

21st Nov, 2024

1. Should Packaged Food Content Be Labeled? GS 2 (Governance)

• Why in News:

- A report by the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) highlights the disparities in the healthiness of food and beverage (F&B) products sold in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs) compared to high-income countries (HICs).
- This brings attention to the importance of labelling packaged food to guide consumers toward healthier choices.

• Key Findings of the Report:

○ Health Star Rating System:

- The report analysed over 52,000 products from major brands like **Nestle, PepsiCo, Unilever**, and others.
- Products were rated out of 5 stars, with scores above 3.5 considered healthy.
- Average scores:
 - LMICs: 1.8
 - HICs: 2.3

○ Disparities in Nutrition:

- Fewer affordable healthy options in LMICs.
- Micronutrient information was less frequently provided for products in LMICs.

○ Historical Patterns:

- Previous reports revealed similar issues. For instance, **Nestlé's baby food in India and African markets contained higher sugar levels compared to European versions**, sparking government scrutiny.

• Significance for India:

○ Health Crisis:

- **Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs):** India faces a significant burden, with over 10 crore people suffering from diabetes and high obesity rates.
- **Undernutrition and Micronutrient Deficiencies:** Coexisting challenges due to unhealthy diets and economic disparities.

○ Dietary Patterns:

- Rising consumption of processed foods rich in sugar and fat.
- Over 56% of India's disease burden is linked to unhealthy diets (ICMR, 2023).

○ Affordability Gap:

- Over half of Indians cannot afford a healthy diet.
- Household spending on processed foods is increasing.

• Importance of Front-of-Pack Labelling:

○ Global Standards:

- Countries like Chile and Mexico successfully reduced consumption of sugary beverages after mandatory **front-of-pack labelling (FOPL)**.

Should packaged food content be labelled?

What does the report published by the Access to Nutrition Initiative state? How does a health star rating system work? Why have non-communicable diseases become so common in India? Can front-of-pack labelling help?

EXPLAINER

Zohra Ahmed

The story is that a new report published by the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI), a non-profit global foundation, has found that leading multinational food and beverage (F&B) companies, on average, sell products that are less healthy in low and middle income countries (LMICs) compared to what they sell in high income countries (HICs). This report, which is the 10th edition of the 'Global Access to Nutrition Index', states that it assessed 50 of the world's largest F&B manufacturers – 25% of the global F&B market – on their performance to improve access to nutritious foods.

What were the report's findings? The report analysed 52,000 products – including those from popular brands such as Nestle, PepsiCo, Unilever, Coca-Cola and Hershey – using a healthy star rating system.

Under this system products are ranked out of 5 on their healthiness, with 3 being the best, and a score above 3.5 considered to be a healthier choice. The report assesses components of food considered to increase risk (sugars, saturated fat, total sugars and sodium) and offset these against components considered to decrease risk (protein, fibre and fruit, vegetables, iron and magnesium) to calculate a final score that is converted to a star rating. The ATNI report found that 'poorly healthiest' were found to be those in LMICs, highlighting disparities in products offered across different markets. Food product healthiness in LMICs scored much lower – 1.8 on the system – than in HICs where it scored 2.3. Only 3% of companies have demonstrated a strategy to prioritise some of their 'healthier' products affordability for lower income consumers, the report found. It also found that in LMICs, micronutrient data were available for a



smaller proportion of products as compared to those in HICs.

Is this the first time?

This is not the first instance of such a finding. In April this year, a report by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, the United Nations Children's Fund, found that the global coalition International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), found that leading baby food products sold in India as well as in other low and middle income countries, had higher sugar content compared to the same products sold in European markets. While Nestle denied this, the Central government asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to initiate 'appropriate action' against Nestle.

Why is this of significance in India?

India is facing a 'triple burden' of malnutrition – undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight/obesity problems.

access to diverse foods, micronutrient deficiencies and overweight/obesity problems. Another significant issue has been the affordability of food. In 2023, 10% of the Indian population lived in poverty, and at the same time, India's government data reveals that households' expenditure on processed food as a proportion of their food expenditure has risen, away from development economist tips. India.

What about food packaging labelling? India is a party to the World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions, one of which is resolution on marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children, highlighting the need to protect children from harmful marketing of junk foods. In 2007, India launched the National Multisectoral Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Common NCDs, 2007-22 (NMACP). However, there has been very little progress made to address front-of-pack labelling of food.

At present, for instance, the government is bringing regulations for front-of-pack labelling of foods that would indicate high sugar, fat and sodium content. A draft notification, Food Safety and Standards (Labelling & Display) Amendment Regulation, 2022 was brought in, but has made no headway in two years, says the Centre for Science and Nutrition, an advocacy for public interest. NMACP. Studies have shown, the Centre points out, that labelling on the front of packaged food is effective in Chile and Mexico. In the instance, the consumption of sugary beverages decreased after such mandatory labelling.

An analysis by WHO of 43 advertisements of pre-packaged food products and their composition revealed that these foods were high in one or more nutrients of concern such as saturated fat etc. 'Policy-makers and governments should consider mandatory policies. To date, voluntary efforts by companies have been insufficient to ensure widespread and strong nutrition-related performance,' the ATNI report states.

THE GIST

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- **India's Current Efforts:**
 - India is part of World Health Assembly resolutions advocating for protecting children from junk food marketing.
 - Policies like the **National Multisectoral Action Plan (2017-2022)** aimed at tackling NCDs have seen limited success in implementing labeling regulations.
- **Challenges:**
 - The **2022 Draft Notification** for FOPL is yet to make progress.
 - Voluntary efforts by F&B companies have been insufficient
- **Recommendations by the Report:**
 - **Mandatory Regulations:**
 - Stronger policies for clear labelling of sugar, salt, and fat content on packaging.
 - **Public Awareness:**
 - Campaigns to educate consumers on interpreting nutritional labels.
 - **Affordable Healthy Options:**
 - Incentivizing companies to offer nutritious products at accessible prices for low-income groups.
 - **Government Action:**
 - Strengthening enforcement and adopting global best practices for food labelling.
- **What is the Indian Nutritional Rating (INR) System?**
 - The INR system rates the overall nutritional profile for packaged food by assigning it a rating from **½ star (least healthy) to 5 stars (healthiest)**.
 - More stars indicate the food product is better positioned to provide for daily human need of nutrients.
 - As per the notification, **solid food with a score of more than 25 will be given 0.5 stars, and those with a score less than – (minus) 11 will get 5 stars.**
 - To generate the star-rating logo for the product, food businesses have to submit nutritional profiles of the products concerned on FSSAI's portal.
- **FSSAI:**
 - **About**
 - The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India is a **statutory body** under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
 - **Objectives:**
 - To lay down science-based standards for articles of food
 - To regulate manufacture, storage, distribution, import and sale of food
 - To facilitate safety of food
 - **Role/Functions of FSSAI:**
 - Framing of Regulations to lay down the standards/guidelines in relation to articles of food.
 - Laying down mechanisms/guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system.
 - Collect and collate data regarding food consumption, incidence and prevalence of biological risk, contaminants in food, etc.
 - Creating an information network across the country so that public receive reliable and objective information about food safety and issues of concern.
 - Provide training programmes for persons who are involved or intend to get involved in food businesses.
 - Contribute to the development of international technical standards for food, sanitary and phytosanitary standards.
 - **Composition**
 - The FSSAI comprises of a Chairperson and twenty-two members out of which one – third are to be women.
 - The Chairperson of FSSAI is appointed by the Central Government.
 - **Concerned Ministry:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

- **At State level:**
 - The FSSAI appoints food safety authorities at the state level.
 - The primary responsibility for enforcement is largely with the State Food Safety Commissioners.

2. PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme GS 2 (Governance)

• **Why in News:**

- Recently, the Union Cabinet chaired by PM Modi approved a new Central Sector Scheme, PM Vidyalaxmi, which seeks to provide financial support to meritorious students applying for higher education.

- Students will now be eligible to get collateral-free, guarantor-free loans from banks and financial institutions to cover the full amount of tuition fees and other expenses related to the course.

• **What is PM Vidyalaxmi?**

○ **About**

- It is a new **Central Sector initiative** aimed at supporting meritorious students financially so they can pursue higher education without economic constraints.
- This scheme is rooted in the National Education Policy, 2020, which advocates for financial assistance to deserving students across both public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

○ **Objectives**

- **Ensure Financial Inclusion in Education:** Enable meritorious students to pursue higher education without financial hurdles.
- **Support Top Educational Institutions:** Applicable only to top-quality HEIs as per the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF).
- **Provide Transparent and Digital Access:** Use a fully digital, transparent, and student-friendly platform for loan processing and management.

○ **Features**

▪ **Loan Availability:**

- **Eligibility:** Any student who secures admission to a Quality Higher Education Institution is eligible.
- **Loan Terms:** Collateral-free and guarantor-free loans will be offered through banks and financial institutions, covering the full amount of tuition and other course-related expenses.
- **Institutional Coverage:** Applies to **institutions ranked in the NIRF top 100 (both government and private)** and state government HEIs ranked in the 101-200 bracket, as well as all central government institutions.
- **Coverage Scope:** In the initial phase, 860 QHEIs qualify, potentially benefiting over 22 lakh students.

▪ **Credit Guarantee Support:**

- For loans up to ₹7.5 lakhs, a 75% credit guarantee on the outstanding amount is provided, encouraging banks to make education loans accessible to more students.

How does PM Vidyalaxmi differ from other schemes?

Does this central scheme cover middle-income students? Does it depend on NAAC and NBA certifications? Why have a lot of institutions been left out from the list?

Ravina Warkad

The story so far:

On November 6, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved a new Central Sector Scheme, PM Vidyalaxmi, which seeks to provide financial support to meritorious students applying for higher education. Students will now be eligible to get collateral-free, guarantor-free loans from banks and financial institutions to cover the full amount of tuition fees and other expenses related to the course.

What does the scheme cover?
The government has said that students who have gained admission in 860 quality higher education institutions, as defined by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), are eligible for the

loans. The scheme will potentially cover 22 lakh students, a Ministry of Education spokesperson said. For students with an annual family income of up to ₹8 lakh, and not eligible for benefits under any other government scholarship, a 3% interest subvention for loans up to ₹10 lakh will be provided during the moratorium period. The interest subvention support will be given to one lakh students every year. Preference will be given to students from government institutions who have opted for technical or professional courses. "An outlay of ₹5,000 crore has been made during 2024-25 to 2030-31, and seven lakh fresh students are expected to get the benefit of this interest subvention during the period," the Ministry added.

What about past schemes?
PM Vidyalaxmi differs from previous

central government schemes in the number of institutions eligible, mode of processing of loans, the income cap, and the amount of money to be disbursed. For example, students can apply for loans through the Vidyalaxmi portal, which simplifies loan applications and has links to all major public sector as well as private banks. It also facilitates the tracking of the loan status.

Moreover, while previous schemes offered benefits to only low-income groups, the Vidyalaxmi scheme expands coverage to middle-income families, irrespective of other factors such as caste.

For earlier schemes, the eligible institutions needed to be accredited with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). With 820 universities of NAAC and 15,501 colleges, along with 3,348 NBA

institutions, the total was about 20,000 institutions. However, under Vidyalaxmi, only institutions with NIRF ranks are eligible. This means that the scheme will be applicable to all government and private institutions ranked within the top 100 in NIRF rankings in the overall list as well as all institutions in the category-specific and domain-specific lists. Professor O R S Rao, Chancellor, ICAI University, Sakinaka, who helped to compile the list of universities eligible for the scheme, says the list does not feature 860 unique institutes as some are ranked in multiple categories. An institute has to register for the ranking as a prerequisite to feature in the rankings. While some institutions apply to a single category, some others apply for multiple categories and hence feature on more than one list.

What are the implications?
Rankings are now becoming more and more important with loan eligibility being conditional on them. As this scheme significantly reduces the number of eligible institutions, the stakes of performing well in higher education entrance tests just got higher. Banker Thomas Franco said that this makes it difficult for students who do not have excellent marks to avail the loan. Banks may charge higher rates of interest for other institutions or straight away reject them if they don't have a good rank.

THE GIST
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- **Interest Subsidy:**

- Eligibility: Students with an annual family income of up to ₹8 lakhs and not benefiting from other government scholarships or interest subvention schemes.
- Subsidy Terms: A 3% interest subvention on loans up to ₹10 lakhs during the moratorium period.
- Beneficiary Priority: Preference is given to students in government institutions and technical/professional courses.

- **How it is different from past schemes?**

- **Expanded Eligibility**

- PM Vidyalaxmi covers middle-income families, unlike previous schemes which were limited to low-income groups, and offers benefits regardless of caste.

- **Simplified Loan Process**

- Students can apply through the **Vidyalaxmi portal**, which links to major public and private banks, simplifies the application process, and facilitates loan tracking.

- **Focus on NIRF Ranking**

- Eligibility is restricted to institutions ranked in the top 100 of the NIRF overall, category-specific, or domain-specific lists.
- For earlier schemes, the eligible institutions needed to be accredited with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA).
- With 820 universities of NAAC and 15,501 colleges, along with 3,348 NBA institutions, the total was about 20,000 institutions.

- **Challenges faced by PM Vidyalaxmi**

- **Reduced Institution Coverage**

- Only institutions ranked in NIRF are eligible, significantly lowering the number of qualifying institutions compared to past schemes.

- **Performance Stakes**

- With eligibility tied to rankings, students must perform exceptionally well in entrance tests to access loans.

- **Exclusion Risks**

- Students in non-NIRF ranked institutions face higher interest rates or loan rejection.

- **Institutional Competition**

- Rankings become crucial, incentivizing institutions to seek higher NIRF standings to attract students benefiting from the scheme.

3. India-China Ties At "New Starting Point" GS 2 (International Relations)

- **Why in News:** In a big step forward in India-China ties, the two countries have discussed resuming direct flights between the countries as well restarting the Kailash Mansarovaryatra.
- **Key-highlights**
 - A high-level engagement between India and China has been held recently on the sidelines of the G20 Summit, between India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi.
 - The meeting was the first high-level engagement between the two countries since the completion of the disengagement process in the two contentious areas of Dopsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh.
 - The disengagement process has contributed to the maintenance of peace and tranquility

India, China agree to work on rebuilding mutual trust

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Chinese counterpart Dong Jun put thrust on cooperation rather than conflict; Mr. Singh calls for drawing lessons from 'unfortunate' border clashes in 2020

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India and China on Wednesday agreed to work towards a road map for rebuilding mutual trust and understanding with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh calling for drawing lessons from the "unfortunate border clashes" of 2020 during talks with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun.

The two Defence Ministers met in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, weeks after Indian and Chinese militaries completed disengagement of troops from the two last face-off points in eastern Ladakh.

The Defence Ministry said both sides agreed to work together towards a road map for rebuilding mutual trust and understanding. In the delegation-level



In consonance: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart, Dong Jun, meet in Vientiane, Laos on Wednesday. ANI

talks, Mr. Singh highlighted that amicable relations between India and China would have positive implications for global peace and prosperity, it said. "Considering that both countries are, and will continue to remain, neighbours, he mentioned that we need to focus on cooperation rather than conflict," it said.

Mr. Singh called for reflecting on the lessons learnt from the unfortunate border clashes of 2020, taking measures to prevent the recurrence of such events and safeguarding peace and tranquillity along the India-China border, the Ministry said in a statement.

"He emphasised and looked forward to greater trust and confidence building between the two sides through de-escalation. Both sides agreed to work

together towards a road map for rebuilding mutual trust and understanding," it added.

The Singh-Dong meeting took place on the sidelines of a conclave of 10-nation ASEAN grouping and some of its dialogue partners.

Indian and Chinese militaries completed the disengagement exercise in Demchok and Dopsang in eastern Ladakh late last month after the two sides reached an agreement following a series of negotiations to resolve the festering border row. The two sides also resumed patrolling activities in the two areas after a gap of almost four-and-a-half years.

Mr. Singh began his three-day visit to Vientiane on Wednesday, primarily to attend a meeting of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).

- **What are the key-issues under discussion?**
 - **Direct flights between India and China** were suspended because of the Covid pandemic in 2020 and have not resumed since then despite the restrictions being lifted.
 - The stand-off in Ladakh began in May that year and a clash took place in Ladakh's Galwan the next month in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed in action and the Chinese side also suffered losses, with the exact number remaining unconfirmed.
 - A troop buildup followed on both sides and military-level talks began taking place to resolve the stand-off
 - **The Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage** to Mount Kailash, believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva, in China was also suspended during the pandemic in 2020 and is yet to resume.
- **What would have prompted this closeness?**
 - **For improved trade:** In New Delhi's case, the economy guided a **political reset with Beijing**. After the Galwan clash, India placed significant restrictions on Chinese investment and visas which had affected the Indian business community.
 - **To eradicate pressure:** The West's stance on the diplomatic trouble in **India-Canada relations** alongside the charges in the United States against an Indian spy over an alleged plot to kill American Sikh separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun may have given some impetus to New Delhi's decision to improve ties with Beijing.
 - **China's behaviour has shifted.** As part of efforts to maintain its international ambitions, Beijing is seeking to present itself as a more responsible and cooperative international player with less emphasis on so-called "wolf warrior" diplomacy.
- **How does the possibility of closer India-China ties impact global power?**
 - India and China, the two most populous countries in the world, are experiencing a shift in their bilateral relations that could have far-reaching consequences for global geopolitics.
 - This evolving partnership, driven by **economic complementarities and strategic cooperation**, has the potential to **reshape the global order**, moving away from the **US-centric model** that has prevailed since the end of the **Cold War**.
 - **Economic Complementarities:** China, a global manufacturing hub, and India, with its strong services sector and growing digital economy, can benefit greatly from enhanced economic ties. The two nations can collaborate on various fronts such as:
 - **Trade and Investment:** With China as a major exporter and India as an emerging market, both countries can benefit from increased trade, investments, and technology exchange.
 - **Infrastructure Development:** India's need for infrastructure development can align with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offering opportunities for collaboration in sectors like energy, transport, and manufacturing.
 - **Asia's Growing Influence:** A closer relationship between India and China could mark a **strategic shift** in global geopolitics. For decades, the world has been dominated by a US-centric global order, with the United States playing the role of the primary power broker. However, as India and China find common ground, they could shift the focus to **Asia** as the new center of influence in world affairs.
 - **Regional Stability:** A partnership between the two Asian giants could bring greater **stability** to the region, reducing tensions that have long existed over issues such as the border dispute.
 - **Balance of Power:** A strong India-China relationship could challenge US dominance, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, and lead to a **multipolar world order**, where global decisions are driven by multiple powers, not just the US.
 - **Recalibration of Alliances:** Traditional alliances, including those centered around the US, may be reevaluated as countries adjust their foreign policies based on shared interests with Asian powers.
 - **Strategic Pragmatism:** Countries may prioritize **strategic pragmatism** over historical rivalries, opting for partnerships that offer economic benefits and regional stability.

- **The Role of the United States in Sino-Indian Relations**

- The United States' actions toward India in recent years have contributed to the **Sino-Indian rapprochement**. Despite historically being a close ally to the US, India has faced increasing pressure on various fronts, including its defense ties with Russia, trade relations, and stance on global security issues.
- This pressure has, ironically, pushed India and China closer, as both countries see **shared interests** in resisting Western pressure.

4. **Aquaculture**

GS 3 (Environment)

- **Why in News:** The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has offered its technical expertise and knowledge to deal with the impact of climate change on the country's aquaculture and the fishing community engaged with it.

- **About Aquaculture:**

- It is the propagation and husbandry of aquatic plants, animals, and other organisms for commercial, recreational and scientific purposes.
- It is an approximate aquatic equivalent to agriculture—that is, the rearing of certain marine and freshwater organisms to supplement the natural supply.
- This includes production for supplying other aquaculture operations, for providing food and industrial products, for stocking sport fisheries, for supplying aquatic bait animals, for stocking fee-fishing operations, for providing aquatic organisms for ornamental purposes, and for supplying feedstocks to the pharmaceutical and chemical industries.
- There are two main types of aquacultures: marine and freshwater.
- It is generally practised in coastal ocean waters, freshwater ponds and rivers, and even on land in tanks.
- It is one of the fastest-growing forms of food production in the world.
- Globally, aquaculture already supplies more than half of all seafood consumed by humans.
- More than 550 aquatic species are farmed in aquaculture.
- The top fish species include carp, catfish, salmon, and tilapia; commonly farmed shellfish include shrimp, oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops.
- Newer to marine farming are various species of seaweed, which total 27% of annual global aquaculture tonnage.
- **Major Producers:**
 - China is at the top of the global aquaculture production, producing nearly 60% of farmed seafood.
 - Other leaders include Indonesia, India and Vietnam.

Climate change is the biggest disruptor in aquaculture: FAO

A.M. Jigeesh
NEW DELHI

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has offered its technical expertise and knowledge to deal with the impact of climate change on the country's aquaculture and the fishing community engaged with it.

Talking to *The Hindu* here on Wednesday, Manuel Barange, Director of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division of the FAO, said that with the climate changing, the oceans will produce less and the composition of the fish catches will also change. Urging for policy measures to help micro, small and medium players in the "blue economy," Professor Barange said India has to adapt to the situation by taking



Manuel Barange

measures such as changing fishing gears being used and marketing new varieties of fish so that the consumers have access to other breeds of fish than they are accustomed to. "Aquaculture has a great potential. In India, it is growing faster than the global average. To realise that potential we need to make sure that we have some systems in place. We need to make sure that it grows sustainably, it grows equitably."

5. State of the World's Children 2024 (SOWC-2024) Report GS 2 (Health)

- **Why in News:** The world is facing an unprecedented crisis with nearly half of all children – about 1 billion – living in countries that face a high risk of climate and environmental hazards, the UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2024 (SOWC-2024) report said recently.

Planetary crisis puts children at risk: UNICEF report

- **About State of the World's Children (SOWC) Report:**

- It is the annual flagship publication of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
- The report closely examines a key issue affecting children.

- These have ranged from children with disabilities, conflict and war, child labour, urbanization, early childhood development, and much more, making it the most comprehensive analysis of global trends that impact children.

- The report includes supporting data and statistics.

○ **Highlights of SOWC-2024:**

- This year, the SOWC was launched on 20 November, celebrated globally as World Children's Day–UNICEF's annual day of action for and by children, with focus on 'Listen to the Future,' voices of children and young people on the world they want.
- The report explores three megatrends that will profoundly impact children's lives between now and 2050: demographics shifts, the climate and environmental crises and frontier technologies.
- The report projects that by 2050, the global child population will stabilize around 2.3 billion, with a significant shift in regional distributions.
- India, China, Nigeria and Pakistan are expected to account for more than a third of the world's child population by 2050.
- India is estimated to have the largest share at 350 million, despite a decline of 106 million compared to today.
- Nearly one billion children worldwide face extreme vulnerability to climate and environmental hazards, with Indian children disproportionately affected.
- According to the Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI), in 2021, India ranked 26th out of 163 ranked countries globally, with children particularly exposed to risks such as extreme heat, floods, droughts, and air pollution.
- By 2050, as the report has cautioned, children, not only in India, but also worldwide, will face dramatically increased exposure to extreme climate and environmental hazards.
- It predicts that nearly eight times more children will be exposed to extreme heat waves compared to the 2000s.
- The digital divide remains stark. In 2024, over 95 percent of people in high-income countries are connected to the internet, compared to nearly 26 percent in low-income countries.

Bindu Shalan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The world is facing an unprecedented planetary crisis with nearly half the world's children – about one billion – living in countries that face high risk of climate and environmental hazards, said the UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2024 (SOWC-2024) report, released on Wednesday.

The report examines impact of three long-term global forces – demographic shifts, climate and environmental crises, and frontier technologies – which it claims will have a profound effect on children's lives between now and 2050.

The report notes that climate destabilisation, biodiversity collapse and widespread pollution threats are intensifying globally.

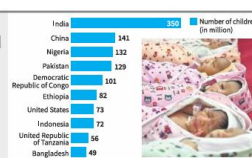
"Children are confronting a more unpredictable, hazardous environment than any previous generation," it warns.

Explaining the adverse impact, UNICEF said that children's developing bodies are uniquely susceptible to these hazards.

From before their first breath, children's brains, lungs and immune systems are vulnerable to pollution and extreme weather. Air

Future of childhood

India and China will remain the two countries with the most children in the 2050s, even as the number of children will have dropped by about 106 million in India and by 203 million in China.



Note: Countries which may have the largest number of children in the 2050s

SOURCE: THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2024, UNICEF

pollution is especially harmful to children, its impact on their respiratory health and development can last a lifetime.

Rising temperatures increase mosquito populations, spreading diseases such as malaria, dengue and Zika. Floods contaminate water supplies, leading to waterborne diseases, which are a major cause of death for children under

five years of age. Extreme weather limits food production and access, increasing children's risk of food insecurity. Climate-related disasters can also cause feelings of helplessness, trauma and anxiety in children, the report notes.

"Since 2022, 400 million students around the world have experienced school closures due to ex-

treme weather. In addition to violating child rights, inhibiting learning stifles economic growth. Climate and environmental hazards also displace children from their homes," the report states.

Additionally, it notes that by the 2050s, the global child population is projected to stabilise at around 2.3 billion. However, this global figure obscures regional shifts where while South Asia will remain one of the regions with the largest child populations, it will be joined by eastern and southern Africa, as well as western and Central Africa.

"These regions already struggle to meet children's basic needs, while also facing significant climate risks and lacking adequate digital infrastructure," says the report adding that with fewer young dependents relative to workers, more

resources could be freed to support children and boost the economy.

On frontier technologies, the report notes that artificial intelligence, neurotechnology, next-generation renewable energy and vaccine breakthroughs could significantly improve childhood in the future.

"Digitalisation can empower children but it can also expose children to online risks, including sexual exploitation and abuse," the report cautions.

It adds that over 95% of people in high-income countries are connected to the Internet, compared with barely 26% in low-income countries. Infrastructure limitations, high costs and permission barriers continue to impede progress. This digital exclusion threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities, especially in regions with rapidly growing child populations.

6. PM Modi's Visit to Guyana GS 2 (International Relations)

• Why in News:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid a visit to the small Caribbean country of Guyana, the first visit by an Indian PM in 56 years. He received a warm welcome in Guyana as President Irfan Ali broke the protocol to receive PM Modi at the airport.
- During this visit, PM Modi also co-chaired the **second India-CARICOM Summit** alongside Grenada's PM (who is the current Chair of CARICOM) and other CARICOM leaders.

• Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

○ About

- CARICOM is a regional organization established in 1973 under the **Treaty of Chaguaramas**.
- It aims to promote economic integration, shared foreign policy, and functional cooperation among member states while ensuring the sustainable development of the region.
- Stretching from The Bahamas in the north to Suriname and Guyana in South America, CARICOM comprises states that are considered developing countries.
- Except for **Belize**, in Central America and **Guyana and Suriname** in South America, **all Members and Associate Members are island states**.

○ Members

- It is a grouping of **twenty-one countries**: fifteen Member States and six Associate Members.

○ Pillars of Integration:

- **Economic Integration**: Focuses on creating a single market and economy through the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME).
- **Foreign Policy Coordination**: Ensures member states speak with one voice on international issues.
- **Human and Social Development**: Promotes education, health, youth development, and gender equality across the region.
- **Security Cooperation**: Aims to address common challenges like crime, border security, and disaster management.

• Why PM Modi visited Guyana?

○ Strengthening Historical and Cultural Ties

- Guyana, home to one of the oldest Indian diasporas, has a population of approximately 3,20,000 people of Indian origin, constituting 43.5% of the country's total population.

○ Energy Security and Hydrocarbon Cooperation

- Guyana is emerging as a global oil hub, expected to surpass Venezuela in oil production by 2026.
- With massive reserves and rapid GDP growth driven by oil discoveries, Guyana offers India a crucial opportunity to diversify its crude oil imports.

○ Expanding Defence Partnerships

- India has strengthened Guyana's defence capabilities by supplying Dornier 228 planes and offering a Line of Credit for the purchase of patrol vehicles, radars etc.
- This marks **India's first-ever defence Line of Credit with a Caribbean nation**.
- Guyana's growing defence market aligns with India's strategic and economic interests.

Modi first Indian PM to visit Guyana in 56 years, signs 10 pacts to expand ties

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 20

INDIA AND Guyana on Wednesday sealed 10 agreements to strengthen cooperation in hydrocarbons, digital payment systems, pharmaceuticals, and defence after bilateral talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Guyanese President Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

Modi said Guyana will play an important role in India's energy security and a blueprint for long-term partnership in the sector will be prepared. "The visit of an Indian Prime Minister to Guyana after 56 years is an important milestone in our relations. I have had a deep personal bond with Guyana," he said while recalling his visit to the South American country about 24 years back.

The PM arrived last night from Brazil's Rio de Janeiro, where he attended the G20 summit. One of the MoUs will allow the deployment of India's UPI (Unified Payments Interface) digital payments system in Guyana. "We will continue to make efforts to increase our mutual trade and economic cooperation," Modi said.

Modi said India will continue to contribute to the capacity

building of Guyana's military through scholarships and training. "Close cooperation in the field of defence is a symbol of our deep mutual trust. I am happy that this year India has supplied two Dornier aircraft to Guyana."

Agreeing to expand cooperation in the agriculture sector, Modi said: "With the millet seeds provided by India last year, we were able to contribute to increasing the food security of Guyana..." India also agreed to set up a Jan Aushadhi Kendra in Guyana.

The two leaders also deliberated on regional and global issues. President Ali said Modi's visit to Guyana represents a significant milestone in enhancing cooperation between the two nations. He called Prime Minister Modi a "champion among leaders" for his impactful leadership and contribution to the developing world.

"Thank you very much... It is our greatest honour to have you here," Ali said during a joint press statement with Modi. He lauded Modi's governance style, noting its relevance and adoption in Guyana and other nations.

"You have shown the light to the developing world, and you have created development metrics and a framework that many are adopting in their own country. And much of it is relevant to us here in Guyana," he said.

- **Enhancing Trade and Economic Cooperation**
 - India is partnering with Guyana in diverse sectors, including agriculture, biofuels, IT, and pharmaceuticals. Key contributions include:
 - Building critical infrastructure like the National Cricket Stadium and solar traffic lights.
 - Supporting projects such as regional hospital upgrades, road linkages, and ocean-going vessels.
 - Promoting bilateral trade, which remains low but shows positive growth potential.
- **Competing with China's Influence**
 - Guyana's strategic location and rich resources have attracted significant Chinese investments in infrastructure under the Belt and Road Initiative.
 - India is countering this influence by committing to infrastructure projects such as a \$100 million road project in Georgetown.
 - Unlike China, India's approach focuses on local engagement and long-term partnerships, which are better received by Guyana's population.
- **Global South and Strategic Alliances**
 - PM Modi's visit reflects India's broader strategy to enhance ties with smaller countries as part of its Global South agenda.
 - Guyana's economic potential, driven by oil wealth, makes it a pivotal partner in this vision.
- **Key highlights of the visit**
 - **PM Modi conferred with The Order of Excellence of Guyana**
 - President of Guyana conferred upon PM Modi the highest national award of Guyana, "The Order of Excellence" .
 - He became only the fourth foreign leader to be conferred with the highest National award of Guyana.
 - **Agreements Across Key Sectors**
 - India and Guyana signed 10 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to deepen cooperation in various sectors. These include:
 - **Health and Pharmaceuticals:** Collaboration on regulation and supply of affordable medicines, including to CARICOM countries.
 - India agreed to establish a Jan Ausadhi Kendra in Guyana to improve access to affordable medicines.
 - **Hydrocarbons:** Cooperation in crude sourcing, natural gas, infrastructure development, and the entire hydrocarbon value chain.
 - **Agriculture:** Joint activities, R&D, exchange of information and personnel, and food security initiatives.
 - Cooperation in agriculture was also expanded, with India contributing millet seeds to support Guyana's food security.
 - **Digital Transformation:** Capacity building, training, exchange of best practices, and public official collaborations.
 - **Banking and Payments:** Deployment of India's UPI-like real-time payment system in Guyana.
 - **Defence and Capacity Building**
 - India is committed to skill development and capacity building in Guyana, especially in defence.
 - Earlier this year, India had gifted two Dornier aircraft to Guyana.
 - PM Modi emphasized cooperation in infrastructure, energy, and food security, highlighting India's ongoing support for Guyana's growth.

- ## 7. International Film Festival of India (IFFI)
- ### Recent events of importance

- [illegible]

- **Why in News:**
 - Union Home Minister recently emphasised the need to release undertrial prisoners who have spent more than one-third of the maximum prescribed sentence for their accused crimes before Constitution Day (November 26).
 - This directive aligns with the newly introduced provisions under the **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS)**.
- **Key Features of Section 479 of BNSS:**
 - **About Section 479 of the BNSS:** It revises bail norms to address the prolonged detention of undertrial prisoners, particularly first-time offenders.

- **General rule for bail:**
 - Undertrials accused of non-capital offences (not punishable by death or life imprisonment) are **eligible for bail if they have served half of the maximum sentence for the offence.**
 - The provision builds on Section 436A of the CrPC, which allowed release after serving half the sentence.

India's undertrial prisoners

What does Section 479 of the BNSS, which provides relaxed bail standards for first-time offenders, state? What has the Supreme Court said on the matter? What is the status of undertrial prisoners in India?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 20

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that undertrials who have spent more than a third of the maximum prescribed sentence for the crime they are accused of committing should be released before Constitution Day (November 26). Highlighting the new relaxed provisions on bail for first-time offenders in the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), Shah said: "Samidham Din or jehle, jehle ke jale mein ek baar kadi aur na to jone apni ek chhore saas ko hi hat aur abhi sulag apni nah milai hai. (Before Constitution Day, we want to make sure there isn't a single prisoner in the jails of India who has spent one-third of his sentence in prison and still hasn't received justice.)"

What does Section 479 of the BNSS, which provides relaxed bail standards for first-time offenders, state? What has the Supreme Court said on the matter? And what is the status of undertrials in India?

Section 479 of the BNSS

Section 479 of the BNSS lays down the "Maximum period for which [a]n undertrial prisoner can be detained". It states that a prisoner who is not accused of offences punishable with death or life imprisonment shall be released on bail if she has "undergone detention for a period extending up to one-half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for that offence under that law".

This same standard was provided under the previously applicable Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC). But the BNSS has also relaxed the standard further in cases concerning "first-time offenders" — requiring such accused persons to be released on bail after they have spent one-third of the maximum possible sentence in prison.

It states: "Provided that where such person is a first-time offender (who has never

been convicted of any offence in the past) he shall be released on bond by the Court, if he has undergone detention for the period extending up to one-third of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for such offence under that law".

The provision, however, clarifies that an accused "shall not be released on bail by the Court" if there are pending investigations or trials into more than one offence or in "multiple cases" relating to the same person.

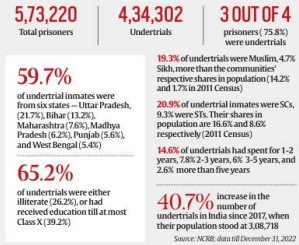
Top court's interpretation
In August, a Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta held hearings on the issue faced by undertrial prisoners in the case *In re: Bhanuman conditions in JBR2 prisons*. The case began as a PIL after former Chief Justice of India K.C. Lalit sent a letter to the

court, highlighting issues such as overcrowding in prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, and the inadequacy of trained prison staff. Since 2013, the court has been hearing issues relating to prisons in this case.

Senior Advocate and amicus curiae (friend of the court) Gaurav Agarwal submitted on August 13 that Section 479 of the BNSS "needs to be implemented at the earliest and it will help in addressing overcrowding in prisons".

Noting that the new provision was "more beneficial", the court on August 23 ordered that Section 479 would apply "retrospectively" to cases that were registered against first-time offenders even before the BNSS came into effect on July 1, 2024. Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhat commu-

WHAT THE DATA SHOW



indicated the Centre's agreement to this measure before the order was passed.

The court ordered all state governments and Union Territories to file affidavits within two months detailing "the number of undertrials who would be entitled to extension of the benefit of Section 479 of the BNSS, the number of applications moved before the concerned Courts for their release and the number of undertrials actually released by the date of filing of the affidavits".

The court also ordered jail superintendents to send reports with this data so that the states and UTs could collect them for their final affidavit.

Notably, Section 479 already places a duty on the superintendents of the jail to send an application to the court for releasing a person on bail under this section once the relevant time period — either half or one-third of the maximum sentence — has elapsed.

However, on October 22, a new Bench comprising Justices Hima Kohli and S.V.N. Bhat noted that only 19 out of the 36 states and Union Territories had filed responses detailing the steps taken to implement the court's August order.

On November 19, the SC once again ordered all jail superintendents to identify all undertrial prisoners, especially women, who would be entitled to bail under Section 479 of the BNSS so that courts can consider granting bail in these cases.

India's undertrial prisoners
According to the National Crime Records Bureau's report *Prison Statistics India 2022* (published in December 2022) of the 5,73,220 people incarcerated in Indian prisons, 4,34,302 are undertrials against whom cases are still pending. That amounts to nearly 75.8% of all prisoners in India.

Of the 23,772 women in prisons, 18,146

are undertrials. The report does not record how many undertrial prisoners were first-time offenders.

As of December 31, 2022, around 8.6% of all undertrial prisoners had been in prison for more than three years.

Steps Taken by the Supreme Court to Ensure the Implementation of Section 479 of BNSS:

- **Retrospective application:** In August 2024, the Court ordered that Section 479 applies retrospectively to cases before the BNSS came into effect on July 1, 2024.
- **Implementation measures:**
 - Jail superintendents are required to **identify eligible prisoners** and report to courts for their release.
 - State governments and Union Territories (UTs) were directed to **submit detailed affidavits** (within two months) on eligible undertrials and their release status.
- **Recent developments:**
 - As of October 2024, **only 19 of the 36 states and UTs complied with the Court's directives.**
 - On November 19, the Court reiterated its directive, **prioritising the identification of women undertrials for bail eligibility.**



India's Undertrial Population:

- **NCRB's report:** The National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) **Prison Statistics India 2022 report** highlights the staggering proportion of undertrials in Indian prisons.
- **Overall numbers:** Out of 5,73,220 inmates, 4,34,302 (75.8%) are undertrials. Women undertrials constitute 18,146 out of 23,772 (76.33%) of incarcerated women.
- **Long-term detentions:** Around 8.6% of undertrials have been in prison for more than three years as of December 31, 2022.
- **Challenges:** The report does not detail how many undertrials are first-time offenders, which is crucial for the effective implementation of Section 479.

Conclusion:

- The BNSS and the Supreme Court's proactive stance underscore a critical attempt to decongest prisons and expedite justice for undertrial prisoners.
- However, **consistent implementation** and thorough reporting by state governments and jail authorities remain **imperative for meaningful reform.**