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## **1. NITI Aayog Releases Report on "Reforming Urban Governance in India"**

**Source: PIB (Press Information Bureau)**

### **Context:**

- The NITI Aayog today released a comprehensive report titled "Reforming Urban Governance for Viksit Bharat 2047." The report provides a roadmap for empowering Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) by suggesting key reforms in their functional, financial, and administrative structures.



### **Significance:**

- The report addresses the critical but often-neglected issue of urban governance, which is fundamental to managing India's rapid urbanization.
- It calls for the full implementation of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, advocating for a greater devolution of functions and finances to city governments.
- Key recommendations include creating a unified metropolitan transport authority, promoting directly elected mayors with longer tenures, and enabling ULBs to raise their revenue through municipal bonds and property tax reforms.

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**Analysis:**

- While many similar reports have been published in the past, this one gains significance due to its direct link to the 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047' vision.
- The success of India's economic growth story is inextricably linked to the functionality of its cities. However, implementation remains the biggest hurdle.
- State governments are often reluctant to cede power to city governments.
- The report's recommendations require strong political will at both the central and state levels.
- The push for financial autonomy is particularly crucial, as most ULBs are currently dependent on grants and are unable to fund their infrastructure and services.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 2:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels, and challenges therein.

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## **2. India's Gig Workforce Crosses 15 Million; Social Security Code Implementation Remains Patchy, Source: Hindustan Times**

**Context:** A new report by a leading industry body estimates that India's gig workforce has surged past 15 million people, driven by the expansion of platform-based services in transport, food delivery, and freelance professional services. However, the report also highlights the patchy and inconsistent implementation of the social security provisions for gig workers under the Code on Social Security, 2020.



### **Significance:**

- The report captures the dual reality of the gig economy: it is a major source of employment and economic activity, but it also creates a large class of workers without traditional social safety nets.
- The Code on Social Security was a landmark legislative step to extend benefits like health insurance and pension schemes to gig workers, but its on-ground implementation has been slow.

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**Analysis:**

- The primary challenge lies in the operationalization of the Code.
- This includes the finalization of rules by all states, the creation of a central database for registering gig workers, and defining a workable model for financial contributions from workers, aggregators, and the government.
- Aggregator platforms have been lobbying for lower contribution rates, citing business viability.
- Worker unions, on the other hand, are demanding comprehensive benefits equivalent to those of formal employees.
- This issue sits at the heart of the future of work, and regulators must find a sustainable middle path that protects workers without crippling the business models that create these jobs.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 2:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States.

**GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy and issues relating to employment.

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### **3. SEBI Mandates ESG Reporting for Top 1500 Listed Companies**

**Source: The Economic Times**

**Context:** The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has expanded the mandate for Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) disclosures. From the next financial year, the top 1500 listed companies by market capitalization will be required to make disclosures and obtain a "reasonable assurance" audit on their ESG performance, up from the top 1000 previously.



#### **Significance:**

- This move signals a major push towards sustainable business practices and responsible investing in India.
- It aligns the Indian corporate sector with global best practices, where investors increasingly use ESG metrics to evaluate a company's long-term risks and resilience.
- Mandatory assurance will improve the credibility and reliability of the data, curbing the practice of 'green-washing'.

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**Analysis:**

- The expanded mandate will force Indian companies to integrate sustainability into their core business strategies.
- However, it also presents challenges. There is a lack of standardized metrics and methodologies for ESG reporting, which can lead to confusion and comparability issues.
- Furthermore, obtaining a reasonable assurance audit is a rigorous and costly process, especially for companies new to this domain.
- SEBI's challenge will be to build capacity within the ecosystem, including among companies, auditors, and credit rating agencies, to ensure that this regulation leads to genuine change rather than becoming a mere compliance exercise.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation. **GS Paper 4:** Corporate Governance.

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#### **4. Ethane Pipeline Project Linking Paradip and Pata Commissioned**

**Source: PIB (Press Information Bureau)**

**Context:** The government today announced the commissioning of the Paradip-Pata Ethane Pipeline, a critical piece of energy infrastructure connecting the Paradip Port in Odisha to the Pata petrochemical complex in Uttar Pradesh. This pipeline will transport imported ethane, a key raw material for petrochemicals.



#### **Significance:**

- This project is a game-changer for India's petrochemical industry.
- It ensures a steady and cost-effective supply of feedstock to major petrochemical plants in northern India, reducing their dependence on more expensive, domestically produced naphtha.
- This will enhance the competitiveness of Indian polymers and plastics in the global market.
- The pipeline infrastructure is a vital link in the 'Urja Ganga' vision to create a national gas and energy grid.

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**Analysis:**

- The pipeline represents a significant engineering achievement and a boost to the "Look East" policy by integrating the eastern coast's port infrastructure with the northern hinterland's industrial hubs.
- Economically, it will lead to import substitution (of naphtha), save foreign exchange, and potentially lower prices for a wide range of plastic goods. Strategically, it diversifies India's feedstock sources for its chemical industry.
- The next logical step would be to expand this pipeline network and explore possibilities of transporting other feedstocks or even hydrogen in the future.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 3:** Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways, etc.

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## **5. India Protests China's New 'Stapled Visas' for Arunachal and J&K Residents at BRICS Ministerial, Source: Indian Express**

**Context:** At a BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting held via video conference, India's External Affairs Minister lodged a strong protest against China's recent decision to issue stapled visas to Indian citizens from Jammu & Kashmir, in addition to its long-standing practice for residents of Arunachal Pradesh.



### **Significance:**

- This move by China is a deliberate provocation and a significant escalation of its tactic to question India's sovereignty over these territories.
- By issuing a stapled visa (a separate sheet of paper instead of a stamp on the passport), Beijing refuses to recognise the Indian passport as a valid travel document for residents of these regions, thereby challenging India's territorial integrity.
- India's strong and public protest at a multilateral forum like BRICS is meant to internationalize the issue and call out China's violation of diplomatic norms.

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**Analysis:**

- This action indicates a further deterioration in Sino-Indian relations, which have remained tense since the 2020 Galwan clash.
- China is using non-military means to assert its territorial claims and keep diplomatic pressure on New Delhi.
- The timing, possibly linked to an upcoming high-level visit or a global event, is designed for maximum political impact.
- For India, the response has to be firm and consistent. It undermines the spirit of cooperation within BRICS and raises questions about the viability of such groupings when fundamental principles of sovereignty are disregarded by a key member.
- This will likely lead to a reciprocal diplomatic freeze and a hardening of India's stance on other issues involving China.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 2:** India and its neighbourhood- relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings.

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## **6. National Health Authority launches 'Heal in India' 2.0 Portal with Integrated Services, Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** The National Health Authority (NHA) has launched an upgraded version of its 'Heal in India' portal, a one-stop platform to promote India as a global medical tourism hub. The 'Heal in India 2.0' portal now integrates visa application services, treatment package comparisons, and a list of accredited hospitals and wellness centers.



### **Significance:**

- This initiative is a concerted effort to organize the largely fragmented medical tourism sector in India and tap into its immense economic potential.
- By providing a transparent and user-friendly digital interface, the government aims to attract more foreign patients seeking high-quality, cost-effective medical care.
- It is a key component of the government's strategy to boost service exports.

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**Analysis:**

- India possesses a unique advantage in medical tourism due to its combination of world-class doctors, advanced healthcare facilities, and significantly lower costs compared to Western countries.
- The portal can help overcome major hurdles faced by medical tourists, such as a lack of reliable information and procedural complexities.
- However, success depends on stringent quality control and accreditation of the listed hospitals to build trust.
- Furthermore, infrastructure like airport connectivity and post-operative care facilities needs to be seamless.
- The 'Heal in India' initiative could become a major foreign exchange earner if executed well, but it must not come at the cost of overburdening the healthcare system for domestic citizens.

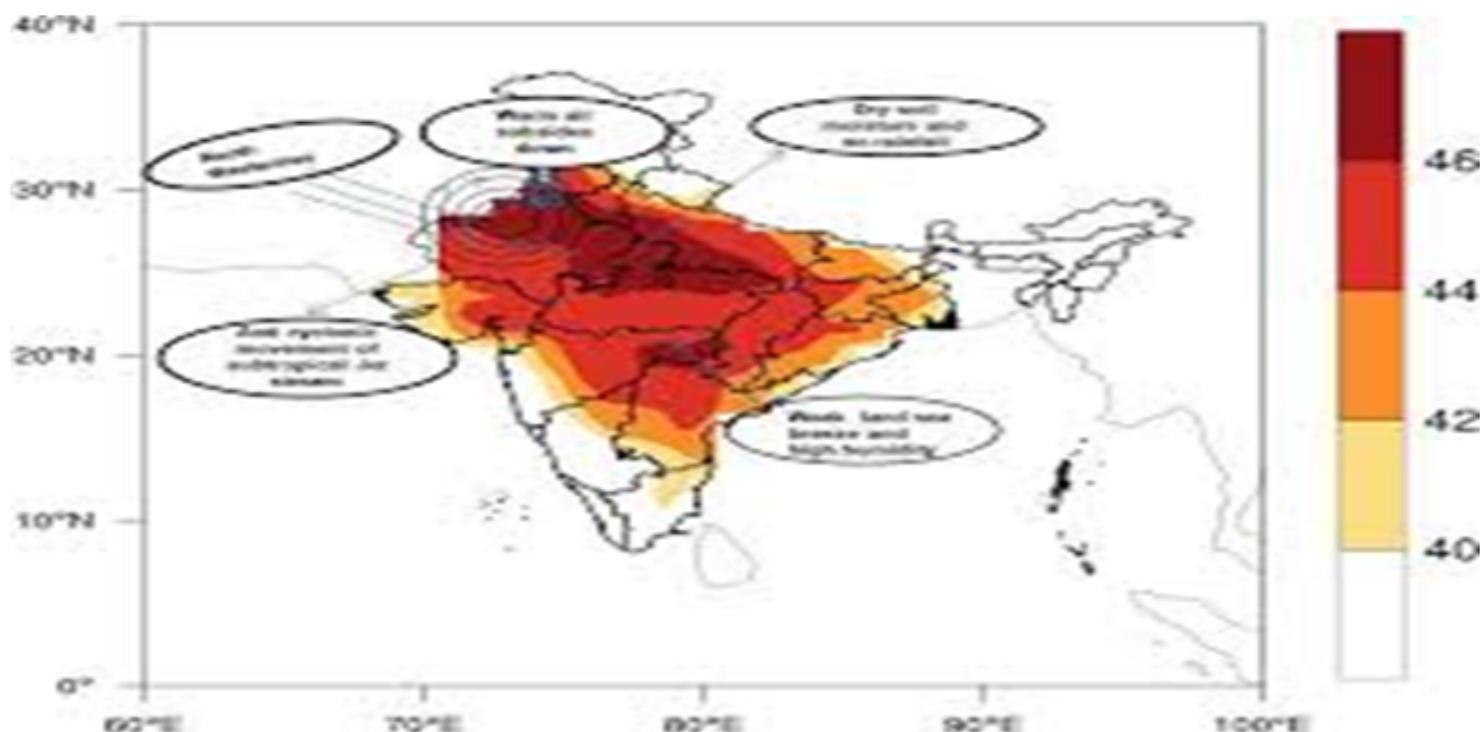
**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 2:** Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

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## 7. Study by IMD links increased pre-monsoon heat-wave intensity to shifting jet stream patterns, Source: Hindustan Times

**Context:** A new study published by scientists at the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has established a strong correlation between the increasing frequency and intensity of pre-monsoon heat waves in Northern India and abnormal shifts in the subtropical westerly jet stream.



### Significance:

- This research provides a crucial scientific explanation for the extreme weather events that have been plaguing India in recent years.
- It moves beyond general attributions to climate change and identifies a specific atmospheric mechanism.
- This understanding is vital for improving long-range weather forecasting and developing more effective heat-wave action plans and early warning systems.

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**Analysis:**

- The study suggests that global warming is altering large-scale atmospheric circulation patterns.
- The northward shift and weakening of the jet stream allow hot, dry air from the west to dominate over the Indian subcontinent for longer periods, leading to severe heat waves.
- This has cascading effects, impacting public health, agriculture (damaging winter crops), water resources, and the energy grid.
- The findings underscore the fact that climate change is not a distant threat but a present reality with tangible impacts on India's weather systems.
- It necessitates a two-pronged approach: global action to mitigate emissions and domestic adaptation strategies to build resilience against such extreme events.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 1:** Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunamis, Volcanic activity, cyclones, etc., geographical features and their location-changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and flora and fauna, and the effects of such changes.

**GS Paper 3:** Climate Change.

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## 8. Cabinet Approves National Deep Tech Start-up Policy

**Source: PIB (Press Information Bureau)**

**Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the National Deep Tech Start-up Policy, aimed at nurturing and scaling up startups in cutting-edge sectors like Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, advanced materials, and biotech. The policy outlines a framework for R&D funding, regulatory sandboxes, and procurement by the government.



### Significance:

- This policy recognizes that deep tech startups, which are based on significant scientific or engineering innovation, have different needs than typical software or e-commerce startups.
- They require long gestation periods, patient capital, and access to sophisticated labs and talent.
- The policy aims to create a dedicated ecosystem to support these ventures, which are critical for India's future technological sovereignty and economic competitiveness.

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**Analysis:**

- The policy is a strategic move to transition India's startup ecosystem from being consumer-focused to one that drives fundamental innovation.
- Key elements include creating a dedicated fund-of-funds for deep tech, streamlining intellectual property (IP) regulations, and facilitating collaboration between academia, research labs (like DRDO, ISRO), and industry.
- The challenge will be in the implementation. Creating a culture of risk-taking, bridging the "valley of death" in funding between research and commercialization, and ensuring that government procurement processes are agile enough to support startups will be critical for the policy's success.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 3:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology.

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## **9. Report on Prison Reforms Highlights Overcrowding and Under-Trial Population Crisis, Source: Indian Express**

**Context:** A report by a committee appointed by the Ministry of Home Affairs on prison reforms has painted a grim picture of Indian jails, highlighting severe overcrowding with national occupancy rates exceeding 140% and a staggering 75% of the prison population being under-trials.



### **Significance:**

- The report brings to the forefront the long-pending issue of prison reforms, which is integral to the health of India's criminal justice system.
- The high proportion of under-trials indicates a system plagued by slow-moving trials, difficulties in securing bail, and a justice delivery mechanism that is failing the poor and marginalized who cannot afford legal representation.

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**Analysis:**

- The report's recommendations likely include the effective implementation of the Supreme Court's guidelines on bail, greater use of non-custodial alternatives like community service, strengthening legal aid services, and building more 'open prisons'.
- It underscores the need to treat imprisonment as a correctional process rather than a punitive one.
- The problem is systemic, involving the police, prosecution, and the judiciary. Addressing it requires a coordinated effort, including judicial reforms to speed up trials and police reforms to ensure fair and swift investigations.
- Without these fundamental changes, prisons will continue to be breeding grounds for crime rather than centers of rehabilitation.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 2:** Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Issues relating to the criminal justice system.

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## **10. Indian Navy Commissions INS Vikrant's Second Carrier Air Wing with Indigenous TEDBF Fighters, Source: The Hindu**

**Context:** In a major boost to naval aviation, the Indian Navy today commissioned its second air wing for the aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. The centerpiece of this new squadron is the initial batch of the indigenously developed Twin Engine Deck-Based Fighter (TEDBF), which will operate alongside the existing MiG-29K aircraft.



### **Significance:**

- The induction of the TEDBF is a landmark achievement for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' in defence.
- It marks the first time an indigenously designed and built fighter jet will operate from an Indian aircraft carrier.
- This reduces our critical dependence on foreign suppliers (like Russia for the MiG-29K and France for the Rafale-M) for carrier-based combat aircraft, a niche and complex technology.

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**Analysis:**

- The TEDBF project, developed by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), builds on the experience gained from the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas program.
- Its successful induction demonstrates India's growing capability in aerospace engineering.
- Having two fully operational air wings enhances the combat readiness and power projection capability of INS Vikrant.
- The key challenges ahead will be to ramp up the production rate of the TEDBF to replace the ageing MiG-29Ks on time and to ensure seamless integration of the new aircraft with the carrier's systems.
- This development is a critical step towards the Navy's long-term goal of operating three aircraft carriers.

**UPSC Syllabus Correlation:**

**GS Paper 3:** Indigenization of technology and developing new technology; Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.