

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Supreme Court dismissed a habeas corpus plea by a 70-year-old man claiming his two daughters were being held captive by the Isha Foundation.

➔ The court ruled the women were living there voluntarily as monks, based on their own assurances.

SC closes *habeas corpus* case against Isha Foundation

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday closed *habeas corpus* proceedings initiated by a 70-year-old man accusing Isha Foundation, founded by Jaggi Vasudev alias Sadhguru, of holding his two daughters, aged 42 and 39, captives.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud terminated the proceedings, which began in the Madras High Court and reached the top court, by noting that the two women had personally assured the court in a video conference that they were living in the Isha Foundation as monks of their own free will. The women had conveyed the same thing to a Tamil Nadu Police team which had talked to them separately.

“You have to accept the fact that they are 42 and 39... You cannot control their lives... We are also parents... Inter-personal relationships between parents and grown-up children are never to be governed by le-

gal suits, injunctions, and actions, you have to gain their confidence. They are not minors in a custody battle,” the Chief Justice addressed the father who was present in the courtroom with his counsel.

“These proceedings are not to be used to malign individuals and institutions... The moment we tend to elaborate on anything wider in today’s times there are handles used by third parties to malign...” the Chief Justice said orally.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, present in court, said these were clickbait used to entice viewers.

The court refused to delve into concerns raised in a report submitted by the Tamil Nadu Police about medical equipment and the functioning of the Internal Complaints Committee to address sexual harassment complaints at the Isha Yoga Centre in Coimbatore. “Please ask the State to engage with the organisation,” the Chief Justice told senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Tamil Nadu.

Habeas Corpus: Concept

- **Definition:** Habeas corpus is a legal remedy enshrined under Article 32 and Article 226 of the Indian Constitution. It is a Latin term meaning "you may have the body."
- **Purpose:** It protects individuals against unlawful detention by ensuring that the detained person is presented before the court to justify the detention's legality.
- **Constitutional Safeguard:** Habeas corpus enforces fundamental rights such as the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21.
- **Jurisdiction:** The writ can be filed in both Supreme Court and High Courts.

Constitutional Writs Under Article 32:

- Article 32 of the Indian Constitution empowers citizens to approach the courts for the enforcement of their fundamental rights. It includes five types of writs:
 1. **Habeas Corpus:** Ensures the release of a person unlawfully detained
 2. **Mandamus:** Commands a public official or body to perform a duty they are legally obligated to perform.
 3. **Prohibition:** Issued by higher courts to prevent lower courts from exceeding their jurisdiction.
 4. **Certiorari:** Directs a lower court or tribunal to transfer a case to a higher court or correct errors in its proceedings.
 5. **Quo Warranto:** Challenges the legal validity of a person holding a public office without proper qualifications.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence will deliberate on the preparedness of the Indian armed forces for hybrid warfare, including cyber and non-kinetic threats.

House panel to discuss readiness to deal with 'non-kinetic warfare'

Dinakar Peri
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Indian armed forces' preparedness to deal with "hybrid warfare" is one of the 17 subjects that the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence has narrowed down for deliberations for the year.

According to informed sources, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, a member of the committee, spoke extensively on the growing danger of "non-kinetic warfare" citing the examples of ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, where these methods have been deployed. He contended that the future wars will be fought using these tools and urged chairman and BJP MP Radha Mohan Singh, at the committee's first meeting on October 15, to ensure that the parliamentary panel closely investigates the Army's preparedness to face these threats.

Several other members concurred with the view, citing the recent spate of pager blasts in Lebanon, which is an example of a "non-kinetic warfare". As per the Lok Sabha bulletin



Non-kinetic warfare goes beyond the usual military tactics and can involve electronic and information warfare. REUTERS

dated October 16, "preparedness of the armed forces in terms of hybrid warfare including cyber, kinetic and non-kinetic warfare and anti-drone capabilities," is listed among the 17 subjects that the panel will discuss.

Evolving concept

Kinetic warfare typically means military employing a range of weapons. Non-kinetic warfare is an evolving concept, it goes beyond the usual military tactics and can involve electronic warfare, cyber, information, psychological and economic among others. Importantly, it can involve non-military stakeholders too. With technological progress, many believe that the non-kinetic warfare can turn out to be deadlier than the traditional

methods and conflicts may be won by non-kinetic means even before a bullet is fired. For example, a massive cyber or malware attack on critical infrastructure of a country such as power grids and hospitals can cripple a nation. Such cyberattacks have been seen globally.

In the domain of counter-drone technologies, the armed forces have been looking to induct a range of kinetic and non-kinetic solutions to neutralise drones and drone swarms, which have emerged as major disruption in warfare as seen in Ukraine. While kinetic options are to physically shoot and destroy the drones, non-kinetic options are jamming them or taking control of their operation, using laser or electro-magnetic waves

to disrupt their operations.

The House panel will also assess the "strategic operational preparedness of the defence forces in view of the current international security scenario, including border security," which will involve reviewing the prolonged stand-off on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China.

Indigenous production

Among other topics, the panel will be reviewing "indigenous defence production", "resettlement policies, healthcare facilities and avenues for ex-servicemen" and "assessment of next of kin policy in the armed forces."

Last month, under an initiative pushed by Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff conducted a first of its kind tri-services "future warfare" course which the Defence Ministry termed a rank agnostic course for Major Generals to Majors and their equivalent level officers from other services.

It is intended to acquaint the officers with the operational and technological aspects of modern warfare.

Non-Kinetic Warfare:

- Use of non-military means: Involves actions that are not directly violent, such as economic sanctions, diplomacy, and propaganda.
- **Goal of achieving objectives without physical conflict:** Seeks to influence behaviour or achieve political goals without resorting to armed force.
- **Examples:** US sanctions against Iran, international pressure on North Korea to denuclearize.

Hybrid Warfare:

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- ➡ Blending of conventional and unconventional tactics: Combines traditional military force with cyberattacks, information warfare, and other non-military tools.
- ➡ **Goal of destabilisation:** Aims to erode an adversary's capabilities and undermine their will to fight.
- ➡ **Examples:** Alleged interference of Russia in the 2016 US election, China's use of economic leverage and propaganda.



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Saint Ramanuja was a prominent philosopher and theologian in the 11th and 12th centuries, known for his contributions to the Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) school of Vedanta.

- ➔ His teachings emphasised devotion to Lord Narayana, the importance of grace, and the accessibility of divine connection for all devotees.

Teachings of Saint Ramanuja:

- ➔ Lord Narayana, along with His divine consort Mahalakshmi, is recognized as the Supreme Being beyond human comprehension and perception.
- ➔ Worshipping God can be easily performed in temples and at home, as His divine essence remains the same everywhere.
- ➔ All sentient and insentient beings are part of Lord Narayana's divine body, promoting love and eliminating hatred among people.
- ➔ Devotees should focus their actions on pleasing God, acknowledging that they are merely instruments of His divine will and purpose.
- ➔ **There are two primary paths to attain God:** bhakti, which is devotion, and prapatti, which is surrender through an acharya.
- ➔ In Sri Vaikunta, all devotees experience divine ecstasy equally, with no discrimination among them, enjoying the bliss of God.
- ➔ Moksha, or liberation, can only be attained after leaving the earthly realm, leading to eternal union with the god.

More About Saint Ramanuja

- ➔ Saint Ramanuja (1017-1137 CE) was a prominent Indian philosopher and theologian in the Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) tradition of Vedanta.
- ➔ He was born in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu. Ramanuja emphasised devotion (bhakti) to Lord Vishnu and advocated for accessibility of spirituality to all, regardless of caste.
- ➔ He authored key texts, including the "Sri Bhashya," which provides commentary on the Brahma Sutras, and the "Bhagavad Gita."
- ➔ His teachings focused on the relationship between the individual soul (jiva) and the Supreme Being (Brahman), emphasising love and devotion.
- ➔ Ramanuja is celebrated for establishing the tradition of the Alvars and promoting temple worship and community rituals.

FAITH

Ramanuja's seven guidelines

Thirukkudandhai Sri Venkatesh said in a discourse that though Saint Ramanuja lived a thousand years ago, the Acharya's guidance is still relevant today and easy to follow. He listed seven guidelines.

Lord Narayana, with His divine consort Mahalakshmi, is the Supreme Being. With our limited senses, we can't realise the unlimited God, nor can we through our inference (*anumanam*). People can easily worship God in temples and at home. He has the same power as in Srivai-kuntam.

He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent and resides in all beings. All sentients and insentients form part of His divine body. If people remember this noble thought, they will not develop hatred towards others. Lord Krishna says those devoted to Indra or other divinities worship Him because all existing things constitute His body (*Yepanya Devatha Bhaktha*: -CH 9-Verse 23).

All sounds and words denote Him only. Whatever deeds we do should be to please God. We must remember that He uses us as instruments. "Focus your mind on Me and be My devotee. Engage your mind and regard Me as the supreme goal. You will attain Me." (*Manmana Bava*-CH-9-Verse 34.) There are two means to attain Him – bhakti and prapatti. Bhakti yoga takes longer, and people need to observe karma and jnana yoga also for the same. Prapatti or surrender through an acharya is the easiest.

In the realm of His world, Sri Vaikunta, the enjoyment of divine ecstasy by ordinary people is the same as that enjoyed by the acharyas, and there is no discrimination. People can attain moksha only after leaving this world.

In News : Mera Hou Chongba Festival

Recently, people in Manipur celebrated the Mera Hou Chongba festival symbolizing unity amongst the indigenous people.



About Mera Hou Chongba Festival:

- It is an annual festival observed in order to strengthen the cordial bond between the indigenous communities living in hills and valley people.
- It is only a festival wherein both hills and valley indigenous communities are observed together in the State
- This festival has been celebrated right from the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in the first Century C.E.
- Every year, in the month of Mera, which falls in September/October, this festival is celebrated, in which all the village Chiefs or Khullakpas and peoples from the surrounding hill areas fully take part
- The royal palace officials share the same dias as the multiple village chiefs from communities such as Mao, Kabui, Zeme, Kom, Liangmei, and many more.
- The main function of Mera Hou Chongba festival is the exchange of gifts between the King and village Chiefs and performance of cultural shows and sports.

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In News : Soliga Tribe

The issue of clean drinking water remains a major challenge for the tribal communities in Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka, especially in the villages inhabited by the Soliga tribes.



About Soliga Tribe:

- ▶ The Soliga, also spelt Solega, are a group of indigenous, forest-dwelling people found mostly in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- ▶ The term "Soliga" literally translates to "children of bamboo", which reflects the tribe's relationship with nature and their belief that they too have emerged from it.
- ▶ They reside in the peripheral forest areas near Biligiri Rangana Hills and Male Mahadeshwara Hills.
- ▶ They are the first tribal community living inside the core area of a tiger reserve in India (Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve) to get their forest rights officially recognised by a court of law.

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- ➔ According to 2011 Census, the population of Soliga is about 33,871 in Karnataka and 5,965 in Tamil Nadu.
- ➔ **Language:** The Dravidian language sholaga is spoken by the Soliga. They also speak Kannada and Tamil.
- ➔ The Soligas live in single-room huts, built of bamboo and mud.
- ➔ **Economy:**
 - The traditional economy of the Soliga is mostly based on shifting cultivation and collection of minor forest produce.
 - Honey is an important part of the diet for the Soliga people, who still forage large parts of their food from the biodiversity-rich Ghats.
 - The Soligas believe in coexisting with the environment and have indigenous ways of using nature to make unique utility products, such as the 'jottai', which is a cup made out of leaves.
- ➔ **Religion:** Along with adhering to Hindu customs, the Soliga people practice naturism and animism.

A perilous highway to salvation in the Himalayas

The 900-kilometre long, 12-metre wide, two-lane Char Dham Highway Project to boost religious tourism to four shrines will end up as an endeavour with catastrophic consequences for the mountain ecology. The conclusions of a scientific paper written recently by a group of authors led by Jürgen Mey of the Institute of Environmental Science and Geography, University of Potsdam, Germany, confirm the worst fears expressed by the experts. This supposedly all-weather road project, at an outlay of ₹12,000 crore, was initiated despite intense opposition by environmental organisations in Uttarakhand, who called it unscientific.

Domino effect

The paper presents the study results of fully or partially road-blocking landslides between Rishikesh and Joshimath, along National Highway (NH-7) in Uttarakhand. Based on instances of more than 300 landslides along the 250 km-long corridor after exceptionally high rainfall between September and October 2022, the study identified “309 fully or partially road-blocking landslides along the 247 km long road, which amounts to an average landslide density of 1.25 landslides per kilometre”.

While identifying variables such as slope angle, rainfall amount, and lithology as the controlling factors, the study singles out “the road-widening [as] having a doubling impact on the road-blocking landslides”. The construction has now proved to be the prime cause of landslides, whose occurrences have doubled over the years. Deaths and accidents on the Char Dham road have become a daily occurrence during the pilgrimage season. This conclusion supports the earlier expert committee reports – overruled by the authorities – that had flagged improper construction practices during the road widening work in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.

The researchers have also predicted an uptick in summer monsoon precipitation due to elevation-dependent warming in the years to come. Thus, landslides and fatalities will become more frequent as climate change prediction models suggest more frequent extreme rainfall events. The study underscores that important environmental caveats must be respected before commencing any mammoth engineering project in the Indian Himalayas.

The authorities put forth the reason for wanting “smoother” and “faster all-weather” connectivity for pilgrim tourists from the plains and the armed forces and armaments, but the engineering interventions have been done with scant regard to the local geology and environment. The government has ignored its original policy framework recommending “best practice” norms for infrastructural expansion in mountainous regions to minimise the negative impact on the mountain ecosystems and landscapes.



C.P. Rajendran

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There is growing scientific evidence that the Char Dham Highway Project will have catastrophic consequences for the mountain ecology

The project, which was initiated under the ‘Char Dham Pariyojana’, is in fundamental violation of all environmental norms and conservation strategies that need to be followed in the Himalayas.

The government used a technical loophole and divided the project into 50-plus smaller projects to bypass environmental clearance and impact assessment reports. Calling the project a ‘geological and ecological fraud’, the petitioners have argued that the roads were longer than 100 km in some stretches and would have a cumulative impact on the whole region. Land encroachment combined with the blasting and the cutting of slopes for developmental projects causes additional stress on a fragile ecosystem. One accepts that roads are the lifeline of remote mountainous regions, but such megaprojects must fully consider the region’s environmental fragility.

Though the project began as a tourism project, it was finally defended in the Supreme Court of India as a defence-related requirement for moving troops and armaments, ignoring the point that the defence forces can airlift troops and heavy artillery during emergencies. The Court initially favouring a narrower intermediate road width for the highways (5.5 m), based on the recommendation of an expert committee appointed in 2019 and a Ministry of Road Transport and Highways’ circular of 2018. But the Court finally permitted the Union Government to go ahead with the project on widening the hill roads from a national security angle.

No scientific assessment

It is a matter of concern that such massive projects are getting the go-ahead without any scientific assessment especially in an unstable and fragile region such as the Indian Himalayas. A key question is this: is mountain morphology, with steep slopes and sharp gradients, easily amenable to human engineering? Unlike the hinterland in the mountains, the steep gradients of the Uttarakhand Himalaya or the Himachal Himalaya make them dynamically heterogeneous in terms of climatic variables and hydrological and tectonic processes at every turn of the mountain path.

A widened road faces problems now as it is constantly blocked by recurrent landslides. It is most likely that this project will end up not being what it was envisioned to be. Not only would the movement of troops or armaments be delayed in critical moments but also much time and resources would have to be used to clear or reconstruct damaged road stretches. Year-wise statistics show a rise in the loss of human lives. In the last four years, 160 people have lost their life in landslide incidents in Uttarakhand, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

The entire region has been destabilised due to massive construction activities. Ground subsidence is now recognised as a “silent

disaster” in many parts of the Himalayas. In a study published in Scientific Reports this year, widely reported land deformation in Joshimath town is being attributed to uncontrolled anthropogenic activities, infrastructural development and inadequate drainage systems. Recently, it has been reported that the Tungnath temple in the Rudrapur district is facing serious issues such as subsidence, weakening foundation and shifting wall slates, which have caused water leakage especially during the rainy season.

Such incidents have not impacted the government’s thinking on its developmental models for such fragile areas. Unsurprisingly, the Border Roads Organisation is now seeking clearance to widen the Gangotri-Dharasu stretch in the fragile Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone, whose integrity is important for the ecology of the Ganga river near its origin.

The issue of local distress

According to Census 2011, of Uttarakhand’s 16,793 villages, 1,053 have no inhabitants, while another 405 have a population of less than 10 people. This situation must have been aggravated recently since large-scale infrastructural projects were brought into the hill State. Internal and external migration have led to depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas despite the State government’s initiatives in incentivising agriculture. Road widening, that promotes increased motorised tourism, will encourage entrepreneurs from the plains to set up hotels and business centres, often forcing the local people to opt for employment in the tourism industry rather than sticking to farming.

Environmental factors such as the depletion of water resources and other emerging hazards may have resulted in people leaving the agriculture sectors. With low returns from the land, farmers sell their lands to private entrepreneurs from the plains.

The State government is countering this trend by framing laws against selling land to outsiders, but this is a step that will not mitigate the local distress caused by human-induced environmental degradation. The State government claims that Uttarakhand’s GSDP has increased 1.3 times in 20 months and that the unemployment rate has decreased by 4.4% in one year. By its admission, people in the State have obtained more employment in tourism.

Making feel-good speeches on climate-change resilience in COP meetings while implementing disaster-prone infrastructure in the country’s most fragile area proves a double standard. The Himalayas face multifaceted environmental challenges that require well-thought-out sustainable pathways. The Union and State governments must scale down these ongoing massive construction programmes, which include dams, and formulate sound ecological solutions for the mess they have already created.

GS Paper 03 : Environment – Environmental pollution and degradation

(UPSC CSE (M) GS-1 2016) : “The Himalayas are highly prone to landslides.” Discuss the causes and suggest suitable measures of mitigation. (200 words/12.5m)

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Discuss the environmental challenges posed by large infrastructure projects like the Char Dham Highway in the ecologically sensitive Himalayan region. (150 Words /10 marks)

Context :

- The Char Dham Highway Project, aimed at boosting religious tourism in Uttarakhand, has led to increased landslides and environmental degradation due to unscientific road-widening practices.
- Experts and studies highlight the severe ecological consequences of such construction in fragile mountain regions.
- The government, however, justifies the project on national security grounds.

Introduction

- The 900-kilometre long, 12-metre wide, two-lane Char Dham Highway Project to boost religious tourism to four shrines will end up as an endeavour with catastrophic consequences for the mountain ecology.
- The conclusions of a scientific paper written recently by a group of authors led by Jürgen Mey of the Institute of Environmental Science and Geography, University of Potsdam, Germany, confirm the worst fears expressed by the experts.
- This supposedly all-weather road project, at an outlay of ₹12,000 crore, was initiated despite intense opposition by environmental organisations in Uttarakhand, who called it unscientific.

Domino effect

- **Overview of the study:** The paper presents the study results of fully or partially road-blocking landslides between Rishikesh and Joshimath, along National Highway (NH-7) in Uttarakhand.
- Based on instances of more than 300 landslides along the 250 km-long corridor after exceptionally high rainfall between September and October 2022, the study identified “309 fully or partially road-blocking landslides along the 247 km long road, which amounts to an average landslide density of 1.25 landslides per kilometre”.
- **Key variables identified:** While identifying variables such as slope angle, rainfall amount, and lithology as the controlling factors, the study singles out “the road-widening [as] having a doubling impact on the road-blocking landslides”.
 - The construction has now proved to be the prime cause of landslides, whose occurrences have doubled over the years.

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- Deaths and accidents on the Char Dham road have become a daily occurrence during the pilgrimage season.
- ➔ **Previous reports by experts:** his conclusion supports the earlier expert committee reports — overruled by the authorities — that had flagged improper construction practices during the road widening work in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.
- ➔ **Climate Change predictions:** The researchers have also predicted an uptick in summer monsoon precipitation due to elevation-dependent warming in the years to come.
 - Thus, landslides and fatalities will become more frequent as climate change prediction models suggest more frequent extreme rainfall events.
 - The study underscores that important environmental caveats must be respected before commencing any mammoth engineering project in the Indian Himalayas.
- ➔ **Government justifications:** The authorities put forth the reason for wanting “smoother” and “faster all-weather” connectivity for pilgrim tourists from the plains and the armed forces and armaments,
 - but the engineering interventions have been done with scant regard to the local geology and environment.
 - The government has ignored its original policy framework recommending “best practice” norms for infrastructural expansion in mountainous regions to minimise the negative impact on the mountain ecosystems and landscapes.

What have been the violations in the project?

- ➔ The project, which was initiated under the ‘Char Dham Pariyojana’, is in fundamental violation of all environmental norms and conservation strategies that need to be followed in the Himalayas.
- ➔ The government used a technical loophole and divided the project into 50-plus smaller projects to bypass environmental clearance and impact assessment reports.
- ➔ Calling the project a ‘geological and ecological fraud, the petitioners have argued that the roads were longer than 100 km in some stretches and would have a cumulative impact on the whole region.
- ➔ Land encroachment combined with the blasting and the cutting of slopes for developmental projects causes additional stress on a fragile ecosystem.
- ➔ One accepts that roads are the lifeline of remote mountainous regions, but such megaprojects must fully consider the region’s environmental fragility.

What has been the Supreme Courts intervention?

- ➔ **Defended by Supreme Court:** Though the project began as a tourism project, it was finally defended in the Supreme Court of India as a defence-related requirement for moving troops and armaments,
 - ignoring the point that the defence forces can airlift troops and heavy artillery during emergencies.

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- ➔ **Courts viewpoint:** The Court initially favouring a narrower intermediate road width for the highways (5.5 m), based on the recommendation of an expert committee appointed in 2019 and a Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' circular of 2018.
- ➔ **Courts permission:** But the Court finally permitted the Union Government to go ahead with the project on widening the hill roads from a national security angle.

No scientific assessment

- ➔ **Concerns Over massive projects:** It is a matter of concern that such massive projects are getting the go-ahead without any scientific assessment especially in an unstable and fragile region such as the Indian Himalayas.
- ➔ **A key question is this:** is mountain morphology, with steep slopes and sharp gradients, easily amenable to human engineering?
 - Unlike the hinterland in the mountains, the steep gradients of the Uttarakhand Himalaya or the Himachal Himalaya make them dynamically heterogeneous in terms of climatic variables and hydrological and tectonic processes at every turn of the mountain path.
- ➔ **Recurrent landslide issues:** A widened road faces problems now as it is constantly blocked by recurrent landslides.
 - It is most likely that this project will end up not being what it was envisioned to be.
 - Not only would the movement of troops or armaments be delayed in critical moments but also much time and resources would have to be used to clear or reconstruct damaged road stretches.
 - Year-wise statistics show a rise in the loss of human lives.
 - In the last four years, 160 people have lost their life in landslide incidents in Uttarakhand, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.
- ➔ **Impact of construction activities:** The entire region has been destabilised due to massive construction activities.
 - Ground subsidence is now recognised as a "silent disaster" in many parts of the Himalayas.
 - In a study published in Scientific Reports this year, widely reported land deformation in Joshimath town is being attributed to uncontrolled anthropogenic activities, infrastructural development and inadequate drainage systems.
 - Recently, it has been reported that the Tungnath temple in the Rudraprayag district is facing serious issues such as subsidence, weakening foundation and shifting wall slates, which have caused water leakage especially during the rainy season.
- ➔ **Government response to issues:** Unsurprisingly, the Border Roads Organisation is now seeking clearance to widen the Gangotri-Dharasu stretch in the fragile Bhagirathi Eco-Sensitive Zone, whose integrity is important for the ecology of the Ganga river near its origin.

The issue of local distress

- ➔ **Depopulation in Uttarakhand village:** According to Census 2011, of Uttarakhand's 16,793 villages, 1,053 have no inhabitants, while another 405 have a population of less than 10 people.

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- This situation must have been aggravated recently since large-scale infrastructural projects were brought into the hill State.
- ➔ **Impact of Migration:** Internal and external migration have led to depopulation and land abandonment in rural areas despite the State government's initiatives in incentivising agriculture.
- ➔ **Road widening and tourism effects:** Road widening, that promotes increased motorised tourism, will encourage entrepreneurs from the plains to set up hotels and business centres,
 - It is often forcing the local people to opt for employment in the tourism industry rather than sticking to farming.
 - **Environmental and economic factors:** Environmental factors such as the depletion of water resources and other emerging hazards may have resulted in people leaving the agriculture sectors.
 - With low returns from the land, farmers sell their lands to private entrepreneurs from the plains.

Way Forward

- ➔ The State government is countering this trend by framing laws against selling land to outsiders, but this is a step that will not mitigate the local distress caused by human-induced environmental degradation.
- ➔ The State government claims that Uttarakhand's GSDP has increased 1.3 times in 20 months and that the unemployment rate has decreased by 4.4% in one year. By its admission, people in the State have obtained more employment in tourism.

Conclusion

- ➔ Making feel-good speeches on climate-change resilience in COP meetings while implementing disaster-prone infrastructure in the country's most fragile area proves a double standard. The Himalayas face multifaceted environmental challenges that require well-thought-out sustainable pathways.
- ➔ The Union and State governments must scale down these ongoing massive construction programmes, which include dams, and formulate sound ecological solutions for the mess they have already created and it needs to be sustained.