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GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

1. Flagship scheme for girl child has helped defeat bias

Context: Asserting that the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save and educate the girl child) campaign had helped overcome gender bias, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted focus on districts with historically low child sex ratios had shown remarkable improvement since the campaign was launched a decade ago. The scheme, launched by the Prime Minister at Panipat in Haryana on January 22, 2015, addresses the declining child sex ratio (CSR) and related issues of women empowerment. It is a tri-ministerial effort of the Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Education.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development is commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, a flagship initiative to empower the girl child and promote gender equality.

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** A government scheme aimed at addressing gender bias and promoting the rights, survival, and education of the girl child. Launched on January 22, 2015, in Panipat, Haryana.

Objectives - Improve Child Sex Ratio (CSR). Ensure gender equality and empowerment of women. Prevent gender-biased, sex-selective elimination. Promote education and participation of the girl child.

Components - Advocacy campaigns were launched to address the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and Sex Ratio at Birth (SBR). Multi-sectoral interventions were planned and are being implemented in gender-critical districts across the country. A financial incentive-linked scheme—Sukanya Samridhi scheme—was launched to encourage parents to build a fund for female children.

Features - Advocacy campaigns for addressing gender bias. Multi-sectoral interventions in gender-critical districts. Financial incentives through the Sukanya Samridhi Scheme. Measurable outcomes, such as improving CSR and providing functional toilets for girls in schools.

- **Mission Shakti:** Mission Shakti comprises of two sub-schemes 'Sambal' and 'Samarthya' for safety and security of women and the empowerment of women respectively.

- *Sambal Scheme* - The existing schemes of One Stop Centres (OSC), Women Helplines and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) have been made part of this sub-scheme, and a new component Nari Adalat has been introduced.

- *Samarthya Scheme* - The existing schemes of Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), Ujjwala & Swadhar Greh (Shakti Sadan), Working Women Hostel (Sakhi Niwas), Gender Budgeting and National Crèche Scheme along with a new component of Hubs for the empowerment of women at National, State, District levels have been subsumed in this scheme.

Q. Which of the following are the objectives of the 'National Nutrition Mission'?

1. To create awareness relating to malnutrition among pregnant women and lactating mothers.
2. To reduce the incidence of anaemia among young children, adolescent girls and women.
3. To promote the consumption of millets, coarse cereals and unpolished rice.
4. To promote the consumption of poultry eggs.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

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

Answer: (a)

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

2. National Health Mission has curbed several public health concerns, says Centre's report

Context: The National Health Mission (NHM) has significantly contributed to improving India's public health, including lowering of the maternal mortality ratio, incidence of tuberculosis (TB), and sickle cell anaemia. It has also contributed to expanding human resources in the field while fostering an integrated response to health emergencies, the Union government said on Wednesday in its assessment report (2021-24) presented to the Union Cabinet. Under NHM, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined by 83% since 1990, which is higher than the global decline of 45%. Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has fallen from 39 per 1,000 live births in 2014 to 28 in 2020.

Key points

- **Overview:** Listing out key achievements of the NHM in the past three years, the Centre noted that there had been a significant increase in human resources within the healthcare sector.
- **Data from the report:** In FY 2021-22, NHM facilitated the engagement of 2.69 lakh additional healthcare workers, including general duty medical officers, specialists, staff nurses, AYUSH doctors, allied healthcare workers, and public health managers. Additionally, 90,740 community health officers (CHOs) were engaged. This number grew in subsequent years, with 4.21 lakh additional healthcare professionals engaged in FY 2022-23, including 1.29 lakh CHOs, and 5.23 lakh workers engaged in FY 2023-24, which included 1.38 lakh CHOs.
- **Support to States & Union Territories (UT):** *Health Facilities* - NHM support is provided to States/UTs for setting up of new facilities as per norms and upgradation of existing facilities for bridging the infrastructure gaps based on the requirement posed by them. *Health Services* - NHM support is also provided for provision of a range of free services related to maternal health, child health, adolescent health, family planning, universal immunisation programme, and for major diseases such as Tuberculosis, vector borne diseases like Malaria, Dengue and Kala Azar, Leprosy etc.
- **Major Initiatives Supported Under NHM:** Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK). Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK). Ayushman Bharat. Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). PM National Dialysis Programme.
- **Growth in Public Health Facilities:** NHM adopts a health system approach and targets to build a network for public health facilities with Health & Wellness Centres at the grassroot level and District Hospitals, with robust referral linkage, to offer Comprehensive primary and secondary care services to citizens.
- **Equitable Development:** A more recent effort at ensuring equity in access and use, is the Aspirational district initiative, in which 115 districts across 28 states, with weak social and human development indicators have been identified for allocation of additional resources and capacity enhancement to catch up with more progressive districts.
- **Health Sector Reforms:** NHM enabled the design and implementation of reforms specifically related to Governance, Procurement and Technology.
- **Addressing high Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE):** Recognising the need for reducing the current high levels of OOPE, and that, almost 70% of the OOPE is on account of drugs and diagnostics, the Free Drugs and Free Diagnostics Services Initiatives have been implemented under the NHM.

GS 2: POLITY, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL JUSTICE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

3. China's moves must recast India's critical minerals push

Context: On January 2, 2025, China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) expanded its export control list by including 28 entities from the United States, effectively restricting their access to a swath of items classified under dual-use export controls. Beijing's list encompasses tungsten, gallium, magnesium, beryllium, hafnium, lithium-6 (isotope), and others — minerals with uses ranging from chip production to speciality alloys. India's push for critical minerals development has faced stubborn challenges. In 2023, lithium deposits that were found in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district made headlines, hinting at a game-changer moment for India's energy transition.

Key points

- **Overview:** The growing geopolitical competition for critical minerals, a situation that directly impacts countries like India, which remains heavily reliant on imports for these essential materials. The situation underscores India's need to strengthen domestic mineral exploration and production capacities.
- **China's Strategic Mineral Export Controls:** *Targeted Minerals* - China's export control targets critical minerals such as tungsten, gallium, lithium, and magnesium, vital for industries like semiconductors and batteries.
Weaponization of Minerals - This is not the first instance of China using mineral exports as leverage, seen previously in the 2010 rare earths embargo against Japan.
Strategic Calculations - China balances its restrictions carefully, avoiding impacts on its own industries and the global supply of minerals heavily reliant on Western imports.
- **India's Mineral Diplomacy and Exploration Efforts:** *Current Dependence* - India continues to rely heavily on imports for critical minerals, such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements, vital for its energy transition and technology manufacturing.
Policy Initiatives - The Indian government has introduced reforms such as the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act 2023 and set up KABIL to secure overseas mineral investments, aiming to diversify supply sources.
Challenges in Exploration - Despite these reforms, domestic exploration remains sluggish, with insufficient foreign participation and challenges in the classification and commercial viability of mineral blocks.
- **India's Mineral Exploration and Market Participation:** *Outdated Classification System* - India's outdated resource classification system leaves many auctioned mineral blocks in early exploration stages, deterring investment.
Low Demand for Exploration Licenses - Despite reforms, the demand for exploration licenses remains low, reflecting the risk perception and lack of interest from private and foreign investors.
Need for Fiscal Incentives - Offering larger upfront fiscal incentives for exploration could mitigate the risks, encouraging both domestic and foreign participation in mineral extraction projects.

Q. Discuss the strategic importance of critical minerals in global geopolitics. What challenges does India face in securing these minerals, and how can policy reforms address these challenges? (বৈশ্বিক ভূ-ৰাজনীতিত গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ খনিজ পদাৰ্থৰ কৌশলগত গুৰুত্বৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰক। এই খনিজ পদাৰ্থসমূহ সুৰক্ষিত কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ভাৰতে কি প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ সন্মুখীন হৈছে, আৰু নীতি সংস্কাৰে এই প্ৰত্যাহ্বানসমূহ কেনেদৰে মোকাবিলা কৰিব পাৰে?)

4. Space telescopes stumble on rule-breaking black hole

Context: An international team of researchers using NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and the Chandra X-ray Observatory has discovered a bizarre black hole that may provide insights into the genesis and growth of supermassive black holes. LID-568 is a low-mass supermassive black hole that existed just 1.5 billion years after the Big Bang. An analysis of its effects on its neighbourhood has indicated that it was feeding on a surrounding cloud of matter at almost 40 times greater than what astrophysicists calculated.

Black holes

- **About:** Black holes are formed after the supernova explosion when the core of a massive dying star more than 2.5 times the mass of the Sun collapses until an infinite density where gravity is so high that even light cannot escape. Predicted by Einstein, its theoretical structure was prepared independently by Tolman, Oppenheimer, Volkoff and S. Chandrasekhar.
- **Types of Black Holes:** They are of different types, primarily based on their mass and the process of their formation.
 - *Stellar Black Holes* - These are often identified by observing the high-energy phenomena that occur as they interact with other stars or accrete matter from their surroundings.
 - *Supermassive Black Holes* - They play a crucial role in the formation and evolution of galaxies, influencing star formation and galaxy dynamics.
 - *Intermediate Black Holes* - They are of great interest to astronomers as they could provide a missing link in our understanding of black hole evolution.
 - *Primordial Black Holes* - They could offer insights into the conditions of the early universe and the nature of dark matter.
- **Significance of Black Hole:** They have a significant role in various aspects of astrophysics and astronomy. These include-
 - *Insights into Stellar evolution* - The formation and evolution of stellar black holes offer valuable information about the life cycles of massive stars and supernova mechanics.
 - *Galaxy dynamics and evolution* - Supermassive black holes at the centres of galaxies significantly influence the dynamics and evolution of their host galaxies, affecting star formation rates and the distribution of matter.
 - *Gravitational wave astronomy* - The merging of black holes is a primary source of gravitational waves, offering a new way to observe and understand the universe, complementing traditional electromagnetic observations.
 - *Testing quantum mechanics* - The study of black holes, particularly the information paradox, challenges and refines our understanding of quantum mechanics.

Q. Recently scientists observed the merger of giant 'black holes' billions of light years away from the Earth. What is the significance of this observation?

- (a) Higgs boson particles were detected
- (b) Gravitational waves were detected.
- (c) The possibility of intergalactic space travel through a 'wormhole' was confirmed.
- (d) It enabled the scientists to understand 'singularity.'

Answer: (b)

5. India's oil demand likely to hit yet another record in 2025-26

Context: India's consumption of refined petroleum fuels and products is projected to hit yet another fresh high in the financial year 2025-26 (FY26) on the back of steady growth in energy use in various sectors of the economy. According to latest projections by the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC) of the oil ministry, consumption of petroleum products is seen as a proxy for crude oil demand which has been rising 4.7% over the revised estimate for FY25 to 252.93 million tonnes. The consumption growth is expected to be led by fuels and products like petrol, aviation turbine fuel (ATF), liquified petroleum gas (LPG), diesel and petroleum coke.

Key points

- **Overview:** India's crude oil imports witnessed a significant shift in December 2024, with increased reliance on West Asian countries like Iraq and the UAE. This adjustment comes as Russian crude oil supplies dwindled due to heightened domestic demand.
- **Shift towards West Asia: Russia's domestic demand surge** - Russian refineries operated at higher capacities post-autumn maintenance, reducing export volumes. Seasonal demand in Russia capped oil exports, impacting Indian refiners reliant on Russian crude.
India's imports from Russia - Imports of Russian crude dropped 17% to 1.48 million barrels per day (bpd). Russia's market share in India's oil basket declined to 31.5% from 38% in November.
- **Rising Role of West Asia in India's Oil Imports: Iraq's increased share** - Iraq emerged as a key beneficiary, with imports jumping 29% to 1.13 million bpd. Iraq's share in India's oil imports rose from 18.7% in November to 24% in December.
UAE's growing presence - UAE imports hit a 32-month high of 530,000 bpd, up 22.1% month-on-month. UAE's share increased to 11.2% in December, up from 9.2% in November.
Saudi Arabia's moderate gains - Imports from Saudi Arabia rose 4.4% to 649,000 bpd. Riyadh's market share grew marginally to 13.8%. However, Saudi Arabia was unable to capitalise on the opportunity due to its barrels being priced higher than Iraqi and Emirati oil.
- **Price Dynamics of India's Oil Imports: Comparative pricing** - Russian Urals crude was priced \$5.5 per barrel cheaper than Saudi Arabia's Arab Light. Iraq's Basrah Medium crude was competitively priced, only \$0.80 higher than Dubai crude.
Impact on Indian refiners - Discounts on Russian crude have shrunk but remain attractive due to India's large import volumes. Even marginal cost savings on oil significantly benefit India, which imports over 85% of its crude needs.
- **Outlook of India's Oil Imports: Short-term trends** - Russian oil imports are expected to remain low in early 2025 due to domestic constraints. Indian refiners are likely to rely more on West Asian suppliers.
Potential rebound - Russian exports may recover during spring maintenance season, potentially resuming higher Indian imports by March-April 2025.
- **Conclusion:** As the world's 3rd-largest consumer of crude oil with a high import dependency level of over 85%, India is extremely sensitive to oil prices. The shift in India's crude oil sourcing highlights the country's agility in navigating global oil market dynamics. While Russia remains a critical supplier, the growing importance of West Asian nations like Iraq and the UAE underscores India's strategic approach to maintaining energy security and cost efficiency.