

Mains Master

Ending discrimination

Context:

- **Landmark Supreme Court Ruling:** The Supreme Court of India declared rules penalizing women employees for getting married as unconstitutional, calling them discriminatory and violative of human dignity. This landmark judgment came in the case of Selina John, a former officer discharged from service in 1988 solely due to her marriage.
- **Highlighting Ongoing Battle:** This decision underscores the ongoing battle for gender parity in the Indian workforce. Women face numerous challenges, including:
 - **Workplace Discrimination:** Biased job interviews, questions about marriage and motherhood, and lack of support systems for working mothers.
 - **Unequal Opportunities:** Limited access to quality education, particularly for girls from poor backgrounds, leading to early dropouts and reduced chances of pursuing higher education or leadership roles.

Background:

- **Abysmal Workforce Participation Rate:** India's female labor force participation rate stands at a mere 19.9%, highlighting the significant underrepresentation of women in the workforce.
- **Restrictive Social Norms:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms often prioritize domestic duties over women's careers, leading them to drop out of school, choose traditional roles, and face limitations in pursuing professional aspirations.
- **Global Gender Parity Gap:** The UN's Gender Snapshot 2023 paints a grim picture, indicating that the global progress towards gender parity is lagging. The report predicts that the next generation of women will continue to shoulder disproportionate housework burdens and remain underrepresented in leadership positions unless course correction measures are taken.

From Gender Stereotyping to Gender Justice:

- **Landmark Judgment's Significance:** The Supreme Court's ruling is a significant step towards dismantling discriminatory policies and promoting gender equality in the workplace. It emphasizes the need for organizations to:
 - **Eliminate Gender Bias:** Revise hiring practices, eliminate discriminatory questions during interviews, and create supportive work environments for women.
 - **Promote Equal Opportunities:** Provide equal access to education, resources, and career advancement opportunities for all genders.
 - **Prioritize Inclusive Workplaces:** Foster a culture of respect, diversity, and equal opportunity for all employees, regardless of gender.

A Long Road to Go:

- **Challenges Remain:** While the Supreme Court ruling marks progress, significant challenges remain:
 - **Systemic Change Needed:** Addressing deeply ingrained social norms and dismantling systemic barriers require sustained efforts at various levels.
 - **Lack of Support Systems:** The absence of affordable and accessible childcare, healthcare, and other support systems continues to hinder women's participation in the workforce.
 - **Limited Implementation of Schemes:** Government schemes aimed at empowering women and girls often face challenges in implementation, rendering their impact minimal.

Last Mile:

- **Call to Action:** The Supreme Court judgment serves as a call to action for all stakeholders:
 - **Organizations:** Implement policies and practices that promote gender equality and create inclusive workplaces.
 - **Government:** Prioritize policies and programs that dismantle discriminatory norms, bridge the gender gap, and empower women through education, skills development, and support systems.
 - **Society:** Challenge traditional gender stereotypes, advocate for equal opportunities, and promote a culture of gender respect and inclusivity.

Conclusion:

Bridging the gender gap and achieving true gender justice require continuous efforts from all stakeholders. The Supreme Court's ruling is a positive step but signifies the beginning of a long journey towards a truly equitable society where women can fully participate and thrive in all spheres of life.

An undeclared war with nature

Context:

- **Wayanad, Kerala,** is witnessing an alarming rise in human-wildlife conflicts, particularly involving wild elephants.
- **Recent tragic incidents,** including the deaths of two individuals, have triggered protests and highlighted the urgency of addressing this complex issue.

Background:

- **Studies conducted by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI)** reveal a significant decrease in elephant corridors over the past two decades.
- **This has resulted in fragmented habitats,** forcing elephants into agricultural lands and human settlements in search of food and water.
- **The past ten years have seen a shocking number of 51 human deaths and 8,873 attacks by wild animals in Wayanad,** causing immense economic damage to the region.

Why Human-Wildlife Conflict:

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation:

- **Deforestation for development projects,** monoculture plantations like eucalyptus and acacia, and tourism expansion have led to the destruction of natural ecosystems.
- **These activities have fragmented elephant corridors,** disrupting their movement patterns and forcing them into human-dominated landscapes.

Degradation of Ecosystem Services:

- **The conversion of forest lands for agriculture and contract farming has disrupted natural resource cycles.**
- **This has weakened the ecosystem's ability to support both humans and wildlife,** leading to competition for resources and increased human-animal interactions.

Unsustainable Tourism:

- **The rapid growth of tourism in Wayanad has resulted in the development of resorts and tourist spots near forest edges and elephant corridors.**
- **This increased human activity disrupts wildlife behavior,** promotes invasive plant species, and contributes to habitat degradation.



Foreign Plantations:

- The introduction of invasive species like eucalyptus and acacia has depleted water resources and native plants, limiting food and water availability for elephants and other wildlife.

Solutions for Conflict Mitigation:

Habitat Restoration:

- Implement large-scale forest restoration projects to protect existing forests, regenerate degraded lands, and create wildlife corridors to connect fragmented habitats.
- This will provide secure passage for elephants and other animals, reducing their need to venture into human settlements.

Sustainable Tourism:

- Develop and enforce regulations for responsible tourism practices that minimize disturbance to wildlife and prioritize eco-friendly operations.
- Encourage activities like wildlife watching from safe distances and promote responsible waste management to protect the environment.

Community Engagement:

- Actively engage local communities, wildlife enthusiasts, and environmentalists in conservation efforts.
- This can involve educational programs, community-based monitoring initiatives, and collaborative decision-making processes to ensure solutions are culturally sensitive and effective.

Effective Monitoring:

- Improve wildlife monitoring systems using radio collars and dedicated teams to track animal movement and predict potential conflicts.
- This information can be used to alert communities and implement preventive measures to avoid human-wildlife encounters.

Strict Enforcement:

- Ensure strict enforcement of the Forest Conservation Act to prevent illegal deforestation and unsustainable development projects that impact wildlife habitats.
- Implement the principle of Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) for any development projects affecting wildlife, ensuring local communities have a say in decisions that impact their lives and surroundings.

Way Forward:

- A collaborative effort involving the Forest, Revenue, and Tourism departments is crucial to assess the situation comprehensively and develop sustainable solutions.
- Establishing a statutory body under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change can facilitate coordination of conservation efforts across states, ensuring a unified approach to addressing this regional issue.
- The Kerala Forest Department needs to take responsibility for protecting wildlife and its habitats. This requires implementing effective conservation strategies, prioritizing forest restoration, and actively engaging with stakeholders to find sustainable solutions.

On financial devolution among States

Context:

- Concerns are rising among several opposition-ruled states, particularly in South India, regarding their perceived unfair share of tax revenue under the current financial devolution scheme. These concerns highlight the need to re-evaluate the distribution of resources and ensure a more equitable system.

Finance Commission (FC):

- Established by the Constitution, the FC is a crucial body tasked with recommending the distribution of net tax proceeds collected by the Union government between the Centre and states (vertical devolution).
 - It further determines the allocation of resources among states themselves (horizontal devolution) based on various criteria, aiming to achieve a balance between equity and efficiency in resource distribution.
- Need for Devolution:

States as Drivers of Economic Activity:

- **Revenue Generation:** While the Union government holds important taxation powers, states contribute significantly to the national economy. States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat are major contributors to India's GDP, generating around 40% of the total revenue. This highlights their critical role in driving economic growth and prosperity.
- **Diverse Portfolio:** State governments manage a diverse range of responsibilities, including agriculture, education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and law and order. Efficient management of these sectors directly impacts the lives and livelihoods of millions of citizens.

Expenditure Burden and Resource Constraints:

- **Greater Responsibilities:** Compared to the Union government's focus on national defense and foreign policy, states shoulder a larger burden of expenditure on essential services like education, healthcare, and infrastructure. These sectors require sustained investment for social development and economic growth.
- **Limited Resources:** Despite bearing a heavier expenditure burden, states often face resource constraints. Limited tax-raising powers and dependence on the Centre for funds can hinder their ability to effectively fulfill their responsibilities and meet growing demands.

FC's Role in Balancing the Equation:

- **Addressing Imbalances:** The Finance Commission plays a critical role in bridging the gap between revenue generation and expenditure by recommending a fair distribution of tax resources between the Centre and states. This helps address fiscal imbalances and ensures states have adequate resources to carry out their responsibilities.
- **Promoting Development:** By ensuring equitable distribution of resources, the FC contributes to balanced national development. States with greater financial resources can invest in crucial sectors like education, healthcare, and infrastructure, promoting economic growth and improving the lives of their citizens.

Additional Considerations:

- **Fiscal Federalism:** A strong and healthy federal system requires a balance between the Centre and states in terms of financial resources and autonomy. Devolution helps to uphold this balance and empower states to participate more actively in national development.
- **Citizen Centricity:** Ultimately, ensuring adequate resources for states translates to better delivery of essential services and improved living standards for citizens across the nation. By addressing resource constraints, devolution contributes to a more inclusive and equitable society.
- **Issues with Financial Devolution:**
 1. **Exclusion of Cess and Surcharge:**
 - **Impact:** This exclusion can significantly reduce the overall resources available for distribution to states. Estimates suggest that cess and surcharge collections by the Union government can be as high as 23% of its gross tax receipts, meaning a substantial portion of collected tax revenue does not reach states.
 - **Concerns:**
 - **Unfairness:** States argue they contribute to generating these taxes, yet have no say in their allocation and utilization.
 - **Opacity:** The criteria for levying and utilizing cess and surcharge are often opaque, raising concerns about accountability and transparency.
 - **Reduced Resources:** Excluding these funds limits states' ability to invest in crucial sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.
 2. **Unequal Return on Tax Contribution:**
 - **Data:** Studies show significant disparities in the return on tax contribution for different states. Some industrially developed states, where many corporations are headquartered, receive less than ₹1 for every rupee they contribute, while others, particularly those with large populations and limited industrial activity, receive more.



- Causes:
 - GST Implementation: The shift to GST, a destination-based tax, can benefit states with higher consumption compared to those with higher production.
 - Tax Effort: States with efficient tax collection systems may not receive proportionate returns if the criteria don't adequately weigh tax effort.
 - Consequences:
 - Disincentivizes Efficiency: States may be discouraged from improving tax collection if they don't see a clear benefit.
 - Regional Imbalances: This widens the gap between developed and less developed states.
3. Declining Share for Southern States:
- Trend: Analysis indicates a declining share of the divisible pool for southern states in recent FC recommendations. This decline could be attributed to:
 - Changing Criteria: Increased weightage given to factors like income gap and population in horizontal devolution might disadvantage states with higher per capita income and smaller populations.
 - Static Formula: The current formula might not adequately capture dynamic changes in economic activity and development across regions.
 - Impact:
 - Underdevelopment: Limited resources can hinder these states' ability to address infrastructure needs, social development goals, and economic growth.
 - Perception of Bias: This raises concerns about potential bias in the devolution process, fueling regional tensions and discontent.

4. Varying Grants-in-Aid:

- Grant Types: The FC recommends various grants-in-aid, including:
 - Revenue deficit grants to bridge fiscal gaps.
 - Sector-specific grants for areas like education, health, and agriculture.
 - State-specific grants for special needs or challenges.
- Concerns:
 - Disparity in Allocation: The criteria and formula for grant allocation can lead to significant variations in the amount received by different states, raising concerns about consistency and objectivity.
 - Lack of Transparency: The process for determining grant amounts may lack transparency, leading to questions about fairness and potential biases.
 - Limited Impact: The effectiveness of grants might be hampered by inadequate monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
- Way Forward:
 - Expanding the Divisible Pool: Including a portion of cess and surcharge in the divisible pool would increase the overall resources available for distribution among states, addressing the current limitations.
 - Enhancing Weightage for Efficiency: While the current criteria consider factors like population and income disparity, increasing the weightage for efficiency parameters like demographic performance and tax effort could incentivize states to improve their performance and attract resources.
 - State Participation in FC: Establishing a more formal mechanism for states to participate in the FC's constitution and functioning could foster greater transparency, trust, and ownership of the devolution process.
 - Strengthening Local Bodies: States need to actively develop resources and empower local bodies with adequate financial autonomy to enable effective and accountable development at the grassroots level.

Conclusion:

Addressing the issues with financial devolution requires collaborative efforts from both the Centre and states. Implementing the suggested reforms, including expanding the divisible pool, enhancing efficiency criteria, and fostering state participation in the FC, can contribute to a more equitable and balanced distribution of resources. Additionally, strengthening local bodies through adequate financial devolution is crucial for ensuring inclusive and sustainable development across the nation.

By working together, the Centre and states can ensure that financial devolution becomes a powerful tool for bridging regional disparities, empowering local communities, and achieving overall national development goals.

Prelims Booster

Astronomers find the small, hot helium stars they were looking for

- Astronomers have discovered a unique class of stars – hot and relatively small orbs covered in helium – that had been predicted to be fairly common but hadn't been found until now, providing proof that the underlying theories are legitimate and opening new doors to understanding their diverse influences on the universe.
- Led by assistant professor Maria Drott of the University of Toronto, the research team found these stars after spending seven years extensively cataloguing thousands of stars and testing different assumptions, ultimately discovering a population of these stars in binary systems.
- The team's findings, published in the journal *Science*, revealed that these stars are hot, strongly gravitating, helium-rich, and hydrogen-depleted stars that are also part of binary systems, supporting the predictions of existing astrophysical theories and shedding light on their potential to end their lives as hydrogen-poor supernovae that leave behind ultra-dense balls called neutron stars, which may ultimately collide in powerful kilonova explosions, releasing gravitational waves.

- India, the world's largest producer of bananas, has seized an opportunity in the Russian market as a Mumbai-based exporter has sent a consignment of 20 tonnes (1540 boxes) of bananas from India to Russia via the sea route, taking advantage of the space created by Ecuador in the Russian market.
- A notable feature of this consignment is the sea protocol developed by **APEDA** in collaboration with the Central Institute of Subtropical Horticulture, aimed at maintaining the quality of fruit in transit.

50 Years of AMUL

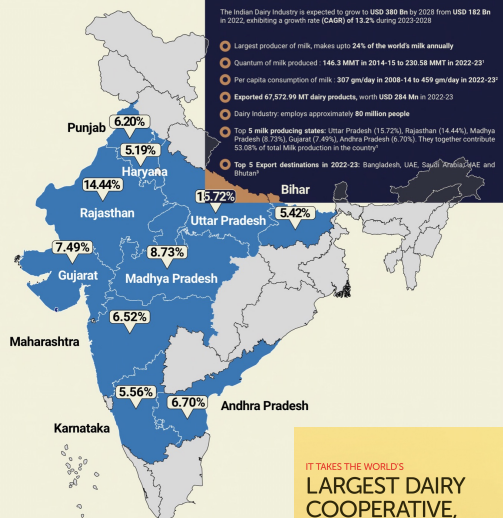
INVEST INDIA

LARGEST MILK PRODUCING STATES

CURRENT SCENARIO

The Indian Dairy Industry is expected to grow to USD 380 Bn by 2028 from USD 182 Bn in 2022, exhibiting a growth rate (CAGR) of 13.2% during 2022-2028

- Largest producer of milk, makes upto 24% of the world's milk annually
- Quantum of milk produced: 146.3 MMT in 2014-15 to 230.58 MMT in 2022-23*
- Per capita consumption of milk: 307 gm/day in 2008-14 to 459 gm/day in 2022-23*
- Exported 67,572.99 MT dairy products, worth USD 284 Mn in 2022-23
- Dairy industry employs approximately 80 million people
- Top 5 milk producing states: Uttar Pradesh (15.72%), Rajasthan (14.44%), Madhya Pradesh (8.73%), Gujarat (7.49%), Andhra Pradesh (5.70%). They together contribute 53.05% of total milk production in the country
- Top 5 Export destinations in 2022-23: Bangladesh, UAE, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bhutan*



IT TAKES THE WORLD'S
LARGEST DAIRY COOPERATIVE,
TO MAKE INDIA THE WORLD'S
LARGEST MILK PRODUCER.

All information in this brochure was last updated in November 2023