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Topic : Impact of Rising Temperatures on Mango Production

Relevance : GS Paper 3 Environment and Ecology

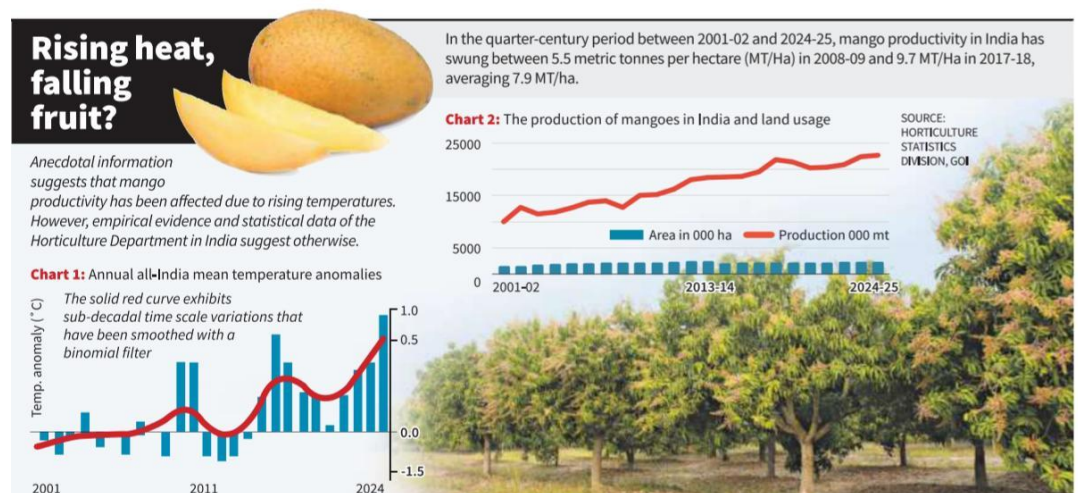
Source : The Hindu

Context :

India has been witnessing increasing temperatures over the past decade. The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** reported that **2024 was the warmest year on record** since 1901, with the annual mean land surface

temperature standing **+0.65°C above the 1991–2020 average**. This trend is part of a broader shift where the past 12 years have consistently remained warmer than the preceding years, breaking the traditional pattern of alternating cool and warm years.

These elevated temperatures have raised concerns over their impact on mango production, one of India's most beloved and economically significant fruits. Anecdotal evidence—such as early flowering, fruit drop, change in taste, or pickle spoilage—suggests that **climate volatility may be affecting mango quality and yield**. Researchers globally, including those in Egypt, predict that mango cultivation will face **serious threats due to climate change**, particularly from rising heat levels.



Quantum of Growth in India

Despite climatic challenges, empirical data paints a surprisingly optimistic picture. Over the **past 25 years (2001–02 to 2024–25)**, mango productivity in India has shown considerable variation but also substantial growth. Productivity has ranged from **5.5 metric tonnes per hectare (MT/Ha) in 2008–09** to a peak of **9.7 MT/Ha in 2017–18**, with an average of **7.9 MT/Ha** across the period.

In the most recent estimate for **2024–25**, mango productivity is projected to be **9.4 MT/Ha**, indicating that Indian mango orchards remain resilient and productive despite temperature fluctuations.

Additionally, according to the **Agricultural Market Intelligence Centre** at Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, the **area under mango cultivation grew by 2.34% in 2023–24**, reaching **24.01 lakh hectares** and yielding **224.23 lakh tonnes**, compared to 208.72 lakh tonnes from 23.46 lakh hectares the previous year.

This data reflects **both an expansion in cultivation area and higher yield**, suggesting ongoing growth in India's mango sector.

Comparison with China and Thailand

India remains the **global leader in mango production**, and its productivity is now surpassing other major producers like **China and Thailand**. As of 2024-25:

- **India:** 9.4 MT/Ha (expected)
- **China:** 8.74 MT/Ha
- **Thailand:** 8.36 MT/Ha

This comparison shows that, while China and Thailand are significant players in mango production, **India maintains a clear lead both in area and yield**, reinforcing its dominance in the global mango market.

Challenges Due to Climatic Stress

Despite positive productivity trends, **climate-induced stress remains a real challenge** for mango cultivation. Mango trees require **specific weather conditions** from the **budding phase (post-winter) to pollination and fruit set**. Sudden changes in weather—such as **unseasonal rains, hailstorms, long dry spells, or heatwaves**—can disrupt these delicate stages, causing:

EXPLAINER

Serish Naniyeti

The story so far:

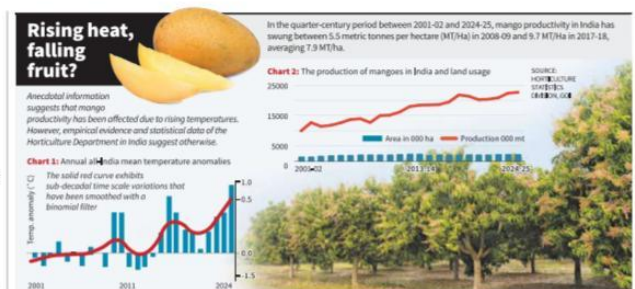
There is a drop in mango harvest. Mangoes no longer taste that sweet. Mangoes are expensive. Mangoes are arriving too early in the market. The mango pickle doesn't last through the year. The mango plant is flowering too early; these are some of the anecdotal conversations about mangoes in India over the past few years. Is this linked to higher temperatures?

What is the threat?

According to the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) Annual Climate Survey of 2024, "the country's annual mean land surface air temperature during the year 2024 was +0.65°C above the 1999-2020 average. Thus, making the year 2024 the warmest year on record since 1901." IMD data shows that the last 12 years have been warmer than earlier years, defying the statistical norm where there is a see-saw of temperatures with some years cooler than others.

Anecdotal information suggests that mango productivity has been affected due to rising temperatures. Researchers in Egypt who published a paper on "Climate change and Mango production" say that "in the near future, agriculture as a whole and mango production, in particular, will face serious threats from climate change."

What's the report from the orchards? However, empirical evidence and statistical data of the Horticulture Department in India suggest otherwise. In the quarter-century period between 2001-02 and 2024-25, mango productivity in India has swung between 5.5 metric tonnes per hectare (MT/Ha) in 2008-09 and 9.7 MT/Ha in 2017-18, averaging 7.9 MT/Ha. In 2024-25, it is expected to be 9.4 MT per hectare. This is higher than the two other leading major producers of



mango, which are China (8.74 MT/Ha) and Thailand (8.36 MT/Ha).

According to the Agricultural Market Intelligence Centre at the Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University in Hyderabad, the area under mango cultivation has increased. "During 2023-24, mango acreage in India was increased by 2.34% to 24.01 lakh hectares (59.34 lakh acres) with 224.23 lakh tonnes of production (as per the 3rd advance estimates) as compared to 208.72 lakh tonnes of production from 23.46 lakh hectares (57.97 lakh acres) during last year."

Do heat waves affect trees?

While the impact of higher temperatures on the human body is being studied, the jury is out on the environmental stress experienced by trees and plants. "Higher temperatures cause fruit drop, early maturity, sun scalding, and uneven ripening in mango. In a variety like Alphonso, spongy tissue disorder will be seen," points out Naga Harshita Devalla, who teaches at the College of Horticulture in Hyderabad.

"Mangoes possess physiological mechanisms that allow them to adjust and thrive in diverse and demanding environments. The substantial genetic diversity provides several advantages for the transfer of traditional or modern breeding techniques and for determining how to adapt to climate change."

The mango plant has specific weather requirements from the time buds start appearing by the end of winter. The pollination has to take place before the fruit is set. The budding stage as well as the fruit setting stage is long. Fluctuating weather patterns with intense heavy rain spells and long dry spells are changing the timing of a mango plant's budding and flowering, says a mango farmer. While rain, hail, or wind can play havoc at any of these stages and affect productivity, the hardness of mango and higher productivity are being linked to genetic diversity.

Is genetic variation important?

Indian researchers led by Rajdeep Haldar, who published a paper in the *International Journal of Advanced Biochemistry Research* in March 2024, drew a similar conclusion about mango production and higher temperatures in the region. He linked it to genetic diversity.

"There are multiple reasons to be optimistic about the future of mango production and agriculture. These species have significant adaptability in response to their surroundings. Mangoes possess physiological mechanisms that allow them to adjust and thrive in diverse and demanding environments. The substantial genetic diversity provides several advantages for the transfer of traditional or modern breeding techniques and for determining how to adapt to climate change. The climatic conditions required for the growth and production of mango trees are to some extent compatible with the impacts of global climate change, including drought and high temperatures," the research paper stated.

- Premature flowering and fruiting
- Fruit drop and sun scalding
- Uneven ripening
- Disorders like spongy tissue in Alphonso varieties

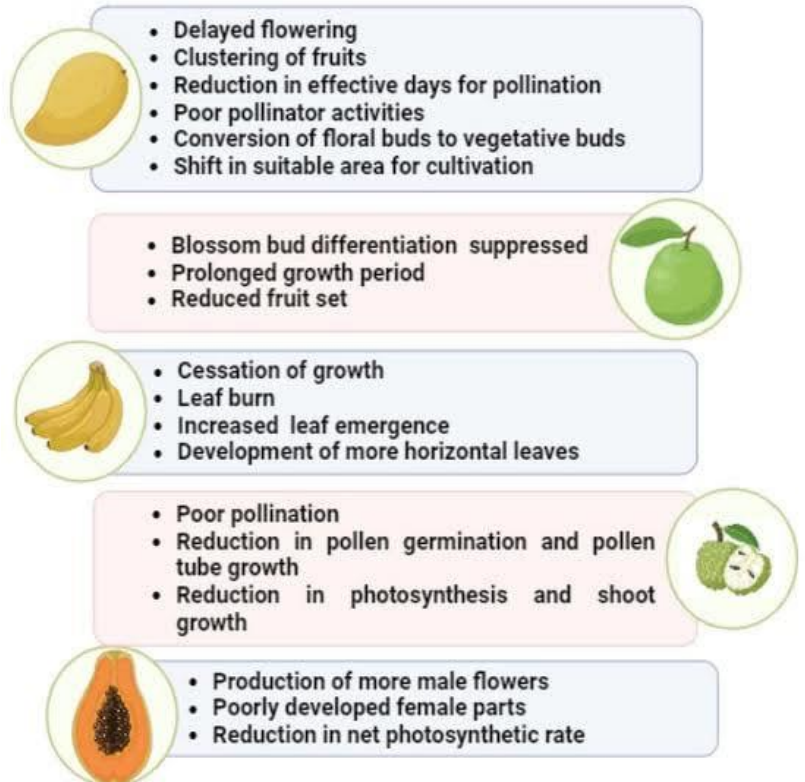
Such events, often unpredictable and intense, are becoming more frequent due to climate change, leading to **localized losses in yield and quality**, even if overall national production remains stable.

Role of Genetic Diversity in Hardiness and Productivity

One of the most critical factors contributing to the resilience of mangoes amid rising temperatures is their **genetic diversity**. Indian researchers, including Rajdeep Halder (2024), emphasize that mangoes possess **inherent physiological mechanisms** that allow them to adjust and thrive in **diverse agro-climatic environments**.

Genetic diversity offers several advantages:

- **Adaptability** to varying and extreme climates (droughts, heatwaves)
- **Resistance** to certain pests and diseases
- **Scope for breeding programs** using traditional and modern techniques
- **Sustainability** of the crop under changing environmental conditions



This diversity, found in the multitude of **Indian mango cultivars** (like Alphonso, Dasher, Langra, Banganapalli, etc.), ensures that **even if some varieties are vulnerable**, others may perform better under new conditions, **stabilizing overall production**.

How Genetic Diversity Helps Combat Climate Change

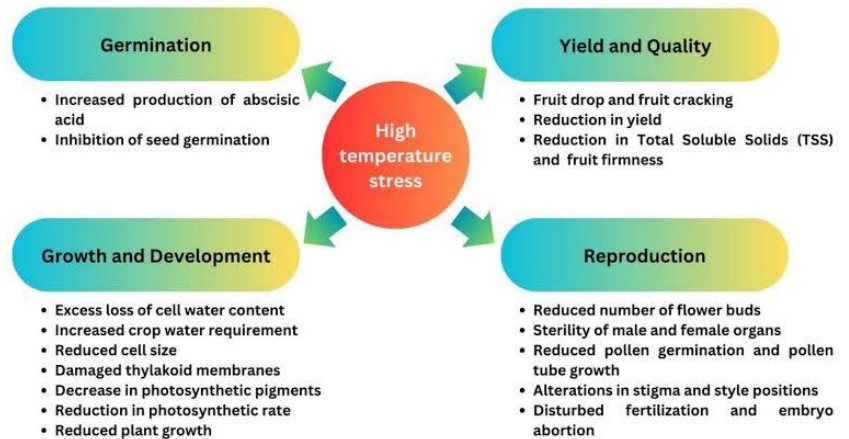
In the face of global warming, **genetic variability becomes a survival toolkit** for crops. Mangoes with rich genetic traits can develop:

- **Drought-resistant root systems**
- **Flexible flowering cycles**
- **High photosynthetic efficiency**
- **Heat-tolerant enzymatic and cellular responses**

These traits not only **improve resilience to climate stress** but also allow mangoes to continue producing viable fruits even under **non-ideal conditions**, offering a critical edge in adapting to long-term climate change.

While anecdotal experiences suggest that high temperatures are affecting mango quality and timing, empirical data indicates that India's mango production

remains robust and continues to grow. India outperforms China and Thailand in both productivity and cultivation area, supported by the crop's inherent genetic diversity. Though environmental stresses such as heatwaves and erratic rainfall pose challenges, **the future of mango production in India looks optimistic**, especially with strategic use of genetic resources and adaptive farming practices to mitigate the impacts of climate change.



Prelims Practice Question:

With reference to mango production in India, consider the following statements:

- India has the highest mango productivity in the world, surpassing both China and Thailand.
- Genetic diversity in mango varieties contributes to resilience against climatic stress like droughts and heatwaves.
- Mango flowering and fruiting are unaffected by fluctuations in weather patterns.
- The year 2024 was recorded as the warmest year in India since 1901, as per IMD data.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2, and 4 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 3, and 4 only

Correct Answer: B. 1, 2, and 4 only

Explanation:

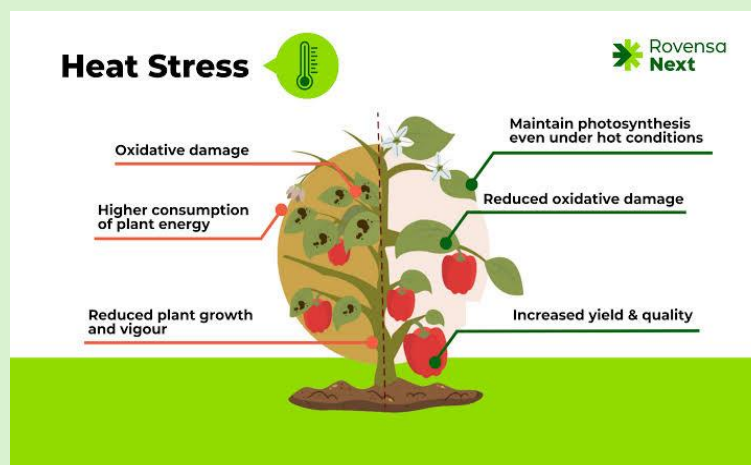
- Statement 1** is correct: India's mango productivity in 2024–25 is projected to be 9.4 MT/Ha, which is higher than that of China and Thailand.
- Statement 2** is correct: Genetic diversity contributes to mango's adaptability and resilience under climate change.
- Statement 3** is incorrect: Mango flowering and fruiting are sensitive to weather fluctuations like unseasonal rains, heatwaves, and dry spells.
- Statement 4** is correct: IMD stated that 2024 was the warmest year on record since 1901.

Mains Model Question:

Q. How is climate change impacting mango production in India? Discuss the role of genetic diversity in enhancing the resilience and productivity of mango crops under changing environmental conditions.

Climate change has emerged as a significant factor influencing agricultural patterns globally, and mango production in India is no exception. Over the past decade, rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, unseasonal hailstorms, and prolonged dry spells have begun to alter the delicate phenological cycle of mango trees. Anecdotal evidence from farmers and consumers indicates a change in fruit taste, early flowering, reduced shelf life of pickles, and premature harvests. These changes point toward the stress mango trees are undergoing due to fluctuating climatic conditions.

However, empirical data suggests that India's mango productivity has remained robust despite these challenges. Between 2001 and 2024, productivity ranged from 5.5 to 9.7 metric tonnes per hectare, with a recent expected output of 9.4 MT/Ha in 2024–25. This figure surpasses the productivity of other major producers like China and Thailand. Moreover, the area under mango cultivation has increased, reflecting the crop's economic viability.



A key reason behind this sustained performance is the genetic diversity inherent in Indian mango varieties. India is home to hundreds of mango cultivars adapted to diverse agro-climatic zones. This genetic variability enables the species to withstand a range of environmental stresses, including drought, high temperatures, and pest infestations. It also provides a valuable pool for breeding climate-resilient varieties using both traditional and modern scientific techniques.

Mangoes possess physiological mechanisms such as heat tolerance and adaptive flowering patterns, which, when coupled with their genetic robustness, make them more resilient to climate variability. Thus, while climate change presents real challenges, the genetic richness of Indian mangoes offers hope for sustaining productivity. Investment in research, conservation of local varieties, and climate-resilient farming practices can ensure that mango production continues to thrive even under the pressures of a warming planet.

Topic : India's Military Expenditure in 2024 and Global Trends**Relevance :** GS Paper 3 Defence and Economy**Source :** Indian Express**Context :**

India's military expenditure in 2024 has drawn global attention, especially due to its significant lead over neighbouring Pakistan and its place among the top five defence spenders in the world. This development comes at a time of rising regional tensions and growing security concerns in Asia and globally. The data comes from the authoritative annual report of the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**, a globally respected think tank that specializes in research on conflict, armaments, arms control, and disarmament.

What is SIPRI and Why Is It Significant?

The **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)**, established in 1966 in Sweden, is an independent international institute that provides data, analysis, and recommendations on armed conflict, military expenditure, arms trade, and disarmament. SIPRI's annual military expenditure report is a widely cited document that helps policymakers, scholars, and defence analysts understand global and regional military spending patterns. The report provides reliable and comparable data on military spending by countries, contributing significantly to transparency and informed policy debates.

India's Defence Spending in 2024: Key Highlights

According to SIPRI's *Trends in World Military Expenditure 2024* report, **India's military expenditure stood at \$86.1 billion**, marking a **1.6% increase** over the previous year. This spending makes India the **fifth largest military spender** in the world, after the United States, China, Russia, and Germany. Notably, India's military budget was **nearly nine times larger than Pakistan's**, which stood at \$10.2 billion.

This expenditure reflects India's commitment to modernising its armed forces, strengthening border security, and investing in advanced technologies like cyberwarfare capabilities, space assets, indigenous weapons systems, and maritime power projection. The increase in spending also aligns with India's broader strategic concerns over a volatile neighbourhood, including threats from terrorism, border skirmishes with China, and internal security challenges.

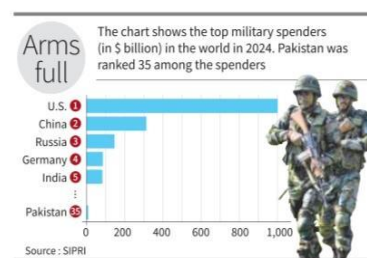
In 2024, India's military expenditure was 9 times that of Pakistan: SIPRI

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's military spending in 2024 was nearly nine times that of Pakistan's expenditure, according to a study released on Monday by a leading Swedish think tank that comes amid growing tensions between the two countries over the Pahal-gam terror attack.

The country's military expenditure, the fifth largest globally, grew by 1.6% to \$86.1 billion while Pakistan spent \$10.2 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

The top five military spenders – the United States, China, Russia, Germany and India – accounted for 60% of the global total, with combined



spending of \$1,635 billion, it said.

China's military expenditure increased by 7% to an estimated \$314 billion, marking three decades of consecutive growth, the study noted.

China accounted for 50% of all military spending in Asia and Oceania, investing in the continued

modernisation of its military and expansion of its cyberwarfare capabilities and nuclear arsenal, it said in the report titled 'Trends in World Military Expenditure 2024'.

SIPRI said military spending in Europe (including Russia) rose by 17% to \$693 billion and was the main contributor to the

global increase in 2024.

With the war in Ukraine in its third year, military expenditure kept rising across the continent, pushing European military spending beyond the level recorded at the end of the Cold War, it noted.

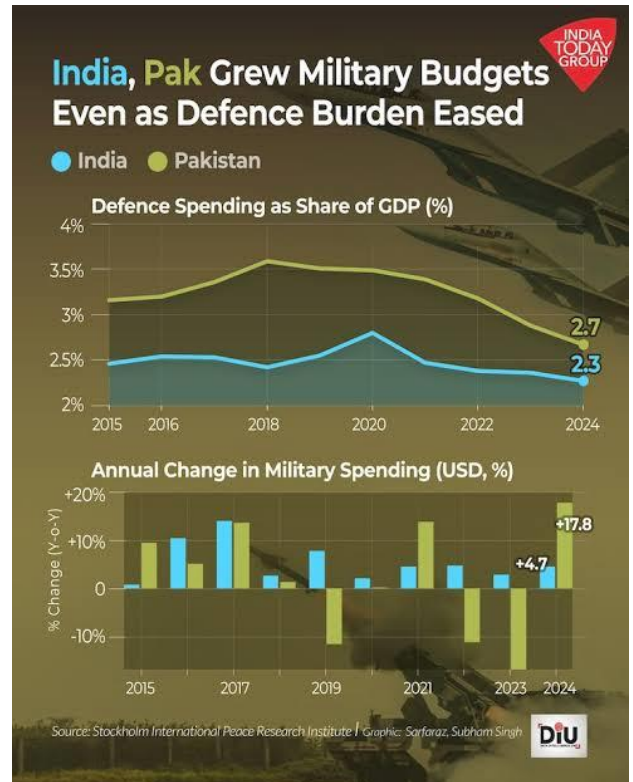
SIPRI said Russia's military expenditure reached an estimated \$149 billion in 2024, a 38% increase from 2023 and double the level in 2015. This represented 7.1% of Russia's GDP and 19% of all Russian government spending.

Ukraine's total military expenditure grew by 2.9% to reach \$64.7 billion – equivalent to 43% of Russia's spending. At 34% of GDP, Ukraine had the largest military burden of any country in 2024, the report added.

Global Military Spending: Recent Trends

The SIPRI report shows that **global military spending reached \$2.4 trillion in 2024**, with the top five spenders — the **U.S., China, Russia, Germany, and India** — accounting for **60% of the total**. Notable trends include:

- **China's defence budget rose by 7% to \$314 billion**, maintaining a three-decade streak of continuous growth. China alone accounted for **50% of all military spending in Asia and Oceania**, underscoring its growing military ambitions, especially in cyber capabilities and nuclear expansion.
- **Russia's military spending jumped by 38% to \$149 billion**, driven by the ongoing war in Ukraine. This is double the amount spent in 2015, with defence accounting for **7.1% of its GDP** and nearly **19% of total government spending**.
- **Ukraine**, despite a smaller economy, spent **\$64.7 billion**, which is **43% of Russia's military spending** but a staggering **34% of Ukraine's GDP**, indicating the highest military burden among all nations.
- **Europe**, overall, saw a 17% rise in military spending to **\$693 billion**, largely due to the continuing conflict in Ukraine and increased NATO preparedness. This level surpasses the Cold War peak.

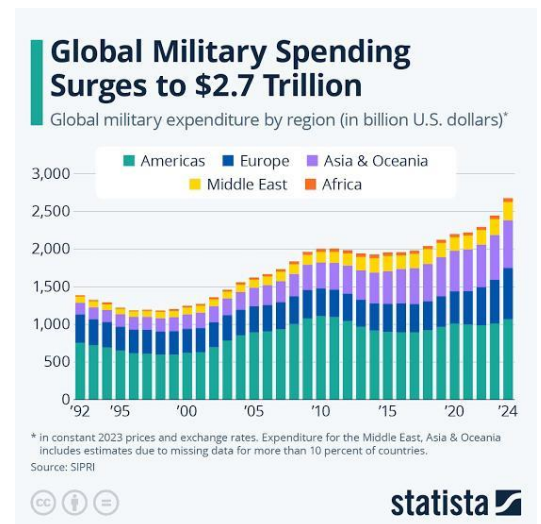


Strategic Implications for India

India's growing military expenditure reflects a combination of **strategic necessity and geopolitical assertion**. With mounting tensions in South Asia — particularly in the context of cross-border terrorism, the situation in Kashmir, and persistent border issues with China — India has been steadily increasing defence outlays for force modernisation, border infrastructure, and domestic defence production under the **Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative**.

Furthermore, India's rise as a regional power and its involvement in multilateral security groupings like **QUAD** (with the U.S., Japan, and Australia) and growing defence partnerships with France, Israel, and the U.S. necessitate a capable and modern military.

SIPRI's 2024 report underscores a global trend of rising military expenditure amidst increasing geopolitical instability. For India, its ninth-fold spending over Pakistan signals a strong commitment to national security and defence preparedness. However, such growth must be balanced with strategic diplomacy and investment



in socio-economic sectors to ensure comprehensive national strength. SIPRI's data continues to serve as an essential benchmark for evaluating global and regional security dynamics.

Prelims Practice Question:

With reference to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)* report on global military expenditure in 2024, consider the following statements:

1. India was the third-largest military spender globally in 2024.
2. China accounted for 50% of all military spending in Asia and Oceania.
3. Ukraine had the highest military burden (as a percentage of GDP) in 2024.
4. SIPRI is a think tank under the United Nations Security Council.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 3, and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, and 4 only

Answer: B. 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

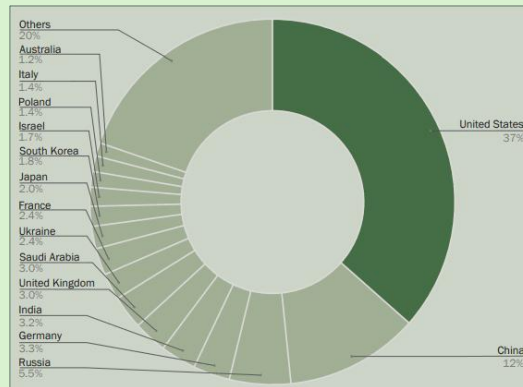
- **Statement 1** is incorrect: India was the **fifth-largest** military spender, not the third.
- **Statement 2** is correct: China accounted for **50% of all military spending in Asia and Oceania**.
- **Statement 3** is correct: Ukraine had the **highest military burden** at **34% of GDP**.
- **Statement 4** is incorrect: SIPRI is an **independent international institute, not under the UN Security Council**.

Mains Model Question:

Q. Discuss the trends in India's military expenditure in light of the SIPRI 2024 report. How does India's spending compare globally and regionally, and what are the implications for strategic stability in South Asia?

The SIPRI 2024 report on global military expenditure reveals that India continues to be among the top military spenders globally, ranking fifth with a defence outlay of \$86.1 billion. This represents a 1.6% increase over the previous year. In stark contrast, Pakistan's military expenditure stood at \$10.2 billion, making India's defence budget nearly nine times greater. This widening gap underscores India's growing emphasis on defence modernization and strategic autonomy, especially in the backdrop of regional and global security challenges.

Globally, India's spending forms part of a broader trend wherein the top five spenders—United States, China, Russia, Germany, and India—accounted for 60% of the world's military expenditure. In Asia and Oceania, China dominates with \$314 billion, accounting for half of all military spending in the region. India's military investments are thus not only a response to long-standing tensions with Pakistan but also to the strategic challenge posed by China, particularly along the Line of Actual Control.



SIPRI, or the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, is a globally respected independent institute that tracks armaments, disarmament, and international security. Its annual military expenditure report is significant for understanding global defence trends, transparency in military budgeting, and geopolitical risk assessments.

India's relatively restrained increase in military expenditure, especially when compared to Russia's 38% rise, suggests a focus on balancing defence needs with economic priorities. However, continued investment in cyber capabilities, strategic deterrence, and indigenous defence production through initiatives like "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" is essential to maintain regional parity and technological edge. The growing military imbalance in South Asia also necessitates a calibrated diplomatic approach to maintain strategic stability while ensuring national security objectives are not compromised.

Topic : Cabinet Decision on Caste Census (2025)

Relevance : GS Paper 2 Polity and Governance

Source : The Hindu

Context :

The Union Cabinet, as announced by Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, has decided to include **caste enumeration** in the upcoming **decennial Census**, which will be the **first time since 1931** that India will count all castes in an official Census. Unlike the 2011 SECC, this enumeration will be part of the **statutorily backed Census Act, 1948**, giving it legal legitimacy.

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Cabinet decides to include caste count in next Census

Census to enumerate caste for the first time in Independent India; dates for the delayed Census yet to be notified; the count will promote inclusion and pave new paths of progress, says Shah

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has decided to include caste enumeration as part of the next Census exercise, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Wednesday. Though the decision comes months ahead of the Bihar Assembly election, the dates for the next decennial Census exercise, last held in 2011, are yet to be notified by the government. The 2021 Census has been postponed indefinitely, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The last time that India's entire population was counted by caste was in pre-Independent India, in 1931. Since then, only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been



Finer details: Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw briefing the media on the Cabinet decision on Wednesday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

counted in the Census exercises.

However, reservation measures for education and employment have expanded to include Other Backward Classes (OBCs), all based on projection and estimates from the British-era head count.

Unlike the 2011 Socio-

Economic Caste Census (SECC), which was done outside the purview of the Census exercise and did not mandate caste disclosure, this time, caste will be enumerated in the second and final phase of the Census, giving the count a statutory backing.

A senior government of-

ficial told *The Hindu* that as the next Census would be conducted in digital mode for the first time, an "other" column with a drop down code directory containing the names of the castes will likely be added in the Census mobile application. The official added that the software for this is currently undergoing tests. Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on X that "the Congress and its allies opposed the caste census for decades while in power and played politics over it while in the Opposition". He said that the decision "will promote inclusion and pave new paths for the progress of the deprived".

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This decision comes amid political momentum around caste-based data, following similar exercises in **Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana**.

Historical Background, Constitutional and Legal Provisions

- **Pre-Independence:** The last full caste census was conducted in **1931**.
- **Post-Independence:** Only **Scheduled Castes (SCs)** and **Scheduled Tribes (STs)** were enumerated.
- **2011 SECC:** A separate exercise from the official Census, it aimed to record caste data but lacked legislative backing and suffered from technical flaws.

Census as a Union Subject

- Entry 69, **Union List (Seventh Schedule)**: Gives the Union exclusive power to conduct the Census.
- **Census Act, 1948**: Empowers the Central Government to collect population and demographic data.

SC/ST Recognition

- Article **341** and **342**: Empowers the President (with Parliament's approval) to notify SCs and STs respectively.
- **OBCs/SEBCs**: Not constitutionally recognized as a homogenous group; they are recognized under statutory frameworks like:
 - **Article 15(4) and 16(4)**: Special provisions for backward classes.
 - **National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993** (now under **102nd Constitutional Amendment, 2018**).

Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), 2011

- Conducted alongside the 2011 Census but not part of it.
- Aimed to collect data on **socio-economic status** and **caste identity**.

Methodology Issues:

- Caste enumeration was **open-ended**: Respondents could write any caste name (e.g., "Agarwal", "Gupta"), leading to over **46 lakh unique entries**.
- Lack of standardization or verification: Led to **inflated and unusable data**.
- No codebook/directory: Unlike SC/ST categories, there was no structured list for OBCs.

Outcome:

- Data was never officially released due to **data inconsistencies**.

Cabinet nod to include caste count in Census

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting on Thursday, Mr. Vaishnav said: "Congress governments have always opposed caste census. Caste was not included in all the census operations conducted since Independence. In 2010, then Prime Minister late Manmohan Singh ji had assured the Lok Sabha that the matter of caste census should be considered in the Cabinet. A Group of Ministers was formed to consider this subject. Most of the political parties had recommended caste census. Despite this, the Congress government decided to conduct merely a survey of caste instead of a caste census. That survey is known as the SECC."

The official quoted earlier added that the SECC showed more than 46 lakh different caste names, whereas the total number of castes counted during the 1931 Census was 4,147.

"The SECC threw up lakhs of caste names as it was kept open-ended. Respondents were asked to name their castes. For example, people wrote Gupta, Agarwal, etc. for Baniya caste, which increased the numbers exponentially. This time, a code directory will likely be provided which will include approved names," the official explained.

According to the latest government data, there are nearly 2,650 communities in the OBC group, 1,170 in the SC category, and 890 in the ST list in the Central list. The State governments maintain their own list of OBC groups.

- Only socio-economic data for rural areas was used for schemes like **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Ujjwala**, etc.

Significance of a Caste Census in India

a. Social Justice and Welfare Targeting

- Accurate caste data helps in **better policy planning, welfare distribution, and affirmative action**.
- Data can help re-evaluate **reservation quotas**, which are based on 1931 projections.

b. Federal and Political Implications

- Strengthens **federalism** by acknowledging State-specific backwardness.
- Can **reshape political narratives** by revealing the numerical strength of castes (especially OBCs).

c. Administrative Utility

- Helps in restructuring programs like **education scholarships, employment reservations, and rural development schemes**.

Criticisms and Concerns

- Critics argue caste enumeration could **reinforce caste identities** and deepen **social fragmentation**.
- Opponents claim such exercises are often **timed before elections** and used for **vote bank politics**.
- Managing and verifying **thousands of caste names** is logistically challenging.
- Lack of standard caste classification at State vs. Central level adds to inconsistency.

Present Developments and Future Steps

Digital Census

- The upcoming Census will be the **first digital Census**.
- A mobile application will include a **drop-down code directory** of castes to reduce data inflation.

Vaishnaw insists SECC, State efforts were 'surveys'

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

While announcing that the Union Cabinet has decided to enumerate caste in the next Census, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw made it a point to argue that the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) and caste enumeration exercises conducted by some State governments were just "surveys".

"The Census is a Union subject, but some States have done it (caste enumeration). Some States had done it well, while some States have done this purely from a political angle in a non-transparent manner," Mr. Vaishnaw said at the Union Cabinet briefing, in a reference to the Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana governments which have done caste enumeration.

The Union government is considering codifying a list of castes and sub-castes to ensure the number of castes is not as unwieldy as it was in the 2011 SECC.

The Bihar, Karnataka, and Telangana governments had all drawn up a list of castes and communities, while leaving room for people to identify with communities that might not be on the list. For instance, Bihar had 214 entries in the list of castes, Karnataka had over 1,300 and Telangana had over 200. All three States used their respective State list of castes, sub-castes, and communities to arrive at the list for enumeration.

While the SC and ST lists for each State are singular and decided upon by Parliament, Socially and Economically Backward Classes (SEBCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are categorised separately by State and Union Territory governments as well. The Central list of OBC lists 2,650 communities across the country, while an independent analysis of State OBC lists showed over 3,651 communities categorised as such.

The Bihar government began conducting a caste-based survey in 2022, announcing its report about a year later. The Telangana government announced its decision to undertake a survey in January 2024 and

Step to realising Ambedkar's dream: Minister

NEW DELHI

The decision to enumerate caste in the upcoming Census is a "historic" and "effective" measure to "give respect to the socially and economically deprived people in the country, make them self-reliant and empowered" and a "decisive step towards realising the dreams of Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Union Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar said on Wednesday. In a social media post on X, Mr. Kumar congratulated the "sensitive" Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "ensuring social justice".

announced its completion in about a year as well. In Karnataka's case, the survey was conducted in 2015 when the State was run by a Congress-led government, and a report based on the data collected then was finalised and submitted to the government only in 2024. The Bihar survey covered 13.07 crore people across the State, which is slightly higher than what its population was projected to be in 2023, according to Government of India estimates. The Telangana survey covered 3.54 crore people, which comes to about 92.91% of the State's projected population at the time. Karnataka's survey covered a total of 5.98 crore, almost 95% of the then-projected population of the State.

Findings challenged

However, the findings of the caste enumeration exercise in each of these States have been challenged by Opposition leaders and certain communities alike. In Bihar and Karnataka, one of the criticisms was that the survey did not cover all of the population. Both the Karnataka and Telangana surveys have been questioned for their estimates of Backward Classes population, with accusations of an undercount.

Mr. Vaishnaw stressed that the Narendra Modi-led government would conduct the exercise "transparently".

Standardization

- Government aims to **codify caste names** to limit the number and remove overlaps.
- Currently, the **Central OBC list has 2,650 entries**, but **State OBC lists** have over 3,600 castes.

Transparency and Credibility

- Union government promises **transparent, scientific data collection**, unlike State-level surveys which have been criticized for **inaccuracy** and **undercounting**.

Examples from States

Bihar

- Conducted in 2022; covered 13.07 crore people.
- Faced legal and political scrutiny.
- Found OBCs and EBCs together form over **60% of the population**.

Karnataka

- Survey conducted in 2015; report released in 2024.
- Political controversy around underreporting OBC data.

Telangana

- Survey completed in early 2025; data not yet public.

The move to include **caste enumeration in the Census** marks a historic shift in India's demographic governance. It seeks to replace **assumptions and estimates with evidence-based policymaking**, ensuring better representation and equity. However, its success hinges on **transparent methodology, standardized coding, and strict data protection** to prevent misuse and uphold constitutional values.

Prelims Practice Question :

Q. With reference to the caste enumeration in India, consider the following statements:

- The Census of India has never included caste enumeration after Independence.
- The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 was conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are enumerated in every decennial Census in India.
- Caste enumeration is a subject under the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Caste count seen as a strategic move to weaken Opposition plank

The announcement, which comes ahead of the Bihar Assembly polls, has longer-term implications too; the outcome is likely to open avenues for new political negotiations, coalitions, and party politics as well as emergence of new aspirations

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet's decision to proceed with caste enumeration as part of the decadal Census exercise has potentially weakened a significant Opposition plank, while also reflecting the BJP-led government's calculations regarding the identification of both dominant and dominated communities within the caste framework and its potential future implications.

The Congress had been demanding a caste census for some time, and such exercises had been announced in Congress-ruled States, including Karnataka and Telangana, where surveys have reportedly been completed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has



The Congress had been demanding a caste count and such exercises had been announced in Congress-ruled States. FILE PHOTO

previously spoken of four categories he described as marginalised in Indian society: youth, women, the poor, and farmers. The issue has the potential to be significant in the upcoming polls in Bihar.

Announcing the Union government's decision, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw referenced attempts by State governments led by the Congress or other Opposition parties, stating

some had conducted such exercises well, while others had "created doubts in society". He added that the decision to include caste enumeration in the decadal Census would "strengthen the social and economic structure of our society".

While there are immediate political considerations including neutralising an important Opposition plank, the move has other, longer-term implications.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, political scientist Badri Narayan, author of a biography of Bahujan Samaj Party founder Kanshi Ram, said the enumeration of castes within the Census exercise would likely lead to the emergence of new identities and aspirations. He elaborated that this assertion of the marginalised might initially occur separately but would ultimately coalesce into larger groups, opening avenues for new political negotiations, coalitions, and party politics.

"Assertions, ruptures and similar developments will happen, opening the space for political negotiation," Mr. Narayan said.

He added that caste enumeration would lead to "the identification of both the dominant and the dominated, which will have a positive effect in terms of targeting welfare."

The experience of the Congress in Karnataka, where dominant communities such as the Vokkaligas and Lingayats have raised issues about the State-wide caste survey, serves as a case in point.

The government, for its part, also highlighted reservation for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) among the general category as part of its aim for welfare for all sections "without causing stress in any section of society", potentially addressing concerns that may arise among upper castes.

Political scientist Ashwani Kumar observed, "The narrative pushed by the government therefore is not for fragmentation but for harmony through power sharing." He said it would be a golden opportunity for better power-sharing and for deepening democracy.

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

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 3 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 2 and 4 only

Correct Answer: B. 3 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1: Incorrect** – While full caste enumeration hasn't occurred since 1931, SCs and STs have been enumerated in every Census post-Independence.
- **Statement 2: Incorrect** – SECC 2011 was not conducted under the **Census Act, 1948**; it was a separate exercise by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- **Statement 3: Correct** – SCs and STs are regularly enumerated in the decennial Census.
- **Statement 4: Incorrect** – Census is a **Union subject** under Entry 69 of the Union List.

Mains Model Question:

Q. Discuss the significance of including caste enumeration in the decennial Census. What are the constitutional, social, and administrative implications of such a move in the Indian context?

The decision to include caste enumeration in the upcoming Census marks a significant policy shift in India's data governance. Since the 1931 Census, India has not conducted a comprehensive caste-based headcount, except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The move to include broader caste data is constitutionally relevant, socially transformative, and administratively crucial.

Rahul welcomes 'sudden announcement' of caste count, demands timeline

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Welcoming what he described as a "sudden announcement" of a nationwide caste count, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday demanded a timeline for the exercise.

He urged the Centre to remove the 50% cap on reservations and ensure quotas in private educational institutions under Article 15 (5) of the Constitution.

Mr. Gandhi asserted that the Congress's pressure on the government worked, but was quick to add that caste count should not be like the women's reservation law without a specific timeline.

"This was our model, I am glad they have adopted it but what we want is that we are given the dates by when this will be done and there should be budgetary provision for this," Mr. Gandhi said at a press conference here.



Rahul Gandhi

ference here.

He said the Centre should follow the Telangana census model and offered help to the Centre to design a similar model. "In Telangana, the questions have been developed by a process of consultation, not a closed but an open process. We want like the national census to follow some of the ideas and we would be more than happy to help the government develop the national census on similar lines," he said.

Mr. Gandhi, who has been demanding a caste

count for the past two years, claimed that the 50% cap on reservations was "becoming an impediment to the progress of backward castes, Dalits and Adivasis and it needs to be demolished". Calling the caste census as a new paradigm of development, he said, "We want to go beyond the caste census and understand what is the participation of 90% of our population in the power structure of country. And we want to give them access to power".

On Pahalgalam attack

Mr. Gandhi also used the briefing to address Prime Minister Narendra Modi directly, and said those involved in the Pahalgalam terror attack must pay a price.

"Whoever they are, wherever they are, they have to pay for it and they have to pay for it properly, not in some half-hearted way," he said.

The constitutional framework allows for affirmative action for SCs, STs, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under Articles 15(4), 16(4), and 340. However, in the absence of accurate caste data, policies for OBCs have largely relied on outdated projections. Inclusion in the Census, which is governed by the Union under Entry 69 of the Seventh Schedule, would lend legitimacy and structure to affirmative action by grounding it in updated demographic realities. This contrasts with the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which was not conducted under the Census Act and produced an unmanageable volume of unverified caste data due to open-ended reporting.

Socially, caste enumeration may enable more equitable policy design and resource distribution, especially in education, employment, and welfare schemes. It could also bring to light intra-caste disparities and neglected communities. However, concerns exist about deepening caste consciousness and political mobilization around caste identities. A transparent and scientifically managed enumeration process is therefore essential to ensure data accuracy and prevent social fragmentation.

Belated decision, says Left on caste in next Census

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Welcoming the government's decision to include a caste Census as part of the general population Census, the Left parties said it is a belated response and the government has not yet laid down any timeline on its implementation.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, CPI(M) general secretary M.A. Baby said: "This is a belated response to the unanimous demand of the Opposition including the CPI(M). Caste socio-economic survey is essential to ensure social justice in government policies."

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the announcement was a result of consistent pressure by Opposition parties. "This announcement by the Union Government is clearly a face-saving measure in response to growing public demand and sustained political pressure," he said. He pointed out that the Census was originally scheduled for 2021. "Despite four years having passed, there is no clarity or commitment from the government, leading to policy decisions based on outdated and incomplete data. The Union Government must immediately declare a definitive timeline for the Census," he added.

CPI(ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya underlined the backpedalling by the government. He said, "It is ridiculous for the Modi government to term the State-level surveys politically motivated while belatedly announcing an all-India one. Instead of targeting States which have conducted caste surveys, the Modi government must take immediate steps to ensure implementation of the 65% reservation policy adopted by the Bihar Assembly."

Administratively, a caste Census would improve the precision of targeting welfare schemes, redress regional disparities, and inform the debate on reservation limits. It may also assist in rationalizing the existing Central and State OBC lists, which currently have inconsistencies and overlaps.

In essence, caste enumeration is a step toward democratizing data, empowering marginalized communities, and enhancing the inclusiveness of governance. If executed with transparency, it has the potential to reshape India's developmental priorities and social justice framework.

Topic : Digital Access as a Fundamental Right

Relevance : GS Paper 2 Polity and Governance

Source : The Hindu

Context :

The recent Supreme Court judgment recognizing **digital access as part of the fundamental right to life and liberty** is a landmark step in affirming the inclusive nature of constitutional rights in the digital age. The judgment, delivered by a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, responded to petitions highlighting the **inaccessibility of digital Know Your Customer (KYC) processes** for persons with disabilities (PwDs), particularly **acid attack survivors and visually challenged individuals**. The Court held that in an era of growing digital dependence for essential services and welfare delivery, exclusionary digital design violates the principles of constitutional justice.

Digital Access as a Fundamental Right

The Court observed that **inclusive and meaningful digital access** is not a luxury but an **intrinsic part of the fundamental rights under Article 21**, which guarantees the **right to life and personal liberty**. It held that inaccessibility to digital platforms—be it for banking, welfare schemes, identification processes, or other government services—disenfranchises and marginalizes citizens, especially vulnerable groups such as the disabled, rural poor, and historically excluded communities.

The Court emphasized the '**principle of substantive equality**', which demands not just formal but effective and equitable access to opportunities and services. A digital divide in access to e-governance, the Court said, undermines constitutional values of **equality, dignity, and non-discrimination**.

Article 21: Right to Life and Liberty

Article 21 of the Constitution states:

"No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."

Digital access a part of fundamental right to life and liberty: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Inclusive and meaningful digital access to e-governance and welfare delivery systems is a part of the fundamental right to life and liberty, the Supreme Court held in a judgment on Wednesday.

A Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan, hearing a petition on how people with disability find it nearly impossible to complete the digital Know Your Customer (KYC) process, said that the state has an obligation to provide an inclusive digital ecosystem to the marginalised, underprivileged, vulnerable, disabled, and historically excluded sections of society. Amidst the "wave of digital progress" in India a crucial

Top court says access to digital welfare systems should be inclusive to all sections of society

aspect often overlooked is whether this technology is truly inclusive, the court said.

"The right to digital access emerges as an instinctive component of the right to life and liberty, necessitating the state to proactively design and implement inclusive digital ecosystems to serve not only the privileged, but also the marginalised," said Justice Mahadevan, who authored the judgment.

CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 10**

Over time, this article has been **expansively interpreted** by the judiciary to include a range of rights essential for a dignified life, such as the right to privacy, health, shelter, education, environment, and now **digital access**. This evolution reflects the **living nature of the Constitution**, adapting to contemporary needs and challenges.

The judgment builds upon earlier Supreme Court rulings, such as the **Puttaswamy judgment (2017)** on privacy and the **Maneka Gandhi case (1978)**, which laid the foundation for a broader interpretation of liberty. It reinforces that **liberty in the 21st century cannot be detached from access to digital platforms**, as many critical services now rely on them.

Significance of the Judgment

1. **Social Inclusion:** It acknowledges that without inclusive digital ecosystems, the state excludes large sections of the population from benefits of governance.
2. **Accountability:** It directs the state to **proactively design accessible digital platforms** using universal design principles, assistive technologies, and regional language content.
3. **Administrative Reform:** The Court issued 20 directions to improve KYC procedures to make them accessible to persons with disabilities, setting a precedent for further reforms in digital service delivery.
4. **Legal Precedent:** The judgment extends **the ambit of Article 21** to the digital domain, setting the stage for future rights-based digital policies.

This judgment is a **progressive recognition** of the evolving nature of constitutional rights. It emphasizes that digital access is **not a privilege of the tech-savvy** but a **constitutional guarantee** that ensures **equity, dignity, and participation** for all. It places a constitutional obligation on the state to bridge the digital divide, aligning technological progress with social justice and democratic inclusiveness.

Digital access a part of fundamental right: SC

The Bench also issued 20 directions to the government to improve the KYC processes, to make them more accessible.

Inaccessible KYC processes

The judgment was based on a petition filed by a group of acid attack survivors led by Pragya Prasad and others, and a separate plea by Amar Jain, who is visually challenged. They raised concerns about how disabled people, including acid attack victims, find it nearly impossible to successfully complete the digital KYC processes, which include visual tasks.

The top court said that the unfriendly digital atmosphere has managed to further cripple these sections of the population rather than returning them to mainstream society.

Inclusivity and equity needed

Invoking the 'principle of substantive equality', the Supreme Court held that digital transformation must be both inclusive and equitable. "PwD encounter unique barriers in accessing online services due to a lack of accessible websites, applications and assisted technology," the judgment said. Similarly, rural Indians face poor connectivity, and scarce content in regional languages, which effectively deny them meaningful access to e-governance and welfare measures.

Prelims Practice Question:

With reference to the recent Supreme Court judgment on digital access, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court declared digital access as a part of the fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
2. The judgment emphasizes the principle of substantive equality in the context of digital governance.
3. The case was primarily concerned with difficulties faced by persons with disabilities in completing the digital KYC process.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Answer: B. 2 and 3 only

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is incorrect: The Court declared digital access as part of the **fundamental right to life and liberty under Article 21**, not under Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression).
- Statements 2 and 3 are correct: The judgment emphasized **substantive equality** and addressed the **inaccessibility of digital KYC processes for persons with disabilities**, making digital inclusion a constitutional necessity.

Mains Model Question:

Q. In light of the recent Supreme Court judgment declaring digital access as part of the fundamental right to life and liberty, discuss the constitutional and socio-economic significance of inclusive digital governance in India.

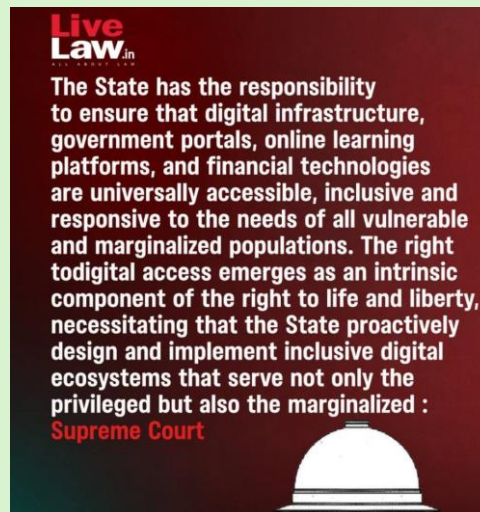
The Supreme Court's recent judgment affirming digital access as an integral part of the right to life and liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution is a landmark step towards inclusive governance in India. In a case concerning the inability of disabled individuals to complete mandatory digital KYC processes, the Court observed that a digitally advancing India must not exclude its most vulnerable citizens. The judgment underscores the evolving nature of fundamental rights in the digital age and reiterates the State's constitutional duty to create inclusive digital systems.

The right to life and liberty, as interpreted by the judiciary, extends beyond mere physical survival to encompass dignity, autonomy, and equal opportunity. In this context, digital access becomes a prerequisite for participation in welfare schemes, e-governance portals, and essential services. Without accessible platforms, marginalized communities—especially persons with disabilities (PwDs), rural populations, and linguistic minorities—face systemic exclusion.

The Court's invocation of the principle of substantive equality highlights that formal equality is insufficient when digital systems are inherently exclusionary. Socio-economic equity in the digital space demands affirmative measures such as regional language interfaces, assistive technologies, and improved connectivity in underserved areas. The judgment also exposes the disproportionate burden faced by PwDs due to non-inclusive platforms, thus emphasizing the need for universal design in digital infrastructure.

By issuing 20 directives to enhance accessibility, the Court not only reaffirmed Article 21 but also linked it with Article 14 (equality before law) and Article 41 (right to public assistance in case of disablement). This holistic interpretation aligns with India's obligations under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Thus, the judgment is a crucial step towards building a digital ecosystem rooted in dignity, inclusion, and constitutional morality.



Topic : Tourism in Jammu & Kashmir: A Catalyst for Development

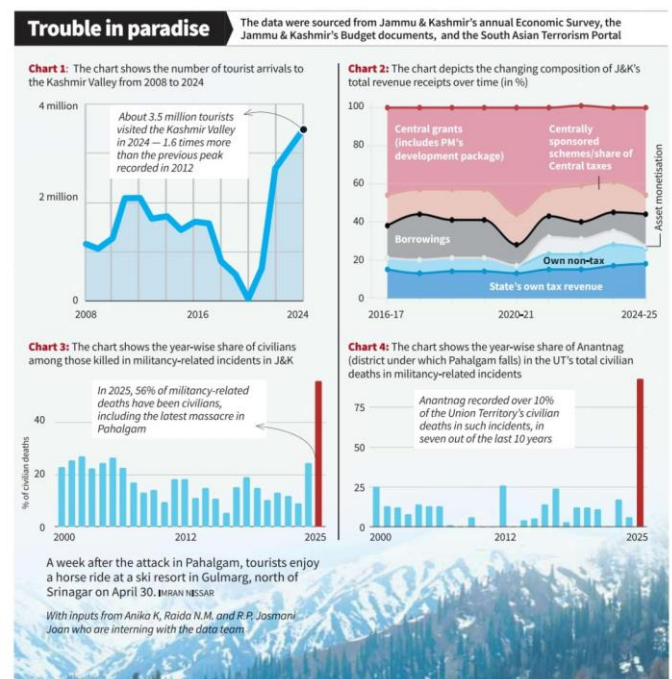
Relevance : GS Paper 2 Economy and Growth

Source : Indian Express

Context :

Jammu and Kashmir's economy is significantly dependent on tourism, which serves as a key livelihood source for a large portion of the population. The region's natural beauty, snow-capped mountains, valleys, shrines, and adventure activities like trekking and skiing attract tourists from across India and the world.

- In 2024, the Valley saw a record **3.5 million tourists**, 1.6 times higher than the previous peak in 2012.
- Tourism contributed significantly to employment, especially in districts like Anantnag, Baramulla, and Srinagar.



- The rise in tourist footfall led to improvements in the UT's **own revenue generation**, with 18% coming from state taxes and 8% from non-tax sources.

Security Challenges and Their Economic Impact

Despite this growth, the Pahalgam attack in 2025 severely disrupted the fragile tourism-dependent economy. With **over 80% of bookings cancelled**, the incident is expected to affect employment, hospitality businesses, and state revenues.

- Civilian deaths now account for **56% of all militancy-related fatalities in 2025**, indicating targeted violence.
- Anantnag has consistently ranked among the **most affected districts**, highlighting security volatility in tourist hotspots.
- Such events diminish confidence among visitors and investors, impacting long-term economic planning.

Indian Tourism: Scope, Policy, and Economic Role

Tourism is a major pillar of India's services sector, contributing around **5% to the national GDP** and supporting approximately **8% of total employment**. India's diversity—spanning heritage, spirituality, medical tourism, and ecology—offers immense potential.

Key initiatives and policies include:

- Swadesh Darshan Scheme:** Promotes theme-based tourism circuits.
- PRASHAD Scheme:** Enhances infrastructure at spiritual destinations.
- Dekho Apna Desh:** Boosts domestic tourism and regional pride.
- E-Tourist Visa and Incredible India 2.0 Campaign:** Focus on international outreach and ease of access.

Tourism's Role in Regional Development and National Integration

Tourism not only generates revenue but also fosters **regional development**, promotes **cultural understanding**, and serves as a tool for **national integration**—especially in conflict-prone or border regions like J&K and the Northeast.

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The targeted killings of tourists in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir took place at a time when the region was witnessing a tourism boom. The number of visitors was at a 15-year high and the Union Territory (UT)'s own revenue generation had started showing signs of improvement. The home States of the victims reflected the diversity of tourists that the Valley had begun attracting. Now, with several key destinations in Kashmir deemed unsafe by the government, over 80% of upcoming bookings have been cancelled. Amid escalating tensions at the border, the tourism sector is bracing itself for a bleak year.

Though attacks on tourists are rare, civilians in the Valley have increasingly become targets in recent years. In 2024, the share of civilians in militancy-related deaths in J&K was the highest in nearly two decades. If the latest killings are included, this year marks the highest share of civilians killed (data till April 30). Notably, when districts are ranked according to civilian deaths, Anantnag – home to Pahalgam, the site of the latest attack – ranks among the worst-affected in many years.

Chart 1 shows the number of tourist arrivals to the Valley. The number of tourists began rising in 2010 and continued to grow until 2012. When juxtaposed with data on terrorism incidents, the trend aligns with the period between 2011 and 2015 – years marked by fewer terrorism-related incidents in the Valley. Thereafter, tourist numbers gradually declined. They crashed in 2018 and 2019 before coming to a standstill in the following years due to the pandemic. However, the number of tourists surged again in 2023 and 2024. In fact, 3.5 million tourists visited the

Kashmir Valley in 2024 – 1.6 times more than the previous peak recorded in 2012.

It was not just tourism that recovered. The UT's ability to raise its own tax and non-tax revenue also improved in recent years. **Chart 2** depicts the changing composition of J&K's total receipts over time.

In 2024-25, over 46% of the UT's revenue was budgeted to come from Central grants and another 10% from centrally sponsored schemes, underscoring the UT's heavy dependence on the Centre. Borrowings were expected to account for an additional 17% of the UT's revenue.

Only 8% of the total revenue came from non-tax sources; 18% was from the State's own taxes. As a trend, this was a notable improvement – the 8% from non-tax revenue was strong compared to many previous years and the 18% from State taxes was the highest in over a decade. In the wake of the recent attack, not just the tourism industry, but also the UT's ability to generate own revenues will likely suffer in the foreseeable future.

Chart 3 shows the year-wise share of civilians among those killed in militancy-related incidents in J&K between 2000 and 2025 (up to April 30). In 2024, civilians accounted for 24% of such deaths – the highest proportion since 2005. In 2024, civilians were deliberately targeted by terrorists. Notably, in 2023 and 2024, there was a rise in targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits and other minorities in the Valley. In 2025, an overwhelming 56% of militancy-related deaths, including victims of the latest attack, have been civilians.

Chart 4 shows the year-wise share of Anantnag in the UT's total civilian deaths in militancy-related incidents. Anantnag recorded over 10% of the UT's civilian deaths in such incidents, in seven out of the last 10 years. Baramulla, Kulgam, Pulwama, Shopian, and Srinagar have also been consistently hotspots for civilian deaths in the past.

- Investment in tourism infrastructure stimulates **local economies**, crafts, transport, and services.
- Promoting tourism in sensitive areas like J&K helps shift narratives from conflict to **peace and progress**.
- Sustainable and inclusive tourism ensures **long-term benefits without ecological damage**.

Tourism in Jammu & Kashmir is more than just an economic activity—it's a symbol of normalcy, resilience, and regional aspiration. While recent security setbacks have dealt a blow to progress, long-term recovery will depend on **holistic security measures**, **inclusive tourism policies**, and **stable governance**. At the national level, tourism continues to be a transformative force capable of reshaping India's growth story and showcasing its global cultural leadership.

Prelims Practice Question:

Q. With reference to the tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir and Indian tourism policy, consider the following statements:

1. Jammu and Kashmir's tourism industry contributes more than 50% to the UT's total revenue.
2. The PRASHAD scheme aims to develop pilgrimage destinations across India through infrastructure development.
3. The Swadesh Darshan scheme focuses on theme-based tourist circuits such as Buddhist, Desert, and Himalayan circuits.
4. In 2024, Jammu and Kashmir recorded the highest tourist footfall in the last 15 years.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1, 2 and 3
- B. 2, 3 and 4
- C. 1 and 4 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4

Answer: B. 2, 3 and 4

Explanation:

- Statement 1 is **incorrect**: While tourism is a major contributor to the UT's economy, the total revenue includes a large share from central grants. Only about 18% comes from state taxes.
- Statement 2 is **correct**: PRASHAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Heritage Augmentation Drive) focuses on developing pilgrimage destinations.
- Statement 3 is **correct**: Swadesh Darshan is a centrally sponsored scheme promoting theme-based tourism circuits.
- Statement 4 is **correct**: In 2024, J&K saw a record 3.5 million tourists—the highest in 15 years.

Mains Model Question:

Q. “Tourism plays a crucial role in the economic and social development of Jammu and Kashmir. Discuss the challenges faced by the tourism sector in the region and evaluate the role of Indian tourism policies in promoting sustainable and inclusive growth.”

Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir is not only a cultural and natural attraction but also an economic lifeline for the region. It generates employment, boosts revenue, and fosters socio-economic development. The Valley’s scenic beauty, spiritual heritage, adventure tourism, and cultural richness have historically drawn millions of domestic and international visitors. In 2024 alone, Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a record-breaking tourist footfall of 3.5 million, reflecting a resurgence post-pandemic and post-security disruptions.

However, the recent targeted attacks on tourists in Pahalgam have cast a shadow over this progress. Civilian casualties in militancy-related incidents have surged, with 2025 witnessing over 56% of such deaths among civilians, the highest share in two decades. These incidents severely undermine tourist confidence, leading to massive booking cancellations and directly impacting local livelihoods and state revenue. The tourism sector’s vulnerability to security concerns and geopolitical instability remains a persistent challenge.

Despite these issues, Indian tourism policies such as the PRASHAD scheme for pilgrimage tourism and Swadesh Darshan for thematic circuits have aimed to diversify and strengthen the sector. The National Tourism Policy also emphasizes sustainability, infrastructure development, skill building, and digital integration. However, the implementation in conflict-prone regions like J&K demands nuanced, security-sensitive strategies. Infrastructural gaps, connectivity issues, and lack of inclusive community participation remain bottlenecks.

To achieve resilient and inclusive growth, tourism in Jammu and Kashmir must be reimagined through a multi-pronged approach involving security assurance, investment in infrastructure, regional circuit development, and active local stakeholder involvement. Tourism, if harnessed correctly with sensitivity to the region’s socio-political context, can act as a catalyst for peace-building, economic revival, and national integration. Therefore, tourism policy must be seen not just as an economic tool but as a strategic and transformative force in Jammu and Kashmir’s development.