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Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project

Syllabus: GS-1: Indian geography – Water Resource.

Context:

The **Tapti Basin Mega Recharge Project** represents a significant step in inter-state water cooperation between **Madhya Pradesh (MP)** and **Maharashtra**, aiming to enhance **water security, irrigation, and drinking water supply** in the region.

Key Highlights of the Project

➤ **Objective:**

- Divert water from the **Tapti River** to:
 - Provide **drinking water to Nagpur (Maharashtra)**.
 - Support **irrigation in southern/southeastern MP (Burhanpur, Khandwa)**.

➤ **Water Allocation:**

- **Total Utilisation: 31.13 TMC** (Thousand Million Cubic feet).
 - **Maharashtra: 19.36 TMC**.
 - **Madhya Pradesh: 11.76 TMC**.

➤ **Benefits:**

- **Irrigation Coverage: 5.78 lakh acres** (1,23,082 ha in MP; 2,34,706 ha in Maharashtra).
- **Drinking Water:** Critical supply for Nagpur and nearby regions.
- **No Displacement:** Uses **3,362 hectares** in MP without village displacement.

➤ **Funding & Cost:**

- **Estimated Cost: ₹19,244 crores**.
- **Central Support:** Expected to fund **90%** of the project.

➤ **Historical Context:**

- **Third major inter-state water project** by MP after:
 1. **Ken-Betwa Link** (with Uttar Pradesh).
 2. **Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal** (with Rajasthan).

- Originally proposed in the **1990s**, now revived.
- **Governance & Next Steps:**
 - **MoU Signed** during the **MP-Maharashtra Inter-State Control Board** meeting in **Bhopal**.
 - Next meeting scheduled for **October 2023** to discuss implementation.

Significance

- **Largest Recharge Scheme:** Touted as the "**world's largest recharge project**".
- **Sustainable Development:** Promotes **collaborative water management** amid growing scarcity.
- **Economic & Agricultural Boost:** Expected to improve **farm productivity** and **water availability** in drought-prone areas.

Challenges & Considerations

- **Implementation Timeline:** Delays possible due to inter-state coordination.
- **Environmental Impact:** Proper assessment needed for river basin health.
- **Funding Clarity:** Awaiting final confirmation of Central government's 90% support.

Conclusion

The project marks a **major milestone** in India's inter-state water-sharing efforts, aligning with long-term **water security** and **agricultural growth**. If executed efficiently, it could serve as a model for future collaborations.

South Asia Press Freedom Report 2024-25

Syllabus: GS-2: Freedom of Press.

Context:

The **23rd Annual South Asia Press Freedom Report 2024-25**, titled "*Frontline Democracy: Media and Political Churn*", highlights a concerning decline in press freedom across South Asia, with **India** being a significant part of this trend.

Key Findings from the Report:

- **Widespread Media Rights Violations:**

- Over 250 **violations** recorded, including 69 journalists **jailed/detained** and 20 killed in the line of duty.
- **India ranked 151st** in global press freedom, while **Bhutan fell to 152nd**, its lowest ever.
- **Pakistan** experienced its **most violent year for journalists in two decades**.

➤ **Major Threats to Press Freedom:**

- **Legal Suppression:** Use of **UAPA, PMLA, sedition, and defamation laws** to silence critical journalists.
 - Example: **Income Tax and ED raids** on dissenting media outlets.
- **Disinformation & AI Risks:**
 - Political "IT Cells" amplify **hate speech and fake news**, eroding public trust.
 - **AI-generated content** threatens journalistic authenticity.
- **Crackdown on Independent Media:**
 - **Government ad denials**, digital media restrictions, and **internet shutdowns**.
- **Gender Inequality in Media:**
 - **Low representation of women** in leadership; widespread **gender-based harassment**.

➤ **Consequences of Declining Press Freedom:**

- **Self-Censorship:** Fear of legal action forces media to avoid critical reporting.
- **Democratic Erosion:** Weakens accountability, transparency, and public trust.
- **Shrinking Information Access:** Laws like **DPDP Act 2023** and diluted **RTI provisions** block legitimate public queries.

Way Forward:

- **Media Law Reforms:** Pass the **Media Transparency Bill 2024** to curb monopolies and politicized ad distribution.
- **Independent Media Ombudsman:** To review censorship complaints and ensure fair editorial standards.

- **Protect Journalists:** Enact **labour protections** for gig journalists and provide **legal aid/safety mechanisms**.
- **Fact-Checking Infrastructure:** Strengthen independent bodies to counter **election-related disinformation**.
- **Digital Pluralism:** Support **independent and community media** to counter corporate/political dominance.

Conclusion:

Press freedom in **South Asia** is under acute strain, with **India facing severe challenges** due to **state control, legal harassment, and disinformation**. To safeguard democracy, **urgent reforms** are needed to protect journalists, ensure transparency, and uphold citizens' **right to information**. A **free press** remains the **bedrock of participatory governance**.

Extended Fund Facility

Syllabus: GS-3: Economy – terms.

Context:

The IMF's approval of a \$1 billion loan to Pakistan under its **Extended Fund Facility (EFF)** highlights both the country's ongoing economic struggles and its recent efforts to implement reforms. Here's a breakdown of the key aspects and implications:

Why Pakistan Needs the IMF Loan

- **Economic Struggles:** Pakistan has faced **stagnant GDP growth** (\$338 billion in 2023, lower than in 2017), **high inflation** (peaking at 29.1% in 2023), and **chronic fiscal deficits**.
- **Structural Weaknesses:** Issues like **low savings, poor infrastructure, rapid population growth, and excessive borrowing** have led to repeated balance-of-payments crises.
- **Dependence on External Funding:** Pakistan has sought **24 IMF bailouts since 1958**, reflecting its inability to achieve self-sustaining growth.

IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) – Key Features

- Designed for countries with **medium-term structural economic problems**.

- Provides **longer repayment periods** (compared to standard IMF loans) to allow for deep reforms.
- **Conditionalities** require policy changes (e.g., tax reforms, subsidy cuts, privatization).

Why Did the IMF Approve This Tranche?

- **Progress on Reforms:**
 - **Inflation control** (dropped to **0.3% in April 2025**).
 - **Increased forex reserves** and reduced borrowing.
 - **Tax reforms**, including the **Agricultural Income Tax**, to broaden the revenue base.
- **Commitment to Austerity:** Pakistan has implemented **energy price hikes, subsidy cuts, and fiscal tightening** to meet IMF conditions.

Concerns & Criticisms

- **Risk of Misuse:** India and other critics argue Pakistan has historically diverted IMF funds to **military spending or debt servicing** rather than structural reforms.
- **Debt Sustainability:** Pakistan's **public debt is over 75% of GDP**, raising questions about repayment capacity.
- **Reform Fatigue:** Past IMF programs saw Pakistan **reverse reforms** after initial compliance, leading to recurring crises.

What's Next for Pakistan?

- **Continued Reforms Needed:**
 - **Tax system overhaul** (reducing evasion, expanding the tax base).
 - **Privatization of loss-making state enterprises** (e.g., PIA, power sector).
 - **Investment in infrastructure & human capital** to boost productivity.
- **Geopolitical Factors:** Relations with China (CPEC debt) and the Gulf states (financial support) will influence economic stability.
- **Political Stability:** Unrest over austerity measures (e.g., fuel price hikes) could derail reforms.

Conclusion

While the IMF loan provides **short-term relief**, Pakistan's long-term stability depends on **sustained structural reforms** and reducing reliance on debt. If reforms stall, the country risks **another debt crisis** in the near future. The success of the EFF hinges on **political will and effective implementation**—something Pakistan has struggled with in the past.

United Nations Forum on Forests

Syllabus: GS-3: Forests and Organisations.

Context:

- India actively participated in United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF20) held at UN Headquarters, New York, presenting achievements in sustainable forest management.

About UNFF

- **Established:** 2000 by **ECOSOC Resolution 2000/35**
- **Headquarters:** New York, USA (UN HQ)
- **Purpose:** Global platform for **sustainable forest management (SFM)** policy coordination.
- **Key Goals:**
 - Promote conservation & sustainable development of forests.
 - Implement **UN Strategic Plan for Forests 2017–2030**.
 - Combat deforestation through international cooperation.
- **Sessions:**
 - **Odd years:** Technical reviews.
 - **Even years:** Policy decisions.

India's Highlights at UNFF20

- **Progress in Forest Cover:**
 - **25.17%** of India's land now under forest/tree cover.
 - **7.86% increase** in mangrove cover (last decade).
- **Key Initiatives:**

- **Aravalli Green Wall Project:** Ecological restoration.
- **Green India Mission:** 1.55 lakh hectares afforested.
- **Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam:** 1.4 billion seedlings planted.

➤ **Global Advocacy:**

- Promoted **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA)**.
- Pushed for **Dehradun CLI (2023)** outcomes on forest fires & certification.

Significance

India showcased leadership in **SFM**, aligning with global goals while emphasizing **community participation** and **biodiversity conservation**.

Plastic Pollution Crisis in the Himalayas

Syllabus: GS-3: Plastic Pollution.

Context:

The Himalayan Cleanup (THC) 2024 report highlights a severe plastic pollution crisis in the Indian Himalayas, driven primarily by single-use food and beverage packaging.

Key Findings:

➤ **Dominance of Single-Use Plastics (SUPs):**

- Over **80%** of plastic waste comes from food and beverage packaging.
- Top polluting brands include **Wai Wai, Maggi (instant noodles), Sting, Mountain Dew (energy drinks), and Lays, Bingo (snacks)**.

➤ **Non-Recyclable Waste Crisis:**

- **71%** of collected plastic waste is **non-recyclable**, including **multi-layered plastics (MLPs)**.
- MLPs alone account for **68.5%** of the waste, with no viable recycling market.

➤ **Health & Environmental Risks:**

- Toxic chemicals from plastics contaminate fragile Himalayan ecosystems.
- Children are particularly vulnerable due to littering near schools.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Ban Multi-Layered Plastics (MLPs):**
 - MLPs are non-recyclable and should be phased out immediately.
- **Enforce Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):**
 - Brands must take accountability for post-consumer waste.
- **Protect Children from Junk Food Pollution:**
 - Ban sale of energy drinks and junk food near schools to reduce littering.
- **Mandatory Warning Labels:**
 - Front-of-pack labels should highlight environmental and health risks.
- **Shift from Recycling to Sustainable Design:**
 - Adopt a "**design-out-waste**" approach to eliminate non-recyclable packaging.
- **Empower Local Waste Management:**
 - Strengthen rural/municipal bodies with training and infrastructure.

Urgent Need for Action:

The report calls for **stricter regulations, corporate accountability, and sustainable alternatives** to combat the Himalayan plastic crisis. Without intervention, non-recyclable waste will continue to threaten biodiversity, water sources, and local communities.