

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

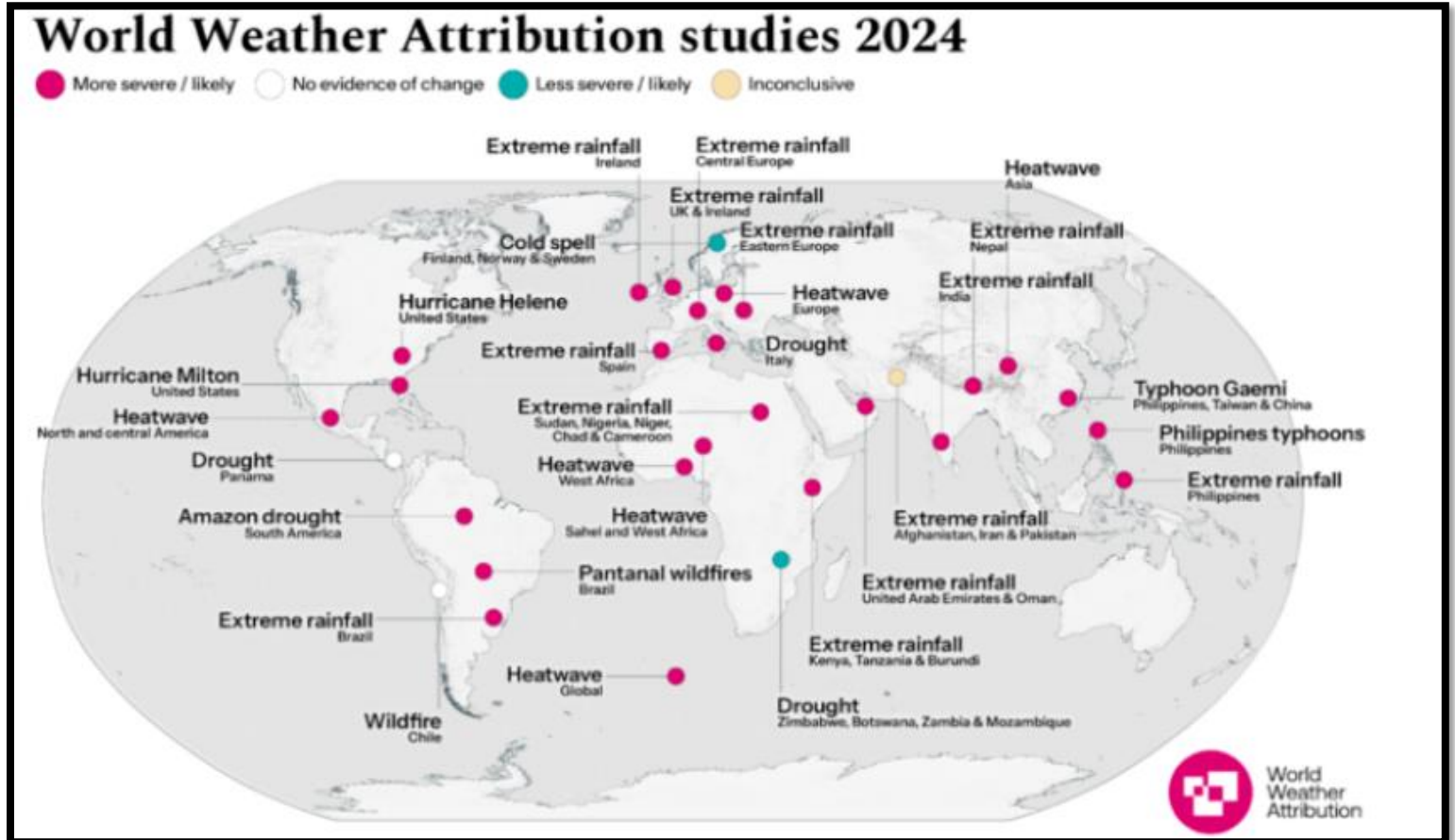
Saturday, 28 Dec , 2024

Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 04 Syllabus : GS 3 : Environment	Climate disasters in 2024 wreaked havoc worldwide, causing losses
Page 04 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	UNSC authorizes new peacekeeping mission in Somalia
In News	NHRC Action on Tribal Suicides in Kerala
In News	Wealth Tax
In News	Forest and Tree Cover Grows, Fire Incidents Fall
Page 06 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus : GS 2 : Social Justice – Education	Marginalised by caste, marginalised in education

Page : 04 : GS 3 : Environment – Environmental pollution and degradation

The year 2024 marked the hottest in history, with unprecedented climate disasters globally, fueled by rising temperatures and warmer oceans.



- ➔ Extreme weather events caused severe casualties, economic losses, and widespread displacement, showcasing the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

Overview of 2024 Climate Disasters

- ➔ 2024 witnessed unprecedented climate disasters across diverse regions, from impoverished areas to prosperous cities.
- ➔ It was the hottest year on record, with rising atmospheric and ocean temperatures fueling extreme weather events.
- ➔ Nearly every analyzed disaster was exacerbated by climate change, marking a dangerous new era of climate impacts.

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Impacts of Rising Temperatures

- Extreme heat led to severe casualties, particularly during events like pilgrimages and in countries like Thailand, India, and the U.S.
- High temperatures intensified droughts, wildfires, and hurricanes.

Flooding and Heavy Rainfall

- Warmer oceans and increased evaporation resulted in heavy rainfall and flooding across continents.
- Countries in Africa, Asia, and the Americas experienced historic floods, displacing millions and causing significant casualties.

Hurricanes and Cyclones

- Warmer ocean surfaces increased the energy and destructive potential of tropical cyclones and hurricanes.
- Regions like the Caribbean, the Philippines, and Mayotte faced multiple devastating storms.

Economic Toll and Consequences

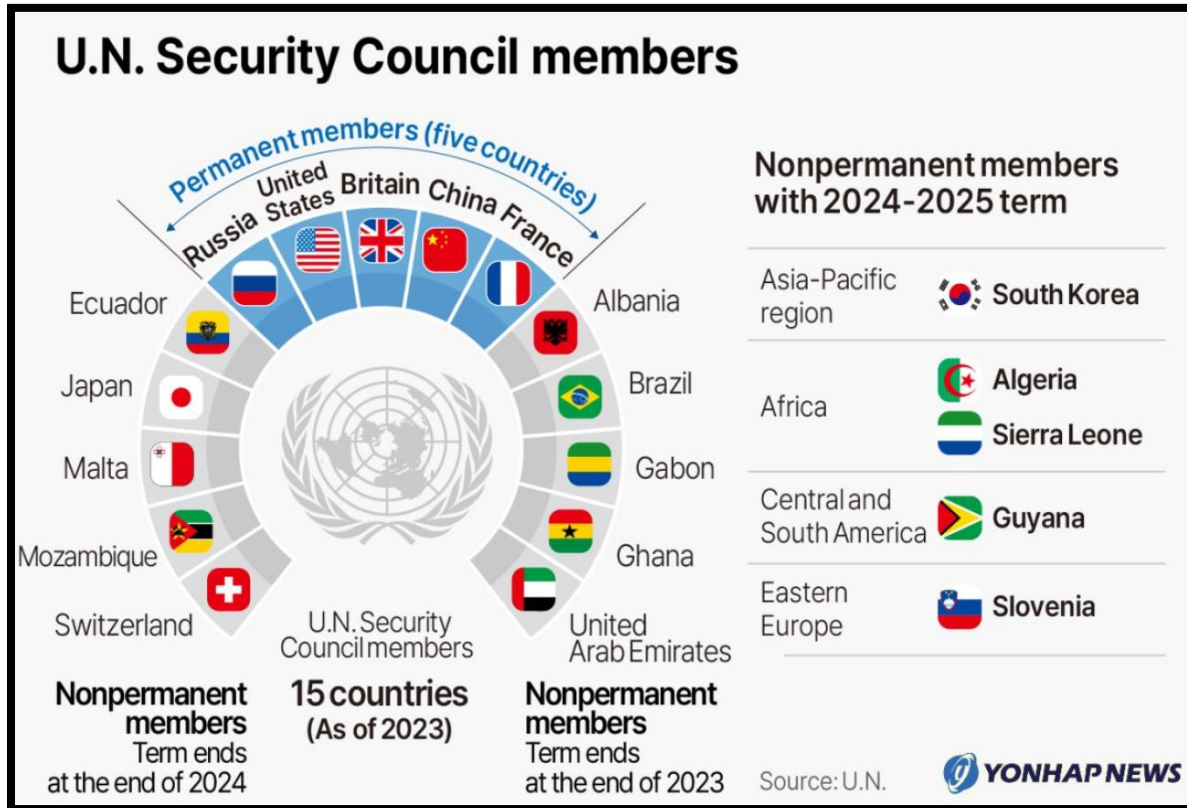
- Global damage from extreme weather reached \$310 billion.
- These disasters caused loss of life, displaced populations, and worsened poverty, with long-term impacts remaining immeasurable.

PYQ: Mains 2016

Ques : The frequency of urban floods due to high intensity rainfall has increased over the years. Discussing the reason for urban floods, highlight the mechanisms for preparedness to reduce the risk during such events. **(200 words/12.5m)**

The UN Security Council approved a new African Union mission, AUSSOM, to stabilize Somalia amid funding concerns from key donors.

- ➔ This mission replaces the larger AU anti-terrorism operation in 2025.



Analysis of the news:

- ➔ The UN Security Council authorized the African Union Stabilisation and Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), replacing a larger AU anti-terrorism operation starting January 1, 2025.
- ➔ Somalia's security has relied on foreign resources since Ethiopia's 2006 invasion, which ousted an Islamist-led administration but triggered a deadly insurgency.
- ➔ The European Union and United States, key funders of AU forces, sought to reduce peacekeeper numbers due to concerns over long-term financing and sustainability.
- ➔ Negotiations over the new force were challenging, highlighting funding complexities.
- ➔ The United States abstained from the vote, citing funding concerns, while 14 other members supported the resolution.

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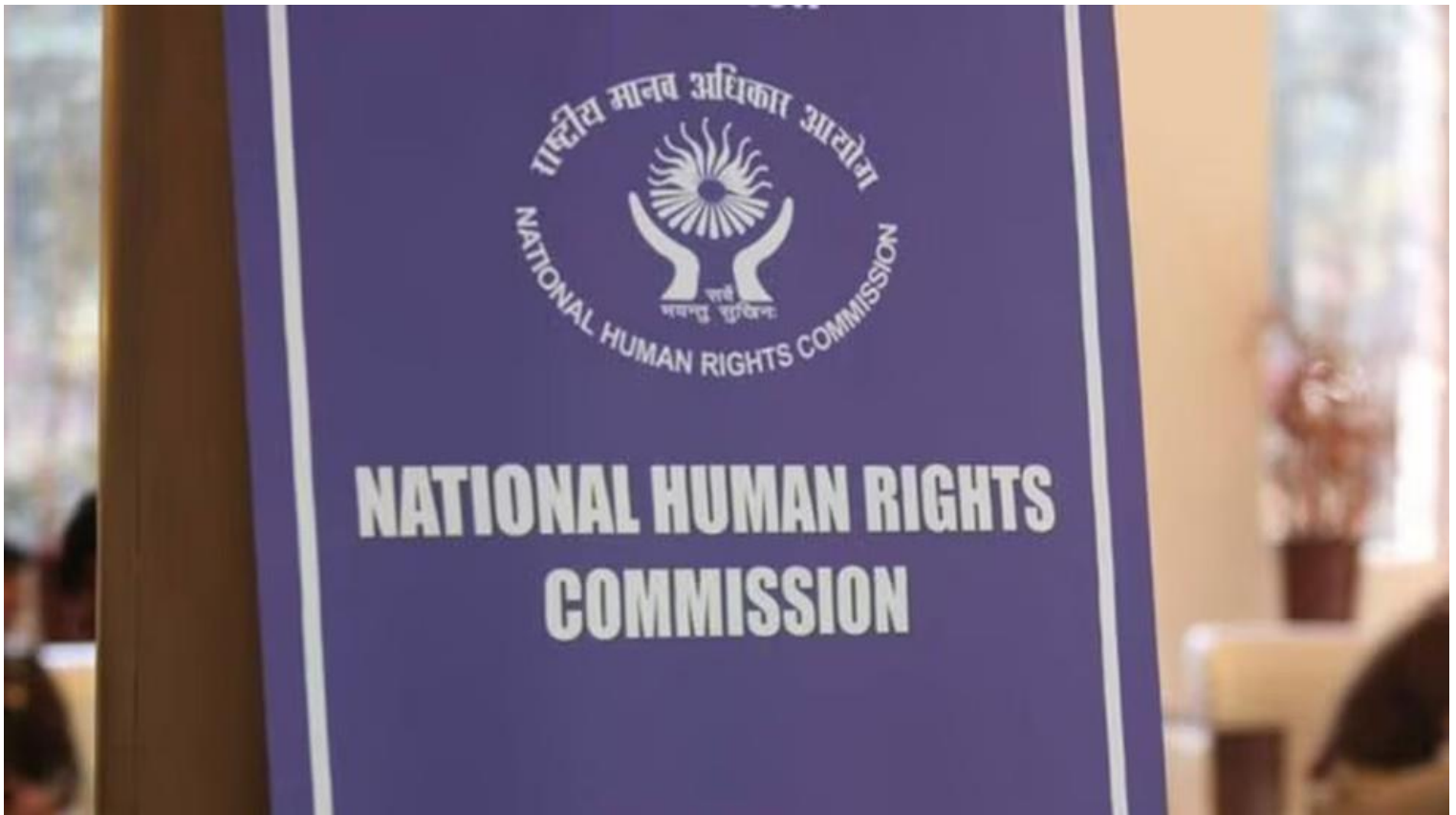
UN Security Council

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations.
- It is responsible for maintaining international peace and security and can authorize military action, impose sanctions, and establish peacekeeping operations.
- **The council comprises 15 members:** 5 permanent members (P5) – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms.
- Permanent members have veto power, allowing them to block any substantive resolution.
- Decisions require at least nine votes, including the concurrence of all permanent members.
- The UNSC is headquartered in New York City and holds regular and emergency meetings.
- Its resolutions are legally binding on all UN member states.

In News : NHRC Action on Tribal Suicides in Kerala

The NHRC took suo motu cognisance of a news report highlighting an alarming rise in suicides among the tribal population in Kerala's Peringammala Panchayat in Thiruvananthapuram district.

- ➡ The report revealed that 23 suicides occurred in 2024, following 138 suicides in the region between 2011 and 2022.



About National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):

- ➡ The NHRC is an independent statutory body established on October 12, 1993, under the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993.
- ➡ It serves as a guardian of human rights in India, overseeing the rights associated with life, liberty, equality, and dignity as guaranteed by the Constitution of India and international covenants.
- ➡ The NHRC aligns with the Paris Principles on Human Rights, ensuring accountability and compliance.

Definition of Human Rights:

- ➡ According to Section 2(1)(d) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, human rights encompass the rights related to life, liberty, equality, and dignity protected by the Constitution or outlined in international treaties enforceable in Indian courts.

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NHRC Composition

The NHRC is a multi-member body, comprising:

➤ Full-Time Members:

- A chairperson (retired Chief Justice of India or Supreme Court judge).
- Members include a sitting/retired Supreme Court judge, a Chief Justice of a High Court, and three experts in human rights (one must be a woman).

➤ Ex-Officio Members: Chairpersons of:

- National Commission for Minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Women, Backward Classes, Protection of Child Rights, and Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.

➤ Appointment:

- Members are appointed by the President of India based on recommendations from a six-member committee led by the Prime Minister, with participation from:
 - Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha,
 - Leaders of the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament,
 - Union Home Minister.
- Consultation with the Chief Justice of India is required for appointing judicial members.

➤ Tenure and Conditions of Service:

- **Term:** 3 years or up to 70 years of age (whichever is earlier).
- **Reappointment:** Allowed after completing the term.
- After tenure, members cannot seek employment with the Central or State governments.

➤ Salaries and Allowances:

- Determined by the Central Government, but terms cannot be altered to members' disadvantage post-appointment.

➤ Removal Process:

- The President of India can remove members on grounds such as:
 - Insolvency, paid employment outside office, physical/mental incapacity, unsound mind, or criminal conviction.
 - For misconduct or incapacity, the matter is referred to the Supreme Court for inquiry, and removal is based on its recommendation.

In News : Wealth Tax

Should wealth tax be brought back to address inequality in India?



About Wealth Tax:

- Wealth Tax is levied on the net market value of various assets owned by an individual, such as cash, bank deposits, shares, fixed assets, personal cars, and real property.
- Globally, several countries like France, Portugal, and Spain impose wealth tax.
- The primary objective of the tax is to target unproductive and non-essential assets of individuals.

Wealth Tax in India:

- **Introduction:** The Wealth Tax Act was introduced in 1957 based on the recommendations of the Kaldor Committee (1955) as a part of tax rationalization measures.
 - It imposed a 1% tax on earnings exceeding ₹30 lakh per annum for individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs), and companies.
- **Abolition:** Abolished in 2015 due to issues such as Extensive litigation, Increased compliance burden, and High administrative costs.
 - Replaced by an increase in the surcharge on the super-rich.
- **Replacement measures:** The surcharge for individuals with income exceeding ₹1 crore and companies with income over ₹10 crore was increased from 2% to 12%.

Other Relevant Economic Concepts:

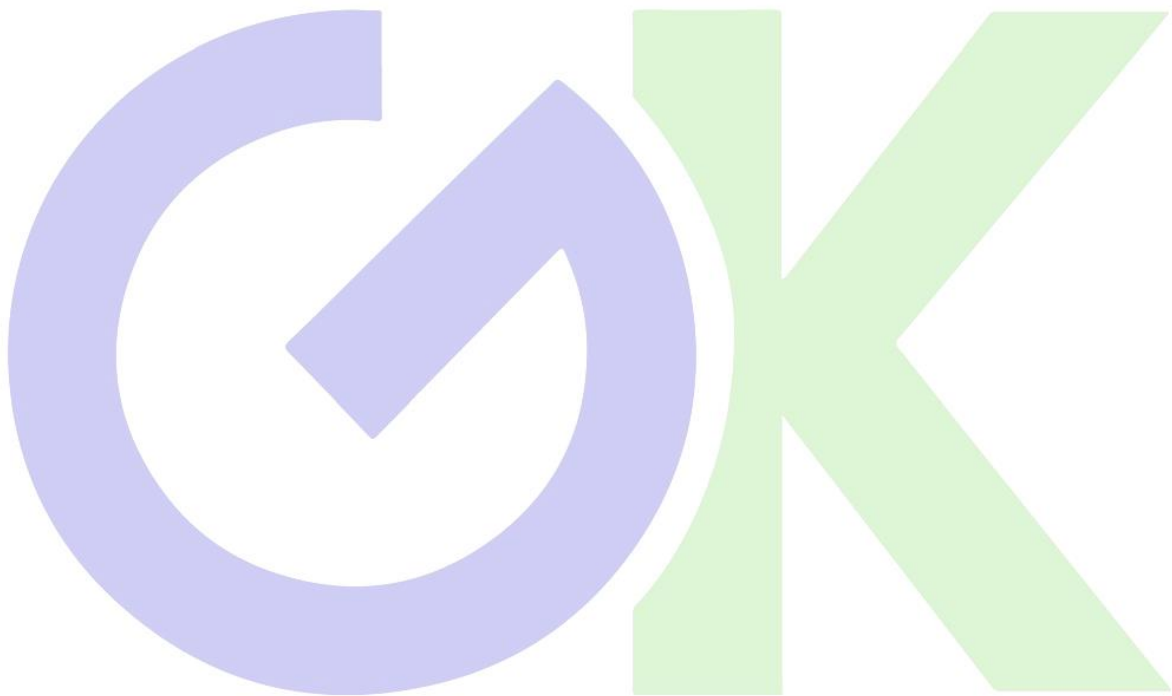
- **Tobin Tax:** A tax on financial transactions, especially currency exchanges.
- **Pigovian Tax:** Levied to correct negative externalities (e.g., pollution tax).

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Daily News Analysis

- ➡ **Laffer Curve:** Demonstrates the relationship between tax rates and tax revenue.
- ➡ **Tax-GDP Ratio:** Indicates the tax revenue as a percentage of GDP, critical for fiscal analysis.



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In News : Forest and Tree Cover Grows, Fire Incidents Fall

Forests are crucial for combating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and ensuring ecological balance.

- India's State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023 highlights significant progress in forest and tree cover expansion, supported by innovative government schemes and community efforts.
- This achievement showcases India's commitment to balancing environmental conservation with sustainable development.

Introduction

- Forests play a critical role in combating climate change by absorbing carbon, preserving biodiversity, and providing essential ecosystem services like clean air and water.
- India's positive shift in forest conservation is reflected in the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.
- The report highlights that Forest and Tree cover now spans 827,357 square kilometers, accounting for 25.17% of India's land area, including 21.76% forest cover and 3.41% tree cover.





ISFR 2023: A Snapshot of India's Forests

- The ISFR is a biennial assessment conducted by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) using satellite and field data, with the first report published in 1987.
- The 2023 edition consists of two volumes:
 - **Volume-I:** National-level assessment, covering forest cover, mangroves, forest fires, carbon stock, and decadal changes.
 - **Volume II:** State/UT-level data on forest cover and field inventories.

Growth in Forest Cover

- Forest cover in India increased from 698,712 km² in 2013 to 715,343 km² in 2023.
- Fire incidents decreased significantly, with 203,544 fire hotspots in 2023-24 compared to 223,333 in 2021-22.
- India achieved a carbon sink of 30.43 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, an additional 2.29 billion tonnes since 2005, nearing its 2030 NDC target.

Government Schemes and Initiatives

- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) improved forest monitoring through upgraded mapping systems, a Forest Fire Alert System, and digitization of forest boundaries in 25 States/UTs.

Key schemes include:

- **Green India Mission (GIM):** Enhanced forest cover through restoration and expansion, with Rs. 944.48 crore released to 17 States and 1 UT.
- **Nagar Van Yojana (NVY):** Developed green spaces in urban areas, with Rs. 431.77 crore allocated for 546 projects.

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- ➔ **School Nursery Yojana (SNY):** Promoted tree planting in schools, with 743 projects sanctioned and Rs. 4.80 crore allocated.
- ➔ **Mangrove Initiative (MISHTI):** Restored mangroves along coasts, with Rs. 17.96 crore allocated to several states.
- ➔ **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management (CAMPA):** Mitigated forest loss due to non-forest activities.
- ➔ **Afforestation Targets:** Annual targets set under the Twenty-Point Programme with a mix of central and state schemes.
- ➔ **Awareness Campaigns:** Tree planting promoted during events like Van Mahotsav and Wildlife Week.

Legal Framework for Forest and Wildlife Protection

- ➔ India's forest and wildlife conservation is governed by key laws, including:
 - Indian Forest Act, 1927
 - Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Adhiniyam, 1980
 - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- ➔ State-specific laws and Tree Preservation Acts ensure urban and rural tree protection.

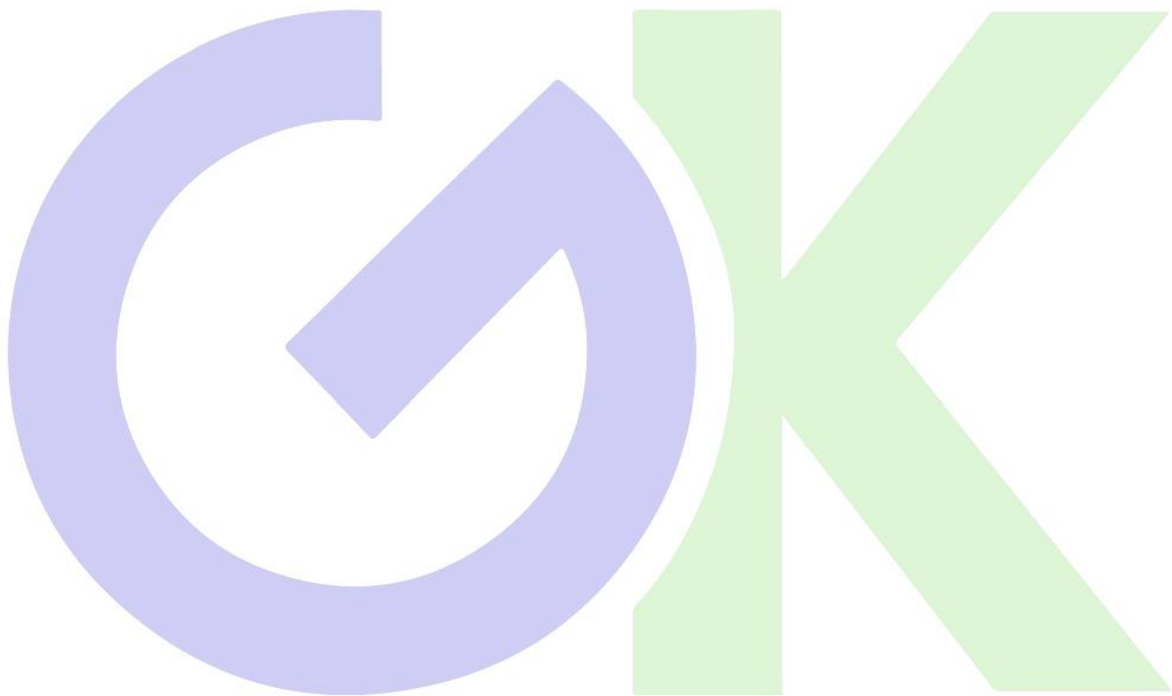
People's Connection with Nature

- ➔ Individual contributions like those of Padma Shri Tulsi Gowda demonstrate the importance of community involvement.
- ➔ Known as the "Mother of Trees," she dedicated over 60 years to planting lakhs of trees, creating lush forests from barren lands.

Conclusion

- ➔ India is advancing towards environmental sustainability through impressive growth in forest and tree cover, reduced fire incidents, and agroforestry expansion.
- ➔ Innovative government initiatives and community participation highlight India's commitment to conservation and restoration.
- ➔ These collective efforts pave the way for a greener, healthier future for all.

**Ques : Examine the status of forest resources of India and its resultant impact on climate change.
(250 words/15m)**



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Marginalised by caste, marginalised in education

Atul Kumar, the son of a daily wage worker and from the Scheduled Caste community, lost his seat at IIT Dhanbad after he was unable to pay the seat booking fee of ₹17,500 that was required to secure his admission. His case gained widespread attention on social media, prompting the Supreme Court of India to intervene by exercising its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to grant him admission. There are many and similar cases like Atul's, but which never draw media attention or receive justice, leaving many deserving students without opportunities due to financial constraints and systemic inequalities.

The rise in tuition fees

The struggles that Dalit students face echo the challenges of pre-Independence India when they were barred from enrolling in educational institutions because of their caste. While these historical restrictions were overt, the situation now is more insidious. Under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan", the Government of India has been pushing for self-reliance in institutions, leading to a significant increase in fees in many government colleges and universities such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), the Indian Institutes of Management, the central universities, and the National Law University. For instance, in 2016, the IIT council's standing committee agreed to increase the undergraduate tuition fees by 200%. This meant a fee increase from ₹90,000 to ₹3 lakh a year.

In response to the criticism regarding the fee increase, the committee set up by the government asserted that students from marginalised communities would benefit from the Vidyalakshmi scheme, which offers interest-free scholarships. However, while this initiative aims to provide support, it remains insufficient to fully address the financial challenges faced by these students, especially as fees continue to rise. The hike in fees that was implemented in seven IIMs including increased tuition fees; IIM-Lucknow hiked it by nearly 30%, IIM-Ahmedabad and IIM-Shillong by 5%, IIM Lucknow by 29.6%, IIM-Calcutta by 17.3%, IIM-Kozhikode by 23.1%, IIM-Ranchi by 19% and IIM-Tiruchirappalli by 20%. IIT-Delhi increased tuition fees for full-time M.Tech students in the semester in 2022-23. The total academic fee is now ₹53,100, which does not include hostel fees. This is a 100% increase from last year's fee of ₹26,450.

The frequent hikes in fees have made it increasingly difficult for students from the marginalised communities to afford higher education or even pursue studies through loans.



Sumant Kumar
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With rising costs in the Indian education system, many students from the marginalised communities are unable to even consider enrolling in prestigious institutions such as the IITs and the IIMs despite securing competitive ranks. As a result, while some students manage to cope with the financial burden, there are others who are overwhelmed by the stress and the inequality in academic institutions. This pressure, exacerbated by the high cost of education, has a human angle too. In 2021, data showed that over the past seven years, 122 students from the IITs and the IIMs had ended their lives, many due to the financial strain of rising fees and the anxiety of securing employment.

The issue of dropouts

Another harsh reality is that many students who manage to enrol themselves in prestigious institutions eventually drop out due to their inability to afford rising education fees. The Human Resources Development Ministry reported that 2,461 students dropped out of IITs in just two years (2017 and 2018). Last year, this issue was raised in the Lok Sabha, revealing that over the past five years, more than 13,500 students from the Scheduled Castes (SC), the Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) had dropped out of courses in the central universities, the IITs and the IIMs. Government data showed that in the central universities, 4,596 students from the Other Backward Classes, 2,424 SC students, and 2,622 ST students dropped out during this period. In the IITs, 2,066 OBC students, 1,068 SC students, and 408 ST students left. Similarly, the IIMs saw 163 OBC, 188 SC, and 91 ST students drop out over the past five years. These numbers highlight the significant challenges faced by marginalised communities in accessing and sustaining higher education in India.

One of the key reasons behind the poor economic conditions of the Dalit community is that their identity in India is still largely defined by caste. Dalits continue to be denied the opportunity to perform work that is on a par with others in society. This has not only left them economically marginalised but also socially vulnerable. Dalits in India are considered an oppressed and discriminated class, often labelled as "untouchable". Historically, this stigmatisation has meant that Dalits have been denied access to education. The term "untouchables" also refers to those who have been forced into the most undesirable and degrading jobs. A recent survey in 29 States on urban sewer and septic tank workers revealed that 92% of these workers belong to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled

Rising costs in higher education are one of the many issues affecting Dalit students

Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). A 2019 report by former Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal revealed that 95% of faculty positions in IITs were held by individuals from upper caste backgrounds, with only 5% allocated to SC, ST, and OBC categories, despite these groups representing 70%-80% of India's population. An RTI filed by IIT-Bombay students further exposed the disparities, showing that 24 departments had no SC faculty, 15 lacked ST representation, and nine had no OBC faculty. These statistics highlight the deep-rooted caste-based inequalities that persist in both employment and education.

The barriers still exist

After Independence, with provisions in the Constitution and welfare mechanisms, Dalit school enrolment rates have improved over time. However, Dalit children continue to face significant barriers in education, including poverty, social discrimination, and caste-based prejudice. Dalit students are often judged based on their clothes, language, and other markers, making it difficult for them to integrate with their upper caste peers.

In many cases, caste-based remarks and discrimination wound these students, leading to social isolation. Some students succumb to the emotional toll of this prejudice – there are cases such as a woman postgraduate medical student in a medical college in Maharashtra and two students from IIT Bombay and IIT Delhi that are painful reminders of this reality. These incidents underscore the persistent shadow of casteism and harassment over the aspirations of many Dalit students. This troubling situation raises a critical question: how can these prestigious institutions effectively address this issue and foster a safe, inclusive environment for all students?

The unfortunate incidents of student suicides point to the immense pressure students face in the education system. Many students are burdened by their families' expectations that completing a degree will solve their economic problems. But unemployment in India is also high. An RTI filed in 2024 about IIT placements showed that approximately 8,000 students (38%) across 23 IIT campuses remained unplaced this year. For students from the marginalised communities, this struggle is even more pronounced, as their caste identity often doubles the challenges they face in securing jobs. These issues underscore the pressing need for systemic reforms in education and employment to alleviate the pressures on students and address caste-based disparities.

GS Paper 02 : Social Justice – Education

PYQ: (UPSC CSE (M) GS-1 2020) : How have digital iniSaSves in India contributed to the functioning of the educational system in the country? Elaborate your answer. (250 words/15m)

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Rising tuition fees and systemic caste-based discrimination hinder access to quality education for marginalised communities in India. Discuss the implications of these barriers on social equity and suggest measures to make higher education more inclusive. (150 Words /10 marks)

Context :

- The financial challenges faced by marginalised students in India highlight systemic inequalities in access to education.
- Rising tuition fees in premier institutions like IITs and IIMs exacerbate economic and social barriers for Dalit and underprivileged students.
- Persistent caste-based discrimination and employment challenges further underline the urgent need for systemic reforms.

Supreme Court Intervention in Atul Kumar's Case

- Atul Kumar, a Scheduled Caste student, lost his IIT Dhanbad seat due to an inability to pay the ₹17,500 seat booking fee.
- The Supreme Court of India exercised its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to grant him admission.
- Many similar cases go unnoticed, leaving deserving students deprived of opportunities due to financial constraints and systemic inequalities.

Rising Tuition Fees

- Government initiatives like "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan" have led to significant fee hikes in premier institutions.
- IIT undergraduate fees increased by 200% in 2016, rising from ₹90,000 to ₹3 lakh annually.
- IIM tuition fees have also risen significantly:
 - IIM-Lucknow by 29.6%, IIM-Ahmedabad by 5%, and IIM-Calcutta by 17.3%.
 - IIT-Delhi doubled its M.Tech semester fees from ₹26,450 to ₹53,100 in 2022-23.

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- ➔ These increases make it difficult for marginalised students to afford higher education, even with schemes like Vidyalakshmi offering limited interest-free scholarships.

Impact on Marginalised Students

- ➔ Rising education costs disproportionately affect marginalised communities, preventing them from enrolling in prestigious institutions despite competitive ranks.
- ➔ Financial strain has contributed to 122 student suicides in IITs and IIMs between 2014 and 2021.

High Dropout Rates

- ➔ Many students drop out due to the inability to sustain the financial burden of education.
- ➔ Between 2017 and 2018, 2,461 students dropped out of IITs.
- ➔ Over five years, more than 13,500 SC, ST, and OBC students dropped out of central universities, IITs, and IIMs.

Historical and Ongoing Caste-Based Barriers

- ➔ Dalits are often confined to low-paying, undesirable jobs, perpetuating economic and social marginalisation.
- ➔ In urban sewer and septic tank work, 92% of workers belong to SC, ST, or OBC communities.
- ➔ Faculty representation in IITs is skewed, with 95% of positions held by upper-caste individuals.
- ➔ Many departments lack SC, ST, or OBC faculty altogether.

Persistent Challenges for Dalit Students

- ➔ Despite constitutional provisions, Dalit students face poverty, discrimination, and prejudice.
- ➔ Caste-based remarks and social isolation worsen their struggles, leading to emotional distress and, in some cases, suicides.
- ➔ Incidents in institutions like IIT Bombay and medical colleges highlight the pressing issue of casteism in education.

Employment Challenges for Marginalised Students

- ➔ Family expectations and high unemployment rates exacerbate the pressure on students.
- ➔ In 2024, 38% of IIT graduates (approximately 8,000 students) across 23 campuses remained unplaced.
- ➔ For marginalised communities, caste identity adds another layer of difficulty in securing jobs.

Conclusion

- ➔ Addressing rising fees, caste-based discrimination, and employment disparities is essential for fostering inclusive and equitable higher education and employment opportunities.
-