

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated the Z-Morh Tunnel in Ganderbal's Sonamarg area, located in Jammu and Kashmir.

About the Tunnel:

- ➔ The Z-Morh Tunnel is located in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir, India. It starts from Gagangir and its ending point is Sonamarg.
- ➔ The Tunnel is designed to ensure all-weather connectivity between Gagangir and Sonamarg, two important locations in the region that were previously inaccessible during heavy snowfall.
- ➔ This Z-Morh tunnel is part of the larger NH1 Srinagar-Leh Highway network.
- ➔ This will make Sonamarg a year-round tourist destination.

Key Features of the Z-Morh Tunnel:

- ➔ **Length and Structure:**
 - The tunnel itself is 6.5 kilometers long.
 - It is a bi-directional tunnel, meaning vehicles can travel in both directions.
 - In addition to the main tunnel, there are 6.05 km of approach roads leading to both ends of the tunnel.
 - The tunnel is situated at a height of approximately 2,637 meters (8,652 feet) above sea level.
 - **Capacity and Usage:** The tunnel is designed to handle up to 1,000 vehicles

Prime Minister inaugurates Z-Morh tunnel in J&K; remains silent on Statehood

Peerzada Ashiq
SONAMARG (GANDERBAL)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who inaugurated the strategic Z-Morh tunnel in Sonamarg area of Ganderbal on Monday, remained non-committal on the timeline of restoration of Statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. But he said the new network of roads and railway lines in the Union Territory has bridged the distance between J&K and New Delhi.

Amid freezing conditions, Mr. Modi inaugurated the state-of-the-art 6.5-kilometre tunnel built at a cost of ₹2,700 crore. The tunnel has made tourist hotspot Sonamarg a round-the-year destination. Mr. Modi said the Z-Morh tunnel and the upcoming Zojila tunnel, connecting Kashmir with Ladakh, will ease the lives of the people in Kargil and Leh.

Referring to the militant attack of October 20, 2024 that left seven workers dead at the construction site, Mr. Modi said, "I salute the dedication of workers who braved harsh weather conditions and even risked their lives to complete this project."

Describing J&K as a destination with the "distinction of having the highest rail and road bridges and rope ways", Mr. Modi said, "The engineering of the Chenab bridge has amazed people across the world. Passenger train trials were completed last week on the bridge. The projects of the Chenani-Nashri tunnel, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla railway link and the rope ways at the Shankara-



Grand launch: Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of a key tunnel in J&K on Monday. IMRAN NISSAR

charya temple, Shiv Khori temple and Baltal-Amar-nath shrine are underway. In all ₹42,000-crore of connectivity projects are being executed in J&K, which include the Katra-Delhi expressway, four national highway projects, two ring roads and 14 Sonamarg-like tunnels. J&K will be the most connected region. Tourists can now reach untouched destinations."

PM's promises

Referring to the upgraded connectivity, the Prime Minister said Viksit Bharat was only possible when all the regions of the country were well developed.

"J&K is the crown of the country and has to be beautiful and strong. I assure you Modi will walk the talk. Any hurdle in your dreams will be removed. 'Dilli ki doori' is already over now. We have to work together to fulfil dreams and have to take pledges together," the Prime Minister added.

Earlier, Mr. Abdullah, in his speech, made a case for

fulfilling the promise of restoration of Statehood. "On his previous visit to Kashmir on International Yoga Day, Prime Minister talked about three promises, which included eliminating the 'Dil ki doori aur Dilli ki doori' [Distance of hearts and distance between Delhi-Srinagar]. People have started trusting you. You [PM Modi] have already fulfilled the promise of holding Assembly elections [in J&K], where no rigging or misuse of official machinery was reported. However, the third promise of Statehood is yet to be fulfilled," Mr. Abdullah said.

In response to Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's speech, where he referred to the Statehood demand, Mr. Modi remained silent on divulging any timeline. "When Modi makes a promise, he fulfils it. Every time has its right time. Right things will take place at the right time," he said.

NC MOBILISES PEOPLE
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per hour with a speed limit of 80 km/hr.

- It includes a 7.5-meter-wide emergency escape tunnel for safety, which also has potential future use for railway access.
- Developed with the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM), the tunnel is known for its efficiency in tunnelling through challenging geological conditions.
- **Engineering and Construction:** The tunnel was constructed using the New Austrian Tunneling Method (NATM), a technique known for its efficiency in challenging geological conditions.
 - The tunnel took nine years to build, with construction starting in May 2015 and completion in 2024. The total cost of construction was Rs 2,700 crore.
- ➔ **Strategic Importance:**
 - **Safety and Travel Efficiency:** The Z-Morh Tunnel replaces a Z-shaped stretch of road that was prone to avalanches and landslides, significantly improving the safety and efficiency of travel.
 - **Military and Civil Use:** In addition to civilian use, the tunnel is also strategically important for military logistics in the region.
 - **Tourism and Connectivity:** The Z-Morh Tunnel will help reduce travel time between Srinagar and Sonamarg, making the area more accessible year-round for both locals and tourists.
 - When completed, the Zojila Tunnel (another key tunnel) will further enhance connectivity between Srinagar and Ladakh.

The Border Security Force (BSF) of India has been working on fencing India-Bangladesh border to prevent cross-border movement and security concerns.

- ➔ However, this initiative has recently led to objections from Bangladesh's interim government, which is reviewing past border agreements with India.

India-Bangladesh Border

- ➔ India and Bangladesh share the 4,096-kilometre-long border of which a 2,216.7 km border area is in West Bengal of this around 20 per cent stretch is unfenced.
- ➔ West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram are the States which share the border with Bangladesh.

Key Agreements:

- ➔ Several important agreements have been made between India and Bangladesh over the years to address border issues. These agreements have focused on resolving land disputes, improving border security cooperation, and setting guidelines for infrastructure development near the border.
- ➔ **1974 Land Boundary Agreement:** This agreement was crucial in resolving issues related to land exchange and the disposal of enclaves, which involved swapping territories between the two countries. It was a major step in resolving long-standing border disputes.
 - The Tin Bigha Corridor, which provides Bangladesh access to a small piece of land, has also been a point of contention. Under the 1974 agreement, Bangladesh ceded some territory to India in exchange for this corridor access. However, disputes have arisen over India's commitment to keeping this corridor open, especially with new agreements allowing fencing near it.
- ➔ **1975 Joint Indo-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities:**

India summons Bangladesh envoy, defends fence work

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI



Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India, Md. Nural Islam, at the South Block. ANI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Monday summoned the Head of Mission at the High Commission of Bangladesh to convey that fencing works on the India-Bangladesh border was being carried out in accordance with "all protocols and agreements".

The conversation took place a day after Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohammad Jashim Uddin expressed "deep concern" to Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Verma about the construction works by the Border Security Force (BSF) along the border.

"India reiterated its commitment to ensuring a crime-free border by effectively addressing the challenges of cross-border criminal activities, smuggling, movement of criminals and trafficking. Barbed wire fencing, border lighting, installation of technical devices and cattle fences are measures for securing the border," said the MEA in a press note, after the Acting High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India, Mohammad Nural Islam, met the Joint Secretary in-charge of Bangladesh and Myanmar division in the Ministry, B. Shyam, at South Block.

Bangladesh had conveyed to Mr. Verma that the construction of barbed wire fences on at least five locations along the Indo-Bangladesh border was "unauthorised" and had "caused tensions and disturbances along the border".

Questions 2015 pact

The Adviser of Home Affairs of Bangladesh, Jehangir Alam Chowdhury, had, in addition, referred to the border agreements between India and Bangladesh as "unequal", casting doubt on the Land Boun-

dary Agreement of 2015 that was concluded between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Responding to Dhaka's accusations, the MEA said, "It was conveyed that with regard to security measures at the border, including fencing, India observed all protocols and agreements between the two governments and between the Border Security Force and the Border Guard Bangladesh."

The latest spat intensified after Mr. Chowdhury addressed a press conference in Dhaka on Sunday where he blamed India for carrying out constructions along the border without following due procedures. The interim government of Bangladesh has also been campaigning to reduce alleged incidents of fatal shooting by the BSF that is said to have caused civilian casualties in the recent years.

The India-Bangladesh border was considered a "settled" matter, especially after the Land Boundary Agreement was signed on June 6, 2015, for which Mr. Modi had travelled to Dhaka. However, the latest comments from Bangladesh has reopened the border debate between the two sides. Land and sharing of river waters have been a lingering issue between the two sides, and Bangladesh has been demanding its share of the Teesta's waters.

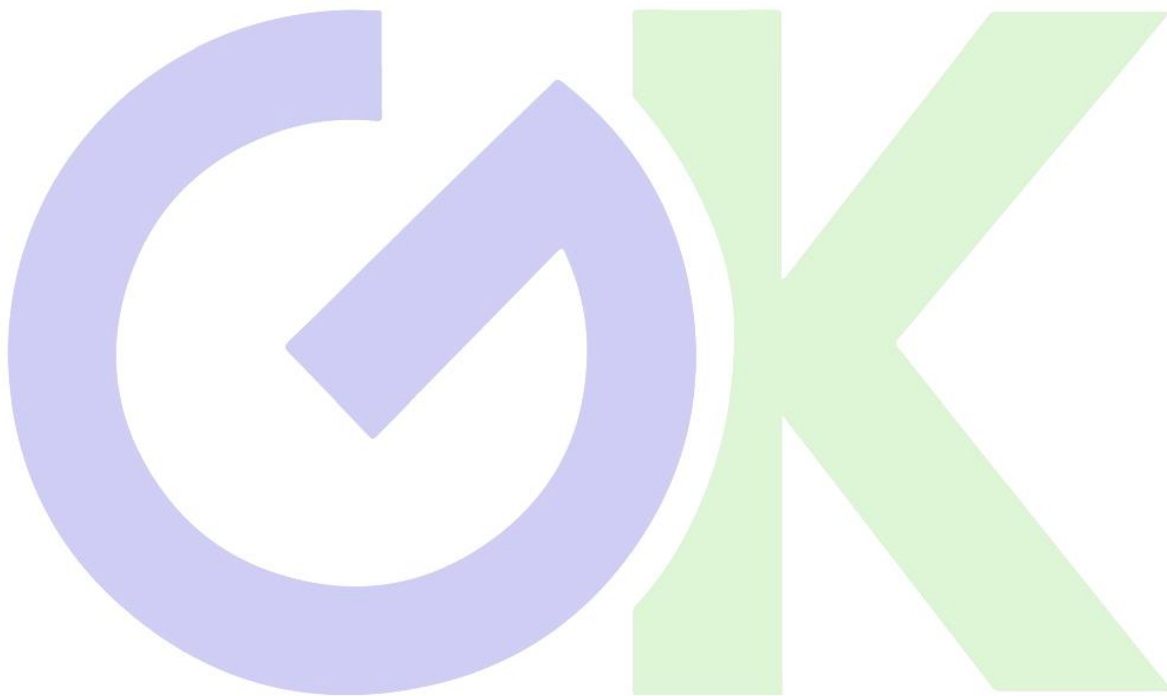
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This agreement set the groundwork for cooperation between India and Bangladesh's border forces, establishing protocols for managing the border and ensuring security.

- ➔ **2011 Land Boundary Agreement Protocol:** This protocol further detailed the implementation of the 1974 agreement, focusing on managing territories and areas along the border.
- ➔ **2011 Coordinated Border Management Plan:** This plan aimed to improve coordination between the border forces of both countries to ensure better security and management of the border.



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The LAC has been the site of rising tensions between India and China, particularly since April 2020. General Upendra Dwivedi, the Chief of the Indian Army, mentioned that although there is a "degree of standoff" along the LAC, the situation is "sensitive but stable".

A 'degree' of stand-off prevails along the LAC, says Army chief

Gen. Dwivedi terms situation 'sensitive but stable', says Army's deployment is 'balanced and robust'; on disengagement, he says 2 rounds of verification patrolling completed; on 1971 painting row, adds new one is reaching out to newer generations

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Stating that a "degree" of stand-off prevails along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said on Monday that he had authorised all Corps Commanders to handle issues at the ground level with respect to patrolling and grazing so that these trivial issues can be resolved at the military-level itself. He termed the situation along the LAC "sensitive but stable", and said the Army's deployment along was "balanced and robust".

"All the Corps Commanders have been empowered to go through the patrolling and grazing issues and wherever you can harmonise relations between the two sides, you should be able to do. When Special Representative talks took place a press release was given. So we are also looking at Kailash Mansarovar *yatra* to resume, some trade points to be resumed. So similarly, we are also looking at, if we can have



Straight talk: Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi addressing the annual press conference in New Delhi on Monday. R.V. MOORTHY

some kind of understanding please go ahead. That kind of delegation has been given to Division Commanders and Corps Commanders. They will come back to us... as far as we are concerned, from my side it is approved," General Dwivedi said in response to a question on whether an understanding had been reached with China not to block their patrols in the Yangtse area in Arunachal Pradesh.

He was addressing the annual press conference ahead of the Army Day on Wednesday.

On the recent disengagement from Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh, he said two rounds of verification patrolling had been completed by both sides.

"There is nothing called as buffer zone," he said, terming them "temporary moratorium". "Where you feel that the nature or the degree of violence can be high and the fuse is short, you create some distances," he said.

"So when we carried out these negotiations over a period of time, some places were declared as a temporary moratorium. It means that both sides will remain back and will not go to the common areas because we still feel that if we meet at those places the violence level may go high."

After April 2020, the trust between the two countries has to have a new definition, he remarked and therefore, there is a requirement for

us to sit together and come to a broader understanding of how we want to calm down the situation and restore the trust.

On the situation along the Line of Control with Pakistan, the ceasefire understanding reached in February 2022 is holding on, but the terror infrastructure across remains intact and infiltrations attempts continue. "The violence level is being orchestrated by the epicentre of terrorism that is Pakistan... If the support is not forthcoming the way India is looking at it, this kind of terrorist infiltration will continue to be there," he said.

They have inducted 15,000 additional troops in 2024 and that is why the violence level has gone down and they have been able to neutralise 73 terrorists out of which 60% were from Pakistan. "The parliamentary elections and the State Assembly elections both had nearly 60% voting... All indicators show that people of J&K are shunning violence and it is being fully orchestrated by our adversary."

On the Siliguri corridor, also referred to as the Chicken's neck, and the Chinese infrastructure

near Doklam, the Army chief said that is the strongest point. "As far as Chicken's neck is concerned, I would like to put it in a different perspective. That is our strongest point, because all the forces which are there in West Bengal, in Sikkim, all the forces which are there in North-east, from all the three sides our forces can congregate there," he said.

To a question on the shortcomings in the performance of women officers as Commanding Officers as revealed by a recent letter by a Corps Commander to the Eastern Army Commander, Gen. Dwivedi firstly noted that the letter should not have been leaked and an inquiry has been ordered. Women officers are doing "exceedingly well" and one kind of example cannot be taken as a yardstick. "Wherever I have seen, women officers have been very mature, considerate, kind... and up and above," he said.

To a query on the row over the 1971 painting, he described the new one as depicting India's civilisation connect and modern technology as also reaching out to the newer generations.

➡ His statements shed light on the evolving military dynamics, specifically concerning ongoing border standoffs, engagements, and security concerns at multiple points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Line of Control (LoC).

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Important Locations

- ➔ **Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck):** The Siliguri Corridor is a narrow land passage that connects the northeastern states of India to the rest of the country. Despite its perceived vulnerability, it is actually India's strongest strategic point.
- ➔ **Doklam:** Doklam is a tri-junction area near Bhutan, where India, China, and Bhutan meet. China's construction of infrastructure in the region has been a matter of concern for India, as it brings the two nations into closer proximity.
- ➔ **Depsang Plains:** The Depsang Plains are located close to the strategically important Daulat Beg Oldie.
 - The crucial Sub-Sector North (SSN) consists of the Depsang plains and Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO). Currently, the airfield at DBO is accessible by the 255 km-long Darbuk-Shyok-DBO (DSDBO) road.
 - Depsang is also close to the Karakoram pass overlooking the strategic Salto ridge and Siachen glacier, the world's highest battlefield.
- ➔ The Depsang Plains issue began in 2013 when China carried out an 18-km incursion in the area.
- ➔ **Demchok:** Demchok is in the southern part of eastern Ladakh. In Demchok, the problem is mainly at the Charding Ninglung Nullah (CNN) junction.

What is LAC?

- ➔ The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the de facto border between India and China, extending approximately 4,057 km. It separates the Indian-controlled territories in Jammu and Kashmir from the Chinese-occupied region of Aksai Chin.
- ➔ The LAC runs through several regions, including Ladakh, Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- ➔ Historically, the LAC emerged from the 1962 India-China war, when both nations' troops were positioned at this line.
- ➔ Over time, it has become a recognized boundary through agreements made in 1993 and 1996, emphasizing that neither side should advance beyond it.
- ➔ However, due to the lack of a clear demarcation, encounters between Indian and Chinese troops frequently occur.

What is LOC?

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- ➡ In contrast, the Line of Control (LOC) is a military control line between India and Pakistan, spanning about 740 km.
- ➡ It divides Jammu and Kashmir into parts controlled by India and Pakistan, and it was established after the first Indo-Pakistani war in 1947.
- ➡ Unlike the LAC, the LOC is well-defined, with Indian and Pakistani forces stationed face-to-face along the line, leading to frequent skirmishes.

Key Differences

- ➡ **Buffer Zone:** The LAC typically has a buffer zone where both sides patrol without direct contact, while the LOC is characterized by constant military presence and confrontation.
- ➡ **Nature of Control:** The LAC results from historical conflict and lacks clear demarcation, while the LOC is a clearly defined boundary established after wars and agreements.

The recent incident in Dima Hasao district of Assam, where several workers were trapped due to flooding in a rat-hole mine, highlights the ongoing dangers of this unregulated mining practice.



In vain: Efforts underway to rescue the labourers trapped inside an illegal rat-hole coal mine, in Dima Hasao district, Assam, on January 9, 2025. #1

Rat-hole mining: why the practice continues in spite of its hazards

Labourers mainly from Assam, Nepal, and adjoining Bangladesh risk the hazards of rat-hole mining – asphyxiation because of poor ventilation, collapse of mines due to lack of structural support, and flooding – to earn thrice or four times as much as working in farms or construction sites

Rahul Karmakar

On January 6, 2025, nine workers were trapped in a flooded coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao district. Bodies of four of the workers have been recovered, and rescue work is still ongoing. In this article, dated November 29, 2023, Rahul Karmakar explains the dangers of rat-hole mining.

The story so far:

A n oral question from the Supreme Court to the Union government continues to remain unanswered even as rescue workers recover bodies of workers who died trapped in a flood rat-hole coal mine at Dima Hasao district in Assam. On January 11, 2019, the top court had asked whether rat-hole mines could possibly operate in the northeast hills without the "connivance" of officials. "Lives are lost due to illegal mining. What about the officials who allowed this to happen?" the court had asked the government.

What is rat-hole mining?

Rat-hole mining, of two types, is so named as it involves digging tunnels 3-4 feet deep, barely allowing workers to crawl in and out. They have to squat while extracting coal with pickaxes. The side-cutting type of mining is usually done on hill slopes by following a coal seam – dark brown or black-banded coal deposited within layers of rock – visible from the outside. The second type called box-cutting entails digging a circular or

squarish pit at least 5 sq. metre in width up to a depth of 400 feet. Miners who drop down in makeshift cranes or using rope-and-bamboo ladders dig horizontally after finding the coal seam. The tunnels are dug in every direction from the edge of the pit, resembling the tentacles of an octopus. Some workers from Assam lost their lives in the coal mines of Meghalaya, dug using this crude method, before and after the National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned it in April 2014.

Why is such mining banned?

The government has little control over the land in Meghalaya, a Sixth Schedule State where the Coal Mines Nationalisation Act of 1973 does not apply. The landowners are thus also the owners of the minerals beneath. Coal mining boomed after Meghalaya attained statehood in January 1972. However, the terrain and expenses involved discouraged mine owners from employing advanced drilling machines. So, labourers mainly from Assam, Nepal, and adjoining Bangladesh risked the hazards of rat-hole mining – asphyxiation because of poor ventilation, collapse of mines due to lack of structural support, and flooding – to earn thrice or four times as much as working in farms or construction sites. Apart from issues of safety and health, unregulated mining led to land degradation, deforestation, and water with high concentrations of sulphates, iron, and toxic heavy metals,

low dissolved oxygen, and high biochemical oxygen demand. At least two rivers, Lukha and Myntdu, became too acidic to sustain aquatic life. These factors led to the NGT banning rat-hole mining in Meghalaya in 2014 while observing, "...there is unmet number of cases where, by virtue of rat-hole mining, during the rainy season, water flooded into the mining areas resulting in the death of many..." Illegal mining and transportation of coal, as mentioned in the interim reports of a one-man committee appointed by the High Court of Meghalaya, has continued despite the ban and the loss of lives. At least 17 miners were drowned in an illegal mine in the East Jaintia Hills district's Ksan in December 2018 after water gushed in from a river.

What led to the NGT ban?

Environmentalists and human rights activists began flagging the hazards of rat-hole mining in Meghalaya two decades ago. The campaign intensified after Impulse, a Meghalaya-based NGO, began addressing the issue of human trafficking and child labour in such mines.

Three reports prepared by the NGO, first with the Nepal-based Esther Benjamin Trust in May 2010, the second with Aide et Action in December 2010, and the last with Human Rights Now in July 2011, estimated that about 70,000 children mostly from Bangladesh and Nepal were employed in these mines

because they were the right size to work in them. The State's Department of Mining and Geology refuted the claim but, under pressure from the National Human Rights Commission, admitted in June 2013 that 222 children were employed in rat-hole mines, specifically in the East Jaintia Hills district. The NGT ban came a year later.

What is the way forward?

Unlike in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, coal seams in Meghalaya are very thin. This, miners say, makes rat-hole mining more economically viable than opencast mining.

The State has an estimated reserve of 576.48 million tonnes of low-ash, high-sulphur coal belonging to the Eocene age (33-56 million years ago). The stakes for a section of locals have been so high that the State government has been under pressure to facilitate the resumption of mining legally.

In May 2023, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said the Coal Ministry approved mining leases for four of the 17 prospective licence applicants. This would lead to the commencement of 'scientific' mining ensuring minimal environmental impact through sustainable and legally compliant extraction procedures. Anti-mining activists, who are assaulted by miners off and on, said that 'scientific' would eventually be a fancy tag in a State where profit has driven coal mining.

What is Rat-Hole Mining?

- ➡ Rat-hole mining is a method of coal extraction commonly used in the narrow, horizontal coal seams of Northeast India, particularly in Meghalaya.

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- ➡ It involves digging narrow pits or tunnels, referred to as "rat holes," that are just large enough for one person to enter. Workers descend into these pits using ropes or bamboo ladders to extract coal manually with basic tools like pickaxes and shovels.

There are two main types of rat-hole mining:

- ➡ **Side-Cutting:** Narrow tunnels are dug on hill slopes until a coal seam is found, typically less than 2 meters thick.
- ➡ **Box-Cutting:** A rectangular opening is created, and a vertical pit is dug up to 400 feet deep, with horizontal tunnels cut for coal extraction.
- ➡ The National Green Tribunal (NGT) banned rat-hole mining in 2014 due to its severe environmental and safety risks. The ban was upheld in 2015 after reports of fatal accidents, particularly during the rainy season when mines were prone to flooding.
- ➡ Despite the ban, illegal rat-hole mining persists, especially in areas like Meghalaya, due to a lack of viable alternative livelihoods for the local communities.

Safety and Environmental Concerns:

- ➡ **Safety Hazards:** The mining process is dangerous due to the lack of proper ventilation, structural support, and safety measures. There have been numerous accidents and fatalities, especially when tunnels collapse or are flooded.
- ➡ **Environmental Impact:** Rat-hole mining leads to land degradation, deforestation, and water pollution, as the process disturbs large areas of the landscape without proper waste management.

In News : Mission Mausam

Prime Minister will launch 'Mission Mausam' during the 150th foundation day celebration of the India Meteorological Department.



About Mission Mausam:

- It aims to boost India's weather- and climate-related science, research, and services and make India a 'Weather-ready and Climate-smart' nation.
- The ambitious programme, with an outlay of Rs 2,000 crore over two years, will chiefly be implemented by the India Meteorological Department, the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, and the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting.
- It will enhance forecasting accuracy, provide near real-time local weather forecasts and research the development of weather management technologies.

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- The mission aims to achieve this by developing cutting-edge weather surveillance technologies and systems, implementing high-resolution atmospheric observations, next-generation radars and satellites, and high-performance computers.
- By leveraging these technologies, the program aims to refine data collection and analysis to improve the spatial and temporal accuracy of forecasting and to help address the challenges posed by climate change.
- It will also focus on improving the understanding of weather and climate processes, and provide air quality data that will help strategise weather management and intervention in the long run.
- It will help to better equip stakeholders, including citizens and last-mile users, in tackling extreme weather events and the impacts of climate change.

About India Meteorological Department (IMD):

- IMD was established in 1875. It is the National Meteorological Service of the country and the principal government agency in all matters relating to meteorology and allied subjects.
- The Director General of Meteorology is the Head of the IMD.
- There are 6 Regional Meteorological Centres, each under a Deputy Director General with headquarters at Mumbai, Chennai, New Delhi, Calcutta, Nagpur, and Guwahati.
- Its headquarters is in New Delhi.
- At present, IMD is under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).
- It takes meteorological observations and to provide current and forecast meteorological information and statistics for weather-sensitive activities like agriculture, shipping, aviation, offshore oil explorations, etc.

Transforming 'men'talities, redefining masculinity

As another International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women passes by (November 25), we face a stark truth: despite decades of advocacy, nearly one in three women worldwide has endured violence at the hands of men. While men are often the perpetrators, they can also be key agents of change. Addressing violence against women requires addressing men's roles and questioning traditional notions of masculinities based on strength, aggression and control. These notions need to be replaced by a culture where equality, empathy, and non-violence define alternative notions of manhood.

Violence against women can be seen, somewhat paradoxically, as a quintessential "men's issue" – a societal issue that demands the active engagement of men. From early childhood, boys are influenced by norms that tell them strength is dominance, that emotions are a weakness, and that asserting control is the way to protect their status. These deeply entrenched ideas not only harm women but also limit men's lives and their relationships, trapping them in cycles of suppressed emotions and aggressive behaviours. Recognising and reshaping these norms is essential for creating healthier relationships and a safer world.

The subject of men and masculinities has become a prominent focus within the development sector. Over the past two decades, academic research and grass-root efforts have revealed the importance of engaging with men, highlighted strategies that work, and shown how men are increasingly stepping out to challenge traditional gender norms. This growing shift reflects a recognition among men of their role in advancing gender equality.

An India report

UNESCO's Transforming MENTalities initiative has aimed to shift the way men engage with gender issues – not just as allies but as active participants in social transformation. This initiative challenges rigid and stereotyped ideas of masculinity and



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A UNESCO initiative with the goal of changing the way men engage with gender issues is making progress

fosters positive, supportive roles for men, engaging them as champions for gender equality. As we inch closer to Agenda 2030 – working to create an inclusive and equal world – UNESCO, in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), is proud to present the report, "Engaging Men and Boys: A Report on Pathways to Gender Equality in India". This report documents 10 pioneering programmes across India that engage men and boys to address gender inequality.

Some of the interventions

Through impactful initiatives, these programmes encourage critical dialogues that are aimed at questioning traditional gender norms, reshaping concepts of masculinity, and fostering inclusive attitudes. By emphasising education, open discussions, and community-driven actions, these programmes empower participants to become advocates for gender equity within their household and within communities and institutions they are part of.

For example, 'Mardon Wali Baat (A man's thing)', an initiative by The YP Foundation, uses storytelling and social media to foster conversations around positive masculinities with young men on campuses and in communities. This intervention helps young men critically examine the limiting narratives they have grown up with, empowering them to embrace values of respect and equality. Similarly, Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS), a collaboration between the ICRW and the Department of Education in the State of Rajasthan, uses interactive classroom activities to help adolescent boys see the harm in toxic masculinity and adopt more equitable gender attitudes. In one session, a boy reflected, "I used to think boys should only do outdoor chores. Now, I believe we should work alongside women at home." These moments of transformation create ripple effects that can reshape entire communities.

Initiatives such as 'Dekh Rekh (caring for each other)' and 'Hamari Shaadi (our marriage)

encourage men's active participation in family nutrition and planning, tackling gender bias through small, everyday actions. These interventions prove that when men and boys are invited to engage with gender equality as a part of their lives, rather than as an abstract idea, change becomes possible.

The defining role of public figures

Change also becomes possible when men and boys have positive role models demonstrating equitable behaviours. These initiatives underscore the importance of role models who actively participate in household and care-giving responsibilities, reject violence as a solution, practise empathy, and embrace vulnerability. Public figures, in particular, can help normalise gender equality. For instance, a well-known Indian cricketer recently sparked a national conversation on shared parenting and responsibility by publicly committing to paternity leave. Actions such as these highlight how equitable relationships are rooted in care, respect, and partnership, redefining what it means to "be a man" in ways that uplift both individuals and communities.

The path to true equality is long, and the active participation of men is crucial in this journey. Beyond rejecting violence, men can challenge the stereotypes and cultural norms that perpetuate it. They must see themselves as essential contributors to change, helping dismantle toxic ideas of manhood. This requires a willingness to question the privileges that patriarchy grants the world and to explore ways to address the pressures and expectations that accompany these privileges. By reflecting on and reshaping their roles, men can play a transformative part in building a more equitable society for all.

In the new year, let us celebrate those men and boys who are "Transforming MEN'talities" and championing equality. Together, by redefining masculinity, we can create a world where every individual, regardless of gender, is free from violence and empowered to thrive.

GS Paper 01 : Indian Society : Issues relating to women

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Violence against women remains a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and sustainable development. Discuss the global and national initiatives aimed at addressing this issue, and critically analyze their effectiveness. Suggest measures to strengthen efforts towards eliminating violence against women. **(250 Words /15 marks)**

Context :

- The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) serves as a sombre reminder of the persistent global issue of gender-based violence.
- Despite decades of advocacy, nearly one in three women worldwide has suffered violence at the hands of men.
- This alarming statistic highlights the need to engage men not just as perpetrators but also as key agents of change in combating violence against women.

The Root Causes of Violence Against Women and Progress in Engaging Men

Early Socialisation and Harmful Expectations

- In many societies, boys are raised with messages that equate masculinity with authority and control.
- Common phrases such as 'boys don't cry' and 'man up' suppress emotional expression, forcing boys to internalise their feelings.
- This emotional suppression often manifests as frustration, aggression, or a lack of emotional intelligence, which can harm their relationships and mental health.
- Boys are also taught to associate strength with dominance, leading to a perception that they must assert control over others, often women, to affirm their masculinity.
- These societal messages are reinforced by gendered expectations in families.
- For example, boys may observe that household decision-making and outdoor activities are reserved for men, while caregiving and domestic chores are deemed women's responsibilities.

Toxic Masculinity

- Toxic masculinity, a term used to describe harmful behaviours and attitudes associated with traditional male roles, further compounds the problem.
- It emphasises aggression, competition, and dominance, which are often expressed in harmful ways.
- Men conditioned by these norms may resort to violence to assert control or resolve conflicts, especially in situations where their authority feels challenged.
- This is a critical factor in domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Toxic masculinity also affects men themselves, trapping them in cycles of emotional isolation and destructive behaviour.
- The inability to express vulnerability can lead to poor mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse.

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The Role of Media and Cultural Narratives

- ➔ Films, advertisements, and popular culture frequently portray men as aggressive protectors or stoic providers, while women are depicted as passive caregivers or victims.
- ➔ Such representations reinforce binary gender roles and discourage deviation from these norms.
- ➔ Boys who consume these narratives often aspire to embody these stereotypical ideals, further entrenching toxic masculinity.
- ➔ In some cultures, religious or traditional beliefs may also reinforce harmful gender norms.

Progress in Engaging Men

- ➔ In recent years, the development sector has increasingly focused on the role of men and masculinities in achieving gender equality.
- ➔ Academic research and grassroots efforts have highlighted effective strategies for engaging men in challenging traditional gender norms.
- ➔ These initiatives reveal a growing willingness among men to contribute to gender equality, not as passive allies but as active participants in social transformation.

Case Study: India's Approach to Gender Equality

➔ UNESCO's Transforming MENTalities Initiative

- UNESCO's Transforming MENTalities initiative stands out as a comprehensive effort to address the root causes of gender inequality by engaging men and boys.
- Rather than treating them solely as allies in the fight for gender equality, this initiative positions them as active participants in social transformation.
- By dismantling rigid and harmful ideas of masculinity, it encourages men to adopt positive, supportive roles within their families and communities.
- As part of this initiative, UNESCO partnered with the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) to produce the report Engaging Men and Boys: A Report on Pathways to Gender Equality in India.
- This report documents pioneering programs that have successfully engaged men and boys in addressing gender biases, fostering equitable attitudes, and creating sustainable change.

Pioneering Programs and their Impact

➔ Mardon Wali Baat (A Man's Thing)

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- Run by The YP Foundation, this initiative uses storytelling and social media to engage young men on college campuses and in communities.
- It encourages participants to critically examine societal narratives around masculinity, such as equating strength with dominance, and to embrace values of respect, equality, and emotional openness.
- By creating conversations on positive masculinities, this program equips young men to challenge stereotypes in their personal lives and communities.

➔ Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS)

- A collaboration between ICRW and the Rajasthan Department of Education, GEMS works with adolescents to address toxic masculinity through interactive classroom activities.
- By focusing on critical discussions, the program helps boys understand the harm caused by traditional gender roles and encourages them to adopt equitable attitudes.
- One transformative moment occurred when a boy reflected, "I used to think boys should only do outdoor chores. Now, I believe we should work alongside women at home."
- These insights have a ripple effect, influencing not only the boys themselves but also their families and peers.

➔ Dekh Rekh (Caring for Each Other) and Hamari Shaadi (Our Marriage)

- These programs focus on engaging men in household and familial responsibilities, such as family planning and nutrition.
- By encouraging men to take active roles in domestic spheres traditionally dominated by women, these initiatives challenge deeply rooted gender biases and promote equality through everyday actions.

The Way Forward

- ➔ **Reshaping Norms to Address Root Causes**
- ➔ Early education is essential to dismantling stereotypes, teaching boys that vulnerability, empathy, and equality are strengths, not weaknesses.
- ➔ Families, schools, and communities must model and promote alternative, healthier definitions of masculinity.
- ➔ Public campaigns, media representations, and positive role models can further reinforce these messages by showing that masculinity can coexist with emotional openness, partnership, and respect for women.

Community-Driven Approaches

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- ➡ The success of these programs lies in their community-driven approach.
- ➡ By integrating local contexts and cultural nuances, these initiatives resonate with participants and develop grassroots ownership of gender equality efforts.
- ➡ For example, interactive sessions, storytelling, and role-playing activities are used to make complex ideas accessible and relatable.
- ➡ Moreover, engaging men and boys within their own social environments ensures that change is not imposed from the outside but emerges organically, making it more sustainable.

Conclusion

- ➡ As we move forward, let us celebrate the men and boys who are challenging traditional masculinities and championing equality.
 - ➡ By redefining what it means to 'be a man,' we can create a world where everyone, regardless of gender, is free from violence and empowered to thrive.
 - ➡ Together, through education, advocacy, and collective action, the violence against women can be eliminated and we can build a more just and equitable society.
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