

MANTHAN

APRIL 2025 : WEEK-1

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1. Cabinet approves inclusion of Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project of Bihar under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana-Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (PMKSY-AIBP)

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, has approved inclusion of Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project of Bihar under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (PMKSY-AIBP) of Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- The CCEA has also approved central support of Rs.3,652.56 crore to Bihar for completion of the project by March, 2029 with an estimated cost of Rs.6,282.32 crore.
- Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link Project envisages diversion of part of surplus water of Kosi river for extending irrigation to Mahananda basin lying in Bihar by way of remodelling of existing Eastern Kosi Main Canal (EKMC) and extending the EKMC beyond its tail end at RD 41.30 km up to river Mechi at RD 117.50 km so that rivers Kosi and Mechi which flow through Bihar could be linked together within Bihar.
- The Link Project will provide 2,10,516 hectares additional annual irrigation in Kharif season in Araria, Purnea, Kishanganj and Katihar districts of Bihar.
- The project has potential to divert/utilize about 2,050 million cubic meter of surplus water of Kosi through the proposed link canal.
- Further, after remodelling of existing EKMC, shortfall supply to 1.57 lakh hectare existing command of existing Eastern Kosi Main Canal shall be restored.

Background

- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY) was launched during the year 2015-16, with an aim to enhance physical access of water on farm and expand cultivable area under assured irrigation, improved on-farm water use efficiency, introduce sustainable water conservation practices, etc.
- Government of India has approved implementation of PMKSY during 2021-26 with an overall outlay of Rs.93,068.56 crore (central assistance of Rs.37,454 crore). Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) component of PMKSY is for creation of irrigation potential through major and medium irrigation projects.
- So far 63 projects have been completed under PMKSY-AIBP and additional irrigation potential of 26.11 lakh hectare has been created since April, 2016. Nine projects have been included after AIBP component of PMKSY 2.0 since 2012-22. Kosi Mechi Intra-State Link project is tenth project included in the list.

Interlinking River Projects

- India has several interlinking river projects aimed at redistributing water from surplus to deficit regions to address water scarcity, irrigation, and hydroelectric needs.
- These projects are divided into two broad categories: Himalayan Component and Peninsular Component.

Himalayan Component

- Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga (MSTG) Link – Transfers water from Bhutan's rivers to the Ganga.
- Kosi-Ghaghra Link – Diverts water from the Kosi River to the Ghaghra River.
- Kosi-Mechi Link – Aims to provide irrigation in Bihar and Nepal.
- Gandak-Ganga Link – Transfers Gandak's water to the Ganga for better water management.
- Ghaghra-Yamuna Link – Diverts surplus water from Ghaghra to the Yamuna.
- Sardar-Yamuna Link – Transfers water from the Sharda River to the Yamuna.
- Yamuna-Rajasthan Link – Supplies water to Rajasthan from the Yamuna.
- Ganga-Damodar-Subarnarekha Link – Aims to benefit Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Odisha.

Peninsular Component

- Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Pennar-Cauvery Link – One of the largest projects to interconnect major South Indian rivers.
- Ken-Betwa Link – Aimed at supplying water from the Ken River (Madhya Pradesh) to the Betwa River (Uttar Pradesh).
- Par-Tapi-Narmada Link – A project in Gujarat and Maharashtra to transfer water from west-flowing rivers to the Narmada basin.
- Damanganga-Pinjal Link – Supplies water from the Damanganga River to Mumbai.
- Netravati-Hemavati Link – Planned to provide additional irrigation in Karnataka.
- Godavari-Krishna Link (Polavaram Project) – A key project to transfer Godavari's surplus water to Krishna.
- Krishna-Pennar Link – Transfers Krishna's water to the Pennar basin.
- Pennar-Cauvery Link – Extends water availability to Tamil Nadu.
- Cauvery-Vaigai-Gundar Link – Provides irrigation to drought-prone regions in Tamil Nadu.

Significance

- **Water distribution:** Addresses water scarcity in drought-prone areas.
- **Irrigation:** Improves agricultural productivity.
- **Flood control:** Helps regulate excess water in flood-prone regions.
- **Hydroelectricity:** Potential to generate renewable energy.

Major interlinking river projects in world

1. China – South-to-North Water Diversion Project

- Largest water transfer project in the world, started in 2002.
- Transfers water from the Yangtze River (south) to the dry northern regions, including Beijing and Tianjin.
- Consists of three routes:
 - Eastern Route (Grand Canal)
 - Central Route (Danjiangkou Reservoir)
 - Western Route (connecting upper Yangtze to Yellow River)
- Expected to transfer 45 billion cubic meters per year when fully operational.

2. Canada – North American Water and Power Alliance (NAWAPA) (Proposed)

- A massive proposal to divert water from Alaska and Canada to the southwestern United States and northern Mexico.
- Aims to transfer water from the Yukon, Mackenzie, and Columbia rivers.
- Has faced environmental and political opposition, making implementation unlikely.

3. United States – California State Water Project (SWP)

- One of the largest state-funded water projects in the U.S.
- Transfers water from the Sacramento River in Northern California to dry areas in the south, including Los Angeles.
- Key infrastructure includes California Aqueduct and Oroville Dam.

4. Russia – Siberian River Diversion Project (Abandoned)

- Proposed during the Soviet era to divert water from the Ob and Irtysh Rivers to dry regions in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan).
- Abandoned in the 1980s due to economic, environmental, and geopolitical concerns.

5. Spain – Tagus-Segura Water Transfer

- Transfers water from the Tagus River in central Spain to the dry Segura River Basin in the south.
- A crucial source of water for agriculture in Murcia, Valencia, and Andalusia.

6. Egypt – Toshka Project (New Valley Project)

- Aims to divert Nile water to the western desert through the Sheikh Zayed Canal.
- Intended to create new agricultural lands but has faced implementation challenges.

7. Kazakhstan – Irtysh-Karaganda Canal

- Diverts water from the Irtysh River to arid central Kazakhstan.
- Supplies drinking water and supports mining industries.

8. Libya – Great Man-Made River Project

- Transfers underground fossil water from the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer to coastal cities.
- The world's largest underground water transfer project, crucial for Libya's water supply.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

1. Consider the following statements regarding the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY):
 1. It was launched during the year 2015-16 to enhance physical access of water on farm and expand cultivable area under assured irrigation.
 2. It is an umbrella scheme, consisting of two major components being implemented by Ministry of Jal Shakti, namely, Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP), and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP).

Which of the statements given above is are correct?

- A. 1 Only
- B. 2 Only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

2. Which of the following is/are sub-components of Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP)?

1. Command Area Development & Water Management (CAD&WM)
2. Surface Minor Irrigation (SMI)
3. Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies
4. Ground Water (GW) Development

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

3. Match the following river link projects from the Peninsular Component with their primary beneficiary regions:

River Link Project	Beneficiary Region/State
1. Ken-Betwa	: Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh
2. Par-Tapi-Narmada	: Gujarat and Maharashtra
3. Damanganga-Pinjal	: Mumbai Metropolitan Region
4. Pennar-Cauvery	: Tamil Nadu

How many of the above pairs correctly matched?

- A. Only one pair
- B. Only two pairs
- C. Only three pairs
- D. All of the above

4. Match the following river link projects from the Himalayan Component with their respective objectives:

River Link Project	Objective/Benefit
1. Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga	: Transfers water from Bhutan's rivers to Ganga
2. Kosi-Mechi	: Provides irrigation to Bihar and Nepal
3. Kosi-Ghaghra	: Diverts surplus water from Kosi to Ghaghra
4. Yamuna-Rajasthan	: Supplies water from Yamuna to Rajasthan

How many of the above pairs correctly matched?

- A. Only one pair
- B. Only two pairs
- C. Only three pairs
- D. All of the above

5. Arrange the following tributaries of Ganga in the west to east direction.

1. Ghagra
2. Gomti

3. Kosi
4. Gandak

Which one of the following is the correct order of the above rivers from east to west?

- A. 3-4-1-2
- B. 2-1-4-3
- C. 2-3-1-4
- D. 1-2-4-3

2. Cooperative Taxi Service will allow registration of two wheelers, taxis, rickshaws and four wheelers

- Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation Shri Amit Shah said that in near future, a cooperative taxi service will be started, in which registration of two wheelers, taxis, rickshaws and four wheelers will be possible and the profit will go directly to the driver.
- Based on principles of “Sahakar se Samridhi”, a taxi-service cooperative will be formed by willing taxi drivers and the management will rest with the members of such society.
- The objective of this initiative is to ensure democratic management by active participation of all members and to ensure that maximum profit earned by such cooperative taxi society is distributed equitably among the taxi drivers who will be members of that society.
- Such an initiative will lead to overall prosperity and improving the income, working conditions, and standard of living for such taxi drivers/members of the cooperative society while providing better services to the consumers.
- Sahkar or Cooperation is a concept where a group of people voluntarily come together and form a cooperative society or Sahkari society based on mutual benefit and common economic interest.
- Sahkari models of economic cooperation have been found to be more fruitful for its members, being more equitable and resulting in inclusive growth for all, like in the case of Amul.
- Government has promoted and assisted Startups and other enterprises in the past for equitable & inclusive growth of the nation. India is home to over 8 lakh cooperative societies, serving nearly 30 crore members across 30 different sectors.
- These cooperatives play a crucial role in promoting self-reliance, financial inclusion, and rural development, particularly in agriculture, dairy, fisheries, banking, housing, consumer services, labour, sugar etc.
- These cooperatives compete in the market alongside other players including private enterprises.
- The cooperatives are registered under the cooperative laws of the respective state/UT and societies which work in multiple states/UTs and are registered under the Multi State Cooperative Societies Act.

Cooperative societies

- Cooperative societies play a crucial role in India's socio-economic development, particularly in fostering financial inclusion, rural development, and self-sufficiency.

1. Economic Empowerment

- Cooperatives provide financial and economic support to farmers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs by pooling resources and distributing profits equitably.
- They help in eliminating middlemen, ensuring better prices for producers and consumers.

2. Agricultural Development

- Agricultural cooperatives, such as dairy and fertilizer cooperatives (e.g., AMUL, IFFCO), help in improving productivity, storage, and marketing of farm produce.
- They provide credit, seeds, fertilizers, and technical assistance to farmers at affordable rates.

3. Financial Inclusion

- Cooperative banks and credit societies provide easy access to credit for small businesses, farmers, and self-employed individuals, reducing dependency on informal moneylenders.
- They play a key role in the rural banking system, particularly through Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS).

4. Employment Generation

- Cooperatives create job opportunities at the local level, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, thus reducing migration to cities.
- They promote self-reliance and entrepreneurship by encouraging small-scale businesses.

5. Women Empowerment

- Many self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperative societies focus on empowering women by providing them with financial independence through micro-financing and skill development programs.

6. Promotion of Social Equity

- Cooperatives operate on democratic principles, ensuring that all members have a say in decision-making, thus reducing economic disparities.
- They focus on welfare rather than profit maximization, benefiting marginalized and weaker sections of society.

7. Role in Rural Development

- Cooperative societies contribute to rural infrastructure development, including irrigation, power generation, and storage facilities.
- They help in promoting community development through housing cooperatives and fair-price shops.

8. Support to Handicrafts and Cottage Industries

- Cooperative societies provide market linkages, raw materials, and financial support to artisans and handloom weavers, preserving traditional skills and boosting rural economies.

9. Government Support and Policies

- The Government of India supports cooperatives through initiatives like the Ministry of Cooperation (established in 2021) and schemes like NABARD's Rural Cooperative Development Fund.
- The Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002 provides a legal framework for their functioning.

Major Cooperative Business Groups in India

- India has several major cooperative business groups spanning various sectors like agriculture, dairy, banking, textiles, and more.

Agriculture and Dairy Cooperatives

Amul (Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation - GCMMF)

- India's largest dairy cooperative, known for revolutionizing the dairy industry through the White Revolution.

Nandini (Karnataka Milk Federation - KMF)

- A major dairy cooperative in Karnataka, competing with Amul in some regions.

Mother Dairy

- A subsidiary of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), providing dairy products across India.

Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO)

- One of the world's largest cooperative societies, engaged in the production and distribution of fertilizers.

Krishak Bharati Cooperative Limited (KRIBHCO)

- A leading fertilizer-producing cooperative in India.

Banking and Financial Cooperatives

State Cooperative Banks (SCBs) and District Cooperative Banks (DCBs)

- These banks play a crucial role in providing credit to farmers and rural businesses.

National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC)

- A government body supporting cooperative societies financially.

Cooperative Housing Finance Societies

- Includes entities like Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank and others providing financial services for housing.

Textile and Handloom Cooperatives

- Co-optex (Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Society)
- A leading handloom cooperative promoting traditional textiles.
- APCO (Andhra Pradesh State Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Society)
- Supports handloom weavers in Andhra Pradesh.

Sugar Cooperatives

Maharashtra State Cooperative Sugar Factories Federation

- Represents several sugar mills in Maharashtra, which is a hub for cooperative sugar production.

Consumer Cooperatives

National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF)

- Supports consumer cooperative stores across the country.

Kendriya Bhandar

- A government-run consumer cooperative supplying essential commodities.

Other Important Cooperative Groups

Indian Coffee House

- A chain of worker cooperative-run coffee houses spread across India.

Lijjat Papad (Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad)

- A successful women's cooperative producing papads and other food products.

Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS)

- A Kerala-based cooperative known for its contributions to infrastructure and construction.

Ministry of Cooperation

- The Ministry of Cooperation is a Union ministry under the Government of India, established on July 6, 2021, to strengthen the cooperative movement in the country.
- Its primary objective is to realize the vision of “Sahkar se Samriddhi” (prosperity through cooperation) by providing a separate administrative, legal, and policy framework for cooperatives.
- The ministry focuses on streamlining processes to enhance the “Ease of Doing Business” for cooperatives and supports the development of Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS).
- It aims to deepen cooperatives as a true people-based movement reaching up to the grassroots level.
- As of April 2025, the ministry is led by Union Minister Shri Amit Shah, with Shri Krishan Pal and Shri Murlidhar Mohol serving as Ministers of State.
- The ministry oversees various services and initiatives, including the National Cooperative Database, registration of new Multi-State Cooperative Societies, cooperative training programs, and providing loans or assistance under various schemes.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

6. Which of the following correctly explains the constitutional and governance framework for Cooperative Societies in India after the 97th Constitutional Amendment?
 - A. Both multi-state and state cooperatives are governed exclusively by the Union Government under Entry 44 of the Union List.
 - B. The right to form cooperative societies was made a Fundamental Right, but no directive principle was added in this regard.
 - C. Multi-State Cooperatives are governed by a Union law, while State Cooperatives are governed by State laws, and their governance framework is mentioned in Part IXB of the Constitution.
 - D. Cooperative Societies are listed exclusively under the State List, and thus the 97th Amendment has no bearing on their governance structure.
7. Consider the following statements regarding the current status and distribution of Cooperatives in India:
 1. India accounts for nearly one-fourth of the world's cooperative societies.
 2. The top three cooperative sectors in India are Dairy, Housing, and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS).
 3. The highest concentration of cooperatives is in Gujarat, followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka.
 4. The percentage of Indians involved in cooperatives is nearly double the global average.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 4 only
- C. 2, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

3. Exercise INIOCHOS-25

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) will be participating in Exercise INIOCHOS-25, a prestigious multi-national air exercise hosted by the Hellenic Air Force.
- The exercise will take place at Andravida Air Base, Greece, from 31 March 2025 to 11 April 2025.
- The IAF contingent will include Su-30 MKI fighters along with combat enabler IL-78 & C-17 aircraft.
- INIOCHOS is a biennial multinational air exercise hosted by the Hellenic Air Force.
- It serves as a platform for air forces to hone their skills, exchange tactical knowledge, and strengthen military ties. The exercise will integrate multiple air and surface assets from fifteen countries under realistic combat scenarios, designed to simulate modern-day air warfare challenges
- The IAF looks forward to participating in Exercise INIOCHOS 25, a platform to enhance international cooperation, synergy and interoperability among participating Air Forces.
- This exercise will provide an opportunity to train in planning and executing Combined Air operations, refine tactics in complex air warfare scenarios, and gain insights into operational best practices.
- With all operations conducted from Andravida, IAF's participation will not only strengthen its operational capabilities but also contribute to mutual learning and enhanced coordination among participating countries.
- IAF's participation in INIOCHOS-25 reflects its commitment to global defence cooperation and operational excellence.
- The exercise will further reinforce India's strategic partnerships and bolster its capabilities in joint operations with friendly nations

Exercise Tiger Triumph

- The Fourth edition of Exercise Tiger Triumph, the bilateral Tri-Service India-US Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise, is scheduled on the Eastern Seaboard from 01 to 13 Apr 25.
- The exercise is aimed at developing interoperability for conducting HADR operations and for the formulation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to establish a Combined Coordination Center (CCC) that would enable rapid and smooth coordination between Indian and US Joint Task Forces (JTF) during exercises and crisis / contingencies.
- The Indian side would be represented by Indian Naval Ships Jalashwa, Gharial, Mumbai and Shakti with integral helicopters and landing crafts embarked, Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft P8I, Army Troops from 91 Inf Brigade and 12 Mech Infantry Battalion, Air Force C-130 Aircraft and MI-17 Helicopters, along with the Rapid Action Medical Team (RAMT). The US side would be represented by US Navy Ships Comstock and Ralph Johnson with troops of the US Marine Division embarked.
- The Harbour Phase is scheduled at Visakhapatnam from 01 to 07 Apr 25 during which an Opening Ceremony with a joint Flag Parade and Media Interaction will be held onboard INS Jalashwa on 01 Apr

25. Participants from both sides would also engage in Training Visits, Subject Matter Expert Exchanges, Sports Events and Social interactions.

- On completion of the Harbour Phase, the ships with troops embarked, would sail for a Sea Phase and undertake Maritime, Amphibious and HADR operations off Kakinada.
- During the exercise, a joint command and control center, would be established by Indian Army and US Marines at the Kakinada Naval Enclave.
- The exercise would culminate with a closing ceremony on board US Navy Ship Comstock on 13 Apr 25 at Visakhapatnam.

Exercise Dharma Guardian 2025 with Japan

- From February 25 to March 9, 2025, the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force conducted the sixth edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian at Mount Fuji, Japan.
- This joint military exercise focused on improving interoperability through joint urban warfare and counter-terrorism drills under a United Nations mandate.
- The Indian contingent comprised 120 personnel, primarily from a battalion of the Madras Regiment, while the Japanese side was represented by the 34th Infantry Regiment.
- The exercise aimed to strengthen the strategic partnership between India and Japan, reflecting their shared commitment to regional security and stability.

Exercise Prachand Prahaar in Arunachal Pradesh

- Between March 25 and 27, 2025, the Indian Army's Eastern Command conducted Exercise Prachand Prahaar in the high-altitude terrain of Arunachal Pradesh.
- This integrated multi-domain warfare exercise involved the Indian Army, Indian Air Force, and other elements of the armed forces.
- The drill showcased seamless integration of advanced surveillance, strike capabilities, and multi-domain operational planning.
- Cutting-edge platforms such as long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft, armed helicopters, UAVs, loitering munitions, and space-based assets were employed to achieve total situational awareness and rapid target engagement.
- The exercise underscored the Indian Armed Forces' emphasis on jointness, technological superiority, and readiness to tackle multi-domain threats.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

8. Consider the following pairs of Military Exercises and their countrreis:

Exercise	Country
1. INIOCHOS-25	: Multi-national air exercise hosted by Greece
2. Tiger Triumph 2025	: India-US bilateral Tri-Service
3. Dharma Guardian 2025	: India-Japan joint army exercise
4. Prachand Prahaar 2025	: Indian Army's integrated multi-domain warfare exercise

Which of the above pairs are correctly matched?

- A. 1, 2 and 3 only
B. 1, 3 and 4 only

C. 2, 3 and 4 only

D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

9. Which of the following statements about 'Exercise Mitra Shakti-2024' are correct?

1. 1. This was a joint military exercise between India and Bangladesh.

2. 2. It commenced at Army Training School, Maduru Oya.

3. 3. It enhances joint military capability of both sides to undertake counter insurgency operations in a Sub Conventional scenario under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate.

4. 4. Indian Air Force was a part of this exercise.

Select the answer using the code given below:

A. 1, 2 and 3

B. 1, 2 and 4

C. 1, 3 and 4

D. 2, 3 and 4

4. "NITI NCAER States Economic Forum" portal

- NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), has developed a portal which is a comprehensive repository of data on social, economic and fiscal parameters, research reports, papers, and expert commentary on State Finances for a period of about 30 years (i.e 1990-91 to 2022-23).
- Hon'ble Finance Minister Ms. Nirmala Sitharaman will launch the "NITI NCAER States Economic Forum" portal on 1st April, 2025 in New Delhi.

The portal has four main components, namely:

- **State Reports** - summarising the macro and fiscal landscape of 28 Indian States, structured around indicators on demography, economic structure, socio-economic and fiscal indicators.
- **Data Repository** – offering direct access to the complete database categorised across five verticals viz. Demography; Economic Structure; Fiscal; Health and Education.
- **State Fiscal and Economic Dashboard** – showcasing graphical representations of key economic variables over time and provide quick access to raw data through a data appendix or additional information through summary tables.
- **Research and Commentary** - draws on extensive research on State finances and critical aspects of fiscal policy and financial management at the State and national levels.
- The portal will facilitate an understanding of macro, fiscal, demographic, and socio-economic trends; easily accessible data and user-friendly format and will also address the ongoing need for consolidated sectoral data in one place.
- It will further help in benchmarking the data of each state against that of other States and the national figures.

- It will also provide a forum to policymakers, researchers, and others interested in alluding to the data for informed debates and discussions.
- The portal will serve as a comprehensive research hub, offering a wealth of data and analytical tools for in-depth research studies.
- It will act as a central repository of information, providing access to an extensive database of social, economic, and fiscal indicators spanning the past 30 years.
- By leveraging historical trends and real-time analytics, users will be able to track progress, identify emerging patterns, and formulate evidence-based policies for development.

NITI Aayog

- NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India) is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, tasked with driving economic and social development through strategic planning and policy innovation.
- It was established on January 1, 2015, replacing the Planning Commission.

Key Functions of NITI Aayog:

- Policy Formulation & Strategy Development – Provides long-term economic and social policy frameworks.
- Monitoring & Evaluation – Tracks progress of government schemes and suggests improvements.
- Cooperative Federalism – Encourages collaboration between central and state governments.
- Innovation & Entrepreneurship – Promotes start-ups and new-age industries (e.g., Atal Innovation Mission).
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Aligns national policies with global sustainability targets.

Major Initiatives by NITI Aayog:

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) – Supports innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Aspirational Districts Programme – Improves socio-economic conditions in backward districts.
- National Data & Analytics Platform (NDAP) – Provides open access to government data.
- AI & Emerging Technologies – Works on AI, blockchain, and 5G policies.
- Health and Nutrition Initiatives – Works on POSHAN Abhiyaan, Ayushman Bharat, etc.

NITI Aayog Composition

- NITI Aayog, the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, is structured to promote cooperative federalism and facilitate economic development.
 - **Chairperson:** The Prime Minister of India.
 - **Vice Chairperson:** Appointed by the Prime Minister.
 - **Full-Time Members:** Currently, these are Dr. V.K. Saraswat, Prof. Ramesh Chand, Dr. V.K. Paul, and Dr. Arvind Virmani.
 - **Ex-Officio Members:** Up to four members from the Union Council of Ministers, nominated by the Prime Minister. As per the latest available information, these include:
 - Shri Raj Nath Singh, Minister of Defence
 - Shri Amit Shah, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Cooperation
 - Shri Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; and Minister of Rural Development

- Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance and Minister of Corporate Affairs
- **Governing Council:** Comprises the Chief Ministers of all States and Union Territories with legislatures, and Lieutenant Governors of other Union Territories.
- **Regional Councils:** Formed to address specific regional issues, these councils consist of Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors from the respective regions and are convened by the Prime Minister or his nominee.
- **Special Invitees:** Experts, specialists, and practitioners with relevant domain knowledge, nominated by the Prime Minister.
- **Chief Executive Officer (CEO):** Appointed by the Prime Minister, the CEO holds the rank of Secretary to the Government of India and oversees the administration of NITI Aayog.

Role of NITI Aayog in India's Development

1. Policy Formulation & Implementation

- Acts as a policy think tank, providing recommendations on economic and social development.
- Develops long-term strategic blueprints for various sectors, such as health, education, infrastructure, and agriculture.

2. Cooperative Federalism

- Promotes collaboration between the Central and State Governments to ensure inclusive growth.
- Encourages state-specific policies and rankings like the Ease of Doing Business Index and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index.

3. Economic & Sustainable Growth

- Prepares the Three-Year Action Plan, Seven-Year Strategy, and Fifteen-Year Vision Document for India's economy.
- Implements schemes like Aspirational Districts Programme to boost development in backward regions.

4. Promoting Innovation & Digital Transformation

- Manages Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) to foster entrepreneurship and startups.
- Supports emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, and Digital Payments.

5. Sectoral Reforms & Infrastructure Development

- Works on reforms in key sectors like healthcare, education, energy, agriculture, and manufacturing.
- Supports infrastructure projects under PM Gati Shakti, Smart Cities, and Bharatmala road network.

6. Social and Environmental Sustainability

- Drives climate action policies and renewable energy expansion.
- Leads initiatives such as India's Net-Zero Emissions goal for 2070 and National Hydrogen Mission.

7. Data-Driven Governance & Monitoring

- Develops real-time monitoring dashboards for government programs.
- Tracks progress of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at national and state levels.

Key Initiatives by NITI Aayog

- Aspirational Districts Programme – Development in 112 backward districts.
- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) – Boosting entrepreneurship & startups.

- National AI Strategy – Advancing artificial intelligence adoption.
- Health & Nutrition Reports – Mapping healthcare progress.
- Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) – Promoting female-led businesses.
- Electric Mobility Push – Supporting EV adoption under FAME India.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

- 10.** Which of the following best differentiates NITI Aayog from the erstwhile Planning Commission with respect to its approach to governance?
- NITI Aayog follows a centralized planning model with allocation of funds to states.
 - NITI Aayog focuses on long-term planning but does not emphasize cooperative federalism.
 - NITI Aayog acts as a policy think tank emphasizing strategic planning, cooperative federalism, and innovation, without financial allocation powers.
 - D. Both institutions are identical in their approach but differ only in composition.
- 11.** Consider the following hypothetical scenario in the context of NITI Aayog's composition:
- A newly created Union Territory is granted a legislative assembly. However, its elected Chief Minister objects to being represented in the Governing Council by the region's Lieutenant Governor instead of themselves. Based on NITI Aayog's structural composition, the Chief Minister's objection would be:
- Invalid, because only Lieutenant Governors represent all Union Territories in the Governing Council.
 - Valid, because Union Territories with legislatures are represented by their Chief Ministers in the Governing Council.
 - Invalid, because representation in the Governing Council is decided solely by the Prime Minister.
 - Valid, only if the Union Territory in question is also a Special Category State.
- 12.** Who among the following are serving as the full time members and Ex-Officio Members in NITI Aayog?
1. Dr. V.K. Paul
 2. Dr. Arvind Virmani
 3. Shivraj Singh Chauhan
 4. Nirmala Sitharaman
 5. Amit Shah
 6. Raj Nath Singh
- Select the correct answer using the codes given below:
- 1, 3, 4 and 5 only
 - 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 only
 - 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 only
 - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6

5. Green Credit Programme

- The Green Credit Programme (GCP) rolled out by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in 2023 was flagged by the Ministry of Law and Justice before its rollout, over legality of the business model built into it.
- The ambitious government scheme seeks to invite voluntary participation in sectors ranging from plantations to water conservation in exchange of tradable credits.
- At present, the pilot on tree plantation and eco-restoration of degraded lands is underway.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, officially unveiled the GCP on December 1, 2023, during the annual United Nations climate conference in Dubai.
- It was dubbed as a mechanism to incentivise “pro-planet” actions in response to climate change, and one which would promote the Centre’s Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment).
- The Union Environment Ministry notified the Green Credit Rules, which spelt out the programme’s objectives and implementation, in October 2023.
- At its core, the GCP seeks voluntary participation (read investments) of individuals, companies, industries, and other entities across seven different activities — such as tree plantation, waste management, and water conservation — that will lead to improvements in the environment. This participation will be incentivised by generating “green credits”, which can then be traded on a domestic market platform to potential buyers looking to meet sustainability targets, or existing legal obligations.
- For instance, could be exchanged for meeting compliance of compensatory afforestation, in cases where forest land has been used for development projects, as per a February 2024 notification spelling out the methodology for calculating green credits.
- The credits can also be used by listed companies as part of their environmental, social and governance disclosures under SEBI’s Business Responsibility and Sustainability framework, indicating efforts taken by these companies on environmental sustainability.

Calculations of Green Credit

- To begin with, the Centre has rolled out the scheme through the pilot on tree plantation, which was later expanded to eco-restoration activities such as plantation of shrubs, herbs and grasses, soil moisture conservation, rain water harvesting, and other similar measures as per site suitability.
- Under GCP pilot on tree plantation and eco-restoration, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Dehradun, will act as the nodal administrator.
- Plantations will be carried out in degraded land parcels including open forest, scrubland, wasteland and catchment areas, and they must be five hectares in size or above.
- Forest departments of states and Union Territories would have to identify these land parcels, which are under their control.
- Any party interested in participating would have to apply and register with ICFRE.
- After processing the applications and charging a fee, the land parcels identified by forest departments would be allotted to the parties.
- It would be the forest department’s responsibility to carry out and maintain the tree plantations, and the plantation would have to be completed within a period of two years after the money is paid.

- One grown tree raised on the identified land parcels would be accounted as one green credit.
- This would be subject to a minimum density of 1,100 trees per hectare based on local silvi-climatic conditions and after certification of completion provided by the forest department.
- As on March 4, 2364 land parcels spread over 54,669.46 hectares were registered by forest departments across 17 states, as per GCP progress status data shared by the union environment ministry in Parliament.
- So far, a total of 384 entities have registered for participation in the GCP, including 41 public-sector undertakings and central public sector undertakings.

Criticisms

- GCP has been criticised for incentivising forest diversion for industries, by generating tradable credits which could also be used to meet legal obligations such as compensatory afforestation.
- It has also been criticised for promoting plantations on degraded lands, open forests and scrub lands, which experts have argued offer unique and important ecological services.
- Earlier this month, the Supreme Court also heard an intervention application on the GCP, in an on-going case challenging the amendments to the Forest Conservation Act.
- The plea questioned the survival issues of plantations raised under the scheme, and the SC Bench has sought the Environment Ministry's views on the matter.
- Under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023, India's forest conservation law, non-forest land equivalent to forest land used for industries and development projects is mandated for compensatory afforestation.
- Only if non-forest land is unavailable, twice the size of degraded or unclassed forest land is used for compensatory afforestation.
- This is to ensure land-for-land compensation.
- However, GCP mandates use of degraded forest land for plantations.
- It also has complementary provisions which allow exchange of credits, generated by paying money, for meeting the compensatory afforestation compliance.
- This translates into compensating for older forests with existing forest land, rather than adding non-forest land into the forest cover, as laid down in the Van Adhiniyam.
- "The Green Credit generated under the said Rules, may be exchanged for meeting the compliance of the compensatory afforestation in case of diversion of forest land for non-forestry purposes under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 (69 of 1980), as applicable," the February 2024 methodology on tree plantation based credit states.
- The Green Credit Rules, also states in its objectives that the programme shall encourage industries, companies and other entities to meet their existing obligations or other obligations under any law for the time being in force.
- In April 2024, over 100 environmental organisations and 400 citizens demanded the government to rollback the scheme.
- The representation to the government stated that arbitrary tree plantation cannot be used as credit to compensate for old-growth forests.

Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment)

- Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment) is an initiative launched by India to promote sustainable living and environmentally responsible behaviors at the individual and community levels.
- It was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the COP26 summit in Glasgow (2021) and formally launched in October 2022 in partnership with the United Nations.

- The initiative aims to encourage pro-environmental habits and reduce ecological footprints through mindful consumption and sustainable practices.

Objectives of Mission LiFE

- Encouraging Sustainable Lifestyles – Promoting eco-friendly habits such as waste reduction, energy conservation, and responsible consumption.
- Shifting from ‘Use and Dispose’ to ‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’ – Advocating a circular economy approach to minimize environmental impact.
- Community and Global Participation – Encouraging citizens, businesses, and governments to work together for sustainable development.
- Climate-Resilient Actions – Addressing global climate challenges by promoting green technologies and carbon-neutral practices.

Thematic Focus Areas of LiFE

Mission LiFE promotes sustainability across seven key areas:

- Save Energy – Promoting energy-efficient appliances and renewable energy.
- Save Water – Encouraging responsible water usage and conservation.
- Say No to Single-Use Plastic – Reducing plastic waste through eco-friendly alternatives.
- Adopt Sustainable Food Systems – Reducing food waste and promoting plant-based diets.
- Reduce Waste – Encouraging recycling and waste segregation.
- Adopt Healthy Lifestyles – Promoting walking, cycling, and using public transport.
- Live an Eco-Friendly Lifestyle – Choosing sustainable fashion, products, and housing solutions.

Implementation Strategy:

- **Public Participation:** Engaging individuals in simple actions like carpooling, using LED bulbs, and composting.
- **Policy Interventions:** Encouraging government initiatives such as renewable energy adoption and sustainable urban planning.
- **Corporate Responsibility:** Encouraging businesses to adopt sustainable practices, reduce carbon footprints, and implement ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) policies.
- **Educational and Awareness Campaigns:** Schools, universities, and NGOs spreading awareness on eco-friendly lifestyles.

Global Significance and Support:

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) supports Mission LiFE as a model for global climate action.
- Mission LiFE aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
- India has positioned Mission LiFE as a mass movement for climate action, inspiring global participation beyond governmental policies.

Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 2023

- The Forest (Conservation and Development) Act, 2023, officially known as the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, introduces significant changes to India’s forest conservation framework.
- Enacted on August 4, 2023, the Act aims to address contemporary challenges related to forest conservation and management.

Exemptions for Specific Land Categories:

- The Act exempts certain forest lands from its purview, particularly:
- Land recorded as forest before October 25, 1980, but not notified as such.
- Land converted from forest use to non-forest use before December 12, 1996.

Expansion of Permitted Activities:

- The range of activities permissible on forest land has been broadened to include:
- Establishment of zoos, safaris, and eco-tourism facilities.
- Strategic linear projects of national importance within 100 km of international borders, exempted from prior forest clearance.

Leasing of Forest Land:

- The Act extends the requirement of prior central government approval for assigning forest land to any entity, including government-controlled organizations, under specified terms and conditions.

Implications:

Environmental Concerns:

- The exemptions and expanded activities have raised apprehensions about potential deforestation and biodiversity loss, especially in ecologically sensitive regions like Northeast India.

Legal and Administrative Challenges:

- The Act's provisions may conflict with the Supreme Court's 1996 judgment in the T.N. Godavarman case, which advocated for a broad interpretation of forest lands to prevent deforestation.

Impact on Indigenous Communities:

- Changes in forest land governance could affect the rights and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities who depend on these forests.
- The Forest (Conservation and Development) Act, 2023, represents a pivotal shift in India's approach to forest conservation, balancing developmental objectives with environmental sustainability.
- While it seeks to facilitate economic growth and infrastructure development, it is crucial to ensure that these changes do not compromise ecological integrity or the rights of forest-dependent communities.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

13. Which of the following features of the Green Credit Programme (GCP) most directly enables it to function as a market-driven environmental initiative rather than a purely regulatory framework?
 - A. Mandatory participation of industries and companies in eco-restoration projects.
 - B. Allocation of land parcels free of cost by forest departments to private participants.
 - C. Generation of tradable "green credits" based on voluntary environmental actions.
 - D. The nodal role of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) in approving plantation projects.
14. Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment) launched by India primarily distinguishes itself from traditional climate change strategies by:
 - A. Emphasizing high-end technological innovation over behavioral changes.
 - B. Promoting individual and community-driven lifestyle changes to reduce environmental impact.

- C. Replacing international agreements with domestic sustainability regulations.
- D. Focusing exclusively on renewable energy expansion as its core strategy.

6. GI tag for Meghalaya's Ryndia strengthens state's handloom industry

- Meghalaya's rich textile heritage has received a significant boost with the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag granted to Ryndia, the state's handwoven, handspun, naturally dyed, and organically produced fabric, along with Meghalaya Handloom Products.
- The announcement was made by the Geographical Indications (GI) Authority, under the Government of India, and has been officially registered on its website.
- The achievement is the result of sustained efforts by the Department of Textiles, Government of Meghalaya, which spearheaded the process with the support of NABARD and technical assistance from Dr. Rajnikanth.
- The application was jointly submitted by the Textiles Department and the Meghalaya Ryndia Producers Association, with the process spanning over four years.
- The recognition of Ryndia and Khasi Handloom Products aligns with the broader vision of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and Textiles Minister Paul Lyngdoh to elevate Meghalaya's unique cultural and traditional assets.
- This milestone not only enhances the identity of Brand Meghalaya but also strengthens the state's position in the handloom and textile industry, paving the way for greater national and global recognition.

Kumbakonam betel leaves and Thovalai flower garlands get GI tags

- The Geographical Indication Registry awarded the GI tag to the traditional Kumbakonam betel leaves and Thovalai Manikka Maalai.
- According to Intellectual Properties Right (IPR) attorney P Sanjay Gandhi, the Kumbakonam vetrilai get its characteristics, which place it apart from other betel leaves, from the Cauvery water and the fertile soils on its banks.
- The betel leaf has been widely cultivated across Kumbakonam and adjacent villages of Ayyampettai, Swamimalai and Rajagiri in Thanjavur district.
- "The heart-shaped Kumbakonam betel leaves are aromatic and aids in digestion," Gandhi said. Similarly, the Manikka maalai made in Thovalai in Kanniyakumari district stands alone among the other flower garlands as the red and white oleander flowers are folded along with nochi leaves like beads.
- They appear like a carpet studded with gemstones. The design is sketched on paper first and then the flowers are counted and arranged precisely before knotting with the thread begins.
- The Tamil Nadu Agriculture and Rural Development Research Centre had applied for the GI tag for the Kumbakonam betel leaves, while the Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation put up the Manikka Maalai for the tag, on January 13, 2022.
- In November 2024, both products were enlisted in the registry and as per regulation, the GI tag was given to both Kumbakonam betel leaves and Thovalai Manikka maalai after four months of the enlistment, Gandhi said. "Tamil Nadu, so far, possesses as many as 62 products with GI tag, and 11 of them are from the Thanjavur district,".

More Geographical Indications

- Six more products unique to Tamil Nadu were accorded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the GI Registry, taking the total number of GI products in the state to 69.
- Tamil Nadu has the second highest number of GI products, next only to Uttar Pradesh, which has 79 products in its kitty.
- The latest GI products are: Panruti Palappazham (Panruti Jackfruit), Panruti Cashew, Puliyanakudi Acid Lime, Virudhunagar Samba Vathal (dried red chillies), Chettikulam Small Onion (shallots) and Ramanadu Chithiraikar Rice.

Panruti jackfruits

- Panruti, a mid-size town in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu, is the largest producer and exporter of jackfruit India.
- And the Panruti jackfruits are known for an aroma that is distinctive and the pulp has a unique melt-in-the-mouth quality.
- They are large in size, with some fruits reaching up to 50 kg, though smaller sizes are also common.
- The oblong-shaped fruit has a green, spiny skin, which softens as the fruit ripens.
- The flesh of the ripened Panruti jackfruit is exceptionally sweet with a subtle acidic tang.
- Its flavour is less intense and more balanced compared to other varieties, making it appealing to man.

Panruti Cashew

- The Panruti Cashew is a highly prized variety known for its sweet, slightly nutty flavour, combined with a crisp yet tender texture.
- These distinctive qualities set Panruti cashews apart from other varieties, making them highly sought after in both domestic and international markets.
- The region's tropical climate and well-drained sandy loam or red soils create an ideal environment for cashew cultivation.
- These favourable conditions, along with the traditional processing methods, help maintain the nuts' freshness and enhance their quality.
- The cashew tree in Panruti typically yields medium-sized, well-formed nuts, which contribute to the overall high standard of the crop.
- The unique cashew formation, where the curved nut is nestled under the cashew apple, also adds to the appeal of this variety.
- The Panruti cashew nut is distinctively curved and typically medium-sized. The nut has a characteristic C-shape that makes it recognizable and sets it apart from other varieties.
- The nuts are medium to large in size, making them ideal for high-quality production.
- The region's traditional processing methods, which focus on maintaining freshness and minimizing handling damage, contribute to the high quality of Panruti cashews.
- The shells and kernels are processed with care to preserve the delicate flavour and texture.
- Panruti cashews are grown in the tropical climate of Tamil Nadu, where the combination of sandy loam or red soils and consistent rainfall creates an ideal environment for cultivation.
- These conditions result in superior cashew nuts that are rich in flavour and texture.
- The trees thrive in well-drained soils with moderate rainfall, which helps produce uniform and healthy crops year after year.

Puliyankudi Acid Lime

- Puliyankudi Acid Lime is known for its intense, tangy, and aromatic flavour, characterised by its high acidity.
- The pulp is typically pale green to yellowish-green and is juicy, making it highly prized for its juice content.
- The Puliyangudi Lime is unique for its high juice yield, intense acidity, rich vitamin C content, thin peel, and essential oils. Puliyangudi Lime, especially the Kadayam Lime, is known for its exceptionally high ascorbic acid content (around 34.3 mg/100g).
- This contributes to its nutritional richness, making it a great source of vitamin C, which boosts immunity and offers various health benefits.
- Each lime fruit typically contains 55% juice, which is notably high compared to many other lime varieties.
- This high juice yield makes Puliyangudi Lime ideal for beverages, juices, and culinary uses, particularly in lime-based drinks like lime soda and lemon rice besides pickles and sauces.
- Puliyangudi Lime has a thin peel (around 3 mm) that is rich in essential oils. These oils are often used in perfumery, giving the lime a fragrant aroma, which is a unique aspect of the variety.
- The wax-like substance on the peel gives it a shiny appearance and offers protection during packaging and transportation, reducing damage and overpressure on the fruit.
- Each tree bears around 950 fruits on average, with individual fruits weighing between 42g and 50g.
- This high yield ensures a steady and abundant supply of limes, which supports both local consumption and commercial distribution. Puliyangudi is often referred to as the Lemon City of Tamil Nadu due to its prominence in lime cultivation.
- The Tenkasi district ranks second in Tamil Nadu for acid lime cultivation, covering 2,178 hectares and producing approximately 12,196 tonnes annually.

Virudhunagar Samba Vathal (Red Dried Chillies)

- Virudhunagar Samba Vathal (Red Dried Chillies), grown in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar district, is a distinguished variety celebrated for its unique flavour, moderate heat, and vibrant red colour.
- Its wrinkled texture and medium size make it stand out in South Indian cuisine. Known for its aromatic profile, it features a balance of smokiness and spiciness, enhancing the taste and appearance of dishes.
- It is widely used in traditional spice blends, pickles, and seasonings.
- The cultivation of Samba Chilli primarily takes place in Tamil Nadu's Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai, and Thoothukudi districts.
- The long, slender shape of the chillies, measuring 6–6.5 cm with sharp tips and bulged shoulders, is referred to as "Virudhunagar Samba Chilli (Vathal)."
- The traditional farming practices employed help preserve the chili's authentic taste and nutritional benefits, ensuring its continued prominence in South Indian culinary traditions.
- The chili has a long, slender shape with a sharp tip and bulged shoulders.
- This gives it a distinctive appearance that makes it easily recognizable.
- The chili has a bright, shiny red colour when mature, which is a hallmark of the variety. This vibrant colour adds to its appeal, especially in culinary presentations.
- It has a moderate level of heat, with a capsaicin content of 0.24%, contributing to its balanced spiciness, which is neither too mild nor overly hot.

- This moderate heat makes it suitable for a wide range of dishes.
- The skin of the chili is relatively thin, which makes it suitable for processing into dried forms.

Chettikulam Small Onion

- Chettikulam Small Onion is unique for its superior quality, high pungency, long shelf life, and excellent propagation potential.
- The combination of favourable soil conditions, a distinct drying process, and traditional storage methods enhances its value.
- These factors, along with the region's specialised farming practices, contribute to the uniqueness of Chettikulam Small Onion, making it a highly sought-after crop in both local and international markets.
- The soil in Chettikulam is primarily red loamy and black soil, with high clay content. The soil in the surrounding blocks of Alathur, Perambalur, and Veppanthattai is deep and calcareous, with moderate alkalinity.
- These soils are rich in sulphur, which contributes to the high pungency of Chettikulam Small Onion, giving it its distinctive sharp flavour.
- The pinkish Chettikulam onions are uniform in size, typically small, with a diameter ranging from 2 to 3 cm.
- This consistent size is highly desirable in culinary uses where uniformity is important.
- The onions are generally round to oval-shaped and exhibit a compact bulb structure. Chettikulam onions are known for their strong pungency.
- This heightened level of pungency is attributed to the high sulphur content found in the soil of the Chettikulam region, which contributes to their distinctive sharp taste.
- One of the key morphological traits is the presence of 15 to 18 layers of dried outer scales.
- This extra layer of skin provides added protection to the inner bulb, which not only enhances the onion's shelf life but also preserves its quality during storage and transportation.
- The outer scales are thicker and more intact than those of many other onion varieties.
- This contributes to the onion's resilience and longer shelf life, typically ranging between 8 to 9 months.
- Perambalur is a major hub for shallots in Tamil Nadu, attracting the attention of the Union govt, which is planning to establish a Common Food Processing Centre in Chettikulam. Farmers in the region use a traditional storage method called "Pattarai", where onions are stored in a structure that protects them from rain and direct sunlight.
- This storage method allows the onions to be preserved for up to three months, and when stored in ventilated conditions, the shelf life is effectively doubled.

Ramanadu Chithiraikar Rice

- The Ramanadu Chithiraikar Rice, with its bold, round grains, high nutritional value, and good pest resistance, offers substantial benefits to local farmers.
- Its unique characteristics, such as the dark outer skin and red inner grain, along with the distinctive flavour of its kanji (porridge), make it a staple local diet.
- The rice variety's adaptability, yield, and low-maintenance cultivation methods make it a valuable and sustainable crop for the region, ensuring its continued importance in the local agricultural landscape.
- Unlike many modern rice varieties, the Ramanadu Chithiraikar Rice is recognized for its high nutritional value.

- It is often considered healthier due to its natural cultivation practices, with no excessive use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides.
- The rice's high nutritional content makes it suitable for traditional recipes such as dosa and idli, both of which benefit from its unique texture and flavour.
- The rice has bold and round grains, making it visually distinct from other varieties.
- The outer skin of the grain is slightly dark and has a black color, while the inner grain is red.
- This coloration is one of the most notable features, adding to its unique appeal.
- The kanji (rice porridge) made from this rice is particularly popular and is appreciated for its good taste.
- The rice's ability to prevent hunger for several hours makes it a staple in many households, particularly in the form of a hearty, filling porridge.
- This rice variety is generally resistant to pests and diseases, which makes it suitable for sustainable farming practices.
- Most local farmers in the region prefer cultivating this landrace variety due to its resilience and suitability to the local climate and soil conditions.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

15. Match the following GI-tagged products with their respective states:

List I (GI-Tagged Product)	List II (State)
-----------------------------------	------------------------

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. 1. Ryndia Fabric | : Meghalaya |
| 2. 2. Puliyankudi Acid Lime | : Tamil Nadu |
| 3. 3. Kasuti Embroidery | : Karnataka |

How many of the above pairs correctly matched?

- A. Only one pair
- B. Only two pairs
- C. All of the above
- D. None of the above

16. Match the following GI-tagged Agricultural Products with their respective States:

List I (GI Product)	List II (State)
----------------------------	------------------------

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Chinnor Rice | : Madhya Pradesh |
| 2. Tezpur Litchi | : Assam |
| 3. Bhagalpuri Zardalu Mango | : Bihar |
| 4. Kandhamal Haldi (Turmeric) | : Odisha |

How many of the above pairs correctly matched?

- A. Only one pair
- B. Only two pairs
- C. Only three pairs
- D. All of the above

7. Why activists are worried about Section 44(3) of new data protection law

- The government wants to use the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act) to curtail access to public information on the pretext of safeguarding privacy, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said.
- A group of activists, researchers, journalists, and experts met Rahul and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the Parliament complex to discuss a change made to the Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act) by the DPDP Act.
- The delegation said the change will adversely impact the ability of people to access information.
- Congress leader Jairam Ramesh wrote to Minister for Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Ashwini Vaishnaw demanding the repeal of Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, which he said would “destroy” the RTI Act.
- RTI activists Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey, Prashant Bhushan, and Anjali Bhardwaj addressed a press conference last week to oppose the impending change to the RTI Act in line with the DPDP Act.

Section 44(3) of DPDP Act

- The DPDP Act received the President’s assent on August 11, 2023, and will come into force after the Rules under the Act are notified.
- In January, Vaishnaw’s ministry invited feedback and comments on the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025.
- The window for comments on the draft Rules closed on February 18.
- The DPDP Act is intended to “provide for the processing of digital personal data in a manner that recognises both the right of individuals to protect their personal data and the need to process such personal data for lawful purposes and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”.
- Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act mentions a change that will be made in Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. This change, RTI activists say, will greatly reduce the amount of information that government agencies are obligated to disclose under the 2005 Act.

Section 8(1)(j) of RTI Act

- This section states: “...There shall be no obligation to give any citizen...information which relates to personal information the disclosure of which has no relationship to any public activity or interest, or which would cause unwarranted invasion of the privacy of the individual unless the Central Public Information Officer or the State Public Information Officer or the appellate authority...is satisfied that the larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information.”
- Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act shortens this clause in the RTI Act to broaden the scope for denying information. It says: “In section 8 of the Right to Information Act, 2005, in sub-section (1), for clause (j), the following clause shall be substituted, namely: — “(j) information which relates to personal information”.

Why the change matters

- The potential conflict between a citizen’s right to information and the privacy of the subject of that information where the greater public interest is involved, has been discussed widely.

- Over the years, several orders of the Central Information Commission and state Information Commissions on the disclosure or denial of information have been based on the interpretation of Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act.
- During the discussions that preceded the passage of the RTI Bill by Parliament, the Bill was examined by a Group of Ministers headed by Pranab Mukherjee. Section 8(1) of the Bill was about “Exemption from disclosure of information”, and sub-sections 8(1)(a) to 8(1)(j) spelt out those exemptions.
- A general rider to the exemptions in Section 8(1) says that any information “which cannot be denied to the Parliament or a State Legislature shall not be denied to any person”.
- Activists point out that a lot of personal information about public servants such as their assets and liabilities are published because it is seen to serve a public purpose.
- The blanket exemption now granted to all “information which relates to personal information” could be used to deny the public their right to know, they say.

Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act, 2023) is a landmark legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament to regulate the processing of digital personal data in India.
- It aims to protect individuals’ privacy while also enabling the growth of the digital economy.

Features of the DPDP Act, 2023:

1. Applicability

- Applies to the processing of digital personal data:
- Within India, whether collected online or offline and later digitized.
- Outside India, if it involves offering goods/services to individuals in India.

2. Personal Data & Data Fiduciary

- **Personal Data:** Any data about an individual who can be identified from such data.
- **Data Fiduciary:** Any entity (individual/company/state) that determines the purpose and means of processing personal data.

3. Rights of Data Principals (Individuals)

- Right to Access: Know what data is collected and how it is used.
- Right to Correction and Erasure of personal data.
- Right to Grievance Redressal.
- Right to Nominate: Nominate someone to exercise rights in case of death or incapacity.

4. Obligations of Data Fiduciaries

- Must ensure data accuracy, security, and purpose limitation.
- Obtain consent in clear, plain language.
- Notice requirement: Clearly inform the Data Principal about data use.

5. Consent and Legitimate Uses

- Consent is the primary ground for processing data.
- Legitimate uses allow data processing without consent in cases like:
- State functions (like subsidy, benefits).
- Compliance with laws or court orders.
- Employment-related purposes (limited scope).

6. Significant Data Fiduciaries

- Entities processing large volumes or sensitive data may be classified as Significant Data Fiduciaries.
- **Additional obligations:** Appoint Data Protection Officer (DPO), perform Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs).

7. Cross-border Data Transfer

- Permits transfer to countries notified by the Central Government.
- No data localization requirement, unlike previous drafts.

8. Data Protection Board of India

- An independent body to handle complaints, ensure compliance, and impose penalties.
- Has powers similar to a civil court.

9. Penalties

- Monetary penalties for non-compliance:
 - Up to ₹250 crore for data breaches or failure to protect data.
 - Up to ₹200 crore for non-fulfillment of duties by Data Fiduciaries.

10. Exemptions

- The Central Government may exempt certain entities (especially startups) or processing under national security and law enforcement concerns.

Significance

- Establishes a comprehensive privacy framework in line with the Supreme Court's Right to Privacy ruling (2017).
- Balances individual rights with the interests of innovation and governance.
- Replaces previous drafts like the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 and the Data Protection Bill, 2022.

Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act)

- The Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI Act) is a landmark legislation enacted by the Parliament of India to promote transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority.

Objective:

- To empower citizens, promote transparency and accountability in the working of the government, and contain corruption.

Salient Features:

Right to Information:

- Citizens can request information from any public authority (government offices, bodies owned, controlled, or substantially financed by the government).
- The authority must reply within 30 days (or 48 hours in life or liberty-related cases).

Public Authorities:

- Include central, state governments, and bodies financed by the government.
- Must maintain records and publish information proactively (Section 4).

Public Information Officers (PIOs):

- Designated officials in every public authority to process RTI requests.

Appellate Mechanism:

If information is not provided, the applicant can appeal to:

- First Appellate Authority (within the same department)
- Central or State Information Commissions (as second appeal).

Exemptions:

- Certain information is exempt under Section 8, such as:
- National security
- Trade secrets
- Personal information without public interest
- Cabinet papers (with time-bound disclosure)

Penalties:

- PIOs can be penalized ₹250 per day for delays, up to ₹25,000.

Institutions Under RTI:

- Central Information Commission (CIC)
- State Information Commissions (SICs)

These bodies ensure the proper implementation of the RTI Act and handle complaints and appeals.

Amendment (2019):

The RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019:

- Removed fixed tenure and salary for Information Commissioners.
- Gave the central government power to decide their terms and conditions.
- This amendment drew criticism for potentially undermining the independence of Information Commissions.

Significance:

- Empowers citizens to hold the government accountable.
- Acts as a tool to combat corruption.
- Strengthens democracy by increasing participation and awareness.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

17. Under the DPDP Act, 2023, the term Data Fiduciary refers to:
 - A. Any individual whose data is being processed.
 - B. Any entity that determines the purpose and means of processing personal data.
 - C. Only government departments handling sensitive information.
 - D. The adjudicating authority under the Act.
18. The DPDP Act applies to data processed outside India only if:
 - A. The data subject is an Indian citizen residing abroad.
 - B. It involves the offering of goods or services to individuals in India.
 - C. It is stored on Indian servers.
 - D. It is processed by Indian companies abroad.

8. TN Assembly passes resolution seeking retrieval of Katchatheevu island

- The Tamil Nadu Assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging the Centre to retrieve Katchatheevu Island, ceded to Sri Lanka, as a permanent solution to protect the traditional fishing rights of the state's fishermen.
- Moving the resolution, Chief Minister M K Stalin said that it has become a habit for some political parties to spread a false information campaign that it was the state government that ceded Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka.
- As far as Katchatheevu was concerned, then Chief Minister M Karunanidhi strongly opposed ceding it and even the DMK MPs, then, objected.
- A day after the Katchatheevu Agreement was signed on June 28, 1974, Kalaingar (Karunanidhi) convened an all-party meeting and passed a resolution condemning it.
- On the same day, he wrote a letter to then Prime Minister expressing "deep disappointment over the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement," Stalin said.
- Also, he pointed out that former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa passed Assembly resolutions on October 3, 1991, and on May 3, 2013, and O Panneerselvam, too, passed a resolution during his tenure on May 5, 2014, calling for steps to retrieve Katchatheevu.
- After becoming chief minister in 2021, he not only prevailed upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi to get back the island but also wrote letters on numerous occasions to ensure a lasting solution to the fishermen's problems.
- Stalin said on an average two fishermen were being arrested daily by the Sri Lankan navy if one went by the statistics presented by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in the Rajya Sabha that 97 Indian fishermen were in Lankan prison.
- At this, Leader of the House Duraimurugan said Karunanidhi staunchly opposed ceding the islet. Law Minister S Reghupathy said "Kalaingar was neither consulted by the Centre on the issue nor did he give his consent." Congress leader K Selvaperunthagai claimed that former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's contribution was being concealed.
- "Though only 285 acres of Katchatheevu was ceded to Lanka, she got 4,600 sq km of Wedge Bank to India," he said and backed the government resolution.
- Katchatheevu was ceded by India to Sri Lanka by way of agreements in 1974 and 1976.

Katchatheevu Island

- Katchatheevu Island is a small, uninhabited island located in the Palk Strait, between India (Tamil Nadu) and Sri Lanka (Northern Province).
- It has been the subject of political and legal debate, especially concerning fishing rights and territorial sovereignty.

Katchatheevu:

- **Location:** In the Palk Strait, about 33 km from the Indian coast (Rameswaram).
- **Size:** Around 285 acres.

- **Uninhabited:** No permanent human settlement.
- **Religious Site:** Home to St. Anthony's Church, an annual pilgrimage spot for both Indian and Sri Lankan Christians.

India-Sri Lanka Agreement (1974):

- Katchatheevu was ceded by India to Sri Lanka through a bilateral agreement in 1974, known as the Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreement.
- India recognized Katchatheevu as Sri Lankan territory, to help define maritime boundaries clearly.
- However, Indian fishermen were allowed to access the island for rest and pilgrimage, and to dry their nets.

Controversy and Political Issues:

- Many in Tamil Nadu claim the ceding was unconstitutional, as Parliament's approval was not obtained.
- Fishermen from Tamil Nadu complain that the Sri Lankan Navy harasses them near the island.
- Legal Challenges have been filed in Indian courts, including the Supreme Court, to retrieve the island or restore fishing rights.
- The issue often surfaces during elections and in India-Sri Lanka diplomatic relations.

Fishing Rights Dispute:

- Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen also use nearby waters.
- Conflict arises due to bottom trawling by Indian fishermen, which is banned in Sri Lanka.
- Sri Lanka has enforced stricter maritime laws, leading to the arrest of Indian fishermen.

Issues Between India and Sri Lanka

- India and Sri Lanka share close historical, cultural, and economic ties, but their relationship has seen occasional tensions over several key issues.

1. Fishermen Disputes

- **Issue:** Indian fishermen (mostly from Tamil Nadu) are frequently arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly poaching in Sri Lankan waters, especially around the Palk Strait.
- **Sri Lanka's View:** They claim Indian fishermen use bottom trawling, which harms marine biodiversity.
- **India's View:** The issue affects the livelihood of Indian fishermen, and there is demand for a humanitarian and diplomatic solution.

2. Tamil Issue

- **Background:** India, especially Tamil Nadu, has deep emotional and cultural ties with the Tamil population in Sri Lanka.
- **Concerns:** There have been calls for justice for alleged war crimes during the Sri Lankan Civil War (ended in 2009), and for political autonomy and rights for Tamils.
- **India's Role:** India has supported the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution, which promises devolution of powers to provinces — a sensitive political issue in Sri Lanka.

3. China's Influence in Sri Lanka

- **Concern:** China's growing presence in Sri Lanka — including the lease of Hambantota Port and infrastructure investments — has raised strategic concerns in India.
- **India's View:** It sees Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka as part of the broader "String of Pearls" strategy to encircle India.
- **Recent Moves:** India has increased its developmental aid and investments to counterbalance China's footprint.

4. Katchatheevu Island Dispute

- **Background:** The island was ceded by India to Sri Lanka in 1974.
- **Current Issue:** Many in Tamil Nadu claim the agreement was unconstitutional and that it affected traditional fishing rights. This occasionally flares up in Indian domestic politics.

5. Economic Ties and Assistance

- **Recent Development:** During Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis, India provided nearly \$4 billion in assistance, including fuel, food, and medicine.
- **Concerns:** There are expectations for Sri Lanka to reciprocate through cooperation and by not allowing anti-India activities or Chinese military presence.

6. Refugee Issue

- **Issue:** Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka have been living in camps in Tamil Nadu for decades.
- **India's Concern:** Ensuring their safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation remains unresolved.

7. Trade and Investment Barriers

- **FTA (Free Trade Agreement):** While the India-Sri Lanka FTA exists, there are concerns over non-tariff barriers, limited market access, and implementation delays.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

19. The Katchatheevu Island was ceded to Sri Lanka through:
 - A. The Sirimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964.
 - B. The Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreements of 1974 and 1976.
 - C. The India-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987.
 - D. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982.
20. Which of the following correctly describes Katchatheevu Island?
 - A. Located in the Gulf of Mannar, 50 km from Rameswaram, inhabited with fishing villages.
 - B. Located in the Palk Strait, about 33 km from Rameswaram, uninhabited with a church.
 - C. Located near Kanyakumari, known for oil reserves.
 - D. A coral island located within the territorial waters of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

9. 'Mockery of tenth schedule': Supreme Court slams Telangana CM Revanth Reddy for remark on defections

- The Supreme Court slammed Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's comments in the state Assembly that there will be no bypolls even if MLAs were to switch sides, and called it "mockery of the Tenth Schedule."

- “If this is said in the floor of the House, your Honourable Chief Minister is making mockery of the Tenth Schedule,” Justice B R Gavai told Senior Advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who appeared for the Assembly Speaker.
- The Tenth Schedule pertains to the anti-defection law.
- Justice Gavai was presiding over a two-judge bench which was hearing pleas by Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) MLAs against the Telangana Speaker’s delay in deciding disqualification petitions of party legislators who had defected to the ruling Congress.
- Even if they (BRS) desires to have one for their seats, there will be none.
- Even if their members switch sides, there will not be a bye-election,” Sundaram said, quoting the chief minister.
- The reference, apparently, was to a hearing on the plea seeking transfer of trial in a 2015 cash-for-vote case against Reddy from Telangana to Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in August last year.
- The court was then apprised that Reddy, while commenting on the grant of bail by the apex court to BRS leader K Kavitha in the Delhi excise policy scam case, had suggested a “deal between BRS and BJP”.
- The Supreme Court criticised this, following which Rohatgi tendered an apology.
- The Supreme Court also questioned the Assembly Speaker for the delay in issuing notices on the disqualification petitions for about 10 months after they were filed.
- Rohatgi said that the courts can only exercise judicial review, which means review of a decision.
- As long as the Speaker does not take a decision, there is not much that courts can do, he submitted.
- “Judicial review can’t be available at a stage prior to making of a decision. Decision is a pre-requisite for judicial review,” the senior counsel said.

Tenth Schedule

- The Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is commonly known as the “Anti-Defection Law.” It was added by the 52nd Amendment Act of 1985 and came into effect in 1985.
- This schedule lays down the provisions for disqualification of elected members on the grounds of defection to another political party.

Disqualification on Grounds of Defection:

- A member of a house belonging to a political party is disqualified if:
- They voluntarily give up membership of the party.
- They vote or abstain from voting contrary to the party’s direction (whip) without prior permission.

Independent and Nominated Members:

- An independent member is disqualified if they join a political party after the election.
- A nominated member is disqualified if they join a political party after 6 months of being nominated.

Exception – Merger:

- If a least two-thirds of the members of a party merge with another party, it is not considered defection.

Authority to Decide Disqualification:

- The Chairman or Speaker of the respective House decides on disqualification petitions.
- The decision was final and not subject to judicial review, but this was altered later.

Judicial Review (Kihoto Hollohan Case, 1992):

- The Supreme Court ruled that the Speaker's decision is subject to judicial review, though not while the decision is pending.

Purpose of the Anti-Defection Law:

- To ensure stability of governments by preventing political defections.
- To curb corruption and protect the mandate of the electorate.
- To promote party discipline.

Judicial Review (Kihoto Hollohan Case, 1992)

- The Kihoto Hollohan vs. Zachillhu and Others (1992) case is a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India that dealt with the validity of judicial review in matters of disqualification of legislators under the Tenth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (commonly known as the anti-defection law).

Background

- The Tenth Schedule was added by the 52nd Amendment Act, 1985, to curb political defections.
- It empowers the Speaker/Chairman of the legislature to decide on disqualification of members on grounds of defection.
- The main issue in the case was whether the Speaker's decision under the Tenth Schedule was subject to judicial review.

Supreme Court's Judgment

- The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the Tenth Schedule except for Paragraph 7, which barred judicial review. It declared Paragraph 7 unconstitutional because it took away the power of judicial review without amending Articles 136, 226, and 227, which required a constitutional amendment under Article 368.

The Court ruled that the Speaker's decision is not immune from judicial review, though such review is limited to:

- Malafide intentions
- Violation of constitutional mandates
- Perverse or irrational decisions

However, the Court affirmed that the Speaker/Chairman can decide on disqualification matters in the first instance.

Significance of the Case

- Reinforced the basic structure doctrine, particularly judicial review and separation of powers.
- Marked a balance between the need to curb political defections and ensuring accountability of the Speaker's decision.
- Judicial review was upheld as part of the basic structure of the Constitution, even in matters involving the legislature.

Major incidents involving the 10th Schedule in India:

1. Arunachal Pradesh (2016)

- **Context:** Political instability in the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.
- **What happened:** Speaker Nabam Rebia disqualified 14 Congress MLAs under the 10th Schedule.
- **Outcome:** The matter went to the Supreme Court, which reinstated the Congress government and declared the Governor's actions unconstitutional.

2. Uttarakhand (2016)

- **Context:** 9 Congress MLAs, including former CM Vijay Bahuguna, defected and voted against the Congress-led government.
- **What happened:** They were disqualified under the 10th Schedule.
- **Outcome:** The High Court upheld the disqualification. President's Rule was imposed but later overturned by the Supreme Court.

3. Karnataka (2019)

- **Context:** 17 MLAs from the ruling Congress-JD(S) coalition resigned, toppling the government.
- **What happened:** Speaker disqualified them under the 10th Schedule.
- **Outcome:** The Supreme Court upheld the disqualification but allowed them to contest by-elections.

4. Manipur (2020)

- **Context:** 7 Congress MLAs supported the BJP-led government after being elected on Congress tickets.
- **What happened:** Speaker delayed disqualification proceedings.
- **Outcome:** Supreme Court intervened, disqualified one MLA and directed action against others, highlighting delays in anti-defection actions.

5. Maharashtra (2022–2023)

- **Context:** Massive political turmoil due to a split in the Shiv Sena party.
- **What happened:** Rival factions (Eknath Shinde and Uddhav Thackeray) claimed legitimacy. Disqualification petitions were filed.
- **Outcome:** Still under review; Supreme Court judgment in 2023 directed the Assembly Speaker to decide within a “reasonable time” and clarified aspects of the 10th Schedule related to party splits and mergers.

Key Takeaways

- Delay in disqualification is a recurring issue; often challenged in courts.
- The role of the Speaker is under scrutiny, with questions about impartiality.
- The Supreme Court has frequently intervened to uphold constitutional morality.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

21. Under the Tenth Schedule, a nominated member of the legislature will be disqualified if:
 - A. They voluntarily give up their membership of the House.
 - B. They join a political party immediately after nomination.
 - C. They join a political party after 6 months from the date of nomination.
 - D. They abstain from voting without permission of the Election Commission.
22. The Supreme Court in the Kihoto Hollohan Case (1992) ruled that:
 - A. The Speaker's decision under the Tenth Schedule is final and beyond judicial review.
 - B. The Speaker's decision is subject to judicial review on limited grounds.
 - C. The entire Tenth Schedule is unconstitutional.
 - D. Judicial review can be exercised only by the President in defection cases.

23. The Tenth Schedule, which introduced the Anti-Defection Law, was added to the Indian Constitution by:
- A. 44th Amendment Act, 1978
 - B. 52nd Amendment Act, 1985
 - C. 61st Amendment Act, 1989
 - D. 73rd Amendment Act, 1992

10. Fiscal Health Index 2025

- The Fiscal Health Index (FHI) initiative by NITI Aayog aims to evolve an understanding of the fiscal health of states in India.
- The FHI analysis covers eighteen major states that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to India's GDP, demography, total public expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability.
- The report objectively evaluates each state's fiscal health through a composite index, facilitating comparisons and benchmarking against best practices.
- The composite Fiscal Health Index has been developed using data from the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), covering the Financial Year 2022-23.

Objectives of the Fiscal Health Index

- To provide a comparative analysis of fiscal health across Indian states through standardized metrics.
- To identify areas of strength and concern in states' fiscal management practices.
- To promote transparency, accountability, and prudent fiscal management through empirical assessment.
- To assist policymakers in making informed decisions aimed at enhancing fiscal sustainability and resilience.

Key Indicators Evaluated

- The Fiscal Health Index 2025 is based on a comprehensive set of indicators that are grouped into five broad categories:

Tax Buoyancy

- Tax buoyancy is a ratio of change in tax revenue in relation to change in gross state domestic product or GSDP of a state. It measures how responsive a taxation policy is to growth in economic activities.
- **Revenue Generation and Mobilization:** Assessment of states' own revenue receipts, tax buoyancy, and non-tax revenue generation.

Debt-to-GSDP

- The debt-to-GDP ratio is a metric that compares a state's total public debt to its gross state domestic product (GSDP), indicating its ability to repay its debts, and is often expressed as a percentage.
- **Expenditure Management and Prioritization:** Evaluation of efficiency in expenditure allocation, prioritization of capital expenditure, and adherence to fiscal discipline.
- **Debt Management:** Analysis of states' debt-to-GSDP ratios, interest payment burdens, and overall sustainability of debt portfolios.

- **Fiscal Deficit Management:** Measurement of states' fiscal deficit as a percentage of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and adherence to statutory limits.
- **Overall Fiscal Sustainability:** Composite analysis of revenue, expenditure, deficit, and debt indicators to gauge long-term fiscal health.

Key Findings

- Odisha leads the fiscal health index with a top score of 67.8, excelling in the Debt Index (99.0) and Debt Sustainability (64.0).
- It maintains low fiscal deficits, a strong debt profile, and a high Capital Outlay/GSDP ratio. Chhattisgarh (55.2) and Goa (53.6) follow, excelling in Debt Index and Revenue Mobilization, respectively.
- Odisha, Jharkhand, Goa, and Chhattisgarh excel in non-tax revenue mobilization, averaging 21% of Total Revenue, with Odisha benefiting from mining premiums and Chhattisgarh from coal block auctions.
- Conversely, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala face significant fiscal challenges, including low expenditure quality, poor debt sustainability, and high fiscal deficits.
- States like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Goa, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh allocate around 27% of their Developmental Expenditure to Capital Expenditure, while West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, and Rajasthan allocate only about 10%.
- While top states excel in Debt Index and Sustainability, West Bengal and Punjab struggle with rising debt-to-GSDP ratios, raising concerns about debt sustainability.

Sustainability of Debt Portfolios

- Sustainability of debt portfolios refers to state's ability to meet its current and future debt obligations without defaulting or requiring exceptional financial assistance, focusing on both solvency and liquidity.
 - **Top Performers:** Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Goa excel in Debt Index, Debt Sustainability, and Revenue Mobilization.
 - **Revenue Mobilization:** Odisha, Jharkhand, Goa, and Chhattisgarh effectively mobilize non-tax revenue (average 21% of Total Revenue).

Debt Index

- The ratio of Interest Payments to Revenue Receipts (IP/RR) indicating the percentage of Revenue Receipts used for interest payment on account of outstanding debt.
 - **Aspirational States:** Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala face fiscal challenges like poor debt sustainability and high deficits.
 - **Capital Expenditure:** High allocation (27%) by Odisha, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh; Low allocation (10%) by West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan.
 - **Debt Concerns:** West Bengal and Punjab face growing debt burdens and increasing debt-to-GSDP ratios.
- The Fiscal Health Index 2025 offers a valuable tool for assessing the fiscal performance of Indian states.
- It highlights the need for continuous monitoring, prudent fiscal management, and proactive measures to enhance states' financial health.
- The Index underscores the importance of revenue generation, efficient expenditure management, debt control, and adherence to fiscal deficit targets for overall fiscal sustainability.
- The FHI report has been shared with all States/UTs to help them evaluate their fiscal performance across key indicators.

- States are encouraged to adopt sustainable fiscal practices suited to their economies and work towards fiscal prudence through appropriate state-level interventions.

QUESTIONS

Solve the multiple choice questions:

- 24.** In the context of the Fiscal Health Index 2025, Tax Buoyancy is best defined as:
- A. The percentage of a state's total expenditure spent on social welfare schemes.
 - B. The ratio of change in tax revenue to the change in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).
 - C. The extent of fiscal deficit as a proportion of state revenue receipts.
 - D. The percentage of non-tax revenue to total debt.
- 25.** Which of the following correctly identifies the pattern of capital expenditure allocation in the states assessed by the FHI 2025?
- A. States with weaker fiscal health spend a higher proportion on capital expenditure.
 - B. Top-performing states like Odisha and Madhya Pradesh allocate around 27% of developmental expenditure to capital expenditure.
 - C. West Bengal and Punjab allocate more than 30% of their developmental expenditure to capital investment.
 - D. All states uniformly allocate 20% of expenditure to capital works due to statutory obligations.

ANSWER KEY AND EXPLANATION

1. **C** Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) was launched during the year 2015-16 to enhance physical access of water on farm and expand cultivable area under assured irrigation, improve on-farm water use efficiency, introduce sustainable water conservation practices, etc. PMKSY is an umbrella scheme, consisting of two major components being implemented by Ministry of Jal Shakti, namely, Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP), and Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP). Further, in December, 2021, implementation of PMKSY for the period 2021-22 to 2025-26 has been approved by Government of India with an overall outlay of Rs. 93,068.56 crore (Central assistance of Rs. 37,454 crore, debt servicing to NABARD for Rs. 20,434.56 crore and an outlay of Rs. 35,180 crore by the State Governments towards State share). However, approval of Ground Water component under PMKSY-HKKP has provisionally been accorded till 2021-22, which has been extended subsequently till completion of ongoing works and liabilities. Also, Per Drop More Crop component, which was earlier a component of PMKSY, is now being implemented separately.
2. **D** Har Khet Ko Pani (HKKP), in turn, consists of four sub-components: (i) Command Area Development & Water Management (CAD&WM); (ii) Surface Minor Irrigation (SMI); (iii) Repair, Renovation and Restoration (RRR) of Water Bodies; and (iv) Ground Water (GW) Development (approval only till 2021-2022, and thereafter only for ongoing works). Further, in 2016, CAD&WM sub-component of HKKP was taken up for pari passu implementation with AIBP. In addition, PMKSY also consists of Watershed Development Component (WDC) which is being implemented by Department of Land Resources, Ministry of Rural Development. Further, Per Drop More Crop (PDMC) component being implemented by Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (DoA&FW) was also a component of PMKSY during 2015-22, and is now being implemented separately by DoA&FW.
3. **D** The Ken-Betwa link aims to transfer surplus water from Ken (Madhya Pradesh) to Betwa (Uttar Pradesh) for irrigation and drinking water. The Par-Tapi-Narmada link is planned for water transfer from west-flowing rivers to the Narmada Basin, mainly benefiting Gujarat and Maharashtra. The Damanganga-Pinjal project is aimed at augmenting Mumbai's water supply. The Pennar-Cauvery link facilitates water transfer to drought-prone regions of Tamil Nadu for irrigation.
4. **D** The Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga link aims to harness Bhutan's rivers for transfer into the Ganga for enhanced water availability. The Kosi-Mechi link seeks to provide irrigation benefits to north Bihar and parts of Nepal. The Kosi-Ghaghra project plans to divert excess water from the flood-prone Kosi to the Ghaghra. The Yamuna-Rajasthan link is designed to supply water to the water-scarce regions of Rajasthan.
5. **B** The Gomti River flows entirely through Uttar Pradesh. The Ghaghara originates in Nepal and enters India in Uttar Pradesh. The Gandak River also originates in Nepal and flows through Bihar. The Kosi River is the easternmost tributary among these rivers. West to East Order — 2. Gomti → 1. Ghaghara → 4. Gandak → 3. Kosi.
6. **C** Multi-State Cooperatives are governed by a Union law, while State Cooperatives are governed by State laws, and their governance framework is mentioned in Part IXB of the Constitution. After the 97th Constitutional Amendment, 2011: The right to form cooperative societies was added as a Fundamental Right under Article 19(1)(c). Directive Principle under Article 43B was added to promote cooperatives. Part IXB (Articles 243ZH to 243ZT) was introduced for cooperative governance. Multi-State Cooperatives fall under Entry 44 of the Union List and are governed by the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002. State Cooperatives fall under Entry 32 of the State List

and are governed by respective State Cooperative Acts. (a) — Incorrect. Multi-state cooperatives fall under Union jurisdiction, but state cooperatives remain under state laws. (b) — Incorrect. Article 43B was added as a Directive Principle to promote cooperatives. (d) — Incorrect. Cooperatives are mentioned in both State and Union Lists depending on their operational area (state or multi-state).

7. **B** India holds 27% of the world's cooperatives — about one-fourth. The top three sectors in India's cooperative movement are: Housing, Dairy, and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS). Maharashtra holds the highest concentration of cooperatives in India (25%), followed by Gujarat, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. 20% of Indians are involved in cooperatives, whereas the global average is 12% — so India's figure is nearly double.
8. **D** The Indian Air Force (IAF) will be participating in Exercise INIOCHOS-25, a prestigious multinational air exercise hosted by the Hellenic Air Force. The exercise will take place at Andravida Air Base, Greece, from 31 March 2025 to 11 April 2025. The Fourth edition of Exercise Tiger Triumph, the bilateral Tri-Service India-US Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise, is scheduled on the Eastern Seaboard from 01 to 13 Apr 25. From February 25 to March 9, 2025, the Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force conducted the sixth edition of Exercise Dharma Guardian at Mount Fuji, Japan. Between March 25 and 27, 2025, the Indian Army's Eastern Command conducted Exercise Prachand Pahaar in the high-altitude terrain of Arunachal Pradesh.
9. **D** Statement 1 is incorrect. The 10th edition of India- Sri Lanka Joint Military Exercise MITRA SHAKTI held, at Army Training School, Maduru Oya, Sri Lanka. Statement 2 is correct. Indian contingent comprising of 106 personnel is being represented by a Battalion of Rajputana Rifles along with personnel from other arms and services. The Sri Lankan contingent is being represented by personnel from Gajaba Regiment of Sri Lankan Army. Joint Exercise MITRA SHAKTI is an annual training event conducted alternatively in India and Sri Lanka. Last edition was conducted in Pune in Nov 2023. Aim of the Joint Exercise is to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake counter insurgency operations in a Sub Conventional scenario under Chapter VII of the United Nations Mandate. The exercise will focus on operations in the semi-urban environment.
10. **C** The Planning Commission was responsible for allocating funds to states and followed a centralized planning model. NITI Aayog was created in 2015 to replace the Planning Commission and shift away from this centralized structure. NITI Aayog focuses on policy formulation, cooperative federalism, innovation, and strategic long-term planning. It does not allocate financial resources to states — that role is now with the Finance Commission.
11. **B** Correct Answer: (b) Valid, because Union Territories with legislatures are represented by their Chief Ministers in the Governing Council. Explanation: NITI Aayog's Governing Council composition is clear: Chief Ministers of States and Union Territories with legislatures (like Delhi, Puducherry) represent themselves. Lieutenant Governors represent Union Territories without legislatures. Thus, the Chief Minister's objection is valid — since the UT now has a legislature, the CM is entitled to represent the UT in the Governing Council.
12. **D** NITI Aayog, the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, is structured to promote cooperative federalism and facilitate economic development. **Ex-Officio Members:** Up to four members from the Union Council of Ministers, nominated by the Prime Minister. As per the latest available information, these include: Shri Raj Nath Singh, Minister of Defence, Shri Amit Shah, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Cooperation, Shri Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; and Minister of Rural Development and Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Finance and Minister of Corporate Affairs. **Full-Time Members:** Currently, these are Dr. V.K. Saraswat, Prof. Ramesh Chand, Dr. V.K. Paul, and Dr. Arvind Virmani.

- 13. C** The Green Credit Programme (GCP) rolled out by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in 2023 was flagged by the Ministry of Law and Justice before its rollout, over legality of the business model built into it. The ambitious government scheme seeks to invite voluntary participation in sectors ranging from plantations to water conservation in exchange of tradable credits. At present, the pilot on tree plantation and eco-restoration of degraded lands is underway.
- 14. B** Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Sustainable Environment) is an initiative launched by India to promote sustainable living and environmentally responsible behaviors at the individual and community levels. It was introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the COP26 summit in Glasgow (2021) and formally launched in October 2022 in partnership with the United Nations. The initiative aims to encourage pro-environmental habits and reduce ecological footprints through mindful consumption and sustainable practices.
- 15. C** Meghalaya's Ryndia – eri silk textile – has received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the GI Authority. The announcement was made by the Geographical Indications (GI) Authority, under the Government of India, and has been officially registered on its website. In a significant boost to Tamil Nadu's agricultural and horticultural heritage, six more products, including the famed Puliyankudi Acid Lime, have been granted the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the GI Registry. Kasuti embroidery, a traditional folk embroidery from Karnataka, has been granted a Geographical Indication (GI) tag. The name "Kasuti" is derived from the Kannada words "kai" (hand) and "suti" (cotton), signifying the hand-embroidered nature of the craft.
- 16. D** Balaghat Chinnor rice, a prized rice variety from the Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh, has been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, becoming the first agricultural produce from the state to receive this recognition. Tezpur Litchi from Assam has received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. The Bhagalpuri Zardalu mango from Bihar has a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, recognized by the Geographical Registry, Chennai. Kandhamal Haldi, a variety of turmeric indigenous to Odisha earned the Geographical Indication (GI) tag from Intellectual Property India (IPI) in April 2019.
- 17. B** A Data Fiduciary under the DPDP Act includes individuals, companies, or the state — anyone deciding how and why personal data is processed.
- 18. B** The extra-territorial applicability of the DPDP Act is triggered when foreign entities process personal data in connection with offering goods or services to individuals in India.
- 19. B** Katchatheevu was ceded to Sri Lanka through bilateral agreements signed in 1974 and further clarified in 1976 — collectively known as the Indo-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreements — aimed at clearly demarcating maritime boundaries.
- 20. B** Katchatheevu is a small, uninhabited island in the Palk Strait, closer to Rameswaram (Tamil Nadu) about 33 km from Rameswaram. It houses St. Anthony's Church, which hosts an annual pilgrimage attended by people from both India and Sri Lanka.
- 21. C** A nominated member can join a political party within 6 months of their nomination. If they join after this period, it results in disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.
- 22. B** The Kihoto Hollohan Case upheld the validity of the Tenth Schedule but allowed judicial review of the Speaker's decision on grounds of malafide intention, violation of constitutional mandates, or irrationality.
- 23. B** The Anti-Defection Law was added through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1985 to prevent political defections and ensure the stability of elected governments.

- 24. B** Tax buoyancy measures how responsive a state's tax revenue is to changes in its GSDP — indicating the effectiveness of the taxation system in capturing growing economic activity.
- 25. B** According to the report, states like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, and Karnataka allocate about 27% of their developmental expenditure to capital expenditure — a sign of fiscal prudence. In contrast, fiscally weaker states like West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab allocate only about 10%. Odisha topped the Fiscal Health Index 2025 with a score of 67.8. The state performed exceptionally in the Debt Index (99.0) and Debt Sustainability, maintaining low fiscal deficits and a high capital outlay-to-GSDP ratio.