

24.11.2021

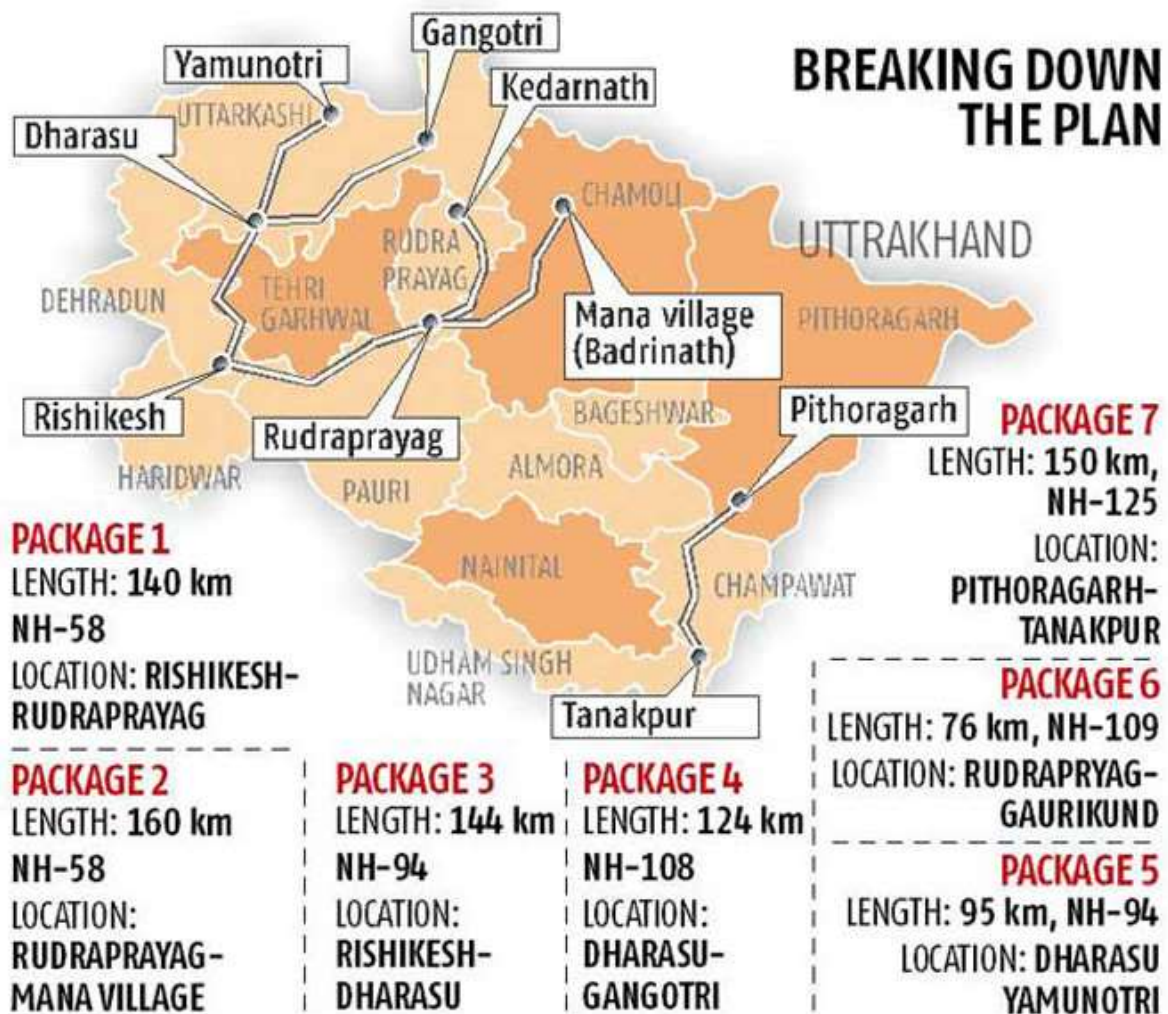
Wednesday



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## The road to a Himalayan blunder

In its current form, the Char Dham road project goes against all environmental safeguards



Source: Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways

## The Char Dham road project

- The Char Dham road project is an ambitious attempt to widen nearly 900 kilometres of hill roads at the cost of ₹12,000 crores. The project, which will be executed by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), aims to provide all-weather connectivity to the four major shrines of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.

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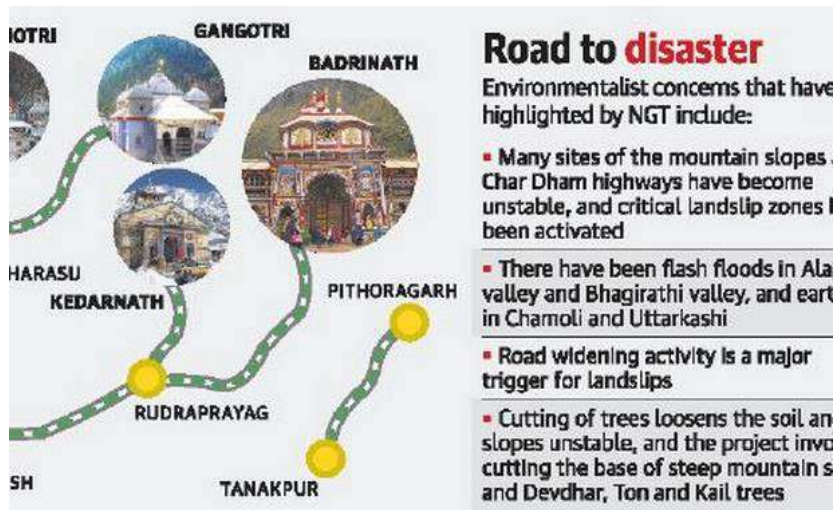
2. In the enthusiasm for an infrastructural project that will increase pilgrimage tourism from the Indian plains and provide attendant local economic dividends, the government has ignored the facts proven by the many tragic incidents in the hills of Uttarakhand over decades.
3. Rampant construction and its complex interaction with climate change have led to massive landslides and floods in the fragile Himalayan range.

### Timeline of the case

1. The project began as a road connectivity project for pilgrim tourists. Now the government argues that it is essential to back up troop and arms movement towards the India-China border.
2. The case is in the Supreme Court. The Attorney General argues that wide roads are necessary for the sake of national security in the Garhwal region.
3. The petitioners, residents of the valleys in the Garhwal region, stress the need for a regulated and narrower intermediate road width with a walking footpath.

### Topography of Uttarakhand:

1. These wide roads are being sought to be built in Uttarakhand, which has been a victim of several disasters in the last two decades.
2. It is crucial to note that the terrain of the Himalayas in Uttarakhand is different from the terrain in Ladakh.



- Valleys in Uttarakhand are narrow and close-ended with steep slopes of 60-70 degrees.
3. On the other hand, the valleys in Ladakh have a slope elevation of 30 degrees. Just this year, we saw how the floods in the Dhauliganga, Rishi Ganga and Alaknanda rivers claimed over 200 lives.
4. During the monsoons, owing to the massive hill-cutting for the Char Dham road project, several landslides have occurred in the region.



## Desecrating the Himalayas

1. Disaster-resilient, safe and stable infrastructure is the only solution for commuting by road in the hills. But double-lane paved shoulder roads are excessively wide and render the slopes vulnerable.
2. The unique Himalayan landscape with steep slopes and sharp gradients is not amenable to human engineering. Any human-induced change beyond the Himalayas' carrying capacity will have an impact on stream run-offs and erosional or depositional processes.
3. Considering such vulnerabilities, we need to keep the scale of human-induced disturbances to the minimum level possible. The Char Dham project in its current form goes against all environmental safeguards.

If the government does not desist from widening the roads under this project, it will be a Himalayan blunder. It will significantly reinforce mass wasting processes and erosion rates given the steepness of the slopes, earthquake activity and erosivity of increased monsoonal precipitation. The Himalayas need to be preserved as a nature reserve for future generations.

## Breaking the ice

Reviving the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum is a chance to break the vicious cycle in economic ties.

### Highlights:

1. A lot has transpired in the Indo-U.S. economic partnership in the four years since the TPF was last convened — from machinations towards a free-trade agreement to the failure to even reach a mini-trade deal towards the latter half of the Donald Trump administration days.
2. Instead of progress, there were setbacks, including raised import tariffs and the withdrawal of benefits to Indian exporters under the U.S.'s Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) which triggered retaliatory trade barbs.
3. GSP restoration could be considered while nudging India to set targets for tariff reductions and easing market access across sectors. The TPF statement also outlines the sectors and goods and services that need quick attention.



## What is GSP?

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- The U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)
  - instituted on January 1, 1976, by the Trade Act of 1974
  - program designed to promote economic growth in the developing world
  - providing preferential duty-free entry
  - up to 5,000 products imported from one of 123 designated beneficiary countries and territories

Recommendations on initiatives to be taken by Bangladesh to regain the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) facilities 29/08/2014

### China plus one:

1. Whatever misgivings may have existed at the beginning of the Biden administration, recent trips by key U.S. Secretaries indicates U.S. interest in engaging with India in significant spheres.
2. That it looks at India as a key partner in rebuilding critical supply chains in a post-pandemic world seeking to cut its dependence on China, is clear from its desire for integration in areas such as health, medical devices and pharma.
3. India's pharma exports account for 40% of the U.S.'s generic drugs supply and the USA has assuaged its concerns about delays in U.S. regulatory inspections of pharma units.




### In News...

Revocation of duty free privileges on import of 90 products (under GSP)

will affect

at least 50 Indian products (mainly MSMEs and in particular, handloom and agriculture sectors)

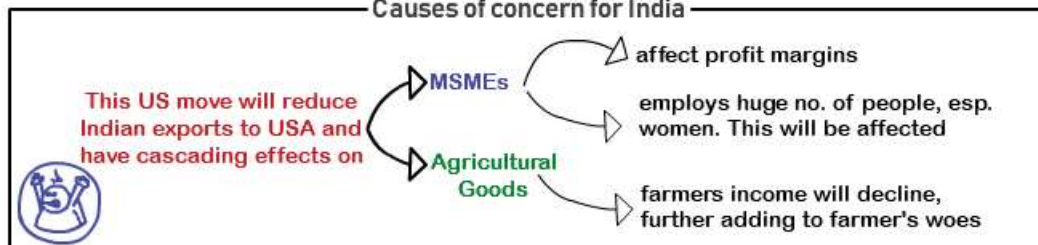
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### Background



### Causes of concern for India



### Analysis



Imp. fact : GSP is an exception under MFN rule of WTO (under which WTO members are not allowed to discriminate against each other.)



*China Plus One, also known simply as Plus One, is the business strategy to avoid investing only in China and diversify the business into other countries.*

*While America's stance on India's proposal on IPR waivers for the COVID-19 vaccine and medicines will be watched at the upcoming WTO ministerial, India must seize this fresh initiative with the U.S. to cement its place in the new supply chains being envisaged. For starters, it must pro-actively steer away from the protectionism that is leading the globalised world adrift.*