Editorial of the Day – 06.03.2026

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1. Transforming Representation into Real Change By 2029(TH)

General Studies Paper: GS II (Governance & Social Justice)

Topic: Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Sub-Topic: Women's Political Participation, Welfare Schemes for the Elderly, and Gender-Responsive Budgeting.

1. Introduction

India is on the verge of a democratic milestone with the Women's Reservation Act, which mandates a one-third reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha beginning in 2029. This reform is poised to create the most gender-representative Parliament in the nation's history. However, for this representation to be truly transformative, it must move beyond symbolism and address structural gaps, specifically the long-overlooked crisis of elder care and the unique vulnerabilities of aging women.

2. Moving Beyond Symbolic Representation

1. **Potential for Change:** Increased representation can reshape national policy priorities and broaden parliamentary debates.
2. **The Risks of a Blank Agenda:** Without a clear mandate to address gender-specific issues, representation may fail to produce structural reform.
3. **Groundwork for 2029:** Political parties and civil society must begin identifying issues that affect women across their **entire life cycle**—not just during reproductive or working years.
4. **Manifesto Inclusion:** Critical issues like elder care must be integrated into party manifestos and electoral campaigns before the 2029 cycle.

3. The Socio-Economic Realities of Aging in India

Demographic Shifts

1. **Rapidly Aging Population:** India currently has over **100 million** citizens above age 60, a figure projected to exceed **250 million by 2040**.
2. **Gendered Longevity:** Women generally live **four to five years longer** than men, leading to a higher proportion of elderly women in the population.

Economic and Personal Vulnerabilities

1. **Financial Insecurity:** Aging women often lack savings, property, or assets due to **broken employment histories** caused by lifelong caregiving responsibilities.
2. **Private vs. Public Burden:** Elder care is currently treated as a **private family burden**—largely shouldered by daughters and daughters-in-law—rather than a matter of public infrastructure.
3. **The "Caregiver's Worry":** Women often care for aging relatives while simultaneously facing uncertainty regarding their own future security and access to services.

4. Policy Gaps and Institutional Invisibility

1. **Gender-Blind Frameworks:** Existing policies, such as the **National Policy for Older Persons (1999)** and the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme**, focus on poverty and health but lack a specific **gender perspective**.
2. **Policy Invisibility:** Aging women are not recognized as a distinct policy category, leading to their specific needs being ignored in legislative sessions.

3. **Health Crisis (Dementia):** A 2023 study found that **8 million** elderly Indians live with dementia—a number expected to double by 2036. Women are disproportionately affected due to longevity and a higher likelihood of living alone.

5. Strategic Steps for the 2029 Parliament

To ensure the new Parliament is effective, several institutional steps are required:

1. **Comprehensive Data:** Future census data must provide **age- and gender-disaggregated statistics** to facilitate evidence-based policy design.
2. **Targeted Budgeting:** Governments must implement **transparent budgeting** specifically for elder-care programs and support systems.
3. **Holistic Representation:** Candidate pipelines must be trained to understand women's issues beyond childcare and employment, extending to **geriatric healthcare** and **dignified aging**.
4. **Political Commitment:** Dignified aging must be elevated to a visible political commitment well before the 2029 elections.

6. Conclusion

The Women's Reservation Act is a historic opportunity to reshape India's legislative priorities. However, the true success of this reform will be measured by its ability to protect women throughout all stages of life. By recognizing the realities of aging and building supportive institutions now, India can ensure that its most representative Parliament also becomes its most **transformative**.

Source: **https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/transforming-representation-into-real-change-by-2029/article70708309.ece**

"The true measure of the Women's Reservation Act will lie in its ability to move beyond symbolic representation to address the structural 'policy invisibility' of aging women. Comment." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

The Women's Reservation Act, which reserves one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women beginning in **2029**, is the largest expansion of political representation ever legislated in India. However, representation alone does not guarantee reform; it must be coupled with a clear policy mandate that recognizes women across their **entire life cycle**, particularly the overlooked demographic of the elderly.

2. The Reality of 'Policy Invisibility' for Aging Women

1. **Demographic Shift:** India's elderly population (above 60) is projected to exceed 250 million by 2040. Women disproportionately comprise this group as they tend to live four to five years longer than men.
2. **Economic Vulnerability:** Aging women often face acute financial insecurity due to broken **employment histories** caused by lifelong caregiving responsibilities, leaving them with limited savings or property.
3. **Health and Social Isolation:** Women are at a higher risk of conditions like dementia—expected to affect 16 million Indians by 2036—and are more likely to live alone in their later years.
4. **Private vs. Public Burden:** Currently, elder care is treated as a private family burden, predominantly shouldered by younger women, rather than a matter of public infrastructure or national welfare.

3. Transforming Representation into Real Change (Commentary)

1. **Beyond Symbolism:** Expanding representation has the potential to reshape national priorities, but without a specific agenda, it risks remaining purely symbolic. Future representatives must advocate for issues like geriatric healthcare and economic security.
2. **Gender-Sensitive Frameworks:** Existing policies like the National Policy for Older Persons (1999) lack a distinct gender perspective. The 2029 Parliament must leverage its new composition to treat aging women as a distinct policy category.
3. **Data and Budgeting:** To be effective, the government must utilize age- and gender-disaggregated statistics from future censuses and ensure transparent budgeting for elder-care programs.

4. Conclusion

The Women's Reservation Act offers a historic opportunity to build a more inclusive social contract. The success of the 2029 Parliament will be judged by its ability to transition from being a symbol of progress to a catalyst for dignified aging. By integrating the concerns of elderly women into the political mainstream now, India can ensure that its most representative Parliament is also its most transformative.

Source: https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/transforming-representation-into-real-change-by-2029/article70708309.ece

2. How West Asia Conflict Has Hit India's Rice Exports, Left Thousands of Containers Stuck at Ports (IE)

General Studies Paper: GS III (Economic Development & Environment)

Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System; Food security; Conservation, environmental pollution, and degradation.

Sub-Topic: Agricultural Exports, Water Footprint (Virtual Water Trade), and Crop Diversification.

1. Introduction

India stands as the global leader in rice production and exports, achieving a record output of 150 million tonnes and exporting 21.69 million tonnes in 2024–25. However, this dominance faces a paradox: while it ensures global food security, it leads to severe domestic water depletion. The current strategy is under scrutiny for its high "virtual water" export and low value realization from non-basmati varieties, prompting a call for a sustainability-oriented model.

2. India's Global Dominance: Production and Exports

1. **Export Leadership**: India has been the world's largest rice exporter since 2011–12. Its 2024–25 export volume (~21.7 mt) vastly outstrips competitors like Vietnam (~8 mt) and Thailand (~7.8 mt).
2. **Global Food Security**: Indian rice is a lifeline for developing regions in Africa, West Asia, and Southeast Asia.
3. **Economic Impact**: Exports generate billions in foreign exchange and support millions of farmers across states like West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Haryana.
4. **Export Basket**: The trade is split between high-value Basmati (targeted at Europe and the Middle East) and volume-heavy non-Basmati rice for developing markets.

3. Environmental Sustainability Concerns

1. **The "Virtual Water" Export**: Producing 1 kg of rice requires nearly 3,000 litres of water. By exporting massive quantities of rice, India is effectively exporting its scarce water resources.
2. **Groundwater Depletion**: Intensive paddy cultivation, especially in the north-western states of Punjab and Haryana, has led to a severe drop in water tables.
3. **Irrigation Inefficiency**: Conventional flooding methods can consume up to 5 million litres of water per acre.
4. **Climate Vulnerability**: Rising temperatures and erratic monsoons increase the risk of high-water-demand systems failing.

4. Financial and Economic Sustainability

1. **The Value Gap**: Non-basmati rice fetches only ₹34–₹39 per kg, whereas Basmati earns ₹82–₹92 per kg. Despite lower volumes (5–6 mt), Basmati's total value is comparable to the much larger non-basmati segment.
2. **Subsidy Burden**: Large-scale exports of low-value rice are often indirectly supported by heavy government outlays in MSP, fertilizers, and power, creating a fiscal strain.
3. **Global Competition**: To remain competitive against Vietnam and Pakistan, India must shift focus from quantity to quality and branding.

5. Shifting to High-Value and GI-Tagged Varieties

The Basmati Advantage

1. **Niche Market**: Globally recognized for its unique aroma and grain length, Basmati provides a strong premium niche.
2. **Eco-Friendly Timing**: Basmati is typically transplanted during the monsoon, reducing the need for summer irrigation.
3. **Expansion Potential**: India has 6.2 million hectares of GI-protected Basmati land, but only **2.1 million hectares** are currently utilized.

Specialty GI Rice

1. **Regional Diversity**: Varieties like **Kalanamak** (UP), **Gobindobhog** (West Bengal), **Seeraga Samba** (TN), and **Jeerakasala** (Kerala) offer unique tastes and higher market value.
2. **Rural Development**: Promoting these traditional varieties supports local economies and preserves heritage agricultural practices.

6. Policy and Strategic Challenges

1. **Regional Imbalance**: Excessive cultivation in water-scarce North-West India persists, while water-abundant Eastern states remain underutilized for rice.
2. **Procurement Trap**: MSP and procurement policies heavily favored in Punjab and Haryana encourage farmers to stick with water-intensive paddy.
3. **The Need for Diversification**: Incentivizing shifts to **millets, pulses, and oilseeds** is essential for ecological recovery in stressed zones.

7. Conclusion

India's future as an agricultural powerhouse depends on transitioning to a sustainability-oriented export model. By leveraging its GI-tagged specialty rice, expanding Basmati zones, and shifting volume-heavy cultivation to water-abundant regions, India can maintain its global market share while safeguarding its natural resources.

Source: **https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/west-asia-conflict-india-rice-exports-10565738/**

"India's emergence as the world's largest rice exporter has led to a significant 'virtual water' drain, particularly from water-stressed regions. Enumerate the environmental and fiscal challenges of the current rice export regime and discuss the strategy for transitioning toward a sustainability-oriented export model." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

India is the world's largest producer and exporter of rice, with exports reaching approximately 21.69 million tonnes in 2024–25. While this dominance bolsters global food security and foreign exchange earnings, the reliance on high-volume, low-value exports has raised alarms regarding the massive "virtual water" export and the ecological depletion of India's primary agricultural zones.

2. Environmental and Fiscal Challenges (Enumeration)

1. **Groundwater Depletion:** Paddy is highly water-intensive, requiring nearly 3,000 litres of water for every 1 kg of rice. In states like Punjab and Haryana, this has led to a critical drop in water tables.
2. **Virtual Water Export:** By exporting over 21 million tonnes of rice, India is effectively exporting billions of cubic meters of its scarce freshwater resources to the rest of the world.
3. **Low Value Realization:** Non-basmati rice fetches only ₹34–₹39 per kg, meaning the environmental cost is not adequately reflected in the economic return.
4. **Fiscal Burden:** The heavy use of Minimum Support Price (MSP), electricity subsidies for pumping groundwater, and fertilizer subsidies creates a significant fiscal strain when supporting high-volume, low-value exports.
5. **Climate Risk:** Intensive flooding irrigation methods contribute to methane emissions and increase the vulnerability of the sector to erratic monsoons.

3. Strategy for a Sustainability-Oriented Model (Discussion)

To address these challenges, India must shift from a "quantity-driven" to a "value-driven" strategy:

1. **Focus on Basmati and GI-Tagged Rice:** Basmati rice earns significantly higher prices (**₹82–₹92 per kg**) and is typically grown during the monsoon, reducing irrigation pressure. Expanding Basmati into its 6.2 million hectares of GI-potential area can boost revenue without increasing the water footprint.
2. **Promoting Specialty Varieties:** Leveraging GI-tagged rice like **Kalanamak, Gobindobhog, and Seeraga Samba** allows India to capture niche, high-value global markets.
3. **Regional Recalibration:** Incentivizing rice cultivation in water-abundant Eastern states (Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh) while encouraging crop diversification (millets, pulses) in the water-stressed North-West.
4. **Improved Irrigation Efficiency:** Promoting scientific developments like **Pusa Basmati-1509** and Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) to reduce crop duration and water demand.

4. Conclusion

The transition toward a sustainable rice export strategy is essential to safeguard India's natural resources without compromising its status as a global agricultural leader. By aligning procurement policies with agro-climatic zones and prioritizing high-value branding over sheer volume, India can ensure that its agricultural trade is both economically profitable and ecologically responsible.

Source: https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/west-asia-conflict-india-rice-exports-10565738/

3. Informal Sector Growth Holds Up (BL)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy

Topic: Indian economy and issues relating to growth and development..

Sub-Topic: Employment and informal sector dynamics

Introduction

The informal sector plays a crucial role in India’s economy by providing employment opportunities and supporting livelihoods for a large section of the population. Recent revisions in the national accounts series have provided improved estimates of economic activity, particularly in the unorganised sector. These new estimates suggest that the informal sector has shown greater resilience and growth than previously assumed.

1. Revision of the National Accounts Series

1. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) introduced a revised National Accounts Series with a 2022–23 base year.
2. The revision incorporates updated datasets, improved enterprise surveys, and administrative data sources.
3. This improves measurement of economic activity in private corporate and unincorporated enterprises.

2. Importance of the Informal Sector in India

1. The informal sector accounts for a large share of employment and economic activity, especially in sectors such as trade, manufacturing, and services.
2. Many workers depend on small-scale enterprises and self-employment for livelihoods.
3. Accurate estimation of this sector is essential for understanding India’s overall economic structure.

3. Evidence of Informal Sector Resilience

1. The revised data suggest that the informal sector has experienced robust growth in recent years.
2. Growth in unincorporated enterprises has kept pace with or exceeded that of the organised sector in certain periods.
3. This indicates that earlier assessments may have underestimated the sector’s contribution to economic growth.

4. Reassessment of Earlier Economic Concerns

1. Earlier narratives suggested a severe contraction of the informal sector following events such as demonetisation, the introduction of GST, and the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Updated statistical methods indicate that the sector has recovered and adapted to changing economic conditions.
3. However, the revised estimates also highlight the limitations of earlier data sources and methodologies.

5. Structural Challenges of the Informal Economy

1. Despite its resilience, the informal sector faces challenges such as low productivity, limited access to credit, and lack of social security.
2. Informal enterprises often operate with limited technological adoption and capital investment.
3. These constraints restrict long-term productivity growth and formalisation.

6. Policy Implications

1. Strengthening data systems is essential for better measurement of informal economic activity.
2. Policies should focus on gradual formalisation, skill development, and access to finance for small enterprises.
3. Expanding social protection and digital integration can improve working conditions and productivity in the informal sector.

Conclusion

The revised national accounts series highlights the significant role and resilience of the informal sector in India's economy. While improved data provide a clearer understanding of its contribution, sustained policy support aimed at enhancing productivity, facilitating formalisation, and improving worker welfare will be crucial for inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/informal-sector-growth-hasnt-fallen-short/article70707727.ece

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *The revised national accounts series suggests that India's informal sector has performed more robustly than previously believed. Examine the significance of the informal sector in India's economy and discuss the challenges in measuring and strengthening it.* (250 words)

Introduction

The informal sector forms a vital component of India's economy, providing employment and income opportunities for a large proportion of the workforce. Recent revisions in the national accounts series by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) have improved the measurement of unincorporated enterprises, indicating stronger growth in the informal sector than earlier estimates suggested.

Significance of the Informal Sector

1. Major Source of Employment- A large share of India's workforce is employed in informal and unorganised enterprises.

2. Contribution to Economic Activity- Informal enterprises play a significant role in sectors such as trade, manufacturing, and services.

3. Economic Resilience- The revised data indicate that the sector has adapted and recovered from economic disruptions.

Challenges

1. Measurement Difficulties- Informal enterprises often lack formal records and reliable datasets, making accurate estimation difficult.

2. Low Productivity- Limited access to technology, finance, and infrastructure constrains productivity.

3. Lack of Social Security- Workers in the informal sector often face income instability and inadequate social protection.

Conclusion

Improved statistical methods provide a clearer understanding of the informal sector's role in India's economy. Strengthening policies that promote formalisation, financial inclusion, and social protection will be essential to enhance productivity and ensure inclusive economic growth.
Source: https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/informal-sector-growth-hasnt-fallen-short/article70707727.ece

4. Opening The Floodgates (THE STATESMAN)

General Studies Paper: General Studies Paper III – Environment and Ecology
Topic: Conservation, environmental protection and biodiversity.
Sub-Topic: Climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration

Introduction

Forests play a crucial role in maintaining biodiversity, ecological balance, and climate stability. India's forest governance framework, particularly the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, aims to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. Recent amendments to the Act have generated debate regarding their implications for forest conservation, ecological sustainability, and economic development.

1. Objectives of the Forest (Conservation) Act

1. The Act was enacted to prevent large-scale diversion of forest land for non-forest activities.
2. It introduced central approval mechanisms to regulate forest land use.
3. The law aimed to ensure sustainable forest management and protection of biodiversity.

2. Plantation Forestry and Industrial Use

1. Forest development corporations in several states promoted plantation forestry using fast-growing species such as eucalyptus, poplar, and acacia.
2. These plantations were intended to supply raw materials for industries such as paper and timber.
3. However, such monoculture plantations often replace diverse natural forests.

3. Ecological Concerns

1. Natural forests possess higher biodiversity and stronger carbon sequestration capacity than monoculture plantations.
2. Replacement of natural forests with industrial plantations can lead to loss of ecological diversity and ecosystem services.
3. Monoculture species may also affect soil quality, water availability, and wildlife habitats.

4. Policy and Legal Implications

1. Amendments to forest laws may expand the scope for commercial exploitation of forest land.
2. Concerns arise that relaxing regulatory safeguards could weaken environmental protection mechanisms.
3. Balancing development needs with ecological sustainability remains a key challenge in forest governance.

5. Climate Change and Forest Conservation

1. Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide and helping mitigate climate change.
2. Preserving natural forests is essential for maintaining long-term climate resilience and ecosystem stability.
3. Large-scale deforestation or conversion to plantations can reduce the overall carbon storage potential.

6. Policy Measures for Sustainable Forest Management

1. Prioritise restoration of degraded forests with native species instead of monoculture plantations.
2. Strengthen environmental impact assessment and regulatory oversight.
3. Promote community participation in forest conservation through local governance mechanisms.

4. Align forest management policies with climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation goals.

Conclusion

Effective forest governance must strike a balance between economic utilisation of forest resources and ecological conservation. Strengthening environmental safeguards and prioritising restoration of natural forests will be essential to protect biodiversity, support climate mitigation, and ensure sustainable forest management in India.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/opening-the-floodgates-1503566647.html

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Q. *Recent changes in forest governance have raised concerns about balancing economic development with ecological sustainability. Examine the challenges associated with plantation forestry and forest land diversion in India.* (250 words)

Introduction

Forests are vital for biodiversity conservation, climate regulation, and ecological stability. India's forest governance framework, particularly the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, seeks to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. However, increasing emphasis on plantation forestry and industrial use of forest land has raised concerns about ecological sustainability.

Challenges Associated with Plantation Forestry

1. Loss of Biodiversity- Monoculture plantations replace diverse natural forests, reducing species diversity and ecological resilience.
2. Reduced Carbon Sequestration- Natural forests generally store more carbon compared to short-rotation plantation species.
3. Ecological Imbalance-Plantation species can affect soil health, water availability, and wildlife habitats.

Issues in Forest Land Diversion

1. Industrial Expansion-Forest land diversion for industries can lead to deforestation and habitat fragmentation.
2. Weak Environmental Safeguards- Relaxation of regulatory mechanisms may reduce environmental oversight and accountability.

Conclusion

Sustainable forest management requires balancing economic development with environmental conservation. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and prioritising restoration of natural forests will be crucial for maintaining ecological stability and climate resilience.

Source: https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/opening-the-floodgates-1503566647.html