Today's Prelims Topics

Decriminalisation of Politics

Context

The Supreme Court is currently hearing petitions seeking a **lifetime ban** on convicted individuals from contesting elections. It has sought a fresh response from ECI & Union Govt. on this matter.

Legal Provisions on Disqualification

Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act, 1951)

- **Section 8(3)**: **Disqualifies** a person **convicted of a criminal offence** and sentenced to **at least two years of imprisonment** from contesting elections. The disqualification lasts for **six years** after release.
- **Section 8(1)**: Disqualifies persons convicted under laws for **heinous crimes**, including:
    - **Rape**
    - **Untouchability** under the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act
    - **Unlawful activities** under UAPA
    - **Corruption** under the Prevention of Corruption Act
    - **These individuals remain disqualified for six years post-release, irrespective of their sentence duration.**
- **Section 11**: Allows the **Election Commission (EC)** to **remove or reduce the disqualification period** of a convicted person.
    - **E.g:** In **2019, Prem Singh Tamang (Sikkim CM)** had his disqualification period **reduced from six years to 13 months**, enabling him to contest a by-election despite being convicted under the **Prevention of Corruption Act.**

Supreme Court's Past Judgments on Decriminalisation of Politics

- **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) Case (2002):**
    - The Supreme Court **mandated disclosure of criminal records** of all candidates contesting elections.
- **Lily Thomas Case (2013):**
    - SC struck down **Section 8(4) of the RP Act, 1951**, which allowed sitting legislators to continue as members **even after conviction** if they filed an appeal.
    - Now, an MP or MLA is **immediately disqualified** upon conviction.
- **Public Interest Foundation v. Union of India (2019):**
    - Political parties publish the criminal record of their candidates on their websites, social media and local newspapers.

Election Data on Criminal Records

- According to a **2024 ADR report:**
    - **251 MPs (46%)** in the **543-member Lok Sabha** have **criminal cases against them.**
    - **171 MPs (31%)** face **serious criminal charges** like **rape, murder, attempt to murder, and kidnapping.**
    - **Winning probability**: Candidates with **criminal backgrounds** had a **15.4% chance of winning**, while **clean candidates** had only a **4.4% chance.**

Source:

- The Hindu - Should convicted persons contest elections?

India's imports of palm oil dip to a 13-year low

Context

For the first time in over a decade, palm oil's share of India's total edible oil imports has dropped below 30%.

What is Palm Oil?

- **Palm oil** is an edible vegetable oil derived from the **mesocarp (pulp) of oil palm fruits**.
- It is widely used in **food products (cooking oil, processed foods), cosmetics, biofuels, and industrial applications**.
- Two main types:
    - **Crude Palm Oil (CPO)** – Extracted from the pulp.
    - **Palm Kernel Oil (PKO) –** Extracted from the seed/kernel.
- Oil palm trees are **native to Africa** but currently **Indonesia and Malaysia make up over 85% of global supply.**
- **Top Producers Worldwide:** (1) Indonesia (2) Malaysia (3) Thailand
- **Largest Importers of Palm Oil:** (1) India (2) China
- **Palm Oil Production in India:**
    - **Annual production:** 0.3-0.4 million MT (less than 2% of India's demand).
    - **States producing palm oil:** Andhra Pradesh, Telangana & Kerala.
- India has already launched the National **Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)** in 2021 to promote oil palm cultivation.

National Mission on Edible Oils - Oil Palm (NMEO-OP)

- **NMEO-OP** is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** with a special focus on the North east region and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- **Aim:** To boost oil palm production in India.
- **Area Expansion:** Aims to increase oil palm cultivation by 6.5 lakh hectares by 2025-26, reaching a total of 10 lakh hectares.
- **Production Target:** Increase Crude Palm Oil (CPO) production to 11.20 lakh tonnes by 2025-26 and 28 lakh tonnes by 2029-30.

Source:

- The Hindu - Palm Oil

AI in Drug Testing

Context

Recently the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed draft guidelines on AI use in drug development.

How AI Improves Drug Testing

- **Drug Discovery Phase:**
  - AI scans databases containing thousands of chemical compounds.
  - It identifies **hundreds of promising candidates** for further testing.
- **Preclinical Research:** AI predicts human drug responses using data on:
  - How the body **absorbs, distributes and eliminates drugs**.
  - Vulnerable populations (e.g., **children**) who cannot participate in trials.
- **Toxicity prediction:**
  - AI models can predict the potential toxicity of a drug candidate based on its chemical structure, reducing the need for extensive animal testing.
- **Faster development time:**
  - AI can significantly shorten the drug discovery process by identifying promising candidates more efficiently.
- **Reduced costs:**
  - By optimizing drug design and minimizing the need for animal testing, AI can lower the overall cost of drug development.

Challenges of AI in Drug Testing

- **Data Quality** ("Garbage in, garbage out")
  - AI models are only as good as their training data.
  - Biases in data can produce **unreliable outputs**.
- **Transparency Issues**
  - Many AI models operate as **"black boxes"**, lacking independent scrutiny.
  - Training datasets are not always accessible for evaluation.
- **Risk of Incorrect Predictions**
  - Incorrect risk assessments of **adverse drug reactions** can be life-threatening.
  - Continuous monitoring is required to ensure AI models **adapt accurately** over time.

Source:

- The Hindu - AI in Drug Testing

Einstein Ring

Context

The **European Space Agency's (ESA) Euclid space telescope** has discovered a rare **Einstein ring** around a galaxy **590 million light-years** from Earth.

What is an Einstein Ring?

- An **Einstein ring** is a rare ring of light that forms due to **gravitational lensing**.
- **Gravitational lensing** occurs when a **massive celestial object** (a galaxy or cluster of galaxies) creates a **gravitational field** that **bends and magnifies the light** from a distant object behind it.
- This was predicted by **Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity** (1915), which stated that **gravity can bend light around massive objects**.
- The first Einstein ring was discovered in **1987**, and though more have been found since, they remain **extremely rare**.
    - **Less than 1% of galaxies** are estimated to have an Einstein ring.
- Einstein rings are **not visible to the naked eye** and can only be observed using advanced space telescopes like **ESA's Euclid**.

Why Scientists Study Einstein Rings

- **Understanding Dark Matter: Dark matter** makes up **85% of the total matter in the universe**, but it has **never been directly observed**.
    - **Gravitational lensing helps indirectly detect dark matter** by observing how light bends around galaxies.
- **Studying Distant Galaxies:** Some galaxies are **too faint** to be observed directly. Gravitational lensing **magnifies their light**, allowing scientists to **study galaxies that would otherwise remain hidden**.
- **Measuring the Expansion of the Universe:** The universe is **expanding**, stretching space between Earth and other galaxies.
    - Einstein rings provide data on **how fast galaxies are moving apart**, helping refine measurements of **cosmic expansion**.

Source:

- Indian Express - Einstein Ring

Rising Maternal Education Levels in Rural India

Context

The recently released Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 has highlighted a significant transformation in maternal education levels across rural India over the past eight years.

Key Findings of ASER 2024 on Maternal Education Levels

- **Decline in Unschooled Mothers:**
  - In **2016**, **46.6%** of mothers (of children aged **5-16 years**) **had never attended school**.
  - By **2024**, this figure dropped to **29.4%**, marking a **17.2 percentage point decline**.
- **Increase in Mothers Pursuing Higher Education:** The percentage of mothers who **studied beyond Class 10** has **doubled** in eight years:
  - **2016: 9.2%** of mothers studied beyond Class 10.
  - **2024: 19.5%**, reflecting a **10.3 percentage point increase**.

State-Wise Trends in Maternal Education Levels

- **Best Performing States (Highest Percentage of Mothers Studied Beyond Class 10 in 2024)**
  - **Kerala:**
    - **2016:** 40% of mothers studied beyond Class 10.
    - **2024: 69.6%** (**Highest in India**).
  - **Himachal Pradesh**
    - **2016:** 30.7% of mothers had studied beyond Class 10.
    - **2024:** 52.4%.
- **Worst Performing State**
  - **Madhya Pradesh**
    - **2016:** Only 3.6% of mothers studied beyond Class 10.
    - **2024:** Increased to 9.7%, but remains **the lowest in India**.

Source:

- Indian Express - Silent Revolution

News in Shorts

Atlas on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections expenditure

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) released an **Atlas on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections Expenditure.**
- Candidates in the **2024 Lok Sabha elections** spent an **average of ₹57.23 lakh** on their campaigns.

Election Expenditure Limits Set by the ECI

- **Lok Sabha Elections:**
  - **Bigger States** (Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, etc.): **₹95 lakh** per candidate.
  - **Smaller States & UTs** (Goa, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, etc.): **₹75 lakh** per candidate.
- **State Assembly Elections:**
  - **Bigger States**: **₹40 lakh** per candidate.
  - **Smaller States & UTs**: **₹28 lakh** per candidate.
- **Currently, no cap exists on political parties' expenditures during elections.**

Source:

- The Hindu - LS poll expenditure

What is contributing to the downturn in Indian markets?

Why is Foreign Money Moving Away from Indian Markets?

- **Shift to U.S. Bonds Due to Higher Yields:**
  - FIIs and FPIs are moving away from Indian markets towards U.S. bonds, which are seen as a safe haven during uncertain times.
- **Market Concerns and Economic Challenges:**
  - Modest earnings growth in India.
  - Overvaluation in mid and small-cap stocks.
  - Inflation consistently above the RBI's lower threshold of 4%.
  - Uncertainty over global trade and tariffs.

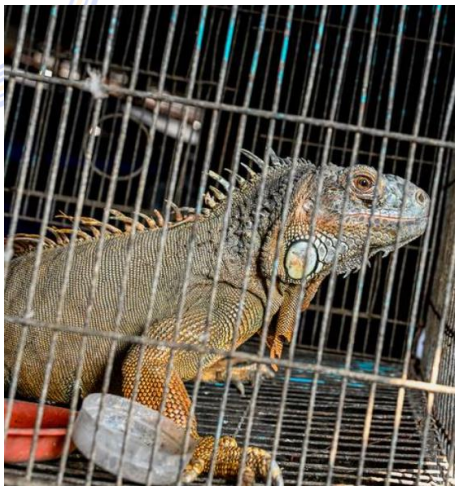
Relationship Between Bond Yields and Stock Markets

- Bond yields and stock markets have **an inverse relationship.**
- Both **bonds and stocks compete for investment funds**—investors choose one based on which offers **higher returns** at a given risk level.
- When **U.S. bond yields rise**, investors **shift money from stocks to bonds** for safer and often better returns.
- This **reduces demand for stocks**, leading to a **decline in stock prices**.
- A **strong U.S. bond market also strengthens the U.S. dollar**, making **foreign investments like Indian stocks less attractive** to global investors.
- Conversely, when **bond yields fall, investors move back to stocks**, boosting stock market performance.

Source:

- The Hindu - Downturn in Indian Markets

Iguana



- Iguanas are large, herbivorous or omnivorous lizards.
- They are **cold-blooded reptiles,** primarily found in tropical and subtropical regions.
- Most iguanas are **arboreal (tree-dwelling)** and have strong claws and tails for defense.
- They are known for their scaly skin, long tails and dewlap (flap of skin under the chin), which helps in **thermoregulation and communication.**
- Iguanas are **native** to tropical regions of Central and South America, Mexico, and the Caribbean.
- Iguanas are **not naturally found in India** but exist as **pets and in captivity**.
- **Iguanas spotted in India:** Green iguanas and American green iguanas.

Source:

- The Hindu - Iguana

Green Credit Programme

- Seventeen States have so far set aside 57,700 hectares of degraded forest land for tree plantation under the Green Credit Programme.

About Green Credit Programme (GCP)

- GCP was launched by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in October 2023.
- It is an innovative market-based mechanism designed to incentivize voluntary environmental actions across various sectors.
- **Key Objectives of the Green Credit Programme:**
    - **Enhancing Forest and Tree Cover:** GCP aims to increase India's forest and tree cover by encouraging afforestation and reforestation activities.
    - **Establishing a Dynamic Land Bank:** The programme plans to create an inventory of degraded forest lands suitable for plantation, accessible through a dedicated web portal.
    - **Issuance of Green Credits:** Participants engaging in approved environmental activities receive Green Credits, which serve as incentives and can be traded on a designated platform.
        - **The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)** administers the programme, overseeing the verification and issuance of these credits.

Source:

- The Hindu - GCP

AI Diffusion Framework

- **U.S. AI Diffusion Framework** is a **policy initiative introduced by the Biden-Harris administration** in its final week in office.
- **The framework aims to:**
    - **Maintain U.S. dominance in AI technology** and its global supply chain.
    - **Restrict access to advanced AI capabilities for adversaries** like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran.
    - **Control the spread of AI innovations** by regulating AI chips, chip-making tools, and AI model weights.
    - **Ensure that future breakthroughs in AI occur only in the U.S. or trusted allies**

Country Classification System (Three Tiers of Access)

- The framework divides countries into three tiers, determining their level of access to AI technology:
- **Tier -1: Key U.S. allies (e.g., UK, Japan) -** Full Access to AI technology without restrictions.
- **Tier-2: Strategic partners and the rest of the world (e.g., India, Israel) - Limited access**, with restrictions on compute capacity and AI models.
- **Tier-3: U.S. adversaries (China, Russia, North Korea, Iran) -** No access to advanced AI technology, strictest export controls apply.

Source:

- The Hindu- AI diffusion framework

Sant Ravidas (1377-1527 C.E.)

- He was a **Bhakti saint, poet and social reformer**. His teachings emphasized equality**, devotion to God and rejection of caste discrimination**.
- His devotional songs and verses made a great impact on the Bhakti Movement.
- He was born in a village called **Seer Govardhanpur in Uttar Pradesh.**
    - His birthplace is now known as **Shri Guru Ravidas Janam Asthan.**
- He is also known as Raidas, Rohidas and Ruhidas.
- He was the disciple of bhakti **poet Ramananda.**
- He followed the **Nirguna tradition,** which worships a formless God, and did not believe in **Saguna Bhakti,** which involves devotion to God in a physical form.
- **41** of his devotional songs and poems are included in the **Guru Granth Sahib.**

- **Association with Mirabai: Mirabai**, the Rajput princess and Bhakti poet-saint, considered Sant Ravidas as her **guru**. She wrote several hymns praising his teachings on **devotion and equality**.
- **Guru Ravidas Jayanti, is celebrated on Magh Purnima,** the full moon day in the month of Magh.

Source:

- The Hindu - Ravidas Jayanti

Editorial Summary

Gender Budget

Context

The Finance Minister in the recent Union Budget laid out a vision for Viksit Bharat (Developed India) with the goal of achieving **70% women in economic activities**.

More in News

- The inclusion of women as a priority within this framework reinforces the government's pledge towards women-led development.

Recent Budget Announcements for Women Empowerment

- **Increased Gender Budget Allocation**
  - **Gender Budget: ₹4.49 lakh crore**, which is **8.8% of the total Budget** (highest in two decades).
  - **49 Union Ministries and Departments** now have gender budgets.
  - **12 new Ministries** from non-conventional sectors (Railways, Ports, Shipping, Land Resources, Pharmaceuticals, etc.) have integrated gender-responsive budgeting.
- **Enhanced Funding for Women-Centric Schemes: ₹1.24 lakh crore (52% of these funds** directly benefit women and girls) allocated to key skilling and livelihood schemes, including:
  - Skill India Programme
  - Entrepreneurship & Skill Development Programme (ESDP)
  - National Skill Training Institutes
  - Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)
  - Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)
  - PM Employment Generation Programme
  - PM Vishwakarma
  - **Krishonnati Yojana**
- **Support for Women in the Gig Economy**
  - **Formalisation of gig workers** through **identity cards** and registration on the **e-Shram portal**.
  - Access to **social security benefits** and **financial inclusion** initiatives.
  - Emphasis on **labour codes enforcement** for job security, maternity benefits, and social protection.
- **Financial & Digital Inclusion:**
  - **₹600 crore dedicated gender budget under the India AI Mission**.
  - **Centre of Excellence on AI for Education** to enhance digital literacy and workforce inclusion.
  - **Easier access to credit for women entrepreneurs**, including collateral-free loans.
  - **Delinking Kisan Credit Cards from land ownership** to support **women farmers** in accessing loans and credit.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Data on Female Labour Participation

- **India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR):**
  - **2021-22:** 33%
  - **2023-24:** ~42%
  - **Global Average (ILO):** 47%
  - **Gap with Male LFPR (79%):** 37%.
- **Sectoral Distribution of Working Women:**
  - **90% of working women** are engaged in the **informal sector**.
  - **Women-owned MSMEs:** 20.5% of all registered MSMEs employ **27 million people**.
  - **Gig and platform economy** is emerging as a key employer for women, but challenges remain in **wages, job security, and benefits**.

Way Forward: Realizing 70% Women's Economic Participation by 2047

- **Diversity of Economic Roles: Bridge the gender gap in leadership roles** by incentivizing companies to promote women executives.
- **Financial & Economic Inclusion: Expand credit access** with **alternative credit scoring models** and **collateral-free loans**.
  - **Encourage Women-Led MSMEs** through targeted incentives and digital marketplaces.
    - Establishing 30 million additional women-owned businesses could generate 150-170 million jobs by 2030.
  - **Introduce gender-disaggregated tracking** for government welfare and loan schemes.
- **Strengthening Social Protection: Extend maternity benefits and childcare support** for informal sector workers.
  - **Strengthen social security entitlements** under **e-Shram** for gig and informal sector women workers.
  - **Enhance safety and workplace rights** through better **labour law enforcement**.
- **Policy & Norm Transformation: Simplifying documentation requirements** for economic and social security provisions, such as delinking Kisan Credit Cards from land ownership, would help women farmers avail loans and credit facilities.
  - **Promote mindset change campaigns** to shift societal attitudes toward women's economic roles.

Source: The Hindu: Budgeting for a gender-inclusive 'Viksit Bharat'

Nuclear Energy- Dangerous Concession On Liability

Context

- The Finance Minister announced the government's intention to amend the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act.

More in News

- The U.S. government and U.S. Ambassador Eric Garcetti has been lobbying India to amend the law to make it easier for U.S. companies to sell nuclear reactors to India.
- U.S. administrations have been unhappy that the law places some minimal responsibilities on nuclear manufacturers in the event of an accident.

Incidents Influencing Laws

- **Bhopal Gas Disaster (1984):** Led to the Supreme Court's "absolute liability" ruling in the Delhi Oleum gas leak case (1986), holding enterprises engaged in hazardous activities strictly liable for harm.
- **Fukushima Nuclear Disaster (2011):** Highlighted the catastrophic economic potential of nuclear accidents. Estimated cleanup costs ranged from ¥35 trillion to ¥80 trillion (₹20 lakh crore to ₹46 lakh crore). The accident also exposed design flaws (Mark 1 containment).
- **Three Mile Island Accident (1979):** Revealed that the reactor supplier, Babcock & Wilcox, had identified a safety hazard but failed to provide operators with clear instructions to mitigate it.

Evolution of Indian Law

- **Dilution of "Absolute Liability" (2010):** The government created a special law for nuclear accidents, diluting the principle of absolute liability.
    - **Channeling of Liability:** Primary liability channeled to the operator (NPCIL).
    - **Liability Cap:** Capped at ₹1,500 crore.
- **"Right of Recourse":** It allows the operator to recoup compensation from the supplier if the accident was caused by "supply of equipment with patent or latent defects or sub-standard services."

Arguments Against Indemnifying Nuclear Suppliers

- **Reduces Accountability and Safety Standards:** If suppliers are indemnified, they have no financial incentive to ensure the highest safety standards.
    - Past accidents (Fukushima, Three Mile Island) show that design flaws in reactors can lead to catastrophic failures.
- **Violates the Polluter Pays Principle:** The **"absolute liability"** doctrine established by the Supreme Court (after Bhopal Gas Tragedy) holds hazardous industries fully responsible for damages.
    - Indemnifying suppliers contradicts this legal principle and shifts the burden to taxpayers.
- **Financial Burden on Indian Government & Taxpayers:** If a nuclear disaster occurs, the entire compensation and cleanup costs (potentially in lakhs of crores) would fall on the Indian government.
    - This is unfair, as foreign suppliers would walk away without any financial responsibility.
- **Dangerous Precedent for Future Industrial Accidents:** Indemnifying nuclear suppliers could set a precedent for other hazardous industries (chemical plants, oil refineries, etc.) to demand similar legal immunity.
    - This weakens corporate accountability across sectors.
- **Contradicts India's 2010 Nuclear Liability Law:** The **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010)** ensures that suppliers can be held liable for defective equipment.

  - Indemnification would completely remove this critical protection.
- **Encourages Reckless Business Practices:** When suppliers know they won't be held liable, they may cut corners in design, safety, and manufacturing to maximize profits.
  - General Electric (GE) ignored safety warnings about its Mark 1 reactor design, which contributed to the Fukushima disaster.

Problems with American Reactors (AP1000)

- **Excessively High Costs:** The AP1000 reactors in the U.S. saw **cost overruns of 250%**, with a final price tag of **$36.8 billion** for two reactors in Georgia.
  - Given India's lower electricity tariffs, recovering such high costs would be economically unviable.
- **Unfinished and Abandoned Projects:** Two AP1000 reactors in **South Carolina were abandoned** after $9 billion was wasted on delays and design flaws.
  - This raises concerns about the feasibility of such reactors in India.
- **Technical and Safety Issues:** The **Westinghouse AP1000 design has faced regulatory and safety challenges** in multiple countries, including the U.S. and China.
  - In China, the first AP1000 reactors faced **major delays due to critical component failures**.
- **Dependency on Foreign Technology:** India has a strong **indigenous nuclear program** (PHWRs, Fast Breeder Reactors).
  - Importing AP1000 reactors makes India **dependent on U.S. technology**, which could be restricted due to geopolitical tensions.
- **Not Competitive with Renewables:** The per-unit electricity cost from AP1000 reactors is **several times higher** than that of solar, wind, and domestic nuclear reactors.
  - Investing in expensive reactors locks India into costly electricity for decades.
- **No Proven Track Record in India:** Unlike **Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs)** that India has successfully deployed, AP1000 reactors have no operational history in India.
  - This increases risks related to local adaptation, maintenance, and long-term sustainability.

Way Forward: Strengthening India's Nuclear Liability Framework

- **Increase Liability Cap:** Adjust the compensation limit to align with real-world disaster costs, ensuring sufficient victim relief.
- **Stronger Regulatory Oversight:** Establish an independent nuclear safety authority with enforcement power over both operators and suppliers.
- **Mandatory Supplier Contributions to Insurance Pool:** Require nuclear suppliers to contribute to the liability fund, ensuring shared financial responsibility.
- **Transparency in Nuclear Agreements:** Disclose all nuclear procurement agreements to the public to ensure accountability in government decisions.
- **Focus on Indigenous Nuclear Technology:** Prioritize investment in Indian-developed reactors (e.g., PHWRs) rather than costly and risky foreign imports.
- **Public Consultation on Policy Amendments:** Before making changes to the liability law, hold public discussions to consider safety, financial, and environmental concerns.

Source: The Hindu: Nuclear energy — dangerous concessions on liability

Should India Withdraw from WTO

Context

A recurring demand from a section of Indian farmers is that India should exit the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Why Are Indian Farmers Demanding Exit from WTO?

- **Limits on Minimum Support Price (MSP) & Subsidies:** WTO's **Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) restricts India's MSP** and other support to farmers.
    - The **External Reference Price (ERP)**, fixed based on 1986-88 prices– **only 10% of the total value of agricultural production** as subsidies, does not account for inflation, making India's MSP seem excessive in WTO calculations.
    - Farmers believe these restrictions hinder **their right to secure a legal guarantee for MSP**.
- **Threat from Cheap Imports:** WTO promotes **free trade, leading to the import of cheaper agricultural goods** from developed countries.
    - **E.g.,** India faces **cheap dairy imports from New Zealand** and **oilseeds from Argentina**, which harm domestic producers.
- **Lack of Fair Market Access for Indian Exports:** Developed nations impose **non-tariff barriers** (e.g., strict quality standards, sanitary measures) that restrict Indian agricultural exports.
    - India struggles to export products like **rice, wheat, and dairy** due to such restrictions.
- **Developed Countries' Unfair Subsidies:** The **U.S. and EU heavily subsidize their farmers** (U.S. farm subsidies exceed $100 billion annually).
    - This makes their agricultural products **artificially cheaper**, reducing the competitiveness of Indian exports.
    - India cannot match these subsidy levels due to WTO's **trade-distorting subsidy caps**.
- **Restrictions on Public Stockholding for Food Security:** India maintains food stocks for **welfare programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS)**.
    - WTO rules limit food stockpiling beyond a certain level, calling it a **trade distortion**.
    - This creates challenges for India's **food security and buffer stock programs**.
- **Lack of Progress on "Special & Differential Treatment" (S&DT):** WTO promised **special treatment for developing countries**, allowing them to protect farmers.
    - However, developed countries **block these reforms** while enjoying policy flexibility for their own farmers.

What Can India Do Instead of Exiting the WTO?

- **Utilize WTO's "Peace Clause" Effectively:** The **peace clause** protects India from legal action even if it **exceeds subsidy limits** for food security programs.
    - India should continue using this clause to **provide MSP and stockpile food grains** while negotiating for permanent relief.
- **Advocate for Reforming the External Reference Price (ERP):** India should push for **updating the ERP** from the outdated **1986-88 levels to current inflation-adjusted values**.
    - This would make India's MSP **more justifiable under WTO norms**.
- **Increase Non-Trade-Distorting Support:** Instead of relying solely on MSP, India can **expand direct income support schemes** like **PM-KISAN**, which are WTO-compliant.
    - Other investment-based incentives (e.g., irrigation infrastructure, crop insurance) can also be **strengthened without violating WTO rules**.
- **Strengthen Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers on Imports:** India should **strategically use tariff and non-tariff measures** to curb excessive agricultural imports harming domestic farmers.
    - **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures** can be used to set higher quality standards, restricting unfair imports.

- **Secure Bilateral and Regional Trade Deals:** India should negotiate **fairer Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)** to **reduce dependence on WTO-led global trade rules**.
    - **E.g.**, The **India-UAE CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement)** ensures better export opportunities for Indian agricultural goods.
- **Strengthen WTO Negotiations Rather Than Exiting:** India should **lead coalitions of developing nations** to push for **fairer agricultural trade policies**.
    - Strengthening multilateralism instead of exiting will help India shape global trade rules in its favor.

Source: **Indian Express: Don't Go it Alone**