Today's Prelims Topics

Repeal of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876

Context

Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the importance of repealing obsolete colonial laws, mentioning the Dramatic Performances Act, which was officially abolished in 2018.

Provisions of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876

- The law gave the British government powers to **prohibit public dramatic performances** that were: **Scandalous, Defamatory, Seditious & Obscene.**
- It allowed authorities to **ban any play, pantomime or drama** that was deemed to:
    - **Excite disaffection against the government.**
    - **Deprave and corrupt the audience.**
- Any **Magistrate** had the power to:
    - **Issue search and seizure warrants** for places suspected of violating the Act.
    - **Arrest** individuals performing prohibited acts.
- **Punishment**: The Act prescribed a **jail term of up to three months, a fine, or both**.
- **Why Was This Law Enacted?**
    - The British enacted this law **after the visit of the Prince of Wales, Albert Edward to India (1875-76).**
    - It was part of a series of colonial laws aimed at **suppressing nationalist activities**.
- **Repeal of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876:**
    - The present government has launched a **flagship initiative** to **repeal obsolete laws** to improve the **Ease of Doing Business Index**.
    - Since **2014**, over **2,000 obsolete laws** have been removed.
    - Though declared **invalid by courts earlier**, this act was formally repealed by **Parliament under the Repealing and Amending (Second) Act, 2017**.

Why Do Colonial Laws Continue to Exist in India?

- **Article 372 of the Constitution** states that **laws in force at the time of Independence would continue** unless repealed or modified.
- However, **colonial-era laws do not enjoy the presumption of constitutionality**:
    - When challenged, the **government must justify their validity**.
    - In contrast, **laws enacted by independent India are assumed to be constitutional unless proven otherwise**.

Source:

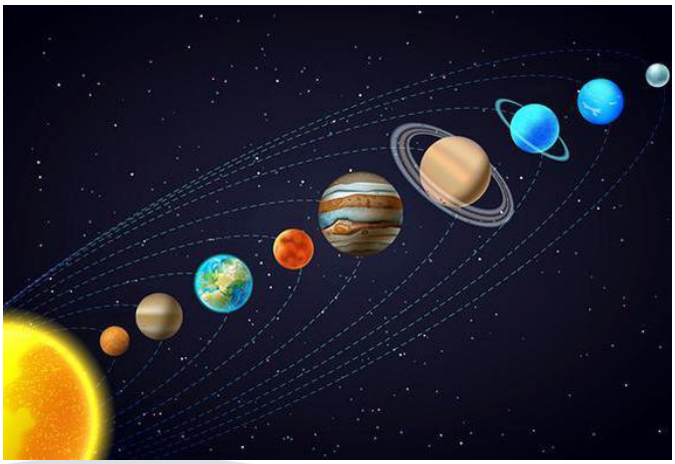
- Indian Express - Repeal of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876

Planetary Parade

Context

Recently on 28th February **Seven planets** lined up for a rare "planetary parade".

About Planetary Parade



- It is an astronomical event where multiple planets appear to line up in the night sky in the order of their distance from the Sun.
- **Why Do Planetary Parades Occur?**
  - Planets move in elliptical orbits around the Sun but remain nearly in the same plane (**ecliptic plane**).
  - The planets don't actually align in space but appear so from Earth due to their positions in their orbits.
  - As they revolve, sometimes multiple planets appear in the same region of the sky when viewed from Earth.
- **Frequency of Planetary Parades:**
  - **Three or Four-Planet Parades**: Occur once every few years and are relatively common.
  - **Seven or Eight-Planet Parades**: Very rare, occurring only once in several decades.
- **The February 28, 2024 Event:**
  - **Planets Involved**: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune (total 7 planets).
  - **Next Similar Event**: The next major planetary parade is expected in **2040**, involving **six planets**.

Related Terms

- **Conjunction**: When two or more celestial objects appear very close to each other in the sky.
- **Great Conjunction**: A rare event when Jupiter and Saturn appear extremely close together (last occurred in December 2020).

Source:

- The Hindu - Planetary Parade

High Selenium Levels Causing Hair Loss

Context

Between December 2024 and January 2025, over 300 cases of sudden hair loss were reported in 18 villages in Shegaon taluka, Buldhana district, Maharashtra.

Investigations and Key Findings

- A team from **ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) and AIIMS Delhi** tested blood, hair, wheat, water, and soil samples.
- **Findings:**
    - Selenium in affected individuals' blood was **31 times higher than normal**.
    - Selenium levels in wheat samples from PDS shops were **2-8 times higher than safe limits**.
    - **Water samples were normal**, ruling out water as the cause.
    - **People who did not eat PDS wheat were not affected**, proving wheat as the source.

About Selenium

- Selenium is a **trace mineral** needed in small amounts for good health.
- It is found in foods like **wheat, eggs, fish, meat, and nuts**.
- It helps with **thyroid function, immune system, and antioxidant defense**.
- **Effects of Too Much Selenium:** Consuming **excess selenium** causes **selenosis**, leading to:
    - Hair loss
    - Brittle nails
    - Skin rashes
    - Digestive issues
    - In severe cases, nerve damage or kidney problems

Source:

- The Hindu - Selenium in Wheat

Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025

Context

The **Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025** was withdrawn recently after facing opposition from legal bodies.

Objectives of Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2025

- The **Law Ministry** sought to amend the **Advocates Act, 1961** to address "contemporary challenges" in the legal profession.
- It aimed to **align Indian legal practices with global standards** and accommodate changes in the legal sector.

About Advocates Act, 1961

- It is the primary law that governs the **legal profession in India**.
- It provides for the **regulation of advocates**, the **formation of the Bar Council of India (BCI) and State Bar Councils**, and the **conduct of advocates**.
- **Section 4** of the Act established the **Bar Council of India (BCI)**, which regulates the **legal profession and legal education**.

Key Controversies Surrounding the Bill

- **Ban on Lawyer Strikes and Boycotts:**
  - The Bill introduced **Section 35-A**, which **prohibited lawyers from going on strike** or boycotting courts.
  - It defined such actions as **"misconduct"**, making lawyers subject to **disciplinary action** under the 1961 Act and BCI Rules, 1975.
  - **Concern:** Many **bar associations protested**, arguing that strikes are a **legitimate tool for lawyers to voice grievances**.
- **Concerns Over Executive Control:**
  - The Bill proposed **expanding the government's role in the Bar Council of India (BCI)** by allowing the Centre to **nominate up to three members**.
  - These nominees would join existing members like the **Attorney General, Solicitor General, and representatives from State Bar Councils**.
  - The **BCI strongly opposed** this, calling it **"draconian"** and an attempt to **reduce its independence**.
  - **Key Provisions Affecting the BCI's Autonomy:**
    - **Section 49B**: Allowed the **Centre to issue binding directions** to the BCI.
    - **Section 45B**: Enabled the **BCI to hear complaints against advocates nationwide** and **suspend lawyers at its discretion**.
    - **Section 48B**: Empowered the **BCI to dissolve State Bar Councils** and replace them with a committee if found ineffective.
- **Impact on Corporate Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms:**
  - The Bill **expanded the definition of "legal practitioner"** to include **corporate lawyers, in-house counsel and lawyers from foreign firms**.
  - It aimed to **formally recognize corporate lawyers** and **regulate the entry of foreign law firms into India**.
  - The **BCI opposed** this, arguing that it could **blur the distinction between advocates and legal practitioners**.

Source:

- The Hindu - Advocates Amendment Bill

Altieri's Ring

Context

The Euclid space mission of the European Space Agency recently spotted an Einstein ring and named Altieri ring.

About Altieri's Ring?

- In September 2023, the **Euclid space telescope** found an Einstein ring in a nearby galaxy called **NGC 6505, which is 590 million light-years away.**
- It was discovered by **astronomer Bruno Altieri** in an early test image, and later, clearer images confirmed its existence.
- The ring was named Altieri's Ring in his honor.
- This ring is actually the **distorted image of another galaxy 4.5 billion light-years away.**
- **Significance of this discovery:**
    - Altieri's ring is special because it was found in **NGC 6505**, a well-studied nearby galaxy that has been known to astronomers since the 19th century.
    - Only **five** other gravitational lenses have been found at similar distances 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**.
- **An Einstein ring forms only when** the background galaxy, the lensing galaxy, and Earth align perfectly.
- 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**.

Euclid Space Mission

- It was launched by the European Space Agency (ESA) in July, 2023.
- **Objective:** To investigate dark matter and dark energy, which together make up 95% of the universe.
- It is equipped with a **1.2-meter telescope**, it captures high-resolution images and spectra of distant galaxies.
- It operates from the **Sun-Earth L2 orbit**, about 1.5 million km from Earth.
- It is expected to map billions of galaxies, creating a 3D cosmic map spanning 10 billion years.
- **Mission Duration** - 6 Years.

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:

- The Hindu - Einstein Ring

Blue Ghost Mission 1

Context

Recently Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost Mission 1 successfully landed on the Moon.

Successful Private Lunar Landing

- Firefly Aerospace's **Blue Ghost lander** successfully landed on the **Moon** as part of **NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative**.
    - CLPS program aims to **promote private-sector competition in lunar exploration** and reduce costs.
- **Landing site:** Mare Crisium, on the northeastern near side of the Moon.
- The spacecraft **descended autonomously from lunar orbit**, navigating the terrain to avoid hazards.
- **Expected mission duration:** Two weeks (one full lunar day).
- **First Private Lander to Land Upright:**
    - Blue Ghost is the first private lander to touch down on the Moon without crashing or toppling over.
    - Even national space agencies struggle with lunar landings—**only five countries (Russia, US, China, India, and Japan) have successfully landed on the Moon**.

Scientific Objectives and Instruments on Blue Ghost

- **Lunar Soil Collection:** A vacuum system to collect lunar soil samples.
- **Subsurface Temperature Measurement:** A drill capable of measuring temperatures up to 10 feet (3 meters) below the surface.
- **Lunar Dust Mitigation:** A **device designed to eliminate lunar dust**, addressing a significant challenge faced by **Apollo astronauts**, whose equipment and suits were covered in abrasive lunar dust.
- **Navigation Advancement:**
    - An onboard receiver successfully acquired signals from the US GPS and European Galileo satellite constellations.
    - This could improve navigation for **future lunar explorers**.
- **High-Resolution Lunar Imaging:**
    - It captured **detailed images of Earth** while en route to the Moon.
    - Also sent **high-resolution photos of the Moon's cratered surface** after landing.

Upcoming Private Lunar Missions

- **Intuitive Machines (U.S.):**
  - Houston-based **Intuitive Machines** is preparing for its **second lunar landing attempt**.
  - The company's **first lunar mission in 2023 tipped over**, but it marked the **first U.S. lunar landing since Apollo (1972)**.
- **ispace (Japan):**
  - Japanese company **ispace** is **three months away** from attempting its **second Moon landing**.
  - Its first lander crashed in 2023.

Source:

- Indian Express - Private lander Blue Ghost

UGC's Draft Regulations on Discrimination in HEI's

Context

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued draft regulations aimed at redefining discrimination and explicitly introducing the term **"caste-based discrimination"** on university campuses.

About Draft Regulations

- The **UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2025** include:
  - New definitions of discrimination.
  - Proposal for an "equity committee" to handle complaints.
  - Punishments for false complaints.
- **Revised Definition of "Discrimination":**
  - Defined as "any unfair, differential, or biased treatment" against any stakeholder on the basis of: Religion, Race, Caste, Sex, Place of birth, Or any combination of these factors.
  - The **2025 regulations apply to all stakeholders**, not just students. This could include faculty, staff and administrators.
  - **Issue: Only SCs and STs** are covered under the new definition, **excluding OBCs and other marginalized groups**. This **narrow definition** has raised concerns.
- **Establishment of "Equity Committee":**
  - The new regulations propose the formation of an **Equity Committee** under the **Equal Opportunity Centres** in universities.
- **UGC's New Power to Derecognize Institutions:**
  - If institutions fail to comply with these regulations, the UGC can de-recognize them.
- **Punishment for False Complaints:**
  - **Disciplinary actions and fines** can be imposed on individuals found making false complaints.
  - **Issue:** The draft does not clearly define what qualifies as a **"false complaint"**, leading to concerns about **misuse of this provision to silence genuine complaints**.

Source:

- The Hindu - UGC new draft rules

News in Shorts

Tea's Ability to Remove Heavy Metals

- According to a new study **properly brewed tea can help filter heavy metals** like **lead and cadmium** from water.

How Tea Adsorbs Heavy Metals

- The process involved is called **adsorption**, where ions or molecules stick to the surface of another molecule, forming a film on it.
- Heavy metal ions attach to the surface of tea leaves and remain trapped there, preventing them from entering the brewed tea.
- **Key takeaways from the study:**
    - A standard cup of tea can remove up to 15% of lead.
    - Longer steeping times (e.g., overnight iced tea) remove more metals.
    - Cellulose tea bags are more effective than nylon or cotton bags.
    - Finely ground black tea adsorbs more metals due to its increased surface area.

Source:

- Indian Express - Tea leaves

Biodiversity Leakage

- **Biodiversity leakage** happens when efforts to protect nature in one place unintentionally lead to environmental harm in another place.
- This occurs when conservation efforts **reduce farming, logging, or other production activities** in one country, causing those activities to **shift to another country**—often one with more biodiversity.
- **Example:**
    - United Kingdom decides to stop farming wheat on 1,000 square kilometers of land to restore forests and protect wildlife.
    - While this is good for local biodiversity, the UK still needs wheat. So, it starts importing more wheat from another country.
    - If that wheat now comes from a highly biodiverse country like Brazil or Indonesia, farmers there might clear forests or destroy natural habitats to grow more wheat.
    - This means that while the UK gains biodiversity, another country loses it, leading to no real global benefit—or even net harm.

Source:

- Down to Earth - Biodiversity Leak

Exercise Desert Hunt - 2025

- It is an integrated Tri-Service Special Forces exercise conducted by the Indian Air Force at **Jodhpur Air Force Station.**
- The exercise involved elite **Para (Special Forces)** from the Indian Army, the **Marine Commandos** from the Indian Navy along with the **Garud (Special Forces)** from the Indian Air Force.

Source:

- PIB - Desert Hunt

Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyan

- It is a **nationwide capacity-building initiative** to **empower Women Elected Representatives (WERs) in PRIs** by:
  - Strengthening leadership and decision-making skills.
  - Enhancing their participation in grassroots governance.
  - Encouraging their active involvement in policy and governance at the rural level
- It is launched by the **Ministry of Panchayati Raj.**
- **Significance of the Initiative:**
  - **First-ever national gathering of women representatives from all three tiers of PRIs** (Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayats, and Zilla Panchayats).

Source:

- PIB - Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyan

Editorial Summary

The Student And The Three Language Debate

Context

National Education Policy (NEP2020) and its three-language language formula have reignited a longstanding debate, particularly between the Centre and Tamil Nadu.

Background

- The **Kothari Commission** (National Education Commission, 1964-66) was the first to propose the **Three-Language Formula**.
- In **1968,** the Three-Language Formula was formally adopted.
- The **NEP 2020** continues to support the Three-Language Formula but introduces **flexibility**:
    - States can decide **which three languages to teach**.
    - No language will be imposed, but students must learn **at least two Indian languages**.
- **Structure**:
    - **Hindi-speaking States:** Hindi + English + a modern Indian language (preferably a south Indian language).
    - **Non Hindi-speaking States:** Regional language + Hindi + English.

Hypothesis and Ground Realities

- The NEP justifies the compulsory study of three languages on three grounds:
    - Improving cognitive ability
    - Enhancing employment mobility
    - Promoting national integration

However, these claims have flaws:

- **Role of Technology in Language Acquisition**: With advancements in **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, language proficiency is becoming less significant for knowledge acquisition.
    - AI tools like **Google Gemini** can translate content instantly in multiple languages, making traditional language learning less critical.
- **Lack of Evidence for Cognitive Benefits**: While bilingualism improves cognitive abilities, there is **no scientific proof that knowing three languages enhances cognitive skills proportionally**.
    - Instead, research suggests that a **strong foundation in the mother tongue** is more beneficial for a child before introducing additional languages.
- **Real-world Learning of Additional Languages**: In practical settings, adults learn new languages based on professional needs.
    - **E.g.,** Tamil soldiers in the **Indian Army** quickly learn Hindi. Tamil salesmen in **Maharashtra** learn Marathi to communicate with customers.

Issues Associated on Implementing 3 Language Formula

- **Burden on Public School Students**: Public school students, who lack access to supplementary education (like coaching and tuition), will struggle with an additional language, widening the gap between them and private school students.
- **Questionable Cognitive Benefits**: While bilingualism is linked to cognitive development, there is no strong evidence that learning three languages proportionally enhances cognitive ability.
- **Weak Foundation in Primary Education**: According to ASER 2024, 88% of Class 3 students in Tamil Nadu lack basic literacy skills. A third language would divert focus from improving foundational learning.
- **Teacher Availability and Infrastructure Challenges**: Public schools already struggle to find enough competent teachers for existing subjects.

    - Adding a third language would worsen this issue, especially if different parents choose different third languages..
    - Despite Tamil Nadu having one of the **highest per-child education budgets** in India:
        - **80-90% of the education budget** is spent on **teacher salaries**.
        - Infrastructure remains **underfunded**.
        - Allocating funds for third-language teachers could **reduce investment in improving school infrastructure**.
- **Language as a Cultural Anchor**: While language plays a role in national unity, a **third language is neither the only nor the best way** to promote cultural integration. A **shared history and mutual respect** among cultures are more effective in fostering unity.
- **Threat to English Proficiency**: A focus on Hindi might dilute efforts to strengthen English proficiency, which is essential for competing nationally and globally.

Way Forward

- **Optional Third Language from Middle School:** Instead of **compulsory three-language learning**, Hindi could be introduced as an **optional subject in middle school** (district headquarters first, then expanded based on demand).
    - This gradual approach ensures students are **not overburdened** while allowing them to learn Hindi **if they see career benefits**.
- **Focus on Teaching and Learning:** The time available in schools is **finite**, and with AI-driven learning tools, education should **prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving** rather than rote language learning.
- **Strengthening English Education:** Tamil Nadu should focus on **improving English proficiency** to:
    - Ensure competitiveness in **central exams**.
    - Increase **job opportunities** in multinational companies.
    - Enhance global career prospects in **service-based industries**.
- **Prioritizing Teacher Training and Infrastructure:** Instead of hiring **third-language teachers**, resources should be directed to:
    - **Training existing teachers** to improve literacy rates.
    - **Enhancing school infrastructure** to create a better learning environment.
- **Monitoring National Language Policy Trends:** If Hindi begins **replacing English at the national level**, Tamil Nadu must **adapt its policies accordingly** to prevent students from being disadvantaged.

Source: [The Hindu: The student and the three language debate]

Why is India staring at an obesity challenge?

Context

Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme, highlighted the alarming increase in obesity in India.

More in News

- He cited that **1 in 8 Indians** is affected by obesity.
- Urged people to **reduce oil consumption by 10% per month** to promote a healthier lifestyle.

The Scale of the Problem

- **Definition of Obesity:** The **World Health Organization (WHO)** defines **overweight and obesity** as **abnormal or excessive fat accumulation** that poses a **health risk**.

Obesity Trends in India (NFHS Data)

- The **National Family Health Surveys (NFHS)** data shows a **steady rise** in obesity:
  - **Women (Overweight/Obese)**:
    - **2015-16 (NFHS-4)**: **20.6%**
    - **2019-21 (NFHS-5)**: **24%**
  - **Men (Overweight/Obese)**:
    - **2015-16 (NFHS-4)**: **18.9%**
    - **2019-21 (NFHS-5)**: **22.9%**
  - **Urban obesity** levels are significantly **higher** than rural areas.
- **Abdominal Obesity (Lancet Study, 2023):** A **2023 study in The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia** analyzed **NFHS-5 data** and found:
  - **40% of women** had abdominal obesity.
  - **12% of men** had abdominal obesity.
- **Childhood Obesity:** NFHS data shows an **increase in overweight children under 5 years**:
  - **2015-16: 2.1%**
  - **2019-21: 3.4%**
  - Older children face **even higher risks** (World Obesity Atlas 2022 estimates for **2030**):
    - **5 to 9-year-olds**: **10.81% prevalence**
    - **10 to 19-year-olds**: **6.23% prevalence**

Health Risks Associated with Obesity

- **Metabolic Syndrome: Indians are genetically predisposed** to **storing fat in the abdomen**.
  - **Abdominal obesity contributes to metabolic syndrome**, increasing risks of:
    - Type 2 diabetes
    - Heart disease
    - Stroke
- **Adult Health Risks:** According to the **WHO**, obesity is a major risk factor for **leading causes of poor health and early death**, including:
  - Several types of cancer
  - Osteoarthritis
- **Diabetes: India has the highest number of** diabetes cases in the world with 101 million people suffering from diabetes.
- **Cancer :** Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – National Cancer Registry Programme projects:
  - **2022**: 14.6 lakh cases
  - **2025**: 15.7 lakh cases
- **Cardiovascular Diseases (CVDs):** One of the **leading causes of death and disability** in India.

- Indians are affected by CVDs **at least 10 years earlier** than other populations.
- **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs): 60% of all deaths** in India are now due to **NCDs**, which include obesity-related illnesses.
- **Childhood and Adolescent Health Risks:** Childhood obesity can lead to:
  - Higher risk of NCDs at an earlier age.
  - Adverse psychosocial effects:
    - Lower school performance.
    - Lower quality of life.
    - Higher risk of stigma, discrimination, and bullying.
  - Children with obesity are more likely to remain obese in adulthood.

Causes of Rising Obesity in India

- **Unhealthy Diet and Ultra-Processed Foods: Urban India** has seen a rise in:
  - **Ultra-processed food consumption**.
  - **Unhealthy eating habits** (high in **sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats**).
- **Low Physical Activity Levels:** A **Lancet Global Health Study (2023)** found that:
  - **Nearly 50% of Indians** do not get **sufficient physical activity**.
  - **Indoor lifestyle**: Increased use of **digital devices** and **sedentary work culture**.
  - **Outdoor conditions discourage activity**:
    - **No safe cycling lanes or pedestrian paths**.
    - **Shrinking green spaces**.
    - **Rising street crime** deters walking in urban areas.
- **Air Pollution: Air pollution** contributes to **inflammation**, leading to:
  - Increased risk of **cardio-metabolic diseases**.
  - **Visceral fat accumulation** (fat stored around organs).
- **Economic Barriers to Healthy Eating:**
  - **Low-income households** rely on **carbohydrate-heavy diets** (rice & wheat).
  - **Protein & micronutrient-rich foods (fruits, vegetables, dairy, pulses, meat) are expensive**.
  - **Rural obesity is rising** and may **soon overtake urban obesity**.

Limitations in Measuring Obesity

- **Traditional BMI Limitations: Body Mass Index (BMI)** is the **most commonly used metric** but has **limitations**:
    - **Does not differentiate between muscle mass and fat**.
  - **Does not indicate fat distribution** in the body.
- **Updated Obesity Diagnosis Guidelines**
  - Indian experts introduced **new obesity classification**:
    - **Stage 1**: Increased fat accumulation but no impact on organs or daily life.
    - **Stage 2**: Fat accumulation impacts **organ function and physical abilities**.
  - **Recommended new measurement methods**:
    - **Waist circumference**
    - **Waist-to-height ratio**
    - **Body fat percentage**

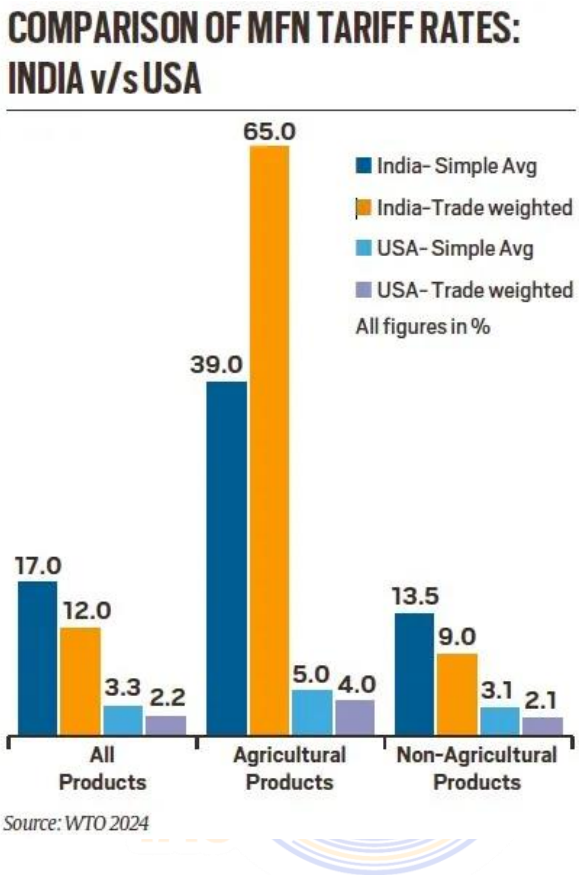
Source: [The Hindu: Why is India staring at an obesity challenge?]

Trump's America First, an opening for Indian farms

Context

The recent announcement of President Trump related to reciprocal tariff could be a chance for India to transition from protectionism to a productivity-driven agri-export strategy.

Challenges for India in Trade with the USA



- **High Tariff Disparities:** India imposes an average tariff of **17% on all goods** compared to **3.3% in the US**.
    - Agriculture tariffs are especially high in India (**39% simple average, 65% trade-weighted**) compared to the US (**5% and 4%, respectively**).
    - The US may introduce **reciprocal tariffs** that could hurt India's exports, especially **shrimp, basmati rice, processed foods, and honey**.
- **Agricultural Trade Imbalance:** India enjoys a trade surplus of **$3.46 billion** in agricultural trade with the US.
    - US exports to India include **almonds, cotton, ethanol, and soybean oil**, but **high tariffs (100-150%) on whiskey, walnuts, chicken legs, and skimmed milk powder** are major points of contention.
- **Genetically Modified (GM) Crop Restrictions:** India **bans GM soy and maize**, despite rising demand for **animal feed and ethanol**.
    - The US, a global leader in GM crops, wants India to **ease restrictions**.
- **Non-Tariff Barriers:** Stringent **quality standards, lengthy approval processes, and bureaucratic hurdles** impact trade.
    - **Limited market access** for Indian agri-exports in the US due to high import duties on certain products (**butter, bovine meat cuts, fruits & vegetables**).
- **Weak Agricultural Infrastructure:** India lacks **cold storage, efficient logistics, and export-focused processing units**.

- Quality certification and traceability issues hinder global competitiveness.

What Needs to Be Done?

- **Strategic Trade Negotiations:** Leverage negotiations under **Mission 500** (targeting **$500 billion bilateral trade by 2030**).
  - Seek **lower duties** for high-value agri-exports (**bananas, okra, mango pulp**).
  - Offer **phased tariff reductions** on **walnuts, cranberries, cheese, skimmed milk powder** to facilitate trade.
- **R&D Investments for Agri-Competitiveness:** Increase **agri-R&D spending** from **<0.5% to at least 1% of agri-GDP**.
  - Encourage **high-yielding crops, sustainable farming practices, and export-driven varieties**.
- **Modernize Agricultural Value Chains:** Expand **cold storage, logistics, and supply chain infrastructure**.
  - Improve **quality certification and food safety standards** for easier global market access.
  - Develop **agri-export hubs** in key production clusters.
- **Selective Trade Concessions:** Reduce tariffs on **low-impact imports like walnuts, blueberries**.
  - Gradual tariff reductions on **poultry, dairy, and ethanol** to balance trade interests.
- **Policy Shift from Protectionism to Productivity:** Move away from **subsidy-heavy agriculture (fertilizers, free power)** towards **efficiency-driven growth**.
  - Focus on **export-oriented policies** rather than heavy tariff barriers.

Source: Indian Express: In America first, on opening