Today's Prelims Topics

Five Eyes Alliance

Context

Recently Intelligence chiefs of Five Eyes Alliance countries attended the Security Conclave organised by the National Security Council Secretariat.

About Five Eyes Alliance (FVEY)

- It is an intelligence-sharing network comprising **5 English-speaking countries.**
    - USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
- It was established in the aftermath of World War II, its roots trace back to the UKUSA Agreement signed in 1946, which aimed to facilitate cooperation in signals intelligence (SIGINT) among these nations.

Objectives of the Five Eyes Alliance

- **Intelligence Sharing:** The primary objective is to collect, analyse and share intelligence on global threats, including terrorism, cybercrime and other security challenges.
- **National Security Enhancement:** By pooling resources and intelligence, the Five Eyes nations aim to bolster their national security capabilities and respond more effectively to emerging threats.
- **Signals Intelligence (SIGINT):** FVEY focuses heavily on SIGINT, which involves intercepting and analysing electronic communications. This includes monitoring phone calls, emails, and internet activities.

Facts

- Beyond the core Five Eyes members, there are extended groups known as:
- **Nine Eyes** (adding Denmark, France, Netherlands and Norway)
- **Fourteen Eyes** (including Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Sweden), which enhance global surveillance capabilities.

Source:

- The Hindu - 5 Eyes

Air pollution will lower India's solar generation capacity

Context

A recent study conducted by researchers at **IIT Delhi** has found that **air pollution and climate change will impair the efficiency of solar panels in India**.

How Climate Change and Air Pollution Affect Solar Energy

- **Global Dimming and Brightening:**
  - **Air pollution reduces solar radiation reaching Earth's surface**, affecting solar panel efficiency.
  - Over time, solar radiation undergoes **significant variations** due to changes in atmospheric conditions.
  - These variations are known as **global dimming** (less radiation reaching the surface) and **global brightening** (more radiation reaching the surface).
- **Role of Atmospheric Components:**
  - **Clouds** reflect incoming solar radiation, reducing the sunlight available for solar panels.
  - **Aerosols and particulate matter (PM2.5, PM10)** either scatter or absorb sunlight, further reducing radiation.
  - **Water vapour and ozone** influence the amount of solar energy that reaches the surface.
  - On **cloudy or hazy days**, particulate matter pollution significantly reduces **solar panel output**.

Factors Affecting Solar Panel Performance

- **High Solar Radiation** – Direct and strong sunlight improves energy conversion efficiency.
- **Low Ambient Temperature** – Cooler surroundings enhance panel efficiency.
- **Airflow Over Panels** – Helps in cooling the panels and maintaining efficiency.
- Any **imbalance** in these factors reduces **solar cell performance**.

Key Findings of the study

- **Projected Drop in Solar Panel Efficiency:**
  - **By mid-century (2041-2050), India's solar panel efficiency will drop by 2.3%.**
  - The **total estimated energy loss** due to reduced efficiency is **840 gigawatt-hours (GWh) per year**.
- **Impact of Temperature Increase:**
  - **Solar cell temperatures will rise by 2°C by 2050** due to higher ambient temperatures.
    - **Ambient temperature** refers to surrounding air temperature.
- **Regional Variations in Solar Potential:**
  - **India's Northeast and Kerala** will experience an **increase in solar potential** in the future.
  - **Reason:** Cloud cover is expected to decrease over these regions, allowing more solar radiation to reach panels.

India's Solar Power Ambitions

- India is currently the **fifth-largest solar power producer in the world**.
  - Presently India's total installed solar power capacity has reached **100.33 GW.**
  - **Top Solar Power Producing states:** (1) Rajasthan (2) Gujarat (3) Karnataka
- It aims to **generate 50% of its electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030**.
- To achieve this, India has set a **target of installing 500 GW of renewable energy capacity**, with **one-fifth of this capacity expected to come from solar power**.

Source: The Hindu - Air Pollution

Sikhna Jwhwlao National Park

Context

Recently **Sikhna Jwhwlao National Park** has been declared **Assam's eighth national park**.

About Sikhna Jwhwlao National Park

- **Location:** Chirang and Kokrajhar districts, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).
  - It lies along the **Indo-Bhutan border** & is part of **Chirang and Manas Reserve Forests.**
- **Major Rivers**: Saralbhanga, Samukha, Champabati, Bhur, Laopani, Dholpani.
- **Flora:**
  - **12 forest types**, including Moist Sal forests, Evergreen forests, Riparian forests, Savannah, and Khair-Sissoo forests.
- **Fauna:**
  - Major population center for the endangered **Golden Langur.** It is found only in select parts of **India and Bhutan.**
  - **Other Wildlife**: Elephants, Tigers, Leopards, Spotted Deer, Hog Deer, Wild Pigs, Bison, Wild Buffalo, Monitor Lizards, Pythons, Porcupines, Tortoises, and various birds.
- **Ecological Role:**
  - **Elephant Corridor**: Part of **Chirang-Ripu Elephant Reserve** (declared MIKE Site in 2003).
  - **Wildlife corridor** connecting **Manas and Raimona National Parks**.

Cultural & Historical Significance

- It is named after **Sikhna Jwhwlao**, a revered **Bodo warrior**.
- Sikhna Jwhwlao fought in the **1866-68 battle between Bhutan and the British**.
- His capital **Sikhanajhar** was in **Ultapani Reserve Forest**, now inside the National Park.
- **Bathou Kherai Puja**, a major **Bodo religious festival**, is performed here annually.

Assam's National Parks (Chronological Order)

- **Kaziranga National Park –** (Declared in 1974). **(Largest NP of Assam)**
- **Manas National Park** – (Declared in 1990).
- **Nameri National Park** – (Declared in 1998).
- **Dibru Saikhowa National Park** – (Declared in 1999).
- **Orang National Park** – (Declared in 1999). **(Smallest NP of Assam)**
- **Dehing Patkai National Park** – (Declared in 2020).
- **Raimona National Park** – (Declared in 2021).
- **Sikhna Jwhwlao National Park –** (Declared in 2025).

Source:

- ETV- Sikhna Jwhwlao

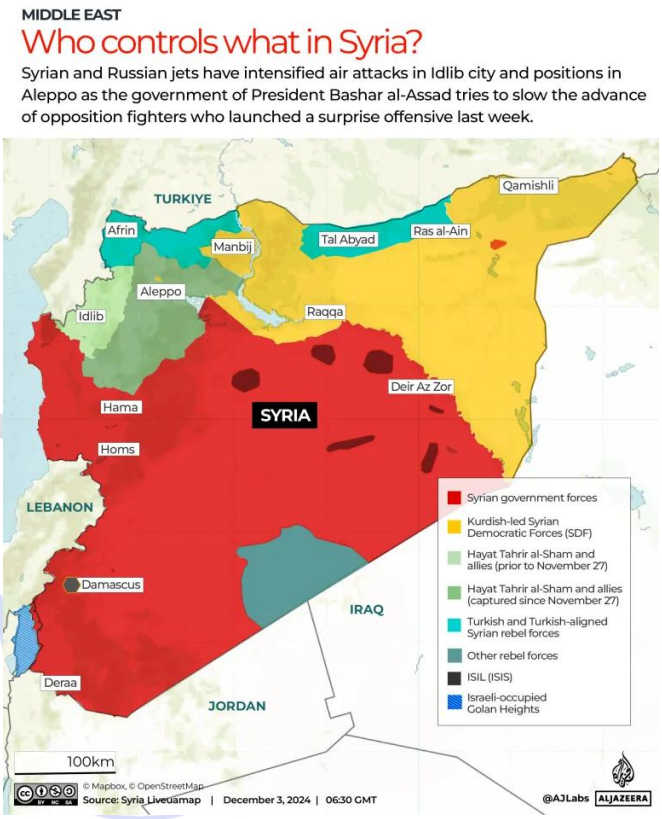
Chaos in Syria, after fall of Assad Regime

Context

After the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in December 2024, Syria has experienced three months of instability.

Who is Fighting Whom, and Why?

- **Bashar al-Assad**, Syria's former president, belonged to the **Alawite community** (a Shia sect).
- Under his rule, **Alawites dominated government positions** and remained loyal to his regime.
- After Assad's **fall in December 2024**, power shifted to **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**, a **Sunni militant group** with **al-Qaeda origins**.
- **Syrian minorities** (Alawites, Christians, Druze) **fear persecution** under the new hardline **Sunni** government.
- **Territorial Control**:
    - The new government **does not fully control Syria**.
    - **Assad loyalists** remain active in **Latakia (coastal region)**.
    - U.S.-backed Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (**SDF**) operates semi-independently in **Rojava (northeast Syria)**.



Historical Context: Why Has Syria Been in Civil War?

- **Assad's Rule and the 2011 Arab Spring:**
    - **Hafez al-Assad** ruled Syria from **1971 to 2000** as a **dictator**.
    - His son, **Bashar al-Assad**, took over in **2000**.
    - The **2011 Arab Spring** triggered **protests against Assad**, similar to uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.
    - Protests started over **economic hardship, corruption, and unemployment**, but quickly turned into a **civil war**.
- **Foreign Involvement in the Syrian Conflict:**
    - **U.S., Israel, and Turkey** backed various rebel groups.
    - **Russia and Iran** supported **Assad and Shia militias**.
    - **Kurds** established an autonomous region in **northeast Syria**.
    - **Israel's Role:** Since **Assad's fall**, Israel has **intensified airstrikes**, claiming it wants to **prevent advanced weapons from falling into the wrong hands**.
    - **Russia's Role:** Russia operates a major military base in **Hmeimim, Latakia**, where **minorities are taking refuge** amid the renewed violence.

Source:

- The Hindu - Syria

Places in News

Yemen - Sadaa City

- Recently the United States launched large-scale airstrikes on Houthi rebels in Yemen.
- Strikes targeted **Sanaa (Yemen's capital) and Saada (Houthi stronghold on the Saudi border)**.

- The Houthis are an armed political and religious group representing Yemen's Shia Muslim minority, the **Zaidis**.
- The group originated in the **1990s** and derives its name from its late founder, **Hussein al-Houthi.**
- Houthis control Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and the northwest of the country, including the strategic Red Sea coastline.
- The **internationally-recognised government of Yemen** is based in the southern port of **Aden**.
- **Yemen Bordering Countries:** Saudi Arabia & Oman

Source:

- Indian Express - Yemen

News in Shorts

Birefringence

- Some materials have **more than one refractive index**, meaning light bends differently in different directions. These materials are called **birefringent**.
- Birefringence results in **double refraction**: a single light ray splits into two separate rays when passing through the material.
- Birefringence arises because the material's **crystal structure varies in different directions**—a property called **anisotropy**.
- **Polarisation** plays a crucial role in determining the direction of light bending in birefringent materials.
- **Examples:** Natural (mica, quartz), Synthetic (barium borate and lithium niobate).

Refraction and the Refractive Index

- When light moves from one medium to another (e.g., from air to glass), its path **bends due to refraction**.
- **Refraction** occurs because the speed of light changes as it enters a new material.
- **Refractive Index (n) =** Speed of Light in vacuum/Speed of light in the material.
    - It determines the extent of bending.
- **Higher refractive index → greater bending of light.**

Source:

- **The Hindu - Birefringence**

14th ADMM-Plus Experts Working Group Meeting on Counter-Terrorism

- The **14th meeting of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts Working Group (EWG) on Counter-Terrorism** will be held in **New Delhi from March 19 to 20, 2025**.
- **India and Malaysia** will **co-chair** the meeting.

About ADMM-Plus and its Expert Working Groups (EWGs)

- **ADMM-Plus** serves as a **platform for practical cooperation** among the defence establishments of participating countries.
- It currently focuses on **seven key areas of practical cooperation:**
    - Counter-Terrorism, Maritime Security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management (HADR), Peacekeeping Operations, Military Medicine, Humanitarian Mine Action & Cyber Security.
- **EWGs (Experts Working Groups)** have been set up for each of these areas to **facilitate cooperation**.
- **Participants:**
    - **ASEAN Members:** Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand.
    - **Dialogue Partners:** India, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, China, USA and Russia.
    - **Other Participants:** Timor Leste & ASEAN Secretariat

Role of EWG Co-Chairs

- Each **EWG is co-chaired by an ASEAN member and a dialogue partner** for a **three-year cycle**.
- Responsibilities of co-chairs include:

- **Setting objectives, policy guidelines, and strategic directions** for the three-year cycle.
- Conducting **regular meetings (at least two per year)**.
- Organizing an **exercise (Table-Top/Field Training/Staff/Communication, etc.)** in the **third year** to evaluate progress in practical cooperation.

Source:

- **PIB - ADMM Plus EWG**

North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR)

- Union Minister of S&T Dr. Jitendra Singh laid the foundation stone for the permanent campus of NECTAR in Shillong.

About NECTAR

- It is an autonomous society, set up under the Department of Science & Technology, Government of India. **(HQ - Shillong, Meghalaya)**
- It was established in 2012 by merging two missions, viz., the National Mission for Bamboo Application (NMBA) and the Mission for Geospatial Applications (MGA).
- **NECTAR's Key Initiatives:**
  - **Mission Saffron Initiative:** Launched in 2021 to expand saffron cultivation in Northeast India.
    - **Current cultivation regions:** Menchukha (Arunachal Pradesh) & Yuksom (Sikkim).
    - **Upcoming expansion:** Nagaland and Manipur
  - **Advancements in Bamboo and Honey Production:** Boosting sustainable agriculture and economic empowerment.

About Saffron

- Saffron is a highly valued spice derived from the **stigmas of the Crocus sativus flower**.
- It is often referred to as **"red gold"** due to its high price and labor-intensive harvesting process.
- Saffron is primarily used in **culinary, medicinal and cosmetic applications.**
- Major saffron-producing countries include:
  - **Iran** – The largest producer (over **90% of global production**).
  - **India (Kashmir)** – Known for **high-quality saffron**, especially from Pampore, Jammu & Kashmir.
  - **Spain** – Produces Spanish saffron, famous for its milder flavor.
  - **Greece, Afghanistan, Morocco** – Other key producers.

Source:

- **PIB - NECTAR**

Editorial Summary

Public Health Education

Context

The United States' decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and significantly downsize the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has caused major disruption in the aid and public health sectors.

Public Health in India

- Article 47 of the Indian Constitution assigns the state the responsibility to improve public health care.
- Public health requires specific knowledge and skills to address health needs.
- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for a dedicated public health workforce.
- Such a workforce is essential for government systems, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and research bodies.

Evolution of Public Health Education and Jobs in India

- **Colonial Era Roots:** Public health education began during the colonial era, embedded within medical teaching.
    - The **All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata** was established in **1932** to formalise public health training.
    - Preventive and social medicine, later termed **community medicine**, became part of medical education.
    - However, specialists in community medicine were few and focused mainly on medical teaching.
- **Rise in Demand and Expansion:** In the early 2000s, most students pursuing public health degrees went abroad to countries like **Australia**, the **European Union**, the **UK**, and the **US**.
    - Recognising the growing need, public health institutions and teaching expanded in India.
    - In **2000**, only **one institution** offered an MPH (Master of Public Health) course; currently, over **100 institutions** offer master's level courses in public health.
    - The expansion coincided with the launch of the **National Rural Health Mission (NRHM)** in **2005**, which opened public health roles to non-medical specialists.
- **Mismatch Between Supply and Demand:** After an initial rise in government recruitment, hiring plateaued while the number of institutions and graduates continued to grow.
    - Securing jobs has become increasingly difficult for MPH graduates.

Challenges in Public Health Education and Employment

- **Mismatch Between Supply and Demand:** Entry-level jobs (e.g., research or programme assistants) attract high competition.
    - The success rate for securing jobs is low due to the limited availability of positions.
    - Shrinking public health roles and institutions further limit job opportunities.
- **Challenges in Establishing Public Health Cadres:** Attempts to create public health management cadres in States face bureaucratic hurdles and policy issues.
- **Impact of Private Sector Dominance:** Private sector health care focuses more on hospital and business management, limiting opportunities for public health graduates.
    - Research and development sectors remain the main employers but rely heavily on foreign grants.
    - India is no longer a priority for international funders, further reducing job opportunities.
- **Poor Quality of Public Health Education**

    - **Lack of Standardisation:** No single regulatory body oversees MPH training.
    - **Insufficient Practical Learning:** Training lacks real-world exposure.
- **Unregulated Institutions:** The number of institutions has increased, but many compromise on quality to attract students.
    - Faculty members often lack practical experience.
    - Students often enrol without a clear understanding of the field.
- **Uneven Regional Distribution:** Large States like **Assam**, **Bihar**, and **Jharkhand** have very few public health institutions.
    - Hilly and smaller States face similar gaps in training facilities.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** MPH courses are not regulated by the **National Medical Commission (NMC)** or the **University Grants Commission (UGC)**.
    - Lack of standardised curriculum and outcome measures reduces overall graduate quality.

Recommendations and Approaches

- **Create More Public Health Jobs:** Governments are the largest employers of public health professionals in most developed countries.
    - India should establish a dedicated public health cadre at the State and national levels to increase employment opportunities and strengthen public health infrastructure.
- **Introduce Robust Regulatory Mechanisms:** A dedicated public health education division should be created within the NMC or UGC.
    - The division should set curriculum standards and minimum training requirements while allowing for innovation.
- **Improve Practical Learning and Training:** Integrate public health training with real-world health systems.
    - Encourage States with limited training facilities to establish new public health institutions.
- **Build National Ecosystems for Sustainable Funding:** Reduced foreign aid necessitates increased domestic funding for public health research and development.
    - Establish national-level funding to support research and program implementation.

Source: **The Hindu: The challenges of public health education in India**

Public Health In India

Context

India has long been committed to '**Health for All**' under the World Health Organization's Universal Health Coverage (UHC) framework, which prioritises **primary health care (PHC) and to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE)**.

Significant Strides Made by India in Public Health Care in Recent Years

- **Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY):** Launched in **2018**, AB-PMJAY is the world's largest government-funded health insurance scheme, providing coverage of up to **₹5 lakh per family per year** for secondary and tertiary care.
    - Over **36 crore Ayushman cards** have been issued, and more than **31,000 hospitals** have been empanelled under the scheme.
- **Expansion of Health Infrastructure:** Under the **Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs)** initiative, more than **1.5 lakh HWCs** have been established to provide comprehensive primary health-care services, including maternal and child health, non-communicable disease screening, and basic diagnostic services.
- **COVID-19 Response and Vaccination Drive:** India conducted the **world's largest COVID-19 vaccination drive**, administering over **2.2 billion vaccine doses**.
    - The development of indigenous vaccines like **Covaxin** and **Covishield** and their rapid deployment demonstrated India's capacity for large-scale public health mobilisation.
- **National Digital Health Mission (NDHM):** Launched in **2020**, the NDHM aims to create a unified digital health ecosystem.
    - Over **47 crore Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts (ABHA)** have been created, enabling individuals to store and share their health records digitally.
- **Reduction in Communicable Diseases:** Concerted efforts under the **National Health Mission (NHM)** have led to a decline in communicable diseases.
    - India was declared **polio-free** in **2014** and has made significant progress in reducing tuberculosis (TB) cases under the **National TB Elimination Programme**, aiming for TB elimination by **2025**.
- **Increased Budget Allocation for Health:** The health budget for **2025** stands at **₹95,957.87 crore** for the **Department of Health and Family Welfare** and **₹3,900.69 crore** for the **Department of Health Research**.
    - This represents an increase of **₹2,000 crore** for AB-PMJAY, reflecting the government's focus on strengthening health-care infrastructure and services.

Issues Associated with Public Health Care in India

- **Inequitable Access to Healthcare::** Informal sector and rural populations face barriers to health care:
    - Poor health infrastructure in rural areas
    - Lack of insurance literacy and reliance on middlemen.
- **Weak Secondary and Tertiary Public Healthcare:** The public sector lacks robust secondary and tertiary care facilities, pushing patients towards expensive private hospitals.
    - This increases out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) and limits access to affordable healthcare.
- **Overemphasis on Curative Care:** The focus on curative care, especially through insurance schemes like PMJAY, has shifted attention away from preventive and community-based health services, which are crucial for reducing long-term healthcare costs.
- **Shortage of Skilled Workforce:** India faces a significant shortage of doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals, which hampers the delivery of quality healthcare services.

- **Declining Public Health Investments:** There has been a steady decline in the share of budgetary allocation to public health programmes like the **National Health Mission (NHM)**.
    - The focus on expanding medical infrastructure and digital health services has come at the expense of strengthening primary and community health care.
- **Outdated Data:** Outdated demographic data limits effective policy planning.
    - **E.g.**, Last Census conducted in 2011.

Global Practices

Negative Example

- **United States:**
    - Insurance-driven system has led to:
        - High health-care costs
        - Widening inequalities
        - Limited access for uninsured individuals
    - Public backlash over claim denials

Positive Examples

- **Thailand:**
    - Tax-funded universal coverage scheme
    - Strong public health investment
    - Regulated private insurance
    - Focus on PHC and community-based services
- **Costa Rica:**
    - Mandatory insurance scheme (Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social)
    - General tax revenue funding
    - Emphasis on PHC and public health infrastructure

Recommendations for Strengthening India's Health System

- **Strengthen Primary Health Care:** Invest in preventive and community-based health services to reduce the burden on secondary and tertiary care.
    - This includes revitalizing public health centers (PHCs) and community health centers (CHCs).
- **Increase Public Sector Investment:** Enhance funding for public healthcare infrastructure, particularly in secondary and tertiary care, to reduce reliance on private hospitals and lower OOPE.
- **Regulate Private Sector:** Implement strict regulations on private healthcare providers to prevent inflated costs and ensure equitable access to quality care.
- **Expand Universal Health Coverage:** Develop comprehensive public health benefit packages that cover informal workers and vulnerable populations, ensuring they have financial protection against health-related expenses.
- **Promote Digital Health**: Leverage digital technologies to improve healthcare accessibility, especially in rural areas, through initiatives like telemedicine and digital health records.
- **Address Workforce Shortages:** Increase medical education opportunities and incentivize healthcare professionals to work in underserved areas to address workforce shortages.
- **Increase Public Health Spending:** Increase health expenditure to at least **2.5% of GDP** (as per National Health Policy 2017).
- **Learn from Successful Global Models:** Adopt Thailand's model of tax-funded universal health coverage.
    - Integrate Costa Rica's approach of mandatory insurance with state control.
    - Strengthen government regulation of private health care (similar to Canada and UK).

Source: **The Hindu: From insurance-driven private health care to equity**

Tackling the problem of nutrition

Context

Although health was not a priority in Budget 2025, the increased allocations for **Saksham Anganwadi** and **Poshan 2.0** suggest a **stronger focus on nutrition** in the coming financial year. However, it remains uncertain whether this will effectively address India's nutrition challenge.

Challenges Associated with Nutrition in India

- **Narrow Policy Focus:** Nutrition policy primarily targets malnutrition among women and children, neglecting other groups such as men, senior citizens, and non-reproductive age women.
    - Lifestyle-induced non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and hypertension are not adequately addressed under nutrition programmes.
- **High Malnutrition Rates:**
    - **36% of children under five** are stunted.
    - Only **11% of breastfed children (6–23 months)** receive an adequate diet.
    - **57% of women (15–49 years)** are anaemic.
- **Rising Lifestyle-Induced NCDs:**
    - **24% of women** and **23% of men** in India are overweight or obese.
    - **14% of the population** take medication for diabetes.
- **Limited Reach of Existing Schemes:** Poshan 2.0 and Saksham Anganwadi focus mainly on take-home rations and supplementary food.
    - They target aspirational districts and the northeastern region, reinforcing the perception that malnutrition is a regional issue.
- **Inadequate Primary Health Infrastructure:** Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) are unevenly distributed, with some rural areas having higher coverage than urban areas.
    - Nutrition services in HWCs are inconsistent and poorly implemented.
- **Lack of Dedicated Nutrition Staff:** HWCs lack dedicated staff for delivering nutrition services.
    - Nutrition forms only a small part of the responsibilities of multi-purpose health workers.

Ways to Strengthen Nutrition in India

- **Broaden the Scope of Nutrition Policy:** Expand focus beyond women and children to include men, senior citizens, and individuals with lifestyle-induced diseases.
    - Tackle both undernutrition (due to food insecurity) and poor nutrition (due to unhealthy diets).
- **Strengthen Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs):** Increase the number of HWCs, especially in urban areas.
    - Equip HWCs to provide comprehensive nutrition services to all segments of society.
    - Ensure HWCs provide consistent nutrition advice for pregnant and lactating mothers, children, elderly, and those recovering from disease or trauma.
- **Engage Local Resources and Institutions:** Use locally available, nutrient-rich produce in supplementary nutrition programmes.
    - Encourage low-cost, culturally acceptable food options for better community acceptance.
- **Dedicated Nutrition Workforce:** Appoint specialised nutrition workers at HWCs.
    - Train staff to provide tailored nutrition advice and monitor outcomes.
- **Community Engagement and Local Ownership:** Involve local elites and community leaders in nutrition campaigns.
    - Link nutrition practices with local cuisines to improve acceptance and adherence.
    - Promote traditional dietary habits alongside modern nutrition advice.
- **Expand and Diversify Nutrition Programmes:** Develop targeted nutrition programmes for lifestyle diseases like diabetes and hypertension.

- Offer school-based nutrition education and expand mid-day meal programmes.

Source: **The Hindu: Tackling the problem of nutrition**

The Five Eyes Fracture

Context

The Five Eyes alliance now faces an unprecedented internal crisis.

Background and Formation of the Five Eyes Alliance

- **Formation During World War II:**
  - The Five Eyes alliance was formed during World War II, initially between the **US** and **UK** to intercept and decode enemy communications.
  - The intelligence-sharing agreement was formalized in **1946** between the US and UK.
- **Expansion of Membership:**
  - Canada joined in **1948** and Australia and New Zealand in **1956**.
  - The alliance focused on **Signals Intelligence (SIGINT)** of common interest among the Anglosphere (English-speaking nations with shared political, legal, and cultural traditions).
- **Cold War and Post-9/11 Role:**
  - During the Cold War, the alliance monitored **Soviet and Warsaw Pact communications**.
  - After **9/11**, it expanded to cover **counterterrorism and cybersecurity**.
  - Recently, it shifted focus to China, warning against risks from **Huawei** in **5G networks** (2018).
  - Encouraged both Western and non-Western nations to exclude Huawei from infrastructure.

Growing Political Crisis in the Five Eyes

- **Trump's Radical Foreign Policy Shifts:** In Donald Trump's second term, US foreign policy has shifted dramatically:
  - Seeking rapprochement with **Russia**.
  - Pushing for a **ceasefire in Ukraine**.
  - Weakening the **EU** and **NATO**.
  - Dismantling the post-war **US-Europe strategic consensus**.
  - These moves have strained Washington's relationship with European allies and the broader Western alliance.
- **Disputes with Canada:** Reports emerged that Trump's aides were considering expelling **Canada** from the Five Eyes due to trade and border tensions. The White House denied these reports.
  - Trump launched an **aggressive trade war** against Canada, a key trading partner.
  - Suggested that Canada should become the **"51st state"** of the US.
  - Claimed the US-Canada border is arbitrary.
- **Territorial Disputes:** Trump proposed annexing **Greenland** (a territory of Denmark) — seen as a direct challenge to Anglo-American allies.
- **Tensions with Britain:** At a conservative gathering, US Senator **J.D. Vance** described Britain as the **"first Islamist country"** to have nuclear weapons, comparing it to **Iran** and **Pakistan**.
  - Trump's "Make America Great Again (MAGA)" movement sees Britain as a failing state dominated by excessive regulation and liberal politics.
    - American right-wing resents the global liberal establishment, including European and Anglosphere elites.

Opportunities for India Amid the Five Eyes Crisis

- **Enhanced Intelligence Cooperation:** With growing instability within the Five Eyes, India can position itself as a reliable intelligence partner.
  - India's experience in counterterrorism, cybersecurity, and regional intelligence (especially concerning China and Pakistan) makes it a valuable ally.

    - India can negotiate intelligence-sharing agreements with Five Eyes members on a bilateral or multilateral basis.
- **Strategic Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific:** The Five Eyes' increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific aligns with India's strategic interests (e.g., QUAD and AUKUS).
    - India can deepen defense and intelligence ties with the US, Australia, and Japan to counter China's influence.
    - Expanding naval cooperation and joint exercises (like **Malabar**) can strengthen India's position in the region.
- **Military-Industrial Collaboration:** India can explore deeper defense collaboration with the Five Eyes nations, especially in advanced technology (e.g., drones, cybersecurity, AI).
    - India's defense industry can benefit from technology transfers and joint ventures with Five Eyes members, particularly in naval and aerospace sectors.
- **Diplomatic Leverage:** India's balanced ties with both Western and non-Western nations position it as a bridge between the Five Eyes and the Global South.
    - India's independent foreign policy and non-alignment stance allow it to mediate between Western and Eastern powers.
- **Cybersecurity and Technology Sharing:** India can propose joint initiatives with the Five Eyes on cybersecurity and digital infrastructure protection.
    - India's growing expertise in IT and digital infrastructure can make it a key partner in securing global communication networks.

Source: **Indian Express: The Five Eyes Fracture**

Revision of Bilateral Investment Treaty

Context

An announcement on revising the **Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** text was made in the **Union Budget 2025** to make it more **investor-friendly**.

More in News

- The last revision of the Model BIT was in **2015**, aimed at balancing investors' rights and obligations.
- The revised BIT aims to reflect **current economic realities** and create a favourable environment for foreign investments.

Purpose and Role of BITs

- BITs, also called **International Investment Agreements (IIAs)**, are legally binding treaties that protect foreign investments from adverse government actions.
- BITs provide rights to investors through two dispute settlement mechanisms:
    - **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**: Allows investors to bring claims against the host state.
    - **State-State Dispute Settlement**: Allows home states to raise disputes against the host state.
- BITs encourage foreign investments by assuring protection but do not guarantee investments from foreign investors.

Global Landscape of BITs

- According to **UNCTAD** data:
    - A total of **3,291 IIAs** (including **2,831 BITs**) have been signed globally.
    - Many BITs are currently under negotiation.
- Countries regularly revise their Model BIT texts:
    - **US** developed a Model BIT in **1994** and revised it in **1998, 2004, and 2012**.

Historical Evolution of BITs

- **Early Phase (Mid-20th Century):** Early BITs were signed between **developed capital-exporting** and **developing capital-importing** countries.
    - Two major factors influenced early BITs:
        - **Decolonisation** and rise in **economic nationalism** – Aimed at protecting foreign-owned private property.
        - **FDI trends** in the 1950s and 1960s focused on **resource extraction** and **import-substitution manufacturing**, requiring minimum investment protection standards.
- **Expansion of BITs:** The first BITs did not include **ISDS** (investor-state dispute settlement).
    - **NAFTA (1990s)** introduced:
        - **Pre-establishment commitments**: Liberalised foreign investment regimes during the establishment and operation of investments.
        - This shifted BITs from pure protection to a combination of **protection** and **liberalisation**.

India's Recent Developments in BITs

- **EFTA Free Trade Agreement (FTA) – March 2024:** India signed an FTA with the **European Free Trade Association (EFTA)** in March 2024.
    - Key innovations in the FTA's investment chapter:

        - **Quantifiable commitment** on investment and direct employment by EFTA in India — a first for India.
        - **Dispute settlement** mechanism shifted from arbitration to **Government-to-Government (G-to-G) consultations**.
- **Shifting Role of India in BITs:** India has transitioned from being a capital-importing country to a significant **capital-exporting** nation:
    - **Inward FDI** grew from **$16 billion** in 2000 to **$537 billion** in 2023.
    - **Outward FDI** grew from **$1.7 billion** in 2000 to **$236 billion** in 2023.
    - India now needs to secure its own investors' interests through updated BITs.

Key Issues and Strategic Questions

- **Single vs Multiple Model BIT Texts:** India's dual position as both a capital-importing and capital-exporting country raises the question:
    - Should India have a **single model text** for all partners or tailor BITs based on the nature of the partner country?
- **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) Clause:** MFN clause originated in **multilateral trade agreements** and was adapted to BITs.
    - MFN ensures that foreign investors receive the same treatment as the most favoured treaty partner.
    - India's 2015 Model BIT excluded the MFN clause due to potential issues like:
        - **Treaty shopping**: Exploiting the most favourable terms from different agreements.
        - Disruption of carefully negotiated bilateral agreements.
    - Alternative approaches to MFN:
        - **Consultative MFN**
        - **Forward-looking provisions**
        - **Checks to prevent treaty shopping**

Strategic Opportunity for India

- The decision to revise the Model BIT after a decade provides India an opportunity to:
    - Reflect its new role as both a capital importer and exporter.
    - Develop a more nuanced approach to BITs tailored to individual partner countries.
    - Introduce innovative mechanisms for **investment protection** and **liberalisation**.
    - Strengthen India's position as a key player in the **global investment landscape** during **Amrit Kaal**.

Source: **Indian Express: Thinking a BIT Differently**