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

**1. Nuclear energy – dangerous concessions on liability**

**Context:** In the Union Budget speech on February 1, the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government’s intention to take up “amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act” This announcement is likely to please Washington, where successive administrations have been unhappy that the law places some minimal responsibilities on nuclear manufacturers in the event of an accident. But, in India, any move to indemnify suppliers should be a matter of serious concern since this could undermine nuclear safety. Moreover, the reactors that the American government is pushing India to buy are extremely expensive and their import makes no sense on economic grounds.

**Key points**

- **Overview:** The line in the Union Budget on the intent to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act should be a matter of serious concern.

- **Risks of Nuclear Reactors:** Any nuclear reactor carries the risk of accidents. Some of which, such as the multiple reactor meltdowns at Fukushima, Japan (2011), can be catastrophic.
- **Liability and Legal Framework:** Following the Bhopal gas disaster (1984), the Supreme Court of India ruled in the Delhi Oleum gas leak case (1986) that any hazardous activity is “absolutely liable” for harm to victims. However, in 2010, the UPA government created a special law for nuclear accidents, diluting this principle. Under this law, primary liability is channelled to the operator and capped at ₹1,500 crore.
- **Assigning responsibility:** Despite this gross mismatch, the law did have one slightly redeeming feature. Under pressure from civil society groups and the political opposition, the UPA government was forced to include a clause called the “right of recourse”.
- **Global Supplier Indemnity and Its Impact:** Because of the historical monopoly enjoyed by U.S. nuclear companies, liability laws in many other countries lack this feature. Instead, they completely indemnify suppliers. This simply reflects the influence of powerful corporations and is not based on a scientific analysis of previous accidents.
- **Indemnity and Supplier Negligence:** Indemnity removes economic incentive for suppliers to ensure reactor safety once a sale is completed. Following the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island, the Kemeny Commission established by the U.S. government noted that Babcock & Wilcox, the reactor supplier, had identified a safety hazard in an “earlier accident, bearing strong similarities to the one at Three Mile Island.”
- **Backtracking on progress:** Nuclear suppliers were furious at the idea that they might have to pay for accidents in India. To appease these companies, the UPA government made farcical attempts to dilute the right of recourse, both during and after the parliamentary debates on the law. This led Bhartiya Janata Party leader Arun Jaitley to write that a “leopard never changes its spots.”
- **Policy Shift Under NDA Government:** After assuming power, the National Democratic Alliance government pursued the same policy of prioritising nuclear corporations over potential victims. Following U.S. President Barack Obama’s visit to India in 2015, the Ministry of External Affairs issued “frequently asked questions”, downplaying the operator’s right of recourse. It also disingenuously suggested that this right could be bypassed using a contractual arrangement between the supplier and the NPCIL.
- **U.S. Suppliers’ Concerns:** These machinations have not satisfied U.S. suppliers, who are unwilling to expose themselves to any legal hazard in India.
- **U.S. Lobbying for Legal Changes:** U.S. officials have actively lobbied on behalf of these politically influential companies. Outgoing U.S. Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti, recently indicated that he had been in touch with leaders from both the ruling party and the Opposition to amend the law. He also lamented that U.S. corporations had been unable to sell a single reactor to India, nearly two decades after the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement.
- **Hollow safety claims:** The debate on liability also exposes the exaggerated safety claims made by suppliers. Westinghouse claims that a large release of radiation from an AP1000 reactor would happen only once in 50 million years.
- **Conclusion:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi projects an image of a strong global leader. However, the government’s announcement on the liability law is a revealing commentary on that message. When faced with pressure from the U.S. government, which puts the profits of U.S. corporations above all else, Mr. Modi’s government seems unable to stand up for the basic rights and the safety of Indians.

**2. Budgeting for gender-inclusive 'Viksit Bharat'**

**Context:** The Union Budget 2025-26 emphasises the government's commitment to inclusive development, balanced growth and prioritising the well-being of four key population groups: the poor, youth, farmers, and women. In a welcome announcement, the finance minister set forth a holistic vision for Viksit Bharat (or Developed India) with 'zero poverty, universal good quality school education, 100% skilled labour with meaningful employment, 70% women in economic activities, and India as the food basket of the world.' The explicit inclusion of women as a priority group within this national development framework is commendable and reinforces the government's pledge towards women-led development.

**Key points**

- **Overview:** Gender-responsive budgeting can help India's women to become key drivers of national growth.
- **Gender budget allocation:** The increase in the gender budget to 8.8% of the total Budget, a significant jump from 6.8% in the previous year. This is the highest allocation in two decades, with ₹4.49 lakh crore spread across 49 Union Ministries and departments. It reflects a strong commitment to creating a more supportive and empowering environment for women and girls. 12 additional central Ministries — many from non-conventional sectors such as-
  - Railways.
  - Ports, shipping, and waterways.
  - Land resources.
  - Pharmaceuticals.
  - Food processing industries.
- **Increase in Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR):** As in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, India's female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) measured at usual status has steadily risen, reaching approximately 42% in 2023-24 from 33% in 2021-22. This is approaching the global average of 47%, as reported by the International Labour Organisation.
- **New Schemes for Women's Workforce Participation:** Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana. First-time entrepreneurs' scheme. Sustainable livelihood for urban workers initiative. Centres of Excellence for Make in India. These will play a critical role in fostering women's workforce participation.
- **AI and Gender Budget for Technological Advancement:** Centre of Excellence on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the education sector. ₹600 crore gender budget under the India AI Mission. Demonstrates the government's intent to harness AI for social good. As technological advancements redefine the future of work, critical areas of investment include - Digital education, Skills training and Enterprise training for women.
- **Conclusion:** Budget 2025-26 provides a robust foundation for advancing women's economic participation. Realising the vision of Viksit Bharat requires sustained efforts in policy implementation, infrastructure development, and social norm transformation. By ensuring gender-responsive budgeting, strengthened social protection, and by fostering a labour market which includes both women and men, India can pave the way for women to become key drivers of national growth, ultimately achieving the ambitious target of 70% women in economic activities by 2047.

### 3. Union Budget and health sector

**Context:** The share of health in the FY26 budget increased marginally to 1.97% from 1.9% in FY25 but overall health allocation remained below 2% of the budget. The Economic Survey (ES) 2024-25 and Union budget 2025-26 recommended and announced several measures to promote health in the country. Among several announcements, the major one is the establishment of Daycare Cancer Centres. The National Health Policy 2017 recommends that the health expenditure be increased from 1.15% (2017) of the GDP to 2.5% of the GDP by 2025.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** The Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated around Rs 1 lakh crore for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- **Taxing UPFs:** The ES 2024-25 proposed a 'health tax' on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) to curb their consumption, citing links to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.
- **Cancer Care Expansion:** The government plans cancer care centres in every district by FY 2026 and 200 new Daycare Cancer Centres by FY 2025-26 for localized chemotherapy and treatment.
- **Life-Saving Drug Exemptions:** The budget exempts 36 life-saving drugs from Basic Customs Duty (BCD), reducing costs, while Patient Assistance Programmes (PAPs) run by pharma firms will continue providing free medicines duty-free.
- **AB PM-JAY for Gig Workers:** AB PM-JAY has been expanded to cover nearly 1 crore gig workers, who will be registered on the e-Shram portal with ID cards for healthcare access.
- **Health Infrastructure and Manpower:** The budget allocated Rs 4,200 crore for Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) to enhance healthcare facilities and set up five skill centres to train 3,00,000 healthcare professionals annually to meet global healthcare demands.
- **Women and Child Healthcare:** PM Matru Vandana Yojana will expand maternal health programs, with increased funding for child nutrition and vaccinations.
- **Pharmaceutical Research:** The government allocated Rs 2,445 crore for the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme to boost pharmaceutical manufacturing.
- **Mental Health and Telemedicine:** The National Tele Mental Health Programme received funding to expand mental healthcare services across India.
- **Conclusion:** The Union Budget 2025-26 introduces key health measures, including cancer care expansion and taxation on ultra-processed foods (UPFs), to address rising health concerns. While the initiatives aim to improve accessibility and affordability, challenges like infrastructure, workforce, and public trust remain significant hurdles to overcome.

#### ES 2024-25 Recommendations to Reduce Consumption of UPFs

- **Clear Regulations:** It recommended stricter FSSAI regulations, including clear UPF definitions, and labelling standards.
- **Higher Taxation:** Consider imposing higher taxes on heavily marketed UPFs to discourage consumption and fund public health initiatives.
- **Consumer Awareness:** Launch educational campaigns, especially for children, about the health risks of UPFs, including obesity, diabetes, and other metabolic diseases.

#### 4. Don't Go It alone

**Context:** Indian farmers demand that India should exit the World Trade Organisation (WTO). They believe WTO rules hinder their ability to secure a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP). MSP is categorised as a trade-disorienting subsidy. The rationale is that if countries are permitted to provide such subsidies to their farmers, it would give them an unfair advantage in the global economy, rendering agricultural products from other countries uncompetitive. As a result, trade disorienting subsidies like MSP are subject to specific limitations.

#### Key points

- **Overview:** Rather than withdraw from WTO, India should strengthen trade multilateralism.
- **WTO's Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) and MSP Challenges:** The AoA has significant imbalances. The external reference price (ERP) — an average price established based on the base years of 1986-88 against which MSP is compared to determine trade-distorting subsidies — has not been revised in decades. India has been negotiating diligently at the WTO to rectify this issue but without success.
- **Existing Policy Flexibility Within WTO Framework:** *Peace Clause Utilization* - It allows India to exceed subsidy limits for rice and wheat without legal challenges. Applies only to food security programs, not all crops.  
*Alternative Support Mechanisms* - Income Support Schemes; PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi: Provides ₹6,000/year to farmers; classified as non-trade-distorting. The Budget did not enhance such schemes.
- **Consequences of Exiting the WTO:** Loss of Trade Benefits - Indian exports could face discrimination in foreign markets. Loss would require renegotiating bilateral FTAs, which can be-
  - *Complex and Costly* - Higher bureaucratic and compliance burdens.
  - *Unfavourable Terms* - Developed countries often impose stricter conditions in FTAs.*Dispute Resolution Void* - WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism provides a structured, rules-based system (e.g. India's successful cases against the US/EU).
- **WTO's Broader Role and Global Context:** *Multilateral Trade Governance* - Ensures non-discriminatory access to global markets for goods/services.  
*Strategic Importance for India* - Critical for a developing economy reliant on exports (e.g. IT, pharmaceuticals).  
*US-China Rivalry* - A weakened WTO enables unilateralism (e.g. US tariffs in China).  
*India's Stake* - Strengthening multilateralism curbs protectionism and safeguards developing nations.
- **Way Forward:** *Revise ERP* - Lobby for inflation-adjusted reference prices.  
*Leverage Peace Clause* - Expand coverage to more crops.  
*Boost Income Support* - Enhance schemes like PM-Kisan to reduce reliance on MSP.  
*Farmer Engagement* - Educate stakeholders on WTO's benefits and collaborative reform strategies.  
*Strengthen Multilateralism* - Advocate for appellate body revival and dispute resolution reforms.  
*Counter Protectionism* - Collaborate with developing nations to uphold fair trade practices.
- **Conclusion:** Trade multilateralism, the principle that the WTO represents is the best bet for developing countries like India. It is essential to communicate clearly with farmers and involve them in this process, as they are key stakeholders.

## 5. Einstein Ring

**Context:** The European Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid space telescope has discovered a rare Einstein ring around the galaxy NGC 6505, located 590 million light-years from Earth. Captured in September 2023 and released recently, the images show a bright central galaxy encircled by a luminous ring. Astronomers have described the find as extraordinary and lucky, highlighting its significance in Euclid's early data.

### Key points

- **NGC 6505:** NGC 6505 is an elliptical galaxy classified as E/S0, located in the Draco constellation in the northern celestial hemisphere. It lies about 608 million light-years from the Milky Way and has a diameter of 190,000 light-years. Discovered by Lewis A. Swift in 1884, it gained significance in 2025 when the Euclid Space Telescope detected a complete Einstein ring surrounding it.
- **Einstein Ring:** An Einstein ring is a circular ring of light formed around a galaxy, dark matter, or a cluster of galaxies due to gravitational lensing.
  - Gravitational lensing occurs when a massive celestial object, like a galaxy or galaxy cluster, bends and amplifies the light from a more distant object behind it but along the same line of sight.
  - The object causing the light to bend is called a gravitational lens.
- **Features of Einstein Rings:** *Caused by Gravitational Lensing* - A massive foreground galaxy distorts light from a background galaxy, creating a circular image.  
*Highly Rare Phenomenon* - Less than 1% of galaxies exhibit Einstein rings.  
*Requires Precise Alignment* - The observer, the lensing object, and the background source must be perfectly aligned.  
*Not Visible to Naked Eye* - Detected using high-powered telescopes like ESA's Euclid or NASA's Hubble Space Telescope.
- **Rarity and Discovery of Einstein Rings:** Einstein rings were predicted by Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity. The first one was discovered in 1987, and while several more have been found, their total number remains unknown. They are extremely rare, with less than 1% of galaxies having an Einstein ring. These rings are not visible to the naked eye and can only be observed through space telescopes like Euclid.
- **Need to Study Einstein Rings:** *Understanding Dark Matter* – Einstein rings help study dark matter, which makes up 85% of the universe but cannot be directly detected. Gravitational lensing allows scientists to observe its effects.  
*Studying Distant Galaxies* – These rings magnify galaxies that would otherwise be invisible, providing insights into their structure and composition.  
*Exploring Universe Expansion* – By analysing light from both foreground and background galaxies, Einstein rings help scientists understand how the universe is expanding over time.  
*Bridging Science with Everyday Life* - The principles of gravitational lensing have applications in medical imaging, optical lens design, and telecommunications.