



# WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

**FEBRUARY, 2024**

**Week-1**

**01-07 Feb., 2024**

★★ Useful for ★★

**CSE, ESE, PSUs, State Services Exams,  
SSC and Banking Exams**

1<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

## Interim Budget (2024-25)

- **Context:** Recently, the Union Finance Minister presented the Union Budget for the next financial year (2024-25) in the Parliament.

### Budget Highlights:

- The government is estimated to spend Rs 47,65,768 crore in 2024-25, 6% higher than the revised estimate of 2023-24. Interest payments account for 25% of the total expenditure, and 40% of revenue receipts.
- The receipts (other than borrowings) in 2024-25 are estimated to be Rs 30,80,274 crore, about 12% higher than the revised estimate of 2023-24. Tax revenue which forms major part of the receipts is also expected to increase by 12% over the revised estimate for 2023-24.
- The government has estimated a nominal GDP growth rate of 10.5% in 2024-25 (i.e., real growth plus inflation).
- Revenue deficit in 2024-25 is targeted at 2% of GDP. This is lower than the revised estimate of 2.8% in 2023-24. Fiscal deficit in 2024-25 is targeted at 5.1% of GDP, lower than the revised estimate of 5.8% of GDP in 2023-24.
- Direct and indirect tax rates have remained unchanged.
- Certain direct tax benefits to following entities have been extended until March 2025: (i) startups, (ii) sovereign wealth funds and pension funds, and (iii) some IFSC units. These benefits would have expired in March 2024.

### Policy Highlights:

- **Railways:** Three major economic railway corridor programs will be implemented. These are: (i) energy, mineral and cement corridors, (ii) port connectivity corridors and (iii) high traffic density corridors. Forty thousand normal rail bogies will be upgraded to Vande Bharat standards to ensure passenger safety and comfort.

- **Housing:** An additional two crore houses will be built over the next five years under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Grameen. A new scheme will be launched to help sections of the middle-class living in rented houses, slums, and unauthorised colonies, to buy or build their own houses.
- **Health:** Vaccination to prevent cervical cancer will be encouraged for girls between nine and 14 years of age. A new platform, U-WIN, will be rolled out for managing immunisation across the country. Healthcare cover under Ayushman Bharat scheme will be extended to all ASHA workers, and Anganwadi workers and helpers.
- **Energy:** Rooftop solarisation of one crore households will be taken up. To achieve net-zero by 2070, blending of compressed biogas in CNG and PNG will be mandated in a phased manner. Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 metric tonnes will be installed by 2030.
- **Environment:** EV manufacturing and charging infrastructure will be strengthened and expanded. Adoption of E-buses for public transport will be encouraged. Blue economy 2.0 scheme will be launched to restore coastal aquaculture and mariculture. A new scheme will be launched to provide environment friendly alternatives such as biodegradable polymers, bio-plastics and biopharmaceuticals.
- **Agriculture:** Public and private investment will be promoted in post-harvest activities including aggregation, storage, supply chain, processing and marketing. Application of the Nano DAP fertiliser will be expanded in all agro-climatic zones. A programme for supporting dairy farmers will be formulated. PM Matsya Sampada Yojana will be expanded to: (i) enhance aquaculture productivity from three to five tonnes per hectare, (ii) double seafood exports to one lakh crore rupees, and (iii) generate 55 lakh employment opportunities.
- **Demographic changes:** A high-powered committee will be set up to address challenges arising out of fast population growth and demographic changes.

- **Research:** To encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation, a corpus of one lakh crore rupees will be set up. This corpus will provide long-term loans at low or nil interest rates.

### About the Interim Budget:

- It is a temporary budget that is presented by the government in an election year.
- In an election year, the incumbent Government cannot present a full Budget as there may be a change in the executive after the polls.
- It is also known as a 'Vote on Account'. There is no constitutional provision for it.

### Disinvestment in India

- **Context:** The Indian government planned to raise 51,000 crore through disinvestment in 2023-24 but has only achieved 12,504 crore so far.

#### Key Highlights:

- There has been a declining trend in disinvestment targets and achievements. After an initial rise until 2020-21, the targets have been decreasing for three consecutive years.
- The government has consistently fallen short of its disinvestment goals, except in 2017-18 and 2018-19.
- Disinvestment helps in raising funds for the government, aiding in managing fiscal deficits. The article mentions the target of 51,000 crore set for 2023-24 as an example.
- Private sector participation is believed to bring greater efficiency. The disinvestment of Air India is cited as an instance where such a move can lead to improved business operations
- The exposure of state-owned enterprises to market competition can lead to better management practices and operational efficiency.

### Lab Grown Fish Meat

- **Context:** The ICAR-CMFRI in Kochi has partnered with a start-up for lab-grown fish meat. It is the first initiative of its kind in the country.

#### Key Highlights:

- It will address the ever-growing demand for seafood, and reduce excessive pressure on wild resources.
- It would help in minimising overfishing and protect marine environment.
- It would ensure food and nutritional security.
- Lab grown fish meat would be antibiotics- and environmental contamination-free.

#### About Lab grown fish meat:

- Cultivated fish meat is produced by isolating specific cells from fish and growing them in a laboratory setting using media that is free of animal components. The final product is expected to replicate the flavour, texture, and nutritional qualities of 'real' fish meat.

2<sup>nd</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

### World Wetlands Day

- **Context:** The Government organised a national event at Sirpur Lake, Indore to celebrate World Wetlands Day (WWD) (February 2nd).

#### Key Highlights:

- The day commemorates the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971 and India has been a party to the Convention since 1982.
- The theme of WWD-2024 is 'Wetlands and Human Wellbeing' which underscores the critical role wetlands play in enhancing lives.
- On the eve of WWD 2024, India has increased its tally of Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance) to 80 by designating five more wetlands as Ramsar sites.
- Three of these sites, Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve, Aghanashini Estuary and Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve are located in Karnataka whereas two, Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary and Longwood Shola Reserve Forest are in Tamil Nadu.

- Tamil Nadu continues to have the maximum number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites) followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).
- Dhanauri Wetland: It is located 15-km away from the Jewar Airport. In the National Inventory of Wetlands, the Dhanauri wetland is mapped across around 98 hectares around Dankaur tehsil in Gautam Buddha Nagar.
- The Environmentalists had filed a petition in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) seeking a stay on the construction till the wetland is granted protection.

### Wetlands in India:

- India includes high-altitude wetlands of the Himalayas, floodplains of rivers such as Ganges and Brahmaputra, lagoons and mangrove marshes on the coastline, and reefs in marine environments.
- India has around 4.6% of its land as wetlands, 80 Wetlands of India covering an area of 14,27,307 hectares are under the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
- Presently, India stands first in South Asia and third in Asia in terms of number of designated sites.

### Government Initiatives to Preserve Wetlands:

- **Wetlands of India Portal:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has launched the Wetlands of India Portal. It is a dynamic knowledge repository for wetlands and provides a single point access system that synthesises information dissemination regarding wetland sites of the country, projects, initiatives, and training.
- **National Wetland Conservation Program (NWCP):** The NWCP was launched in 1986 by the MoEF&CC. It aims to conserve wetlands in the country and is implemented through the State Wetland Authorities. The program focuses on the identification, notification, and management of wetlands.
- **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (IDWH):** The IDWH scheme, implemented by the MoEF&CC,

supports the conservation and management of wildlife habitats, including wetlands.

- **State Wetland Authorities:** Many states in India have established State Wetland Authorities to implement wetland conservation and management programs at the state level.
- **Wetland Conservation Rules:** The Ministry of Environment has notified the new Wetland Conservation Rules that prohibit setting up or expansion of industries, and disposal of construction and demolition waste within the wetlands.
- **Amrit Dharohar Initiative:** It is a part of the 2023-24 budget announcement and was launched by MoEF&CC in 2023 to promote unique conservation values of the Ramsar Sites in the country while generating employment opportunities and supporting local livelihoods. This initiative is to be implemented over three years in convergence with various Central Government ministries and agencies, State Wetland Authorities, and a network of formal and informal institutions and individuals, working together for a common cause.

### National Mission for Mentoring (NMM)

- **Context:** The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) held a 2-day seminar to share best practices and review the National Mission for Mentoring (NMM) with stakeholders.

### Key Highlights:

- It is a programme in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- It provides mentors with opportunities to share expertise with mentees, assisting them in becoming effective teachers.
- To establish a strong mentorship system that empowers teachers to improve teaching practices and effectiveness.
- NMM enhances mentee teachers' teaching abilities and fosters a culture of continuous learning.
- It keeps teachers updated and relevant in today's dynamic educational landscape.

- NCTE has onboarded 60 professionals as NMM mentors for various areas including leadership, digital education, socio-emotional learning, inclusive education etc.

## Digital Detox

- **Context:** The Karnataka government recently announced it will ensure a responsible gaming environment by pursuing 'digital detox' initiatives.

### Key Highlights:

- The government plans to launch the detox initiative in collaboration with All India Game Developers' Forum (AIGDF).
- A digital detox is a period of time when one voluntarily abstains from using digital devices such as smartphones, computers, and social media.
- This can be for a short period of time, like a few hours, or for a longer period, like a week or even a month.
- One study found that around 25% smartphone owners between ages 18 and 44 don't remember the last time their phone wasn't right next to them
- This will assist people to overcome addiction to technology. Research shows that about 61% of people admit they're addicted to the internet and their digital screens.
- Disconnecting from technology can help reduce stress and anxiety, and can improve overall mental health and wellbeing.
- Taking a break from constant digital stimulation can help improve focus and concentration, leading to increased productivity and creativity.
- Excessive screen time has been linked to poor sleep quality and disrupted sleep patterns. A digital detox can help improve sleep by reducing exposure to blue light and stimulating content.
- Spending less time online can lead to more time for face-to-face interactions, improving communication skills and overall social connectedness.

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

## Lakhpati Didi Scheme

- **Context:** With the aim of creating two crore women entrepreneurs in villages, the Union Finance Minister announced expansion of the Lakhpati Didi Scheme in her Interim Budget 2024–25 speech. The interim budget proposes to increase the number of beneficiaries to three crore from 2 crore.

### Key Highlights:

- Lakhpati Didi Scheme Launched in December 2023 to financially empower women in rural areas and promote their entrepreneurial spirit.
- **Target beneficiaries:** Women members of existing or newly formed SHGs in rural areas.
- Participants in the Scheme must be active members of self-help groups.
- **Documents required:** Domicile certificate, Aadhar card, Ration card, Proof of income and Bank details.
- **Financial assistance:** Interest-free loan of Rs. 5 lakh per SHG for initiating or expanding income-generating activities.
- **Skill training:** Skill development programs in various areas like tailoring, food processing, animal husbandry, etc., based on local needs and market potential.
- **Market linkages:** Connecting SHGs with markets through fairs, exhibitions, and digital platforms.
- It will help women earn a sustainable income of at least Rs. 1 lakh annually per household.
- **Financial inclusion:** Bring more women into the formal financial system by encouraging them to join self-help groups (SHGs).
- **Skill development:** Provide skill training to women entrepreneurs to improve their business capabilities.
- **Women empowerment:** Create a network of successful women entrepreneurs who can inspire and support others.

## Sunrise Technologies

- **Context:** During the Interim Budget 2024-25 presentation, the Finance Minister revealed a plan to create a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore for the sunrise technologies.

### Key Highlights:

- Sunrise technologies is a category of industries with high growth potential and expected to become significant in the future.
- It's important to note that the specific industries considered "sunrise" can change overtime depending on technological advancements, economic trends, and societal needs.
- The goal is to encourage private investment in sunrise technologies and usher in a "golden era for our tech savvy youth".
- The corpus will be created with a fifty-year interest-free loan, giving a financial boost to encourage innovation and research in emerging technology fields.
- The Finance Minister mentioned that long-term financing with extended tenors and low or zero interest rates will inspire the private sector to increase their focus on research and innovation in sunrise domains.
- Stressing the significance of research and innovation in India's growth she noted the shift from "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan" to "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan Jai Vigyan and Jai Anusandhan" underlining that innovation is the cornerstone of development.

## Cervical Cancer

- **Context:** The Union Budget 2024-25 encourages vaccination against cervical cancer.

### Key Highlights:

- The government will encourage vaccination for girls in the age group of 9 to 14 years for the prevention of cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer develops in a woman's cervix (the entrance to the uterus from the vagina).

- Almost all cervical cancer cases (99%) are linked to infection with high-risk human papillomaviruses (HPV), an extremely common virus transmitted through sexual contact.
- Although most infections with HPV resolve spontaneously and cause no symptoms, persistent infection can cause cervical cancer in women.
- Effective primary (HPV vaccination) and secondary prevention approaches (screening for, and treating precancerous lesions) will prevent most cervical cancer cases.
- When diagnosed, cervical cancer is one of the most successfully treatable forms of cancer, as long as it is detected early and managed effectively.
- Cancers diagnosed in late stages can also be controlled with appropriate treatment and palliative care.
- There are, at present, two vaccines available in the country against the human papillomavirus (HPV) which causes cervical cancer, namely Merck's Gardasil and Serum Institute of India's Cervavac.

4<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

## Rapid Population Growth of India

- **Context:** India's rapid population growth and demographic changes highlights the need for committee to focus on related challenges, such as job creation and social security.

### Key Highlights:

- The demographic shift and rising life expectancy in India are leading to new challenges in managing an aging population and rapid urbanization.
- With high unemployment and slow creation of non-farm jobs, there's a risk of not fully capitalizing on the demographic dividend.
- Adequate social security is crucial for the aging workforce, ensuring support in later years.
- The committee should focus on these demographic challenges rather than getting sidetracked by issues of religion and immigration, as suggested by the ruling party.

## Current Situation of India's Population:

- The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in India has decreased to 2.
- Some states like Bihar (2.98), Meghalaya (2.91), Uttar Pradesh (2.35), Jharkhand (2.26), and Manipur (2.17) have TFRs above 2.1.
- The TFR has fallen from 5.7 in 1950 to 2 in 2020, showing significant reduction.
- Southern States' population share decreased from 26% in 1951 to 21% in 2011, due to rapid TFR reduction.
- This decrease in TFR is linked to better socio-economic outcomes and education in these regions.

## GHAR (GO Home and Re-Unite) Portal

- **Context:** The Ministry of Women and Child Development developed the "Track Child Portal" to track missing and found children in all States/UT.

### Key Highlights:

- It is launched by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)
- The GHAR portal has been developed to digitally monitor and track the restoration and repatriation of children as per the protocols under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.
- Digital tracking and monitoring of children who are in the Juvenile Justice (JJ) system and have to be repatriated to another Country/State/District.
- Digital transfer of cases of children to the concerned Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) of the State. It will help in the speedy repatriation of children.
- CWCs and District Child Protection Units (DCPUs) will ensure proper restoration and rehabilitation of children by digitally monitoring the progress of the case of the child.

5<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

## Brainoware

- **Context:** A team of researchers has recently combined brain-like tissue with electronics to create an 'organoid neural network' known as Brainoware. It is capable of recognizing voices and solving complex maths problems.

## Key Highlights:

- Researchers utilized lab-grown real human brain tissue to create mini-brains known as organoids.
- Brain organoids are 3D clusters of brain cells. These organoids are not actual brains, they are simply tissue structures without thoughts or feelings. They help in studying how the brain works without using a real human brain.
- Brainoware connects these organoids to microelectrodes through a method of artificial neural network known as reservoir computing.
- This device comprises three layers: input, reservoir, and output.
- The brain organoid, which is connected to microelectrodes, acts as the reservoir. It received inputs via electrical stimulation from the input layer (live brain cells).
- The output layer comprised modified conventional computer hardware programmed to recognize Brainoware's neural activity.
- The researchers showcased Brainoware's capabilities by forecasting a Henon map. Henon map is a mathematical function that plots a curve on a graph, displaying chaotic or non-chaotic behaviour based on the values of two variables.
- It marks a significant advancement in multiple areas of science and engineering, such as tissue engineering, electrophysiology, and neural computation.

## Exercise Vayu Shakti-2024

- **Context:** The Indian Air Force will be conducting Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 at the Pokhran Air to Ground Range, near Jaisalmer. The last edition was held on 16 February 2019.

### Key Highlights:

- It will be a demonstration of the IAF's capability to deliver weapons with long range, precision capability as well as conventional weapons accurately, on time and with devastating effect, while operating from multiple air bases.

- It will also exhibit joint operations with the army, which tri-services have been doing for some time ahead as they move towards proposed jointness.
- Special operations by the IAF transport and helicopter fleets, involving the Garuds and Indian Army elements will also be on display,
- This year, the exercise will see participation by 121 aircraft, including the indigenous Tejas, Prachand and Dhruv.
- Other participating aircraft would include the Rafale, Mirage-2000, Sukhoi-30 MKI, Jaguar, Hawk, C-130J, Chinook, Apache and Mi-17.
- Indigenous Surface to Air Weapon systems Akash and Samar will demonstrate their capability to track and shoot down an intruding aircraft.
- The exercise aims to showcase the prowess of the IAF and also enhance coordination and synergy among various aircraft and systems.
- The inclusion of indigenous platforms underscores the nation's commitment to self-reliance and the advancement of its defense capabilities.
- His teachings have had a profound impact on many lives, and his influence continues to be felt today.

## UPI in France

- **Context:** India launched UPI at the iconic Eiffel Tower in France.

### Key Highlights:

- NPCI International Payments (NIPL), a subsidiary of NPCI, partnered with French e-commerce and proximity payments provider, Lyra to ensure the acceptance of the UPI payment mechanism in France, starting with the Eiffel Tower.
- UPI was designed and launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2016.
- It is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank), merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- It also caters to the "Peer to Peer" collect request which can be scheduled and paid as per requirement and convenience.
- Countries like UAE, Singapore, Bhutan, and Nepal have adopted UPI in the past.
- In 2023, UPI and Singapore's PayNow signed an agreement, allowing users in either country to make cross-border transactions.
- To enable cross-border transactions, the NIPL and AI Etihad Payments of UAE inked a Memorandum of Understanding in 2023.
- The internationalization of UPI will provide access to fast, convenient, and low-cost payment services. This can help reduce the reliance on traditional banking infrastructure and facilitate economic participation for underserved populations.
- It will streamline the process of sending and receiving remittances across borders, offering a faster, affordable, and secure alternative to traditional remittance channels.
- It will foster closer economic ties and cooperation between countries by promoting interoperability and collaboration in the realm of digital payments.

6<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

## Acharya Shri Satya Narayana Goenka

- **Context:** Recently, the Prime Minister addressed the concluding ceremony of year-long celebrations of Acharya Shri S N Goenka's 100th birth anniversary.

### Key Highlights:

- He was an Indian teacher of Vipassana meditation.
- Born in Burma to an Indian business family, he moved to India in 1969 and started teaching meditation.
- He is known for his significant contribution to the propagation of Vipassana, a form of meditation that involves self-observation and self-transformation.
- Goenka dedicated his life to the mission of Vipassan and is remembered as a perfect example of 'One Life, One Mission'.



7<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY, 2024

## The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

- **Context:** Recently, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha aiming to amend the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

### Key Highlights:

- The bill proposes the appointment of an 'adjudication officer' who will decide on the penalty in cases of environmental violations.
- The 1974 Act states the Chairman of the State Pollution Control Board was nominated by the State government, to which the Bill adds 'in such a manner as may be prescribed by the Central Government'.
- The Bill would be applicable to Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, and any other state that passes a resolution under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.
- The bill aims to decriminalise the existing provisions of the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, which means that instead of imprisonment, violators would be required to pay a fine.
- The 1974 Act currently prescribes imprisonment of up to three months for not informing the State Board about abstraction of water from a stream or well in a substantial volume and not providing information about construction, installation, or operation of disposal system.
- The Bill amends it to a fine between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15 lakh.
- The Bill enables the Centre to 'exempt certain categories of industrial plants' from the restrictions on new outlets and discharges.
- The Bill also enables the Centre to 'issue guidelines'

on matters relating to grant, establishment of any industry, etc.

## Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

- **Context:** Recently, American envoy Garcetti said that the Quad summit is more likely after the U.S. Elections.

### Key Highlights:

- It is an informal strategic forum comprising the United States, India, Australia, and Japan.
- The core objective of the Quad is to secure a rules-based global order, freedom of navigation, and a liberal trading system, along with to work for a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.
- It is seen as to reduce Chinese domination in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Quad leaders held their first formal summit in 2021.
- US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti informed that the Quad can be the 'model for the world' as it is 'very strong and stable'.

## Tax-to-GDP Ratio

- **Context:** India's tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to hit a record high of 11.7% of GDP in 2024-25, led by an uptick in the more 'equitable' direct taxes.

### Key Highlights:

- The tax-to-GDP ratio measures a nation's tax revenue relative to the size of its economy.
- Developed nations typically have higher tax-to-GDP ratios than developing nations.
- A higher ratio denotes a wider fiscal net and reduced dependence on borrowings.
- Higher tax revenues mean a country can spend more on improving infrastructure, health, and education—keys to the long-term prospects for a country's economy and people

## Grammy Awards 2024

- **Context:** Indian jazz band Shakti bagged Best Global Music Album for 'This Moment' in the 2024 Grammy Awards.

### Key Highlights:

- The recently reunited fusion band, once named "Turiyananda Sangit," was originally founded by British guitarist John McLaughlin, Indian tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, and percussionist Vikku Vinayakram in 1973.
- They were joined later by violinist L. Shankar and the late mridangam maestro Ramnad Raghavan.
- The band was regrouped in 2020 with McLaughlin, Hussain, vocalist Shankar Mahadevan, percussionist V. Selvaganesh, and violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan.
- Mahadevan, Selvaganesh, and Rajagopalan secured the band's Grammy award alongside founding members McLaughlin and Hussain.

