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

1. Electronic distraction

Context: While there are numerous issues related to the integrity of elections that the Election Commission of India (ECI) needs to come clean on, the risk of electronic tampering with EVMs is not among them. To assume that EVMs are so elaborately and precisely manipulated that the BJP wins in some States and loses in some others in a detailed conspiracy, defies logic. By repeatedly raising the spectre of EVM manipulation, the real and serious questions of election integrity are being overlooked. Large-scale additions and deletions of voter names are now a pattern, and the ECI seems to be brazening it out.

Key points

- **Overview:** In recent years, there has been growing discussion and analysis surrounding the integrity and dependability of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used during elections in India. SC emphasized that EVMs are often questioned only in the wake of electoral losses, reaffirming confidence in their mechanism and the safeguards in place.

- **Necessity of electoral reforms:** Electoral reforms refer to the changes or improvements made to the electoral process to ensure the integrity and transparency of the electoral system. These reforms are necessary to maintain the credibility of the electoral process and to ensure that every vote counts.
 - *Ensuring free and fair elections (Article 324)* - Electoral reforms aim to address the issues of electoral malpractices and ensure that elections are conducted in a free and fair manner.
 - *Enhancing voter participation* - Electoral reforms aim to increase voter turnout and to address the issue of voter apathy, difficulty in accessing polling booths, etc.
 - *Reducing the influence of money and muscle power* - Electoral reforms help to reduce the influence of money and muscle power by regulating campaign finance and ensuring the safety of voters.
 - *Encouraging transparency and accountability* - Electoral reforms initiate the measures such as mandatory disclosure of criminal records by candidates and the use of technology to monitor the electoral process.
 - *Addressing electoral inequalities* - Electoral reforms try to bring down the inequalities such as the under-representation of women and marginalized communities.
- **Recommendations by Election Commission of India (ECI):** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has made several recommendations for electoral reforms over the years to improve the electoral process and ensure free and fair elections. Some of the major recommendations are-
 - The Commission is of the view that the law should be amended to provide that a person cannot contest from more than one constituency at a time.
 - Election commission endorsed the call for a lifetime ban in the apex court. It had argued that such a move would “champion the cause of decriminalization of politics”.
 - The Commission proposes that where any general election is due on the expiration of the term of the House, advertisements of achievements of the governments, either Central or State, in any manner, should be prohibited for a period of six months prior to the date of expiry of the term of the House.
 - The Election Commission proposes an amendment to provide the same protection and safeguard in the matter of removability of Election Commissioners from office as is available to the Chief Election Commissioner.
 - The decisions relating to anti-defection matters should be rendered by the President or the Governor with the recommendation of the Election Commission.
 - There should be the use of common electoral rolls at elections conducted by the Election Commission and the State Election Commissions.
 - Election Commission proposes that making false declarations concerning elections be an offense.
 - Rule-making authority under the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and Representation of the People Act, 1951, should be conferred on the Election Commission instead of the Central Government.

Q. In the light of recent controversy regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India to ensure the trustworthiness of elections in India?

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

2. Section 6A of the Citizenship Act — why it fails Assam

Context: The 4:1 majority ruling by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India, in October 2024, that upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 is significant. This provision establishes a distinct framework for migrants from the former East Pakistan (Bangladesh) who settled in Assam, allowing them to acquire Indian citizenship if they arrived before March 25, 1971. Section 6A of the Citizenship Act was introduced in 1985 following the Assam Accord, an agreement reached between the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement. The movement arose in response to the migration from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) into Assam, sparking concerns about the preservation of the local culture, economic strain, and political imbalance.

Key points

- **Overview:** Recently, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act 1955, which permits immigrants from Bangladesh residing in Assam to secure Indian citizenship, as a valid piece of legislation aligned to the Preamble value of fraternity. According to the court, the principle of fraternity cannot be selectively applied to one section living in Assam while another lot are labelled “illegal immigrants”.
- **Majority Opinion:** *Reaffirming Constitutional Validity* - The court ruled that Section 6A does not violate Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution, which set 26th January 1950, as the cut-off for granting citizenship to migrants from East and West Pakistan.
Power of Union - Parliament enacted Section 6A under its powers from Article 246 and Entry 17 of the Union List, which addresses citizenship, naturalization, and aliens.
Acknowledging the Issue - The court affirmed that the ongoing migration from Bangladesh has placed a significant burden on Assam.
Clarifying Responsibility - It was emphasised that Section 6A should not be solely blamed for this situation.
Criticizing the System - The court found that the current mechanisms and Tribunals responsible for identifying illegal immigrants in Assam are inadequate.
Need for Oversight - The enforcement of immigration and citizenship laws requires judicial supervision and cannot be left to the discretion of authorities.
- **Dissenting Opinion:** *Dissenting view* - The dissent declared Section 6A unconstitutional with prospective effect, rejecting concerns that different ethnic groups would infringe on the cultural and linguistic rights of others.
Balancing Development and Immigration - The dissent asserted that sustainable development and population growth can coexist without conflict.
- **Implications of this Judgement:** *Assamese Identity Preservation* - The majority opinion dismisses the notion that the presence of immigrants automatically infringes upon the cultural and linguistic rights of the Assamese people.
Tensions on Demographic Shift - Critics argue that continued immigration strains Assam's demographic balance, threatening its cultural identity and economic resources.
Resource Allocation - Immigrants continue to be eligible for citizenship and the resources and rights that come with it, potentially increasing strain on Assam's already limited economic resources.
Pressure on Immigration Laws - The judgment stresses the need for more effective implementation of immigration laws, particularly the detection and deportation of illegal immigrants who entered after the 1971 cut-off date.

Bangladesh Relations - By not recognizing post-1971 immigrants as Indian citizens, the judgement could lead to tensions with Bangladesh, as it may be seen as India pushing responsibility for these immigrants onto its neighbour, potentially straining diplomatic ties.

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

3. Trump says India charges lot of tariffs, threatens to impose reciprocal tax

Context: US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges “a lot” of tariff, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products. Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products. Imposing reciprocal duties violates global trade rules but one must follow a “wait and watch” approach to US President-elect Donald Trump’s remarks on imposing reciprocal tariffs. Mr Trump has used measures like Section 232 of the Tariff Act which allows the US to take unilateral measures against countries on national security grounds.

Key points

- **Trump’s Criticism:** *Historical Context of Tariff Disputes* - Trump has previously criticized India’s tariffs, calling it a “tariff king” and claiming India imposes “very high” tariffs. In 2019, he said India charged “100% tariffs” on American products like Harley-Davidson motorcycles, arguing that this was unfair compared to zero tariffs on Indian products sent to the US.
Proposal for Reciprocal Tariffs - Trump has suggested that if he returns to power in 2024, he will consider adding tariffs on Indian goods to balance what he sees as unfair practices. He stresses the need for fairness in trade, proposing that if India charges high tariffs, the US should respond with similar tariffs.
- **Tariffs:** Are taxes imposed by a government on imported goods, used to protect domestic industries from foreign competition by making imported goods more expensive. In Trump's remarks, he points to high tariffs in India as a barrier to trade.
 - *Reciprocal Tariffs* - This concept refers to the idea of imposing tariffs that mirror those of another country. Trump suggests that if India imposes high tariffs on U.S. goods, the U.S. should respond with similar tariffs on Indian goods. This strategy is intended to promote fairness and balance in trade relations.
- **Analysis of India’s Tariff Structure:** *Current Tariff Rates* - India’s average tariff rate is around 17%, which is much higher than that of developed countries like Japan, the US, and the EU, where rates are between 3% and 5%. However, when compared to other developing countries, India’s rates are competitive. For example, Brazil and South Korea have average tariffs of 13% and 13.4%, respectively.
Contextualizing High Tariffs - Experts argue that while India imposes high duties on certain products, this practice is common among many countries to protect their own industries.
- **Implications for India-US Relations:** *India-US Trade Negotiations* - Trump’s comments highlight ongoing tensions in India-US trade relations, especially regarding tariffs. For the US to gain zero-tariff access to Indian markets, experts suggest pursuing a free trade agreement (FTA).
Strategic Considerations - As the US and India work on their trade relationship, understanding the details of tariff structures and the historical context is crucial. With Modi's upcoming visit, there may be chances for discussion to address these tariff concerns and promote better trade cooperation.

- **Conclusion:** Trump's remarks about India's tariffs reflect broader issues in international trade. While India's tariff rates are higher than those of many developed nations, they are similar to those of other developing countries. As the US and India continue to negotiate their trade relationship, addressing these tariff differences will be important for strengthening cooperation and economic growth.

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4. Making affordable generics more reliable

Context: Generic drugs are crucial for addressing healthcare affordability in a population marked by significant income disparities. Bioequivalent to branded drugs, generics offer cost-effective alternatives. India leverages economies of scale and low production costs to supply affordable medication domestically and internationally. The key issue lies in India's decentralised drug regulation system, which grants significant authority to State Drug Regulatory Authorities, leading to inconsistent enforcement and quality standards. Ensuring the quality of generic medicines in India is vital to make them affordable and effective as innovator drugs. Despite being bioequivalent to brand-name drugs, quality control lapses have occasionally compromised their efficacy and safety.

Key points

- **Generic medicines:** A generic medicine is a drug that is made to be exactly like brand-name drugs that are already available in the market. They have the same active ingredients, strength, safety, and intended use. This means that a generic drug works just as well as a brand-name medicine and provides the same benefits
- **Cost effectiveness of generic medicine:** Generic Drugs cost less because they don't have to go through all the expensive tests and studies that brand-name drugs do. When a new drug is created, it is protected by patents that stop others from making copies of it for some time. But after that protection period ends, other companies can make generic versions without repeating those expensive tests.
- **Importance of Generic Medicines:**
 - Control various diseases* - The use of generic drugs is crucial for managing chronic diseases like diabetes, heart problems, and thyroid issues, especially as the population ages.
 - Essential for developing countries* - For instance, In India, the government and regulatory bodies encourage the production of effective generic drugs to make healthcare more accessible and affordable.
 - New Technological Integrations* - 3D printing technology has also played a role in producing generic drugs with different release dates and Flavors.
 - Affordable Medicine* - The competition among different companies to produce generic drugs reduces prices, making healthcare more affordable for people, and promoting the growth of the pharmaceutical industry.
- **Challenges Faced by Generic Medicines:** Some of the key challenges are-
 - *Quality and Safety Concerns* - Ensuring consistent quality and safety standards for generic drugs can be a challenge. In some instances, there have been reports of substandard or counterfeit medications entering the market, which can pose health risks to patients.

- *Prescription Practices* - In some cases, healthcare professionals may be influenced by pharmaceutical marketing and prescribing branded drugs over equally effective and more affordable generic alternatives.
- *Lack of Trust* - Building trust among patients and healthcare professionals in the quality and efficacy of generic drugs is crucial. Any negative incidents related to generic medications can erode trust and hinder their wider acceptance.
- **Promotion of Generic Medicines in India:** Here are some strategies to encourage the use of generic drugs in India-
 - Public Awareness Campaigns* - Launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns to educate the general population about the benefits and safety of generic drugs.
 - Generic Drug Substitution Policies* - Encourage generic drug substitution policies in hospitals and healthcare institutions. This means that when a brand-name drug is prescribed, the pharmacist should offer the patient a cheaper generic version as an alternative, with the patient's consent.
 - Government Incentives* - The Indian government can provide incentives to doctors and healthcare institutions that prescribe and dispense generic drugs. This can be in the form of tax benefits, subsidies, or other financial rewards to encourage more widespread adoption.
- **Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP):** It is a campaign launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in association with Central Pharma Public Sector Undertakings, to provide quality medicines at affordable prices to the masses through dedicated outlets called 'Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendra'. These provide generic medicines at much lesser price. The potency of these medicines is same as compared to expensive branded medicines available in the open market.
- **Conclusion:** Developing countries like India and other African countries are in dire need of generic drugs as it will help them make their healthcare responsive, affordable, and pro-poor. Right now, generic medicines face a few challenges in India. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from regulatory authorities, healthcare professionals, pharmaceutical companies, and patient education initiatives. Creating a more favourable environment for generic drugs can improve the accessibility and affordability of healthcare for the population in India.

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5. MP plans new home for cheetahs, relocate leopards

Context: Analysing the lineage of cheetahs to create a strong genetic foundation and relocating leopards from the predator-proof fenced areas and augmenting the number of prey animals are part of the Cheetah Action Plan for Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh. The sanctuary spreads across 2500 sq km landscape of Madhya Pradesh & Rajasthan, is a mix of grasslands, dry deciduous forests and riverine evergreen patches, which serves as an ideal habitat for the cheetahs to thrive. According to an action plan devised by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the MP wildlife dept. and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), 6-8 cheetahs will be released into a 64 sq km predator-proof enclosure within the sanctuary's West Range.

Key points

- **About the Species (Acinonyx Jubatus Venaticus):** The Cheetah (a carnivore) is the world's fastest land animal historically ranging throughout most of Sub-Saharan Africa and extending eastward to India. They maintain prey species healthy (by killing the weak and old) and control the population of

prey, helping plants-life by preventing overgrazing. Today, Cheetahs are found in only 9% of their historic range, occurring in a variety of habitats such as savannahs in the Serengeti, arid mountain ranges in the Sahara and hilly desert terrain in Iran.

- **Status:** Currently, Cheetahs (African) are listed as Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, as there are fewer than 7,100 adult and adolescent Cheetahs in the wild. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) lists them as an Appendix 1 species.
- **Historical Range of Cheetahs in India:** Historically, Asiatic Cheetahs had a very wide distribution in India, occurring from as far north as Punjab to Tirunelveli district in southern Tamil Nadu, from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west to Bengal in the east. Thus, the Cheetah's habitat was very diverse - scrub forests, dry grasslands, savannas and other arid and semi-arid open habitats.
- **Causes of Extinction of Cheetahs in India:** The big cat population got completely wiped out in the early 1950s, mainly due to over-hunting and habitat loss. Records of Cheetahs being hunted (sport hunting, capturing during Mughal period) go back to the 1550s. However, the final phase of its extinction coincided with British colonial rule (the British declared a bounty for killing it in 1871).
- **Cheetah Reintroduction Plan:** Under the 'Action Plan for Reintroduction of Cheetah in India', 50 cheetahs are brought from African countries to various national parks over 5 years. Kuno Palpur National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh Amongst the surveyed sites of the central Indian states, KNP has been rated the highest, because of its suitable habitat and adequate prey base.

Significance of bringing back Cheetahs - Besides conserving the big cat, the initiative is a boon to the ecosystem. They are not a threat to humans and do not attack large livestock either.

- **Challenges of bringing back Cheetahs:** Based on the evidence available, it is impossible to conclude that the choice to bring the African Cheetah into India is scientifically sound. As a result, the Supreme Court of India (in 2020) permitted an experimental release of Cheetahs in a suitable habitat.
- **Project Cheetah:** The plan involves partnering with other countries to conserve cheetahs, enhancing conservation and eco-tourism in India's dry forests.
Aim - To conserve threatened species and restore ecosystem functions. It is spearheaded by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

- **Leopards (Panthera pardus):** The leopard is the smallest of the Big Cat family (of genus Panthera namely the Tiger, Lion (Panthera leo), Jaguar, Leopard, and Snow Leopard), and is known for its ability to adapt in a variety of habitats. Melanism is a common occurrence in leopards, wherein the entire skin of the animal is black in colour, including its spots. It is a nocturnal animal, feeds on smaller species of herbivores found in its range, such as the chital, hog deer and wild boar.

Habitat - It occurs in a wide range in sub-Saharan Africa, in small parts of Western and Central Asia, on the Indian subcontinent to Southeast and East Asia. The Indian leopard (Panthera pardus fusca) is a leopard widely distributed on the Indian subcontinent.

Threats - Poaching for the illegal trade of skins and body parts, habitat loss and fragmentation, Human-Leopard conflict.

Conservation Status - IUCN Red List: Vulnerable, CITES: Appendix-I, Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule-I.

- **Status of Leopards in India:** India's leopard population rose by 8% from 12,852 in 2018 to 13,874 in 2022. About 65% of the leopard population is present outside protected areas in the Shivalik landscape. Only about a third of the leopards are within protected areas.