

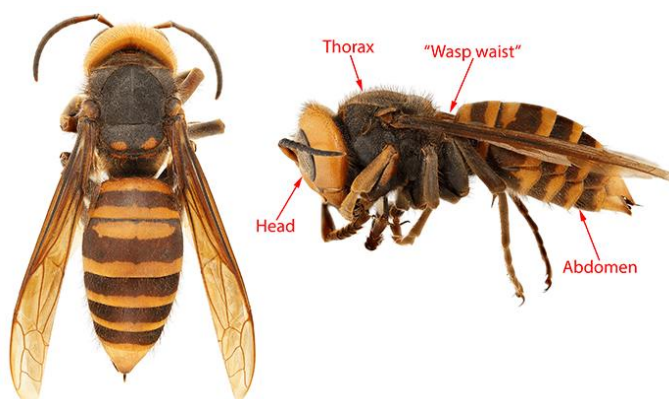
Today's Prelims Topics

Murder Hornets

Context

The Murder Hornet/Northern Giant Hornet has been declared eradicated in the United States by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). It was first spotted near the Canadian border in **Washington State in 2019**.

About Northern Giant Hornet



- It is the largest hornet species in the world.
- It is **Native** to subtropical and temperate mountainous regions of Asia, including **northern India, the Korean peninsula and Japan**.
- **Characteristics:**
 - They are approximately **4 times** the size of domestic honeybees.
 - **Appearance:** Large **orange head** with prominent black eyes. **Dark brown thorax** and abdomen with yellow-orange bands.
 - **Builds underground nests**, generally in abandoned rodent burrows.
- **Difference between Hornet & Wasp:**
 - The major difference between wasp and hornets is **size and colour**. Wasps are smaller in size than Hornets.
 - Wasps have black and yellow rings, while hornets have black and white rings.

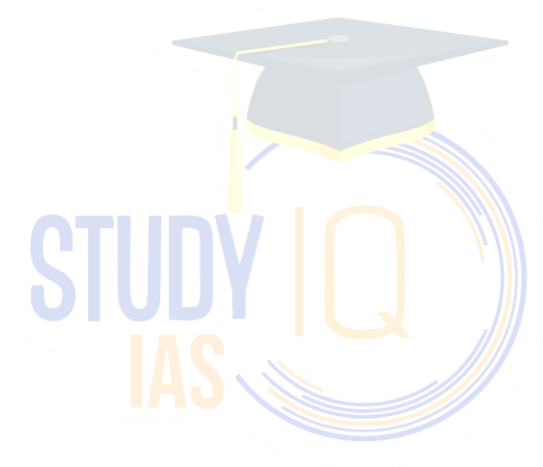
Why Are 'Murder Hornets' a Threat?

- **Impact on Pollinators:**
 - It is capable of destroying an entire **honeybee hive in just 90 minutes**.
 - Hornets can enter a '**slaughter phase**' where they kill entire hives by **decapitating the bees**. The hornets then defend the hive as their own, taking the brood to feed their own young
 - Threatens native pollinators essential for agriculture and ecosystems.
- **Human Danger:**
 - Their stings can penetrate beekeeper suits, delivering venom **seven times more potent than a honeybee's**. They can sting **multiple times**, causing significant harm.

- **Invasive Concerns:** In non-native areas, the hornet can destabilize ecosystems by preying on native species. It competes with local predators for food resources.

Source:

- [Indian Express - Why and how did the United States eradicate 'murder hornets'?](#)



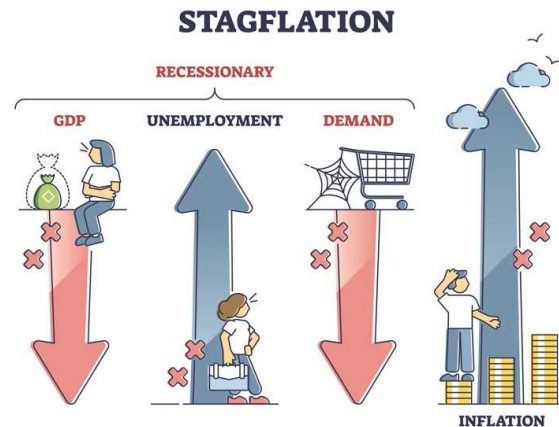
We find ourselves in a slow growth, high inflation scenario

Context

In a recent statement External member of the Monetary Policy Committee Nagesh Kumar said that, India is in a **slow growth-high inflation scenario**, largely due to **food prices** with significant weight in the Consumer Price Index .

About Stagflation

- It is an economic situation characterised by **high inflation, slow economic growth, and high unemployment.**
- The term comes from the words "stagnation" and "inflation".
- **Economic impacts of Stagflation:**
Diminished purchasing power, Increased unemployment, Reduced investment, Wage price spiral etc.



- **Causes of Stagflation:**

- **Supply-Side Shocks:** A sudden increase in the cost of essential resources like oil can increase production costs across industries, leading to inflation without corresponding economic growth. E.g. 1970s oil crisis.
- **Poor Economic Policies:** Misguided monetary or fiscal policies can also contribute to stagflation.
- **Structural Rigidities in the Economy:** Stagflation can also result from structural problems in an economy, such as labor market rigidities (difficulty in hiring and firing workers), lack of technological advancements or inefficient resource allocation.

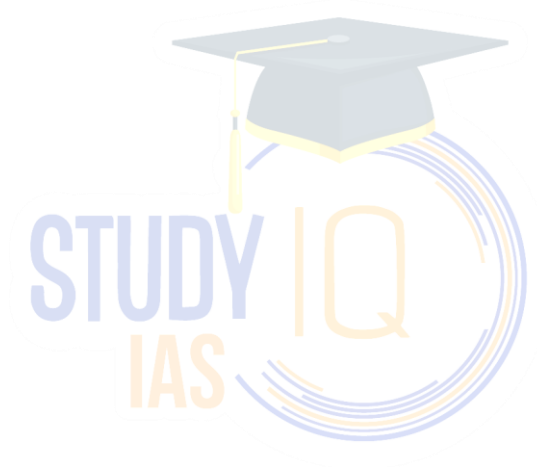
- **Policy measures to tackle Stagflation:**

- **Supply side reforms:** Improving labor market flexibility, reducing regulation, investing in infrastructure, encouraging innovation etc.
- **Targeted Fiscal Policies:** Providing subsidies for essential goods, reducing taxes on lower-income households, incentivizing investment in key sectors.
- **Monetary Policies:** Central banks need to strike a balance between controlling inflation and supporting economic growth.

Related Terms

- **Inflation:** It refers to a sustained rise in general level of prices over a period of time in the economy.
- **Deflation:** Refers to a fall in the general level of prices over a period of time. (Negative rate of inflation)
- **Disinflation:** slowing down of rate of inflation

Source: [The Hindu - 'We find ourselves in a slow growth, high inflation scenario'](#)



New undersea cables to boost India's digital connectivity

Context

India is expanding its undersea cable network with the two new systems.

Expansion of India's Undersea Cable Network

- India is enhancing its undersea cable network with two new systems, the **India Asia Xpress (IAX) and the India Europe Xpress (IEX)**, set to launch in the next three months.
- The IAX will connect **Chennai and Mumbai with Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia**, while the **IEX links these cities to France, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Djibouti**.
- These cables, over 15,000 kilometers in total length, are owned by Reliance Jio with investment from China Mobile.
- **Significance of submarine cables:**
 - Submarine cables are vital for global communications, they carry over 99% of international internet traffic.
 - They enable critical services such as commerce, financial transactions, government activities, digital health and education.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

- It is a **United Nations agency** that coordinates global telecommunications networks and services. (ITU became a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1947).
- ITU was founded in **1865** with the **International Telegraph Convention**. (HQ -Geneva, Switzerland).

International Advisory Body for Submarine Cable Resilience

- It is a partnership between **ITU and the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC)** to improve the resilience of submarine cables.
- The body is made up of **40 members** from around the world, including ministers, heads of regulatory authorities and senior telecommunications experts.
- **India's telecom secretary** is also part of the body.

Source:

- [The Hindu - New undersea cables to boost India's digital connectivity](#)

Places in News

Libya

- Sixteen Indian workers at Libya Cement Company in Benghazi, are being held in "prison-like conditions" after protesting against contractual violations.



- **Location:** Situated in North Africa, bordered by the **Mediterranean Sea to the north.**
- **Bordering Countries:** Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia.
- **Prominent Mountains:** Nafusa and Jebel Akhdar.
- **Desert:** Majority of Libya is covered by the Libyan Desert (part of the Sahara Desert).
- **Important ports:** Benghazi, Misrata, Derna & Tripoli (**capital**).
- **Facts:**
 - Libya has no permanent rivers. Over **97% of Libya's freshwater comes from groundwater.**
 - It is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Efforts on to bring back Indian workers stuck in Libya: MEA](#)

Georgia

- Eleven Indians have died in **Georgia's Gudauri** due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

- **Location:** Situated in the Eastern European region of the **South Caucasus**, bordered by **Black Sea to the West.**
- **Bordering Countries:** Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia & Turkey.
- **Major Rivers:** Inguri, Rioni, and Kodori.
- **Conflict Regions:** Abkhazia, South



Ossetia and Ajaria.

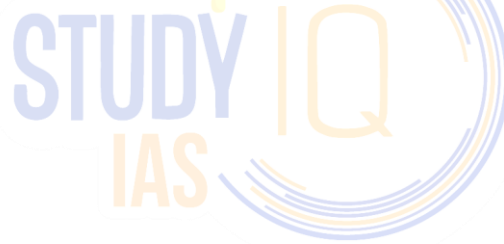
- **Gudauri:** It is a ski resort and mountain town in Georgia known for its skiing, snowboarding.

About Caucasus Mountains

- **Countries:** Extends across Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- **Highest point:** Mount Elbrus (5,642 meters), the highest peak in Europe.
- **Significance:**
 - Acts as a natural barrier between Europe and Asia.
 - Biodiversity hotspot with unique flora and fauna.
 - Popular for tourism and winter sports.

Source:

- [Indian Express - Under the shadow of hotel tragedy](#)



News in Shorts

Kisan Kavach

- It is an **Anti-pesticide bodysuit** designed to protect farmers from the harmful effects of pesticide exposure.
- **Developed by:** Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC-inStem) in collaboration with Sepio Health Pvt. Ltd.
- The kit consists of a trouser, pullover and a face-cover made of '**oxime fabric**' that can chemically breakdown any of the common pesticides that get sprayed onto cloth or body during spraying operations. This prevents chemicals from leaching into the skin.
- Kisan Kavach's fabric deactivates pesticides upon contact through **nucleophilic mediated hydrolysis**, preventing pesticide-induced toxicity and lethality.
 - **Nucleophilic mediated hydrolysis** is a type of nucleophilic substitution reaction where water acts as a nucleophile and attacks an organic bond

Source:

- [PIB - Bharat's First Anti-Pesticide Bodysuit](#)

D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation

- D-8 is an organization for economic cooperation among **Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey**.
 - In its latest summit held in Cairo, Egypt, **Azerbaijan** has joined as the newest member of D-8.
- It was established in **1997 through the Istanbul Declaration**.
- Its secretariat is based in **Istanbul, Turkey**.
- **Objectives:**
 - To improve member states' position in the global economy
 - Enhance participation in decision-making at international level
 - Improve standards of living.

Source:

- [The Hindu - Yunus, Sharif discuss the settling of 1971 issues 'once and for all'](#)

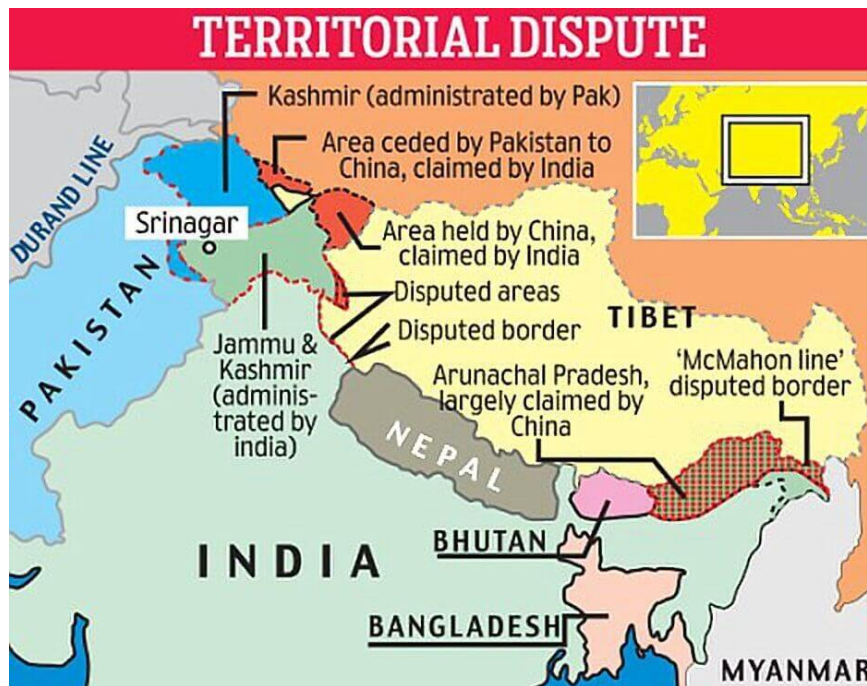
Editorial Summary

India- China Relations and Border Negotiations

Context

The 23rd meeting of Special Representatives (SRs) on the India-China boundary question was held in Beijing.

Background



- India and China share a 3,488-kilometer-long undemarcated border that has been a source of friction for decades.
- It led to a brief but bloody war in 1962 and several face-offs since.
- However, a series of pacts signed between 1993 and 2013 resulted in largely peaceful ties.
- This truce was broken when China moved tens of thousands of troops and weaponry to the border in Eastern Ladakh in April-May 2020, catching New Delhi by surprise.
- While caught off guard, India quickly mobilized forces to match the numbers deployed by China.
- Following the October 2024 announcement, India and China disengaged their troops, i.e. they were withdrawn from their eyeball-to-eyeball positions.

Do You Know?

The Special Representatives (SR) mechanism was established in 2003 to address the dispute related to 3,488-kilometer India-China border. It has convened 22 times, with the last meeting held in 2019.

Stances of India and China at the 23rd SR Meeting

India's Stance

- **Acknowledgment of Frictions:** Explicit reference to the border tensions that began in 2020.
- **Focus on Specific Outcomes:**
 - Emphasized new patrolling arrangements.
 - Highlighted the conclusion of the disengagement process in some areas.
 - Mentioned resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, data sharing on trans-border rivers, and border trade.
- **Approach to Border Management:** Stressed coordination between diplomatic and military mechanisms to maintain peace.
 - Avoided promoting direct exchanges between border personnel, reflecting the no-patrolling buffer zones established along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- **Reluctance to Reference Existing Agreements:** Did not emphasize the **2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles**.

2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles

- Signed on April 11, 2005
- This agreement was a product of the Special Representatives (SR) mechanism.

Key Features of the Agreement

- **Purpose and Context:** The agreement aims to provide a framework for a peaceful resolution of the boundary question, ensuring that differences do not adversely affect overall bilateral relations.
 - It reflects both countries' commitment to fostering a constructive partnership based on mutual respect and cooperation.
- **Core Principles:**
 - **Boundary differences should not impede overall bilateral development**, and both parties are to resolve these through peaceful consultations.
 - It calls for a fair and reasonable solution based on mutual respect, with an emphasis on equality in negotiations.
- **Package Settlement Approach:** The agreement introduces the concept of a "package settlement," which means that all aspects of the boundary dispute should be considered collectively rather than in isolation.
 - This approach contrasts with previous sector-by-sector negotiations.
- **Consideration of Interests:** Historical evidence, national sentiments, practical difficulties, and the actual state of border areas should be taken into account during negotiations.
 - The interests of settled populations in border areas are also to be safeguarded.

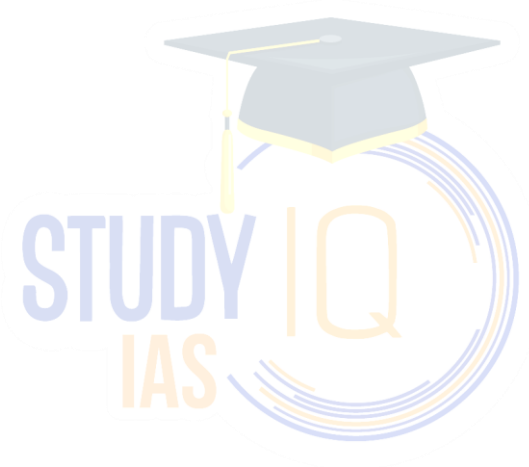
China's Stance

- **Evaluation of Solutions:** Positively reviewed the progress made on border-related issues.
- **References to Agreements:** Cited the 2005 Agreement but with little weight given its repeated violations.
- **Strategic Perspective:** Indirectly conveyed satisfaction with the disengagement process as a step forward in reducing tensions.

Conclusion of the Meeting

- **Progress Highlighted:** Both sides acknowledged some progress on disengagement and new patrolling arrangements.
 - Agreed on the need for continued diplomatic and military coordination.
- **Unresolved Issues:** No concrete steps or timelines for de-escalation were agreed upon.
 - Persistent differences in expectations and interpretations of agreements remained apparent.
- **Broad Takeaway:** India emphasized reducing tensions and maintaining peace, reflecting reduced expectations for a swift resolution.
 - China appeared content with the slower pace of disengagement, which it views as a strategic gain.

Source: [Indian Express: Two Step Forward, One Step Back](#)



It is for historians to dig for tell-tale remains, not bigots

Context

- Typically, excavations at historic sites are conducted by archaeologists or historians to uncover evidence of lost civilizations, ancient cities, or mythological events.
- In India, excavations have been conducted under places of worship of one religion to seek evidence of another religion's historical presence.
- Such actions have raised questions about secularism and legality, especially in cases like the Gyanvapi Mosque survey.

About Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

- It was enacted by the Government of India to maintain communal harmony by preserving the religious character of places of worship

Key Provisions

- **Status of Religious Places (Section 4):** The religious character of any place of worship existing on August 15, 1947, shall remain unchanged.
 - No legal proceedings can challenge the religious character of such places as it stood on that date.
 - **Exception:** The Act does not apply to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, which was ongoing at the time of its enactment.
- **Prohibition of Conversion (Section 3):** Conversion of a place of worship or any part thereof from one religious denomination to another or from one religious group to another is prohibited.
- **Penalties for Violation (Section 6):** Violators attempting to alter the status of a religious site can face imprisonment of up to 3 years and/or a fine.
- **Scope of Application:** The Act applies to all religious places in India, except those specifically exempted by the government or related to ongoing disputes as of 1991.

Ground for Challenges to the Act's Constitutionality

- Multiple petitions have been filed challenging the Act, arguing it restricts the right to judicial remedies and violates **Article 25 (freedom of religion)** and **Article 26 (right to manage religious affairs)**.
- The choice of August 15, 1947, as a cutoff date was arbitrary.
- It is claimed that the Act removes the judiciary's power to review cases related to religious sites.

Judicial Observations and Misinterpretations

- In 2022, CJI Chandrachud remarked that "a survey may not necessarily fall foul of the Places of Worship Act" during the Gyanvapi mosque case hearing.
- This oral observation has been misinterpreted by lower courts, leading to orders for surveys of mosques in Uttar Pradesh.
- Misinterpretation has resulted in violence, as seen in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh.
- Legally, the religious character of a place of worship as of **August 15, 1947**, is already established.
- Fresh surveys or excavations are unnecessary and could violate the Act.

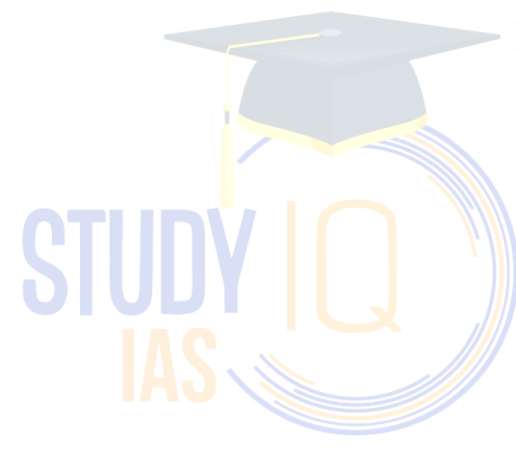
- The Act prohibits not only conversions but also attempts to determine religious character afresh.

Broader Implications

The implications of these judicial actions are profound:

- Recent surveys have led to communal tensions and violence in areas like Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, highlighting fears that such judicial inquiries could reignite historical grievances and lead to unrest.
- Article 26 of the Indian Constitution grants religious denominations the right to manage their own affairs in matters of religion.
 - Surveys or excavations in places of worship could infringe upon these rights, raising ethical concerns about judicial interference in religious practices
- Historical remains beneath places of worship, whether Hindu temples, Buddhist viharas, or Jain shrines, are for **archaeologists and historians** to study, not for rekindling communal tensions.
- Judicial missteps risk fueling false historical narratives and deepening communal divides.

Source: [The Hindu: It is for historians to dig for tell-tale remains, not bigots](#)



PM Visit to Kuwait

Context

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to visit Kuwait on December 21-22, 2024.
- It is the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 43 years, the last being Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981.

Significance of Kuwait for India

- **Strategic Importance:** Located at the northeast end of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait shares borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and hosts key U.S. military bases.
 - It is the only monarchy in the Gulf region that has successfully experimented with democracy.
 - It plays a neutral and mediatory role in resolving regional disputes.
- **Energy Partner:** Kuwait has the world's **sixth-largest oil reserves** and is a founding member of OPEC.
 - It was the **sixth-largest crude oil supplier to India** in FY 2023-24, catering to about 3% of India's energy needs.
- **Sovereign Wealth Fund:** Kuwait's Sovereign Wealth Fund (KIA) is the **fourth-largest globally**, valued at \$924 billion (March 2024).
 - KIA has invested over \$10 billion indirectly in India, showcasing its economic partnership potential.
- **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** Around 1 million Indians form the **largest expatriate group in Kuwait**, strengthening ties through cultural exchanges and remittances.
 - India's educational influence is significant, with **26 CBSE-affiliated schools** in Kuwait educating over 60,000 students.
- **Historical Relations:** India was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait in 1961, post its independence.
 - The Indian Rupee was legal tender in Kuwait until 1961.

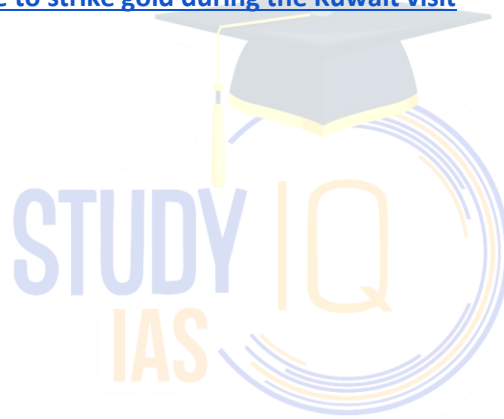
Past Relations Between India and Kuwait

- **Trade Relations:** Bilateral trade stood at **\$10.47 billion in FY 2023-24**, with India consistently ranking as one of Kuwait's top trading partners.
 - India imported crude oil and exported food, textiles, and other goods to Kuwait.
- **COVID-19 Collaboration:** India supplied **2 lakh vaccine doses** to Kuwait during the pandemic.
 - Kuwait provided vital medical supplies to India, including oxygen cylinders and concentrators, during the second COVID wave in May 2021.
- **Cultural Initiatives:** Events like the **Festival of India** (March 2023) and the weekly '**Namaste Kuwait**' Hindi radio program have deepened cultural bonds.
- **People-Centric Cooperation:** Kuwait swiftly helped repatriate mortal remains of over 40 Indians killed in a residential fire in June 2024.
 - Indian workers are highly trusted and contribute significantly to Kuwait's economy.

Expected Outcomes of PM Modi's Visit to Kuwait

- **Strengthening Bilateral Agreements:** Signing of a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement** to bolster ties.
 - Likely agreement on **defense cooperation**.
- **Economic Collaboration:** Discussions on cooperation between **KIA** and **India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)**.
 - Exploration of Kuwait's participation in India's **strategic oil reserves**.
- **Infrastructure and Education:** India could assist in Kuwait's '**Vision 2035**' **infrastructure initiatives**, potentially building institutes like IITs, IIMs, and modern hospitals.
- **Sustainable and Technological Cooperation:** Kuwait's potential joining of the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** and the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)**.
 - Collaboration in **space technology**, including launching satellites for Kuwait.
- **Aviation and Connectivity:** Addressing Kuwait's request for additional airline seat allotments to improve connectivity.
- **Geopolitical Engagement:** Addressing the stagnation in India-Kuwait relations and aligning policies to strengthen India's overall West Asia strategy.

Source: [The Hindu: A chance to strike gold during the Kuwait visit](#)



Direct Benefit Transfer In Recent Times in India

Context

Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT) and cash transfer schemes have gained significant traction in India. Around 15 states governed by various political parties have implemented versions of unconditional cash transfers, targeting women and marginalized sections of society.

Current Situation

- **Widespread Adoption:** Around 15 states, governed by different political parties, have implemented cash transfer schemes targeted at women. Sixty percent of India's women population now reside in these states.
- **Fiscal Magnitude:** Nearly 100 million women receive direct cash transfers annually, amounting to approximately **\$25 billion (₹2 lakh crore)**, roughly **10% of the annual revenue of state governments combined**.
- **DBT Success:** The **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** program, initiated in 2013, has disbursed over **₹5.5 lakh crore** in subsidies and benefits to over 700 million individuals since inception, significantly reducing leakages.
- **Schemes Targeting Women:**
 - **Ladli Lakshmi Yojana (MP):** Incentives for girl child education and marriage.
 - **KCR Kit Scheme (Telangana):** Financial assistance for women post-pregnancy.
 - **Mukhya Mantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana (UP):** Conditional cash transfers to girl children for education and health.

Arguments in Favour of Monetary Transfer Policies

- **Empowerment of Women:** Cash transfers to women enhance their financial independence and decision-making power, fostering gender equality.
- **Poverty Alleviation:** Direct cash injections help the poorest families meet basic needs, reducing abject poverty.
- **Boost to Consumption:** Unconditional cash transfers increase household consumption, stimulating demand in the economy.
 - **E.g.,** The **Economic Survey 2022** noted that rural consumption grew by **10%** in states implementing cash transfer schemes, as beneficiaries used funds for food, clothing, and education.
- **Efficient Governance:** Cash transfers bypass intermediaries, reducing corruption and leakages in welfare delivery systems.
- **Flexibility in Spending:** Beneficiaries can prioritize spending according to their needs, ensuring better resource utilization.
- **Economic Multiplier Effect:** Cash transfers can indirectly contribute to local economic growth by increasing spending in rural and underserved areas.

Disadvantages or Drawbacks

- **Fiscal Burden:** The Reserve Bank of India highlighted that too many centrally-sponsored schemes are straining state budgets, reducing flexibility in state spending.

- **E.g.,** The disbursement under these schemes surged from Rs 11,000 crore in 2021 to Rs 1,09,554 crore in 2024.
- **Inflationary Pressures:** Injecting large sums of money into the economy can lead to inflation, disproportionately affecting the poor.
- **Short-Term Focus:** Immediate fiscal costs are tangible, whereas benefits like empowerment and poverty reduction are long-term and intangible.
- **Dependency Risk:** Unconditional transfers might discourage work effort among certain beneficiaries, fostering dependency on government aid.
- **Inefficiency in Targeting:** Leakages, misidentification, and exclusion errors can result in benefits not reaching the truly needy.
- **Neglect of Structural Reforms:** Over-reliance on monetary transfers may divert attention from addressing deeper issues like unemployment, education, and healthcare.

Way Forward

- **Calibrated Implementation:** Limit annual increases in cash transfer budgets to **5%** while focusing on targeted expansions.
- **Better Targeting Mechanisms:** Leverage the **Aadhaar-PAN linkage** and recent census data for accurate identification of beneficiaries.
- **Focus on Complementary Policies:** Combine cash transfers with skill development programs like **PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana**, ensuring long-term income security.
- **Fiscal Discipline:** Dedicate revenue from additional cess (e.g., infrastructure cess) to fund cash transfers, maintaining fiscal deficit below the **3% target**.
- **Periodic Impact Assessment:** Initiate annual independent audits of schemes to measure their **social return on investment (SROI)**.
- **Encourage Women-Centric Initiatives:** Link cash transfers with self-help group activities like those under the **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM)** to foster entrepreneurship among women.

Source: [Indian Express: Nyaya Gone Wrong](#)