

16 May 2024

TOPICS COVERED

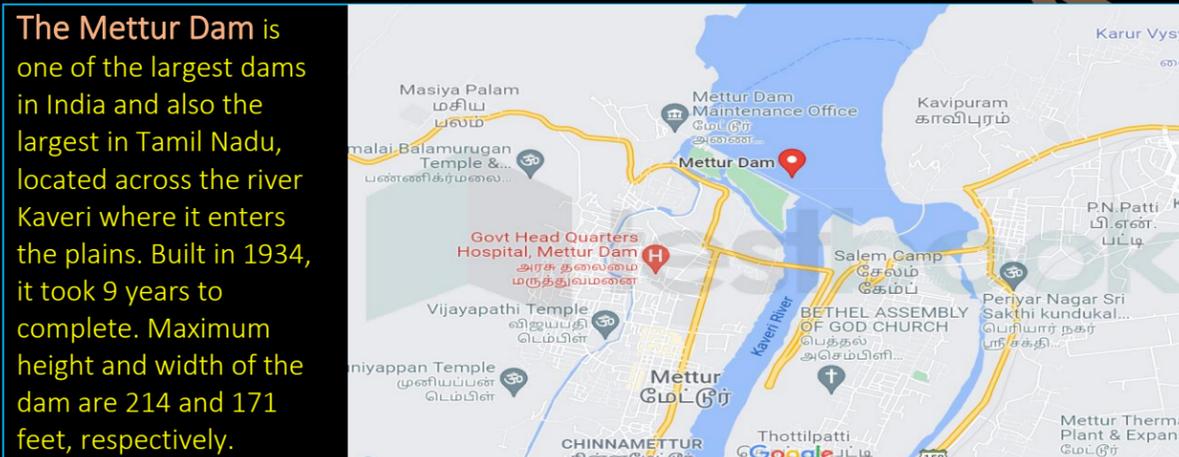
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Purkayastha's arrest under UAPA invalid, says SC (16 May) (GS Paper II: Polity)

- The Supreme Court declared the arrest and detention of journalist and NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) by the Delhi Police as invalid.
 - Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta stated that Mr. Purkayastha and his counsel were not provided with the written grounds of his arrest.
 - Mr. Purkayastha was accused of using Chinese funding to spread "anti-national propaganda" through digital media and was arrested on October 3, 2023, by the Delhi Police Special Cell. He was remanded in police custody the next day, with his lawyer being informed of the grounds of arrest on October 5.
 - The court emphasized that the right to be informed about the grounds of arrest is fundamental, as per Article 22(1) of the Constitution. Any violation of this right would invalidate the arrest and remand process.
 - The court clarified that the mere filing of a chargesheet in the case wouldn't justify the illegalities committed during the arrest.
 - As a result, the Supreme Court ordered Mr. Purkayastha's release from custody, stating that his arrest and detention were invalid in the eyes of the law due to the failure to inform him of the grounds of arrest.
 - The Supreme Court quashed the arrest of Prabir Purkayastha but clarified that its decision wasn't a judgment on the merits of the case against him.
 - Justice Mehta emphasized that just like arrests, the grounds of detention should also be communicated in writing to the detainee.
 - Failure to provide written grounds for detention violates Article 22(5) of the Constitution, which requires detainees to be informed of the grounds for their detention and given a chance to challenge it.
 - It's crucial that the investigating agency or police communicate the grounds of arrest or detention in writing, as it's considered sacrosanct and cannot be ignored under any circumstance.
 - Any non-compliance with this constitutional requirement and statutory mandate renders the custody or detention illegal, as declared by the Supreme Court.
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- The Supreme Court made a rule that arrested people or their lawyers must be given written reasons for their arrest under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), as decided in the Pankaj Bansal case in 2023.
 - This rule now applies to cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), following a recent judgment in Mr. Purkayastha's case.
 - Prabir Purkayastha was arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell on October 3, 2023.
 - He asked for a copy of the First Information Report (FIR) but was ignored by the police
 - He only received a copy of the FIR after being remanded in police custody by a Sessions Judge at 6 a.m. on October 4, 2023.
 - Mr. Purkayastha's lawyer, advocate Arshdeep Khurana, was told about the reasons for the arrest on October 5, which was 24 hours after his client was remanded in police custody.

Clandestine exercise

- The Supreme Court found that Mr. Purkayastha's personal liberty was severely compromised on October 4.
- They criticized the entire arrest process as clandestine and an attempt to bypass legal procedures.
- Mr. Purkayastha was arrested without being informed of the grounds, depriving him of the chance to defend himself or seek legal representation.
- Justice Mehta described the arrest as a blatant violation of due process, aimed at keeping the accused in police custody without giving him a fair opportunity to challenge it.
- The Delhi Police argued that Mr. Purkayastha was orally informed about the grounds of his arrest, but the court found this insufficient and upheld the importance of written communication of arrest grounds.



Bengaluru-Mysuru highway to get 60 AI-powered speed cameras (16 May)

- Due to more people speeding and driving on the wrong side of the Bengaluru-Mysuru highway, the NHAI is taking action.
- They're installing 60 smart cameras along the highway to catch violators.
- These cameras will be powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and placed strategically along both stretches of the highway.
- The cameras will be mounted on special arches with solar panels for power.
- Each arch will have five cameras and speed limit indicators for each lane to monitor traffic violations effectively.
- This is to make the highway safer by enforcing traffic rules and reducing accidents.
- In February, the NHAI approved the use of AI-based cameras at six spots along the highway.
- These cameras will automatically capture vehicles and their number plates.
- This will enable authorities to penalize violators without manual intervention.
- Motorists using the highway are happy about this initiative.
- One commuter from Bengaluru stated that it's necessary to tackle reckless driving, and these cameras might make people reconsider breaking the rules.

NHAI (National Highways Authority of India) was established in 1995 under the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988.

- Its main function is to develop, maintain, and manage National Highways assigned to it by the Government of India.
- NHAI operates as an independent agency under the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).
- It is governed by a board that includes a full-time Chairman, five full-time Members, and four part-time Members who are appointed by the Central Government.

Probe agencies must give written grounds of arrest: Supreme Court (16 May)

- The Supreme Court emphasized the importance of the right to life and personal liberty, considering it the most crucial fundamental right.
- They ruled that investigating agencies must give arrested individuals under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) a written copy specifying the reasons for their arrest.
- Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta referred to their previous judgment in the Pankaj Bansal case, where it was decided that arrested persons should be informed of the grounds of arrest under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- This ruling extends the requirement of providing written grounds of arrest from the PMLA to cases under the UAPA, ensuring that individuals' rights are protected during the arrest process.

Centre objects

- The Union government disagreed with extending the principles of the Pankaj Bansal judgment to cases under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).
- Additional Solicitor-General S.V. Raju argued against this extension, stating that the Pankaj Bansal judgment specifically addressed arrests under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and not the UAPA.
- The government's objection was based on the argument that the circumstances and legal provisions of the PMLA and UAPA are different, so the same rules shouldn't apply to both.

Army set to receive next batch of shoulder-fired Igla-S air defence systems (16 May) (GS Paper III: Internal Security)

- The Indian Army is getting more Russian Igla-S air defense systems by the end of May or early June.
- These systems are crucial for India's air defense but have faced delays in the past.
- There was a payment issue between India and Russia for defense deals, but it's been resolved now.
- The Igla-S systems were ordered last year under Emergency Procurements and are being assembled in India by Adani Defence Systems And Technologies Limited with technology from Russia.
- The Indian Army will receive the first of two Israeli Hermes-900 Medium Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) assembled by ADSTL in Hyderabad next month.
- Last year, the Army ordered 48 Igla-S launchers, 100 missiles, 48 night sights, and one missile testing station under a contract worth ₹260 crore. Deliveries are expected to start by the end of May.
- Some parts of the missile will be imported, while sights, launcher, and battery will be assembled or manufactured by Adani Defence.
- A VSHORAD (very short-range air defense systems) is a critical defense system for soldiers, serving as their last line of defense against enemy combat aircraft, helicopters, and UAVs in the air defense network.

The Igla-S, also known as the SA-24 Grinch by NATO, is a man-portable air defense system (MANPADS) developed by Russia.

Function: The Igla-S is a short-range surface-to-air missile system designed to be fired from the shoulder by a single soldier to engage low-flying fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft, drones, and cruise missiles.

Deployment: The Igla-S is operational in the Russian Armed Forces and has been exported to numerous countries worldwide.



Summer 2023 was hottest in 2,000 years, says study (16 May) (GS Paper III: Environment)

- Last year's intense summer heat in the northern hemisphere led to wildfires in the Mediterranean, buckled roads in Texas, and strained power grids in China.
- This extreme heat made it not only the warmest summer on record but also the warmest in approximately 2,000 years, according to new research.
- The findings, published in the journal Nature, come from analyzing meteorological records dating back to the mid-1800s and temperature data derived from tree ring analysis across nine northern sites.
- Scientists found that temperatures during the summer of 2023 were 2.07 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial averages, indicating a dramatic increase in global warming.
- The study underscores the urgency of addressing climate change as global temperatures and emissions continue to rise.
- Tree ring data shows that the summer months in 2023 were 2.2 degrees Celsius warmer on average compared to the estimated average temperature until 1890.
- Scientists predicted in January that 2023 was likely the warmest year in 100 millennia, but establishing year-by-year temperature comparisons over such a long period is challenging.

- The intense summer heat in 2023 was worsened by the El Niño climate pattern, causing longer and more severe heatwaves and droughts.
- A study published in PLOS Medicine found that over 150,000 heatwave-related deaths occur annually in 43 countries between 1990 and 2019.
- More than half of these deaths happened in Asia, with Europe having the highest per capita toll of 655 heat-related deaths per year per 10 million residents.
- Greece, Malta, and Italy reported the highest excess deaths within Europe.
- Extreme heat can cause health problems like heart issues, breathing difficulties, and heat stroke.

The pitch for subaltern secularism

In the shifting sands of politics, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Lalu Prasad Yadav are two politicians who have remained steadfast on one question of principle – Hindu-Muslim harmony. Both are outstanding orators with a sense of humour, but the commonality ends there. Their lives and histories are far wide apart otherwise. Mr. Aiyar thinks and speaks in English; Mr. Yadav does so in Hindi, in fact, in Bhojpuri. Mr. Aiyar is 83, and Mr. Yadav is 75, but their paths have never crossed, though they were Ministers in the same Union Cabinet under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). Their parallel lives make a metaphor of the crisis of Indian secularism.

The trajectory across the years

Mr. Aiyar went to Doon School, St. Stephen's College and joined the Indian Foreign Service. Mr. Yadav went to a village school and then college in Bihar. Mr. Aiyar describes himself as a 'secular fundamentalist,' the title of one of his numerous books. Mr. Yadav has not written any book (though he has lent his name to a biography of himself titled, *Gopalganj To Raisina*). He has, however, scripted a social coalition of Bihar's subalterns and Muslim minorities, by stopping the *rath yatra* of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) veteran L.K. Advani and ordering his arrest in Bihar in 1990.

The India International Centre in New Delhi is considered a nerve centre of English intellectualism. In 2006, Mr. Yadav, then Union Minister of Railways and leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) – the second largest contingent in the ruling UPA coalition and in power in Bihar – applied for membership of the IIC. The screening committee of the IIC, in its wisdom, decided that Mr. Yadav was not fit to be its member. "I should not have applied," Mr. Yadav said later. "It is not my place." The IIC never explained its decision. The scholar and politician, Karan Singh, who had sponsored Mr. Yadav's application, resigned as the IIC's life trustee in protest.

Mr. Aiyar, of course is a member of the IIC, which is the gated community of India's English speaking secular elite. He wears his command over the English language on his sleeve. In contrast, Mr. Yadav's humour is often social criticism. And when he turns that on his opponents, they too laugh, as when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in splits listening to Mr. Yadav taking him down during the debate on a trust vote motion in the Lok Sabha in April 1999. Mr. Yadav cites village life, Kabir, Rahim, Buddha, Krishna in his speeches.

Mr. Aiyar would cite Orwell, Kipling and Shakespeare and his humour is often at the cost of his opponents. In his running battle with a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-leaning editor in



Varghese K. George

Social, economic and Political Justice

There is subaltern Hindutva, but the question in the 2024 general election is whether there can be subaltern secularism

Delhi, he would repeatedly recall that he went to Deshbandhu College, a far cry from the Stephanian world. Ever ready with one-liners, whether to take down an opponent or eulogise a friend, he used to be a joy when it came to sound bites. And in 2014, he gave the winning slogan, not for his party the Congress, but the target of his ire, Narendra Modi. "Let him sell tea," he quipped in response to a question, on a former tea seller's claim to the top post in the country.

Mr. Narendra Modi is opposed in the subaltern terrain by Mr. Yadav. Around the same time that Mr. Modi (born 1950) was selling tea in Gujarat, Mr. Yadav (born 1948) was herding cattle in Bihar. Much before Mr. Modi's *chaiwallah* story became an international bestseller, Mr. Yadav had sold his. In the same speech cited above, Mr. Yadav said about his wife Rabri Devi, "It is the beauty of Indian secularism that a poor woman from the village is the Chief Minister of Bihar," charging the BJP with trying to destroy it.

Mr. Aiyar spoke within the gated community. Mr. Yadav spoke to those without gates and homes. Their secularism ran on parallel tracks, not agnostic of each other, but fostering a mutual hostility. The English elite could never accept Mr. Yadav and his like; though a Union Minister, the IIC would not admit him. Mr. Yadav had his own views. In the speech in 1999, he reminded Yashwant Sinha, fellow Bihari, and Indian Administrative Service-turned Minister in the A.B. Vajpayee cabinet, "We faced struggle and jail. In Delhi, there are intellectuals like you who are always in power..."

The communities that were mobilised by Mr. Yadav (and his counterparts in Uttar Pradesh such as Mulayam Singh Yadav and Kanshi Ram), the Hindu subalterns, over the decades, sensed the contempt they faced in the English world, particularly when more of them were educated. They would in turn be attracted to the BJP's pitch for honour within Hindu society. That turned out to be the moment for what scholar Sajjan Kumar terms subaltern Hindutva that Mr. Modi mobilised in 2014. In 2024, its contradictions are surfacing, but the reckoning of 2014 was long in the making.

Vernacular, subaltern secularism

In the early 2000s, when the BJP was gradually moving to the centre stage of Indian politics, Alok Rai wrote this about the need for vernacularising – more specifically, Hindi-fying – secular values in order to communicate with masses. He said, "The social privilege enjoyed by this (English) elite becomes...a serious liability for the secular and modern value package espoused by them....The English elite will be condemned to confront in the political battlefield the popular energies which Hindi can command with relative ease. The strategic location of the English elite in

the apparatuses of power may delay the day of reckoning....The overwhelming social dominance of English is a threat to certain other things which they value like secularism, like the struggle for a modern society..The association with English and the class that lives off English has become a serious liability for those valued goals."

The expansion across the subcontinent, of what is today called Hinduism, over millennia, is a story of constant vernacularisation and regionalisation of the traditions that were formed in northwestern regions of the country, called Aryavarta in ancient texts. In new terrains and among new peoples, the carriers of those traditions sought connections by negotiating with local practices. The historian, R. Champakalakshmi, describes this as a process of "interaction, acculturation and accommodation and often confrontation between different zones of language and culture." This continues into the Hindutva project as well – for instance, in Mr. Modi's outreach to Tamils.

Secular inquisitors travelled in the opposite direction, cancelling people and practices for the slightest of disagreements and even labelling them regressive or communal. And, with the focus entirely on inter-religious relations and negligence of intra-religious justice, distanced secularism from the subalterns. "Intra-religious domination, i.e., religion-related patriarchy and caste domination, fanaticism, bigotry and extremism got ignored," writes political theorist Rajeev Bhargava. "...as the intra-religious dimension was ejected from the meaning of secularism....much to the detriment of its overall value, secularism began to be identified, by proponents and opponents alike, exclusively with the defence of minority rights...especially Muslims."

The contest, the challenge

There is subaltern Hindutva, but the question in 2024 is whether there can be subaltern secularism. Mr. Modi and his principal opponent, Rahul Gandhi, are framing the general election as a choice between subaltern Hindutva versus subaltern secularism. Both of them are facing resistance within their parties to this subalternisation. Mr. Gandhi has brought questions of caste justice into mainstream Congress thinking, besides partnering with parties such as RJD, the Samajwadi Party and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, that represent subaltern groups but also carry their own baggage. But the real challenge before him is reconciling his party's old elitism with the inescapable turn to the subaltern terrain where the numbers are aggregated. The question is whether he can force Mr. Aiyar to meet Mr. Yadav.

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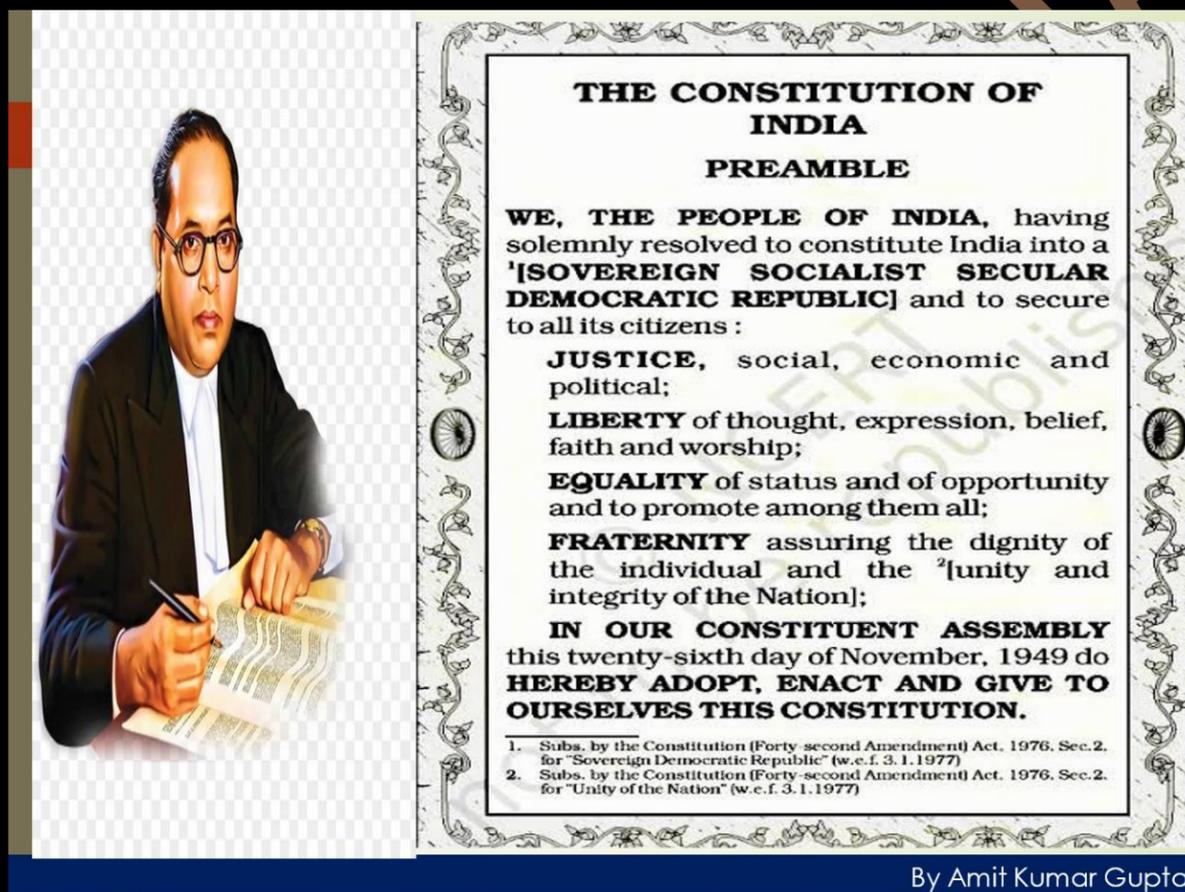
The pitch for subaltern secularism (16 May) (GS Paper I & GS Paper II: Secularism)

There is subaltern Hindutva, but the question in the 2024 general election is whether there can be subaltern secularism

- Mani Shankar Aiyar and Lalu Prasad Yadav are politicians known for their commitment to Hindu-Muslim harmony.
- They are both skilled speakers with a sense of humor.
- However, they differ in many aspects of their lives and backgrounds.
- Aiyar communicates in English, while Yadav speaks in Hindi, particularly in Bhojpuri.
- Aiyar is 83 years old, while Yadav is 75.
- Despite both being Ministers in the same Union Cabinet under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), their paths have never crossed.
- Their contrasting lives serve as a metaphor for the challenges facing Indian secularism.

The trajectory across the years

- Mr. Aiyar and Mr. Yadav have different backgrounds:
- Mr. Aiyar went to prestigious schools like Doon School and St. Stephen's College, and later joined the Indian Foreign Service.
- Mr. Yadav, on the other hand, attended a village school and then went to college in Bihar.
- Mr. Aiyar calls himself a 'secular fundamentalist' and has written several books, including one with that title.
- Mr. Yadav hasn't authored any books himself, but there's a biography about him titled "Gopalganj To Raisina".
- Mr. Yadav is known for his role in Bihar politics, where he formed a coalition of marginalized groups like subalterns (lower class) and Muslim minorities.
- In 1990, Mr. Yadav made a significant move by stopping a political rally (rath yatra) of L.K. Advani, a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and ordering his arrest in Bihar.
- The India International Centre (IIC) in New Delhi is known as a hub for English intellectualism.
- In 2006, Mr. Yadav, who was then the Union Minister of Railways and a leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), applied for membership at the IIC.
- However, the screening committee of the IIC decided that Mr. Yadav wasn't suitable for membership, although they never provided a clear explanation for their decision.



- Mr. Yadav later admitted that he shouldn't have applied in the first place, saying, "It is not my place."
- Karan Singh, a scholar and politician who had sponsored Mr. Yadav's application, resigned as the IIC's life trustee in protest against the decision.
- In contrast, Mr. Aiyar is a member of the IIC, which is seen as a gathering place for India's English-speaking secular elite.
- Mr. Aiyar is known for his fluency in English, while Mr. Yadav's humor often involves social criticism.
- Mr. Yadav's speeches often reference village life and cultural figures like Kabir, Rahim, Buddha, and Krishna.
- Mr. Aiyar is known for citing authors like Orwell, Kipling, and Shakespeare. His humor often targets his opponents.
- He humorously reminded a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-leaning editor in Delhi about his humble college background at Deshbandhu College, contrasting it with the prestigious St. Stephen's College.
- In 2014, he famously quipped about Narendra Modi's humble beginnings as a tea seller, saying, "Let him sell tea."
- Mr. Yadav, on the other hand, opposed Narendra Modi, citing his own humble background of herding cattle in Bihar while Modi was selling tea in Gujarat.
- Mr. Yadav's wife, Rabri Devi, being a poor woman from the village who became the Chief Minister of Bihar, exemplified Indian secularism for him, which he accused the BJP of trying to destroy.
- Mr. Aiyar spoke within the elite circles, while Mr. Yadav spoke to the common people. Their secularism intersected but also clashed, fostering mutual hostility.

- Despite being a Union Minister, Mr. Yadav was not accepted into elite circles like the India International Centre (IIC).
- Mr. Yadav highlighted the contrast between the struggles of people like himself from Bihar and the intellectuals in Delhi who always seemed to be in power.
- Communities mobilized by Mr. Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Kanshi Ram, particularly Hindu subalterns, felt the contempt from the English-speaking elite, which drove some to be attracted to the BJP's pitch for honor within Hindu society.
- This attraction to the BJP's message culminated in what scholar Sajjan Kumar terms "subaltern Hindutva" mobilized by Modi in 2014. However, by 2024, the contradictions of this movement are becoming apparent, although the roots of the reckoning go back years.

Vernacular, subaltern secularism

- In the early 2000s, as the BJP gained prominence in Indian politics, Alok Rai argued for the need to make secular values more accessible to the masses by vernacularizing, specifically by promoting Hindi.
- Rai suggested that the dominance of English among the elite could hinder the spread of secular and modern values to the wider population, as English-speaking elites might struggle to connect with the popular masses.
- He believed that the association with English and the elitist class could be a hindrance to goals like secularism and the promotion of a modern society.
- Hinduism's historical expansion across the subcontinent involved adapting to local languages and customs, a process known as vernacularization. This allowed Hindu traditions to spread and connect with new populations.
- Historian R. Champakalakshmi describes this process as involving interaction, acculturation, accommodation, and sometimes confrontation between different linguistic and cultural regions.
- This process of vernacularization continues in the Hindutva project, as seen in Narendra Modi's efforts to connect with Tamil speakers, demonstrating an ongoing adaptation of Hindu traditions to different linguistic and cultural contexts.
- Some secular individuals or groups became overly focused on criticizing and condemning people and practices within their own religious community, often labeling them regressive or communal for minor disagreements.
- This narrow focus on inter-religious relations led to a neglect of issues within religious communities themselves, such as patriarchy, caste domination, fanaticism, bigotry, and extremism.
- Political theorist Rajeev Bhargava argues that by ignoring issues within religious communities, secularism lost some of its value. Secularism became exclusively associated with defending minority rights, particularly those of Muslims.
- This exclusion of intra-religious issues from the meaning of secularism was detrimental to its overall effectiveness, leading both supporters and critics to see secularism solely in terms of protecting minority rights, especially those of Muslims.

The contest, the challenge

- In 2024, there's a debate about whether there can be a concept called "subaltern secularism" to counter the rise of "subaltern Hindutva."
- Narendra Modi and his main rival, Rahul Gandhi, are presenting the general election as a choice between subaltern Hindutva and subaltern secularism.
- Both leaders are facing opposition within their parties to this idea of subalternization.
- Rahul Gandhi is trying to bring issues of caste justice into mainstream Congress ideology and has formed alliances with parties like RJD, Samajwadi Party, and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which represent marginalized groups but also have their own challenges.
- The real challenge for Rahul Gandhi is reconciling his party's traditional elitism with the need to appeal to the subaltern groups where the majority of voters lie.
- The question is whether he can bridge the gap between figures like Mr. Aiyar, who represents the elite, and Mr. Yadav, who connects with the grassroots.

The case for election day as a holiday

In a vibrant democracy such as India, the right to vote is not just a privilege but also a fundamental duty enshrined in the Constitution. Several countries around the world such as Australia (where voting is mandatory), South Africa, South Korea, France provide a holiday on election day to facilitate voter participation.

Recent discussions have brought to light an intriguing debate surrounding the obligation of employers, particularly Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), to declare a holiday on election day. While some argue for the sanctity of this practice, citing constitutional principles, others question its necessity and potential infringement on individual liberties. Interestingly, several member-countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (made up largely of advanced democracies) conduct their national elections on a weekend. Other democratic nations such as the United States do not mandate election day as a paid holiday. Some States in the U.S. make election day as a paid holiday, while some do not. However, a study published by Princeton University, about 'Increasing Voter Turnout' said, "The results are clear. There is no evidence from the 'natural experiment' of states providing an election holiday for state employees that such holidays significantly increase voter turnout", concluding that "having an election holiday, by itself, is not an effective strategy to increase voter turnout."

The issue of a balance

The mandate for employers to declare a holiday on election day raises pertinent questions about the balance between civic responsibility and personal freedoms. Should businesses be compelled to provide a paid day off when voting is not obligatory? Is it fair to impose such obligations on employers?



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The issue must be seen as one that delves into the essence of democracy itself

Advocates for mandatory holiday declaration argue that the Constitution of India upholds the right to vote as a fundamental aspect of democratic governance. Therefore, ensuring access to polling booths by granting employees a day off is seen as a practical means to uphold this constitutional mandate. Additionally, organisations such as the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), and National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), as representatives of the business community, are expected to align with broader societal goals, including facilitating voter participation.

The counterargument to this perspective emphasises individual freedom and the principles of a free market economy. In a democracy, citizens are granted the liberty to choose whether or not to exercise their right to vote. By extension, employers should also have the discretion to determine their operational policies, including whether to provide a paid holiday on election day. Compelling them to do so may be perceived as an infringement on their autonomy and could potentially create undue burdens, especially for smaller businesses with limited resources. Comparisons with other democracies, such as the U.S., further complicate the matter. In the U.S., election day is not designated as a national holiday, and the onus is on individuals to manage their schedules to cast their votes. While some States have implemented provisions for paid time off to vote, it is not universally mandated at the federal level.

What should India do?

This raises questions about whether India should follow a similar approach, allowing for flexibility and adaptation to varying business needs and cultural contexts. The recent effort by the Home

Secretary of Tamil Nadu, P. Amudha, suggesting linking paid leave to proof of voting introduces an interesting middle ground in this debate. By incentivising voter turnout while maintaining employer discretion, this proposal addresses both the importance of civic engagement and the concerns of businesses regarding operational disruptions. Employees would have the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights while also fulfilling their professional responsibilities, thereby striking a balance between individual liberties and societal obligations.

In perspective

Ultimately, the question of election day holiday mandates transcends mere legalities and delves into the essence of democracy itself. It is about fostering a culture of civic engagement while respecting the diverse needs and circumstances of both citizens and businesses. Rather than imposing rigid mandates, policymakers should explore innovative solutions that encourage voter participation without unduly burdening employers. As technology progresses sometime in the future, we may be able to vote, without any undue influence, in the privacy of our homes. The debate surrounding the obligation of employers to declare a holiday on election day is a nuanced one that touches upon fundamental principles of democracy, individual freedoms, and economic realities. While the Constitution underscores the importance of voting rights, it is imperative to strike a balance that respects both civic obligations and business autonomy. By fostering dialogue and exploring flexible solutions, India can uphold its democratic ethos while accommodating the dynamic needs of its diverse society.

The views expressed are personal

The case for election day as a holiday (16 May) (GS Paper II: Right to Vote)

- In India, voting is not only a privilege but also a fundamental duty according to the Constitution.

- Right to vote and to be elected in India is a (UPSC 2017)
- (a) Fundamental Right
- (b) Natural Right
- (c) Constitutional Right
- (d) Legal Right

- Some countries like Australia, South Africa, South Korea, and France provide a holiday on election day to encourage voter participation.
- There's a debate about whether employers, especially Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), should declare a holiday on election day.
- Proponents argue it upholds constitutional principles, while others question its necessity and potential impact on individual freedoms.
- Many advanced democracies, including OECD member-countries, hold national elections on weekends.
- The United States doesn't require election day to be a paid holiday nationwide, though some states do.
- A study by Princeton University found no significant increase in voter turnout in states where election day was a holiday for state employees.
- The study concludes that simply having an election holiday may not effectively increase voter turnout.

The issue of a balance

- The debate over mandating employers to provide a holiday on election day raises questions about balancing civic duty and personal freedoms.
- Proponents argue that since the Constitution of India considers voting a fundamental right, granting employees a day off to vote is a practical way to uphold this constitutional mandate.
- Business organizations like FICCI, ASSOCHAM, and NASSCOM are expected to support broader societal goals, including promoting voter participation.
- Opponents emphasize individual freedom and the principles of a free market economy, arguing that citizens should have the liberty to choose whether to vote, and employers should have the discretion to set their operational policies.
- Forcing businesses to provide a paid holiday on election day may be seen as infringing on their autonomy and could burden smaller businesses with limited resources.
- Comparisons with other democracies like the U.S., where election day is not a national holiday and individuals are responsible for managing their voting schedules, complicate the issue.
- While some U.S. states offer paid time off to vote, it is not universally mandated at the federal level.

What should India do?

- There's a question of whether India should adopt a flexible approach like some other countries regarding election day policies, considering varying business needs and cultural contexts.
- The recent suggestion by the Home Secretary of Tamil Nadu, P. Amudha, proposes linking paid leave to proof of voting, offering a middle ground in the debate.
- This proposal incentivizes voter turnout while allowing employers to maintain discretion over operational matters.
- Employees would have the chance to vote while fulfilling their professional duties, striking a balance between individual freedoms and societal responsibilities.

In perspective

- The debate about election day holiday mandates goes beyond just legal issues and speaks to the core of democracy.
- It's about promoting civic engagement while considering the diverse needs of citizens and businesses.
- Instead of imposing strict rules, policymakers should find creative ways to boost voter participation without burdening employers excessively.
- With advancements in technology, there might be future possibilities for voting from home without external influence.
- This debate involves fundamental aspects of democracy, individual freedoms, and economic realities.
- While voting rights are crucial as per the Constitution, it's important to find a balance that respects both civic duties and business autonomy.
- India can maintain its democratic values while adapting to the changing needs of its society through open dialogue and flexible solutions.

- **The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI)** is a non-governmental trade association and advocacy group based in India.
 - Founded in 1927 on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi by Indian businessmen G.D. Birla and Purshottamdas Thakurdas.
 - It is the largest, one of the oldest, and the apex business organization in India.
 - FICCI operates as a non-government, not-for-profit organization.
- Dr. Anish Shah, the Group CEO and Managing Director of Mahindra & Mahindra, currently serves as the President of FICCI.
- FICCI's membership includes both private and public sector companies, including Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Multinational Corporations (MNCs).
 - It has an indirect membership of over 250,000 companies from various regional chambers of commerce.
- The chamber is actively involved in sector-specific business development, promotion, and networking activities.
- FICCI is headquartered in New Delhi, the national capital, and has a presence in 12 states in India and 8 countries worldwide.

The Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) is the country's oldest apex chamber.

- It brings actionable insights to strengthen the Indian ecosystem.
- It leverages its network of more than 4,50,000 members.
- MSMEs represent a large segment of its membership.
- ASSOCHAM has a strong presence in states and key cities globally.
- It encompasses more than 400 associations, federations, and regional chambers.
- Established in 1920 by a group of chambers of commerce led by the Calcutta Traders Association.
- Represents the interests of trade and commerce in India.
- Acts as an interface between issues and initiatives.
- **Location:**
 - Headquartered in New Delhi.
 - Regional offices in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Ranchi, Jammu, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Mumbai, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Jaipur, and Bhubaneswar.
- **Initiatives:**
 - Members lead initiatives in various segments such as empowerment, healthcare, education and skilling, hygiene, affirmative action, road safety, livelihood, life skills, and sustainability.

National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) is a not-for-profit industry association, serving as the apex body over the \$250 billion technology industry in India.

- It has made a significant contribution to India's GDP, exports, employment, infrastructure, and global visibility.
- This industry provides the highest employment in the private sector in India.
- **Establishment:**
 - Nasscom was established in 1988.
- **Focus:**
 - Nasscom is focused on building the architecture integral to the development of the technology sector.
 - It does this through policy advocacy and by helping set the strategic direction for the sector.
- **Leadership:**
 - Debjani Ghosh serves as the President of Nasscom.
- **Affiliation:**
 - Nasscom comes under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Question: Assess the effectiveness of incentivizing voter participation through the provision of paid leave. (250 Words/15 Marks)

Crime and time: On election-time incarceration (16 May)

Election-time incarceration adversely affects democratic spirit

- Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, was arrested on January 31 and seeks interim bail to campaign in the general election in his home state.
- The Supreme Court granted interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal until the end of the polls, emphasizing the importance of the election.
- The Court acknowledged that key leaders should be allowed to campaign for electoral democracy but chose to hear the prosecution's objections first.
- The Court set a hearing date for May 17, earlier than the requested date of May 20, to consider Mr. Soren's case.
- Bail orders must be given after hearing the prosecution's objections, ensuring a fair process.
- The delay in Mr. Soren's case was due to the Jharkhand High Court's two-month delay in delivering a judgment on his petition.
- Mr. Soren is accused of money laundering related to the illegal sale of land, while Mr. Kejriwal faces bribery charges related to adopting a favorable excise policy.
- Differences in the merits of their cases exist, with Mr. Kejriwal's case relying on approvers' statements and Mr. Soren's case relying on documentary evidence.
- Strict bail provisions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act require courts to consider the overall merits of a case at the bail stage.
- Election-time incarceration unfairly disadvantages affected parties and undermines democratic principles.

New term, old problems: On Putin's new term and the Ukraine war (16 May)

Russia's Vladimir Putin is finding it difficult to keep the effects of war from hitting home

- Vladimir Putin, after his fifth term as Russia's President, removed long-time Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.
- The appointment of civilian economist Andrei Belousov to run the Defence Ministry highlights the economic aspect of Russia's war in Ukraine.
- Criticisms about Shoigu's handling of the war, which Russia expected to be quick, led to his removal despite his past successes.
- Putin aims to shake up the Defence Ministry to meet military objectives more effectively.
- Russia recently launched a new offensive in northeast Ukraine, targeting Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city.
- Ukraine expects new weapons from the U.S., but it's uncertain if they can counter Russia's advances.
- Putin's immediate goal is to win the war, but the path to victory is unclear due to damage to Russia's relations with the West and deepening ties with China.
- Internally, Putin has tightened control over the state and society and is intolerant of dissent.
- Russia has managed to shield ordinary citizens from sanctions' effects so far, but the duration of the war poses challenges.
- Ukraine has retaliated by attacking Russia's Black Sea fleet and border towns, increasing the war's costs.
- Putin believes momentum is on his side, but continued conflict could leave Russia internally repressive, economically weaker, and isolated internationally.

Social media's impact on Indian politics (16 May) (GS Paper I: Society)

The traditional media's shift to more provocative, biased content for survival, may have ensured its death

- In Uttar Pradesh, a young Muslim man credits Dhruv Rathee for Congress' potential victory in the election.
- Young Jatav men in Agra also mention Dhruv Rathee and local online influencers as significant figures they follow.
- Even a supporter of the ruling BJP from the Rawat community in Mohanlalganj admits to regularly listening to Ravish on YouTube.
- Many people can recall the content of these influencers' shows and episodes in detail.
- This election is being characterized as the first social media election in India.
- Social media platforms have provided spaces for alternative viewpoints that are independent of state control.
- As a result, there is a noticeable cognitive dissonance between the government's narrative and the perspectives shared on social media.

Changing contours

- Social media was initially used by the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to create cognitive dissonance with traditional media.
- A "right-wing ecosystem" emerged on social media, openly politically biased and pushing boundaries with commentary on various topics.
- Traditional media started echoing content from the right-wing ecosystem, saturating the type of content received by the public.
- People began recognizing the control exerted by traditional media, with even core BJP supporters acknowledging its bias.
- **The shift towards more biased content by traditional media created an opportunity for critical voices on social media.**
- **These critical voices do not align with any political party, allowing them to gain credibility abandoned by traditional media.**
- **Many people find it easier to get an accurate picture of India through social media due to its diversity of viewpoints.**
- Influencers challenging the dominant narrative have gained traction, aided by algorithms boosting rapidly growing content.
- For example, **Dhruv Rathee's video titled "Is India becoming a DICTATORSHIP?" has amassed 25 million views on YouTube**, with its impact spreading across social media platforms.
- Social media has provided a platform for political engagement, particularly for reticent voters silenced by fear.
- An Instagram influencer from the Jatav community in Mohanlalganj remains publicly apolitical due to fear but expresses growing frustration against the BJP.
- **Social media has been widely adopted by educated youth**, who were once seen as a core support base for Prime Minister Modi.
- After 10 years, many youths have lost their aspiration and feel frustrated due to various reasons.
- In regions like Barabanki, divisions among the Kurmi population, a key demographic, are evident, with educated youth moving away from the BJP.
- This shift is reflected in election results, where the BJP lost several constituencies compared to previous elections.
- **While diversity of opinion and active political contestation are positive signs for democracy, the long-term implications need scrutiny.**
- Political narratives are now being shaped outside the formal party system, diminishing the role of party workers and intermediaries.
- Social media allows leaders to directly shape narratives, leading to greater centralization within political parties.
- Algorithms on social media platforms contribute to deeper polarization among voters.
- The decline of traditional media's credibility in framing political issues has elevated social media's role in elections.
- The impact of social media dominance on reasoned discussion and the health of Indian democracy is a significant concern for the 2024 election.

Conflict with pachyderm pathways (16 May)

Kadar tribesman's death due to an elephant attack sparks concern in Tamil Nadu

- The recent death of a **Kadar tribesman in Tamil Nadu's Anamalai Tiger Reserve** due to an elephant attack has shocked both the indigenous community and conservationists.
 - The Kadar tribes are known for their long-standing co-existence with wild elephants.
- The Kadar are recognized as a tribal or indigenous community in India and are designated as a Scheduled Tribe in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala.
 - They are considered an aboriginal tribe whose traditional livelihood revolves around hunting and gathering.
 - The Kadar specialize in collecting various forest resources such as honey, wax, sago, arrowroot, cardamom, ginger, and umbrella sticks, which they trade with merchants from the plains.
 - The Paraiyar community asserts that the Kadar are part of their community, emphasizing their role in forest conservation and the protection of forest life.
- Human-elephant negative interactions in Tamil Nadu are increasing due to habitat degradation, developmental activities in forest buffers, and obstruction of critical elephant movement paths.
 - In response to the escalating danger, the Tamil Nadu government has formed a panel to identify elephant corridors.
 - The panel is headed by Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests V. Naganathan.
 - It aims to reassess existing corridors in the state, including those identified in previous studies conducted by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).

Infographics

- The panel recently released a list of **42 elephant corridors** in Tamil Nadu.
- The public was invited to provide comments on the draft report until May 5.
- Environmentalists praised the report for doubling the number of corridors compared to previous reports.
- The Project Elephant Division's report in 2023 identified 20 corridors, while the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) identified 19 corridors.
- The elephant population in Tamil Nadu was recorded at 2,961 in 26 forest divisions during a census conducted in southern states in 2023.
- Intense conflict between elephants and humans is observed in Coimbatore, Gudalur, Hosur, and Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR), resulting in casualties on both sides.

Unnatural deaths

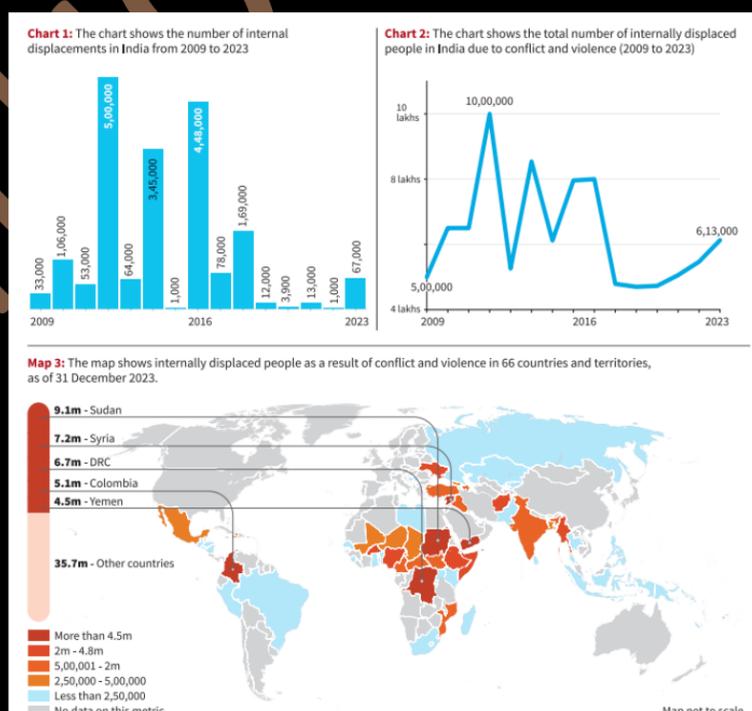
- A total of 1,593 elephants died in Tamil Nadu from 2010, with 168 classified as 'unnatural deaths'.

- Electrocutation was the primary cause of unnatural deaths, followed by bait bombs, poisoning, road accidents, train collisions, and hunting.
- Most unnatural deaths occur outside forests when elephants traverse forest peripheries, encountering hazards like illegal electric fences and sagging power lines.
- Securing elephant corridors and safe movement paths is crucial to reducing such deaths and maintaining sustainable elephant populations.
- The draft corridor report faced opposition from some stakeholders, including farmers' organizations and political parties.
- Concerns included fears of losing land and livelihoods, restrictions, and insufficient consultation.
- Requests were made for the draft to be released in Tamil for better understanding.
- Public hearings will now be held in each forest range district to address objections and find solutions for peaceful human-animal coexistence.

Manipur accounted for 97% of displacements in South Asia (16 May)

New report reveals 69,000 displacements in South Asia due to conflict, with Manipur violence accounting for 67,000

- In 2023, there were 69,000 displacements in South Asia due to conflict and violence.
- The majority of these displacements, around 67,000, occurred in Manipur, India.
- This is the highest number of displacements in India since 2018, according to a report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) based in Geneva.
- The displacements in Manipur were triggered by ethnic clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities.
- The clashes were sparked by a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organized in Manipur's hill districts on May 3, 2023.
- The march was in protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.
- The violence resulted in over 200 casualties.
- The Manipur High Court had previously called for recommendations to grant ST status to the Meitei community to prevent marginalization.
- The call to grant Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community in Manipur was met with resistance from other local STs, including the Kukis.
- Land disputes were a significant underlying factor contributing to the tensions.
- On May 3, 2023, protests turned violent in Churachandpur district, spreading to other districts like Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnoupal, and Kangpokpi, resulting in around 67,000 displacements.
- Internal displacement refers to the forced movement of individuals within the borders of a country due to events or occurrences causing displacement.
- More than three-quarters of the occurred within Manipur, while a fifth neighboring state of Mizoram, with going to Nagaland and Assam.
- In response to the violence, the Union curfews, shut down the internet, forces, established relief camps, and committee for Manipur, although there about its composition.
- By the end of 2023, there were 0.61 displaced people in India.
- Globally, as of 2023, 68.3 million displaced by conflict and violence, with million internally displaced people over particularly notable in 2022 and 2023.
- Map 3 displays the number of internally (IDPs) by country as of 2023.
- Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Palestinian territories witnessed significant conflict-driven displacement, accounting for nearly two-thirds of new movements of people due to conflict in 2023.
- Throughout 2023, Sudan experienced six million forced movements of people due to violence, marking the second-highest number of forced movements within a year, following Ukraine's 16.9 million in 2022.
- Globally, in 2023, there were 20.5 million internal displacements resulting from conflict.
- Displacements can also occur due to natural disasters, contributing to the total number of internally displaced persons. When considering natural disasters, the total IDPs reached a record high of 75.9 million by the end of 2023, with 7.7 million displacements attributed to disasters. This figure increased from 71.1 million at the end of 2022.



displacements went to the smaller numbers government imposed deployed security formed a peace were disagreements million internally people were an increase of 22.6 the past five years, displaced persons Congo, and the

On Delhi's mounting waste crisis (16 May)

As the national capital, Delhi needs to scale up its processing capacity to manage daily waste. The quantity of waste is expected to increase in the coming years together with the per capita waste generation

- The Supreme Court recently criticized the state of solid waste management (SWM) in New Delhi, bringing attention to a significant issue.
- In the national capital, there is an excess of 3,800 tonnes of solid waste that remains untreated.
- This untreated waste poses a threat to public health and the environment as it ends up in landfills.
- The accumulation of solid waste in landfills can have adverse effects on the surrounding areas and ecosystems.

What is the status of Delhi's SWM system?

- According to the 2011 Census, New Delhi's population was about 1.7 crore, expected to be around 2.32 crore in 2024, and projected to rise to 2.85 crore by 2031.
- With an average per capita generation of about 0.6 kg/day per person, New Delhi generates approximately 13,000 tonnes per day (TPD) of waste, which equals roughly 1,400 truckloads, totaling about 42 lakh tonnes per annum.
- By 2031, with the population increase, waste generation could rise to 17,000 TPD.
- About 90% of the waste generated in New Delhi is collected by the three municipal corporations: the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Cantonment Board, and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation.
- Generally, about 50-55% of the waste generated in Indian cities is biodegradable wet waste, 35% is non-biodegradable wet waste, and 10% is an inert component.
- Accordingly, in New Delhi, 7,000 TPD would be wet waste, 4,800 TPD dry waste, and 2,000 TPD inert.

What about the processing capacity of SWM in Delhi?

- New Delhi has waste-processing facilities at Okhla, Bhalswa, Narela, Bawana, Tehkhand, SMA Industrial Area, Nilothi, and Ghazipur.
- These facilities have a collective design capacity of about 9,200 TPD (Tonnes per day).
- The facilities include composting facilities handling around 900-1,000 TPD and waste-to-energy projects of 8,200 TPD.
- However, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is disposing of unprocessed waste of 3,800 TPD in the three designated landfills: Gazipur, Bhalswa, and Okhla.
- These landfills consist of unprocessed wet and dry waste, generating methane gases, leachates, and causing landfill fires, which adversely affect the surrounding environment.
- The accumulation of unprocessed waste in these landfills has led to a staggering 2.58 crore tonnes of legacy waste piling up over 200 acres of land.
- The MCD initiated biomining in 2019 to reduce the amount of waste, but the COVID-19 pandemic halted these efforts.
- Initially planned to be completed by 2024, biomining will now take another two to three years.
- However, the environmental impact will persist until fresh waste is scientifically processed.
- With the current accumulation of 3,800 TPD of unprocessed waste, the landfills will only become bigger and taller.

What are the MCD's challenges?

- Lack of waste segregation at the source is a major challenge for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Many households and commercial establishments do not segregate their waste, leading to unprocessed mixed waste entering landfills.
- Waste processing plants require large land parcels, approximately 30-40 acres each, which is difficult to find in Delhi. This scarcity of land leads to a significant portion of waste being left untreated.
- Public awareness of proper waste management practices is low, contributing to littering and improper disposal habits. This diverts the MCD's attention towards clearing open points rather than processing wet waste.
- Certain areas lack regular waste collection services, resulting in the accumulation of waste and littering.
- Illegal dumping in open areas and water bodies further increases pressure on the municipal body, requiring more resources for clean-up efforts.
- Lack of coordination among various stakeholders, including multiple municipal corporations, leads to inefficient waste management, complicating the MCD's efforts to address the city's waste management issues.

What efforts need to be made in order to separate the waste?

- Delhi needs to increase its waste processing capacity to handle the growing amount of waste generated daily.
- The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) should plan for a waste management system that can accommodate the needs of approximately three crore people.
- The total design capacity of the city's waste processing facilities should be 18,000 tonnes per day (TPD).
- Biodegradable wet waste should be composted or used to generate biogas. The design capacity for processing wet waste should be set at 9,000 tonnes.
- Delhi will need at least 18 composting or biogas plants to ensure that no biodegradable wet waste reaches landfills.
- Non-biodegradable dry waste, comprising about 33% of the total waste, can be processed through recycling facilities.
- The remaining non-recyclable dry waste fraction, known as refuse-derived fuel (RDF), can be used to generate power in waste-to-energy projects.
- While waste-to-energy projects may have slightly higher costs for power generation, the objective is to manage waste scientifically and mitigate environmental impacts, particularly those from landfill fires.

Can waste processing be decentralised?

- Delhi faces challenges in identifying large land parcels for waste processing plants, so it should collaborate with neighboring states to establish composting plants.
- The market for organic compost produced from wet waste exists in neighboring states like Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

- Tamil Nadu and Kerala have decentralized Micro-Composting Centers (MCC) at the ward level, managing about 20% of the city's wet waste.
- Bengaluru has set up ward-level Dry Waste Collection Centers (DWCC) managing about 10% of dry waste.
- Delhi's solid waste management (SWM) system should integrate decentralized options for both wet and dry waste, alongside large processing facilities to ensure all waste is scientifically processed.
- Existing processing facilities should operate at full capacity, while new ones are built to handle the increasing waste generation.
- Urban local bodies should learn from successful waste management practices in other cities in India and abroad for efficient SWM processing.

More than 1,300 SC/ST entrepreneurs benefited from Annal Ambedkar Business Champions Scheme in first year (16 May)

- The Annal Ambedkar Business Champions Scheme (AABCS) in Tamil Nadu aims to promote economic development and entrepreneurs from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.
- A total of 1,303 entrepreneurs from SC/ST communities have availed themselves of ₹134.86 crore in capital subsidy for their businesses under this scheme.
- The scheme offers a 35% capital subsidy on eligible project costs, capped at ₹1.5 crore, and a 6% interest subvention for loans not exceeding 10 years.
- There is no minimum educational qualification required, but applicants must be under 55 years old to qualify.
- Both new and existing entrepreneurs from SC/ST communities are eligible for benefits.
- Entrepreneurs can submit their project proposals to the District Industries Centre (DIC) in their districts.
- A task force led by the Collector evaluates proposals and grants clearance.
- Once approved, beneficiaries can access capital subsidy and interest subvention for their loans.
- T. Chitralekha, a 50-year-old assistant professor-turned-entrepreneur from Coimbatore, was surprised to learn about the AABCS when she approached the DIC.
- She decided to become an entrepreneur during the COVID-19 pandemic, inspired by her husband's experience in manufacturing auto parts.
- Chitralekha received ₹62.37 lakh in capital subsidy from the scheme and started an automobile parts manufacturing unit for electric vehicles in Vilankurichi, Coimbatore.
- Her venture employs nearly 25 people and supplies products to leading automobile and cycle manufacturers.
- P. Prabhakaran, a 54-year-old beneficiary from Salem, approached the DIC after seeing an advertisement on social media.
- He received ₹51 lakh in subsidy to purchase three 14-wheeler trucks for transporting heavy machinery and goods.
- Prabhakaran hopes for more awareness about the scheme from the government.
- The government is also conducting online training programs for beneficiaries to manage their venture accounts.
- Out of the 1,303 beneficiaries, 288 are women who received a total capital subsidy of ₹33.09 crore.

The Annal Ambedkar Business Champion Scheme would be introduced in 2023, according to the Tamil Nadu government. Through this program, the state government of Tamilnadu would support the economic growth of members of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe categories. The Tamil Nadu Budget Speech for 2023–2024 made the announcement of the Annal Ambedkar Business Champions Scheme.

- **Scheme Name:** Annal Ambedkar Business Champion Scheme
- **Introduced by:** Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu State during the presentation of TN Budget 2023-24
- **State:** Tamil Nadu
- **Objective:** To promote economic growth among SC/ST business owners by offering capital subsidies and interest rate concessions for loans to purchase machinery and equipment
- **Capital Subsidy:** 35%
- **Interest Subvention:** 6%
- **Budgetary Allocation:** Rs. 100 crore

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS:

<p>Question 1: The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is a specialized force in India that deals with:</p> <p>(a) Law and order maintenance (b) Management of cyber security threats (c) Disaster preparedness, response, and relief (d) Counter-insurgency operations</p>	<p>Answer: (c) Disaster preparedness, response, and relief</p> <p>Explanation: The NDRF is a specialised force under the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) tasked specifically with disaster preparedness, response, and relief operations during natural or man-made disasters.</p>
<p>Question 2: NDRF battalions are deployed in various parts of India. What is a primary factor determining the location of NDRF battalions?</p> <p>(a) The political significance of the region (b) The population density of the area (c) The historical record of disasters in the region (d) The availability of infrastructure in the area</p>	<p>Answer: (c) The historical record of disasters in the region</p> <p>Explanation: NDRF battalion locations are strategically chosen based on the historical prevalence of specific disasters in that region. This allows for a quicker response time when a disaster strikes.</p>
<p>Question 3: NDRF collaborates with various stakeholders during disaster response operations. Who is MOST LIKELY NOT a collaborator with NDRF in such scenarios?</p> <p>(a) Local police and administration (b) State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) (c) Indian Armed Forces (d) Private companies specializing in disaster relief</p>	<p>Answer: (d) Private companies specializing in disaster relief</p> <p>Explanation: NDRF primarily collaborates with government agencies and نیروهای امداد و نجات (نیروهای امداد و نجات is Farsi for "rescue forces") like the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Indian Armed Forces, and local authorities for disaster response. Private companies might get involved in specific situations but are not the primary collaborators.</p>
<p>Question 4: The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) is:</p> <p>(a) A government department responsible for trade regulation (b) An international organization promoting global commerce (c) An apex non-governmental organization representing Indian businesses (d) A regulatory body overseeing the financial sector in India</p>	<p>Answer: (c) An apex non-governmental organization representing Indian businesses</p> <p>Explanation: FICCI is India's largest and oldest non-governmental organization advocating for and representing Indian businesses across various sectors.</p>
<p>Question 5: What are some of the key functions of FICCI?</p> <p>(a) Setting and enforcing business regulations (b) Providing financial aid and subsidies to businesses (c) Representing business interests to the government and policymakers (d) Directly managing and operating industrial units</p>	<p>Answer: (c) Representing business interests to the government and policymakers</p> <p>Explanation: FICCI acts as a bridge between Indian businesses and the government. It lobbies for policies that promote business growth, provides recommendations on economic issues, and facilitates interaction between policymakers and industry leaders.</p>
<p>Question 6: The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) is the apex body for:</p> <p>(a) The Indian automobile industry (b) The Indian pharmaceutical industry (c) The Indian information technology (IT) industry (d) The Indian agricultural sector</p>	<p>Answer: (c) The Indian information technology (IT) industry</p> <p>Explanation: NASSCOM is the leading trade association for the Indian IT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry.</p>
<p>Question 7: What are some of the ways NASSCOM contributes to the growth of the Indian IT industry?</p> <p>(a) Setting educational standards for IT professionals (b) Providing financial grants to IT startups (c) Lobbying the government for industry-friendly policies (d) All of the above</p>	<p>Answer: (d) All of the above</p> <p>Explanation: NASSCOM plays a multifaceted role in promoting the Indian IT industry:</p> <p>Lobbying: NASSCOM advocates for government policies that favor the IT industry, such as promoting ease of doing business or relaxation of tax regulations.</p> <p>Skill Development: NASSCOM collaborates with educational institutions to bridge the skill gap and ensure a workforce equipped for the IT sector.</p> <p>Industry Promotion: NASSCOM promotes the Indian IT industry globally, attracting</p>

	investments and showcasing India's capabilities.
<p>Question 8: The Anna Ambedkar Business Champion Scheme is likely named after:</p> <p>(a) A renowned scientist (b) A freedom fighter and social reformer (c) A prominent economist (d) A military leader</p>	<p>Answer: (b) A freedom fighter and social reformer</p> <p>Explanation: B. R. Ambedkar was a prominent figure in Indian history who championed social justice and equality for underprivileged communities. Naming a scheme focused on uplifting such communities after him aligns with this purpose.</p>
<p>Question 9: What might be a potential target group for the Anna Ambedkar Business Champion Scheme?</p> <p>(a) Established large corporations (b) Existing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (c) Aspiring entrepreneurs from underprivileged communities (d) All businesses regardless of size or background</p>	<p>Answer: (c) Aspiring entrepreneurs from underprivileged communities</p> <p>Explanation: The scheme's name suggests it aims to support individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who are interested in starting businesses.</p>
<p>Question 10: The Igla-S is a type of weapon system used for:</p> <p>(a) Long-range ballistic missile defense (b) Close-range air defense against low-flying aircraft (c) Destroying tanks and armored vehicles (d) Large-scale attacks on enemy positions</p>	<p>Answer: (b) Close-range air defense against low-flying aircraft</p> <p>Explanation: MANPADS like the Igla-S are designed to be shoulder-fired by a single soldier and are effective against low-flying aircraft like helicopters, drones, and some fixed-wing aircraft.</p>
<p>Question 11: The Igla-S is a product of which country's defense industry?</p> <p>(a) United States (b) France (c) Russia (d) China</p>	<p>Answer: (c) Russia</p> <p>Explanation: The Igla-S is a further development of the Soviet-era Igla MANPADS system and is currently produced by Russia.</p>
<p>Question 12: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is responsible for:</p> <p>(a) Regulating traffic flow on national highways (b) Developing, maintaining, and managing National Highways (c) Constructing and operating toll roads across India (d) Issuing driving licenses and vehicle registration</p>	<p>Answer: (b) Developing, maintaining, and managing National Highways</p> <p>Explanation: The NHAI's primary function is to oversee the development, maintenance, and management of National Highways in India, which are the primary road network connecting major cities and states.</p>
<p>Question 13: The NHAI operates under the administrative control of which ministry?</p> <p>(a) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) (b) Ministry of Railways (c) Ministry of Urban Development (d) Ministry of Finance</p>	<p>Answer: (a) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)</p> <p>Explanation: The NHAI is a statutory body established under the NHAI Act, 1988, and functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH).</p>