

**WEEKLY**  
**Current Affairs**

**22<sup>nd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**UPSC / RPSC**  
and All Other Competitive

**EXAMS**

- Minerals Security Partnership
- Heliopolis Memorial
- Nutraceutical Properties of Joha Rice
- Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical
- India-Egypt Strategic Partnership
- Google's 'Perspectives' Search
- Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24' Scheme



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## Current Affairs 22 June to 30 June

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- Heliopolis Memorial
- Liberalization of UAV Export Policy
- Nutraceutical Properties of Joha Rice
- Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical
- 2023 IMD World Competitiveness Ranking
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- How to Make Polluters Pay: Climate Finance to Support Global Equity
- World Drug Report 2023
- In-country' Renewable H-1B Visas
- Google's 'Perspectives' Search
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## Minerals Security Partnership

The global initiative known as the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), also referred to as the critical minerals alliance, was announced in June 2022. The primary goal of this partnership is to ensure the availability of stable supplies of critical minerals for participating countries' economies while reducing China's dominance in the global critical mineral market.

### Focused Minerals: Cobalt, Nickel, Lithium, and Rare Earth Minerals

The MSP places a strong emphasis on the supply chains of critical minerals, including cobalt, nickel, lithium, and the 17 "rare earth" minerals. These minerals are essential for manufacturing advanced technologies such as mobile phones, electric vehicles, solar panels, and defense applications.

### India's Position: Not a Current Member

Currently, India is not a part of the Minerals Security Partnership. However, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States, discussions are expected to take place regarding India's potential entry into this global alliance on critical minerals.

### Participating Countries: A Global Effort

The Minerals Security Partnership consists of several key countries, including Japan, Australia, Finland, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Republic of Korea, France, Sweden, and the European Union. Together, these nations aim to strengthen critical mineral supply chains and reduce reliance on a single dominant player.

### China's Dominance in Processing: A Major Challenge

In terms of processing critical minerals, China currently holds a dominant position. This highlights the need for diversification and the development of alternative sources to reduce dependence on a single country.

### Rare Earth Minerals: Essential Components for High-Tech Industries

Rare earth minerals, which include elements like scandium, yttrium, and lanthanides, are crucial components in the production of various high-tech applications. These minerals are vital for the functioning of devices such as cellular telephones, flat-screen monitors, televisions, and electric vehicles.

### India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership

To strengthen critical mineral supply chains, India and Australia have established the India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership. This partnership aims to support India's space and defense industries, as well as the manufacture of electric vehicles, by providing resources and expertise in critical minerals.

### Moving Towards Secure and Sustainable Mineral Supply

As India undergoes a transition towards clean energy sources and electric vehicles, securing a reliable supply of critical minerals becomes imperative. By actively participating in global initiatives and forming strategic partnerships, India can address challenges posed by the uneven distribution of rare earth elements and ensure a stable supply of critical minerals for its growing industries.

## Heliopolis Memorial

Located in Cairo, Egypt, the Heliopolis (Port Tewfik) Memorial stands as a solemn tribute to the valor and sacrifice of Indian soldiers who fought in Egypt and Palestine during World War 1.

The Heliopolis Memorial stands tall, bearing the names of nearly 3,727 Indian soldiers who valiantly fought in the theaters of Egypt and Palestine during World War 1. It serves as a testament to their bravery and dedication to the cause of peace.

### Unveiling of the Original Memorial in 1926

The original Port Tewfik memorial, unveiled in 1926, stood proudly at the entrance to the Suez Canal. However, due to the Israeli-Egyptian War of 1967, the memorial was destroyed by retreating Egyptian soldiers. In its place, a new memorial





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was erected in the Heliopolis Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in 1980, ensuring the names of the fallen Indian soldiers would never be forgotten.

## **The Role of Indian Troops: Securing the Suez Canal and More**

Indian troops played a vital role in the West Asian campaigns of World War 1. They secured strategic locations such as the Suez Canal in Egypt and contributed significantly in Palestine. Notably, Indian cavalry participated in the famous Battle of Haifa, a historic moment commemorated in a war memorial in New Delhi.

## **Commemorating the 42nd Deoli Regiment**

Among the regiments listed at the Heliopolis memorial, the 42nd Deoli Regiment holds a special place for its noteworthy contribution to the war effort. Alongside other Indian regiments and state forces, they saw action in various theaters of the war, leaving an indelible mark on history.

## **The Courage of Risaldar Badlu Singh**

One name that shines brightly at the Heliopolis Memorial is that of Risaldar Badlu Singh. This courageous Indian soldier was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest British wartime gallantry award. He made the ultimate sacrifice during a charge on a strong enemy position, demonstrating bravery and self-sacrifice that will never be forgotten.

## **Remembering Sepoy Nazara Singh and Sepoy Gurcharan**

Sepoy Nazara Singh of the 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force) and Sepoy Gurcharan from Dehra, Kangra, Punjab, are among the brave soldiers commemorated at the war memorial. Their names, etched in stone, serve as a poignant reminder of their dedication and sacrifice.

## **Preserving the Legacy**

The Heliopolis (Port Tewfik) Memorial stands as a solemn reminder of the sacrifices made by Indian soldiers during World War 1. It serves to preserve their memory and pay homage to their extraordinary bravery.

## **Liberalization of UAV Export Policy**

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has recently implemented significant changes to the policy governing the export of Drones/UAVs from India. With the aim of promoting the export of high-tech items for civilian end uses, the DGFT has simplified and liberalized the regulations surrounding drone exports.

Previously, drones fell under the restrictive Category 5B of the SCOMET list, which regulates items with dual-use potential in both civilian and military applications. Exporters were required to obtain a SCOMET license, which posed challenges, especially for drones with limited capabilities meant solely for civilian use.

## **Introducing General Authorization for Export of Drones (GAED)**

To address these challenges, the DGFT introduced the General Authorization for Export of Drones (GAED). Drones meeting specific criteria are now eligible for this authorization, simplifying the export process. The criteria include a range equal to or less than 25 km, a payload of not more than 25 kgs (excluding software and technology), and a clear purpose for civilian end-use.

## **Benefits for the Drone Industry**

The policy change is expected to bring significant benefits to the drone industry in India. By eliminating the need for SCOMET licenses for each export shipment, compliance requirements are reduced, streamlining the process for exporters. This change aims to position India as a global manufacturing hub for drones, fostering innovation and economic growth within the industry.

## **Validity and Procedural Details**





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The GAED authorization grants a one-time general license valid for 3 years. This means that drone manufacturers and exporters with GAED authorization no longer need to apply for a SCOMET license for each export shipment within the 3-year validity period. Detailed procedures and guidelines for GAED can be found on the DGFT website, specifically in the DGFT Public Notice No.19.

## **Nutraceutical Properties of Joha Rice**

Joha rice, a variety cultivated in the Northeastern region of India, has gained attention for its distinct aroma and notable taste. Beyond its sensory appeal, Joha rice has been traditionally associated with health benefits, including a low incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. In recent years, scientists at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) have conducted research to explore the nutraceutical properties of this unique grain.

Researchers at the IASST have made significant strides in unraveling the nutraceutical properties of Joha rice. Through their studies, they identified two essential fatty acids: linoleic acid (omega-6) and linolenic acid (omega-3). These fatty acids, which are not produced by the human body, play a vital role in maintaining various physiological conditions. Notably, omega-3 fatty acids have been linked to the prevention of metabolic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer.

## **Balanced Ratio and Patented Rice Bran Oil**

The scientists discovered that scented Joha rice exhibits a more balanced ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 essential fatty acids compared to the widely consumed non-scented variety. This finding suggests that the scented variety may offer enhanced nutritional benefits. Building upon this, the scientists utilized Joha rice to create a patented rice bran oil, which has demonstrated efficacy in the management of diabetes.

## **Antioxidants and Bioactive Compounds**

Joha rice is not only rich in essential fatty acids but also contains a range of beneficial compounds. It boasts antioxidants, flavonoids, and phenolics, which contribute to its potential health advantages. Among the identified bioactive compounds present in Joha rice are oryzanol, ferulic acid, tocotrienol, caffeic acid, catechuic acid, gallic acid, and triclin. These compounds have been associated with antioxidant, hypoglycemic, and cardio-protective effects.

## **Udyami Bharat-MSME Day**

Udyami Bharat-MSME Day is an important occasion that highlights the achievements and potential of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India. This year, the event will be celebrated on June 27, bringing together key stakeholders from the government and the MSME sector.

The event will be graced by the presence of Narayan Rane, Union Minister, who will serve as the chief guest. Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma, Union Minister of State, will also be present as the guest of honour. Their participation underscores the government's commitment to the growth and development of MSMEs in the country.

## **Exciting Initiatives to be Launched**

Udyami Bharat-MSME Day will witness the launch of several noteworthy initiatives aimed at empowering and uplifting MSMEs. These include the unveiling of the Champions 2.0 portal, a platform that will provide valuable support and resources to MSMEs. Additionally, a mobile app for geo-tagging of cluster projects and technology centres will be introduced, facilitating effective management and monitoring of these initiatives. Moreover, the event will mark the launch of the MSME Idea Hackathon 3.0, a platform that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship among women entrepreneurs.

## **Recognition and Support**

The event will also serve as a platform to acknowledge the accomplishments of MSMEs. The results of the MSME Idea Hackathon 2.0 will be announced, showcasing the creative and innovative ideas generated by participants. Furthermore,





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certificate distribution ceremonies will be held to honor Gold and Silver ZED-certified MSMEs. The MSME Sustainable (ZED) Certification, which promotes Zero Defect Zero Effect practices, aims to enhance the quality and efficiency of MSME operations.

## **Boosting Economic Growth**

To further bolster the growth of MSMEs, the event will witness the digital transfer of Rs 400 crore margin money subsidy. This subsidy, a part of the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), will contribute to local employment generation and empower aspiring entrepreneurs.

## **Building a Vibrant MSME Ecosystem**

The government's initiatives for MSMEs are centered around creating an enabling environment for their success. These initiatives aim to improve the overall business ecosystem, foster innovation, promote regional development, and reduce regional disparities. By supporting MSMEs, the government seeks to drive economic growth and create a conducive environment for their sustainable development.

## **A Venue of Significance**

The Udyami Bharat-MSME Day event will take place at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi, a prestigious venue that symbolizes the government's commitment to the growth and progress of the MSME sector.

## **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical**

The World Bank has recently given its approval for a substantial loan of USD 255.5 million to India, aiming to improve the quality of technical education in the country. This ambitious project is set to make a significant impact by focusing on research, entrepreneurship, innovation, and governance improvement in government-run technical institutions.

The Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education Project is expected to benefit approximately 275 government-run technical institutions across India. This massive undertaking aims to enhance the quality of education and empower students with the necessary skills for their future careers.

## **Empowering Students Through Upgraded Curricula**

As part of the project, students will gain access to upgraded curricula that incorporate emerging technologies in communication and climate resilience. This forward-thinking approach will equip students with the knowledge and competencies required to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and rapidly evolving world.

## **Enhanced Internship and Placement Services**

Students participating in the project will also enjoy improved internship and placement services. This includes invaluable opportunities to network with professional associations, fostering connections and opening doors to promising career paths. Such practical exposure is instrumental in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application.

## **World Bank's Role in Empowering Technical Education**

The World Bank, a respected multilateral institution, played a vital role in making this loan possible. Their support demonstrates a commitment to bolstering technical education and expanding career prospects for Indian students. The loan, granted by the IBRD, will reach its full term after 14 years, during which there will be a grace period of five years.

## **Addressing Gaps in Tertiary Education**

Recent studies have highlighted significant gaps in both technical and non-technical skills among tertiary education students in India. These include reasoning, interpersonal communication, and conflict resolution. The Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education Project acknowledges these challenges and aims to address them effectively.





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## Promoting Gender Equality and Inclusion

The project also places emphasis on promoting gender equality in technical education. Outreach programs will provide prospective female students, parents, and guardians with better information on technical education program options. Sensitization efforts will address misconceptions and encourage female participation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

## A Step Towards National Education Policy 2020

The project aligns with the Indian government's National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes modernizing the education sector. By equipping students with relevant skills and preparing them for emerging job opportunities, the project supports the nation's vision for educational advancement.

## 2023 IMD World Competitiveness Ranking

The latest world competitiveness ranking has brought forth interesting insights into the competitive landscape of nations. The rankings, compiled by the International Institute for Management Development (IMD), provide valuable information on economic performance, government efficiency, infrastructure, and more.

In the highly anticipated ranking, Denmark emerged as the top-ranked country for competitiveness. This achievement reflects the country's consistent excellence across all four measured factors: economic performance, government efficiency, infrastructure, and business efficiency.

## Singapore's Position

Singapore, known for its vibrant business environment, claimed an impressive fourth position in the global competitiveness ranking. While the city-state slipped from third place in the previous year, its overall competitive edge remains strong and noteworthy.

## Ireland's Remarkable Progress

The ranking witnessed Ireland making significant strides, emerging as the country with the most notable improvement. Climbing from the 11th position to second place, Ireland showcased outstanding economic performance as its ranking in this criterion soared from seventh to first. Several factors contributed to Ireland's ascent, including a skilled workforce, high educational standards, policy stability, a competitive tax regime, and a business-friendly environment.

## Factors Considered

The IMD's competitiveness ranking evaluates countries based on four key factors: economic performance, government efficiency, infrastructure, and business efficiency. These factors provide a comprehensive assessment of a country's overall competitiveness, taking into account various aspects that shape its economic landscape.

## Hard Data and Survey Responses

The ranking process combines hard data and survey responses to derive comprehensive results. Two-thirds of the overall ranking results are based on hard data, comprising 164 competitiveness criteria obtained from extensive research and multiple sources. The remaining one-third is derived from responses to 92 survey questions answered by senior executives, providing valuable insights from industry leaders.

## Switzerland's Government Efficiency and Infrastructure

Switzerland retained its position as a leader in government efficiency and infrastructure. This achievement reflects the nation's strong governance and well-developed infrastructure, contributing to its overall competitiveness. Switzerland ranked first in government efficiency and infrastructure, seventh in business efficiency, and saw an improvement in economic performance, moving from 30th to 18th place.

## India-Egypt Strategic Partnership





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India and Egypt have taken significant steps to enhance their bilateral cooperation through a strategic partnership agreement. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Egypt, several key developments unfolded, solidifying the relationship between the two nations.

The strategic partnership agreement between India and Egypt aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation across various sectors. Its primary purpose is to enhance the existing relationship between the two nations and foster closer ties on multiple fronts.

## Chief Guest Visit

Egyptian President El-Sisi visited India as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day celebrations in January. This visit played a crucial role in setting the foundation for the strategic partnership agreement. It marked a significant moment in bilateral relations and laid the groundwork for future collaborations.

## Four Elements of the Strategic Partnership

The strategic partnership agreement encompasses four key elements. These include political, defense and security cooperation, economic engagement, scientific and academic collaboration, and cultural and people-to-people contacts. This comprehensive approach ensures a holistic and multi-dimensional partnership.

India and Egypt solidified their collaboration through the signing of three pacts. These pacts focus on important areas such as agriculture, preservation of monuments and archaeological sites, and competition law. Such agreements facilitate mutual cooperation, knowledge exchange, and further strengthen the foundation of the strategic partnership.

## Exploring Historical Sites

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Egypt included visits to significant historical sites. One of the highlights was his exploration of the iconic Great Pyramids of Giza. The Great Pyramids of Giza consist of three main pyramids: the Pyramid of Khufu (or Cheops), the Pyramid of Khafre, and the Pyramid of Menkaure. Built during the Old Kingdom period of ancient Egypt, these pyramids were constructed as tombs for the pharaohs. Towering over the desert landscape, they were meticulously designed and constructed with precision, ingenuity, and immense human effort.

## Meeting the Bohra Community

During his visit to Al-Hakim Mosque, Prime Minister Modi had the opportunity to meet members of the Bohra community. This community actively contributes to the preservation and upkeep of the mosque, reflecting the strong people-to-people ties between India and Egypt.

## Building Bilateral Relations

Upon his arrival in Cairo from the United States, Prime Minister Modi met Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly-led India Unit. This assembly of senior officials, formed under the leadership of President El-Sisi, is dedicated to enhancing the mutual ties between the two nations. Such initiatives lay the groundwork for greater collaboration and mutual growth.

## High Death Rates in Bee Colonies

Honeybee colonies in the United States are facing a concerning trend according to an annual bee survey conducted by the University of Maryland and Auburn University. While the overall number of honeybee colonies has remained stable, the survey reveals a high death rate among managed colonies.

The survey reports that nearly half of managed honeybee colonies in the United States have been lost, marking the second highest death rate on record. This loss, while staggering, is even more concerning when considering the vital role honeybees play in pollinating over 100 crops, including nuts, vegetables, berries, citrus fruits, and melons.

## Contributing Factors







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Several factors contribute to the high mortality rate of honeybee colonies. Parasites, such as the Varroa destructor mite, weaken the bees and make them susceptible to viruses. Pesticides further compromise their immune systems and foraging abilities. Starvation, caused by habitat loss and a lack of diverse food sources, exacerbates the issue. Additionally, the effects of climate change and extreme weather events pose additional challenges for these delicate pollinators.

## Challenges Faced by Beekeepers

Beekeepers face the challenging task of maintaining the overall population of honeybee colonies. They invest significant resources in splitting and restocking hives, which involves finding or purchasing new queens and colonies. Commercial beekeepers play a vital role in replenishing losses and ensuring the stability of the bee colony population.

## The Importance of Conservation Efforts

The significance of addressing the threats to honeybees cannot be overstated. While the current situation may not reach the crisis level observed 15 years ago, environmental threats persist. Honeybees are crucial for pollinating insect-dependent plants and maintaining diverse ecosystems. The growing demand for pollination from commercial bee colonies necessitates increased efforts to safeguard their populations and find sustainable solutions.

## Compliance Status of Coal-Based Power Plants

India's coal-fired power plants are facing challenges in installing flue gas de-sulfurisation (FGD) systems, which are crucial for controlling sulphur dioxide emissions and reducing air pollution. A recent analysis conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) highlights the low installation rate of FGD systems and the implications for emission norms compliance.

According to the CSE analysis, only 5% of India's coal-fired power plants have installed FGD systems. This indicates a significant gap in meeting the emission control requirements set by the Union environment ministry in December 2015.

## Delays and Challenges

The report identifies several reasons for the slow progress in FGD installation. The dependency on the external market for FGD components, the novelty of the technology in the Indian market, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to delays in implementation.

## Emission Norms Compliance

The analysis reveals that a substantial percentage of capacity near Delhi-NCR and cities with a population of 1 million or more (43%), critically polluted areas (11%), and the remaining capacity (1%) are unlikely to meet the emission norms by the latest deadlines. This raises concerns about the potential air pollution impact in these regions.

## Time and Investment Required

Installing FGD systems is a time-consuming process, typically taking around two years. The CSE report estimates the likelihood of power plants meeting emission norms based on their compliance stage and the remaining time until the deadlines. Urgent action is needed to ensure timely compliance.

## Importance of Emission Control

The CSE report emphasizes the need for compliance with emission norms and highlights that power plant emissions can contribute to air pollution beyond their boundaries. The impact of air pollution on public health and the environment necessitates effective pollution control measures.

## How to Make Polluters Pay: Climate Finance to Support Global Equity

The Summit for a New Global Financial Pact recently took place in Paris, bringing together country leaders, finance ministers, and civil society organizations. A side event was held to discuss "polluter pays principle".

## Making Polluters Pay: Exploring the "Polluter Pays" Principle





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One of the side events held during the summit was titled “How to make polluters pay: Climate finance to support global equity.” This session delved into the concept of the “polluter pays principle.” This principle asserts that those who contribute to pollution should bear the responsibility of managing the environmental damage caused by their actions and compensate those affected by it. Greenhouse gases, which are considered pollutants due to their contribution to climate change and various forms of pollution, were a key focus of discussion.

## **Estimating the Climate Finance Requirement**

The need for significant climate finance was highlighted during the summit. It was estimated that an annual investment of \$2.4 trillion would be necessary until 2030 to facilitate a smooth transition towards sustainable practices in developing countries. This massive financial requirement emphasizes the urgency to explore new revenue streams beyond government and multilateral development bank contributions to ensure the availability of adequate climate finance.

## **Exploring Potential Revenue Streams**

Various revenue streams were discussed as potential sources of climate finance during the summit. These included shipping levies, financial transaction taxes, fossil fuel taxes, levies on the export of oil, gas, and coal, and airline levies. These revenue-generating mechanisms have the potential to generate substantial funds that can be allocated towards climate-related initiatives and support the transition to greener economies.

## **The Role of Shipping Industry and Proposed Levy**

The shipping industry was a significant topic of discussion, given its contribution of 2.9% to global greenhouse gas emissions. To address this issue, a proposed solution was the implementation of a shipping levy of \$100 per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted. This levy aims to incentivize emission reductions within the industry and generate significant funds that can be used to support climate initiatives.

## **World Drug Report 2023**

A recently released United Nations report has shed light on the growing challenges posed by drug use worldwide. The report, titled the World Drug Report 2023, provides alarming statistics and emphasizes the urgent need for prioritizing public health, prevention, and access to treatment services.

According to the UN report, the estimate of people who inject drugs in 2021 stands at a staggering 13.2 million, representing an 18% increase compared to previous estimates. This sharp rise highlights the persistent nature of drug addiction and the pressing need for effective interventions and support systems.

## **Widespread Drug Use**

Globally, over 296 million people were reported to have used drugs in 2021, reflecting a concerning increase of 23% over the past decade. These numbers demonstrate the scale of the challenge and the need for comprehensive strategies to address drug use and its associated harms.

## **Growing Burden of Drug Use Disorders**

One of the most alarming findings of the report is the significant increase in the number of people suffering from drug use disorders. Over the past 10 years, there has been a 45% surge in individuals experiencing drug use disorders, reaching a staggering total of 39.5 million. This surge underscores the critical importance of access to treatment services and effective support for those struggling with addiction.

## **Treatment Gaps and Disparities**

Despite the escalating burden of drug use disorders, the report highlights that fewer than 20% of people with drug use disorders are currently in treatment. This significant treatment gap raises concerns about the accessibility and availability of support services. Furthermore, the report reveals that only 27% of women who use amphetamine-type stimulants receive treatment, indicating gender disparities in accessing care.





## **Youth as a Vulnerable Population**

The report emphasizes that youth populations are particularly vulnerable to drug use and substance use disorders in various regions. In Africa, for instance, 70% of people in treatment for drug use are under the age of 35. These findings highlight the need for targeted prevention programs, education, and early intervention initiatives to address the specific needs of young people.

## **Addressing Drug Challenges: A Global Priority**

The UN report unequivocally underscores the urgent need for prioritizing public health, prevention, and access to treatment services as part of a comprehensive response to drug challenges. It emphasizes that failure to address these challenges will result in more individuals being left behind, exacerbating social and economic inequalities and contributing to global crises and conflicts.

## **In-country' Renewable H-1B Visas**

The United States authorities have recently announced a significant development in the H-1B visa renewal process. The introduction of 'in-country' renewable H-1B visas aims to streamline the renewal procedure for Indian professionals working in the US.

H-1B visas are highly sought-after non-immigrant visas that allow US companies to employ foreign workers in specialized occupations requiring theoretical or technical expertise. These visas play a crucial role in facilitating the recruitment of talent, particularly in the technology sector, with many employees coming from countries like India.

Until 2004, certain non-immigrant visas, including H-1B visas, could be renewed or stamped within the US. However, subsequent changes necessitated foreign tech workers to leave the country, often returning to their home countries, for H-1B visa extension stamps on their passports. This requirement posed significant inconveniences, especially considering the lengthy wait times for visa renewal, which could exceed 800 days or two years.

## **Introducing 'In-Country' Renewal**

To address the difficulties faced by Indian professionals, the US visa office has introduced 'in-country' renewable H-1B visas. This initiative eliminates the need for individuals to travel overseas for visa renewal. The timing of this announcement aligns with the forthcoming bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden, underscoring the significance of the Indo-US relationship.

## **Expanding Convenience and Collaboration**

The 'in-country' renewal program is a people-to-people initiative aimed at fostering smoother visa renewal procedures. The Biden administration has also unveiled plans for a pilot program to adjudicate domestic renewals of certain work visas, including those for Indian nationals. The intent is to eventually expand this program to cover a broader pool of H-1 and L visa holders, enhancing convenience and collaboration for foreign workers.

## **Google's 'Perspectives' Search**

Google has recently launched a new search feature called Perspectives, aiming to provide users with a broader range of viewpoints on various topics.

Perspectives search on Google encompasses a wide range of content types, including long- and short-form videos, images, and written posts. These materials are sourced from discussion boards, Q&A sites, and popular social media platforms. Google's blog post highlighted examples such as TikTok videos, YouTube videos, websites, tweets, Quora results, and Reddit posts, to name a few.

## **Emphasizing Authoritativeness and Trustworthiness**





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One of the key focuses of Perspectives search is to prioritize content that demonstrates authoritativeness, expertise, and trustworthiness. Google aims to provide users with reliable and informative perspectives from trusted sources. By highlighting these attributes, the company strives to ensure that users can rely on the information they find.

## **Pinterest-Like Layout for Visual Appeal**

The layout of Perspectives search results resembles the visually engaging style of Pinterest. This approach offers users a unique and visually appealing way to explore different perspectives on their search queries.

## **Encouraging Balanced Information Seeking**

Google's motivation behind introducing Perspectives is to discourage users from solely relying on appending "reddit" to their searches. The feature aims to provide information from real people and diverse sources, encouraging a balanced approach to information seeking.

## **Addressing Challenges and Timing**

The decrease in effectiveness of using "reddit" in searches was prompted by Reddit communities going offline in protest of planned API changes. Critics have speculated that Google's Perspectives could be seen as an attempt to encroach on Reddit's territory, but it's important to note that the timing of the feature's launch was announced during a Google conference in May, suggesting that the introduction may be coincidental.

## **Gradual Rollout for Wider Adoption**

To ensure a seamless experience, Google has chosen to gradually roll out the Perspectives tab over the course of several weeks. This allows users to familiarize themselves with the new feature and gradually explore the diverse perspectives it offers.

## **Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24' Scheme**

The Ministry of Finance has introduced a special assistance scheme aimed at enhancing capital spending by states in India. This scheme, announced in the Union Budget 2023-24, has garnered attention for its significant impact on capital investment proposals and the sectors benefiting from it.

The Ministry of Finance has approved capital investment proposals amounting to Rs 56,415 crore for 16 states in the current financial year. This substantial allocation reflects the government's commitment to promoting growth and development in various regions across the country.

## **Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24**

The Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24 scheme was unveiled in the Union Budget as a means to bolster capital spending by states. Under this scheme, states are provided interest-free loans amounting to a total of Rs 1.3 lakh crore during the financial year. The objective is to empower states and support their initiatives for infrastructure development and sectoral advancements.

## **Department of Expenditure's Approval**

The capital investment proposals for the current financial year have been approved by the Department of Expenditure. This department plays a crucial role in assessing the feasibility and viability of proposed projects across sectors and determining their eligibility for financial assistance.

## **Diverse Sectors Benefiting from the Scheme**

Several sectors have been identified for capital investment projects under the scheme. These sectors include health, education, irrigation, water supply, power, roads, bridges, and railways. The infusion of funds in these areas is expected to accelerate progress and contribute to the overall development of the states involved.

## **Focused Funding for Specific Projects**





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To ensure the timely completion of critical projects, the Special Assistance scheme specifically targets the Jal Jeevan Mission and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. By providing dedicated funding to these initiatives, the government aims to expedite the delivery of essential services related to water supply and rural connectivity.

### **Previous Year's Achievements**

In the previous financial year, a similar scheme titled 'Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment for 2022-23' was implemented. Under this scheme, capital investment proposals amounting to Rs 95,147.19 crore were approved, and an impressive Rs 81,195.35 crore was released to the states. This highlights the continuity and success of the government's efforts in driving capital spending across states.

### **Continued Focus on Capital Spending**

The scheme for financial assistance to states for capital investment/expenditure was first introduced by the Ministry of Finance in the financial year 2020-21, with the aim of addressing the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This ongoing scheme has been instrumental in providing a much-needed boost to capital spending by states, stimulating economic growth and infrastructure development.

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