



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 07-12-2024

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1. Erasmus Prize 2024

GS-2

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GS-3

3. Windfall Gains Tax
4. UPI Lite
5. Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary

Erasmus Prize 2024

Syllabus: GS-1: Indian History and Essay perspectives.

Context:

- **Amitav Ghosh**, celebrated for his literary exploration of the 'east,' is known for dismantling stereotypes about the region.
- Acknowledged globally for his poignant narratives on topics like climate change, migration, colonialism, and cultural intersections.
- Awarded the **Erasmus Prize (2024)** for his contribution to the theme “imagining the unthinkable”, addressing climate change and its cultural dimensions.

Key Themes in Ghosh's Works

- **Climate Change**
 - Views climate change as both an environmental and cultural crisis.
 - Highlights the human dimensions of ecological collapse through storytelling.
- **Migration**
 - Explores how migration is influenced by environmental and socio-political factors.
- **Colonialism and Trade**
 - Critiques the exploitative impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures and natural resources.
- **Human Rights and Conservation**
 - Balances the complexities of conservation with the struggles of marginalized communities.
- **Polyphonic Narratives**
 - Employs multiple perspectives to reflect the diversity of his settings and themes.

Notable Works

The Hungry Tide

- **Setting:** Sunderbans' tidal landscapes at the confluence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna.
- **Themes:**
 - Rising sea levels and climate change.
 - Conservation vs. human rights, focusing on the refugees of **Morichjhāpi**.

➤ **Characters:**

- Piya, a marine biologist studying river dolphins.
- Kanai, a translator grappling with the region's complexities.

Gun Island

➤ **Published:** 2019.

➤ **Plot:** Chronicles the quest of Deen Datta, a rare book dealer, to uncover the Bengali legend of the 'gun merchant.'

➤ **Themes:**

- Ecological collapse as a driver of migration.
- Intersection of folklore and climate change.

Jungle Nama

➤ **Form:** Novella-in-verse.

➤ **Theme:** Uses folklore and myth to address environmental concerns and cultural narratives.

The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis

➤ **Published:** 2021.

➤ **Focus:** Follows the journey of nutmeg from the Banda Islands to highlight:

- Colonial exploitation.
- Environmental and cultural transformations due to trade.

The Ibis Trilogy

➤ **Books:**

- Sea of Poppies (2008)
- River of Smoke (2011)
- Flood of Fire (2015)

➤ **Setting:** 1830s, during the First Opium War across India, China, and the Indian Ocean.

➤ **Themes:**

- Opium trade's socio-economic and political impact.
- Human stories of war, displacement, and ambition.

➤ **Key Symbol:** The ship "Ibis" links characters and events.

Smoke and Ashes: A Writer's Journey Through Opium's Hidden Histories

- **Published:** 2023.
- **Focus:** Explores opium's colonial history and its legacy in shaping modern corporate practices.

Recognition and Legacy

- Renowned for blending historical accuracy with compelling narratives.
- Ghosh's works serve as mirrors to global crises, urging readers to reflect and act.
- His ability to make an uncertain future palpable through stories ensures his legacy as a **sutradhar (storyteller) of the east**.

Anna Chakra

Syllabus: GS-2; Government policies and Interventions

Context

- Recently, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi unveiled 'Anna Chakra', a groundbreaking supply chain optimization tool for the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Overview of the Initiatives

- The Government of India launched **Anna Chakra** and **SCAN portal** to modernize the Public Distribution System (PDS) and streamline subsidy claims under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).
- These initiatives aim to enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs, and ensure timely delivery of essential commodities to beneficiaries.

Anna Chakra: Supply Chain Optimization Tool

- **Development:** Created by the Department of Food and Public Distribution in collaboration with:
 - **World Food Programme (WFP)**
 - **Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT), IIT Delhi**
- **Purpose:** Streamlines the movement of food grains across the supply chain using advanced algorithms.
- **Benefits:**

- Reduces **fuel consumption** and **transportation costs**.
- Lowers **carbon emissions**, contributing to environmental sustainability.
- Enhances the logistics network serving **810 million beneficiaries** under the food security program.
- **Route Optimization:**
 - Implemented across **30 states**.
 - Projected to save ₹250 crore annually through optimized logistics routes.
 - Reduces the key metric of **quantity in quintal multiplied by distance (QKM)** by 580 million units annually.

Integration with Logistics Platforms

- The interstate route optimization tool integrates with:
 - **Railways' Freight Operations Information System (FOIS)**
 - **PM Gati Shakti platform**
 - Unified Logistics Interface Platform, ensuring seamless movement of food grains between states.

SCAN Portal: Streamlining Subsidy Claims

- **Functionality:**
 - Centralized platform for states to submit subsidy claims.
 - Automates review, approval, and settlement processes for food subsidies.
- **Impact:**
 - Ensures faster release of subsidies.
 - Reduces manual errors and enhances transparency.

Schemes Under PDS

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):**
 - Provides **5kg of wheat or rice per person per month** for free.
 - Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020) and extended for another five years starting January 2024.
- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):**
 - Households receive **35kg of grains per month** irrespective of family size.
 - Pricing:
 - ₹3/kg for rice.
 - ₹2/kg for wheat.

Key Impacts

- **Financial Savings:** ₹250 crore annually.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Streamlined supply chain and faster subsidy processing.
- **Environmental Contribution:** Significant reduction in carbon footprint due to optimized logistics.

Windfall Gains Tax

Syllabus: GS-3; Economy

Context

- Recently, The government withdrew the windfall gains tax on domestic production of crude oil and export of **diesel, petrol, and aviation turbine fuel (ATF)**, scrapping the levy that was introduced 30 months ago amid a surge in the prices of crude oil and key fuels in the international market in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Definition

- A **Windfall Gains Tax** is a one-time tax imposed on companies or individuals that earn unexpected or extraordinary profits, often due to favorable external circumstances like market disruptions, regulatory changes, or geopolitical events.

Key Features

- **Objective:**
To capture a portion of unanticipated and excessive profits and redistribute wealth, reduce fiscal deficits, or address economic inequality.
- **Scope of Application:** Typically applied to industries such as:
 - Energy (e.g., oil and gas companies during periods of high global energy prices)
 - Mining
 - Financial institutions during economic booms
- **Rationale:**
Governments justify windfall taxes on the grounds of fairness, especially when the extraordinary profits arise from factors beyond the control or effort of the company, like:
 - War-induced price surges

- Supply-chain disruptions
- Favorable regulatory changes
- **Nature:**
This tax is often:
 - Temporary in nature
 - Targeted towards specific sectors

Examples

- **Global Instances:**
 - **UK (2022):** The UK introduced a windfall tax on energy companies to fund social welfare programs after these companies profited from a surge in oil and gas prices during the Russia-Ukraine war.
 - **USA (1980s):** The U.S. imposed a windfall profit tax on oil companies after the 1979 energy crisis.
- **India's Context:** In 2022, India imposed a windfall tax on crude oil producers, as rising global crude prices led to significant profits for domestic oil companies. The revenues were used to stabilize domestic fuel prices and reduce fiscal pressure.

Advantages

- **Revenue Generation:** Provides a short-term boost to government revenues without increasing the general tax burden on citizens.
- **Redistribution of Wealth:** Ensures equitable distribution of profits arising from unforeseen circumstances.
- **Economic Stabilization:** Helps mitigate inflationary pressures caused by high profits in specific sectors (e.g., oil).

Criticisms

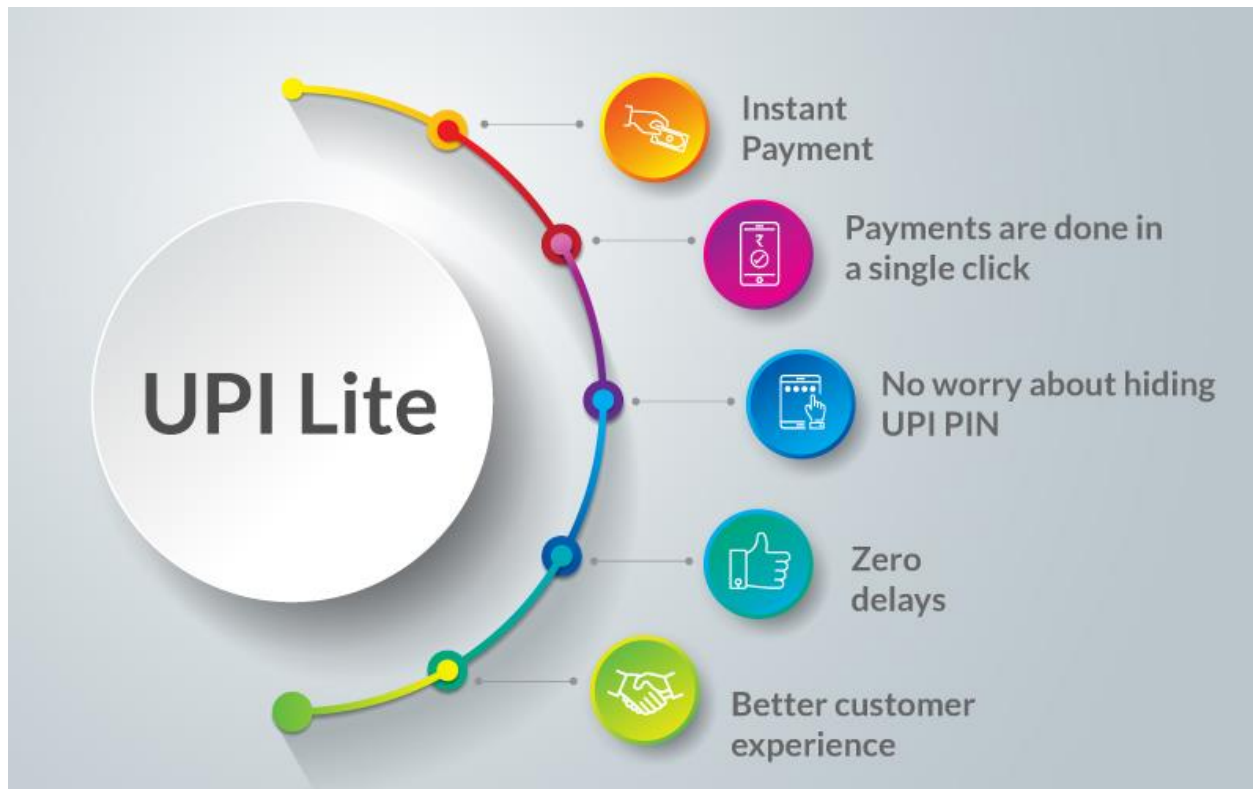
- **Unpredictability:** Sudden imposition of taxes can discourage investments and create uncertainty for businesses.
- **Sectoral Impact:** May disproportionately affect specific industries, reducing their competitiveness.
- **Legal Challenges:** Companies often challenge such taxes, claiming they are arbitrary or excessive.

UPI Lite

Syllabus: GS-3; Digital Currency

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has increased the transaction limit for offline digital payments through UPI Lite.



About

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) Lite is a simplified and faster digital payment method introduced by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- It aims to enhance the user experience by enabling quicker, small-value transactions without the need for entering a UPI PIN for every transaction.

Key Features of UPI Lite:

- **Offline Transactions:**
 - Transactions can be conducted without internet connectivity, offering convenience in areas with poor network coverage.
 - Only debit transactions are supported offline; credit transactions require internet access.

- **Small-Value Transactions:**
 - UPI Lite is designed for low-value payments, typically capped at ₹200 per transaction.
 - The maximum wallet balance is limited to ₹2,000 at any given time.
- **No UPI PIN Required:**
 - Users do not need to enter their UPI PIN for each transaction, reducing the processing time and enhancing convenience.
- **Seamless Integration:**
 - Integrated within existing UPI apps like Paytm, PhonePe, and GPay.
 - Transactions are reflected in the app but not in the bank passbook, ensuring a clutter-free banking statement.
- **Bank Support:**
 - Multiple banks support UPI Lite, including State Bank of India (SBI), ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, and more.

Benefits of UPI Lite:

- **Enhanced Transaction Speed:**
 - Faster processing of small payments due to offline functionality and absence of UPI PIN requirement.
- **Reduced Server Load:**
 - Helps decongest the main UPI system by handling high volumes of low-value transactions separately.
- **User Convenience:**
 - Ideal for frequent and small transactions, such as payments at retail stores, street vendors, or public transport.
- **Inclusivity:**
 - Addresses the digital payment needs of users in rural or low-connectivity areas.

Significance for India:

- **Promoting Digital Economy:**
 - Aligns with India's vision of a cashless economy by fostering digital payment adoption.
- **Rural Inclusion:**
 - Facilitates financial inclusion by catering to rural and semi-urban areas with limited digital infrastructure.
- **Complementing UPI Growth:**

- Enhances UPI's ecosystem, which already witnesses over 10 billion transactions monthly.

Challenges and Concerns:

- **Security Risks:**
 - Offline transactions might be susceptible to fraud if adequate security measures are not implemented.
- **Adoption Barriers:**
 - Requires user education, especially in rural areas, for successful adoption.
- **Limited Use Cases:**
 - Currently suitable only for low-value transactions, which may restrict its broader utility.

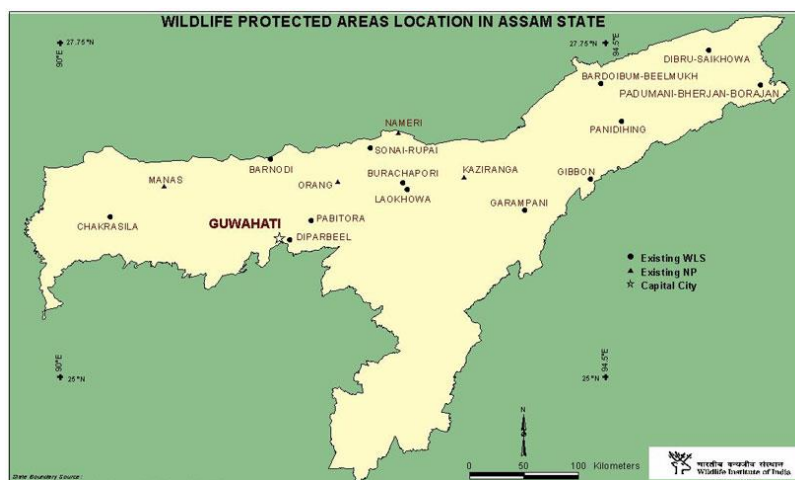
UPI Lite is a significant step toward enhancing India's digital payment infrastructure, addressing the needs of small-value transaction users, and promoting a seamless, inclusive payment ecosystem.

Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary

Syllabus: GS-3; Biodiversity

Context

- Assam's chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, shared pictures of a tiger who was spotted in Sonai Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary.



Location:

- Situated in **Sonitpur district, Assam**.
- Lies along the foothills of the **Himalayas**.
- Adjacent to the western boundary of **Nameri National Park**.

Establishment:

- Declared a wildlife sanctuary in **1998**.

Key Features:

- **Habitat:** A mix of tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, grasslands, and wetland ecosystems.
- **Flora:** Rich in medicinal plants, orchids, and tropical trees.
- **Fauna:**
 - Mammals: Asiatic elephants, Indian bison, leopards, and capped langurs.
 - Birds: Home to several migratory and resident bird species, including hornbills.
 - Reptiles: Includes various species of snakes and turtles.

Rivers:

- The sanctuary is nourished by the **Gabharu River** and **Bhorelli River**, tributaries of the **Brahmaputra River**.
- These rivers are vital for the sanctuary's ecosystem, supporting aquatic biodiversity and providing water for flora and fauna.

About Tiger

Scientific Classification:

- **Scientific Name:** *Panthera tigris*.
- **IUCN Status:** Endangered.
- **CITES:** Listed in Appendix I, providing the highest level of protection.

Species and Subspecies:

1. **Bengal Tiger** (*Panthera tigris tigris*): Found in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan.
2. **Indochinese Tiger** (*Panthera tigris corbetti*).
3. **Malayan Tiger** (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*).
4. **Siberian Tiger** (*Panthera tigris altaica*).

5. **Sumatran Tiger** (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*).
6. **South China Tiger** (*Panthera tigris amoyensis*): Critically endangered, possibly extinct in the wild.

Distribution in India:

- Found across tropical and subtropical forests, mangroves, grasslands, and dry deciduous forests.
- Major habitats include:
 - **Sundarbans** (mangroves).
 - **Western Ghats**.
 - **Central India**.
 - **Himalayan foothills**.

Conservation in India:

- **Project Tiger (1973):**
 - Flagship conservation initiative.
 - Implements the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) guidelines.
 - Focus on creating Tiger Reserves with a core-buffer strategy.
- **Tiger Reserves:**
 - Currently, **53 Tiger Reserves** under Project Tiger.
 - Examples: Corbett, Ranthambore, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Sundarbans.
- **Tiger Census:**
 - Conducted every four years using the M-STrIPES method.
 - India is home to over **3,000 tigers (2022 estimate)**, constituting **70% of the global tiger population**.

Ecological Role:

- **Apex Predator:** Controls prey populations, maintaining ecological balance.
- **Indicator Species:** Health of the tiger population reflects the health of the ecosystem.
- **Umbrella Species:** Conservation of tigers protects a wide range of other species in their habitats.

Threats:

- **Habitat Loss:** Deforestation, agricultural expansion, and urbanization.
- **Poaching:** Illegal trade of tiger parts for traditional medicine and trophies.

- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** Encroachment and retaliation killings.
- **Climate Change:** Rising sea levels threatening mangrove habitats in the Sundarbans.

Government Initiatives:

- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):** Implements policies for tiger conservation.
- **Global Tiger Forum (GTF):** International collaboration to protect tigers.
- **Eco-Development Programs:** Engaging local communities for sustainable coexistence.
- **Tackling Poaching:** Use of technology like drones, camera traps, and anti-poaching squads.

Global Initiatives:

- **Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP):** Launched during the 2010 St. Petersburg Tiger Summit to double tiger populations by 2022.
- **International Tiger Day (July 29):** Awareness on tiger conservation.