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Priest can certify CAA eligibility, says govt. helpline (GS Paper II: Citizenship)

Route to citizenship
A brief outline of the application process under the CAA

<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The entire process is online but applicants will have to present themselves on an appointed day before a committee, which will verify the documents		<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ which include an eligibility certificate to validate the religion of the applicant. Any local priest can certify the faith of the persons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The applicants have to submit a clutch of documents,		<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The reasons for which applicant wishes to acquire an Indian citizenship is also to be stated

- According to a response from the Union Home Ministry's helpline on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to The Hindu, a local priest can issue an "eligibility certificate" to validate the religion of an applicant.
- This certificate is mandatory and must be enclosed along with an affidavit and other required documents to be uploaded on the CAA portal.
- Applicants are also required to state the reasons for wishing to acquire Indian citizenship.

- The Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024, were notified by the Ministry on March 11 to enable the implementation of the CAA.
- On March 21, a helpline number (1032) was launched by the Ministry to provide assistance and information regarding the CAA. This helpline operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and offers free calls from anywhere in India.
- The certificate is supposed to be issued by a "locally reputed community institution."
- When The Hindu contacted the helpline on March 26 to inquire about the format of the certificate, the responder stated that it can be on a blank sheet of paper or on a judicial paper with a stamp value of ₹10.
- It was also mentioned that any local priest (pujari) can be asked to issue the certificate.

Final authority

- When the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) Rules were notified, the Ministry did not specify the authority or body that can issue the eligibility certificate.
- Any institution that has the trust of the people can issue the certificate, according to a source.
- The final decision on granting citizenship will be made by the empowered committee, with the local institution only recommending the applications.
- After uploading the documents, applications will be reviewed by a district-level committee headed by the Superintendent of the Department of Post.
- Applicants will need to visit this committee on the designated day for in-person document verification.
- The final decision on applications will be made by the empowered committee headed by the Director (Census Operations) in each State.
- The CAA fast tracks the citizenship process for undocumented individuals belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.
- Around 100 Pakistani Hindus living in the Majnu ka Tila area of north Delhi have registered on the portal for citizenship so far.
- Some of them obtained the eligibility certificate from the Arya Samaj mandir and others from the nearby Shiv Mandir.
- The person issuing the certificate must specify their name and address and confirm that the applicant belongs to one of the six specified communities from the three countries and is known to them.
- They must certify that the applicant continues to be a member of the specified community.
- The CAA facilitates citizenship for undocumented individuals belonging to the specified communities.

India strongly objects to U.S remarks on Kejriwal's arrest (GS

Paper II: IR)

- India summoned a U.S. diplomat to express "strong objection" to remarks made by the spokesperson of the U.S. State Department regarding the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a corruption case.

- The External Affairs Ministry emphasized the importance of respecting each other's sovereignty between fellow democracies and highlighted India's independent judiciary.
- India objected to the U.S. State Department spokesperson's comments about legal proceedings in India, stating that diplomacy requires states to be respectful of each other's sovereignty and internal affairs.
- The spokesperson of the State Department had expressed hope that Mr. Kejriwal's case would be treated through a "timely legal process" and encouraged a fair, transparent, and timely legal process.
- India defended its legal processes, stating that they are based on an independent judiciary committed to objective and timely outcomes, and criticized casting aspersions on it as unwarranted.

U.S. official summoned

- Gloria Berbena, the U.S.'s Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, was summoned to a 40-minute meeting at the South Block in New Delhi on Wednesday to convey India's protest officially.
- Despite India's stern summons, the U.S. reiterated its concerns during its briefing in Washington on Wednesday.
- The U.S. State Department spokesperson, Matthew Miller, mentioned that the U.S. "continues to follow" the actions of the Indian government in the run-up to the election.
- Miller addressed the Congress party's allegations regarding frozen bank accounts by tax authorities, stating that the U.S. encourages fair, transparent, and timely legal processes for such issues.
- The U.S. emphasized the importance of fair legal procedures in response to a journalist's question citing a report by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International

Key Facts

- **Founded:** 1961, London
- **Headquarters:** London, United Kingdom
- **Secretary General:** Agnès Callamard
- **Nobel Peace Prize:** Awarded in 1977
- **A global movement:** Over 10 million people worldwide, campaigning for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.
- **Non-governmental organization (NGO):** Independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest, or religion.
- **Vision:** A world where every person enjoys all the human rights enshrined in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.**

Focus Areas

Amnesty International focuses its work on a range of human rights issues, including:

- **Women's, children's, minorities' and indigenous rights**
- **Ending torture**
- **Abolition of the death penalty**
- **Rights of refugees**
- **Rights of prisoners of conscience**
- **Protection of human dignity**

How They Work

- **Research and investigation:** Amnesty meticulously investigates and documents human rights abuses around the world.
- **Mobilization:** They mobilize members, supporters, and the public to take action through petitions, letter-writing campaigns, protests, and other forms of pressure.
- **Advocacy:** Amnesty advocates with governments, companies, and intergovernmental organizations to change policies and practices that violate human rights.

The politics of humanitarian aid (GS Paper II: IR)

There are many examples across the world of politics trumping humanitarian assistance even if it means starving millions to achieve political or military goals

- **Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State, highlights that 100% of Gaza's population is facing severe acute food insecurity**, a classification unprecedented in humanitarian aid.
- Despite this alarming situation, the **US Congress decides to halt funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) until March 2025**.
- **UNRWA is the primary UN agency providing vital humanitarian aid** to millions of Palestinian refugees across various regions.
- The decision to defund UNRWA could be seen as **a political move, potentially derecognizing Palestinian refugees and undermining their right of return**, a crucial issue for Palestinian statehood.
- Some Western countries previously defunded UNRWA based on Israeli allegations, but are now reconsidering their stance as these allegations appear unsubstantiated.
- **Defunding UNRWA may serve political or military goals, even at the cost of millions of lives**, exemplifying the geopolitics at play in humanitarian aid.

UNRWA

- **Mandate: A United Nations agency created in 1949 to provide humanitarian aid and development support specifically to Palestinian refugees.**
- **Funding:** UNRWA is primarily **funded by voluntary contributions from UN member states**.
- **Operational Areas:** UNRWA operates in five fields: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

Key Roles and Services

- Provides emergency food and cash assistance, shelter, and critical relief during crises and ongoing situations of hardship.

- **Core Services:**
 - **Education:** Operates one of the biggest school systems in the Middle East, providing basic education to Palestinian refugee children.
 - **Healthcare:** Runs a network of primary healthcare clinics, offering preventive and curative services.
 - **Social Services:** Assists the most vulnerable refugees with social protection and livelihoods programs.
 - **Camp Infrastructure:** Supports infrastructure development, sanitation, and improvement in Palestinian refugee camps.

- This situation extends beyond Gaza and underscores broader political tensions and unresolved issues in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Gaza waits for a pier

- U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans **to construct a temporary pier off** the Gaza coast to deliver humanitarian aid.
- The situation highlights how politics can impede simple acts of sending aid to a population in need.
- Instead of allowing aid convoys through land openings, Israel didn't permit their passage, prompting the U.S. to resort to **an air drop of food packets**.
- **Tragically, Israeli soldiers shot and killed 112 Palestinians and injured hundreds who were waiting for aid, while twelve people drowned trying to retrieve packets that fell into the sea.**
- **UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres described the scene in Rafah as a "moral outrage,"** emphasizing the humanitarian crisis.
- The **blocking of humanitarian aid is a serious violation of international law and goes against the interim order of the International Court of Justice**, which mandates "effective and immediate" aid to Gaza.
- The situation underscores the desperate need for a pier to facilitate humanitarian aid delivery to Palestinians in Gaza.
- On **March 25, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire during Ramadan**, aiming for a lasting sustainable ceasefire and ensuring humanitarian access and hostage release.
- The **United States abstained from the vote**.
- The French Ambassador to the UN warned that the crisis isn't over, and a permanent ceasefire must be established after Ramadan.
- There's doubt about whether Israel will respect the resolution and observe a ceasefire or allow humanitarian aid.
- **Hamas seeks the exchange of Palestinian prisoners for Israeli hostages**, dead or alive, raising concerns that Israel may resume the war after the exchange and after Ramadan.
- The **U.S. labeled the resolution as "non-binding," potentially allowing Israel to continue its bombing operations**.
- **Despite the UN Security Council resolution, humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza remains uncertain due to political factors.**

When India sent aid

- India's **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government**, led by Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, sent **80,000 "family packets"** of food and clothes to displaced Sri Lankan Tamil civilians in 2008.
- The aid was intended to show solidarity with Sri Lankan Tamils, who were being used as human shields by the retreating Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
- To ensure distribution, the Government of India requested the International Committee of the Red Cross to handle the delivery.
- In 2022, M.K. Stalin, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and Karunanidhi's son, sent nearly 10,000 tonnes of food and medical aid to Sri Lanka during its economic crisis.
- This aid demonstrated Tamil Nadu's continued support for Sri Lankan Tamils.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, India sent vaccines to over 100 countries, showcasing **compassionate diplomacy** and solidarity with nations in need, despite vaccine shortages in the West.

The case of Afghanistan

- When India was a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) from 2021 to 2022, it witnessed aid being used as a political tool.
- In December 2021, under pressure from the P-5 and others to engage with the Taliban, the UNSC agreed to provide humanitarian aid to the Taliban without any progress on women's rights.
- Despite the aid, the status of Afghan women worsened over two years.
- Politics has often overridden humanitarian concerns in conflicts like Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Sudan.
- In Syria, Western and Gulf backers regulate aid through their troops stationed in northern Syria.
- In Ethiopia, aid was used to pressure the government due to support for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).
- Sudan faces internal conflict, with only 5% of the needed aid funding being met, leaving millions in need.
- Across the world, people suffer while leaders prioritize politics over their well-being, leaving many waiting for essential aid like food and medicine.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION: GS PAPER II: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Question: Discuss the role of political considerations in humanitarian aid delivery, citing examples from various conflicts around the world. (250 Words/15 Marks)

ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce the answer with the recent contextual background of Humanitarian situation in Gaza.
- Then bring such instance from the recent such events e.g. African countries, Afghanistan.
- Also, bring the implication on the legitimacy of UN.
- Conclude accordingly

ANSWER

As per Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State 100% of Gaza's population is facing severe acute food insecurity, a classification unprecedented in humanitarian aid. Despite this alarming situation, the US Congress decides to halt funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) until March

2025. Humanitarian aid delivery often becomes entangled in political considerations, leading to significant challenges in ensuring timely and effective assistance to those in need.

Gaza Crisis:

- Despite severe acute food insecurity affecting the entire population of Gaza, political factors have hindered humanitarian efforts.
- The decision by the US Congress to halt funding to UNRWA, the primary agency providing aid to Palestinian refugees, reflects political motivations.
- The withholding of aid funding may serve political agendas, potentially undermining the rights and well-being of millions of Palestinians.

Afghanistan:

- The UNSC's decision to provide humanitarian aid to the Taliban, without addressing critical issues such as women's rights, illustrates political compromises.
- Despite the aid provided, the situation for Afghan women has deteriorated, highlighting the prioritization of political interests over humanitarian concerns.

Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Sudan:

- In various conflicts, including Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen, and Sudan, political interests often override humanitarian imperatives.
- Aid delivery may be politicized, with certain parties controlling distribution channels and using aid as leverage to advance their agendas.
- Internal conflicts, such as those in Yemen and Sudan, exacerbate humanitarian crises, as limited aid funding fails to meet the needs of millions of affected people.

Thus, politics often plays a significant role in shaping humanitarian aid delivery, impacting the lives of millions caught in conflicts and crises worldwide. While humanitarian principles call for impartiality and prioritization of human welfare, political interests sometimes take precedence, leading to challenges in providing timely and effective assistance. Thus we need compassionate diplomacy as seen in India's provision of humanitarian aid to Sri Lankan Tamils and other countries, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects a commitment to compassionate diplomacy.

Timely restatement: On pre-trial injunctions against the media and Court order (GS Paper II: Freedom of Speech and Expression)

Supreme Court makes a case against pre-trial restraint on journalistic content

- The Supreme Court issued a recent order **cautioning courts against granting pre-trial injunctions against the media in civil suits for defamation.**
- This order serves as a reminder that **such injunctions could restrict freedom of speech and impair the public's right to know.**
- The Court set aside a Delhi lower court order, confirmed by the Delhi High Court, that directed news outlet Bloomberg to remove an allegedly defamatory article concerning Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd.
- The Supreme Court reiterated the standard three-fold test for granting interim injunctions:
 - Whether there is a prima facie case.
 - Whether the 'balance of convenience' favors an interim restraint.
 - Whether not granting the injunction will cause "irreparable loss or harm" to the plaintiff.

- It emphasized the importance of **protecting journalistic expression as a constitutional mandate**.
- The Court cautioned against courts mechanically applying the three limbs of the test without proper analysis of the facts.
- **Courts granting injunctions are expected to record reasons for their decisions.**
- There are **three types of judicial orders that restrict journalistic publications**:
 - **Outright gag orders**: Ban any publication of information related to ongoing court cases.
 - **Omnibus prior restraint orders**: Restrict all media houses from publishing based on a **plaintiff's fear of defamation repetition**.
 - **Pre-trial orders to specific media houses**: Require them to **remove articles and halt further publication**.
- These orders conflict with the common law principle established in **Bonnard vs Perryman**:
 - Injunctions in defamation suits are allowed only if the content is defamatory and cannot be justified during trial, such as by proving truth and public interest.
- The court's recent order also warns about **Strategic Litigation/Lawsuit against Public Participation (SLAPP)**:
 - SLAPP is a tactic used by influential and economically powerful entities to silence public criticism of their projects and companies.
- The court emphasizes that **granting early injunctions in prolonged trials effectively kills the material to be published, akin to a 'death sentence'**.

Toxic words: On the discourse in politics and women politicians

Women should bring down barriers to their own advancement

- **Congress social media in-charge Supriya Shrinete** posted a denigrating comment about actor Kangana Ranaut, which has since been deleted.
- Instead of apologizing, Shrinete defended herself by stating that many people have access to her Facebook and Instagram accounts, implying that someone else made the inappropriate post.
- Kangana Ranaut, who is contesting her first election from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh on a BJP ticket, criticized Shrinete's remarks.
- Ranaut emphasized the importance of freeing women from prejudices and not using the challenging lives of sex workers as an insult.
- The incident has sparked a political controversy ahead of a crucial general election, **overshadowing important issues like the electoral bonds scam, rising unemployment, and the distress of the poor**.
- Shrinete's attempt to blame others for the post contradicts her stated values, especially regarding women's issues.
- Colleague Pawan Khara's clarification that Shrinete "can never resort" to such language is not convincing because the objectionable comment appeared under her name.

- **Kangana Ranaut should refrain from making disparaging remarks, considering her past comments against a fellow woman actor who received an election ticket.**
- Women face challenges both at home and in the workplace, hindering progress towards gender equality.
- **India passed a law last year to reserve 33% of legislative seats for women, but there is no deadline for implementation.**
- **The BJP, despite overseeing the legislation, has not come close to reaching the 33% mark for female candidates.**
- **Only about 14% of Lok Sabha legislators were women when the Women's Reservation Bill, 2023 was passed, far below the global average.**
- Himachal Pradesh has only one woman Lok Sabha MP, indicating the limited representation of women in politics.
- Women's involvement in policymaking is crucial for ensuring their needs are considered and addressed.
- It is essential for women to work towards removing barriers to their advancement rather than making their path more difficult.

WTO's investment facilitation negotiations are not illegal (GS Paper III: External Sector)

India should reconsider its defensive approach towards plurilateral agreements such as the investment facilitation for development agreement

- At the **13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Abu Dhabi**, a significant development occurred regarding the agreement **on investment facilitation for development (IFD)**.
- The IFD agreement, **aimed at facilitating investment flows**, was launched in 2017 through a process called the Joint Statement Initiative, with 70 countries participating.
- Despite opposition from countries like India, negotiations for the IFD agreement continued, and it was finalized in November 2023.
- Currently, **around 120 out of 166 WTO member countries (more than 70% of the membership) support the IFD agreement.**
- **These 120 countries wanted to include the IFD Agreement as a plurilateral agreement (PA) within Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement.**
- While the **WTO is primarily a multilateral trade organization, Article II.3 of the WTO Agreement allows for plurilateral agreements (PAs) to be established.**
- **Plurilateral agreements like the IFD Agreement bind only those WTO member countries that choose to accept them and do not impose obligations on the remaining members.**

WTO

- **Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland
- **Founded:** January 1, 1995
- **Membership:** 164 member states (as of today)
- **Director-General:** Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

- **WTO is only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.** Its primary goal is to help trade flow smoothly, fairly, predictably, and as freely as possible.
- A forum for governments to negotiate trade agreements.
- A place for member governments to settle trade disputes.
- Operates a system of trade rules.

Key Functions

- **Administering WTO trade agreements:** The WTO agreements form the essential legal framework for international trade.
- **Forum for trade negotiations:** WTO is where member governments discuss and negotiate new trade agreements to further liberalize trade.
- **Handling trade disputes:** A neutral dispute settlement mechanism helps resolve trade disagreements between members.
- **Monitoring national trade policies:** Through regular reviews, the WTO ensures members' trade policies remain transparent and within the bounds of the agreements.
- **Technical assistance and training for developing countries:** The WTO helps developing countries better integrate into the global trading system.
- **Cooperation with other international organizations:** The WTO works with other global organizations to address issues where trade connects with other areas like development and the environment.

India's concerns

- The IFD Agreement aims to enhance regulatory transparency and simplify administrative procedures to encourage foreign investment inflows.
- However, the **agreement does not include provisions on market access, investment protection, or investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS).**
- **Contention Over ISDS:** ISDS allows foreign investors to file claims against host states, but integrating it into the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism is seen as impractical.
- **India's Concerns:** India, along with South Africa, played a key role in preventing the IFD agreement from being incorporated into the WTO's rulebook.
- **India's main concerns** revolve around **whether investment should be a part of the WTO and the process followed to include the IFD agreement in the WTO's rulebook.**

Investment is not trade

- India argues that investment should not be considered part of the WTO because it is distinct from trade.
- **Cross-Border Trade:** Investment may or may not lead to cross-border trade, contrasting with the traditional understanding of trade within the WTO framework.
- Despite India's stance, economic literature emphasizes the interconnectedness of trade and investment, suggesting that they are closely linked.
- **Global Value Chains (GVCs):** Around **70% of international trade occurs within global value chains**, which involve both trade and investment components, highlighting their interdependence.
- **Modern Trade Agreements:** Many contemporary free trade agreements, such as RCEP and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), include detailed provisions on investment to address this interconnectedness.

- India's Trade Agreements: Interestingly, **India's recent trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) also includes provisions on investment**, albeit focusing primarily on facilitation and promotion measures.
- India asserts that there is no mandate for conducting negotiations on investment within the WTO framework.
- The **General Council of the WTO decided in 2004** that talks on the relationship between trade and investment, known as the '**Singapore issues**', would not occur as part of the Doha round of negotiations.
- **Nairobi Ministerial Decision**: The 2015 WTO Nairobi ministerial decision stipulated that launching negotiations on new issues would require unanimous agreement from all members.
- India argues that **since all WTO members did not agree to launch negotiations on an IFD Agreement**, the negotiations and subsequent text are deemed illegal.
- Scope of Negative Mandate: While acknowledging the negative mandate, questions arise regarding **whether it covers all aspects of investment**, including facilitation.
- **1996 Singapore Ministerial**: They dropped investment agreement proposed in 1996 focused on market access and investment protection, raising doubts about whether the negative mandate encompasses all investment-related matters within the WTO.
- India questions whether the **negative mandate applies to negotiations** launched on a plurilateral basis, as the IFD agreement negotiations were.
- **Consensus Requirement**: While Article X.9 of the WTO Agreement mandates consensus for adding an agreement to the existing set of plurilateral agreements in Annex 4, it does not require consensus to initiate negotiations for a plurilateral agreement.
- **Updating WTO Rules**: The WTO is tasked with updating existing rules and creating new ones to address the evolving nature of international trade.
- **Challenges in Decision-Making**: The WTO's decision-making process faces obstacles due to difficulties in achieving consensus among its members.
- **Importance of Plurilateral Agreements**: Plurilateral agreements like the IFD agreement are crucial for revitalizing the WTO's legislative function, which has stagnated due to consensus challenges.
- **India's Role**: As India is poised to become the third-largest economy, it should reconsider its defensive stance towards plurilateral agreements, such as the proposed IFD Agreement in the WTO.

Preventing a China-Taiwan conflict (GS Paper II:IR)

India needs to enact tougher policies to serve its own interests

- India has significant national interests that extend to regions far from its borders.
- One such region where India's interests are entangled is Taiwan, situated on the far edges of Asia.



- China claims sovereignty over Taiwan and is preparing to take control of the island forcibly if necessary.
- The U.S. has indicated its willingness to defend Taiwan against Chinese aggression.
- **India is unlikely to engage in a military conflict over Taiwan due to its economic and security concerns.**
- Instead, **India prefers to maintain the current situation, where Taiwan remains a self-governing territory.**
- This status quo benefits India economically, as trade between India and Taiwan has increased substantially.
- There are ongoing discussions about a **potential free trade agreement between India and Taiwan.**
- Collaboration between Indian and Taiwanese companies, such as **Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation and the Tata Group**, is evidence of economic ties.
- **Maintaining peace across the Taiwan Strait** aligns with India's interests, given its **reliance on critical supply chains and the presence of Indian workers in Taiwan.**
- Chinese aggression against Taiwan would have severe consequences for India.
- It would disrupt global trade with China and Taiwan, affecting economies in Asia and West Asia.
- A Bloomberg study suggests that a **conflict over Taiwan could cost over 10% of global GDP.**
- **India's economy would suffer more than the U.S., particularly in sectors like electronics and pharmaceuticals.**
- A war between China and the U.S. could escalate tensions along the India-China border.
- It could also damage industrial capacity in China, the U.S., and other regional countries, impacting global supply chains.
- There's a **risk of nuclear escalation** if the conflict intensifies.

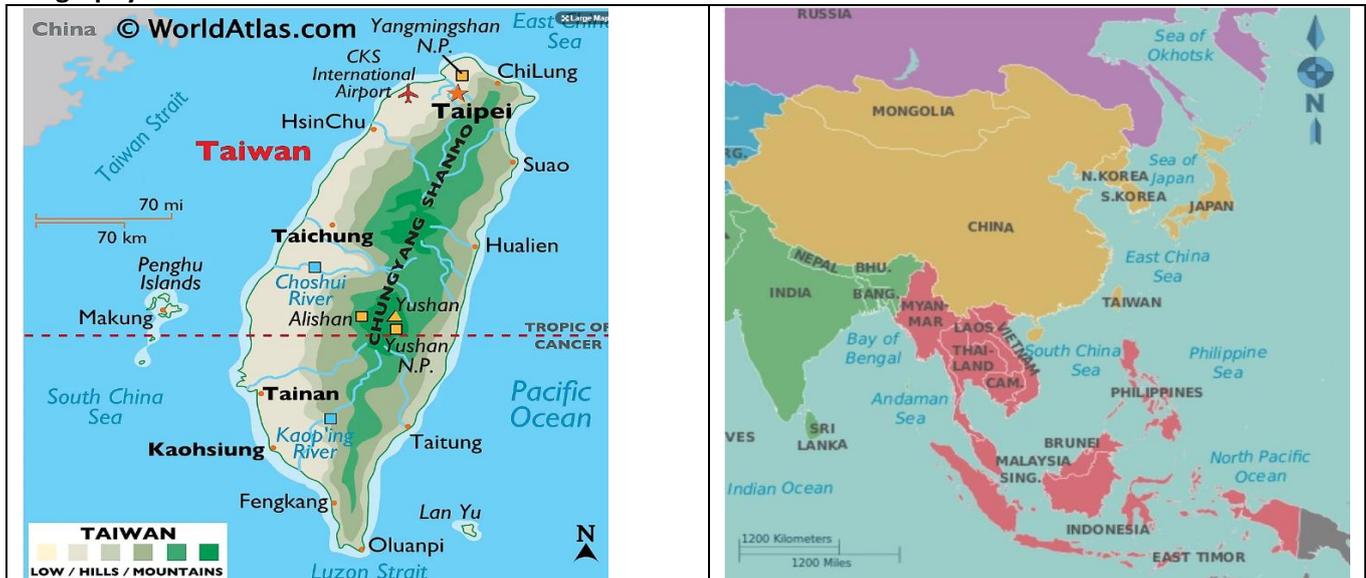
- India cannot afford to engage in a conflict over Taiwan due to its focus on stability and national development.
- A conflict over Taiwan could have severe consequences for India's long-term international standing.
- Depending on the outcome, **it could worsen India's position in the global arena.**
- **If China wins, it could become the dominant military power in the region, undermining the existing security structure.**
- This could lead to less credible security guarantees from the U.S., prompting neighboring countries to arm themselves.
- China may feel emboldened to assert its influence, potentially affecting regions like the Indian Ocean.
- **India relies on the U.S. for military modernization and a stable strategic environment,** despite not being an American ally.
- Overall, India has much to lose in a conflict over Taiwan and must consider its long-term interests in maintaining stability.

What India can do

- India can play a role in preventing conflict over Taiwan by influencing Beijing's perception of the situation.
- Beijing prefers non-military methods to resolve the Taiwan issue, using tools like international law, economic leverage, and political pressure.
- India can bolster deterrence by convincing Beijing that conditions for military action are not favorable.
- India has six policy options to achieve this:
 1. Utilizing international law arguments.
 2. Promoting narratives against aggression.
 3. Coordinating diplomatic messaging.
 4. Implementing economic de-risking measures.
 5. Conducting active information operations to support Taiwan.
 6. Providing military support to U.S. forces in the Indian Ocean.
- These options can be adjusted based on varying levels of ambition and political willingness.
- Other countries can also adopt and adapt these strategies to contribute to preventing conflict over Taiwan.
- Implementing these policy options can benefit India's overall strategic position.
- They would provide India with more leverage in its growing competition with China.
- Deepening cooperation with the U.S. through these policies can enhance India's national development.
- These measures can also elevate India's leadership role internationally, particularly among Global South nations.
- They are driven by Indian self-interest rather than favoring Taiwan or the U.S.
- While they may provoke Chinese retaliation, India has shown readiness to endure such consequences.
- The costs of implementing these policies are outweighed by the risks of inaction.

Taiwan, officially the Republic of China. It is located at the junction of the East and South China Seas in the northwestern Pacific Ocean, with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the northwest, Japan to the northeast, and the Philippines to the south.

Geography



- **Location:** East Asia, archipelago of islands off the southeastern coast of mainland China.
- **Coordinates** 23°30'N 121°00'E
- **Area:** 36,193 km² (slightly smaller than Maryland, USA)
- **Main Island:** The island of Taiwan (formerly known as Formosa) makes up 99% of the territory.
- **Terrain:** Mostly mountainous in the east, with gently rolling plains in the west.

Demographics

- **Population:** Approximately 23.5 million
- **Capital:** Taipei City
- **Largest Cities:** Taipei, New Taipei City, Taichung, Kaohsiung
- **Ethnic Groups:** Predominantly **Han Chinese**, with a significant indigenous population.

Government

- **Political System:** Semi-presidential representative democratic republic
- **President:** Tsai Ing-wen
- **Legislature:** Unicameral Legislative Yuan

Economy

- **Highly developed economy:** Major global supplier of electronics, machinery, and petrochemicals.
- **Key industries:** Information technology, electronics manufacturing, chemicals, textiles.
- **Currency:** New Taiwan Dollar (TWD)

Culture

- **Rich blend of influences:** Chinese traditions, indigenous cultures, Japanese influences, and modern globalization.
- **Languages:** Mandarin Chinese (official), Taiwanese Hokkien, Hakka, and indigenous languages.
- **Famous for:** Night markets, delicious cuisine, natural beauty, historical temples, and technological innovation.

Telangana's fiscal challenge (GS Paper III: Fiscal Deficit)

The government is facing an arduous task in fulfilling its six guarantees

- The Telangana government is finding it challenging to **fulfill six guarantees** promised by the Congress party before coming into power.
- This difficulty arises due to the **slow growth in revenue receipts**.
- The government is facing hurdles in generating enough resources to meet its immediate obligations, such as paying salaries, pensions, and interests.
- Nearly half of the revenue receipts are being utilized for these purposes alone, as per the provisional data released by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).
- This indicates the severity of the financial situation the government is grappling with.
- Tax revenue projected for the current fiscal year is ₹1.52 lakh crore according to budget estimates.
- Expenditure on salaries/wages, pensions, and interest payments amounts to ₹74,058 crore.
- Additionally, subsidies total ₹12,958 crore.
- As of February, the State's overall revenue receipts reached ₹1.51 lakh crore, which is 70.16% of the budget estimates.
- With only a month left in the financial year, meeting the budgetary commitments is challenging.
- The government faces the daunting task of implementing six guarantees promised before the Assembly elections.
- These guarantees include **free bus travel for women**, increasing health coverage under YSR Aarogya Sri, **providing LPG cylinders at ₹500**, offering **free power up to 200 units under the Gruha Jyoti scheme**, **providing houses to the poor under the Indiramma scheme**, and **offering a sustenance allowance for women**.
- The State has initiated the implementation of **free bus travel, requiring reimbursement of over ₹300 crore monthly to the State Road Transport Corporation**.
- There's an ongoing increase in health coverage limits.
- In the ₹2.75 lakh crore vote-on-account budget for 2024-25, ₹53,196 crore has been allocated for implementing the six guarantees.
- No tax or duty hikes were introduced in the budget.
- A provision of ₹2,418 crore was made for the Gruha Jyoti scheme for the upcoming fiscal year.
- This brings the total allocation for Transco and distribution companies to ₹16,825 crore, affirming the government's commitment to provide 24X7 free power supply to farmers.
- ₹7,740 crore was allocated for the Indiramma housing scheme, with 3,500 houses sanctioned for each of the 119 Assembly constituencies in the State.
- The actual financial burden of implementing the six guarantees is yet to be determined.
- The government's intention to fulfill its guarantees is clear, but there are concerns due to discrepancies between budget estimates and actual figures over multiple years.
- Till the end of February, the overall revenue receipts stood at ₹1.51 lakh crore, falling short of the projected ₹2.16 lakh crore for 2023-24.
- **Borrowings and other liabilities amounted to ₹41,448 crore, indicating a reliance on external sources to cover the deficit.**
- There's also a shortfall in grants in aid and contributions from the Central government. The estimated revenue under this category was ₹41,259 crore, but only ₹6,955 crore was realized by the end of February.

- Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka acknowledged a significant gap of up to ₹70,000 crore between budget estimates and actual figures for the current fiscal year.
- This claim is supported by substantial differences between the budget estimates and actual figures observed until the end of February.
- The **Union Finance Ministry imposed restrictions on the state's market borrowings due to financial management concerns.**
- However, these restrictions were partially relaxed following meetings between Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in January.
- **The state of Telangana needs to find new ways to increase its resources rather than relying solely on revenue from excise and selling land parcels.**
- **It should also pay attention to areas where there are leaks or losses in revenue.**
- These leaks negatively impact government revenue and must be addressed to help Telangana tackle financial challenges effectively.

Sustainable Building (GS Paper III: Environment)

- India's construction sector is experiencing rapid growth, erecting over **3,00,000 housing units annually**, which brings economic benefits but also environmental challenges.
- The building sector consumes a significant amount of energy, accounting for over 33% of India's electricity usage, contributing to environmental degradation and climate change.
- According to the India **Cooling Action Plan**, there is projected to be an **eight-fold increase in the demand for cooling between 2017 and 2037**, highlighting the importance of reducing active cooling demand while ensuring thermal comfort.

How can the construction sector become energy efficient?

- To improve energy efficiency in the construction sector, **addressing inefficiencies in residential buildings is crucial** due to factors like economic growth, urbanization, heat islands, and climate change.
- Initiatives like the **Eco-Niwas Samhita (ENS) and the Residential Energy Conservation Building Code** aim to enhance energy efficiency in residential buildings.
- The **ENS introduces the Residential Envelope Transmittance Value (RETV) metric**, which **measures heat transfer through a building's envelope**. Lower RETV values result in cooler indoor environments and reduced energy usage.
- It's recommended to maintain an RETV of 15W/m² or less for optimal efficiency, improved occupant comfort, and lower utility expenses.
- However, **current construction trends prioritize fast-paced, energy-intensive techniques with active cooling strategies, often compromising thermal comfort.**
- There is a need for broader awareness about climate-appropriate design and architecture to promote the construction of climate-responsive buildings, despite perceived higher initial costs.

What materials are optimal?

- Analysis conducted in four warmer climate cities in India identified popular construction materials including **Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (AAC) blocks**, red bricks, fly ash, and **monolithic concrete (Mivan)**.
- **Despite sustainability concerns, monolithic concrete construction was preferred by developers due to its speed, strength, quality, and scalability, especially in high-rise buildings and skyscrapers.**
- Over **60%** of buildings under design and construction phases opted for monolithic concrete.
- RETV evaluation showed that AAC blocks consistently had **the lowest RETV across all climatic conditions**, indicating their potential as a **thermally efficient material**.
- Literature review revealed substantial differences in embodied energy (energy associated with manufacturing) among building materials, with monolithic concrete having 75 times greater embodied energy than AAC.
- Red bricks required the longest construction time for a 100 sq. ft wall area, while Mivan construction required the least, offering faster construction, especially for taller structures.
- Sustainability concerns exist across various building materials, including red bricks, AAC blocks, and monolithic concrete.
- Red bricks have moderate embodied energy, contributing to resource depletion, emissions, and waste.
- AAC blocks have lower embodied energy compared to red bricks but still contribute to emissions and waste.
- **Monolithic concrete, despite its quick construction time, has the highest embodied energy, significant environmental impact, and sustainability challenges.**
- **AAC blocks offer a better balance between embodied energy and construction time compared to red bricks and monolithic concrete.**

What next?

- India has untapped potential for innovative building materials, requiring interdisciplinary collaborations with sustainability experts.
- Strategies like **optimized building orientation, Window Wall Ratio (WWR), and improved U-value** can contribute to a sustainable built environment.
- The construction industry's preference for Mivan raises sustainability concerns due to high embodied carbon and thermal discomfort.
- Sustainable construction necessitates **innovation from manufacturers to develop cost-effective, durable, and climate-resilient solutions.**
- Re-imagining construction design and fostering a culture of sustainability are crucial for creating resilient and energy-efficient structures aligned with environmental goals.

Rohingya refugees (GS Paper II: IR)

- The recent rescue of Rohingya refugees from a capsized boat near the Indonesian coast has highlighted their desperate plight.
- **Rohingya refugees are increasingly undertaking dangerous sea journeys in search of a better life.**

- According to the **UNHCR**, **over 4,500 Rohingya refugees embarked on risky journeys across the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea last year.**
- Tragically, **569 people lost their lives** or went missing during these perilous journeys, marking the highest death toll since 2014.

Who are the Rohingya refugees?

- The **Rohingya are a Muslim minority ethnic group originating from the Arakan kingdom in Myanmar (formerly Burma).**
- They are culturally and religiously distinct from Myanmar's majority Buddhist population.
- Despite claiming to have **lived in Myanmar's Rakhine State for generations, successive governments have labeled them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.**
- Myanmar has **denied them citizenship since 1982**, rendering them the **world's largest stateless population without fundamental rights or security.**
- The largest exodus of Rohingya occurred in August 2017 when violence erupted in Rakhine, forcing over **750,000 people to seek refuge in Bangladesh.**
- The violence led to widespread destruction of villages, separation of families, and severe human rights violations, prompting the **UN to describe it as "ethnic cleansing."**
- A **UN fact-finding commission in 2018 accused the Myanmar government of having "genocidal" intent** against the Rohingya.

Why sea journeys?

- Despite over one million Rohingya having fled Myanmar since the 1990s, around 600,000 remain in the country, mainly in internally displaced people camps with restricted movements and livelihoods.
- Approximately 960,000 Rohingya reside in refugee camps in Bangladesh, particularly **near the Myanmar border in Cox's Bazar**, which hosts some of the world's largest and most densely populated refugee camps.
- Conditions in these overcrowded camps are dire, lacking basic necessities like food, water, sanitation, healthcare, and education.
- Security in the camps has deteriorated due to **gang violence and arson attacks**, resulting in over **60 Rohingya deaths** in clashes in 2023.
- **With the option of returning to Myanmar virtually impossible and worsening conditions in Bangladeshi relief camps, more Rohingya are undertaking perilous sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea to Muslim-majority nations like Indonesia and Malaysia.**
- Human traffickers exploit their desperation, charging exorbitant fees to ferry them on unsafe boats, often leading to horrifying abuse, including violence against women.

What about the rising death toll?

- The UN estimates that **one in eight Rohingya attempting the sea route die or disappear**, making it one of the deadliest stretches of water globally.
- Last year saw a 21% increase in the number of people embarking on sea journeys, with a 63% rise in deaths or disappearances compared to 2022.
- There has been a significant spike in Rohingya arrivals in Indonesia via sea, with a 1,261% increase between 2021 and 2023.

- While most refugee boats docked in Indonesia, only one boat carrying 83 individuals reached Malaysia in the same period, according to UNHCR data.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS:

Question 1: Consider the following services:

1. Education
2. Military training
3. Healthcare
4. Social Services

How many of the above is/are the core service provided by UNRWA?

- a. Only one
- b. Only two
- c. Only three
- d. All the four

Question 2: UNRWA's primary source of funding is:

- (a) Mandatory contributions from UN member states
- (b) Private donations from multinational corporations
- (c) Voluntary contributions from UN member states
- (d) Revenue generated through its commercial activities

Question 3: Consider the following statements about UNRWA's mandate:

1. It includes facilitating a durable solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.
2. It focuses exclusively on providing humanitarian and development assistance.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Question 4: The practice of courts recording reasons for issuing injunctions is primarily meant to uphold the principle of:

- (a) Natural justice
- (b) Separation of powers
- (c) Fundamental right to privacy
- (d) Sovereignty of Parliament

Question 5: Consider the following statements regarding the World Trade Organization (WTO):

1. Multilateral trade agreements negotiated under the auspices of the WTO must be adhered to by all members.
2. Plurilateral agreements are optional for WTO members and cover only those who have explicitly signed on.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Question 6: With reference to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the term 'Plurilateral Agreement' refers to:

- (a) Agreements limited to countries from specific geographical regions only.
- (b) Agreements that are negotiated on a consensus basis by all WTO members.
- (c) Trade agreements among a subset of WTO members focusing on specific sectors.
- (d) Agreements relating to intellectual property rights within the WTO framework.

Question 7: Which of the following agreements under the WTO framework is an example of a Plurilateral Agreement?

- (a) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)
- (b) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)
- (c) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)
- (d) Information Technology Agreement (ITA)

Questions	Explanation
<p>Question 1: Consider the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education 2. Military training 3. Healthcare 4. Social Services <p>How many of the above is/are the core service provided by UNRWA?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Only one b. Only two c. Only three d. All the four 	<p>Answer: (c)</p> <p>Explanation: UNRWA's role is strictly humanitarian and focuses on development. It does not engage in any activities related to military training of individuals.</p>
<p>Question 2: UNRWA's primary source of funding is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Mandatory contributions from UN member states (b) Private donations from multinational corporations (c) Voluntary contributions from UN member states (d) Revenue generated through its commercial activities 	<p>Answer: c</p> <p>Explanation: UNRWA heavily relies on donations from various UN member states. These contributions are voluntary and can fluctuate, causing potential challenges to its operations.</p>
<p>Question 3: Consider the following statements about UNRWA's mandate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It includes facilitating a durable solution to the Palestinian refugee issue. 	<p>Answer: b</p> <p>Explanation: UNRWA's mandate is limited to providing essential services and assistance to Palestinian refugees. It does not have the</p>

<p>2. It focuses exclusively on providing humanitarian and development assistance.</p> <p>Which of the above statements is/are correct?</p> <p>(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2</p>	<p>authority or mandate to engage in the political negotiations required for a durable solution</p>
<p>Question 4: The practice of courts recording reasons for issuing injunctions is primarily meant to uphold the principle of:</p> <p>(a) Natural justice (b) Separation of powers (c) Fundamental right to privacy (d) Sovereignty of Parliament</p>	<p>Answer: (a) Natural justice</p> <p>Explanation: The principle of natural justice requires that decisions with significant impact should be reasoned and transparent. Recording reasons for injunctions allows for potential scrutiny and appeals, ensuring fairness and accountability in the judicial system.</p>
<p>Question 5: Consider the following statements regarding the World Trade Organization (WTO):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multilateral trade agreements negotiated under the auspices of the WTO must be adhered to by all members. 2. Plurilateral agreements are optional for WTO members and cover only those who have explicitly signed on. <p>Which of the above statements is/are correct?</p> <p>(a) 1 only (b) 2 only (c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2</p>	<p>Answer: (b) 2 only</p> <p>Explanation: Statement 1 is incorrect. Multilateral WTO agreements are binding on all members. This is a core principle of the WTO system.</p> <p>Statement 2 is correct. Plurilateral agreements (PAs) are a specific allowance under the WTO. They involve a subset of members, not the whole, and are optional.</p>
<p>Question 6: With reference to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the term 'Plurilateral Agreement' refers to:</p> <p>(a) Agreements limited to countries from specific geographical regions only. (b) Agreements that are negotiated on a consensus basis by all WTO members. (c) Trade agreements among a subset of WTO members focusing on specific sectors. (d) Agreements relating to intellectual property rights within the WTO framework.</p>	<p>Answer: (c) Trade agreements among a subset of WTO members focusing on specific sectors.</p> <p>Plurilateral agreements are not geographically restricted.</p> <p>While multilateral WTO agreements operate on consensus, plurilateral agreements don't require approval from the entire membership. Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an example of a multilateral WTO agreement, not plurilateral.</p>
<p>Question 7: Which of the following agreements under the WTO framework is an example of a Plurilateral Agreement?</p> <p>(a) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)</p>	<p>Answer: (d) Information Technology Agreement (ITA)</p> <p>TRIPS, AoA, and GATS are multilateral agreements binding on all WTO members.</p>

<p>(b) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) (c) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (d) Information Technology Agreement (ITA)</p>	<p>The ITA is a plurilateral agreement focusing specifically on eliminating tariffs on information technology products. Only members who sign on to it are bound by its terms.</p>
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