

Topic of Discussion:

1. COP30 begins today in Brazil: Limited outcomes so far, focus on implementation
2. Air quality beyond AQI: The case for measuring indoor pollutants
3. Story of India's withdrawal from overseas airbase in Tajikistan
4. After Trump-Xi ceasefire in Busan, here's a to-do list for New Delhi
5. Cash transfers are valuable, they are not a substitute for jobs
6. Hungary gets a pass from US on Russian oil sanctions: What it means for India

COP30 begins today in Brazil: Limited outcomes so far, focus on implementation

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance.

Mains Examination: General Studies-II, III: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

What's the ongoing story: The 30th edition of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP30), the annual two-week climate talks beginning in Belem, Brazil, on Monday, is as much about restoring the credibility of this UN-mandated negotiating process as it is about saving global climate.

Key Points to Ponder:

- What is Conference of the Parties or COP?— Read about the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- What were the major outcomes of the COP29?
- What do you understand about Net-zero emissions?
- What is climate finance?
- What are Nationally-Determined Contributions?

- What is the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility and respective capabilities”?
- How can India balance its development needs with its increasing global leadership on climate finance and climate action?
- What is Brazil’s new initiative Tropical Forests Forever Facility?

Key Takeaways:

- It’s now been more than 30 years that countries have been getting together to deliberate on a coordinated global response to climate change. While thousands of climate-positive actions have been initiated as a result, these have so far had minimal impact on arresting the steady rise of global temperatures. **Emissions of greenhouse gases, the primary driver of global warming, are still on the rise.** And, at the current pace of climate action, **the world cannot even pretend to get anywhere close to a 2030 target of reducing emissions by 43 per cent on 2019 levels.**
- **Developing countries have been extremely unhappy** at their concerns not getting adequately addressed, particularly those relating to finance and technology that the developed countries are obligated to provide them. And **the United States, the biggest historical emitter of greenhouse gases, has walked out of the Paris Agreement again, without facing any consequences.**
- “There is a disappointment with the process no doubt. And it is mainly because of the fact that the developed nations, particularly the **US, have not been doing enough**, certainly not as much as they are required to do — **not just on emission reductions, but also on finance and technology.** The US has now also walked out of Paris Agreement. When we say the negotiating process is in crisis, it is primarily because of this,” said Ravi Shankar Prasad, a former lead negotiator for India and now a distinguished fellow with the Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

“America will be a manufacturing nation once again, and we have something that no other manufacturing nation will ever have: the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on Earth, and we are going to use it. We’re going to use it,” Trump said.

Donald Trump's first speech as the 47th President of the United States featured various slogans that he employed during his presidential campaign, and among them was **"Drill, baby, drill"**, indicating that his administration will push for more oil and gas production as well as consumption in the US. **The biggest irritant in this direction is the Paris Agreement requirement that the United States cut down on its emissions.**

—But Prasad said this was still the best forum to deliver results on a global scale and it would not be advisable for countries disappointed with the outcomes to follow the example of the US and leave the process.

— **Brazil, which has the Presidency of the COP30 climate meeting by virtue of being the host country**, has repeatedly said that its **primary goal** is to **strengthen the trust of the countries in this multilateral process, so that more ambitious outcomes can be obtained.**

— Earlier, COP30 President André Corrêa do Lago told, **that the climate meetings have been very good at negotiation, but not so good at implementation, and Brazil wanted to change that.** One way of achieving this is by expediting the effective implementation of the decisions that have been taken in the past, focusing on the delivery of promises rather than making new ones, he said.

— COP30 CEO Ana Toni recently told The Indian Express that of the nearly 600 different initiatives announced on the sidelines of these climate meetings since the 2015 Paris Agreement, only about 300 were surviving. The others had been completely forgotten and lost track of. These climate initiatives had not come out of the negotiation process but were launched on the sidelines by different groups of countries to build momentum for more ambitious climate action.

— **Unlike some previous climate meetings, there are no big-ticket headline items to be resolved, or agreed upon, at Belem.** The conversations are likely to be mainly focused around strengthening multilateralism, increasing the effectiveness of implementation, and paying more attention to adaptation, which is one of the key concerns of the developing countries. Belem is hoping to get some meaningful outcomes on defining a Global Goal on Adaptation, a set of

indicators to measure the progress on reducing vulnerabilities and increasing resilience of population groups, natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

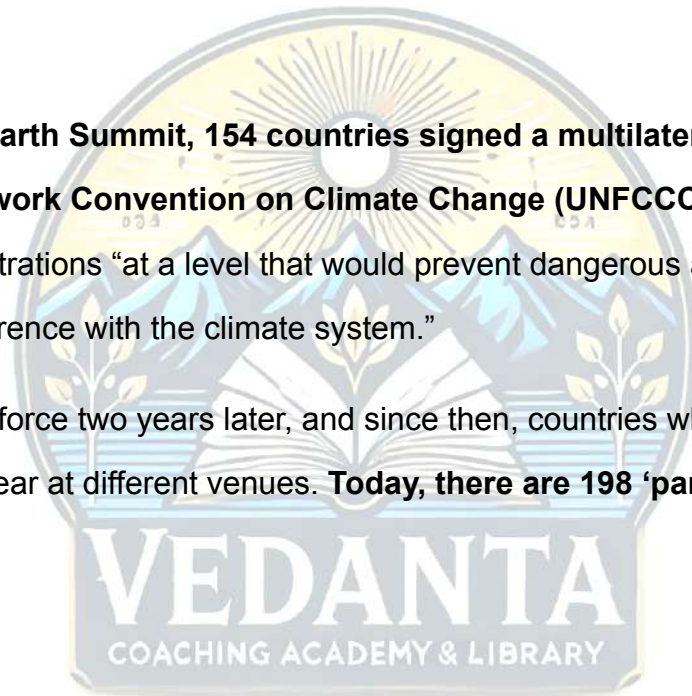
— **From India's perspective, the main interest would be in the possible release of its NDC (Nationally-Determined Contributions) and NAP (National Adaptation Plan). Unlike many other countries, India is yet to announce its NDC, or climate action plan, for 2035, which is mandated under the Paris Agreement.**

— Preparation and submission of a national adaptation plan is voluntary in nature. India has finalised its first NAP and is expected to release it soon. **The submission of NDC and NAP are not linked to COP30 in any way. India may use the COP30 platform to release this.**

Do You Know:

— **In 1992, at the Rio Earth Summit, 154 countries signed a multilateral treaty called the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).** It aimed to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system.”

— The treaty came into force two years later, and since then, countries which are part of the UNFCCC, meet every year at different venues. **Today, there are 198 'parties' or signatories of the Convention.**



Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering similar theme:

(1) With reference to the Agreement at the UNFCCC Meeting in Paris in 2015, which of the following statements is/are correct? (UPSC CSE 2016)

1. The Agreement was signed by all the member countries of the UN and it will go into effect in 2017.
2. The Agreement aims to limit the greenhouse gas emissions so that the rise in average global temperature by the end of this century does not exceed 2°C or even 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

3. Developed countries acknowledged their historical responsibility in global warming and committed to donate \$ 1000 billion a year from 2020 to help developing countries to cope with climate change.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

(a) 1 and 3 only

(b) 2 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

Describe the major outcomes of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)? What are the commitments made by India in this conference? (UPSC CSE 2021)

Air quality beyond AQI: The case for measuring indoor pollutants

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: General issues on Environmental ecology, Biodiversity and Climate Change – that do not require subject specialization.

Main Examination: General Studies-III: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

What's the ongoing story: While outdoor air pollution is a matter of concern, most people assume their homes are safe. But indoor air can actually be two to five times more polluted and hazardous than outdoor air because pollutants get trapped inside.

Key Points to Ponder:

— What is air pollution and what are its sources?

- What are the impacts of poor air quality?
- What is the Air Quality Index (AQI)?
- What are the key initiatives taken by the Indian government to control air pollution?
- What steps should be taken to control air pollution?

Key Takeaways:

- Neighbourhood construction dust, cooking emissions, incense sticks, strong cleaning chemicals and even stored household waste silently degrade the air we breathe for nearly 90 per cent of the day we stay indoors.
- Yet, despite this high exposure, monitoring and regulations for indoor air are largely absent in India. Sensing this gap, a research team from BITS Pilani [Hyderabad](#)'s BEST Lab, led by Professor Sankar Ganesh and Dr Atun Roy Choudhury, has created India's first customised Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) scale, which can be accommodated in a small device with existing sensors available in India.
- In their study, they examined the correlation between construction and demolition practices and the deterioration of IAQ, identifying common pollutants such as PM2.5, PM10, carbon monoxide, NOx (nitrogen oxide), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs or gases that are emitted from many household products and processes, including paints, cleaners, and fuels).
- Benzene emerged as the most dangerous, followed by carbon monoxide, VOCs and radon. The study was published in the Royal Society of Chemistry journal.
- “The biggest indoor pollution is from construction dust from sites near your home, or even renovation and refurbishing of your own home. The total volume of construction and demolition dust has gone up from 150 million tonnes in 2016 to 300 million tonnes today. By 2030, this is expected to go up to 430 million tonnes,” says Ganesh. The study calls for including IAQ standards in building codes, smart cities and workplace regulations.
- Poor IAQ is linked to sick building syndrome, which triggers headaches, fatigue and irritation. Given that most modern constructions lack cross ventilation, poor IAQ can cause asthma, bronchial allergies, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder), reduced immunity,

cardiovascular disease and cancer. Women and infants are the most vulnerable due to longer indoor exposure and cooking-related emissions.

— Households can take simple yet impactful steps such as improving ventilation by opening windows during low-pollution hours, using exhaust fans during cooking, reducing incense burning, and segregating organic waste. Regular dusting, indoor greenery, and minimising synthetic air fresheners and harsh chemicals can further improve air quality. Small lifestyle changes can create healthier homes.

Do You Know:

— The AQI in India is a standardized system that measures and reports air quality based on the concentration of major air pollutants, including PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), ozone (O₃), carbon monoxide (CO), and ammonia (NH₃).

— The AQI is categorized into six levels: Good, Satisfactory, Moderately Polluted, Poor, Very Poor, and Severe, with associated health advisories. This system helps inform the public about local air quality and its potential health effects.

— Among the more harmful pollutants are those of a smaller size, such as particulate matter (PM)_{2.5}, which is an atmospheric particulate matter of a diameter smaller than 2.5 micrometres (or around 3 per cent of the diameter of a human hair). It causes respiratory problems and reduces visibility. The particles can only be detected with the help of an electron microscope because they are so small.

Pollutants	Source	Impact
Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)	Burning of fuel, with sources including emissions from vehicles and power plants.	Short-term exposure to high levels of NO ₂ can aggravate respiratory diseases. Long-term exposure may also contribute to the development of asthma and could increase susceptibility to respiratory infections.

Ozone (O₃)	Surface ozone pollutant is formed by the reaction of atmospheric pollutants in the presence of sunlight.	Increase in risk of hospital admissions for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases (COPD) and the number of cardiovascular and respiratory deaths
Sulfur dioxide (SO₂)	Burning of fossil fuels by power plants and other industrial facilities. Additional sources are industrial processes and natural sources such as volcanoes.	Harmful to the cardiovascular system and can lead to the development of respiratory illnesses. SO ₂ can also react with other compounds to form particulate matter.
Ammonia (NH₃)	Increase in fertilizer use coupled with large contributions from livestock waste have resulted in the world's highest concentrations of atmospheric ammonia	Excess ammonia is harmful to plants and reduces air and water quality
Lead (Pb)	It is a naturally occurring toxic metal found in the Earth's crust exposed through mining, smelting, manufacturing and even recycling activities	Children who survive severe lead poisoning may be left with permanent intellectual disability and behavioural disorders.
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	It is given off when fuel containing carbon, such as wood, coal and petrol, is burned	If CO levels are high enough, a person may become unconscious and die. Long-term exposure has been linked with an increased risk of heart disease.

Previous year UPSC Prelims Question Covering Similar Theme:

(2) In the cities of our country, which among the following atmospheric gases are normally considered in calculating the value of Air Quality Index? (UPSC CSE 2016)

1. Carbon dioxide
2. Carbon monoxide
3. Nitrogen dioxide
4. Sulfur dioxide
5. Methane

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 1, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering Similar Theme:

Describe the key points of the revised Global Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs) recently released by the World Health Organisation (WHO). How are these different from its last update in 2005? What changes in India's National Clean Air Programme are required to achieve revised standards? (UPSC CSE 2021)

Story of India's withdrawal from overseas airbase in Tajikistan

Syllabus:

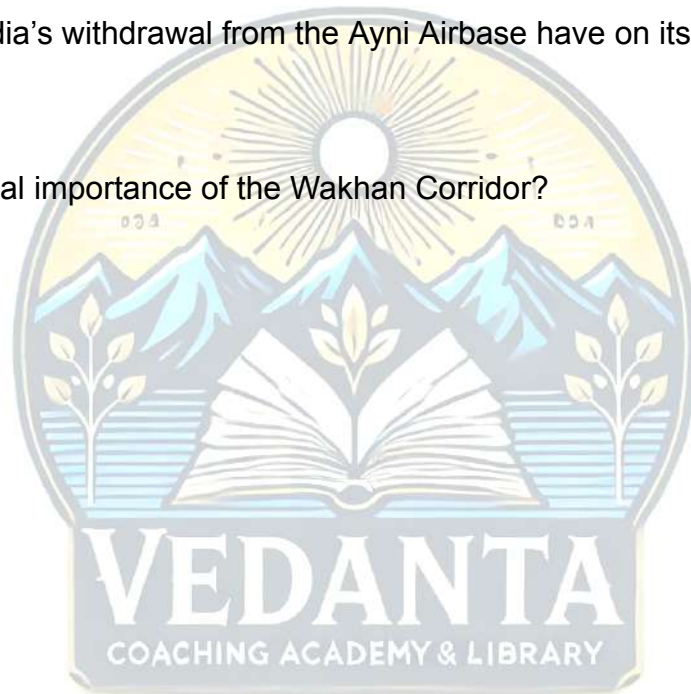
Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance.

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests. Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

What's the ongoing story: Last month, it came to light that India no longer operates its erstwhile overseas airbase in Tajikistan that gave it a strategic heft in central Asia. In 2022, India started quietly withdrawing its military personnel and equipment from the Ayni airbase in Tajikistan, which it had built and maintained for the last two decades.

Key Points to Ponder:

- How have India-Tajikistan ties evolved?
- What are the areas of cooperation between the nations?
- What is the strategic significance of Ayni airbase for India?
- What impact does India's withdrawal from the Ayni Airbase have on its regional strategic interests?
- What is the geopolitical importance of the Wakhan Corridor?



— **Map work:** Locate Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries on a world map. (Refer to the atlas)

The Caucasus and Central Asia



Key Takeaways:

- Ayni was India's only full-fledged overseas base, and its location offered India a military foothold in central Asia and leverage over Pakistan. Its presence projected influence in the region dominated by major powers like Russia and China.
- The Ayni airbase was a key airbase of India in a strategic location in Tajikistan, where India first deployed military personnel when it was supporting the earlier Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, which was fighting the Taliban. The airbase was also used by India to evacuate its nationals after the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021.

— It is located around 20 km from Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor, which shares a boundary with the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and with China's Xinjiang province.

— **The airbase, originally built during the Soviet era, was in poor condition following the split of the Soviet Union. Over the last two decades, India spent around \$80 million to renovate the airbase, which included repairing and upgrading the runway to a 3,200-metre runway suitable for combat jets and heavy lift transport aircraft, as well as constructing hangars, fuel depots, air traffic control facility, under a 2002 bilateral agreement with the Tajik government. Much of the renovation of the airbase was done by the Border Roads Organisation.**

— At one point, up to 200 Indian military personnel, mostly from the Army and the IAF, were also stationed at the airbase along with a few Sukhoi 30 MKI jets. After the agreement with the Tajik government lapsed, India started pulling out people and assets from the airbase in 2022.

— India has officially said that it had a bilateral arrangement with Tajikistan for the rehabilitation and development of any aerodrome, and while this arrangement was in place for several years, the facility was handed over to the Tajikistan side in 2022 after the conclusion of the agreement with the country.

— It is understood that the Tajikistan government was reluctant to renew the lease for the airbase owing to pressure from Russia and China.

— Withdrawal of Indian presence from Ayni airbase may be a setback for India, particularly because of its proximity to the Wakhan corridor, which is of geopolitical interest to both China and Pakistan for security reasons and for trade, potentially.



Ayni air base.

— Notably, India does not have a functional overseas military base in any other country. In 2024, India and Mauritius jointly inaugurated an airstrip and a jetty that India has built on Agaléga, a set of two islands in the western Indian Ocean. Both of these are key strategic projects that can help to expand India's reach in the Indian Ocean and enhance its coverage of the waters off the east coast of Africa, where China is also expanding its influence.





— India has a military training team in Bhutan, which is responsible for the training of the personnel of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and the Royal Bodyguard of Bhutan (RBG).

— China, on the other hand, has an official overseas military base in Djibouti. Various reports and satellite imagery have pointed to China building a military base in Tajikistan, but China has not officially acknowledged it. The United States has over a hundred overseas military bases or installations across the globe, including Camp Humphreys in South Korea (the largest overseas base), Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and multiple installations in Germany and Japan.

Do You Know:

— Ayni airbase was India's **only full-fledged overseas base** and was located in a region that offered it not only a presence in central Asia, where it was looking to expand its influence in the long term, but also offered it a strategic heft compared to its proximity to both the Xinjiang region and to Wakhan corridor — a narrow, landlocked strip of land in Afghanistan's Badakhshan

province that borders China's Xinjiang region to the east, Tajikistan to the north, and PoK to the south.

— Any overseas military base is of high importance to any country as it offers access not just to the country it is located in, but also to the neighbouring region. And if its located in a strategically key region, such a base would often be critical in filling up security and intelligence voids for the country.

— Ayni airbase was India's only full-fledged operational overseas military base. It was also one India spent significant resources over the last two decades, both in terms of manpower and funds.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question Covering similar theme:

(3) Recently in the news, Ayni Airbase is located in:

- (a) Afghanistan
- (b) Tajikistan
- (c) Pakistan
- (d) Iran



After Trump-Xi ceasefire in Busan, here's a to-do list for New Delhi

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance.

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

What's the ongoing story: Nirupama Rao writes- "Diplomacy often resembles theatre. Summits come with scripts, staging and deliberate silences. The brief Trump-Xi meeting at the October 2025 APEC Summit in Busan revealed more through its setting and tone than through official statements."

Key Points to Ponder:

— How has the US and China relationship evolved in recent times?

- What is the significance of the Indo-Pacific for the USA?
- How is the recent US-China trade truce going to impact India?
- Is China and USA closeness a cause of concern for India?
- What is the status of India-USA trade talks?
- What are the key defence agreements signed between India and the US?
- What is the significance of signing the 10-year Framework for the US-India Major Defence Partnership?
- Read about the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

Key Takeaways:

- The meeting took place at Gimhae Air Base, a South Korean military base used by the Americans. For China, this was symbolically uncomfortable. It evoked the Korean War, when Chinese and US forces fought each other, and highlighted the continuing American power in East Asia. Beijing normally insists on optics that show equality. Agreeing to this venue suggested a shift.
- “The outcomes followed the same pattern. China agreed to ease export controls on rare earth minerals, increase US soybean imports, cooperate on fentanyl precursor controls, and explore buying Alaskan oil. **These were not acts of surrender, but of pressure management — moves to reduce strain rather than project strength. More telling was what China apparently avoided raising: Taiwan, South China Sea, US chip restrictions, and US nuclear testing. These are central to Beijing’s strategic posture, yet were left unsaid. The silence was strategic. China came to Busan to buy time.**”
- “The roots lie in China’s domestic situation. Days earlier, the Fourth Plenum of the 20th Party Congress met in a subdued mood. The country faces a prolonged property slump, high local government debt, youth unemployment, and shrinking foreign investor confidence.”
- “China’s recalibration is visible in three areas. In security, where the People’s Liberation Army has toned down its posture. Military exercises around Taiwan are shorter and more predictable,

signalling resolve without courting risk. South China Sea patrols maintain presence but avoid escalation. The tone is vigilance without provocation.”

— “In diplomacy, Chinese diplomats are less combative. The Global Times has softened its rhetoric. China has returned to phrases like “mutual respect” and “win–win cooperation,” which had faded during its confrontational phase.”

— “And in domestic politics, the Party has prioritised stability. Campaigns central to Xi’s rule — anti-corruption, “common prosperity,” cultural messaging — have shifted to a steadier, risk-averse mode. The goal is to keep the system stable through uncertainty, not to change course.”

— “This is not retreat but a tactical lowering of sails. Easing rare earth controls was framed at home as “optimisation”, aimed at slowing Western diversification and preserving leverage. The Busan concessions were designed for short-term relief, not long-term softness.”

— “China’s next phase could take one of three forms. One is a **strategic pause**: Stabilise the economy, rebuild external trust, upgrade technology, and return to the world stage with renewed strength — a modern Deng-style reset. A **second is drift**: An unsettled decade of half-measures, brittle nationalism, and unpredictable policy swings. Neither assertive nor conciliatory, simply reactive. The third is quiet **adaptation**: Selective technological gains, new supply chains, and pragmatic diplomacy that allows China to regain momentum with less noise.”

— For India, Busan offers a moment to read both China and itself. At the ASEAN Summit, Narendra Modi avoided a public appearance with Trump. Washington saw electoral calculation; Beijing perhaps saw prudence; many Indians saw strategic restraint. India is prone to step cautiously given recent geopolitical trends with the US, especially in Asia’s close-quarters neighbourhood.”

— “China’s pause offers both opportunity and risk. A China fixated on domestic issues may be easier to engage, yet also more sensitive. India should use this period to reinforce its economic, military, and tech resilience — not to imitate China, but to avoid being caught off guard if Beijing regains momentum. India should deepen partnerships but avoid triumphalism. Public gloating rarely plays well in Asia, where face and pride carry weight.”

— “A connected challenge is managing President Trump. A sadder but wiser [Delhi](#) is wary of being used as a prop. Trump values loyalty as performance and prefers spectacle. India gains little by appearing eager. A steadier approach is a firm, unsentimental partnership: Close enough to influence, distant enough to avoid being drafted into someone else’s rivalry.

— “Three habits matter. Work with the wider US system, not just the White House. Congress, the Pentagon, governors, tech firms, and think tanks provide continuity beyond one president. Set boundaries early and privately. Trump often respects firmness behind closed doors more than praise in public.”

— “Build cooperation only where it serves India’s long-term interests — defence co-production, supply chain resilience, critical minerals, and skilled mobility — without acting as America’s “China card”. India’s influence comes from being a voice others look for, not an echo.”

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

‘What introduces friction into the ties between India and the United States is that Washington is still unable to find for India a position in its global strategy, which would satisfy India’s National self-esteem and ambitions’. Explain with suitable examples. (UPSC CSE 2019)

Cash transfers are valuable, they are not a substitute for jobs

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national importance, social and economic development.

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Government policies and interventions, Role of women and women’s organisation, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanisation, their problems and their remedies.

What’s the ongoing story: Madan Sabnavis writes- “Cash transfers make headlines during election cycles. The latest to grab attention are those announced for women in various states, normally just before the assembly elections or topped up if the schemes already exist. While some concerns have been voiced, such transfers may not be negative.”

Key Points to Ponder:

- How do cash transfer schemes promote social inclusion and empower women?
- What are the major challenges associated with “cash and kind” transfer schemes?
- How do cash transfer schemes affect a state’s fiscal discipline?
- What are the arguments in favour and against the direct cash transfer schemes?
- How freebies are a double-edged sword?
- How do cash transfers to women have become a political tool rather than addressing the real problems?
- Read about the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

Key Takeaways:

- “There are several positive consequences of “cash and kind” transfers. Remember that the free food scheme has helped to raise several families out of poverty and proves that direct interventions work. The same holds for benefits given to farmers either directly through cash or through subsidies.”
- **“Three issues need to be discussed. One, whether such transfers provide direct economic and social benefit. Two, whether they upset fiscal math. And three, the ideology of the role of the state.”**
- “These cash transfer schemes cover almost 100 million women. This has led to empowerment as they are less dependent on their spouses. It helps them spend money more meaningfully, which matters in lower-income groups.”
- **“Schemes like free bus rides have helped increase mobility,** easing access to educational and occupational institutions. Schemes which involve distribution of laptops, cycles or sewing machines help in social advancement either through better education or providing avenues for employment. Hence, **“cash and kind” transfers are good if directed well.**”
- “The broader question is whether this process can be sustained when governments spend more on such avenues and less on, say, infrastructure. Here, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget

Management Act ensures fiscal discipline. There are rules in place on how much a state can borrow. The issue is whether such unconditional transfers in cash or kind are better than, say, an infrastructure project, considering that even money transferred adds to spending and growth.”

— “This leads us to the role of the state. It is to ensure fair distribution, and giving cash is a direct way of raising living standards, just like how the free food scheme has benefited society at large. States have been allocating funds for capex, too. But, at times, these have been pruned to meet fiscal targets. This can be considered the cost of keeping the less privileged in a society above the level of deprivation.”

— “Schemes involving unconditional cash transfers do serve the general good. Though, arguably, in the long run, more jobs must be created. There is no substitute for that.”

Do You Know:

— **The term ‘freebie’ in the dictionary refers to an item or service that is offered or delivered without any cost.** In a bulletin published in June 2022, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a definition for the term **‘freebies’ as a form of public welfare programme that is offered without any cost.**

— **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) asserts that freebies can be differentiated from public or merit goods, such as education and healthcare, as well as other state expenditures that yield broader and enduring advantages.** Nevertheless, discerning between welfare goods, often referred to as ‘merit’ goods, and freebies or ‘non-merit’ products poses a significant challenge. — Scholars have underscored the significance of merit goods, such as free or subsidised food, education, shelter, and healthcare, in expediting human development and subsequently fostering national economic progress.

Previous year UPSC Mains Question Covering similar theme:

What are the continued challenges for women in India against time and space? (UPSC CSE 2019)

Hungary gets a pass from US on Russian oil sanctions: What it means for India

Syllabus:

Preliminary Examination: Current events of national and international importance.

Mains Examination: General Studies-II: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests, Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

What's the ongoing story: Just weeks after announcing sanctions on Russian oil companies Rosneft and Lukoil on October 22, the US on Friday (November 7) surprisingly announced a one-year exemption for Hungary after the European country committed to purchasing US liquefied natural gas (LNG) worth approximately \$600 million and nuclear fuel worth \$114 million.

Key Points to Ponder:

- Read about India's bilateral relations with Russia and the US.
- What are the reasons for the US sanction on Russian oil?
- What is the status of India's import of oil from Russia?
- How is the recent ban by the US going to impact Indian refineries?
- What are secondary sanctions?
- How U.S. tariff threats have influenced India's decisions on oil import diversification?

Key Takeaways:

- Notably, following his high-stakes talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on October 30, US President Donald Trump had said that the issue of Russian oil did not come up for discussion, even though China is the largest purchaser of Russian oil. The country has also successfully set up a domestic payment mechanism, future-proofing itself against sanctions.
- In sharp contrast, India is not only witnessing a steep decline in exports to the US due to high tariffs but has also begun seeing a drop in cheaper Russian oil supplies — a trend that could potentially strain long-standing ties with Moscow. While low commodity prices are giving the US

room to wield sanctions at its discretion, New Delhi seems to be paying the steepest price for purchasing Russian oil, unlike others.

— This comes amid differences between the two countries over a trade deal. The US imposed steep 50 per cent tariffs on India on August 27 after a trade deal could not be reached due to several concerns, including India's objection to genetically modified US agricultural products. India's exports to the US slipped 12 per cent in September, particularly hurting labour-intensive exports.

— Justifying the exemption, Trump said Hungary faced unique logistical challenges, including access to a sea that could be used to drill oil.

— Following the sanctions announcement, which is expected to come into effect on November 21, Russian oil dispatches to India have dropped sharply.

— As expected, the crash in exports is driven by lower dispatches from Rosneft and Lukoil, which account for over half of Russia's oil production and exports, and are used to make up more than two-thirds of India's Russian oil imports. Exports to India from Rosneft — Russia's largest oil company — plunged to 0.81 million bpd in the week to October 27 from 1.41 million bpd in the previous week. For Lukoil, no dispatches to India were recorded in the week to October 27, as against 0.24 million bpd in the previous week,

— A trade deal with the US involving higher purchases of American energy could be a way out for India. This could also help New Delhi secure a more favourable tariff rate of between 15 and 20 per cent. However, the ongoing US Supreme Court case on the legality of the tariffs could impact the dynamics if the Trump administration loses.

Do You Know:

— Under international law, secondary sanctions are viewed as coercive measures that penalise third states or their entities for maintaining relations with a sanctioned actor. Unlike primary sanctions, which regulate a state's own nationals and territory, secondary sanctions target external actors to influence their dealings with the primary target.

— They operate by altering access to the sanctioning state's market or financial system, creating indirect pressure on third parties to conform to the sanctioning state's policy objectives.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question Covering similar theme:

(4) Consider the following statements:

1. Tariffs are taxes or duties imposed by a government on imported goods and services.
2. Objective of tariffs is to make foreign products more expensive compared to domestically produced goods

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

ALSO IN NEWS

Navy deploys INS Sahyadri for Malabar exercise

The navies of India, the US, Australia and Japan will kick-start the annual Malabar naval exercise in the Northern Pacific beginning Monday with an aim to further bolster interoperability among them. The Indian Navy has deployed its guided missile frigate INS Sahyadri for the mega exercise being hosted by the US. The exercise is taking place in Northern Pacific's Guam amid some strain in ties between India and the US over Washington's policies on trade and tariff.

Energy cooperation foundation of India-Angola trade ties, says President	<p>President Droupadi Murmu, during her maiden visit to Angola as the Indian head of state, has said that energy cooperation is the foundation of trade ties between the two countries. Murmu held bilateral talks with her Angolan counterpart João Lourenço in Luanda. Earlier, she was accorded a grand ceremonial welcome and Guard of Honour at the Presidential Palace in Luanda upon arrival. The two leaders held comprehensive talks aimed at deepening the multifaceted partnership between India and Angola. India and Angola also signed three MoUs in the field of defence, culture and Ayurveda.</p>
E.coli spreads as fast as swine flu	<p>New research has revealed that Escherichia coli (E. coli), a bacterium that normally lives in the human gut, can spread through populations at a rate comparable to the swine flu. Researchers from the Wellcome Sanger Institute, the University of Oslo, the University of Helsinki, Aalto University in Finland, and their collaborators have been able to estimate how efficiently one person can pass gut bacteria to others. This kind of calculation, which measures transmission rates, has previously been possible mainly for viruses.</p>

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