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

1. Thaw in India-China chill: Direct flights, Mansarovar yatra

Context: Marking a Major diplomatic breakthrough after the disengagement of process between India & China was completed last November, New Delhi and Beijing decided on a slew of measures to Improve Bilateral exchanges; resuming Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in the summer this year, working to restore direct flights between the two countries, issuing visas for journalists and think tanks and the sharing of trans-border river data. The disengagement process completed in November 2024 marked a significant diplomatic breakthrough.

Key points

- **Overview:** Meetings between Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong in Beijing, as well as discussions between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, paved the way for renewed cooperation.
- **Key Agreements and Initiatives:** During the high-level meetings, both nations agreed on several initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust and enhancing collaboration-
 - *Resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra* - Scheduled for the summer of 2025, this pilgrimage holds significant cultural and religious importance for Indian devotees.
 - *Direct Flights and Visa Services* - Both sides committed to restoring air connectivity between major cities and facilitating visas for media, think tanks, and business representatives.
 - *Hydrological Data Sharing* - Dialogues will resume under the India-China Expert Level Mechanism to discuss data sharing on trans-border rivers, a critical issue for downstream water management.
- **Focus on Economic and Trade Relations:** Despite record trade volumes exceeding \$125 billion in 2023, tensions persist due to restrictions imposed by both countries. India expressed concerns over China's curbs on pharmaceutical and high-tech exports, while China raised issues regarding India's investment policies and regulatory hurdles for Chinese businesses. A joint statement emphasized the need for long-term policy transparency and predictability in economic and trade relations. By addressing these concerns, both countries aim to foster a more balanced trade partnership.
- **Enhancing People-to-People Ties:** As part of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025, India and China plan to organize cultural events, media exchanges, and academic collaborations. These initiatives aim to restore mutual trust and foster deeper understanding among citizens.
- **Challenges in Bilateral Relations:** While the agreements mark a positive step, several challenges remain-
 - *Border Issues* - The LAC dispute and unresolved de-escalation measures continue to strain relations.
 - *Strategic Distrust* - Historical tensions and competing geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific region contribute to mutual suspicion.
 - *Economic Barriers* - Trade imbalances and protectionist policies hinder seamless economic collaboration.
- **Way forward:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasized the importance of reducing “mutual suspicion and estrangement” to strengthen bilateral ties. Similarly, Indian officials highlighted the need for mutual respect, sensitivity, and shared interests to sustain long-term cooperation. Key areas of focus include-
 - *Maritime Cooperation* - Enhancing collaboration in the Indo-Pacific to ensure regional stability.
 - *Technology and Innovation* - Promoting joint research and innovation in fields like renewable energy and healthcare.
 - *Cultural Diplomacy* - Leveraging shared heritage to foster goodwill.
- **Conclusion:** The renewed dialogues between India and China represent a significant step toward stabilizing a complex relationship. While challenges persist, the agreements on cultural exchanges, trade transparency, and environmental cooperation underscore both nations’ commitment to fostering mutual growth and regional stability. By addressing underlying issues and prioritizing constructive engagement, India and China can pave the way for a more harmonious and prosperous future.

2. Getting drunk, on homoeopathy

Context: A recent judgment of the Supreme Court of India, in *Bhagwati Medical Hall vs Central Drugs Standard Control Organization & Ors.*, has, once again, turned the spotlight on the impossible challenge faced by State governments in regulating a significant public health hazard — that posed by alcoholic tinctures marketed in India as homoeopathic remedies. Feeble attempts by the Union Government to tackle the problem have often been frustrated by ruthless lawfare conducted by the very formidable homoeopathic industry.

Key points

- **Related Court Judgements:** *Suresh Bada Math et al. (2015 Research Analysis)* - The judiciary consistently upheld crosspathy as negligence, permitting it only where explicitly authorized by state governments.
Bombay High Court Stay on 2017 Notification - The Bombay High Court issued a stay, questioning the risk posed to patients and highlighting the lack of authority to permit crosspathy.
- **Allopathy:** Allopathy, or modern medicine, focuses on treating diseases by targeting their symptoms and underlying causes. It uses scientifically validated drugs, surgeries, and advanced technologies for diagnosis and treatment. Allopathic treatments are fast-acting and often used in emergencies.
 - *Approach* - Targets symptoms and specific organs using drugs and surgeries.
 - *Medications* - Relies on synthetic, machine-made pharmaceutical drugs.
 - *Side Effects* - Side effects can occur due to potent drugs or invasive treatments.
- **Homeopathy:** Homeopathy is a form of alternative medicine based on the principle of “like cures like.” It uses highly diluted natural substances to stimulate the body’s self-healing mechanisms. Homeopathy emphasizes holistic care, considering the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of patients.
 - *Approach* - Treats the root cause by stimulating the body’s natural healing process.
 - *Medications* - Uses highly diluted natural substances.
 - *Side Effects* - Minimal side effects due to dilution.
- **Need for proper Integration:** *Improved Healthcare Accessibility* - With over 80% shortage of specialist doctors in rural health centres (Health Dynamics of India 2022-23), integrating systems can bridge gaps in care delivery.
Cost-Effectiveness - Homeopathic treatments are affordable and accessible, making them a viable option for low-income populations.
- **Challenges and Limitations:** *Trust Deficit* - Lack of evidence-based validation for many homeopathic treatments creates scepticism among allopathic practitioners.
Quality Control - Ensuring the quality and standardization of homeopathic medicines remains a challenge.
- **Way Ahead:** *Evidence-Based Practices* - Conduct large-scale clinical trials to validate the efficacy of homeopathic treatments and integrate them into modern healthcare guidelines.
Strengthen Regulations - Develop a robust regulatory framework to govern integrative practices, ensuring safety and accountability.
Pilot Projects - Initiate pilot programs in rural areas to test the effectiveness of integrative healthcare models.

3. PM Modi a co-chair of Paris AI Summit

Context: Amid concerns over regulating AI without stifling innovation, global leaders will meet in Paris on February 10 for a two-day AI Action Summit. This builds on the 2023 AI Safety Summit in Bletchley Park, which focused on "doomsday" concerns and resulted in 25 states, including the US and China, signing the Bletchley Declaration on AI Safety. Additionally, the 2024 Seoul summit saw 16 leading AI companies voluntarily commit to transparent AI development.

Key points

- **2023 Bletchley Declaration:** The UK-hosted AI Safety Summit led 28 countries and the EU to adopt the Bletchley Declaration, addressing AI's promises and risks. It emphasizes aligning AI with human intent, safeguarding rights, and ensuring safety, ethics, and accountability. It highlights civil society's role and developers' responsibility for testing and mitigating AI risks.
- **Paris AI Summit:** The Paris AI Summit, an initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron, focuses on global AI governance, innovation, and advancing public interest. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-chair the summit and has accepted the invitation to attend.
Key Objectives - The summit aims to tackle the concentration of power in the AI market, particularly concerning foundational models controlled by companies like Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, and Meta.
- **Paris Summit and Europe's AI Challenge:** The Paris AI Summit is crucial for Europe as AI development is increasingly seen as a race dominated by American tech giants and Chinese state power. French President Emmanuel Macron's personal initiative underscores Europe's need to compete in this field.
 - *America's AI Ambitions* - The summit follows Washington's announcement of the Stargate Project, a \$500 billion initiative involving OpenAI, SoftBank, Oracle, Microsoft, and Nvidia to build cutting-edge AI infrastructure.
 - *China's Rapid AI Advancements* - China's significant AI progress remains a key topic of concern. Alibaba has also released a new AI model, reportedly comparable to OpenAI's GPT-o1 series, showcasing China's competitive edge in AI development.
- **Diverse Approaches to AI Regulation:** Policymakers worldwide have intensified regulatory scrutiny of generative AI, focusing on three key concerns: privacy, system bias, and intellectual property violations.
 - *European Union (Strict and Use-Based Regulation)* - The EU has proposed a stringent regulatory framework that categorizes AI based on its use case, degree of invasiveness, and associated risks, reflecting its cautious stance on AI governance.
 - *United States (Balanced but Shifting)* - The US approach has been moderate, positioned between strict regulation and innovation promotion.
 - *China (Structured Measures for Control)* - China has introduced its own regulatory measures, balancing AI advancements with oversight, particularly in areas critical to state interests.
 - *India (Emphasis on Safety and Trust)* - India advocates for AI to ensure safety, trust, and ethical use, while also recognizing its transformative potential. The government emphasizes addressing the "weaponization" of technologies like social media to create a secure digital landscape.

4. The Union Budget as a turning point for climate action

Context: The Union Budget 2026 presents a critical juncture for India as it grapples with the dual challenge of climate change and economic resilience. With just five years remaining to achieve the first interim Net-Zero target, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman must navigate an intricate balancing act—addressing the urgency of climate adaptation and mitigation while ensuring economic growth. The Budget can catalyse transformative policy measures that can safeguard vulnerable communities, boost India's global competitiveness, and accelerate progress toward sustainable development.

Key points

- **India's Progress in Climate Action:** *PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana* - This flagship initiative aims to promote solar energy adoption in residential households, enhancing energy access while reducing carbon footprints.
National Green Hydrogen Mission - With an increased budgetary allocation, this initiative seeks to position India as a global hub for green hydrogen production.
Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Support - By investing in EV charging infrastructure, India is addressing one of the key barriers to EV adoption, range anxiety.
- **Remaining Gaps in India's Climate Action Plan:** *Renewable Energy Capacity Gap* - India's installed renewable energy capacity stands at 203.18 GW, significantly short of the 500 GW target set for 2030.
Implementation Challenges in Solar Energy - The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana highlights the disparity between policy intent and execution. While registrations for the scheme have crossed 1.45 crore households, the actual completion rate remains dismal, with only 6.34 lakh installations (4.37%).
Dependence on Imports for Solar Modules - India's solar manufacturing ecosystem remains underdeveloped, fulfilling only 40% of domestic demand.
- **Expectations from Union Budget 2026:** *Adapting to International Market Dynamics* - India's export sector faces a looming challenge with the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), set to take effect in 2026.
Transitioning to a Circular Economy - The adoption of a circular economy offers India significant economic and environmental benefits.
Strengthening Climate Resilience and Green Finance - India's vulnerability to climate change necessitates urgent measures to enhance resilience.
- **Way ahead:** Climate-linked economic policies are no longer peripheral concerns but central to maintaining India's competitiveness in global trade and investment. The rising demand for low-carbon goods and the growing alignment of capital markets with sustainability metrics necessitate decisive action.
- **Conclusion:** The Union Budget 2026 represents a pivotal opportunity for India to align its fiscal priorities with its climate commitments. By addressing implementation gaps in renewable energy, safeguarding export competitiveness, creating a circular economy, and strengthening climate resilience, the government can pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future. This Budget will be a litmus test of India's seriousness in integrating climate action into its economic strategy, reflecting the nation's readiness to lead in a low-carbon global economy.

5. Welcome move

Context: In a major decision, the Assam government has decided to transform Dibrugarh, the British-era hub of tea and oil, as the State's second capital. As part of the move, the Upper Assam town will have an Assembly complex by 2027. Also in the offing are similar initiatives for two other major towns – Tezpur in Central Assam on the North Bank and Silchar in the Barak Valley. Tezpur town will house a Raj Bhavan and emerging as State's cultural capital, and Silchar will get a Mini Secretariat and the Chief Secretary's office.

Key points

- **Overview:** The past few years have seen the State government announce a host of development projects in the State as part of its commitment to propel Assam into the fast-track growth trajectory.
- **Nation-wide reports:** India's infrastructure has transformed over the past 25 years, with increased progress and private participation. However, challenges remain as 90% of the required infrastructure is yet to be built to reach its USD 30 trillion economy goal by 2047.
- **Achievements in the Infrastructure Sector in 2024:**
 - Roads and Highways* - Road network nearly tripled to 146,000 km since 2000, featuring modern access-controlled expressways and GPS-based toll systems.
 - Railways* - India's first bullet train project, with trainsets capable of running at 280 km/h is set for completion by 2026.
 - Maritime Sector* - India plans to invest Rs 54 trillion to become a top five shipbuilding nation by 2047.
 - Aviation* - Weekly domestic flights increased from 3,568 in 2000 to 22,484 in 2024.
 - Urban Metro* - The metro network has grown from 248 km in 2014 to 945 km by 2024, serving 21 cities and 1 crore daily passengers.
 - Ropeways Development* - The Parvatmala Programme has seen the initiation of 32 ropeway projects, enhancing connectivity in difficult terrains and reducing urban congestion.
- **Challenges in Infrastructure Sector:**
 - Stalled and Delayed Projects* - The Rs 10 trillion Bharatmala Project was shelved due to red tape, while the Rs 20 trillion Vision 2047 plan has been deferred following a policy shift.
 - Sluggish Progress* - Railway route expansion has been slow, with only 231 km of new tracks added annually on average since 2000, reflecting less than a kilometre per day.
- **Way Forward:**
 - Integrated Infrastructure* - The PM GatiShakti National Master Plan ensures infrastructure projects complement each other, reducing delays and duplication, while boosting high-speed connectivity.
 - Safer and Resilient Infrastructure* - The government's initiatives, like KAVACH for railways and the Advanced Traffic Management System, aim to reduce accidents and improve safety.
 - Incorporating Green Technologies* - The shift to EVs and alternative fuels in public transport will reduce the transportation sector's carbon footprint, with schemes like FAME-II and PLI accelerating this transition.

Q. Analyze the achievements and challenges in India's infrastructure sector and suggest measures for its future growth. (ভাৰতৰ আন্তঃগাঁথনি খণ্ডৰ সাফল্য আৰু প্ৰত্যাহ্বানসমূহ বিশ্লেষণ কৰক আৰু ইয়াৰ ভৱিষ্যতৰ বিকাশৰ বাবে ব্যৱস্থাৰ পৰামৰ্শ দিয়ক।)