

ENVIRONMENT**Fragility of Himalayan Ecosystem**

Ramon Magsaysay award winner and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has recently announced 21-day climate fast to highlight the larger issue of the fragility of the Himalayan ecosystem. Ladakh comprises 97% indigenous tribes and tribes depend on farming and animal rearing for a livelihood. Apart from border issues, it also faces the damaging effects of climate change through floods, drought, landslides, greenhouse gases, and other pollutants.

some of the recent disasters in the Himalayan region

There have been several disasters in the Himalayan region since 2010 causing loss of lives and livelihoods.

For ex-

- A) In 2013, a cloudburst in the upper reaches of the Himalayas led to flash floods at Kedarnath that claimed 6,000 lives
- B) In January 2023, disaster struck Joshi math, when water gushed down a lower slope of the mountain, submerging parts of the town.
- C) In November 2023, 41 workers were trapped in the collapsed Silkyara tunnel project in the Himalaya.

Reasons behind these tragic events

- 1) **Infrastructure boom**– Since Ladakh became a Union Territory, many big infrastructure projects have been launched. For ex- the Zojila tunnel (14.15 km long), the Kargil-Zaskar National Highway (230 km long) etc. Incidentally, all these areas are vulnerable to climate change-related disasters.
- 2) **Disregard for scientific warning**– Despite continued warning from geologists and ecologists, Uttarakhand, where all these tragedies occurred, has started many infrastructure projects. Further, an expert committee constituted by the Supreme Court has suggested limiting the number of pilgrims visiting the Char Dam Himalayan shrines. However, pilgrim numbers have only increased every year.
- 3) **Lack of due diligence**- There are no proper scientific risk assessment, safety measures and geological and seismic analysis before starting infrastructural projects.
- 4) **Role of NMSHE**– National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE) was started with the objective to develop a capacity to scientifically assess the vulnerability of the Himalayan region to climate change and continuously assess the health status of the Himalayan ecosystem. However, it could not fulfill its objective effectively.

Pursuit of development should not upset the fragile balance in the Himalayan ecosystem and its biodiversity.

GOVERNMENT BUDGETING**Decoding State Budgets**

In India, the central government's finances are closely examined whereas state governments' fiscal health often receives less attention. However, there is a renewed interest in the financial status of states because of the rise in market borrowing by state governments.

publicly available information on state government finances

- 1) **State Budgets** -They are a good source of publicly available information on state government finances.
- 2) **CAG** –There is publication of monthly fiscal indicators by the CAG. This is useful in assessing emerging trends in state finances.
- 3) **Other important source** – They are states' usage of ways and means advances and overdraft facilities extended by the Reserve Bank of India.

Analysis of the 2024-25 budgets or votes on account (VoA)

An analysis of the data suggests that states expect a 9.2 % growth in their combined revenue receipts this year.

1) Revenue side of states

- A) About half of the total income for states comes from their own taxes.
- B) Another 40-45 per cent of the revenues of the states comes from transfers by the Centre, taxes and grants. States saw an increase in their revenues due to higher-than-expected tax sharing for three years in a row during FY2022-24.

2) Expenditure sides of states-

States plan to increase their revenue spending by 7% and their capital spending by 11%. However, due to elections this year, there will be less capital spending by states till final budget is presented in July 2024.

Issues with grants from the Centre to the states

- 1) **Uncertainty in transfer of additional devolution**– In many cases, states may have deviated from their planned borrowing because they had no prior knowledge about the timing of inflow of such additional devolution by Centre.
- 2) **Multiple factors**– There are many factors on which center gives grants to states for Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS). For ex- submitting utilization certificates. Thus, actual grants from the Centre to the states differ a lot from what the states expect.

Reason behind larger market borrowing by states

- 1) States may have preferred to hold larger cash before the model code of conduct period, driving some states to expand their borrowings.
- 2) Some states may have decided to utilize more of their borrowing limit for 2023-24 before the year ends.

PRELIM FACT**1. Invasive alien species threatening Natural ecosystem**

In order to manage the rising chital population on Ross Island (now Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Island), the Andaman and Nicobar administration has sought assistance from the Wildlife Institute of India.

About Invasive Alien Species:

1. Invasive alien species (IAS) are the species which are introduced and/or spread outside their natural past or present distribution threatens biological diversity.
2. These include animals, plants, fungi, and even microorganisms. It can influence all kinds of ecosystems.
3. Characteristics of Invasive Alien Species is described as “arrive, survive and thrive.”
4. These species are introduced either through natural or human intervention. They survive on native food resources, reproduce at a fast rate and edge out native species in the competition over resources.
5. Example of Invasive Alien Species in India: The list of invasive wildlife in India is dominated by certain species of fish such as the African catfish, Nile tilapia, red-bellied piranha, and alligator gar, and turtle species such as the red-eared slider.
6. Impact on Flora: In habitats where there is no competition, invasive species can dominate the entire ecosystem. For ex- The increased population of chital in the Andamans has affected the regeneration of native vegetation, as the deer are known to consume seeds and seedlings.
7. Impact on Fauna: Invasive species act as disruptors in the food chain and disturb the balance of the ecosystem. For ex- In Keoladeo Park, Bharatpur in Rajasthan, the African catfish has been known to prey on waterfowls and migratory birds as well.
8. Impact on economy: In September 2023, the IPBES reported that 37,000 alien species have been introduced globally, adding around 200 new species annually and costing over \$423 billion each year in economic damages. For ex- The cotton mealybug from North America has significantly impacted India’s cotton yields.

2. How Interest Rates in US impacts India

The US Federal Reserve has decided to hike interest rates that will impact the Indian economy.

1. With the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank maintainig ‘higher for longer’ interest rates, the consequent strength of the U.S. dollar and the euro leads to an initial depreciation of emerging economies’ currencies, including the Indian rupee.
2. The depreciation of the rupee directly affects India’s import, increasing the prices of imported goods, particularly oil and other commodities that are crucial for India’s economy.
3. This would add approximately 0.4 percentage points to India’s inflation through 2024 and 2025 which would exacerbating the cost of living and production costs within the country.
4. As per ADB’s projections, India’s GDP growth may slow slightly (by under 0.2 percentage points in 2025) compared to baseline projections. This is partly due to increased costs of

borrowing and investments, as global capital shifts towards higher yielding U.S. assets, reducing the amount of foreign investment flowing into emerging markets like India.

5. On the positive side, a weaker rupee could make Indian exports more competitive on the global market, potentially boosting export volumes. This could add about 0.05 percentage points to India's GDP growth this year.
6. However, this effect might reverse in 2025 and 2026 as global monetary conditions stabilize and the rupee potentially strengthens, making exports less competitive again.
7. Higher interest rates in the U.S. could lead to a wider gap between U.S. and Indian interest rates, affecting the flow of capital. India might have to increase its own interest rates to manage inflation and prevent further depreciation of the rupee, which could have its own set of consequences on the domestic economy.

3.PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM)- ISRO's Zero Debris Milestone

ISRO's PSLV-C58/XPoSat mission successfully deployed the XPoSat satellite and converted the PSLV's last stage into the POEM-3 module, leaving no debris in Earth's orbit.

About PSLV Orbital Experimental Module (POEM)

1. The PSLV Orbital Experimental Module is a platform that will help perform in-orbit experiments using the final stage of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
2. It was developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).
3. It was used for the first time in the PSLV-C53 mission in June 2022. ISRO had POEM orbit the earth to perform in-orbit scientific experiments with various payloads onboard.
4. POEM is powered by solar panels mounted on the fuel tank of the rocket's fourth stage and a lithium-ion battery.
5. It has a navigation, guidance, and control (NGC) system to stabilise its altitude along with helium control thrusters.
6. The NGC system has four Sun sensors, a magnetometer, and gyroscopes. It also has a telecommand system to communicate with the ground station.
7. It communicates to ISRO's NavIC satellite constellation for navigation.
8. **Earlier use of PS4 rocket junk:** ISRO first demonstrated the capability of using PS4 as an orbital platform in 2019 with the PSLV-C44 mission that injected Microsat-R and Kalamsat-V2 satellites into their designated orbits. The fourth stage in that mission was kept alive as an orbital platform for space-based experiments.

Achievement of POEM-3

1. ISRO's PSLV-C58 mission successfully launched the XPoSat satellite into a 650 km orbit and converted its fourth stage into the POEM-3 module at 350 km for experiments.
2. It features nine payloads. POEM-3 completed 400 orbits and conducted several experiments over 25 days.
3. After two months, POEM-3 re-entered Earth's atmosphere on March 21, 2024, disintegrating successfully with all objectives met.

4.Defence Attache

India has started to post military and defence attachés to several new countries. This is being done to expand strategic ties with key regions across the globe.

1. **Description-**A Defence Attache is a member of the armed forces who serves in an embassy as a representative of his/her country's defence establishment abroad.
2. **Representation-**A Defence Attaché (DA) can represent all branches of the military, but in bigger countries, they may represent an individual service branch, such as an air force or naval attaché.
3. **Duties-**
 - A) They have to protect, develop, and promote the defence interests of their country in the nation they are assigned,
 - B)They have to protect, develop, and promote the defence interests of their country in bilateral military and defence relations as well
 - C) They may be deployed to work on specific issues, like migration.
 - D) They may serve as part of a military mission with organisations such as NATO, the EU, or the UN.

4. **Designation**-They usually operate as the head of the mission or a military adviser.

5. **Diplomatic immunity**-The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of April 18, 1961, gives immunity to individuals based on their position in a diplomatic mission. Article 7 of the convention defines the legal status of the Defense Attaché.

Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of 1961

Objective- To ensure that diplomats can conduct their duties without threat of influence by the host government.

Provisions-

A) It outlines the rules of diplomatic relations to facilitate friendly relations between States and to enable States to develop economic, cultural and scientific relations.

B) It provides the legal basis for diplomatic immunity.

5. Representation of the People Act, 1951

1. The Election Commission (EC) has issued a directive to crackdown on anonymous political hoardings, requiring the disclosure of the names of their publishers and printers for traceability and accountability.
2. This move aims to regulate campaign financing and ensure accountability if the content violates the Model Code of Conduct or statutory provisions.
3. This decision follows representations received by the EC regarding hoardings lacking identification of printers or publishers.
4. Section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, mandates the prominent display of the name and address of the printer and publisher on election-related material.
5. This directive holds printers, publishers, and licensees/contractors of urban local bodies accountable for political advertisements published on outdoor media.

ANSWER WRITING

Q. What are the main factors influencing the political attitudes of nations toward war? Additionally, how can social influence and persuasion be leveraged to shape a political attitude against war?

Political attitudes are ethical dispositions and beliefs that shape individuals' or entities' perspectives and actions regarding governance, policy-making, and public affairs. Political attitudes towards war are shaped by a complex interplay of national interests, ideologies, and international dynamics. These attitudes determine how a nation perceives, engages in, or avoids conflict.

Main factors influencing the political attitudes of nations toward war

- **National Interests:** Nations prioritize their territorial integrity, economic resources, and strategic alliances. Eg: **Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022, driven by a desire to assert its influence and control over the region**, exemplifies how national interests can lead to military aggression, despite widespread international condemnation.
- **Historical Experiences:** Past war experiences shape current attitudes. Eg: **Germany's and Japan's pacifist stances in international affairs stem from their World War II experiences**, leading to constitutions and policies that emphasize peace and restrict military engagement, reflecting a profound transformation in their political attitudes toward war.
- **Public Opinion:** Domestic public opinion can influence government policies. Eg: **U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, ending America's longest war, was partly influenced by American public opinion**, which increasingly favored ending the conflict and focusing on domestic issues.
- **Global Power Dynamics:** Relations with major world powers affect attitudes toward war. Smaller nations often align with powerful allies for security and support, **as seen in Eastern European countries seeking NATO support amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict**, reflecting their political attitudes toward regional security threats.
- **Security Threats:** Perceived or real security threats, such as terrorism or territorial encroachments, can justify military actions. Eg: **Iran's attacks on Pakistani border areas in response to cross-border terrorism concerns illustrate how security threats can shape a nation's political attitudes** toward using military force to protect its borders and citizens.
- **Ethical and Humanitarian Considerations:** Ethical imperatives to prevent human rights violations can motivate interventions. Eg: **international community's response to the**

Syrian Civil War, including efforts to address humanitarian crises and condemn human rights abuses, reflects the ethical dimensions influencing political attitudes toward war.

- **Geopolitical Strategies:** Geopolitical interests, such as regional dominance or control over strategic locations, play a role. Eg: **China's actions in the South China Sea, aimed at asserting territorial claims shows how geopolitical strategy can influence political attitudes toward conflict**, often leading to tensions with neighbouring countries.

Social influence refers to the process by which individuals' attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors are affected by the presence or actions of others. Persuasion is a method of influencing that involves communication aimed at changing someone's beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors, often guided by ethical considerations of right and wrong. In the post truth era, there is substantial rise in polarizing narratives which gives moment to political attitudes in favour of wars for promoting vested interests. Thus, social influences and persuasion could be used as powerful means create peaceful and harmonious political attitudes.

Ways in which social influence and persuasion can be leveraged to shape a political attitude against war

- **International Agreements and Accords:** These serve as powerful tools for shaping political attitudes towards peace. Eg: Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and several Arab nations demonstrates how diplomacy and mutual understanding, facilitated by social influence and persuasion, can lead to peaceful resolutions.
- **Global Summits and Declarations:** These gatherings of world leaders can set the tone for international political attitudes. Eg: **New Delhi Declaration, adopted at the 2023 G20 Summit emphasising that the" current era not being one of war" and its call for peace in Ukraine** illustrate how such declarations can persuade nations against conflict.
- **Promoting Peace Education:** Implementing educational programs that emphasize the ethical values of peace, non-violence, and conflict resolution, **akin to the peace education initiatives in Scandinavian countries**.
- **Utilizing Media Campaigns:** Media campaigns can disseminate messages promoting peace and the ethical implications of war, **similar to the anti-war sentiments expressed in popular media during the Vietnam War era**.
- **Influential Public Figures and role models :** Public figures and leaders can use their platforms to advocate for peace and ethical considerations in conflict resolution, **as seen in the efforts of figures like Malala Yousafzai and Desmond Tutu**.
- **Strengthening Grassroots Movements:** Grassroots movements, **inspired by the anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s**, can mobilize public opinion against war. These movements often start at the community level and can grow to have a national or even global impact, advocating for peaceful solutions through protests and advocacy.
- **Celebrating Peace Heroes: Recognizing and celebrating Nobel Peace Prize laureates and other peace activists** can inspire others to adopt anti-war attitudes. Their stories and achievements can serve as powerful examples of the impact one can have in promoting peace.
- **Responsible use of social media by society at large :** the right to freedom of expression over social media needs to be balanced with proper checks and balances, to curb the propagation of vile and polarizing narratives and creation of echo chambers that creates a war-favoring political attitude.

Overall, the political attitudes of nations toward war are shaped by a blend of strategic, historical, and ethical factors. By employing these strategies, social influence and persuasion can be effectively used to foster a political attitude against war, emphasizing the ethical implications and promoting a culture of peace and understanding.

MCQs

- Which of the following statements regarding the right to privacy is true?
 - The right to privacy is explicitly mentioned in the Indian Constitution.
 - The right to privacy only applies to individuals' interactions with government entities.
 - The right to privacy encompasses various aspects of personal autonomy and informational self-determination.**
 - The right to privacy is limited to certain privileged groups within society.
- Consider the following statements regarding Curative petition.

1. The concept of Curative petition was evolved by the Supreme Court of India.
 2. A curative petition can be entertained if the petitioner establishes there was a violation of the principles of natural justice.
 3. The Review petition is filed after the Curative petition to ensure there is no miscarriage of justice.
- How many of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) Only one **(b) Only two**
(c) All three (d) None

3. Consider the following statements about CDP-SURAKSHA platform:

1. It aims to promote the growth of India's horticulture sector by facilitating instant subsidy disbursement to farmers' bank accounts.
2. It uses e-RUPI vouchers from the National Payments Corporation of India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

4. Consider the following statements about International Narcotics Control Board (INCB):

1. It is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for drug enforcement.
2. It has the authority to enforce drug laws within individual countries.
3. It is one of the four treaty-mandated bodies under international drug control law.

How many of the above statements are correct?

(a) **Only one** (b) Only two
(c) All three (d) None

5. Why is gypsum commonly used in agriculture?

- (a) **To improve soil structure**
- (b) To increase soil pH
- (c) To enhance water retention in soil
- (d) To provide essential nutrients for plant growth

6. With reference to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

1. It aims to promote economic and social development in Asia and the Pacific.
2. India is the largest shareholder in the ADB.
3. Pakistan is not a member country of the ADB.

Select the correct answer using the codes give below:

(a) 1 and 2 only **(b) 1 only**
(c) 1 and 3 only (d) 3 only

7. Consider the following statements:

1. Ladakh is home to 97% indigenous tribes, with a lifestyle predominantly based on farming and animal rearing.

2. Ladakh is least affected by the climate change due to its high altitude.

3. National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) includes the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem (NMSHE), which is aimed at assessing and protecting the Himalayan region from climate change.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

(a) Only one **(b) Only two**
(c) All three (d) None

8. Consider the following statements:

1. Statement-I: In the recent interim Budget, the government has consolidated capital allocation for the three-Armed Services based on similar expenditure items.

2. Statement-II: Consolidation is expected to expedite decision-making and ensure better utilization of the capital budget in the armed services.

Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?

(a) **Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I**

(b) Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I

(c) Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect

(d) Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct

9. In which one of the following ways does PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 (POEM-3) contribute to reducing space debris?

(a) Through collecting and disposing of space debris

(b) By transforming into a satellite for long-term space exploration

(c) **By de-orbiting and burning up in the earth atmosphere after its mission**

(d) Through repairing and servicing malfunctioning satellites.

10. A rise in U.S. interest rates can lead to:

(a) Increased foreign investment inflow into India.

(b) **A weaker Indian Rupee compared to the U.S. Dollar.**

(c) Lower borrowing costs for Indian businesses.

(d) Faster economic growth in India.