

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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India has achieved an outstanding outcome in the Mutual Evaluation conducted during 2023-24 by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

- ➡ The Mutual Evaluation Report of India, which was adopted in the FATF plenary held in Singapore recently, places India in the "regular follow-up" category, a distinction shared by only four other G-20 countries.

India achieves 'outstanding outcome' in FATF evaluation

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

India has achieved an outstanding outcome in the mutual evaluation conducted during 2023-24 by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the government said on Friday.

The Mutual Evaluation Report of India, which was adopted at the FATF plenary held in Singapore from June 26 to 28, places India in the "regular follow-up" category, a distinction shared by only four other G-20 countries.

"This marks a significant milestone in the nation's efforts to combat money laundering (ML) and terrorist financing (TF)," read a Press Information Bureau release.

In a statement, the FATF said the plenary concluded that India had reached a high level of technical compliance with its requirements. The country's anti-money laundering (AML),



The report was adopted at the FATF plenary held in Singapore.

countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), and counter-proliferation financing (CPF) regime was achieving good results, including international cooperation, access to basic and beneficial ownership information, use of financial intelligence, and depriving criminals of their assets.

However, the FATF observed that improvements were needed to strengthen the supervision and implementation of preventive measures in some non-financial sectors. "India also

needs to address delays relating to concluding ML and TF prosecutions, and to ensure that CFT measures aimed at preventing the non-profit sector from being abused for TF are implemented in line with the risk-based approach, including by conducting outreach to NPOs [Non-Profit Organisations] on their TF risks," it said.

Among other things, the FATF has recognised the efforts made by India on the issue of mitigating the risks arising from ML/TF, including the laundering of proceeds from corruption, fraud, and organised crime, and the effective measures implemented by India to transition from a cash-based to a digital economy to reduce ML/TF risks. "This recognition is a testament to the rigorous measures implemented over the last 10 years to safeguard the financial system from ML/TF threats," the government said.

About Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- ➡ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1989.
- ➡ It is an initiative of the G7 countries to develop policies to combat money laundering.
 - In 2001, its mandate was expanded to include terrorism financing.
 - It has also started dealing with virtual currencies.
- ➡ It sets international standards that aim to prevent these illegal activities and the harm they cause to society.

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- It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in money laundering.
- It monitors progress in implementing its recommendations through "peer reviews" ("mutual evaluations") of member countries.
- The FATF Secretariat is located in Paris.

Objectives of FATF:

- FATF sets standards and promotes effective implementation of:
 - legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering.
 - The FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

Members of FATF:

- The FATF currently comprises 38 member jurisdictions and two regional organisations, representing most major financial centres in all parts of the globe.
- India became an Observer at FATF in 2006. In 2010, India was taken in as the 34th country member of FATF.

FATF Evaluation and Its Significance:

- **High-Level Compliance:** The FATF plenary concluded that India has reached a high level of technical compliance with FATF requirements. The anti-money laundering (AML), countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), and counter-proliferation financing (CPF) regimes of India are achieving good results, including international cooperation and access to beneficial ownership information.
- **Effective Measures:** India's AML/CFT/CPF framework has been effective in using financial intelligence and depriving criminals of their assets. The evaluation highlighted India's success in transitioning from a cash-based to a digital economy to reduce ML/TF risks.
- **Recognition of Efforts:** The FATF has recognized India's rigorous measures over the past decade to safeguard its financial system from ML/TF threats, including efforts to mitigate risks arising from corruption, fraud, and organized crime.

Areas Needing Improvement:

- **Supervision and Implementation:** The FATF observed that India needs to strengthen the supervision and implementation of preventive measures in some non-financial sectors.
- **Delays in Prosecutions:** India needs to address delays in concluding ML and TF prosecutions to ensure timely justice.
- **CFT Measures for NPOs:** Improvements are required to ensure that CFT measures aimed at preventing the non-profit sector from being abused for TF are implemented effectively, including conducting outreach to NPOs about their TF risks.

Policy Implications and Future Directions:

- **Enhancing Supervision:** Strengthening the supervision of non-financial sectors will be crucial to maintaining and improving compliance with FATF standards.
- **Speeding Up Legal Processes:** Addressing delays in ML and TF prosecutions will enhance the effectiveness of India's AML/CFT framework and ensure quicker justice.

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- ➡ **Outreach to NPOs:** Conducting regular outreach and providing guidance to NPOs will help them understand and mitigate TF risks, ensuring compliance with FATF's risk-based approach.

Government's Response:

- ➡ India's recognition by the FATF reflects the country's effective measures over the past decade to protect its financial system from ML and TF threats.
- ➡ This achievement underscores India's commitment to international standards and enhances its capacity to lead global efforts against financial crimes.
- ➡ Since 2014, the government has enacted legislative changes and bolstered enforcement efforts, aligning with international standards and yielding positive results, including disrupting terror funding networks.
- ➡ The Department of Revenue led India's engagement with the FATF, supported by a diverse team from various sectors, showcasing the country's comprehensive approach to combating ML and TF.

Initiatives by the Indian government against money laundering

1. Guidelines and rules under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2001
2. Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures
3. Fugitive Economic Offenders Act in 2018
4. Anti-black money Act, 2015
5. Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA), 1973
6. Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) in 1999
7. Indian Customs Act, 1962
8. Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators Forfeiture of Property Act, 1975
9. Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976
10. The promulgation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002
11. India is a signatory to the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (the Vienna Convention).

Black List and Grey List

Those are two types of lists that FATF maintains;

1. A blacklist is given to the countries that FATF considers uncooperative tax havens. These countries are known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs).
2. A Grey list is a warning given to the country that it might come on the Black list.
 - But even when a country comes under a grey list it faces many problems like problems in getting loans Economic sanctions Reduction in trade.

Page 05 : GS 2: International Relations : Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests

The United States Secretary of State recently declared a list of countries designated as "Countries of Particular Concern(CPCs)", 'Special Watch List (SWL)' countries and 'Entities of Particular Concern(EPCs)' due to violations of religious freedom.

India slams 'deeply biased' U.S. report on religious freedom

The report reflects 'one-sided projection of issues' and has selectively picked incidents to advance a pre-conceived narrative, says government while questioning the law and order situation in U.S

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on Friday slammed the U.S. State Department's report on International Religious Freedom for 2023 as "deeply biased" and said it reflected "one-sided projection of issues".

During the weekly press briefing, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the report questioned the "integrity" of certain legal judgments of the Indian courts and highlighted the United States's own record in handling domestic hate crimes.

"The exercise itself is a mix of imputations, misrepresentations, selective usage of facts, reliance on biased sources and a one-sided projection of issues. This extends even to the depiction of our Constitutional provisions and duly enacted laws of India. It has selectively picked incidents to advance a pre-conceived narrative as well," Mr. Jaiswal said.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken unveiled the annual report on international



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RANDHIR JAISWAL
MEA spokesperson

religious freedom and pointed at a number of countries for failing to protect religious rights of minority groups and basic human rights. He noted that a wide array of violence against religious minorities were taking place in India and said, "In India, we see a concerning increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities. At the same time, people around the world are also working hard to protect religious freedom."

In nearly 69 pages dedicated to the state of religious freedom in India, the report elaborated on apparent complicity between the law enforcement agencies and the majoritarian

groups and flagged a number of factors like the campaign for Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as well as the campaign for creating a "Hindu Rashtra" in India.

Responding to the criticism, Mr. Jaiswal raised the law and order situation in the U.S. and highlighted the crimes committed by racially motivated individuals against Indians and other coloured communities. "In 2023, India has officially taken up numerous cases in the U.S. of hate crimes, racial attacks on Indian nationals and other minorities, vandalism and targeting of places of worship, violence and mistreatment by law enforcement authorities, as well as the according of political space to advocates of extremism and terrorism

abroad," he said.

Mr. Blinken had focused on Pakistan, India, and other countries that also included the U.S. for growing threat against religious minorities and said, "In India, for example, Christian communities reported that local police aided mobs that disrupted worship services over accusations of conversion activities or stood by while mobs attacked them and then arrested the victims on conversion charges."

The U.S. report also referred to the drive for the UCC and observed that "various personal laws, instead of a uniform civil code, apply to members of different religious communities in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance based on religion, faith, and culture".

Referring to the remarks regarding Indian legal provisions, Mr. Jaiswal said the report appeared to intrude into the legislative affairs of India. "In some cases, the very validity of laws and regulations are questioned by the report, as are the right of legislatures to enact them," he said.

US Religious Freedom Designations

➡ About:

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- The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommends countries to the Secretary of State for designation as CPCs.
- The US acknowledges ongoing religious freedom violations in countries not officially designated. Governments are urged to halt abuses such as attacks on religious minorities, communal violence, prolonged imprisonments for peaceful expression, transnational repression, and calls to violence against religious communities.

➡ **Criteria for the Designation:**

- The US emphasizes that promoting the freedom of religion or belief has been a fundamental goal of US foreign policy since the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) in 1998.

➡ **Criteria for Designation of Countries in Different Categories**

- **CPCs:** When the governments of the countries engage in or tolerate "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations" of the right to freedom of religion or belief under IRFA 1998.
- **SWL:** It is based on the governments' perpetration or toleration of severe religious freedom violations.
- **EPCs:** For systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.

➡ **Countries Designated for Religious Freedom Violations in 2024:**

- **Countries of Particular Concern:** The designated countries include China, North Korea, Pakistan, Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, Nicaragua, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Myanmar.
- **Special Watch List Countries:** Algeria, Azerbaijan, the Central African Republic, Comoros, and Vietnam are labeled as "Special Watch List countries".
- **Entities of Particular Concern:** Terrorist organizations such as al-Shabab, Boko Haram, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Houthis, ISIS-Sahel, ISIS-West Africa, al-Qa'ida affiliate Jamaat Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin, and the Taliban are designated as "Entities of Particular Concern."

➡ **Note**

- Earlier, the USCIRF in its 2023 report, designated India as a CPC, citing severe violations of religious freedom against various religious minorities, especially Muslims, Christians, and Dalits.
- The report also criticized some of the laws and policies of the Indian government, such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), as well as the alleged harassment, violence, and discrimination faced by religious dissenters and activists.
- The Indian government rejected the report as 'biased and motivated'. The government also defended its commitment to protect and promote the rights and freedoms of all its citizens, regardless of their faith.

State of Freedom of Religion

➡ **India:**

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- The Indian Constitution's Articles 25-28 guarantee freedom of religion as a fundamental right. The Constitution also states that India is a secular state and does not declare any religion as the country's official religion.
- Article 25 (Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion).
- Article 26 (Freedom to manage religious affairs).
- Article 27 (Freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any religion).
- Article 28 (Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions).
- Further, Article 29 and 30 of the Constitution deal with the protection of interests of minorities.

► Globally:

- Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

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Page 06 : GS 3 : Economy

Kenya is grappling with a severe financial crisis triggered by a heavy debt burden, compounded by a controversial finance bill proposing tax hikes. The issue has resulted in widespread protests, showcasing the delicate balance between debt management and public welfare.

Controversy Surrounding the Finance Bill:

- ➡ **Introduction to the Issue:** The Kenyan government's decision to introduce an IMF-backed finance bill to increase taxes on essentials sparked protests. This move, aimed at stabilizing the country's debt-laden economy, faced significant backlash.
- ➡ **Debate Over Public Sentiment:** The bill's proposal to raise taxes on items such as sanitary pads, fuel, and bread led to public outrage, resulting in violent protests that left at least 23 people dead and 200 injured.
- ➡ **Government's Response:** Following the protests, President William Ruto announced he would not sign the bill, highlighting the government's need to consider public sentiment while addressing economic challenges.

Impact on Kenya's Economy and Debt Situation:

- ➡ **Debt Burden:** Kenya's debt, both domestic and foreign, reached \$80 billion last year, accounting for nearly three-fourths of its GDP. The country spends over half of its revenue on debt servicing.
- ➡ **Economic Strain:** The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war exacerbated Kenya's financial woes, with rising global food and energy prices impacting the economy.
- ➡ **Reliance on Multinational Lenders:** Kenya's development model relies heavily on loans from the IMF, World Bank, and bilateral partners like China. However, the rising debt burden poses significant challenges for economic stability.

Challenges and Policy Implications:

- ➡ **Implementation Hurdles:** The proposed tax hikes were intended to raise an additional 200 billion Kenyan shillings (\$1.55 billion) but faced strong public opposition and implementation challenges.
- ➡ **IMF's Role:** The IMF's stringent conditions for additional lending and tax reforms have been criticized for being one-sided, potentially exacerbating public discontent and economic instability.

Debt trap

Kenya must find ways to service its debt without punishing its people

The Kenyan President's decision to rush through Parliament an IMF-backed finance Bill that sought to increase taxes on everything from imported sanitary pads and tyres to bread and fuel backfired, with protesters storming a section of the Parliament on Tuesday. After the protests, which rights groups said had left at least 23 people killed and 200 injured, President William Ruto announced that he would not sign the Bill. The Kenyan government could have avoided this bloody confrontation had it paid more attention to the public mood. The government's plan was to raise an extra 200 billion Kenyan shilling (some \$1.55 billion) in taxes. Earlier this year, the country had reached a deal with the IMF to secure \$941 million in additional lending. In subsequent talks in Nairobi, they agreed to reforms, including tax increases, to stabilise the country's debt-battered financial situation. The IMF deal triggered street protests. But the government still went ahead with the plan to impose additional taxes on the country of 54 million people, a third of whom still live in poverty.

The government argues that its hands were tied as the country struggles to repay its huge debt burden – domestic and foreign debt was a staggering \$80 billion last year, accounting for nearly three-fourths of its GDP. The government spent more than half of its revenue servicing debts last year. The crisis is an indictment of the development model Kenya and several other countries in the continent follow. Kenya, one of the fastest growing countries in Africa, has borrowed heavily from multinational lenders such as the World Bank and the IMF as well as bilateral partners such as China, to finance its infrastructure projects. But growth tanked and expenses rocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic years. The Ukraine war has led to a spike in global food and energy prices, hitting African economies. When the advanced countries increased interest rates to fight inflation, the payment burden of debt-ridden countries ballooned. In Africa, Zambia and Ghana defaulted on their payments, and then reached agreements with their creditors to restructure debt. Mr. Ruto, who came to power in 2022, has promised to address the debt problem. But he has been unimaginative and conventional, letting the unpopular IMF dictate one-sided policy measures. Now that the Bill has been withdrawn, he will have to tread carefully. He has yet to spell out his next measures, besides saying that austerity measures would be rolled out. He will have to strike a balance between his people's needs and Kenya's creditors. Multinational and bilateral lenders should help the debt-laden countries in Africa come out of this trap without punishing their poor populace.

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- ➡ **Need for Balanced Measures:** Moving forward, President Ruto must balance austerity measures with the needs of the populace. International lenders should support African countries in debt distress without further impoverishing their citizens.

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Page 08 : GS2 – Polity and Governance

The integrity, credibility, and legitimacy of India's high-stakes entrance examinations are under scrutiny due to cancellations, postponements, and demands for re-conducting exams like UGC-NET, UGC-CSIR, and NEET-PG. These issues highlight systemic failures in establishing a reliable examination system despite efforts like the National Education Policy 2020.



Students get their documents checked at an examination centre in Bengaluru before entering the hall for NEET on May 5. A. BHASKAR/PRASHANTH

Write NEET and repeat

The number of students who write NEET more than once — taking a year or more off exclusively to prepare for it — to finally get a seat in a medical college is on the rise. **Jayanth R.** speaks to students and parents on the different issues

“I did not get a medical seat because I got only 320 out of 720 marks in NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) results last year. I had the dream of becoming a doctor since childhood, so I skipped the year, joined a coaching centre, and studied hard. This year, I got 600 marks, and I am hoping to get a medical seat,” said Namrata (name changed), a 20-year-old student from Kolar, a town about 65 km from Bengaluru.

Pradyumna, from Bengaluru, is also a repeater. He appeared for NEET for a third time this year and is waiting for medical counselling. “I have been writing NEET continuously since 2021, hoping to get a government quota seat. I got the 32,000th rank in this NEET exam. Last year, I secured the 3,52,000th rank even though I trained all year,” he said.

For Monica S.J., a resident of a village in Ramana district, close to Bengaluru, it has been a challenge to attend college as well as prepare for NEET since she is from a rural area. “I could not go to coaching centres because there are none nearby. I studied with notes from college lectures, online resources, and by referring to guides,” she said. But her rank is below 17 lakh, which means a medical seat is out of the question.



Students protesting at Freedom Park on June 11, against the alleged irregularities in the conduct of NEET. (Left) Candidates at a NEET examination centre in Bengaluru on May 5. A. BHASKAR & S. SAKSHITHA

It is the students' right to appear again and again for NEET. However, the Union government should impose some restrictions on repeaters.



Students protesting at Freedom Park on June 11, against the alleged irregularities in the conduct of NEET. (Left) Candidates at a NEET examination centre in Bengaluru on May 5. A. BHASKAR & S. SAKSHITHA

Recurring studies
Several such students have written the NEET this year. They are waiting for counselling, which has been delayed because of the alleged exam scam and the ongoing Central Bureau of Investigation investigation.

Now, even high scorers are unsure of getting a seat of their choice. For example, Kalyan V. of Bengaluru, who got the All India Rank 1 (AIR 1) in the NEET this year and wanted to join the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, is not certain about getting a seat since an unprecedented 67 students have got AIR 1.

The alleged exam scam this year aside, statistics show that the trend of students taking a break after II PU to prepare for NEET exclusively has been growing. A large number of candidates are repeaters. According to the information provided by the Karnataka Examination Authority (KEA), out of the total 10,916 medical seats available in 2023, as many as 7,012 went to repeaters, that is 64.2%. This includes a student who passed the II PU exam in 2007 and attempted UGNEET successfully. This year, out of 89,088 students who have qualified for counselling, 53,696 are repeaters, that is 60.2%.

Among those who have registered for counselling, which has yet to start, is one candidate

each who passed II PU in 1999, 2000, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015.

Freshers, meaning students who are writing II PU exams and also taking NEET in the same year, find it hard to compete with repeaters who have dedicated a full year for preparation,” said Divya Prakash, a student from a Bengaluru college.

Demand for restrictions
Students and parents are unhappy with this trend of candidates writing the exam repeatedly. They are calling for restrictions on the number of attempts. “As of now, it is their right to appear again and again for NEET.”

However, the Union government should impose some restrictions on repeaters,” Pushpa Lakshmi, a parent from Bengaluru, argued.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Sharan Prakash Patil, Karnataka Minister of Medical Education, said, “In this regard, with the concurrence of the States, the Union government should bring regulations. There is an age limit for the entrance exams conducted for the various government recruitments. Similarly, repeaters appearing for NEET should have a limit of two or three at-

tempts or an age limit.”

Coaching centres
Meanwhile, intense competition for NEET has resulted in coaching centres mushrooming. According to Higher Education Department estimates, there are around 2,000 coaching centres in Karnataka. Most repeaters join one of them and train for a year. These centres charge a hefty fee, conduct classes with boarding facilities, and have strict schedules and restrictions.

“The question pattern has got tougher by the year. Because of mobile phones, TV and the internet, children are unable to study properly at home. So, at the coaching centres, we keep them away from all these distractions,” said Pradeep Edwar, an MLA and founder of Parishrama NEET Academy, Bengaluru. “We make them study continuously for at least six to seven hours a day. Thus, coaching centre students are more successful in NEET.”

Even though the Higher Education Department has ordered that these coaching centres should be registered under the Karnataka Education Act, 1983, pay a fee of ₹25,000 and meet 22

Allotment of medical seats in 2023



conditions, none have complied so far. However, Pradeep Edwar said Parishrama NEET Academy has obtained permission from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs to run a coaching centre. “I am paying 18% GST on the fees received from each student,” he said.

Beyond their reach
While on the one side, academics are thriving, on the other side, medical education is beyond reach for students who have no adequate financial resources or can't skip a year. This is particularly true for those from rural areas or those who have studied in Karnataka medium schools. Despite the NEET being conducted in regional languages, this time, the number of students who wrote NEET in Kannada is only 1,065.

“Medical courses are a daydream for rural and Karnataka medium students,” said Sripathi Bhat, an education activist. “Those who have money go to coaching centres. Except for tier 1 and tier 2 cities, there are no coaching centres available for CET, NEET and JEE exams. Therefore, the government should immediately take steps to provide training for these exams at the college level.”

No free training
Earlier, the Higher Education Department used to train students seeking admission to engineering courses through an online programme called GetSetGo. It also helped medical seat aspirants partially, as they also trained in Physics and Chemistry subjects as part of this course. However, this hasn't happened for a year.

In the 2024 Budget, the Karnataka government announced that it would provide CET and NEET training in all government run PU colleges. However, no steps have been taken to implement this yet. Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil said, “We are working on that. From this academic year, CET and NEET coaching will be started in the government colleges.”

Meanwhile, Monica, the student from Ramana, has given up on her dream of pursuing medical education. She cannot afford to drop one year, and even if she does, there are no specialised NEET training centres near her village. “I am just hoping to get an engineering seat or join some other professional course that will fetch me a job,” she said.

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Controversy Surrounding Examination Integrity:

- ➡ **Introduction to the Issue:** The recent controversies surrounding paper leaks and exam postponements have exposed the flaws in India's entrance examination system, emphasizing the need for a credible and trust-based system.
- ➡ **Debate Over Short-term Changes:** The establishment of the National Testing Agency (NTA) in 2017 without substantial systemic overhaul has led to recurring issues, undermining its purpose of ensuring consistent and reliable evaluations.
- ➡ **Government's Proactive Measures:** The government's response, including referring cases to the CBI and forming a committee led by K Radhakrishnan, demonstrates its understanding of the crisis's potential consequences and commitment to comprehensive reforms.

Challenges in Operational Framework:

- ➡ **Stagnant Operational Practices:** Despite its promising inception, NTA's operational framework has remained stagnant, failing to address technological threats and operational deficiencies. The lack of infrastructure enhancement and skilled personnel has resulted in substandard performance.
- ➡ **Instances of Mismanagement:** The NTA's compensatory marks issue during NEET exams without structured criteria highlights the nonchalance in its operations, further eroding public trust.
- ➡ **Need for Comprehensive Reforms:** The NTA must adopt innovative approaches and significant infrastructure investments to transition from traditional assessment methods to a dynamic, technology-driven evaluation system.

Federal Sensitivity and Trust Building:

- ➡ **Significance of Trust:** Building trust is crucial for developing a credible examination system. The disparities in education quality and evaluation due to the concurrent list status of education in the Constitution exacerbate the issue.
- ➡ **Exploitation of Systemic Loopholes:** The disparities and inconsistencies provide opportunities for the coaching industry to exploit learning gaps, leading to unethical practices like paper leaks.
- ➡ **Collaborative Mechanism:** Empowering the NTA with authority and a collaborative framework involving federal and state law enforcement and intelligence agencies is essential to combat examination malpractices effectively.

Russia warns of 'response' against U.S. drones over Black Sea

Associated Press

MOSCOW

Russia's Defence Minister ordered officials to prepare a "response" to U.S. drone flights over the Black Sea, the Ministry said on Friday, in an apparent warning that Moscow may take forceful action to ward off the American reconnaissance aircraft.

The Russian Defence Ministry noted a recent "increased intensity" of U.S. drones over the Black Sea, saying they "conduct intelligence and targeting for precision weapons supplied to the Ukrainian military by Western countries for strikes on Russian facilities".

"It shows an increased involvement of the U.S. and other NATO countries in the conflict in Ukraine on the side of the Kyiv regime," the Ministry said in

a statement.

It noted that "such flights significantly increase the probability of incidents involving Russian military aircraft, which increases the risk of direct confrontation between the alliance and the Russian Federation".

"NATO members will bear responsibility for that," it added.

The Ministry said that Defence Minister Andrei Belousov has directed the General Staff to "make proposals on measures of operative response to provocations".

Washington and Moscow have clashed before over U.S. drones in the Black Sea. In a 2023 incident, a Russian fighter jet damaged an American drone there, causing it to crash. A repeat of such a confrontation could further fuel tensions.

About Black Sea

- ➡ It is a large inland sea located at the southeastern extremity of Europe.
- ➡ It covers an area of approximately 436,000 square kilometers (168,000 square miles).

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- ▶ **Bordering countries:** It is bordered by Ukraine to the north, Russia to the northeast, Georgia to the east, Turkey to the south, and Bulgaria and Romania to the west.
 - Countries bordering the Black Sea are-
 1. Ukraine
 2. Russia
 3. Georgia
 4. Turkey
 5. Bulgaria
 6. Romania
- ▶ Russia has the longest coastline on the sea (2,300 km), followed by Turkey (1,329 km) and Ukraine (1,282 km).
- ▶ The Crimean Peninsula extends into it from the north.
- ▶ It is connected with the Aegean Sea (an arm of the Mediterranean Sea) through the Bosphorus Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles Strait, and with the Sea of Azov by the Kerch Strait.
- ▶ Created when structural upheavals in Asia Minor split off the Caspian basin from the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea gradually became isolated; salinity is now less than half that of the world's oceans.
- ▶ The Black Sea receives freshwater inflows all around the basin. It is a meeting point for many rivers, such as the Danube, Southern Bug, Dnieper, Rioni, and Dniester.
- ▶ It is the largest meromictic basin, which means the movement of water between the lower and upper layers of the Sea is rare.
- ▶ It is one of the world's largest anoxic basins, meaning it has areas with very little dissolved oxygen.

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- Islands: It contains several islands, with the largest ones being Snake Island (Ukraine), Giresun Island (Turkey), and St. Ivan Island (Bulgaria).

Significance of Black Sea for Russia

- Black Sea has traditionally been Russia's warm water gateway to Europe.
- For Russia, the Black Sea is both a stepping stone to the Mediterranean.
- It acts as a strategic buffer between NATO and itself.
- It showcases the Russian power in the Mediterranean and to secure the economic gateway to key markets in southern Europe.
- Russia has been making efforts to gain complete control over the Black Sea since the Crimean crisis of 2014.

Page : 06 Editorial Analysis**GS Paper 02 : Indian Polity****GS Paper 03 : Indian Economy – Issues relating to mobilisation of resources..****PYQ: (UPSC CSE (M) GS-3 2019)** Enumerate the indirect taxes which have been subsumed in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India. Also, comment on the revenue implications of the GST introduced in India since July 2017. (150 w/10m)**Practice Question:** Discuss the recent measures taken by the GST Council to simplify the tax regime and their potential impact on taxpayers and the economy?(150 w/10m)

Context : The GST Council recently met after a nine-month hiatus, introducing significant tax relief measures, procedural simplifications, and reforms to ease taxpayer burdens and reduce litigation. Key decisions included exemptions for hostel accommodation and railway services, and the elimination of the anti-profiteering clause, with plans for further rate rationalisation in future meetings.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council

- The Goods and Services Tax regime came into force after the Constitutional (122nd Amendment) Bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament in 2016.
- The GST Council is a joint forum of the Centre and the states.
- It was set up by the President as per Article 279A (1) of the amended Constitution.
- The members of the Council include the Union Finance Minister (chairperson), the Union Minister of State (Finance) from the Centre.
- Each state can nominate a minister in-charge of finance or taxation or any other minister as a member.
- The Council, according to Article 279, is meant to make recommendations to the Union and the states on important issues related to GST, like the goods and services that may be subjected or exempted from GST, model GST Laws.
- It also decides on various rate slabs of GST.

The recent one

- The council was convened last week for the first time in nearly nine months.

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- With 11 new State Ministers on board and a recalibrated NDA government at the Centre, the Council began afresh with a loaded agenda of clarifications, tweaks, forbearances, and other procedural changes, based on industry feedback and vetted by officials, that awaited its nod.
- Yet, it is quite creditable that the Council could, over an afternoon preceded by Union Budget consultations with States, arrive at a consensus on a flurry of issues aimed at easing the lot of taxpayers, reducing litigation, and even providing tax relief on some items.
- To help students, hostel accommodation costing up to ₹20,000 a month has been exempted from GST altogether, along with railway services availed by passengers.
- A uniform 12% rate has been approved for packing cartons, milk cans, and solar cookers, doing away with confusing classification differences based on material or technologies.
- The Council also opted to waive interest and penalty on tax dues for the first three years of GST, provided they are paid by March 2025.
- Moreover, it lowered the stipulated pre-deposits for filing appeals, including those that will be filed with the upcoming GST Appellate Tribunals, and approved a new form for taxpayers to correct errors or oversights in previous returns.
- Beyond nitty-gritties, the Council also signed off on ending the anti-profiteering clause that required firms to pass on any tax cut gains to customers, and mandating biometric-based Aadhaar authentication for all GST registrations in a phased manner across India.

Way forward

- The GST Council's recent meeting marked a significant step towards simplifying and decluttering the seven-year-old indirect tax regime.
- The ground-level impact of these decisions will depend on the fine print that follows, but the intent to ease taxpayer burdens and streamline processes is clear.
- The upcoming August meeting and future efforts to rationalise the GST structure and include currently excluded items will be essential in achieving a more comprehensive and efficient GST system.

A fresh start

The GST Council must not lose sight of broader reforms

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council was convened last week for the first time in nearly nine months. With 11 new State Ministers on board and a recalibrated NDA government at the Centre, the Council began afresh with a loaded agenda of clarifications, tweaks, forbearances, and other procedural changes, based on industry feedback and vetted by officials, that awaited its nod. Acknowledging that it could not conclude deliberations on all that had accumulated on its plate, the Council has resolved to meet again in August to take up the rest of the items. Yet, it is quite creditable that the Council could, over an afternoon preceded by Union Budget consultations with States, arrive at a consensus on a flurry of issues aimed at easing the lot of taxpayers, reducing litigation, and even providing tax relief on some items. To help students, hostel accommodation costing up to ₹20,000 a month has been exempted from GST altogether, along with railway services availed by passengers. A uniform 12% rate has been approved for packing cartons, milk cans, and solar cookers, doing away with confusing classification differences based on material or technologies.

Apart from several industry-specific measures, a few of which will kick in with retrospective effect, the Council also opted to waive interest and penalty on tax dues for the first three years of GST, provided they are paid by March 2025. Moreover, it lowered the stipulated pre-deposits for filing appeals, including those that will be filed with the upcoming GST Appellate Tribunals, and approved a new form for taxpayers to correct errors or oversights in previous returns. Beyond nitty-gritties, the Council also signed off on ending the anti-profiteering clause that required firms to pass on any tax cut gains to customers, and mandating biometric-based Aadhaar authentication for all GST registrations in a phased manner across India. The former will quell a difficult-to-implement industry irritant, and one hopes the latter will effectively ease the registration process that some say has become cumbersome in recent times, while curbing fraud perpetrated through fake invoicing. The ground-level impact of these moves may depend on the fine print that may follow, but the intent to simplify and declutter the seven-year old indirect tax regime is clear. It is refreshing that the Council also plans to take stock of the 2021 plan to rationalise the multiple-rate GST structure, that has been in cold storage for a while, when it meets next. The apex GST body must not only revive and expedite GST rate reforms but also incorporate a road map to bring excluded items such as petroleum and electricity into the GST net while rejigging tax rates.

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The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council:

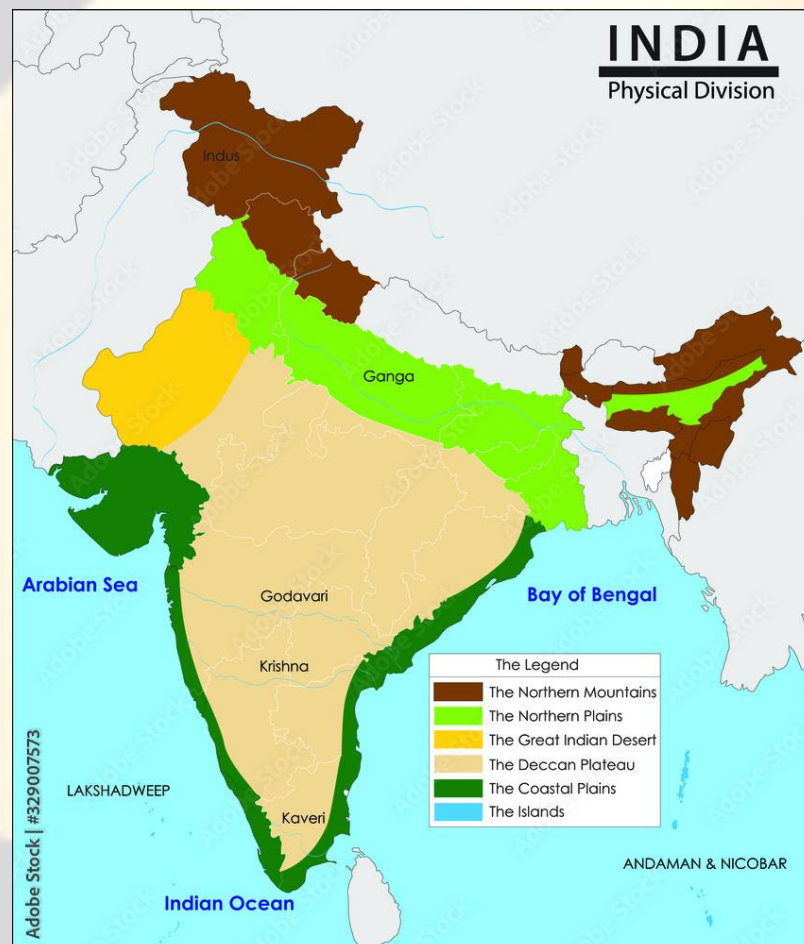
- ➡ **Constitutional Basis:** The GST Council is established under Article 279A of the Indian Constitution.
- ➡ **Formation:** It was constituted on September 12, 2016.
- ➡ **Chairperson:** The Union Finance Minister chairs the GST Council.
- ➡ **Members:** Includes the Union Minister of State for Finance and Ministers from each state in charge of finance or taxation.
- ➡ **Decision-Making:** Decisions require a three-fourths majority; the central government has one-third of the votes, and the states collectively have two-thirds.
- ➡ **Functions:**
 - Recommend the tax rates, exemption list, and threshold limits.
 - Suggest special provisions for certain states.
 - Resolve any disputes arising from the implementation of GST.
- ➡ **Meetings:** Typically convenes periodically to review and make recommendations.
- ➡ **Significance:** Aims to ensure a uniform and simplified tax structure across India, promoting ease of business and reducing tax evasion.
- ➡ **Impact:** Has streamlined indirect taxes, replaced multiple state and central taxes, and facilitated a single national market.

Anti-Profiteering Clause:

- ➡ The Anti-Profiteering Clause under GST aims to ensure that businesses pass on the benefits of reduced tax rates or increased input tax credits to consumers.
- ➡ This provision, governed by the National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA).
- ➡ It mandates that any reduction in tax rates or gains from input tax credits must result in a commensurate reduction in the price of goods or services, preventing businesses from unduly profiting at the consumer's expense.

Major Physical Divisions of India

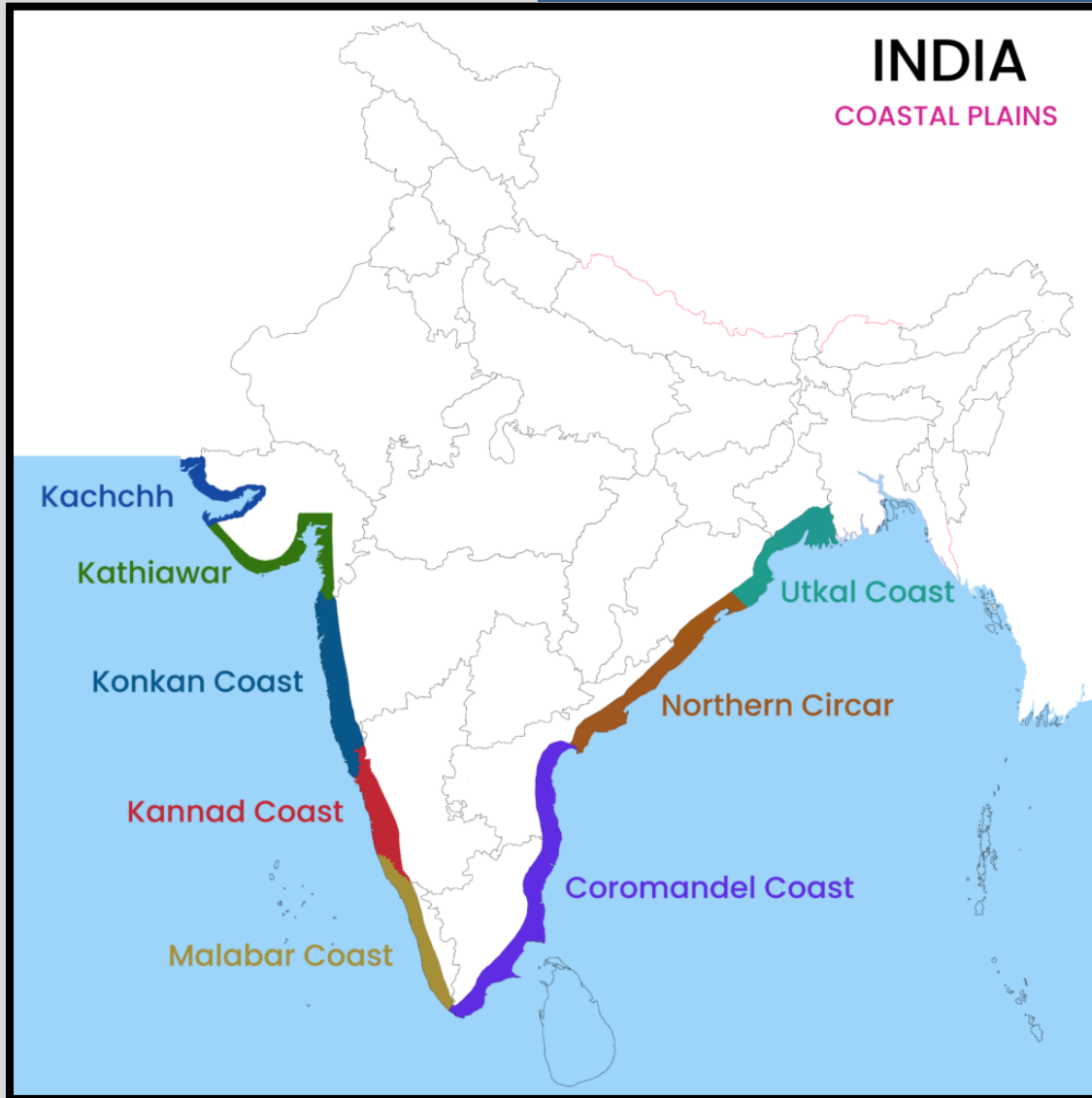
1. The Himalayan Mountains
2. The Northern Plains
3. The Peninsular Plateau
4. The Indian Desert
5. The Coastal Plains
6. The Islands



The coastal plain of India

- ➔ A coastal plain is flat, low-lying land adjacent to a sea coast. A fall line commonly marks the border between a coastal plain and a piedmont area.
- ➔ The Coastal Plains of India lie on either side of the Deccan Plateau, along the western and eastern coasts of India. They extend for about **6,150 km from the Rann of Kutch in the west to West Bengal in the east.**
- ➔ The **Indian coastline which is 7516.6 km** long covers 6100 km of mainland coastline along with the Andaman, Nicobar, and the Lakshadweep islands.
- ➔ The straight and regular coastline of India is the result of the faulting of the Gondwana land during the Cretaceous period.
- ➔ The coastline of India touches 13 states and Union Territories. The western coastal plains are along the Arabian Sea whereas the eastern coastal plains are located along the Bay of Bengal.
- ➔ Coastal Plains of India are broadly divided into the Western Coastal Plains and the Eastern Coastal Plains.

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Coastal Plain of India are broadly divided into 3 major parts:

1. **Gujrat / Kathiawar Coastal Plain**
2. **The Western Coastal Plain**
3. **The Eastern Coastal Plain**

Gujrat / Kathiawar Coastal Plain

- ➡ It is formed from the alluvial deposits of rivers like Sabarmati, Mahi etc. To its south is the Arabian Sea and to its west is the Kathiawar Peninsula.

The Western Coastal Plain

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- The western coast of India is a narrow plain located between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea.
- This coast can be divided into three parts.

1. Konkan Coast

Maharashtra and Goa

2. Karnataka Coast or Kanara Coast

Goa to Karnataka - Mangaluru

3. Malabar Coast

Mangaluru to Kanyakumari

- The northern part of the coast is called **Konkan Coast (Maharashtra and Goa)**,
- The central part is called **Karnataka Coast or Kanara Coast (Goa to Karnataka - Mangaluru)** and
- The southern part is called **Malabar Coast (Mangaluru to Kanyakumari)**

The Eastern Coastal Plain

- The eastern coastal plain is very fertile due to it being formed by the deltas of Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri rivers.
- This coast can be divided into three parts.

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1. The Coromandel Coast

Between the
Krishna and Kaveri
rivers

2. Northern Circars Coast

Between the
Mahanadi and
Krishna rivers

3. Utkal Coast

Mahanadi delta
area

1. The Coromandel Coast (between the Krishna and Kaveri rivers)
2. Northern Circars coast (between Mahanadi and Krishna rivers)
3. Mahanadi delta area is called Utkal plain

Major Sea Ports in India

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India has 13 major seaports and 205 notified minor and intermediate ports that handle a huge volume of traffic.

All ports in India are situated in the 9 coastal states of India namely:

1. Gujarat
2. Maharashtra
3. Goa
4. Karnataka
5. Kerala
6. West Bengal,
7. Odisha,
8. Andhra Pradesh, and
9. Tamil Nadu.

Will be Continue.....