

Mains Master

The determinant in 'more women in the job growth'

Context

India's female labor market participation rate is significantly lower than it could be. This low rate is seen as a hurdle to the country's economic growth. Traditionally, women have been expected to stay at home and manage the household, while men are the primary breadwinners. This societal expectation discourages women from pursuing careers and contributes to the underutilization of their skills and potential.

Interdependence of Women and Economy

There's a strong belief that increasing the number of women in the workforce would significantly benefit the Indian economy. Here's why:

- **Larger Talent Pool:** A more diverse workforce with a higher female participation rate expands the pool of available talent and skills. Businesses can tap into a wider range of qualified workers, leading to greater innovation and productivity.
- **Enhanced Productivity:** Studies suggest that companies with a healthy gender balance tend to perform better. Women bring different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, fostering creativity and leading to improved decision-making.
- **Closing the Skill Gap:** Women may possess specific skills and experiences that are currently underutilized. Increased participation allows companies to benefit from this untapped potential and potentially fill existing skill gaps.
- **Increased Household Income:** When women enter the workforce and earn an income, it leads to a rise in overall household income. This translates to increased purchasing power, stimulating economic activity across various sectors.
- **Improved Standard of Living:** With higher household income, families can invest in better housing, education, and healthcare. This leads to a higher overall standard of living and a healthier population.
- **Demographic Dividend:** India has a growing working-age population. A larger female workforce can ensure a more skilled and educated labor force in the long term, further propelling economic growth.

Challenges for Women's Role in Economy

Despite the potential benefits, several challenges prevent women from fully participating in the workforce:

- **Patriarchy:** The deeply ingrained social structure that prioritizes male dominance discourages women from pursuing careers. Traditional gender roles expect women to manage the household and prioritize family needs over professional ambitions.
- **Unpaid Care Economy:** The burden of housework, childcare, and eldercare falls disproportionately on women. This significantly reduces their time and energy available for paid work. Here's a breakdown of the specific challenges within the unpaid care economy:
 - **Time Constraints:** Housework and childcare are incredibly time-consuming, leaving women with less time to dedicate to professional pursuits.
 - **Unpredictable Schedule:** Unlike typical office jobs, caregiving demands are unpredictable. Children get sick, elderly parents require assistance, and household emergencies arise unexpectedly. This lack of a fixed schedule makes it difficult for women to commit to consistent work hours.
 - **Burnout and Exhaustion:** The constant demands of unpaid care work can lead to burnout and exhaustion, making women less motivated to take on additional paid work.
 - **Limited Skills Development:** Unpaid care work rarely provides opportunities to develop skills valued in the paid workforce. Women may struggle to find relevant jobs after a long absence due to caregiving responsibilities.
- **Social Stigma:** Societal expectations can pressure women to prioritize domestic duties over careers. Women who choose to pursue careers may face criticism or judgment for neglecting their families.

- **Marriage Bar:** This discriminatory practice exists in some workplaces where married women are discouraged from working or forced to resign after marriage. This outdated notion assumes that a married woman's primary responsibility is to her family, hindering their career progression.

- **Glass Ceiling:** Invisible barriers prevent women from reaching top positions in their careers. Women may face subtle biases, lack of mentorship opportunities compared to male colleagues, and unequal opportunities for promotion. This reinforces the idea that leadership roles are primarily for men.

Way Forward

To overcome these challenges and unlock the full potential of India's female workforce, several solutions exist:

- **Reduce Unpaid Care Burden:**
 - **Lighten Housework:** Technological advancements (e.g., efficient stoves) and infrastructure improvements (e.g., water access) can significantly reduce the time and effort required for household chores.
 - **Shift Caregiving:** Moving some caregiving responsibilities (e.g., childcare, eldercare) to the formal economy through accessible childcare centers and eldercare facilities can free up women's time for paid work.
 - **Shared Responsibilities:** Encouraging men to share household responsibilities by dismantling the idea that housework is solely a woman's domain can create a more equitable distribution of labor within households.
- **Promote Gender Equality in Work:**
 - **Education and Skill Development:** Increasing access to education and training programs specifically designed for women can equip them with the skills needed to compete for high-paying jobs.
 - **Challenge Stigma:** Awareness campaigns and legislative changes can address societal stigmas and discriminatory practices like marriage bar, fostering a more inclusive work environment.
 - **Breaking the Glass Ceiling:** Implementing diversity initiatives within companies can help dismantle these invisible barriers. This could include:
 - **Mentorship Programs:** Connecting women with experienced professionals, both male and female, can provide guidance and support for career advancement.
 - **Fair Promotion Policies:** Ensuring clear and objective criteria for promotion based on merit and performance, not gender, can create a level playing field for women.
 - **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offering flexible work options like part-time schedules or remote work opportunities can cater to women's caregiving responsibilities and allow them to maintain a better work-life balance.
 - **Unconscious Bias Training:** Educating managers and employees about unconscious bias can help identify and eliminate gender-based assumptions that might hinder women's career progression.

Overall, creating a supportive ecosystem that addresses the challenges women face and promotes gender equality in the workplace is crucial for unlocking the full potential of India's female workforce and reaping the economic benefits of their participation.

Troubled waters

Context: Tensions are high between China and the Philippines in the South China Sea, with recent incidents involving blocked resupply missions and accusations of illegal actions.



Background:

- **China's Expansive Claims:** China claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, marked by a nine-dash line on their maps. This vast claim includes territories and features that are also claimed by other countries bordering the sea.
- **Philippines' Previous Approach:** The Philippines, under former President Rodrigo Duterte, opted for a cautious approach to avoid escalating tensions with its more powerful neighbor. This involved downplaying disputes and prioritizing economic ties with China.

What is the South China Sea Dispute?

- **Overlapping Territorial Claims:** Several countries bordering the South China Sea have overlapping territorial claims to islands, reefs, and surrounding waters. These include the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, all contesting China's expansive claims.
- **Strategic Importance:** The South China Sea is a vital waterway for international trade. Trillions of dollars worth of goods are shipped through the region annually. It's also believed to be rich in natural resources like fish and potential oil and gas reserves, making it strategically important for all involved nations.

Significance of the 2016 PCA Ruling:

- **Philippines' Legal Victory:** In 2016, the Philippines brought its case against China's claims to the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. The PCA ruled in favor of the Philippines, declaring China's expansive claims to have no legal basis and violating the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
- **China's Disregard:** Despite the international court's ruling, China has refused to acknowledge or abide by it. This has fueled tensions in the region and raised concerns about China's disregard for international law.

Changing Stance of Philippines - Growing Proximity to USA:

- **New Philippine Leadership:** The election of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in June 2022 marked a shift in the Philippines' approach. President Marcos Jr. has taken a more assertive stance on the South China Sea disputes.
- **Strengthened US-Philippines Military Ties:** The Philippines has increased its military cooperation with the United States. This includes granting access to nine Philippine military bases to US forces. Additionally, the Philippines participated in its largest ever joint military exercise with the US in 2022. This growing military cooperation is seen by China as a challenge to its dominance in the region.

Looking Forward:

- **The Need for Dialogue:** The author argues that China's aggressive actions, including blocking resupply missions and disregarding international rulings, are not fostering friendly relations with its neighbors.
- **A Call for Cooperation:** The author urges China to adopt a more positive approach focused on dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. Open communication and cooperation with other claimant countries are crucial for ensuring stability and security in the South China Sea, a vital global trade route.

A slippery slope

Context:

- The Supreme Court of India harshly criticized the Uttarakhand government's actions in Jim Corbett National Park. The court condemned the felling of around 6,000 trees to expand a tiger safari project.
- The court's judgment highlighted the collusion between forest officials and a politician to significantly increase the scope of the safari, highlighting a disregard for proper conservation practices.

Background:

- This case brings to light the ongoing struggle to balance tourism activities like tiger safaris with crucial wildlife conservation efforts. Finding the right balance is essential for protecting these vital ecosystems.

Conservation vs Tourism: Weighing the Arguments

- Arguments for Safaris with Proper Guidelines:
 - **Protecting Core Zones:** When conducted responsibly within designated areas and following strict guidelines, safaris can actually divert tourist attention away from the most sensitive, core areas of the forest. This helps to maintain the undisturbed nature of these critical habitats.

- **Raising Public Awareness:** Well-managed safaris can be a powerful tool for educating the public about conservation efforts. Tourists who experience wildlife firsthand are more likely to become advocates for protecting these animals and their habitats.

- **Economic Benefits:** Tourism generated through safaris can bring much-needed revenue to local communities bordering wildlife parks. This revenue can be used to support conservation initiatives, infrastructure development, and create employment opportunities for local people. This fosters a sense of ownership and investment in the park's well-being among local communities.

Concerns about Uncontrolled Tourism:

- **Habitat Disruption:** Poorly managed safaris with excessive noise, off-road driving, and unregulated tourist behavior can disrupt wildlife habitats and negatively impact animal behavior. This can lead to stress, displacement, and even endangerment of wildlife populations.
- **Political Interference:** As seen in the Corbett Park case, political corruption can lead to prioritizing commercial tourism over conservation efforts. Politicians and businesses may exert undue influence, pushing for expansion of tourism activities beyond sustainable limits, ultimately harming the wildlife they claim to showcase.

Priority Should Be Given to Conservation:

- The Supreme Court's judgment emphasizes the critical importance of prioritizing tiger conservation. Tigers are keystone species, meaning their presence plays a vital role in maintaining the health of the entire ecosystem. Protecting tigers ensures the well-being of countless other plant and animal species.
- Wildlife safaris, if conducted at all, should prioritize eco-tourism over commercial tourism. Eco-tourism focuses on responsible travel that minimizes environmental impact and supports conservation efforts.

Buffer Zones: Finding Common Ground

- Buffer zones are designated areas surrounding national parks that can serve as a buffer between core wildlife habitats and human activity. These zones can be used for controlled tourism activities like limited vehicle safaris, nature walks, and educational centers.
- Establishing buffer zones allows for some level of tourism while minimizing disturbance in the most sensitive areas of the park. This creates a crucial buffer, protecting core wildlife habitats and allowing animals to maintain natural behaviors.

Way Forward: Charting a Sustainable Course

- The Supreme Court's recommendation that the central government establish clear guidelines for conducting safaris is a crucial step forward. These guidelines should address issues like:
 - Maximum number of vehicles and visitors allowed per safari
 - Designated routes and restricted areas within the park
 - Noise pollution limitations and responsible visitor behavior
 - Training and certification for safari guides to ensure responsible practices
 - Revenue generated from safaris being directed towards conservation efforts
- The government should exercise caution when promoting tourism in wildlife parks. The message should be clear: conservation is the top priority, and tourism activities must be conducted in a way that supports, not undermines, this vital goal. Striking a balance between responsible tourism and effective conservation is essential for ensuring the long-term health of wildlife populations and the ecosystems they depend on.



Prelims Booster

Centre to rope in ISRO to provide Internet in 80 remote tribal villages

- The Tribal Affairs Ministry is planning a strategic collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to implement V-SAT stations in approximately 80 remote tribal villages across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra. The primary objective of this initiative is to provide essential Internet services, medical connectivity, and educational resources to these underserved communities, thereby bridging the digital divide and empowering tribal populations.
- The project is designed to overcome the geographical challenges and difficult terrains that have historically hindered connectivity in these remote villages. By leveraging V-SAT technology, the government aims to establish a reliable communication infrastructure that can support e-governance initiatives and enhance access to vital services in these marginalized areas. The pilot project's success will pave the way for potential expansion to similar tribal regions in other states, ensuring broader coverage and impact.
- In collaboration with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the Ministry is focusing on advanced research related to tribal health issues, with a specific emphasis on addressing sickle cell anemia. Additionally, plans are underway to conduct specialized training programs for healthcare professionals and paramedical staff operating in tribal communities, aiming to improve healthcare delivery and outcomes in these regions.
- Partnerships with prestigious institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Kolkata are being explored to establish dedicated departments for appropriate technology and entrepreneurship. These initiatives seek to equip tribal populations with essential skills, knowledge, and resources to foster sustainable development, economic empowerment, and self-reliance within their communities.
- Furthermore, a proposal to collaborate with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru involves setting up a specialized training facility offering semiconductor courses to tribal students. This initiative aims to provide access to high-quality technical education and training, empowering tribal youth with valuable skills and opportunities for career advancement in the field of technology.

Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA)

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has granted approval for the development of India's fifth-generation fighter jet, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), to be led by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- The AMCA is envisioned as a 25-tonne twin-engine stealth aircraft featuring an internal weapons bay and diverterless supersonic intake, marking the first indigenous development of such advanced capabilities in India.
- Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL), the designated production agency for the project, has commenced manufacturing activities, signaling progress towards the realization of this cutting-edge fighter jet.
- Fifth-generation fighter jets are the most advanced operational aircraft globally, developed post fourth-generation fighters, incorporating cutting-edge technologies of the early 21st century.
- Key characteristics of fifth-generation aircraft include stealth capabilities, enabling them to evade radar detection and conduct surprise attacks in enemy airspace.
- Supercruise capability allows these jets to fly at supersonic speeds without using afterburners, enhancing fuel efficiency and endurance during missions.
- Advanced avionics systems provide pilots with superior situational awareness and targeting capabilities, while sensor fusion technology integrates data from various sensors for a comprehensive battlefield view.
- High maneuverability enables fifth-generation fighters to engage in close-quarters combat and evade enemy threats effectively.
- Currently, operational fifth-generation fighter jets are fielded by a few countries, including the United States (F-22 Raptor, F-35 Lightning II), China (Chengdu J-20), and Russia (Sukhoi Su-57).

A bold step towards a cervical cancer-free future

- India's interim Union Budget 2024-25 has taken a significant step towards women's health by endorsing the vaccination of girls aged nine to 14 against cervical cancer, aligning with global efforts to combat this prevalent disease.
- The '90-70-90' targets set by the World Health Organization aim to achieve high vaccination rates, cervical cancer screening, and treatment coverage by 2030, emphasizing the importance of HPV vaccination in eradicating cervical cancer.
- Globally, successful HPV vaccination programs in countries like Scotland, Australia, and Rwanda have demonstrated a decline in cervical cancer incidence, underscoring the effectiveness of prioritizing vaccination in disease prevention.
- Sikkim's exemplary approach to HPV vaccination, achieving 97% coverage through robust communication strategies, serves as a model for effective public health initiatives and community engagement.
- India's development of the indigenous quadrivalent vaccine, Cervavac, in collaboration with the Serum Institute of India, offers a cost-effective solution to combat HPV infections and cervical cancer, enhancing accessibility and affordability.
- India's track record in vaccination campaigns, exemplified by the successful COVID-19 vaccine rollout, instills confidence in scaling up HPV vaccination efforts and reaching remote populations, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility.
- Overcoming challenges such as vaccine hesitancy and ensuring equitable access to HPV vaccination requires concerted efforts to engage communities, dispel misinformation, and strengthen healthcare infrastructure, emphasizing the importance of public-private partnerships and community collaborations.

India's Maritime Development Fund likely by year end

- India's proposed Maritime Development Fund aims to provide long-term, low-cost financial support to boost indigenous ship-building and is expected to be operational by the end of the year, with participation from industry stakeholders, financial institutions, and Ministries.
- The fund, currently under discussion, may be structured as a dedicated maritime vertical under a development finance institution or as a standalone company with multi-agency equity, focusing on developing the entire value chain locally, including ship-building, flagging, ownership financing, and leasing to reduce India's annual spending on ship leasing.
- The fund's objectives include increasing India's share of the world's tonnage, promoting cruise tourism, and enhancing port mechanization and capacity expansion through public-private partnerships (PPP) initiatives.
- With an initial corpus of ₹25,000 crore over seven years, the fund will utilize various funding mechanisms such as debt, equity, Viability Gap Funding (VGF), and buyer credit support to address challenges faced by Indian shipping companies in accessing long-term, low-cost finance for vessel acquisition and expansion.
- Efforts are underway to secure 'infrastructure' status for the shipping sector to facilitate access to long-term, low-cost funds, aligning with the Ministry's goal of supporting the growth and sustainability of the maritime industry in India.

Cabinet approves ₹10,372 cr. AI corpus

- The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹10,371.92 crore corpus to support Artificial Intelligence (AI) computing infrastructure and start-ups in the AI sector, providing viability gap funding and subsidies for projects involving data centers and related facilities.
- The corpus aims to foster innovation and application development in AI, particularly for government use, representing the largest direct investment by the Centre in AI initiatives and complementing efforts to enhance semiconductor fabrication, design, and assembly capabilities in India.
- Disbursed through the India AI Mission, established last year, the corpus is set to strengthen India's progress and solutions in the field of Artificial Intelligence, with plans to produce Graphics Processor Units through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode, as highlighted by Union Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal.