

**DAILY
CURRENT
AFFAIRS
ANALYSIS**



LAKSHYA ACADEMY®

14 MARCH 2024

1 - Female Genital Mutilation:

GS II

Health related issues

- **Context:**

- According to recent reports from UN agencies, around 4.4 million girls worldwide could become victims of female genital mutilation by the year 2024.

- **Female Genital Mutilation: What Is It?**

- **About:** Female genital mutilation (FGM) is defined as any treatment that involves modifying or hurting the female genitalia for purposes other than medical ones. It is regarded on a global scale as a violation of girls' and women's human rights as well as their health and integrity.
- **Prevalence:** It is mostly found in North-Eastern, Western, and Eastern Africa, along with a few countries in the Middle East and Asia.
- **But as more people migrate,** FGM is now a worldwide issue that affects women and girls in North America, Europe, and Australia.
- **Impacts:** Girls who have their female genitalia cut may experience long-term effects on their mental and sexual health in addition to acute issues such as acute pain, shock, excessive bleeding, infections, and difficulties urinating.
- **Current situation in India:** The practice of FGM is not currently prohibited by law in the nation.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development stated in 2017 that "at present there is no official data or study which supports the existence of FGM in India" in answer to a petition filed in the Supreme Court.
- However, other unofficial reports claim that FGM is a common practice among the Bohra group, mainly in the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Rajasthan.

- **Obstacles in the Eradication of FGM:**

- **Cultural and Social Norms:** FGM is a practice that is frequently firmly ingrained in communities' cultures and societies, where it is a tradition that has been passed down through the centuries.
- It can be hard to break these firmly embedded habits and beliefs.
- **Lack of Education and Awareness:** It's possible that many members of the communities where FGM is conducted are unaware of the dangers associated with the procedure.
- FGM may continue if people are not made aware of and educated about the harms it poses to their physical and mental health.
- **Inadequate Data Gathering and Reporting:** Inadequate data gathering and reporting about the incidence of FGM impedes attempts to comprehend the extent of the problem and efficiently target treatments.

- **Global Programmes for Eradication:**

- Since 2008, the United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have together spearheaded the greatest global initiative to end female genital mutilation (FGM).
- The International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation was declared by the UN General Assembly in 2012 in an attempt to focus and intensify efforts towards the practice's abolition.
- In keeping with the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 5, the UN aims to completely eradicate it by 2030.
- SDG 5.3 calls for the abolition of all harmful customs, including female genital mutilation and child, early, and forced marriage.

- **Way Ahead:**

- Enforcing policies and enacting stronger legislation that expressly outlaws FGM and penalises anyone who carry out or assist in it.
- Through law enforcement organisations, governments should guarantee that these laws are effectively enforced.
- Awareness and Education: Educating populations about the detrimental effects of female genital mutilation (FGM) on their physical, mental, and sexual health by launching extensive awareness campaigns.
- These initiatives ought to target both outsiders and members of the practicing groups.
- Inclusion in the Human Rights Framework: It is important to make sure that initiatives to stop FGM are based on the principles of human rights and that women's and girls' rights are respected.
- It is imperative that FGM preventive and response measures be included in the international human rights framework.

Source → The Hindu

2 - UPI Services in Mauritius and Sri Lanka:

GS II

International Issues

- **Context:**

- The Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, as well as the RuPay card services in Mauritius, were recently launched by the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Pravin Jugnauth, and Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, the President of Sri Lanka.
- By enabling smooth digital payments between residents of the three nations, this action seeks to strengthen economic connections.
- Under the direction and assistance of the Reserve Bank of India, NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) and partner banks/non-banks from Mauritius and Sri Lanka devised and carried out these projects.

- **What do UPI and RuPay mean?**

- **RuPay:**

- The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) developed the RuPay payment system and financial services package.
- This domestic card payment network is available throughout India at point of sale (POS) terminals, automated teller machines (ATMs), and e-commerce websites.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) were given the authority to establish a safe electronic payment and settlement system in India by virtue of a clause in the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
- RuPay has introduced a number of card variations to meet the needs of several societal groups.
- Apart from the cards offered by the government, the RuPay Classic, Platinum, and Select variants are intended for both mainstream and high-end consumers.
- The RuPay card is now accessible in Africa through Mauritius, the first non-Asian nation to issue it, following Nepal, Bhutan, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Banks in Mauritius will be able to issue RuPay cards locally via the Mauritius Central Automated Switch (MauCAS) card network thanks to the adoption of RuPay technology.
- The Bank of Mauritius is the only owner and operator of MauCAS, a cutting-edge digital hub designed to facilitate payment routing between operators.

- **UPI:**

- The NPCI created the UPI, a real-time digital payment system, in 2016.
- With UPI, customers can quickly transfer money between any two bank accounts via the IMPS (Immediate Payment Service) infrastructure.
- With UPI, many banking functions, smooth financial transfers, and merchant payments may all be combined into a single smartphone app.
- In 2023, UPI was used for over 100 billion transactions totaling Rs 2 lakh crores.
- France, the United Arab Emirates, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Bhutan, and Nepal are among the nations that take UPI payments.

- **How Will Users in Sri Lanka and Mauritius Benefit from RuPay and UPI?**

- **Encouraging Smooth Transactions:**

- With the use of RuPay and UPI, users in Mauritius and Sri Lanka will find it easier to conduct transactions both locally and abroad.
- Travellers between India, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka may make transactions with ease thanks to RuPay cards and UPI connection, which does away with the requirement for currency exchange and simplifies transactions.

- **Improved Access to Finances:**

- RuPay cards will be accepted in Mauritius at PoS terminals and ATMs, increasing the region's residents' access to digital payments.
- Users in Sri Lanka can make payments at merchant locations using QR codes thanks to UPI connectivity, which offers a practical substitute for cash payments.

- **Encouraging the Inclusion of Financial People:**

- Financial inclusion is promoted by the accessibility of RuPay cards and UPI services, which enable people from a range of socioeconomic levels to engage in the digital economy.
- Users can save money by using UPI transactions, which lower the costs of using traditional banking services and make financial transactions more accessible.

- **Enhanced Economic Relations:**

- Efficient payment methods promote economic cooperation and collaboration by boosting trade and tourism among India, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka.
- By encouraging cashless transactions, improving transparency, and lowering dependency on cash-based transactions, an increase in digital transactions benefits neighbourhood businesses.

- As part of India's "neighbourhood first" strategy and "SAGAR" (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, the launch of UPI and RuPay services would help deepen the strategic and economic links between the three nations.
- **Innovation and the Progress of Technology:**
- RuPay and UPI's launch indicates a dedication to embracing digital innovation and establishing Mauritius and Sri Lanka as forward-thinking economies in the world of online commerce.
- Users can use cutting-edge financial solutions that enable them to handle their money more safely and effectively by utilising cutting-edge payment technologies.

Source → The Hindu

3 - Smart Gram Panchayat:

GS II

Government Policies and Interventions

- **Context:**
- The 'Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat' Project was recently inaugurated at Paprou Gram Panchayat in Begusarai District, Bihar, by the Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj. This marks a significant step towards digital empowerment in rural India.
- **The Smart Gram Panchayat Project: What is it?**
- By bringing the Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) service to Begusarai's Gram Panchayats, the project hopes to revolutionise rural connection.
- As part of the PM-WANI Scheme, Begusarai is spearheading Bihar's digital transformation by providing Wi-Fi services to every Gram Panchayat.
- Funded under the redesigned Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA), the initiative aims to serve 455 Gram Panchayats in 37 Blocks in the Bihar districts of Begusarai and Rohtas. It is carried out by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.
- The focus is on leveraging technology to improve rural residents' quality of life by expanding their access to online services in vital areas such as health, education, and skill development.
- Beneficiaries of this campaign include women's self-help groups (SHGs), farmers, students, and artisans.

- Ensuring the project's impact is sustained over time will need implementing robust processes for Operation & Maintenance (O&M).
- Through digital footprints, the project hopes to empower communities, close the gap between rural and urban areas, and promote efficiency and accountability in local self-governance.
- **RGSA, or Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:**
 - The Ministry of Panchayati Raj introduced the RGSA initiative in 2018. After revision, it was allowed to be implemented from 2022–2026 under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of RGSA, with the goal of enhancing the ability of elected representatives (ERs) of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) from 2022–2026.
 - The main goal of the Revamped RGSA is to strengthen panchayat governance capacities so they can fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which fall under their jurisdiction.
 - According to the plan, ERs of Panchayats must receive basic orientation training within six months after election and refresher training within two years. With the exception of the northeastern hilly states and the UT of J & K, where the ratio of Central to State Share is 90:10, the funding pattern for the State components is 60:40 among the Central and States, respectively. The Central share is 100% for other UTs.
 - The RGSA is focused on:
 - enhancing the convergence of panchayats and SHGs and providing training on e-Government and SDG localization at all levels.
 - using cutting-edge technologies to provide uniform training and interactive capacity building. PRIs are being capacitated in leadership roles and digital literacy.
- **PM-WANI: What is it?**
 - The Department of Telecom (DoT) introduced PM-WANI in December 2020 to encourage public WiFi hotspots for nationwide digital connection. In keeping with the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018 (NDCP), which strives for a strong digital infrastructure in rural areas, any organisation is able to establish hotspots.
- **PM-WANI Environment:**
- **Public Data Office (PDO):**
 - By obtaining internet bandwidth, PDOs install and maintain PM-WANI Wi-Fi hotspots, which enable last-mile broadband connectivity for users.
- **Aggregator for Public Data Offices (PDOA):**
 - By offering PDOs aggregation services like accounting and authorisation, PDOA will make it easier for PDOs to offer services to final consumers.

- **App Publisher:**
- App providers create applications for finding Wi-Fi hotspots, registering users, and authenticating users in order to provide PM-WANI compliant services.
- **Central Database:**
- It will keep track of App Provider, PDOA, and PDO information. Currently, the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT) is in charge of maintaining it.
- **Advantages:**
- PM-WANI will increase rural areas' access to and cost of broadband, promoting digital inclusion and entrepreneurship. It enhances BharatNet programmes.
- Compared to mobile technologies like 5G, which demand large investment and subscription prices, it can offer a convenient and reasonably priced choice for internet access.

Source → The Hindu



4 - India's Act East Policy:
GS II

Government Policies and Interventions

- **Context:**
- In keeping with India's Act East Policy, which focuses on improving inland water transport, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways recently flagged off the first batch of experimental cargo vessels from Maia Inland Custom Port in West Bengal to Sultanganj Port in Bangladesh.
- The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is organising it, which represents a fresh start for enhanced communication and collaboration between Bangladesh and India.
- **How Does This Trial Shipment Significate?**
- The operationalization of Maia Terminal is anticipated to be a game-changer because it will convert 2.6 million tonnes of export cargo heading for Bangladesh from roads to waterways annually (MTPA).

- The distance between Bangladesh and the North Eastern Region and NW1 (National Waterways 1) will be shortened by 930 kilometres via the Maia-Aricha route (Protocol Routes 5 & 6).
- **Inland Water Transport (IWT): What is it?**
- The term "inland waterways transportation" (IWT) describes the movement of cargo and people over lakes, rivers, canals, and other navigable waterways.
- This kind of transportation links different ports and terminals along the waterways by using water vehicles like ships, barges, and boats to convey people and goods within a nation's interior areas.
- **Importance:**
- For bulk goods like coal, iron ore, cement, food grains and fertiliser, in particular, IWT is an incredibly economical means of transportation.
- Its present proportion in India's modal mix is under 2%, notwithstanding its benefits. The Maritime India Vision (MIV)-2030 is the government's plan to raise this percentage to 5% by 2030.
- Through feasibility studies, the IWAI has identified 25 additional National Waterways (NWs) that can be navigable for transportation in order to accomplish this goal.
- **Act East Policy: What Is It?**
- The "Look East Policy" was updated with the announcement of the "Act East Policy" in November 2014.
- It is a diplomatic endeavour to advance, on various fronts, strategic, commercial, and cultural ties with the enormous Asia-Pacific area.
- It entails extensive and ongoing bilateral, regional, and multinational engagement with nations in Southeast Asia concerning connectivity, trade, culture, defence, and people-to-people interaction.
- **Goal:**
- To enhance the economic growth of the North Eastern Region (NER), which serves as a gateway to the South East Asia Region, by fostering economic cooperation, cultural links, and the establishment of strategic relationships with nations in the Indo-Pacific region through a proactive and practical approach.
- **The Look East Policy: What Is It?**
- India attempted to strengthen its ties with the United States and its allies in Southeast Asia in an effort to heal from the loss of its strategic ally, the Soviet Union, with the end of the Cold War in 1991.

- In order to further this goal and strengthen India's position as a regional power and a counterbalance to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China, the country's former prime minister, P V Narasimha Rao, introduced the Look East policy in 1992.

- **What Separates the Act East Policy from the Look East Policy?**

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries and economic integration were the emphasis of the Look East policy.

- In 1996, India joined ASEAN as a discussion partner, and in 2002, it became a summit level partner.
- The partnership was upgraded to a Strategic Partnership in 2012.
- India's commerce with ASEAN was worth USD 2 billion in 1992, when the country initiated the Look East Policy. Trade has increased to USD 72 billion since ASEAN and the United States signed a free trade agreement in 2010 (2017–18).
- Additionally, India actively participates in a number of regional forums, including the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

- **Act East:**

- Act East Policy prioritised security cooperation, economic integration, ASEAN members, and East Asian countries.
- The Indian prime minister emphasised the Act East Policy's four Cs.
- Traditions
- Trade
- Interaction
- Building capacity
- An essential component of India's Act East Policy is security.
- Securing freedom of navigation and India's own position in the Indian Ocean is a critical component of Act East Policy, particularly in light of increased Chinese aggression in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.
- India has been involved in this under the informal Quad grouping and the Indo-Pacific narrative.

- **What are the Act East Policy's Initiatives to Improve Connectivity?**

- Bangladeshi and Indian rail connections at Agartala and Akhara.
- Inland waterways and links for multimodal transportation across Bangladesh.
- The Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the Trilateral Highway Project, which link Thailand and Myanmar with the Northeast region.
- Projects like modernising hydroelectric power projects and building roads and bridges have been carried out under the India-Japan Act East Forum.
- The 2017 establishment of the India-Japan Act East Forum intends to offer a forum for bilateral cooperation between the two countries under the auspices of Japan's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" and India's "Act East Policy."

- The Forum will identify particular projects for the economic modernization of the Northeastern area of India, including those linked to connectivity, industrial connections, developmental infrastructure, and interpersonal interactions through tourism, culture, and sports.
- **Additional Projects:**
- Medication and medical supplies were given to ASEAN nations as aid during the pandemic.
- Participants from ASEAN countries have been granted scholarships at IITs, with offers of 1000 PhD fellowships.
- India is also working with grassroots communities in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam to support their development in areas such as health, education, and water resources. These projects are known as Quick Impact Projects.
- Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) are low-cost, small-scale initiatives that are designed and carried out quickly.
- Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 has identified 46 initiatives to increase the modal share of inland water transport and coastal shipping.
- The establishment of port-based agglomeration areas, coastal berths close to production/demand centres, and measures to enhance connection via inland waterways, roads, and rail are important initiatives.
- In order to improve efficiency and accessibility, the plan also intends to operationalize 50 canals by 2047 and deploy low-draft vessel designs with potential tug-barge combinations.

Source → The Hindu