

**1. BharatNet: Extending Internet Access, Expanding Rural Progress****What is the BharatNet project?**

BharatNet is an ambitious project of the Government of India aimed at providing broadband connectivity to all Gram Panchayats (GPs) in the country. It is one of the biggest rural telecom projects in the world.

**What is the objective of the BharatNet project?**

The primary objective is to provide unrestricted access to broadband connectivity to all the telecom service providers. This enables access providers like mobile operators, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Cable TV operators, and content providers to launch various services such as e-health, e-education, and

e-governance in rural and remote India. It aims to empower rural India, foster inclusive growth, and bridge the gap between urban and rural communities.

**How many Gram Panchayats (GPs) are targeted under BharatNet?**

The project initially aimed to connect approximately 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats across the country.

**What other initiatives support digital empowerment in rural India?**

Several other initiatives complement BharatNet, including:

**1. Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):** To ensure digital literacy in rural households, with over 6.39 crore individuals trained by March 31, 2024.

**2. National Broadband Mission (NBM):** Launched to fast-track the expansion of digital communications infrastructure. National Broadband Mission 2.0 was launched on January 17, 2025. Key initiatives under NBM include the Centralized Right of Way (RoW) Portal GatiShakti Sanchar.

**How is BharatNet being funded?**

BharatNet is primarily funded through the Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN), which is a fund that replaced the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF). Digital Bharat Nidhi is a pool of funds generated by a 5 per cent Universal Service Levy charged upon all the telecom fund operators on their Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR).

The idea is that this money would be used to fund the expansion of telecom networks in remote and rural areas, where private companies may otherwise resist offering their services due to them not being revenue-generating markets.

### Who is executing the BharatNet project?

The project is being executed by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) namely Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL), which was incorporated in 2012 under the Indian Companies Act 1956. Under the Amended BharatNet Program, BSNL is appointed as the single Project Management Agency (PMA) for Operation & Maintenance of the entire network.

### What is the current status of BharatNet implementation?

As of 19th March 2025, 2,18,347 GPs have been made service ready under the BharatNet project in the country.

### What are the benefits and impact of the BharatNet project?

BharatNet has had a transformative impact on rural India, contributing to socioeconomic development in multiple ways:

**O Digital Inclusion:** Connecting remote villages to high-speed internet, enabling access to e-governance, online education, and telemedicine.

**O Economic Opportunities:** Enabling participation in digital commerce, access to financial services, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

**O Education and Healthcare:** Facilitating digital classrooms and telehealth services.

**O Empowering Local Governance:** Enabling Gram Panchayats to implement e-governance projects.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: PIB

## 2. Anti-Semitism

### Why in News?

Harvard University and the Trump administration have locked horns over allegations by the latter that the university has failed to contain anti-Semitism. Consequently, the administration has cut the funding of the university.



### What is Anti-Semitism?

Anti-Semitism, as we understand it today, refers to any form of prejudice against the Jewish people, particularly the use of stereotypes.

However, the term itself is a misnomer as Semitic designates a language group, not a race. In a linguistic sense, the term could describe prejudice against speakers

of the Semitic languages (including Arabs and Ethiopians).

### Why has Anti-Semitism been contentious?

A primary reason has been the enduring legacy of Nazism, which converted anti-Semitism into an institutional attack on Jewish people, ranging from a boycott of Jewish products and social ostracisation and culminating in the Holocaust.

Following the attack on Israel by the Palestinian militant group, Hamas, on October 7, 2023, and the resulting Israeli military onslaught into Palestine that has ensued since then, anti-Semitism has been used by detractors in the context of pro-Palestine protests. The Trump administration has adopted this understanding in pursuing universities and sites of such protests to shut them down.

### **Why the Funding Freeze?**

The federal Task Force to Combat Anti-Semitism visited ten university campuses, including Harvard, in February to gather information about alleged "antisemitic incidents".

The task force subsequently sent letters to the university demanding a "federal review" of over \$8.7 billion in federal research grants for failing to combat "antisemitic harassment". Its letter to Harvard on April 11 demanded that it comply with conditions, including stopping its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives, and having its student body and staff audited by an external party, to continue receiving federal funding.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

## **3. New global pandemic treaty**

### **Why Now?**

Following more than three years of arduous negotiations, member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) last week agreed on a draft of a legally binding treaty designed to tackle future pandemics better. The deal is expected to be ratified at the World Health Assembly in May.



The pandemic treaty, which was agreed upon without the United States, is the only the second legally binding accord in the WHO's 75-year history, the first being the 2003 tobacco control treaty.

### **But first, why was there a need for a global pandemic treaty?**

The negotiations for a global pandemic treaty began in December 2021, at a time when the Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 was spreading across the world and producing a massive new surge of COVID-19. By then, countries that were manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines had hoarded millions of doses, leaving those with no vaccine plants often with no access to the shots.

A 2022 study published by the journal Nature revealed that more than one million lives could have been saved if COVID-19 vaccines had been shared more equitably with lower-income countries — the virus had claimed more than seven million lives across the world.

In a bid to prevent loss of human life, and disruption to households and societies at large – as it happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic — during future pandemics, WHO member states got together and began to iron out a treaty. It took nearly three-and-a-half years and 13 rounds of meetings to reach the deal.

### **What does the pandemic treaty say?**

One of the key elements of the draft agreement is a “pathogen access and benefit sharing” system, which gives pharmaceutical companies access to scientific data such as pathogen samples and genomic sequences in return for more equitable sharing of drugs, vaccines and diagnostics during a pandemic.

The draft treaty says participating manufacturers will have to allocate 10% of their production of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics to the WHO. Another 10% will then be supplied at “affordable prices”.

Also, member states should “promote and otherwise facilitate or incentivise” the exchange of technology and know-how to help manufacturers in developing nations make their own drugs and vaccines.

Countries also need to develop national policies for putting conditions on research into drugs and vaccines that they fund — given either to universities or companies — to guarantee “timely and equitable access” to resulting drugs or diagnostics during pandemics.

### **How strong is the global pandemic treaty?**

Although the agreement on the draft treaty has been hailed as groundbreaking and historic, several experts have said that it has a limited scope.

1. For instance, the agreement does not give the WHO powers over individual states.

Clause 24, paragraph three states, “Nothing in the WHO Pandemic Agreement shall be interpreted as providing the WHO Secretariat, including the WHO Director-General, any authority to direct, order, alter, or otherwise prescribe the national and/or domestic laws, as appropriate, or policies of any Party.”

2. The draft treaty also says that the WHO does not have the power to mandate or otherwise impose any requirements such as “ban or accept travellers, impose vaccination mandates or therapeutic or diagnostic measures, or implement lockdown”.

This means that in a situation like the fierce competition for COVID-19 vaccines, the WHO would have no way to ensure countries adhere to the terms to which they had agreed. As a result, pharmaceutical companies may hesitate to commit resources to developing medical solutions for emerging pathogens.

3. Also, currently, there is no clarity on how the pathogen access and benefit sharing system will work.

4. Notably, the draft treaty has been agreed upon without the US. The country withdrew from negotiations after President Donald Trump came back to the White House in January, and announced his plans of withdrawing the US from the WHO. Therefore, it is unlikely that the US will ratify the treaty.

Given the dominance of the country in the drug, vaccine, and diagnostics manufacturing industries, its absence will weaken the agreement.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

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