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## Prelims Exam Topics

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### CAUSE AND IMPLICATION OF UAE EXIT FROM OPEC

#### Context:

- UAE has exited OPEC amid long-standing disagreements signalling a shift in global oil politics and weakening cartel cohesion

#### Reasons for UAE Exit

- **Monetising Oil Before Peak Demand:** UAE wants to **produce maximum oil now** as global demand is expected to peak with energy transition (e.g. low-cost producer aiming to capture market share early).
- **Disagreement with OPEC Quotas:** UAE was restricted to producing below its capacity (e.g. ~3.1 mbpd vs ~4.8 mbpd capacity), limiting revenue and growth potential.
- **Differences with GCC Members:**
  - **Diversified vs Oil-Dependent Economy:** United Arab Emirates has built a **diversified economy (trade, tourism, finance, logistics)**, with oil contributing ~30%, while GCC members like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait depend heavily on oil revenues. Thus UAE is comfortable with lower oil prices, unlike others needing high prices to sustain budgets.
  - **Normalisation with Israel:** UAE's independent foreign policy (e.g. Abraham Accords with Israel) contrasts with Saudi's cautious stance, widening political differences.
  - **Response to Iran Threat:** UAE pushed for a **stronger response after facing direct drone and missile attacks**, whereas GCC countries largely adopted a **defensive and cautious approach**.
- **Shift from Gulf Unity to Strategic Autonomy:** UAE is increasingly acting as an **independent global player**, rather than aligning fully with GCC consensus

#### Impact of Exit

- **Weakening of Cartel Power:** UAE exit reduces OPEC's ability to control global oil supply and prices (erosion of coordinated production system).
- **Possibility of Further Exits:** Other members may question quota system (risk of more countries leaving, weakening unity).
- **Reduced Saudi Dominance:** Saudi Arabia's leadership within OPEC may weaken as UAE challenges its policy direction.
- **Downward Pressure on Oil Prices:** Increased production by UAE may lower prices in long term (especially after Strait of Hormuz reopens).
- **Market Volatility:** Less coordination may lead to price fluctuations and potential price wars among producers.
- **Impact on India:**

- **Positive:** Lower oil prices reduce import bill (India imports ~89% of crude)
- **Negative:** Greater volatility and geopolitical uncertainty affect energy security

UAE's exit reflects a broader transition in global oil markets—from **cartel-based control to competitive production**, with significant implications for energy geopolitics and major importers like India.

## VIKRAM VT-21 INFANTRY COMBAT VEHICLE

### Context:

- India is developing the Vikram VT-21 under DRDO to replace ageing BMP-2 vehicles.

### About Vikram VT-21

- Developed by DRDO as an **Advanced Armoured Platform (AAP)** for future infantry combat needs.
- **Variants:** Two versions—**wheeled (faster, urban use)** and **tracked (better off-road, rough terrain)**, enabling flexibility across terrains.
- **Firepower System:** Equipped with **30 mm crewless turret (remote-operated)** + **7.62 mm PKT machine gun** + **Nag ATGM (anti-tank missile)** for precision strikes against armoured targets.
- **Protection Level:** Provides **STANAG Level 4–5 armour protection (NATO defined standard)**, against heavy gunfire, blasts and shrapnel.
- **Amphibious Capability:** Can cross rivers and water bodies using **hydro jets and water propulsion systems**.
- **Modular Design:** Can be adapted for **troop transport, reconnaissance, combat support and surveillance roles**.
- **Indigenisation:** About **65% indigenous content (target ~90%)**, promoting self-reliance in defence manufacturing.
  - Developed with partners like **Bharat Forge and Tata Advanced Systems**, along with MSMEs.



### Need for Vikram VT-21

- **Replacement of Ageing Fleet:** Indian Army's requirement for a Futuristic Infantry Combat Vehicle (FICV) stems from the need to replace the ageing BMP-2 fleet (in service since 1980s)
- **Modern Warfare Requirements:** Needed for **network-centric warfare** where real-time data sharing, sensors and communication are crucial for operations.

- **Enhanced Combat Capability:** Provides improved **mobility, protection and firepower** for infantry in high-threat environments (e.g. borders with China and Pakistan).

## SUPREME COURT ON HATE SPEECH

### Context

The Supreme Court of India examined multiple petitions seeking a separate law to address hate speech and related crimes.

The Court acknowledged the seriousness of the issue but refused to direct the creation of a new law, stating that law-making is the responsibility of the legislature.

### Key observations by the court

- **“Us vs them” mindset:** The Court observed that hate speech arises from a mindset that divides society into opposing groups. This thinking promotes exclusion, where certain communities are treated as inferior or outsiders.
- **Threat to fraternity:** Hate speech weakens the idea of fraternity, which is a core value in the Constitution. It damages social harmony and undermines the unity of a diverse society like India.
- **Moral and social impact:** The Court noted that hate speech is not just inappropriate language but a serious threat to the moral fabric of society. It goes against India’s civilisational idea of harmony, often reflected in the **principle of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”** (the world is one family).
- **Link with violence:** Hate speech and rumours can lead to real-world violence and conflicts between communities. Such speech creates an environment where hostility and aggression become normalised.
- **Separation of powers:** The Court emphasised that it cannot create laws, as this is the role of Parliament and legislatures. Judicial intervention in law-making would disturb the balance between different branches of government.
- **Adequate existing legal framework:** The Court stated that current laws already address hate speech and related offences. These include provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.
- **Focus on enforcement, not new laws:** According to the Court, the real issue lies in poor implementation of existing laws. Ineffective enforcement allows hate speech and related crimes to continue.

### Concerns highlighted

- **Weak implementation of laws:** Authorities often fail to take timely action against hate speech. This reduces the deterrent effect of the law and encourages repeat offences.
- **Continued social divisions:** Deep-rooted social differences based on religion, caste, or identity make hate speech more impactful. These divisions create fertile ground for such behaviour.
- **Spread of rumours:** Rumour-mongering, especially through digital platforms, amplifies hate speech. It can quickly escalate tensions and lead to violence.

## Way forward

- **Strict enforcement of existing laws:** Law enforcement agencies must act promptly and fairly in cases of hate speech. Consistent application of laws will act as a strong deterrent.
- **Accountability of authorities:** Police and administrative officials should be held responsible for inaction or bias. Proper monitoring mechanisms can improve compliance.
- **Promoting Constitutional values:** Public awareness about equality, dignity, and fraternity should be strengthened. Education and civic engagement can reduce prejudices.
- **Role of legislature:** While the Court did not mandate a new law, it left the option open for Parliament to consider specific legislation if required.

## CREAMY LAYER

### Context

The creamy layer issue has recently come back into focus as fresh petitions have been filed before the Supreme Court of India seeking to extend the creamy layer principle to SC/ST reservations.

### About the creamy layer

- **Meaning:** The creamy layer refers to the relatively advanced sections within a backward class who have achieved a certain level of social and economic progress. The idea is that such groups may no longer require reservation benefits.
- **Current scope:** At present, the creamy layer principle applies only to OBCs and not to SCs and STs.
- **Origin:** The concept was introduced in **Indra Sawhney v. Union of India (1992)**, where the Court upheld OBC reservations but excluded the advanced sections to ensure fair distribution.
- **Initial criteria:** Early guidelines (1993) focused on social status rather than just income.
- **Shift to income:** Later, a 2004 clarification emphasised income levels.
  - **Eg: Union of India v. Rohith Nathan (2025)**, the court restored the importance of status-based criteria, rejecting income as the sole factor.

### Classification and Sub-classification

- **Creamy layer exclusion:** This approach removes the more advanced individuals from a reserved category so that benefits reach the truly disadvantaged.
- **Sub-classification:** This divides a reserved group (such as SCs) into smaller sub-groups and prioritises the most marginalised within the category, without excluding anyone.
- **Key difference:** Creamy layer reduces the number of eligible beneficiaries, while sub-classification redistributes benefits within the same group.
- **Why SC/ST case is different:**
  - OBC status is based on social and educational backwardness, which can change over time.

- SC/ST status is based on constitutional lists under **Articles 341 and 342**, reflecting historical discrimination like untouchability and tribal exclusion.
- Therefore, applying income-based exclusion to SC/STs raises constitutional concerns.

### Supreme court observations

- **Issue:** The issue has returned to the Supreme Court of India through fresh petitions seeking to extend the creamy layer principle to SC/ST reservations.
- **Trigger:** These petitions rely on the ruling in **State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh (2024)** and demand:
  - Exclusion of creamy layer from SC/ST quotas
  - Income-based prioritisation within these categories
- **Davinder Singh judgment:** The Court allowed sub-classification within SCs to better target benefits. Some judges also observed that creamy layer logic could be considered, leading to the present debate.
- **Ambedkar's view:** B.R. Ambedkar argued that economic progress does not remove social discrimination. Even well-off individuals from oppressed castes may continue to face exclusion.
- **Data evidence:** Cases like **Jaishri Patil v. Union of India (2021)** show that income limits can exclude genuinely disadvantaged people. Studies also indicate that reservation benefits often reach the most deprived sections.
- **Key concern:** The “creamy layer trap” arises when income limits exclude families that are only slightly better off, even though they still face social discrimination.

## PANCHAYAT ADVANCEMENT INDEX (PAI) 2.0 REPORT

### Context

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj unveiled the Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0 Report for the year 2023–24 on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day.

### About Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) 2.0

- PAI 2.0 is a nationwide, data-centric assessment framework developed to evaluate and improve the functioning of more than 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Traditional Local Bodies (TLBs).
- It acts as a localized performance evaluation tool for Panchayats.
- The framework measures progress using 150 indicators and 230 data points grouped under nine thematic areas, aligned with the **Localization of Sustainable Development Goals (LSDGs)**.

### Key findings and highlights

- **Participation:** The index recorded 97.30% participation, covering 2,59,867 Panchayats across 33 States and Union Territories. This marks a substantial increase from 80.79% participation in PAI 1.0.
- **Performance classification:** Panchayats are categorized into five grades based on their overall scores:
  - Achiever (A+)

- Front Runner (A)
- Performer (B)
- Aspirant (C)
- Beginner (D)
- **Category distribution:**
  - **Front Runners (A):** 3,635 Gram Panchayats
  - **Performers (B):** Largest group with 1,18,824 GPs (around 45.7%)
- **Thematic achievements:** Poverty Reduction (Theme 1): 3,313 GPs secured A+ grades
  - **Health & Well-being (Theme 2):** 1,015 GPs attained A+ status
- **Framework improvements:** Indicators reduced from 516 (PAI 1.0) to 150 (PAI 2.0) for sharper focus and usability.
- **State participation:** 33 States/UTs participated.
  - **Eg:** West Bengal did not participate, while Delhi and Chandigarh were excluded due to the absence of Gram Panchayats.
- **State-level highlights:**
  - **Top Performer:** Tripura, with nearly 80% of its Panchayats achieving Front Runner status.
  - **No A+ Panchayats:** No Gram Panchayat reached the Achiever (A+) category nationally.
  - **Highest Participation:** Uttar Pradesh, with 57,678 Panchayats contributing data.

#### Success trends in high-performing panchayats

- **Evidence-based governance:** Panchayats are increasingly using PAI scores to design targeted development plans (GDPDs).
- **Knowledge sharing:** High-performing Panchayats are being developed as learning hubs for peer exchange.
- **Transparency measures:** Validation through Gram Sabhas has improved accountability and citizen participation.
- **Digital integration:** Real-time dashboards and automatic data integration from Union Ministries have enhanced data reliability.

#### Key challenges

- **Regional disparities:** Significant variation exists across states.
  - **Eg:** Bihar has a large number of Panchayats in the Aspirant category, while northeastern states like Manipur and Meghalaya have many in the Beginner category.
- **Digital constraints:** Limited digital literacy hampers effective participation, especially in remote regions like Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Many Panchayats struggle with funding for essential infrastructure.

- **Eg:** In Uttar Pradesh, thousands remain in the Beginner category due to basic facility shortages.
- **Social justice concerns:** Performance in social equity indicators lags behind livelihood improvements, indicating gaps in inclusion and welfare delivery.
- **Financial dependence:** Heavy reliance on state funds limits autonomy and growth, particularly in states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

#### Way forward

- **Targeted funding:** Direct additional financial support to Panchayats in the Aspirant category.
- **Capacity building:** Provide structured training for representatives, especially in lower-performing Panchayats.
- **Incentive linkages:** Align Panchayat awards and incentives with PAI performance to encourage competition.
- **Language accessibility:** Expand vernacular support for better usability of the portal.
- **Policy integration:** Use PAI as a key tool for evaluating government schemes and shaping rural development policies.

