.

An Analysis of Socio-Economic Factors and Population Growth of Muslim Population -

- The Role of Education —
 - **Education is a critical determinant of fertility rates** and overall population growth.
 - **Communities with higher levels of educational attainment**, particularly among women, tend to have **lower fertility rates**.
 - **Education empowers individuals with knowledge about family planning**, reproductive health, and the economic implications of having more children.
 - **In India, disparities in educational attainment** between different religious communities can partly explain variations in population growth rates.
 - **The Muslim community**, which has historically faced barriers to accessing quality education, exhibits **higher fertility rates compared to the Hindu community**.
 - **This suggests that the higher population growth rate among Muslims is not a reflection of religious doctrine** but rather a consequence of limited educational opportunities.
- Economic Conditions —
 - **Economic conditions significantly influence family size** and population growth. Families with better economic stability tend to have fewer children, as they can invest more resources in each child's health, education, and overall well-being.
 - **Conversely, in economically disadvantaged communities, higher fertility rates can be a coping mechanism** for economic insecurity, with children often seen as contributors to the household income.
 - **The higher growth rate of the Muslim population in India can be attributed to the community's lower average income levels** and limited access to economic opportunities.
 - **Addressing economic disparities is essential for moderating population growth** and improving overall human development.
- Healthcare Access —
 - **Access to healthcare**, particularly reproductive health services, **plays a crucial role in determining fertility rates**.

- Communities with better access to healthcare services, including contraception and maternal health care, tend to have lower fertility rates.
- **The Muslim community in India has historically faced challenges** in accessing healthcare services, which has contributed to higher fertility rates.
- Improving healthcare access for all communities is vital for achieving balanced population growth and enhancing quality of life.
- Cultural Factors and Gender Norms —
 - **Cultural factors and gender norms also influence fertility rates.** In some communities, traditional norms that value large families and early marriage can lead to higher fertility rates.
 - **Efforts to promote gender equality and empower women to make informed reproductive choices are essential** for moderating population growth.
 - Programs aimed at changing cultural attitudes towards family size and encouraging later marriages can have a significant impact on reducing fertility rates.
- Urbanisation and Migration —
 - Urbanisation and migration patterns also affect population growth.
 - **Urban areas typically have lower fertility rates** than rural areas due to better access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
 - **Migration from rural to urban areas can lead to a decline in fertility rates** as individuals adapt to the socio-economic conditions of urban life.
 - **In India, rural areas, where the Muslim population is relatively more concentrated,** tend to have higher fertility rates.
 - Promoting urbanisation and facilitating the integration of rural communities into urban settings can contribute to balanced population growth.
- Human Development Indicators —
 - **Overall human development indicators, such as life expectancy,** child mortality rates, and literacy rates, **are closely linked to population growth.**
 - Communities with higher human development indicators tend to have lower fertility rates.
 - **The Muslim community's lag in human development indicators compared to the Hindu community highlights the need for targeted interventions** to improve education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for all.

The Broader Context of Religious Demography -

- Historical Stability in Religious Composition —
 - Historical data suggests that the religious composition of India has remained relatively stable over the decades.
 - **According to the 2021 Pew Research Centre report,** which analysed Census data from 1951 to 2011, the proportions of **India's major religious groups have shown remarkable stability since Partition.**
 - **This stability is a significant counterpoint to claims of dramatic demographic shifts.**
 - **The Hindu population has consistently constituted a large majority,** while the proportions of other religious groups, including Muslims, have grown at a predictable rate.
 - **This historical perspective is crucial for understanding that changes in religious demography** are gradual and not indicative of sudden or alarming shifts.
- Projections and Future Trends —
 - **Projections by leading demographers** provide a more nuanced understanding of future demographic trends. **P. N. Mari Bhat and Francis Xavier, in their 2005 study, projected that the proportion of Muslims in India's total population would peak at around 18.8% by 2101.**
 - This projection is based on historical trends and accounts for factors such as declining fertility rates and improvements in socio-economic conditions.
 - **The recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data shows a significant decline in Muslim fertility rates,** suggesting that the peak proportion might be even smaller if similar studies were conducted today.
 - **These projections highlight that fears of Muslims overtaking Hindus in population numbers are unfounded** and not supported by empirical evidence.
- Socio-Economic Development and Demographic Trends —
 - **Socio-economic development plays a critical role** in shaping demographic trends.

- Improved education, healthcare, and economic opportunities lead to lower fertility rates across all communities.
- **The decline in Muslim fertility rates, as observed in the NFHS data, is a direct result of better access to education and healthcare.**
- This trend is expected to continue as development efforts reach more communities.
- **Therefore, socio-economic development is a key factor in achieving balanced population growth and should be the focus of policy interventions.**

Conclusion -

- **The sensationalism and misinterpretation of the EAC-PM working paper's findings are detrimental to an informed public discourse.**
- **Accurate understanding of population dynamics requires a nuanced analysis of socio-economic conditions and demographic data.**
- **As India awaits updated Census data, it is crucial to foster a more informed and balanced discussion on religious demography, free from divisive political narratives.**

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the socio-economic and cultural factors influencing the religious demography of India. How can policy interventions address the disparities contributing to varying population growth rates among religious communities, ensuring balanced development and informed public discourse?

Exclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

As the 2024 general election in India draws to a close, **the absence of sign language interpreters during the ECI's announcement in March is a stark reminder of the pervasive exclusion faced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) citizens.**

This incident **underscores the broader societal neglect and ableism that continue to marginalise the DHH community in everyday life.**

It is **important to assess everyday challenges for DHH individuals, limited opportunities and what needs to be done.**

The Push for Equity and the Reality of Exclusion -

- **India's aspirations for equity in education, healthcare, and rights are fundamentally undermined by the failure to dismantle ableist barriers that exclude DHH individuals.**
- **The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Deafness is a case in point.**
- **While it addresses the prevention and treatment of hearing impairment, it falls short of enhancing the quality of life for DHH individuals.**
- **The program focuses on theoretical aspects of screening and hearing aids but neglects the Indian Sign Language (ISL), a crucial element of deaf communication.**
- **Despite the establishment of the ISL Research and Training Centre by the Social Justice Ministry in 2015 and recommendations for ISL standardisation in schools as per the National Education Policy 2020, ISL remains unrecognised as an official language and is sparsely used in educational systems, even in schools for the deaf.**

The Oralism Debate and Educational Exclusion -

- Historical Context and Pedagogical Approaches —
 - **The debate between oralism and the use of sign language in educating deaf individuals has deep historical roots, reflecting broader societal attitudes towards disability and communication.**
 - **Oralism, which emphasises teaching deaf individuals to use their voices and read lips rather than relying on sign language, emerged in the late 19th century.**
 - **Proponents of oralism believed that integrating deaf individuals into the hearing world was best achieved by encouraging them to mimic spoken language as closely as possible.**

- This **approach assumed that speech and lip-reading would enable deaf individuals to function** more effectively in a predominantly hearing society.
- Criticisms of Oralism —
 - Despite its intentions, **oralism has been widely criticised for its limitations and negative impacts** on deaf individuals.
 - One of the primary criticisms is that **oralism often leads to linguistic deprivation**, especially in children.
 - **Learning to speak and read lips can be extremely challenging and time-consuming** for many deaf individuals, leading to delays in language acquisition and cognitive development.
 - Without early and consistent exposure to a natural language, such as sign language, **deaf children are at risk of not developing the foundational language skills** necessary for effective communication and learning.
 - Additionally, **the focus on oralism can create significant social isolation for deaf individuals.**
 - The **pressure to conform to oral communication can also undermine the development of a strong, positive deaf identity** and a sense of belonging within the deaf community.
- The Case for Sign Language —
 - In contrast, **using sign language as the primary mode of instruction** for deaf students has been shown to have **numerous benefits.**
 - **Sign language is a natural and fully developed language** that enables deaf individuals to communicate effectively from an early age.
 - Research has demonstrated that **early exposure to sign language supports cognitive development and academic achievement**, allowing deaf children to develop language skills on par with their hearing peers.
 - Furthermore, **sign language fosters a sense of community and cultural identity among deaf individuals.**
 - **Being part of a linguistic and cultural minority** can provide a strong sense of **belonging and self-worth.**
- The Indian Context —
 - **In India, the education system has largely adhered to the oralist approach**, which has significant implications for deaf students.
 - **Most educators in schools for the deaf are not trained in Indian Sign Language (ISL)**, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion and limited accessibility.
 - The **current educational framework focuses on "rehabilitation," expecting deaf individuals to adapt to their surroundings** rather than addressing the societal barriers that impede their inclusion.
 - This **approach fails to recognise the value of sign language and the importance of providing deaf students with a language-rich environment** that supports their linguistic and cognitive development.

The Invisible Deaf Population, Everyday Challenges and Opportunities -

- The Invisible Population —
 - According to the 2011 Census, **India has five million hearing-impaired people, but the National Association of the Deaf estimates 18 million**, while the World Health Organization estimates nearly 63 million Indians have significant hearing impairment.
 - Despite these numbers, **DHH individuals are often invisible in society and only 5% of deaf children attend school**, and those who do often face prolonged educational timelines due to an oralist curriculum.
 - **Employment opportunities for the deaf are limited**, with government recruitment practices sometimes favouring those with lesser impairments, leading to protests.
 - Despite petitions for ISL recognition, **the government has been resistant, citing the adequacy of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPDA) 2016**, yet this act falls short in practical implementation.
- Lack of Accessibility in Public Transport —
 - **DHH individuals face numerous everyday challenges** due to a lack of accessibility in public transport, media, public structures, and emergency services.

- Basic activities, **such as following public announcements or accessing customer service**, are insurmountable tasks.
- **While some progress has been made** with accessible options in films and sports, **much remains to be done**.
- **Employment opportunities for the deaf are often restricted to low-skill jobs**, and the government sector lags in accessibility and inclusion initiatives.
- **Protests by the deaf community** demanding better education and employment opportunities **have often been met with force or empty promises**.
- **Healthcare and Mental Health Accessibility —**
 - **Access to healthcare poses additional challenges** for the deaf community, as most hospitals lack interpreters, complicating communication.
 - **This is especially problematic in mental healthcare**, where a lack of ISL-trained professionals further marginalises DHH individuals.
 - **Although the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 promises universal mental health care, its implementation is ineffective**, with only 250 certified sign language interpreters available and no clear data on ISL-trained mental health professionals.

Way forward -

- To address these issues, **it is imperative to recognise ISL as an official language and integrate it into schools** and colleges for both hearing and DHH students.
 - **This approach would also create employment opportunities for DHH individuals as educators**.
- Moreover, **healthcare systems need to be updated to ensure easy and accessible communication for DHH patients**, including employing language-concordant physicians.
 - **Regulatory commissions in medical fields must reduce barriers for DHH individuals aspiring to healthcare professions**, fostering a more inclusive workforce.
- **Media channels should consistently offer deaf programming**, and government event announcements should include live ISL interpreters, as seen in many other countries.
- **Timely interventions in these areas could lead to significant improvements**, potentially ensuring real-time ISL interpretations in future elections.

Conclusion -

- **The challenges faced by the DHH community in India are multifaceted** and deeply entrenched in societal ableism.
- While some progress has been made, much needs to be done and therefore **it is crucial for authorities to actively engage with the DHH community and address their specific needs**.
- By recognising and implementing necessary changes, **India can move towards a more inclusive society where the rights and needs of DHH individuals are fully acknowledged and met**.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the challenges faced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals in India, particularly in the context of societal exclusion and ableism. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of existing government programs and policies, such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Deafness and the implementation of Indian Sign Language (ISL). Propose measures to enhance the inclusion and quality of life for DHH individuals, considering the roles of education, healthcare, and employment.

Menstrual Hygiene in prisons

India has made significant progress in menstrual hygiene management. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS 2019-2020) shows that around 80% of young women aged 15-24 now use safe menstrual products.

However, while urban areas and certain groups have seen improvements, women in Indian prisons remain neglected. In a society that often denies prisoners basic rights, female prisoners

suffer more due to societal biases that refuse to accept women can commit crimes. This has led to their basic needs, like menstrual hygiene, being overlooked.

What is the Meaning of Menstrual Hygiene?

- Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) is essential to the well-being and empowerment of women and adolescent girls.
- **On any given day, more than 300 million women worldwide are menstruating.**
- In total, **an estimated 500 million lack access to menstrual products and adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management (MHM).**
- To effectively manage their menstruation, girls and women require –
 - Access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities,
 - Affordable and appropriate menstrual hygiene materials,
 - Information on good practices, and
 - Supportive environment where they can manage menstruation without embarrassment or stigma.

Status of Menstrual Hygiene in Indian Prisons -

- There are **23,772 women in Indian prisons**, with 77% in the reproductive age group and likely to menstruate regularly.
- However, the availability and quality of sanitary napkins in prisons are inconsistent and often inadequate.
- **Despite the 2016 Model Prison Manual's recommendations, many states haven't provided sufficient water and washroom facilities for female prisoners.**
- Overcrowding and poor conditions make it difficult for women to access essentials like water, sanitary napkins, detergent, and soap during menstruation.
- A 2023 study conducted in a Maharashtra prison revealed that **water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities are inadequate, forcing women to store water and share limited toilets.**
 - This situation led to higher instances of urinary infections and difficulties in maintaining menstrual hygiene.
- Prisons rely on NGOs for sanitary napkin donations, often resulting in substandard products.
- In one case, only one pair of reusable napkins was provided per woman, which was impractical due to limited access to water and detergent.

Measures taken by the Government -

- India has been working to improve menstrual hygiene access, particularly for young women, through initiatives like the **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme**, which distributes free or subsidised sanitary napkins.
- Additionally, **affordable Suraksha Suvidha Napkins are available at Jan Aushadhi Kendras for ₹1 each.**
- In 2023, India introduced the '**National Menstrual Hygiene Policy**' to recognise menstruation as a natural process needing more attention, emphasising equity in safe and dignified menstrual hygiene management for all, regardless of socioeconomic status or location.
 - The policy acknowledges prisoners as a group with limited access to menstrual hygiene.
 - However, it lacks a specific action plan to address this issue and does not involve the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is crucial for prison-related matters.

Way forward -

- The Indian government must ensure basic menstrual hygiene standards for women in prisons.
- **The inconsistent implementation of the Model Prison Manual 2016 across states needs immediate action, with every state required to follow its recommendations.**
- Addressing menstrual hygiene in prisons should be seen through a public health perspective as part of combating 'period poverty.'
- **Public health authorities and prison administrators should collaborate to develop a comprehensive strategy** for providing adequate menstrual hygiene products and facilities, prioritising the health and dignity of incarcerated women.
- Additionally, **there is a need for research to understand the current state of menstrual hygiene in prisons.**

GENERAL STUDIES - II

Polity

Election in the time of Deep Fakes

In the evolving digital age, **public figures such as PM Modi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee etc share an unexpected commonality**; they have all been **victims of deep fake videos**.

These deep fakes, generated through advanced artificial intelligence (AI) technology, **pose significant challenges, particularly in the context of elections**.

Therefore, **it is crucial to explore the consequences of deep fakes on the electoral process**, the existing legal frameworks to combat them, and the need for more robust legal mechanisms to safeguard democratic integrity.

Understanding Deep Fakes and Their Impact -

- The Technology Behind Deep Fakes —
 - **Deep fakes utilise generative adversarial networks (GANs)**, a class of AI algorithms where two neural networks, the generator and the discriminator, are pitted against each other.
 - The **generator creates fake media**, while the **discriminator attempts to detect which media are real** and which are fake.
 - Through this adversarial process, **the generator improves its ability to produce convincing fakes over time**.
 - **This technology can swap faces in videos, mimic voices, and even create entirely new video content from scratch**.
- Historical Context and Evolution —
 - The concept of manipulating images and videos is not new. Traditional methods, such as photo editing and video effects, have been used for decades.
 - However, **the advent of deep learning has exponentially increased the capability to produce high-quality forgeries**.
 - The ease with which deep fakes can now be created and the difficulty of detecting them pose unprecedented challenges.
- Political and Social Ramifications —
 - Deep fakes have **profound implications for politics and society and during elections**, deep fakes can be used to create misleading content that appears to show political figures saying or doing things they never did.
 - **This can be used to smear opponents, spread disinformation, or manipulate public opinion**.
 - For instance, **a deep fake could be used to fabricate a scandalous statement by a candidate on the eve of an election**, potentially altering the outcome by swaying undecided voters.
 - The **impact of deep fakes extends beyond politics** and celebrities and public figures are frequent targets.

- **Fake videos or audio recordings can damage reputations**, lead to financial loss, and cause emotional distress.
- **Scarlett Johansson's allegation that her voice was used without permission in an AI application** highlights the issue of consent and intellectual property in the age of deep fakes.
- Psychological and Cultural Impacts —
 - The **existence of deep fakes also contributes to a broader erosion** of trust in media.
 - As **people become aware of the possibility of sophisticated forgeries, they may start to doubt the authenticity** of genuine content.
 - This **phenomenon, known as the "liar's dividend," benefits wrongdoers who can deny genuine evidence** by claiming it is a deep fake.
 - This **undermines the credibility of all media and complicates the public's ability to discern truth** from falsehood.
- Economic and Security Concerns —
 - From a **security perspective, deep fakes pose significant risks** and they can be used for blackmail, to incite violence, or to create diplomatic conflicts.
 - For example, **a deep fake video of a government official making inflammatory statements could lead to international tensions** or even conflict.
 - The ability of malicious actors to create convincing false narratives can undermine national security and public safety.
 - **The economic impact of deep fakes is also noteworthy and businesses can be targeted through deep fake audio** or video messages that could manipulate stock prices, deceive investors, or disrupt operations.
 - Fake news driven by deep fakes can lead to significant financial consequences, as seen in instances where false information has led to stock market fluctuations.

Available Legal Provisions in India -

- Indian Penal Code Sections —
 - **Section 468 - Forgery for the Purpose of Cheating** —
 - This section **deals with the creation of false documents** or electronic records intended to deceive others.
 - While **traditionally applied to paper documents, it can be extended to include digital forgeries** like deep fakes.
 - For instance, a deep fake video intended to mislead the public about a political figure's actions or statements could be prosecuted under this section.
 - **Section 505 - Statements Conducing to Public Mischief** —
 - This **section criminalises the making, publishing, or circulating of any statement, rumour, or report** intended to cause fear or alarm among the public.
 - **Deep fakes** that incite violence, panic, or unrest **fall under this provision**.
 - An example is a deep fake video falsely showing a government official making inflammatory remarks.
 - **Section 416 - Cheating by Personation** —
 - This **provision addresses cases where an individual pretends to be someone else**, including digital impersonation.
 - **A deep fake that convincingly portrays one person as another, thereby deceiving viewers, could be prosecuted under this section.**
- Information Technology Act, 2000 —
 - **Section 66C - Identity Theft** —
 - This **section penalises the use of electronic means to assume someone else's identity** with fraudulent intent.
 - **Deep fakes used to impersonate individuals for fraudulent purposes, such as financial scams or defamation, can be addressed under this provision.**
 - **Section 66D - Cheating by Personation Using Computer Resource** —
 - This **section specifically targets cheating by personation using digital tools**, making it directly applicable to deep fakes.
 - It **provides for imprisonment up to three years**, which serves as a deterrent against the creation and dissemination of deep fakes intended to deceive.

- **Sections 66E and 67 - Violation of Privacy and Obscene Content —**
 - These **sections deal with the privacy invasion** and distribution of obscene material.
 - **Deep fakes that violate someone's privacy** by depicting them in compromising situations or distributing non-consensual intimate images **can be prosecuted under these sections.**

International Threats and Legal Responses -

- The threat of deep fakes is **not confined to domestic politics; it has international implications.**
- In 2024, as major democracies like India, the US, and the UK prepare for elections, **there are concerns about foreign interference.**
- **British Home Secretary James Cleverly warned that adversaries like Iran or Russia could generate manipulative content** to sway voters.
- Similarly, **the Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre (MTAC) cautioned that China might use AI-generated content to influence elections in India, South Korea, and the US.**
- Forbes reported on **Russia's attempts to shape US opinion against Ukraine and NATO** using deep fake videos.
- These **developments underscore the necessity for a global response** to the challenges posed by deep fakes.
- **Europe's Artificial Intelligence Act, set to come into force in June 2024, provides a framework for addressing offences related to AI and deep fakes** aimed at manipulating human behaviour.
- This legislation offers valuable insights for other countries looking to bolster their legal defences against AI-driven misinformation.

Conclusion -

- **The rise of deep fakes represents a formidable challenge to the integrity of electoral systems** and the formation of informed public opinion.
- **The battle for electoral integrity has moved into the virtual domain,** demanding innovative legal solutions to safeguard the future of democracy.
- Therefore, as we navigate this digital frontier, **it is imperative to ensure that democratic processes remain secure and that public trust in elections is maintained.**

Philosophical foundations of Model Code of Conduct

The profound declaration **Satyameva Jayate or Truth alone triumphs, originating from the Mundaka Upanishad was inscribed (26th Jan 1950)** on the base of the national emblem, the Ashokan pillar, signifies the importance of truth in the nation's ethos.

Coincidentally, **the day before, the Election Commission of India (ECI) was established with the primary objective of ensuring free and fair elections,** upholding the democratic principle of allowing citizens to choose their government.

The **ECI's role includes enforcing a level playing field** where candidates and political parties do not manipulate voters through excessive money, muscle power, or deceit **but the challenge lies in defining and upholding "truth" amidst political machinations.**

- The philosophical inquiry into truth is complex as **Francis Bacon's Essay of Truth opens with a reference to Pilate's rhetorical question, "What is truth?"—a query often left unanswered due to its intricate nature.**
- This **complexity is mirrored in the Ashokan pillar's depiction of three visible lions, symbolising the three dimensions of truth: my perspective, your perspective, and a third-person perspective.**
- The fourth, **unseen dimension represents the absolute truth**, often perceived as known only to a higher power.
- **The ECI, however, operates within the realm of human imperfection**, aiming to enforce a Model Code of Conduct (MCC) that seeks to curb dishonest practices during elections.
- Yet, **expecting individuals to adhere to this model for a brief period during elections**, if they have not lived by such principles otherwise, **is arguably naive.**

The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) -

- The **MCC was introduced with the hope that it would instil a sense of self-restraint** among political stakeholders.
- **In the 2019 Manual on the Model Code of Conduct, it was emphasised that those aspiring to public office should exemplify conduct** worthy of emulation.
- The **ECI considers the MCC a crucial contribution by political parties to democracy**, expecting them to exhibit model behaviour in their actions and rhetoric.
- However, **the reality often deviates**, with political discourse sometimes degenerating into coarse and ignoble exchanges.
- This has led to debates on **whether the MCC should be termed a moral rather than a model code.**

The Intersection of Morality and Law in Electoral Process -

- Philosophical Foundations of MCC —
 - **At the heart of the MCC** lies a fundamental tension between **legal requirements and moral expectations.**
 - **Morality pertains to the principles governing individual behaviour** based on notions of right and wrong, often derived from cultural, religious, or personal beliefs.
 - **Law, on the other hand, comprises rules established by a governing body to regulate behaviour**, ensuring order and justice within society.
 - **Immanuel Kant's philosophy offers a vital perspective** on the distinction between morality and law. According to Kant, moral actions are those performed out of a sense of duty, whereas legal actions are governed by societal rules.
 - **Utilitarianism, as advocated by philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, evaluates actions** based on their consequences.
 - From this viewpoint, the morality of an action is judged by its contribution to the overall happiness or well-being of society.
 - In the context of the MCC, this perspective suggests that political behaviour should be assessed not only by legal standards but also by the broader impact on societal harmony and democratic health.
- Legal Framework and Enforcement —
 - **The legal framework** underpinning the MCC includes **specific provisions in the Indian Penal Code** and the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
 - These **laws delineate actions that constitute corrupt practices and electoral offenses**, providing a legal basis for enforcing the MCC.
 - However, **the intersection of morality and law within this framework presents unique challenges.**
 - In legal terms, **mens rea refers to the intention or knowledge of wrongdoing** and **establishing mens rea is crucial** for proving guilt in many legal cases.
 - The **MCC implicitly addresses mens rea by prohibiting actions intended to manipulate** or deceive voters, such as false promises or appeals to communal sentiments.
 - **Sections 123(3) and 123(3A)** of the Representation of the People Act classify appeals to caste or communal feelings as corrupt practices, **punishable under the law.**

- Similarly, Section 125 of the Act prohibits promoting enmity between different groups in connection with elections.
- **These legal provisions aim to curb divisive tactics** and uphold the ethical conduct envisioned by the MCC.
- However, **enforcement requires clear evidence** linking the actions to the intent of influencing electoral outcomes.

Imperative for Ethical Reflection : Lesson from Mahabharata -

- **The imperative for ethical reflection** in the electoral process **stems from the need to uphold democratic integrity** and ensure that the conduct of elections aligns with the core values of truth and fairness.
- **The story of Yudhishtira in the Mahabharata, who lost his moral high ground despite technically telling the truth, underscores the importance of ethics** over mere adherence to rules.
- **Ethics in elections is about more than just following the law;** it involves adhering to higher standards of honesty, integrity, and fairness.
- **Ethical reflection ensures that political actions and decisions are not just legally compliant** but also morally sound.
- This is particularly important in a democracy, **where the legitimacy of the government is derived from the consent of the governed**, and this consent must be obtained through fair means.
- **When ethical standards are compromised, democratic norms** such as transparency, accountability, and fairness are **weakened**.
- This **erosion can lead to a governance crisis** where the authority of elected officials is questioned.

Conclusion -

- **Satyameva Jayate is more than a motto; it is a guiding principle** that should permeate the conduct of individuals and institutions alike.
- **The ECI's efforts to enforce the MCC reflect an ongoing struggle** to balance legal enforcement with moral persuasion.
- For a truly democratic society, **this balance must be continually sought, ensuring that the pursuit of political power does not erode the foundational value of truth.**

Governance

AMRUT Scheme

Around 36% of India's population is living in cities and by 2047 it will be more than 50%. The World Bank estimates that around \$840 billion is required to fund the bare minimum urban infrastructure over the next 15 years. Against this backdrop, the **AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) scheme** was launched in June 2015, with its 2.0 version launched on October 1, 2021.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) -

- AMRUT was launched to provide basic civic amenities as to improve the quality of life for all especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

- The focus of the Mission is on infrastructure creation that has a direct link to provision of better services to the citizens.
- The Mission covers 500 cities that includes all cities and towns with a population of over one lakh with notified Municipalities.

AMRUT 2.0 -

• About —

- The target in the second phase of AMRUT is to
 - improve sewage and septic management,
 - make our cities water safe cities and
 - ensure that no sewage drains anywhere in our rivers'
- In other words, AMRUT 2.0 focused on enhancing sewerage and septic management and to make all Indian cities water secure.

• Aim

- providing 100% coverage of **water supply** to all households in around 4,700 urban local bodies by providing about 2.68 crore tap connections
- 100% coverage of sewerage and septage in 500 AMRUT cities by providing around 2.64 crore sewer or septage connections

• Principles and Mechanism —

- AMRUT 2.0 will adopt the principles of circular economy and promote conservation and rejuvenation of surface and groundwater bodies.
- The Mission will promote data led governance in water management and Technology Sub-Mission to leverage latest global technologies and skills.
- 'Pey Jal Survekshan' will be conducted to promote progressive competition among cities.

• Coverage —

- Extends coverage from 500 cities under the first phase to 4,700 cities and towns.
- It will benefit more than 10.5 crore people in urban areas.

Performance of scheme -

- The AMRUT dashboard shows that as of May 2024, a sum of ₹83,357 crore has been dispersed so far.
- This amount has been utilised to provide a total of 58,66,237 tap connections, and 37,49,467 sewerage connections.
- A total of 2,411 parks have been developed, and 62,78,571 LED lights have been replaced.

Criticism -

- It is estimated that about 2,00,000 people die every year due to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene.
 - In 2016, the disease burden due to unsafe water and sanitation per person was 40 times higher in India than in China. This has not improved much.
 - Huge amounts of waste water and little treatment enhances the vulnerability and incidence of diseases.
- Around 21 major cities are going to run out of ground water. In a NITI Aayog report it was stated that 40% of India's population will have no access to drinking water by 2030.
- Nearly 31% of urban Indian households do not have piped water; 67.3% are not connected to a piped sewerage discharge system.
- Average water supply per person in urban India is 69.25 litres/day, whereas the required amount is 135 litres.
- Additionally, air quality in AMRUT cities and in other large urban settlements continue to worsen.
 - A National Clean Air Programme was launched by the central government in 2019, as AMRUT 2.0 focused only on water and sewerage.

Challenges -

- The AMRUT scheme was fundamentally flawed, adopting a project-oriented rather than holistic approach.
- It lacked city participation and was driven by bureaucrats, parastatals, and private companies, with minimal involvement from elected city governments.
- Governance was dominated by non-elected officials, violating the 74th constitutional amendment.

- The apex committee was headed by the MOHUA secretary, and state committees were led by chief secretaries.
- It excluded people's representatives and favoured a private nexus of consultants and professionals.
- Water management in cities must consider climate, rainfall patterns, and existing infrastructure.
- Sewage treatment plants are inefficiently designed, with faecal matter traveling longer distances than the average worker's commute.
- Urban planning, driven by private players and real estate developers, often leads to the disappearance of water bodies, disrupted storm water flows, and a lack of proper storm water drainage systems.

Way forward -

The scheme needs nature-based solutions and a comprehensive methodology with a people centric approach and empowering local bodies.

PM-JANMAN Scheme

India is home to numerous tribal groups, with 75 identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) across States.

Recognising their backwardness, **the Government of India announced the Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission in 2023-24** to improve the socio-economic conditions of PVTGs.

However, **the PVTGs and frontline officials face numerous challenges** in using a mobile application to register for the Housing scheme.

Key Objectives and Implementation of Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN) -

- **The PM JANMAN initiative seeks to provide essential services** such as safe housing, clean drinking water, and sanitation to PVTGs through 11 critical interventions.
- **One of the flagship programs under this initiative is the Housing scheme**, designed as a Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme **aimed at reaching 4.90 lakh PVTG households by 2026.**
- **Each household is entitled to ₹2.39 lakh in three instalments** to ensure secure and habitable housing.
- **This measure is intended to protect these vulnerable populations** from environmental challenges and provide them with a sense of security.

Challenges in the Implementation of PM-JANMAN Housing Scheme -

- **Data Mismatch and Ineligibility Issues —**
 - One of the primary challenges in the registration process is the **widespread deletion of job cards**, which are mandatory for registering for the PM JANMAN Housing scheme.
 - Over the past two years, **more than eight crore MGNREGA workers' job cards** have been deleted, some of whom belong to PVTGs.
 - **This massive data purge has resulted in many eligible households being unable to register** for the housing scheme, thereby excluding them from receiving the benefits.
 - Moreover, **cases of incorrect registrations further complicate the situation and Instances have been reported** where someone else has registered using the job cards of actual beneficiaries.

- **This not only deprives the rightful owners** of their entitlements but also creates additional administrative burdens in rectifying these errors.
- Discrepancies in Data Collection Systems —
 - **The registration app, 'Awaas+',** provided to block/panchayat-level officials, **plays a crucial role in the data collection process.**
 - However, **there are significant discrepancies** between the data in this app and other official records.
 - For example, in **Vanjari Panchayat, Alluri Sitharama Raju district in Andhra Pradesh,** the **app lists only 22 villages,** whereas the **MGNREGA Management Information System (MIS) lists 31 villages.**
 - **Such discrepancies create confusion among beneficiaries** and officials, leading to potential exclusion of eligible households.
- App Usability and Confusion —
 - **The 'Awaas+' app's** user interface and functionality also **present notable challenges.**
 - **The app gathers beneficiaries' data** in three primary areas: geographical location, household profiles, and bank account details.
 - However, the app's design and operational issues make the process cumbersome.
 - **The app includes pre-populated lists of villages,** which often do not match official records.
 - This mismatch can lead to incorrect registrations or inability to register certain households.
- Geo-tagging and Network Issues —
 - **The app's geo-tagging feature,** intended to accurately record the **location of households and planned construction sites, has also encountered problems.**
 - Network issues in remote and inaccessible areas make geo-tagging difficult, resulting in incomplete or incorrect data entries.
 - **This not only hampers the registration process but also affects the planning and delivery of services.**
- Financial Inclusion Barriers —
 - The app's functionality related to bank selection is another significant hurdle where **beneficiaries must choose from three categories of banks** (Cooperative Bank, Commercial Bank, or Regional Rural Bank), each presenting a long list of options.
 - For example, **selecting 'Commercial Bank' can display over 300 options,** and choosing 'State Bank of India' can show over 500 branch options.
 - **This complexity is overwhelming for both beneficiaries and officials,** particularly those with limited digital literacy.
 - Furthermore, **despite the Government of India's emphasis on the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)** to improve financial inclusion in remote areas, **the app does not include IPPB in its list of banks.**
 - This **omission restricts access to convenient banking services** for many PVTG households, who might rely on IPPB for financial transactions.
- Inclusivity and Accessibility Issues —
 - **The app also fails to capture explicit information** about PVTGs, defaulting to a general 'ST' (Scheduled Tribe) category.
 - This oversight results in non-PVTG registrations, further complicating the process.
 - **Local officials sometimes require PVTG members to obtain certification** from village leaders, which can be problematic in areas where PVTGs and non-PVTGs coexist.
 - Additionally, **network issues have made the geo-tagging feature cumbersome,** adding to the difficulties faced by both officials and beneficiaries.

Recommendations for Policymakers to Improve the PM JANMAN Scheme -

- User-Friendly Application Interface —
 - The **'Awaas+' mobile app should be redesigned** to simplify navigation, with intuitive menus and clear instructions.
 - **This will help both beneficiaries and frontline** officials who may not be tech-savvy.
 - **Also, there should be detailed instructions on how to enter names** and other details, especially in cases where Aadhaar information is not available or differs from official records.
- Accurate and Comprehensive Data Lists —

- The **government must ensure the app's pre-populated lists of villages** and other data fields are regularly updated and synchronised with other government databases, such as the MGNREGA Management Information System (MIS), to eliminate discrepancies.
- Also, **there should be inclusion of explicit fields for PVTGs** within the app to prevent non-PVTG households from being incorrectly registered.
- Include IPPB in Banking Options —
 - **The government should consider adding the IPPB** to the list of available banks in the registration app.
 - **Given IPPB's extensive reach in rural and remote areas**, this inclusion would significantly enhance financial access for PVTG households.
 - **Moreover, the government should strive to reduce the complexity of the bank selection dropdown** by implementing a search function or categorising banks more effectively to facilitate easier selection by users.
- Improve Technical Infrastructure —
 - **The government should invest in improving network connectivity** in remote areas to support the use of geo-tagging and other app functionalities.
 - **Partnering with telecom companies to extend coverage to underserved regions and developing offline capabilities** for the registration app to allow data collection without immediate internet access, with subsequent synchronisation when connectivity is available can be useful.
 - Other than that, **the government should provide comprehensive training programs** for frontline officials and community volunteers on using the app and managing the registration process efficiently.
 - **Also, it will be beneficial to establish dedicated technical helplines or support centres** to assist with real-time troubleshooting and guidance for users facing difficulties.

Conclusion -

- Despite numerous initiatives aimed at addressing their vulnerabilities, **PVTGs continue to face significant challenges in accessing government benefits** and the PM JANMAN initiative offers an opportunity to improve the lives of these marginalised communities.
 - However, **overcoming the current obstacles in the registration process and ensuring inclusivity and accessibility are crucial.**
 - The PM JANMAN scheme represents a chance to change this narrative, but **only if the implementation challenges are adequately addressed and the promises made are fulfilled.**
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International Relations

Strengthening India's FTA negotiating capabilities

The Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry has started looking at ways to strengthen India's negotiating capabilities for free trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK, EU, etc. Experts pointed out that the country's negotiating strategy cannot rely on transferable generalist civil servants and could need a separate service to handle trade negotiations.

Major Pending FTAs of India -

- India is currently negotiating FTAs with the **United Kingdom (UK), the European Union (EU), Oman, Australia**, and a review of the 2009 trade pact with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**).
- Following the general elections, the government has made indications that it intends to reopen talks with the Eurasian Economic Union (**EEU**), which is led by Russia.
- After years of discussions, India has already made the decision to **pull out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** agreement, which was led by China.
- Trade deals with more competitive countries such as the UK and EU **have been stuck for years**, despite India's ability to manage early harvest accords with these countries.

Why India's major FTAs remain pending for years?

- **Trade agreements are becoming more and more complex** and India's trade partners conduct detailed studies in areas ranging from India's informal labour market to entire product value chains.
- **However, India lacks such deep research** and despite having one of the best trade negotiators, there is an information and process gap.
- One of the prime reasons for delays in negotiating major FTAs is that India is a high tariff country and it **spends a lot of time in tariff negotiations**.

What are the issues?

- **Loss of institutional memory** — On account of the routine transfer of key civil servants steering extended trade negotiations.
- **Lack of efficient file-keeping** — The Ministry of Commerce and Industry does not have an efficient database and that is one of the reasons for loss of institutional memory.
- **Lack of permanent institutional structure** — India's bilateral and multilateral talks fall short while facing subject matter experts, especially from developed nations.
 - These experts from developed nations tend to deploy considerably larger teams of negotiators and researchers with decades of experience.
- **Serious shortage of accountability** — Indian negotiators fail to map research deliverables, which makes it challenging to pinpoint blame when there is a shortcoming.

What needs to be done?

- **Clarity of thoughts** —
 - **India needs clarity on the motivation** behind the FTA, i.e., what it wants to achieve and how FTA can help to get there.
 - **If India can streamline and reduce unilateral tariffs**, and focus on areas like having time bound Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) to address non-tariff barriers, the benefits of trade agreements will be more.
- **Briefing Cabinet, Parliament** — Experts suggest detailed reporting and periodically informing the parliament and cabinet about the negotiations.
- **Setting accountability** —
 - Before going for any negotiating meeting, each official had to get the brief for the meeting approved.
 - On return, they **must file a detailed report on what happened in the meeting**.
- **Need for permanent institution** —
 - **When new officers join the negotiating table** with little knowledge on what was negotiated before, **India loses out on institutional memory-wise**.
 - Other countries have dedicated negotiation institutional structures, where the same officers enjoy a tenure of 30-40 years.
 - Therefore, India must create an institutional structure in various centres namely,
 - Centre for WTO studies,
 - Centre for Trade and Investment Laws and
 - Centre for Regional Trade.
- **Preparing standard operating procedures (SOP)** — The Ministry of Commerce and Industry is working on preparing a set of fresh SOPs on streamlining trade talks.
- **Understanding fast changing contours of trade talks** — That go beyond traditional areas such as tariffs concessions to labour and environment.

- **Extensive record keeping** — To build institutional memory, the ministry should revive practise of extensive record keeping on negotiations.
- **Audit** — The extent of the issue might be discovered by a third-party audit of the ongoing negotiations.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - India's approach to negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) has faced several challenges, including the complexity of modern trade deals, loss of institutional memory, and inadequate research and accountability mechanisms. Critically analyse the structural and procedural issues that hinder India's FTA negotiations. What strategic reforms can be implemented to enhance India's negotiating capabilities and ensure successful trade agreements in the future?

Chabahar's Opportunities and Challenges

The recent renewal of the contract between India and Iran, allowing New Delhi to invest in and operate the Shahid-Beheshti terminal at Chabahar Port for another decade, **highlights the strategic and economic importance of this project.**

This agreement comes at a tumultuous time in West Asia, marked by ongoing conflict in Gaza, heightened Israel-Iran tensions, and a destabilizing helicopter crash that killed Iran's President and Foreign Minister.

Despite these challenges, the Chabahar project remains a pivotal element anchoring the economic relations between India and Iran.

Strategic Significance of Chabahar for India -

- Economic Connectivity and Trade Facilitation —
 - The Chabahar Port **serves as a pivotal point in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**, a multi-modal network aiming to connect India with Central Asia, Russia, and beyond.
 - By offering a direct sea-land route that bypasses Pakistan, **Chabahar significantly reduces the transportation time and costs for Indian goods** destined for these regions.
 - **This enhanced connectivity facilitates increased trade, economic integration, and access to new markets**, boosting India's export potential and economic growth.
- Geopolitical Leverage and Strategic Autonomy —
 - For India, **Chabahar is a strategic tool to assert its influence in the region and reduce its dependency on Pakistani routes**, which are fraught with geopolitical tensions.
 - By investing in Chabahar, **India secures a strategic foothold in Iran, a country with significant influence in West Asia and Central Asia.**
 - This **port allows India to project power and maintain a strategic presence in a region where China**, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Pakistan are also vying for influence.
 - This **strategic autonomy is crucial for India's foreign policy**, allowing it to navigate complex regional dynamics independently.
- Regional Security and Stability —
 - **Chabahar Port also plays a critical role in India's approach to regional security and stability**, particularly concerning Afghanistan.
 - **With the Taliban's endorsement and financial commitment to Chabahar, the port emerges as a key transit point** for humanitarian aid and economic goods to Afghanistan, thereby stabilising a region plagued by conflict.
 - **By fostering economic development** and providing alternatives to Pakistani ports, **Chabahar helps mitigate the risk of economic isolation for Afghanistan**, contributing to regional stability.
- Counterbalancing Chinese Influence —

- **Chabahar is strategically positioned to counterbalance Chinese influence in the region**, particularly with respect to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar Port.
- **While China's Gwadar is geographically close to Chabahar, the Indian port offers an alternative route** that is crucial for diversifying regional supply chains.
- By strengthening Chabahar, **India not only mitigates the strategic risks posed by Chinese dominance in regional infrastructure but also provides a viable alternative for international trade routes** that seek to avoid Chinese-controlled pathways.
- Diplomatic Engagement and Multilateralism —
 - **Chabahar Port exemplifies India's commitment to diplomatic engagement and multilateralism.**
 - **Through this project, India demonstrates its ability to collaborate with diverse international partners, including Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian countries, developing a cooperative regional environment.**
 - **The port also aligns with broader international efforts to enhance connectivity and economic integration across Eurasia**, positioning India as a central player in regional development initiatives.
- Energy Security —
 - **Given Iran's vast energy resources, Chabahar Port also holds potential for enhancing India's energy security.**
 - **By providing a strategic entry point for Iranian oil and gas, the port can facilitate energy imports, diversify India's energy sources**, and reduce dependency on any single country or route.
 - **This diversification is crucial for ensuring a stable and resilient energy supply**, critical for India's growing economy.

Challenges surrounding Chabahar Port and India-Iran Relations -

- Sanctions and International Pressure —
 - **The imposition of international sanctions on Iran, particularly by the United States, has significantly impacted India-Iran economic relations.**
 - **Projects like the Farzad-B gas field and the Irano Hind Shipping Company suffered directly due to sanctions.**
 - **Even the Chabahar Port project has had to navigate the complexities of U.S. sanctions**, requiring India to obtain periodic exemptions to continue its development.
- Geopolitical Alignments —
 - **India's geopolitical alignments, especially its strategic partnership with the United States, sometimes clash with its engagements with Iran.**
 - **For instance, during the Obama administration, India reduced its oil imports from Iran to align with U.S. policies on Tehran's nuclear program.**
 - **This decision affected bilateral trade relations and reduced Iran's position as one of India's top oil suppliers.**
- Competing Regional Interests —
 - **Both countries have regional interests that sometimes diverge.**
 - **While Iran seeks to maintain its influence in West Asia and strengthen its ties with countries like China and Russia, India's regional focus includes countering China's Belt and Road Initiative and securing its interests in Afghanistan.**
 - **These differing priorities can lead to friction and limit the scope of bilateral cooperation.**

Recommendations for Future Engagement -

- Diversifying Economic Cooperation —
 - **While the Chabahar Port is a critical element of India-Iran relations, it should not be the sole focus.**
 - **Both countries should identify and invest in other sectors** such as energy, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and technology.
 - **Reviving stalled projects like the Farzad-B gas field or initiating new joint ventures can help diversify economic ties.**
 - **Establishing a more robust trade framework can enhance bilateral commerce.**

- This could involve reducing tariffs, simplifying customs procedures, and creating incentives for businesses to invest in each other's countries.
- Enhancing Diplomatic Engagement —
 - **Regular high-level visits and dialogues can help address misunderstandings**, align strategic interests, and foster a deeper mutual understanding.
 - **Such engagements should be institutionalised**, ensuring continuous and structured communication.
 - **Both countries should leverage their participation in multilateral forums** like the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and regional organisations to coordinate their positions on global issues.
 - **Joint initiatives in these forums can enhance their diplomatic leverage** and foster closer ties.
- Balancing Geopolitical Alignments —
 - **India must adeptly balance its strategic partnership with the United States while engaging with Iran.**
 - This requires clear communication with the U.S. regarding the strategic importance of Chabahar and other bilateral projects with Iran.
 - **Diplomatic efforts should focus on securing exemptions from sanctions** that hinder critical projects.
 - Strengthening ties with other regional players can also bolster India-Iran relations.
 - **This includes deepening cooperation with Afghanistan, Central Asian countries, and Russia.**
 - **Collaborative projects that include these countries can create a network of interdependencies**, enhancing regional stability and economic integration.

Conclusion -

- **The Chabahar port project encapsulates the multifaceted nature of India-Iran relations**, blending economic interests with strategic imperatives.
- As both nations navigate their geopolitical landscapes, **Chabahar stands out as a testament to their enduring yet evolving partnership.**
- **Balancing this legacy project with broader economic cooperation and nuanced diplomacy will be crucial** in sustaining and enhancing India-Iran ties in the future.

Source - [The Hindu](#)

QUESTION - Discuss the multifaceted significance of the Chabahar Port project for India, considering its economic, strategic, and geopolitical dimensions. How does this project influence India's foreign policy, especially in relation to West Asia, Central Asia, and its balancing act with major global powers? In light of recent challenges, what strategies should India adopt to sustain and enhance its partnership with Iran while navigating complex international dynamics?

GENERAL STUDIES - III

Economy

Patent process in India

In 2018, the Indian Patent Office had rejected the request of the Proctor and Gamble (P&G) for its patent application. The Indian Patent Office is an agency under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade which administers the Indian law of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks. The P&G challenged the Patent Office's ruling in the Delhi High Court. The High Court reprimanded the Patent Office saying that the manner of dealing with the application filed by the American multinational company was "extremely arbitrary and whimsical".

What is a Patent?

- A patent is the **granting of a property right by a sovereign authority to an inventor**.
- This grant provides the inventor exclusive rights to the patented process, design, or invention for a designated period in exchange for a comprehensive disclosure of the invention.
- Government agencies typically handle and approve applications for patents.
- The Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks (CGPDTM), also known as **India Patent Office**, grants patent so that any invention can be freely commercialised or utilised without any fear of infringement.
 - The head patent office is located in Kolkata, West Bengal.
- The Indian Patent Office grants patents which are governed by the **Indian Patents Act, 1970**.

Indian Patents Act, 1970 -

- The Patents Act 1970, along with the Patents Rules, 1972, came into force in April 1972, replacing the **Indian Patents and Designs Act, 1911**.
- The Patents Act was largely based on the recommendations of the **Ayyangar Committee Report** headed by Justice N. Rajagopala Ayyangar.
- Later, India became signatory to many international arrangements with an objective of strengthening its patent law and coming in league with the modern world.
- One of the significant steps towards achieving this objective was becoming the member of the **Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) system**.
- Significantly, India also became signatory of the **Paris Convention** and the **Patent Cooperation Treaty** in 1998 and thereafter signed the **Budapest Treaty** in 2001.
 - Being a signatory to TRIPS, India was under a contractual obligation to amend its Patents Act to comply with its provisions.
- Subsequent amendments were made to the Indian Patents Act, 1970 by the introduction of the **Patents (Amendment) Act, 1999**, the **Patents (Amendment) Act, 2002**, the **Patent (Amendment) Act, 2005**, and **Patents (Amendment) Rules, 2006** and the **Patents (Amendment) Rules, 2021**.

Draft Patents (Amendment) Rules, 2023 -

- In August 2023, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry proposed and published Draft Patent (Amendment) Rules, 2023 (the “draft rules”) invited objections and suggestions from all stakeholders within a timeline of 30 days from the date of the publication of the draft Rules.
- **Key Highlights of the Draft Rules —**
 - **Pre-Grant Opposition —**
 - Controller can decide a maintainability of the representation and dismiss a pre-grant opposition if found to be frivolous.
 - At present, Controller cannot dismiss the representation without offering a chance of hearing to Opponent.
 - Time period for applicant to reply to notice has been reduced from 3 months to 2 months.
 - Also, Controller has to issue a decision ordinarily within 3 months from the completion of the proceedings.
 - Currently, there is no such in which the Controller has to issue a decision.
 - **Reduced timeline for filing Request for Examination —**
 - As per the draft Rules, the timeline for filing the RFE is now proposed to be **reduced to 31 months**, which currently is 48 months from the priority date or filing date, whichever is earlier.
 - **Statement and undertaking regarding foreign applications —**
 - Applicant shall keep the Controller informed of the details in respect of applications filed in any country **within two months** from the date of issuance of first statement of objections.
 - Earlier the duration was six months.
 - **Annual Working Report —**
 - The draft Rules propose that the Annual Working Report is to be filed in respect of every period of **three financial years** (currently this is to be filed for every financial year).

India's Patent Delays & Withdrawals -

- In 2018, the anti-corruption branch of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) booked SP Subramaniyan, Deputy Controller and branch head in the office of Controller-General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks for demanding a bribe of Rs 10 lakh for releasing a patent.
 - The patent applicant in this case had first applied for the patent in 2010 and was allegedly made to wait for five years to get a patent.
- In March 2023, the Delhi High Court pulled up the patent office for passing “mechanical, cut-paste order” while rejecting Blackberry Ltd.’s invention application.
 - The Court said that the patent office “must bear in mind that the question of grant and rejection of a patent is a serious matter”.

Impact of Delays and Withdrawals -

- Arbitrary refusals and procedural inconsistencies have marred the track record of India’s patent office.
- It has pushed the share of patent applications withdrawn in India to one of the highest in the world.
- This is at a time when countries such as the **US, Japan, South Korea and China are using their patent processing systems to foster scientific research and technological innovation.**
- Government officials contend that they have begun addressing these issues and started conducting open house sessions to address grievances, which have improved the process of granting patents over the last 12 months.

Rise in Patent Filing in Recent Times -

- India reported a sharp 44.6% growth in international patent filing in 2023 compared to 2022, as per the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).
- **WIPO ranked India third** in terms of trademark registrations in force in 2022 at nearly **2.9 million**, after **China (42.7 million)** and the **US (3.1 million)**.
- The Patent Office has granted about 1 lakh patents for the year 2023-24. Everyday about 250 patents are issued and the patent office receives patent applications every six minutes online.

Source - [The Indian Express](#)

QUESTION - The functioning of the Indian Patent Office has significant implications for innovation and economic growth. Examine the issues related to patent delays and arbitrary rejections in India, and discuss the measures needed to improve the patent system in the context of the Draft Patents (Amendment) Rules, 2023.

Cause and Effect of Inflation in Pulses in India

Pulses posted an annual retail inflation of 16.84% in April 2024, making it more painful for the consumers, given the fact that pulses are hardly sold through the public distribution system (PDS).

Food inflation pressures during an El Niño and election year have undone the nation's progress toward near pulse self-sufficiency.

Pulses Production in India -

- Pulses are the major sources of **protein** in the diet and these are grown in **all three seasons** (Kharif: Arhar, Urad, Moong; Rabi: Gram, Lentil, Pea; Summer: Greengram, Blackgram and Cowpea) in India.
- India, with over 35 Mha pulses cultivation area, is the largest pulses producing country in the world.
- **It ranks first in area and production** with 37% and 29% respectively. During 2021-22 our productivity at 932 kg/ha, has also increased significantly over the last 5 years.
- The Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare is implementing the **National Food Security Mission (NFSM)-Pulses**.
 - It aims to increase production through area expansion and productivity enhancement in all the districts of 28 States and 2 UTs (J&K and Ladakh) of the country.

- In order to increase the productivity potential of pulses crops in the country, the ICAR is undertaking basic and strategic research on these crops.
- Further to ensure remunerative prices to farmers, the Government implements an umbrella scheme PM Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (**PM-AASHA**).
 - It comprises Price Support Scheme (PSS), Price Deficiency Payment Scheme (PDPS) and Private Procurement Stockist Scheme (PPSS).
 - **It ensures Minimum Support Price (MSP)** to farmers for their produce of notified oilseeds, pulses and copra.

The Current Prices of Pulses as per the Department of Consumer Affairs -

- **Chana (chickpea)** — It is the **cheapest** available pulse at an average all-India modal (most-quoted) price of was Rs 85 per kg on May 23, as against Rs 70 a year ago.
- **Arhar/tur (pigeon pea)** — The corresponding price rise of this has been even more from Rs 120 (a year ago) to Rs 160 per kg now.
- **Urad (black gram) and Moong (green gram)** — The prices have increased from Rs 110 to Rs 120 per kg for both.
- **Masoor (red lentil)** — It is the only pulse whose modal retail price has actually eased from Rs 95 to Rs 90 per kg.

Cause and Effect of the Inflation in Pulses -

- **Cause - Decline in domestic pulses production** — From 27.30 million tonnes (mt) in 2021-22 and 26.06 mt in 2022-23 to 23.44 mt in 2023-24, as a result of irregular/deficient monsoon caused by **El Niño** and winter rain.
 - Farmers (especially in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) planted less area due to irregular/deficient rainfall.
 - The two pulses (chana and arhar) to register the highest inflation have both seen sharp output falls.
- **Effect - Surge in imports** —
 - Renewed food inflation pressures have forced the Central government to **phase out tariffs and quantitative restrictions (QR)** on imports of most pulses.
 - As a result, **India's pulses imports - valued at \$3.75 billion in 2023-24** (April-March), were the highest since the record \$3.90 billion and \$4.24 billion of 2015-16 and 2016-17.
 - In quantity terms, import of major pulses totaled 4.54 mt in 2023-24, up from 2.37 mt and 2.52 mt in the preceding two fiscals.
- **Effect - Reversal of the relative self-sufficiency achieved by the country** —
 - Domestic pulses production rose from 16.32 mt to 27.30 mt between 2015-16 and 2021-22, as a result of **government incentivising farmers to grow pulses**.
 - **These policy measures** of incentivising farmers included **MSP-based procurement and levying of duties** on imports.
 - Domestic production further rose with the **development of short-duration** (50-75 day) **chana and moong varieties**, which can be grown with little to no irrigation by utilising the remaining soil moisture from prior crops.
 - The allowed planting of as many as four crops a year: kharif (post-monsoon), rabi (winter), spring and summer.

Sign of Relief and Challenges Ahead -

- **La Niña** — According to global climate projections, El Niño is expected to shift into a neutral phase next month, and there's even a chance of La Niña, which is linked to abundant rainfall in the subcontinent.
- **Unstable domestic supply** —
 - From this year's crop, the government agencies have procured very little chana, as opposed to 2.13 mt in 2023 and 2.11 mt in 2022.
 - Till March 31, 2025, the government has already approved duty-free imports of urad, masoor, desi chana, and arhar/tur.
- **Import of cheaper substitutes** —
 - **A less expensive alternative to chana** are yellow/ white peas, which can be imported for between Rs 40 and Rs 41 per kg.
 - Similarly, **masoor dal is replacing arhar or tur** in many eateries to make sambar.

- Imports of these pulses from Russia, Australia and Canada, are anticipated to increase more than urad and arhar/tur from East Africa and Myanmar.

Source - Financial Express

QUESTION - Analyse the recent surge in retail inflation of pulses in India, discussing the underlying causes and its broader implications on food security and the economy. Evaluate the effectiveness of government measures such as the National Food Security Mission (NFSM)-Pulses and PM Annadata Aay Sanrakshan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) in mitigating these challenges. Propose strategies to enhance the resilience and sustainability of India's pulse production.