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GS 1: ART & CULTURE, HISTORY, INDIAN SOCIETY AND GEOGRAPHY

1. Eco-cultural landscape of Assam

Context: Natural heritage forms the backbone of the eco-cultural landscape of a region, be it rural or urban. It supports biodiversity, fosters community well-being, and nourishes mental and physical health. Natural heritage also holds profound cultural significance, serving as a foundation for traditions, spiritual practices, and community life. In Assam, numerous ancient trees, parks, hills, hillocks, and waterbodies are intricately woven into the local culture, reflecting centuries of rich history and ecological consciousness. These natural assets are treasured repositories of nostalgia, and their preservation is key to maintaining Assam's unique cultural identity. Unfortunately, the impact of rapid urbanization and infrastructure

development in Assam often comes at the expense of its natural heritage. A recent example is a proposal to cut down 25 trees to construct a flyover at Dighalipukhuri in Guwahati.

Key points

- **Overview:** If you're looking for a beautiful and serene place to visit in India, look no further than the northeastern state of Assam. This stunning region is home to rolling hills, lush forests, and miles of tea plantations. The people of Assam are warm and friendly, and the culture is rich and diverse.
- **History of Assam:** Assam is a state in Northeast India. The region has been home to various ethnic groups, including the Tai-Ahom, Koch, Borahi, Kachari, and Dimasa peoples. The first recorded history of Assam dates to the third century BCE, when it was part of the Mauryan Empire. In the 12th century CE, the region came under the rule of the Ahom Kingdom, which lasted for six centuries. The Ahoms were succeeded by the Burmese in 1824 CE, who ruled Assam until 1826 CE when it became a part of British India. Since independence in 1947 CE, Assam has been plagued by ethnic and separatist violence. In recent years, however, there has been some progress towards peace and stability in the region.
- **Geography of Assam:** Assam is a state in northeastern India. It is the size of South Korea and is bordered by Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The capital is Dispur, located in the central part of the state. Assam covers an area of 78,438 square kilometres (30,285 square miles) and the population of Assam is 31,205,576 (2011 Census). Most of the people are of Indo-Aryan descent, with smaller numbers of Tibeto-Burman and Mongoloid peoples. The largest city is Guwahati, with a population of over one million.

Climate - The landlocked state has a tropical climate and receives heavy rainfall. Assam's average temperature ranges from 20 to 28 degrees Celsius (68 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit). The state has three main geographical regions: the Brahmaputra River valley in the north, the Barak River valley in the south, and hilly areas in between.

Flora and Fauna - Assam is home to the one-horned rhinoceros, elephants, tigers, leopards, and many other animals. It is also home to more than 600 species of birds. The state has dense tropical forests with a variety of trees such as bamboo, teak, mahogany, and sandalwood. Assam is also known for its tea plantations. More than 50% of India's tea comes from Assam.

- **Loss of natural heritage:** The lack of focus on protecting natural heritage has caused a great imbalance in the eco-cultural landscape of the region, which urgently needs attention. In Assam, there seems to be a significant lack of a balanced approach towards natural assets and development. The State's renowned Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has witnessed a shrinking of grassland areas due to the construction of hotels, resorts, and infrastructure for tourism.
- **Conclusion:** Overall, Assam is a beautiful and unique region of India with a rich culture and history. The tea-growing industry is an important part of the economy, and the people are friendly and welcoming. Protecting Assam's natural heritage is not just our collective responsibility but also a way to honour our cultural roots and values. Hills, waterbodies, and ancient trees hold stories, traditions and nostalgia that are essential to Assam's identity. If left unchecked, the relentless drive for urban expansion will erode this rich heritage, leaving future generations disconnected from the roots that shaped their identity.

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

2. Eklavya schools struggle to meet 5% PVTG sub-quota; dropouts on the rise

Context: About four years after the Centre introduced a sub-quota of 5% for the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in admissions to Eklavya Model Residential Schools for tribal students across the country, government data show that they are struggling to meet this quota. Just 3.4% of students in these schools now are from these communities. The Right to Information Act show that of the 1,30,101 students enrolled into all 407 such functional schools as of October, 4,480 belong to PVTG communities, which amounts to about 3.4% of the total student population at these schools. The data showed that States that had the most students — Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Gujarat were struggling to meet the 5% quota.

Key points

- **Overview:** Government data tabled in the Lok Sabha on Thursday showed that more and more PVTG students had been dropping out of these schools for the past three years.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):** EMRS is a scheme for making model residential schools for Indian tribals (ST- Scheduled Tribes) across India. It started in the year 1997-98. Its nodal ministry is the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The scheme aims to build schools like Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas, with a focus on state-of-the-art facilities for preserving local art and culture, as well as providing training in sports and skill development. The EMRS scheme was revamped in FY 2018-19.
- **National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS):** A National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS) was set up and entrusted with the management of the State Education Society for Tribal Students (SESTS), which would run the EMRS on the ground. During the 2023 Budget session of Parliament, the finance minister announced that the responsibility for recruiting staff in EMRS would be transferred to the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS).
- **Issues Related to Recruitment to EMRS:**
 - Requirement of Hindi Competency* - The recent centralization of recruitment introduced Hindi competency as a mandatory requirement. This has resulted in many staff recruited from Hindi-speaking states being posted to EMRS in southern states, where the language, food, and culture are unfamiliar to them.
 - Impact on Tribal Students* - Most tribal students in Eklavya schools would benefit from teachers who understand their local cultural contexts, as the communities have very specific contexts under which learning can be made conducive.
- **Way Forward:**
 - Localised Recruitment* - The recruitment of teachers from local communities should be prioritised to ensure they are familiar with the cultural and linguistic contexts of the students. Both local and non-local teachers should be recruited to ensure a diversity of teaching methods while respecting local traditions.
 - Flexible Language Requirements* - The mandatory Hindi competency requirement should be reevaluated to allow for flexibility in non-Hindi speaking regions. Language support programs should be actively encouraged for teachers to learn the local languages of the regions they are posted to.

Q. Discuss the issues related to Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and how to solve them?
[একলব্য মডেল আবাসিক বিদ্যালয় (ই. এম. আৰ. এছ.) সম্পর্কীয় বিষয়সমূহ আৰু সেইবোৰ কেনেকৈ সমাধান কৰিব পাৰি সেই বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰক।]

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

3. India, France sign pact for grand museum in North, South blocks

Context: India and France on Tuesday signed an agreement towards the 'adaptive reuse' of the north and south blocks for the ambitious new national museum project, to be the largest museum in the world. It is a part of the central vista redevelopment project and is set to span approximately 1.55 lakh square meter, overtaking "The Louvre" in Paris, presently the world's biggest. It will be implemented in two phases, with an estimated deadline of June 2026. As a part of the agreement, India and France are collaborating on a comprehensive feasibility study, encompassing museum case studies, interpretive planning and building programming.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Indian Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with France Museums Développement, is set to establish the Yuga Yugeen Bharat National Museum as part of the Central Vista Redevelopment Project.
- **Origin:** Announced by the Prime Minister at the International Museum Expo in May 2023.
- **About:** It is a national museum to celebrate India's unbroken civilizational history, emphasizing inclusivity and community narratives.
- **Aim:** To serve as a global cultural landmark combining India's heritage with contemporary narratives, bridging past, present, and future.
- **Features:** Largest museum in the world, spanning across the North and South Blocks in New Delhi. Collaboration with France for expertise in museum design and management, inspired by projects like the Louvre. Focus on inclusivity and community-centric narratives.
Themes - Adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, celebrating India's democracy, diversity, and cultural heritage.

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

4. Crimes against humanity and an obtuse Indian stance

Context: On December 4, 2024, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution approving the text of a proposed treaty governing the prevention and punishment of crimes against humanity (CAH treaty). This marks the beginning of the negotiation process among states for the conclusion of a CAH treaty. This resolution comes five years after the International Law Commission submitted the draft text of the CAH treaty to the Sixth Committee which is the primary forum for considering legal questions in the UNGA. This development is a landmark in the international community's quest to combat impunity for CAH. India's response to a 'crimes against humanity' treaty aligns with its aversion to the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court.

Key points

- **Overview:** The UN General Assembly's legal committee approved a landmark resolution on November 22, 2024, initiating negotiations for the first-ever treaty to prevent and punish crimes against humanity. This step followed intense negotiations, culminating in Russia withdrawing amendments that could have derailed the process.
- **Current laws governing the conflict:** The 1949 Geneva Conventions provide the foundational legal framework for humanitarian protection during armed conflicts. These treaties outline the

responsibilities of states to protect civilians and ensure humane treatment for non-combatants. While the International Criminal Court (ICC) addresses war crimes and genocide, there is currently no specific treaty that comprehensively covers crimes against humanity. The ICC recognizes crimes against humanity as acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, which include offenses such as murder, torture, and sexual violence.

- **Recent Examples:** Recent history has seen numerous instances of crimes against humanity. The conflict in Syria, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and the situation in Darfur, Sudan, are notable examples where widespread and systematic attacks against civilian populations have been documented.
- **Role of the International Community:** The international community plays a crucial role in addressing crimes against humanity. Organizations like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court work to investigate, prosecute, and prevent these crimes.
 - *International Criminal Court (ICC)* - The ICC is the permanent court responsible for prosecuting crimes against humanity.
 - *National Courts* - Countries that incorporate crimes against humanity into their criminal law can also prosecute these crimes.
- **Need for a CAH treaty:**
 - Legal Gaps* - Existing international treaties cover war crimes and genocide but do not specifically address crimes against humanity. This lack creates a legal void that allows perpetrators to evade accountability for serious offenses committed against civilian populations.
 - Increasing Incidence of Crimes* - There has been a notable rise in crimes against humanity globally, with reports of such offenses in countries like Ethiopia, Sudan, Ukraine, and Myanmar. A dedicated treaty would facilitate international cooperation in prosecuting these crimes and provide a framework for justice.
 - Strengthening International Law* - A new treaty would reinforce the international justice framework by imposing obligations on states to prevent and punish these crimes, thereby enhancing global standards for human rights protection.
- **Steps taken:**
 - Preparatory Sessions* - Scheduled for 2026 and 2027, these sessions will prepare the groundwork for formal discussions on the treaty.
 - Formal Negotiating Sessions* - Three-week sessions are planned for 2028 and 2029 to finalize the treaty's text.
 - Broad International Support* - The initiative is backed by Mexico, Gambia, and 96 other countries, indicating a strong international commitment to addressing these serious human rights violations.
- **Way forward:**
 - Adopt a Survivor-Centric and Inclusive Approach* - Ensure the treaty prioritizes the rights of victims, incorporates survivor input, and mandates comprehensive support mechanisms while maintaining a robust, enforceable legal framework.
 - Strengthen Global Collaboration* - Mobilize international cooperation, with developed nations providing financial and technical assistance, to build national capacities for prosecuting crimes against humanity and preventing impunity.

Q. At the international level, the bilateral relations between most nations are governed on the policy of promoting one's own national interest without any regard for the interest of other nations. This leads to conflicts and tensions between the nations. How can ethical consideration help resolve such tensions?
(আন্তঃৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় পৰ্যায়ত, বেছিভাগ ৰাষ্ট্ৰৰ মাজত দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পৰ্ক আন ৰাষ্ট্ৰৰ স্বার্থৰ প্ৰতি কোনো গুৰুত্ব নিদিয়াকৈ নিজৰ ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় স্বার্থৰ প্ৰচাৰৰ নীতিৰ ওপৰত পৰিচালিত হয়। ইয়াৰ ফলত ৰাষ্ট্ৰসমূহৰ মাজত সংঘাত আৰু উত্তেজনাৰ সৃষ্টি হয়। নৈতিক বিবেচনাই কেনেকৈ এনে উত্তেজনা সমাধানত সহায় কৰিব পাৰে?)

5. Economic disparity

Context: Assam's economy ranks among the lowest in the country, ahead of only Bihar, UP and Jharkhand. As per the latest RBI data, Assam's per capita income stands at Rs 1,35,787 for 2023-24, and States like Sikkim, Meghalaya and Tripura fare better economically, while Andhra Pradesh and Delhi perform significantly higher on the count. According to a World Bank assessment of 2018, one-third of the State's then population of 3.1 crore were poor, and while poverty levels in Assam had declined rapidly between 1994 and 2005, the State has since lagged most other States in reducing poverty. The growing number of beneficiaries also contrast ominously with the burgeoning figure of the unemployed, with 32 lakh candidates recently applying for 12,600 grade III and IV jobs.

Assam Budget Analysis 2024-25

- **Budget highlights:** The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Assam for 2024-25 (at current prices) is projected to be Rs 6,43,089 crore, amounting to growth of 13% over 2023-24. Expenditure (excluding debt repayment) in 2024-25 is estimated to be Rs 1,36,699 crore, a decrease of 9% from the revised estimates of 2023-24. In addition, debt of Rs 7,192 crore will be repaid by the state. Receipts (excluding borrowings) for 2024-25 are estimated to be Rs 1,14,165 crore, a decrease of 5% as compared to the revised estimate of 2023-24. Revenue surplus in 2024-25 is estimated to be 0.3% of GSDP (Rs 1,852 crore), as compared to a revenue deficit of 0.2% of GSDP (Rs 1,396 crore) at the revised estimate stage in 2023-24. Assam had budgeted a revenue surplus of 0.5% of GSDP in 2023-24. Fiscal deficit for 2024-25 is targeted at 3.5% of GSDP (Rs 22,534 crore). In 2023-24, as per the revised estimates, fiscal deficit is expected to be 5.2% of GSDP, higher than the budgeted 3.7% of GSDP.
- **Policy Highlights:** *Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina* - One-time incentives of Rs 10,000, Rs 12,500, and Rs 15,000 will be paid to 10 lakh girl students for joining class 11, graduation (first year), and post-graduation (first year), respectively. This will be available for students taking admission in government colleges and institutions.
Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan - A minimum amount of Rs 47,500 will be provided to each woman member of self-help groups in rural and urban areas. This will be provided by a combination of grant, subsidy, and loan.
Mukhya Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin) - Under the scheme, 13,000 houses each will be allocated to eligible beneficiaries from tea garden communities and poorest of poor beneficiaries who were not included under the socio-economic caste census.
Rooftop solar - All new private and public buildings constructed in Assam will have to mandatorily install rooftop solar facility.
Farm mechanisation - The state government will distribute power tillers, tractors, threshers, and other farm equipment to support agricultural activities.
- **Assam's Economy:** *GSDP* - In 2022-23, Assam's GSDP (at constant prices) is estimated to grow by 10.2% over the previous year. In comparison, India's GDP is estimated to grow by 7.2% in 2022-23.
Sectors - In 2022-23, agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors are estimated to contribute 35%, 19%, and 45% of Assam's economy, respectively.
Per capita GSDP - In 2022-23, Assam's per capita GSDP (at current prices) is estimated to be Rs 1,36,819, an increase of 17% over 2021-22. In 2022-23, India's per capita GDP is estimated to increase by 15% over 2021-22 to Rs 1,96,983.

6. Popular drugs for weight loss endorsed by WHO scientists

Context: In a significant move, scientists from the World Health Organization (WHO) have endorsed a new class of medicines known as GLP-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs), which mimic a hormone that regulates appetite and blood sugar levels, to manage obesity. Globally, one in eight people were obese in 2022, according to WHO. The WHO is currently in the process of drafting guidelines for the use of GLP-Ras in adults with obesity to provide clarity on 'clinical indications and programmatic considerations globally'. The guidelines are likely to be published in July 2025. There has also been a significant increase in childhood obesity over the last three decades in India resulting from 2 lakh boys and girls each in 1990 to 73 lakh boys and girls in 2022.

Key points

- **Overview:** Recently, in a first, an expert committee of India's drug regulator gave the green light to the drug tirzepatide and India could soon allow 'game-changing' weight-loss drug tirzepatide.
- **Diabetes Drug for Weight Loss:** In 2017, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a drug called Ozempic for managing type 2 diabetes. The active ingredient, semaglutide, was later noted for causing weight loss, which led to its off-label use for treating obesity.
- **Tirzepatide and Semaglutide:** These two weight loss drugs have been approved by the FDA for chronic weight management in adults. Semaglutide and tirzepatide are polypeptides, small proteins that boost the levels of naturally occurring hormones in the body, including that of glucagon-like-peptide 1 (GLP-1), which control weight through the brain and digestive tract.
Functioning - Higher GLP-1 levels, released in the gut, spark a reaction by stimulating neurons that alter gut function, leading to a sense of fullness. They also help manage glucose levels, making them an effective treatment for diabetes.
Side effects - Nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, constipation, abdominal pain, indigestion, injection-site reactions, fatigue, allergic reactions, belching, hair loss, and heartburn.
- **Significance of the drugs:** These drugs can be prescribed to those who are obese (with a body mass index of over 30), or overweight (with a BMI between 27 and 30), and have at least one other health condition related to their weight (such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or type 2 diabetes).
- **Promising Global Trials:** Global clinical trials for tirzepatide (Zepbound) have shown significant results, with the highest dosage leading to an average weight loss of 20.9% over 72 weeks. The approval in India is due on further post-marketing surveillance (Phase IV trials) to monitor the drug's side effects and its effectiveness across India's diverse population.
- **Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO):** CDSCO is India's national regulatory body for cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. It serves a similar function to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the US or the European Medicines Agency of the European Union.