



## Prioritizing the Poor, Youth, Women, and Farmers

**For Prelims:** [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#), [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), [Global Gender Gap Index](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [Women's Reservation Bill, 2023](#), [World Bank](#), [Unemployment](#)

**For Mains:** Multidimensional Poverty and Unemployment, Empowering Women, Factors Contributing to Agricultural Distress, Related Government Initiatives

**Source:** [DTE](#)

### Why in News?

The Prime Minister of India has underscored the imperative of prioritizing the well-being of four groups: **the poor, youth, women, and farmers.**

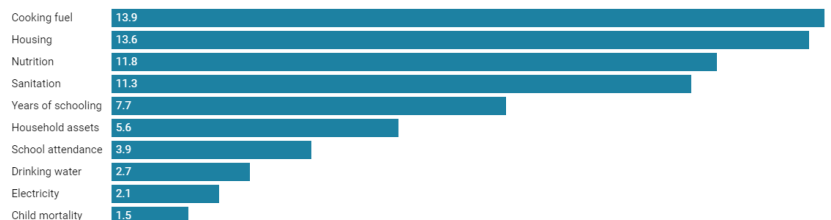
- This emphasis reflects a commitment to ensuring dignity and respect for the deprived.

### What are the Socioeconomic Dynamics of the Highlighted Groups in India?

#### ▪ **Poor:**

##### ◦ **Multidimensional Poverty Index:**

- India has more than 230 million poor people.
- According to the [2023 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index](#), published by the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, some **415 million Indians escaped poverty between 2005-06 and 2019-21.**
- Approximately **18.7% of the population falls into the category of being 'vulnerable' to multidimensional poverty**, as defined by the UNDP.
  - This refers to individuals who, while not classified as poor, but have experienced deprivations in 20-33.3% of all weighted indicators.
- [Cooking fuel, housing, and nutrition](#) are major areas of deprivation. Approximately 13.9%, 13.6%, and 11.8% of the population were classified as deprived in these respective metrics. [// Headcount ratio of Indians deprived on individual sub-indicators \(in %\)](#)



##### ◦ **Unemployment:**

- India's [unemployment](#) rate rose to the highest level in over two years in October 2023, with **rural areas experiencing an increase in joblessness.**
- The [National Sample Survey Office's Periodic Labour Force Survey](#) for 2022-23

revealed a **decrease in unemployment from 5.3% to 2.4%** in rural areas and from **7.7% to 5.4% in urban areas compared to 2017-18.**

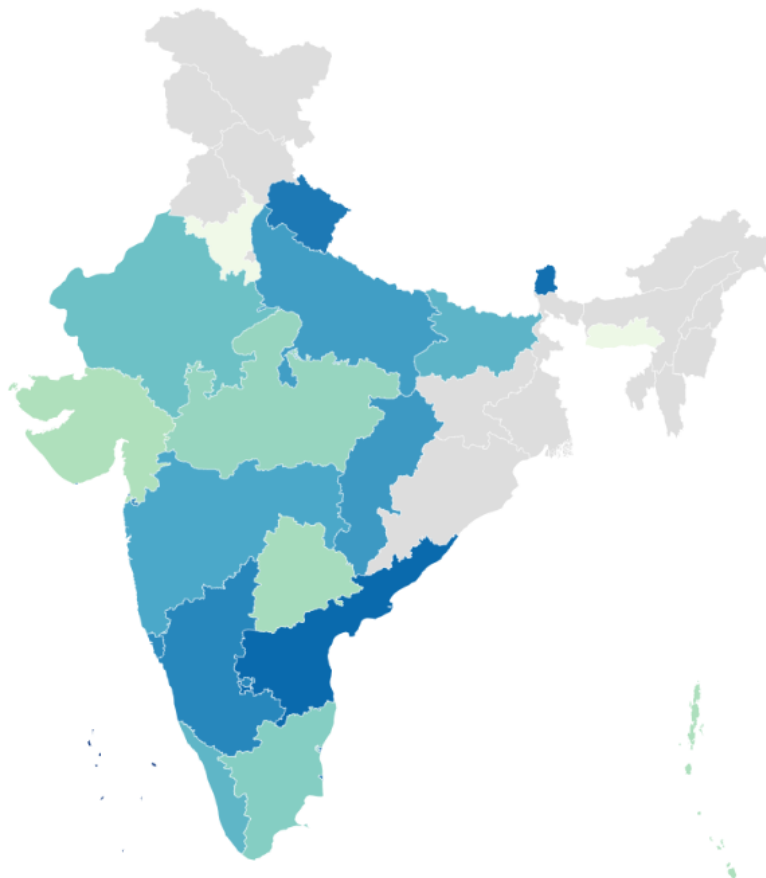
- The proportion of **self-employed** individuals in the total employed population increased from 52% in 2018-19 to 57% in 2022-23.
  - Self-employment covers various activities such as running a tea stall, farming, assisting in household enterprises, practising medicine, and undertaking unpaid work within one's economic activities.
  - A high level of self-employment levels indicates a **lack of alternatives**, with individuals often adhering to these less rewarding jobs.
    - Typically, **countries with lower per capita income** tend to have higher proportions of self-employed populations.

#### ▪ **Women:**

- **India ranked 127 out of 146 countries** in the **Global Gender Gap Report 2023** released by the **World Economic Forum** showing an improvement of 1.4% points and eight positions from 135 in 2022.
- According to the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** reports Crimes **against women rose by 4% in 2022** compared to 2021, with over 4.45 lakh crimes registered.
  - Majority of crimes were related to cruelty by husbands or relatives, kidnapping, assault, and rape.
  - 12 states and Union territories recorded crime rates higher than the national average.
- The **Women's Reservation Act, 2023** also known as the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**, was passed to reserve **one-third of seats** in legislative assemblies and Lok Sabha for women.

#### States where crimes against women increased in one year

Darker the shades, higher the % increase in crimes



States in grey have seen a decline in crimes against women

#### ▪ **Farmers:**

- Farmers lost **standing crops to excess and untimely rain**, leading to a significant blow to their incomes.
    - [Southwest monsoon](#) was below normal and erratic, impacting [Kharif crop](#) yields in many parts of the country.
    - States like **Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand** are facing drought and drought-like conditions.
  - Recurring losses due to the [pink bollworm pest on the BT cotton crop](#) in north India added to farmers' distress.
  - NCRB data revealed an increase in [deaths by suicide](#) among those involved in farming.
    - At least **one farmer died by suicide every hour in India**, with 11,290 suicide cases reported in 2022.
    - Deaths by the **suicide of agricultural labourers were higher** than farmers/cultivators, with 53% of the suicide cases being agricultural labourers.
  - The dependence of an average agricultural household for income has been increasing on wages from farming rather than crop production.
- **Youth:**
- According to the [World Bank](#) the **youth unemployment rate in India was at 23.2%**, higher than its neighbours Pakistan (11.3%), Bangladesh (12.9%), and Bhutan (14.4%), in 2022.
    - The unemployment rate in China stood at 13.2%, South Korea 6.9% and Singapore 6.1%.
    - Although the youth unemployment rate in India dropped from 23.9% in 2021, it is still marginally higher than the 22.9% recorded in the Pre-Covid year of 2019.
  - The youth unemployment rate refers to those in the workforce who are aged 15 to 24 years and without a job, but actively seeking one.
  - The **State of Working India 2023 study** found that unemployment among graduates under the age of 25 was at 42.3% in 2021-2022, while the overall joblessness rate was 8.7%.

## What are the Related Initiatives Aimed at Addressing these Specific Groups?

- **Poor:**
  - [Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana](#)
  - [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\) 2005](#)
  - [Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihood Mission \(DAY-NRLM\)](#)
  - [Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana](#)
  - [Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana](#)
- **Women:**
  - [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme](#)
  - [Ujjawala Yojna](#)
  - [Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme](#)
  - [One Stop Centre](#)
  - [The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace \(Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal\) Act, 2013](#)
  - [The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences \(POCSO\), 2012](#)
  - [NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR](#)
  - [Mahila police Volunteers](#)
  - [Mahila Shakti Kendras \(MSK\)](#)
- **Farmers:**
  - [The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi \(PM-KISAN\)](#)
  - [Agriculture Infrastructure Fund \(AIF\)](#)
  - [Kisan Credit Cards \(KCC\)](#)
  - [Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana \(PKVY\)](#)
  - [Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana](#)
- **Youth:**
  - [YUVA: Prime Minister's Scheme For Mentoring Young Authors](#)
  - [National Youth Policy-2014](#)
  - [National Skill Development Corporation](#)
  - [Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram Scheme](#)

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q1. The Multi-dimensional Poverty Index developed by Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative with UNDP support covers which of the following? (2012)**

1. Deprivation of education, health, assets and services at household level
2. Purchasing power parity at national level
3. Extent of budget deficit and GDP growth rate at national level

**Select the correct answer using the codes given below:**

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

**Ans: (a)**

**Q2. Disguised unemployment generally means (2013)**

- (a) large number of people remain unemployed
- (b) alternative employment is not available
- (c) marginal productivity of labour is zero
- (d) productivity of workers is low

**Ans: (c)**

**Q3. Under the Kisan Credit Card scheme, short-term credit support is given to farmers for which of the following purposes? (2020)**

1. Working capital for maintenance of farm assets
2. Purchase of combine harvesters, tractors and mini trucks
3. Consumption requirements of farm households
4. Post-harvest expenses
5. Construction of family house and setting up of village cold storage facility

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

- (a) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

**Ans: (b)**

**Q4. Consider the following statements: (2017)**

1. The nation-wide 'Soil Health Card Scheme' aims at expanding the cultivable area under irrigation.
2. Enabling the banks to assess the quantum of loans to be granted to farmers on the basis of soil quality.
3. Checking the overuse of fertilizers in farmlands.

**Which of the above statements is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

## **Mains**

**Q1.** Most of the unemployment in India is structural in nature. Examine the methodology adopted to compute unemployment in the country and suggest improvements. **(2023)**

**Q2.** Despite Consistent experience of high growth, India still goes with the lowest indicators of human development. Examine the issues that make balanced and inclusive development elusive. **(2016)**

**Q3.** We are witnessing increasing instances of sexual violence against women in the country. Despite existing legal provisions against it, the number of such incidences is on the rise. Suggest some innovative measures to tackle this menace. **(2014)**

## **Technological Innovations Implemented Under MGNREGA Scheme**

**For Prelims:** [Aadhaar Payment Bridge System \(APBS\)](#), [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\) scheme](#), **National Electronic Fund Management System (NEFMS)**,

**For Mains:** MGNREGA Scheme, Government Policies & Interventions.

**Source:** [PIB](#)

### **Why in News?**

The Ministry of Rural Development has responded to concerns about the use of technology, particularly [Aadhaar](#), in denying **welfare benefits to vulnerable Indians** and delaying wage payments under the [Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act \(MGNREGA\) scheme](#).

- In response to these concerns, the ministry has highlighted several technological innovations under the MGNREGA, aiming to **enhance transparency and efficiency** in its implementation.

### **What is the MGNREGA Scheme?**

- **About:**
  - Launched in **2005** by the Ministry of Rural Development, MGNREGA stands as one of the **world's largest work guarantee programs**.
  - This initiative provides a legal guarantee, ensuring a **hundred days of employment each financial year** for adult members of any rural household.
    - Participants engage in unskilled manual work related to public projects, earning the statutory minimum wage.
- **Current Status of MGNREGA:**
  - There are **14.32 crore registered Job Cards**, with 68.22% active Job Cards, and a total of 25.25 crore workers, of which 56.83% are active workers.
- **Technological Innovations Implemented:**
  - **Aadhaar Integration:**
    - Continuous **Aadhaar seeding**( linking an Aadhaar number to a primary bank

- account number) for de-duplication and authentication of genuine beneficiaries.
- Aadhaar seeding of 14.08 crore **(98.31%)** active workers have already been completed. Against these seeded Aadhaar, a total 13.76 crore Aadhaar have been authenticated and **87.52% active workers are now eligible for [Aadhaar Payment Bridge System \(APBS\)](#).**
    - APBS is a payment system that uses **Aadhaar numbers to electronically send government subsidies and benefits** to the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of beneficiaries.
      - **[Gram Panchayats](#)** facing technical or Aadhaar-related problems may seek exemptions from APBS on a case-by-case basis until the resolution of the issues.
      - **[National Payments Corporation of India \(NPCI\)](#)** data indicates a success rate of 99.55% or above when Aadhaar is enabled for DBT.
    - Payment for beneficiaries who **turn up for wage employment** to be made through APBS.
    - The recent concerns stating that **34.8% of total registered workers and 12.7% of active workers are still ineligible for ABPS** have no relevance.
      - Because **APBS is applicable only in case a registered beneficiary turns up** for wage employment.
  - **National Electronic Fund Management System (NEFMS):**
    - **NEFMS** is Introduced in FY 2016-17 for direct wage payments to beneficiaries.
      - Over 99% of wage payments are directly credited to beneficiaries' bank/post office accounts.
  - **Real-time Monitoring through NMMS:**
    - **[National Mobile Monitoring System \(NMMS\)](#)** app captures real-time attendance of beneficiaries at worksites.
      - Beneficiaries and citizens can verify worker attendance, enhancing transparency.
  - **Geotagging of Assets:**
    - Utilizes **remote sensing technology** for geotagging assets created under the scheme.
      - Remote sensing is the process of detecting and monitoring the physical characteristics of an area by measuring its **reflected and emitted radiation** at a distance (typically from satellite or aircraft).
    - Ensures public scrutiny and accountability by providing location-specific information.
  - **Job Card Updation:**
    - Regular exercise conducted by states/UTs for job card updation/deletion.
      - A Job card can be deleted in case it is a fake job card (incorrect job card)/ duplicate job card/ household not willing to work/ family shifted from Gram Panchayat permanently/ single person in job card and that person is expired.
      - Since **April 2022 about 2.85 crore Job cards have been deleted.**
  - **Drone Monitoring:**
    - Pilot testing of drone usage is conducted for monitoring and implementation, enhancing real-time monitoring and data collection for improved decision-making.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q. Among the following who are eligible to benefit from the “Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act”? (2011)**

- (a) Adult members of only the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households
- (b) Adult members of below poverty line (BPL) households
- (c) Adult members of households of all backward communities
- (d) Adult members of any household

**Ans: (d)**

## Exp:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREGA), which is the largest work guarantee programme in the world, was enacted in 2005 with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- It aims at addressing the causes of chronic poverty through the 'works' (projects) that are undertaken, and thus ensuring sustainable development. There is also an emphasis on strengthening the process of decentralisation by giving a significant role to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and implementing these works.
- Therefore, option D is the correct answer.

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## Inflation in India: Demand vs. Supply

**For Prelims:** [Inflation](#), [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\)](#), [Headline Inflation](#), [COVID-19](#), [Russia-Ukraine Conflict](#), [Pandemic](#), [Lockdowns](#), [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\)](#), [International Monetary Fund](#), [Demand Pull Inflation](#), [Cost-push Inflation](#)

**For Mains:** Impact of Demand and Supply over Inflation.

**Source:** [TH](#)

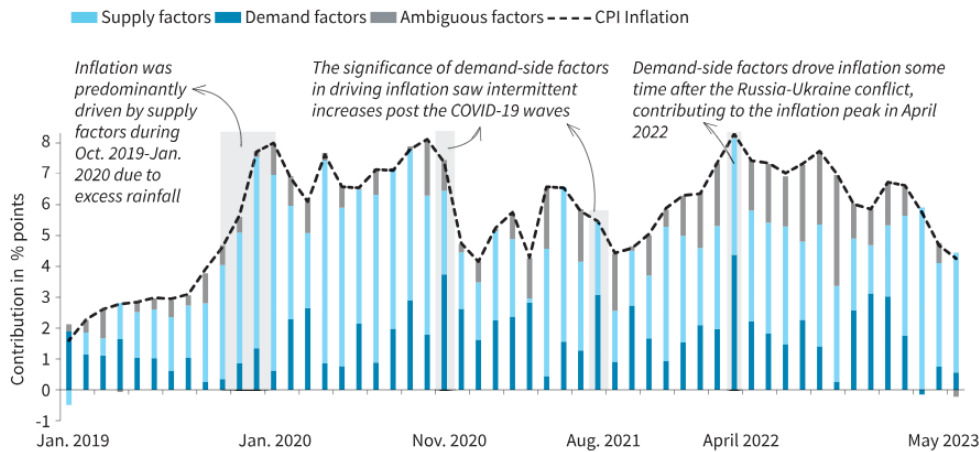
### Why in News?

Recently, [Inflation](#) in India is a perennial concern, but recent observations by the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** suggest changing dynamics influenced by both supply and demand factors.

- Over the entire period from **January 2019 to May 2023**, approximately **55%** of the [Consumer Price Index \(CPI\) headline inflation](#) is attributed to supply-side factors and the contribution of demand drivers to inflation stood at 31%.

### What has Caused Inflation in India in Recent Years?

- During the two waves of [Covid-19](#), supply disruptions were the main cause of inflation.
  - The start of the [pandemic](#), [lockdowns](#) caused a major decline in production and demand, leading to a **steep drop** in economic growth.
  - This phase also saw a decrease in **commodity prices** due to **weakened demand**.
  - As the economy began to reopen with distribution of vaccines and release of pent-up demand, demand recovered more rapidly than supply. This imbalance resulted in rising pressures on commodity prices.
- The onset of the [Russia-Ukraine conflict](#) in **2022** further **intensified supply chain challenges** and added to **commodity price pressures**.



## What is the Methodology for Assessing Inflation Causes?

- Unforeseen shifts in **prices** and **quantities** within a month determine whether **inflation** is **demand-driven** (prices and quantities move in the same direction) or supply-driven (prices and quantities move in opposite directions).
  - An **increase in demand** leads to a **rise in both prices and quantities**, while a **decrease in demand** results in a **reduction in both**.
  - Inflation is considered to be **supply-driven** if there is an **unexpected change in prices and quantities** that move in **opposite directions**. In this case, a **decrease in supply** is linked with a **lower volume** but an increase in price, and vice versa.
- Demand and supply factors at the sub-group level were combined using the CPI weights to assess overall headline inflation.
- **Headline inflation** is a measure of the **total inflation** within an economy, including commodities such as **food and energy prices**, which tend to be much more **volatile** and prone to **inflationary spikes**.
  - The headline inflation figure is reported through the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**, which calculates the **cost to purchase** a fixed **basket of goods** to determine how much inflation is occurring in the broad economy.

## What is Inflation?

- **About:**
  - **Inflation**, as defined by the **International Monetary Fund**, is the rate of increase in prices over a given period, encompassing a broad measure of overall price increases or for specific **goods and services**.
  - It reflects the **rising cost of living** and indicates how much more expensive a set of goods and/or services has become over a specified period, usually a year.
    - In India, inflation's impact is particularly significant due to **economic disparities** and a large population.
- **Different Causes of Inflation:**
  - **Demand-Pull Inflation:**
    - **Demand Pull inflation** occurs when the **demand for goods and services** exceeds their **supply**. When the overall demand in the economy is high, consumers are willing to pay more for the available goods and services, leading to a **general rise in prices**.
      - A **booming economy** with high consumer spending can create excess demand, putting upward pressure on prices.
  - **Cost-Push Inflation:**
    - **Cost-push inflation** is driven by an increase in the **production costs for goods and services**. This can be caused by factors such as **increased incomes, increased costs of raw materials, or disruptions in the supply chain**.
  - **Built-In or Wage-Price Inflation:**



- This type of inflation is often described as a **feedback loop** between **wages and prices**. When workers demand **higher wages**, **businesses** may raise prices to cover the **increased labor costs**. This, in turn, prompts workers to seek higher wages, and the cycle continues.
  - Collective bargaining by labor unions can result in **higher wages**, leading to **increased production costs** and subsequently **higher prices for goods and services**.

# INFLATION AND RELATED TERMS

## INFLATION

- ♦ Rise in goods/services prices; corresponding decline in purchasing power
- **Creeping Inflation:** Mild/moderate inflation where price level persistently rises over a period of time at a mild rate (single digit inflation rate)
- **Galloping Inflation:** Occurs when mild inflation is not checked/controlled (inflation in double/triple digits - 20/100/ 200% annually)
- **Hyperinflation:** Prices rise a million or even a trillion percent annually (witnessed by Germany in 1920s)

## DISINFLATION

- ♦ When inflation rate decelerates
  - Implies that prices are rising (inflation is happening) but at a slower rate each passing month

Deflation is decline in prices, whereas disinflation is a decline in inflation rate

Inflation

Disinflation

Deflation

## CORE INFLATION

- ♦ Change in costs of goods/services but excluding those from food/energy sectors (due to price volatility)

## REFLATION

- ♦ Typically follows deflation
  - Policymakers try to stimulate economic activity by producing inflation (more govt spending, reduced interest rates etc.)

## HEADLINE INFLATION

- ♦ **Headline Inflation** - Change in value of all goods in the basket (including food and energy)

Core = Headline - Food & fuel items

## SKREWFLATION

- ♦ Skewness of inflation among different sectors of the economy - some sectors facing huge inflation while some none and some even deflation

## STAGFLATION

- ♦ When Inflation, unemployment and economic stagnation /recession occur simultaneously; most difficult type of inflation to manage
- Witnessed by developed countries in the 1970s (US, UK) when world oil prices rose dramatically

## GREEDFLATION

- ♦ Where (corporate) greed is fuelling inflation; companies increasing their prices beyond just covering costs to maximise profits

## DEFLATION

- ♦ Reverse of inflation - a sustained decline in price of goods/services
- Here, annual inflation rate falls below 0% resulting in an increase in the real value of money (Japan suffered for almost a decade in 1990s)
- Can worsen into recession/depression; hence, more dangerous than inflation

## SHRINKFLATION

- ♦ Hidden form of inflation; often leads to customer frustration/dissatisfaction
  - Practice of reducing the size of a product while maintaining its sticker price

2 liters

\$5

→ Shrinkflation →

1.75 liters

\$5

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q.1 With reference to Indian economy, demand-pull inflation can be caused/increased by which of the following? (2021)**

1. Expansionary policies
2. Fiscal stimulus
3. Inflation-indexing of wages
4. Higher purchasing power
5. Rising interest rates

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

(a) 1, 2 and 4 only  
 (b) 3, 4 and 5 only  
 (c) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (a)

**Q.2 Consider the following statements: (2020)**

1. The weightage of food in Consumer Price Index (CPI) is higher than that in Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
2. The WPI does not capture changes in the prices of services, which CPI does.
3. The Reserve Bank of India has now adopted WPI as its key measure of inflation and to decide on changing the key policy rates.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

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

Ans: (a)

**Q 3. If the RBI decides to adopt an expansionist monetary policy, which of the following would it not do? (2020)**

1. Cut and optimize the Statutory Liquidity Ratio
2. Increase the Marginal Standing Facility Rate
3. Cut the Bank Rate and Repo Rate

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

- (A) 1 and 2 only  
(B) 2 only  
(C) 1 and 3 only  
(D) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B

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## Global Geopolitical Intricacies and Opportunities for India

**For Prelims:** Global Geopolitical Intricacies and Opportunities for India, [Russia-Ukraine conflict](#) and the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip, [Khalistani](#) separatist in the US.

**For Mains:** Global Geopolitical Intricacies and Opportunities for India.

**Source:** [IE](#)

### Why in News?

Despite India's emphasis on that, **"this is not the era of war"**, the Year 2023 became a year of wars:

Russia-Ukraine conflict and the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip are now among the most destructive conflicts of recent decades.

- These conflicts, alongside China's assertive behavior, pose significant challenges and disrupt diplomatic efforts, causing **worry not only in the West but also in India.**

## What is the Overview of 2023 Global Geopolitical Trends and Challenges for India?

### ▪ Crisis in the Middle East:

- Two years of sustained effort to normalize ties between **Israel and the Arab world** was **disrupted by the  [Hamas attack](#)** in which more than 1,200 civilians and military personnel were killed, and more than 230 taken hostage.
- Israel's angry and disproportionate **response has so far killed more than 20,000 Palestinians in Gaza** — which has attracted criticism from even the US. The Israeli-Arab reconciliation process has been derailed for now, and the future of Gaza is unknown.
  - India backed **a two-state solution** to resolve the decades-old Israel-Palestine conflict and bring lasting peace to the troubled region.

### ▪ Stress in India-US Ties:

- After successful visits by the Indian and President Joe Biden to each other's capitals, **bilateral ties are facing headwinds over allegations of an Indian official link** to an assassination plot against a [Khalistani separatist in the US](#).
- India's response has been **different from the way it reacted to Canada when it suggested an Indian government link** to the murder of another Khalistani in that country.
- India has expressed **India's "commitment to the rule of law"**, and promised to "look into" the role of Indian citizens in the alleged US plot if information is provided.

### ▪ Russia-Ukraine War:

- As the war drags on, the **West is facing funding challenges**. Ukraine hopes to get Euro 18.5 billion from the European Union and more than USD 8 billion from a US package that also **contains vital military assistance**.
- But the **assistance has been blocked** — by Republicans in the US Congress and by Hungary in the EU — so far.
- Meanwhile, Putin's re-election as Russia's President is a foregone conclusion. The Russian economy has been resilient despite sanctions, and proximity between Moscow and Beijing worries the West.

### ▪ India's Maldives Challenges:

- The **government of President Mohamed Muizzu**, who rode an **"India Out" campaign** to power, has asked India to withdraw military personnel stationed in the Maldives, and conveyed its intention to terminate a water survey pact. The Muizzu establishment is considered close to China.

### ▪ China's Behaviour:

- China continues to be **India's biggest worry and strategic challenge**. The **[Border Standoff](#)** is in its fourth year, with the force posture being maintained to rival the Chinese military presence. The dependence of Moscow, India's strategic defence partner, on Beijing for economic survival, and the Maldives getting closer to China in the Indian Ocean have added to the concern.

### ▪ G-20 and Global South:

- India's success in **negotiating a joint declaration at the [G20 summit](#)** came as a surprise for many in the international community.
- A big takeaway from the **G20 process was New Delhi's mobilisation** of developing and less developed countries under the umbrella of the Global South.
- The idea of leading the Global South is seen as taking forward the legacy of India's Non-Alignment leadership, only adapted to the 21st century.

### ▪ Engagement with Taliban:

- There has been a change of guard in the Afghanistan embassy in New Delhi, with the incumbent ambassador leaving and that country's diplomats in Mumbai and Hyderabad stepping in to take charge.
- To India's relief, they have assured **they won't fly the Taliban flag** or have Taliban

nomenclature in their official correspondence.

## What are the Upcoming Challenges for India in 2024?

- **US & Canada Relations:**
  - Resolving the US 'assassination plot' issue is a challenge. The US President's absence at **Republic Day caused irritation, delaying the [Quad summit](#).**
  - Canada's allegations also strain ties, but public support backs India's response. Different approaches are needed for US and Canada issues, as both countries hold distinct importance for India.
- **Pakistan Relations:**
  - Since 2019, when the Indian government was re-elected and the constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir were affected, ties **with Pakistan have been at a low.**
  - The change of guard in Islamabad and Rawalpindi did not make much difference, and India kept to its doctrine of indifference towards Pakistan.
    - Elections are now due in Pakistan, and there could be a new government there after February 2024.
- **Bangladesh Elections:**
  - Bilateral ties have gained positive momentum in the last 15 years of the Sheikh Hasina government, and Indian will be keen to see her return to power in the elections due early in the new year.
  - Security imperatives guide India's choice in Dhaka; the Bangladesh opposition is viewed with **suspicion and animosity**, going by the track record of the Khaleda Zia government in the early 2000s.
- **China Border Standoff:**
  - The border standoff is ongoing **since 2020**, and any fresh escalation will impact both the security environment and India's domestic political atmosphere.
  - India will be extra careful in its response to a challenge from its biggest adversary. That imperative will frame India's diplomacy towards China in the next few months, and even later.
- **West Asia Dynamics:**
  - India's evolving stance in the Israel-Hamas conflict and the nuanced diplomatic positioning in the region present complex challenges.
- **Balancing Interests between Russia and US:**
  - Balancing interests between imports of Russian oil and pressure from the US amid the ongoing war shapes India's foreign policy strategy.

## Way Forward

- India will be looking to move the **efforts at improving connectivity between its Northeast and Bangladesh** to a higher gear, which will benefit the region and both countries. India aims for continuity in positive bilateral ties with Sheikh Hasina's government while navigating potential shifts in power.
  - India must continue evolving its diplomatic stance in the Israel-Hamas conflict, aiming for a balanced approach between supporting Israel and addressing concerns of the Global South. Seeking ways to contribute positively to peace-building efforts and advocating for humanitarian aid could be crucial.
  - The free trade pacts with the UK and European partners are said **to be at a critical stage.** Elections to the EU parliament, and possibly in the UK, are due in 2024— and this shrinks the policy space and flexibility for negotiators. Even so, 2024 may see these major economic diplomacy initiatives come close to fruition.
  - The dialogues with the US and EU on technology and **trade, to remove the barriers for India to access high tech in AI**, quantum computing, and cybersecurity, will be a related policy space to look out for.
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# Proposed Hypotheses on the Parting of the Red Sea

Source: DTE

## Why in News?

The story of parting the [Red Sea](#) for the **Hebrews to escape from Egypt** is seen as a miracle in the **Book of Exodus**. But now, some researchers have looked at this story in a different way, **explaining it using some [meteorological phenomena](#)**.

## What are the Recent Meteorological Hypotheses Related to Parting of the Red Sea?



- The researchers proposes **4 potential meteorological phenomena** that could have temporarily parted the waters of the Red Sea:
  - **Medicane:** These [hurricane-like storms](#) in the Mediterranean can cause extreme **negative storm surges**, pushing coastal waters back and exposing landmasses.
    - The researchers note **Hurricane Irma's effect on Florida's coastline** as a similar example.
  - **Wind Setdown:** Sustained high-speed winds could temporarily expose raised reefs in the **Gulf of Suez**, facilitating a passage.
    - The Bible mentions an "**east wind**" **during the Exodus**, which aligns with this phenomenon.
  - **Tidal Resonance:** When external forces like **strong winds coincide with a location's natural tidal patterns**, it can result in unusually low tides and expose large areas of seabed.
    - The **Bay of Fundy** on the US-Canada border in the North Atlantic is a prominent example of this phenomenon.
  - **Rossby Waves:** These large-scale waves in **oceans and atmosphere**, caused by [Earth's](#)

**rotation**, can shift water masses.

- Their **occurrence in the Red Sea** could have temporarily created a shallow or dry pathway for the Israelites.
  - **Napoleon Bonaparte's** historical account during his Egyptian campaign also mentioned crossing the Red Sea amidst tidal changes.
- However, the study's conclusions are limited by the **uncertainties of ancient geography and climate**, as well as the inherent challenges of modeling complex natural phenomena. Further research and archaeological work are needed to strengthen the evidence.
- 

## Expansion of Litchi Cultivation Across India


**Source: DTE**

### Why in News?

The cultivation of **Litchi**, traditionally restricted to Muzaffarpur Bihar, has witnessed a significant expansion **across 19 Indian states, highlighting the Horticulture boost in India.**

- This development stems from the efforts of the **National Research Centre on Litchi (NRCL)** based in Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

### What are the Key Facts about Litchi?

- **Botanical Classification:** Litchi belongs to the Sapindaceae family and is known for its delicious, juicy, translucent aril or edible flesh.
- **Climatic Requirements:** Litchi thrives in **sub-tropical climates and prefers moist conditions**. It grows best in regions with low elevation, up to an altitude of around 800 meters. 
- **Soil Preference:** The ideal soil for litchi cultivation is **deep, well-drained loamy soil** rich in organic matter.
- **Temperature Sensitivity:** Litchi is sensitive to extreme temperatures. It does not tolerate temperatures above 40.5 degrees Celsius in summer or freezing temperatures in winter.
- **Rainfall Impact:** Prolonged rain, especially during flowering, can interfere with pollination and affect the crop adversely.
- **Geographical Cultivation:** In India, the commercial cultivation was traditionally restricted to the north in the foot hills **of Himalayas from Tripura to Jammu & Kashmir** and plains of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
  - But due to increased demand and viability, cultivation has expanded to states **like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.**
  - Bihar alone **accounts for nearly 40% of India's litchi production.** Bihar is followed by West Bengal (12%) and Jharkhand (10%).
- **Global Production:** India ranks as the **second largest producer of litchi globally**, following China. Other significant litchi-producing countries include Thailand, Australia, South Africa, Madagascar, and the United States.

### What is Horticulture?

- **About:**
  - Horticulture refers to **the science, art, and practice of cultivating fruits, vegetables, flowers, ornamental plants, and other crops.**
  - It encompasses a broad spectrum of activities **related to plant cultivation, management, propagation, and improvement** for human use and enjoyment.
- **Initiatives for Horticulture:**

- **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH):**
  - **MIDH** is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables and other areas.
  - Under MIDH, Government of India contributes 60% of the total outlay for developmental programmes in all the states (except North Eastern and Himalayan states where GOI contributes 90%) & 40% is contributed by State governments.
- **Horticulture Cluster Development Programme:**
  - It is a **central sector programme** aimed at growing and developing identified horticulture clusters to make them globally competitive.
  - Horticulture cluster is a regional/geographical concentration of targeted horticulture crops.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

**Q.** Assess the role of National Horticulture Mission (NHM) in boosting the production, productivity and income of horticulture farms. How far has it succeeded in increasing the income of farmers? **(2018)**

## India as a MICE Destination

**Source:** [PIB](#)

### Why in News?

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry is promoting India as a **global MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destination**.

- The objective is to showcase **India's MSME sector, traditional handicrafts**, artisanal offerings, weavers, and manufacturing prowess internationally.
- The Ministry also **unveils India's ambitious Mega Events line-up** for the coming months; Aatmanirbhar Bharat Utsav, Indus Food, **Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024** and Bharat Tex.

### What is MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions)?

- **About:**
  - MICE is a term used in the **tourism and events industry to categorize and represent a segment** related to business and corporate tourism.
    - MICE tourism involves organizing and hosting events, meetings, conferences, exhibitions, and incentives for companies and groups.
    - These activities aim to facilitate networking, knowledge exchange, business collaborations, and the showcasing of products and services within a professional or business context.
  - The **main purpose is to create a networking platform for business**, industry, government and Academic Community and engage in meaningful conversations.
- **Scope in India:**
  - Core MICE infrastructure amenities are at par with most developed countries.
  - India has consistently improved its rank in **World Bank Ease of Doing Business** and WEF Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Rank (**54<sup>th</sup> in 2021**).
  - **Growing Economic Strength of India.**

- India has progressed rapidly in the areas like Information Technology, and Scientific Research.
  - **Global Scenario and India:**
    - The **International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA)** brings out the ranking of countries and cities based on the international association meetings tracked by ICCA.
      - As per ICCA Country and City Rankings 2019, USA remained as number 1 country with 934 meetings out of a total 13,254 meetings followed by Germany, France.
    - **India:**
      - Indian MICE has less than 1% share in the estimated global MICE business despite the natural & cultural advantages of India and being one of the highest growing economies.
      - India is ranked **28<sup>th</sup> with 158 meetings in the 2019 ICCA ranking of countries.**
  - **Major Strategy:**
    - “Meet in India” Brand for promoting MICE Industry.
    - Providing **Infrastructure status** for financing of MICE infrastructure.
    - Skill development for the MICE industry.
- 

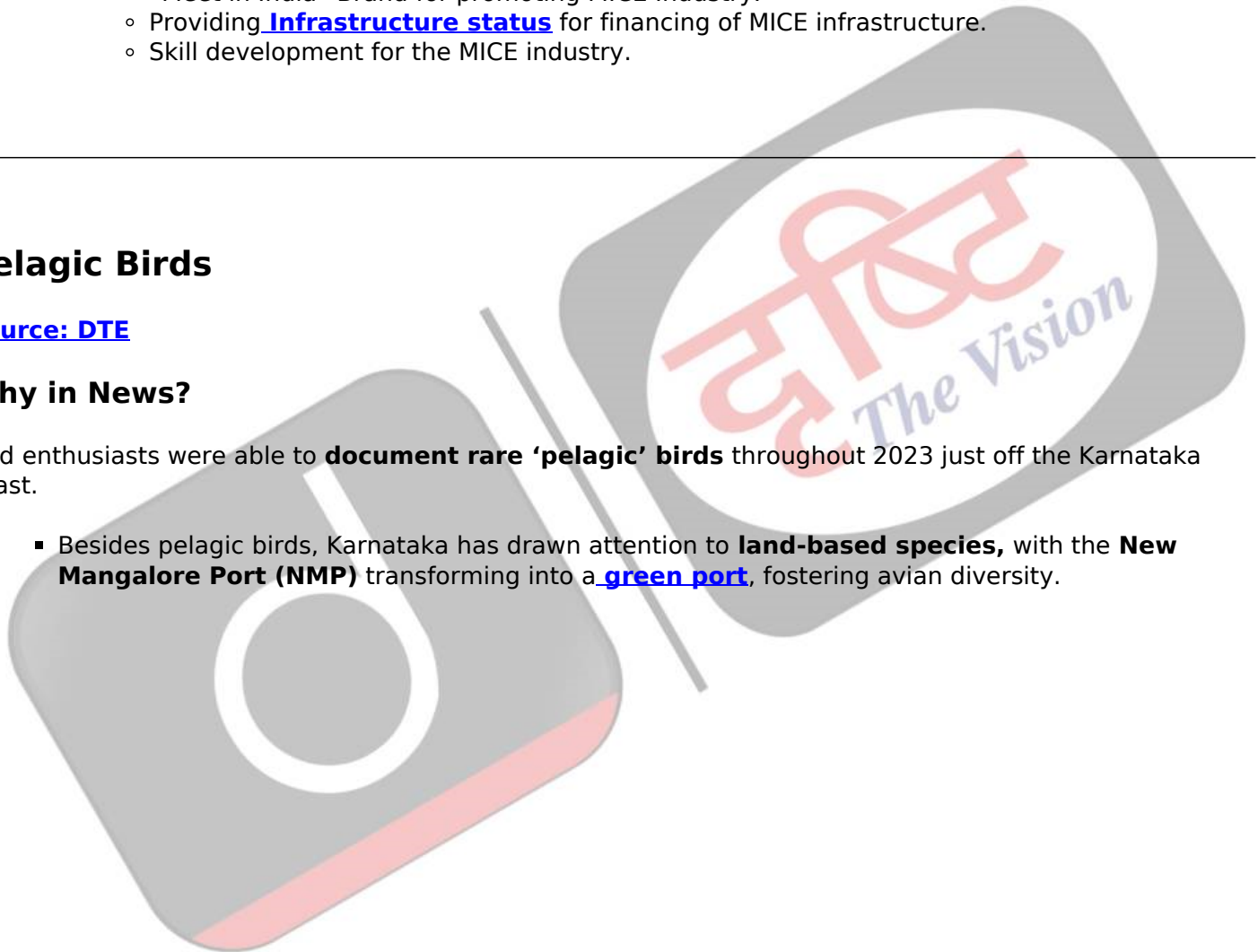
## Pelagic Birds

**Source:** [DTE](#)

### Why in News?

Bird enthusiasts were able to **document rare ‘pelagic’ birds** throughout 2023 just off the Karnataka coast.

- Besides pelagic birds, Karnataka has drawn attention to **land-based species**, with the **New Mangalore Port (NMP)** transforming into a **green port**, fostering avian diversity.







## What are the Key Facts About Pelagic Birds?

### ▪ About:

- Pelagic birds are birds that spend a **large portion of their lives on the open ocean.**
  - They can be found thousands of miles offshore but can get blown onto land during high winds and storms. The only other time they come inland is to breed.

### ▪ Features:

- These birds vary greatly in size and description from each other, but they all live on **open water, dive for food, and are excellent swimmers.**
- Pelagic birds possess **remarkably long, slender wings** enabling extended flights without rest.
  - Some can stay airborne for days or weeks, even sleeping during flight.
- These birds feature a **unique salt gland that extracts salt from seawater, preventing its accumulation to toxic levels.**
- They feed on planktonic crustaceans (related to shrimp and crabs), and squid and hunt fish far from land.

### ▪ Examples:

- One of the better-known pelagic birds is the **Laysan Albatross**, which breeds almost exclusively on the Hawaiian islands but roams the nutrient-rich waters of the Pacific to feed.
  - Pelagic birds also include **Sooty Shearwater, Brown Skua, Brown Booby, Streaked Shearwater** and Masked Booby, Pomarine Skua, Arctic skua, Long-tailed skua, Swinhoes storm-petrel, Wilson's storm-petrel, and other oceanic wanderers.

### ▪ Threats:

- Human activities pose threats to birds, including those in remote open oceans.
- Seabirds, globally, face significant threats, with issues arising both from terrestrial nesting grounds and oceanic factors.
  - [Oil spills](#), [climate change-induced alterations](#) to prey availability, and fishing nets contribute to the challenges.

- The decrease in pelagic bird density is attributed to a decline in fish populations, possibly influenced by factors such as **sea rains** pushing fish to deeper waters.
  - **Plastic pollution** is a major concern for pelagic birds, as plastics persist in oceans, breaking into smaller pieces.
    - Birds often mistake plastic fragments for prey, leading to ingestion and associated health risks.
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## Snow Leopard

[Kyrgyzstan](#) has officially declared the **Snow Leopard**(*Panthera uncia*) as its national symbol, signifying its commitment to conservation and ecological balance.

- The snow leopard holds historical importance in Kyrgyz culture, featuring in the **story of Manas, a Kyrgyz folk hero**, revered as a symbol of greatness, courage, and resilience. It has come to be known as the '**ghost of the mountains**'.
- Snow leopards are **vital for ecological balance**, inhabiting 1/3 of the global territory. A decline in their population poses risks to various species.
  - Adapted to high-altitude terrains, their unique physique ensures agility in steep, rugged environments.
  - Snow leopards face threats from **poaching, habitat loss, and declining prey**. [Human-wildlife conflict](#) and **warming in the high Himalayas**.
- The Government of India has identified the snow leopard as a **flagship species for the high-altitude Himalayas**. It has developed a [Project Snow Leopard](#) to conserve the species and habitats.



# Snow Leopard

*Panthera Uncia*

Often referred to as the "ghost of the mountains"

## HABITAT

- Mountainous regions of **Central and Southern Asia**
- **12** Range Countries
- In India:
  - **Western Himalayas:** Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh
  - **Eastern Himalayas:** Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh

## MAJOR SITES

- Hemis National Park, Ladakh
  - **Snow leopard capital of the world**
- Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh
- Gangotri National Park, Uttarakhand
- Khangchendzonga National Park, Sikkim

## PROTECTION STATUS

- **Vulnerable:** IUCN Red List
- **Appendix I:** CITES
- **Schedule I:** Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972

## THREATS

- Human Snow Leopard Conflict
- Climate Change
- Loss of Prey and Habitat
- Poaching

## CONSERVATION EFFORTS

- Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Programme
- Himal Sanrakshak- Community Volunteer Programme
- Project Snow Leopard
- Snow Leopard Conservation Breeding Programme- Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, West Bengal



Read more: [Snow Leopard](#)

## Prime Minister's National Relief Fund

An **acid attack** survivor has approached the Delhi High Court seeking **additional compensation** from the **Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF)**, highlighting delays and challenges in accessing the grant.

- PMNRF was instituted in 1948 by then **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru**, to assist displaced persons from Pakistan. The fund is currently used to provide support to **people affected by**

**natural and man-made disasters.**

- This includes natural disasters like [floods](#), [cyclones](#), and [earthquakes](#), and **man-made disasters** like major accidents, acid attacks, and riots.
- The fund consists entirely of **public contributions** and does **not get any budgetary support**.
- The corpus of the fund is invested with **banks in [fixed deposits](#)**. Disbursements are made with the **approval of the [Prime Minister](#)**.
- All donations towards the PMNRF are notified for **100% deduction from taxable income** under Section 80G of the [Income Tax Act, 1961](#).

**Read more:** [PM - CARES Fund](#)

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## Family Pension Guidelines for Government Servants/Pensioners

The **Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare**, in accordance with the [Central Civil Service \(Pension\) Rules, 2021](#), has delineated comprehensive provisions for the **disbursement of family pension** in cases involving a deceased Government servant or pensioner survived by a spouse and children.

- As per the provisions of **sub-rule (8) and sub-rule (9) of Rule 50 of CCS (Pension) Rules, 2021**, the family pension is initially granted to the spouse, while other eligible family members become eligible subsequently, following the spouse's ineligibility or demise.
- According to a recent development, in **scenarios where a female Government servant or pensioner is involved in divorce proceedings** or has filed cases under specific laws against her spouse, provisions have been outlined to enable the nomination of **her eligible child/children for family pension**, supplanting the spouse.

**Read more:** [Old Pension Scheme](#)

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## IREDA's 2024 Roadmap

2024 has been designated as the '**Year of Human Resource Development and Discipline**' for [Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited \(IREDA\)](#), signifying the organization's strategic expansion into new sectors and regions.

- IREDA is a **Mini Ratna (Category - I)** Government of India Enterprise under the administrative control of the **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE)**.
- It is a **Public Limited Government Company** established as a Non-Banking Financial Institution in **1987** engaged in promoting, developing and extending financial assistance for setting up projects relating to **new and [renewable sources of energy](#) and energy efficiency**.

**Read more:** [IREDA](#)

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