Mediation as a Solution to Judicial Backlog

[Source: TH]()

Why in News?

The **backlog of cases** in India's judicial system has reached alarming levels, with over **82,000 pending cases in the Supreme Court (SC),** 62 lakh in High Courts, and nearly 5 crore in lower courts.

- Amidst growing concerns over judicial delays, **[mediation]() is emerging as a viable alternative** to reduce the burden on courts and facilitate quicker dispute resolution.

What are the Causes for Judicial Backlog in India?

- **Low Judge-to-Population Ratio:** India has **only 21 judges per million people**, one of the lowest ratios globally. This results in an overwhelming **workload for judges,** slowing down case disposal.
- **Rise in Litigation**: Growing legal awareness and mechanisms like **[Public Interest Litigation (PIL)]()** have led to an increase in the number of cases filed.
  - Litigants often approach courts for **every small dispute,** including non-meritorious cases which further clog the judiciary.
  - Nearly **half of all pending cases** involve the **government as a litigant,** increasing the burden on courts.
- **Adversarial Legal System:** The Indian Judicial system encourages **multiple interim applications and successive appeals**, prolonging the litigation process**.**
  - Further, laws like the **Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016,** have further clogged high courts with bail applications.
- **Infrastructure and Procedural Deficiency: Lack of sufficient courtrooms, and digital infrastructure** delays proceedings. Budgetary constraints limit the expansion of judicial capacity.
  - Adjournments, difficulty in locating witnesses, and delays in obtaining evidence contribute to the backlog.
- **Underutilized ADR Mechanisms**: Although **[Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)]() Mechanisms like mediation, [arbitration,]() and [conciliation]()** are available, they are not widely used.

How Can Mediation Help in Reducing Judicial Backlog?

- **Mediation:** It is an **ADR process** in which a **neutral third party (mediator)** facilitates discussions between disputing parties to help them reach a mutually agreeable solution.
  - Mediation is voluntary, confidential, and cost-effective, with mediators guiding parties to a

mutual solution.

- **Legal Framework:**
    - **Mediation Act, 2023**: Mandates **pre-litigation mediation** for civil and commercial disputes, except in urgent cases.
        - The **Mediation Act, 2023** grants mediation agreements the same legal status as a court decree and mandates resolution within **120 days,** extendable by 60 days if needed.
        - However, cases related to **criminal offenses, third-party rights, and taxation** are exempt from mediation.
    - **Commercial Court Act 2015:** Parties are mandated to try mediation before entering courts.
    - **Code of Civil Procedure, 1908:** Includes ADR methods like **Arbitration, Mediation, and Conciliation** for resolving disputes outside traditional court proceedings.
- **Role in Reducing Judicial Backlog:** Mediation resolves **civil, commercial, family, consumer, and property disputes**, allowing courts to focus on **criminal and constitutional cases**, reducing their workload.
    - **NITI Aayog (National Institution for Transforming India)** suggests pre-litigation mediation in government cases to ease court congestion and minimize legal disputes.
    - Mediation helps **resolve business, family, and community disputes** while preserving relationships, often leading to amicable settlements in matrimonial cases.

What are the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms?

Click here to Read: Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

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What are the Challenges Regarding Mediation in India?

- **Lack of Awareness:** Many litigants and lawyers **prefer traditional litigation** over mediation due to lack of awareness about its benefits.
- **Enforcement Mechanism**: While the **Mediation Act, 2023** mandates the **Mediation Council of India (MCI)**, no such body has been formed yet for effective implementation.
    - Government agencies, involved in **50% of cases**, often prefer prolonged litigation over quick mediation settlements.
- **Non-Binding Nature**: Since mediation is **voluntary and non-binding until agreement**, parties may **walk away** without resolution.
- **Limited Institutional Support**: Court-annexed mediation centers are **not available in all courts**, limiting access to mediation services.

Way Forward

- **Adopt Best Practices:** India can adopt global best practices like the UK's mediation mandate, and Italy's mandatory mediation to reduce judicial backlog.
- **Institutional Upgrade:** Establish the **MCI** to regulate mediation, authorize mediators, and enforce standardized practices.
    - Expanding **court-annexed mediation** can further ease backlog and enhance creditworthiness.
    - Additionally, increase the **judge-population ratio from 21 to 50 per million** (as per the **Law Commission's 1987 report**) to ensure timely justice and effectively address broader issues of judicial backlog.
- **Online Mediation**: Encourage online mediation by developing digital platforms to assist mediators, similar to the **Supreme Court's SUPACE** for legal research.
    - Promote institutional mediation for businesses to resolve disputes efficiently.
- **Training**: Conduct **awareness campaigns** for litigants and legal professionals while introducing **structured training programs** for mediators.

Drishti Mains Question:

AI's Environmental Impact & Mitigation

For Prelims: **UNEP**, **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**, **LLM (large language model)**, **Rare Earth Elements**, **E-waste**, **Greenhouse Gas (GHGs)**, **Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence**, **UNESCO**, **Carbon Credits**.

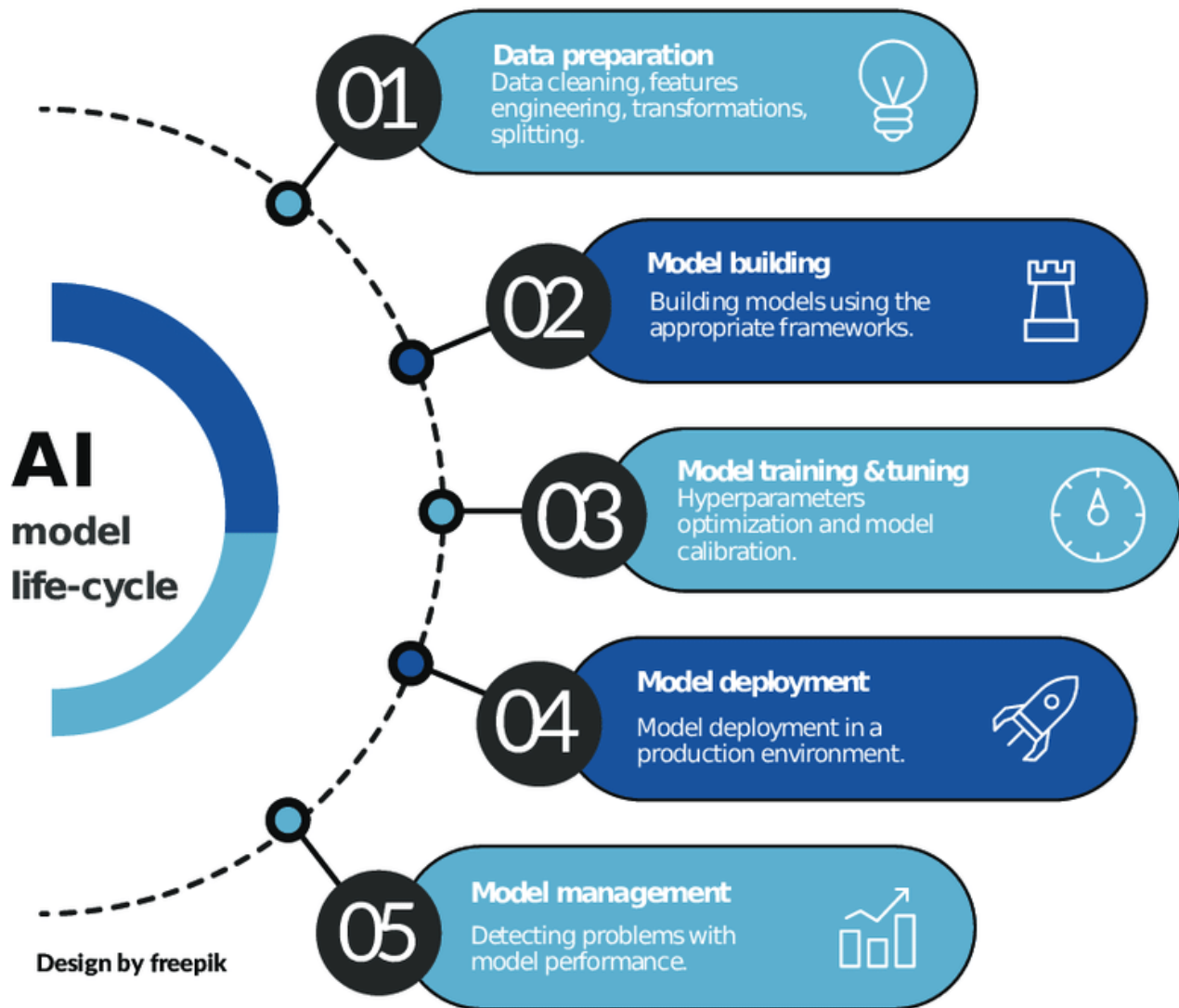**For Mains**: Environmental impact of artificial intelligence (AI) life cycle and ways to mitigate them.

Source: TH

Why in News?

Amid rising global adoption of **artificial intelligence (AI)**, many experts have raised concerns about the **environmental impacts of the AI life cycle** and recommended **measures to mitigate** them.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

- **About: AI** refers to the **simulation of human intelligence** in machines, enabling them to perform tasks that typically require **human cognition**, such as **learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making**.
- **AI Market:** The global AI market is valued at **USD 200 billion** and could contribute **USD 15.7 trillion** to the economy by **2030.**
- **India's Initiatives:** India plans to build its own **LLM (large language model)** to compete with **DeepSeek** and **ChatGPT.**
  - India launched "**AI for India 2030 initiative**" that emphasizes **ethical, inclusive and responsible AI adoption** to position India as a global leader in AI innovation.
- **AI Life Cycle:** It refers to the structured process of **developing, deploying, and maintaining AI models** to deliver meaningful results.

AI model life-cycle

01 Data preparation
Data cleaning, features engineering, transformations, splitting.

02 Model building
Building models using the appropriate frameworks.

03 Model training & tuning
Hyperparameters optimization and model calibration.

04 Model deployment
Model deployment in a production environment.

05 Model management
Detecting problems with model performance.

Design by freepik

AI Data Centers

- **About:** AI data center is a **specialized facility** that provides the **computing power, storage, and networking** needed for AI model processing and training.
- **Key Features:**
  - **High-Performance Computing (HPC):** Uses GPUs, and accelerators for **fast model training** and complex computations.
  - **Massive Storage:** Stores **large training data** and AI outputs e.g., cloud storage.
  - **Efficient Networking:** High-speed **interconnection** ensures real-time data transfer.
  - **Energy Efficiency:** Uses **liquid/air cooling** and renewable energy to manage high power consumption.

What are the Environmental Impacts of AI?

- **GHG Emissions:** AI-driven data centres require vast amounts of **electricity**, mostly sourced from **fossil fuels**.
  - AI hardware and data centres currently contribute **1% of global Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) emissions**, and this is **expected to double by 2026.**

- E.g., Training one LLM emits **3,00,000 kg of CO$_2$**, (equivalent to **five cars' lifetime emissions**).
  - **Increased Computing Power:** Generative AI models like **ChatGPT** use **10–100 times more power** than earlier versions, increasing demand for **graphic processing units (GPUs)** and worsening the **environmental footprint.**
    - E.g., a single LLM query requires **2.9 watt-hours** of electricity, compared with **0.3 watt-hours for a regular internet search.**
  - **E-waste Generation:** Data centers generate substantial **e-waste**, including hazardous substances like **mercury** and **lead,** exacerbating the **global e-waste crisis.**
    - Generative AI could account for up to **5 million metric tons of e-waste by 2030.**
  - **Impact of Other Inputs Related to AI Industry:** AI data centers require vast raw materials, with AI chips depending on **REEs** from harmful mining.
    - They also consume significant water for **cooling of data centers**.

What Initiatives are Taken to Curb the Environmental Impacts of AI?

- **COP29 of UNFCCC:** At COP29 of **UNFCCC** 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, the **International Telecommunication Union** emphasised the urgent need for **greener AI practices.**
- **Legislative Actions:** Both the **EU (EU AI Act, 2024)** and the **US (Artificial Intelligence Environmental Impacts Act, 2024)** have enacted laws to **reduce AI's carbon footprint** and promote sustainable practices.
- **Global Ethical Guidelines:** Over **190 countries** adopted **non-binding ethical AI guidelines** at **UNESCO's "Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence"** promoting sustainability b**y reducing carbon footprint, and energy consumption.**
- **AI Action Summit 2025:** UN Secretary-General urged countries to **design AI algorithms and infrastructures** that **consume less energy** and integrate AI into **smart grids** to optimize power use.
- **UNEP's Recommendations: UNEP** has proposed **five key strategies** to mitigate AI's environmental footprint:

UNEP's 5 Key Strategies

Standardized Measurements

A strategy for consistent environmental impact assessments.

Enhancing Efficiency

Focuses on improving AI efficiency while promoting recycling.

Integrating Policies

Incorporates AI policies into wider environmental regulations.

Mandatory Disclosures

Requires AI companies to disclose environmental impacts.

Greener Data Centres

Aims to make data centres more environmentally friendly.

Way Forward

- **Renewable Energy:** Companies should use **renewable energy** for data centers and locate them in **renewable energy-rich regions** to reduce fossil fuel emissions.
    - **Purchasing carbon credits** can help offset emissions.
    - AI itself can help **enhance the efficiency** of **renewable energy grids** for a smoother clean energy transition. E.g., Use of **Google's DeepMind** to improve **wind energy forecasting.**
- **Energy-Efficient Models: Smaller, domain-specific** AI models, optimised algorithms, specialised hardware, and **energy-efficient** cloud data centres can reduce the carbon footprint by **100 to 1,000 times.**

- Businesses should use **pre-trained AI models** instead of training from scratch to save energy and computation.
  - **Transparency and Accountability:** Organizations need **standardized frameworks** for tracking AI emissions and clear **sustainability reporting** to ensure accountability and reduce environmental impact.

> ***Drishti Mains Question:***
>
> Discuss the environmental costs associated with the artificial intelligence (AI) life cycle. How can sustainable AI practices mitigate these impacts?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With the present state of development, Artificial Intelligence can effectively do which of the following?(2020)

1. Bring down electricity consumption in industrial units
2. Create meaningful short stories and songs
3. Disease diagnosis
4. Text-to-Speech Conversion
5. Wireless transmission of electrical energy

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1, 2, 3 and 5 only

(b) 1, 3 and 4 only

(c) 2, 4 and 5 only

(d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Ans: (b)

Mains

Q. What are the main socio-economic implications arising out of the development of IT industries in major cities of India? (2021)

Q. "The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Digital Revolution) has initiated e-Governance as an integral part of government". Discuss. (2020)

SC's Direction on Remission

For Prelims: **Remission, Pardoning Power of the President**, **Article 72**, **President**, **Supreme Court**, **Article 161**, **Governor**, **Prison Act, 1894**, **Kehar Singh vs. Union of India (1989)**, **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)**.

Why in News?

The **Supreme Court** (SC) issued **guidelines on remission,** directing states to **consider the premature release of prisoners under remission policies**, even **without a formal application.**

- This judgment, delivered in a **suo-motu case initiated in 2021**, aims to **address prison overcrowding** while ensuring a **fair and non-discriminatory approach to remission.**

What are Latest SC Guidelines on Remission Policy (2025)?

- **Directive:** States **must formulate a clear remission policy within 2 months**, ensuring **alignment with constitutional and judicial principles.**
- **Legal Precedent: Remission criteria must be reasonable,** as upheld in the **Mafabhai Motibhai Sagar Case (2024)**.
- **Due Process Requirement:** Remission **cannot be revoked arbitrarily,** if conditions are violated, the state must **issue a notice with reasons** and **allow the convict to respond** before a final decision.

Note

- As per **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** data for 2022, India's prisons have a 131.4% occupancy rate, with 75.8% undertrials.
- As per **Prison Statistics in India Report (2022)**, **premature releases** rose from **2,321 (2020) to 5,035 (2022)**.

What is Remission?

- **About:**
  - Remission refers to the **reduction of the duration of a prison sentence without altering the nature of the sentence**.
  - It allows a **convict to be released earlier than the original term** prescribed by the court, provided they **meet specific eligibility criteria.**
- **Constitutional Provisions:**
  - **Article 72** empowers the **President of India** to grant **pardons, reprieves, respites, or remissions** of punishment, or to **suspend, remit, or commute the sentence of any person** convicted of an offense under Union law or in cases involving military courts.
  - **Article 161** grants **similar powers to the Governor** for offenses under state laws.
  - **Article 32 & 226:** Enable the **SC and High Courts, respectively, to intervene in remission cases through writ jurisdiction.**
- **Statutory Provisions:**
  - **Section 473 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023** (earlier **Section 432 of the CrPC**): Grants state governments the power to remit sentences *at any time*, with or without conditions.
    - Non-compliance with conditions can lead to cancellation of remission and re-arrest without a warrant.
  - **Section 475 of BNSS** (earlier **Section 433A of CrPC**): Life convicts sentenced for offenses punishable by death cannot be released before completing 14 years of

imprisonment.

Key Terms

- **Pardon: Completely absolves the convict,** removing both **conviction and sentence,** along with **all associated punishments and disqualifications.**
- **Commutation:** Replaces a **punishment with a lesser one**, such as converting a death sentence to rigorous imprisonment.
- **Respite:** Grants a r**educed sentence considering special circumstances,** like physical disability or pregnancy of the convict.
- **Reprieve: Temporarily delays the execution of a sentence**, particularly the death penalty, **allowing time for the convict to seek pardon or commutation.**

What are the Supreme Court Rulings Related to Remission?

- In _**Laxman Naskar v. Union of India (2000)**_, the **Supreme Court (SC)** outlined **5 factors for remission: societal impact, crime severity, risk of recidivism, prison conduct, and potential for reintegration,** ensuring a **balanced approach to justice and public safety.**
- In _**Epuru Sudhakar v. State of Andhra Pradesh (2006)**_, the SC ruled that j**udicial review of remission orders is permissible** on grounds such as **non-application of mind, mala fide intent, reliance on extraneous or irrelevant considerations**, exclusion of relevant materials, or arbitrariness.
- In the _**State of Haryana vs. Mahender Singh (2007),**_ the SC held that while remission is not a fundamental right of a convict, the State must exercise its executive power judiciously, considering each case based on relevant factors.
- In _**Sangeet & Anr. v. State of Haryana (2013)**_, the SC held that **remission under Section 432 CrPC requires a convict's application** and **cannot be granted _suo-motu_** by the government.
- In _**Mohinder Singh v. State of Punjab (2013),**_ the SC reaffirmed that **courts do not have the authority to grant remission on their own**, emphasizing that **remission must be initiated through a formal request.**
- In _**Union of India v. V. Sriharan (2015)**_, the **SC upheld life imprisonment without remission until the convict's "last breath,"** deeming it an **alternative to the death penalty.**
- The SC, in 2024 quashed the _**Gujarat government's remission order**_ for the 11 convicts in the _**Bilkis Bano case**_ and **set aside its 2022 judgment** that had allowed Gujarat to decide their premature release.
  - It ruled that, as per **Section 432(7) of the CrPC,** the **"appropriate government"** for remission is where the **offender is sentenced, not where the crime occurred.** This principle was reaffirmed from _**V. Sriharan v. Union of India**_ (2015) .
- In _**Mafabhai Motibhai Sagar v. State of Gujarat (2024),**_ the SC ruled that r**emission conditions must be reasonable**, ensuring they are neither arbitrarily stringent nor vague.

Read More:

- **What are the Different Types of Pardoning Power?**
- **What are the Issues in Granting Remission?**

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Differentiate between pardon, commutation, remission, reprieve, and respite under Indian law. How do these executive powers contribute to the principles of justice and reform?

Peatland Conservation

For Prelims: Peatlands**, Wetlands, Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, carbon sequestration**

For Mains: National Wetland Inventory & Assessment, Significance of Wetlands, Challenges in Wetland Conservation

Source: DTE

Why in News?

A recent study has highlighted the alarming state of under-protection of **peatlands,** which are crucial for **carbon storage** and **climate regulation.**

What are the Key Highlights of the Study About Peatland?

- **Limited Protection**: Only **17% of global peatlands** are under legal protection, far less than other critical ecosystems such as **mangroves (42%) and saltmarshes (50%)** and **tropical forests (38%).**
- **High Human Pressure**: Around **22% of global peatlands face high human pressure** (mainly in **Europe** and **US**).
- **Freshwater Security and Biodiversity:** Peatlands contain **10% of the world's unfrozen freshwater** and support diverse ecosystems.
- **Indigenous Role in Conservation: 27% of global peatlands** are on **indigenous people's land**, where traditional conservation practices have led to **better ecosystem preservation**, yet 85% remain outside formal conservation frameworks.
- **Carbon Storage and Climate Impact**: Peatlands store **600 gigatonnes of carbon**, more than all the world's forests combined, but, when degraded they release **CO_2**, **2-5% of annual human-driven greenhouse gas emissions**.

What are Peatlands?

- **About:**
  - Peatlands are **terrestrial wetland ecosystems** characterized by **waterlogged conditions** that prevent complete decomposition of plant material, leading to the **accumulation of peat (type of soil)**.
  - They **store more carbon than any other terrestrial ecosystem,** making them crucial for climate regulation.
- **Global Distribution:**

- Peatlands cover approximately **4.23 million km²** (**2.84%** of Earth's terrestrial surface) and are found in every **climatic zone.**
- **Canada, Russia, Indonesia, the US and Brazil** contain **70%** of global peatlands.

peatland cover in %
- 0
- 0.0 - 0.4
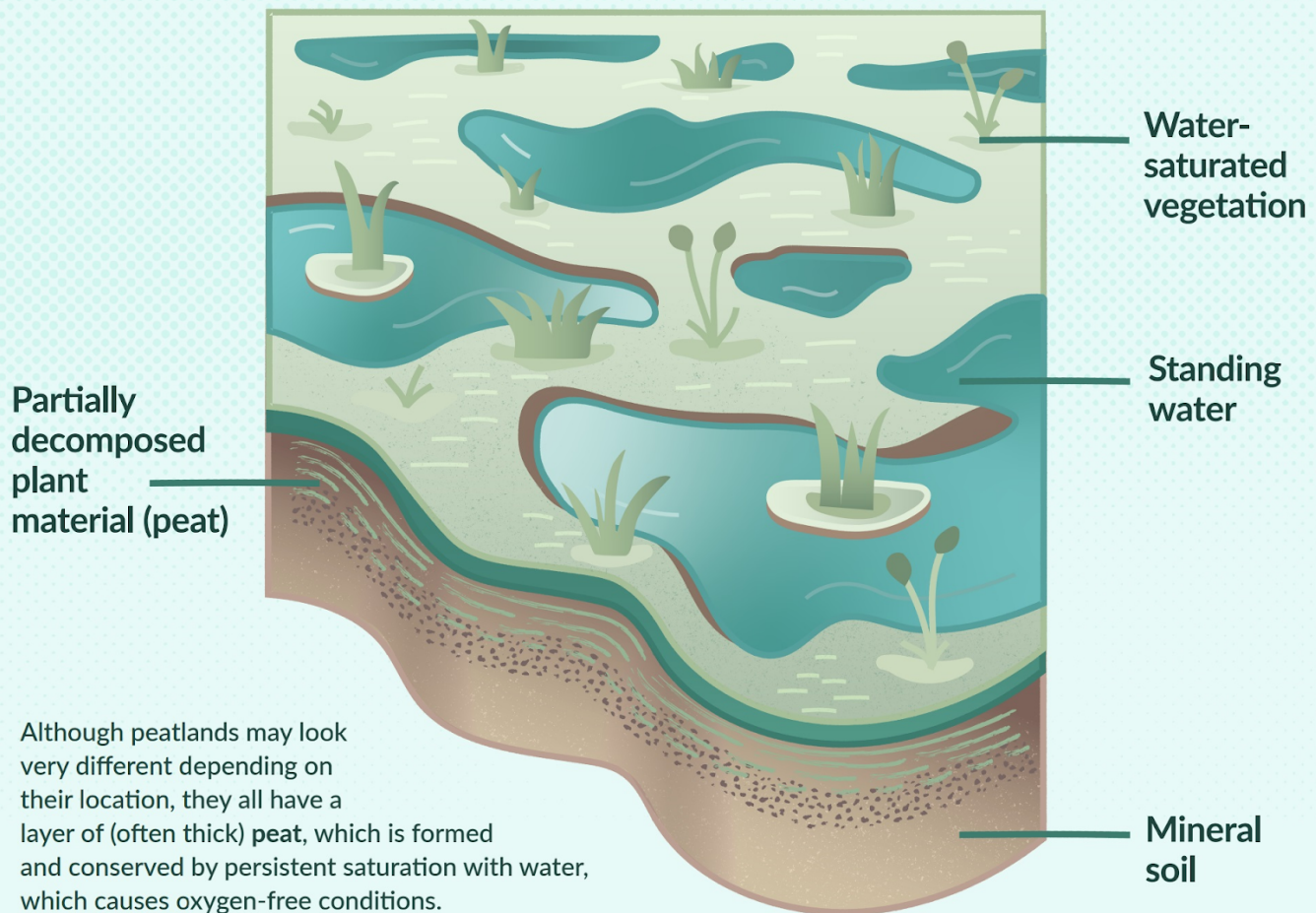- 0.4 - 2.0
- 2.0 - 4.0
- 4.0 - 8.0
- > 8.0
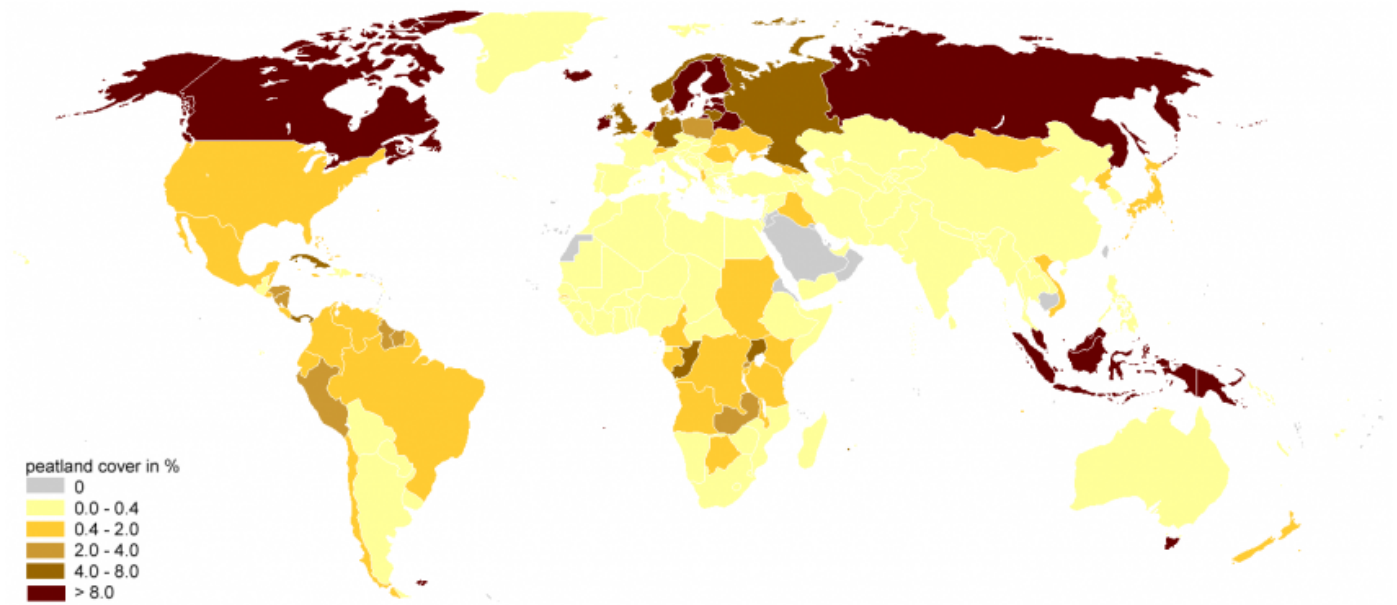
- **Types:**
  - **Northern and Temperate Peatlands:** Predominantly found in **Europe, North America, and Russia**, formed under high precipitation and low temperature conditions.
  - **Tropical Peatlands:** Found in **Southeast Asia, Central and South America, Africa, and Australasia**, often associated with rainforests and mangroves.
- **Significance:**
  - **Water Security & Disaster Risk Reduction:** Peatlands play a crucial role in **regulating water flows**, mitigating **floods, droughts, and seawater intrusion**.
    - Healthy peatlands (**soggy and spongy**) help **lower temperatures, prevent wildfires,** and **naturally filter water** for safe drinking, while poor drainage leads to water pollution.
  - **Biodiversity Conservation:** Peatlands are **biodiversity hotspots**, supporting **endangered species** like the **Bornean orangutan**.
    - They also **preserve archaeological** and ecological records such as pollen data and ancient artefacts.
  - **Preventing Zoonotic Disease Risk:** Peatland degradation increases **human-wildlife interaction**, raising the **risk of zoonotic diseases** like Ebola and HIV/AIDS (originating from Congo's peatlands).
    - Biodiversity loss also fuels vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue.
  - **Livelihoods & Economic Importance:** They support **local economies, traditional knowledge, and cultural heritage** by providing food, fibre, and raw materials.

What Are Peatlands?

Peatlands are a type of wetland found in many parts of the world.

Water-saturated vegetation

Standing water

Partially decomposed plant material (peat)

Mineral soil

Although peatlands may look very different depending on their location, they all have a layer of (often thick) **peat**, which is formed and conserved by persistent saturation with water, which causes oxygen-free conditions.

Read More:

- [What are Wetlands?](#)
- [What is the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands?](#)

What are the Challenges in Peatland Conservation?

- **Weak Legal Protection:** Only **17% of global peatlands** are under legal protection.
  - **Weak enforcement, bureaucratic delays, and competing interests** hinder restoration efforts.
- **Economic Exploitation:** Peatlands face **large-scale drainage for cash crops** (palm oil, rice), industrial agriculture, forestry, **and peat extraction**, while **urbanization and infrastructure expansion** drive **irreversible degradation**.
- **Climate Change & Natural Degradation**: Rising **temperatures and droughts accelerate peatland drying,** increasing **wildfires and CO_2 emissions**, while human activities further disrupt their ecosystem balance.
- **Financial Constraints**: **Limited funding** for conservation and **short-term economic priorities** often lead to **unsustainable land use, undermining restoration efforts.**
- **Weak Indigenous Land Rights:** Over **85% of peatlands on indigenous peoples'**

lands are **not part of other protected areas**.
- Limited awareness and research gaps further hinder effective policy measures.

Way Forward

- **Protect & Sustain: Stop harmful activities** like draining and converting peatlands for farming while promoting **sustainable peatland management** to ensure long-term carbon sequestration.
- **Restoration & Rewetting: Replenish water levels to revive peatlands**, making them **effective for storing carbon** and reducing emissions sustainably.
- **Policy & Legal Framework:** Establish **clear national and global targets for peatland restoration**, include them in climate action plans under the Paris Agreement, and strengthen laws to prevent further damage.
- **Standardized Definitions**: Adopt **globally consistent definitions** of peatlands prioritizing **conservation, restoration, and sustainable management** over industrial interests.
- **Global Cooperation & Knowledge Sharing**: Strengthen international efforts under **UNEP, FAO, Ramsar Convention**, and **IUCN** to map, protect, and restore peatlands, monitor emissions, and engage local communities for sustainable management.
- **Inclusion in Climate Agreements: Recognize peatlands as vital ecosystems i**n global climate and biodiversity frameworks and **incorporate their restoration into national climate action plans under the UNFCCC.**

__Drishti Mains Question:__

Peatlands are vital for climate regulation and biodiversity but face degradation due to weak protection and exploitation. Discuss their significance and suggest measures for sustainable conservation

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UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. If a wetland of international importance is brought under the 'Montreux Record', what does it imply? (2014)

(a) Changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur in the wetland as a result of human interference.

(b) The country in which the wetland is located should enact a law to prohibit any human activity within five kilometers from the edge of the wetland.

(c) The survival of the wetland depends on the cultural practices and traditions of certain communities living in its vicinity and therefore the cultural diversity therein should not be destroyed.

(d) It is given the status of 'World Heritage Site.'

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. What is wetland? Explain the Ramsar concept of 'wise use' in the context of wetland conservation. Cite two examples of Ramsar sites from India. (2018)
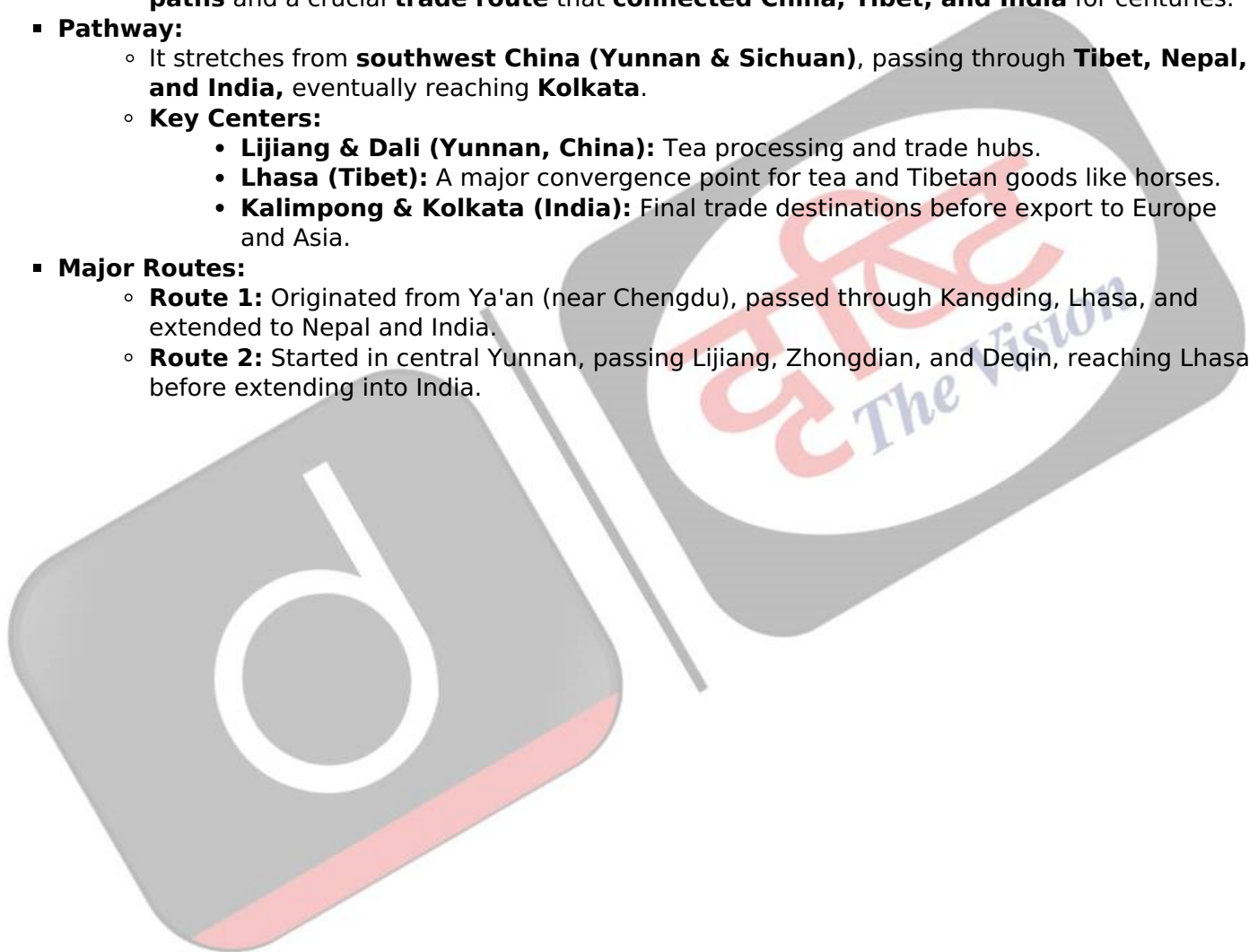
Tea Horse Road

Why in News?

China's Ambassador to India highlighted the **Ancient Tea Horse Road**, connecting **China to India via Tibet**, emphasizing its centuries-old role in facilitating **exchanges between China and the Indian subcontinent.**

What is Ancient Tea Horse Road?

- **About:**
  - **Tea Horse road**, often referred to as the **Southern Silk Road,** is a network of **caravan paths** and a crucial **trade route** that **connected China, Tibet, and India** for centuries.
- **Pathway:**
  - It stretches from **southwest China (Yunnan & Sichuan)**, passing through **Tibet, Nepal, and India,** eventually reaching **Kolkata**.
  - **Key Centers:**
    - **Lijiang & Dali (Yunnan, China):** Tea processing and trade hubs.
    - **Lhasa (Tibet):** A major convergence point for tea and Tibetan goods like horses.
    - **Kalimpong & Kolkata (India):** Final trade destinations before export to Europe and Asia.
- **Major Routes:**
  - **Route 1:** Originated from Ya'an (near Chengdu), passed through Kangding, Lhasa, and extended to Nepal and India.
  - **Route 2:** Started in central Yunnan, passing Lijiang, Zhongdian, and Deqin, reaching Lhasa before extending into India.
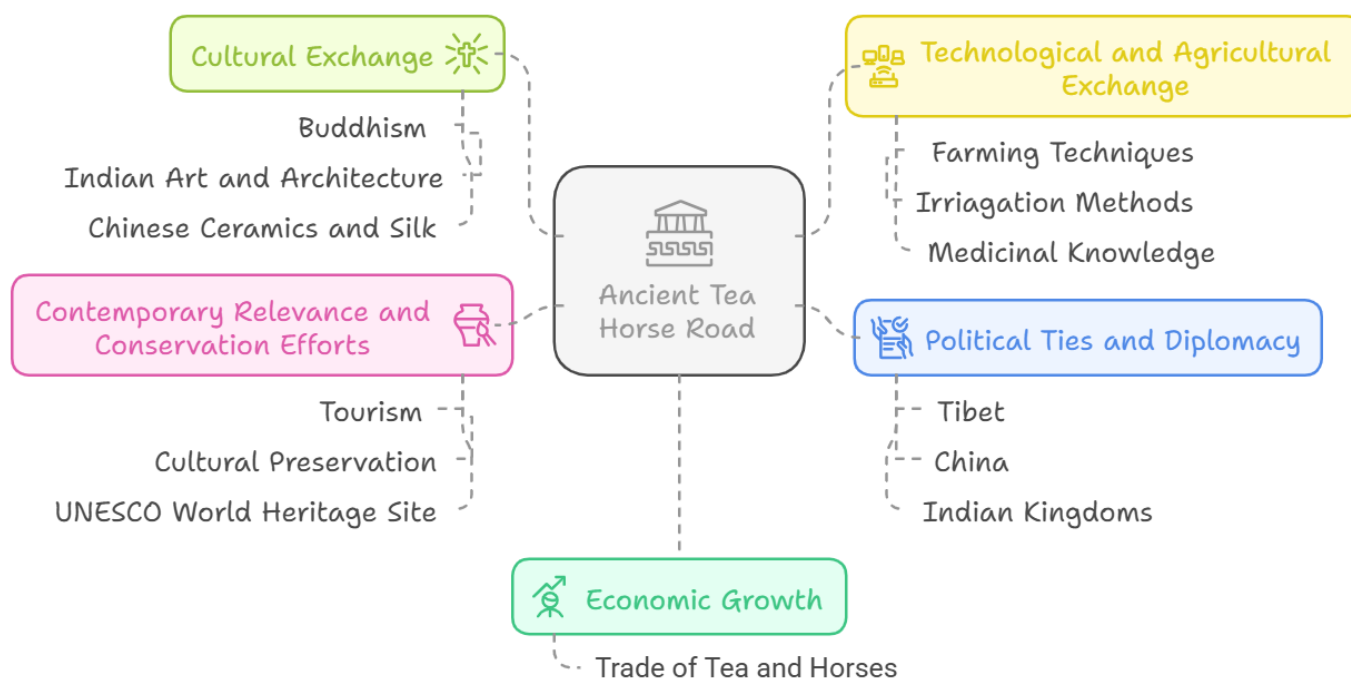
- **Origin & Evolution:**
    - The **Tea Horse Road** dates back to the **Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE)** and initially **facilitated the trade of sugar, textiles, and rice noodles** from China to Tibet and India, while horses, gold, saffron, and medicinal herbs were traded in the opposite direction.
    - The trade eventually centered around **tea and horses**, leading to the route being named the **"Tea Horse Road."**
    - **Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE)** formalized the trade, regulating the exchange of Tibetan horses for China's military and Chinese tea for Tibet.
        - The **13th-century Mongol expansion** further **heightened the route's importance** for supplying horses.
- **Decline of Tea Horse Road:**
    - **End of the Qing Dynasty (1912)**: Political instability weakened control over trade routes.
    - **Modernization of Infrastructure**: Modern transportation networks made traditional routes obsolete.
    - **World War II and Economic Shifts**: Though briefly revived for military logistics, industrial production and mechanized transport led to its decline.
    - **Establishment of Modern China (1949)**: Land reforms and road construction made the traditional portering system redundant.

Significance of the Ancient Tea Horse Road

Cultural Exchange
- Buddhism
- Indian Art and Architecture
- Chinese Ceramics and Silk

Technological and Agricultural Exchange
- Farming Techniques
- Irriagation Methods
- Medicinal Knowledge

Contemporary Relevance and Conservation Efforts
- Tourism
- Cultural Preservation
- UNESCO World Heritage Site

Ancient Tea Horse Road

Political Ties and Diplomacy
- Tibet
- China
- Indian Kingdoms

Economic Growth
- Trade of Tea and Horses

Read More: What is the Silk Road?

1st Regional Dialogue on Social Justice

Source: PIB

Why in News?

The first ever **Regional Dialogue on Social Justice** under the **Global Coalition for Social Justice** was held in New Delhi.

- It also marked the 74th Foundation Day of **Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC)** (founded on **24th February 1952**).

What is the Global Coalition for Social Justice?

- **About:** Launched in **2023** by the **International Labour Organization (ILO),** it aims to tackle **social justice deficits** and fast-track progress toward the SDGs.
- **Objective:** It promotes **strong, sustainable, and inclusive development** through global solidarity, policy coherence, and coordinated action among various stakeholders.
- **Membership:** It is open to **governments, organizations, businesses, and academia**, with members committed to social justice and labor rights under **UN** and ILO principles.
  - Membership is **voluntary** and **India** is a member.

What are India's Constitutional Provisions on Social Justice?

- **Preamble:** It ensures **social, economic, and political justice**, and guarantees equality of status and opportunity.
- **Fundamental Rights: Article 23** prohibits **human trafficking** and forced labour and **Article 24** bans child labour in **hazardous occupations**.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:**
  - **Article 38:** It directs the State to reduce **social and economic inequalities.**
  - **Article 39:** It ensures **equal livelihood, fair wages,** and protection from exploitation.
  - **Article 39A:** It guarantees **free legal aid** for disadvantaged people.
  - **Article 46:** It mandates special **educational and economic promotion** for SCs, STs, and weaker sections to prevent discrimination.

ESIC

- **About:** It is a **statutory body** formed under the **Employees State Insurance Act, 1948** and functions under the **Ministry of Labour and Employment.**
- **Purpose**: It provides **social security and health insurance** to employees in establishments with **10 or more employees** (in less than 10 employees if it's a **hazardous industry** e.g., firecrackers, toxic chemicals etc).
- **Eligibility**: Employees earning up to **Rs 21,000 per month.**
- **Benefits Provided:** Medical care, sickness benefit, Maternity benefit, disability benefit, dependent's Benefit, and unemployment allowance.

Note: The ILO's **World Social Protection Report 2024-26** shows India's social protection coverage (excluding health) rose from **24.4% in 2021 to 48.8% in 2024**.

- The **employability** of Indian graduates has risen from **33.95% in 2013 to 54.81% in 2024.**

(b) the Preamble and the Directive Principles of State Policy

(c) the Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy

(d) None of the above

Ans: (b)

Black Plastic

Black Plastic, widely used in kitchenware and containers, faces scrutiny over potential health risks, raising concerns about its safety.

- **About:** Black plastic is often made from **recycled electronic waste**. Its black color comes from a substance called **Black Carbon** (short-lived pollutant, significant contributor to warming).
- **Composition: Its composition may contain toxic substances such as brominated flame retardants, antimony, lead, cadmium, and mercury.**
    - These heavy metals are **toxic at high exposure levels** and banned in many countries. The flame-retardant **decabromodiphenyl ether (BDE-209)** in black plastic poses potential health risks.
    - Despite bans on certain chemicals, **legacy plastics** (cannot be reused or recycled) with harmful elements continue to enter the recycling chain.
- **Concerns:** While exposure through kitchen utensils is lower, concerns about **cumulative chemical exposure** remain.
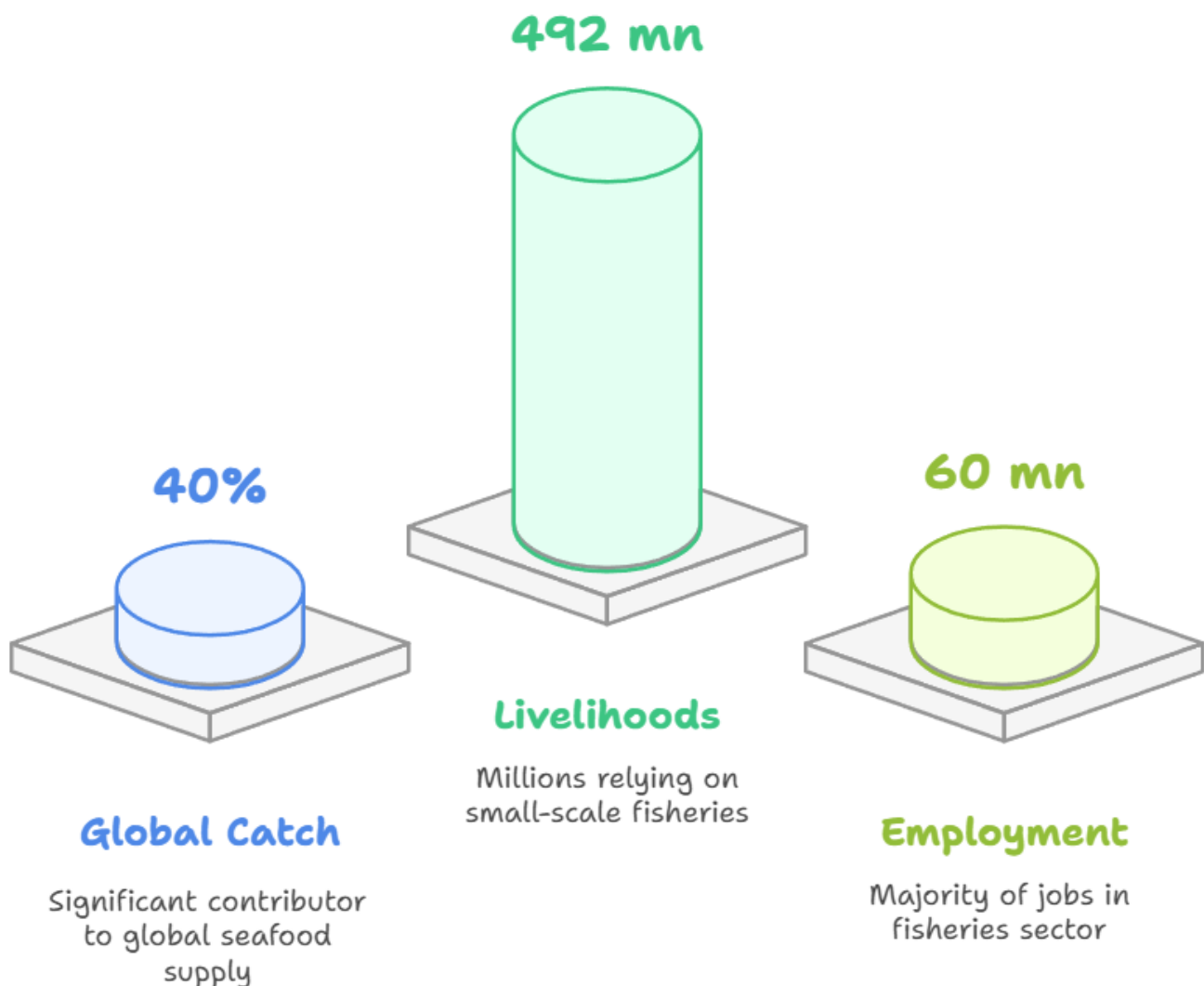

Read more: India as the World Largest Plastic Polluter

Advancing Small-Scale Fisheries

India has taken over the Chairmanship of the **Bay of Bengal Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)** from Bangladesh reinforcing its commitment to the **blue economy**.

- India aims to improve **livelihoods, sustainability, and economic development** of the **Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF).**
- **About BOBP-IGO (2003):** It is a **regional** fisheries body supporting SSF in the **Bay of Bengal.**
  - Members include **Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka**, with Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand as cooperating non-contracting parties.
- **About SSF:** SSF are **traditional, low-capital fisheries** by fishing households, using small vessels (if any), making **short, nearshore trips** either for subsistence or commercial purposes.
- **Global Importance of SSF:**

Impact of Small-Scale Fisheries Globally

492 mn

40%

60 mn

Livelihoods

Millions relying on small-scale fisheries

Global Catch

Significant contributor to global seafood supply

Employment

Majority of jobs in fisheries sector

- **Fisheries Sector in India:** India is the world's **2nd largest fish producer**, with **28 million people** engaged in the sector.
  - India is the **6th largest** marine capture fish producer **(1/3rd of the total fish production).**
  - India has **13 coastal States and UTs**, a coastline of **7,516 km**, and an **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** of 2.20 million sq. km.

- India has **5 million active marine fishermen**, with around **50%** of the workforce being **women.**

Read More: Transforming Fisheries Sector

Jurisdiction of Lokpal

Source: TH

The **Supreme Court (SC)** has stayed a **Lokpal** **order** that classified **High Court (HC) judges as "public servants"** under the **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013**, thereby bringing them under its jurisdiction.

- **Case Background:** Lokpal claimed that High Courts were created under British-era laws like the Indian High Courts Act 1861, and **Article 214 merely recognizes** them rather than establishing them, making their judges subject to its jurisdiction.
  - However, it excluded **SC judges**, as the SC was established by the **Constitution (Article 124), not an Act of Parliament.**
- **SC Ruling:** The SC ruled that all judges, whether in **HCs or the SCs, are appointed under the Constitution**, making them **immune from Lokpal oversight.**
  - SC judges are appointed under **Article 124**, and HC judges under **Article 217**.
- **Jurisdiction of Lokpal:** Lokpal has jurisdiction over the **Prime Minister** ((with exceptions for matters of national security, international relations, etc.), **Union Ministers, MPs**, and **Government Officials** (Group A-D).
  - It also covers **chairpersons, members, officers, or employees** of entities established by an **Act of Parliament**, those **partially/wholly funded or controlled by the Central Government**, or organizations receiving **foreign donations over Rs 10 lakh/year** under the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, 2010**.

LOKPAL

It is a statutory body functioning as "Ombudsman" to investigate corruption allegations against specific public officials and related issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

World

- **1809:** Institution of Ombudsman first created in Sweden

India

- **1963:** Idea of ombudsman first came up in Parliament
- **1971:** First Lokayukta established in Maharashtra
- **2011:** Anna Hazare Movement for Lokpal
- **2013:** Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, 2011 passed
- **2014:** Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 came into force and amended in 2016
- **2019:** Justice (Retd) Pinaki Chandra Ghose as first Lokpal of India

Statutory Provision: Lokpal And Lokayuktas Act (2013)

Seeks to establish institution of Lokpal at Centre and Lokayukta at State

Jurisdiction

- Includes Prime Minister, Ministers, MPs and Groups A, B, C and D officers, officials of Central Govt
- Institutions financed fully or partly by Government
- Entities getting over ₹10 lakhs annually in foreign donations under FCRA

Power

- Authority to approve public servants' prosecution instead of government or relevant authority
- Power of superintendence and direction over any investigating agency, including CBI, for cases referred to them by Lokpal
- Incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property of public servants acquired by corrupt means, even while prosecution pending

Punishment

- Enhances maximum punishment under Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988

Appointment

- Selection of Chairperson and members through Selection Committee (PM, Speaker-LS, Leader of largest opp. party, CJI or sitting SC Judge nominated by CJI and an eminent jurist nominated by President)
- Search Committee assists Selection Committee in process of selection

Structure

- Chairperson + maximum 8 members
  - 50% Judicial members
  - 50% from SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and women

Term of office

- 5 yrs or until the age of 70 yrs

Drishti IAS

Read more: Lokpal and Lokayukta

PRAKRITI 2025

The **PRAKRITI 2025** (Promoting Resilience, Awareness, Knowledge, and Resources for Integrating Transformational Initiatives), the **International Conference on Carbon Markets,** organized by the **Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE),** united global experts to discuss carbon market challenges and opportunities.

- **Insights of PRAKRITI 2025:** Highlighted that India's Carbon Market is influenced by global policies like the **EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM),** impacting steel, and high-emission sectors. Urgent domestic reforms are needed to mitigate these effects.
- **EU's CBAM:** It imposes a fair carbon price on imports, ensures parity with EU-produced goods, and promotes cleaner industrial production globally.
- **Carbon Markets:** Carbon markets (trading systems), under **Article 6 of the Paris Agreement,** allow entities to buy **carbon credits** to offset emissions by supporting projects that reduce or remove greenhouse gases.
- **India's Carbon Markets:** India ranks 2nd in global CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) project registrations.
    - The **Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme** has saved over **106 million tonnes of CO₂ since 2015.** The carbon market in India is regulated by the BEE.
- **BEE:** Established in 2002 under the **Energy Conservation Act, 2001,** BEE operates under the **Ministry of Power** and aims to reduce India's energy intensity by developing policies, promoting self-regulation, and coordinating with stakeholders.

Read more: Rise of India's Carbon Marketplace