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GS 3: ECONOMY, ECOLOGY, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, DEFENCE, SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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1. Over-centralization threatens federal health policy

Context: The recent Supreme Court judgment in *Dr. Tanvi Behl vs Shrey Goyal* (2025), which struck down domicile-based reservations in post-graduate medical admissions, marks a pivotal moment in India's medical education policy. By dismantling a key mechanism for States to ensure a stable and locally rooted medical workforce, the decision risks exacerbating regional disparities in healthcare access. A deeper examination of the judgment reveals potential flaws in its reasoning, particularly in its rigid interpretation of meritocracy and its failure to recognise the intricate relationship between medical education and State health policy.

Key points

- **Significance of Domicile Quotas:** Domicile-based reservations in post-graduate medical courses play a crucial role in aligning State investments in medical education with long-term health system needs. States invest substantial public resources in medical education with the expectation that graduates will contribute to the local healthcare infrastructure.
- **Drawbacks of the SC Judgement:** *The Judgement Overlooks an Essential Distinction* - The SC's reliance on *Pradeep Jain vs Union of India* (1984) to justify the elimination of domicile quotas overlooks an essential distinction between undergraduate and post-graduate medical education.
Undermining Competitive Federalism and State-Level Health Planning - Moreover, the judgment undermines the incentive for States to invest in medical education. Competitive federalism encourages States to develop strong institutions, but if they cannot ensure that their investment translates into a local specialist workforce, they may deprioritise funding for government medical colleges.
Narrow Interpretation of Constitutional Concerns - The right to life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution encompasses access to adequate healthcare. Since public health falls under State legislative competence, the role of government medical colleges extends beyond academics; they are an integral part of the State's healthcare system.
- **Reliance on Absolute Meritocracy:** The SC's insistence on a rigid, meritocratic framework for medical admissions disregards structural inequities within India's medical entrance system. The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Postgraduate) (NEET-PG) has been criticised for its flaws, including the fact that candidates with negative marks may still qualify due to percentile-based cutoffs.
- **Way Forward:** *Implications of Over-Centralisation* - Over-centralisation, especially when driven by judicial rulings, restricts States' ability to formulate policies that align with their socio-economic and public health contexts.
Need for Reconsideration - While the Court's decision aligns with legal precedents, it does not adequately reflect the evolving realities of India's healthcare system. The framework established in *Pradeep Jain* (1984) was formulated in a different public health landscape, and the challenges of retaining specialists within State health systems have become more pressing, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Conclusion:** The SC's judgment in *Dr. Tanvi Behl vs Shrey Goyal* (2025) reflects a well-intentioned but overly rigid application of meritocracy. By reinforcing centralised control over medical admissions, the ruling undermines State investment in medical education, weakens the public health system, and exacerbates regional disparities.

2. The delimitation promises

Context: Despite its central role in the democratic theory of political equality, the process of delimitation often grapples with a lingering democratic paradox in large republics, which face the challenge of balancing conflicting territorial, demographic, ethnic, and factional political considerations. Delimitation in India aims to ensure fair representation in Parliament by adjusting constituency boundaries in line with population changes. This imbalance, referred to as malapportionment, has fuelled political tensions, with concerns that the upcoming delimitation exercise in 2026 will shift power toward the politically hegemonic North.

Key points

- **Constitutional Framework:** *Constitutional Mandate* - Delimitation is mandated under Article 82 of the Indian Constitution. It is conducted by an independent Delimitation Commission to ensure fair parliamentary representation.

Freeze on Delimitation - Frozen since 1976 (42nd Constitutional Amendment) to avoid penalizing states with controlled population growth (e.g. southern states). Extended until 2026 in 2001, creating malapportionment (e.g. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar underrepresented; Tamil Nadu and Kerala overrepresented).

Current Status - Next delimitation exercise due in 2026, sparking fears of a power shift toward the Hindi heartland.

- **Demographic Imbalance:** Northern states (e.g. UP, Bihar) have higher populations but fewer seats. Southern states (e.g. Tamil Nadu, Kerala) have smaller populations but more seats due to the freeze.
- **Socio-Economic Disparities:** Southern states outperform the North in per capita income, infrastructure, healthcare, education, urbanization, and life expectancy.
Fiscal Burden - Southern states contribute more to central taxes but feel they subsidize northern states' population growth, unemployment, and underdevelopment.
- **Red Queen Effect:** Delimitation risks worsening inequalities if northern states' population growth and economic gaps are unaddressed.
- **Implications of Delimitation:** *Women's Representation* - Women's Reservation Bill (2023) which proposes reserving 1/3rd of parliamentary seats for women. Implementation delayed until post-2026 delimitation, stalling gender parity.
Impact on Marginalized Communities - Seat reservations based on 2001 Census data, ignoring population growth (e.g., Bihar's SC population rose from 15.9% to 19.65%). Leads to underrepresentation of growing communities.
- **Way Forward:** *Expanding Lok Sabha* - Political scientist Alistair McMillan suggests increasing seats to accommodate demographic shifts without reducing southern representation.
Reforming Rajya Sabha - Milan Vaishnav proposes using the Rajya Sabha to counterbalance northern dominance in Lok Sabha.
Devolution of Power - Link delimitation to subnational empowerment to enhance participatory democracy.
Equality of Conditions - Focus on empowering women and lower castes, aligning with Alexis de Tocqueville's vision of gradual equality.

3. Chicken's Neck corridor

Context: With the Partition of the country in 1947, the Northeast became a landlocked region, connected to the rest of the country only by a narrow, 22-kilometre-wide Chicken's Neck corridor, and any disturbance in that area could virtually cut off the region. Minor disturbances or agitations have caused delays in the transportation of goods to the Northeast, and if something major were to occur in the corridor, the region would be totally cut off. The threat to the corridor has increased due to unrest in Bangladesh, and India needs to be careful.

Key points

- **Overview:** The Siliguri Corridor, often referred to as the "Chicken's Neck", is a narrow stretch of land in the Indian state of West Bengal. It connects the northeastern states of India with the rest of the country. Its geopolitical, strategic, and economic significance makes it a critical asset for India.
- **Geographical Overview:**
 - Location* - The corridor is situated in the northern part of West Bengal, spanning approximately 22 kilometres at its narrowest point.
 - Borders* - It is flanked by Nepal to the west, Bhutan to the north, and Bangladesh to the south.
 - Connectivity* - It links the North-eastern Region (NER) comprising eight states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura—to mainland India.
- **Significance of Siliguri Corridor:**
 - National Security* - The corridor is crucial for maintaining India's territorial integrity. Any compromise in the region can isolate the northeastern states from the rest of India.
 - Military Importance* - The corridor serves as a vital supply route for the Indian Army, particularly for accessing forward bases in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - Geopolitical Sensitivity* - Its proximity to China's Chumbi Valley (a tri-junction of India, Bhutan, and China) poses a strategic challenge. Control over this area could jeopardize India's access to the Northeast.
- **Economic Importance:**
 - Trade and Connectivity* - The Siliguri Corridor is a gateway for trade between mainland India and its north-eastern states, facilitating the movement of goods and services. It connects to important international trade routes, including access to Bhutan and Nepal.
 - Developmental Integration* - The corridor supports initiatives like the Act East Policy, which aims to integrate north-eastern states with Southeast Asia for economic development.
- **Challenges:**
 - Geographical Vulnerability* - The narrow width of the corridor makes it highly susceptible to natural disasters like floods and earthquakes, which could disrupt connectivity.
 - Infrastructure Gaps* - Despite its importance, the corridor faces infrastructural deficits, including poor road and rail connectivity, hindering efficient transport and logistics.
- **Way ahead:**
 - Border Infrastructure Development* - Investments in road and rail networks, including the Bharatmala Pariyojana and Golden Quadrilateral, aim to strengthen connectivity in the region.
 - Act East Policy* - This policy focuses on improving trade and cultural ties with Southeast Asia, with the Siliguri Corridor acting as a vital link.
- **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB):** It is a border guarding force of India deployed along its borders with Nepal and Bhutan. Originally set up under the name Special Service Bureau in 1963 in the aftermath of the Indo-China War to strengthen India's border areas against enemy operations.

4. Who will apologize to the 'Himalayans'?

Context: Norway formally apologized for its past assimilation policies targeting indigenous groups, acknowledging cultural suppression and proposing corrective measures. Similar challenges persist in the Himalayan region, where indigenous communities face resource exploitation and cultural erosion. These policies, known as Norwegianization, were implemented between the 1850s and 1960s to suppress indigenous languages and cultures. Alongside the apology, the government proposed measures to address ongoing discrimination, such as protecting indigenous languages and monitoring inclusion efforts starting in 2027.

Key points

- **Nordic and Himalayan Communities:** Like Nordic regions, the Himalayan region also faces environmental challenges and historical exploitation of resources. The Himalayan region spans 2,500 km from Afghanistan to northeast India, containing the world's largest ice reserves after the poles. This region is home to 52 million people from various ethnic groups, including those in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.
- **Impact of Colonial Rule:** British colonial policies disrupted Himalayan trade and local economies. In the northeast, trade blockades and forced agreements affected goods like tea, gold, silk, and opium. Between 1853 and 1910, over 80,000 km of railway tracks were laid, destroying vast forested areas in Garhwal and Kumaon.
- **Policies and Economic Changes:** In the early years after independence, policies aimed to respect tribal ways of life. However, by the 5th and 6th Five-Year Plans, resource exploitation intensified, disrupting local ecosystems and cultures.
- **Challenges of Hydropower Projects:** Hydropower projects were promoted to generate state revenue and reduce financial dependence. Arunachal Pradesh was expected to meet 40% of India's power demand after completing major hydropower projects. However, these projects often ignored local laws and customary land ownership, leading to displacement and cultural erosion.
- **Way ahead:** Norway's apology for past injustices highlights the importance of acknowledging historical wrongs and committing to reconciliation. The Himalayan region has also faced resource exploitation and cultural erosion, but there has been no formal recognition of these issues. Sustainable and inclusive development is necessary to protect the cultural identity and environment of Himalayan communities.

Q. How have assimilation policies impacted indigenous communities globally? Compare Norway's approach to reconciliation with the challenges faced by indigenous groups in the Himalayan region. (একত্ৰীকৰণ নীতিয়ে বিশ্বব্যাপী থলুৱা সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহক কেনেদৰে প্ৰভাৱিত কৰিছে? হিমালয় অঞ্চলত থলুৱা গোটবোৰে সন্মুখীন হোৱা প্ৰত্যাহ্বানৰ সৈতে নৰৱেৰ পুনৰ্মিলনৰ দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীক তুলনা কৰক।)

5. Defying US reciprocal tariff threats, markets rebound with 1% gain

Context: US President Donald Trump announced the implementation of reciprocal tariffs on trade partners starting April 2, regardless of their economic status. In his Joint Address to Congress, he criticized both friendly and unfriendly nations, including India, China, and the European Union, for imposing higher tariffs on US products.

Key points

- **High Tariffs Imposed by India on U.S. Goods:** The U.S. argues that India imposes excessively high tariffs on American products, particularly in the automobile and agricultural sectors.
- **Reasons for imposing reciprocal tariffs:**
 - High Import Tariffs Imposed by These Countries* - The U.S. administration has expressed concerns over the substantial tariffs that nations such as India and China impose on American goods. For instance, India charges auto tariffs exceeding 100%.
 - Trade Imbalances* - The U.S. aims to address significant trade deficits with countries like China. By imposing reciprocal tariffs, the U.S. seeks to encourage these nations to reduce their tariffs and open their markets to American products, thereby promoting fairer trade practices.
 - Protection of Domestic Industries* - High tariffs from countries like China have adversely affected U.S. industries, particularly manufacturing and agriculture. The reciprocal tariffs are intended to protect these sectors from unfair competition and to support domestic employment.
- **Global trade implications:**
 - Escalation of Global Trade Wars* - Reciprocal tariffs can trigger retaliatory measures from affected countries, leading to prolonged trade conflicts and increased global economic uncertainty. Example: After the U.S. imposed tariffs on Chinese goods under Section 301, China retaliated with tariffs on U.S. agricultural products, disrupting global supply chains and trade flows.
 - Rising Costs for Consumers and Businesses* - Increased tariffs raise the cost of imported goods, leading to higher prices for consumers and increased production costs for businesses reliant on global supply chains. Example: U.S. tariffs on Chinese electronics increased costs for American companies like Apple, which faced higher prices for components and devices.
- **Impact on India:**
 - Widening of the Current Account Deficit (CAD)* - Higher U.S. tariffs on Indian exports can reduce foreign exchange earnings, leading to a wider CAD as export revenue declines while import costs remain unchanged or increase. Example: The U.S. withdrawal of GSP benefits in 2019 reduced India's export competitiveness, contributing to a widened CAD of 2.1% of GDP in FY19 from 1.8% in FY18.
 - Depreciation of the Indian Rupee* - A higher CAD increases demand for foreign currency, putting pressure on the rupee's value and causing depreciation, which raises the cost of imports like crude oil. Example: In 2018, after U.S. tariffs and India's rising oil import bill, the rupee fell to ₹74 per USD, increasing inflation and making imported goods more expensive.
- **Way forward:**
 - Bilateral Trade Negotiations* - Strengthen diplomatic efforts to negotiate mutually beneficial trade agreements with the U.S., focusing on reducing tariffs and enhancing market access for key sectors like pharmaceuticals, textiles, and technology.
 - Diversification of Export Markets* - Reduce dependency on the U.S. by exploring new markets through regional trade agreements (e.g., Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements) and expanding in regions like Africa and Southeast Asia.