

DAILY **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

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In a bid to empower tribal communities and improve irrigation access, Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy launched a new scheme titled "Indira Saura Giri Jala Vikasam" in Nagarkurnool district. This initiative directly addresses tribal agricultural distress and aims to bring clean energy solutions to underserved farmlands.

Telangana CM launches solar scheme to benefit tribal farmers

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy launched the 'Indira Saura Giri Jala Vikasam' scheme at Macharam in Nagarkurnool district on Monday and asked the officials to provide solar pumpsets to all the eligible Scheduled Tribes farmers in Achampet constituency within a month.

The Chief Minister, accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka, said this was a unique scheme aimed at empowering the tribal farmers.

Mr. Reddy said the pilot project was being launched in Macharam for the benefit of tribals whose lands were allegedly



CM Revanth Reddy during the launch of the scheme in Mahabubnagar on Monday. ANI

snatched away during the BRS regime and cases were filed for protests. He suggested to the officials to involve the women's self-help groups in setting up solar power plants, so that they too could generate revenues from it.

Under the Forest Rights Act, the government has

sanctioned pattas for 6.69 lakh acres benefiting about 2.3 lakh farmers of Scheduled Tribes in the State. The new scheme aims to provide irrigation facilities using solar-powered borewells across six lakh acres of tribal land that don't have power connections.

Focussing on making women stronger financially, he said Telangana would see entrepreneurs among women due to government's initiatives like awarding works to generate 1000 MW of solar power to the women SHGs and also making them owners of buses.

Later, the Chief Minister went to his native village Kondareddypalle where he performed special poojas at the Anjaneya Swamy temple.

Key Highlights:

- **Scheme Objective:** To provide solar-powered borewell irrigation facilities to Scheduled Tribe (ST) farmers whose lands lack electricity-based irrigation.
- **Target Group:** Scheduled Tribe farmers, particularly in areas like Achampet constituency, where lands were reportedly lost or deprived of development under the previous regime.
- **Pilot Location:** Macharam village, Nagarkurnool district – chosen for initial implementation of the scheme.
- **Land Coverage & Forest Rights Act:** Under the Forest Rights Act, pattas for 6.69 lakh acres have been granted to about 2.3 lakh tribal farmers. The new solar irrigation scheme targets around 6 lakh acres of such land.
- **Women Empowerment Integration:** Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are to be involved in setting up solar plants. The government also plans to generate 1000 MW solar power through women SHGs and allocate ownership of buses to them, indicating a strong push toward economic participation of women.
- **Political Significance:** The move seeks to undo the alleged injustice done to tribal communities during the BRS regime by restoring land and providing sustainable irrigation support.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : With reference to the 'Indira Saura Giri Jala Vikasam' scheme recently launched in Telangana, consider the following statements:

1. The scheme aims to provide solar-powered borewell irrigation facilities to tribal farmers.
2. It is implemented under the central government's PM-KUSUM scheme.
3. Women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are to be involved in setting up solar power plants under this scheme.
4. The scheme targets lands allotted under the Forest Rights Act.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| a) 1 and 3 only | b) 1, 3 and 4 only |
| c) 2 and 4 only | d) 1, 2, 3 and 4 |

Ans: b)

Page 06: GS 2 : Governance and Social Justice

A recent report by LibTech India, a collective of academics and activists, has revealed growing gaps in the performance of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for FY 2024-25. While coverage has expanded with more households registering under the scheme, actual delivery in terms of person-days of employment has declined, highlighting deep systemic and implementation-level inefficiencies.

Report reveals delayed wages are a key factor to mismatch between MGNREGS coverage, delivery

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

A review of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for the financial year 2024-25 reveals that while the coverage has increased, with an 8.6% rise in number of registered households under the programme, the delivery of promised employment has gone down, with person days having dropped by 7.1%. This was revealed in a report released by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists on Monday.

Person days under the MGNREGS is defined as the total number of workdays by a person registered under the scheme in a financial year.

The LibTech study revealed that only 7% of households got 100 days of work. The MGNREG Act promises guaranteed em-



Women at work: Women levelling the land, under the MGNREGS, in ASR district of Andhra Pradesh. V. RAJU

ployment up to 100 days. The report highlights that total registered households under the programme have gone up by 8.6% from 13.80 crore in FY 2023-24 to 14.98 crore in 2024-25. At the same time, average days of employment per household fell by 4.3%, from 52.42 person days in FY 2023-24 it went down to 50.18 person days in FY

2024-25. This, the LibTech report states, reflects a mismatch between the scheme's coverage and its delivery. "This trend raises questions about systemic and implementation-level challenges that continue to constrain the programme's effectiveness," the report said.

Also, the persistent problem with the programme

of regional variations continues. Odisha (34.8%) Tamil Nadu (25.1%) and Rajasthan (15.9%) saw the sharpest decline in person days, while Maharashtra (39.7%), Himachal Pradesh (14.8%), and Bihar (13.3%) recorded increases.

Inadequate allocation

Among the key factors leading to an overall employment drop are the inadequate allocation of budget and extraordinary delay in wage payments reported from across the country. Both issues have been highlighted on various platforms. The parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development in the past has raised concerns over reduction in budget allocation by the Union government and its effect on the progress of the scheme. People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG) had recommended

a budget allocation of ₹2.64 lakh crore for the MGNREGS for FY 2022-23 itself. However, the Union government has allocated only ₹86,000 crore for FY 2024-25. There was no revision in the MGNREGS budget for FY 2024-25.

The LibTech report also notes that the deletions of MGNREGS workers across the country have been arrested at least partially. Between 2022 and 2024, 7.8 crore workers were deleted.

The Ministry maintained that both deletions and additions are part of a regular process. But the rate of deletions far exceeded the rate of additions. In the corresponding period, only 1.92 crore workers were added. For the first time in FY 2024-25, this trend has been reversed, the report notes. So, while 99 lakh workers were deleted, 2.22 crore were added.

Key Highlights of the Report:

- **Rise in Coverage but Decline in Employment Delivery:**
 - Registered households rose by 8.6%, from 13.80 crore in FY 2023-24 to 14.98 crore in 2024-25.

- In contrast, person-days of employment fell by 7.1%, indicating the scheme's growing demand is not being matched with actual job generation.
- Only 7% of households received the full 100 days of employment, the core guarantee under the Act.
- **Decline in Average Person-Days:**
 - Average workdays per household dropped from 52.42 to 50.18, despite the rising number of registered families.
 - This reflects a coverage-delivery mismatch and questions the efficacy of planning and fund utilization.
- **Regional Disparities:**
 - While Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan saw steep declines in employment days, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, and Bihar recorded gains.
 - This suggests variations in state-level implementation and possibly differences in fund release, governance, and local demand-supply dynamics.
- **Delayed Wages and Budget Constraints:**
 - Delayed wage payments remain a chronic issue, disincentivizing participation, especially among the poorest.
 - Budgetary support is grossly inadequate – ₹86,000 crore allocated for FY 2024–25, far below the ₹2.64 lakh crore recommended by civil society groups like PAEG.
 - No mid-year revision of the budget despite rising demand reflects apathy in policy responsiveness.
- **Worker Deletions and Additions:**
 - From 2022 to 2024, 7.8 crore workers were deleted, while only 1.92 crore were added, creating a significant net loss in registered workforce.
 - However, for the first time in 2024–25, the trend reversed – 99 lakh deletions versus 2.22 crore additions, potentially signaling correction in implementation.

Broader Issues and Implications:

- **Systemic Governance Issues:** The mismatch indicates poor planning, lack of proactive fund release, and administrative bottlenecks, undermining the legal guarantee of 100 days of employment.
- **Social Equity Concerns:** The scheme, critical for rural livelihoods and gender empowerment (especially for women workers), is weakening in delivery, which can exacerbate rural distress and inequality.
- **Fiscal Austerity vs. Welfare Obligations:** Reduced budget allocation reflects the government's broader shift towards fiscal consolidation at the cost of social protection.
- **Policy-Implementation Disconnect:** The declining person-days despite rising registration signals a disconnect between field realities and policy planning.

Way Forward:

- **Enhance Budgetary Support:** The Centre must ensure adequate and timely funds, with flexible revisions based on demand.
- **Ensure Timely Wage Payments:** Integrate real-time monitoring and penalty mechanisms for delayed payments.
- **Decentralized Planning:** Empower local Gram Panchayats for more responsive implementation and demand estimation.
- **Technological Reforms with Safeguards:** Use technology for transparency but avoid mass deletions without proper verification.
- **Strengthen Accountability:** Regular audits, social audits, and grievance redressal mechanisms need to be institutionalized.

Conclusion:

- MGNREGS, a lifeline for rural India, especially in times of economic distress and climate uncertainties, is facing a crisis of delivery. Bridging the gap between entitlement and execution through adequate financing, responsive governance, and ground-level planning is essential to restore its credibility and impact.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), though legally guaranteed, suffers from chronic implementation deficits. Critically examine this statement in light of recent trends in coverage and delivery of the scheme.

Page : 07 :GS 2 : International Relations

The World Health Organization (WHO) is facing a financial and structural crisis as the United States, its single largest contributor (nearly 18% of total funding), has initiated the process of withdrawal under former President Donald Trump.

- The U.S. departure, scheduled for January 21, 2026, is likely to create a \$600 million funding shortfall and force the agency to reassess its priorities and operational model. The development comes amid multiple global health challenges including mpox, cholera, and post-pandemic health system strengthening.

Key Issues and Developments:

- U.S. Withdrawal and Budgetary Gap:**
 - The U.S. has been a critical funder, contributing nearly one-fifth of WHO's budget.
 - Its exit would leave a massive funding deficit and threaten the continuity of critical programmes, particularly in global surveillance, vaccine guidelines, and outbreak response.
 - WHO is planning a 21% budget cut over the next two years as part of its contingency plan.
- Shift in Power Dynamics:**
 - With the U.S. stepping back, China is set to become the top state contributor, with its share rising to 20% of assessed contributions under the 2022 funding reform.
 - This reshapes geopolitical influence within the organization, raising concerns about global health neutrality and balance.
- Reevaluation of WHO's Role and Efficiency:**
 - The crisis has prompted internal debate on the agency's core functions and resource use.
 - Suggestions include shutting regional offices in wealthier countries, reducing training programmes, and cutting down on extensive publications and committee work.
 - There's a growing call for WHO to focus more on core mandates—responding to disease outbreaks, vaccine regulation, and health emergency preparedness.
- Structural Reforms and Institutional Efficiency:**
 - The WHO Foundation, a fundraising wing, has advocated for operational streamlining and reduced bureaucracy.



A view of the World Health Organization headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. REUTERS

WHO begins planning for life after the U.S. quits

Reuters

Hundreds of officials from the World Health Organization (WHO) will join donors and diplomats in Geneva from May 19 with one question dominating their thoughts: how to cope with crises from mpox to cholera without their main funder, the U.S.

The annual assembly, with its week of sessions, votes and policy decisions, usually showcases the scale of the U.N. agency set up to tackle disease outbreaks, approve vaccines, and support health systems worldwide.

This year, since U.S. President Donald Trump started the year-long process to leave the WHO with an executive order on his first day in office in January, the main theme is scaling down.

Just what that "high-value stuff" will be is up for discussion. Health officials have said the WHO's work in providing guidelines for countries on new vaccines and treatments for conditions from obesity to HIV will remain a priority.

One WHO slideshow for the event suggested work on approving new medicines and responding to outbreaks would be protected while training programmes and offices in wealthier countries could be closed.

The U.S. had provided around 18% of the WHO's funding. Its year-long exit process, mandated under U.S. law, means the U.S. will remain a WHO member until its official departure on January 21, 2026.

Trump — who accused the WHO of mishandling COVID, which it denies — muddied the waters days after his statement by saying he might consider

The U.S. provides around 18% of the WHO's funding. There is a mandated year-long exit process, which means the U.S. will remain a WHO member until its official departure on January 21, 2026

rejoining the agency if its staff "clean it up."

But global health envoys say there has since been little sign of a change of heart. So the WHO is planning for life with a \$600 million hole in the budget for this year and cuts of 21% over the next two years.

As the U.S. prepares to exit, China is set to become the biggest provider of state fees, one of the WHO's main streams of funding alongside donations. Its contribution will rise from just over 15% to 20% of the total state fee pot under an overhaul of the funding system agreed in 2022.

Others have suggested this might be a time for an even broader overhaul rather than continuity under a reshuffled hierarchy of backers.

"Does WHO need all its committees? Does it need to be publishing thousands of publications each year?" Anil Soni, chief executive of the WHO Foundation, an independent fund-raising body for the agency, asked.

He said the changes had prompted a re-examination of the agency's operations, including whether it should be focused on details like purchasing petrol during emergencies.

Other business at the assembly includes the rubber-stamping a historic agreement on how to handle future pandemics and drumming up more cash from donors at an investment round.

But the focus will remain on funding under the new world order. In the run up to the event, a WHO manager sent an email to staff asking them to volunteer, without extra pay, as ushers.

- Questions are being raised: Should WHO be involved in micro-level logistics like fuel procurement in emergencies? Such introspections are forcing the agency to consider institutional reforms.
- **Pandemic Treaty and Emergency Preparedness:**
 - Amid the financial crisis, the WHO Assembly is expected to ratify a historic pandemic agreement, setting new global rules for managing future pandemics.
 - This is crucial in light of COVID-19 lessons, ensuring transparent data sharing, early alerts, and equitable access to vaccines.
- **Donor Dependency and Multilateral Fragility:**
 - WHO's dual structure of funding—assessed contributions (from member states) and voluntary donations (from states and private donors)—makes it vulnerable to political swings and strategic withdrawal.
 - The reliance on large donors undermines global health equity, especially when dominant funders push their own health agendas.
- **Human Resource and Moral Crisis:**
 - The financial crunch has reached a point where WHO staff were asked to volunteer as ushers without extra pay during the Geneva assembly, reflecting the depth of operational strain.

Conclusion:

- The WHO's current crisis marks a critical juncture for redefining the future of global health governance. The U.S. withdrawal threatens not only financial stability but also multilateral legitimacy and neutrality. The rise of other state funders like China could tilt the balance of influence, demanding institutional safeguards, reform in funding mechanisms, and enhanced transparency. It is an opportunity for WHO to recalibrate its core focus—moving from fragmented donor-led priorities to equitable, needs-based global health action.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The exit of the United States from the World Health Organization signals a deeper crisis in global health multilateralism. Critically examine the implications of this development on the future of global health governance. (15 marks)

Page 09 : GS 2 : Governance and Social Justice

The growing concern over adolescent obesity in India has gained renewed attention, especially during the 7th edition of Poshan Pakhwada, which focused on childhood nutrition and obesity. Multiple stakeholders - including the ICMR-NIN, UNICEF, and the Public Health Foundation of India - have recently issued policy recommendations for improving adolescent food environments.

- The Supreme Court's directive to enforce transparent food labelling within three months underscores the urgency of the issue. This is not merely a health concern but a wider socio-economic and developmental challenge.

Combating obesity among adolescents

There is an increased focus in public discourse on growing obesity among adolescents. The seventh edition of Poshan Pakhwada, held last month, focused on childhood and adolescent obesity alongside the first 1,000 days of life. The 'Let's Fix Our Food' consortium, a multi-stakeholder initiative spearheaded by the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Nutrition, the Public Health Foundation of India, UNICEF-India, and others, recently released a set of policy briefs advocating for the need to better the food environments for adolescents. Last month, in a move to improve transparency on food labels, the Supreme Court gave the Central government a strict three-month window to finalise and enforce transparent food labelling regulations. These measures point towards growing concern about the problem.

Nutrition paradox

Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and transformation that lays the foundation for future health and well-being. Yet, in India, this crucial stage is being compromised not only by the problem of under nutrition but also by an emerging epidemic of obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Ironically, we now live in an era where reaching for a highly processed packaged food item is more convenient than choosing healthier alternatives. Poor nutrition, driven by the aggressive marketing and widespread availability of ultra-processed foods, is pushing our youth towards a lifetime burden of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. This is threatening their well-being and also the nation's long-term productivity and growth.

India has, for a while, been facing a nutrition paradox where under nutrition and obesity coexist. While malnutrition



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A healthier India demands more than awareness — it requires healthy eating plates, playgrounds, policy action, youth leadership, and a major shift in our food environments

persists among children, obesity and diet-related diseases are surging at an alarming rate. As per the World Obesity Atlas 2024, India has one of the steepest annual increases in childhood obesity globally. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey indicates that on average, over 5% of adolescents in India and as many as 10-15% in about 10 States are either overweight or obese. For a country with a fifth of its population being adolescents, this is deeply concerning.

Adolescents are among the most vulnerable yet least empowered. In an apparently liberal food environment, their food choices appear to be many, but healthier options are not easy to find. Food choices are shaped by schools, social media, peer influence, and aggressive marketing. As highly processed foods, sugary drinks, and high sodium foods become dietary staples, obesity rates among teenagers continue to climb at an alarming pace. Nutrition, however, is not just a health issue — it directly impacts education, mental well-being, and future productivity. Poor nutrition is linked to decreased concentration, lower academic performance, and higher absenteeism, limiting students' potential. In our current food systems frameworks, a shift in power towards children (or those who uphold children's rights) is imminent to achieve healthy and equitable food systems that prioritise children's well-being. Government policies such as making nutrition a 'Jan Andolan (people's movement)', and school health and wellness programmes, will create greater awareness on nutrition.

Dealing with the crisis

What we essentially need is a two-pronged approach: strong regulatory policies that prioritise adolescent health and active youth engagement. How can policies ensure that healthy foods become accessible, affordable, and most importantly, aspirational in our

diverse food environments? Fiscal measures such as a health tax on high fat, salt, and sugar, and subsidies for nutrient-rich foods, have proven to be somewhat effective in discouraging consumption of sugar sweetened beverages in other countries. We must implement front-of-pack nutrition labels to enable informed consumer choices, alongside stricter regulations to curb misleading advertisements targeting children, particularly on digital platforms and in schools.

Schools too play a critical role in shaping children's food environments. Nutrition education in schools and communities can empower the youth to make informed food choices, and take up physical activity. However, the problem is not only about a lack of awareness or bad food choices. There is a need to enhance food literacy as an essential life skill that can equip adolescents to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy food, whether they are bought from outside or prepared at home; help them choose diverse diets from what is locally grown; and to be able to read and decipher the information on food labels.

We also need inter-ministerial coordination. Nutrition falls under multiple ministries — Women and Child Development, Health, Agriculture, Industry, Consumer Affairs, and Education — and each is working on different aspects. However, without convergence in discourse and action, efforts remain fragmented. Initiatives such as Poshan Abhiyaan provide a framework for collaboration, but a united front from multiple sectors can advocate for stronger regulatory frameworks.

It is time to acknowledge that a healthier India demands more than awareness — it requires healthy eating plates, playgrounds, policy action, youth leadership, and a major shift in our food environments. When we prioritise healthy beginnings, we will pave the way for a hopeful future.

The Double Burden of Malnutrition:

- India is facing a nutrition paradox - under-nutrition and obesity co-exist, particularly among adolescents. While children in poor communities continue to struggle with stunting and wasting, a parallel rise in obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is being observed, especially in urban and semi-urban regions.
- As per the World Obesity Atlas 2024, India ranks among the highest in the annual increase of childhood obesity.
- The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey shows that over 5% of adolescents are overweight or obese, with the figure rising to 10–15% in certain states.

Structural Causes and Socio-Cultural Influences:

- Ultra-processed foods are more accessible and affordable than traditional, healthy alternatives.
- Peer pressure, school cafeterias, social media, and aggressive digital marketing of unhealthy foods shape adolescent dietary habits.
- Nutrition education is minimal in school curricula, and food literacy as a life skill is missing.
- Adolescents, while vulnerable, are also the least empowered to make healthy choices due to systemic and commercial barriers.

Consequences of Poor Nutrition:

- Poor adolescent nutrition is not just a health issue; it affects:
 - **Cognitive development:** Poor concentration, lower academic performance.
 - **Mental health:** Links with body image issues and stress.
 - **Productivity:** Reduced long-term economic potential and increased healthcare burden.

Policy Measures and Their Gaps:

- Government Initiatives like Poshan Abhiyaan, Jan Andolan for nutrition, and School Health and Wellness Programmes are positive steps.
- However, fragmentation among ministries — Women & Child Development, Health, Education, Consumer Affairs — leads to a lack of convergence.
- The need for inter-ministerial coordination is critical for addressing adolescent obesity holistically.

What Needs to Be Done – A Two-Pronged Strategy:

1. Regulatory and Fiscal Interventions:

- Health taxes on high-fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) foods and subsidies on nutritious foods.
- Front-of-pack nutrition labelling to aid informed decision-making.
- Banning misleading advertisements of unhealthy foods, especially those targeting children via digital media and school spaces.

2. Empowering Youth and Transforming Food Systems:

- Nutrition education as part of formal curricula.
- Food literacy: Teaching adolescents how to read food labels, differentiate between healthy/unhealthy choices, and appreciate locally-grown foods.
- Physical activity infrastructure like playgrounds, parks, and school-based sports programmes.

Conclusion:

- Adolescent obesity is not just a dietary issue but a systemic failure of food environments, policy fragmentation, and commercial influence. A healthy India requires more than awareness—it needs a multi-sectoral response, strong regulatory measures, empowered youth leadership, and sustainable, equitable food systems. Transforming adolescent nutrition today is an investment in India's demographic dividend tomorrow.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India is facing a nutrition paradox where both undernutrition and obesity coexist among adolescents. Discuss the factors responsible for rising obesity among adolescents in India. Suggest policy interventions to address this double burden. (250 words)

Page 10: GS 2 : International Relations

Recent geopolitical events, particularly Turkey and Azerbaijan's support to Pakistan after the Pahalgam terror attack in India, have triggered a wave of backlash within Indian civil society, academia, and trade circles.

- There have been public calls for boycotting these countries, cancellations of tourism and education ties, and even suspensions of academic collaborations. This has reopened a critical debate on India's foreign policy posture, especially towards nations that have been historically aligned with Pakistan.

Understanding India's relationship with Turkey and Azerbaijan

Data suggests that even if an official trade ban is issued against these two nations, India stands to lose little

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Sambavi Parthasarathy
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Following Türkiye and Azerbaijan's support for Pakistan after India's military confrontation in the wake of the Pahalgam massacre, many online travel platforms reported a sharp spike in cancellations of tour bookings to these countries. Many Indian tour operators withdrew offers and promotional packages for trips to Türkiye and Azerbaijan. On social media, calls to "boycott" both countries gained traction. Institutions such as IIT Bombay, IIT Roorkee, and Jawaharlal Nehru University suspended MoUs with some Turkish universities.

Data show that the relationship between Pakistan and Türkiye has been strengthened by arms trade. The two countries have also shown reciprocal support during past geopolitical standoffs. For instance, Türkiye has backed Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, while Pakistan has supported Türkiye in disputes related to Cyprus.

Similarly, in 2020, it was with Turkish backing that Azerbaijan captured much of the Armenian-populated enclave from Armenia. Though Azerbaijan regained full control of the region in 2023, Türkiye denied any direct involvement in that year's operation.

Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) shows that Türkiye has been exporting arms to Pakistan since the 1990s. **Chart 1** shows Türkiye's arms exports to Pakistan between 1995 and 2023 by category and volume. A significant share of this trade comprised artillery – defined as naval, fixed, self-propelled guns, howitzers, and multiple rocket launchers. Pakistan also received armoured vehicles from Türkiye, including tanks, armoured cars, and personnel carriers.

India has supplied weapons to Armenia (**Chart 2**). Most of these exports comprise surface-to-air missile systems and a few multiple rocket launchers. In contrast, SIPRI data shows no official arms transactions between India and Azerbaijan, or India and Türkiye.

Last week, some Indian trader associations passed resolutions to boycott all forms of trade and commercial engagement with Türkiye and Azerbaijan. However, data suggests that even if this escalates into an official trade ban, India stands to lose little. Crude oil is the primary import from both countries, but their combined share in India's total crude imports has remained below 1% over the past six years (**Chart 3**). In contrast, Azerbaijan could face a greater impact, as India was its third largest destination for crude oil as of 2023.

Another major import from Türkiye is machinery and mechanical appliances, including nuclear reactors, boilers, and related parts. But even in this category, Türkiye accounts for only about 1% of India's total imports (**Chart 4**). India remains far more dependent on countries such as China and Germany for such equipment.

While calls to boycott Türkiye and Azerbaijan have led to "mass cancellations" of travel bookings from India, data shows that Indian tourists formed less than 1% of all tourists to Türkiye in 2024. That said, the number of Indian visitors to Türkiye has been rising steadily in recent years (**Chart 5**).

In 2023, Indians made up less than 6% of all tourists in Azerbaijan, but this share rose to around 10% in 2024. The boycott calls, therefore, come at a time when Indian travel to both these countries was on the rise (**Chart 6**).

The number of Indian students pursuing higher education in Türkiye and Azerbaijan has also increased in recent years. In 2017, the number of Indian students in these countries was less than 100. As of January 2024, it increased by at least seven times (777).

Interests in conflict

The data for the charts were sourced from SIPRI, the Lok Sabha, Türkiye's Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Azerbaijan Tourism Board, UN Comtrade, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Azerbaijan State Statistical Committee

Chart 1: The chart shows Türkiye's arms exports to Pakistan between 1995 and 2023

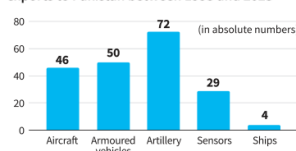


Chart 2: The chart shows India's weapons exports to Armenia over the years

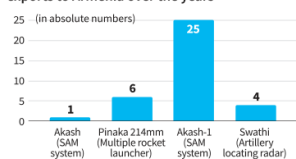


Chart 3: The country-wise share of India's imports of crude oil over the six years

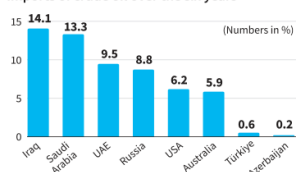


Chart 4: The country-wise share of India's imports of nuclear reactors and machinery

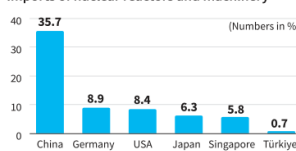


Chart 5: The chart shows the number of tourists from India and Pakistan to Türkiye

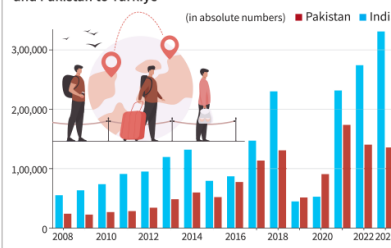
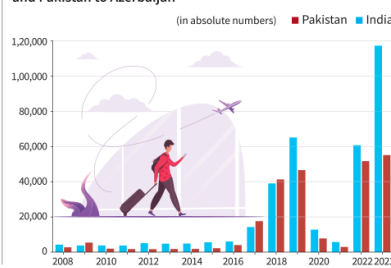


Chart 6: The chart shows the number of tourists from India and Pakistan to Azerbaijan



Geopolitical Background:

- **Turkey-Pakistan Nexus:**

- Turkey has long supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, reciprocated by Pakistan's backing of Turkey on Cyprus. Their partnership is also militarily entrenched, with Turkey consistently exporting weapons such as artillery and armoured vehicles to Pakistan since the 1990s.

- **Azerbaijan-Turkey Alliance:**

- Azerbaijan's military success in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia was widely viewed as supported by Turkey, although Ankara officially denied direct involvement. India, by contrast, has provided military support to Armenia, including missile systems and rocket launchers, leading to a strategic divergence between India and Azerbaijan.

India's Strategic Position:

- While no official arms trade exists between India and Turkey/Azerbaijan, India has cultivated ties with Armenia, Turkey's regional rival, signaling a nuanced balancing strategy in the South Caucasus.
- India's increasing military engagement with Armenia aligns with its broader geopolitical goals of countering Turkey's growing influence in the Islamic world and limiting Pakistan's strategic space.

Trade and Economic Dimensions:

- **Despite the media uproar, economic ties are limited:**

- Combined imports of crude oil from Turkey and Azerbaijan constitute less than 1% of India's total crude oil imports.
- Machinery and mechanical equipment from Turkey also account for just around 1% of India's import basket.

- **Tourism and Education Impact:**

- Indian tourists constitute less than 1% of Turkey's total tourist inflow, though the numbers were increasing before the boycott.
- Similarly, in Azerbaijan, Indians formed around 10% of all tourists in 2024.
- The number of Indian students in both countries, though growing (777 as of 2024), remains relatively small compared to countries like the U.S., U.K., or Australia.

Implications for Indian Foreign Policy:

- **Low Trade Risk, High Symbolism:** India's economic exposure to Turkey and Azerbaijan is minimal, meaning that a diplomatic or commercial boycott would not severely harm India's interests, but would send a symbolic message of disapproval.
- **Strategic Signaling to Pakistan:** By suspending university MoUs and tourism engagement, India underscores a zero-tolerance approach towards states supporting Pakistan diplomatically or militarily, especially post-terror events.
- **Rising Global Balancing:** India's outreach to Armenia reflects a realpolitik approach, balancing Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan trilateral dynamics with a counter-trilateral alignment (India-Armenia-Greece/Cyprus).
- **Diplomatic Prudence Needed:** While popular sentiment favors isolation of hostile states, foreign policy must remain guided by long-term strategic goals, especially as India expands its presence in Central Asia and West Asia.

Conclusion:

- India's ties with Turkey and Azerbaijan, though superficial in economic terms, reflect deeper strategic and ideological challenges. Turkey's overt support to Pakistan, its ambition to lead the Islamic world, and its regional activism pose both diplomatic and security concerns for India. While India may not suffer materially from a rupture in ties, a balanced strategy combining strategic deterrence with diplomatic engagement is essential to preserve India's expanding influence in West and Central Asia.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India's geopolitical tensions with Turkey and Azerbaijan reflect deeper strategic alignments in West and Central Asia. Discuss the implications of Turkey and Azerbaijan's growing ties with Pakistan for India's regional diplomacy. (250 words)

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Getting the 'micropicture' at the panchayat level

Evidence-based decision-making has been the buzzword for the government for quite some time now. However, the extent of data-based decision-making in practice remains an open question.

Critics point to the delay in conducting Census operations and releasing Census data to researchers. They also highlight the other surveys carried out by the government and/or the change in methodology, thereby making the availability of time series data difficult, as obstacles to overcome in evidence-based decision-making at all levels of government. But government officials point to the availability of mammoth data in the portals of different Ministries and also the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012 of the Government of India. This policy intended to make non-sensitive government data available to the public in an open, accessible, and reusable format (<https://data.gov.in>).

However, researchers complain that the data made available are not in a format which can be easily understood by the public or elected representatives. Citizens and even trained researchers feel overwhelmed by the voluminous data. Data visualisation tools on <https://data.gov.in> as well as other government portals are relatively under-developed. Data analytics leaves a lot to be desired. Consequently, decisions continue to be made based on experience and/or the intuitions of Ministers and senior bureaucrats at the Union and State levels.

Data generation and use

At the grassroots level – the gram panchayats, blocks and districts – data are only generated and fed into the system for use by senior officials at the State and national headquarters. Generally, portals are designed to meet the requirements of the heads of departments and secretaries and certainly not of government functionaries and elected representatives at the district, block or gram panchayat levels. Thus, we always get the 'mega picture' and not the 'micro picture'. Data at the gram panchayat level gets linked to a household and family and so becomes difficult to ignore if presented in an easily understandable



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The PAI portal can become a useful tool for officials of line departments and help local and State governments

form to residents.

On the PAI

It is in this context that the magnitude of the work that has gone into the making of Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) Baseline Report 2022-23 (officially released in April 2025 by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj) needs to be understood. PAI is a composite Index and has been compiled based on 435 unique local Indicators (331 mandatory and 104 optional) with 566 unique data points across nine themes of LSDGs (Localization of Sustainable Development Goals) aligned with the National Indicator Framework (NIF) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. Validated data relating to over 2.16 lakh gram panchayats have been analysed and presented in a form where even a sarpanch or ward member can understand (with some support) not only where their GP stands in relation to the nine LSDGs but also what needs to be done to achieve them. Data relating to a little over 11,000 GPs were not included in PAI as they could not be validated as in laid down procedure. While 25 States/Union Territories provided validated data of almost 100%GPs, it is a matter of serious concern that Uttar Pradesh provided data for only 23,207 GPs (40%) out of its 57,702 GPs. This omission raises serious questions about the state of development in U.P. The PAI portal (www.pai.gov.in) can serve as a useful tool for officials of line departments. A constituency-wise report generation facility can prove very useful for even Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly if they wish to make a specific intervention in respect of any LSDG.

It is a dramatic shift that data have now been linked to outcome. For instance, is the GP really a healthy panchayat? Based on the scores of GP on Healthy Panchayat indicators, gaps can now be easily identified and plugged in a short period. Further, the role of all stakeholders such as the individual, community, elected representatives and frontline workers of the health department would also suggest themselves. Excellent coordination between the frontline workers of development departments such as rural

development, panchayati raj, education, health, drinking water and elected panchayat representatives and civil society organisations (CSOs) is seen as a very important factor in the performance of GPs on PAI.

It would be ideal if over 4,000 institutions linked with the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan undertake a study of at least five gram panchayats in their vicinity and explain to the community the implications of their PAI score and what could be done by them to improve their score. Hand-holding of GPs by these institutions and CSOs would go a long way in supplementing the role of departmental officials and attaining the SDGs. The PAI score card also has implications for how corporate social responsibility funds, the Prime Minister's Mineral Area Fund administered by the District Mineral Foundation (DMF), Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) and Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Scheme (MLALAD) among others can be used for realisation of SDGs by 2030.

Need for analysts

There is an urgent need to provide trained data analysts at the block and district panchayat levels who can prepare and provide regular report cards for various stakeholders. More than the Union Government, PAI can be a gamechanger for State and local governments. A Similar Achievement Index should also be formulated for urban local governments. A baseline PAI report should be followed by publications of reports at regular intervals especially after the difficult groundwork has been done.

PAI is much more than a ranking of GPs, Districts or States. It is a call for action. GPs faring poorly are in need of support. We need to not only understand where funds are going or how they are being used (or misused). We need to use the latest data visualisation tools to make all stakeholders understand their critical role and ensure that the goal of making India march forward on the path of development becomes a reality.

The views expressed are personal

Paper 02 : Indian Polity

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Evidence-based governance must begin from the grassroots. Discuss this statement in the context of the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) and its role in improving local self-government in India.(250 words)

Context :

- The emphasis on evidence-based decision-making in governance has gained traction in India, but the translation of data into actionable insights, especially at the grassroots level, remains limited.
- The recent launch of the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) Baseline Report 2022–23 by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj marks a significant milestone in linking data with developmental outcomes at the gram panchayat (GP) level.
- The PAI is designed to help elected representatives and citizens understand where their panchayat stands on key developmental parameters and what interventions are needed to achieve the Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs).

Challenges in Data-Driven Governance:

- **Gap Between Data Availability and Usability:**
 - Although platforms like data.gov.in host vast government datasets under the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012, the presentation, visualisation, and interpretation of this data remain inadequate.
 - Trained researchers, let alone elected grassroots representatives, often find it difficult to extract meaningful insights due to poor design, excessive technicality, or volume of data.
- **Top-Down Orientation of Data Systems:**
 - Most existing data portals and MIS platforms are designed for central or state-level monitoring, rather than empowering local stakeholders like sarpanchs, ward members, or frontline workers.
 - As a result, while the “macro picture” is available for senior officials, the “micropicture” at GP level remains blurred.

Significance of Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI):

- Composite Index developed using 435 local indicators across nine thematic areas aligned with the SDGs and National Indicator Framework.
- **Coverage:** Over 2.16 lakh GPs with data made understandable even for local representatives.
- **Outcome-Oriented:** For instance, if a GP scores poorly on “Healthy Panchayat,” stakeholders can identify the exact gaps — such as immunization, sanitation, or malnutrition — and plan corrective action.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Constituency-wise report generation allows MPs, MLAs, and civil society organisations to track and respond to local development gaps.

Implementation Gaps and State-Level Issues:

- Uttar Pradesh's underreporting (only 40% of GPs) raises concern about data quality and political will at the state level.
- Some GPs (11,000+) were excluded due to failure to validate data — pointing to the need for better training, infrastructure, and support mechanisms.

Recommendations and Way Forward:

- **Capacity Building and Grassroots Data Literacy:**Deployment of trained data analysts at block and district levels to prepare PAI-based report cards.
 - Involve educational institutions (like those under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan) in interpreting PAI scores for local communities.
- **Citizen Engagement and Accountability:**CSOs and universities should help explain PAI scores to citizens and promote community-led planning and social audits.
- **Integration with Development Funds:**PAI can guide targeted allocation of CSR funds, DMF, MPLADS/MLALADS to low-performing GPs for gap filling in SDG indicators.
- **Urban Extension Needed:**A similar Achievement Index should be designed for Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) to track progress on urban development goals.
- **Data Visualisation Tools and Real-Time Dashboards:**Modern data visualisation interfaces should be developed to make PAI more interactive and user-friendly for both officials and citizens.

Conclusion:

- The Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) represents a paradigm shift in local governance—from input-based monitoring to outcome-based planning. It is not merely a ranking tool, but a strategic instrument for decentralised planning, transparency, and participatory governance. For India to truly achieve the SDGs by 2030, efforts must be grounded in the 'micropicture' of development—one panchayat at a time.