

India ranks fourth in global gold recycling: WGC

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

Why in news?

- Recently, the **World Gold Council (WGC)** report titled ‘Gold refining and recycling’ was released.

Key findings:

- China topped the global gold recycling chart as it recycled 168 tonnes of the yellow metal, **followed by Italy** in the second position with 80 tonnes and the **US in the third rank** with 78 tonnes in 2021.
- India was ranked fourth in the list as the country recycled 75 tonnes in 2021.



Observations on India:

- From 300 tonnes in 2013, India’s gold refining capacity increased by 1,500 tonnes (500%) in 2021.
- The gold refining landscape in the country has changed over the last decade, with the number of formal operations increasing from less than five in 2013 to 33 in 2021.
- While the informal sector accounts for as much as an additional 300-500 tonnes, it is worth noting that the **scale of unorganised refining has fallen**, largely due to the government’s tightening of pollution regulations.
- On the other hand, **tax advantages have underpinned the growth of India’s gold refining industry** like the import duty differential on dore over refined bullion has spurred the growth of organised refining in India.
- As a result, **gold dore’s share of overall imports has risen from just 7% in 2013 to around 22% in 2021.**

Potential of India:

- Despite being the fourth largest recycler in the world, India recycles little of its own stock of gold about 8% of the global scrap supply.
- Current gold price movements, future price expectations and the economic backdrop drive recycling.
- India has potential to emerge as a competitive refining hub if the next phase of bullion market reforms promotes responsible sourcing, exports of bars and consistent supply of dore or scrap.

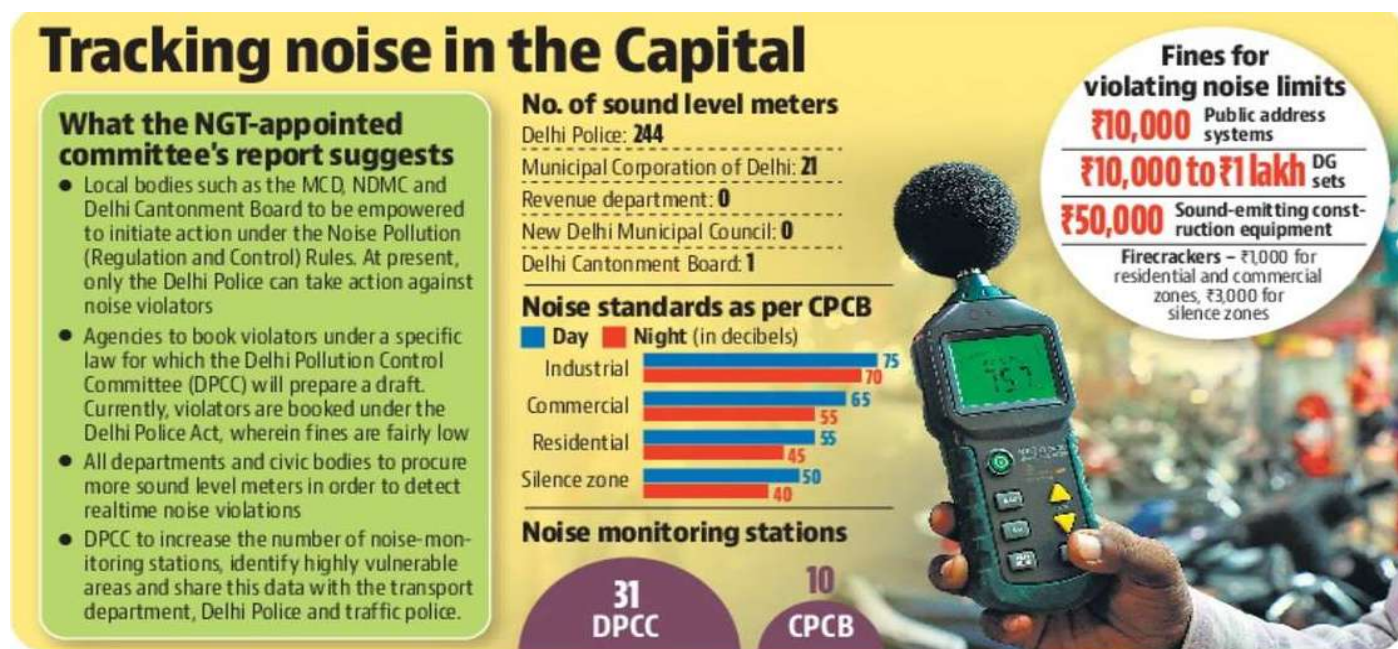
Way Forward:

- The holding periods of jewellery will continue to decline as younger consumers look to change designs more frequently, a trend that could contribute to higher levels of recycling.
- On the other hand, higher incomes following stronger economic growth will reduce outright selling and consumers will find it easier to pledge their gold rather than sell it outright. It is, therefore, necessary to support organised recycling with better incentives and tech-based solutions encompassing the gold supply chain end-to-end.

Expand noise monitoring in Capital: NGT panel (GS Paper 3, Pollution)

Why in news?

- Recently, an expert committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) with the mandate to devise a legal framework to regulate noise pollution in Delhi has submitted its final report.
- The expert committee was headed by Justice (retd.) SP Garg.



Key Highlights:

Expansion of noise monitoring network:

- It called for the expansion of Delhi's current noise monitoring network of 31 stations in proportion to the city's area and population, while also suggesting that agencies other than the Delhi Police be empowered to act against violators.
- At present, **only the Delhi Police can take penal action**, while agencies such as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment Board have no powers to take on-the-spot action against noise polluters.

Sound Level Meters (SLMs):

- It has also asked for all agencies to increase the number of **sound level meters (SLMs)** currently available with them so that real-time measurement of ambient noise levels could take place.
- According to the report, while the Delhi Police has 244 SLMs, the now-unified MCD has a total of 21 SLMs. NDMC and the revenue department have none, while the Delhi Cantonment Board has just one.

Designated authority:

- In addition to **civic agencies and other local bodies not having punitive powers** under the Noise Pollution (Regulation & Control) Rules, there is often confusion with regards to permissions being granted for the usage of loudspeakers. So, to clarify the situation, the environment department has been asked to issue a fresh notification.
- Though this notification is yet to be issued, **Delhi Police has been designated as an 'authority'** and directions have been issued that compliance of noise rules should be made mandatory in the prior permission (for using loudspeakers) and an undertaking may also be obtained.

- The committee also asked DPCC to identify vulnerable areas where noise levels are high and to share this data with the police.

Way Forward:

- A noise monitoring network, similar to that of air quality monitoring stations, will make it easier to identify local hot spots across the city.
- While traffic cannot be reduced, certain interventions can be taken in areas where the levels are exceedingly high.

Study flags emergence of drug-resistant typhoid strains

(GS Paper 3, Health)

Why in news?

- Recently, a study was conducted by researchers from Stanford University, Christian Medical College Vellore and other institutions on drug –resistant typhoid strains.
- Typhoid fever causes 11 million infections and more than 100,000 deaths per year. **South Asia accounts for 70% of the global disease burden.**



Key Findings:

- The effectiveness of antibiotics for typhoid fever is threatened by the emergence of resistant strains, according to a large genome sequencing study of the bacteria Salmonella Typhi.
- Since 2000, **multi-drug-resistant (MDR) S Typhi has declined steadily in Bangladesh and India**, remained low in Nepal, and increased slightly in Pakistan.
- However, these are being replaced by strains resistant to other antibiotics.
- The genome analysis also reveals that resistant strains, almost all originating in South Asia have spread to other countries 197 times since 1990.
- The study sequenced 3,489 S Typhi isolates from 2014-19 from people in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, and 4,169 samples isolated from over 70 countries during 1905-2018.

When a strain is classified MDR?

- Strains were classified as MDR if they had genes giving resistance to antibiotics ampicillin, chloramphenicol, and trimethoprim/ sulfamethoxazole.

What's next?

- India's Health Ministry is considering introducing new typhoid conjugate vaccines into the national immunisation program. Two WHO-prequalified vaccines have been developed in India (by Bharat Biotech and Biological E).
- Surveillance at 18 Indian sites during 2016-20 found typhoid was as common as it was two decades ago, especially in urban areas.

Panel pitches nixing of GST exemptions on host of items

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Why in news?

- A review of a **series of exemptions and inverted duty structure** as recommended by the Group of Ministers (GoM) **on rate rationalisation** are likely to be taken up for **discussion in the upcoming Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting**.

Background:

- In its earlier meeting, the GoM, headed by Karnataka Chief Minister, had converged upon the preparation of an interim report and seeking an extension of its tenure.

Suggestions in GoM report:

- The GoM, in its interim report to the GST Council, have suggested **an increase in the GST rate on electronics-waste to be raised to 18 per cent from 5 per cent along** with an increase in the rate on exploration activities of goods related to petroleum and coal bed methane from 5 per cent.
- A recommendation has been made to **remove exemption on rent of hospital rooms with rent over Rs 5,000** as against complete exemption at present.
- **Business class travel from airports in the north-eastern states** could also end soon if the recommendation of the GoM gets accepted in the Council. This compares with a levy of 12 per cent GST on business travel by air in the rest of the country.
- The panel has also looked at the **possibility of withdrawing exemption on services provided by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** to food business operators as against 18 per cent levy on services at present.
- The panel is also likely to have suggested a review of the unbranded food items, which at present do not attract GST.



About GST Council:

- The GST Council governs the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Article 279 (1) of the amended Indian Constitution states that the GST Council has to be constituted by the President within 60 days of the commencement of the Article 279A.

Functions:

- The GST council is the key decision-making body that will take all important decisions regarding the GST.
- The GST Council dictates tax rate, tax exemption, the due date of forms, tax laws, and tax deadlines, keeping in mind special rates and provisions for some states.
- The predominant responsibility of the GST Council is to ensure to have one uniform tax rate for goods and services across the nation.