

3<sup>rd</sup> Dec, 2024

## 1. Citizens with disabilities, making their rights real GS 2 (Social Issues)

- **Why in News:** The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWD Act)**, passed to align with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, aims to enhance disability inclusion in India. However, the **State Commissioners for Disabilities**, tasked with monitoring and enforcing the law, have faced challenges in fulfilling their role due to delays in appointments, lack of independence, and insufficient capacity. Recent reports highlight the need for improvements in the functioning of these offices.

### Challenges in Implementation

- **Underutilization of State Commissioners:** Many State Commissioners have failed to meet the expectations outlined in the **RPWD Act** due to insufficient empowerment and laxity by state governments.
- **Appointment Issues:** Commissioners are often civil servants with limited experience in disability rights, conflicting with the law's intention to have independent and impartial overseers.
- **Delayed Appointments:** The delay in appointing Commissioners, as highlighted in a recent writ petition (WPC 29329/2021), has hindered the effective enforcement of the law.

### Role and Powers of State Commissioners

- **Judicial Powers:** Under **Section 82 of the RPWD Act**, State Commissioners possess civil court powers, enabling them to intervene in cases where laws and policies discriminate against persons with disabilities.
- **Suo Motu Intervention:** Commissioners are authorized to take action independently to address discriminatory practices and ensure the full implementation of the RPWD Act, yet this provision has not been fully utilized.
- **Need for Accountability:** Commissioners must engage consistently with persons with disabilities and their organizations to identify violations and take corrective action.

### Best Practices and Recommendations

- **Karnataka's Approach:** The State of Karnataka has successfully implemented mobile adalats and district-level disability management reviews, promoting disability-inclusive governance and expediting grievance redress.
- **Collaboration with Legal Experts:** Strengthening the capacity of State Commissioners by partnering with law schools and legal experts is vital for enhancing their effectiveness in their quasi-judicial role.
- **Research and Advocacy:** Commissioners should focus on research in disability inclusion, collaborating with international bodies to promote inclusive policies and raise awareness on issues like disability-inclusive social protection.

**Citizens with disabilities, making their rights real**

The data from the 2011 national Census of India indicate that persons with disabilities constitute 2.21% of the total population. This is a gross undercounted figure. According to the 2019 World Health Organization survey across India, 14.5% of the population, or 1.45 billion people, have some form of disability. The prevalence of severe disability among Indian adults is 8%. India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on October 1, 2007, and one of the immediate measures expected out of the state parties to the convention is to ensure alignment of the national disability legislations in line with the principles of the convention. Accordingly, Parliament passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWD Act) that came into force on April 15, 2017 to replace the earlier Persons with Disabilities Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act, 1995, which fell short of promoting a social and human rights model of disability rights.

**The role of the State Commissioner**

One of the unique powers of the RPWD Act in comparison to many disability legislations of the developing countries is the provision for the constitution of the office of the State Commissioner for Disabilities at the State level with a combination of review, monitoring, and quasi-judicial functions to ensure effective implementation of the disability law. According to Section 82 of the RPWD Act, the State Commissioners, for the purpose of discharging their functions under the Act, shall have the same powers of a civil court under the Civil Procedure Code 1908 while trying a suit, and every proceeding before the State Commissioner shall be a judicial proceeding within the meaning of Sections 193 and 228 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

Despite the legislation providing for such quasi-judicial powers to the State Commissioners in safeguarding the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, this dual functioning of the office of the State Commissioner is largely due to the lacuna existing on the part of the state governments to investigate the statutory office to discharging its functions in accordance with the law. This reality has been aptly highlighted in the writ petition WPC 29329/2021, where Justice Lalit, of the Supreme Court, has also been highlighting the lacuna existing in the State Commissioners in the manner in which the commission are appointed. The RPWD Rules provide an opportunity for persons with substantial

experience in law, human rights, education, social work and rehabilitation and with a non-governmental organisation background to be appointed to the position of State Commissioner. In reality, a majority of the commissioners, either civil servants from the civil ministry, are civil servants from the civil ministry. According to the latest report (2023) of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities, only eight States have appointed commissioners who are not part of the civil ministry to the office of the State Commissioner. Having civil servants from the civil ministry in the office of the State Commissioner is not only against the purpose of having an impartial and independent office that can exercise oversight over the executive and hold them accountable for not implementing the provisions of the disability law. State of the progressive States in terms of disability inclusion have appointed representatives of civil society organisations as State Commissioners and the State governments should consider appointing qualified women with disabilities as commissioners as they will be in a better position to address intercommunal forms of discrimination that women and girls with disabilities in India currently experience.

The State Commissioners have a substantive role in holding powers to intervene and monitor the implementation of the RPWD Act and recommend appropriate corrective measures. There are many contradictions of the RPWD Act that are highlighted by aggrieved persons with disabilities and by certain practice organisations of persons with disabilities (COPDs) and the State Commissioners have not been able to intervene suo motu to address discriminatory policies and practices which have led to an erosion of faith in the statutory office created under the disability law to uphold the rights of citizens with disabilities. The State Commissioners should interact consistently with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations to understand which are these policies, guidelines, executive orders that contravene the provisions of the law and initiate necessary remedial action.

**The example of Karnataka**

It is vital for State governments and the office of the Chief Commissioner for Disabilities to build the capacity of the State Commissioners in performing their quasi-judicial role and functioning as a civil court. As done by the State Commissioner's office in Karnataka, collaborating with law schools and legal experts in strengthening their respective capacities could be a viable option. While some States such as Karnataka and Delhi have been able to instill confidence among persons with disabilities to register complaints with regard to a deprivation

of their rights, it is equally important for State Commissioners to look into complaints and dispose of them expeditiously. The websites of the office of the State Commissioners should indicate the number of cases received, disposed of and those pending for action along with other vital information such as annual reports and special reports submitted to the government on implementation of the law by the government with concrete recommendations.

Mobile adalat mobile courts, as practiced years ago by the Karnataka Commissioner's Office, could be a good practice for other States to continue in reaching out to persons with disabilities to remove them and to look into a deprivation of their rights. Adalats were organized in the State with prior notice to persons with disabilities through the mobile disability office in the districts for aggrieved individuals or institutions to get their grievance redressed.

Often, these grievance redressal would be resolved on the spot for persons with disabilities and their families. Organising District Magistrate as Deputy Commissioners for persons with disabilities – as done in the case of Karnataka – is a promising way to make local governance disability inclusive.

The RPWD Act enables State Commissioners to monitor the implementation of various pieces of legislation, programmes and schemes that impact persons with disabilities. To maximize the effectiveness of this critical role, the District Disability Management Review (DDMR) undertaken by the Karnataka State Commissioner's Office could be one of the preferred practices for State Commissioners. The DDMR has become an inclusive governance tool for the State Commissioner in Karnataka to have sight of how development and welfare programmes and policies have been implemented and to what extent the quotas earmarked for persons with disabilities have been fulfilled.

**Research as a function**

One of the key functions of the State Commissioner is to undertake and promote research in the field of disability rights. This opens up opportunities for the State Commissioner to collaborate with United Nations entities which have a mandate to promote disability inclusion on the basis of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy in undertaking research in areas such as disability inclusive social protection, disability inclusive care economy and the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities. The findings could pave the way for more inclusive policies and in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in India.

## 2. India's PRAGATI Platform GS 2 (Governance)

- **Why in News:** A recent **University of Oxford** study, "**From Gridlock to Growth: How Leadership Enables India's PRAGATI Ecosystem to Power Progress**," highlights **PRAGATI platform** has revolutionized project execution in India.
- **What is PRAGATI Platform?**
  - India's **PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation)** platform was launched in **2015**
  - PRAGATI uses **real-time data, drone feeds, and video conferencing** to monitor projects, streamline processes, and ensure timely execution.
  - It connects multiple government agencies, enabling quicker decision-making and better accountability in project execution.
- **Achievements of PRAGATI**
  - By June 2023, PRAGATI had reviewed over **340 projects** worth ₹17.05 lakh crore (approx. **\$205 billion**), spanning sectors like **railways, roads, power, and aviation**.
  - PRAGATI's efforts have significantly improved the implementation of several key infrastructure projects, some of which had been delayed for decades.
  - **Notable Projects Transformed by PRAGATI**
    - **Bogibeel Rail and Road Bridge, Assam:** Delayed since **1998**, the project was fast-tracked under PRAGATI, leading to its inauguration in **December 2018**.
    - **Jammu Udhampur Srinagar Baramulla Rail Link, J&K:** Approved in **1995**, the project faced challenges until PRAGATI's intervention in **2015**. It will connect **Kashmir Valley** to the rest of India and is expected to be completed by **2025**.
    - **Bengaluru Metro Rail Project, Karnataka:** Phase 1 was operationalized in **2017** after resolving land acquisition challenges. PRAGATI's support is helping complete **Phase 2** by **2026**.
    - **Haridaspur-Paradeep Rail Line, Odisha:** Stalled for over **10 years**, this **82 km** project was completed after PRAGATI's intervention, halving travel time between mining hubs and Paradeep Port.
    - **Dahisar-Surat Highway, Maharashtra-Gujarat:** A **239 km** highway expansion project, delayed due to land acquisition issues, was completed after **PRAGATI's review** in **2014**.
    - **Varanasi-Aurangabad Highway, UP-Bihar:** Stuck for years due to land acquisition challenges, this road project is nearing completion after **PRAGATI's review** in **2016**.
    - **North Karanpura Thermal Power Plant, Jharkhand:** Approved in **2014**, the **1,980 MW** plant faced delays until PRAGATI expedited necessary approvals. It is expected to begin operations in **2024**.
    - **Navi Mumbai International Airport, Maharashtra:** Delayed since **2007** due to land disputes, PRAGATI's intervention in **2015** led to the resolution of disputes, with the airport set to open by **December 2024**.
  - **Environmental and Sustainable Impact:** PRAGATI has not only fast-tracked stalled projects but also promoted **sustainable practices** by integrating **green technologies** and facilitating necessary **environmental clearances** for projects.

### Oxford study lauds PRAGATI system for fast-tracking projects

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

A study by Oxford University's Said Business School has lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's PRAGATI infrastructure monitoring system for accelerating 340 projects worth \$205 billion across the country and bringing about economic transformation.

The study titled "From gridlock to growth: how leadership enables India's PRAGATI ecosystem to power progress" was authored by Soumitra Dutta, dean at the SBS, and co-authored by associate fellow Mukul Pandya. It was presented at a symposium hosted by the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, on Monday.

The study looked at factors including close monitoring of infrastructure projects and their completion since 2015 through the PRAGATI system, an acronym for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation of projects.

"The platform symbolises India's commitment to overcoming bureaucratic inertia and fostering a Team India mindset and culture of accountability and efficiency," says the report. "PRAGATI has brought together diverse stakeholders from Central

The report says that PRAGATI system symbolises India's commitment to overcoming bureaucratic inertia

and State governments onto a single platform and this collaborative approach has been instrumental in addressing some of the complex challenges in infrastructure development, from land acquisition to inter-ministerial coordination," the report says.

The report adds that the economic impact of PRAGATI is evident. According to studies by the Reserve Bank of India and the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, for every rupee spent on infrastructure, India sees a gain of ₹2.5 to ₹3.5 in GDP. "By fast-tracking projects that provide services like roads, railways, water, and electricity, PRAGATI has improved the quality of life for millions of Indians. It has incorporated sustainability into its core operations, facilitated faster environmental clearances and promoted the use of green technologies. This holistic approach ensures that India's development is both inclusive and sustainable," the report says.





- **Cultural and Social Impact:**

- DNA testing brought to light a **genetic fact** that contradicted the family's social narrative. This raised the issue of **genetic privacy**, as families may prefer to keep certain aspects of their ancestry and relationships hidden, especially when traditional practices like levirate marriage are involved.
- The case shows how **DNA analysis** is powerful but can sometimes reveal **uncomfortable truths** that might breach privacy, especially in cultures where family and ancestry hold significant importance.

#### 4. Indian justice system needs to be fair — not just fast

##### GS 2 (Justice)

- **Why in News:** India's judiciary faces significant case pendency due to structural inefficiencies. Proposed solutions such as measuring judge performance by case disposal rates and recruiting retired officials to address delays have sparked concerns about balancing speed with fairness. Additionally, the absence of video conferencing facilities in district courts and challenges in undertrial legal aid highlight key barriers.
- **Speed vs Fairness in Judicial Disposal**
  - **Balancing Speed and Fairness:** Focusing on speeding up case disposal may undermine fairness if the quality of trials suffers. Rushed judgments could lead to increased appeals, thereby further clogging the system.
  - **Performance Metrics for Judges:** Evaluating judges based on their case disposal rates may incentivize them to prioritize easier cases, potentially neglecting complex or sensitive cases, which would affect the fairness of the judicial process.
  - **Impact of Frequent Adjournments:** Frequent adjournments, often necessary for gathering evidence or waiting for significant events, ensure a fair trial. Limiting adjournments could lead to hasty decisions, harming the justice system.
- **Structural Issues and Alternatives**
  - **Involvement of Retired Officials:** Appointing retired officials for administrative roles could lead to inefficiencies, as they may not be well-versed in judicial procedures, potentially complicating efforts to streamline case disposal.
  - **Structural Bottlenecks in the Judicial Process:** Delays in case disposal are often due to bottlenecks at different stages, such as investigation, evidence gathering, and missing files. Identifying and addressing these critical delays could improve efficiency without compromising fairness.
  - **Challenges with Video Conferencing:** While video conferencing can expedite proceedings, it risks undermining the rights of undertrials, as they may not receive adequate legal counsel or suffer from mistreatment in custody. Physical presence ensures better oversight of the accused's condition.



**FAIRNESS, NOT JUST SPEED**  
A sensitive judicial system maintains a delicate balance between the two

OM DAMANI AND ANSHUL AGRAWAL

SHALAJA CHANDRA'S ARTICLE, 'Leiser, faster, faster' (8 November 22), highlights several reasons behind the high number of pending cases across Indian courts and proposes two main solutions — measuring judge's performance by the case disposal rate and recruiting retired officials. It also pointed out the absence of video conferencing facilities in several district courts.

We started the project 'System dynamics modelling of the pendency of undertrials' with a focus on speeding up the disposal of cases. However, after talking to several stakeholders in the judicial system for a year and a half, we realised that a fair trial is as important as a speedy trial. One must be careful while talking about faster case disposal since reducing the number of pending cases requires a delicate balance. The pursuit of speed should not come at the cost of fairness.

Categorising judges, on their disposal performance, could push them to choose cases that have a high likelihood of faster disposal. This might negatively impact the hearings of sensitive cases where judges might not have enough time left on the listing days. Hasty judgments can increase the likelihood of appeals, further clogging the judiciary.

The article also mentions, "In an average district or subordinate court, about half of the 90 cases listed daily reportedly get adjourned." Keeping the fairness aspect in mind, we need to ask why are there such frequent adjournments. Which type of cases are adjourned frequently? Is it justified to put a permissible limit for adjournments?

During our research, multiple advocates told us that they demand adjournments to get more time to gather evidence, research the law, file motions, or wait for certain events that can have a significant impact on the verdict. Refusing these adjournments in such cases could be unfair.

The judicial system is complex with numerous actors — with judges, lawyers, litigants, and court employees having their own mental models. Delegating administrative tasks to retired officials who are not familiar with and sensitive towards judicial procedures, might create new inefficiencies and increase the unfairness. A system's behaviour is a function of its structure. Delayed disposal and high pending case counts are due to the justice-system structure and cannot be improved by tweaking without addressing structural issues. Each case passes through multiple stages: Charge sheet filing, charge framing trial (evidence presentation), arguments, and judgment. Each stage has a different source of delay. For example, investigation officers can take time to gather evidence; police and public prosecutors usually keep issuing summonses instead of a non-traceable report if a witness is not responding; the 'roznama' has inaccurate or misleading information about the case stage; case files get misplaced or are not available since the case has been pending for long. It is necessary to identify the critical stages where there are bottlenecks and focus on reducing the delays in those specific stages.

Several experts we spoke to raised concerns about video proceedings. During such proceedings, the accused are often surrounded by jail officers creating an environment of intimidation. If they are mistreated in jail, say they have been tortured, they fear saying so. Judges cannot see their physical condition clearly. During the physical trial, the accused are under the custody of judges, not jailers. Coming out of jail to the court for trial is the only chance for an accused to breathe free air. They can meet their family members and talk to their lawyers confidentially. Video conferencing trials take away these particularly important rights of undertrials.

Accessing prompt legal advice and assistance is critical for ensuring a fair trial and the rule of law. However, researchers at National Law University Delhi's Project 39A have shown that undertrials from poor socioeconomic backgrounds cannot get the desired legal assistance due to unawareness about free legal aid, and the poor quality of the legal aid system. We urge allocating more resources to strengthen the legal aid system to ensure that the judicial system is both efficient and fair.

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- **Mental health benefits:** Improves family contact and reduces stress from isolation.
- **Lessons from the US: Challenges of Electronic Monitoring**
  - **E-Carceration and Its Impact**
    - Studies in the US reveal that EM can function as "e-carceration," extending the punitive control of prisons into broader society.
    - As per a report, EM exacerbates government surveillance, criminalizing environments, particularly affecting marginalized communities.
  - **Overrepresentation of Marginalized Communities**
    - In the US, communities of color are disproportionately affected by EM practices.
    - A parallel exists in India, where 68.4% of prisoners belong to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, as per NCRB data, raising concerns of unequal impact.
  - **Financial Burden on Individuals**
    - In the US, monitored individuals often bear the costs of EM, including setup fees (\$100–\$200) and daily charges (\$3–\$35).
    - While the Supreme Court's report in India suggests the government would bear these costs, international practices reveal potential risks of shifting the financial burden to individuals.
  - **Stigma and Mental Health Concerns**
    - Visible tracking devices like ankle bracelets can cause social stigma, isolation, and heightened stress, as noted in the Prisons in India report.
    - These devices may exacerbate depression and anxiety, discouraging compliance and raising questions about their humanitarian impact.
- **Privacy and Electronic Tracking**
  - **Judicial Stance on Privacy Violation**
    - On July 8, the Supreme Court struck down a bail condition by the Delhi High Court that required accused individuals to share their location via Google Maps.
    - The Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan ruled that such tracking violated the fundamental right to privacy under Article 21, emphasizing that investigative agencies cannot intrude into the private lives of individuals on bail.
  - **Consent and Human Rights Safeguards**
    - The 2023 Parliamentary Standing Committee emphasized that electronic monitoring must be voluntary and consent-based to prevent human rights violations.
    - It suggested that inmates' approval is necessary before implementing such measures.
  - **Recommendations by the 268th Law Commission**
    - The Law Commission of India acknowledged the serious impact of electronic monitoring on constitutional rights.
    - It recommended that such measures be restricted to grave and heinous crimes and only for individuals with prior convictions for similar offences.
    - It also proposed amending criminal legislation to codify these safeguards.
- **Conclusion - Balancing Privacy and Monitoring**
  - The discourse underscores the need for stringent safeguards, limited application, and respect for fundamental rights to ensure electronic tracking aligns with constitutional principles.



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- In July 2022, the RBI has provided an additional arrangement for invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports/imports in the rupee.
- As part of this mechanism, in December 2022, India saw its first settlement of foreign trade in rupee with Russia.
- So far banks of more than 19 countries including the UK, New Zealand, Germany, Malaysia, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates have been permitted to make settlements in rupees.
- **Challenges**
  - **Rupee not a dominant currency**
    - The rupee constitutes only 1.6% of global forex turnover.
    - For the rupee to be recognized as an international currency, its turnover must rise to 4%, equivalent to other non-US, non-Euro currencies.
  - **Challenges in India-Russia Trade in Rupees**
    - **US Sanctions Fear:** Indian banks are cautious about facilitating trade in rupees due to potential US sanctions.
    - **Trade Imbalance:** India's imports from Russia (\$61 billion in FY24) vastly outweigh exports (\$4.2 billion), resulting in Russia holding large rupee reserves. These reserves are underutilized in trade and are instead invested in Indian stocks and bonds.
- **Lessons from Russia-China Trade in Domestic Currencies**
  - Over 90% of their \$240 billion bilateral trade in 2023 was settled in roubles and yuan.
  - This is due to their more balanced trade relationship and reduced dependence on the US dollar.
- **India is not trying to target the US dollar**
  - India is looking for alternative settlement mechanisms when trade partners face dollar shortages, to ensure continued trade without hostility towards the dollar.
- **Potential Risks of imposing 100% Tariffs on BRICS Nations**
  - Experts argue that imposing 100% tariffs on BRICS nations could backfire:
    - Imports into the US would simply shift to third countries, potentially increasing costs for American consumers without bringing manufacturing jobs back home.
    - The US has become less competitive in manufacturing labour-intensive goods due to higher production costs, and tariffs are unlikely to reverse this trend.
- **What should be the way forward?**
  - **Need for Balanced Currency Frameworks in BRICS**
    - Experts emphasized that India should ensure BRICS currency initiatives do not disproportionately favor China due to its economic dominance.
  - **India's Strategic Approach**
    - India must take a balanced approach:
      - **Diplomatic Engagement:** Explain to the US that diversifying trade mechanisms promotes financial stability and is not anti-American.
      - **Leadership in BRICS Initiatives:** Accelerate the internationalization of India's digital currency (CBDC) and financial platforms like UPI to assume a leadership role.
- **Conclusion**
  - India must balance its participation in BRICS financial reforms with strategic ties to the US while ensuring frameworks do not favor China.
  - The global financial system shows diversification, but the US dollar remains dominant, with gradual shifts toward non-traditional currencies.



## 7. Land Degradation: A Growing Crisis Threatening Humanity

### GS 3 (Environment)

#### • Why in News:

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has released a comprehensive report titled 'Stepping Back from the Precipice: Transforming Land Management to Stay Within Planetary Boundaries.'
- The report (published a day before the COP16 of UNCCD began in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) underscores the **alarming scale and consequences of land degradation globally** and urges transformative changes in land management.

#### • What is Land Degradation?

- **Meaning:**
  - Land degradation refers to the **loss of biological and economic productivity of ecosystems** like croplands, forests, and pastures.
  - According to the UNCCD, it **results from unsustainable land use and management practices**, amplified by natural and human-induced pressures.
- **Key impacts:**
  - **Human health and livelihoods:** Reduces food quality and quantity, raising malnutrition risks.
    - Promotes **water- and food-borne diseases** from poor hygiene and water scarcity.
    - Causes **respiratory diseases** due to soil erosion.
  - **Ecosystems and biodiversity:** Harmful runoff from eroded soils impacts freshwater and marine systems, endangering fauna and dependent communities
    - Decreases biodiversity and destabilises ecosystems.
  - **Climate change contributions:** Degraded land releases stored carbon and nitrous oxide, **intensifying global warming**.
    - Ecosystem carbon absorption capacity has dropped by 20% in the past decade.
- **Causes of land degradation:**
  - **Unsustainable agricultural practices:** Overuse of chemical inputs, pesticides, and fertilizers disrupts soil health. Water diversion and poor irrigation practices lead to freshwater depletion.
  - **Climate change:** Increased heat stress and erratic precipitation worsen land degradation. Global warming escalates soil erosion and reduces vegetation cover.
  - **Rapid urbanisation:** Expanding urban areas contribute to habitat destruction and pollution. Loss of agricultural and forest lands impacts biodiversity.

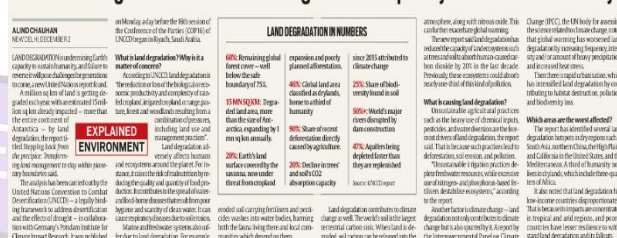
#### • Regions Most Affected by Land Degradation:

- **Dry regions:**
  - South Asia, northern China, the High Plains and California (USA), and the Mediterranean are particularly vulnerable.
  - These areas face severe soil erosion, reduced vegetation, and water scarcity.
- **Low-income countries disproportionately affected:**
  - Tropical and arid regions, especially in **Africa**, bear the brunt of degradation due to limited resources and resilience.
  - A third of humanity, including three-quarters of Africa's population, lives in drylands, making them especially vulnerable.

#### • Consequences and the Need for Action:

- **Consequences:** The degradation of 15 million square kilometers of land - equivalent to the size of Antarctica - signals a planetary crisis.
- **Immediate steps are essential to reverse this trend**, including:
  - Sustainable agricultural and water management practices.

### How land degradation is threatening Earth's capacity to sustain humanity



- Restoring degraded ecosystems to rebuild carbon sinks.
- Addressing urban expansion impacts on natural habitats.
- **Steps taken by India:**
  - India's Union Environment Minister, while speaking at the 16th conference of parties (**COP16**) held under the UNCCD in **Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**, highlighted that India is taking proactive measures to tackle land degradation.
  - **As desertification and poverty are linked** the minister emphasised that land degradation is not just an environmental but **socioeconomic issue**.
  - As a result, India has initiated several programmes to enhance resilience and recovery against land degradation, including issuance of **soil health cards**, to help farmers engage in sustainable agricultural practices.
- **Conclusion:** Without swift action, land degradation will undermine global efforts to combat climate change, protect biodiversity, and ensure food security, leaving a dire legacy for future generations.

LAND DEGRADATION IN NUMBERS		
<b>60%:</b> Remaining global forest cover – well below the safe boundary of 75%.	expansion and poorly planned afforestation.	since 2015 attributed to climate change
<b>15 MNSQ KM:</b> Degraded land area, more than the size of Antarctica, expanding by 1 mn sq km annually.	<b>46%:</b> Global land area classified as drylands, home to a third of humanity	<b>25%:</b> Share of biodiversity found in soil
<b>20%:</b> Earth's land surface covered by the savanna, now under threat from cropland	<b>90%:</b> Share of recent deforestation directly caused by agriculture.	<b>50%+:</b> World's major rivers disrupted by dam construction
	<b>20%:</b> Decline in trees' and soil's CO <sub>2</sub> absorption capacity	<b>47%:</b> Aquifers being depleted faster than they are replenished
Source: UNCCD report		



**MCQ Current Affairs**  
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1. In which year was the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted?
  - a) 1986
  - b) 1992
  - c) 2000
  - d) 2006
  
2. Which technologies are uniquely bundled in the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) platform?
  - a) Artificial intelligence, blockchain and video conferencing
  - b) Digital data management, video conferencing and geospatial technology
  - c) Quantum computing, data analytics and geospatial technology
  - d) Cloud computing, machine learning and video conferencing.
  
3. Exercise HARIMAU SHAKTI, is conducted between India and:
  - a) Vietnam
  - b) Russia
  - c) Sri Lanka
  - d) Malaysia
  
4. Consider the following statements regarding the Asia-Oceania Meteorological Satellite Users' Conference:
  - A. It was first held in Beijing in 2010.
  - B. It provides a platform for dialogue and collaboration between satellite operators and users.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

  - a) A only
  - b) B only
  - c) A and B
  - d) Neither of two
  
5. Consider the following statements regarding Global One-Stop Centres:
  - A. These centres aim to provide comprehensive assistance to women in vulnerable situations.
  - B. These centres will be established by the Union Ministry of External Affairs in UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

  - a) A only
  - b) B only
  - c) A and B
  - d) Neither of two

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1. d
2. b
3. d
4. c
5. c

