

2024

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS





Daily Current Affairs from *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express* & *The Assam Tribune*

18th Aug 2024

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

1. Arctic tundra emitting more carbon than it absorbs

Context: Arctic Tundra is frozen treeless biome which has stored carbon for thousands of years, has now become a source of heat-trapping greenhouse gases (GHGs) which are primary drivers of global warming, according to a new report by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Increased wildfires and unusually high temperatures are the main reasons behind the dramatic transformation of this Arctic ecosystem. Arctic tundra is emitting more carbon than it holds which will have global consequences, it will exacerbate climate change, and the adverse impacts are unfolding across all parts of the globe.

Key points

- **Overview:** A recent report titled the 2024 Arctic Report Card by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reveals that the Arctic, once a major carbon sink, is now becoming a carbon source due to ongoing climate-induced warming.

- **Arctic:** The Arctic is the northernmost polar region of Earth. It includes the Arctic Ocean, adjacent seas, and parts of Alaska (US), Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden. The Arctic is characterized by its cold climate, with temperatures often dropping below freezing. *Geopolitical Importance* - The Arctic is rich in natural resources, including oil, natural gas, and minerals, attracting significant international interest and competition for control over these resources. *India's Interest in Arctic Region* - India engaged with the Arctic by signing the Svalbard Treaty in 1920. India began its Arctic research program in 2007 and launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean and established the Himadri research base in the Svalbard archipelago, Norway in 2008.
- **Features of tundra:** Extremely cold climate, low biotic diversity, simple vegetation structure, limitation of drainage, short season of growth & reproduction, energy and nutrients in the form of dead organic matter, large population oscillations.

2024 Arctic Report Card

- **About:** A recent report titled the 2024 Arctic Report Card by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reveals that the Arctic, once a major carbon sink, is now becoming a carbon source due to ongoing climate-induced warming.
- **Accelerated Arctic Warming:** The Arctic is warming at an unprecedented rate, with 2024 marking the second-warmest year since records began in 1900. The Arctic's summer of 2024 was the third warmest on record, with regions like Alaska and Canada experiencing extreme heat waves.
- **Arctic Tundra a Carbon Source:** Permafrost thaw is causing the Arctic tundra to switch from a carbon sink to a carbon source. Decomposing permafrost releases carbon dioxide and methane, accelerating global warming. Wildfires are increasing in frequency and intensity, releasing more carbon and extending the wildfire season.
- **Decline in Sea Ice:** The extent and thickness of sea ice have reduced significantly over the past decades. The shorter sea ice season exposes more dark ocean surfaces, which absorb more heat and further contribute to warming. Arctic glaciers and the Greenland Ice Sheet continue to contribute meltwater to oceans, exacerbating global sea-level rise.
- **Implications:** Changes in the Arctic contribute to global challenges like coastal flooding, extreme weather events, and wildfires. The Arctic's diminishing ability to store carbon underscores the need to urgently reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions to mitigate further risks. The reindeer or caribou are in decline due to climate change affecting Indigenous communities reliant on them for food and cultural practices.
- **Permafrost thaw & carbon release:** Arctic soils hold 1.6 trillion metric tonnes of carbon, double the amount currently in the atmosphere. Thawing permafrost activates microbes that decompose trapped organic matter, releasing both CO₂ and CH₄. Permafrost is any ground that stays frozen for at least two years straight.

Q. Which of the following statements is/are correct about the deposits of 'methane hydrate'?

1. Global warming might trigger the release of methane gas from these deposits.
2. Large deposits of 'methane hydrate' are found in Arctic Tundra and under the sea floor.
3. Methane in atmosphere oxidizes to carbon dioxide after a decade or two.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

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

2. The challenge of universal health coverage

Context: The ongoing national conversation on what India needs to do for universal health coverage (UHC) often misses the complexity of multiple health systems and the unique challenges they bring. Every health system type that is seen globally is present in different parts of India. Government expenditure (per capita) on healthcare, for example, varies significantly from State to State. Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu spend ₹3,829, ₹2,590, and ₹2,039, respectively, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar spend only ₹951 and ₹701, respectively. West Bengal, a rural State, has a low fertility rate at 1.64, but it also has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates (16%). This is hugely different from other States with low fertility, such as Kerala and Himachal Pradesh, where teenage pregnancy rates are 2.4% and 3.4%, respectively.

Key points

- **Overview:** The expansion of Universal health coverage will be complex, but data and digital technology can smoothen the way.
- **Universal Health Coverage (UHC):** Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. It covers the full continuum of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course.
SDG target - Achieving UHC is one of the targets the nations of the world set when they adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.
- **UHC in India:** Currently, India aims to attain UHC through the expansion of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the flagship publicly financed health insurance (PFHI) scheme of the Union government.
- **Challenges:**
Off-track progress - The world is off track to make significant progress towards universal health coverage (Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 3.8) by 2030.
Shortage of manpower - Many Western and Central Asian nations today are staring at acute shortages of manpower in healthcare.
Disruption due to pandemic - The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted essential services in 92% of countries at the height of the pandemic in 2021. In 2022, 84% of countries still reported disruptions.
- **Suggestions for improvement:**
Global Initiative on Digital Health - It is here that India's leadership in digital health becomes significant. Under India's G20 presidency, the WHO has launched a Global Initiative on Digital Health aiming to marshal investments into digital health and facilitate regional and international exchange and reporting on health.
Role of India's Digital Health journey - India's own indigenous digital health movement, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, preceded this initiative and is steadily gathering steam. Digital

health must be seen as a tool for effectively managing the inevitably complex nature of UHC expansion.

- **Role of AI:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming health care worldwide, and India has the potential to be at the forefront of this revolution.

Diagnostics - One of the key areas where AI can make a significant impact is in diagnostics.

Predictions & preventions - Additionally, AI can help predict disease outbreaks, analyse health-care data, and optimise treatment plans, expediting health-care procedures, and revolutionising drug discovery ultimately making health care more personalised and effective.

- **Way Ahead:** It will be imperative that national interests don't lose ground to international ambitions and that digital technologies are leveraged to create non-competing solutions that are mindful of the Global South. Countries need to build on their existing systems, overlaying reforms, and best practices incrementally.

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

3. The Constitution on minority rights

Context: The debate on minority rights should be lifted from its current framework of communalism versus secularism and placed in the theoretical field of democracy and substantive equality. Recognising the importance of minority rights, the UN General Assembly adopted a declaration on the 'Rights of Persons Belonging to National, or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities' on December 18, 1992, and it is celebrated as Minority Rights Day all over the world. One may not be individually unjustly treated but it hurts if the group to which one belongs is subjected to ridicule or denied any value. This also undermines an individual's right to dignity.

Key points

- **Overview:** Minorities Rights Day 2024 is observed on 18 December every year in India to spread awareness about the need of protecting the rights of the minority communities. The day encourages people to learn more about the issues faced by minorities in India and ways and methods to ensure their safety.
- **Minorities Rights Day in India:** India is a secular nation, and the constitution of India provides equal rights to all its citizens. In the same spirit of equality, our constitution also provided measures that safeguard the rights of minorities through ensuring specific laws for them are made. These laws take care of people who are economically and socially disadvantaged irrespective of their caste, culture, and community including the people of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes.
- **Ministry of Minority Affairs in India:** On 29th January 2006, the Ministry of Minority Affairs was established, separating it from the Ministry of Social Justice and Environment to adopt a more focused approach to addressing issues concerning notified minority communities, namely Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jains. The ministry is tasked with formulating comprehensive policies, planning, coordination, evaluation, and reviewing developmental programs and regulatory frameworks to promote the welfare and empowerment of these communities.
- **National Commission of Minorities:** The Union Government established the National Commission for Minorities under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 to protect the interests of minority communities. Initially, five religious communities—Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists,

and Zoroastrians (Parsis)—were notified as minorities. Later, on 27th January 2014, the Jains were also recognized as a minority community.

- **The geographic spread of minorities in India:** Notified minorities constitute about 19% population of the country. In rural India during 2009-10, 11 percent of households followed Islam with about 12 percent of the population. In urban areas, the percentages of households and population following Islam were about 13 and 16 and those following Christianity were about 3 and 3, respectively.
- **Problems and concerns:** Some of the main problems faced by minorities in India are as follows-
 - *The problem of identity* - Because of the differences in socio-cultural practices, history, and backgrounds, minorities must grapple with the issue of identity everywhere which gives rise to the problem of adjustment with the majority community.
 - *Backwardness* - Minority communities are unable to join the mainstream of society. Sachar Committee which was constituted in 2005 has placed Muslims below the scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes.
 - *Economic reasons* - Indian socio-economic fabric is complex because it is much affected by caste, religion, and the more regional/linguistic differentials. At the same time, the Indian economic, social, and political institutions which persisted for centuries have a historical basis also. These factors have given a unique character to Indian society. It has become a conglomeration of various layers and segments divided and sub-divided.
- **Way forward:** Political leaders must take a leadership role in disowning hateful elements within their party and uphold their commitment to our constitution. Comprehensive anti-hate legislation and policy must be brought to function as a deterrent against hate crimes. Recent positive developments like the decriminalisation of homosexuality have shown that our society is empathetic towards minorities. A few anti-social elements must not be allowed to jeopardise gains made in this regard.

Q. Which of the following are the objectives of 'National Nutrition Mission'?

1. To create awareness relating to malnutrition among pregnant women and lactating mothers.
2. To reduce the incidence of anaemia among young children, adolescent girls, and women.
3. To promote the consumption of millets, coarse cereals, and unpolished rice.
4. To promote the consumption of poultry eggs.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

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

4. Double PM KISAN amount, implement legal guarantee of MSP

Context: A Parliamentary panel report has recommended doubling the annual financial assistance under the PM KISAN Samman Nidhi from Rs. 6,000 to Rs. 12,000 and a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) to farmers, an issue that has been central to the farmers protest in Punjab and Haryana last year. The recommendations are made by the standing committee on agriculture, animal husbandry and food processing, which is headed by MP Charanjit Singh Channi. The committee also recommended introducing a scheme to waive off debts of farmers and farm labourers and they also recommended that the government to explore the possibility of providing compulsory universal crop insurance to small farmers with land holding of up to 2 hectares on the lines of the centres health insurance scheme – PMJAY.

Key points

- **Overview:** Prime Minister has approved the 17th instalment of the PM Kisan scheme. This move will benefit 9.3 crore farmers, amounting to a distribution of approximately Rs 20,000 crore.
- **Beneficiaries outreach:** Over 11 crore farmers (with more than 3 crore women farmers) across the country have availed of the PM-Kisan scheme, indicating its widespread reach and impact.
- **Financial Support:** This financial aid helps farmers meet their agricultural expenses, purchase seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs, and support their families' livelihoods.
- **Improved Agricultural Practices:** This contributes to food security and boosts the agricultural sector's growth.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** The scheme plays a crucial role in alleviating poverty among small and marginal farmers by providing them with a steady source of income just like Universal Basic Income (UBI).
- **Enhanced Livelihoods:** PM-Kisan supports farmers' livelihoods, by providing a safety net during times of agricultural distress or economic uncertainties, ensuring a better quality of life for rural communities.

PM-KISAN Scheme

- **About:** The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% funding from the Government of India. It was implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare in 2019.
- **Aim:** To help procure various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income at the end of each crop cycle.
- **Objective:** To provide eligible farmers with annual financial assistance of ₹6,000. This assistance is distributed in three equal instalments of ₹2,000 every 4 months, via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) into the bank accounts of beneficiaries.
- **Beneficiaries:** Farmer families that hold cultivable land can apply for the benefits of this plan. Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs) (a farmer who owns cultivable land up to 2 hectares as per land records of the concerned State/UT). The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.

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

5. Lower Q2 GDP growth a temporary blip

Context: India's economic growth in Q2 FY25 slowed to 5.4%, marking a seven-quarter low and reflecting challenges across multiple sectors. This decline comes amidst global economic uncertainties, weak domestic demand, and election-induced delays in government spending. While sectors like agriculture,

services, and construction showed resilience, others like manufacturing, mining, and electricity faced significant hurdles. Understanding the performance of each sector and addressing the underlying issues is critical to sustaining long-term economic growth and meeting the projected targets for FY25.

Key points

- **Sectors that grew:** *Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing (3.5% growth)* - Favourable monsoon in many regions improved agricultural output. Increased rural demand contributed positively to the sector.
Services Sector (7.1% growth) - Growth in trade, hotels, transport, and communication services. Resilient demand in the IT and financial services sectors.
Construction (7.7% growth) - Continued public investment in infrastructure projects. Urban housing demand played a role in sustaining growth.
Primary Sector (Agriculture and Mining – 3.9% growth) - Modest recovery in mining due to stabilization of commodity prices. Continued reliance on natural resources for energy and raw materials.
- **Sectors that declined:** *Manufacturing (2.2% growth)* - Weak domestic consumption demand affected production levels. Global economic slowdown reduced export demand.
Electricity, Gas, and Other Utilities (3.3% growth) - Slower industrial demand for electricity due to subdued manufacturing activity.
Mining (-0.1% contraction) - High base effect from the previous year. Regulatory challenges and limited investment in exploration.
Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF – 5.4% growth) - Reduced government capital expenditure (down 14.7% in April-October). Election-induced slowdown in public spending.
- **Analysis of GDP slowdown:** *Weak Domestic Demand* - Private consumption expenditure grew only 6%, reflecting reduced household spending. High inflation, especially in food prices, curtailed consumer purchasing power.
Decline in Exports - Net exports positively contributed to GDP, but overall export growth slowed due to global headwinds.
Election-Related Delays - Public spending on infrastructure projects slowed during the election period.
High Base Effect - Robust growth in the same quarter last year led to subdued comparative growth.
Limited Manufacturing Growth - Industrial output remained weak due to supply chain challenges and reduced global demand.