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

1. Digital archives and endangered languages

Context: Digital language archives, defined as repositories of diverse types of digital linguistic data amassed during language documentation processes, serve as the foundation for organizing such data for long-term preservation and safekeeping, ensuring access for future generations. The tasks undertaken by the individuals responsible for archiving such materials are intricate and require meticulous attention to detail. The archivist's responsibilities span receiving digital data from depositors, curating the data, and preparing it for archiving. Archives such as the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) and the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures (PARADISEC) house a vast amount of data on various indigenous languages deposited at different times by researchers or research groups.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Government of India is running a scheme known as "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages" for conservation of threatened languages.

- **Background:** According to the census 1961, India has around 1652 languages. But by 1971, only 808 languages were left. Government of India currently defines a language as one that is marked by a script and effectively neutering oral languages. Therefore, government recognizes 122 languages which is far lower than the 780 counted by the People's Linguistic Survey of India (along with a further 100 suspected to exist).
- **Causes For Decline:** GOI does not recognize languages with less than 10,000 speakers. In and out migration of communities which leads to dispersal of traditional settlement. Changes in social and cultural values. Growth of "individualism", which puts self-interest over that of community.
- **Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL):** It was instituted by Ministry of Human Resource Development (Government of India) in 2013.
Objective - The sole objective of the Scheme is to document and archive the country's languages that have become endangered or likely to be endangered soon.
- **National Archives of India (NAI):** NAI is the custodian of the records of enduring value of the Government of India. Established on March 11, 1891, at Calcutta (Kolkata) as the Imperial Record Department, it is the biggest archival repository in South Asia. The NAI keeps and conserves records of the government of India and its organisations. It does not receive classified documents.
 - *Abhilekh PATAL* - The Abhilekh PATAL (Portal for Access to Archives and Learning) is an initiative of NAI to make its rich treasure of Indian archival records available to all online. It contains more than 2.7 million files held by the National Archives of India. The Digitized Collections contains over 71792 digitized records for online access.
 - *Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)* - Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) was established in 1969. It is under the administrative control of Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL):** The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) is a pioneering Indian initiative, jointly by the CSIR and Ministry of AYUSH. The TKDL contains Indian traditional medicine knowledge from classical/ traditional texts related to Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Sowa Rigpa, and Yoga techniques in a digitized format and is available in five international languages (English, French, German, Spanish and Japanese) to patent examiners.
Aim - To prevent exploitation and to protect Indian traditional knowledge from misappropriation by way of wrongful Intellectual Property Rights.
- **Way forward:** The proven method to ensure the survival of language is the development of schools that teach in languages of minority (tribal languages) which enables the speakers to preserve and enrich the language. Audio-visual documentation of the important aspects of such language - like storytelling, folk literature and history.

Q. How many Indian languages have been declared endangered by UNESCO?

- (a) 47
- (b) 87
- (c) 117
- (d) 197

Answer: Option (b) – 197

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2. India 'protests' China's new counties in Ladakh

Context: India has lodged a 'solemn protest' with China over the formation of two counties in the Hotan prefecture that incorporates territory of India's Ladakh. The protest from the Indian side came after Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on December 27, 2024, that the authorities in northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region had declared the formation of He'an County and Hekang County, in the Hotan prefecture. The Hotan prefecture contains parts of Aksai Chin that India accuses China of occupying and formation of the two new counties appears like Beijing firming up administrative measures in the region.

Key points

- **Overview:** The protest from the Indian side is significant as it comes against the backdrop of the December 18, 2024, meeting between the Special Representatives for the border mechanism. The meeting is to resolve the tension that erupted in eastern Ladakh in June 2020 that has since been termed the 'Galwan clashes.'
- **Galwan Clash:** In May 2020, Indian and Chinese troops clashed at various points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These points included: Pangong Tso, Galwan Nalah and Demchok in Ladakh and at Naku La (a mountain pass at an altitude of over 5000 metres) in Sikkim.
- **Corps Commander level talks:** Since then, India and China have held multiple rounds of the talks at Corps Commander level on the LAC in Eastern Ladakh area to resolve the standoff.
- **Friction points:** There are seven friction points in eastern Ladakh where Indian and Chinese troops have had confrontations since May 2020. These include PP 14 (Galwan), PP 15 (Hot Springs), PP 17A (Gogra), north and south banks of Pangong Tso, Depsang Plains (the Chinese had cut off Indian access to the PPs there) and Charding Nullah.
- **Importance of Ladakh:** The importance of Ladakh to both India and China is rooted in complicated historical processes that led to the territory becoming union territory in 2019 (earlier it was part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir), and China's interest in it post the occupation of Tibet in 1950.
 - *Rich in natural resources* - Ladakh is situated within the upper reaches of the Indus watershed, which in total supports about 120 million people in India (in the states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan) and about 93 million in the Pakistan province of the Punjab (literally, "Land of the Five Rivers").
 - *Geothermal potential* - surveys have identified a geothermal resource at depths suitable for exploration and development.
 - *Tourism industry* - Popularly known as the Lama Land or little Tibet, Ladakh lies at altitudes ranging between about 9,000 feet and 25,170 feet. From trekking and mountaineering to Buddhist tours of various monasteries, Ladakh has it all.
- **Geopolitical Significance:** The land of Ladakh enjoys the significance of being located at the ancient Silk Route which passes through these regions and played a very vital role in the development of culture, religion, philosophy, trade and commerce in the past.
- **Geostrategic location:** The presence of resources is what makes India, China and Pakistan struggle over Ladakh, to gain control over resources in this region. Pakistan and China conflict with India over Siachen and Aksai chin in this region. Ladakh's geostrategic significance has increased in the backdrop of these conflicts.

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

3. India, cross-border insolvency and legal reform

Context: The growth in international trade has amplified cross-border insolvency challenges, highlighting the need for effective regulation. A reliable and predictable insolvency framework is essential for economic stability, attracting foreign investments, and facilitating corporate restructuring. To address domestic insolvencies, the Indian Insolvency Act of 1848 was introduced as the first insolvency law. This was later replaced by the Presidency-Towns Insolvency Act 1909, which applied to Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, and the Provincial Insolvency Act, 1920, which governed insolvencies in mofussil regions. While these laws provided a framework for handling domestic insolvencies, they failed to address the complexities of cross-border insolvencies, leaving a critical gap in the legal system.

Key points

- **Overview:** The current state of cross-border insolvency laws is poor, with rules that cannot be enforced and slow progress in making necessary changes. This situation needs to be fixed.
- **Evolution of cross-border insolvency framework in India:**
 - Post-Independence Legal Framework* - After Independence, India's insolvency laws focused on domestic cases and did not address cross-border insolvency, leaving a significant gap in the legal framework.
 - Committee Recommendations and IBC Drafting* - In the 2000s, committees like the Eradi, Mitra, and Irani Committees recommended adopting the UNCITRAL Model Law, leading to the drafting of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in 2015, which initially focused on domestic insolvencies.
 - Incorporation of Cross-Border Provisions* - Sections 234 and 235 were introduced in 2016 to facilitate cross-border insolvency, allowing reciprocal agreements and assistance from foreign courts, though their effectiveness was limited by the lack of implementation and reciprocal arrangements.
- **Challenges with cross-border framework in India:**
 - Outdated Framework* - Current legal provisions, such as Sections 234 and 235 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), remain non-notified and unenforceable, rendering them ineffective. Reliance on ad hoc protocols like in the Jet Airways case increases judicial burden, delays resolutions, and reduces asset value.
 - Legislative Gaps* - The delay in adopting structured frameworks, such as the UNCITRAL Model Law, highlights a critical regulatory gap in managing cross-border insolvencies.
- **India's proposed legislation w.r.t UNCITRAL Model:** India's proposed amendments to the IBC aim to incorporate elements of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, which provides a structured framework for international cooperation and coordination in insolvency matters.
- **Implications for foreign investment and economic growth:**
 - Attracting Foreign Investment* - A robust cross-border insolvency framework will enhance investor confidence by ensuring that their rights are protected in case of insolvency. This predictability is crucial for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) into India, as investors seek assurance that their interests will be managed effectively across borders.
- **Way forward:**
 - Adopt UNCITRAL Model Law* - Expedite the implementation of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency to establish a predictable, structured framework for managing international insolvency cases, fostering investor confidence and global integration.
 - Enhance NCLT Capacity* - Strengthen the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) with expanded jurisdiction and training to effectively handle cross-border insolvency cases, alongside modernizing judicial coordination mechanisms through international guidelines like JIN.

4. A win-win for environment

Context: Crop burning in Punjab & Haryana is a seasonal phenomenon that adds to Delhi's pollution. It has decreased significantly in the four years, yet the air quality remains a serious problem. These vehicles, however, NO₂ and add to ozone pollution. They are also secondary PM emitters under certain meteorological conditions. India has 83 of the world's 100 most polluted cities. Air pollution caused 2.1 million deaths, with 99% breathing air below WHO standards.

Key points

- **Overview:** Having identified the transport sectors as the single biggest polluter, we explored alternatives to fossil fuel-driven vehicles. We analysed the environmental and economic benefits of transitioning to EVs in Delhi and found the shift can drastically reduce healthcare spending and improve air quality.
- **Share of Road Transport in India's CO₂ Emissions:** Road transport is responsible for approximately 12% of India's total CO₂ emissions. Within this sector, heavy vehicles are a significant contributor to particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emissions, which are particularly harmful due to their ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Studies indicate that heavy vehicles contribute to about 60-70% of total vehicular PM emissions and 40-50% of total Nitrogen Oxide (NO_x) emissions in urban areas. This highlights the critical role that road transport plays in India's overall air pollution problem.
- **Failure in states like Karnataka & Maharashtra:** *Lack of Awareness and Less Incentives* - There is a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of scrapping old vehicles among the public. Although the policy offers incentives, such as tax relief for scrapping vehicles may not be sufficient to encourage widespread participation.
Bureaucratic delays - The implementation of the scrapping policy has faced bureaucratic delays and inconsistencies. In Maharashtra, despite announcing incentives for scrapping old vehicles, the actual impact has been limited due to slow bureaucratic processes and a lack of effective enforcement.
- **Initiatives taken:** The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has taken several significant steps towards enhancing fuel efficiency and reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector through the implementation of the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) norms.
 - *Transition to WLTP Testing* - A significant step is the commitment to transition from the Modified Indian Driving Cycle (MIDC) to the World Light Duty Vehicle Testing Procedure (WLTP) by March 31, 2027.
 - *Penalties for Non-Compliance* - The BEE has outlined financial penalties for manufacturers that fail to meet the established fuel efficiency standards.
- **Way forward:** *Enhance Infrastructure and Accessibility* - Need to increase the number of registered vehicles scrapping facilities (RVSFs) across states like Karnataka and Maharashtra to make the process more accessible.
Strengthen Policy Enforcement and Incentives - Transition from voluntary to mandatory compliance for the scrapping of old and polluting vehicles. This can be supported by enhancing public awareness campaigns that highlight the environmental and financial benefits of vehicle scrapping.