UPSC Daily Current Affairs| Prelim Bits 22-05-2025

Scheme-based workers (SBWs)

***Prelims**: Rights Issues| Economic and Social Development*

Why in News?

Recently, in the 45th Indian Labour Conference (ILC), a unanimous recommendation was sent to the central government to treat the SBWs as "workers" and pay them minimum wages, pension, health insurance and provident fund, among others.

> ***Indian Labour Conference (ILC),** a tripartite consultative body established in 1942 that advises the Indian government on labour-related issues. It is composed of representatives from central trade unions, central organizations of employers, state governments and union territories, and central ministries/departments.*

- **SBWs** – It refers to individuals ***employed under various government schemes*** and programs.
  - These schemes are those which carry out social and economic functions by taking care of children and lactating mothers and nutrition aspects.
- **Role** – They are also a *bridge between the community* and the public health system, improving school enrolment and the nutritional health system.
- **Employment** – There are around ***60 million workers*** work in government schemes.
  - Anganwadi workers or AWWs
  - Anganwadi helpers or AWHs
  - Accredited Social Health Activists or ASHAs
  - Mid-Day-Meals workers or MDMWs

> ***Mid-Day-Meals workers** are employed under 'The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme' since 1975, the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) and the mid-day meals day scheme.*

- **Issues** – They have been *denied basic labour market* rights such as workers' status, minimum wages and social security.
- The *three basic issues* they face are
  - An identity as "workers" just like any government employee
  - Minimum wages
  - Social security
- State governments have not always been kind to striking workers.

    - Maharashtra Essential Services Maintenance Act, 2017 *curbed the right of Anganwadis* in the State to go on strike.
- The Supreme Court in 2006, held that as *Anganwadis do not hold a post under a statute*, it did not consider them as workers.

Judicial Recognition of Scheme Based Workers
• The Supreme Court in 2022 granted that Anganwadis are *eligible for gratuity* under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972. • In 2024, the Gujarat High Court directed the *central and State governments to jointly frame a policy* under which the AWWs and AWHs could be regularised as Class III and Class IV grade State employees - Until then, they would be paid minimum wages (Class III and Class IV, respectively).

Reference

The Hindu| Scheme Based Workers

Trans fats and its Regulation

***Prelims**: Current events of national and international importance | Social Development*

Why in News?

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) at the 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva, officially recognised 4 countries for their outstanding leadership in eliminating industrially produced trans fats from their national food supplies.

Trans fats
• They are ***unsaturated fats*** present in both *industrial and natural sources.* • They are also known as *trans-fatty acids (TFA).* • Both industrial and naturally occurring trans fats are equally detrimental to health. • **Industrially produced trans fats** – They are commonly found in *baked goods* like biscuits, pies, fried foods, margarine, vegetable shortening and Vanaspati ghee, among others. • They contribute to *over 278,000 global deaths annually.*

- **Recognised countries** – ***Austria, Norway, Oman and Singapore***.
- The Director-General of the WHO, presented *validation certificates* to countries that effectively implemented best-practice policies and maintained robust monitoring and enforcement.

  *Countries must restrict trans fats to 2 grammes per 100 grammes of total fat or prohibiting partially hydrogenated oils, and also show strict enforcement and monitoring to qualify for the **WHO's validation programme.***

- **Targets** – WHO had set a target of covering countries that account for at least 90% of

the global trans-fat burden with *best-practice polices by the end of 2025* and at least 70% within each region.
    - By May 2025, such policies were adopted by 60 countries, covering 46% of the world's population.
- **Challenges** – When WHO launched its call to eliminate industrially produced trans fats in 2018, *only 11 countries representing just 6% of the global population had adopted* best-practice policies.
- **Regulation in India** – In 2022, it enforced regulations *limiting trans fats in oils & fats* used in food products to no more than 2 %.
- The Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) 2nd Amendment Regulations, 2021 placed India among the countries with best-practice trans-fat elimination policies.
- After Thailand, India was also led implementation of best practice policies in trans-fat elimination in Asia.
- **Significance of reducing trans-fat** - It can *eliminate the cause of 7% of cardiovascular diseases globally* and can help in achieving SDG of *reducing premature death from noncommunicable diseases* by a third by 2030.

Reference

Down To Earth| Recognising Best Practices of Reducing Trans fats

Pandemic Treaty (WHO Pandemic Agreement)

Why in news?

Recently, member states of World Health Organization (WHO) have adopted a Pandemic Agreement without opposition at the World Health Assembly in Geneva after over three years of negotiations and 13 rounds of meetings.

- **Pandemic Treaty –** It is the world's **first Pandemic Agreement** to ensure better global cooperation, preparedness, and response to future pandemics.
- **Purpose of the Pandemic Treaty**
    - To prepare nations with better systems and resources.
    - To respond more effectively and equitably during global health emergencies.
- **Equity and multilateralism focus –** The treaty aims to **address inequities** seen during COVID-19 (e.g., vaccine hoarding by rich nations).
- It emphasizes solidarity between nations and support for **low- and middle-income countries**.

*The WHO Pandemic Agreement is the **second international legal agreement** negotiated under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution. The first was the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was adopted in 2003 and came into force in 2005.*

Core Components of the Agreement

- **Pathogen access and benefit sharing system** – It includes a formal mechanism where countries sharing virus samples receive guaranteed benefits.
- It also establishes a coordinated financial mechanism for implementation.
- Up to **20% of medical products of pharma companies** will be reserved for WHO with,
    - 10% donated by pharmaceutical companies
    - 10% offered at affordable prices
- **Equitable resource Distribution –** Benefit sharing system will ensure a fair access to diagnostics, vaccines, and treatments during future pandemics.
- The distribution of these products to countries will be based on public health risk and need, with particular attention to the needs of developing countries.
- **Technology transfer** – It facilitates transfer of technology, knowledge, and skills on "**mutually agreed terms**".
- It aims to build geographically diverse R&D and manufacturing capacity.
- **Healthcare worker protection** - All countries agreed to a provision for **better protection and support** for frontline health workers in future pandemics.

Limitations

- The **United States** is **not a part of the final agreement**, having withdrawn from WHO under the Trump administration.
- The treaty is **non-binding**; there are **no penalties** if countries **fail to comply**, limiting enforceability.
- Negotiations on operational aspects, like how samples and products will be shared, are still ongoing.

Reference

The Indian Express| WHO adopts first global pandemic treaty

Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revised draft guidelines for investments by regulated entities (REs) in Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), aiming to enhance oversight and prevent potential misuse.

A Regulated Entity (RE) is any financial institution that operates under the regulatory framework of the RBI, E.g., Banks, NBFCs.

- **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)** - It is a **privately pooled investment scheme** that collects funds from investors (Indian or foreign) to invest in accordance with a

defined investment policy.

- AIFs are **not mutual funds** and are **regulated by SEBI** under the SEBI (AIF) Regulations, 2012.
- AIFs can be invested in **unlisted companies**, **real estate**, **start-ups**, and **other non-traditional assets**.
- **High Net-Worth Individuals (HNIs)** and **institutional investors** are the main participants.
- **It is not available to retail investors**.
- **Types of AIFs** – There are three categories of AIF as per SEBI,
- **Category I AIF** – Promotes start-ups and socially beneficial sectors.
    - Examples: Venture capital funds, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) funds, infrastructure funds.
    - Enjoys certain tax and regulatory incentives.
- **Category II AIF** – Risk free and do not undertake leverage except for day-to-day operational needs.
    - Examples: Private equity funds, debt funds.
- **Category III AIF** – Employ diverse or complex trading strategies.
    - Examples: Hedge funds, PIPE (Private Investment in Public Equity) funds.
- **Significance –** It helps to **channel capital** into **non-traditional sectors** and facilitates **growth funding** for start-ups and MSMEs.

Recent RBI Proposals

- **Investment caps** – A single RE can invest a **maximum of 10%** in a **single AIF scheme**.
- Collective investment by all REs in a single AIF scheme is capped at **15%**.
- **Threshold-based regulation** – RE's must set aside ***100% of that investment as a safety buffer*** if,
    - The investment in AIF is more than 5% and,
    - The RE has downstream exposure to a company.

Downstream exposure means that if a RE provides loan through AIF to a company that already financially related to it.

- **Exemptions** - Equity shares and certain convertible instruments are excluded from the downstream exposure restrictions.

References

1. SEBI| Alternative Investment Funds
2. The Indian Express| RBI revises rules for investment in AIF

Pilot Apprenticeship Scheme for Northeast India

Why in news?

Recently Union Government launches a pilot apprenticeship scheme for northeast youth.

- The scheme was launched in pilot basis to provide **structured, paid, and high-quality apprenticeship** opportunities to youth across Northeast region.
- **Launched by** - Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- In collaboration with **Mizoram Government.**
- **Objectives** – To promote **apprenticeship among youth in the Northeast.**
- To address **mobility and access barriers** to training and jobs.
- **Implementing agencies**
  - Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (Guwahati)
  - National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)
  - Supported by: State Skill Missions, Regional Directorates, and local institutions.

Key features

- **Financial benefits -** Extra Rs 1,500/month for 12 months in addition to the existing Rs 1,500/month under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS).
  - The incentives can be availed for apprentices **within or outside** the North East.
  - The incentives are transferred through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- **Target beneficiaries** – **26,000 youth** from Northeast India
- The scheme is designed with special focus on **higher female participation.**

Significance

- It offers **real industry exposure** through hands-on factory and sector experience.
- It encourages **industry participation** in youth training and hiring.
- It promotes region-specific skilling for equitable development and supports inclusive growth and future-ready workforce.
- It aligns with India's vision of "Ashta Lakshmi" & "Viksit Bharat, Viksit North East.

Reference

The Hindu| Centre launches pilot apprenticeship scheme for northeast

One Liners 22-05-2025

History, Art and Culture

Kandha Women Abandon Facial Tattoo Tradition

Recently, Kandha women in Odisha's Kandhamal district are increasingly abandoning their centuries-old facial tattooing tradition, once a protective measure against exploitation, due to changing societal norms and awareness.

• **Kandha Tribe -** or Khond are Odisha's largest tribal community, primarily in Kandhamal, Rayagada, Kalahandi, and Koraput.
• **Language** - They speak Kui or Kuvi, Dravidian languages.
• **Sub-groups include** - Desia, Dongria, and Kutia Kandha Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
• **Origin of Tattoo Tradition -** Facial tattooing began as a protective measure to deter sexual exploitation by landlords and colonial forces, making women appear unattractive.
• **Cultural Significance -** The practice evolved into a crucial cultural identity marker, with tattoos becoming essential for marital eligibility and community acceptance.
• **Painful Ritual -** Girls, typically around 10, underwent hours of painful facial piercing with crude tools, causing severe swelling and infection. Silver earrings also denoted marital status.
• **Current Status -** The tradition has virtually vanished among women under 40 due to increased awareness and educational interventions since the 1990s, as younger generations no longer find it necessary.

Geography

Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki Erupts on Flores Island

Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki erupted twice on May 19, 2025, prompting Indonesian authorities to raise the alert to the highest level (Level 4) due to increased seismic activity and a significant ash plume.
• **Location & Features:** Located on Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, Mount Lewotobi Laki-Laki (5,197 feet) is paired with the taller, calmer Mount Lewotobi Perempuan.
• **Eruption -** Eruption sent ash clouds of 0.7 miles (1.1 km) above the peak. Previous eruptions in November 2024 caused fatalities and flight disruptions.
• **Safety Measures -** Residents are advised to wear masks, avoid a 3-mile crater radius, and be aware of potential lahars.
• **Aviation Impact -** The Volcanic Ash Advisory Center (VAAC) in Darwin issued a red alert, indicating major ash emissions posing significant aviation risks.
• **Geological Context -** Indonesia, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, has over 130 active volcanoes, making such events.

Polity & Governance

India Launches 'Sagar Mein Samman' for Women in Maritime

Recently, Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways launched the 'Sagar Mein Samman' initiative in Mumbai.

• **Objectives -** The initiative seeks to promote inclusivity, ensure safety, provide equal opportunities, and offer skill development and leadership training for women, dismantling gender barriers in the maritime profession.

• **Growth in Women Seafarers -** India has seen a 649% increase in women seafarers since 2014, rising from 341 to 2,557 in 2024, supported by government financial assistance.

• **Policy Features -** The policy includes strategic planning, training, research, and community outreach. It offers incentives for shipping companies to hire women and provides scholarships for their training.

• **Future Goals -** The initiative targets 12% female representation in technical maritime roles by 2030, aligning with national and UN Sustainable Development Goals for gender equality.

• **International Alignment -** 'Sagar Mein Samman' aligns with the International Maritime Organisation's mission for gender inclusion and supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals, promoting gender equality across sectors.

India Launches e-Zero FIR for Cyber Financial Fraud

Recently, India has launched the e-Zero FIR initiative, announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, to expedite FIR registration for high-value cyber financial fraud cases. The pilot project began in Delhi and will expand nationwide.

• **e-Zero FIR** - This initiative allows victims of cyber financial crimes exceeding Rs 10 lakh to report incidents via the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) or helpline 1930. These complaints are automatically converted into an FIR, eliminating the need for police station visits.

• **Benefits -** Automated FIR registration would streamlines legal procedures, reduces response time, and facilitates swift freezing of fraudulent transactions, thereby enhancing cybercrime investigation effectiveness.

• **National Cybersecurity Focus** - The e-Zero FIR initiative underscores the Government of India's commitment to strengthening cybersecurity and creating a secure digital environment nationwide.

• **Role of I4C** - The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C), established by the Ministry of Home Affairs, is the central agency for combating cybercrime in India, providing tools and resources for law enforcement.

• **Future Expansion** - Currently in its pilot phase, the e-Zero FIR initiative is slated for nationwide rollout, with plans to further enhance India's cybersecurity grid and foster citizen trust in the digital economy.

International Relations and Issues

China-Cambodia "Golden Dragon-2025" Joint Military Exercise

The "Golden Dragon-2025" exercise, the seventh iteration, commenced in mid-May 2025. Notably, it's the first to integrate operations from the China-Cambodia Ream Port Joint Support and Training Center, signifying deeper military cooperation.

• **Participants & Location -** China's PLA and Cambodian Armed Forces are participating, with operations spanning land and maritime areas in Cambodia, including Port Ream.

• **Themes -** Focusing on counter-terrorism, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), and peace and cooperation.

• **Features -** The drill involves adaptive training, command drills, and live-force exercises. It showcases advanced technology like drone swarms and FPV drones.

• **Aims to** - Enhance joint land-sea-air combat capabilities, tactical coordination, and strengthen mutual military trust.

• **Strategic Significance -** "Golden Dragon-2025" underscores the deep military trust between China and Cambodia, bolstering China's strategic presence in Southeast Asia.

Sudan Appoints First PM Since Civil War

Recently, Sudan's army chief Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan appointed Kamil al-Taib Idris as PM, the 1st since Abdalla Hamdok's 2022 resignation. This follows the military's recent recapture of Khartoum from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) aiming to restore civilian governance.

• **Conflict Background -** The civil war, erupting in April 2023, stems from a power struggle between Sudan's military and the paramilitary RSF, spreading conflict and causing widespread humanitarian crisis.

• **Humanitarian Impact -** The conflict has resulted in over 20,000 deaths, 13 million displaced, and 25 million facing severe food insecurity, affecting half of Sudan's population.

• **Kamil al-Taib Idris -** A respected, neutral legal expert and diplomat, Idris previously served at Sudan's UN mission and the UN International Law Commission.

• **Appointment Objectives -** The appointment aims to form a transitional government leading to elections and civilian rule, and to counter the RSF's Nairobi charter for a parallel government.

• **Expert Opinion -** Analysts believe Idris's non-partisan background enhances his acceptance across various factions, including RSF supporters.

India's rank on the World Press Freedom Index 2025

India's rank improved to 151st out of 180 nations in 2025, up from 159th, reflecting ongoing efforts to enhance media freedom despite existing challenges.

• **World Press Freedom Index -** Published annually by Reporters Without Borders, the index assesses 180 countries based on political, economic, and social conditions affecting press freedom, using responses from over 5,000 individuals.

• **Top and Bottom Rankings** - Norway leads the index, followed by Estonia and the Netherlands. Eritrea ranks last, with North Korea, China, and Syria also at the bottom due to severe restrictions.

• **Challenges to Global Press Freedom** - The report highlights global challenges, including economic pressures on news organizations, political instability (e.g., Palestine, Tunisia), and media ownership concentration, leading to lack of diversity and self-censorship.

• **India's Media Landscape** - Despite a vibrant media environment with numerous TV channels and publications, India still faces press freedom issues. The improved ranking suggests a positive shift, though challenges persist.

• **Factors Affecting Rankings** - Political influence, economic viability of news outlets, and legal frameworks governing press freedom significantly impact a country's ranking, with restrictive laws often leading to lower positions.

Security

India's High-Altitude Platform (HAP) Prototype Completes Flight Tests

Recently, India's indigenous High-Altitude Platform (HAP) prototype, designed by National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), successfully completed pre-monsoon flight tests using a certified autopilot system, marking a significant step in its development.

HAP - Is a solar-powered, unmanned stratospheric aircraft operating at 17-22 km altitude, bridging the gap between terrestrial systems and satellites.

Developed by - National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), Bengaluru.

HAP aims - To provide persistent aerial coverage for border patrolling, surveillance, telecommunication relays, and meteorological platforms over sensitive and remote terrains.

Key Features - The solar-powered HAP prototype features a certified autopilot system for autonomous, fail-safe flight. It achieved 24,000 ft in tests, with a full-scale version targeting 65,000 ft and a 10kg payload capacity.

Applications - HAP has diverse applications including defense (surveillance, intelligence), meteorology (radiosonde deployment, monsoon measurements), telecommunications (temporary 5G), geoinformatics (mapping), and crowd monitoring.

Science

Dr. M. R. Srinivasan

Dr. M. R. Srinivasan, a pioneering Indian nuclear scientist and mechanical engineer, passed away on May 20, 2025, in Udhagamandalam, Tamil Nadu, at 95.

• **Key Roles -** He was instrumental in India's nuclear energy program, serving as former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and founding Chairman of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL).

• **Career Highlights -** Joining the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in 1955, he worked with Dr. Homi Bhabha on Apsara, India's first nuclear reactor. He became Chief Project Engineer at Madras Atomic Power Station and later led the Atomic Energy Commission and NPCIL, overseeing the development of 18 nuclear power units.

• **Beyond Nuclear Energy -** Dr. Srinivasan also served as a senior advisor at the IAEA, a member of India’s Planning Commission, and on the National Security Advisory Board.

• **Awards & Legacy -** Recipient of Padma Shri (1984), Padma Bhushan (1990), and Padma Vibhushan (2015), his visionary leadership laid the foundation for India’s self-reliant nuclear energy program.

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Prostate Cancer

Recently, Prostate cancer is a global health issue for men, highlighted by recent diagnoses like Joe Biden's. Increased awareness, early diagnosis, and effective management strategies are vital for combating this aggressive disease.

• **Prostate Cancer -** Originates in the walnut-sized prostate gland, producing seminal fluid. It is the most common cancer in men across 112 countries, accounting for 15% of all male cancers, and ranks second in male cancer mortality, after lung cancer.

• **Risk Factors -** Age is a primary risk factor, increasing with advancing years. Family history also plays a role. Obesity contributes, with studies showing overweight men at higher risk. African American men face a higher risk compared to other ethnic groups.

• **Symptoms -** Early stages often show no symptoms. When present, symptoms include frequent, difficult, or painful urination; blood in urine or semen; lower back pain; and painful ejaculation. Early diagnosis is crucial.

• **Stages of Prostate Cancer -** Staging uses the Gleason score (2-10). Scores below 5 are non-cancerous. Stages 1 and 2 are localized, Stage 3 involves nearby tissue spread, and Stage 4 is advanced, metastasized cancer.

• **Treatment -** Depends on stage and health. Options include active surveillance for slow-growing cancers, surgery (prostatectomy), radiation, hormone therapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy.

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