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A short history of our nation's names; from the Rig Veda to the Constitution of India

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper I; History & Culture

Why in news?

- The recent official invitation to a G20 dinner had the image of being hosted by "The President of Bharat" instead of the usual "President of India".

- There is speculation of an official change in the name of the country from India to Bharat, even though Article 1 of the Constitution uses the two names interchangeably: "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States."

- Also, several names such as Reserve Bank of India and the Indian Railways already have Hindi variants with "Bharatiya" in them.

- In 2020, the Supreme Court had dismissed a PIL seeking to remove "India" from the Constitution and retain only Bharat in order to "ensure the citizens of this country...get over the colonial past" saying: "India is already called Bharat in the Constitution itself."

Origin of the term 'Bharat'

- The roots of "Bharat", "Bharata", or "Bharatvarsha" are traced back to Puranic literature, and to the epic Mahabharata. The Puranas describe Bharata as the land between the "sea in the south and the abode of snow in the north".

- As per a prominent social scientist, 'Bharata' refers to the "supraregional and subcontinental territory where the Brahmanical system of society prevails". Bharata is also the name of the ancient king of legend who was the ancestor of the Rig Vedic tribe of the Bharatas, and by extension, the progenitor of all peoples of the subcontinent.

- Writing in 1927, Jawaharlal Nehru alluded to the "fundamental unity of India" that has endured from "the remote past": "a unity of a common faith and culture. India was Bharata, the holy land of the Hindus, and it is not without significance that the great places of Hindu pilgrimage are situated in the four corners of India — the extreme South overlooking Ceylon, the extreme West washed by the Arabian Sea, the East facing the Bay of Bengal and the North in the Himalayas."

'India' and 'Hindustan'

- The name Hindustan is thought to have derived from 'Hindu', the Persian cognate form of the Sanskrit 'Sindhu' (Indus), which came into currency with the Achaemenid Persian conquest of the Indus valley (northwestern parts of the subcontinent) that begin in the 6th century BC (which was the time of The Buddha in the Gangetic basin).

- The Achaemenids used the term to identify the lower Indus basin, and from around the first century of the Christian era, the suffix "stan" came to be used with the name to create "Hindustan".

- The Greeks, who had acquired knowledge of 'Hind' from the Achaemenids, transliterated the name as 'Indus'. By the time the Macedonian king Alexander invaded India in the 3rd century BC, 'India' had come to be identified with the region beyond the Indus.

- By the time of the early Mughals (16th century), the name 'Hindustan' was used to describe the entire Indo-Gangetic plain. As per a historian, "in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Hindustan often referred to the territories of the Mughal emperor, which comprised much of South Asia".

- From the late 18th century onwards, British maps increasingly began to use the name 'India', and 'Hindustan' started to lose its association with all of South Asia.

How did 'Bharat' and 'India' come into the Constitution?

- In his monumental 'Discovery of India', Nehru referred to "India", "Bharata" and "Hindustan": "Often, as I wandered from meeting to meeting, I spoke to my audiences of this India of ours, of Hindustan and of Bharata, the old Sanskrit name derived from the mythical founders of the race."

- But when the question of naming India in the Constitution arose, 'Hindustan' was dropped, and both 'Bharat' and 'India' were retained.

- During the Constituent Assembly debates in Sept. 1949, the "Name and territory of the Union" was taken up for discussion. Right from the time the first article was read out as "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States", a division arose among the members. There were quite a few members who were against the use of the name 'India', which they saw as being a reminder of the colonial past.

- However, none of the suggestions made by them were accepted by the committee.

Beginning of UPI QR Code-Central Bank Digital Currency interoperability

Why in news?

- With banks enabling the interoperability of Unified Payments Interface's (UPI) Quick Response (QR) code with their central bank digital currency (CBDC) or e₹ application, users of retail digital rupee will be able to make transactions by scanning any UPI QR at a merchant outlet.

- Merchants can also accept digital rupee payments through their existing UPI QR codes.

- This integration of UPI and CBDC is part of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ongoing pilot project on pushing the retail digital rupee (e₹-R).

What is interoperability?

- Interoperability is the technical compatibility that enables a payment system to be used in conjunction with other payment systems, according to the RBI.

- Interoperability allows system providers and participants in different systems to undertake, clear and settle payment transactions across systems without participating in multiple systems.

- Interoperability between payment systems contributes to achieving adoption, co-existence, innovation, and efficiency for end users.

What is UPI QR code-CBDC interoperability?

- Interoperability of UPI with the digital rupee means all UPI QR codes are compatible with CBDC apps. Initially, when the pilot for the retail digital rupee was launched, the e₹-R users had to scan a specific QR code to undertake transactions.

- However, with the interoperability of the two, payments can be made using a single QR code. The digital rupee issued by the RBI, or the CBDC, is a tokenised digital version of the rupee.

- The e₹ is held in a digital wallet, which is linked to a customer's existing savings bank account. UPI is directly linked to a customer's account.

Benefits

- The interoperability of UPI and CBDC will ensure seamless transactions between a customer and merchant without having the need to switch between multiple digital platforms.

- It will allow a digital rupee user to make payments for their daily needs, such as groceries and medicines, by scanning any UPI QR codes at any merchant outlet.

- Even merchants are not required to keep a separate QR code to accept the digital rupee payments. They can accept CBDC payments on their existing QR code.

What is a QR code?

- A Quick Response (QR) code consists of black squares arranged in a square grid on a white background, which can be read by an imaging device such as a camera.

- It contains information about the item to which it is attached. QR code is an alternate contactless channel of payments. It allows merchants or businesses to accept payments from their customers directly into their bank accounts.

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Interoperability's role in increasing CBDC adoption

- Currently, UPI is a widely used payment method, and the interoperability between it and the CBDC will propel the adoption of the digital rupee.

- At present, more than 70 mobile apps and over 50 million merchants accept UPI payments. In July, there were 1.3 million customers and 0.3 million merchants using the retail digital rupee. The daily per-day e₹-R transactions in July were around 5,000-10,000.

- As per SBI, the seamless integration of CBDC with UPI will enhance the acceptance and utilization of digital currencies in everyday transactions.

- Notably, banks including State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Yes Bank, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and IDFC First Bank, have introduced UPI interoperability on their digital rupee application.

Why in news?

- France has banned the Abaya, a long, loose-fitting garment, from being worn in its public schools in view of the larger policy of secularism in the country, where a hard separation between the Church and the State is observed.

- As per the French Education Minister, "When you walk into a classroom, you shouldn't be able to identify the pupils' religion just by looking at them."

- Nearly 300 girls showed up wearing abayas, a week after the ban was announced. Most agreed to change their clothing, but 67 refused and were sent home.

- A challenge to the ban via a petition to the apex court of the country also failed when it ruled that the ban was not a "serious and obviously illegal infringement of a fundamental freedom".

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What is the Abaya?

- A loose-fitting dress, the Abaya is worn by women. "The aba (or abaya) was of ancient origin and is mentioned in the Bible as the attire of Hebrew prophets".

- It is similar to some other free-flowing garments that are worn in parts of Africa and West Asia. Over the years there have been variations in its designs, with open Abayas worn on top of long skirts and pants.

- While associated with some regions of the world, Abaya is also described as clothing specific to Muslim women and draws comparisons to the Burqa (which is similar but also has a veil for the face) and the Chador (which is tied slightly differently).

- The garment has been common among women in Saudi Arabia, where conservative dressing in public is strictly enforced.

Why France doesn't allow religious clothing?

- The idea of secularism, of a separation between religious institutions and organs of the govt, is unique in its implementation.

- It has its origins in the French Revolution, which championed values of liberty, equality and fraternity. The role that religion might then play in public life, interfering with liberty, was seen with suspicion.

- Based on this principle, a law came into place in 2004. It said, "…the wearing of signs or outfits by which students ostensibly show a religious affiliation is prohibited." This did not mention specific clothing items but was interpreted as a ban on headscarves, caps like the Jewish Kippah and large Christian crosses.

- Following immigration into France from countries outside Europe in recent years, such issues have come up from time to time and often become contentious.

- Critics argue that they constitute policing of women's right to choose what they want to wear in particular, making it difficult for women from conservative backgrounds to participate in public life.

(more ahead)

Cont'd

- In 2010, a law banned any covering of faces by clothing in public, except when travelling as a car passenger or visiting a place of worship.

- Last year, France's highest administrative court upheld a ban on the full-body covering swimsuit known as burkini (from the words burqa and bikini) in the city of Grenoble.

Rising breaches to secularism

- Since the 2004 law doesn't mention particular items of clothing, whether certain clothes should be allowed or banned and can strictly be called religious clothing has been a grey area.

- As per the French govt, over the past months, breaches to secularism have increased considerably, in particular with [pupils] wearing religious attire like abayas and kameez.

- In 2022-2023, 4,710 cases were reported when compared with 2,167 the previous year. Over 40% of monthly reports now concern clothing that may be both cultural and religious – such as the kameez for men, or the abaya for women.

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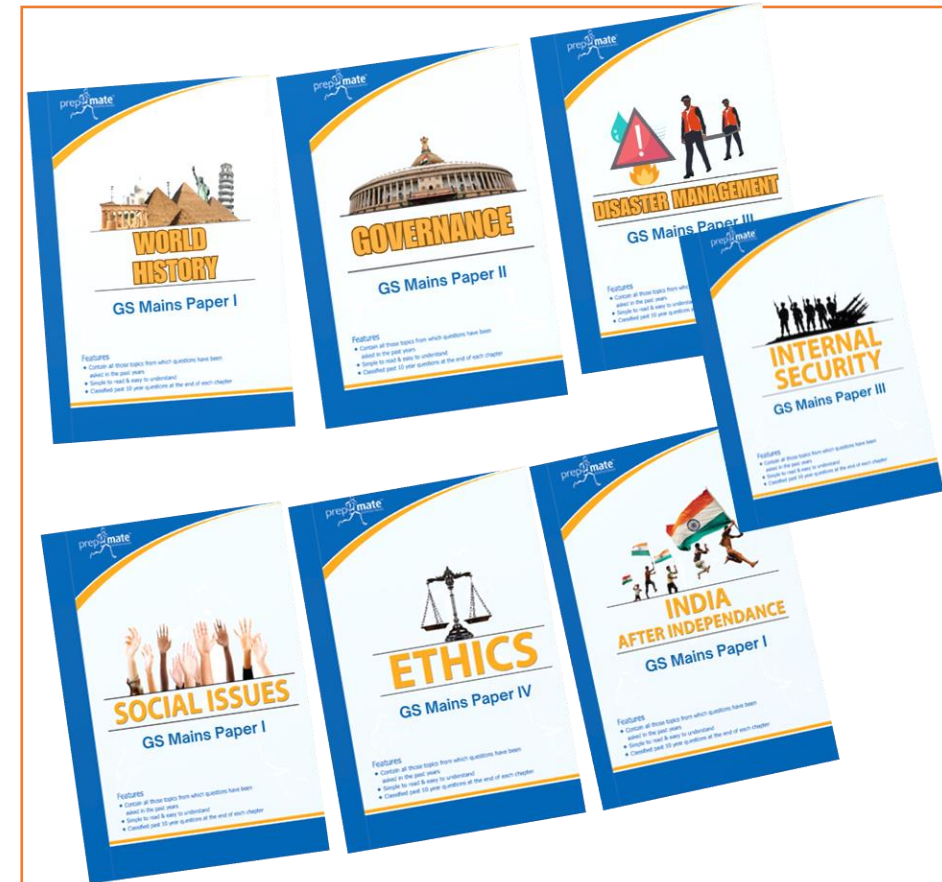## 1. 10 Published Books for Pre cum Mains

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