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GS 1: ART & CULTURE, HISTORY, INDIAN SOCIETY AND GEOGRAPHY

1. A tale of two friendly States

Context: A recent discovery of some old government records at the Regional Archives, Calicut Civil Station has portrayed the close ties between Kerala & Assam. One of the official files was titled as 'The Assam Earthquake Fund' which has the record of a massive tremor that hit Assam in 1950. There are cultural differences between the peoples living in Kerala and Assam. Despite these distinctions, the spirit of unity unites the people of these two states. The need of the hour is to improve the ties not only between Kerala and Assam but also between South India and North-eastern India. Tourism, sports and games, cinema, art, and literature can break the Berlin Wall between these two regions and bring the people closer. The easiest and best way to achieve this is to organize festivals. For example, a Kerala festival introducing art, literature, cinema, football, tourist centres, and more can be organized in the northeastern states. And vice-versa.

Regionalism

- **About:** Regionalism is a term used to describe the idea that people living in a particular region share a common identity based on their distinct characteristics, such as language, culture, history, and food habits. This shared identity creates a sense of togetherness among people inhabiting a region.

- **Factors that lead to Regionalism in India:** *Geographical factors* - The geographical boundaries in India are closely linked to linguistic distribution, topography, and climate, leading to a territorial orientation among the inhabitants of a particular region. This induces a sense of regionalism in people based on their symbolic attachment to their region.

Historical and cultural factors - In India, historical and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping regionalism. Cultural heritage, folklore, myths, symbolism, and historical traditions contribute to regionalism by inspiring a sense of pride and identity among people of a particular cultural group. Political and economic realities also influence regionalism under this factor.

Caste and religion - When caste is combined with language conflicts or religious fundamentalism, it leads to dogmatism, orthodoxy, and obscurantism, further fuelling regional feelings.

Economic factors - uneven development across different parts of India is a primary cause of regionalism and separatism. This disparity has led to a feeling of relative deprivation among the inhabitants of economically neglected regions, resulting in demands for separate states.

Politico-administrative factors - Political parties and regional leaders exploit regional sentiments and deprivation to solidify their support bases by highlighting regional problems in their election manifestos and promising political and regional development to gain support

- **Positive impacts:** *Preservation of culture and traditions* - Regionalism helps to preserve unique cultures and traditions as people can express and celebrate their regional identity and keep traditional practices alive.

Development of local economies - Regionalism can encourage the development of local economies by promoting investment in local businesses and industries, potentially creating job opportunities and boosting the economy.

- **Negative impacts:** *Tensions and conflicts* - Regionalism may lead to tensions and conflicts between different regions. This can manifest as a sense of competition, mistrust, or even hostility between regions.

Effect on International relations - Regionalism can become a hurdle in international diplomacy, as seen in issues such as Tamil Nadu's concerns with Sri Lanka and West Bengal's dispute with Bangladesh over the sharing of Teesta River water.

- **Some regional movements in India:** *Supra-state regionalism* - This type of regionalism involves a group of states that come together based on a common interest or issue, often against another group of states or the union. The Northeastern states of India are an example of supra-state regionalism where the states have formed a common front due to their shared historical and socio-cultural background and their perception of being neglected by the government.

Inter-state regionalism - This type of regionalism involves the identities of one or more states within the same provincial territory. It is also issue-specific and often results in disputes, such as the conflicts between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over the distribution of Kaveri water.

Intra-state regionalism - This type of regionalism refers to a part of a state that strives for self-identity and development. For example, in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, there is often a feeling of regionalism within specific coastal and western regions.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

2. What is the procedure for removing judges?

Context: Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution provide that a judge of the Supreme Court/High Court shall be removed by the President, on the grounds of 'proved misbehaviour' or 'incapacity' after a motion is passed in each House of Parliament. Fifty-five MPs of the Rajya Sabha have submitted a motion, for removing Allahabad High Court Judge, Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, to Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. Justice Yadav made communally charged remarks while speaking at an event organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The stringent process with the requirement of special majority in both houses has resulted in the non-removal of judges even after having been found guilty of misbehaviour by the inquiry committee.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Opposition in Rajya Sabha is preparing to move a motion for impeachment of Allahabad High Court Judge for his controversial remarks inciting communal hatred.
- **Impeachment Process for Judges in India:** The process involves Parliament passing an address to the President to remove the judge. To pass the motion, two-thirds of the MPs present and voting in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha-
 - Must approve it, with a majority of more than 50% of the total membership of each House.
- **Constitutional Provisions:** *Article 124(4)* - The judge can only be removed by a Presidential order, passed after a majority vote in both Houses of Parliament. The vote must come from two-thirds of the members present and voting. Articles 218 of the Constitution extends the same rules to High Court judges. The impeachment process ensures judicial independence by maintaining a high bar for removal, limiting political influence.
- **Grounds for Impeachment:** A judge of the Supreme Court or High Court can be impeached on two grounds: "proved misbehaviour" or "incapacity" as per the Constitution of India. Further clarified in the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, including-
 - Misuse of office.
 - Grave offences that undermine the judge's integrity.
 - Contravention of the provisions of the Constitution.
- **Procedure under the Judges Inquiry Act, 1968:** The impeachment motion must be signed by at least 100 MPs in the Lok Sabha and 50 MPs in the Rajya Sabha.
Committee Formation - Once the motion is introduced, the Speaker or Chairperson of the respective House forms a three-member inquiry committee:
 - Headed by the Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court judge.
 - The second member is usually a Chief Justice of any High Court.
 - The third member is a distinguished jurist, appointed by the Speaker or Chairman.*Inquiry Process* - The committee investigates the charges, cross-examines witnesses, and regulates its procedure.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

3. Lanka: Won't allow use of our land against India

Context: The recent visit of Sri Lankan president Anura Kumara Dissanayake lays a great significance to India and his assurance of not letting the island nation to be used in a manner that is detrimental to the interest of India. The two sides also agreed to explore the possibility of concluding a framework agreement on defence cooperation, provision of defence platforms and assets to augment Sri Lanka's defence capabilities, intensify collaborations through joint exercises, maritime surveillance and defence dialogue and exchanges. Enhanced capacity building and training for Sri Lankan defence training programmes will also be provided whenever required.

India-Sri Lanka Relations

- **About:** India and Sri Lanka have a long and complex history of cultural, economic, and political ties dating back over 2,500 years.
- **History:** *Ancient* - Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka by Emperor Ashoka's son Mahinda in the 3rd century BCE. This led to the establishment of a strong cultural and religious connection between the two countries. In the 10th century CE, the Chola dynasty of South India conquered Sri Lanka several times. However, the Cholas also left a lasting cultural impact on Sri Lanka, influencing art, architecture, and language.
Modern - India and Sri Lanka gained independence from British rule in 1947 and 1948, respectively. India played an important role in helping Sri Lanka establish its democratic institutions. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed in 1976, and it was involved in an armed conflict with Sri Lankan armed forces from 1983 to 2009. During the Tamil conflict, India and Sri Lanka signed the 1987 India-Sri Lanka Agreement to enact the 13th amendment and send the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 further changed India's attitude towards the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Civil War in Sri Lanka ended through a military operation in 2009.
- **Significance of Sri Lanka to India:** *Strategic location* - Sri Lanka's location in the Indian Ocean region makes it a strategically important hub for India's security interests.
Geopolitical importance - Sri Lanka's location makes it important for India's Indian Ocean strategy and for networking with partners for its aim of establishing an Indian Ocean Rim Community.
China's presence - India is also concerned about China's increasing presence in Sri Lanka through investments in ports, which could potentially be used for military purposes.
- **India's engagement:** *Economic cooperation* - India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISFTA) in 2000 contributed significantly towards the expansion of trade between the two countries.
Cultural relations - Buddhism is one of the strong pillars connecting both nations. Both countries jointly commemorated the 2600th year of Buddha's enlightenment.
Development cooperation - Sri Lanka is a major recipient of development assistance from the Government of India. India's overall commitment stands close to US\$ 3 billion, out of which around US\$ 560 million are purely in grants.
Defence and security cooperation - Since 2012, India has participated in the Indo-Sri Lankan Defence Dialogue. This platform helps to review security and defines cooperation issues.
Infrastructure development - In 2022, India signed an agreement to set up hybrid power projects on northern Sri Lanka islands. Various development projects have been started by India at Kankesanthurai port on the northern tip of Sri Lanka, very close to India, and at Trincomalee port on its northeastern coast.

Multilateral cooperation - Both are members of organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Both are part of international organizations such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank etc.

- **Challenges:** *Strategic issues due to increased Chinese presence* - As part of the Maritime Silk Route (MSR) policy, China built Colombo and Hambantota ports. China has also collaborated in satellite launching activities with Supreme SAT (Pvt.), Sri Lanka's only satellite operator.

Political instability - Sri Lanka has witnessed political instability in recent years, with frequent changes in government and leadership. This has affected the country's ability to engage with India and implement policies that promote economic cooperation and regional stability.

- **Way forward:** Both countries should try to work out a permanent solution to the issue of fishermen through bilateral engagements. India needs to focus more on its traditional and cultural ties to improve relations with Sri Lanka. Mutual recognition of each other's concerns and interests can improve the relationship between both countries.

GS 3: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, DEFENCE, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

4. Levy a higher GST rate on tobacco, sugared beverages

Context: Over the past seven years, since the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), there have been no significant increases in GST rates on harmful products such as tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages, except for two minor hikes in National Calamity Contingent Duties (NCCD) on tobacco. This has made these products more affordable, undermining efforts to curb their consumption. In this context, the proposal by the Group of Ministers (GoM) to raise the highest GST tier on tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages from 28% to 35% is a welcome step. However, further tax reforms are essential to effectively tackle the public health and fiscal challenges associated with these products.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Group of Ministers (GoM) on GST Rate Rationalisation met on December 2, 2024, and proposed significant changes to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) structure. These changes primarily affect sin goods like cigarettes, tobacco products, and aerated beverages, as well as apparel.
- **Next step for the GoM:** The GoM report will be reviewed and discussed in detail by the GST Council during its meeting on December 21, 2024. The GST Council, chaired by the Union Finance Minister, will have the final say on the proposed tax changes. There may be further discussions on periodic rationalisation of GST rates in future meetings of the Council.
- **The 4-Tier GST Structure:** Currently, the GST system in India is organized into four tax slabs-
 - 5%: For essential goods.
 - 12%: For items of medium importance.
 - 18%: For standard goods.
 - 28%: For luxury and demerit goods (e.g., high-end cars, tobacco, aerated beverages).

In addition to these, there are cesses applied on demerit goods like cigarettes and aerated drinks, further increasing their tax burden.

- **Other Proposals Discussed in Previous GoM Meetings:** *Packaged Drinking Water* - The GoM has proposed reducing the GST on packaged drinking water (20 liters or more) from 18% to 5%.
Bicycles - The proposal to reduce the GST on bicycles costing less than ₹10,000 from 12% to 5%.

Exercise Notebooks: A proposal to reduce GST on exercise notebooks from 12% to 5%.

Luxury Shoes - GST on shoes costing above ₹15,000 would be increased from 18% to 28%.

Luxury Watches - The GoM suggested increasing the GST on wristwatches costing above ₹25,000 from 18% to 28%.

- **Conclusion:** The proposed 35% GST on cigarettes, tobacco products, and aerated beverages could discourage consumption of these products, especially cigarettes and tobacco, which are harmful to health. It could lead to increased revenue collection for the government but may also raise concerns about the price elasticity of demand for these goods. A higher tax could drive some consumers to the black market for cheaper products.

Key proposals by the GoM

- **GST Rate on Sin Goods:** The GoM has proposed a new 35% GST rate on certain sin goods like-
 - Cigarettes
 - Tobacco products
 - Aerated beverages

Currently, these goods are taxed at a 28% GST under the four-tier GST system. The introduction of a 35% rate aims to curb the consumption of these goods, which are often associated with negative health and environmental impacts. Additionally, these goods attract a cess on top of the GST, making them more expensive and discouraging consumption.

- **GST Structure on Apparel:** The GoM also proposed changes to the GST rate on readymade garments based on their price-
 - Garments costing up to ₹1,500: GST reduced to 5% (from the current 12%).
 - Garments costing between ₹1,500 and ₹10,000: GST would be 18%.
 - Garments costing above ₹10,000: GST would be 28%.
- **Overall GST Rate Rationalisation:** The GoM report proposes tax adjustments on a total of 148 items.

QUICK FACTS: IDIOPATHIC PULMONARY FIBROSIS (IPF) WHICH LED TO ZAKIR HUSSAIN'S DEATH

Tabla Maestro Zakir Husain passed away on Sunday in San Francisco due to idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), it is a chronic lung disease that causes the lungs to scar, making it hard to breathe. The exact cause of IPF is unknown, hence termed as idiopathic (without a clear reason).

Symptoms: Shortness of breath, dry cough, chest pain, gradual weight loss, feeling faint, tiredness, loss of appetite

Risk factors: Smoking, emphysema, certain types of work, cancer treatments, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

Who it affects: Most commonly affects people in their 60s and 70s, and males are affected more often than females.

Treatment: Antifibrotic treatments can help slow IPF, but there's no treatment to stop or reverse the scarring.