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The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

21st January 2025



Plough to Precision: Smart Agriculture



CONTEXT: Indian agriculture is at a critical juncture, balancing the need for food security, rural livelihoods, and sustainability amid global and domestic challenges.

Indian Agriculture – food security, rural livelihoods & overall economy

Contribution of Indian Agriculture

- Share in GDP – 18.3%
- Employment – 45%
- Exports – \$50.21 USD

Food Security Aspect

- Foodgrain Production ~330 mt – 22–23
- Global Ranking:
 - 1st – milk production, pulses & jute.
 - 2nd – rice, wheat, fruits & vegetables.
 - 3rd – fisheries

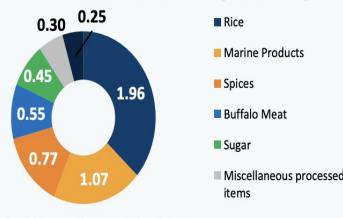
Gross Value Added By Agriculture And Allied Sectors (US\$ billion) (At Constant prices)



Agricultural exports from India (US\$ billion)



Key agricultural and allied sector exports from India in FY25* (US\$ billion)



Note: * From April to May 2025

Key Challenges Facing Indian Agriculture

- **Land Fragmentation** – Increasing population and inheritance laws; 2.28 to 1.08 hectares – Agricultural Census 2021 – Mechanisation unviable
- **Declining Soil Health** – Overuse of chemical inputs; Monocropping; 30%

- land – MoEFCC – Reduced productivity
- **Water Scarcity** – Over Extraction & Inefficient Irrigation; 89% – Agriculture; 256 Districts – Critically Low – CGWB, 2023
- **Climate Change** – EWEs, rising temperatures – Loss – \$10 Billion annually; Crop Yields – 6–7% by 2050 – IPCC
- **Low Mechanization Levels** – high costs; ~40% – ICAR, 2023 – Low Productivity
- **Inadequate Market Access – Middlemen**; Low price realisation; 24% – formal market – NSSO, 2019
- **Post-Harvest Losses** – Poor Infra & SCs; ₹92,000 crores annually; ~8k – Cold Storage
- **Inadequate Agricultural Research and Extension Services** – 0.3% of its agricultural GDP; Slows – HYVs
- **Limited Technology Adoption** – Low penetration of advanced technologies; ~30% Farmsteads – IAMAI, 2023

The Way Forward

- **Promote Crop Diversification** – Shift to – high-value and climate-resilient crop; crop-specific incentives, awareness campaigns, cold chain infrastructure
- **Enhance Irrigation Efficiency** – micro-irrigation techniques; Expand coverage –PMKSY; WUAs – Water Resource Management
- **Strengthen Agricultural Research and Development** – 1% agri-GDP; startup ecosystems; Bio-tech
- **Improve Market Access and Supply Chain Infrastructure** – robust infra – PHM; Strengthen



Plough to Precision: Smart Agriculture



CONTEXT: Indian agriculture is at a critical juncture, balancing the need for food security, rural livelihoods, and sustainability amid global and domestic challenges.

- based AI tools; KVKs
- robust infra - PHM; Strengthen e-NAM; rural storage and transportation; FPOs
- Address Land Fragmentation Issues** - Consolidation; land leasing policies; Mechanisation - custom hiring centers
- Expand Digital and Smart Agriculture** - Leverage AI, IoT, and blockchain; ver

Way Forward - Smart Agriculture

"advanced technologies like the IoT, AI, Big Data & precision farming to enhance productivity, optimize resource utilization & address the challenges of climate change"

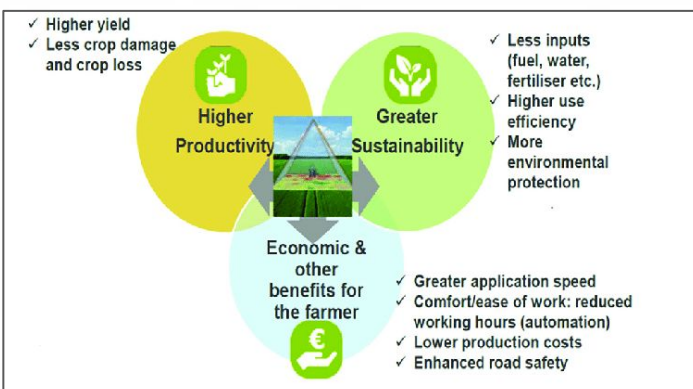
Editorial

- Use of AI in Agriculture** - weather forecasting, pest detection & crop yield optimization - vernacular AI platforms; affordable AI solutions; AI-based advisory services
- Regenerative Farming Practices** - ZBNF, private sector-led R&D
- Robotics and Automation** - tailored **low-cost robotics**; PPPs
- Alternative Proteins** - public awareness
- Digital Twin Technology - digital modeling - faster field trials
- Blockchain for Agriculture** - for transparency and market access
- Climate-Smart Farming** - micro-irrigation technologies; climate-resilient seed varieties

Mains Practise Question

"Indian agriculture is at a crossroads, grappling with challenges of sustainability, productivity, and climate change. In this context, discuss the role of smart agriculture in transforming the sector. Highlight the potential benefits and steps needed to make it inclusive for small and marginal farmers."

(15 Marks, 250 words)

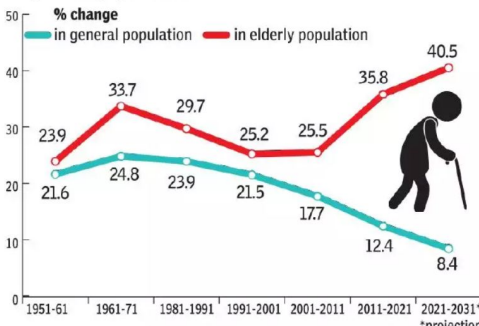


CONTEXT: The SC allowed a petitioner seeking the creation of a dedicated Ministry for senior citizens in the country to make a representation before the government.

Statistics

- India - **Exponential growth** - number & proportion
- From 10% to 19.5% by 2050 - **UNFPA**

Decadal growth in elderly population compared to that of general population



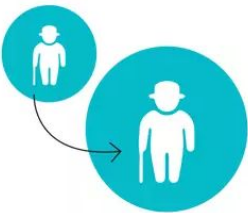
It submitted that the India Ageing Report 2023 *Caring for Our Elders: Institutional Responses* said there were 149 million persons aged 60 years and above in 2022, comprising around 10.5% of the country's population.

The petitioner argued that senior citizens were a vulnerable class and came under the Constitutional prism of Article 21 (right to a dignified life).

Population Census Data, Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections November 2019, Population, Projections for India and States 2011-2036, Census of India 2011
Source: MOSPI

300M ELDERLY BY 2050

30 years from now, the elderly population in India is expected to triple from **104 million** in 2011 to **300 million** in 2050



Elderly population in India (134m in 2020) is fast reaching the current size of population of Mexico (130m) or Russia (143m)

The 2050 population of elderly will be close to the population of the US (326m in 2018) today

India's 12 million population of 80+ is equal to the total population of countries such as Belgium, Greece, or Cuba

Challenges faced by Elderly population in India

- **Social Challenges**
 - Social Neglect
 - Abuse of the elderly population
 - Feminisation of ageing
- **Economic and Financial Challenges**
 - Lack of Income & Poor financial status
 - Low funding by the government

-Lack of housing and other basic amenities

- **Health Issues and Challenges**

- Rise in age-related chronic illness
- Increasing need for geriatric care

Government Initiatives

- National Policy for Older Persons, 2011
- Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
- Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana
- Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana
- Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE) Initiative and SAGE portal

Way forward

- Formalization of caregiving economy
- Comprehensive policy on home based care
- Awareness of Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
- Strengthening pension systems
- Replication of Switzerland's Time Bank initiative

Mains Practise Question

India's aging population is rapidly growing, creating new challenges for social welfare systems. Discuss the need for elderly care in India, the challenges associated with it, and the measures that should be taken to ensure their well-being."

(15 Marks, 250 words)



Syllabus : GS 3: Technology, Environment
Newspaper: The Hindu, Page No: 7

Decoding the News

One in three consumers in India is eyeing electric vehicles (EVs) for their next purchase, says the 'Think Mobility' report by Google and BCG. Women are emerging as key decision-makers in the EV market. While EV-related challenges persist, innovations and localised manufacturing could pave the way for greater adoption, says the report.

The report highlights significant growth potential in India's automotive market. **Chart 1** shows that the vehicular market has the highest potential for growth in developing countries such as India. On the other hand, countries such as the U.S., Switzerland, and Denmark, which already have a high vehicle penetration rate, have limited room for further growth.

Chart 2 shows that 36% of consumers are considering an EV for their next four-wheeler, while 30% are inclined towards an electric two-wheeler.

When read together, Charts 1 and 2 show that not only is there significant growth potential in India's automotive market as only a small share of the population (3.3%) owns cars, but a substantial portion of this growth is likely to be driven by consumers who are increasingly inclined towards EVs.

The study also estimates a 2.7-fold increase in elite households by 2035. This suggests that the affordability of higher-priced EVs is unlikely to deter a substantial share of households.

However, barriers remain. Over half express concerns about the availability of charging infrastructure, while 45% are dissatisfied with the high acquisition costs of EVs. One in three worry about battery life, and one in five feel the current variety of models is insufficient (**Chart 3**).

Chart 1: The chart plots the penetration of personal cars in 2023 versus the GDP per capita

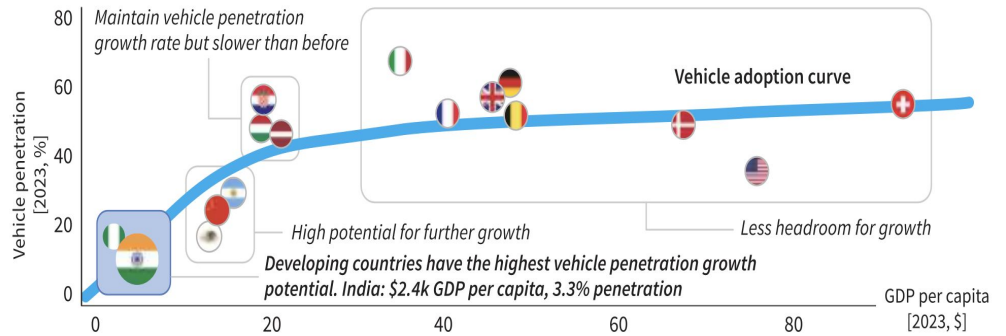
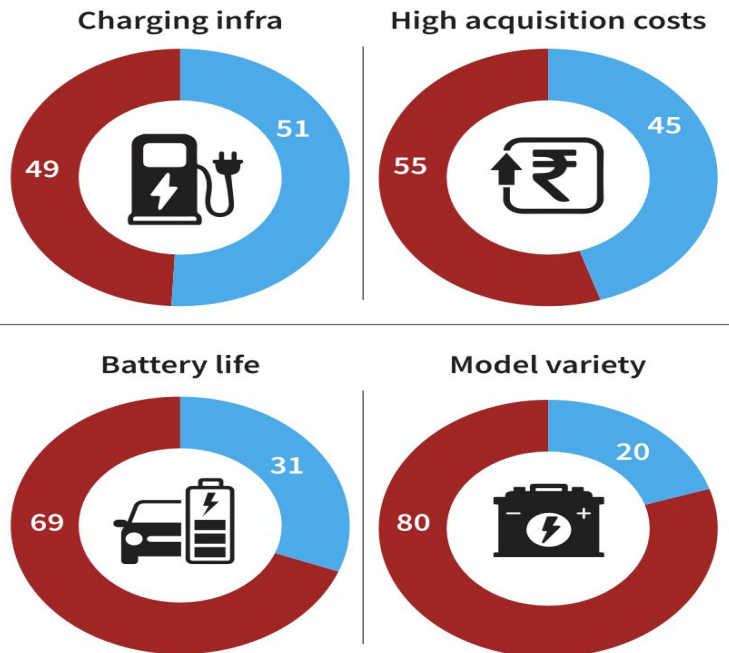


Chart 3: The share (%) of customers who found the following issues to be of concern while adopting electric vehicles are depicted in blue, and those who did not are depicted in red



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To address these challenges, the report suggests several solutions:

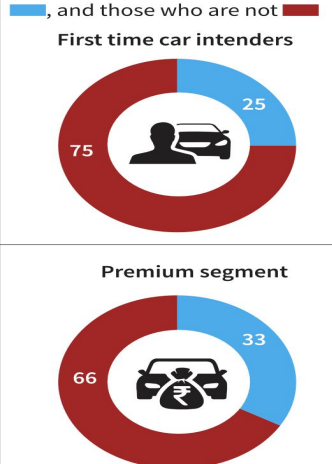
improving the availability and discoverability of charging infrastructure, offering innovative financing options, scaling up localised manufacturing, extending warranties, ensuring transparency in battery health, and introducing new models – 60% of which are being developed by major Indian-original equipment manufacturers and are new to the market.

Women influence 52% of EV purchase decisions, while they influence only 38% of non-EV purchase decisions in India. The re-

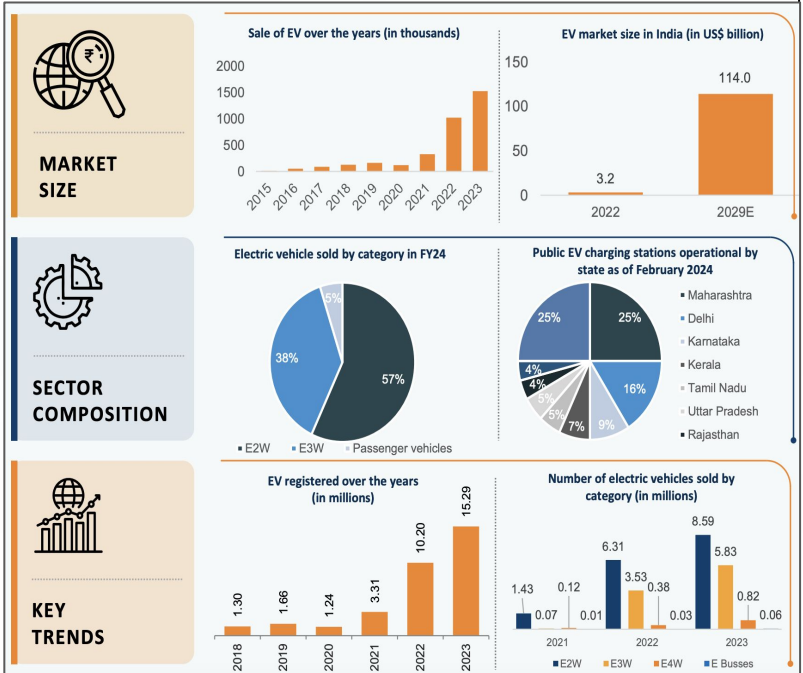
Notably, Gen Z is 2.7 times more likely to use self-drive rentals compared to the older generations.

One in four consumers who are buying a car for the first time are planning to purchase a pre-owned vehicle. To convert these intentions into actual sales, factors such as digitisation, transparency, and trust are essential. Additionally, one in three consumers seek pre-owned cars to upgrade their lifestyle. High-income, status-driven commuters are drawn towards luxury second-hand cars for their uniqueness, while those who take frequent road trips prefer pre-owned vehicles for their durability (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Share (%) of consumers in various segments planning to purchase a pre-owned vehicle



Knowledge Booster!



- EV subsidy scheme offering upfront incentives for purchase and supporting the installation of critical EV charging infrastructure
- It has replaced previous flagship initiatives such as the FAME policy, which expired in March, and the three-month EMPS, which ended on September 30, 2024.
- Convenience Energy Services Limited will provide upfront incentives facilitating the establishment of essential charging infrastructure in nine cities and supporting intercity and interstate e-buses in consultation with states.
- One can get the e-vouchers which need to be signed by the buyer submitted to the dealer and uploaded on the PM E-DRIVE portal

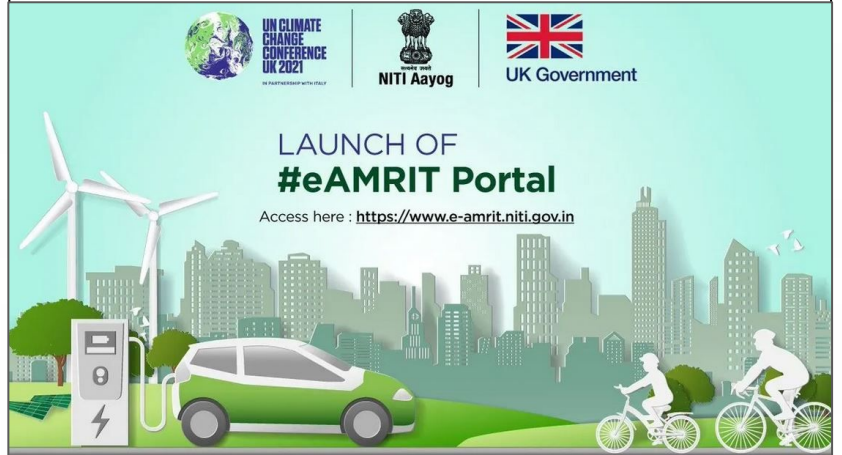


India's EV Status

Syllabus : GS 3: Technology, Environment

Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No** : 7

- India launched '**E-Amrit**', a web portal on electric vehicles (EVs) at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow.
- **Developed by NITI Aayog**, the portal **provides information on EV adoption, purchase, investment opportunities, policies, and subsidies.**
- Additionally, it **complements the UK government's initiatives** to raise awareness and sensitise consumers to EV benefits.



Syllabus - GS 2 : Centre-State Relations, Education

Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No** : 8

Decoding the News

Six of Tamil Nadu's State universities are at present without a Vice Chancellor (VC). Some of these posts have been vacant from a few months to over a year. This impasse is due to a disagreement between the Governor and the State government regarding the composition of the search committee for selecting VCs.

The Governor (as ex-officio Chancellor of State universities under the University Acts) insists on including a nominee of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the search committee as per Regulation 7.3 of the UGC Regulations, 2018.

Conversely, the State government insists on adhering to the respective State University Acts, which generally require the search committee to consist of one nominee each from the Chancellor, the syndicate, and the senate. It opposes UGC involvement due to concerns over erosion of State autonomy in university governance.

Conflicting Supreme Court rulings have complicated the situation. One set of judgments support the Governor's stance that UGC regulations are mandatory and can override the State University Acts in cases of conflict. Another set of judgments back the State government, holding that UGC regulations are merely recommendatory for State universities. The controversy has been exacerbated by the UGC's Draft Regulations, 2025 which are seen to erode State autonomy further.

There is a somewhat similar stand-off in Kerala and Punjab where numerous universities also face leadership vacuums. This has led to serious deterioration in university administration, including delays in staff appointments and award of degrees.

A constitutional question

UGC regulations are a subordinate legislation framed under Section 26 of the UGC Act, 1956. The crux of the dispute is whether UGC regulations framed by the UGC's Chairman, Vice-Chairman and 10 other members can supersede provisions of State University Acts which are plenary laws passed by State legislatures and assented to by the Governor or President. This is part of a larger question of law dealing with Centre-State relations – "can delegated legislation (rules, regulations, notifications, etc.) framed by the Union Government and its agencies under a Central law override the provisions of a plenary State law?"

It underlines a critical constitutional issue regarding the scope of delegated legislation with potential for eroding the separation of powers, and federalism – both considered 'basic features' of the Constitution.



Syllabus - GS 2 : Centre-State Relations, Education

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Decoding the News

Judicial precedents

Article 254(1) of the Constitution addresses conflicts between central and State laws. It states that if a State law is repugnant to a central law on matters in the Concurrent List, the central law will prevail, and the conflicting part of the State law will be void. The plain wording of Article 254(1) indicates that it applies only to plenary laws enacted by Parliament and State legislatures, and not to delegated legislation. The Supreme Court has consistently upheld this interpretation in several landmark judgments.

The leading case on the subject is *Ch. Tika Ramji versus State of Uttar Pradesh* (1956). The Supreme Court ruled that the Centre's Sugarcane Control Order, 1955

issued under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, could not repeal the provisions of the U.P. Sugarcane Act, 1953. It held: "The power of repeal, if any, was vested in Parliament, and Parliament alone could exercise it by enacting an appropriate provision in regard thereto. Parliament could not delegate this power of repeal to any executive authority. Such delegation, if made, would be void..."

Constitution Article

Article 254 in Constitution of India

254. Inconsistency between laws made by Parliament and laws made by the Legislatures of States

- (1) If any provision of a law made by the Legislature of a State is repugnant to any provision of a law made by Parliament which Parliament is competent to enact, or to any provision of an existing law with respect to one of the matters enumerated in the Concurrent List, then, subject to the provisions of clause (2), the law made by Parliament, whether passed before or after the law made by the Legislature of such State, or, as the case may be, the existing law, shall prevail and the law made by the Legislature of the State shall, to the extent of the repugnancy, be void.
- (2) Where a law made by the Legislature of a State with respect to one of the matters enumerated in the Concurrent List contains any provision repugnant to the provisions of an earlier law made by Parliament or an existing law with respect to that matter, then, the law so made by the Legislature of such State shall, if it has been reserved for the consideration of the President and has received his assent, prevail in that State:

Provided that nothing in this clause shall prevent Parliament from enacting at any time any law with respect to the same matter including a law adding to, amending, varying or repealing the law so made by the Legislature of the State.



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In *Indian Express newspapers (Bombay) versus Union of India* (1984), the Supreme Court ruled: "Subordinate legislation may be questioned on any of the grounds on which plenary legislation is questioned. In addition, it may also be questioned on the ground that it does not conform to the statute under which it is made. It may further be questioned on the ground that it is contrary to some other statute. That is because subordinate legislation must yield to plenary legislation." In *J.K. Industries versus Union of India* (2007), the Supreme Court again ruled: "(Subordinate legislation) may further be questioned on the ground that it is inconsistent with the provisions of the Act or that it is contrary to some other statute applicable on the same subject matter. Therefore, it has to yield to plenary legislation." These rulings make it clear that the Central Government and its agencies cannot use subordinate legislation to override plenary State laws; any changes require a plenary central law passed by Parliament.

An overreach by the UGC

There is no repugnancy between the provisions of the UGC Act, 1956 and Tamil Nadu's University Acts because no provision of the UGC Act addresses the appointment of VCs. According to the UGC, its power to form Regulation 7.3 relating to VCs is derived from Section 26(1)(e), which allows the UGC to define qualifications for university teaching staff, and Section 26(1)(g), which permits regulation of standards and coordination of work or facilities in universities, of the UGC Act, 1956. But the VC is not a 'teaching staff' within the meaning of S.26(1)(e). In all University Acts – Central and State – the VC is an "officer of the university" along with the Chancellor, Registrar, Controller of Examinations, Finance Officer and Directors. So, the above two provisions do not apply to VCs. Moreover, the UGC's powers under

Section 12(d) of the Act are only recommendatory. While the UGC can advise on standards in higher education, it cannot enforce compliance, except by withholding grants under Section 14. The Supreme Court has affirmed this interpretation in *University of Delhi versus Raj Singh* (1994), ruling that UGC regulations are advisory, not mandatory. Universities can choose whether or not to follow them, albeit at the risk of losing funding. Thus, UGC's regulation 7.3 on VCs is a classic case of executive overreach in delegated legislation and is *ultra vires* the UGC Act, 1956.

Inconsistencies in judgments

Recently, some conflicting Supreme Court judgments have created confusion.

In *Annamalai University versus Secretary, Information & Tourism* (2009), *State of West Bengal versus Anindya Sundar Das* (2022), *Gambhirdan K. Gadhvi versus State of Gujarat* (2022) and *Professor Sreejith P.S. versus Dr. Rajasree M.S.* (2022), the Supreme Court held, without articulating reasons, that once UGC regulations are laid before both Houses of Parliament, they become part of the UGC Act, invoking Article 254(1) and rendering any VC appointments contrary to these regulations void.

The interpretation that UGC regulations lose their subordinate character and automatically become part of the parent Act merely by being laid

before Parliament is not supported by the Constitution or the General Clauses Act, 1897. It contravenes a significant precedent ruled in *Chief Inspector of Mines versus Karam Chand Thapar* (1961) where the Supreme Court held: "(Rules) continue to be rules subordinate to the Act, and though for certain purposes, including the purpose of construction, they are to be treated as if contained in the Act, their true nature as subordinate rule is not lost." In other words, they retain their character as subordinate legislation and do not become integral to the parent Act.

What next?

Given the constitutional significance of the dispute and doctrinal ambiguities, a definitive ruling by a Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court is imperative. Such a ruling would hopefully reaffirm that Article 254(1) of the Constitution applies only to conflicts between plenary Central and State laws; clarify that delegated legislation does not automatically become part of the parent Act unless laid under the affirmative resolution procedure; and emphasise the advisory nature of UGC regulations for State universities unless adopted by the State.

Such clarity is essential not only to restore the normal functioning of State universities across the country, but also to preserve the delicate balance of legislative powers between the Centre and States.



Need of Distinguished Jurists



Syllabus - GS 2 : Judiciary

Newspaper : The Hindu, Page No : 7

Decoding the News

A critical aspect of a judicial system is the effective and timely delivery of justice. This can be achieved in the Indian judicial system only if the significant crisis of backlogs and vacancies is addressed urgently by both the judiciary and the government.

Data as of January 1, 2025, show that 371 posts of the 1,122 posts sanctioned across the High Courts of the country remain vacant. The Allahabad High Court functions at only 50% of its total sanctioned strength. Naturally, this has a direct impact on the already alarming levels of backlog. As millions of people have to wait for a long time for justice, their faith in the judicial system is eroding. Although this has been a perennial issue, there are now about 60 lakh cases pending across all the High Courts, an astonishing number. To solve this, we need both immediate remedial steps and reformative measures.

While it is true that the pace of Collegium recommendations and the resulting appointments has picked up in the last couple of years, it has unfortunately not been able to match the number of retirements and ever-increasing number of filings. In turn, this has put enormous strain on the system, compelling judges to take on a higher caseload than feasible. This is likely to adversely impact both the time given to as well as the depth of engagement with a particular case. Therefore, a well-staffed judiciary functioning at near-total sanctioned strength is the need of the hour.

A game changer

In that context, Article 124(3)(c) and Article 217(2)(c), now repealed, of the Constitution become increasingly significant. These provisions allow for the appointment of individuals who, in the opinion of the President (read Collegium), are 'distinguished jurists', as judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts. Unfortunately, Article

124(3)(c) remains unutilised and Article 217(2)(c) has been repealed without any stated reason. In other words, no jurist has been found to be distinguished enough to be appointed to these posts till date. Although it is a routine practice in jurisdictions across the globe to appoint jurists as judges, appointments to the High Courts and the Supreme Court in India have always been either from the Bar (practising advocates) or the judicial services.

Article 124(3) in Constitution of India

- (3) A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a Judge of the Supreme Court unless he is a citizen of India and--
- (a) has been for at least five years a Judge of a High Court or of two or more such Courts in succession; or
 - (b) has been for at least ten years an advocate of a High Court or of two or more such courts in succession; or
 - (c) is, in the opinion of the President, a distinguished jurist.

Article 217(2) in Constitution of India

- (2) A person shall not be qualified for appointment as a Judge of a High Court unless he is a citizen of India and--
- (a) has for at least ten years held a judicial office in the territory of India; or
 - (b) has for at least ten years been an advocate of a High Court ' or of two or more such courts in succession;



Syllabus - GS 2 : Judiciary

Newspaper : The Hindu, Page No : 7

Decoding the News

At a time when the issue of vacancies and backlogs is stifling the system, introducing and invoking the provision to appoint 'distinguished jurists' to High Courts of the country can turn out to be a game changer. In fact, a similar idea was floated by Shri Shibban Lal Saxena but negated by the Constituent Assembly on June 7, 1949, without any meaningful deliberation.

Involving the world of academia directly into the mainstream Indian judicial system can bring both immense benefits and challenges. A vast pool of specialised knowledge, research-based critical thinking, and expertise can provide unique insights and add a hitherto missing dimension to the judiciary's understanding of complex socioeconomic and socio-legal cases. At the same

time, the lack of courtroom experience, procedural knowledge, understanding of limits to exercising judicial power, and a certain degree of resistance among the status quoists within the institution are challenges that will need to be overcome as well.

An important message

A number of countries (such as the United States, Poland, Myanmar, Kenya, Thailand, Spain and Italy) that allow jurists or professors of law to be appointed to posts equivalent to that of a judge in the High Courts and/or the Supreme Court of India have vastly benefited from this practice. In India, where academia has expressed its legitimate concerns

and grievances of not having been adequately nurtured or supported, re-introducing Article 217(2)(c) and appointing jurists or academics as judges of the High Courts would send across an important message. At the same time, with adequate training of procedural know-how and courtroom experience, the presence of our sharpest academic minds on the Bench would ensure that the judicial discourse is enriched and that judicial decision-making is further strengthened.

Granting an opportunity to distinguished academics to effectively engage with the complex problems of the contemporary legal world would lend a fresh perspective to the cause of justice. Such appointees would naturally serve as a bridge between academia and practice. This would lead to a synergistic interaction of legal research with the more nuanced and practical aspects of delivering justice.

Therefore, the need of the hour is to tide over the current crisis of increasing backlogs, and bridge the widening gap between the actual strength and the sanctioned strength of courts. First, the government must comply with the Collegium's recommendations within a strict time frame. Second,

deploying innovating solutions, such as re-introducing and invoking Article 217(2)(c) to appoint distinguished jurists to High Courts, would help fill existing vacancies. Tapping into the academic world as a valuable resource sector would help ensure that the Indian judicial system remains dynamic, robust, and diverse, grounded in practical realities as well as an in-depth understanding of its underlying constitutional principles. By



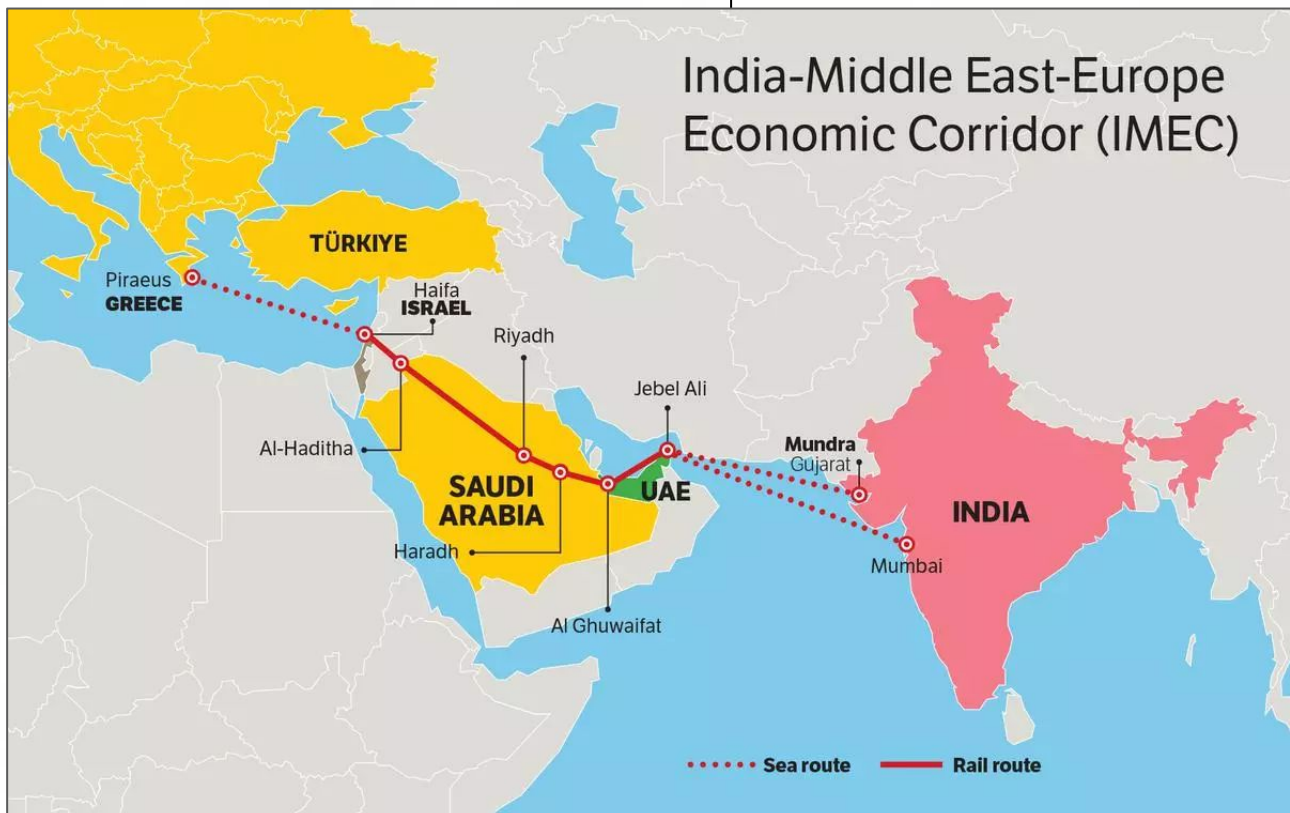
Syllabus - GS 2 : Inter-State Relations
Newspaper : The Hindu, **Page No** : 5

Getting the Basics Right!

The **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** is a significant geopolitical and economic initiative unveiled during the **G20 Summit in September 2023**. It aims to enhance connectivity and trade between Asia, the Middle East, and Europe by developing a modern, multi-modal transportation corridor. Here's a detailed explanation:

1. Key Features of IMEC:

- **Purpose:** To facilitate seamless transportation of goods, energy, and data between India, the Middle East, and Europe, fostering economic growth and regional connectivity.
- **Components:**
 - **Eastern Corridor:** Connects India to the Middle East.
 - **Northern Corridor:** Links the Middle East to Europe.
- **Multi-Modal Transportation:** Includes railways, ports, highways, and digital infrastructure for enhanced connectivity.
- **Green Energy Focus:** Includes electricity grids, hydrogen pipelines, and renewable energy sources to promote sustainable development.



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Getting the Basics Right!

2. Participating Countries:

- India, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and European Union nations.
- Supported by global players like the **United States** and financial institutions.

3. Strategic Significance:

- **Countering China's BRI:** Acts as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offering a more transparent and sustainable alternative.
- **Geopolitical Stability:** Strengthens India's role in global supply chains and enhances strategic ties with the Middle East and Europe.
- **Economic Integration:** Boosts trade, reduces logistics costs, and accelerates economic development across regions.
- **Energy Security:** Facilitates the transport of green energy resources like hydrogen, supporting global decarbonization goals.

The United States-India relationship has evolved into an increasingly vital strategic partnership ever since the Clinton administration laid the foundation for a new direction in the 1990s. Today, broad bipartisan consensus supports building upon these ties even further, driven by converging interests in economic growth, regional security, and democratic values. As global dynamics shift, the importance of this relationship for the Trump administration becomes even more pronounced.

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) agreement presents a tremendous opportunity for President Donald Trump to solidify this multilateral partnership while advancing both the strategic interests of the U.S. and India. By leading the effort to secure cooperation among the participating nations, the U.S. can help create a robust economic corridor to ensure free and open trade routes, with enhanced energy security and technological innovation, which, in turn, will also benefit American companies.

More conceptual now

Announced in 2023, IMEC represents an ambitious vision to forge an integrated network spanning three vital regions through advanced physical and digital infrastructure. The corridor must develop efficient transportation routes, including railways, shipping networks, and maritime connections, while also establishing cross-border electricity and hydrogen pipelines and digital communication cables. The end goals should be to enhance trade connectivity and reduce transportation costs, while diversifying global supply chains and promoting deeper economic integration among participating countries (India, the U.S., the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, and the European Commission).

At the moment, it is reasonable to suggest that IMEC is more conceptual than concrete. Meeting its lofty goals requires extensive planning and cooperation. The Trump administration's leadership on this matter could enhance his legacy on the international stage. By supporting IMEC, the U.S. and India can establish a



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political will and economic strategy. The corridor demands substantial infrastructure investments that directly compete with other national priorities. Moreover, private sector engagement introduces another layer of complexity. Corporate investors require clear pathways to return on investment; and without active engagement from the private sector, it is unlikely that the project could succeed.

Without regular, strategic engagement, there is a significant risk of creating an uneven economic landscape that could breed tension and political friction among participating nations. The

As an alternative to China's BRI

IMEC promises substantial economic advantages for India by dramatically reducing trade costs and transforming maritime logistics. This strategic network reduces vulnerability to potential disruptions such as those that might occur in the Suez Canal, but also creates compelling opportunities for increased foreign direct

investment. By positioning itself as an alternative to the BRI, the corridor allows India to strengthen diplomatic ties with West Asian and European countries.

Better for the environment

There are implications to this deal that could impact the earth's climate health. India has emerged as a significant player in green hydrogen development, positioning itself as a potential global leader in this emerging clean energy technology. The country has launched ambitious initiatives to develop green hydrogen as a strategic component of its energy transition and decarbonisation efforts.

India is collaborating with international partners such as Germany and Japan, and developing infrastructure for green hydrogen production, storage, and transportation. This will help reduce carbon emissions, decrease dependence on fossil fuel imports and create new job opportunities in emerging green technology sectors.

The Trump administration's role in facilitating the Abraham Accords proved instrumental in creating the diplomatic conditions that made IMEC possible. Former U.S. President Joe Biden has been a strong proponent of IMEC. Looking ahead, questions remain about IMEC's future under potential new U.S. leadership. One intriguing factor is Mr. Trump's warm personal relationship with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This rapport could prove significant to ongoing relations. Now that there is a peace agreement between Israel and Hamas, both leaders could facilitate the much needed (and required) meeting of IMEC participants to discuss the next steps.



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The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday orally asked the States of Tamil Nadu and Kerala to address it on whether the supervisory committee formed by the court would be more effective in taking care of the 129-year-old Mullaperiyar dam or the job must be given to a statutory committee envisaged under the new Dam Safety Act of 2021.

“Which one of these committees would be more effective? If it is the statutory committee under the 2021 Act, then we can avoid overlaps and avoid unnecessary problems,” Justice Surya Kant, heading a Bench, observed orally.

The court listed the case for hearing detailed sub-



Next sitting: The Supreme Court listed the case for hearing detailed submissions on February 19. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

missions on February 19.

Section 5 of the 2021 Act mandates the constitution of the National Committee on Dam Safety.

Committee's functions

The committee would be chaired by the Central Wa-

ter Commission Chairperson and have representatives from the Centre and States and include three specialists in the field of dam safety and allied fields.

The committee's crucial functions under Section 6

include evolving policy, guidelines and standards to prevent disasters related to dam failures and maintain safety standards.

Senior advocate Shekhar Naphade for Tamil Nadu said if there was an “honest desire to work out” on the part of both States, things would be resolved. Mr. Naphade said the intent of Kerala was to obstruct.

Senior advocate Jaideep Gupta, for Kerala, said Tamil Nadu was owning a dam in Kerala and “they do not want to take care of it”.

Justice Kant said this issue was already resolved and the question now was on whether the supervisory committee of the Supreme Court or the statutory committee of the 2021 Act was the right entity to ensure the safety of the Mullaperiyar dam.

1. Overview of the Dam Safety Act, 2021:

- **Objective:** To provide for the surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of dams to ensure their safe functioning and mitigate disasters caused by dam failures.
- **Applicability:**
 - Applies to all dams in India that are **15 meters or more in height** or between **10-15 meters with certain design complexities**.
 - Covers over **5,200 large dams** and several smaller ones in the country.

2. Key Features:

a. Institutional Framework:

1. National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS):

- Composed of experts in dam safety.
- Functions:
 - Formulates dam safety policies.
 - Provides technical guidance.
 - Reviews dam safety data and practices.



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2. National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA):

- Ensures compliance with dam safety norms.
- Resolves disputes between states on dam safety.
- Lays down uniform dam safety protocols.

3. State Dam Safety Organizations (SDSOs):

- Established by state governments.
- Conducts dam inspections and implements safety measures.
- Monitors the functioning of dams within the state.

4. Owner Agencies:

- Entities or organizations owning dams (state departments, corporations, or private entities).
- Responsible for ensuring safety and maintenance of dams.

b. Provisions for Inspection and Monitoring:

- **Periodic Inspections:**
 - Dams are subject to regular inspections based on their age, design, and risk potential.
- **Emergency Action Plan (EAP):**
 - Mandatory for all dams to minimize disaster impacts.
- **Safety Protocols:**
 - Detailed dam safety manuals, surveillance systems, and maintenance protocols.

c. Penal Provisions:

- **Penalties for Non-Compliance:**
 - Fines or imprisonment for individuals or agencies failing to adhere to safety standards.

3. Significance:

- **Public Safety:** Prevents dam failures that can lead to catastrophic loss of life and property.
- **Environmental Protection:** Mitigates risks to ecosystems in dam catchment and downstream areas.
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** Provides a structured approach to address and manage risks associated with dam operations.
- **Accountability:** Ensures clear roles and responsibilities among stakeholders, including state and central governments.



Q1. Consider the following statements regarding Smart Agriculture:

1. Smart agriculture involves using IoT, drones, and AI technologies to optimise farming practices and improve crop yields.
2. Precision agriculture techniques are exclusively designed for large-scale farming operations and do not apply to smallholder farms.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. India aims to achieve 30% electric vehicle adoption in passenger cars, 70% for commercial vehicles, and 80% for two- and three-wheelers by 2030.
2. The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme provides subsidies for electric buses, passenger cars, and two-wheelers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has overriding authority over state laws regarding university regulation in India.
2. State governments cannot establish universities without UGC approval.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor):

1. IMEC is envisioned as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, connecting India to Europe via the Middle East through rail and maritime routes.
2. The corridor aims to promote economic integration and trade while fostering renewable energy cooperation among participating nations.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Dam Safety Act, of 2021:

1. The Dam Safety Act establishes the National Committee on Dam Safety to develop policies and recommend regulations for dam safety.
2. The Act mandates regular inspection and risk assessment of all dams in the country, irrespective of their size or age
3. The Act applies only to dams constructed after its enactment in 2021.

How many of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) All Three
- d) None

Answer: a

