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- **Drugs for rare diseases get customs duty relief**
- **Issues with the Quality Control Orders for fibers**
- **Ahead of tribunal's launch, SOP for GST investigations**
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- **GPT-4: the shift from 'what it can do' to 'what its augurs'**

Drugs for rare diseases get customs duty relief

Context
- Recently, the Ministry of Finance announced a full exemption from basic customs duty for drugs and food imported for personal use for the treatment of rare diseases.
- The ministry noted that this will result in substantial cost savings and provide much-needed relief to patients.
- The annual cost of treatment for some rare diseases may vary from ₹10 lakh to over ₹1 crore annually.
- The import duty waiver will come into effect from April 1.

Customs duty on drugs
- Basic customs duty of 10% is generally charged on medicines.
- In some categories of lifesaving drugs and vaccines, it is either a concessional 5% or zero.
- Exemptions were earlier provided to specified drugs for the treatment of spinal muscular atrophy.
- After the latest government notification, basic customs duty on all drugs and food for special medical purposes imported for personal use for the treatment of rare diseases will be exempted.
- The Centre has also fully exempted pembrolizumab (Keytruda), used in the treatment of various cancers, from basic customs duty.

Procedure for availing of exemption
- In a notification, the Union finance ministry said that individual importers need to produce certificates from the Central or State Director of Health Services or District Medical Officer/Civil Surgeon of the district to avail of the exemption for the diseases listed under the National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021.

Drugs that are currently under exemptions
- Exemptions have already been provided to specified drugs for the treatment of Spinal Muscular Atrophy.
- The government has been receiving many representations seeking customs duty relief for drugs and medicines used in treatment of other rare diseases.

Issues with the Quality Control Orders for fibres

Context
- The Quality Control Orders (QCO) have been issued for fibres which include cotton, polyester, and viscose.
- These fibres constitute the basic raw materials for majority of the Indian textile and clothing industry.
- While the standards were available earlier too, these are now revised and made mandatory for a few, and yet to be finalised for others.
- International manufacturers of these fibres, who supply to India, are also mandated to get a certificate from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which is the certifying authority for the QCOs.

Why are fibres covered under QCOs
- The main aim of the QCO is to control import of sub-quality and cheaper items and to ensure that customers get quality products.
- The imports are for different reasons — cost competitiveness, non-availability in the domestic market, or to meet a specified demand of the overseas buyer.
- The entire supply chain, from the textile manufacturers to exporters, has so far focused on quality standards prescribed by the buyers.

Challenges under new mandate

- India imports annually 50,000 - 60,000 tonnes of viscose fibre and its variants such as Modal and Tencel LF from nearly 20 countries.
- Getting the certificate from the BIS involves a cost and and hence not all are interested in getting the certificate.
- Furthermore, BIS officials must visit the manufacturing unit abroad before issuing the certificate and this process is yet to be completed for all suppliers who have applied for the BIS registration.

What next

- The textile industry is of the view that import of speciality fibres that are used as blends with other fibres should be made available without restriction.
- The Quality Control Orders (QCO) should be implemented only after the ambiguities are cleared and the anomalies set right.
- Also, any overseas applicant for the BIS certificate should get it without delay after inspection.

Ahead of the tribunal's launch, SOP for GST investigations

Context

- Recently, The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council approved the creation of a national tribunal for the redressal of GST disputes.
- In further development to this the Revenue Department is in the process of finalising a standard operating procedure (SOP) for officers undertaking intelligence and investigation work.

Policy draft

- The GST Investigation wing of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), which deals with policy issues relating to enforcement actions such as search, seizure, prosecution, and arrest, is drafting the manual.
- It will include various SOPs and instructions for field formations to abide by, and will be published shortly.

Legal challenges

- Over the past couple of years, the number of legal challenges mounted by taxpayers in various courts have also been rising, in the absence of a dedicated GST Tribunal that were envisaged since the GST regime's launch in July 2017.
- In the recent time there will be sudden rush in filing of appeals once the tribunal is set up, and hence, a careful deliberation on investigation processes and the appellate bodies' functioning, will help all stakeholders.

Cases status

- Between April 2021 and November 2022, over 21,500 cases of GST evasion were booked by the revenue authorities, entailing an amount of almost ₹1.5 lakh crore.
- Of this, about ₹46,200 crore was released and over 470 people were arrested.

About GST Appellate Tribunal

- The GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is the second appeal forum under GST.
- For any dissatisfactory order passed by the First Appellate Authorities, an application for revision of the same can be raised to the National Appellate Tribunal.
- Section (109) of the Goods and Service Tax Act, 2017 (CGST Act) mandates the constitution of a GSTAT and its Benches.
- The Tribunal is likely to be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.

Disinvestment facing many challenges

Context
- In the Union Budget for 2023-24, the government has set a disinvestment target of ₹51,000 crore, down nearly 21% from the budget estimate for the current year and just ₹1,000 crore more than the revised estimate.
- It is also the lowest target in seven years.

Multiple challenges in privatising
- The Finance Ministry has acknowledged the multiple challenges it is facing in privatising public sector enterprises (PSEs):
  o COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted transactions in 2020 and 2021
  o Russia - Ukraine conflict since 2022
  o Multiple court cases filed by employees' unions and other interest groups against the disinvestment policy
  o Challenges to disinvestment through minority stake sale include reduced availability of government stake over 51% for large listed central PSEs

Use of ETFs
- Between 2016-17 and 2019-20, the government had raised almost ₹99,000 crore from Exchange-Traded Fund (ETF) with underlying shares of CPSEs.
- Disinvestment receipts so far this year amount to just ₹35,282 crore, against a Budget target of ₹65,000 crore and revised estimates of ₹50,000 crore.
- The privatisation of Central Electronics and Pawan Hans had to be scrapped after being announced, owing to legal concerns about the winning bidders.

GPT-4: shift from 'what it can do' to 'what it augurs'

Context
- A U.S. company, OpenAI, has once again sent shock waves around the world, this time with GPT-4, its latest AI model.
- This large language model can understand and produce language that is creative and meaningful, and will power an advanced version of the company's sensational chatbot, ChatGPT.
- Currently, GPT-4 is available to try by premium subscription or by getting on OpenAI's waitlist.

About GPT-4
- GPT-4 is a remarkable improvement over its predecessor, GPT-3.5, which first powered ChatGPT.
- GPT-4 is more conversational and creative.
- Its biggest innovation is that it can accept text and image input simultaneously, and consider both while drafting a reply.
- For example, if given an image of ingredients and asked the question, "What can we make from these?"GPT-4 gives a list of dish suggestions and recipes.
- The model can purportedly understand human emotions, such as humorous pictures.

What GPT-4 can do
- The GPT-4 can take into context up to 25,000 words, an improvement of more than 8x.
- GPT-4 was tested in several tests that were designed for humans and performed much better than average.
- GPT-4 also sailed through advanced courses in environmental science, statistics, art history, biology, and economics.
- However, GPT-4 failed to do well in advanced English language and literature, scoring 40% in both.

Ethical questions
- GPT-4 is still prone to a lot of its flaws its predecessor has.
- Its output may not always be factually correct a trait OpenAI has called "hallucination".
- GPT-4 has been trained on data scraped from the Internet that contains several harmful biases and stereotypes.
- There is also an assumption that a large dataset is also a diverse dataset and faithfully representative of the world at large.

What next

- In essence, GPT-4 is a machine that predicts the next word in an unfinished sentence, based on probabilities it learned as it trained on large corpuses of text.
- Research has maintained that GPT-4 does understand what it is saying, and that not all intelligence is a type of next-word prediction.
- More broadly, efforts are underway worldwide to build a model with a trillion degrees of freedom.
- The advent of large language models raises the question about building models that leave out society's concerns.

30.03.2023

- **No evictions for Great Nicobar project**
- **Defence Ministry inks deal for Project Akashtee**
- **SEBI to boost disclosure norms**
- **SMART PDS scheme: A bold initiative in digitisation**
- **India's DPIs, catching the next wave**

No evictions for Great Nicobar project

Context

- Recently, NITI Aayog has prepared a 75,000-crore project for the 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Islands in Andaman and Nicobar Islands'.
- Environmentalists and biodiversity experts have raised strong objections to this project of the NITI Aayog.
- Amid the ongoing controversy over the project, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has informed the Rajya Sabha, the government will not allow the displacement of tribespeople to make way for the Great Nicobar Island project.

Government stand

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs said that the utilisation of tribal reserve area will be subject to the interests of the local tribespeople living in the area, especially the Shompen tribe, which is classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- The government said the utilisation of the tribal reserve area will be subject to the following conditions:
  - The interests of the tribal population especially Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group are not affected adversely
  - Strict implementation of the provisions of Protection of Aborigine Tribe (PAT) Regulation to protect the interest of the Shompen
  - Displacement of tribals will not be allowed; and eco-tourism will be regulated in an effective manner.
  - Further, the government said that the Lieutenant-Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands had already constituted an Empowered Committee to obtain views and consultations on the impact of the project.

Diversity in Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- Andaman and Nicobar Islands are one of the global hotspots for rich biodiversity with almost 86 per cent area of these islands covered with lush green rain forests.
- This archipelago also has great historical and anthropological significance.
- These islands are home to some of the aboriginal tribes that are protected under India's 1956 Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation Act because of the vulnerability of their traditional culture.

Environmental concerns

- Environmentalists and biodiversity experts have warned that this project is likely to impact turtle and megapode nesting sites and coral reefs on the islands.
- The project, being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO), includes a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant, and a greenfield township.
- In November 2022, the project received Stage 1 clearance from the Union Environment and Forest Ministry to divert 130.75 sq. km. of forest land for the purpose.

Defence Ministry inks deal for Project Akashteer

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has signed a deal for the procurement of **Automated Air Defence Control and Reporting System 'Project Akashteer'** for the Army and **Sarang Electronic Support Measure (ESM) systems** for the Navy.
- The ministry signed three contracts worth ₹5,400 crore:
- Two contracts with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) worth ₹2,400 crore
- One contract with ₹2,963-crore contract is with NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).
- NSIL is Central Public Sector Enterprise under the Department of Space, for an advanced communication satellite.

Project Akashteer
- The Automated Air Defence Control & Reporting System 'Project Akashteer' will empower the Air Defence units of the Indian Army with an indigenous, state-of-the-art capability, to effectively operate in an integrated manner.
- The Air Defence system will enable monitoring of low-level airspace over the battle areas of the Indian Army and effectively control the Ground Based Air Defence Weapon Systems.

Sarang systems
- Sarang is an advanced Electronic Support Measure system for helicopters of the Indian navy, designed and developed indigenously by the Defence Electronics Research Laboratory, Hyderabad under the programme Samudrika.
- According to the statement from MoD, both projects will encourage the participation of Indian Electronics and associated industries, including MSMEs, who are sub-vendors of BEL.

Advanced communication satellite
- The Advanced communication satellite will considerably enhance the communication capability of the Indian army by providing mission-critical beyond-the-line-of-sight communication to troops and formations as well as weapon and airborne platforms.
- The geostationary satellite, being a first-of-its-kind in the five-tonne category, will be developed indigenously by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

SEBI to boost disclosure norms
Context
- To ensure more transparency and timely disclosure of material events by listed entities, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has decided to amend norms whereby a quantitative threshold will be introduced for determining the materiality of events.
- SEBI has decided to do away with the practice of individuals having permanent seats on boards of listed companies.
- SEBI has also now allowed Private Equity (PE) firms to own stakes in Asset Management Companies (AMCs) that operate mutual funds.

Corporate governance
- To bolster corporate governance at listed entities, the Securities and Exchange Board of India said that periodic shareholders' approval will be required for any special right granted to a shareholder of a listed entity.
- Periodic shareholders' nod will also be needed for any director serving on the board of a listed entity "to do away with the practice of permanent board seats".
- The market regulator also said that listed entities will be required to fill up the vacancy of Directors, Compliance Officer, Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Financial Officer within a period of three months from the date of such vacancy to ensure that such critical positions are not kept vacant.

Strengthening grievance redressal mechanism
- In an effort to strengthen the investor grievance redressal mechanism in the securities market, Securities and Exchange Board of India has decided to operationalise the online dispute resolution mechanism for investors across registered intermediaries and regulated entities.
- The Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) system would be extended to MII (Market Infrastructure Intermediaries) administered conciliation and arbitration mechanism to registered intermediaries, regulated entities and their investors and clients.
- Besides, the proceedings would be conducted in a hybrid mode, the dispute resolution process will be streamlined and other measures will be adopted to strengthen the enforcement of awards.

SMART PDS scheme: A bold initiative in digitisation

Context
- The Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution urged all states and union territories to implement the SMART-PDS to ensure the smooth operation of the public distribution system.
- He said transparency should be of utmost importance for free supply chain of foodgrains under Public Distribution System.
- The National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA), governs the country's largest beneficiary-centric programme.
- The Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) provides food security to 81.35 crore persons every month.

About SMART-PDS
- SMART-PDS is a system where smart ration cards are issued to beneficiaries of the public distribution system.
- The fingerprint template of the beneficiary is recorded in these smart ration cards, which records all transactions.
- The ration is given through fair price shops on production of the smart ration card by any member of the beneficiary family.

Data Analytics
- As the Centre has begun moving towards the implementation of the Scheme for Modernisation and Reforms through Technology in Public Distribution System (SMART-PDS) to prevent leakage of foodgrains, a lot of data is being generated and stored every day by states/UTs.
- Data Analytics on the TPDS ecosystem will generate critical information about the beneficiaries, their food security needs and patterns of migration.
- The lack of credible and dynamic data on consumption and mobility patterns was always a big challenge.
- The SMART-PDS initiative will go a long way in addressing this deficit.

Technology-led reforms
- Technology-led reforms are expected to overcome the state-level technological limitations of PDS operations concerning IT hardware, software, and technical manpower.
- This will also institutionalize an integrated central system for all PDS-related operations across all states/UTs.
- Today, nearly 93 per cent of the total monthly allocated foodgrains are distributed through the Aadhaar authentication mode using electronic Point of Sale (ePoS) devices.

Integrated Management of Public Distribution System
- To sustain the reforms brought in by the End-to-end Computerisation of TPDS Operations scheme and address challenges, the government has launched **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (**Central Sector Scheme).
- Its main objectives are:
- Implementation of One Nation One Ration Card (nation-wide portability)
- Creation of a national-level data repository for de-duplication of beneficiary/ration cards data
- Creation of integrated data infrastructure/systems across ration card management
- Allocation, supply chain of foodgrains and FPS automation among Centre and all states.

Way forward
- In order to ensure efficient and effective food security management systems across the country, the technological advancements will play a crucial role.
- The technology upgrade in Public Distribution System will ensure transparent in delivery system and reduce corruption.
- The scope of SMART PDS is clearly beyond just ration distribution.

India's DPIs, catching the next wave

Context
- Public infrastructure has been a cornerstone of human progress.
- In the twenty-first century, technological innovation has created a tempest of ideological, geographical and economic implications that pose new challenges.
- India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) is a marvel that is shaped in a unique partnership between governments (Union and States), regulators, the private sector, selfless volunteers, startups, and academia/think tanks.

Aadhaar and the private sector

- The rebirth of Aadhaar happened in 2014 and gave it a canvas far wider and bigger than what was originally envisaged and enabled it to become the rocket ship to launch good governance on.
- The judgment of the Supreme Court of India had affirmed privacy to be sacrosanct.
- Aadhaar holders can voluntarily use their Aadhaar for private sector purposes, and private sector entities need not seek special permission for such usage.
- Also, between government departments (intra- and inter-State) Aadhaar data can be shared, but with the prior informed consent of the citizen.
- Banks and other regulated entities can store Aadhaar numbers as long as they protect it using vault and other similar means, as in Unique Identification Authority of India security regulations.

DigiYatra and DigiLocker

- Digi Yatra uses a facial recognition system (FRS) to confirm the identity of the passengers while DigiLocker aims to provide a Digital wallet to every citizen so that all lifelong documents.
- The Digi Yatra pilots have shown that about two lakh passengers have utilised this successfully.
- DigiLocker today has 150 million users, six billion stored documents.

UPI's impact

- Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant real-time payment system developed by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- It most preferred and the most used payment system in India that allows users to transfer money between bank accounts instantly using their mobile phones.
- In 2021, UPI processed around 39 billion transactions totalling $940 billion, equivalent to 31% of India's GDP.

Way forward

- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has provided a solution to improve the lives of citizens' around the world by enabling digital inclusion.
- DPI has emerged as the most feasible model due to its low cost, interoperability, and scalable design.
- There is more to be tapped in the country's digital public infrastructure (DPI), which has paved the way for greater economic freedom for citizens.

29.03.2023

- **EPFO marginally hike interest on deposits**
- **India to host SCO-National Security Advisors meeting**
- **Prices of essential medicines set to see a hike**
- **IRDAI permits commissions for agents and brokers**
- **The need for sector-specific safeguards in 'techade'**

EPFO marginally hike interest on deposits

Context

- The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has recently raised the interest rate on the provident fund deposits.
- The new rate will be at 8.15 per cent for FY23.
- In March 2022, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) had lowered the interest rate on EPF for 2021-22 to a four-decade low of 8.10 per cent for its subscribers, from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21.
- The interest rate would be officially notified in the government gazette after getting the customary approval from the Finance Ministry, following which EPFO would credit the rate of interest into its subscribers' accounts.

Objective of EPF

- The objective of EPF investments has always been to increase the wealth, but since EPFO is the custodian of people's wealth, the investment is done rather conservatively. The reserve fund has increased from last year.
- Hence, it was decided to raise the interest rate, though marginally.
- EPFO is expected to distribute Rs 90,000 crore this year to its members' accounts, on a total principal amount of Rs 11 trillion.
- The expected surplus this year is likely to be about Rs 660 crore.

Investment avenues of EPFO

- EPFO being one of the largest social security organisations.
- Over the years, the organinstion has been able to distribute higher income to its members, through various economic cycles with minimal credit risk.
- Considering the credit profile of the EPFO investment, the interest rate of EPFO is higher than other comparable investment avenues available for subscribers.
- EPFO has consistently followed a prudent and balanced approach towards investment, putting the highest emphasis on safety and preservation of principal with an approach of caution and growth.

India to host SCO-National Security Advisors meeting

Context

- India, the current chair of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), is set to host a meeting of National Security Advisors (NSA) on March 29, 2023.
- Last year, India had assumed the SCO chair ship for 2023.
- Pakistan and China are likely to attend the SCO-NSA meeting virtually.
- The meeting is part of the preparatory meetings for the SCO summit that will be held in India this year.

About SCO

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 2001 and it comprises eight member states, namely, India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- SCO is a major regional powerhouse that aimed at promoting economic, political, and military cooperation among its member nations.
- The eight-member countries of SCO represent around 42% of the world's total population and 25% of the global GDP.
- India became a full member of SCO on June 9 in 2017.

Prices of essential medicines set to see a hike

Context
- Amid the sharp rise in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and increased prices of almost all essential medicine raw components, the prices of medicines are set to hike by 12 percent from April 1.
- According to reports, the prices of 384 essential drugs including painkillers, anti-infection drugs, cardiac drugs, antibiotics and over 1,000 formulations are set to witness a hike.

Burden for consumer
- The price surge of almost all essential medicine will mean that consumers have to pay more for routine and essential drugs, including painkillers, anti-infection drugs, cardiac drugs, and antibiotics.
- Annual hikes in the prices of drugs listed in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) are based on the WPI.

NLEM list
- The National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) is a list released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- The medicines listed in the NLEM are sold below a price ceiling fixed by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA).
- Last year, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) announced a 10.7% change in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
- In India, it was framed on the lines of the Essential Medicines List (EML) released by the WHO.

About NPPA
- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.
- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was constituted in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- The NPPA regularly publishes lists of medicines and their maximum ceiling prices.

Irdai permits commissions for agents and brokers

Context
- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has asked insurance companies, including life and non-life, to fix an overall cap on commission payment to agents, brokers and other intermediaries, giving more flexibility to insurers in managing their expenses.
- The IRDAI (Payment of Commission) Regulations, 2023, notified on March 26, 2023 is expected to provide more flexibility in product innovation and insurance penetration.
- The IRDAI has removed the individual ceiling of commission to be paid by insurers for the sale of their products.
- The removal of the cap on commission payments will positively impact the insurance sector.

Advantages
- The removal of the cap on commission payments will facilitate greater product innovation, development of new product distribution models and lead to more customer-centric operations.
- It will also increase insurance penetration and provide flexibility to insurers in managing their expenses. Overall, it will smoothen adherence to compliance norms.

The need for sector-specific safeguards in 'techade'

Context
- India's digital economy is set to reach a milestone of $1 trillion by 2026.
- The citizens of the country have witness digital change from shopping and socialising to education and government services.
- But, as we include digital convenience, we are also generating massive amounts of personal data.
- Understanding how this data is handled and protected is fast becoming critical.

Digital Personal Data Protection

- To ensure data protection for the citizen, the centre has recently proposed the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill 2022.
- The draft Bill sets out the rights and duties of the citizen (Digital Nagrik) and the obligations of the Data Fiduciary to use the collected data lawfully.
- Even the Bill outlines citizens' rights over their personal data and the responsibilities of data collectors, it lacks specificity in certain clauses such as the interaction with sectoral data protection regulations.

Sectoral regulation

- The current draft of the Bill tries to tackle the issue of conflicting sectoral regulations; in Section 29.
- It states that the provisions of the Bill will complement and not create exemptions from existing regulations, but in case of conflict, the Bill will take precedence.
- Sectoral expertise offers a deep understanding of a particular sector, including its market dynamics, technologies, risks and business models.
- It also enables regulators to engage with stakeholders and industry experts in a well-informed and productive manner.
- The first part allows the Bill to fill in any regulatory gaps, but the second part raises concerns about sectoral regulations that may go beyond what the Bill provides.

Global approaches

- The global community has adopted two major approaches to regulate privacy and protect data: comprehensive legislation and sector-specific regulations.
- The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) embodies the comprehensive approach, offering the strongest and most stringent framework to date. The sectoral approach in the United States, as seen through laws such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in health care.
- GDPR also permits EU Member States to implement measures which go beyond the provisions given in the GDPR.

Next Course of action for India

- In India, the sectoral regulations regarding data protection such as the Reserve Bank of India's directive on storage of payment data and the National Health Authority's Health Data Management Policy.
- These are the result of extensive industry consultations and expert input.
- Neglecting these regulations and establishing a new framework would undermine the considerable effort invested in their creation.
- Any deviation from existing regulations will further require the industry to readjust their operations again at considerable cost.
- The DPDP Bill, therefore, must serve as the minimum layer of protection, with sectoral regulators having the ability to build on these protections.

Bottom line

- Data protection is a complex subject and government must create room for sectoral experts to weigh in to safeguard the interests of citizens more effectively.
- This will ensure a safer, more secure, and dynamic digital landscape in the years to come.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill must serve as a basic layer of protection, with sectoral regulators having the ability to build on this.

28.03.2023

- **NCERT to develop new syllabus and textbooks**
- **India to use G20 platform to push rupees trade**
- **Heat action plans in India fail to identify vulnerable groups**
- **SEBI set to regulate index providers**
- **A shared G20 vision for the ocean commons**

NCERT to develop new syllabus and textbooks

Context

- According to the details and confirmation form the Ministry of Education, the government will introduce the new NCERT textbooks and syllabus.
- After nearly two decades, school students at all levels will learn from updated textbooks to be introduced in the academic year 2024-25.
- The decision in Synchronization with the National Education Policy, 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) released in August 2022.

Imparting multilingual education

- The new National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks will be developed in 22 languages, in consonance with the NEP 2020 perspective of imparting multilingual education.
- The NCERT had developed material to feed into the play-way teaching method: the magic box (jaadui pitaara) would be made available to every school in the form of open education resources.
- Private publishers, including the Oxford University Press (OUP), have already published "NEP 2020 and NCF 2022 aligned" books for preschool and Class 1 and 2.

Five-step learning process

- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in its guidelines, has emphasised that students' learning should be planned keeping in mind Indian roots and has proposed a five-step learning process for children at the preschool or foundational level.
  - Introduction of a topic
  - Conceptual understanding
  - Practice
  - Application
  - Expansion
- Through the NCF, the Ministry aims to help students develop their cognitive and critical thinking skills, which involve problem-solving in real-life situations.

School data

- As per Ministry of Education there are 14.8 lakh schools in India, 28,000 are Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), nearly 2,000 Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), and 345 International Baccalaureate (IB) schools.
- The rest are State Board schools.

Next courses of action

- Recently the Ministry of Education convened the National Steering Committee meeting to streamline the next steps under the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) agenda.
- Currently, the government has released the NCF for preschool to Class 2, for children aged between three and eight.
- The framework for other classes is yet to be rolled out.

India to use G20 platform to push rupees trade

Context

- As an incumbent chair of G20 India will use the G20 platform to further push the cross-border trade settlement in rupee with the member countries.
- India will be focusing on those countries that are facing problems with a particular currency or a basket of currencies, and are looking to come out of that crisis.
- India is holding the G20 Presidency from December 1, 2022 to November 30, 2023.

Mechanism to settle international trade in rupees

- In July, 2022 the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had put in place a mechanism to settle international trade in rupees to promote the growth of global trade with emphasis on exports from India.
- The mechanism also aims to support the increasing interest of the global trading community in the rupee.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had approved domestic and foreign AD (Authorised Dealer) banks in 60 cases for the opening of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs) of correspondent banks from 18 countries.
- **Note: A Vostro account is an account a correspondent bank holds on behalf of another bank.**
- The countries include Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and the United Kingdom.

G20 Trade and Investment Working Group
- The G20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting will engage in deliberations to accelerate global trade and investments.
- Trade finance supports economic growth, and it is integral for maintaining international trade flows, for mitigating risks emerging from tight liquidity.
- Global trade finance involves a number of parties, including banks, trade finance companies, export credit agencies, insurers, importers and exporters.
- The G20 members represent around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population.

Heat action plans in India fail to identify vulnerable groups
Context
- According to the Study by Centre for Policy Research, the Action plans prepared by the state and city governments to address the grave challenges posed by heat waves are weak and inefficient as they lack structural support like funding and fail to protect the vulnerable communities.

About Heat action plans
- Heat action plans (HAPs) are the primary policy response to economically damaging and life-threatening heat waves.
- They prescribe several activities, disaster responses and post-heatwave response measures to reduce the impact of heat waves.

Review of heat action plans
- A review of 37 heat action plans in India shows most of them do not explicitly carry out vulnerability assessments, leaving the authorities with little data on where to direct their scarce resources.
- The Centre For Policy Research (CPR), which conducted the "first critical review" of heat action plans at the city (nine), district (13) and state (15) levels across 18 states, said it was unclear to what extent actions prescribed in the HAPs were being implemented.
- Though the exact number of HAPs in India is unknown, some estimates claim the existence of well over 100 HAPs nationwide.

Changing weather pattern
- According to the India Meteorological Department, India logged its hottest February in 2023 since record-keeping began in 1901.
- March 2022 was the warmest ever and the third driest in 121 years.
- The year also saw the country's third warmest April, eleventh warmest August and eighth warmest September since 1901.
- Studies show India is one of the most exposed and vulnerable countries to heat. Between 1951 and 2016.

Representative Concentration Pathway
- Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs) are used to understand how our climate may change in future.
- RCPs capture assumptions about the economic, social and physical changes to the environment that will influence climate change within a set of scenarios.
- The conditions of each scenario are used to model possible future climate evolution.
- The increased heat is already leading to more heat-related deaths, heat stress, unbearable working conditions and the wider spread of vector-borne diseases.

Other important findings
- By 2050, as many as 24 urban centres are projected to breach average summertime highs of at least 35 degrees Celsius, disproportionately impacting economically weaker sections.

- The International Labour Organisation estimates that working hours lost due to heat stress would increase to 5.8 per cent of working hours by 2030, or an equivalent of 34 million jobs.

SEBI set to regulate index providers

Context

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India has moved to regulate the practices of market index amid concerns about the safety of passive investors' savings parked in funds linked to indices that have added or retained several Adani group stocks, despite their meltdown following the release of the Hindenburg Research report.
- The Parliament has entrusted SEBI with protecting investor interests, so it must do whatever it takes to meet that mandate and is moving to regulate index providers.

Need for greater oversight

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India's upcoming meeting will discuss the need for greater oversight of currently unregulated index providers like NSE Indices (a National Stock Exchange subsidiary) and the Asia Index Pvt. Ltd. (a BSE joint venture with Dow Jones), citing their growing dominance due to the "proliferation" of index funds.
- A draft regulatory framework for index providers mooted by SEBI in December had raised concerns about possible conflicts of interest that could arise in their governance.

About SEBI

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is a statutory body established under the SEBI act of 1992.
- It was formed in response to prevent malpractices in the capital markets that were negatively impacting people's confidence in the market.
- Its primary objective is to protect the interest of the investors, prevent malpractices, and ensure the proper and fair functioning of the markets.

A shared G20 vision for the ocean commons

Context

- The oceans hold limitless opportunities for the prosperity of our planet.
- Most prosperous cities and countries are endowed with a coast.
- The G20 countries together account for around 45% of the world's coastlines and over 21% of the exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Blue Economy

- The term 'blue economy' includes not only ocean-dependent economic development, but also inclusive social development and environmental and ecological security. Recognising the contribution of the ocean economy for sustainable development, the Prime Minister of India said, "To me, the blue chakra in India's flag represents the potential of the ocean economy."

Government Initiatives

- The Government of India has launched bold initiatives to promote the development of a blue economy.
- The **Sagarmala initiative** promotes port-led development.
- The **Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy encourages domestic ship-building**.
- The **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana** is actively engendering a **'blue revolution'** through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector.
- The **Sagar Manthan dashboard** tracks vessels in real-time.
- The **Deep Ocean Mission** explores deep-sea resources in the **EEZ and continental shelf** as well as development of technology for harnessing them.

Coastal Regulation Zone

- India adopted the Coastal Regulation Zone notification to classify and better manage coastal regions and conserve ecologically sensitive coastal and marine areas including ecosystems.
- As the host of the World Environment Day in 2018, the prime minster or India gave a clarion call to eliminate single-use plastic.

Addressing plastic pollution

- In 2022, the global community rallied together for a multilateral treaty on addressing plastic pollution.
- In this regard, India introduced an amendment to the Plastic Waste Management Rules banning select single-use plastic items.
- India also introduced policies for extended producer responsibility in waste management in order to combat plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.

India's G20 opportunity

- As the current chair to G20 Presidency, India's Blue economy roadmap is well articulated as a key priority area under the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group.
- The aim is to promote adoption of high-level principles that guide sustainable and equitable economic development through the ocean and its resources.

G20 forum and ocean-related Initiative

- Over the last decade, the G20 forum has discussed some specific ocean-related issues.
- These include:
    - G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter
    - Osaka Blue Ocean Vision
    - Coral Research and Development Accelerator Platform
- In 2022, holistic discussions on blue economy were initiated at the Ocean 20 launch in Bali.

Way Forward

- India's G20 presidency would play an important role in promoting individual and collective actions to facilitate the transition towards a sustainable blue economy.
- The G20 forum presents an excellent opportunity to build effective communication with all stakeholders to share best practices, foster collaborations for advancements in science and technology, promote public-private partnerships, and create novel blue finance mechanisms.
- The spirit of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' must unite the global community for the well-being of ocean commons.

27.03.2023

- **Understanding IMF bailouts**
- **AUKUS focus is on submarine tech**
- **IMF chief warns risks to financial stability**
- **EPFO board of trustees to discuss interest rates and pension**
- **Making sense of the disqualification of a Lok Sabha MP**

Understanding IMF bailouts

Context

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has recently approved a $3 billion bailout plan for Sri Lanka's struggling economy.
- IMF is also in negotiations with Pakistan for a $1.1 billion bailout plan as the country faces a severe economic crisis marked by a falling currency and price rise.

Why do nations seek an IMF bailout

- Countries seek help from the IMF usually when their economies face a major macroeconomic risk, mostly in the form of a currency crisis.
- For instance, in the case of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, both countries have witnessed domestic prices rise rapidly and the exchange value of their currencies drop steeply against the U.S. dollar.
- Such currency crises are generally the result of gross mismanagement of the nation's currency by its central bank.
- A rapid, unpredictable fall in the value of a currency can destroy confidence in said currency and affect economic activity as people may turn hesitant to accept the currency in exchange for goods and services.

Lending via special drawing rights

- The IMF basically lends money, often in the form of special drawing rights (SDRs), to troubled economies that seek the lender's assistance.
- SDRs simply represent a basket of five currencies, namely the U.S. dollar, the euro, the Chinese yuan, the Japanese yen, and the British pound.
- The IMF carries out its lending to troubled economies through several lending programs such as the extended credit facility, the flexible credit line, the stand-by agreement, etc.
- Countries receiving the bailout can use the SDRs for various purposes depending on their individual circumstances.

About International Monetary Fund

- The IMF was set up in 1945 out of the Bretton Woods conference.
- The primary goal of the IMF back then was to bring about international economic coordination to prevent competing currency devaluation by countries trying to promote their own exports.
- Eventually, the IMF evolved to be a lender of last resort to governments of countries that had to deal with severe currency crises.

Prerequisite for IMF bailout

- The IMF usually imposes conditions on countries before it lends any money to them. For example, a country may have to agree to implement certain structural reforms as a condition to receive IMF loans.
- The IMF may demand a country affected by high price inflation to ensure the independence of its central bank.
- The IMF's conditional lending has been controversial as many believe that these reforms are too tough on the public.

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AUKUS focus is on submarine tech

Context

- The leaders of AUKUS grouping have categorically noted that the primary focus of the AUKUS arrangement between Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. is submarine technology development.
- Making its stand clear it said that within AUKUS there is no room for a fourth country.
- tHE second pillar call for broader technology cooperation where there is room for cooperation with other countries, including India.

About AUKUS

- It is a trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS).
- The AUKUS partnership, unveiled in 2021.
- The military grouping designed to deter China, most noted for its cooperation on nuclear-powered submarines.

Two pillars of AUKUS partnership

- The AUKUS partnership, which focuses on transferring and jointly developing vital defence and emerging technologies, has two pillars.
- The first aims to transfer highly sensitive nuclear submarine technology from the US and UK to Australia.
- The other focuses on advanced capabilities like emerging defence technologies, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.
- The exploratory conversations have focused on India-AUKUS cooperation under Pillar 2.

Australia and SSN class nuclear attack submarines

- Recently, the three AUKUS partners announced their implementation plan to equip Australia with SSN class nuclear attack submarines.
- Under this, Australia will receive at least three second-hand SSNs from the U.S. in the 2030s as an interim measure, and five new SSNs to be designed and developed by the U.K. from the early 2040s to the late 2050s.

Quad summit 2023

- In May, Australia will host the Quad leaders' summit involving India, Australia, Japan and the U.S., where the recent implementation roadmap is expected to come up during discussions.
- On the possible conversation between the AUKUS and the Quad, diplomatic sources said the former has no implications for the latter.

India's SSN programme

- India has its own indigenous programme for the design and development of SSNs, which will give the Indian Navy unlimited endurance underwater.
- India is currently looking at procuring six advanced conventional submarines to arrest its depleting submarine strength, and also speeding up its SSN programme.

IMF chief warns risks to financial stability

Context

- Recently while addressing Press conference, the International Monetary Fund warned that the risks to financial stability have increased and stressed the "need for vigilance". This comes after the recent banking turmoil, however, she also noted that the decisive actions by advanced economies have calmed market stress.

World economy performance

- The IMF noted that the world economy would expand by just 3% in this year as rising borrowing costs, combined with the war in Ukraine and scarring from the Covid-19 pandemic, would suffocate growth.
- Global growth which is slowing down to below three per cent due to the aspects, despite the better outlook for the upcoming year will remain well below the historic average of 3.8 per cent.

IMF forecast

- The IMF in January estimated global growth would slow from an estimated 3.4 per cent last year to 2.9 per cent in 2023, then rise to 3.1 per cent in 2024.
- Even with a better outlook for 2024, global growth will remain below last decade's average of 3.8 per cent.

- The most positive development in the world economy this year was the expected strong economic rebound in China after it relaxed its strict Covid controls at the end of 2022.
- The IMF forecasts growth of 5.2 per cent in China in 2023 compared with 3 per cent a year earlier.
- IMF projects Indian economy to grow at 6.1% in 2023.

EPFO board of trustees to discuss interest rates and pension

Context
- The upcoming 233rd meeting of the Central Board of Trustees will discuss the gamut of issues which includes:
  - Interest rate for the financial year 2022-23
  - Higher pension option linked to actual salaries
  - Annual financial estimates for the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)
- This is the first CBT meeting where a status note on pension is expected to be discussed after the EPFO allowed a window till May 3 for the subscribers of the Employees' Pension Scheme to opt for the higher pension linked to actual salaries.

Interest rate
- In March 2022, the CBT had recommended a four-decade low interest rate of 8.1 per cent for over 6 crore active subscribers of the EPFO for the financial year 2021-22, leaving it with an estimated surplus of Rs 450 crore.
- In June 2022, the finance ministry had then ratified the interest rate.
- FY22 is the first financial year when the Centre's proposal to tax interest on higher contributions to the EPF will come into effect.
- The interest rate for FY23 is unlikely to go below 8 per cent level amid a rising interest rate scenario.
- Several subscribers had reported delays in crediting of interest rate for FY22.

Supreme Court direction on pension
- The upcoming 233rd meeting of the Central Board of Trustees will have detailed discussion on the higher pension issue following the directives of the Supreme Court.
- The Kerala High Court has also issued interim order saying those who are receiving higher PF pension over its verdict should not be affected by by Supreme Court's verdict dated November 4, 2022.

Making sense of the disqualification of a Lok Sabha MP

Context
- Recently senior congress leader was disqualified as a Member of Parliament (MP) of the Lok Sabha following his conviction by a Gujarat court in a defamation case filed against him.
- The legal community is mystified by the harshness of the sentence, which is unprecedented in a defamation case.
- The issue will anyway be dealt with by the appellate courts.
- But the issues relating to the disqualification need to be examined carefully.

Representation of the People Act, 1951
- **Section 8** of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) specifies the various offences, conviction for which entail the disqualification of a member of the legislature. Clause (3) of this section says that a person convicted of any offence other than those mentioned in the other two clauses, and sentenced to not less than two years shall be disqualified from the date of conviction.
- However, clause (4) has exempted sitting members from instant disqualification for three months to enable them to appeal against the conviction.

Lily Thomas v. Union of India 2013
- The clause (4) of Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was struck down as ultra vires the Constitution by a two judge Bench of the Supreme Court on the ground that Parliament has no power to enact such an exemption for sitting members of the legislature (Lily Thomas vs Union of India, 2013).
- The effect of this judgment is that there is an instant disqualification of a sitting legislator as soon as he is convicted. However, the Court made it clear that in the event of the appellate Court staying the conviction and sentence, the disqualification will be lifted and the membership will be restored to him.

The role of the President

- Section 8(3) of the RP Act which provides for disqualification on conviction has been subjected to judicial interpretation in a number of cases.
- But a closer reading will reveal that the words "shall be disqualified" used therein cannot mean instant disqualification.
- Article 103 shows that the President of India is that authority who decides that a sitting member has become subject to disqualification in all cases which come under Article 102(1).
- Sub Clause (e) of this Article relates to all cases of disqualification under the RP Act 1951 which include disqualification on conviction and sentence under Section 8(3) of the Act.
- In cases where adjudication is not required, the President can simply declare that the sitting Member has become subject to disqualification.

An issue to reflect on
- The law on criminal defamation needs an urgent review.
- Many countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have scrapped it. India's neighbor Sri Lanka too has done away with it.
- In 1965, the Supreme Court had drawn the attention of the judicial system to the need for a liberal approach to rhetorical, hyperbolic or metaphoric words used by politicians in election speeches.

Way forward
- India possess a multi-party democracy, every political party is a potential ruling party. So, every political leader is exposed to the danger of being hauled up for defamation and put out of the electoral process for long years.
- The law on criminal defamation needs review as every elected political person faces the danger of being put out of the electoral process for years.

25.03.2023

- **ICMR releases ethical guidelines for AI usage in healthcare**
- **Centre forms panel to relook at pension system**
- **India signs pact with Cambodia on tiger translocation**
- **Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting**
- **A chilling remark and the 'price to pay'**

ICMR releases ethical guidelines for AI usage in healthcare

Context
- Recently, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) issued a country first ever guiding document- "The Ethical Guidelines for Application of AI in Biomedical Research and Health care".
- The document, prepared by the Department of Health Research and the ICMR Artificial Intelligence Cell, Delhi, will be updated as and when the need arises.
- The document notes that the regulation of AI technologies in healthcare is still in its nascent stage even in developed countries.

Key patient-centric ethical principles
- The guideline by the ICMR outlined 10 key patient-centric ethical principles for AI application in the health sector for all stakeholders involved.
- These include:
  o Accountability and liability
  o Autonomy
  o Data privacy
  o Collaboration
  o Risk minimisation and safety
  o Accessibility and equity
  o Optimisation of data quality
  o Non-discrimination and fairness
  o Validity
  o Trustworthiness

Applications of AI in healthcare

- Some of the recognized applications of AI in healthcare are in the areas of: Surgery-assisting robots
  - Diagnosis
  - Finding new links between genetic codes
  - Medical imaging
  - Therapeutics
  - Clinical decision-making
  - Public health surveillance
  - Data analysis
  - Prediction of pandemics
  - Health management systems

Advantages

- The guideline documents will make AI-assisted platforms available for the benefit of the largest section of common people with safety and highest precision possible.
- It will also address emerging ethical challenges when it comes to Artificial Intelligence in biomedical research and healthcare delivery.
- It aims at creating an ethics framework for development, deployment, and adoption of solutions in AI space.

Centre forms panel to relook at pension system

Context

- The finance minister recently announced the formation of a committee to look into improving the system of pension for government employees and evolve an approach to address the need of employees while maintaining fiscal prudence.
- The decision comes in the backdrop of after several states in india has adopted the Old Pension Scheme.

States that revert to OPS

- The state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have informed the Centre about their decision to revert to the Old Pension Scheme and have requested a refund of corpus accumulated under the NPS.
- Under the OPS, retired government employees received 50 per cent of their last drawn salary as monthly pensions.
- The amount keeps increasing with hike in the DA rates.

About the committee

- The committee, which will be headed by Finance Secretary T V Somanathan, will work on an approach that will strike a balance between employees' needs and fiscal prudence, with any changes proposed to be adopted by both Central and state governments.

About National Pension Scheme

- NPS has been implemented for all government employees except those in armed forces joining central government on or after 1st of January 2004.
- Most of the state/ Union Territory governments have also notified the NPS for their new employees.
- According to the PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority), 26 state governments, with the exception of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, have notified and implemented NPS for their employees.
- NPS has been made available to every Indian citizen from May 1, 2009 on a voluntary basis.

India signs pact with Cambodia on tiger translocation

Context

- Recently, India signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Cambodia, which is seeking our support for tiger reintroduction.
- The country has lost all its tigers due to poaching, habitat loss and other issues.
- India is considering sending tigers to Cambodia to help it reintroduce the big cat to its forests.
- India recently signed a pact with Cambodia for the world's first transnational tiger reintroduction programme in 2022.

Ground reality

- According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), conservationists in Cambodia declared tigers "functionally extinct" in 2016.
- Cambodia's last tiger was seen on a camera trap in the eastern province of Mondulkiri in 2007.
- In September 2017, the Cambodian government announced plans to reintroduce tigers in the country with the help of the WWF.
- Both India and Cambodia would follow all protocols of the International Union for Conservation of Nature for the tiger reintroduction programme.

Tiger reserves in India

- At present, India has 53 tiger reserves covering more than 75,000 sq km (approximately 2.4 per cent of the country's geographical area).
- With a population of about 3,000 tigers, India is home to more than 70 per cent of the global wild tiger population and their number is increasing at six per cent per annum.
- Countries with tiger populations — India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam.

50th year of 'Project Tiger'

- 'Project Tiger', which began in 1973 at the Corbett national park, completes 50 years on April 1 this year.
- The last tiger spotted on a camera trap in Cambodia was in 2007.
- India, following the success of the first-of-its-kind transcontinental translocation of the African Cheetahs last September, signed a memorandum of understanding with Cambodia in November to assist it with "all technical details and knowledge'' regarding the reintroduction of tiger in the country.

Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting

Context

- In the recent Second G20 Framework Working Group meeting, most G20 countries see inflation as being sticky and easing more slowly than they would like.
- Participants do not envisage current banking turmoil leading to a systemic crisis; prefer to tackle financial stability risks separately, do not view them as a constraint to rate increases
- Most member countries are also of the view that financial stability risks can be handled separately and need not constrain further interest rate increases if required.

Current banking situation

- On the current banking turmoil in the western world, India CEA said the prevailing sentiment expressed by members was that it need not lead to a systemic crisis and that policy makers have things under control and are responding to developments as warranted.

A chilling remark and the 'price to pay'

Context

- On various occasions the tussle between Judiciary and executive is clearly evident.
- In a recent statement, India's Union Law Minister describes retired judges in a rather harsh manner, it is something that cannot be taken lightly.
- For the Minister to label retired judges who question "state policies" as being "anti-India" elements is not just a case of a flawed understanding of concepts but also a matter of grave concern for citizens.
- To a larger extend, minister's assumption that certain judges are working against India and "will have to pay the price," was not only intimidatory in its tone but also portends grave danger for the future.

A right to free speech

- Judges who demit judicial office do not cease to be citizens of this country.
- They have possess the fundamental rights as per the constitution.
- They have a right to free speech and expression and a duty to speak up when they find the legislature, the executive or even the judiciary to be transgressing their limits.
- The act of questioning the state is not a case of being "anti-national".
- It is a case of being a "concerned patriot".

- In turn, the response of the state has to be to either justify the measures it has adopted, or take the advice offered and course correct.

Indispensable freedoms
- In her address to the Supreme Court of India in November 2022, the President of India, raised the issue of the plight of undertrials in the prisons of India, despite getting bail. The President narrated her experience of meeting undertrial prisoners when she was a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Odisha, and later as the Governor of Jharkhand. It was a speech that moved the Court, which directed jail authorities to submit the details of such prisoners to the State governments concerned which in turn were to forward the documents to the National Legal Services Authority within 15 days.
- Had the President kept quiet, for fear that she may have to "pay the price"", things would never have moved.

Looking ahead
- At this juncture when India is celebrating, 75 year of Independence and Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, the strong coordination between executive and Judiciary in must.
- Supreme Court is not only the Guardian of the Constitution but also thrust of millions of citizen in the country.

24.03.2023

- **India's push for semiconductors**
- **GST appellate tribunal may be headed by a former SC judge**
- **India rejects J&J's attempt to extend the patent on TB drug**
- **India's Roadmap to eliminate TB by 2025**
- **A climate change survival guide to act on**

India's push for semiconductors

Context
- To Make India self-reliance and boost the production of electronics manufacturers, the Centre has disbursed around ₹1,645 crores in performance-linked incentives (PLI) for electronics manufacturers.
- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes are a cornerstone of the Government's push for accomplishing the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Why government is encouraging semiconductor manufacturing
- Semiconductor fabrication units or fabs, to turn raw elements such as silicon into integrated circuits that are fit to be a part of practically all electronic hardware in the world.
- Fabs are highly capital-intensive undertakings, costing billions of dollars for large facilities.
- According to a report by the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA).
- China pulled ahead of Taiwan last year, in terms of share of global sales from fabs.
- It's not just India that is wary of this dominance.
- The U.S. passed the CHIPS Act last August, providing upwards of $280 billion in subsidies and investments to manufacturers opening fabs and making semiconductors in the U.S.
- This has been combined with restrictions on the Chinese semiconductor industry.

Are fabs opening in India
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the first semiconductor manufacturing Semiconductor fabrication units or fabs would be announced in the coming weeks.
- The government's Invest India agency estimates that electronics manufacturing as a whole will be worth $300 billion by the financial year 2025–26.
- While facilities for assembling finished products have been steadily growing in number, Semiconductor fabrication units, or fabs for making chipsets and displays, which are crucial parts of the manufacturing process for many electronics, are rarer.

Advantages for India
- A large part of semiconductor manufacturing involves the design and intellectual labour.
- India possess a large portion of semiconductor design engineers globally is either Indian or Indian origin.

- This is an advantage as China is losing control in the face of sanctions and ageing population.

Enabling programs
- The opening of display and Semiconductor fabrication units, or fabs is one of strategic and economic goals of India's electronics manufacturing incentive programmes.
- The government appears to be developing the parts of the ecosystem that have promise for sustainable growth and fiscal feasibility.

GST appellate tribunal may be headed by a former SC judge

Context
- Recently, the GST Council in its 49th meeting assented to the Group of Ministers (GoM) recommendations on the long pending constitution of the GST Appellate Tribunal in the country with some modifications.
- The GoM on Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunals (GSTATs) was set up in July last year under the chairmanship of the Haryana deputy chief minister.

About GST Appellate Tribunal
- The GST Appellate Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body proposed to be established to resolve disputes related to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India.
- Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal is the form of the second appeal in GST laws and the first common forum of dispute resolution between Centre and States.
- As per the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, the GST Appellate Tribunal holds the same powers as the court and is deemed Civil Court for trying a case.

Composition of Tribunal
- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Appellate Tribunal is likely to be headed by a former Supreme Court judge or a former Chief Justice of a High Court and its framework may permit the resolution of disputes involving dues or fines of less than ₹50 lakhs by a single-member bench.
- Amendments to the GST laws to enable the tribunal's constitution, are expected to be introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Bench of the Tribunal
- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Appellate Tribunal will be one principal bench of the Appellate Tribunal in New Delhi and several State benches.
- Tax experts said the delay in setting up the Appellate Tribunal has led to a pile-up of unresolved legal matters over the tax.

Advantages of the Tribunal
- The Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) is expected to help resolve these matters faster.
- The establishment of tribunal is expected to bring relief to businesses that have long awaited a quick and efficient process for resolving GST disputes.

India rejects J&J's attempt to extend the patent on TB drug

Context
- Recently, the Indian Patent Office rejected US pharmaceutical firm Johnson & Johnson's (J&J) attempt to extend its monopoly in India on the TB drug bedaquiline beyond the primary patent's expiry this July.
- J&J currently has a monopoly through its primary patent on the bedaquiline compound that will expire in July 2023.
- Section 3(d) of the Patents Act states that salt forms and derivatives of known substances are not patentable.

About Bedaquiline
- Bedaquiline fumarate is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use as part of a combination therapy in adults with pulmonary multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB).
- Currently, Bedaquiline tablets are priced at $400 per six-month treatment course.

Merits of decision

- The ruling by Indian Patent Office paved the way for the entry of generic versions of the tuberculosis (TB) drug that are likely to be 80% cheaper for a six-month course for patients suffering from drug-resistant TB.
- Since 2020, bedaquiline has become the backbone for all drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) regimens.

Evergreening attempts
- Since 2007, J&J had indulged in 'evergreening' — a strategy to extend the life of patents about to expire in order to retain revenues from them by making multiple claims in its applications for patent extensions.
- When the firm filed for evergreening of its patent on fumarate salt (a formulation salt of Bedaquiline), the practice was challenged by TB survivors and other stakeholders.

Access of Drug
- According to the latest available estimates, in 2019, over 55,000 patients who had developed multi-drug resistant TB could have benefited from access to Bedaquiline.
- As of March 2020, only a little over 10,000 of these patients had accessed the drug.

India's Roadmap to eliminate TB by 2025

Context
- In 2018, the Prime Minister of India had envisioned ending TB in India by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 2030.
- India set the target of eliminating tuberculosis by 2025, five years ahead of the global target.

TB cases in India
- India continues to be the largest contributor to global TB cases.
- But in recent years there has been a decline in the number of cases in 2021.
- There were 21.3 lakh cases detected in 2021 as compared to 18.05 lakh cases in 2020.
- According to the Global TB Report 2022, India accounts for 28% of all TB cases in the world.
- The incidence of TB – new cases detected throughout the year reduced by 18% in 2021 over the 2015 baseline, dropping to 210 cases per lakh population as compared to 256 cases per lakh population.
- The incidence of drug-resistant TB also went down by 20% during the period from 1.49 lakh cases in 2015 to 1.19 lakh cases in 2021.

TB elimination target
- Although the elimination of Tuberculosis is one of the sustainable development targets to be achieved by 2030 by the world, India has set a target of 2025.
- The national strategic plan 2017-2025 sets the target of India reporting no more than 44 new TB cases or 65 total cases per lakh population by 2025.
- Achieving this target is a big task as the plan had envisaged an incidence of only 77 cases per lakh population by 2023.
- The goals are in line with the World Health Organization's End TB strategy that calls for 80% reduction in the number of new cases, 90% reduction in mortality, and zero catastrophic cost by 2030.

Measures and Initiatives by India
- To achieve the TB elimination target of 2025, the government has taken several steps including looking for cases actively among vulnerable and co-morbid populations, screening for it at the health and wellness centers, and calling on the private sector to notify all TB cases.
- An online Ni-kshay portal has been set up to track the notified TB cases.
- At present, there are 4,760 molecular diagnostic machines available, covering all districts of the country.
- In addition, 79-line probe assay laboratories and 96 liquid culture testing laboratories have been set up for the diagnosis of multi and extremely drug-resistant TB.

Status of treatment protocols
- Newer drugs such as Bedaquiline and Delamanid for the treatment of drug resistant TB have been included in the government's basket of drugs provided free TB patients. These oral drugs can replace the injectable kanamycin that was associated with serious side effects like kidney problems and deafness.
- These new drugs have also been included in the new National List of Essential Medicines that gives the government power to regulate their market price as well.

- For a newer version of the Drug, trials are underway to test the effectiveness of a vaccine called Immuvac, which was initially developed to prevent leprosy, in preventing TB.
- The vaccine developed using mycobacterium indicus pranii has antigens – the portions of a pathogen against which antibodies are developed like those of leprosy and TB bacteria.

A climate change survival guide to act on

Context
- Recently the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released the synthesis report of its Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) cycle, drawing together key findings from its six most recent reports.
- The United Nations Secretary-General has called it a 'survival guide for humanity'.
- The report can shape our collective response in this critical decade, which may be make-or-break for humanity, and is likely to be the last IPCC report for a few years.

Some takeaways
- <u>**Human activity:**</u> The report confirms that human activity is 'unequivocally' driving global temperature rise, which has reached approximately 1.1° C above pre-industrial levels.
- While the rate of emissions growth has slowed in the past decade, humanity is estimated to be on a 2.8° C (2.1°-3.4° C range) trajectory by 2100.

- <u>**Carbon budget**</u>: The amount of carbon that the world can cumulatively emit before reaching key temperature limits, i.e., the world's 'carbon budget', is far lower for the 1.5° C than the 2° C target.
- The IPCC report points out that humanity had already consumed 4/5ths of its total carbon budget for 1.5° C by 2019, with developed economies consuming the maximum share.

- <u>**CO2 emissions:**</u> The report notes that the projected CO_2 emissions over the lifetime of existing fossil fuel infrastructure without additional abatement already exceed the remaining carbon budget for 1.5° C.

Need for climate adaptation
- The Sixth Assessment Report called for recognition of greater risks at lower temperatures points to the necessity of early climate adaptation.
- The report highlights that adaptation itself has limits, which implies that some losses and damages of climate change are inevitable.
- It reports noted that at higher levels of warming, climate change could lead to cascading risks such as food insecurity and migration, which are intensely challenging to manage.
- The report calls for developmental model that integrates both adaptation and mitigation to advance sustainable development for all.

Sustainable technologies
- The Sixth Assessment Report assesses the plethora of technologies and design options, such as solar energy or electric vehicles which can help countries reduce emissions.
- The report strikes a particularly upbeat note on the co-benefits of climate action for air quality.
- A cost-benefit analysis suggests that the air quality and health benefits of mitigation outweigh its costs.
- Prioritizing and addressing equity and social justice in transition processes are shown to be key to climate-resilient development.

Way forward
- The climate-resilient development pathway is the journey, the destination is net zero emissions at the global level.
- Amid the current situation, high upfront investments in clean infrastructure are imperative.
- The IPCC AR6 synthesis report is a landmark as it offers a blueprint for sustainable development, while presenting a sobering account of present and future damages to ecosystems and the most vulnerable amongst us.

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23.03.2023

- **Centre attempt to open corridor to Sharda Peeth in PoK**
- **High Seas Treaty: Key provisions and challenges**
- **PM Holds High-Level Review Meeting On Covid**
- **SC to hear petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape**
- **The old pension scheme as a burden on the poor**

Centre attempt to open corridor to Sharda Peeth in PoK

Context
- Recently the union Home minister said the government would move forward to open a corridor to the Sharda Peeth in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) on the lines of the Kartarpur corridor.
- The corridor links two important Sikh shrines:
  - Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur district of Punjab
  - Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, Pakistan
- Both sites allow pilgrims to travel visa-free.

About Sharda peeth
- The Sharda Peeth is an abandoned holy site for the Hindu community.
- It is located in the Neelum Valley in PoK across Teetwal village along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The shrine was once regarded as a major centre of higher learning of Vedic works, scriptures and commentaries.
- The temple has been completely deserted since Partition in 1947.

Significance
- The reconstruction of Maa Sharda's temple in Kupwara is a necessary and important step in the direction of the discovery of Sharda-civilisation and promotion of Sharda-script.
- Sharda script is the original script of Kashmir.

Restoration work
- The Centre has planned a systematic restoration and repair work was going on at 123 places, including many temples and Sufi places.
- In the first phase, 35 places were being renovated at the cost of ₹65 crore.
- The government also organised 31 mega cultural programmes were organised by identifying 75 religious places and Sufi shrines.

High Seas Treaty: Key provisions and challenges

Context
- In a breakthrough, for the first time, United Nations (UN) members have agreed on a manage conservation through a draft international agreement referred to as the UN High Seas Treaty
- The High Seas Treaty will work as an implementation agreement under the UNCLOS, much like the Paris Agreement works under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Key provisions of Treaty
- The High Seas Treaty has four main objectives:
  - Demarcation of marine protected areas (MPAs), rather like there are protected forests or wildlife areas
  - Sustainable use of marine genetic resources and equitable sharing of benefits arising from them
  - Initiation of the practice of environmental impact assessments for all major activities in the oceans
  - Capacity building and technology transfer

Legally binding
- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas is a legally binding agreement to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of ocean biodiversity.

- The treaty calls for the Comprehensive protection of endangered species and habitats is now finally possible on more than 40% of the Earth's surface.
- The treaty also establishes ground rules for conducting environmental impact assessments for ocean commercial activities.

New body for managing conservation
- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity on the high seas will create a new body to manage the conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas on the high seas.
- It is critical to achieving the UN Biodiversity Conference's pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters and its land for conservation.

What are high seas
- The high seas are defined by international law as all parts of the ocean that aren't included in the exclusive economic zone, the territorial sea, the internal waters of a country, or in the archipelagic waters of an archipelagic country. This means that the high seas and associated resources are not directly owned or regulated by any country.
- The high seas comprise 64 per cent of the ocean surface, and about 43 per cent of the Earth.
- These areas are home to about 2.2 million marine species and up to a trillion different kinds of microorganisms.

How vital is High Seas Treaty for marine life
- The key measure is put the world's international waters into protected areas (MPAs) - which will help achieve the global goal of protecting 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, which was agreed at the 2022 UN biodiversity conference.
- This could mean limiting fishing activities, shipping routes and exploration activities like deep-sea mining.
- Environmental groups are seriously concerned about the possible effects of mining, such as disturbing sediments, creating noise pollution and damaging breeding grounds.

PM Holds High-Level Review Meeting On Covid

Context
- Amid rising Covid cases in the country, a high-level meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, came against the backdrop of a spike in influenza as well as Covid-19 cases in the past two weeks.
- Prime Minister directed officials to conduct regular mock drills at hospitals, enhance whole genome sequencing in positive samples, and ensure Covid-appropriate behaviour.
- The PM stressed that the pandemic was far from over and there was a need to monitor the status across the country on a regular basis.

Recent Covid-19 cases
- According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Covid-19 cases have risen to their highest level in around four months.
- 1,134: New cases recorded in the country on March 21
- 7,026: Total active caseload
- 1.09%: Daily positivity rate
- India's active caseload currently stands at 7,026.

Preventive measure
- During the high level meeting the Prime Minister emphasised Covid-appropriate behaviour, including wearing masks on hospital premises by all concerned patients, health professionals, and health workers.
- He also said wearing masks was advisable when senior citizens and those with co-morbidities visited crowded areas.
- He asked officials to ensure necessary drugs, beds, logistics, and human resources were available in health facilities.
- The government is monitoring the availability and prices of 20 main Covid drugs, 12 other drugs, eight buffer medicines, and one influenza drug.

Five-fold strategy
- The Prime Minister advised to continue focusing on:
- Five-fold strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccination & Covid Appropriate Behaviour
- Enhance Lab Surveillance
- Testing of all Severe Acute Respiratory Illness

SC to hear petitions seeking to criminalise marital rape

Context
- Respsonding to the batch of petitions to criminalisation of marital rape, the Supreme Court fixed May 9 for a detailed hearing the petitions.
- The top court on January 16 had sought a response of the Centre on a batch of petitions pertaining to criminalisation of marital rape.

High Court orders
- The Karnataka High Court had earlier held that a husband was liable to be charged for rape under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) if he has forcible Sexual intercouse with his wife.
- A Division Bench of the Delhi High Court had in May 2022 delivered a split verdict in a separate case on the identical issue. The two-judge Bench, struck down as unconstitutional the Exception two to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code.

Exception
- In 2017, the top court interfered with Exception 2 of Section 375, but only to the extent that it protected husbands from prosecution under the rape charge if the wife was not below 15 years.
- The Supreme Court read down the exception clause to hold that a wife must not be below 18 for the immunity to operate.

JS Verma committee

- The justice JS Verma committee, which was set up to propose amendments in criminal laws in the wake of the gang-rape of a paramedical student in December 2012, made a contrary recommendation.
- The committee recommended the criminalisation of marital rape since the state of being married does not generate automatic consent.

The old pension scheme as a burden on the poor

Context
- The demand for the old pension scheme (OPS) is growing especially after a few States announced that they would be reverting to it.
- Old Pension Scheme (OPS) is a retirement scheme approved by the central government which provides a monthly pension to the beneficiaries till the end of their life service.
- Under this, the amount of monthly pension is equal to half of the last salary drawn by an individual.

About National Pension System
- New Pension Scheme (NPS) is the latest retirement scheme in which the beneficiaries will be able to withdraw 60% of the amount invested after retirement.
- It was introduced by the central government in December 2003.
- It was made mandatory for all new recruits to the Government service (except armed forces) with effect from January 1, 2004, and has also been rolled out for all citizens with effect from May 1, 2009, on a voluntary basis.
- In consonance with the spirit of the National Pension System (NPS), the Sixth Pay Commission had substantially increased the basic salary of government employees to cover pension contributions and promote savings for post-retirement expenses.

Rising pension liabilities
- The pension liabilities of the government increased due to a substantial hike under the Sixth pay matrix as it was politically tricky to withdraw the OPS for existing employees when the NPS was introduced.
- As a result, pension liabilities substantially increased to 9% of total States expenditure, and are expected to increase in the future.
- The pension liabilities of States account for 1.2% of GDP as on 2021-22.
- From 2004 to 2019, the pension expenditure of States registered an average annual growth of 16%, whereas total expenditure growth stood at 12.8%.

Burden falls on those at the base
- Many State governments have yet to implement the Seventh pay norms, whereas some States have reportedly not paid arrears of the Sixth pay.
- Currently, the bottom 50% of the population bears the burden of indirect taxation six times more than their income.
- Public provision of education and health care is indispensable to harness the demographic dividend.
- The OPS facilitates a further monopolisation of future labour markets in the private sector by this proprietary class.

Way ahead
- To protect employees from the vagaries of the market, the government can tweak the NPS to provide a guaranteed monthly return.
- Administrative reforms are required to address unequal pay among various ranks of employees.
- A participatory pension for government employees will provide a more egalitarian outcome in an economy with acute income inequality.

22.03.2023

- **Rajasthan passes Right to Health Bill**
- **Panel pulls up Railways for excess expenditure**
- **Panel to moot ways to bring home Indian start-ups**
- **Indian economy likely to keep pace of expansion**

- **A grave mistake in Great Nicobar**

Rajasthan passes Right to Health Bill

Context
- The Rajasthan legislative assembly recently passed the Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022.
- Rajasthan became the first state in the country to pass the Right to Health Bill.
- The Bill provides the right to health and access to healthcare for people in the state.
- The state is becoming a model state in the field of health and 7% of the budget is being spent on the health sector.

Provision under the Bill
- Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022 includes free health care services at any clinical establishment to residents of the state
- The Bill sets certain obligations on the state government to ensure the right to health and maintain public health.
- No healthcare provider shall delay treatment merely on the grounds of receiving police clearance or a police report.

Treatment Facilities
- According to the bill, the patient during emergency treatment such as accidents, snake or animal bites and any other emergency decided by the state health authority will be treated without prepayment of requisite fee by public health institutions, health care establishments and designated health care centres, qualified to provide such care or treatment accordantly to their level of health care.

Constitutional provision
- According to the government, the Bill intends "to provide protection and fulfilment of rights and equity in health and well-being under
  - Article 47: Under the Directive Principles, the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health) of the Constitution of India.
  - Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty (Right to Health as per the expanded definition of Article 21)

Agitation by private doctors
- The passage of the Rajasthan Right to Health (RTH) Bill 2022 had Commented on the agitation by private doctors.
- Doctors are agitating despite the fact that their suggestions have been accepted.

Panel pulls up Railways for excess expenditure

Context
- A parliamentary panel has slammed the ministry of railways, saying excess expenditure over the original allocations has become a recurring phenomenon.
- A drastic fall in the net revenue of the Indian Railways has left the Parliamentary Standing Committee upset.

Performance record
- In FY2021-22, the Railways recorded a negative net revenue or loss of ₹15,024.58 crore.
- In the Demands for Grants Report, the committee has observed that the Railways' net revenues are witnessing a downward trend, except in 2014-15 when it witnessed an increase of 8.20%.

Ministry of railway stand
- The Railways noted that it recorded a loss due to a sharp rise in staff cost following the implementation of the 7th Central Pay Commission in 2016-17 and 2017-18, and the adverse impact of the pandemic from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

Recommendation
- The committee has recommended that Railways should institute remedial measures to plug leakages and reverse trend.
- The Railways has planned to reverse this and set a net revenue target of ₹2,393 crore for FY23.
- The committee has stressed that Railways should explore other non-fare revenues like advertisements or hoardings, monetisation of surplus railway land, and setting up ATMs at stations.

Panel to moot ways to bring home Indian start-ups

Context
- The International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) has formed a committee to design a road map to attract Indian start-ups to set up base in GIFT City and not have their domicile in other nations.
- The expert committee headed by former Reserve Bank of India executive director G Padmanabhan to identify their concerns.

Start-ups in India
- India has the world's third-largest startup ecosystem with 115 unicorns (firms with billion-dollar valuations).
- It is further estimated that Indian startups raised $44 billion in 2021.
- Indian startups raised $44 billion in 2021, with over $33 billion going towards deals worth more than $5 million.

Finding solutions
- IFSCA has constituted an expert committee to formulate a roadmap to onshore the Indian innovation to GIFT IFSC.
- The committee, which is expected to submit its recommendations within three months, includes representatives from leading venture capital funds, startups, fintechs, law firms, and tax firms as well as other domain experts.

Indian economy likely to keep pace of expansion

Context
- RBI in its latest bulletin has said that unlike the global economy which is risk of recession, India would not slow down and maintain the pace of expansion achieved in 2022-23,
- RBI noted that, India has emerged from the pandemic years stronger than initially thought, with a steady gathering of momentum since the second quarter of the current financial year.

GDP growth and other forecast
- Currently available forecasts of India's real GDP growth for 2023-24, including those of the RBI, settle between 6.0 and 6.5 per cent.
- The article also observes fresh geopolitical risks after Russia suspended its participation from the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) dented positive sentiment in the Indian equity market during the second half of February 2023.

Global banking system
- The failure of the global banking system has raised concerns over macroeconomic stability across the markets.
- The report said bank collapses in the US in the first half of March 2023 are rippling through the global financial markets.

A grave mistake in Great Nicobar

Context
The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has granted clearance for the diversion of forest land for the development project of the Great Nicobar Island.
The project, at an estimated cost of Rs 72,000 crore, has already received the environmental clearance and the development activities are proposed to commence in the current financial year.
NITI Aayog is piloting the project and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation is the project proponent.

Aim
- The 'Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island' project aims to develop:
  - International transshipment port of 14.2 m Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU) cargo capacity at Galathea Bay along the island's south-eastern coast.
- Note: TEU is a unit of cargo capacity.
- International airport to support 4,000 passengers during peak hours
  - 450 MVA gas and solar-based power plant
  - Ecotourism and residential township of about 160 sq km

- The government hopes to establish the offices of multinational corporations by clearing about a million trees in the tropical rainforest and destroying large parts of coral reefs.

Quick clearances

- The process towards implementation of this free trade zone and transshipment facility in Great Nicobar, located about 1,650 km from Chennai and 40 nautical miles from the international shipping route, started in September 2020 when the NITI Aayog issued a request for proposals for preparing the master plan for the project.
- The MoEFCC's Expert Appraisal Committee initiated the process of environmental clearance in April, and the project proponent contracted the Hyderabad-based Vimta Labs to prepare the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report.
- In December 2021, the Ministry placed the draft EIA report in the public domain for comments and discussion.
- The quick approvals, clearances, exemptions and de-notifications show that the Union government is keen to implement this project.

Concern's

- The Great Nicobar Island has a population of about 8,000.
- Once completed, the project is expected to attract more than 3 lakh people, which is equal to the current population of the entire 1,000-km-long island chain.
- The ecological and environmental cost of this urbanisation project in an area known for its marine and terrestrial biodiversity appears to have been set aside without any serious consideration.

Environmental threat

- The island, which is spread over 900 sq km, was declared a biosphere reserve in 1989 and included in the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme in 2013.
- More than three-fourth of it is designated as a tribal reserve under The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Amendment Regulation.
- The developmental project will end up destroying vast stretches of coral reefs.

Tectonic instability

- The Great Nicobar Island is located close to the epicentre of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake which displaced the sea floor by 10-20m vertically as well as trillions of tonnes of undersea rock.
- The EIA report itself admits that "Great Nicobar lies in close proximity to the Ring of Fire and the Tsunami of 26 December 2004 is a clear demonstration of how prone it is to severe natural disasters"
- The repeated up and down movement of land in response to such earthquakes makes the Great Nicobar Island unsuitable to be developed as an urban port city.

Bottom line

- India as a country highlights its role in championing conservation, sustainability, and green development models.
- But our optimism is dampened by unsustainable developmental projects such as the one being formulated for Great Nicobar — projects which dilute environmental laws to ease execution.
- The ecological and environmental cost of the project in an area known for its marine and terrestrial biodiversity appears to have been set aside.

21.03.2023

- **IPCC calls for rapid action to tackle climate crisis**
- **Panel suggests prepaid cards for power to save groundwater**
- **SC sets new timeline for OROP arrears payment**
- **Panel suggests modifying PMAY-U to cover all deserving**
- **The wide disparities in human development**

IPCC calls for rapid action to tackle climate crisis

Context

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in its latest report has said that world was not doing enough to rein in global temperatures from breaching the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold.

- The report noted that average temperatures had already touched 1.1 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial times, and the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold was "more likely than not" to be reached in the "near term" itself.

About IPCC
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change.
- It provides policymakers with regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change, its impacts and future risks, and options for adaptation and mitigation.
- It was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Monday's Synthesis Report
- Monday's Synthesis Report, a summary of the five earlier reports released between 2018 and 2022, marks the culmination of IPCC's sixth assessment cycle that began in 2015.
- These include three parts of the main sixth assessment report:
  - one special report on the feasibility of keeping temperature rise within 1.5 degrees Celsius
  - Another one on the connections between oceans and cryosphere.

More about synthesis report
- The synthesis report says that by 2030 there is a 50 per cent chance that global surface temperature in any single year could exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- The modelling shows that it is theoretically possible to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, but the current scale, scope and pace of global action, pledged until 2030, is not enough.
- The Synthesis Report also highlighted the fact that climate impacts were "unequally distributed" with the poor and disadvantaged being the most vulnerable.
- The report said that while adaptation planning and implementation had progressed across all sectors and regions, large gaps existed.

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Barriers to effective climate action
- The IPCC report said noted that there were some key barriers to effective climate action which include:
  - Limited resources
  - Insufficient finance
  - Low sense of urgency
  - Lack of political commitment

Suggestions
- Monday's Synthesis Report by IPCC suggested that in order to have a 50 per cent chance of keeping warming below 1.5 degree Celsius, the world must not emit more than 500 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent after 2020.
- Incidentally, current annual emissions in 2019 amounted to 59 billion tonnes.
- That means that the 500 billion tonnes carbon budget would be exhausted in less than ten years.

Panel suggests prepaid cards for power to save groundwater
Context
- In order to save groundwater, the Parliamentary Standing Committee in its report, "Groundwater: A Valuable but Diminishing Resource", has said that use of electric pumps needs to be further discouraged by introducing measures such pre-paid cards for power supply and restricting power supply to few hours a day.

Reason for exploitation of groundwater
- The primary reason for excessive exploitation of groundwater is wide cultivation of water guzzler paddy and sugarcane crops, which are "heavily incentivized".
- States like Punjab, Haryana, Telangana and Tamil Nadu offer completely free power, while other states have provision for collection of token charges.

States with over-extraction of groundwater

- The Committee notice that over-extraction of groundwater for meeting irrigation needs is prevalent mainly in northern states, particularly in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, which are extracting 97%, 90% and 86% of groundwater.
- Other states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh are also significant users of groundwater for irrigation as they are using approximately 89%, 92% and 90%, respectively.
- The Committee are of the view that use of electric pumps needs to be further discouraged.

Recommendation

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee recommend the Ministry of Jal Shakti to work out a policy to ensure judicious water use not only to reduce dependence on groundwater but to reduce its footprint in agriculture.
- The committee has recommended that the Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation under Jal Shakti Ministry should take the initiative by urging both the Power Ministry and Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare along with state governments to take measures on the suggested lines.

SC sets new timeline for OROP arrears payment

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court headed by CJI directed the Centre to clear all One Rank One Pension (OROP) arrears totaling Rs 28,000 crore for ex-servicemen by February 28 2024.
- The apex court said that the government is duty-bound to comply with its 2022 judgement on the matter.
- The Ministry of Defence was seeking extension of the deadline for clearing the OROP dues.

Promoting transparency

- The SC bench at the outset refused to accept the sealed cover report submitted by Attorney General of India and asked him to read the report as pertained to compliance of the court's judgement.
- The bench said there cannot be anything secret about the report which cannot be reveal to the ex-service personnel seeking payment of OROP arrears.
- The bench directed that the six lakh family pensioners and gallantry award winners shall be paid their OROP dues by April 30, 2023.

About OROP scheme

- Under the One Rank One Pension scheme or OROP scheme, uniform pension is to be paid to armed forces personnel retiring at the same rank with the same length of service, regardless of when they completed their service or retired.
- OROP bridges the gap between the rates of pension of current and past pensioners at periodic intervals.
- The scheme was implemented with retrospective effect from July 1st, 2014 with 2013 as the base year.
- The armed forces personnel who retired by June 30, 2014, are covered under the scheme.
- In 2014, the Centre passed the order of implementation of the OROP scheme.

Panel suggests modifying PMAY-U to cover all deserving

Context

- A parliamentary Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs has recommended to the government conduct an impact assessment study of its urban housing scheme.
- The panel also explore the feasibility of extending it with modifications or formulating another similar one to benefit the urban poor at large to achieve the objective of 'Housing for All'.

Need for progress report

- The Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs also sought to know the number of slums de-notified since the implementation of the In-Situ Slum Redevelopment (ISSR) vertical of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U).
- The Committee recommended that the ministry conduct an impact assessment of the scheme to understand the benefits and gaps.
- The report stated that the Union Housing and Urban Affairs (HUA) Ministry has accepted that it had not conducted any independent urban housing need assessment study of the PMAY-U.

Houses sanctioned

- The committee said that out of the total 122.69 lakh houses sanctioned under the four verticals of the PMAY-U, 73.45 lakhs (around 60 per cent) houses have been sanctioned under the Beneficiary-led Construction (BLC) vertical itself.
- The panel noted that there was a gap of 67 lakh houses in between the initial assessment and the sanctioned houses.


The wide disparities in human development

Context

- Human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's freedoms and opportunities and improving their well-being.
- The human development concept was developed by economist Mahbub ul Haq.
- India is now one of the fastest-growing economies globally, however, this growth has not resulted in a corresponding increase in its Human Development Index (HDI).

About Human Development Index

- The HDI is a composite statistical measure created by the United Nations Development Programme to evaluate and compare the level of human development in different regions around the world.
- It was introduced in 1990 as an alternative to conventional economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which do not consider the broader aspects of human development.
- According to the Human Development Report of 2021-22, India ranks 132 out of 191 countries, behind Bangladesh (129) and Sri Lanka (73).
- Given India's size and large population, it is critical to address the subnational or State-wise disparities in human development.
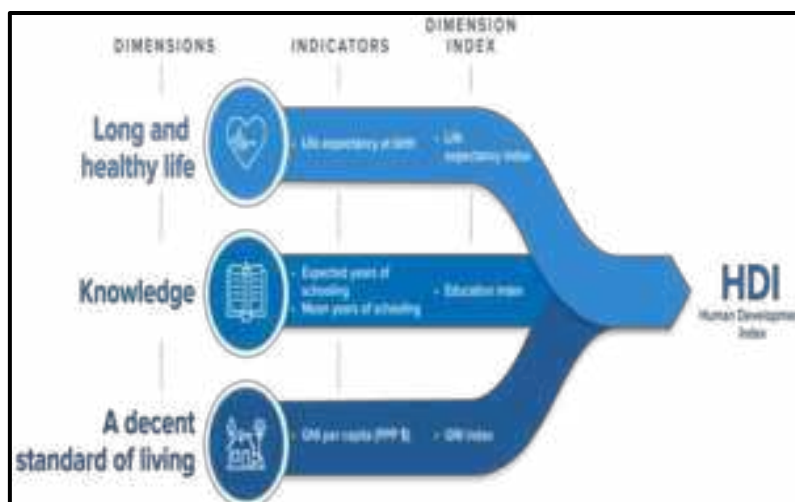
- Doing so will help India realize its demographic dividend. For this purpose, I have developed a new index using the methodology suggested by the UNDP and the National Statistical Office (NSO) which measures human development on a subnational level for 2019-20.

HDI Indicators
- The HDI is calculated using four indicators:
  - Life expectancy at birth
  - Mean years of schooling
  - Expected years of schooling
  - Gross National Income (GNI) per capita
- Life expectancy estimates are taken from the Sample Registration System and mean and expected years of schooling are extracted from National Family Health Survey-5.
- HDI scores range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher levels of human development.

States report
1. Top Performing States
- The five States with the highest HDI scores are Delhi, Goa, Kerala, Sikkim, and Chandigarh.
- Delhi and Goa have HDI scores above 0.799, which makes them equivalent to countries in Eastern Europe with a very high level of human development.
- Nineteen States, including Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Telangana, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh, have scores ranging between 0.7 and 0.799 and are classified as high human development States.

2. Worst Performing States
- The bottom five States are Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Assam, with medium levels of human development.
- This category also includes States such as Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal, which have HDI scores below the national average.
- The scores of these low-performing States resemble those of African countries such as Congo, Kenya, Ghana, and Namibia.

Reasons for discrepancies
- One of the main reasons for this discrepancy is that economic growth has been unevenly distributed.
- The top 10% of the Indian population holds over 77% of the wealth.
- This has resulted in significant disparities in access to basic amenities, healthcare, and education.
- Another reason is that while India has made significant progress in reducing poverty and increasing access to healthcare and education, the quality of such services remains a concern.

Way Forward
- Governments must prioritize human development alongside economic growth to ensure that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed.
- This requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses:
  - Income inequality and gender inequality
  - Improves access to quality social services
  - Addresses environmental challenges
- There is need to provides for greater investment in social infrastructure.
- Governments must prioritize human development alongside economic growth to ensure that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed.

20.03.2023

- **India-Japan to strengthen bilateral ties**
- **No antibiotics, plasma therapy to treat adult COVID patients**
- **Difficult to allocate public funds to art and culture**
- **FY23 fiscal deficit target within reach**

- Moving forward with a newer concept of UHC

India-Japan to strengthen bilateral ties

Context
- The Japanese Prime Minister is set to arrive in India for a two-day.
- The visit is seen as a great opportunity to review the bilateral ties between the two countries.
- Since the last Summit meeting held in March 2022 between India and Japan, now is a significant time to engage on a bilateral level as both India and Japan are holding the Presidencies of the G20 and G7, respectively.

Focus area
- The partnership between both countries ranges in multiple areas like defence and security, trade and investment, S&T, Education, healthcare, and critical and emerging technologies.
- Sources said that defence, security, economic ties, skill development and clean energy partnership are among the top issues on the agenda.

Defence and security
- The area of defence and security cooperation have emerged as one of the most important pillars of the India-Japan partnership and an important factor in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The successful conduct of the first fighter jet exercise 'Veer Guardian' in Japan in January 2023 between our two countries was a significant milestone.
- Recently the fourth 'Dharma Guardian' Army exercise, was conducted for the first time in Japan.
- India took part in the International Fleet Review in Japan and the Malabar exercise off the coast of Japan.
- This was preceded by the JIMEX (Japan India Maritime Exercise) in September 2022.

Commercial and economic ties
- The bilateral trade between India and Japan stood at USD 20.75 billion last year, which was the largest ever.
- Both countries have had a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) since 2011.
- The agreement covers not only trade in goods but also services, movement of natural persons, investments, intellectual property rights, custom procedures and other trade-related issues.

Clean energy partnership
- India and Japan was launched on the occasion of the 14th India-Japan Annual Summit Clean Energy Partnership (CEP) for cooperation in March 2022.
- The partnership is aimed towards achieving sustainable economic growth, addressing climate change and ensuring energy security.
- The partnership will lead to clean growth by boosting job creation, innovation and investments.
- It also aims at ensuring energy security, carbon neutrality and economic growth
- It will also demonstrate to the world that India and Japan are at the forefront in delivering on the ambitious climate and sustainable development goals.

No antibiotics, plasma therapy to treat adult COVID patients

Context
- The COVID-19 National Task Force of the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on recently issued revised clinical guidelines for the management of adult COVID-19 patients.

About new guidelines
- As per the new guidelines, convalescent plasma therapy and drugs, including lopinavir-ritonavir, molnupiravir, favipiravir, azithromycin and doxycycline, are not to be used for treatment.
- The guideline suggested that the antibiotics should not be used unless there is clinical suspicion of bacterial infection.
- The possibility of co-infection of COVID-19 with other endemic infections must be considered.
- Systemic corticosteroids are not indicated in mild disease.

About convalescent-plasma therapy
- When a pathogen like novel coronavirus infects, the human immune systems produce antibodies.

- The antibodies span out to identify and mark the invading virus.
- White blood cells attach the identified intruders, and the body gets rid of the infection. The therapy, like blood transfusion, harvests the antibody from a recovered patient and ingest into a sick person.
- Helped by the antibody, the immune system mounts robust combat on the virus.

What are antibodies
- Antibodies are one of the front-line immune responses to an infection by a microbe.
- They are a particular type of proteins secreted by immune cells called B lymphocytes when they encounter an invader, such as a novel coronavirus.
- The immune system designs antibodies that are highly specific to each invading pathogen.
- A particular antibody and its partner virus are made for each other.

Difficult to allocate public funds to art and culture
Context
- While responding to the queries made by a parliamentary committee, the Ministry of Culture said that it might not be "tenable" for a developing nation like India to allocate a considerable proportion of its public fund to the promotion of art.
- The ministry noted that the centre is more focused towards improving elementary rural infrastructure such as health, education and transportation.

Budgetary location
- the allocation of the Ministry of Culture was just 0.075% of the total Budget for the year 2023-24.
- The Union Budget for 2023-24 has allocated ₹3,399.65 crores under revenue and ₹285.4 crores under capital heads to the Ministry of Culture for prioritised programmes.
- It which was in sharp contrast to countries such as China, the U.K., the U.S., and Australia, which spend roughly 2%-5% of their Budget on the promotion of art and culture.

Fund from non-government sources
- The officials of the Ministry of Culture said that most of the amount spent on art and culture in the countries mentioned above are sourced from non-government sources, which is not the case in India.
- The Ministry was also trying and evolving innovative methods to maximise non-government organisations' participation in the promotion and conservation of art and culture.

FY23 fiscal deficit target within reach
Context
- The economic affairs secretary in a statement said that the Centre will rein in the fiscal deficit at the targeted 6.4% of the gross domestic product in the current financial year.
- He also noted that the target will be achieved despite some likely variations in revenues and expenditures from the respective revised estimates.
- The Economic Survey provides for a range of 6-6.8%, but next year around 6.5% appears to be reasonable.

Growth targets
- The economic affairs secretary said that a 6.5% economic growth next year appears to be likely and 'reasonable' and any adverse impact of the banking crisis in the advanced economies on India by way of capital outflows would be manageable, thanks to strong forex reserves.
- The centre bats for higher millet output, and inclusion in the public distribution system.
- The revised capex target of Rs 7.3 trillion would, however, be met in FY23.

Expenditure targets
- The Centre's expenditure was increased by Rs 2.42 trillion or 6.14% to Rs 41.87 trillion in the RE from the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 39.44 trillion, to cater to higher revenue expenditure on subsidies, including that on food and fertilisers.
- In FY23RE, the net tax revenue target was raised by 8% to Rs 20.87 trillion, 81% of which was achieved till January.

- The Centre had released Rs 3.1 trillion to states, or about 70% of the centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) outlay for FY23. Of the Rs 3.1 trillion released, Rs 1.75 trillion or more than 56% was still lying with the Single Nodal Agencies (SNAs) of states.

Second Supplementary Demands for Grants
- The Second Supplementary Demands for Grants for FY23 was placed before Parliament on March 13, seeking nod to spend an additional Rs 1.48 trillion on a net basis, analysts suggested a modest deviation may be there in fiscal deficit from the RE level of Rs 17.55 trillion.

Favorable situation for India
- Few favorable things are happening at the global level has helped Indian economy for example, crude oil prices are coming down and that is good for the economy.
- The Brent crude fell 2.1% to $73.11 a barrel recently.
- Being a major importer of crude, natural gas and fertiliser, India could benefit from lower global commodity prices on multiple fronts such as in inflation management, lower subsidy bills and reduced cost for industry.

Moving forward with a newer concept of UHC
Context
- Do we believe in health as a basic human right, which India's Constitution guarantees under the right to life?
- In contrast, we believe in the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health: a certain totality of health to the realms of mental and social well-being and happiness beyond physical fitness, and an absence of disease and disability.

Health for All policy
- We all subscribed to the slogan "Health for All by 2000" that was proposed by Halfdan Mahler and endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 1977.
- This slogan had an inherent implication, i.e., "for All", which means universalization. Thus, nobody is denied this and everybody is eligible without being discriminated against based on financial status, gender, race, place of residence, affordability to pay or any other factors.
- Universal Health Care/coverage (UHC) was implied as early as 1977.
- India, through its National Health Policy 1983, committed itself to the 'Health for All' goal by 2000.

Focus on primary care
- The International Conference on Primary Health Care, at Alma Ata, 1978, listed eight components of minimum care for all citizens.
- It mandated all health promotion activities, and the prevention of diseases including vaccinations and treatment of minor illnesses and accidents to be free for all using government resources, especially for the poor.
- Any non-communicable disease, chronic disease including mental illnesses, and its investigations and treatment were almost excluded from primary health care.

Astana declaration of 2018
- The Astana declaration of 2018 calls for "partnership" with the private sector, though alcohol, tobacco, ultra-processed foods, and industrial and automobile pollution contributed by the commercial private sector are well established.
- Also, poorer countries miserably fail or are unwilling for "private sector regulation".
- It never addressed poverty, unemployment, and poor livelihood.

Challenges
- In India secondary and tertiary care was left to the individual to either seek it from a limited number of public hospitals or from the private sector by paying from their own pockets.
- There were not enough government-run institutions for the poor.
- The states is showing reluctance towards its responsibility, i.e., to provide secondary or tertiary care by the state, ensured the dominant, unregulated, profit-making private sector and also the health insurance sector was kept happy and thriving.
- This created a dichotomy between peripheral primary and institutional-referred specialist care at the secondary and tertiary levels.

Primary Health Care Version 2

- Primary Health Care (PHC) Version 2 or Comprehensive PHC was defined which that fact that even the poor do contract chronic illnesses and non-communicable diseases such as cardiac, neural, mental, and metabolic disorders, and also require investigations and management at peripheral primary health institutions.
- It was operationalized through the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in India from 2013.
- The second half of the last decade saw the operationalization of the Health and Wellness Centre as a model of implementation of Comprehensive Primary Health Care.

Way forward

- The Universal Health Coverage slogan must be avoided as it is deceptive.
- This is because it is neither universal in its implementation nor comprehensive in its coverage of services and never assures accessibility or affordability as its financing is conditional to insurance premiums paid either by the individual or state.
- The National Health Mission with concurrent intersectoral thrusts on Poshan Abhiyan, National Food Security, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, water sanitation, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, etc. is a better model of fully tax-funded Universal Health Care, but the Ayushman Bharat Jan Arogya Bhima Yojana damages that approach.

18.03.2023

- **PM MITRA mega textile parks to be set up in seven states**
- **India-Africa Chiefs Conclave**
- **IIA researchers develop low-cost star sensor**
- **ICC issues arrest warrant against Putin over Ukraine**
- **A history of poor Choices**

PM MITRA mega textile parks to be set up in seven states

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister announced that "PM MITRA mega textile parks" will be set up in seven states.
- The states include Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

About PM MITRA Parks

- PM MITRA is inspired by the 5F vision Prime Minister of India.
- The '5F' Formula encompasses - Farm to fibre; fibre to factory; factory to fashion; fashion to foreign.
- This integrated vision will help furthering the growth of textile sector in the economy.
- The scheme is to develop integrated large scale and modern industrial infrastructure facility for entire value-chain of the textile industry.
- PM MITRA Parks represent a unique model where the Centre and State governments will work together to make India a global hub for textile manufacturing and exports.

Significance

- PM MITRA Parks will help in creating world-class industrial infrastructure that would attract large scale investment including foreign direct investment (FDI) and encourage innovation and job creation within the sector.
- Centre expects the parks to attract investments worth ₹70,000 crore, generate jobs for 20 lakh people and create an integrated value chain for the sector.
- The parks will offer an excellent infrastructure, plug and play facilities as well as training and research facilities for the industry.

Facilities to state government
- For the establishment of mega textile parks, state governments will provide contiguous and encumbrance-free land parcel of at least 1000 acres of land.
- Other facilities that be made available to he states will includes:
  o Provision of all utilities
  o Reliable Power Supply
  o Water availability
  o Waste Water Disposal system
  o Effecticve single window clearance
  o Conducive and stable industrial/textile policy

Funding via Special Purpose Vehicle
- An Special Purpose Vehicle owned by Centre and State Government will be set up for each park which will oversee the implementation of the project.
- The Ministry of Textiles will provide financial support in the form of Development Capital Support up to ₹500 crore per park to the park SPV.

India-Africa Chiefs Conclave

Context
- The Indian Army will hold a nine-day mega military exercise with militaries of over 20 African countries from March 21, 2023 in Pune, Maharashtra.
- The mega military exercise aims to significantly boost overall cooperation, amid China's persistent efforts to expand its strategic influence in the continent.
- The military exercise involving the countries in the African continent will be the second such military game being hosted by India.
- The first Africa-India field training exercise was held in Pune in March 2019.

Two sessions of the Conclave
- The India-Africa Chiefs Conclave will take place over two sessions.
- The first session will explore the key pillars of India-Africa defence partnership.
- The second session will focus on the Indian defence industry's Outreach to Africa.

Significance of Conclave
- The first India-Africa Chiefs Conclave will be a landmark event and it will provide a fillip to the cooperation between the Indian Army and the armies of African nations.
- India has also decided to increase the number of courses for African nations to 450 from the current year which would be almost double compared to last year.
- The courses include various skill-building modules and tailor-made capsules decided according to requirement.
- India has been focusing on ramping up overall defence and strategic ties with the African continent.

Participating countries
- Army chiefs of 10 African countries have confirmed their participation at the conclave while military heads of 12 nations will send their representatives for the India-Africa Chiefs Conclave.
- The army chiefs of Congo, Niger, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, Seychelles, Gambia, Tanzania and Kenya are attending the conclave.
- The countries which are sending their personnel are Ethiopia (5), Ghana (10), Kenya (5), Lesotho (10), Niger (12), Seychelles (10), Tanzania (6), Uganda (10) and Zambia (10)

IIA researchers develop low-cost star sensor

Context
In a breakthrough, the researchers at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) have developed a **low-cost star sensor for astronomy** and **small CubeSat class satellite missions.**

Star sensor: Starberry-Sense
The star sensor named Starberry-Sense can help small CubeSat class satellite missions find their orientation in space.
According to Department of Science and Technology, the Starberry-Sense is ready for launch on the PS4-Orbital Platform by ISRO and can be used for CubeSats and other small satellite missions in the future.
Based on commercial/off-the-shelf components, the star sensor costs less than 10% of those available in the market.
The brain of the instrument is a single-board Linux computer called Raspberry Pi, which is widely used among electronics hobby enthusiasts.

Importance of Starberry-Sense
It is a low-cost star sensor (Starberry-Sense) developed "from off-the-shelf components."
It can help small CubeSat class satellites orient themselves in space.
India has also developed and launched CubeSat satellites for various purposes, such as remote sensing, atmospheric and oceanographic studies, and technology demonstrations.
This small device is a huge success for India and its increasing space abilities.

ICC issues arrest warrant against Putin over Ukraine

Context
- Recently, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing him of war crimes for his alleged involvement in the abduction of children from Ukraine.
- The Court said that the crimes were committed in Ukraine from 24 February 2022 - when Russia launched its full-scale invasion.
- It was the first time the global court has issued a warrant against a leader of one of the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Russia's Stand
- Russia's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that the ICC arrest warrants "have no meaning for our country, including from a legal point of view".
- Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty underpinning the world's permanent war crimes tribunal.
- The Rome Statute gives the ICC jurisdiction on four international crimes that are genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression.

Risk of arrest
- While it is unlikely that Russian President will end up in court any time soon, the warrant means that he could be arrested and sent to The Hague if travelling to any ICC member states.
- Vladimir Putin is the third serving president to be the target of an ICC arrest warrant, after Sudan's Omar al-Bashir and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi.

Ukraine response
- Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has called the ICC's arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin a "historic decision, from which historical responsibility will begin".
- Ukrainians accuse Russia of attempting genocide against them and seeking to destroy their identity partly through deporting children to Russia.
- More than 16,000 Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia since the February 24, 2022 invasion.

About the ICC
- The International Criminal Court is an independent, permanent judicial body.
- It was established in accordance with the Rome Statute, signed on 17 July 1998 at a conference in the capital of Italy.
- Its competence extends to all the most serious international crimes committed after 1 July 2002, the date the Rome Statute came into force.

- The court's jurisdiction is limited to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

A history of poor Choices

Context

- Monument is a type of structure that was explicitly created to commemorate a person or event, or which has become important to a social group.
- Monuments are important and their presence can have lasting impact within the societies they are constructed.
- The present government at centre is emphasizing on the contribution of important personality in Indian history that include **sagas of King Suheldev, Rani Durgavati and Lachit Barphukan.**

Economic Advisory Council report on Monuments

- The report titled 'Monuments of National Importance: The Urgent Need for Rationalization' drawn up by the EAC states that the existing list of MNI has not been reviewed since Independence, and has become "unwieldy" due to the inclusion of minor colonial structures or monuments that are not of national significance
- A report by the Economic Advisory Council (EAC) to the Prime Minister has found the country's list of centrally protected monuments to be bloated and in urgent need of streamlining.
- India currently has 3,693 monuments of national importance (MNI), and their protection and upkeep is the responsibility of the Archaeological Survey of India, under the Ministry of Culture.

Monuments details

- As per the report, over 60% (2238 out of 3695) of them are located in just five states: Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
- By way of illustration, while the city of Delhi alone has 173 MNIs, a large state like Telangana has only eight.
- Culturally and historically significant states like Bihar (70), Odisha (80), Chhattisgarh (46) and Kerala (29) have disproportionately fewer MNI.

Click the link: **https://www.aptiplus.in/product/daily-news-editorial-anlysis-compilation**

About National Monuments Authority

- National Monuments Authority (NMA) under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India has been setup as per provisions of The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains AMASR (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010 which was enacted in March, 2010.
- Several functions have been assigned to the NMA for the protection and preservation of monuments and sites through management of the prohibited and regulated area around the centrally protected monuments.
- The Director General of Archaeological Survey of India is the ex-officio chairperson of the NMA.

Recommendation by EAC

- EAC-PM in its report recommended that Archaeological Survey of India to come up with substantive criteria and a detailed procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance.
- It also called on the Centre to denotify untraceable monuments and hand over the preservation of monuments of local importance to states.
- Standalone antiquities should be removed from the list of monuments of national importance.
- Wherever possible, they may be shifted to museums for better upkeep.
- The report suggested that the Allocation of funds for the preservation of MNI should be increased, while ASI should retain the proceeds generated from revenue streams like tickets, events, fees and other sources.

17.03.2023

- **EC proposal of e-postal ballot for overseas voters under review**
- **NIOT to set up green desalination plant in Lakshadweep**
- **More than one lakh people opted for higher PF pension**
- **DAC clears Defence acquisition proposals**

- Tested but tired, this force could be in distress

EC proposal of e-postal ballot for overseas voters under review

Context
- Recently Union Minister of Law and Justice has informed the parliament that an Election Commission proposal to facilitate electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas Indian voters is under discussions with the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The total number of overseas electors as on January 1 2023 stands at over 1.15 lakh.

Proposal to amend the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961
- The Election Commission of India has taken up a proposal to amend the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 to facilitate an electronically-transmitted postal ballot system for overseas electors.
- The matter is under discussion with the Ministry of External Affairs to iron out the logistical challenges involved in the implementation of the proposal.

Issued of photo identity card
- According to the EC website, as of now an overseas voter is not issued a photo identity card they are allowed to vote in person at the polling station by producing their original passport.
- The EC has maintained that overseas voters find it difficult to fly down to India to cast vote.

NIOT to set up green desalination plant in Lakshadweep

Context
- The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) is stepping up from its ongoing initiative of providing potable water on six islands of Lakshadweep using low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technology.
- Currently, the desalination plants, each of which provides at least 1,00,000 litres of potable water every day, are powered by diesel generator sets — there being no other source of power on the islands.

About LTTD
- The low-temperature thermal desalination (LTTD) technology is a process under which the warm surface seawater is flash evaporated at low pressure and the vapour is condensed with cold deep seawater.
- The LTTD technology does not require any chemical pre and post-treatment of seawater and thus the pollution problems are minimal and suitable for island territories.
- The LTTD technology is completely indigenous, robust and environmentally friendly.

Desalination plants in operation
- Currently, there are five desalination plants in operation on the Lakshadweep islands. Four more were expected to be functioning in the coming months.
- The proposed self-sustaining plant the 10th plant is expected to be ready later this year.

National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT)
- NIOT is an autonomous institute under the aegis of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) established in 1993.
- The chief objective of the institute is to develop reliable indigenous technologies to solve the various engineering problems associated with the harvesting of non-living and living resources in the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is about two-thirds of the land area of India.
- The institute engages in developing technologies for the sustainable utilization of ocean resources.

More than one lakh people opted for higher PF pension

Context
- The Centre has informed the Rajya Sabha that 1,20,279 employees have submitted joint options on the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) portal for higher pension.
- In November 2022, the Supreme Court had asked the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) to give four months' time to subscribers as well as pensioners to contribute on their actual salaries towards EPS-95.
- The total number of beneficiaries in accordance with the directions given in the Supreme Court judgment will depend upon the employees exercising the joint option and the number of such employees who are eligible.

- The Ministry said there is no option under the Employees' Pension Scheme to allow employees to contribute towards the scheme on their own.

About Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) 1995

- The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 originally did not provide for any pension scheme.
- In 1995, through an amendment, a scheme was formulated for employees' pension, wherein the pension fund was to comprise a deposit of 8.33 per cent of the employers' contribution to be made towards provident fund corpus.
- The EPS, which is administered by the EPFO, aims to provide employees with pension after the age of 58.
- Both the employee and the employer contribute 12 per cent of the employee's basic salary and dearness allowance to the EPF.
- The employee's entire part goes to EPF, while the 12 per cent contribution made by the employer is split as 3.67 per cent contribution to EPF and 8.33 per cent contribution to EPS.
- Apart from this, the Government of India contributes 1.16 per cent as well for an employee's pension.
- Employees do not contribute to the pension scheme.

EPS amendment in 2014

- The EPS amendment of August 22, 2014 had raised the pensionable salary cap to Rs 15,000 a month from Rs 6,500 a month, and allowed members along with their employers to contribute 8.33 per cent on their actual salaries (if it exceeded the cap) towards the EPS.
- It gave all EPS members, as on September 1, 2014, six months to opt for the amended scheme.
- This was extendable by another six months at the discretion of the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner.

DAC clears Defence acquisition proposals

Context

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), under the chairmanship of Defence Minister, accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition amounting to over Rs 70,500 crore under the Buy Indian IDDM (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured)" category.
- Some of the projects are long-gestation projects involving indigenous design and development including the development of marine diesel engine.

Procurement Proposals

- **Indian Navy:** The Navy proposals includes indigenous BrahMos cruise missiles, Shakti Electronic Warfare (EW) systems, Utility Helicopters-Maritime among others.

An AoN is the beginning of the long winding procurement process.

- **Indian Air Force (IAF):** Long Range Stand-Off Weapon (LRSOW) to be designed and developed indigenously

Integrated on SU-30 MKI fighters and the indigenous 155mm/52-Caliber Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) along with High Mobility Vehicles (HMVs) and Gun Towing Vehicles (GTVs) for the Army.

About Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- The Defence Acquisition Council is the highest decision-making body.
- It worked under the Defence Minister and was constituted for overall guidance of the defence procurement planning process.
- The objective of the Defence Acquisition Council is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces.

Tested but tired, this force could be in distress

Context

- In order to enhance security and restructuring the force deployment, the Centre has granted approval for the construction and upgradation of temporary camps of CISF and CRPF in Jammu and Kashmir.

A warning signs

- The internal security scenario in the country has been showing marginal improvement especially in insurgency-affected northeast India.

- But there has been 'insignificant improvement' in left-wing extremism areas and also terrorist-affected Kashmir.
- It is here that the point about deployment levels is of relevance.
- The introduction of the Indian Army has taken place, with the void filled mainly by the CRPF.

Concerns

- The central government has been compelled to entrust a number of assignments that are becoming riskier by the day to these forces — especially to the CRPF because of the force's versatility and flexible operational procedures.
- The personnel of these forces continue to be tasked with carrying out hard duties and are overstretched without any rest or respite.
- As a consequence, training becomes compromised.
- The need to enhance tactical skills and cannot be overlooked.

Need for parity

- What makes the observance of Pulwama day different from previous years is that former personnel and their families turned up in large numbers in different parts of the country to demand the old pension scheme to serving members of the fraternity.
- The old pension scheme was stopped for personnel joining service after December 31, 2003.
- They cited the Delhi High Court order of December 2022 that reiterated their status as a force (CRPF) under the category of 'Armed Forces of the union'.
- The fraternity is grieved that despite facing a war-like situation on a daily basis a point that is recognised by the public and the judiciary.
- The government is reluctant to grant the paramilitary these benefits.

Conclusion

- The most important goal in observing Pulwama day should be to avoid a repeat of that dark day in 2019.
- The morale of security personnel needs to be kept high.
- The genuine grievances of India's paramilitary forces need to be addressed.

16.03.2023

- **BCI Permits Foreign Lawyers & Firms To Practice**
- **House panel questions huge cut in outlay for MGNREGS**
- **Eurasian otter raises hope for J&K stream**
- **India's revised foreign trade policy be announced soon**
- **The Village by the border**

BCI Permits Foreign Lawyers & Firms To Practice

Context

- In a move that could transform the legal landscape, The Bar Council of India (BCI) has opened up a law practice in India to foreign lawyers and law firms.
- This comes 5 years after the Supreme Court permitted the entry of foreign lawyers and firms on a temporary basis, but left it to the BCI to frame appropriate rules.
- The areas of practice of law by a foreign lawyer or Foreign Law Firm shall be laid down by the Bar Council of India.

About Bar Council of India

- The Bar Council of India (BCI) is an apex disciplinary and regulatory body for legal education and profession in India.
- It is a statutory body created by Parliament under the Advocates Act, 1961 to regulate and represent the Indian bar.
- It also sets standards for legal education and grants recognition to Universities whose degree in law will serve as qualification for enrolment as an advocate.

- In addition, it performs certain representative functions by protecting the rights, privileges and interests of advocates and through the creation of funds for providing financial assistance to organise welfare schemes for them.

Only advisory roles
- As per latest rule by Bar Council of India (BCI), foreign lawyers and firms can only play as advisory roles to their clients in India to making renewal of registration mandatory every 5 years,
- The rules are framed in such a way that it does not jeopardize the prospects of Indian lawyers.
- The foreign lawyers and firms are allowed to practice on transactional work/corporate work such as **joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions, intellectual property matters, drafting of contracts and other related matters on reciprocal basis.**

Restrictions
- The rules restrict such advocates and firms from appearing before a judicial forum including tribunals and other statutory or regulatory authorities.
- The rules also clarify that such lawyers shall not be involved to do any work pertaining to property-linked matters.

House panel questions huge cut in outlay for MGNREGS
Context
- The latest Union Budget 2023-24 sharply cut the budget for the rural employment scheme.
- Only about ₹60,000 crore has been allocated to MNREGA this year, about 33% below the revised budget estimates for the scheme in this fiscal.
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme provides 'Right to Work' to such deprived sections of the rural populace who are willing to work.

Parliamentary standing committee concerns
- The Standing Committee on Rural Development, which submitted its report in the Rajya Sabha said the budget estimates for MGNREGS have been reduced by Rs 29,400 crore for 2023-24 when compared to the revised estimates of 2022-23.
- The ministry, in its response, stated that the scheme is demand-driven and whenever needed, the allocation has been increased.
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development seeks rationale behind reduction in allocation considering the key role the scheme plays for the distressed populace of the country.
- The panel also expressed distress over the delay in wage payments and material fund release to the State governments.

Problem with digital capturing of attendance
- Reacting to complaints from the ground against digital capturing of attendance of the workers through the National Mobile Monitoring System, a mobile based application, the committee said that while it understood the reason for bringing in this innovation, the government should also be aware of the problems faced by the workers.

Eurasian otter raises hope for J&K stream
Context
- Recently, a group of scientists from the University of Jammu have reported about the presence of Eurasian otter in Jammu and Kashmir.
- They were caught in the infrared camera along the Neeru stream (tributary of the Chenab River) of the Chenab catchment in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The first photographic record of otter has indicated that not all is lost for a Jammu and Kashmir stream.

About Otters
- Otters are members of the mammalian family and are carnivorous.
- It is regarded as a flagship species and indicator of high-quality aquatic habitats.
- Otters are found the world over, except in Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar, and other oceanic islands.

- It is found in very few places in the south and south-east Asia.
- India is home to 3 of the 13 species of otters found worldwide.

Protection Status
- IUCN Red List: Near Threatened
- CITES: Appendix I
- Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule II

India's revised foreign trade policy be announced soon

Context
- The much-delayed reboot of India's Foreign Trade Policy is expected to be finally be announced by the end of this month.
- The has been unchanged since 2015 and its revision has been due for three years.
- The Commerce Ministry had planned to announce a new trade policy last September but instead extended the 'Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20' by six more months till March 31.

Reasons for extension of FTP 2015-20
- The main reason cited by government for the extension of the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 include the global headwinds, such as **tighter monetary conditions, currency volatility, and Russia-Ukraine conflict.**

Roadmap of the policy
- India's upcoming foreign trade policy will seek to:
  - Handhold MSMEs to build their financial capabilities
  - Set up special zones for ecommerce exports
  - Develop new mechanisms to support services related to artificial intelligence and Internet of Things.
- The policy will provide guidelines for enhancing exports to push economic growth and create jobs and incentives under different schemes such as Duty Free Import Authorisation (DFIA) and Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG).

The Village by the border

Context
Recently, the Centre has approved Centrally Sponsored Scheme- "Vibrant Villages Programme" (VVP) for the Financial Years 2022-23 to 2025-26 with financial allocation of Rs. 4800 Crore.

The Programme calls for comprehensive development of villages of blocks on northern border thus improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.

In 2018, the Parliamentary Standing Committee pointed towards illiteracy, backwardness, and lack of basic facilities in our border areas.

Aim of VVP
- **Strengthen basic infrastructure:** The Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) aims to strengthen and enhance basic infrastructure in the villages along the LAC so that migration can be stemmed.
- The scheme will provide funds for the development of essential infrastructure and creation of livelihood opportunities in 19 Districts and 46 Border blocks 4 states and 1 UT along the northern land border of the country which will help in achieving inclusive growth and retaining the population in the border areas.
- In the first phase 663 Villages will be taken up in the programme.

- **Reversing the outmigration:** The VVP will help in encouraging people to stay in their native locations in border areas and reversing the outmigration from these villages adding to improved security of the border.

- **Basic amenities:** Border villages are being provided with all basic amenities including modern housing and good roads; water and electricity supply; good education, health and communication facilities; access to Doordarshan channels, etc.

- **Skill development and social entrepreneurship:** The scheme will also develop growth centres on the "hub-and-spoke model" through the promotion of social entrepreneurship, empowerment of youth and women through

skill development and entrepreneurship and leverage the tourism potential through the promotion of local culture and traditional knowledge.

- It will also develop sustainable eco-agribusinesses through the "One Village-One product" concept.

Roadmap
- The Union is planning the incorporate the concept of Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) to border villages neighbouring China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, and address the problem of migration.
- A total of 2,962 border villages in five states will be developed under this scheme.

Way Forward
- The Vibrant Villages Programme rolled out the centre specifically for border areas will witness a social and economic transformation.
- This will also aid India's borders by making them more safe and secure.
- It will also bring remote and border villages into the national mainstream, and make them more vibrant, developed and self-sufficient.
- This will be a milestone in the development of border villages and the progress of the Himalayan states.

15.03.2023

- **RBI has permitted other country banks to trade in rupee**
- **Centre calls for indigenous acquisitions for the military**
- **India plans new security testing for smartphones**
- **A case for a better electricity public hearing**
- **India and Italy: Friends in a turbulent world**

RBI has permitted other country banks to trade in rupee

Context
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has granted approvals to foreign banks in 18 countries to open Vostro accounts to settle international trade in rupees.
- The Minister of State for Finance while responding a question in parliament said the central bank had granted 60 approvals in total so far to domestic and authorised foreign banks to open so-called 'Special Rupee Vostro Accounts' of correspondent banks from 18 countries, including those from major nations such as the United Kingdom and Germany.

Background
- The process of special vostro rupee accounts (SVRA) began in July 2022 when the RBI announced to put in place an additional arrangement for invoicing, payment, and settlement of exports/imports in Indian rupees.
- The announcement came against the backdrop of the commodities crisis triggered by the Western sanctions against Russia after President of Russia launched the "special military operation" against Ukraine in February 2022.

About Vostro account
- A Vostro account is an account that a domestic bank holds for a foreign bank in the domestic bank's currency, which, in the case of India, is the rupee.
- The owners and beneficiaries of this money will be the exporters and importers in both countries.

Countries allowed to open Vostro accounts
- The RBI has allowed Botswana, Fiji, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Russia, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, and the United Kingdom to open Vostro accounts as of now.

Merits of Trade in local currencies
- Trade in local currencies have been mooted as a solution to avoid the current wave of wartime international sanctions that are hampering supply chains and global trade flows.

- In the past one year, India has finalised trade pacts with partner countries such as the UAE and Australia and begun negotiation with others such as the U.K. and the EU while making inroads for the national currency in bilateral and global trade.

Centre calls for indigenous acquisitions for the military

Context

- With the financial year drawing to a close and no progress on clearing outstanding Rouble payments for weapons purchased from Russia, the government of India is set to go in for a series indigenous acquisition for the military.
- Several new acquisitions are under consideration and orders are likely to be placed this month once they get the final nod from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

Approved Acquisitions and procurement plan

Indian Navy

1. Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels

- In 2018, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) had accorded approval for the procurement of six Next Generation Offshore Patrol Vessels (NGOPVs), fitted with state-of-the-art sensor suite, for the Navy.
- These platforms are aimed at strengthening maritime security by undertaking a multitude of operational roles.

2. Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries:

- In 2019, the DAC had accorded approval for procurement of the Next Generation Maritime Mobile Coastal Batteries (NGMMCBs) for deployment along the coast.
- The NGMMCBs are fitted with BrahMos surface-to-surface supersonic cruise missiles.
- They have been developed and made in India by BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited, an India-Russia joint venture company.

Indian Air Force

1. Radars system: For the IAF, procurement of indigenously-developed medium power radars and high-power radars for detection and tracking of aerial targets including fighter aircraft and slow-moving objects and close-in weapon systems is also on cards.

2. Dornier-228 aircraft: The Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to procure six Dornier-228 aircraft for the IAF at a cost of Rs 667 crore.

- The aircraft will be used for transport and communication duties.
- Earlier this month, the CCS approved the procurement of 70 HTT-40 Basic Trainer Aircraft from HAL for the IAF.

Indian Army

1. Project Himshakti: For the Army, contracts for Project Himshakti, a DRDO-developed integrated electronic warfare system for mountains, a dedicated communications satellite for the Army, and an indigenous air defence control and reporting system are in the pipeline.

2. GSAT 7B: In 2022, the DAC had accorded approval for the procurement of GSAT 7B for the Army.

India plans new security testing for smartphones

Context

- Under proposed new security rules, India plans to force smartphone makers to allow removal of pre-installed apps and mandate screening of major operating system updates.
- The new rules could extend introduction timelines in the world's number two smartphone market and lead to losses in business from pre-installed applications for players including Samsung, Xiaomi, Vivo, and Apple.

Concerns about spying

- The IT Ministry is considering these new rules amid concerns about spying and abuse of user data.
- Pre-installed apps can be a weak security point.
- India has ramped up scrutiny of Chinese businesses since a 2020 border clash between the neighbours, banning more than 300 Chinese apps, including TikTok.

- As per experts some pre-installed apps like the camera are critical to user experience and the government must make a distinction between these and non-essential ones when imposing screening rules.

India's smartphone market
- India's fast-growing smartphone market is dominated by Chinese players.
- The brand Xiaomi and BBK Electronics' Vivo and Oppo account for 47% of total sales, Counterpoint data shows.
- South Korea's Samsung has a 20% share and Apple has 3%.

A case for a better electricity public hearing
Context
- The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) recently issued a public notice where it announced that hearings of public grievances will resume through in-person mode.
- It is natural that decisions on the planning and the operation of the power sector have a significant impact on the public.
- The scale of operations of electricity distribution companies is clear from the fact that their annual revenue requirement is 20% of the Union Budget.

About CERC
- Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) is a key regulator of power sector in India.
- It is a statutory body functioning with quasi-judicial status under section 76 of the Electricity Act 2003.
- CERC was instituted primarily to regulate the tariff of Power Generating companies owned or controlled by the government of India, and any other generating company which has a composite scheme for power generation and interstate transmission of energy, including tariffs of generating companies.

States that reverted to in-person hearings
- The ERCs in Tamil Nadu and Telangana have also reverted to in-person hearings. However, several State ERCs, including those in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, recently held public hearings entirely online.
- Many State ERCs, including those in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, have tried to increase access and diversify participation by organising tariff revision public hearings at different locations.

Important and popular public hearing
- The in-person by Electricity Regulatory Commissions provide a platform for citizens to voice their views to the ERC.
- They facilitate meaningful interactions and cross-learning between various sector actors, help to build consumer networks, and enable collective action.
- In-person process paves the way for consensus building and also lends enhanced credibility to decisions on complex matters.
- In addition to cost savings, a consumer's concerns with the quality of supply also get discussed and corrective measures evolve.

Pros and cons of online hearings challenges
- Online hearings were the only option during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- These hearings proved to be a welcome step, as they circumvented transport and logistics issues while enabling wider attendance from remote locations, and allowed for quick convening and multiple meetings, which could have aided the consultative process.
- Technological access and know-how are not uniform across the country, making it difficult for some to participate.
- Issues such as poor Internet connections, technical mishaps, and the use of complex platforms and applications by ERCs hinder participation.
- The ERC also has greater control of the platform in online hearings.

Way forward
- Public hearings must be conducted in hybrid mode, with the choice of mode being left to the citizen, are best suited to improving access.
- Public hearing is a major platform of social action, and participants by enabling discourse and community building and ensuring transparency and accountability in operations, besides improving access to these public proceedings are the steps needed.

- In the crucial electricity sector, an online with in-person hearing mode would only boost public participation.

India and Italy: Friends in a turbulent world

Context
- The year 2023 mark the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations between India and Italy
- India and Italy have decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership, opening a new chapter on defence cooperation.
- The Prime minister of Italy also announced that it will be joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.

Moving towards strategic partnership
- The elevation of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership has been established for the first time.
- The strategic partnership that will also focus on sectors such as defence, cybersecurity, space and energy.
- In recent years, Italy and India have already intensified their collaboration, bringing bilateral trade to a record figure of around 15 billion euros in 2022, doubling the figure recorded in 2020.

Five-year action plan
- India and Italy in 2020 adopted a five-year action plan with a well-defined range of priorities which include:
  o Energy transition
  o Food processing
  o Advanced manufacturing
  o Creative industry
  o Infrastructure of various kinds

Italy joined multilateral initiatives
- In recent years, Italy has joined all the multilateral initiatives promoted by India, from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to the Coalition for Disaster Relief Infrastructure (CDRI), to the International Solar Alliance.
- Italy and India have also further enhanced collaboration in the cultural field, on the heritage front as well as in the creative industry — fashion, design, cinema, etc.

Health sector collaboration
- In the health sector, during the pandemic, our two countries have collaborated since the beginning with the exchange of experiences and practices, with humanitarian initiatives, and we have also promoted joint research projects.

Way forward
- The link between the two areas will become increasingly substantiated in the fields of maritime and digital connectivity and security.
- Italy intends to offer full support to the Indian Presidency of the G20.
- India and Italy have also expressed their commitment to enhancing the European-Indian strategic partnership and their support for the ongoing negotiations for Free Trade Agreements and agreements on investment protection and geographical indication protection.

14.03.2023

- **India remains world's largest importer of arms**
- **Synchronised Vulture Survey in Karnataka, TN, Kerala**
- **Panel pulls up Labour Ministry for underutilisation of funds**
- **India treasure trove sitting in US museum**
- **A chance for India to shape a data governance regime**

India remains world's largest importer of arms

Context
- According to the latest report released by defence think-tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India remained the world's top arms importer.
- But the imports segment declined by 11 per cent between 2013-17 and 2018-22.
- The decline was linked to a complex procurement process, efforts to diversify arms suppliers and attempts to replace imports with local designs.

About SIPRI
- SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament.
- Established in 1966 in Stockholm, SIPRI provides data, analysis and recommendations, based on open sources, to policymakers, researchers, media and the interested public.

World's largest arm Importer and Exporter
- As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report five largest arms importers in the world during 2018-22 were **India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Australia and China.**
- The five largest arms exporters were the United States, Russia, France, China and Germany.
- The report said India received 30 per cent of France's arms exports during 2018-22 and France displaced the US as the second-largest supplier of arms to India after Russia.

Other countries
- The imports by Pakistan, the world's eighth-largest arms importer during 2018-22, increased by 14 per cent, with China as its main supplier.
- It said France's arms exports increased by 44 per cent between 2013-17 and 2018-22 and most of these exports were to countries in Asia and Oceania and the Middle East.

Russia's share falls
- The report compared two five-year periods and noted that between 2013-17 and 2018-22, Russian arms supplies to India are declining
- Russia's share of total Indian arms imports fell from 64 per cent to 45 per cent; this is because of strong competition from other supplier states and increased Indian arms production
- It said the United States share of global arms exports increased from 33 to 40 per cent, while Russia's fell from 22 to 16 per cent.

Reason for high arms imports
- India's tensions with Pakistan and China largely drive its demand for arms imports. With an 11% share of total global arms imports, India was the world's biggest importer of major arms from 2018 to 2022.
- It retained this position even though its arms imports dropped by 11% between 2013 to 2017 and from 2018 to 2022.

Synchronized Vulture Survey In Karnataka, TN, Kerala

Context
The first-ever synchronized survey conducted along the borders of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka (February 25 and 26, 2023) has spotted as many as 246 vultures.

More about Survey

- The two-day Synchronised Vulture Survey held in:
1. <u>**Karnataka**</u>
   o Bandipur Tiger Reserves - 73 vultures
   o Nagarahole Tiger Reserves - 23 vultures
2. <u>**Tamil Nadu**</u>
   o Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (MTR) - 98 vultures
   o Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) - 02 vultures
   o Nilgiris
3. <u>**Kerala**</u>
   o Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary covering the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve - 52 vultures

Vulture spotted in Survey
- During the survey, volunteers sighted:
  o White-rumped vultures (183)
  o Long-billed vultures (30)
  o Red-headed vultures (28)
  o Egyptian vultures (3)
  o Himalayan Griffon
  o Cinereous vulture (1)

Reason for declining vultures' population
- The major reason behind the vulture population is the use of Diclofenac drug.
- The drug was commonly used to treat inflammation in cattle.
- It is mostly found in the carcass of cattle on which the vultures feed.
- The government of India has banned the use of Diclofenac drug for veterinary purposes in 2008.
- Diclofenac is dangerously fatal for Vultures.

Panel pulls up Labour Ministry for underutilization of funds
Context
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour, has pulled up the Union Labour Ministry for underutilization of the allocations meant for the Ministry's schemes.
- The panel has asked the Ministry to assess and work out the likely financial implication of implementing the Supreme Court judgment on higher provident fund pension and approach the Ministry of Finance for additional funds to enable timely payment of amounts that may become due.

Budget allocation and utilization
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in its report on the demands for grants tabled in both Houses of Parliament noted that ₹16,893.68 crores were allocated as Budget estimates for 2022-23, which was decreased to ₹16,117.65 crore at revised estimates stage.
- The actual expenditure incurred as on February 21, 2023, was ₹ 13,092.99 crore, which amounts to 81.23% of the revised estimates (RE) amount.
- The panel has asked the Ministry to approach the Ministry of Finance for additional funds

Scheme-wise find utilisation
- The scheme-wise analysis of utilisation of funds for the fiscal 2022-23 up to February 13, 2023 reveals that the Employee's Pension Scheme (EPS) and National Career Services (NCS) are the only schemes which recorded expenditure up to 90% vis-à-vis RE provisioning whereas for most other schemes, the percentage utilisation has been substantially low.
  o The Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan - 26.66%
  o National Database of Unorganised Workers - 30.02%
  o Labour Welfare Schemes - 30.63%
  o Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour - 48.30%

Negative Impact
- The panel observed that gross underutilization of the funds has impacted the performance of certain schemes thereby defeating the laudable intent of these schemes in benefiting the targeted groups.

India treasure trove sitting in US museum

Context

- An investigation by The Indian Express, in association with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and UK-based Finance Uncovered, has found that the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York catalogue includes at least 77 antiquities spanning centuries, including 59 paintings.

Important antiquities

- From an ivory sculpture of "Moon God Chandra" traced to the 2nd-1st century BCE.
- Eighth-century stone sculpture of "Kamadeva, the God of Love"
- An ink-and-watercolor painting of "Mahishasura Mardini" in 1760 to another in "red ochre
- Wash on paper" from 1775-80 depicting "Rama and Lakshmana".

A chance for India to shape a data governance regime

Context

- India has witnessed rapid digital growth in a short time span.
- This has resulted in technological advances and new governance regimes.
- In recent years, India has made great strides in its digital strategies and data governance.
- India has embraced technology and digitalisation to drive economic growth and to improve the lives of its citizens.

India's G-20 presidency and opportunity

- India's G-20 presidency has provided an opportunity for the country to showcase its advancements in the digital arena, particularly with regards to data infrastructures and data governance.
- As the world becomes increasingly digital, the G-20 has recognized the need for international cooperation and collaboration in addressing the challenges, opportunities and risks posed by the rapid growth of data and digital technologies.
- Significant progress has been made in the use of digital technologies to provide access to bank accounts and in the promotion of digital transactions through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and other options.

Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture

- Recently, the NITI Aayog has released draft Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA) which aims to promote greater user control on data sharing.
- The launch of India's Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), a consent management tool, has generated both excitement and concern among stakeholders.
- DEPA has the potential to improve data protection and privacy for citizens by giving them greater control over the use and sharing of their personal information.
- DEPA could help to build trust in digital technologies and data governance.

DEPA and concerns

- There are risks associated with Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), particularly in terms of security and privacy.
- If the consent management tool is not properly implemented or managed, there is a risk that personal information could be misused or misappropriated.
- Additionally, there are concerns that the implementation of DEPA may be inconsistent across different sectors and jurisdictions, which could undermine its effectiveness and create confusion among citizens.
- In order to realism the potential benefits of DEPA and minimize the risks, it is important that the tool is implemented in a transparent, consistent, and secure manner.
- Another issue is that of ownership and governance of data generated and collected in health and agriculture.
- These concerns must be addressed through strong and robust data protection regulations, the development of ethical and responsible data governance practices, as well as effective and accountable oversight mechanisms.

Issue of data sovereignty

- The term "data sovereignty" refers to the principle that a country has the right to control the collection, storage, and use of data within its borders and also to the informational self-determination of citizens over their data.

- India's establishment of an India Data Management Office (IDMO) is a step forward in the country's journey towards data sharing and data governance.
- The IDMO is expected to oversee and coordinate the implementation of India's digital strategies and data governance framework, and to ensure that these efforts are aligned with the country's values and priorities.

Way forward
- It is important for India to navigate a middle way between restrictive data sovereignty and limitless data flow, and define which data, for which purposes, can be shared and used by whom.
- The government must respect and protect the fundamental right to privacy with a robust data protection law, and balance the interests of all stakeholders.
- This requires the development of clear, transparent and accountable data governance policies and regulations as well as investment in the necessary digital infrastructure.
- The crafting of the country's data governance must enable a secure, more egalitarian, and trustworthy digital future for all.

13.03.2023

- **New norms to achieve net-zero waste for building**
- **India, Australia for early conclusion of pact on market access**
- **The rise of the ESG regulations**
- **US to reboot India's chip ambitions**
- **Adultery as misconduct and judicial musings**

New norms to achieve net-zero waste for building
Context
- The Union government in a plan to bring in new norms for all upcoming housing and commercial complexes to mandatorily ensure net-zero waste.
- The mechanized sewage system, coupled with the mandatory zero net waste clause for housing and commercial complexes, will be an crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The United Nations SDG 6.3 aims at "halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increase recycling and safe reuse globally" by 2030. India currently generates 72,368 million liters of urban wastewater a day, of which only 28% is treated, show the Ministry data from 2023.

Direction to sates
- The centre will direct the states government to incorporate the requirement in building bylaws as part of efforts to end manual scavenging; mechanized sewerage important for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) will send a directive to all State governments to incorporate the net-zero requirement in the building bylaws and ensure implementation.

Plan of action
- As part of the Union government's push for reforming and modernizing the sewage disposal system, all upcoming housing societies and commercial complexes in the country will soon have to mandatorily ensure net-zero waste and have their liquid discharge treated,
- Achieving net-zero waste means reducing, reusing and recovering waste streams (sludge) to convert them to valuable resources so that zero solid waste is sent to landfills.

Eradication of manual scavenging
- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is also planning at integrating septic tank design into the bylaws and adherence to standard specifications, geo-tagging all septic tanks and manholes for proper tracking and reducing GST on mechanized cleaning vehicles.
- The directives are part of the government's effort to implement the manhole to machine-hole scheme to eradicate manual scavenging.
- In her Budget speech for 2023-24, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that all cities and towns would be enabled for 100% transition of sewers and septic tanks from manhole to machine-hole mode.

Other guidelines

- **Commercial use of processed sludge:** The urban local bodies such as municipalities to explore the potential of commercial use of processed sludge as fertilizer and empaneling all agencies providing sanitation services in both the organised and unorganized sectors.

- **Tariff rates for de-sludging:** The central government will review the Indian standards for mechanized cleaning equipment and consider differential tariff rates for residential and commercial de-sludging.

- **Low-cost technological solutions:** A "Make in India" start-up for promoting low-cost technological solutions such as mechanized spades and sensor sticks for gas detection is being considered.

India, Australia for early conclusion of pact on market access

Context
- The recent India-Australia Joint Ministerial Commission discussed negotiations for a full-scale free trade pact and steps to spur investment flows into both countries.
- The meeting made the progress in resolving various bilateral technical market access issues and "look forward to concluding" the India-Australia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) soon.
- Both countries also discussed engagements in the G-20, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Merits of Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement
- The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement will create new employment opportunities, raise living standards, and improve the general welfare in both countries.
- The CECA will include discussions on deeper market access and outcomes in new areas, including digital trade, government procurement, and cooperation.
- India and Australia look forward to an early conclusion of an ambitious CECA, which will build on the foundation laid by the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement including new areas of trade, investment and cooperation.
- India-Australia would continue to work together on areas of mutual interest, including the clean economy and resilient supply chains.

Strengthening bilateral trade
- After the implementing of interim trade deal i.e., Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) in December, India and Australia now aim to conclude negotiations for a comprehensive trade pact by the end of this year.
- Both countries are also looking at achieving $100 billion in bilateral trade.
- ECTA was the first stage of our economic engagement.
- When the ECTA was signed last year, it was decided that the larger idea would be to use the foundation of the interim deal to resume negotiations on the more ambitious trade deal or comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA).

The rise of the ESG regulations

Context

- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals are a set of standards for a company's operations that force companies to follow better governance, ethical practices, environment-friendly measures, and social responsibility.
- Over the last decade, regulators and corporations around the world have embraced the idea that businesses should be measured not just on traditional economic metrics such as shareholder return, but also by their environmental impact, commitment to social issues and the soundness of their corporate governance and protection of shareholder rights.
- The evolution of ESG laws and regulations is, however, still at a nascent stage in India.

How ESG differs from CSR

- India has a robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy that mandates that corporations engage in initiatives that contribute to the welfare of society.
- This mandate was codified into law with the passage of the 2014 and 2021 amendments to the Companies Act of 2013.
- The amendments require companies with a net worth of ₹500 crore or a minimum turnover of ₹1,000 crore or a net profit of ₹5 crore in any given financial year spend at least 2% of their net profit over the preceding three years on CSR activities.
- ESG regulations, on the other hand, differ in process and impact.
- The U.K. Modern Slavery Act, for example, requires companies with business in the U.K. and with annual sales of more than £36 million to publish the efforts they have taken to identify and analyse the risks of human trafficking, child labour and debt bondage in their supply chain; establish internal accountability procedures; evaluate supplier compliance and to train supply chain managers regarding these issues.

Relevance of ESG in India

- India has number of laws and bodies regarding environmental, social and governance issues, including the Environment Protection Act of 1986, quasi-judicial organisations such as the National Green Tribunal, a range of labour codes and laws governing employee engagement and corporate governance practices.
- The penalty for violations can be substantial.
- While these laws and bodies provide important environmental and social safeguards, new initiatives in India go further, establishing guidelines that emphasize monitoring, quantification and disclosure, akin to ESG requirements found in other parts of the world.
- Further legislation regarding ESG are likely, given the increased emphasis by the Indian government on ESG issues, which can be seen in India's more active role in global climate forums as well as in specific policy developments.

SEBI Stand

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), responding to the increase in environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing and the demand by investors for information on ESG risks, substantially revised the annual Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) required by the 1,000 largest listed companies in India.

US to reboot India's chip ambitions

Context

- The recent semiconductor manufacturing incentives rolled out by the government of India offer an opportunity for U.S. companies to expand their capacities in India.
- It also allows American companies to leverage the skilled workforce in India to build capacity and invest in catalyzing R&D in the semiconductor and related industries.
- From a domestic industry perspective, the collaboration between India and U.S. could also prompt a potential realignment of India's current policy approach on chip manufacturing.
- According to industry estimates by the Indian Cellular and Electronics Association, Taiwan account for over 70 per cent of the chips that mobile devices made in India utilize,
- India expects its semiconductor market will reach $63 billion by 2026, compared with $15 billion in 2020.
- A small beginning, with the country's first semiconductor chip manufacturer Polymatech starting production of its Opto-semiconductors and memory modules at Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu.

Main upsides from India's perspective

- The deal between India and the United States on fostering private-sector cooperation in semiconductor manufacturing could have three main upsides from India's perspective.

- The possibility of India getting aligned into a more central role in the global electronics supply chain is among the most important, especially the possibility of finding potential convergence in the chip manufacturing incentive scheme launched by the country and those by other governments across the world.
- There is a commitment to mainstream India's $10 billion in incentives by dovetailing component manufacturing projects from established foreign chip firms and industry leaders such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) and Intel Corp, as opposed to just marginal players that have shown interest in India's incentive scheme so far.
- There is also the possibility of India benefiting from a further realignment of the regional collaborative effort being fostered by the US in a pivotal role, as U.S. tries to diversify the sourcing supply base for semiconductor chips and avoid duplication of efforts.

Chip 4 alliance initiative

- The U.S.-led "Fab 4" or 'Chip 4' semiconductor alliance of Taiwan, the United States, Japan and South Korea.
- The US is already pursuing the "Chip 4" alliance initiative with three other top semiconductor makers — Taiwan, Japan and South Korea.
- India, Japan and Australia had announced plans in September 2021 to establish a semiconductor supply chain initiative "to secure access to semiconductors and their components".

Adultery as misconduct and judicial musings

Context

- In 2018 the Supreme Court of India decriminalized adultery in its landmark judgment, Joseph Shine versus Union of India (September 2018).
- It held Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (on adultery) along with Section 198 of the Criminal Procedure Code to be unconstitutional on the premise that these provisions were violative of Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

Issue concerning the Armed Forces

- The Union of India sought clarification from the Court saying that any adulterous acts should be allowed to be governed by the relevant sections of the Army Act, the Air Force Act and the Navy Act being special legislations by the virtue of Article 33 of the Constitution.
- On January 31st, 2023 a 5-Judge Constitution Bench led by Justice K.M. Joseph passed the final order clarified that while passing the Judgment in 2018, the Court was not concerned with the laws of the Armed Forces and therefore did not stand in their way.

Article 33 of Indian constitution

- Article 33 of Indian constitution empowers the Parliament to restrict or abrogate the fundamental rights of the 'Members of the Armed Forces', paramilitary forces, police forces, intelligence agencies and analogous forces.
- The objective of this provision is to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline among them.
- The power to make laws under Article 33 is conferred only on Parliament and not on state legislatures.

Issue of discharge of duties

- The debatable (moot) question is whether these observations by the Court give an impression that the armed forces may go ahead with disciplinary action for the misconduct of adulterous acts.

Way forward

- Though Article 33 of the Constitution empowers Parliament to restrict the fundamental rights of the members of the armed forces, the caveat of 'so as to ensure the proper discharge of their duties and the maintenance of discipline among them' cannot be overlooked.
- The same principle will also apply to members of the forces charged with the maintenance of public order.
- The legislative intent of Article 33 of the Constitution is also similar. Therefore, the sacrosanct right to privacy available to the members of the armed forces cannot be taken away under the guise of the special legislations unless it has some nexus with their duties.

11.03.2023

- **3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**
- **Production and promotion of organic and bio fertilisers**
- **India, U.S. to launch a semiconductor sub-committee**
- **India's factory output rises in January**
- **A moment of reckoning for AUKUS and Australia**

3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Context
- The Prime Minister inaugurated the 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR).
- Prime Minister pitched for a "proactive rather than reactive" approach to handle natural disasters and minimise damage.
- India is one of the most disaster-affected countries in the world.
- Over 50 per cent of the country's population is affected due to earthquakes, flood, cyclones, droughts, and tsunamis.
- After the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, the world has recognized and appreciated the role of India's disaster management efforts"

Theme
- The main theme of the 3rd session of this platform is "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate".
- The session was jointly organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), and National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM).

10-Point Agenda

Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar award 2023
- During the programme, the PM felicitated awardees of the Subhas Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar for 2023 — Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) and the Lunglei Fire Station, Mizoram.

About NPDRR
- NPDRR is a multi-stakeholder platform constituted by the Government of India to facilitate dialogue, sharing experiences, views, ideas, action-oriented research and explore opportunities in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction.

Laws and institutional setup for disaster management
- The aftermath of the 2001 earthquake in Kutch, Gujarat was the first state to come up with a disaster management Act.
- Based on this Act, the Centre enacted the National Disaster Management Act in 2005.
- Subsequently, the National Disaster Management Authority was set up.

Use of technology
- The Prime Minister while addressing the 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) stressed exploring the use of artificial intelligence, 5G along with the Internet of Things (IoT) to make the ambulance network future-ready.
- He also asked the stakeholders to investigate the use of drones, gadgets for alerting, and personal gadgets that can help in locating people buried under debris.

Production and promotion of organic and bio fertilisers

Context
- Recently the NITI Aayog released a report Titled "Production and promotion of organic and biofertilizers with special focus on improving the economic viability of gaushalas",
- According to the latest report by the NITI Aayog, Gaushalas (cow shelters) can become major suppliers of inputs for natural farming in the country.
- Achieving the targets would require concerted efforts of the government, private players and entrepreneurs says a report prepared by the NITI Aayog.

Promoting natural farming and organic farming
- In the recent time, realization has been growing to reduce or replace agro chemicals, serving as plant nutrients and plant protection, for economic, health, environment and sustainability reasons.
- Accordingly, there is a trend towards natural farming and organic farming where inorganic fertilizer and agro chemicals are replaced by livestock manure, plant-based products, bio inputs, and products made from cow urine and cow dung.
- The task force felt that gaushalas can be of great help in promoting natural farming and organic farming.

Advantages of cow shelters
- The Task force report by NITI Aayog suggested that cow shelters could address the problem of stray cattle that damaged crops in many parts of the country.
- It said the number of stray and abandoned cattle had risen to a level beyond the resources available.
- According to the report, the population of stray cattle is estimated at 53 lakhs.

Adherence to Article 48
- The report said cow dung-based organic fertilizers would have a huge impact in fulfilling the constitutional mandate under Article 48.
- Article 48 of the Constitution of India is one of the Directive Principles which directs the state to make efforts for banning animal slaughtering of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle. It further states to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines.

India, U.S. to launch a semiconductor sub-committee

Context
- Recently, India and the United States signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that will pave the way for creating a semiconductor sub-committee under the Commercial Dialogue between the U.S. Department of Commerce and India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the Ministry of Commerce.
- The first engagement of the sub-committee is expected to take place before the end of 2023.

Key theme of the dialogue
- The key theme of the dialogue focused on:
  - Resilient and secure supply chains
  - Facilitating climate and clean technology cooperation
  - Inclusive digital growth

- o Talent development, including skilling
- o Focus on cooperation on quality standards.
- o Post-pandemic economic recovery, especially for MSMEs and start-ups

Advantages
- The Commercial Dialogue aims to enhance public and private efforts to promote industry cooperation in the semiconductor sector.
- These efforts will identify opportunities for growth and challenges to address in order to ensure that US and Indian semiconductor industries develop stronger connections, complementary ecosystems, and a more diverse supply chain for semiconductors.
- Both countries also expressed interest in working together in developing next-generation standards in telecommunications, including 6G.

India-U.S. trade value
- The US is India's largest exporter and trading partner while India is the ninth-largest trading partner for the US.
- Bilateral merchandise trade during April-January stood at $108.43 billion.
- Both nations aim to achieve bilateral trade of $500 billion by 2025.
- The US is also the third-biggest source of foreign direct investment for India, and is one of the top five investment destinations for India.

India's factory output rises in January
Context
- According to the latest data by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, India's industrial output grew 5.2 per cent in January.
- It was a 4.7 per cent rise in December 2022.

Sector performance
- A double-digit surge in electricity generation for the third successive month was one of the factors that bolstered the increase.
- Consumer durables output contracted for the second month in a row, declining 7.5 per cent in January.
- December saw an 11 per cent drop in consumer durables output.
- Manufacturing growth at 3.7% struggled for traction despite a low-base of just 1.9% growth in January 2022, with textiles and electronics pulling the month's output measure down.
- The Indices of Industrial Production for the Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity sectors for the month of January 2023 stand at 135.9, 144.3 and 186.6 respectively.

Primary goods' output
- In January, primary goods' output grew 9.6 per cent, capital goods' output grew 11 per cent, intermediate goods output was up 0.1 per cent, construction goods grew 8.1 per cent while durables' output grew 6.2 per cent.

A moment of reckoning for AUKUS and Australia
Context
- AUKUS is new trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the U.K. and the U.S.
- The week ahead is likely to be crucial for Australia.
- Under the AUKUS deal, Australia would obtain eight state-of-the-art, nuclear-powered but conventionally armed submarines capable of stealthy, long-range missions.

Concern for Australia
- The main issue for Australia is that many of its regional partners oppose the Royal Australian Navy operating nuclear attack submarines.
- Some, such as Indonesia, have been open about their reservations.
- Others, such as India, despite being politically supportive of AUKUS, appear conflicted about the prospect of
- officials hope will be the chosen pathway, is for the U.S. to build nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) for Australia.

- Two top U.S. Senators wrote to U.S. President in January this year, urging him not to sell nuclear submarines to Australia, warning that it would jeopardize U.S. national security given the vessels' scarcity.
- The second option is for the U.K. to expand its Astute-class programme to Australia. The U.K. is constructing its Dreadnought-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) programme while designing the Astute-class replacement in a sequential build process.
- The third and most likely option is a trilateral effort to develop a new nuclear submarine design.
- Australia could announce a modified version of the yet-to-be-launched U.S. Next-Generation Attack Submarine or U.K. Submersible Ship Nuclear Replacement (SSNR) programmes, or even a completely new AUKUS-class design to be acquired by all three countries.

N-technology transfer is complicated

- The nuclear technology is difficult under the international system.
- For Australia to operate nuclear-powered submarines with high-enriched uranium (HEU) fueled reactors, it will have to exploit a loophole that allows non-nuclear weapon countries to withdraw the fissile material required for submarine reactors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)-monitored stockpile.

India's concern

- Acquiring nuclear propulsion technology is likely to be also complicated for India, which is not a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- The complexities involved in the transfer of technology for HEU-fuelled reactors in nuclear attack submarines from the U.S. and U.K., leave India with only one practical option: buying a high-power reactor from France.
- India, which has never been in the same league of U.S. partners as Australia, acquiring critical technology from the U.S. remains a more daunting prospect.

Bottom line

- India will need to work with the transnational institutional arrangements in place, roping in like-minded nations into symbiotic partnerships, and calibrate future alliance plans.
- The soon-to-be announced 'optimal pathway' for AUKUS has implications that go beyond Australia and its near neighborhood.

10.03.2023

- **India-Australia security partnership**
- **Centre formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023**
- **India, US to ink MoU on semiconductor**
- **The ideal track to run India's logistics system**
- **Making of a Destination**

India-Australia security partnership

Context
- Recently, the Australian Prime Minister visited the Indian Navy's indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant at Mumbai and termed relations between the two countries as "a partnership that is of increasing strategic importance.
- India will step up its participation in joint military exercises with Australia after being elevated to a "top-tier security partner".

Defence exercise and engagement

Malabar naval exercises
- Australia will host the 2023 Operation Malabar naval exercises with the US, India and Japan.
- The Indian Ocean is central to both countries' security and prosperity.
- The Malabar exercise began as an annual bilateral naval exercise between India and the US in 1992 but has increased in scope and complexity over the years.

Talisman Sabre exercises
- India will join Australia in the biennial Talisman Sabre war games exercises for the first time.
- It is a biennial, multinational military exercise led by Australia and the United States.
- The other countries include Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and U.K.

Economic And Trade Relationship
- India is the 5th largest trade partner of Australia with trade in goods and services at $ 29 billion representing 3.6% share of the total Australian trade in 2017-18, with export at $ 8 billion and import at $ 21 billion.
- The two countries are also discussing a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).
- India-Australia CEO Forum is a mechanism for business from both nations to engage directly on ways to build the bilateral trade and investment relationship

Centre formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023

Context
- Recently, the Union government formally outlined the Digital India Act, 2023, which is a broad overhaul of the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- Policy advocates and legal experts on the broad principles of the Digital India Act (DIA), with the definition of internet intermediaries and their safe harbors among the top subjects of discussion.
- The government will have multiple rounds of consultations before the new Act is brought to Parliament.

Key aspects of Digital India Act
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
  - Deepfakes
  - Cybercrime
  - Competition issues among Internet platforms
  - Data protection

Goal of Digital India Act
- New law should evolve through rules that can be updated, and address the tenets of Digital India such as:
  - Open internet

- o Online safety and trust
- o Accountability
- o Quality of service
- o Adjudicatory mechanism
- o New technologies

Safe Harbor Principle

- Section 79 of the Information Technology Act 2000 introduced the safe harbour immunity clause that protected an intermediary from being held liable for third-party content on its platform - provided that the intermediary observed 'due diligence' as prescribed by the Central Government.
- The government is reconsidering a key aspect of cyberspace 'safe harbour', which is the principle that the so-called 'intermediaries' on the Internet are not responsible for what third parties post on their website.
- This is the principle that allows social media platforms to avoid liability for posts made by users.

Reform in digital law

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has been working on a draft Digital India Bill to replace the primary digital law, IT Act, 2000, and address challenges posed by the internet today.

Grievance Appellate Committees

- Recently, the union government established three Grievance Appellate Committees based on the recently amended Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 ("IT Rules 2021").
- The Grievance Appellate Committees as envisaged under Rule 3A of the IT Rules 2021.
- Three Grievance Appellate Committees have now been established to take up content complaints by social media users.

India, US to ink MoU on semiconductor

Context

- India and U.S. will sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in semiconductors.
- The move will help India to play a greater role in diversified supply chains and identify opportunities for joint ventures or technology partnerships.
- Jointly mapping the supply chain will help the two countries to figure out where there might be opportunities for joint ventures or technology partnerships, job training, and research and development partnerships.

India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue

- India and U.S. recently launched a new initiative called the India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue that will focus on aligning the export control regimes of both countries for critical technologies.

Policy measure

- India has launched a production-linked incentive scheme for chips and the US recently unveiled its CHIPS and Science Act to help rebuild its manufacturing and supply chains. Both initiatives have come at a time when India and the US are working to end their dependence on China for chips.

India's semiconductor industry

- The current value of the semiconductor industry in India is of worth $27.2 billion in 2021.
- India's semiconductor industry is projected to grow to $64 billion by 2026, representing a compound annual growth rate of 19 percent.

The ideal track to run India's logistics system

Context

- The Union Budget 2023 has doubled the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan to States from ₹5,000 crore to ₹10,000 crore, and has announced an outlay of ₹2.4 lakh crore for the Indian Railways.
- The plan is a "transformative approach for economic growth and sustainable development dependent on the engines of roads, railways, airports, ports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure".

PM Gati Shakti mission

- The Railways offer an efficient and economic mode of logistics movement given their pan-India network.
- PM Gati Shakti mission aims for increasing the share of the railways in freight movement from 27% to 45% by 2030.
- The mission provides the right platform to address the infrastructural challenges that have hampered the movement of freight by rail.
- It can play an important role in enabling a coordinated and integrated logistics system.

Freight movement

- Currently, the modal mix in terms of freight movement is skewed by a considerable extent towards road transport, with 65% of freight movement by road.
- The effect is an increased burden on roads, and, therefore, significant congestion, increased pollution, and resultant logistics cost escalations.
- The increased adoption of the railways as a mode for cargo movement is crucial to improve India's logistics competitiveness.
- A look at the comparable costs of different forms of transportation suggests that freight movement cost is the highest in the road sector — nearly twice the rail cost.

Major Items of freight movement

- In 2020-21, coal constituted 44% of the total freight movement of 1.2 billion tonnes, followed by iron ore (13%), cement (10%), food grains (5%), fertilizers (4%), iron and steel (4%), etc.
- Transportation of non-bulk commodities accounts for a very small share in the rail freight movement.

Rise in container traffic

- The convenience of moving non-bulk commodities in containers has led to an increase in containerized traffic over the last decade.
- From 7.6 million in 2018, Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit (TEU)s is 16.2 million in 2020.
- TEU is a unit of cargo capacity.

Challenges

- Infrastructural: Lack of necessary terminal infrastructure, maintenance of good sheds and warehouses.
- Operational: High network congestion, lower service levels, and increased transit time.
- Connectivity: Absence of integrated first and last-mile connectivity by rail increases the chances of damage due to multiple handling and also increases the inventory holding cost.

Way forward

- The upcoming Dedicated Freight Corridors along India's eastern and western corridors and multimodal logistics parks will ease the oversaturated line capacity constraints and improve the timing of trains.
- An integrated logistics infrastructure with first and last-mile connectivity is essential to make rail movement competitive with roads, and facilitate exports by rail to neighbouring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh.
- Increased adoption of the railways for cargo movement is crucial to improve the country's logistics competitiveness

Making of a Destination

Context

- As one of the fastest-emerging tourist destinations in the world, India's travel and tourism sector will be the key axis of development in the coming years.
- Prime Minister reiteration of the importance of tourism in driving growth.
- The Union Budget 2023, has outlined the path to developing tourism in mission mode.
- India's G20 presidency together with government's vision to develop 50 destinations across the country has provided the right fillip to the tourism sector and is certain to dramatically improve India's global ranking on the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index.

Call for collaborative efforts

- The collective action by industry stakeholders and the government could shape the future for the Tourism sector.
- The development of tourism accounting for 10 per cent of the total employment directly, and providing 8 per cent of the overall GDP.
- The Union budget has listed six themes for the development of the sector:
  o Convergence
  o Public-private participation
  o Creativity
  o Innovation
  o Digitization
  o Development of destinations.
- The power of collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities in developing and promoting tourism has long term positive impact.

Some recent projects
- The Prime Minister gave the examples of Kashi, Kedarnath, the Statue of Unity and Pavagadh, to show how a unified approach put the wind in the sails of these regions. The Kashi Vishwanath Dham temple is a significant one.
- The newly-developed site around the Statue of Unity.
- Renovation at Mahakaleshwar Jyotirling Temple in Ujjain.

Technology and tourism
- Technology and tourism will go together.
- Travel experiences are becoming more personalised, immersive, and interactive.
- AR/VR can help travellers explore destinations before they even arrive, providing virtual tours and simulations of famous landmarks, historical sites, and cultural experiences. AI-powered chatbots and digital assistants can help travellers plan their trips, recommend personalised activities, and offer real-time assistance while travelling.

Way Ahead
- Unlocking India's immense tourism potential requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses the six key pillars of planning, place, people, policy, process, and promotion. The Budget Session addressed all these "6Ps" effectively by covering:
  o Destination planning and management
  o Infrastructure development
  o Sustainability and safety
  o Development of human capital
  o Policy
  o Process interventions

07.03.2023

- **Railways ties up with ISRO for train tracking**
- **India to launch global alliance for big cats**
- **Centre authorised States to authenticate Aadhaar of prisoners**
- **Rushikulya sands teem with Olive Ridleys**
- **How to become a green hydrogen superpower**

Railways ties up with ISRO for train tracking

Context
- According to the Ministry of Railways, Indian Railways is installing a Real-Time Train Information System (RTIS), developed in collaboration with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- The Indian Railways is harnessing the power of data analytics for integrated transportation.

Enabling real-time tracking
- Indian Railways has commenced a project which will now enable real-time tracking of train movements with the assistance of satellite imagery under the Real Time Train Information System (RTIS) project.

Indigenous navigation satellite system
- ISRO has developed its own regional navigation satellite system called Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC) and Bhuvan, a web-based utility which allows users to explore a set of map-based content being deployed for tracking.
- Indian Railways have taken bandwidth from ISRO and integrated Railways systems with NavIC and Bhuvan. Every locomotive is fitted with a device and a SIM, which communicates the train's real position to the satellite and feedback is received.
- The movement is updated every three seconds.

Advantages of Real-time tracking
- Real-time tracking of trains is also useful during accidents, floods and landslips when there is a need to pin down the train's exact location for rendering help.
- A total of 4,000 locomotives have been fitted with the technology, and new locomotives come with tracking devices.
- Even the Ministry of Railways emphasized the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum tech for the Indian Railways.
- The Railways is tapping into data analytics to improve passenger experience, help chart out empty seats, and enable more passengers to receive confirmed tickets.

India to launch global alliance for big cats

Context
- Recently, India has proposed to launch a mega global alliance named International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) under its leadership to protect big cats.
- Also, there will be assured support over five years with guaranteed funding of $100 million (over Rs 800 crore).

International Big Cat Alliance
- The proposed International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) will work towards the protection and conservation of the seven major big cats.
- These include tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar and cheetah. Membership to the alliance will be open to 97 "range" countries, which contain the natural habitat of these big cats, as well as other interested nations, international organisations, etc.
- According to a proposed timeline, the alliance is expected to be launched next month in a "suitable office complex" in India.

The objective of IBCA
- To provide a platform for the "dissemination of information on benchmarked practices, capacity building, resources repository, research and development, awareness creation", etc., on the protection and conservation of big cats.
- Its major activities will include "advocacy, partnership, knowledge e-portal, capacity building, eco-tourism, partnerships between expert groups and finance tapping".

Composition of IBCA
- The International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) governance structure will comprise a General Assembly consisting of all member countries.
- A council of at least seven but not more than 15 member countries elected by the General Assembly for a term of 5 years.
- A Secretariat.
- Upon the recommendation of the Council, the General Assembly will appoint the IBCA Secretary General for a specific term.

Project Cheetah
- Recently, Prime Minister released 8 cheetahs at the Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.

- These were brought in the country from Namibia, as part of the programme Project Cheetah to reintroduce the species in India, 7 decades after it was declared extinct in the country.
- Twelve cheetahs (seven males and five females) from South Africa arrived, as scheduled in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park (KNP) on February 18, 2023.

Centre authorised States to authenticate Aadhaar of prisoners

Context
- The Union Home Ministry has authorised state governments to carry out Aadhaar authentication of prison inmates on a voluntary basis.
- The authentication process will aid them to get health care, skilling, vocational training, interview with relatives and legal aid, among other services.
- The Ministry said the exercise was voluntary as Prison is a listed under State subject.

Rule 5 of the Aadhaar
- The decision by the centre has been taken after it was authorised under Rule 5 of the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020, for the targeted delivery of financial and other subsidies, benefits and services.

Process of authentication
- The Aadhaar authentication will be carried out on the prison inmates on a voluntary basis using Yes/No authentication facility for delivery of various benefits or facilities to which they are entitled, such as correctional reform measures, health, skilling, vocational training, interview with relatives, legal aid, etc.
- The prison authorities of the states and Union Territory administrations shall adhere to the guidelines with respect to the use of Aadhaar authentication as laid down by the central government.

Rushikulya sands teem with Olive Ridleys

Context
- The Rushikulya river mouth in Odisha's Ganjam district has emerged as a major rookery for the endangered Olive Ridley turtles, as a record number of over 6.37 lakh turtles laid eggs on the beach during the eight-day mass nesting.
- The odisha forest department said that the beaches remained unaffected as there were no extreme weather events such as cyclone and heavy rain and the turtles ascended the perfectly sloped beaches at the Rushikulya river mouth.

About Olive Ridleys
- The Olive ridley turtles are the smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world, inhabiting warm waters of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
- The Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary is known as the world's largest rookery (colony of breeding animals) of sea turtles.

Protection Status:
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule 1
- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable
- CITES: Appendix I

Preventive measures
- All necessary measures have been taken to protect the eggs in the rookery.
- Adequate number of personnel, including local people, has been engaged to keep watch on the eggs from predators.
- As the female turtles go back to the sea after laying eggs, predators like jackals, wild dogs, wild boars, and birds will be on the prowl to eat the eggs.

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How to become a green hydrogen superpower

Context
- The 2023-24 Union Budget has allocated ₹19,700 crore for the National Green Hydrogen Mission.
- This endeavour by the government will set in motion a programme that can position India as a green hydrogen (super)power.

Benefits of the mission
- Creation of export opportunities for Green Hydrogen and its derivatives
- Decarbonisation of industrial, mobility and energy sectors
- Reduction in dependence on imported fossil fuels and feedstock
- Development of indigenous manufacturing capabilities
- Creation of employment opportunities
- Development of cutting-edge technologies.

India's Green Hydrogen production capacity
- India's Green Hydrogen production capacity is likely to reach at least 5 MMT per annum, with an associated renewable energy capacity addition of about 125 GW.
- The targets by 2030 are likely to bring in over Rs. 8 lakh crore investments and create over 6 lakh jobs.
- Nearly 50 MMT per annum of CO2 emissions are expected to be averted by 2030.

India commitments and challenges
- India has committed to 50% electricity capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030.
- But an energy transition in industry is needed at the same time.
- Most industrial greenhouse gas emissions in India come from steel, cement, fertilizers, and petrochemicals.
- Green hydrogen holds the promise of fueling industrial growth while simultaneously reducing industrial emissions.

Five priorities of India

1. Domestic demand

- First, domestic demand is critical which means that If India is not a big player domestically, then we cannot be a major player in the international market.
- The mission introduces a Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) fund for five years, with ₹13,000 crores as direct support to consume green hydrogen.
- This will encourage heavy industries to increase demand, offering economies of scale by which suppliers can reduce prices.

2. Investment

- Second, India can be an attractive destination for domestic and foreign investment. Green hydrogen production projects announced/underway in India are far fewer compared to others.
- Green hydrogen is difficult and expensive to transport. The mission envisions green hydrogen hubs to consolidate production, end use and exports.
- A mission secretariat can ensure project clearance is streamlined and reduce financial risks.

3. Electrolyser manufacturing

- Third, the SIGHT fund offers ₹4,500 crores to support electrolyser manufacturing under the performance-linked incentive scheme.
- Currently, manufacturers are importing stacks and assembling them.
- India must become more competitive with targeted public funding in manufacturing the most critical and high-value components of electrolyser in India.
- Electrolyser technology must be improved to achieve higher efficiency goals, specific application requirements, be able to use non-freshwater, and substitute critical minerals.

4. Bilateral partnerships

- Fourth, establish bilateral partnerships to develop resilient supply chains.
- Globally, about 63 bilateral partnerships have emerged; Germany, South Korea and Japan have the most.
- Using yen- or euro-denominated loans for sales to Japan or to the EU, respectively, could reduce the cost of capital and help us become export competitive.

5. Global coordination

- Fifth, India must coordinate with major economies to develop rules for a global green hydrogen economy.
- In the absence of common global frameworks, attempts for rules and standards are being driven by collectives of private corporations rather than through structured intergovernmental processes.
- There are already signs of conflicting regulations and protectionist measures in major markets.

Way forward

- India's G20 presidency is an opportunity to craft rules for a global green hydrogen economy.
- These rules must address operational threats, industrial competitiveness, and strategic threats.
- India should promote a global network on green hydrogen via which companies could collaborate.
- Green hydrogen will be a critical industrial fuel of the 21st century. India is well-positioned to show leadership.

06.03.2023

- **India holds a conference of global intelligence chiefs**
- **Nations secure pact to protect marine life in the high seas**
- **Rajasthan power lines installation threatens bustard**
- **China defence budget up for 8th consecutive year**
- **The hardships of a career in Ayurvedic practice**

India holds a conference of global intelligence chiefs

Context

- Recently, India held the second conference of intelligence on March 1, 2023, which saw participation from over 26 countries.
- The conference witnessed the participation of security chiefs and top officials from around the world.
- While the U.S. was absent, intelligence chiefs from the U.K., France, Japan and Bahrain attended the conference.

Focus area
- The focus of the second conference of intelligence includes:
  - Global security
  - Counterterrorism, radicalization
  - Drugs trafficking
  - Illegal arms smuggling

Rationale of the conference
- Through the conference of global intelligence chiefs, India is trying to make its presence felt by bringing together global intelligence agencies for exchanges on issues of common concern.

About the security conference
- The security conference is organised by the country's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) that reports to the National security advisor.
- The conference was held for the first time in April 2022, a day before the start of Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on "geopolitics and geo-strategy" organised by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in collaboration with Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
- The conference comes a year after the war in Ukraine that is still ongoing and the global attention fixed on it, while India has been flagging other global issues including Afghanistan.

Nations secure pact to protect marine life in the high seas

Context
- In a breakthrough, for the first time, United Nations (UN) members have agreed on a manage conservation
- It was a long-awaited step that environmental groups say will help reverse marine biodiversity losses and ensure sustainable development.

Background
- An updated framework to protect marine life in the regions outside national boundary waters, known as the high seas, had been in discussions for more than 20 years, but previous efforts to reach an agreement had repeatedly stalled.

Legally binding
- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas is a legally binding agreement to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of ocean biodiversity.
- The treaty calls for the Comprehensive protection of endangered species and habitats is now finally possible on more than 40% of the Earth's surface.
- The treaty also establishes ground rules for conducting environmental impact assessments for commercial activities in the oceans.

New body for managing conservation
- The unified treaty to protect biodiversity on the high seas will create a new body to manage the conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas on the high seas.
- It is critical to achieving the UN Biodiversity Conference's pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters, as well as its land, for conservation.

Rajasthan power lines installation threatens bustard

Context
- In order to explore ways to protect endangered Great Indian Bustards and to continue the solar power projects in Rajasthan, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) has proposed that only power lines below 33kV need to go underground and the rest be fitted with bird-diverters.
- The draft Central Electricity Authority (Construction of Electric Lines in Great Indian Bustard Area) Regulations, 2023 was released by CEA.

- The Conservationists have objected CEA move and said that it could lead to the "extinction" of the bird.
- The proposal was part of draft regulations issued on February 1 and open to public comment until March 3.

Concerns
- High-tension power lines in Rajasthan and Gujarat from solar plants often lie on the flight path of the birds especially the GIB resulting in electrocution of Birds.
- The matter is of particular concern to the future of the bustard as fewer than 150 of them remain, and existing conservation methods fall short of replenishing their numbers.
- With poor vision and high body mass, GIBs are very vulnerable to collisions with power lines.
- A significant population dies each year from such accidents.

Supreme Court's direction
- In 2019, environmentalists approached the Supreme Court, which in 2021 directed all 'low-voltage' power lines, in areas demarcated as "priority and potential habitats of the Great Indian Bustard" in Thar and Kutch deserts, be pushed underground.
- A majority of the power lines from Rajasthan's solar projects have a rating above 33kV and several such proposed ones are expected to pass through the 'priority' areas.
- The court order would have required several existing and proposed lines to move underground, hiking the cost of supplying solar power.

About great Indian bustard
- The great Indian bustard, (Ardeotis nigriceps) is large bird of the bustard family (Otididae).
- It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world.
- The great Indian bustard inhabits dry grasslands and scrublands on the Indian subcontinent.
- Its largest populations are found in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

Key Facts

A	Common Name: Great Indian bustard
Aa	Scientific Name: Ardeotis nigriceps
	Population: 200 individuals worldwide
M	Height: 100 cms or 1 metre
M	Length: Wingspan of 210-250 cm
Kg	Weight: 15-18 kg
	Status: Listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection)Act, 1972, in the CMS Convention and in Appendix I of CITES, as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and the National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016). It has also been identified as one of the species for the recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

China defence budget up for 8th consecutive year

Context
- Recently, China hiked its defence budget by 7.2 per cent, marginally higher than last year, to 1.55 trillion yuan (about USD 224 billion).
- This is the eighth consecutive year that China has announced a single-digit percentage point increase in its military budget.

Strengthening Army
- China's armed forces, with a focus on the goals for the centenary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2027.
- The armed forces would also intensify military training and preparedness across the board, develop new military strategic guidance, devote greater energy to training under combat conditions, and make well-coordinated efforts to strengthen military work in all directions and domains.
- China is the second biggest spender on defence next to the US whose defence budget for 2023 totaled USD 816 billion.

India's defence budget
- The Union Budget 2023-24 has enhanced the allocation to India's defence budget by 13 per cent to INR 5.94 lakh crore, up from INR 5.25 lakh crore in fiscal 2022-23.
- Of this, INR 1.62 lakh crore has been allocated towards capital expenditure, including the purchase of new weapons, aircraft, warships, and other military equipment.
- This constitutes an increase of 7 per cent over the current fiscal's INR 1.52 lakh crore but is almost unchanged in absolute terms given an average inflation rate of around 6 percent over the current fiscal year.

- From India's point of view, however, China's defence budget continued to be over three times higher.

Roadmap
- The Chinese military has embarked on a massive military modernisation with a goal to be on par with the US armed forces in the next few years.
- China has been ramping up its defence expenditure as it vied with the US for global influence.
- The Chinese Navy, the fast-expanding arm of the Chinese military, has now three aircraft carriers while its Air Force continued to be modernized with a vast variety of military jets including stealth jet fighters.

The hardships of a career in Ayurvedic practice

Context
- Ayurveda is a holistic and natural treatment that has been practiced all over India since ancient times.
- For most Ayurveda graduates, practice does not seem to be a feasible career option.
- Despite the publicity campaigns to promote Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), the fact is that there is a trust-deficit in these systems.
- Even the Prime Minister during a speech at the sixth World Ayurveda Congress noted Ayurveda practitioners do not seem to trust it fully trusted by people

Reason for the scepticism
- There is widespread scepticism in the public mind about the soundness of Ayurvedic theories and the fruitfulness of its practices.
- The Ayurveda establishment has failed to keep pace with the intellectual and scientific advances of the times.
- Archaic theories that are apt to arouse suspicion in the minds of educated patients are peddled as sophisticated dogmas.
- Thus, a major reason for the trust-deficit in Ayurveda is its diminished evidence-based quality.

Methodology of treatment
- Ayurvedic science of medicine is based on the principle that prevention is better than cure.
- Ayurveda's thrust is on patient benefit and not merely on patient gratification.
- Sustainability of treatments requires a gradual transition from illness to wellness. Sudden relief is deemed superficial and temporary in Ayurveda.
- The popular view that Ayurvedic treatments are slow to heal is thus a half-truth.
- It can be corrected by appropriate patient education.

A practitioner's ordeal
- A novice who enters the field of Ayurvedic practice would be greeted with these difficult realities of public perception.
- Given that Ayurveda does not have a vibrant ecosystem of science and research.
- Ayurveda can be used safely and efficaciously only in about 60%-70% of primary-care illnesses.
- For the rest, patient interest would necessitate complementing Ayurveda with modern medicine.
- Most States prohibit the practice of modern medicine by Ayurveda graduates and, consequently, the practitioner finds himself crippled again.

Focus on primary care
- There is a dire need for appropriate policy-making to solve a lot of these problems that well-meaning Ayurveda practitioners face.
- Primary-care doctors are becoming an endangered species in India's healthcare system.
- Rejuvenating primary care is an absolutely necessary if a country is to secure the health of its citizens.
- Ayurveda graduates can contribute enormously towards this rejuvenation if trained properly.
- Appropriate policy-making can solve many of the problems a well-meaning Ayurveda practitioner faces.

04.03.2023

- **Select Central staff can opt for Old Pension Scheme**

Select Central staff can opt for Old Pension Scheme

Context

- In a major move, the government has recently decided to give a one-time option to select Central government employees to migrate to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).
- According to the latest notification by the Ministry of Personnel, the employees who joined the central government services against posts advertised or notified before December 22, 2003, are eligible to join the old pension scheme under the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 1972 (now 2021).
- The National Pension System (NPS) was notified in 2003.
- The option is available to the Central government employees enrolled under the NPS as they joined service on or after January 1, 2004.

Who are eligible for Old Pension Scheme

- According to central government order, it will applicable to employees of central government services.
- This will also be applicable to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel.
- This option may be exercised by the government servants concerned latest by August 31, 2023.
- The move came following various references and court decisions in this regard.
- Those government servants who are eligible to exercise option, "but who do not exercise this option by the stipulated date", shall continue to be covered by the National Pension System.

Stakeholder's Response

- The National Movement for Old Pension Scheme (NMOPS), an umbrella body of more than 14 lakh central and state government employees, has welcomed the government decision.
- The Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DPPW) held extensive consultations with the Ministries of Finance and Law and Departments of Expenditure and Personnel and reached a consensus to allow the employees the option to switch to the OPS.

Total employee under NPS

- Till January 31, 2023 a total of 23,65,693 Central employees and 60,32,768 State government employees have enrolled under the NPS.
- Except West Bengal, all States had implemented the NPS.

World Bank to support India's health sector

Context

- Recently, the World Bank and India signed two complementary loans of USD 500 million each to support and enhance the country's healthcare infrastructure.
- The combined financing of USD 1 billion (about ₹8,200 crore), the bank will support India's flagship Pradhan Mantri-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM), launched in October 2021, to improve the public healthcare infrastructure across the country.

Roadmap

- In addition to the national-level interventions, one of the loans will prioritize health service delivery in seven States — Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh.
- The $500-million Public Health Systems for Pandemic Preparedness Programme (PHSPP) will support the government's efforts to prepare India's surveillance system to detect and report epidemics of potential international concern.
- Another $500-million Enhanced Health Service Delivery Programme (EHSDP) will support government's efforts to strengthen service delivery through a redesigned primary healthcare model, which includes;
  o Improved household access to primary healthcare facilities
  o Stronger links between each household and its primary care facility through regular household visits
  o Risk assessment of non-communicable diseases.

India's performance in health

- India's performance in health has improved over time.
- According to the World Bank estimates, India's life expectancy at 69.8 in 2020, up from 58 in 1990 is higher than the average for the country's income level.
- The under-five mortality rate (36 per 1,000 live births)
- Infant mortality rate (30 per 1,000 live births)
- Maternal mortality ratio (103 per 100,000 live births) is all close to the average for India's income level.

World Bank report on freedom at the workplace

Context

- According to a new report by the World Bank on freedom at the workplace highlighted that the Indian laws made little progress in removing possible gender inequities.
- India scores 74.4 in World Bank index on working women out of a possible 100.
- For India, the Index used data on laws applicable in Mumbai, viewed as the country's main business city.

More about the report

- Globally, women have 77.1% of the legal rights that men have, up just half a percentage point from the 2021 score.
- India scored higher than the 63.7 average for the South Asian region, though lower than Nepal which had the region's highest score of 80.6.
- Of the 190 economies covered in the Index, only 14 scored a perfect 100: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

Concern for India

- World Bank on freedom at the workplace noted that India lags when it comes to laws affecting women's pay, pension and work after having children, constraints on women starting and running a business, gender differences in property and inheritance.

U.S. blames Indian firm for cough syrup deaths

Context

- According to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States and the Gambian health authorities, there is a strong link between the death of several children in Gambia and cough syrups made in India that are allegedly contaminated.
- The syrup was manufactured by India-based company Maiden Pharmaceuticals.
- In October last year, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued an alert stating that the four cough syrups supplied by India-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd to Gambia were of substandard quality and alleged that they were linked to the death of many children in Gambia.

Finding of CDC report

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its report said, medications contaminated with Diethylene Glycol [DEG] or Ethylene Glycol [EG] imported into The Gambia led to this Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) cluster among children."
- Patients with DEG (Diethylene glycol) poisoning can experience a range of signs and symptoms, including altered mental status, headache, and gastrointestinal symptoms.
- The report also said that in past Diethylene glycol (DEG) outbreaks, manufacturers have been suspected of substituting DEG in place of more expensive, pharmaceutical-grade solvents.
- The CDC report is the third such evidence to link cough syrups manufactured in India to the deaths.
- Earlier, the World Health Organization had stated that it had found DEG and EG, two industrial chemicals, in tested samples in the range of 1% to 21.3%.

Government of India's Stand

- The Indian government, however, maintains that when it collected control samples from the pharma company of the same batch that was exported to Gambia and found no contamination.
- The Union Minister of State for Health in a reply to the Lok Sabha recently said that after testing, the samples of the cough syrups have been declared to be of standard quality.
- The samples were found to be negative for both Diethylene Glycol (DEG) and Ethylene Glycol (EG), Pawar had said in a written reply to a question.

Clean tech as the next big thing in rural India

Context
- Clean energy solutions are transforming women's livelihoods at the grassroots level.
- From solar refrigerators to silk-reeling machines and biomass-based cold storage to bulk milk chillers, distributed renewable energy (DRE) is transforming women's livelihoods at the grassroots.
- The women from rural India have adopted clean energy-based livelihood technologies to catalyze their businesses.

Distributed renewable energy
- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) systems are power, cooking, heating and cooling systems that generate and distribute services independently of any centralized systems.
- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) powered technologies provide an additional advantage to women farmers and microentrepreneurs by enhancing income opportunities through mechanization.
- They also free women from several gender-assigned manual activities that are laborious.
- A recent Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) study has shown that out of the 13,000 early adopters of clean tech livelihood appliances, more than 80% are women.

Potential of Distributed renewable energy
- By 2030, India is expected to see 30 million women-owned micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) employing around 150 million people.
- Distributed renewable energy (DRE) livelihood technologies are a $50 billion market opportunity in India alone and have the potential to transform rural livelihoods, with women at the core of this transition.

Required interventions
- To achieve the potential outcome from distributed renewable energy, there are key that needs to be followed from reaching rural women as part of the Powering Livelihoods initiative.

- **First,** leverage the experience of early women adopters. Because of their novelty and high starting price, DRE appliances are perceived as high-risk purchases, especially by women users with a relatively lower risk appetite due to socio-economic reasons.
- To overcome the challenge, technology providers must leverage early users to share their experiences with potential customers, becoming demo champions/sales agents to market these products, based on their first-hand product experience and local credibility.
- **Second,** organise hyperlocal events and demos. People want to touch and see a high-tech, high-ticket-size product before believing in its ability and promised benefits.
- **Third,** enable easy finance to purchase products. Limited avenues to avail financing for these clean technology products remain a bottleneck.
- Financiers supporting women farmers and microentrepreneurs should consider the technologies themselves as collaterals while easing the loan application process.
- **Fourth**, support backwards and forward market linkages.
- Many rural products have larger market potential. Thus, finding and connecting producers to consumption hubs in urban areas are equally important to generate higher incomes.
- **Fifth**, is to enable policy convergence. No private sector entity has the kind of reach and scale government institutions have, so leveraging their reach is imperative to exponentially scale up.
- Multiple Ministries are working towards promoting livelihoods for women — from State rural livelihood missions, horticulture and agriculture departments, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, to the Ministry of Textiles.
- They should embrace clean energy solutions to further their respective programmes and outcomes.

03.03.2023

- **India-Italy ties elevated to Strategic Partnership**
- **GDP growth may be at 7% current financial year**
- **India, China discusses LAC situation**
- **SC forms an expert committee to probe Adani allegations**

- More independent Commission

India-Italy ties elevated to Strategic Partnership

Context

- India and Italy have decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership, opening a new chapter on defence cooperation.
- The announcement was made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi after holding comprehensive talks with his Italian counterpart.
- The Prime minister of Italy is on a two-day state to India as chief guest of the eighth Raisina Dialogue.

8th Raisina Dialogue

- The Prime minister of Italy while delivering the inaugural address of the 8th Raisina Dialogue said global interconnection has enabled our economies to grow and flourish but it comes at a cost, especially in times of turbulence in the international community.
- On the war in Ukraine, she said it is a violation of the fundamental principle of the global order that enables the international community to thrive.
- Raisina Dialogue is organised by Observer Research Foundation jointly with the Ministry of External Affairs.
- The conference is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving a variety of global policymakers including heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials.

Important Strategic Partnership

1. Defence cooperation

- India has invited Italian defence companies to actively participate in the Make in India initiative.
- Both India and Italy have also decided to hold joint exercises and training courses between the armed forces of the two countries on a regular basis.
- The two sides also agreed to work to counter irregular migration and human trafficking.

2. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative

- The Prime minister of Italy also announced that it will be joining the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative as the two nations celebrate the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations.

3. Money laundering and financing terrorism

- The two leaders agreed to assess and address potential risks associated with virtual assets and new financial technologies that may be abused for the purpose of money laundering and financing terrorism.
- Both India and Italy also agreed to take steps to ensure that such virtual assets are subject to Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing for Terrorism (AML/CFT) regulations.

4. Space cooperation

- India and Italy have agreed to expand cooperation in the field of space and welcomed bilateral exchanges and took stock of the wide potential of possible joint research projects in areas such as:
  - Remote sensing
  - Satellite communication
  - Lunar exploration
  - Gravitational wave detection
  - Practical applications of space technology between ISRO and ASI Italy

5. Declaration of Intent on migration and mobility

- India and Italy also signed a Declaration of Intent on migration and mobility, announced the establishment of a Start-up Bridge to tap, and inked a memorandum of understanding between Rabindra Bharti University, Kolkata and Italian Consulate General; and Morarji Desai Institute of Yoga and Sarva Yoga International, Italy.

GDP growth may be at 7% current financial year

Context

- Recently, the Chief Economic Advisor has expressed hope that the GDP growth for the current financial year will exceed the projected 7 per cent in view of the expected revision of high frequency data.
- The latest second advance estimate released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) maintained the growth projection of 7 per cent as was projected in the first advance estimate which was released in January.

More about NSO report

- Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2022-23 is estimated at Rs 159.71 trillion as against the first revised estimate of GDP for the year 2021-22 of Rs 149.26 trillion.
- According to NSO, the growth in real GDP during 2022-23 is estimated at 7 per cent as compared to 9.1 per cent in 2021-22.
- The growth slowed to 4.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, mainly due to a contraction in the manufacturing sector.

Interest rates

- According to Chief Economic Advisor (CEA), the rising interest rates need not necessarily be a cause of lower growth but simply reflects the fact that there is healthy underlying demand for credit.
- On the economic benefit of digitization, he said that digital transactions enable increase in formalisation.
- About rural inflation remaining high, the CEA said it did not consider the fact that bulk of the population may be getting food grains at zero cost.

India, China discusses LAC situation

Context

- Recently, the External Affairs Minister of India held a talk with his Chinese counterpart. The meeting focused on addressing current challenges to the bilateral ties, especially peace and tranquillity in the border areas.
- The discussions on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers' meeting came amid the over 34-month-long border row in eastern Ladakh.

India's stand on bilateral relations

- India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.
- The talks came nearly eight months after The External Affairs Minister of India held a meeting with the then-Chinese foreign minister in Bali on the sidelines of a G20 meeting.
- India on its stand has categorically said tha the relationship between the two countries should be based on "three mutuals" (3M)
  - Mutual respect
  - Mutual sensitivity
  - Mutual interests.

Process of disengagement

- In line with a decision taken at the 16th round of military talks, the two sides carried out disengagement from Patrolling Point 15 in the Gogra-Hotsprings area in September last year.
- But the face-off between the two of the planet's biggest military forces lingered on in Demchok and Depsang regions though the Indian side pressed for completion of the disengagement in remaining friction points at the earliest.
- The meeting took place under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC).

SC forms an expert committee to probe Adani allegations

Context

- Recently, The Supreme Court has constituted an expert committee under the supervision of former SC court judge, Justice A.M. Sapre, to review the market regulatory mechanism in the light of the Adani-Hindenburg controversy.
- The apex court also fixed a two-month deadline for the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to complete its probe into the allegations made in a report by the American investment research firm.
- The court noted the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) was already investigating the allegations of Hindenburg Research.

Supreme Court's directions

- Expert committee to assess factors leading to volatility in the securities market
- To investigate regulatory failure, if any, in dealing with allegations against Adani group and others
- Suggest measures to strengthen the statutory and/or regulatory framework
- Sebi to probe violation of its rules

- And whether there was a failure to disclose transactions with related parties

Rule 19A of Securities Contracts

- Rule 19A of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957, talks about the maintenance of minimum public shareholding and its attainment within a specified period.

More independent Commission

Context

- Recently, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has ordered that Election Commissioners will be appointed by the President of India on the advice of a Committee consisting of:
  - Prime Minister
  - Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (or leader of largest opposition party)
  - Chief Justice of India
- This is a very significant judgment that seeks to change the way in which India's top election officials are appointed, and can potentially have far-reaching implications.
- The judgment revives the era of judicial activism.

Constitutional provision

- There are just five Articles (324-329) in Part XV (Elections) of the Constitution. Article 324 of the Constitution vests the "superintendence, direction and control of elections" in an Election Commission consisting "of the Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners.
- The Constitution does not lay down a specific legislative process for the appointment of the CEC and ECs.
- The President makes the appointment on the advice of the Union Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister.

Bone of contention

- The bone of contention of the petitioners was that as per Article 324(2) of the Constitution, the appointment of the CEC and ECs, though to be made by the President, should be done based on a law to be promulgated.
- Yet, no law was enacted by Parliament in this regard.
- Therefore, the petitioners pleaded for an independent body to appoint the CEC and the ECs to ensure functional autonomy for the panel.

Concern and challenges

- According to the proviso to Article 324(5), a special protection against removal is given to the CEC while not extending the said immunity to the other ECs.
- The proviso says that "the Chief Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court". This practically means that the only way to remove the CEC is to get him impeached by Parliament which is difficult, but not impossible.
- The same provision also says that the conditions of service of the CEC "shall not be varied to his disadvantage after his appointment".
- This immunity granted to the CEC loses its purpose when the selection is vitiated by arbitrariness or favoritism.

Way forward

- The Election commission of India is an important body which must be free from any kind pf political interference to prevent any kind of manipulation in the selection process.
- The commission need more power and transparency to continuously reinvent its powers given as Indian Constitution for better functioning.
- The recent judgment by the Supreme court finds an activist judiciary after a long time.

02.03.2023

- **PM address webinar on Urban Planning, Development and Sanitation**
- **Two Australian universities to set up campuses in Gujarat**
- **India asks G-20 to extradite economic offenders fast**
- **S-400 regiments expected to be delivered by early 2024**

- **G-20: India's platform for global leadership**

PM address webinar on Urban Planning, Development and Sanitation

Context
- Recently, the Prime Minister addressed a Post Budget Webinar on the subject of 'Urban Development and Sanitation 'with focus on planning'.
- It is the sixth of a series of 12 post-budget webinars organized by the government to seek ideas and suggestions for the effective implementation of the initiatives announced in the Union Budget 2023.
- Prime Minister noted that well-planned cities will determine the fate of the country, asserting that India's position in the world would have been completely different if 75 planned cities had been developed since Independence.

Roadmap
- Urban planning will determine the fate of Indian cities in 'Amrit Kaal'.
- It is only well-planned cities that will determine the fate of India.
- Prime Minister said that when planning is better, cities will become climate resilient and water secure.

Focus area
- Prime Minister while addressing had urged the participants of the webinar to focus on three main questions about:
  - how to strengthen the urban planning ecosystem in the states,
  - how to properly use the expertise available in the private sector in urban planning and how to develop a centre of excellence that will take urban planning to a new level.

Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT 2.0)
- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 scheme, was launched in October, 2021 for a period of 05 years.
- It is designed to provide universal coverage of water supply through functional taps to all households in all the statutory towns in the country and coverage of sewerage/septage management in 500 cities covered in the first phase of the AMRUT scheme.
- AMRUT 2.0 aims to promote the circular economy of water through the development of the City Water Balance Plan (CWBP) for each city focusing on recycling/reuse of treated sewage, rejuvenation of water bodies and water conservation.

Government initiative on Urban Development
- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) – Housing for all (Urban)
- Smart Cities Mission (SCM)
- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)
- Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY)
- Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM)

Two Australian universities to set up campuses in Gujarat

Context
- Recently the education minister has announced that Two Australian universities -- Deakin University and University of Wollongong will soon establish campuses in Gujarat's 'GIFT CITY'
- This will be the first foreign education institutions to set up campuses in GIFT City, Gujarat.
- The two varsities will sign an agreement on setting up their campuses next week during Australian Prime Minister visit to India.

Education and skilling roadmap
- Australian Minister for Education is on a five-day visit to India to foster ties in education sector.
- The two countries are scheduled to enter 10 MoUs and an agreement on mutual recognition of educational qualifications.
- The Australian minister also announced that noted former cricketer Adam Gilchrist, the global brand ambassador of Wollongong University, will help in setting up the university campus in India.

- One of the key strategies of Australia is education knowledge and skill development and vocational training.
- India, being a young nation, wanted to collaborate with Australia.

Indian students studying in Australia
- There are about 70,000 Indian students studying in Australia.
- In the past 17 years, more than 1.5 million students have studied in Australia and more than 1,700 lecturers have an Indian ancestry.

India asks G-20 to extradite economic offenders fast

Context
- Recently during the meeting of the anti-corruption working group of G20, Union Minister of State for Personnel said that G20 nations will deliberate on ways to trace and extradite fugitive economic offenders.
- India called upon G-20 countries to adopt multilateral action for faster extradition of fugitive economic offenders and recovery of assets, both domestically and abroad.

Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018
- India has put in place specialised legislation in this regard, in the form of Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018, the term wherein 'fugitive economic offender' [FEO] is defined as an individual against whom a warrant of arrest in relation to scheduled offence has been issued by any court in India and who has left the country to avoid criminal prosecution; or the FEO abroad refuses to return to face criminal prosecution.
- The Enforcement Directorate had transferred assets worth about $180 billion to public sector banks that suffered losses of around $272 billion from frauds committed by high-net-worth individuals.

India's G20 presidency
- India's G20 presidency aims to strengthen international cooperation for action against corruption and economic crimes, and recovery of stolen assets.
- India's chairpersonship will support G20 countries in prioritizing recovery and return of stolen assets in their broad strategy against corruption.

Key focus areas
- Enhancing the effectiveness of asset-tracing
- Identification mechanisms
- Developing mechanisms for rapid restrain of illicit assets
- Promoting effective use of open-source information
- Asset recovery networks

Use of technology fighting corruption
- India will utilize its experience from implementing citizen-centric governance model to demonstrate the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in preventing, detecting and fighting corruption by creating common ICT platforms for higher transparency and best practices.
- The inception in 2010, G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group has been at the forefront of guiding the anti-corruption initiatives of the member countries.

S-400 regiments expected to be delivered by early 2024

Context
- According to official sources, Russia will soon complete the delivery of the third regiment of S-400 Air Defence System.
- Deliveries of five regiments of S-400 air defence systems under a $5.43-billion deal with Russia are expected to be completed by year-end or early 2024.
- India has contracted five S-400 regiments under a $5.43 billion or ₹40,291 crore deal as per a conversation rate of ₹74.2 against the dollar at the time, signed in October 2018.

Roadblock
- The issues of delayed payments as well as insurance and reinsurance remain major stumbling blocks delaying deals.

- Officials had acknowledged that transportation and finding cargo carriers outside the purview of sanctions and their insurance has been a major issue.
- In July 2019, the Union government said in a written reply in Parliament that S-400 deliveries were "likely to be made by April 2023".

Threat of U.S. sanctions
- With the looming threat of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), the two sides had worked out payments through the rupee-rouble exchange.
- The payments troubles compounded after Russia was shut out of the global SWIFT system for money transfers.
- India and Russia have agreed to conduct payments through the rupee-rouble arrangement after trying payments in euros as well.

G-20: India's platform for global leadership

Context
- The Group of Twenty (G20) is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union.
- The G20 was founded in 1999 after the Asian financial crisis as a forum for the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to discuss global economic and financial issues. It was upgraded to the level of Heads of State/Government in the wake of the global economic and financial crisis of 2007, and, in 2009, was designated the "premier forum for international economic cooperation".

Difficult road for India
- Recently, the G-20 Finance Ministers meet first time ever, the group could not agree on an outcome document, India found itself in the uneasy situation of having to explain whether it supported its own Chair's summary, which noted that the majority of states condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and rejected the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons.
- India's Finance Minister would not confirm whether India was part of this majority.
- In several occasion India, and 31 others, including China and Pakistan, abstained on a call for Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine and cease hostilities.

Call for upholding UN Charter
- To a larger extent, India condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not about supporting the United States or encouraging NATO expansion.
- It is about upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity enshrined in the UN Charter.
- These are also the same principles that India has relied on for international support in the four wars that it has fought since independence.

Global concern
- Russia's invasion of Ukraine is global and not just a European problem.
- The war has affected oil and gas prices, exacerbated inflation and disrupted global food supplies and prices.
- It had further added to the precarity of life for millions in parts of Africa and Asia.
- Further, it has escalated nuclear risks, not just in the form of threats of the use of nuclear weapons, but threats to Ukraine's nuclear power plants, all five of which have come under direct shelling this past year.

Renewing commitments

- India has recently denied Ukraine's Finance Minister Serhiy Marchenko an invitation to address the gathering in Bengaluru, Japan, as chair of the G7, invited him to a meeting on the sidelines at which the G7 renewed their financial commitments to Ukraine and discussed further sanctions on Russia.
- India has, thus, found itself in the odd position of hosting a group but staying away from the main party where all the action is taking place.

Way Forward

- The G20 platform would help India to showcase its development and propose its models to the world as potential solutions.
- India has found itself in the odd position of hosting a group but staying away from the main party where all the action is taking place.

01.03.2023

- **RBI's new pilot project on coin vending machines**
- **ISRO successful in key test for Chandrayaan-3**
- **Proton beam therapy out of reach for many with cancer**
- **UK to launch India-Britain exchange scheme**
- **States progress in transition to clean electricity**
- **International courts and climate change**

RBI's new pilot project on coin vending machines

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India's Governor has announced that it will launch a pilot project on QR code-based coin vending machine (QCVM).
- The pilot project will roll out in 19 locations in 12 cities across the country.

About the project

- Under the QR code-based coin vending machine (QCVM), vending machines will dispense coins against debit to the customer's account using Unified Payments Interface (UPI) instead of physical tendering of banknotes.
- Customers would be endowed with the option of withdrawing coins in required quantities and denominations.
- The proposed mechanism for coin dispensation would be a departure from the conventional machines which relied on banknotes for facilitating coin exchanges.
- The machines are intended to be installed at public places such as railway stations, shopping malls and marketplaces.

Advantages

- QR code-based coin vending machines (QCVM) will enhance the ease of accessibility to coins.
- It will improve the distribution of coins among the public.
- The guidelines will be issued to banks to promote the distribution of coins using these machines.

Are coins significant in our ecosystem

- As per the latest RBI bulletin, the total value of circulation of rupee coins stood at ₹28,857 crore as on December 2022.
- The figure is an increase of 7.2% from the year-ago period.
- Circulation of small coins remained unchanged at ₹743 crores.
- The number is inclusive of mobile banking, internet banking, IMPS, BHIM-UPI and NEFT, among others.

ISRO successful in key test for Chandrayaan-3

Context

- In a milestone achievement, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully conducted the flight acceptance hot test of the CE-20 cryogenic engine that will power the Cryogenic Upper Stage of the LVM3 launch vehicle for the Chandrayaan-3 mission.
- As per ISRO test was conducted at the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri in Tamil Nadu.
- All the propulsion parameters during the test were found satisfactory and closely matched with predictions.

Successfully EMI-EMC TEST
- Chandrayaan-3 lander successfully completed the crucial EMI-EMC (Electromagnetic Interference/ Electromagnetic Compatibility) test at the U.R. Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru.
- The EMI-EMC test is conducted for satellite missions to ensure the functionality of the satellite subsystems in the space environment and their compatibility with the expected electromagnetic levels.
- This test is a major milestone in the realization of the satellites.

About Chandrayaan-3
- Chandrayaan 3 is an upcoming lunar exploration mission by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO). It is the third mission in the Chandrayaan series, following Chandrayaan 1 and Chandrayaan 2.
- The primary objective of Chandrayaan 3 is to land a rover on the lunar surface and conduct scientific experiments to study the composition of the moon's surface and sub-surface.
- The mission is also aimed at demonstrating India's technological capabilities in lunar exploration.

Major modules of Chandrayaan-3
- Chandrayaan-3 interplanetary mission has three major modules:
  - Propulsion module
  - Lander module
  - Rover.
- The mission's complexity calls for establishing radio-frequency (RF) communication links between the modules.

Proton beam therapy out of reach for many with cancer

Context
- According to reports the cancer patients in India face twin challenges when it comes to accessing proton beam therapy (PBT).
- The foremost problem is about enough facilities across the country.
- Another bottleneck is that the proton beam therapy (PBT) Treatment and cost in lakhs which it unaffordable for many people.
- The PBT is considered a viable alternative to radiation for treating solid tumours, especially head and neck cancers.

About Proton therapy
- Proton therapy, also called proton beam therapy, is a type of radiation therapy.
- It uses protons rather than x-rays to treat cancer.
- Proton beams can be used to treat tumors composed of different types of cells.
- A proton is a positively charged particle.
- Unlike radiation which uses X-rays, the PBT uses protons to tackle cancer.
- At high energy, protons can destroy cancer cells.

Working of Proton Therapy
- Proton beam therapy works by disrupting the tumor's DNA and destroying tumor cells.
- The radiation from protons damages the DNA of the tumor, making the tumor unable to repair itself or grow new cells.
- This means a tumor stops growing and starts shrinking.
- The effects of proton radiation vary depending on the size of the tumor, its location, and other factors.

Proton therapy and disease
- While proton therapy is most often used to treat cancer, it can also be used to treat noncancerous (benign) tumors in children and adults.
- some examples include:
  - Brain tumors, including those in the base of the skull

- o Spinal cord tumors
- o Head and neck cancer
- o Breast cancer
- o Lung cancer
- o Liver cancer
- o Pancreatic cancer
- o Rectal cancer
- o Prostate cancer

Proton Cancer Centre treatment in India
- According to privately-run Apollo Hospital, it has treated up to 900 patients in its Chennai-based Proton Cancer Centre, and 47% of those cases are brain tumours. Patients with cancers of the prostate, ovaries, breast, lungs, bones and soft tissues have also seen promising results in terms of recovery through the Proton therapy.
- Currently there are 42 PBT machine installations in the U.S., followed by Europe (35), Japan (26), China (seven), Taiwan (three) and South Korea (two), while India has only one.

UK to Launch India-Britain exchange scheme

Context
- India and the U.K. will launch the Young Professionals Scheme next month that will allow degree-holding Indian nationals in the age group 18-30 years to live and work in Britain for up to two years.
- The official conformation was made by U.K Foreign Secretary who in a visit to India to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers' meeting.
- India and U.K. will focus on the progress of the UK-India 2030 Roadmap, which aims to bolster the two countries ties in defence and security, trade and investment.

Young Professionals Scheme
- U.K Foreign Secretary will mark the opening of the Young Professionals Scheme at IIT Delhi.
- The partnership between the UK and India which allows up 3,000 Britons and 3,000 Indians each year the right to live and work in the other country for up to two years.

Tech Envoy to the Indo-Pacific region
- The United Kingdom government has announced for the creation of the UK's first Tech Envoy to the Indo-Pacific region, who will boost ties with India as a priority.
- This envoy is the second of its kind to be announced by the UK (after the appointment of a Tech Envoy to the US in late 2020).

India-U.K. free trade agreement
- U.K. is commitment to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) with India during an India-Europe business event in Delhi.
- According to official UK government data, the UK-India trading relationship was worth GBP 34 billion in 2022 growing by GBP 10 billion in one year.
- India has the world's third highest number of tech unicorns and start-ups, with 108 start-ups gaining the unicorn status of a private company valued at more than $1 billion.

States progress in transition to clean electricity

Context
- Recently, the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis has released a report on Indian States' Energy Transition.
- According to the report, Karnataka and Gujarat are among the major states making the most progress in the transition to clean electricity.
- The report was jointly prepared by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) along with EMBER.

More about the report

- The report on Indian States' Energy Transition released on Monday has analyzed 16 states, which together account for 90% of India's annual power requirement.
- The analysis has tracked four dimensions. (figure)
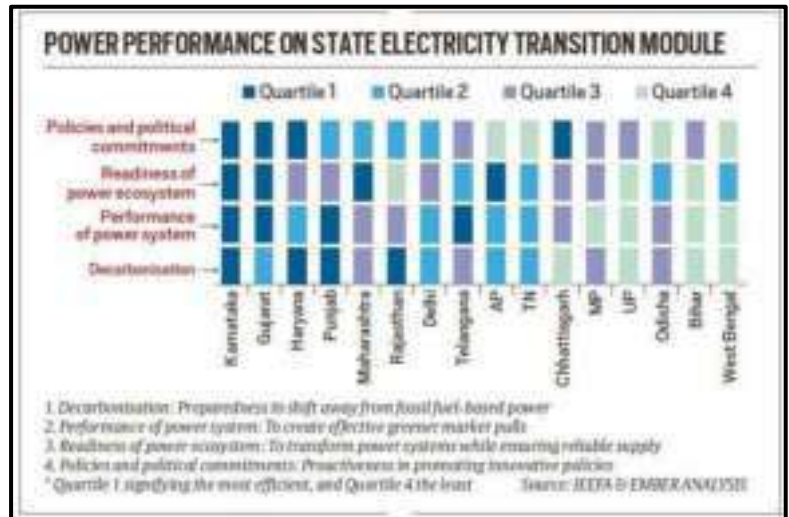
State's performance

- Karnataka is the only state among the 16 analyzed that scored well across all four dimensions of clean electricity transition identified in this study.
- It also has conducive policies and political commitments for a smoother transition.
- The analysis found that Karnataka currently is one of the few states overachieving its Renewable Purchase Obligations targets.

POWER PERFORMANCE ON STATE ELECTRICITY TRANSITION MODULE

- The state still has a large amount of untapped renewable energy potential, having installed just 11% of its total potential.
- Rajasthan is second only to Karnataka, with renewables supplying 29% of the state's power mix.

- Gujarat was a little behind Karnataka in terms of decarbonizing its electricity sector. Haryana and Punjab have shown promising preparations and implementations for electricity transition.
- Haryana has the lowest installed capacity of older, more polluting coal power plants.
- Maharashtra, with the highest power demand in India, was found to be mid-table, mainly due to slow renewable energy uptake in the state and the inability to shut down older polluting coal power plants. Its renewable energy share (11%) is lower than most other states.
- Bihar, UP and West Bengal have work to do to strengthen their clean electricity transition performances.

International courts and climate change

Context

- Recently, group of 16 countries has launched a gallant effort to fight the problem of climate change an existential threat to human civilization at the United Nations (UN) led by Vanuatu (an island country in the South Pacific Ocean)
- The group seeks an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the issue of climate change.

Jurisdiction of International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- The ICJ has two types of jurisdictions: contentious and advisory.
- The Contentious jurisdiction refers to resolving legal disputes between consenting states.
- Under advisory jurisdiction, the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Security Council (SC) and other specialised bodies of the organisation can request the ICJ for an opinion on a legal question.
- Unlike decisions given under the contentious jurisdiction, the ICJ's advisory opinions are non-binding.
- ICJ's advisory opinion on climate change will also be handy in climate-related litigation at the national level.

Vanuatu's initiative

- The Republic of Vanuatu is leading a coalition of States seeking an Advisory Opinion on Climate Change from the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
- Small Island Developing (SID) states such as Vanuatu are most vulnerable to rising temperatures and sea levels.
- Accordingly, in September 2021, Vanuatu launched an initiative, through the UNGA, to seek an advisory opinion from the ICJ to "clarify the legal obligations of all countries to prevent and redress the adverse effects of climate change".
- Since then, the initiative has gathered momentum with more than 100 countries backing the idea.

Concerns

- The international legal instruments on climate change such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, has not delivered the concrete solutions to the problem of climate change.
- The recently concluded 27th UN Climate Change Conference (COP-27) where countries failed to narrow their differences on critical issues such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions perfectly exemplifies the failure.

Legal questions

- The draft resolution piloted by Vanuatu seeks answers to the following questions from the ICJ.
- First, what are the international law obligations of countries toward the protection of the climate system from anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases for the present and future generations?
- Second, given these international legal obligations, what are the legal consequences for states that have caused significant harm to the climate system.
- This question seeks to determine the price that states should pay for not honoring their international legal obligations on climate change.
- Third, as part of climate justice, there is a long-standing demand for climate reparations, that is, the rich countries that have historically caused maximum greenhouse gas emissions should compensate developing countries bearing a disproportionate brunt of climate change.
- At COP-27, while it was agreed to establish a "loss and damage" fund to assist vulnerable developing countries financially, but there is little clarity on which countries will provide the funding.

Role of International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea

- It is not just the ICJ whose advisory opinion is being sought.
- The Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law, comprising countries like Antigua and Barbuda and Tuvalu, has sought the advisory opinion of the Hamburg-based International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). ITLOS has been requested to determine the specific obligations of the countries under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea about preventing, controlling, and reducing pollution of the marine environment.
- The challenges of ocean warming, sea level rise and ocean acidification are all linked to the marine environment.

Conclusion

- These advisory opinions by ICJ are not a panacea.
- Nonetheless, as part of a multi-pronged approach to saving our planet, one should welcome the role of international courts.
- Developed countries and groupings like the G-20 should support these laudable initiatives of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS).
- Environment and climate sustainability are important themes of G-20.
- India, as the president of the G-20, should take a lead given its relentless emphasis on LiFE (developing environment-friendly lifestyle) campaign.

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29.04.2023

- **National Health Account Estimates 2019-20**
- **PM launches 91 new FM transmitters in 18 States**
- **Defence minister call for fixing accountability on supporters of terrorism**
- **SC directs all States to register cases over hate speeches**
- **The women's reservation Bill cannot wait any longer**

National Health Account Estimates 2019-20

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released the National Health Accounts Estimates report for India (2019-20) revealing various health outcomes.

Findings of the report

- National Health Accounts Estimates report noted that there has been a consistent increase in government spending, coupled with declining out-of-pocket expenditure by people on their healthcare needs.
- The government spent on healthcare as a percentage of the country's Gross Domestic Product has increased from 1.13% in FY 2015 to 1.35% in FY 2020.
- Although the number is still far from the target of 2.5% investment in healthcare by 2025.

i) Out of Pocket expense

- Share of Out-Of-Pocket expenditure in Total Health Expenditure declines from 62.6% in 2014-15 to 47.1% in 2019-20. This shows progress towards ensuring financial protection and Universal Health Coverage for citizens.
- The aim is to bring this down as low as possible by investing in public health and insurance among others so that people don't have to shell out the money when they are sick.

ii) Focus on the Primary Sector

- Major chunk of the government's health spend was in the primary sector.
- Out of the total spending by the government on healthcare in FY 2020, 55.9% went to primary care, 29.6% went to secondary care, and 6.4% went to tertiary care.
- There has been the great achievement of 1.5 lakh health and wellness centers across the country that can also screen people for cancers, diabetes, and eye disease.

iii) Increase in social security expenditure

- According to the union health secretary pointed out that there has been a consistent increase in social security expenditure by the government, which increased from 5.7% of the total spending on health in FY 2015 to 9.3% in FY 2020.

iv) Increase in spending on insurance

- Along with an increase in government spending, the report shows that there has been an increase in spending on privately purchased health insurance as well.
- Privately purchased health insurance made up for only 3.9% of the total health expenditure in FY 2015, which increased to 7.72% in FY 2020.
- The government-financed health insurance spending also went up from 3.8% of the total money spent on healthcare in FY 2015 to 6.37% in FY 2020 as per the report.

Health spending by states

- The NITI Aayog member said the National Health Accounts Estimates report could be meaningfully used by the states to design their policy and budget.
- There was a need for the states to increase their contribution towards healthcare and achieve the target set by the National Health Policy 2017, which says that 8% of states' budget should go towards healthcare.
- At present except for one or two states, the target of 8% hasn't been achieved.
- Most stand at 4.5% to 5% of their budget.
- Only two big states and three of the smaller ones have crossed the 8% target in FY 2020 – Delhi (contributing 18.7% of its total spending on health), Kerala (8%), Puducherry (10.5%), Meghalaya (8.9%), and Goa (8.7%), according to the report.

PM launches 91 new FM transmitters in 18 States

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister commissioned FM Transmitters of 100 Watt capacity at 91 locations across the country.
- These transmitters have been installed in 85 districts of 18 states and two Union Territories.
- With this, the network of transmitters with All India Radio has increased from 524 to 615.
- The addition will further boost the coverage of AIR to 73.5 per cent of the population of the country.

Priority location for the installation

- The Left-Wing Extremism hit areas, Aspirational Districts, and border areas of the country have been given priority for the installation of the transmitters.
- Clear sound quality and easy availability of FM receiver-equipped mobile phones have increased the demand for FM radio service in the country.
- In another major step towards meeting this demand and capacity building of the organization, Government has further approved the installation of 63 more FM transmitters in the country.

Linguistic diversity

- The commissioned FM Transmitters will help Prime Minister to touched upon the dimension of linguistic diversity and information in all the languages and especially in the regions with 27 dialects.
- The optical fiber in villages and the cheapest data cost has eased access to information, which has given a new push to digital entrepreneurship in villages.
- Akashwani has the largest FM network in India and this network will carry the growth story of New India to every corner of the country.

Defence minister call for fixing accountability on supporters of terrorism

Context

- India's Defence Minister during the ongoing SCO meeting called upon the SCO member nations to fix accountability on supporters of terrorism.
- He pitched for a framework of regional cooperation that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries in the grouping, in comments seen as a veiled reference to Pakistan and a message to China respectively.
- The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Concept of SECURE

- The defence minister highlighted the concept of 'SECURE' floated by the Prime Minister of India during the SCO summit in China in 2018.
- Elaborating on it he said
  - S stands for security of citizens
  - E for economic development for all
  - C for connecting the region
  - U for uniting the people
  - R for respect for sovereignty and Integrity
  - E stands for environmental protection.

India's Vision

- The Minister of Defence categorically noted that India envisions a robust framework of regional cooperation which mutually respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all member states by taking care of their legitimate interests.
- India strives to further bolster "trust and cooperation" among the members of the grouping as it believes in maintaining peace and security based on the provisions of the UN charter.
- The Defense minister also noted that there is need for respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all member states under a regional framework for cooperation came amid the three-year border row between India and China.
- India is moving forward with a collaborative approach in the field of defence partnership, keeping in mind the shared interests.

Addressing global challenges

- In his address, defence minister said that today a large part of the world is passing through a food crisis and urged the SCO member countries to ensure food security under an integrated plan.
- This will establish SCO as a role model for the whole world and adding energy security should be a part of the common strategy.
- He called for a secure, stable, and prosperous region that helps in improving the quality of life of the people of each member nation.

SC directs all States to register cases over hate speeches

Context

- The Supreme Court recently directed all the States and Union Territories to ensure that as and when any hate speech is made, they shall take suo moto action for registration of FIR even without any complaints.
- The Supreme Court makes it clear that such action shall be taken irrespective of the religion of the persons who made the speech so that the secular character of Bharat as envisaged by the Preamble is preserved.

- The order passed by the top court in October 2022 for suo motu registration of FIR in hate speech cases was passed against Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Uttarakhand governments.

The directive by SC

- The apex court warned delay in registering hate speech cases will be treated as contempt of court and termed hate speech a serious offence, capable of affecting the secular fabric of the country.
- The top court was hearing a bunch of petitions on hate speech crimes when it passed the order.
- The Bench ordered Director-Generals of Police in the States to inform their subordinates about the court order so that "appropriate action in accordance with the law will be taken at the earliest".
- The bench had earlier sought a response from the state of Maharashtra on a contempt petition filed alleging failure to take action against hate speeches.

Penal provision

- The Supreme Court highlighted the penal provisions under which hate speech offenders ought to be booked.
- The of Sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to be invoked include:
  o 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on the ground of religion)
  o 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration)
  o 505 (public mischief)
  o 295A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings)

The women's reservation Bill cannot wait any longer

Context

- India may have achieved suffrage early, but women still face significant barriers to political participation and do not have the right to govern.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2008 seeks to reserve one-third of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state legislative assemblies.
- It is disheartening to witness that even 75 years after Independence, Parliament lacks substantial representation from half the population, with women holding just 14% of the seats.
- It is time to acknowledge the systematic exclusion of women from politics and demand action to create a more equitable political landscape.

Demand since Pre-Independence

- The discourse on women's reservation in India originates from the pre-Independence era when several women's organisations demanded political representation for women. It can be traced back to 1955 when a government-appointed committee recommended that 10% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies should be reserved for women.
- The National Perspective Plan for Women (1988) recommended that 30% of seats in all elected bodies should be reserved for women.
- This recommendation was reiterated in the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, which was adopted in 2001.

Women's contribution

- Women played a crucial role in India's fight for independence, by organizing demonstrations, leading rallies, and raising awareness.
- There were numerous female representatives in the Constituent Assembly as well.
- Despite the presence of influential women in Indian politics, there has been regressed since the 1980s and patriarchal backlash has resulted in the status of women in India being far from ideal.

Amendments to Panchayati Raj Act

- In 1993, the Panchayati Raj Act was amended to reserve 33% of all seats in local government bodies for women, which was a significant step towards women's political empowerment.
- The success of this reservation led to demands for similar reservations in other elected bodies; in 1996, the Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha.
- The Bill proposed to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State legislative Assemblies for women.
- However, facing strong opposition from some political parties it lapsed but gained more momentum again in the early 2000s.

Global examples

- Across the globe, women leaders are outperforming their male counterparts.
- The Scandinavian countries have implemented policies and governance structures that support gender equality and women's empowerment, which includes women's representation in political and leadership positions.
- Moreover, countries led by women have shown to have some of the best policies and governance practices.
- Even Norway implemented a quota system in 2003 that required 40% of seats on corporate boards to be occupied by women.
- Now, it is time for the women in India, the 'mother of democracy', to lead the nation.

Way forward

- The framer of the constitution, Babasaheb Ambedkar was of the opinion that the progress of a community can be measured by the degree of progress which women have achieved, but we are still far away from that benchmark.
- Women have been waiting for too long for their right to govern — not just for themselves but for the greater common good.
- India must now let women take charge of the task of transforming India.
- The government and stakeholders must not overlook the pivotal role women can play in nation-building and development.

28.04.2023

- **Indian Army to raise cyber operations and support wings**
- **Different GST rates for games of skill, chance**
- **EPFO to wait for applications before finalizing higher EPS**
- **RBI wants banks to firm up capital buffers and assess risks**
- **Darwin must stay in Indian school textbooks**

Indian Army to raise cyber operations and support wings

Context

- According to the Ministry of Defence, the Indian Army is set to launch command cyber operations and support wings (CCOSW) to bolster its online networks and safeguard them against the increasing activities of China and Pakistan to target India in the virtual world.
- Cyberspace has emerged as an important component of the military domain both in grey zone warfare as well as conventional operations.
- The Ministry said the decision to operationalize CCOSW was taken during the Army Commanders Conference, which reviewed the current and emerging security scenarios and assessed the operational readiness of the Indian Army.

Rationale of the decision

- Amid the rising activities of adversaries China and Pakistan in the online domain to target India, the Indian Army has operationalized new specialist units to counter these threats and challenges under its cyber warfare initiatives.
- The move by the Ministry of Defence comes as the Indian Army seeks to modernize its communication systems and protect its networks against evolving threats.
- In order to augment the capabilities of the forces by absorption of niche technologies and equipment, it was decided to nominate lead directorates and 'test bed' formations to evolving optimal employment philosophies and scaling to facilitate better exploitation.

Technical Entry Scheme

- A new technical entry scheme (TES) for officers which is expected to be enforced from January 2024 was also approved.
- Under the existing TES for the Indian Army as BTech graduates it is a five year education model which was introduced in 1999.
- Under the current model of a five-year programme – military training at the Officers Training Academy (OTA) in Gaya, followed by three years of B Tech degree is taught and this is then followed by one year at one of the three engineering colleges of the Indian Army.
- And now a decision has been taken to adopt a four-year model which means it will now be three years of training which is focused on technical training.

Different GST rates for games of skill, chance

Context

- The Finance Ministry is considering classifying online gaming into categories of skill and chance, and levying a differential rate of GST.
- Online games where winning is dependent on a certain outcome or is in the nature of betting or gambling would attract 28 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST), while those which involve some amount of skill could be taxed at a lower 18%.

- A final decision on the taxation on online gaming would be taken by the GST Council in its next meeting, which is likely in May or June.

Identifying game category
- The task would be to differentiate between what should be a game of skill and what can be called a game of chance.
- Currently, online gaming attracts 18% GST.
- The tax is levied on gross gaming revenue, which is the fees charged by online gaming portals.
- A Group of Ministers, chaired by Meghalaya Chief Minister in December last year submitted a report on GST on online gaming to Union Finance Minister.

Outcome of GoM Meeting
- The Group of Ministers in its earlier report submitted to the Council in June 2022, suggested a 28 per cent GST on the full value of the consideration, including the contest entry fee, paid by the player, without making a distinction, such as games of skill or chance.
- However, the Council had asked the GoM to reconsider its report.
- Charging 28% GST on the entire amount, which a player deposits for a game for both categories of online game, would reduce the prize money left for distribution and drive away players from legitimate tax-deducting portals.

Gaming Industry in India
- India is the world's largest mobile gaming market in terms of App downloads.
- The online gaming industry had grown exponentially during the pandemic.
- The online gaming industry is currently contributing more than Rs 2,200 crores of GST, as per a study by EY and Assocham.
- As per a KPMG report, the online gaming sector would grow to Rs 29,000 crore by 2024-25 from Rs 13,600 crore in 2020-21

EPFO to wait for applications before finalizing higher EPS

Context
- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has decided to wait for the total number of applicants before releasing the procedures to calculate the pension and the share of employees.
- The last date to file joint options to claim higher Provident Fund pension ends on May 3, 2023.
- The EPFO issued a circular recently, in which it stated that applications and joint options for higher pension will be examined by the field office.

Supreme court order
- The Supreme court in its order gave four more months to eligible subscribers to opt for higher pension under EPS-95.
- The court had also struck down the requirement in the 2014 amendments mandating employee contribution of 1.16 per cent of the salary exceeding Rs 15,000 per month. This will facilitate the subscribers to contribute higher to the scheme and get enhanced benefits accordingly.

Current provision
- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) members are entitled to a pension after retirement.
- Currently, the employees and employers contribute 12% of their basic salary and dearness allowance to the EPF.
- Of the employer's 12% contribution, 8.33% goes to the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) and 3.67% to the EPF.

- However, the 8.33% EPS contribution is capped at the maximum amount of Rs.15,000 even when the employee draws a higher salary.
- The cap on the EPS contribution was introduced in 2014 through an amendment to the EPS.

RBI wants banks to firm up capital buffers and assess risks

Context
- The Reserve Bank expects the managements and the boards of directors of banks to assess their financial risks and secure capital resources surpassing the minimum regulatory benchmark on a constant basis.
- While addressing the Global Conference on Financial Resilience, RBI Indian banking system remain resilient and not been affected by the recent sparks of financial instability seen in some advance economies.
- This is required for continued resilience and sustainable growth of individual banks and financial entities.

Roadmap
- The Reserve Bank governor further said resilient future ready bank needs to be financially, operationally and organizationally resilient.
- To be financially resilient, banks should have adequate capital buffers and be ready to generate earning even in times of severe macroeconomics shocks.
- The RBI therefore started looking at the business models of banks more closely.

Darwin must stay in Indian school textbooks

Context
- The government has removed the chapter on Charles Darwin's "Theory of Biological Evolution" from the NCERT textbook for Class 10 under the guise of a curriculum rationalisation exercise.
- This decision raises questions about whether it is part of a genuine rationalisation process or a larger ideological plan to promote certain beliefs.
- In 2018, the then Union Minister of Human Resource Development, called Darwin's theory of evolution "scientifically wrong" and asked that it be removed from Indian school and college curriculum.

Proposed changes
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) dropped Darwin's theory from the examination syllabus for Class 9 and 10 students in the academic year 2021-22.
- In a development this year, the NCERT has now dropped the entire section on evolution from its Class 10 textbooks.

Need for Darwin's theory
- Scientists and educators across the country are understandably disappointed with this move.
- As one of the most firmly established theories in science, Darwin's theory not only explains the origin of human beings, but also rescues this explanation from the belief that an 'intelligent designer'.
- Depriving students of this information will make student deprived from strong foundation on biological science.
- Darwin's theory is based on the fossils he collected and the wildlife he observed on his five-year trip (1831-36) on the HMS Beagle — a fact that is routinely taught.

Conclusion

- The concerns by the teacher and expert with regards to the continuation of Darwin's theory is genuine.
- The reason is that these examples carry crucial insights about science in both the historical and contemporary world.
- Most importantly, these examples remind us that science is a messy affair (like all human endeavour) that requires caution alongside curiosity, creativity and imagination.
- The teaching of Darwin's theory offers possibilities of this confrontation without underplaying its strengths.

27.04.2023

- **Cabinet approves setting up of govt nursing colleges**
- **Centre tells States to scrap levies on power generation**
- **SC modifies order on ESZ around protected forests**
- **One Earth One Health: Advantage Healthcare India-2023 summit**
- **Virtual digital assets, India's Stand and the way ahead**

Cabinet approves setting up of govt nursing colleges

Context
- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved setting up 157 new government medical nursing colleges besides approving a new policy for the medical device sector.
- The colleges would be co-located with existing medical colleges, allowing optimal utilization of the existing infrastructure, laboratories, clinical facilities, and faculty.

Allocation to states
- Uttar Pradesh (27) and Rajasthan (23) will get the maximum number of such colleges followed by Madhya Pradesh (14), Tamil Nadu (11) and West Bengal (11). Karnataka will get four new nursing colleges.
- According to Union Health Minister, there are currently 1.18 lakh BSc nursing seats in the country.
- The distribution of nursing colleges is based on the number of new medical colleges that have been opened in the state since 2014.
- The Centre will provide Rs 10 crore for the setting up of each of the colleges.

Monitoring committee
- A committee headed by the Union Health Secretary at the Centre and the Principal Secretary of health or medical education in the state will monitor the progress in their construction, expected to be completed over the next two years.

Global Demand for Nurses
- According to Union Health Minister, in addition to demand within the country, th there is a global demand for Indian nurses.
- Currently, there are 26,000 Indian nurses working in the UK, 20,000 in the Gulf countries, 16,000 in the US, 12,000 in Australia and 5,000 in Canada.

Medical Devices Sector Policy
- The Cabinet also approved a new policy for the Medical Devices Sector, hoping that such a policy would help the sector grow from the present $11 billion to $50 billion in the next five years.

- The policy focuses on six strategies to tap the potential of the sector with the 'implementation of action plan'.

Strategies

- The six strategies planned under the policy are:
  - Regulatory Streamlining
  - Enabling Infrastructure
  - Facilitating R&D and Innovation
  - Attracting Investments in the Sector
  - Human Resources Development
  - Brand Positioning and Awareness Creation.

Centre tells States to scrap levies on power generation

Context

- The Centre recently issued a warning to States against resorting to tax levies on electricity generation, including through the imposition of a water cess, noting that there were no provisions in the Constitution that enabled States to do so.
- The Ministry of Power said any such tax /duty on the generation of electricity, which encompasses all types of generation viz. thermal, hydro, wind, solar, nuclear, etc. is illegal and unconstitutional.

Provision for States

- The States government are empowered by the constitution to levy taxes on the consumption or sale of electricity in their jurisdiction, but this does not include the power to impose any tax or duty on the generation of electricity.
- Entry-53 of List-II (State List) authorizes states to put taxes on the consumption or sale of electricity in its jurisdiction.
- This does not include the power to impose any tax or duty on the generation of electricity.
- Article 286 of the constitution explicitly prohibits states from imposing any taxes or duties on supply of goods or services or on both where the supply takes place outside the state.
- Articles 287 and 288 prohibit the imposition of taxes on the consumption or sale of electricity consumed by the central government or sold to the central government for consumption by the government or its agencies.
- Any imposition of tax on the non-consumptive use of water of these rivers for electricity generation is in violation of provisions of the Constitution.

SC modifies order on ESZ around protected forests

Context

- The Supreme Court recently modified its June 3, 2022 judgment to have mandatory eco-sensitive zones (ESZ) of a minimum of one kilometer around protected forests, national parks and wildlife sanctuaries across the country.
- The apex court noted that the earlier order would have prevented the government from building roads and other important infrastructure in those areas.

Government's Plea

- The government in its plea said that it has already issued guidelines of ESZs in February 2011, around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries which were framed after consulting the National Board for Wildlife and hence, was seeking the modification of the June 3 last year court order on the demarcation of such zones.

- Besides the demarcation of ESZ, mining within such parks and sanctuaries across the nation was also banned, according to the 2022 order.

Court direction

- The Centre has been directed to give wide publicity be given to the draft notification issued by it so that all persons interested have adequate knowledge about the concerned matter.
- The top court in 2022, issued a slew of directions and said, "The role of the State cannot be confined to that of a facilitator or generator of economic activities for immediate upliftment of the fortunes of the State."

One Earth One Health: Advantage Healthcare India-2023 summit

Context

- In a virtual address to the "One Earth One Health - Advantage Healthcare India 2023",
- Prime Minister called for an integrated, inclusive and institutional global response to healthcare challenges.
- He said that the Covid pandemic showed that borders cannot stop threats to health in a deeply-connected world.
- He the global response to healthcare challenges cannot be isolated without an integrated, inclusive and institutional approach, which India seeks to focus on during its G20 presidency.

Vaccine development

- The Prime Minister said that Made-In-India vaccines were developed by India's vibrant science and technology sector.
- India became home to the largest and fastest Covid-19 vaccination drive in the world.
- The government of India also shipped 300 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines to over 100 countries.
- This showed both capability and commitment of India.

Holistic healthcare

- India has tremendous diversity in culture, climate, and social dynamics.
- Healthcare professionals trained in India are exposed to diverse experiences.
- This helps them develop skills that can meet the needs of different situations.
- Indian healthcare talent has won the world's trust.
- India has a great tradition of preventive and promotive health systems like Yoga and Ayurveda.
- India has a healthcare system that is affordable and accessible.
- The Ayushman Bharat initiative covers over 500 million people with free medical treatments.

Virtual digital assets, India's Stand and the way ahead

Context

- According to the Income tax act, 'virtual digital asset' refers to any information or code, number, or token (not being Indian currency or foreign currency) generated through cryptographic means.
- The advent of new technologies, in fact, often evokes Red Flag Acts of their own.

A considered approach

- The Finance Ministry recently brought out a notification placing all transactions involving virtual digital assets under the purview of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- This means virtual digital assets platforms carrying out the said activities will now have to register as a reporting entity with the Financial Intelligence Unit-India.
- The unit is the national agency to strengthen India's efforts against money laundering and terror financing.

- This is a step in the right direction.

Significance of the move
- Such rules are already applicable to banks, financial institutions and certain intermediaries in the securities and real estate markets.
- Extending them to virtual digital assets provides virtual digital assets platforms with a framework to diligently monitor and act against malpractices.
- A standardization of such norms will go a long way in making the Indian virtual digital assets sector transparent.

It will also build confidence and assurance in the ecosystem, and give the government more oversight on virtual digital asset transactions, which will be a win-win for all.

Reconsider tax rates
- The centre move for the preview of virtual digital assets are in line with global guidelines put forward by the International Monetary Fund and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- FATF, in fact, has a comprehensive definition of Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASPs) — an extensive list covering intermediaries, brokers, exchanges, custodians, hedge funds, and even mining pools.
- VASPs are the most efficient bridges and eyes for regulators to effectively implement Anti-Money Laundering/Countering/Combating the Financing of Terror principles.

Using the G-20 platform
- India is holding the presidency of the G-20.
- The finance track of the G-20 is spearheading critical discussions on establishing a global regulatory framework for virtual digital assets.
- India's leadership and experience are key here.
- There is also an opportunity to consider the steps taken by other G-20 nations.
- A progressive regulatory framework has the potential to establish India's virtual digital assets leadership.

26.04.2023

- **On the Code on Social Security for platform-based gig workers**
- **India to host SCO Defence Ministers' meeting**
- **PM inaugurates Kochi Water Metro**
- **Centre caution on El Nino, oil cartel threat to GDP growth**
- **Brain Economy Challenge**

On the Code on Social Security for platform-based gig workers

Context
- The labour codes passed in 2020 acknowledge gig workers as new occupational categories in the making, in a bid to keep India's workforce secure as it embraces 'new kinds of work'.
- But the question is whether these codes have enabled workers to ask for the pay they were promised.

Rajasthan Platform-based Gig Workers Bill 2023
- The Rajasthan government has recently announced the Rajasthan Platform-based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill, 2023, which has stringent provisions against errant aggregators as well as various welfare policies.

- The new Code on Social Security allows a platform worker to be defined by their vulnerability — not their labour, nor the vulnerabilities of platform work.

Protest by Gig Workers Union
- During the last six months, many platform workers have unionized under the All India Gig Workers Union and have protested day in and day out, deploring Swiggy for reducing their base pay from ₹35 to ₹10 per delivery order.
- Swiggy workers have been essential during the pandemic.
- Even so, they have faced a continuous dip in pay and no rewards for being essential workers.

Definition of an employee
- The Code on Wages, 2019, tries to expand this idea by using 'wages' as the primary definition of who an 'employee' is.
- The wage relationship is an important relationship in the world of work, especially in the context of a large informal economy.
- Even so, the terms 'gig worker', 'platform worker' and 'gig economy' appear elsewhere in the Code on Social Security.

Platform worker
- Platform delivery people can claim benefits, but not labour rights.
- This distinction makes them beneficiaries of State programmes.
- This does not allow them to go to court to demand better and stable pay or regulate the algorithms that assign the tasks.
- This also means that the government or courts cannot pull up platform companies for their choice of pay, or how long they ask people to work.
- The main role of the laws for a 'platform worker' is to make available benefits and safety nets from the government or platform companies.

No guarantees of benefits
- In the Code on Social Security, 2020, platform workers are now eligible for benefits like maternity benefits, life and disability cover, old age protection, provident fund, employment injury benefits, and so on.
- However, eligibility does not mean that the benefits are guaranteed.
- The Central government can formulate welfare schemes that cover these aspects of personal and work security, but they are not guaranteed.

India to host SCO Defence Ministers' meeting

Context
- India as the Chair of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2023 will host the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi on April 28, 2023
- According to the defence ministry, apart from the member states, two observer countries Belarus and Iran will also be participating in the SCO Defence Ministers Meeting.

Theme
- The theme of India's Chairmanship of SCO in 2023 is 'Secure-SCO'.
- India attaches special importance to SCO in promoting multilateral, political, security, economic and people-to-people interactions in the region.

Focus area of meeting
- Matters concerning regional peace and security

- Counter-terrorism efforts within SCO
- Effective multilateralism
- The ongoing engagement with SCO has helped India promote its relations with the countries in the region with which India has shared civilizational linkages, and is considered India's extended neighborhood.

About SCO
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 2001.
- The SCO members include Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan besides India.
- SCO pursues its policy based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, non-interference in internal affairs, equality of all member States and mutual understanding and respect for the opinions of each of them.

PM inaugurates Kochi Water Metro

Context

- The Prime Minister inaugurated India's first water metro in Kochi, Kerala.
- The boat will connect 10 islands around the city of Malabar.
- In the first phase of the project, the boat service will run between the High Court-Vypin route and the Vyttila-Kakkanad terminals.
- The metro will benefit one lakh islanders.

About Kochi Water Metro

- The Kochi Water Metro is a project being implemented by Kochi Metro Rail Corporation Limited (KMRL) with the assistance of a German funding agency, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau.
- Kochi Water Metro has been envisaged as a feeder service of the Kochi metro rail, which has been operational since 2017.

Water Metro

- It includes boats that are hybrid, battery-powered, air-conditioned, and disabled-friendly among other features.
- The water metro will operate on water bodies like any other ferry or traditional boat service, but with modern facilities, and enhanced safety and security measures.
- The water metro boat service will operate in the backwaters of Kochi, connecting 10 nearby islands with the mainland of Kochi, the commercial hub of Kerala.
- The project is envisaged with 38 jetties, and 78 boats, covering a distance of 76 km. The non-polluting, battery-powered boats are noise-free and produce low waves, unlike traditional ferries.
- Each boat can carry 100 passengers with a seating capacity of 50.

Existing boat services

- At present, Kerala Water Transport Department is operating around 200-odd boat services on different routes, which mainly connect Vypin islands to Kochi.
- Over the years, however, these services have been criticised for several reasons such as for not being punctual and offering poor passenger safety.
- Apart from the water transport department, there are stray services operated by private players.

Centre caution on El Nino, oil cartel threat to GDP growth

Context

- Recently, while addressing the monthly economic review, the Finance Ministry warned that downside risks to the official 6.5% GDP growth projection for this year could dominate, as the prospect of El Nino conditions triggering a drought, along with geopolitical developments and concerns about global financial stability could affect the "favourable combination of growth and inflation outcomes currently anticipated".

Factors that could effect growth

- The monthly economic review noted that the OPEC+ grouping's surprise production cut has seen oil prices rise in April, off their lows of low $70s per barrel in March.
- Further troubles in the financial sector in advanced nations can increase risk aversion in financial markets and impede capital flows.
- Forecasts of El Nino have elevated the risks to Indian monsoon rains.
- The Economic Survey 2022-23 and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), both have pegged India's GDP growth at 6.5 per cent for the fiscal 2023-24.
- The global multilateral agencies' projections are lower than the government's estimate.

Brain Economy Challenge

Context

- Brain Economy as a concept involve an economy based around psychological and cognitive wellness would enable us to create a stronger, more resilient future
- Physical labour required no education, skill-based labour required higher education, training and expertise, and, now, brain-based labour is about rapid innovation and creation, driven by technology.

Global brain economy

- No industry will be immune from technology in the global brain economy.
- Retail, agriculture, automobile, finance, energy, manufacturing, healthcare, education, sports and entertainment will be driven and reshaped by technology and brain power. Technology will not be limited to software, artificial intelligence and data analytics — it will spread rapidly across brain sciences, quantum computing, genetic engineering, 3D printing, nanotechnology and combinations thereof.

Evolution of technology across sectors

- Automobiles changed our lives vastly for the better, but have led to hundreds of thousands of deaths due to accidents and have hurt the environment due to emissions.
- The answer, obviously, is not to ban automobiles but to make them safer and cleaner. Technology will keep evolving and the new generation of technology will solve the problems of earlier generations.
- First generation vaccines saved billions of lives from Covid.

Significance of technology

- Technology illiteracy impedes understanding, perpetuates falsehoods and obstructs progress.
- A clear understanding of technology is as important an issue as those of privacy, inclusivity, fairness, and ethics. Scientists, technologists, businessmen, entrepreneurs and corporations must also be present at the discussion table.

Technology challenges

- Technology does not destroy jobs — it creates jobs, liberates people and drives social progress.
- The advances in technology in the brain economy will always be a couple of steps ahead of politicians, bureaucrats, policies and laws.
- There will be ethical dilemmas regarding technology choices.
- Regulation and oversight are essential, but these need to be pragmatic, not dogmatic.
- In the brain economy, they will question the company's impact on the environment, gender parity, wealth sharing and other social issues.

Conclusion

- The scale and scope of open-source innovation will continue to expand, giving rise to a "societal brain".
- India's digital public goods revolution is an example of this.
- The balance of power between capital and labour will become more symmetric.
- In a country the size of India, it's impossible to transition everyone to the brain economy overnight.
- India needs to embrace the concept of this new world of the brain economy, adapt its mindset and appropriate its resources accordingly.

25.04.2023

- **Vibrant Villages plan to be merged with PM Gati Shakti**
- **Malaria set to be a notifiable disease across India**
- **India, China hold 'frank and in-depth' talks**
- **Operation Kaveri to rescue nationals stranded in Sudan**
- **Wages are rising**

Vibrant Villages plan to be merged with PM Gati Shakti

Context

- The Centre's ambitious Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP), which aims to develop infrastructure and open up villages along the China border to tourists, will be integrated with the Prime Minister's Gati Shakti mega project.
- The digital platform of the Gati Shakti project brings 16 Ministries, including Railways and Highways, together for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects and allows departments to break operational silos.

Satellite images

- The Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geoinformatics (BISAG-N) in Gujarat has been roped in to provide satellite images and GIS mapping of the projects that will be taken up under the scheme.
- The BISAG-N will be tracking the infrastructure and other land-use changes in border villages for real-time monitoring.

Implementation of VVP

- On February 15, the Union Cabinet approved the programme to cover 2,967 villages in 46 border blocks of 19 districts in four States and one Union Territory along the China border. Of these, 662 villages will be prioritised for coverage.
- The scheme has allocated ₹4,800 crores for the financial years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26. The amount allocated for road construction is ₹2,500 crore.

About Vibrant Villages Programme

- This village development scheme was first announced in the 2022 Budget.
- The programme's targets are to provide comprehensive development of villages on the border with China and improve the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.
- The development in these villages will help prevent migration, and thus also boost security.
- The highest priority for village development includes:
  - Road connectivity
  - Drinking water
  - Power including solar and wind energy
  - Mobile and internet access
  - Tourist attractions,
  - Multipurpose facilities
  - Healthcare infrastructure and wellness centres

Objectives of the scheme

- The aims of the scheme are to identify and develop the economic drivers based on local, natural, human and other resources of the border villages.

- Development of growth centres on the "Hub and Spoke Model" through the promotion of social entrepreneurship, and empowerment of youth and women through skill development is also one of the objectives of VVP.
- One of the objectives of the Vibrant Villages Programme is to stop the migration of the border population.

Malaria set to be a notifiable disease across India

Context
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare noted that Malaria is all set to become a notifiable disease across India.
- The country plans to be malaria-free by 2027 and to eliminate the disease by 2030.
- The Health Ministry has also initiated a joint action plan with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for malaria elimination in tribal areas.
- Malaria is not just a public health issue but also a social, economic, and political challenge that requires the cooperation of all stakeholders.

Malaria cases trend
- India was the only high-burden, high-impact country in the Southeast Asia region to report a decline in malaria cases in 2020 compared to 2019. India witnessed an 85.1% decline in malaria cases and an 83.36% decline in deaths during 2015-2022.

States efforts
- The states of Bihar, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Meghalaya too in the process of putting the vector-borne disease in the category.
- This will then require by law that cases be reported to government authorities.
- Currently, malaria is a notifiable disease in 33 States and Union Territories in India.

Preparedness
- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare added that there is now the availability of near-real time data monitoring through an integrated health information platform (HIP-Malaria Portal) and periodic regional review meetings to keep a check on malaria growth across India.
- Malaria is more prevalent among young children whose mothers have a lower level of education and live in rural areas.
- Reaching these populations with available malaria prevention, diagnosis and treatment are critical for achieving the global technical strategy for malaria 2016-2030 and Sustainable Development Goal targets.

India, China hold 'frank and in-depth' talks

Context
- Recently, The 18th round of talks between senior military commanders from India and China.
- The meeting was held on the Chinese side of the Chushul-Moldo border meeting point; days ahead of the first visit by the Chinese Defence Minister since the start of the crisis.
- The 18th round of talks followed the first in-person meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) since July 2019.

Agenda of meeting
- The two sides had a frank and in-depth discussion on the resolution of the relevant issues along the LAC in the Western Sector to restore peace and tranquility in the border areas, which will enable progress in bilateral relations.

- China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson said that "according to the important common understanding of the leaders of both countries, the two sides held in-depth exchange of views on expediting the resolution of relevant issues."
- Both sides reviewed the situation along the LAC and discussed proposals for disengagement in the remaining areas in an open and constructive manner.
- This move will help in the restoration of peace and tranquility along the LAC in the Western Sector and create conditions for the restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations.

India's stand

- India has maintained disengagement, and subsequently de-escalation along the LAC which has seen tens of thousands of troops deployed in forward areas, are both critical to restoring ties.
- Relations have been in a state of freeze since 2020.
- India has not yet given the green light for resuming direct flights between the two countries, first suspended because of the pandemic, and yet to restart.

Operation Kaveri to rescue nationals stranded in Sudan

Context

- India recently launched 'Operation Kaveri' to evacuate its stranded citizens from Sudan. The rescue operation is currently underway and around 500 Indians have reached Port Sudan.
- Sudan has been witnessing deadly fighting between the country's army and a paramilitary group for the last 11 days that has reportedly left around 400 people dead.
- The government is focusing on the safety of over 3,000 Indian citizens currently located throughout Sudan.

About evacuation operation

- The External Affairs Ministry said that the evacuation operation was launched a day after Ministry approval of two C-130s aircraft and the navy ship INS Sumedha are on standby to evacuate Indians from the violence-hit African nation.
- As per official data, around 4,000 Indians are stuck in Sudan.

What is happening in Sudan

- Sudan has been facing a conflict between the country's army and a paramilitary group for the last 11 days, which claimed more than 427 lives including at least 273 civilians and over 3,700 have been wounded.
- The warring factions have agreed to a 72-hour ceasefire beginning from today as Western, Arab and Asian nations race to evacuate their nationals from the country. Scores of people including Sudanese and people from neighbouring countries have fled the country in the past few days to Egypt, Chad, and South Sudan.

Wages are rising

Context

- Rural real wage growth is an important indicator of the wellbeing of individuals, especially the poor.
- India's well-known economists, Jean Dreze has recently said that there has been no significant growth of real wages at the all-India level or in the last eight years.
- His major point is there is a "stark and disturbing contrast between the rapid growth of the Indian economy and the sluggish growth of (rural) real wages" between 2014-2021.

Data source of reference

- Jean Dreze obtains his data from the RBI website and rues the fact that the website does not report wages for rural women workers.
- The original source of the data was Labour bureau via its publication Rural Real Wages in India which reports rural wages for 38 occupations, 24 for men and 14 for women.
- There are sharp differences, however, in the selection of the data and the method of estimation.

Differences in data intensity

- Differences in data intensity between the two methods can be illustrated by noting the differences in one important indicator — growth in real wages of agriculture labour. Dreze has 16 units of macro information — national average for each year (unclear how that was obtained) and national average for Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers (CPIAL).
- In author case, there are 20 states, eight years, and 12 months in each year.
- For male agricultural labourers, there are 228 unique observations for each fiscal year; for eight years, 1,824 observations plus 240 observations each for price level and 20 for rural population.

Error in estimation

- The problems with Dreze's estimates do not end with just data, observations or method. It also extends to his chosen time period of analysis, 2014-21.
- No study in general combines pre-Covid and Covid years without even a mention of the "difference".
- Indeed, 2019-20 is a super-outlier with a devastation unmatched in rural wage history.
- A formal recounting of what happened to GDP and rural wage growth in 2019-20 is yet to be conducted.

Wage growth

- Wage growth for (male) sowing, ploughing, and harvesting averaged 2.6 per cent per year.
- This is high real wage growth and consistent with per-capita GDP growth of 5.9 per cent for these five years.
- For reference: Per capita GDP growth averaged 6.4 per cent during the high-growth years 2004-2011, a period when wage growth for (male) sowing, ploughing, and harvesting averaged 3 per cent per year.

Conclusion

- According to the leaked results, the 2017-18 survey data showed that real rural per capita consumption declined by 8 per cent over 2011-12.
- The real wage data between 2014-18 show average male-female wages in agricultural operations grew at a 2.9 per cent rate or that in 2017-18 average wages were 16 per cent above the 2013-14 level.

24.04.2023

- **How can a juvenile be tried as an adult in Court**
- **Amid global volatility, centre declines to set exports target**
- **Start-ups facing liquidity crunch**
- **Network of sensors to monitor groundwater quality**
- **Safeguarding Constitution**

How can a juvenile be tried as an adult in Court

Context

- The National Commission for Protection of Children (NCPCR) has recently issued guidelines for conducting a preliminary assessment by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) under Section 15 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 (JJ Act, 2015).
- This preliminary assessment is to determine whether a juvenile can be tried as an adult.
- Replacing the Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, the 2015 Act, for the first time, provided for trying juveniles in the age group of 16-18 as adults in cases of heinous offences.

How does a child get tried as an adult

- The Act has categorized the offences committed by children into three categories — petty offences, serious offences, and heinous offences.

Section 15 of the JJ Act

- The Act provides that in case of a heinous offence alleged to have been committed by a child, who has completed or is above the age of sixteen years, the Board shall conduct a preliminary assessment regarding his mental and physical capacity to commit such offence, ability to understand the consequences of the offence and the circumstances in which he allegedly committed the offence.

Section 18 of the JJ Act

- The Section 18 (3) of the Act further suggests that, if the Board, after preliminary assessment under section 15 passes an order that there is a need for trial of the said child as an adult, then the Board may order the transfer of the case to the Children's Court having jurisdiction to try such offences.
- Thus, the sole objective of having such a preliminary assessment is to determine whether a child within the age group of 16-18 years should be tried as an adult in case of heinous offences.

Responsibilities of the Board

- The Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) is responsible for the preliminary assessment and providing the child, the child's family, and their counsel a copy of the order.
- If JJB does not have at least one member who is a practising professional in child psychology or child psychiatry, the Board shall take the assistance of psychologists or experts.
- The child should also be provided with legal aid counsel through the District Legal Services Authority and shall be present during the preliminary assessment.
- During the preliminary assessment, the Board and experts shall also analyse and take into consideration the Social Investigation Report (SIR), to be prepared by the Probation officer or Child Welfare Officer or any social worker, or a Social Background Report (SBR) to be prepared after interaction with the child or child's family.

What next

- The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is under a statutory obligation under Section 109 of the JJ Act, 2015 to monitor the proper implementation of the provisions of the Act.
- The guidelines have been made to remove any ambiguity and to clarify the steps that need to be followed while conducting the preliminary assessment.
- However, the major issue remains the implementation and absorption of these principles in the system, particularly to be followed by the JJB and the Children's Court. A lot of principles which have been made a part of the Act have not been given due prominence by the Board as well as by the Children's Court.

Amid global volatility, centre declines to set exports target

Context

- Considering the volatility and weakness in the global economy, the Union government has pressed pause on setting any exports target for the financial year 2023-24.
- The volatility has been ravaged by the impact of the Russian war and high inflation, impacting discretionary spending.
- The Centre has decided to evaluate the situation on the ground and take a pragmatic view.

What next

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the next five months, we will be taking delegations of different export sectors to several countries to understand the situation on the ground and then to set our exports target.
- India will be organizing buyer-seller meets and exhibitions to push country's exports.

Merchandise and service exports

- In FY23, despite the adverse conditions, India had clocked record merchandise and service exports of $770 billion.
- In the previous two years, exports were to the tune of $676 billion and $500 billion respectively.
- The free trade agreements with the UAE and Australia had immensely helped the exporters and the forthcoming ones would also increase the exports volume.

Start-ups facing liquidity crunch

Context

- A liquidity crunch is hitting Asia's start-up ecosystem.
- The Lenders are looking for a separate liquidity window from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to get funds for on-lending to start-ups.
- A dedicated window will help in mobilizing the much-needed capital for start-ups that are experiencing a liquidity squeeze since the last year.
- Lenders may soon approach the regulator with their request for the liquidity window.

Covid pandemic and lending

- During the Covid pandemic in 2020, the RBI had come out with special windows such as targeted long-term repos operations (TLTROs), TLTROs 2.0 and on tap TLTROs to inject liquidity into stressed sectors such as agriculture, agri infrastructure, MSMEs, MFIs, NBFCs and healthcare.
- Banks are looking at a similar arrangement which will help them meet the requirements of start-ups.

Consequences of liquidity crunch

- India's start-ups, that rely majorly on private equity/venture capital funds for money, have been facing funding slowdown over the last one year amid uncertain macro-economic conditions and concerns over their profitability and steep valuations.
- A funding squeeze has resulted in many start-ups resorting to massive layoffs.
- Indian start-ups raised just $2 billion in the first quarter of 2023, 75 per cent lower than the same period last year.
- With a squeeze in capital, start-ups are now looking at banks to meet their funding needs.
- Usually, banks are conservative in lending to start-ups, given the uncertainty around their growth prospects.

Government measure

- Recently, the finance minister in a review meeting with public sector banks had asked lenders to focus more on the start-up sector which provides ample opportunities.
- She also asked the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) to come up with an action plan in consultation with banks to support the sector.
- IBA has nominated 12 public sector banks as nodal banks for select cities.
- These lenders will conduct the outreach drive in different cities where other private and foreign banks will also participate to understand major concerns of start-ups and their expectations from banks.
- In 2016, the government had set up the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) scheme with a corpus of Rs 10,000 crore.

Network of sensors to monitor groundwater quality

Context

- The Jal Shakti Ministry is working on an ambitious plan to deploy a vast network of groundwater sensors that will continuously relay information on groundwater levels and the degree of contamination down to the taluk level.
- Currently, such information is only measured a handful of times a year and communicated via reports of the Central Groundwater Board.

Significance of decision

- Under the new initiative, around 16,000 to 17,000 digital water level recorders will be connected to piezometers in the wells.

- Piezometers measure groundwater levels, the recorders will transmit the information digitally.
- Establishing a network that will continuously measure groundwater quality, feed it into a centralized network such as that of the National Water Informatics Centre.
- It will make it available for monitoring would make groundwater visible much the same way as air quality and meteorological variables — air pressure, moisture, precipitation.

National Aquifer Mapping Programme

- The Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) is in charge of the National Aquifer Mapping Programme (NAQUIM), that as of March has mapped the country's aquifers at a resolution of 1:50000 and under the second phase of the programme, expects to improve the resolution by five times.
- The average stage of groundwater extraction for the country as a whole works out to be about 60.08%.
- Anything above 70% is considered "critical" though there are regions in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Rajasthan with groundwater blocks with over 100% extraction.

Safeguarding Constitution

Context

- The year 2023 mark the golden jubilee of Kesavananda Bharati judgment.
- Kesavananda Bharati was a landmark decision of the Supreme Court that outlined
- the "basic structure doctrine" of the Indian Constitution.
- The case is also known as the Fundamental Rights Case and the Basic Structure Case. The Apex Court in a 7-6 decision asserted its right to strike down amendments to the constitution that were in violation of the fundamental architecture of the constitution

Judiciary vs government

- The ruling was the result of a petition by Kesavananda Bharati, the head of a Hindu monastery in Kerala's Kasargod district, challenging the state government's land reform acts that would result in the institution losing its holdings.
- The Kesavananda Bharati ruling was the culmination of a power struggle between Parliament and the Supreme Court that began with an earlier case.
- In 1967, the Supreme Court had ruled in the case of Golak Nath vs State of Punjab that Parliament could not amend the Fundamental Rights laid down in the Constitution.
- The Golak Nath verdict was perceived as a political decision.
- Article 368 of the Constitution deals with amendments to the Constitution.
- Kesavananda Bharati emerged as an opportunity for wise exercise of co-constituent power by the summit court.

Basic Structure Doctrine

- Basic features are principles include:
  o Supremacy of the Constitution
  o Republican and democratic form of government
  o Secular character of the Constitution
  o Parliamentary democracy
  o Fundamental rights
  o Judicial review

Judicial independence

- Judicial independence is important as the "essence" of rule of law, which embeds both "decisional autonomy" and "institutional autonomy" ("freedom from the pressure from the State").

- Rule of law means that the "parameters of decision making and discretion" remain always circumscribed by the Constitution and demands respect for "constitutional conventions".
- Any breakdown of this constitutional togetherness marks a structural crisis of legality and legitimacy.
- The Supreme Court won the right of judicial review of constitutional amendments by enunciating the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- The doctrine of the basic structure helps to prevent legislative excesses, as was evident in the Emergence Era.

21.04.2023

- **New space policy allows private and government entity**
- **SCO meeting for prevention and elimination of emergency situation**
- **MPC member caution war against inflation not yet won**
- **A new edge to the fight against tuberculosis**
- **Steel frame to Bhavna Vriksh**

New space policy allows private and government entity

Context
- Recently, the Union Cabinet allowed the non-government entities (NGEs) or private companies or startups to "establish and operate remote sensing satellite systems within and outside India through self-owned or procured or leased satellites.
- The Indian Space Policy 2023 was unveiled by ISRO.
- In recent times ISRO has launched several remote sensing satellites like Risat and Cartosat over a period of time which were later used by Indian security agencies for keeping an eye on the country's borders, checking infiltration and planning cross-border operations like the 2016 .

More about New space policy
- The new policy also gives more freedom to private companies in setting up their own space assets.
- The non-government entities (NGEs) shall be allowed to undertake end-toend activities in the space sector through establishment and operation of space objects, ground-based surgical strikes assets and related services, such as communication, remote sensing, navigation, etc.
- They can establish and operate ground facilities for space object operations, such as telemetry, tracking & command, earth stations and satellite control centres (SCCs). They can also use Indian orbital resources and/or non-Indian orbital resources to establish space objects for communication services over India and outside India.

Role of Space regulator
- The new policy also clearly defined the new roles of ISRO, space regulator INSPACe and commercial arm NewSpace India Limited (NSIL).
- The NSIL, the new policy shall be responsible for commercialising space technologies and platforms created through public expenditure.
- It shall also service space-based needs of users on sound commercial principles.
- The industry has reacted positively to the unveiling of the Indian Space Policy 2023.
- On IN-SPACe, the policy said, "It shall act as the single window agency for the authorisation of space activities by government entities as well as non-government entities (NGEs), subject to relevant government directives, keeping in mind safety, national security, international obligations and/or foreign policy considerations.

Significance of Policy

- The policy is forward looking and will help to fulfill India's vision for the growth of the space industry in India.
- It provides the much-needed clarity on all space activities especially regarding space communication and other applications.
- It will also help create opportunities for the private sector to engage in all aspects of the space industry.
- he policy will be a catalyst for development of a robust innovative and globally competitive space ecosystem in India.

SCO meeting for prevention and elimination of emergency

Context

- The union home minister chaired the meeting of Heads of Departments of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Member States responsible for Prevention and Elimination of Emergency Situations.
- India attaches special importance to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in promoting dialogue on the subject relating to multi-dimensional political, security and economic subjects.

India's SCO journey

- India has been associated with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization since 2005 and plays an important role as an observer country.
- At the 17th Summit in 2017, India became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as part of an important step in the process of expansion of this organization.
- India's priority as the Chair of the Council is to take forward the SECURE theme articulated by the Prime Minister at the Qingdao Summit of the SCO in 2018, which means, S – Security, E – Economic Cooperation, C – Connectivity, U – Unity, R – Respect For Sovereignty and Integrity and E – Environment Protection.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization will probably be the largest regional organisation in the world at this time, representing 40% of the global population, 25% of the global GDP and 22% of the world's total land area.

Disaster Risk Reduction

- India attaches special importance to Disaster Risk Reduction and is ready to share its expertise and experience in this field for greater cooperation and mutual trust among SCO Member States.
- The Home Minister said that India believes that no hazard is small or big and it does not leave anyone behind.
- India now has a more accurate and timely early warning system in place and the country has seen a sea change in the way its early warning systems (EWS) for drought, flood, lightning, heat wave, cold wave, and cyclone, have improved.

Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure

- The union Home minister said that the India-led Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) currently has 39 members from across the world.
- CDRI is working with member countries to ensure that all investments in infrastructure is made in a manner that it makes our infrastructure resilient to disasters, thereby securing not just our present but also our future.

Five major approaches of SCO

- The union Home minister said that to further strengthen the approach of SCO, 5 major areas can be identified to work:
  o Confidence Building Efforts in Asia
  o Collective Responsibility Approach

- o Expanding Cooperation in Communication and Information Sharing
- o Identification of Priority Areas
- o Use of newly developed technology in disaster resilience capacity building

MPC member caution war against inflation not yet won

Context
One of the members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), Jayanth Varma, argued that the war against inflation has not yet been won and it would be premature to declare end to the rate-tightening cycle, showing the minutes of the MPC meeting held on April 3-6.
He noted that it would be premature to declare an end to this tightening cycle.

Retaining repo rate
The MPC in April chose to retain the repo rate at the same level taking into account the turmoil caused by the global banking crisis and the contagion risks.
The MPC kept the repo rate, or the rate at which it lends short-term funds to banks, at 6.5 percent.
The MPC maintained the 'withdrawal of accommodation' stance highlighting the readiness to act should the situation so warrant.

About Monetary Policy Framework
In May 2016, the RBI Act was amended to provide a legislative mandate to the central bank to operate the country's monetary policy framework.
The framework aims at setting the policy rate based on an assessment of the current and evolving macroeconomic situation, and modulation of liquidity conditions to anchor money market rates at or around the repo rate.

A new edge to the fight against tuberculosis

Context
- During the One World TB Summit in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh in March, 2023, Prime Minister instilled fresh energy to the global tuberculosis (TB) elimination response and reiterated India's commitment to spearhead this effort.
- The summit further emphasized the importance of innovation and the need to "find new ways and formulate new strategies" to achieve the desired outcomes.

Lessons from the COVID-19 response
- The COVID-19 pandemic provided upon the innate human spirit to adapt, learn, experiment, and innovate.
- The pandemic has shown us that together, we can overcome unprecedented adversity.
- Over the last few years, India has made significant progress in its efforts to end TB. India's National TB Elimination Programme, or the NTEP (previously known as the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme, or RNTCP), has introduced several measures to find, notify and treat TB cases, with case notifications rising from 15.6 lakh in 2014 to over 24 lakh in 2022.
- This reflects the programmer's expanded reach and improved detection measures.

Engagement with the private sector
- In the journey of eliminating the TB, the engagement with the private sector, launch of social support provisions and introduction of diagnostic tools and new drug regimens, have improved TB management.
- However, while these efforts have been commendable, lack of widespread awareness about the disease and lack of access to quality care continue to be a challenge.

- The recent National TB Prevalence Survey (in India) found that 64% of people with infectious TB did not seek care.

Addressing challenge of TB

- To address this challenge and truly bring transformative change in TB response efforts, there is a need to introduce disruptive approaches and new tools to change the way we prevent, diagnose, and treat TB.
- India has long recognized the importance of investing in health research and development, especially in recent years.
- The Mission COVID Suraksha programme to develop vaccines was a good example of a public-private partnership, with clear goals and outcomes.
- The huge number of diagnostic tests developed and a variety of different vaccine platforms show that our manufacturing sector is robust and can scale rapidly.

Prioritizing TB vaccine trials

- First, for any infectious disease, a vaccine is what makes elimination possible.
- At present we have the Bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG) vaccine for TB, but it does not adequately protect adolescents and adults who are at the highest risk for developing and spreading TB.
- While COVID-19 vaccines were developed within a year, we must prioritise and pick up the pace to find an effective TB vaccine.
- Second, testing for, and diagnosing TB needs to become more accessible and affordable so much so that each person with suggestive symptoms or frontline worker can test and get results within minutes, at minimal costs.
- Point-of-Care Tests (POCTs), such as home-based tests for COVID, allowed decentralised, rapid and low-cost diagnostics to provide results within minutes.
- New innovations such as nasal and tongue swab-based tests for TB can be a game changer by reducing diagnostic delays.
- Third, the development and introduction of new therapeutic molecules can play a crucial role in the long run.
- Shorter, safer, and more effective regimens do exist and include the 1HP regimen for latent TB infections, the four-month regimen (HPZM) for drug-susceptible TB, and the six-month regimen (BPaL/M) for drug-resistant TB.

Appropriate policy frameworks

- In this spirit to eliminate TB by 2025, we must create a strong platform that channelises investments in research to bring in a paradigm shift at every stage of the TB care cascade — prevention, testing, and treatment.
- With its G-20 presidency, India has another historical opportunity to build a global health architecture that creates equitable access for all.
- TB should no longer be the leading infectious disease killer globally, in the 21st century, and India can lead the way.

Steel frame to Bhavna Vriksh

Context

- The Government of India observes the 21st of April every year as 'Civil Services Day'.
- The day is a celebration of the idea of a national civil service.
- Sardar Patel inaugurated the newly-created Indian Administrative Service in 1947.
- It is, therefore, a attribute to Sardar Patel, the phrase "steel frame" with its negative connotation of a rigid, restrictive, and rule-bound colonial bureaucracy.

Background

- This task of defining an Indian ethos for the civil service began in the 75th year of India's independence, with Prime Minister address where he spelt out the country's vision and the Panch Pran — the five pledges to drive India's transition from Amrit Mahotsav to Amrit Kaal.
- The second pledge is the removal of a colonial mindset demanded a revision of self-imagination and the shedding of colonial baggage among the civil services.

Civil service as a living entity

- The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA) responded by visualising the civil service as a living entity — the "Peepul tree", which has animated our civilisational vision from time immemorial.
- The civil service as Bhavna Vriksh, a tree of "service and empathy", is thus a positive reaffirmation of the spirit of self-assurance and decolonisation.
- The attributes and conception of an ideal civil servant for Amrit Kaal were first enunciated by the prime minister on October 31, 2019, at the Statue of Unity.
- They are, being proactive and polite; professional and progressive; energetic and enabling; transparent and tech-enabled; creative and constructive; and imaginative and innovative.

Future-ready civil service

- The idea of a future-ready civil service is a holistic one: A whole-of-government and de-siloed attitude, anticipating the future, collaborative in its method, participatory in its engagement, and innovative in its spirit.
- The shaking off of a former colonial mindset, sharing a sense of pride in the Indian roots, and a duty-bound set of civil servants with a nation-first approach is the new ethic of civil servants.
- The day for the Bhavna Vriksh to acquit itself as an able servant of its masters — the people of India.

20.04.2023

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- **India's population to overtake China by mid-2023**
- **Cabinet approves Cinematograph Amendment Bill 2023**
- **India-UK MoU on advancing military capability**
- **How India can become a trillion-dollar economy by 2029**
- **India-UAE cooperation to sow regional food security**

India's population to overtake China by mid-2023

Context

- According to latest data released by the United Nations, India is on track to become the world's most populous nation, surpassing China by 2.9 million people by mid-2023.
- The demographic data from the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) 'State of World Population Report, 2023' estimates India's population at 1,428.6 million or 1.4286 billion against 1.4257 billion for China.
- The world's population hit the 800-crore mark in November 2022.

More about the report

- The United States stands in third position, with an estimated population of 34 crores.
- The report finds that just eight countries will account for half the projected growth in the global population by 2050.

- These include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the United Republic of Tanzania.

India's population as per age group

- According to the new UNFPA report:
  - 25 per cent of India's population is in the age group of 0-14 years
  - 18 per cent in the 10 to 19 age group
  - 26 per cent in the age bracket of 10 to 24 years
  - 68 per cent in 15 to 64 years age group
  - 7 per cent above 65 years.

Cabinet approves Cinematograph Amendment Bill 2023

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approves the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2023.
- The bill aims to curb piracy in film content and protect the creative industry.
- The bill will be brought in the next Parliament session by the ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Aim of the bill

- The bill ensures that the film content does not suffer due to piracy as the menace causes heavy loss to the industry.
- It also aimed to tackle film piracy by including penal provisions for unauthorised cam-cording and duplication of films in an exhibition facility.
- The bill has provisions for categorising films based on age group, rather than the current practice of 'U,' 'A,' and 'UA'. (ANI)
- The bill will also prove to be a revolutionary step towards promoting Indian films and helping local content go global.
- The proposed amendments allowing the sub-categorisation for film certification purposes, appear to be in line with the age-based restrictions recently implemented for over-the-top (OTT) content providers under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (Intermediary Rules).

India-UK MoU on advancing military capability

Context

- The UK's Chief of the Defence Staff has said that India and the United Kingdom are having detailed discussions over sharing technical know-how and experience on maritime electric propulsion systems to meet future requirements of Indian warships.

Memorandum of Understanding

- The two sides are also discussing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on military training.
- The United Kingdom is keen to help India develop maritime electric-propulsion technology for its future warships and both sides have held two rounds of discussions on how to take this forward.

Logistics pact

- The logistics pact between India and the UK was seen to be put to effect during the visit of the IAF to Exercise Cobra Warrior where IAF pilots flew five Mirage 2000 fighters and during the recent visits of HMS Tamar and HMS Lancaster to India.
- HMS Lancaster visited Kochi last month to train with the Indian Navy as part of Exercise Konkan.

How India can become a trillion-dollar economy by 2029

Context

- India is expected to become a $3 trillion economy by 2029.
- In recent times, India had an established track record of high growth.
- India's average annual GDP growth was 6.6 per cent compared with 6.3 per cent in the preceding decade.

India's economic growth

- In fiscal 2023, India is seen growing at 7 per cent, making it the fastest-growing large economy.
- Indian economy will grow at 6.8 per cent per year for the next five years with 52 per cent of it from capital, 38 per cent from efficiency and 10 per cent from labour.
- CRISIL expects India to decelerate and grow at 6 per cent in fiscal 2024.
- Growth accounting provides a useful framework to analyse medium-term prospects by decomposing their drivers into the contribution of capital, labour and efficiency.
- The pace of private investments in select segments is the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme drawn up for 15 manufacturing sectors, especially in electronics and pharmaceuticals, with ACC batteries and speciality chemicals in the pipeline.
- Raising the competitiveness of manufacturing is crucial to the broad-based resilience of exports.

Physical and digital infrastructure

- The creation of physical and digital infrastructure in conjunction with efficiency-enhancing reforms will raise the contribution of productivity to growth.
- The economy is expected to continue seeing efficiency gains from reforms such as GST and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

Women's labour force participation

- The falling labour force participation of women will have to be reversed through employment policies and investment in the health and education of women.
- According to a World Bank report in 2018, India could add 1.5 percentage points to its GDP growth by improving the participation of women in its workforce.

Conclusion

- At present, there is a significant sense of optimism around India.
- Given current growth dynamics, India should become a $5 trillion economy by fiscal 2029.

India-UAE cooperation to sow regional food security

Context

- India and the United Arab Emirates are going ahead with food security cooperation under the I2U2, a new West Asian quadrilateral that includes Israel and the United States.
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose food security has been built on imports from global markets, is now focusing on the twin objectives of food access and readiness to confront supply chain crises.
- India, the world's second-largest food producer, is an essential partner in the UAE's ambition to strengthen food security.

India as a global agri-export

- India has built its status as a global agri-export powerhouse using its vast tracts of arable land, a highly favourable climate, and a large and growing food production and processing sector.

- India in recent years has acted as a humanitarian provider of food to developing countries, demonstrating awareness of its evolving role in advancing regional and global food security.
- India has also made major budgetary outlays towards setting up massive food parks, with due emphasis on modern supply chain management spanning farm gate to retail outlets.

India's Policy of Public Distribution System

- In parallel, India runs the Public Distribution System (PDS), the world's largest food subsidy programme, providing nearly 800 million citizens with subsidised grains, and providing its people with the reassurance of daily, affordable meals.
- Apart from PDS, the 'Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) Abhiyaan', is the world's largest nutrition programme for children and women. As a part of its G-20 presidency, India is promoting the consumption and farming of millets that demonstrate the resilience focus that India offers to the global food security dialogue.

India and UAE collaborations

- India brings to the table an incredible wealth of food sector experience and the ability to operationalize the world's largest food supply chains — formidable capabilities that are strengthening the India-UAE food security partnership in a variety of ways.
- During the I2U2 (India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates and the United States) summit in July last year, the UAE committed $2 billion in investment towards constructing food parks in India (in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat), while the signing of a food security corridor on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)'s sidelines (with logistics partner DP World) has taken forward India's envisioned presence on the global food value chain, beyond the UAE.

Dubai Multi Commodities Centre

- The Dubai Multi Commodities Centre, the UAE's largest free trade zone, launched Agriota, an agri-trading and commodity platform to link Indian farmers to food companies in the UAE.
- Agriota gives millions of Indian farmers the opportunity to directly reach out to the entirety of the UAE's food ecosystem (processing companies, traders, wholesalers) and stock their products in Emirati stores.
- Alongside this initiative, a consortium of UAE-based entities are investing up to $7 billion in mega food parks, contract farming and the sourcing of agro-commodities in India.
- The initiative will include mega food parks, logistics and warehouse hubs, and fruits and vegetable hubs.

Way forward

- India's G-20 presidency offers an opportune moment for both India and the UAE to showcase viable strategies and frameworks that can forge the basis of food security in the Global South.
- Multiple points of convergence will ensure that India is an essential partner in the plan of the United Arab Emirates to strengthen food security in the Global South.

19.04.2023

- **ISRO plans to launch TeLEOS-2 Satellite**
- **IITs to appoint mental health counsellors**
- **India to appeal WTO panel ruling on ICT import tariffs**
- **India, China snap up Russian oil above 'price cap'**

- **A judgment that upholds the Constitution**

ISRO plans to launch TeLEOS-2 Satellite

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch Singaporean Earth Observation satellite TeLEOS-02 on board the workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle
- The launch will take place satellite from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- on April 22, 2023.
- The satellite on board will be TeLEOS 2 a 750kg earth observation satellite that has synthetic aperture radar capable of providing data in 1-metre resolution.
- The satellites arrived in India in February.

PSLV as launch vehicle

- The launch, will be carried out by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- This launch will be the PSLV's 55th mission and TeLEOS-2 are an Earth Observation Satellite developed by ST Engineering.
- The launch vehicle has also carried onboard India's big-ticket missions like Chandrayaan-1, Mangalyaan, and AstroSat.

Major achievement

- The launch of TeLEOS 2 will be the third launch of the year for Isro—all three using different launch vehicles. The first launch took place in February when the new Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV) successfully deployed three satellites and was declared operational by the space agency.
- The second launch took place in March when India's heaviest LVM3 launched 36 OneWeb satellites in a purely commercial mission.

# IITs to appoint mental health counsellors

Context

- Amid growing concerns over student deaths by suicide, the IIT Council in a meeting at IIT Bhubaneswar decided to appoint at least one mental health counsellor on every campus.
- At the meeting, the mental health and wellness of students was discussed at length, with Education Minister, stressing on the need to develop a "robust mechanism of zero tolerance for discrimination in institutes.

Student Suicide data

Preventive measures

- The Ministry of Education directed every IIT to submit reports on the specific reasons behind students struggling with mental health issues, dropping out midway, and in some cases, resorting to extreme steps.
- The government's call for 'zero discrimination' on the campuses is also an implicit recognition of the

The total number of suicide cases of students in last five years in IITs, NITs and IIMs
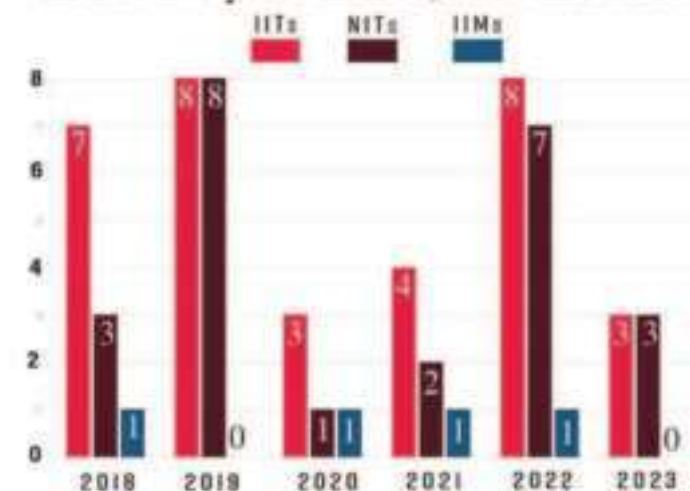
SOURCE: GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

ThePrint

presence of unequal treatment.
- The IITs are likely to hold a special meeting on the aspect of mental health in the next few months where students, teachers as well as parents will be invited.

Augmenting student teacher ratio
- The members of the Council suggested to increase the student teacher ratio to 1:10 compared to the existing ratio of 1:20.
- It will help the teachers to give better attention to the issues students face.
- Emphasis was also given to identify students with their potential problems through both classroom attendance and hostel attendance.

India to appeal WTO panel ruling on ICT import tariffs

Context
- According to Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India will appeal against a ruling of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) trade dispute settlement panel which ruled that the India's import dues on certain information and technology products are inconsistent with the global trade norms.
- The dispute panel of the Geneva-based WTO on Monday said the import duties imposed by India on certain informational and technology products violates global trading norms.

Background
- In April 2016, European Union, Japan and US had written to WTO seeking justification from India for increasing basic customs on a host of ICT products.
- In 2017, government levied an import duty of 7.5%, which later increased to 15% on a host of ICT products to encourage domestic production. This was challenged in WTO by EU in 2019. Japan and Taiwan also filed complaints subsequently. The duties were raised to 20% by the government later.

Appeal against the decision
- India is expected to appeal a recent ruling by a panel of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on its imposition of tariffs on mobile phones and electronic components in a bid to ensure that the ruling does not impact the country's domestic manufacturing goals, especially in a sector which has seen capacity building.
- The appeal will be filed by India in the WTO's appellate body, which is the final authority on such trade disputes.
- The ruling followed a dispute filed by the European Union, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in the WTO.
- The EU in April, 2019 had challenged the introduction of import duties by India on a wide range of ICT products, for instance, mobile phones and components, base stations, integrated circuits and optical instruments.

Information Technology Agreement
- It is a plurilateral agreement enforced by the WTO and concluded by 29 participants in the Ministerial Declaration on Trade in Information Technology Products at Singapore in 1996 and came into force on 1st July 1997.
- It seeks to accelerate and deepen the reduction of trade barriers for the critically important ICT industry.
- India is a signatory to the Information Technology Agreement (ITA).

India, China snaps up Russian oil above 'price cap'

Context
- According to traders and Reuters calculations, India and China have snapped up the vast majority of Russian oil so far in April at prices above the Western price cap of $60 per barrel.
- That means the Russia is enjoying stronger revenues despite the West's attempts to curb funds for Russia's military operations in Ukraine.

Supplies to India
- India account for more than 70% of the seaborne supplies of the grade so far this month and China for about 20%.
- Meanwhile, lower freight rates and smaller discounts for the Urals against global benchmarks nudged the daily price of the grade back above the cap earlier in April from a period of trading below.
- India and China have not agreed to abide by the price cap, but the West had hoped the threat of sanctions might deter traders from helping those countries buy oil above the cap.

Price difference
- Shipping costs have come down significantly in recent weeks as Russian port ice conditions eased and more tankers became available.
- Freight rates for Urals cargoes loading in Baltic ports for delivery to India have eased to $7.5-$7.6 million from $8-$8.1 million two weeks ago.
- The cost of tanker shipment from Baltic ports to China was $10 million, down from nearly $11 million a couple of weeks ago, they added.
- During winter, freight costs for Urals cargoes jumped above $12 million for both India and China.

A judgment that upholds the Constitution

Context
- In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court recently ruled against the telecast ban imposed by the Union Government on the Malayalam news channel MediaOne.
- The Supreme Court judgment in the Media One case (Madhyamam Broadcasting Ltd Media One Headquarters v. Union of India and Others) requires a political reading and not merely a legal one.
- It is a landmark judgment on the freedom of expression and a judicial fiat against sealed cover malpractice.
- The judgment comes at a time when the Centre is being criticised for its attempts to destabilise the institutions of democracy.

An attempt to regain glory
- The Supreme court has tried to regain its glory, In Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India, it took away the power of appointment of Election Commissioners from the sole domain of the executive and directed the constitution of a committee comprising the Chief Justice of India, the Prime Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition to select them.
- The contribution of the Chief Justice of India in modernising the court is remarkable. The Media One judgment has underlined the institutional capacity of the court in troubled political times.
- In the past, many constitutional principles were developed by the court when the matter was either infructuous or had mere academic value.

The court and the Opposition
- The Media One judgment is a evident of judiciary's effort to resist majoritarian overtones.

- The court has taken a counter majoritarian role, which is qualitatively different from the role that the Opposition is supposed to play.
- The task before the court, however, is not to uphold the Opposition's politics, even when it might be legitimate.
- Recently, for instance, the apex court rightly dismissed a plea by Opposition parties, which alleged arbitrary use of central probe agencies against them.
- The grievance is genuine, but it needs a political solution, not an adjudicatory resolution.

Conclusion

- The court can only put forth a judicial or constitutional check against an aggrandising State.
- It cannot pose a political check, which can only happen by way of mass movements or electoral decisions.
- The Media One judgment has underlined the institutional capacity of the court in troubled political times.

18.04.2023

- **2nd G20 health working group meeting**
- **India to host summit on Buddhism**
- **How coastal species are living on plastic debris in the ocean**
- **G7 nations to reduce global GHG emissions**
- **Terror of Narco Network**

2nd G20 health working group meeting

Context

- Recently, the Second meeting of the health working group for G20 began in Goa.
- The meeting focused on the need for collaborative surveillance, community protection, safe and scalable care, access to medical countermeasures and emergency coordination.
- The health secretary noted that there was a need to invest "substantially more" in health systems, especially prevention which usually gets under-financed.
- India also raised the issue of intellectual property rights during a public health emergency.

Priorities area

- The working group meeting will continue on the three priorities set by Indian presidency:
  o Tackling future health emergencies
  o Building a manufacturing network of vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics
  o Leveraging digital solutions to provide universal health coverage

Medical tourism

- India is recognized worldwide for its excellence in the medical sector.
- Medical Tourism in India has boosted significantly in past years and has also attained remarkable results.
- India's medical value tourism with over 1.4 million people visiting the country for treatment last year.

Technical sessions

- The Second meeting of the health working group for G20 held three technical sessions.

- **First:** The first session focused on health emergency prevention, preparedness and response, with delegates discussing collaborative surveillance systems supported by advanced networks of laboratories and relevant infrastructure.
- The discussion also centred on embedding anti-microbial resistance as part of any health emergency governance system and it being complementary to such on-going efforts at various levels of government.

- **Second:** The second session focused on creating better collaborations at various levels for access and availability of safe, effective, and quality medical countermeasures.
- The discussions centred on methods such as public-private partnerships, international collaborations through a network-of-networks platform.

- **Third:** In the third session, discussion on draft outcome document was done exclusively among G20 member states in an hour-long session afterwards.
- It was emphasized that any consensus must be built through measures that are evidence-based, inclusive, fair, equitable, transparent and need-based.

India to host summit on Buddhism

Context
India is set to host the first-ever Global Buddhist summit on April 20 and 21, 2023 in New Delhi.
- The maiden conference being organised by the Union Culture Ministry and the International Buddhist Confederation will discuss contemporary global issues through a Buddhist perspective.
- The conference themed "Responses to contemporary challenges from philosophy to praxis" will be inaugurated by Prime Minister.

Themes
- The Global Buddhist summit will hold discussion under four themes:
    o Buddha Dhamma and peace
    o Buddha Dhamma: environmental crisis, health and sustainability
    o Preservation of Nalanda Buddhist tradition
    o Buddhist pilgrimage, living heritage and relics

More about the conference
- The summit aims to find solutions to problems such as climate change, poverty, and conflict, among others, by exploring the Buddhist teachings and practices.
- The two-day conference will bring together prominent Buddhist leaders from around the world.
- Delegates from 30 countries will participate, a notable exception being China.
- Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, is also unlikely to attend the two-day conclave.
- Over 170 delegates from countries such as Mexico, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Japan, and 150 from India will participate in the summit to be held in the national capital.

How coastal species are living on plastic debris in the ocean

Context
- According to a latest study, Marine animals that usually only live in coastal areas of the western Pacific Ocean have been found living and reproducing on plastic debris on the high seas, in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.
- The study, which is among the first to document the creation of an artificial, floating habitat for coastal marine life in the open ocean.
- The study was published in the peer-reviewed British journal Nature Ecology and Evolution.

- The research was led by Linsey Haram et al. 'Extent and reproduction of coastal species on plastic debris in the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre', Nature Ecology & Evolution.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch

- There are some water currents in the ocean that, driven by winds and the Coriolis force, form loops, these are called gyres.
- The North Pacific Subtropical Gyre (NPSG) is one such, located just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean.
- It consists of the Kuroshio, North Pacific, California, and North Equatorial currents and moves in a clockwise direction.
- These currents flow adjacent to 51 Pacific Rim countries.
- Any trash that enters one of these currents, from any of these countries, could become part of the gyre.

Finding of the study

- The tsunami off the Japanese coast in 2011 contributed to the debris in this garbage patch.
- Until at least 2017, researchers had found debris washing ashore on the West coast of North America containing live lifeforms originally found in Japan.
- From November 2018 to January 2019, researchers collected 105 pieces of plastic debris from the eastern part of the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre (NPSG), the most heavily plastic-polluted ocean gyre on the globe.
- The study reported that 98% of the debris items had invertebrate organisms.
- They also found that pelagic species (species of the open ocean) were present on 94.3% of them and coastal species on 70.5%. That is, organisms found on coasts were getting by on small floating islands of garbage (to humans) out in the Pacific Ocean.

Where were the organisms from

- According to the paper, "nearly all taxa were of Northwest Pacific origin", including Japan.
- The researchers also found that 68% of the coastal taxa and 33% of the pelagic taxa reproduced asexually, while there was evidence of sexual reproduction among the hydroids and the crustaceans, among others.
- They reported a strong positive correlation between reproduction and mobility.

G7 nations to reduce global GHG emissions

Context

- The G7 climate change, energy, and environment ministers wrapped up their two-day meeting in Sapporo with an agreement to drastically expand offshore wind power by 2030.
- G7 nations meeting was reluctant to endorse a 2030 deadline for phasing out coal and leave the door open for continued investment in fossil gas.

Targets

- The G7 countries set the urgent need to reduce global GHG emissions by around 43 per cent by 2030 and 60 per cent by 2035 aligned to 1.5 degrees Celsius and in light of the most recent IPCC report.
- The G7 countries commit to "fully" or "predominantly" decarbonize their power grids no later than 2035 and accelerate the phase-out of domestic unabated coal power.
- The meeting also calls for increasing deprioritization of gas, coal and fossil fuels in a bid to limit global temperatures rises to 1.5 degrees.

Renewable energy

- In a renewable boost, the G7 Climate and Environment Ministers have agreed to a breakthrough acceleration in solar and wind energy signalling a massive boost for renewable energies.
- The member will collectively increase offshore wind capacity of 150 GW by 2030 and solar PV to more than 1TW (terawatt) by 2030.
- The ministers also agreed to accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels in order to achieve net zero in energy systems by 2050.

Promoting Ammonia co-firing

- Japan's attempt to promote ammonia co-firing as a form of clean technology in the power sector domestically and in Asia via the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) was degraded by the rest of the group.
- Japan strongly objected to ending coal and full decarbonisation of the power sector by 2035.

Terror of Narco Network

Context

- Drug trafficking is a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.
- The narcotics trade is assuming dangerous proportions all over the world.
- It is a social problem that harms youth and families and the money it generates is diverted for disruptive activities that have bearings on national security.
- The issue has kept security agencies and law enforcement agencies on the anxious.
- Traditionally India has been seen as sandwiched between the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle.
- **Golden Crescent:** It includes Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan and is a principal global site for opium production and distribution.
- **Golden Triangle:** It includes the regions of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand and is Southeast Asia's main opium-producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and North America.
- Nearly 90 per cent of the world's demand for these drugs is being met from these two regions. India is both a big market and a transit route for other countries.

Illicit trade via maritime route

- The maritime route has also become very active after the recent developments in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The use of drones to supply drugs and weapons across the border in Punjab is a new phenomenon and law enforcement agencies are working out strategies to neutralize this.
- The Indian Coast Guard (ICG), in conjunction with the intelligence agencies, has been making big seizures frequently.
- ICG has developed a good synergy not only with the security agencies but also with the coast guards of Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh.
- Money generated in this illicit trade is phenomenal.
- The illegal money is used for terror activities sponsored by the ISI.

India's vulnerability

- India has surprisingly also become a hot destination for cocaine, the supply of which is controlled by South American drug cartels.
- Recent investigations have revealed the connection of these cartels with NRIs based in Canada, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and several European countries along with local drug lords and gangsters in India.

Use of darknet

- Studies reveal that 62 per cent of the darknet is being used for illicit drug trafficking. Darknet markets are disrupting traditional drug markets because of their anonymity and low risks.
- Cryptocurrency payments and doorstep deliveries, through courier services, have made darknet transactions attractive.
- Concerted and coordinated efforts of all the agencies will be required to tackle this growing threat.
- However, in January-February, the Narcotics Control Bureau busted an organised racket of darknet vendors and arrested several Indian nationals.

Way forward

- The government and law enforcement agencies have taken a number of steps to address these challenges.
- The centre must also strengthen border security measures, increasing surveillance and intelligence gathering, and increasing penalties for drug trafficking and related criminal activities.
- The nexus between terrorists and organised gangs/underworld is a new and disturbing trend, which has to be tackled effectively by security agencies.

17.04.2023

- **G-7 to work for carbon-free electricity by 2035**
- **PSBs set target for selling govt insurance schemes**
- **Centre approved proposal for Sabarimala greenfield airport**
- **On democratizing tiger conservation**
- **Going National**

G-7 to work for carbon-free electricity by 2035

Context

- Towards a progressive effort for carbon-free electricity by 2035, the Energy and environment ministers of the Group of Seven wealthy nations vowed to work to hasten the shift toward cleaner, renewable energy.
- The officials issued a 36-page communique laying out their commitments ahead of a G-7 summit in Hiroshima in May, 2023.
- The participants also agreed to accelerating solar and wind energy investments to produce 1,000 GW by 2030.
- The G-7 nations account for 40% of the world's economic activity and a quarter of global carbon emissions.

Japan to lead

- Japan won endorsements from fellow G-7 countries for its own national strategy emphasizing so-called clean coal, hydrogen and nuclear energy to help ensure its energy security.
- The leaders reiterated the need to urgently reduce carbon emissions and achieve a "predominantly decarbonized power sector" by 2035.
- Japan relies on coal for nearly one-third of its power generation and is also promoting the use of so-called clean coal, using technology to capture carbon emissions, to produce hydrogen — which produces only water when used as fuel.

India's participation and commitments

- India's Environment Minister had also participated in the summit with India being invited as a 'guest', in the context of its presidency of the G-20.

- At the United Nations-Conference of Parties (COP) meeting in Glasgow in 2021, India had objected to language in the agreement to "phase out" and pushed instead for a "phase down" of coal.
- At the COP 26 meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, India pushed for a proposal to phase out all fossil fuel sources, including coal and gas.
- India and China are significantly dependent on coal for electricity, whereas several developed countries, including the United States, Japan, Canada and Europe, are reliant on gas reserves.

Accelerating solar and wind energy investments

- The participants of G-7 countries also agreed to accelerating solar and wind energy investments to produce 1,000 gigawatts (GW) by 2030 from solar power and 150 GW of wind power from off-shore platforms.
- This would be in line with recent reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that repeat the need to ensure that global temperatures not increase by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial levels by the end of the century.

PSBs set target for selling govt insurance schemes

Context

- Public sector banks (PSBs) have set a target for the sale of flagship government insurance schemes Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) in FY24.
- The Ministry of Finance has told banks to encourage customers to buy these policies for multi-years rather than renewing every year.
- Besides, they have also set goals for other financial inclusion schemes like Mudra Yojana and Stand Up India Scheme.

Beneficiaries' data

- There are about 8.3 crore beneficiaries under PMJJBY and 23.9 crore under PMSBY, as of now.
- Since the launch of the schemes in 2015, 15.99 crore enrolment has taken place under PMJJBY, while 33.78 crore under PMSBY as of March 31, 2023.

Rate revision

- In 2022, the finance ministry revised rates from Rs 330 to Rs 436 under PMJJBY and from Rs 12 to Rs 20 for PMSBY, effective June 1, 2022.
- The revision was being undertaken because of the long-standing adverse claims experience by the schemes and to make them economically viable.

Coverage under PMJJBY and PMSBY

- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY):** PMJJBY offers life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh, in case of death due to any reason, to people in the age group of 18-50 years having a bank or post office account, who give consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

- **Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY):** The scheme offers offers insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh for accidental death or total permanent disability and Rs 1 lakh for partial permanent disability to people in the age group of 18-70 years with a bank or post office account, who give consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

Centre approved proposal for Sabarimala greenfield airport

Context

- The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation recently approved the plan to establish the Sabarimala greenfield airport in Erumely of Kottayam district in Kerala.
- It is located on the way to the Sabarimala Temple – one of India's holiest shrines.
- The approval was granted after reviewing the techno-economic feasibility study report presented by the Kerala government.

Scrutiny procedure

- The project has passed a significant technical milestone.
- At present, the social impact assessment (SIA) study for the project is in its final stage, while the environment impact assessment (EIA) is nearing completion.

More about Airport

- The Sabarimala Temple is situated on the Western Ghats in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district.
- The proposed airport will have a 3.5-km-long runway with adequate width to enable the operation of aircraft of all sizes.
- Upon completing land acquisition, the detailed project report will be formulated, followed by the constitution of a Special Purpose Vehicle to execute the project.
- After all the requisite approvals are received, it will take another three or four years to construct the airport.
- The airport after its operation is expected to cater to 16.9 lakh passengers in 2026, which will grow to 32.9 lakh in 2035 and reach 64.2 lakh in 2052.

On democratizing tiger conservation

Context

- Recently, 5th cycle of India's Tiger Census has been released recently to mark the 50th year of Project Tiger.
- As per the latest tiger population census, the number rose by 200 from 2,967 in 2018 to 3,167 in 2022.
- This is around 6.7% higher than the previous estimate of 2018.
- Much of the success of wildlife conservation in India has been attributed to the Wild Life (Protection) Act (WLPA), enacted 50 years ago.
- Project Tiger was able to hold on to tiger populations in most of the geographical regions where they existed at its inception.
- There has been a decline in tiger populations from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Eastern ghats and the Northeastern forests.

Significance of Tiger Conservation

- The tiger was considered an "umbrella species". Saving the tiger meant saving the entire ecosystem.
- Tigers in India occur in a wide range of habitat types, from the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats to the Terai grasslands of the Himalayan foothills; from the tropical dry forests of Rajasthan to the mangroves of the Sundarbans.
- Given the inherent differences in such habitat types, it is inevitable that not all of them will support similar densities of tigers.

Decentralizing conservation

- Conservation in India depends entirely on a network of Protected Areas (PAs).
- This is an exclusive conservation model and suffers from a "sarkaar" complex.
- This is ironic because the innate tolerance of Indians for wildlife is generally credited with the success of conservation.
- The Wild Life Protection Act is a restrictive law, It describes in great detail what you can't do.
- There is no policy framework and incentive for ordinary citizens to aid in conservation — be it for tigers or for any other species.
- In other countries, natural lands are owned or managed by individuals, communities, farmers, ranchers, corporates, charities, and the government.

Need for the hour

- There is a need to have frameworks that allow local communities, citizens, scientists, non-governmental organisations, and businesses to participate meaningfully in conservation.
- Such areas can be co-managed with an inclusive approach which also provides economic benefits for local communities.

Going National

Context

- Recently, the Election Commission of India (EC) revised the list of "recognized" national parties and state parties.
- It recognized the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as a national party, giving it a major boost before 2024, while the Trinamool Congress (TMC), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Communist Party of India (CPI) lost their national party status.
- The country now has six national parties — the BJP, Congress, Bahujan Samaj Party, CPI(M), National People's Party and AAP.

Revoking the status of state party

- Election Commission of India (EC) revoked the state party status granted to Rashtriya Lok Dal in Uttar Pradesh, Bharat Rashtra Samithi in Andhra Pradesh, People's Democratic Alliance (Manipur), Pattali Makkal Katchi (Puducherry), Revolutionary Socialist Party (West Bengal) and Mizoram People's Conference (Mizoram).

Criteria for national party

1. It secures at least 6% of the valid votes polled in any 4 or more states at a Lok Sabha election or to the State Legislative Assembly (Vidhan Sabha election).

2. Additionally, apart from the votes secured as mentioned above, it must also get four Lok Sabha seats from any state or states Or It wins at least 2% seats in the Lok Sabha & these members are elected from at least three distinct States.
3. The party gained recognition as a state party in 4 states.

Recognition of national party

- The process of recognition and derecognition is stipulated under the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, which lays down the criteria for recognition as a national or state party.
- These specific stipulations also find concurrence in the EC's Political Parties and Election Symbols, 2019 Handbook.
- The EC's decision was based on a review of the parties' poll performances in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls and 21 state assembly polls since 2014.
- A party may gain or lose national/state party status from time to time, depending on the fulfilment of these conditions.

Advantages of being a National Party

- The election symbol of the party will remain unchanged across India.
- National parties get free broadcast/telecast times on Akashvani and Doordarshan during the general election.
- A national Party can have a maximum of 40-star campaigners whose travel expenses will not be counted in the accounts of the candidates.
- Recognized "state" and "national" parties need only one proposer to file nomination. They get two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls.
- More importantly, the parties will have the privilege of consultation with the EC in the setting of election dates, and giving inputs in setting electoral rules and regulations.
- Additionally, top slots on the EVM/ballot paper are reserved for the national parties.

15.04.2023

- **NISAR satellite to map Himalayas' seismic zones**
- **NITI Aayog to reimagine its role to fulfil Amrit Kaal vision**
- **PM inaugurated Northeast's first AIIMS**
- **Textile, apparel exports witness decline**
- **A reminder about unfettered constitutional posts**

NISAR satellite to map Himalayas' seismic zones

Context

- In a major boost to advance warning, an upcoming satellite, NISAR will map the most earthquake-prone regions in the Himalayas with unprecedented regularity.

- NISAR is jointly developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the U.S.

Significance

- The data collected from the NISAR will generate can potentially give advance warning of land subsidence, as recently observed in Joshimath, Uttarakhand, as well point to places that are at greatest risk from earthquakes.
- NISAR satellite to accurately mapping earthquake-prone areas to draining out Himalayan glacial lakes that are at the brink of an outburst.
- It will also serve as a valuable tool to give warning of land subsidence.

India's seismic zoning map

- As per India's seismic zoning map, the total area is classified into four seismic zones: V, IV, III & II. Zone V is seismically the most active region, while zone II is the least.
- A large section of the Himalayan region falls in Zone V, with the highest risk of strong earthquakes.

About NISAR satellite

- NASA-ISRO SAR (NISAR) is a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) observatory being jointly developed by NASA and ISRO.
- It will map the entire globe in 12 days and provide spatially and temporally consistent data for understanding changes in Earth's ecosystems, ice mass, vegetation biomass, sea level rise, ground water and natural hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides.
- The NISAR satellite, expected to cost approximately $900 million (with ISRO contributing about one-tenth) will use two frequency bands: the L-band and S-band to image the seismically active Himalayan region.

NITI Aayog to reimagine its role to fulfil Amrit Kaal vision

Context

- The Government's premier think tank NITI Aayog is expected to l hold a 'chintan shivir' (contemplation camp) for reimagining its role to fulfil the "vision" of Amrit Kaal.
- The vision will be for a 25-year period between 2022 and 2047.

Targets for contemplation camp

- According to a source, the contemplation camp (chintan shivir) to be held in May, 2023 will focus broadly on five themes:
  o Viksit Bharat
  o Bank of wisdom
  o Working with states
  o Strengthening networking
  o In-house capacity
- The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and all four members of NITI Aayog have been tasked with each of the five topics.
- Under the theme 'Viksit Bharat', the focus will be on discussing the role of NITI in helping India become a developed nation by 2047.
- The theme, 'Bank of wisdom', which will focus on the role of NITI as a think tank.

About NITI Aayog

- NITI Aayog was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet on 1 January 2015 replacing the erstwhile Planning Commission.
- It is the premier policy think tank of the Government of India, providing directional and policy inputs.

- Apart from designing long-term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant strategic and technical advice to the Centre, States, and Union Territories.
- NITI Aayog acts as platform for the Government of India to bring States to act together in national interest and thereby foster cooperative federalism.

Governing Council of NITI Aaayog
- The Governing Council of NITI Aayog is headed by the Prime Minister.
- The Governing Council headed by the Prime Minister, also comprising the chief ministers of all the states and Lt Governors of Union Territories, is the top decision-making body of the Aayog.

PM inaugurated Northeast's first AIIMS

Context
- Recently, Prime Minister inaugurated the first All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the Northeast in Guwahati, Assam.
- The foundation stone of the AIIMS was laid by PM in May 2017.
- The super-specialty hospital, built at a cost of ₹1,120 crores, has a capacity of 750 beds including 30 AYUSH beds and will admit 100 MBBS students annually.
- The new super-specialty hospital will provide healthcare services to people not only in Assam but also in other northeastern states.
- Additionally, he inaugurated three medical colleges located in Nalbari, Nagaon, and Kokrajhar through virtual means.
- These medical colleges are equipped with 500-bed tertiary care teaching hospitals that have 24 undergraduate departments.

Ayushman cards and other initiatives
- The Prime Minister also launched the distribution of 1.1 crore Ayushman cards to beneficiaries, which will enable them to receive cashless medical treatment benefits up to Rs five lakh.
- Furthermore, the Prime Minister also laid the foundation for the Assam Advanced Healthcare Innovation Institute (AAHII), which is a joint initiative of the state government and IIT Guwahati and is worth Rs 546 crore.

Textile, apparel exports witness decline

Context
- The Indian Textile and Apparel Industry is valued at over US$ 100 billion, employing over 45 million people and accounting for 14% of the country's industrial production. India is a global leader in producing several textile products, such as being the second biggest producer of silk, cotton and Multimode Fibre (MMF).
- It is also a world leader in jute production, accounting for nearly 70% of global production.

Recent export trend
- Textile and apparel exports contracted 14% in 2022-2023 compared with the previous year.
- At $41.3 billion exports in 2021-2022, textiles and apparel constituted 9.79% of total goods exports.
- However, in 2022-2023, the segment recorded exports of $35.5 billion and constituted just 7.95% of goods exports.

Rise in Imports
- While apparel exports grew 1.1% last financial year ($16.1 billion) compared with the previous year ($16.01 billion), textile exports shrank 23.3% to $19.3 billion last fiscal. Meanwhile, imports of yarn, fabrics and made-ups rose 26.7%.

- According to the executive director of the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council, It was an exceptional (bad) year for cotton textiles.
- However, in March 2023, cotton textile exports crossed $1 billion, which is giving hope.

High inventory
- Couple of factors that affected exports this year were the huge inventory that was with the international buyers and the high cotton prices in India last year.
- The inventory with buyers had affected orders to countries such as Bangladesh too. Now, the buyers are resuming sourcing for their needs, he said.
- According to the chairman of the Apparel Export Promotion Council, India had ramped up its global apparel exports in 2022-2023 despite:
  o Russia-Ukraine war
  o Sluggish demand in major garment importing countries
  o Stiff competition by other major apparel manufacturing countries
  o Volatility in raw material prices in the beginning of the year

A reminder about unfettered constitutional posts

Context
- Two recent comments of the Supreme Court of India will have direct bearing on the concept of the independence of various constitutional authorities in India.
- **First,** In a hearing of the 'Sena versus Sena' case, the Court expressed its "serious concern" over the active role being played by Governors in State politics, observing that Governors becoming part of political processes is complicated.
- **Second,** an important step in ensuring the independence of the Election Commission of India, the Court divested the executive of its sole discretion in appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) by forming a committee to suggest suitable names to man these constitutional posts.

Need for independent institutions
- A democracy requires a system of checks and balances to prevent the arbitrary use of power by the elected government of the day.
- India's democracy provides for various constitutional authorities such as the Public Service Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), the ECI, the Finance Commission and the National Commissions for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Backward Classes (BC), etc.
- The Constituent Assembly of India had recognized the need for such independent institutions.
- It is necessary that such constitutional bodies are provided with complete independence to enable them to function without fear or favor and in the larger interests of the nation.

Essential attribute of independence
- An essential attribute of independence is not being influenced by any vested interest and the ability to withstand pressure from the executive.
- While empowering the President of India to appoint all constitutional authorities, the Constitution-makers had kept in mind those institutions whose independence is of paramount importance to the country.

Strengthening the Auditor-General
- In the draft Constitution, the article for appointment of the CAG (Article 124) had provided that 'There shall be an Auditor General who shall be appointed by the President.

- The Constituent Assembly had discussed that "the Auditor-General, like the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, is to be appointed by the President and therefore it is essential that the words 'by warrant under his hand and seal' should be introduced". The Constituent Assembly further discussed that 'The Auditor-General should be always independent of either the legislature or the executive.
- He is the watchdog of country finances, his position must be made so strong that he cannot be influenced by anyone, howsoever great he may be.
- In the recent amendments, the position of the Auditor-General has been made very strong.'

Appointments by President

- For appointments to be made by the President (Articles 75, 76, 280(2), 316 and 324(2)), the Constitution provides for certain conditions to be fulfilled by those who may be considered for such appointments.
- In these articles, the words used are – 'To be appointed by the President', and as such the President must act on the advice of the Prime Minister after ensuring that the requisite qualifications are fulfilled.

Need for a select committee for CAG

- The process of selecting a person to be appointed as the CAG of India should begin by appointing a committee consisting of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Chief Justice of India, and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to shortlist names to be considered for appointment as the CAG of India.
- The panel of three names should be forwarded to the President for him to make the final selection as in Article 148 of the Constitution of India.
- There should not be any dilution of the essential attribute of the independence of India's constitutional bodies.

14.04.2023

- **Dabba trading and its effects on economy**
- **Centre launches Vibrant Villages Programme in Arunachal**
- **Rupee trade to help cut transaction cost**
- **India raises concerns about global economic outlook**
- **Ambedkar model of Statecraft**

Dabba trading and it effect on economy

Context

- Recently, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) issued a string of notices naming entities involved in 'dabba trading'.
- The Exchange cautioned retail investors to not subscribe (or invest) using any of these products offering indicative/assured/guaranteed returns in the stock market as they are prohibited by law.
- It added that the entities are not recognized as authorised members by the exchange.

About dabba trading

- Dabba (box) trading refers to informal trading that takes place outside the purview of the stock exchanges.
- Traders bet on stock price movements without incurring a real transaction to take physical ownership of a particular stock as is done in exchange.
- In simple words, it is gambling centered around stock price movements.

- Dabba trading is a proxy market.
- It is not recognized by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Purpose of dabba trading
- The primary purpose of such trades is to stay outside the purview of the regulatory mechanism, and thus, transactions are facilitated using cash and the mechanism is operated using unrecognized software terminals.
- Other than this, it could also be facilitated using informal or rough records, transaction books, challans, DD receipts, and cash receipts alongside bills/contract notes as proof of trading.

Penal Provision
- 'Dabba trading' is recognized as an offence under Section 23(1) of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act (SCRA), 1956 and upon conviction, can invite imprisonment for a term extending up to 10 years or a fine up to ₹25 crore, or both.

Problem and concerns
- Since there are no proper records of income or gain, it helps dabba traders escape taxation.
- They would not have to pay the Commodity Transaction Tax (CTT) or the Securities Transaction Tax (STT) on their transactions.
- The use of cash also means that they are outside the purview of the formal banking system.
- All of it combined results in a loss to the government exchequer.

Centre launches Vibrant Villages Programme in Arunachal

Context
- The union Home minister recently launched the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' at Kibithoo - a border village in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The government has authorised the Vibrant Villages Programme under the direction of the Prime Minister, with central components totalling Rs. 4800 crores, including Rs 2500 crore specifically for road connectivity for the financial years 2022-23 to 2025-26.

About Vibrant Villages Programme
- This village development scheme was first announced in the 2022 Budget.
- The programmer's targets are to provide comprehensive development of villages on the border with China and improvement in the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.
- The development in these villages will help prevent migration, and thus also boost security.
- The highest priority for village development includes:
  o Road connectivity
  o Drinking water
  o Power including solar and wind energy
  o Mobile and internet access
  o Tourist attractions,
  o Multipurpose facilities
  o Healthcare infrastructure and wellness centres

Objectives of the scheme
- The aims of the scheme are to identify and develop the economic drivers based on local, natural, human and other resources of the border villages.

- Development of growth centres on the "Hub and Spoke Model" through promotion of social entrepreneurship, empowerment of youth and women through skill development is also one of the objectives of VVP.

States come under VVP
- Under this centrally sponsored scheme, 2,967 villages in 46 blocks of 19 districts have
- been identified for comprehensive development. These villages about the border in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- In the first phase, around 662 villages have been identified for priority coverage.

Rupee trade to help cut transaction cost

Context
- The Minister of Commerce and Industry said that international trade in the domestic currency will help reduce transaction costs for the industry and several countries are in discussion with the RBI on this.
- Last year, the RBI and finance ministry asked the top management of banks and representatives of trade bodies to push export and import transactions in the rupee.
- Several banks, including HDFC Bank and UCO Bank, have opened special Vostro accounts as of date to facilitate overseas trade in the rupee.

Rupee vostro accounts
- A Vostro account is defined as an account that a correspondent bank holds on behalf of another bank.
- Vostro is a Latin word that means "your", therefore, a vostro account implies that it is "your account".
- An example of such an account would be the HSBC Vostro account is held by SBI in India.

Advantages of rupee trade
- It will probably reduction in trade deficit of approximately $20 billion on a monthly basis
- Other countries adopting to take up Rupee as a currency for their trade activity
- Strengthening of Rupee in the global market
- Rupee becoming a reserve currency over a period for developing economies for trade

How much will India save with this decision
- According to the latest trade data, India's imports from Russia stood at $2.5 billion in April and May.
- This annualizes to $30 billion, and experts suggest it could increase to as much as $36 billion annually.
- In the best-case scenario, if India pays for all its Russian imports in rupees, it would end up saving $30-36 billion in dollar outflows.
- For context, the RBI recently spent $40 billion in keeping the Rupee stable, and it could spend another $40 billion.

India raises concerns about global economic outlook

Context
- During the Development Committee Meeting of the World Bank-IMF, the Union Finance Minister said that India remains concerned about the global economic outlook and geopolitical environment despite this year's projected growth rate of over six per cent for the country's economy.

Pressure on global economy

- The Union Finance Minister also told global leaders during a meeting here that the current headwinds and strained global supply chains have put a tremendous pressure on the global economy, marked by persistently high interest rates, northbound inflationary pressures, and currency depreciation.
- The recent turbulence in the banking sector in some advanced economies has further increased the challenges to global economic recovery and increased fiscal pressures, especially on EMDEs and LDCs.

Impacts of global supply chains

- The continued disruptions to global supply chains are still straining food, fuel and fertiliser supplies, and endangering food and energy security.
- This is disproportionately impacting the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized, particularly in the developing world.

Need for bold and robust approach

- The Union Finance Minister called upon all shareholders and stakeholders to adopt an innovative, bold and robust approach to transform the WBG into an institution capable of effectively addressing present and future challenges.
- The minister asserted that an optimistic business environment, robust industrial output and rapid vaccination coverage against Covid have provided a strong momentum to the Indian economy, as evidenced by an estimated GDP growth of 9.1 per cent for the previous financial year.

Ambedkar model of Statecraft

Context

- The 132nd birth anniversary of B R Ambedkar is a moment to recognize the moral force behind the immortal spirit.
- B R Ambedkar was more than an individual, he epitomized the spirit of justice.
- His ideas and actions continue to illuminate the present and are a guiding light for the future.
- This anniversary marks a special occasion as it is also the centenary of Ambedkar's work, The Problem of Rupee: Its Origin and its Solution, which paved the foundation of the Reserve Bank of India in 1934.

Significant role played by B R Ambedkar

- He vigorously advocated to nation-building measures in a multidimensional manner.
- His association with the Simon Commission is also significant.
- He represented the cause of the Depressed Classes in all three Round Table conferences
- As labour member in the Viceroy's Council (1942-46) and as chairman of the Constitution's drafting committee, he firmly safeguarded the interests of the people.
- He stressed establishing institutions for a just society.
- In the newly-independent India, a greater acceptance of Ambedkar could have led us further on the path of welfare and justice he propagated.

Recent government initiatives

- Under the Ministry of Culture's auspices, the National Research for Conservation of Cultural Property, Lucknow, has preserved Babasaheb's belongings for posterity.
- A total of 1,358 objects, including the typewriter used to draft the Constitution, have been preserved and will be showcased at the upcoming Dr B R Ambedkar Socio-Economic & Culture Centre, Chicholi Nagpur.

- Stand-Up India, Start-Up India, PM Awas Scheme, BHIM, Mudra, and JAM trinity, among many other schemes, show that the government is leaving no stone unturned to fulfil the assigned targets and ensure saturation-level implementation.
- The Prime Minister's Panch Pran mantra for making a developed India is a reflection of Ambedkar's ideas.
- Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, is an initiative to unearth the courageous stories of unsung heroes who sacrificed their lives for the natio

13.04.2023

- **Composition of proposed Fact Check Unit**
- **Combat aircraft at Cope India 23**
- **Credit system will integrate general and vocational education**
- **Aadhaar for Land**
- **India must board the Online Dispute Resolution bus**

Composition of proposed Fact Check Unit

Context
- As per official confirmation from the government sources, the Fact Check Unit as proposed in the Information Technology Rules, 2021, is likely to have four members.
- The four will include:
  - One representative from the IT Ministry
  - One from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation,
  - A media expert and A legal expert
- Recently, MeitY notified amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2021, creating a regulatory regime that will allow a fact check body known as Fact Check Unit.

Power of FCU
- Further, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) is also learnt to have finalized the broad-level processes that the Fact Check Unit (FCU) will follow, including granting it:
  - Suo motu powers to identify potentially misleading content
  - Corroborating evidence across various ministries and departments
  - Communicating its conclusion to social media platforms

Functioning of FCU
- The unit will uphold the highest levels of professional and ethical standards to ensure trustworthiness and neutrality in the identification of potentially misleading or fake content.
- Content marked as such by the body will have to be taken down by online intermediaries if they wish to retain their 'safe harbor,' which is legal immunity they enjoy against third-party content.

Fake news vs online censorship
- The proposed Fact Check Unit will ask social media platforms to take down content which it sees as fake or misleading.
- Despite the government's assurance that the unit would work in a credible fashion, various stakeholders have serious misgivings and fear it would widen the scope of online censorship.
- The FCU is also expected to have a designated website of its own where it will publish the links to pieces of content that it has identified as fake or misleading.

Appeals mechanism

- The government is also planning to establish an appeals mechanism when it notifies the unit.
- The general understanding so far was that people whose content may have been taken down by platforms after FCU's inputs would have had to approach the courts to appeal the decision with no other avenue of recourse.
- Any person aggrieved by the action of the intermediaries, based on the information identified as fake or false by the FCU, may take the standard route of appeal as per IT Rules.

Combat aircraft at Cope India 23

Context

- The second phase of the ongoing bilateral air exercise, Cope India 23 began on 13 April 2023.
- The first phase of the exercise began on April 20.

Participating aircraft

- **United States Air Force:** The second phase segment of the exercise will witness participation of B1B bombers of the United States Air Force (USAF). F-15 fighter aircraft of the USAF will also join the exercise subsequently.
- **Indian Air Force:** The Indian Air Force (IAF) element will include the Su-30 MKI, Rafale, Tejas and Jaguar fighter aircraft. The exercise will be supported by aerial refuellers, Airborne Warning and Control System and Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft of the IAF. The exercise will conclude on 24 April 2023.
- **Japanese Air Force:** Personnel from the Japanese Air Self Defence Force will also observe the exercise and interact with the two participating air forces.

More about the exercise

- The Cope India exercise will see "air combat and mobility elements" operating from multiple air bases like Kalaikunda, Panagarh, Agra and Hindon.
- The bilateral exercise will "further enhance operational capability and interoperability between the two air forces".
- In the fighter training exercise, India will field the French-origin Rafale, Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKI and indigenous Tejas fighters as well as AEW&C (airborne early-warning and control) planes, C17 Globemaster-III strategic airlift aircraft and IL-78 mid-air refuellers for the exercise.
- The US, on the other hand, will deploy its F-15 Strike Eagle jets.

Aim

- The aim is to participate in diverse fighter engagements and learn from the best practices of various air forces.
- It helps in understanding the latest developments in tactical and operational employment of air power.
- The exercise will see intense air maneuvers aimed at improving interoperability.

Credit system will integrate general and vocational education

Context

- University Grants Commission Chairman said the recently released National Credit Framework (NCrF) would function as a broad enabling framework for all regulatory organisations and universities, including institutions of national importance.
- He said institutions would be free to notify their detailed implementation guidelines with flexibility for catering to their academic requirements.

Vision of NEP

- National Education Policy (NEP) put emphasis on the integration of general academic education and vocational and skill education, which would provide seamless horizontal and vertical mobility between the two streams for lifelong learning.
- It is a meta-framework to seamlessly integrate the credits earned through school education, higher education, and vocational and skill education.

About the Credit System

- Under the system, one credit corresponds to 30 notional learning hours in a year of two semesters.
- "Every semester, a student is required to earn a minimum of 20 credits. A student earns 40 credits in one year corresponding to 1,200 notional learning hours. But students can also earn more than 40 credits in a year.
- The credits earned by a student during the entire schooling period will be 160 credits. Higher education levels start from Level 4.5 and end at Level 8.
- A three-year degree will have levels 4.5, 5, and 5.5 corresponding to the first year, second year, and third year.
- Every year, a student has to earn 40 credits to move to the next level, and by the end of a three-year Bachelor's degree course, the student will have earned 120 credits.

Aadhaar for Land

Context

- In March, there was a national conference on Bhu-Aadhaar.
- The National Conference on Digitizing and Georeferencing India with Bhu-Aadhaar (ULPIN) - Bhumi Samvaad IV on the implementation of Unique Land Parcel Identification Number (ULPIN) or Bhu-Aadhaar is being organized by the Department of Land Resources.

Advantages of the digitization process

- Once the digitization process of land records and registration is complete, it will help mitigate the huge pendency of court cases involving land disputes.
- A study says, 66 per cent of all civil suits in India are related to land or property disputes, and the average pendency of a land acquisition dispute is 20 years."
- The GDP loss to the country's economy is about 1.3 per cent due to projects being stalled over litigation involving land disputes.

Access to Justice Survey

- In 2015, DAKSH began its work on access to justice, when it conducted a survey, the first of its kind in India, to understand access to justice, and the experiences and perceptions of litigants in the subordinate courts of India.
- It has been undertaken across 300 district courts all over India, it maps litigants' perceptions on issues relevant to their experiences with the judicial system.
- The study mentioned is the 2017 "Access to Justice Survey" by Daksh. Just so that we are clear, 66 per cent of all civil suits aren't necessarily related to land or property.
- The Daksh study concluded, "The loss of productivity due to attending court hearings because of wages and business lost comes to 0.48 per cent of the Indian GDP."

Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme

- Land is, of course, a state subject and land rights are a complex bundle of rights and unlocking this unproductive asset has many layers.
- The Digital India Land Record Modernisation Programme (DILRMP), which integrates computerization of land records, strengthening of revenue administration, and updating of land records.

- Once this has been done and the system is cleaned up, every plot/parcel of land (both urban and rural) can get the 14-digit alpha-numeric ULPIN (Unique Land Parcel Identification Number).
- Computerization and strengthening revenue administration is easier for registration and record of rights, including addressing the multilingual issue.

Way forward

- The unique ID assigned to each land parcel based on geo-coordinates of the parcel's vertices will help to resolve multiple disputes of land ownership and identification.
- Standardization at the data and application level would bring in effective integration and interoperability across departments.
- It will also help farmers leverage their land and use it as collateral to borrow money from banks.
- It will help mitigate the pendency of court cases involving land disputes.

India must board the Online Dispute Resolution bus

Context

- Online dispute resolution (ODR) is a form of dispute resolution which uses technology to facilitate the resolution of disputes between parties.
- Recently, at the Delhi Arbitration Weekend, Union Law Minister emphasised the need for institutional arbitration to enhance the ease of doing business.
- India has shown tremendous improvement in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business report, rising from the 142nd rank among 190 countries in 2014 to 63rd in 2019.
- However, India is ranked 163rd, in 'Enforcing Contracts', which is a marginal improvement from the 186th rank in 2015 and 173rd in 2006.

Arbitration and dispute resolution

- The Government of India is committed for speedy resolution of commercial disputes and to make India an international hub of Arbitration.
- To give an impetus to this endeavor, the Department of Legal Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, in January, 2017 constituted a ten Member, High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice B.N.Srikrishna.
- Yet, India is not a preferred arbitration destination, even for disputes between Indian businesses.
- Singapore, which opened its International Arbitration Centre (the Singapore International Arbitration Centre) has emerged as a global arbitration hub and is ranked first in terms of 'Enforcing Contracts'.

Technology as an advantage

- India can still make use of its strengths in technology and emerge a frontrunner in Online dispute resolution (ODR).
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the judiciary led the way with online hearings.
- ODR, which is about resolving disputes in a virtual environment, has several advantages.
- It can reduce the burden on the courts, save time and costs, and provide effective resolutions.
- NITI Aayog has rightly claimed that India is "uniquely positioned to emerge as the epicentre for the developments in ODR" due to the need for an efficient dispute resolution system and advancements in technology.

Steps to consider

- First, incentivize use of ODR by way of legislative measures such as setting ODR as a default dispute resolution tool for categories of disputes arising out of online transactions, fast-tracking enforcement of ODR outcomes, and exempting or reducing stamp duty and court fees.

- Two, solve infrastructural challenges, curb the digital divide, and catalyse ODR's growth by optimizing existing setups such as Aadhaar Kendra to also function as ODR kiosks. Each court can have an ODR cell along with supplemental technical and administrative support.
- Three, government departments should explore ODR as a grievance redress mechanism.
- Proactive use of ODR by government entities will not only increase trust in the process but also ensure that citizens have access to a convenient and cost-effective means of resolving disputes with the government.

Conclusion

- At a time when pendency is eroding the administration of justice, Online Dispute Redressal has the potential to ensure justice for all in India.
- India may have missed the bus to become an arbitration hub, but it can still catch up and overtake them all online.

12.04.2023

- **Data Protection Bill in Monsoon Session**
- **Stands still between Tamil Nadu & Centre over online gaming**
- **6 GHz band spectrum for Wi-Fi to broadband penetration**
- **Despite El Nino fears, IMD predicts normal monsoon**
- **Regulating the Regulators**

Data Protection Bill in Monsoon Session

Context

- The Centre recently informed the Supreme Court that the government will table the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill in the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament in July.
- During the hearing in pleas challenging the latest privacy policy of WhatsApp, the Attorney General for India, informed a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court that the new Data Protection Bill is ready.

Background

- The Constitution bench of SC was hearing pleas filed by two students challenging WhatsApp's 2021 Privacy Policy to share users' data with parent company Facebook and others as a violation of their privacy and free speech.
- In 2022, the apex court had asked the government either place before the Parliament, the Bill, which addresses the privacy concerns of users and standards to be followed by WhatsApp or it will begin the final hearing in the case.

Purpose of the bill

- The new Bill, if passed by Parliament, will replace the current Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, which was notified in 2011.
- The Supreme Court had recognised privacy as a fundamental right in 2017 and highlighted the need to protect online personal data from prying eyes.
- 'Data' under the new Bill is defined as a "representation of information, facts, concepts, opinions or instructions in a manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing by humans or by automated means".

Definition under the bill

- The Bill separately defines **data fiduciary** as persons who determined the purpose and means of processing of personal data.
- **Data principal** as the individual to whom the personal data related to
- **Data processor** as any person who processes personal data on behalf of a data fiduciary.

Withdrawal Old Data Protection Bill

- Earlier, the Centre had said Indian users cannot be discriminated against by other users of WhatsApp and informed the apex court that the government has already withdrawn the old Data Protection Bill and a new Bill will be introduced in the Parliament.
- The plea had challenged the contract entered between the two companies to provide access to calls, photographs, texts, videos and documents shared by users is a violation of their privacy and free speech.

Stands still between Tamil Nadu & Centre over online gaming

Context

- The ongoing battle between the Centre's regulatory measures and the Tamil Nadu government's total ban on online gambling has sparked an intense debate, exposing the intricate network of economic potential, addiction, and cybercrime characterising India's booming online gaming sector.
- The Tamil Nadu government prohibited internet gambling earlier this week, defying the Centre's more measured approach.
- While the online gaming industry offers immense opportunities for economic growth, it also raises significant social and psychological concerns.

Tamil Nadu's law on online gambling

- The Bill prohibits online gambling and online games of chance played for money or other stakes.
- While it specifically names Rummy and Poker as games of chance, it can go much wider in scope.
- It also establishes the Tamil Nadu Online Gaming Authority and empowers it to regulate online gaming companies.
- The state's proposed gaming authority will identify games of chance and recommend them to be included in the Schedule of prohibited games.
- The state's Governor gave his assent to the Bill hours after the legislative assembly passed a resolution against him for indefinitely withholding assent to several bills.

Online gaming: Centre vs Tamil Nadu

- Aside from the state assembly's resolution against the Governor, the timing of the development is also particularly significant given that his assent to the Bill comes just days after the Centre notified amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2021, which brought in rules for regulating online real money games.
- In a meeting with MeitY a day after the amended IT Rules were notified, online gaming companies had raised concerns about state governments passing competing legislations which could potentially go against norms prescribed under Centre's rules. MeitY believes that while gambling is a state subject, activities that occur on the Internet – including online gambling and gaming – fall exclusively in its domain to regulate.

Centre's norms for online gaming

- Recently MeitY notified amendments to the Information Technology Rules, 2021 clearing regulations for the online gaming sector.
- The fresh changes require the setting up of multiple self-regulatory bodies (SRBs) whose approval will be required for online games with a monetary element.
- Games that involve wagering on outcomes of events will not be allowed.

- Online gaming companies will also have to complete a KYC procedure for users when they first make a deposit in their accounts to play a game.
- KYC norms laid down by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for its regulated entities will have to be followed by them.

6 GHz band spectrum for Wi-Fi to broadband penetration

Context
- The policy think tank Broadband India Forum (BIF) said the spectrum in the 6 GHz band is crucial for Wi-Fi and the same is required to drive broadband penetration across the country.
- The comments from the think tank come at a time when telcos are continuously lobbying the government to allocate the 6 GHz spectrum for mobile networks so that they can provide better 5G services.

About 6 GHz band
- 6 GHz 5G spectrum can play a central role in sustainable social and industrial development.
- The 6 GHz band includes a 1200 MHz spectrum in the range of 5.9-7.1 GHz.
- According to National Frequency Allocation Plan 2022, the spectrum in the band is allocated for fixed satellite and mobile services.

PM-WANI scheme
- PM WANI (Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) is a scheme meant to increase Wi-fi access throughout the country.
- Given that public Wi-Fi is the way to accelerate broadband penetration across the country, liberalisation of public Wi-Fi through the PM-WANI scheme is one of the important steps to help achieve the government of India's vision of Digital India and to attain the objectives of providing 'Broadband for all',".

Criteria of allocating the spectrum
- Key arguments by other experts on allocating the spectrum for Wi-Fi include
- Indoor coverage of the internet is better than mobile networks
- Boost innovations including artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality, etc.

Committee on 6 GHz spectrum
- Currently, the government has formed a committee to open the 6 GHz spectrum and look into the allocation of band.
- In the vision document of 6G, the government-appointed task force recommended that the lower part of the 6 GHz band be reserved and at least 4.32 GHz in the V band be delicensed.

Despite El Nino fears, IMD predicts normal monsoon

Context
- Despite concerns over the likely impact of El Nino, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted a normal monsoon for the country.
- The rainfall is likely to be 96% of the long-period average (LPA) of 87 cm for the period June to September.
- The forecast carries a model error of +/-5%.
- The IMD said the conditions over the equatorial Pacific Ocean remain neutral, and El Nino is likely to develop during the monsoon season.
- However, it's impact could be seen on the monsoon only during the second-half, post July.

Rainfall Forecast

- The forecast indicates the rainfall could be normal in the southern peninsula — Karnataka, Kerala, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu as well as in East Central India including Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha, and Jammu & Kashmir in the north.
- However, there is a higher probability of below normal rains over parts of Northwest India mainly states of Haryana, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan, as well as parts of Maharashtra and Gujarat, and Telangana.

Negative impact of El Nino

- According to the department, this year, the negative impact of El Nino is expected to be countered with the positive impact of two other meteorological conditions — a Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and reduced snow cover over the Northern Hemisphere this time.
- Since 2019, India has been under the influence of the converse La Nina and therefore getting substantial rainfall.

Regulating the Regulators

Context

- The establishment of statutory regulators constitutes one of the most significant governance reforms of the last century.
- There is a global surge in the popularity of such agencies as an alternate mode of governance.
- To deliver on this potential, regulators need to be well governed.
- Governance of these agencies centers around their governing boards (GB).

Five design features of GB

- Five design features relating to governing boards (GB) can significantly improve the governance of regulators.

- **First,** the law typically creates a board governed by a board, an authority by an authority, a council by a council, a commission by a commission, etc.
- For example, the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 establishes a board, namely, the Securities and Exchange Board of India.
- The general superintendence, direction, and management of the affairs of this board vests in a board of members.
- **Second,** it is normally difficult for an entity to take decisions about itself or its working with complete objectivity or hold itself accountable for its conduct or performance.
- Conceptually, the governing boards (GB) are primary responsibility is to act as a hands-on principal to hold the management accountable.
- **Third,** the government typically has a few official nominees on the governing boards (GB) of regulators.
- The views of such nominees, being the representatives of the minister who is accountable to the legislature, carry disproportionately more weight in the decision-making process.
- **Fourth,** the independence of a regulator critically rests on the professional strength of the leaders.
- An individual, who has the demonstrated capability, would not join a regulator for a 3-5 years tenure.
- If the regulators are to maintain true independence, they must attract younger individuals, who have demonstrated their capability in the relevant field, for a reasonable period of service.
- **Fifth,** a regulator in India typically performs three functions, namely, quasi-legislative, executive, and quasi-judicial.
- The statute should envisage a separate organizational unit responsible for each of the distinct types of functions and powers.

Conclusion

- The governing boards (GB) should be enabled to delegate executive and administrative tasks to different functionaries in the organisation, who would discharge the duties and functions on behalf of the regulator, in the manner prescribed.
- Such delegation would enhance the organizational capacity to ensure timely service delivery as well as promote greater accountability.

11.04.2023

- **Recent weather events affected wheat crop**
- **FM to attend IMF, World Bank meetings**
- **CAG flags need for transparent accounting by States**
- **Zojila tunnel development project**
- **An Important Forum**

Recent weather events affected wheat crop

Context

- The unusual rise in mercury in February this year, followed by an untimely spell of widespread rain accompanied by winds and hails during in the month of March have left wheat-growing farmers worried as they anticipate a drop in yield (productivity), output (production) and quality.
- The most affected state includes Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Gujarat.

Impact of rain on wheat crop

- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), widespread rains along with stormy winds between 40-50 kilometers per hour lashed several parts of the major wheat-growing States in the country during March, under the influence of consecutive western disturbances.
- Rain spells accompanied by winds are not considered to be a good sign for the crop's health if they are close to the ripening and harvesting stage.
- Wheat, a key rabi (winter) crop is sown between late October till December; it nears the ripening stage in the month of mid-March, and harvesting of the early sown varieties usually commences by the end of March itself.
- The IMD data suggests that between March 1 and April 9, large excess rains (40% more rain than normal) were received in several States.

How much output would be affected

- Agri watch, an agri-commodity research firm, in its latest report has stated that owing to the recent untimely rains, the country's wheat production in the agriculture year 2022-23 is likely to be 102.9 MT which is less than the Union government's estimate of 112 MT.

Agri-experts opinion

- A sizable section of farmers assert that the inclement weather has adversely damaged the standing wheat crop.
- Moreover, if the country's wheat production drops below the government estimate it could lead to a hike in prices of wheat and wheat-based products in the domestic market.
- The wheat price for the consumer in the domestic market should hardly be impacted as the government's priority would be to replenish its foodgrain stock.

FM to attend IMF, World Bank meetings

Context

- Union Finance Minister of India is on the visit to Washington DC for the World Bank-IMF spring meetings, as well as for other bilateral and multilateral interactions.
- High on the Minister's agenda is the second G-20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting, which India is hosting as part of its year-long presidency of the group.
- The Minister and RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das will co-chair the FMCBG meet.
- The Finance Minister will also hold high-level talks with her American counterpart.
- 3rd G20 FMCBG meeting to be held in Gandhinagar, India, in July 2023.
- The 3rd G20 FMCBG meeting to be held in Gandhinagar, India, in July 2023.

Three sessions of meeting

- This week's G-20 meeting will have three sessions:
  - Global Economy and International Financial Architecture
  - Sustainable Finance, Financial Sector and Financial Inclusion
  - International Taxation

Core interests

- Food and energy security
- Managing global debt vulnerabilities
- Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)
- Mobilizing finance for climate action
- Financial inclusion, etc.
- However, the Russia-Ukraine war continues to remain a pressing issue and it is likely to cast its shadow on many of this week's meetings in Washington.

CAG flags need for transparent accounting by States

Context

- During the Annual Accountant General's Conclave, the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) of India said that States must take measures to maintain proper accounting of subsidies, reduce fiscal deficits, remove revenue deficits and keep outstanding debts at an acceptable level.

Caution for states

- The Comptroller & Auditor General of India said States should meet their capital expenditure, including loans and advances, from their own sources of revenue, or at least confine net debt to capital expenditure.
- He noted that subsidies is very important to help the underprivileged, but it is essential to transparently account for such subsidies.
- There is need to distinguish between justifiable subsidies from freebies, which are not fiscally responsible.

Changes in state finances

- The Comptroller & Auditor General of India highlighted that state finances have undergone several changes in recent years as a result of implementation of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, computerization of treasuries and implementation of the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS).
- He said the implementation of the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) by the Central Government has wide implications for state accounting as far as sanctions of state grants, funds transfer and monitoring are concerned.

Zojila Tunnel development project

Context
- The Union Minister for Transport and Roadways Minister recently inspected the strategically important Zojila Tunnel that connects the Kashmir Valley with the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Efforts are being made to open the tunnel for traffic ahead of its deadline set for 2026.
- Once completed, the tunnel, projected as Asia's longest, would reduce the travel time from 3 hours to 15 minutes with avalanche-free travel on the Srinagar-Leh section of NH1.

Long desired project
- The importance of connecting Kashmir and Ladakh was strongly felt during the Kargil war between India and Pakistan.
- The decision to speed up work comes at a time when troops of India and China military confict was witnessed in Ladakh since the Galwan incident in 2020.
- India has matched its build-up to the Chinese along the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh.

About Zojila Pass
- Zoji La Pass is a high mountain pass in the Himalayas.
- It is in the Indian Union Territory of Ladakh, Kargil district, Kashmir.
- It provides a vital link between Ladakh and the Kashmir Valley.
- An all-weather Zoji-la Tunnel is under construction to mitigate seasonal road blockages due to heavy snowfall.

ZojiLa Tunnel
- Zoji La Tunnel is 13.14-km long road tunnel under Zoji La pass in NH-1 in the Himalayas.
- The tunnel will connect Srinagar and Leh through Dras and Kargil.
- The passage will begin at Sonmarg in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and terminate at Minamarg, in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Zojila tunnel will be India's longest road tunnel and Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel.
- An approach road will be added to the head of the tunnel, connecting it with the end of the Z-Morh tunnel, which leads to Kargil.

An Important Forum

Context
- The idea of moving towards GST was first mooted by the then Union Finance Minister in his Budget speech for 2006-07.
- The historic introduction of a unified, one-nation, one Goods and Services Tax was through a complex web of central and state laws.
- Further, the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017 also created a GST Tribunal.
- It was unfortunate that the composition and structure of this tribunal were contrary to settled principles laid down by several Supreme Court decisions.

Madras High Court on GST tribunal
- GST Tribunal was held to be unconstitutional by the Madras High Court in Revenue Bar Association v Union of India (2019).
- No appeal was filed by the Union of India for a considerable time, presumably because the statutory provisions were patently unconstitutional.
- The result was that there has been no GST Tribunal for the last five years.

Validity of tribunal

- Tribunals are part of the justice delivery system and are created as specialised fora to reduce the workload of courts.
- But the new provisions creating a GST Tribunal were inserted on the last day and the amended Finance Bill, 2023 was passed without any discussion or debate as the proceedings were disrupted.
- The new tribunal is equally unconstitutional and several provisions are in the teeth of binding precedents laid down by the Supreme Court in no less than seven cases: Sampath Kumar (1987), L Chandrakumar (1997) and Madras Bar Association (2010, 2014, 2015, 2020, 2021). It is regrettable that laws continue to be drafted and enacted in deliberate contravention of Supreme Court judgments.

Prohibition for lawyers

- The new GST Tribunal disqualifies lawyers from becoming judicial members when such exclusion was even recently held to be impermissible in the context of the Consumer Forum.
- Every other tribunal permits advocates to become judicial members and there is no reason to exclude them from this important all-India tribunal.
- It is illogical to select a district judge who has never dealt with any tax case but refuse to consider an advocate who has practised tax law.

Composition and selection of members

- The GST Tribunal will have one Principal Bench at New Delhi which consists of the president, a judicial member, a technical member (Centre) and a technical member (State). Similarly, the state benches will also have four-member tribunals consisting of two judicial members and two technical members.
- There is no logic in having one technical member for the states and another for the Centre when the Centre and state GST laws are identical.
- It would have been far better if each bench had just two members — one judicial and one technical.
- The search-cum-selection committee of GST Tribunal has to recommend two names for each post and the central government will choose one of them.
- A similar provision in the Tribunal Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021 was struck down by the Supreme Court.
- When the search committee is headed by a Supreme Court judge and senior secretaries are on the committee, why should not the selection by the committee be binding on the central government?

SC on tenure of Tribunal

- From 1985, the Supreme Court has held that tribunal members should have a minimum tenure of five years with an automatic renewal for another term unless there are compelling reasons to discontinue their services.
- Despite this salutary rule, the 2017 amendment introduced a term of three years.
- When this was again held illegal, the term was increased to four years with an option for renewal for another two years, refusing to accept the five-year norm.

Way forward

- There is a serious need to change the manner in which our tribunals are created.
- The formation of the GST Tribunal should have been done by a proper bill and referred to a Parliamentary Committee.
- The present provisions are liable to be challenged, triggering a fresh round of litigation.
- It is also worthwhile to consider whether it is time to have an Indian Tribunal Service that will attract professional talent and domain expertise.

10.04.2023

- **India's tiger population tops 3,000**
- **Centre plans revamp of livestock insurance scheme**
- **India to bridge language gap with neighbours**
- **Old approach, new pact**
- **Directing AI for better and smarter legislation**

India's tiger population tops 3,000

Context
- According to the latest census, India's tiger population has climbed to 3,167 in 2022.
- The census was released by Prime Minister at an event to mark the International Big Cat Alliance conference and the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger.
- There were 2,967 tigers recorded in 2018, and 2,226 in 2014.
- India accounts for 70 per cent of the world's tigers.
- India has only 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, it contributes about "8 per cent of the world's known global [species] diversity".

Tiger population
- The tiger population has grown the most in the Shivalik hills and the Gangetic flood plains, followed by central India, the northeastern hills, the Brahmaputra flood plains, and the Sundarbans.
- There was a decline in the Western Ghats numbers, though "major populations" were said to be stable.
- The tiger numbers are estimated by adding animals caught in camera traps, and those that may not have been captured in this way.
- The latter is estimated by statistical techniques.

International Big Cats Alliance
- In July 2019, the Prime Minister of India called for an Alliance of Global Leaders to obliterate demand and firmly curb poaching and illegal wildlife trade in Asia.
- Taking the message, the International Big Cats Alliance is being launched which will focus on the protection and conservation of seven major big cats of the world, viz. Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Puma, Jaguar and Cheetah.
- India has committed to providing funding of 100 million USD over 5 years to support the IBCA.
- The alliance will create knowledge e-portal, laws, and partnerships, and will work to improve eco-tourism and financial capacity.
- The main objective of the alliance is to rehabilitate the big cats.

Centre plans revamp of livestock insurance scheme

Context
- The Centre is considering a comprehensive livestock insurance scheme modelled on the Prime Minister's Fasal Bima Yojana.
- The decision was taken after the concerns were raised by Parliamentary Standing Committee for zero insurance coverage of livestock in 2022-23.
- At present, less than 1% of the country's cattle population is insured.

Proposal under the scheme
- There are initial proposals to waive off premiums for cattle rearers from Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.

- At present, less than 1% of the country's cattle is insured and the average yearly premium is 4.5% of the insured amount.
- The Animal Husbandry Ministry recently held a meeting with various insurance companies and other stakeholders on the matter.

Revamped livestock insurance
- Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying notes that government will introduce new comprehensive livestock insurance which will replace the present Livestock Insurance Scheme.
- Presently, the scheme is functional in 100 districts of the country.
- The Centrally sponsored scheme is being managed by the respective State Livestock Development Boards.
- The centre has held meeting with insurance companies and stressed the importance of expanding the ambit of the scheme and decreasing the premium paid by the farmers.

Death due to disease
- During the lumpy skin disease pandemic, about two lakh cattle died.
- Farmers demanded compensation from the government for the loss.
- Hence, the Centre's attempt is to keep the premium low and ensure maximum coverage of livestock.
- Several farmers' organisations had also demanded comprehensive livestock and crop insurance in the background of pandemics such as lumpy skin disease.

India to bridge language gap with neighbors

Context
- With the aim to expand its cultural footprint in nations with which it has historical ties, including those in its immediate neighborhood, India is planning to create a pool of experts in languages spoken in countries such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Indonesia to facilitate better people-to-people exchanges.

Language Friendship Bridge program
- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has envisaged a special project called 'The Language Friendship Bridge', which plans to train five to 10 people in the official languages of each of these countries.
- As of now, the ICCR has zeroed in on 10 languages: Kazakh, Uzbek, Bhutanese, Ghoti (spoken in Tibet), Burmese, Khmer (spoken in Cambodia), Thai, Sinhalese and Bahasa (spoken in both Indonesia and Malaysia).

Focus shift
- In India, the focus till now has been on learning European languages such as Spanish, French and German, along with the languages of major Asian economies such as China and Japan.
- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) plans to incorporate more languages from neighborhood countries.
- The discussion with universities and institutes as well as experts offering foreign language courses in the country on the modalities of implementing the project.
- Among those being consulted are the foreign language departments at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi University, Hyderabad's English and Foreign Languages University, Banaras Hindu University, and Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwa Vidyalaya at Wardha.

Growing demand
- Experts also feel that the ICCR's list of languages needs to be expanded, with India seeing a boom in cultural and economic ties with other neighbouring countries as well.

- Many people are visiting India for treatment from countries like Turkey, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Maldives and there is a need for a pool of translators and interpreters for facilitating their visits as well.

Old approach, new pact

Context

- Free trade agreement (FTA) is a pact between two or more nations to reduce barriers to imports and exports among them.
- In the recent times India had held free trade agreement (FTA) negotiating with several countries.
- In the last few years, India has signed FTAs with Mauritius and the UAE and an interim one with Australia.

Essence of FTAs

- The FTAs entails instrument of international law to be held accountable for their sovereign conduct on trade and investment.
- The FTAs include binding rules on both, international trade liberalisation, and the protection of foreign investment from arbitrary state conduct.
- Additionally, these FTAs give foreign investors the guarantee to use international treaty arbitration to settle disputes with states.

FTA on track

- India is currently negotiating FTAs with the UK, European Union, Canada, and Israel.
- FTAs create binding international rules on trade and investment and the objective is to build global value chains, and international economic relations with partner countries.
- India followed this logic in signing several FTAs in the 2000s with countries like Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, and Japan.

Policy shift

- India's current FTA policy seems to be a break from the past.
- As part of its FTA 2.0 approach, India is decoupling international trade law from international investment law (IIL).
- The FTAs with Mauritius, UAE, and Australia contain detailed international rules on trade, but rules on foreign investment protection are missing.
- The absence of investment protection in these FTAs is even more striking because India has unilaterally terminated its bilateral investment treaty (BIT).
- BITs are conventional international law instruments that protect foreign investment with Mauritius and Australia.

Free trade agreement 2.0

- In FTA 2.0, India is following an approach known as as the "domestication of international investment law"
- The approach give primacy to their domestic laws in safeguarding foreign investment by doing two things.
- First, domestically legislating investment protection standards that are typically part of international investment law.
- Second, providing a dispute resolution mechanism at the municipal level instead of treaty arbitration.
- South Africa is a good example of this kind of domestication.
- In 2015, after terminating its BITs, South Africa enacted a new law, "Protection of Investments Act", to replace investment treaties as the key instrument for protecting foreign investment.

Conclusion

- The domestication or de-legalisation of international investment law takes India back to the pre-1991 era when India was timid about the international legalisation of economic relations, with one difference.
- The decoupling of international trade law from international investment law is not in sync with the approaches of India's current and potential FTA partner countries.

Directing AI for better and smarter legislation

Context

- Artificial intelligence is the lucrative domain of science and technology to the mankind and which has revolutionised the modern world.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is attracting the attention of entrepreneurs, political leaders, and policymakers the world over.
- Most mature democracies are now using AI tools for better pieces of legislation and parliamentary procedures.
- AI tools also empower legislators to make informed decisions by having access to insights into citizen grievances, media opinions, and voices of citizen-centric associations.

Assisting legislators

- Compared to western democratic nations, in India, parliamentarians manage constituencies with a huge population.
- AI can analyse citizens' grievances and social media responses, and flag issues and priorities that need immediate attention.
- It can also assist parliamentarians in seeking citizen inputs for public consultation of laws and preparing a manifesto.

Global Practice

- The House of Representatives in the United States has introduced an AI tool to automate the process of analysing differences between Bills, amendments and current laws.
- The Netherlands House of Representatives, for instance, has implemented the "Speech2Write" system which converts voice to text and also "translates" voice into written reports.
- Japan's AI tool assists in the preparation of responses for its legislature and also helps in the automatic selection of relevant highlights in parliamentary debates.
- Brazil has developed an AI system called Ulysses which supports transparency and citizen participation.
- The good news is that India is also innovating and working towards making parliamentary activities digital such as the 'One Nation, One Application' and the National e-Vidhan (NeVA) portal.

Challenges

- For AI to work in India, the utmost necessity is to codify laws.
- The challenges with current laws are they are opaque, complex and there is a huge translation gap between law-making, law-implementing and law-interpreting organisations.
- There is a need to make laws machine-consumable with a central law engine, which can be a single source of truth for all acts, subordinate pieces of legislation, gazettes, compliances, and regulations.

Way forward

- AI can also simulate the potential effects of laws.
- The technology can uncover potential outcomes of a policy.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has given a strong thrust to the Digital India initiative and a digitisation of services.

- This momentum needs to be kept up and utilised in the field of law, policy-making, and parliamentary activities, harnessing the power of AI to get best of it.

08.04.2023

- **Centre nod biogas plants for urban areas**
- **MHA to provide financial assistance to prison inmates**
- **Drugmakers get time to join 'Track and Trace' system**
- **Panel apprised of collusive threat from China and Pakistan**
- **Some advice to India on the IFA negotiations**

Centre nod biogas plants for urban areas

Context
- The Union Budget 2023-24 sought the setting up of 500 biogas plants across the country under the Gobardhan scheme.
- Of these, 75 plants were to be set up in urban areas.

Implementation of the scheme
- According to Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry officials, 42 plants had been approved and the remaining proposals would be cleared soon.
- The Budget announcement of setting up 75 bio methanation plants, which convert wet waste into biogas.
- Most of these plants were in Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Punjab.

About GOBARDHAN scheme
- GOBARDHAN scheme aims to ensure cleanliness in villages by converting bio-waste including cattle waste, kitchen leftovers, crop residue and market waste to improve the lives of villagers.
- Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation has launched the GOBAR (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources) - DHAN scheme.
- The scheme is being implemented as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
- The scheme aims to positively impact village cleanliness and generate wealth and energy from cattle and organic waste.
- The scheme also aims at creating new rural livelihood opportunities and enhancing income for farmers and other rural people.

Benefits of GOBARDHAN scheme
- Effective biodegradable waste management.
- Reduction of GHG emissions.
- Reduction in import of crude oil.
- Employment opportunities for the local community.
- Boosting entrepreneurship.
- Additional income for farmers/ local village community from organic waste.
- Promotion of organic farming.

MHA to provide financial assistance to prison inmates

Context

- To reduce the burden on prisons, the Centre launched a special scheme to provide financial support to poor people who are struggling in prison because they cannot pay fines or bail.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) recently announced that it would provide States with financial support to help underprivileged prisoners who are unable to get bail or secure release from prisons due to financial hardship.

Support for Poor Prisoners Scheme
- The scheme envisages the provision of required financial support to poor persons who are in prisons and unable to afford the penalty or the bail amount.
- The scheme involves monetary aid to poor inmates who cannot afford the penalty or the bail amount
- To further strengthen the process, technology-driven solutions will be put in place to ensure that benefits reach the poor prisoners.
- The E-prisons platform is being reinforced; the District Legal Services Authority system is being strengthened.

Prisons Statistics
- According to the Prisons Statistics of India Report, 2021, over 5.54 lakh people were lodged in prison and the total capacity of the jails in India was about 4.25 lakh, an occupancy rate of 130%.

Other initiatives by Centre
- The Ministry of Home Affairs has been taking various steps to address the issue of growing number of undertrials in prisons from time to time.
- These include insertion of Section 436A in the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and insertion of a new chapter XXIA (Plea Bargaining) in the CrPC.
- Free legal aid is provided to poor prisoners through Legal Services Authorities at various levels.
- The MHA has also been providing financial support to the State Governments for enhancing and modernizing the security infrastructure in prisons.
- The MHA has been sharing important guidelines with State Governments through various advisories issued from time to time.

Drugmakers get time to join 'Track and Trace' system

Context
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has extended the implementation of track and trace system for export of pharmaceuticals with respect to maintaining the parent-child relationship in packaging levels and it's uploading on the Central portal till April 1, 2023, for both non-SSI (Small Scale Industry) and SSI-manufactured drugs.

About track & trace system
- A track & trace system is a software-based solution to track vehicles, loading units, shipments or products throughout the entire supply chain, from supplier to consumer.

Relief for drug exporters
- The decision by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has provided sigh of relief to drug exporters especially pharma MSMEs reeling under covid-19 pandemic aftershock.
- Pharma MSMEs are not able to create requisite infrastructure involving huge funds to implement the trace and track system.
- There has been a significant decline in the capital base since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.
- The drug exporters had sought deferment of its implementation.

Procedure for Drug Export

- The manufacturers and exporters are required to barcode their products using GS1 standards along with the batch number, and expiry date to facilitate authentication of exported drugs.
- They are also required to upload data on barcodes on secondary and tertiary packaging of exported drugs on the iVEDA portal which is set to replace Drugs Authentication and Verification Application (DAVA) portal.
- The DAVA portal had hit technical glitches hampering manufacturers and exporters from uploading data on barcodes on secondary and tertiary packs of drugs meant for export.

Panel apprised of collusive threat from China and Pakistan

Context
- Indian Navy representative has recently informed that Parliamentary standing committee on defence that the Indian Navy currently has a strength of around 131 ships and submarines.
- While Indian Navy has set a target to have a 200-ship Navy, given the current trajectory, it is likely to have 155-160 ships very soon.

Indian Navy's capacity
- The Indian Navy currently has 143 aircraft and 130 helicopters.
- In addition, 43 ships and submarines are under construction at various shipyards, while initial approval exists for the indigenous construction of 51 ships, six submarines and 111 Naval Utility Helicopters.

Concern over China and Pakistan advancement
- The Chinese Navy has grown from having 250 ships to over 350 in just over a decade.
- Pakistan's maritime force is projected to expand its Navy capacity by 50% with help from China.
- China currently holds 355 ships and is the world's largest Navy in terms of numbers.
- The Chinese Navy is expected to have a strength of about 555 ships.
- The Parliamentary standing committee on Defence has recommended that Ministry of Defence should assess the threat perception which has increased many folds in view of hostile nations in the neighborhood and the increase in trade in the Indian Ocean Region.

Some advice to India on the IFA negotiations

Context
- With over 100 World Trade Organization (WTO) members pushing to wrap up negotiations for an Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, what would the actual accord mean for investment governance and sustainable development, and what thorny issues remain before a mid-year deadline.
- India is not included in this proposal.

Background
- Since September 2020, a group of WTO members has been negotiating a new agreement on investment facilitation disciplines, following nearly 3 years of preparatory work.
- The negotiations for this Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IFDA) have since advanced at a rapid pace.
- Although the World Trade Organization (WTO) is in a moribund condition, there is prolific activity taking place in one area of rule-making: investment facilitation agreement (IFA).

Legal obligations
- The legal obligations inter alia will require states to augment regulatory transparency and predictability of investment measures.

- This agreement will be very different from investment protection agreements such as bilateral investment treaties (BITs) that allow foreign investors to bring claims against the host state for alleged treaty breaches.
- This is known as investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS).

About investor-state dispute settlement

- Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) or investment court system (ICS) is a system through which countries can be sued by foreign investors for certain state actions affecting foreign direct investment (FDI). This system most often takes the form of international arbitration between a foreign investor and the nation receiving the FDI.

Fear of ISDS

- One of the reasons India is not a party to investment facilitation agreement (IFA) negotiations is the apprehension that foreign investors could use a future IFA to bring claims under the existing BITs.
- Bilateral investment treaties (BITs) are international agreements establishing the terms and conditions for private investment by nationals and companies of one country to another country.
- Foreign investors may use the most favoured nation (MFN) provision in bilateral investment treaties (BITs) to borrow or import.
- Second, it is doubtful that an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) tribunal will accept the argument that mere non-compliance with investment facilitation agreement (IFA) breaches an investor's legitimate expectations.
- Third, most new investment treaties avoid 'umbrella clauses' altogether.
- Moreover, the investment facilitation agreement (IFA) can be firewalled from BITs.

Reforming BITs

- The investment facilitation agreement (IFA) cannot bind an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) tribunal, which will hear a claim brought by an investor under bilateral investment treaties (BITs).
- For the ISDS tribunal, the IFA is just another international law instrument that must be interpreted and applied in accordance with the context of the relevant bilateral investment treaties (BITs).

Way forward

- The possibility of a strong investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) tribunal interpreting provisions broadly can never be ruled out.
- India should not be opposed to joining the investment facilitation agreement negotiations for fear of investor-state dispute settlement claims.

07.04.2023

- **Centre Amends IT Rules 2021 To Regulate Online Gaming**
- **Pre-draft of National Curriculum Framework for schools**
- **Cabinet nod for Space Policy to increase private participation**
- **FTP opens doors for some second-hand goods imports**
- **A Pause in the Cycle**

Centre Amends IT Rules 2021 To Regulate Online Gaming

Context

- The Central Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 aiming to regulate online gaming.
- The new rules for online gaming prohibit any game that involves betting and wagering, and entail a framework of multiple self-regulatory organisations (SROs).
- Exercising power under Section 87(1), Section 87(2)(z) and Section 87(2) of the Information Technology Act it has amended the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules,2021 (2021 Rules).

Aim

- The new amendment Rules, 2023 amendments to enforce greater due diligence by online gaming and social media intermediaries with respect to online games and fake or falsely misleading information related to government business.
- As per the amended rules, it has been made mandatory on the part of intermediaries to make a reasonable effort to not host, publish, or share any online game that can cause the user harm.

Regulatory bodies

- According to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023, an online gaming self-regulatory body or bodies (SROs) designated by the Central government will determine whether a real-money game is permitted or not.
- The self-regulatory body will have the authority to inquire and satisfy itself that the online game does not involve wagering on any outcome.
- There will be multiple SROs, and these SROs will have participation from all the stakeholders, including but not limited to the industry.

Prohibition on advertisement

- The intermediary will also have to ensure that no advertisement, surrogate advertisement, or promotion of an online game that is not a permissible online game is hosted on its platform.

Pre-draft of National Curriculum Framework for schools

Context

- The Education Ministry recently released a "pre-draft" of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for school education.
- The draft also invited suggestions from stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers and scholars.
- The NCF has been revised four times to date i.e in 1975, 1988, 2000 and 2005.
- The new proposed revision will be a fifth of the framework.
- The pre-draft has been prepared by a committee headed by K Kasturirangan.

Curricular and pedagogical structure

- The Education Ministry has designed four National Curriculum Frameworks (NCFs) based on the 5+3+3+4 'curricular and pedagogical' structure that NEP 2020 has recommended for school education.
- The ministry launched the NCF for the foundational stage (NCF-FS) for children between ages 3-8 years in October 2022.
- In continuation of that policy, the next NCF for school education is being prepared.
- Revamping class 10 and 12 board exams, aligning the shift from 10+2 structure to 5+3+3+4 structure and emphasis on developmental perspectives suggesting curricular and pedagogical shifts at different stages — foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary are among the recommendations made in the pre-draft.

Revamping board exams

- Under the National Curriculum Framework, revamping of class 10 and 12 board exams, aligning the shift from 10+2 structure to 5+3+3+4 structure and emphasis on developmental perspectives suggesting curricular and pedagogical shifts at different stages foundational, preparatory, middle and secondary are among the recommendations made in the pre-draft.
- For Class 11 and 12, the document states, "Modular Board Exams will be offered as opposed to a single exam at the end of the year and result will be based on cumulative result of each exam.

Moral development

- The Pre-draft of the National Curriculum Framework for schools document focuses on the moral development of a child through five-fold development.
- This concept is an ancient explanation of the importance of the body-mind link in human experience and understanding.
- The pre-draft recommends developing moral values for the child through a balanced diet, traditional games, yoga asanas, as well as a wide variety of stories, songs, lullabies, poems, prayers to develop a love for cultural context.

Cabinet nod for Space Policy to increase private participation

Context

- Cabinet Committee has approved Indian Space Policy-2023.
- The policy seeks to institutionalize the private sector participation in the space sector, with ISRO focusing on research and development of advanced space technologies.
- India's share in the global space economy is less than two per cent at present and the space policy will help it increase substantially to 10 per cent in the future.

Key feature of policy

- **Private participation:** The Policy will allow the private sector to take part in end-to-end space activities that include building satellites, rockets and launch vehicles, data collection and dissemination.
- The policy also spells out the framework for the private sector to use ISRO facilities for a small charge and also encourages them to invest in creating new infrastructure for the sector.

- **Defining the roles and responsibilities:** The Indian Space Policy-2023 define the roles and responsibilities of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the space sector PSU NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) and Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Center (IN-SPACe).
- The strategic activities related to the space sector will be carried out by NSIL, a public sector undertaking under the Department of Space, which will work in demand-driven mode.
- The INSPACe, created recently, will be the interface between Indian Space Research Organisation and non-governmental entities.

FTP opens doors for some second-hand goods imports

Context

- The new Foreign Trade Policy recently unveiled by the centre adopted a fresh approach to the import of second-hand goods, making it possible to re-export old items after repairing them in the country.
- The move is expected to give a boost to the export of refurbished electronic and IT goods
- It also paves the way for the import of used electronics and IT goods, albeit with certain restrictions.

Unrestricted imports

- The import policy for second-hand goods in the FTP 2023 outlines a new category of unrestricted imports for goods brought into the country for the purpose of **repair, refurbishing, re-conditioning, or re-engineering, with an intent to re-export them.**
- Such imports will be conditional upon importers ensuring that any waste generated during the repair or refurbishing process is treated as per domestic laws and environmental, safety and health norms.

Decoding RBI's pause on repo rate hike

Context
- In a significant monetary policy measure the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to not increase the repo rate.
- The decision was taken amid continuing hikes by important central banks such as the US Federal Reserve (Fed) and European Central Bank (ECB), and domestic inflation concerns.

Policy and inflation
- The tightening of financial conditions in the US amid the banking stress will create a downside to growth and reduce the need for the Fed to hike the rate to control inflation.
- The RBI's MPC decision is the expectation of a decline in inflation — driven by a healthy rabi crop, normal monsoon, moderating international commodity prices and the impact of rate hikes — to 5.2 per cent in the current fiscal.

Inflation forecast
- The consumer inflation is expected to cool to 5 per cent this fiscal from an estimated 6.8 per cent in the last, for three reasons.

- **First**, it is expected that fuel inflation to reduce to 3 per cent from a high of over 10 per cent in the current fiscal because some easing of crude oil prices is likely as global growth slows down.
- **Second**, slowing domestic growth will ease core inflation from very sticky levels of over 6 per cent last fiscal 2023 to 5.5 per cent in the current one.
- The decline in core inflation will be limited as input cost pressures have not dissipated. To protect their margins, firms will continue to pass on input costs to end-consumer. Services inflation will also continue to exert pressure as the rotation of consumption demand from goods to services continues.
- **Third**, food inflation, which has a high weightage in the Consumer Price Index and has driven headline inflation in the past, is projected to moderate to slightly below 5 per cent, assuming a normal monsoon.
- However, food inflation has always been volatile and carries upside risks largely because of climate-related factors affecting agriculture output and prices.
- The ongoing freak weather events continue to threaten rabi cereal, fruit and vegetable production.
- After three years of La Nina, 2023 is expected to see El Niño play out.
- The Indian Meteorological Department will issue clear guidance later this month.

GDP growth and export
- The GDP growth to slow to 6 per cent from 7 per cent this fiscal as slowing global growth, domestic interest rates, and messy geopolitics bite.
- Slowing global growth will be net negative for exports for three reasons.
- **One,** the impact of the growth slowdown in the US and Europe (whose combined GDP is twice that of China) is deeper than the recovery in China.
- **Two,** India's exports to the US and Europe are more than to China by a factor of six.
- **Three,** the growing dependence on commodity exports (petroleum products and steel) makes us more vulnerable to global growth volatility.

Bottom line
- The good news on the external front is that India's external vulnerability is expected to decline with a narrower current account deficit (CAD) and modest short-term external debt.
- It is expected that the CAD to narrow to 2 per cent of GDP this fiscal from an estimated 2.5 per cent last fiscal.

06.04.2023

- **About open-source seeds movement**
- **Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Bill 2023**
- **Supreme Court Lifts Telecast Ban On MediaOne**
- **Services PMI signals slowdown in sector's growth**
- **Takeaways from the UN World Water Conference**

About open-source seeds movement

Context
- Farmers have innovated and shared seeds without any intellectual property rights (IPR) for centuries.
- They also have not sought exclusive rights over seeds and germplasm to prevent others from innovating on the seeds.
- However, with the emergence of the global IPR regime over plant varieties, there was a dire need to 'open-source' seeds.

About open-source seeds
- The open-source model for seeds and plant varieties was proposed in 2002.
- The Open-Source Seeds movement promotes the sharing of plant seeds without intellectual property restrictions.
- In India, the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), Hyderabad, developed a model that included an agreement between CSA and the recipient of the seed/germplasm.
- It is trying to use this approach through three farmer-producer organisations engaged in seed production.
- Under India's Plant Variety Protection and Farmers' Rights Act 2001, farmers can register 'farmer varieties' if they meet certain conditions, and have the right to reuse, replant, and exchange seeds.

Significance
- One potential application of the open-source approach is to use it in farmer-led seed conservation and distribution systems.
- The model can also be used to promote farmer-led participatory plant-breeding exercises.
- Open-source principles can help overcome these two challenges by facilitating testing, improvisation, and adoption.
- All of these will ultimately be beneficial to India's food security and climate resilience.

IPR regime
- The arrival of hybrid seeds, scientific plant-breeding, and some other factors conferred developers of new varieties called for plant breeders' rights (PBR) and patents, particularly in the U.S.
- In 1994, the establishment of the World Trade Organization cast a global IPR regime over plant varieties.
- The Trade-Related IPR Agreement (TRIPS) required countries to provide at least one form of intellectual property (IP) protection.

- This consolidation of rights in the seeds sector raised concerns about the freedom to innovate.
- Unlike the Green Revolution, the genetic revolution in agriculture was led by the private sector, with seeds mostly availed as hybrids or protected by strong IPRs.

How is IP protected in agriculture

- There are two major modes of IPR protection in agriculture:
  1. **Plant-breeders' rights**
  2. **Patents**
- Together, they restrict farmers' rights and the freedom to develop new varieties using germplasm from IP-protected varieties, and have thus increased the number of IP-protected plant varieties.

Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Bill 2023

Context

- Recently, the Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying introduced the Coastal Aquaculture Authority (Amendment) Bill 2023.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act 2005.

CAA Act, 2005

- The Coastal Aquaculture Authority Act, 2005 (CAA Act, 2005) was enacted by Parliament to establish a coastal aquaculture authority for regulating the activities connected with coastal aquaculture in the coastal areas of the country.
- Section 14 of the CAA Act, 2005 provides for punishment for carrying on coastal aquaculture without registration under CAA Act, 2005.

Key features

- The Bill seeks to decriminalize the offences under the Act for promoting ease of doing business and to fine-tune the operational procedures of the Coastal Aquaculture Authority.
- It also aimed at promoting newer forms of environment-friendly coastal aquaculture including cage culture, seaweed culture, marine ornamental fish culture and pearl oyster culture which has the potential for creating additional employment opportunities.
- The Bill also has a provision to prevent the use of antibiotics and pharmacologically active substances which are harmful to human health in coastal aquaculture.

Supreme Court Lifts Telecast Ban on MediaOne

Context

- In a significant judgment, the Supreme Court recently ruled against the telecast ban imposed by the Union Government on the Malayalam news channel MediaOne.
- The Supreme Court has ruled that the Centre's refusal to renew the broadcast licence of Malayalam channel MediaOne amounted to restricting the freedom of the press, and that criticism of government policy does not constitute a "reasonable restriction" under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.
- The Court passed the judgment in a special leave petition filed by Madhyamam Broadcasting Ltd (MBL).

Sealed cover procedure criticised

- The Supreme Court heavily criticised the High Court's approach in upholding the Centre's decision solely on the basis of the sealed cover documents submitted by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- A "sealed cover" refers to a confidential document or information that is submitted to the court in a sealed envelope or cover.

- The court said the sealed cover procedure violated principles of both natural justice and open justice, and devised a procedure for "public interest immunity claim" as a less restrictive alternative.

Background

- The Malayalam news channel MediaOne got security clearance from the Home Ministry on February 7, 2011, when the UPA-2 government was in power.
- Subsequently, on September 30, the Information & Broadcasting Ministry gave Madhyamam Broadcasting Ltd (MBL), the company that runs MediaOne, permission to uplink for 10 years.
- On January 31, 2022, the I&B Ministry government revoked the permission after the Home Ministry refused to grant fresh security clearance.
- According to the Supreme Court judgment, the MHA cited the channel promoters' alleged links with the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind.

Press Freedom

- The Supreme Court noted that an independent press is vital for the robust functioning of a democratic republic.
- The apex court noted that press has a duty to speak truth to power, and present citizens with hard facts enabling them to make choices that propel democracy in the right direction.
- A homogenised view on issues would pose grave dangers to democracy.

Services PMI signals slowdown in sector's growth

Context

- According to S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's services sector lost some growth momentum in March, even as new orders and output continued to rise for the 20th straight month.
- The PMI slowed to 57.8, from 59.4 in February. A reading above 50 indicates expansion in activity.

Input cost inflation

- Although Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) noted that input cost inflation dropped to the lowest level since September 2020, firms reported higher expenses on account of rising food, fuel, transportation, and wage costs.
- New hiring was fractional, with almost 98% of firms leaving their payroll numbers unchanged from February.

Advancement of international orders

- S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) reported an uptick in international orders even as overall order books grew at a softer pace than in February. Services providers also passed on higher cost burdens to clients by raising selling prices at a three-month high pace.
- On average, services firms were optimistic about business volumes rising a year ahead, but the overall level of positive sentiment fell to an eight-month low as several firms foresee no change in activity from present levels.

Takeaways from the UN World Water Conference

Context

- Water is a dealmaker for the Sustainable Development Goals, and for the health and prosperity of people and planet.
- The first World Water Conference that was convened by the United Nations (March 22-24 2023) was the first UN conference on freshwater in almost 50 years.
- The Water Conference 2023 is co-hosted by the Governments of Tajikistan and the Netherlands will be a watershed moment.

- The Water Action Agenda is voluntary and legally non-binding commitments.

Aim

- The UN World Water Conference aimed to mobilize Member States, the UN system and stakeholders alike to take action and bring successful solutions to a global scale.
- It will also catalyse action, the Conference is seeking voluntary commitments, galvanized by the Programme, to the Water Action Agenda.

Themes

- The Conference has five themes that support the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework:

1. Water for Health: Access to 'WASH' (Global Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene) including the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

2. Water for Sustainable Development: Valuing water, the water-energy-food nexus and sustainable economic and urban development.

3. Water for Climate, Resilience and Environment: Source to sea, biodiversity, climate, resilience and disaster risk reduction.

4. Water for Cooperation: Transboundary and international water cooperation, cross sectoral cooperation and water across the 2030 Agenda.

5. Water Action Decade: Accelerating the implementation of the objectives of the Decade for Action, including through the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan.

Poor finances, poor water services

- The commitments made at the conference must be scrutinised to see whether they will yield universal, safe, affordable, and equitable access to water that is consistent with SDG 6.
- Meeting this target by 2030 will incur capital expenditures of $114 billion per year.
- The World Bank estimates recurring operations and maintenance for basic water and sanitation service (WASH) costs to rise from about $4 billion to over $30 billion per year by 2030.
- The metering of water has triggered resistance from India to Ireland because of concerns about equitable access and affordability of water services.

Global Environment Facility

- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is the only international funding mechanism that has been able to cover more than 300 watersheds and an even greater number of aquifers across the political boundaries of two or more states with its grant and concessional loan.

India at the conference

- India's commitments at the conference were: an investment of $240 billion in the water sector and efforts to restore groundwater level.
- A 2021 CAG report says that groundwater extraction in India increased from 58% to 63% between 2004-17.
- This has been further accelerated by climate change resulting in intermittent rainfall, which further undermines the recharge potential.
- The revised Groundwater Bill 2017 vests State groundwater boards with creating laws, managing water allocation and other relevant issues.

- The State boards are understaffed and lack expertise in prioritising socio-political conflicts over groundwater resources.

Way forward

- UN World Water Conference 2023 will provide a roadmap for countries, sectors and river basins.
- It seeks better outcomes for all, all water-related challenges, in order to accelerate the delivery of the UN SDGs.
- The 2023 Water Conference takes place within the context of SDG 6, and not within the context of the UN Water Convention 1997 and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Water Convention 1992, the two legally binding legal instruments on the regulation of transboundary river water courses.
- It remains to be seen whether the commitments made at the conference will ensure universal, safe, affordable, and equitable access to water.

05.04.2023

- **NMC issued code of conduct for teachers and students**
- **Finland joins NATO in historic shift**
- **Third edition of India Justice Report**
- **World Bank lowers India's growth forecast**
- **In controlled digital lending, the issue of public interest**

NMC issued code of conduct for teachers and students

Context

- Recently, the National Medical Council, the country's apex regulatory body for medical education and medical professionals has for the first time issued a set of guidelines specifying professional responsibilities of medical students, teachers and institutions.

Code of Conduct

- National Medical Council released a 25-page document has explained the code of conduct for teachers and students while studying/working, the relationship between a teacher and a student, expectations from the two (personal attributes and conduct) and their collective responsibility to the community.
- The document noted that there should not be a base for any discrimination based on Sexual orientation, gender and socio-economic class.

Rationale of the guideline

- National Medical Council's Code of Conduct stated that the intention behind these guidelines was to make students understand the grave responsibilities of their chosen profession.
- For teachers, the guidelines were not to penalise or point a finger, but to remind them of their professional role in the life of a student and nation.

Role of Student

- As per the new code of Conduct medical students was expected to be diligent about their study and research, be responsible for their personal growth and stay away from substance abuse, while seeking help in case of addiction.

- The guideline noted that they should dress modestly, approach appropriate authorities for grievance redressal and seek professional help in case they felt overwhelmed.
- Students were also advised to work towards ensuring an ethical doctor-patient relationship and maintaining public trust in the health system.
- They were warned about the possible professional hazards associated with the indiscriminate use of social media.

Guidelines for teachers

- As per the guideline medical teachers should constantly demonstrate to students the correct elements of the doctor-patient relationship, including soft skills of communication and respect for the dignity and rights of patients.
- Teaching bedside clinical skills may be more useful in a community setting to ensure the early detection of diseases and their cost-effective management.
- The teachers must be aware of the stress and mental health problems that students face and should be aware of the processes available in their institutions to address these issues.
- Teachers should make students aware of the medico-legal aspects of patient care.

Finland joins NATO in historic shift

Context

- In a breakthrough, the Finland officially joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization recently.
- Now Finland officially became the 31st member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- NATO Allies signed Finland's Accession Protocol on 5 July 2022, after which all 30 national parliaments voted to ratify the country's membership.
- NATO Secretary-General welcomes Finland to the alliance's ranks; he says Russian President who cited the NATO expansion as one justification for the Ukraine invasion, is getting 'exactly the opposite'

Why is Finland joining NATO

- Finland has a 1,340km land border with Russia.
- In 1948, it agreed to be a neutral country as part of a "friendship agreement" with the Soviet Union.
- When the Soviet Union collapsed, it edged closer to NATO, becoming an "official partner" of the bloc in 1994.
- Soon after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both Finland and Sweden asked to be given full entry to NATO as soon as possible.
- Finland has joined NATO in a historic shift triggered by the war in Ukraine, prompting anger in Russia where officials have cast the move as a threat.

Russia's stand

- Russia said it would strengthen its military capacity in its western and northwestern regions in response to the move.
- The event marks the end of an era of military non-alignment for Finland that began after the country repelled an invasion attempt by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and opted to try to maintain friendly relations with Russia.

About NATO

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a military alliance created in 1949.
- It aims to provide collective security against Soviet expansionism and to encourage European political integration in the aftermath of World War II.
- It serves as a collective security system, wherein its member states agree to mutually defend any attack on a member party.

Third edition of India Justice Report

Context

- The Third edition of India Justice Report finds that as of December 2022, India had 19 judges per million population when calculated against the sanctioned strength, and a backlog of 4.8 crore cases.
- The India Justice Report (IJR), which claimed to be India's only ranking of states on delivery of Justice in the country, was initiated by Tata Trusts in 2019.
- The India Justice Report is a collaborative effort undertaken in partnership with DAKSH, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Common Cause, Centre for Social Justice, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and TISS-Prayas.

Women judge

- According to the India Justice Report, Women judges in subordinate courts now constitute a national average of 35%, with five states recording above 50% of women judicial officers.
- Nationally, the data showed the share of women across the justice system to have increased from 18% in 2020 to 25% last year.

- This was far better than the overall share of women in police force at 11.75% and 13% among prison staff.

Women workforce

- Among states, women constituted over 50% of the district judicial workforce, with Goa topping the chart at 70%, followed by Telangana (52.8%) among the big states.
- Among smaller states, Meghalaya (62.7%), Sikkim (52.4%) and Mizoram (51.2%) were the top rankers.
- The report also highlighted the crucial concern on vacancies.
- Vacancy among high courts stood at 30%, with just 20,076 high court judges available for 1.4 billion people.
- Vacancies in subordinate judiciary stood at 22%.

Budget Shortcoming

- The budget for the judiciary was abysmally low, with the report pointing out that except for Delhi and Chandigarh, no state spends more than 1% of its total annual expenditure on the judiciary.
- The national per capita spending on judiciary stood at ₹146.

Pending cases

- On pendency of cases, the report found that in 28 states and union territories, one in every four high court cases remained pending for more than five years.
- In district courts of 11 states and union territories, one in every four cases was found pending for over five years.
- At High Court level, Uttar Pradesh has the highest average pendency; cases remain pending for an average of 11.34 years, and in West Bengal for 9.9 years.
- The lowest average High Court pendency is in Tripura (1 year), Sikkim (1.9 years) and Meghalaya (2.1 years).

Case clearance rate

- The case clearance rate (CCR), or the number of cases disposed of in a year measured against the number filed in that year.
- It is a common metric used to determine the rate at which cases are disposed of.
- A CCR of more than 100% indicates that the number of pending cases is reducing.
- The report found that the High Courts are clearing more cases annually than the subordinate courts.

Data on case clearance rate

- As per the 3rd edition of India Justice Report, between 2018-19 and 2022, the national average improved by six percentage points (88.5% to 94.6%) in High Courts, but declined by 3.6 points in lower courts (93% to 89.4%).
- During the same period, Tripura is the only State where the case clearance rate (CCR) in district courts remained above 100%, except in 2020 the year of the pandemic.
- The High Courts of Kerala and Odisha have higher case clearance rates i.e. 156% and 131% respectively.
- While the High Courts of Rajasthan (65%) and Bombay (72%) have the lowest case clearance rates.

World Bank lowers India's growth forecast

Context

- The World Bank has recently revised India's GDP growth forecast for the next financial year to 6.3 per cent from 6.6 per cent in December.

- The services sector followed by the construction sector were the fastest growing industries in India.

Reason for low growth forecast
- The World Bank expects growth to be constrained by slower consumption growth due to rising borrowing costs and slow income growth, along with challenging external conditions.
- Slow income growth is also expected to weigh on private consumption, while government consumption is likely to grow at a slower pace due to the withdrawal of pandemic-related fiscal support measures.

India's economic performance
- The World Bank said that the Indian economy continues to show strong resilience to external shocks and remains one of the world's fastest-growing economies despite significant challenges.
- World Bank also noted that although inflation remained high, averaging around 6.7 percent in financial year 2023, the Current Account Deficit (CAD) narrowed in the December quarter due to strong growth in services exports and easing global commodity prices.
- However, the female labour participation rate and the size, and (low) productivity of the informal sector were concerns.

Fiscal deficit target
- World Bank expects the central government to meet its fiscal deficit target of 5.9 percent of GDP and combined with consolidation in state government deficits, the general government deficit is also projected to decline.
- On the external front, the current account deficit is projected to narrow to 2.1 percent of GDP from an estimated 3 percent in financial year 2023 on the back of robust service exports and a narrowing merchandise trade deficit.

In controlled digital lending, the issue of public interest

Context

- Controlled digital lending (CDL) enables libraries to scan and lend a digitized version of a book in lieu of a physical copy, in a controlled manner that precludes copying or redistribution.
- An ongoing legal tussle in the United States between four major publishers and the Internet Archive (IA), posed a fundamental question about the interface of copyright law and technological advancements.
- The big question is should copyright law protect the broader public interests or the commercial interests of the copyright holders?
- Internet Archive (IA) is a not-for-profit organisation trying to build a globally accessible digital library.

Potential of Internet Archive
- Within a short period, the IA has become a truly global digital library to access information, particularly for persons with disabilities.
- The IA has archived over 735 billion web pages, 41 million books and texts, 14.7 million audio recordings, 8.4 million videos, 4.4 million images, and 890,000 software programs.
- A substantial portion of the books digitized by IA are outside copyright protection and are accessible without restrictions.

Copyrighted issue

- Publishers have alleged that around 3.6 million books, which are also available to borrow under some conditions, are copyrighted.
- The publishers have argued that the IA thus violated the diverse rights provided under copyright law for 127 titles published by them.
- The IA rebutted by arguing that books under copyright protection are lent only in a regulated manner, through 'Controlled Digital Lending' (CDL), and should, therefore, be considered to be 'fair use' under United States copyright law.
- They have been particularly upset by the 'National Emergency Library' that the IA set up at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein the IA relaxed the conditions for lending.

Understanding Controlled Digital Lending

- The IA's Controlled Digital Lending (CDL) model follows the lending approach generally seen in physical libraries, where if one copy is owned, that copy can be loaned to one person at a time.
- So, the IA avails one digital copy of each non-circulating print book it has stored.
- For example, if libraries of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institute of Science, and the National Law School of India University (NLSIU) were partners in the IA's digitization project and each of these institutions had six physical copies of a particular book on health law, the CDL model would ensure that readers could borrow no more than three copies of that book at a time.

Future of Controlled Digital Lending

- The district court for the Southern District of New York (SDNY) has ruled in the motions for summary judgments that the IA's activities violated various rights vested on publishers under copyright law, and that the activities do not constitute 'fair use' under the same law.

CDL and the public interest

- Lending physical copies of books from libraries, including at India's universities has been on the decline. But that does not mean the demand for reading books is going down.
- Closing physical libraries during the pandemic may have just accelerated this shift. Today, many people prefer to read books on devices such as their smartphones and tablets.
- The CDL is a positive response to this trend; it also helps bridge the gap between urban and rural, and the privileged and unprivileged.
- By making books accessible to readers, the CDL invokes enormous public benefits for education, research, and cultural participation.

India and CDL

- Though India is yet to have a major CDL initiative, some universities such as the NLSIU have initiated major digitization projects that can facilitate CDL in future.
- The outcome of the IA litigation will in turn have considerable ramifications for such initiatives, in India and elsewhere.
- It is high time to remind ourselves that the copyright system is not just about protecting the interests of copyright holders, but, equally, about protecting the rights of the users of copyrighted works, and thus the broader public interest.

04.04.2023

- **EC submits response to SC on disqualification plea**
- **Price of 651 essential drugs down by 6.73%**
- **Cope India 2023 exercise**

- Poverty and Inequality in India: Before and After Covid-19
- Time to put a price on carbon emissions

EC submits response to SC on disqualification plea

Context
- Recently, the Election Commission of India (ECI) filed its response before the Supreme Court in a plea seeking disqualification of **Members of the Legislative Assembly and Parliament** from contesting for election for five years upon having violated Article 191(1)(e) and Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India.
- The Election Commission in the Supreme Court has chosen to maintain a distance on the question.
- The commission said it would be "appropriate" to have the Union government deal with the issue.

What was the petitioner's demand
- The petitioner contended that an MP or an MLA who has either been disqualified from the House under the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) or Article 191(1)(e) of the Constitution should be barred from contesting elections for five years.
- Article 191(1)(e) gives the various grounds of disqualification "for being chosen as, and for being a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State".
- These include:
  o Holding an office of profit
  o Being of unsound mind
  o Undischarged insolvent
  o Being a non-citizen
  o Voluntarily acquiring the citizenship of a foreign state
  o Being under any acknowledgement of allegiance or adherence to a foreign state.

Election conducted by EC
- The EC is vested with the authority of superintendence, direction, and control of elections for the conduct of elections to Parliament, State legislatures and the offices of the President and the Vice-President.
- Article 324: Superintendence, direction, and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.

Price of 651 essential drugs down by 6.73%

Context
- In a major relief to citizens, the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority of India (NPPA) recently announced that the cost of 651 essential medicines has come down by an average of 6.73 per cent.
- The price of the drug will be effective from 01 April 2023 with the government capping ceiling prices of a majority of the scheduled drugs.

Ceiling prices
- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) noted that the government has been able to fix the ceiling prices of 651 medicines so far out of the total 870 scheduled drugs listed under the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).
- The health ministry had amended NLEM in September 2022 and it now has a total of 870 drugs.
- NPPA fixes the ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013.

- The calculation is based on the simple average of all the medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1 per cent.

Why is there a reduction in prices

- According to the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority of India (NPPA), with the capping of ceiling prices the cost of 651 essential drugs on average had already come down by 16.62 per cent.
- Consumers will benefit from this decline in prices despite a 12.12 per cent annual hike in prices of drugs based on WPI.
- The annual hikes in prices of medicines listed in NLEM are based on Wholesale Price Index (WPI).
- The World Health Organization, in its note on Essential Medicines in Southeast Asia, said that an estimated 40% of health budgets in low- and middle-income countries were spent on medicines, with much of the cost borne out-of-pocket by patients.

About NPPA

- The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) is a government regulatory agency that controls the prices of pharmaceutical drugs in India.
- National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was constituted in 1997 as an attached office of the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP), Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers as an independent Regulator for pricing of drugs and to ensure availability and accessibility of medicines at affordable prices.
- The NPPA regularly publishes lists of medicines and their maximum ceiling prices.
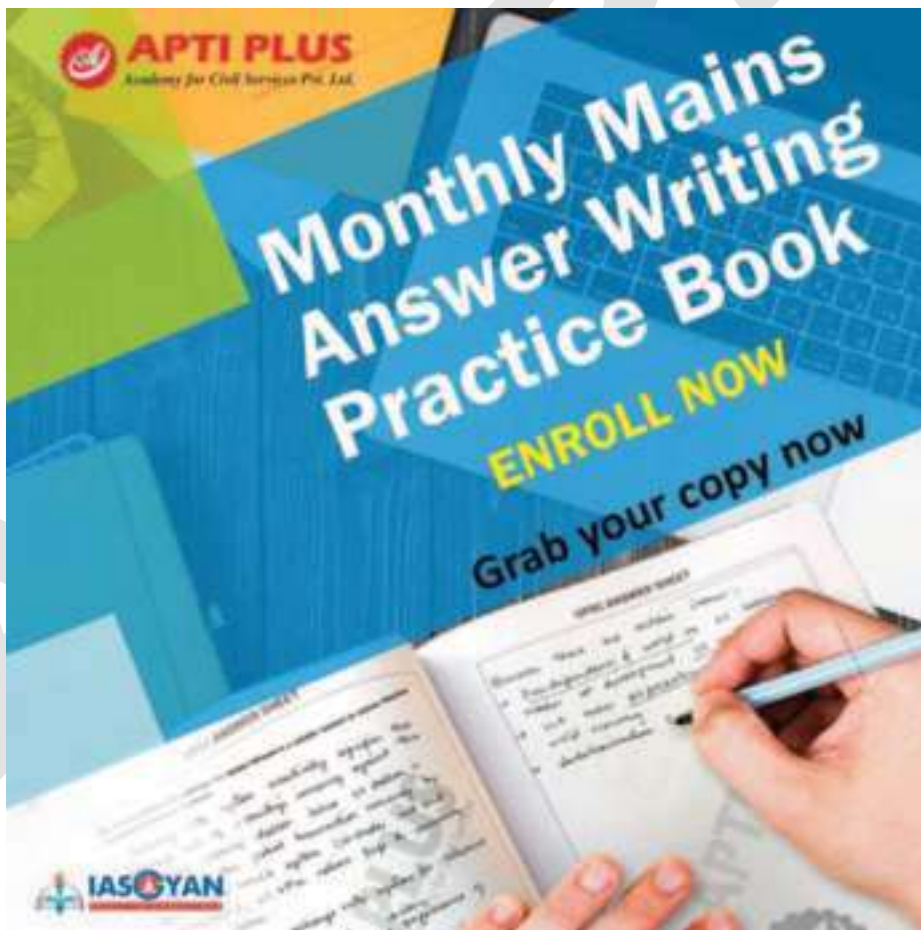
Cope India 2023 exercise

Context

- Indian and the US Air Force are set to take part in Cope India 2023 exercise from April 10 to 21 at the Kalaikunda airbase in West Bengal, with **Japan as an observer**.
- The Cope India began in 2004 as a fighter training exercise held at Air Station Gwalior, India.
- The exercise has evolved to incorporate subject matter expert exchanges, air mobility training, airdrop training and large-force exercises, in addition to fighter-training exercises.

More about the exercise

- The Cope India exercise will see "air combat and mobility elements" operating from multiple air bases like Kalaikunda, Panagarh, Agra and Hindon.
- The bilateral exercise will "further enhance operational capability and interoperability between the two air forces".
- In the fighter training exercise, India will field the French-origin Rafale, Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKI and indigenous Tejas fighters as well as AEW&C (airborne early-warning and control) planes, C17 Globemaster-III strategic airlift aircraft and IL-78 mid-air refuellers for the exercise.
- The US, on the other hand, will deploy its F-15 Strike Eagle jets.

Aim

- The aim is to participate in diverse fighter engagements and learn from the best practices of various air forces.
- It helps in understanding the latest developments in tactical and operational employment of air power.
- The exercise will see intense air maneuvers aimed at improving interoperability.

Poverty and Inequality in India: Before and After Covid-19

Context

- According to a paper ('Poverty and Inequality in India: Before and After Covid-19') co-authored by eminent economist Arvind Panagariya, claims of a spike in poverty and inequality in India during the Covid-19 pandemic are patently false as such claims are based on incomparable different surveys.
- The paper also noted that inequality fell in the country during Covid years, both in rural and urban areas as well as nationally.
- In India, the official poverty definition and numbers are estimated based on the Consumption Expenditure Survey (CES) conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

More about the research paper

- The paper analyses poverty and inequality before and after the Covid-19 pandemic in India using data on household expenditures reported in the periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) of India.
- According to the paper, it is only during the strict lockdown period of April-June 2020 that rural poverty saw a "modest rise".
- But it fell for the full year 2019-20, even if at a significantly lower rate.
- It witnessed a sharp decline in 2020-21 as in the pre-Covid year of 2018-19.
- The free distribution of additional 5 kg food grain perhaps helped arrest a sharper rise in urban poverty.

Rural poverty

- The data available in the paper shows that rural poverty increased to 36.4 per cent in April-June 2020 as compared to 34.9 per cent in the same quarter a year ago.

- The figure was also higher as compared to 33.5 per cent in the January-March quarter of 2020.
- However, rural poverty started seeing a decline from July-September 2020 (33.5 per cent) onwards to 26.1 per cent in April-June 2021.

Time to put a price on carbon emissions

Context

- Carbon pricing curbs greenhouse gas emissions by placing a fee on emitting and/or
- offering an incentive for emitting less.
- In the absence of a price for the use of natural resources such as air and forests, environmental destruction has been part of every country's recipe for boosting GDP growth.
- But the consequence of this approach has been the relentless emission of carbon, causing runaway climate change.
- India as president of the G-20 this year can take the lead in carbon pricing, which will open unexpected avenues of Decarbonisation.

Ways of pricing

- Three ways of pricing carbon are
- Establishment of a carbon tax domestically, as in Korea and Singapore
- Use of an emissions trading system (ETS), as in the European Union (EU) and China; Application of an import tariff on the carbon content, as the EU is proposing.
- Some 46 countries price carbon, although covering only 30% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and at an average price of only $6 a ton of carbon, a fraction of the estimated harm from the pollution.
- The International Monetary Fund has proposed price floors of $75, $50, and $25 a ton of carbon for the United States, China, and India, respectively.
- It believes this could help achieve a 23% reduction in global emissions by 2030.

Impact on India

- India could find a carbon tax appealing as it can directly discourage fossil fuels.
- It could replace the more inefficient scheme of petroleum taxes which are not directly aimed at emissions.
- In most countries, including India, fiscal policy has set in place the basic structures needed to implement a carbon tax.
- Policymakers must choose the tax rate, which varies widely from Japan's $2.65 a ton of CO_2 to Denmark's $165 a ton set for 2030.
- India could start with the IMF figure of $25 a ton.

Carbon credits

- India might allow companies to use high-quality international carbon credits to offset up to a certain percentage of their taxable emissions.
- The EU excludes transport, where higher costs would have been passed on to consumers directly.
- Singapore provides vouchers for consumers hit by utility price rise.
- California uses proceeds from the sales of carbon permits partly to subsidize purchases of electric cars.

What next

- A high enough carbon tax across China, the U.S., India, Russia, and Japan alone (more than 60% of global effluents), with complementary actions, could have a notable effect on global effluents and warming.

- This could also pave the way to seeing Decarbonisation as a winning development formula. as carbon pricing gains acceptance.
- India, as president at the G-20 can play a lead role by tabling global carbon pricing in the existential fight against climate change.

03.04.2023

- **India target to become a $1-tn tourism economy**
- **Border talks between India and Bhutan**
- **ISRO's successfully conducts RLV landing test**
- **India's fossil fuel lessons for net zero**
- **India needs a national programme on autism**

India target to become a $1-tn tourism economy

Context

- During the Inaugural session of the 2nd Tourism Working Group Meeting under G20, the Minister of Tourism said that India wants to be a $1-trillion tourism economy with 100 million international visitors by 2047.
- The Working Group Meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Tourism was held at Siliguri, West Bengal.
- The first G-20 TWG meeting hosted in the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat that more than 200 Buddhists monasteries, 40 UNESCO-listed world heritage sites, State, and national archaeological sites, many living temples, and prayer centres had been highlighted.

Roadmap

- To achieve the target of a $ 1 trillion tourism economy, the focus is being put on various government-led initiatives in the public-private partnership (PPP) mode.
- The centre had priorities various initiatives which include:
  - Green tourism
  - Digitization
  - Skilling
  - Tourism MSMEs
  - Destination management
  - The government is observing 'Vision India-2023', a programme which invites the entire world to explore India.

Two mega trails

- Two mega-adventure tourism trails would be launched in the Himalayas and the Ganga this year.
- These trails would be followed by others such as:
  - Narmada trail from Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh to the Arabian sea
  - Cauvery river trail, the West Coast trail from Kutch to Kanyakumari
  - East Coast trail from West Bengal to Kanyakumari
- Observing that India's topography makes the country an ideal destination for sustainable adventure tourism.

Draft National Tourism Policy

- The new Policy is a holistic framework for sustainable and responsible growth of the tourism sector in the country and aims at
  o Improving framework conditions for tourism development in the country
  o Supporting tourism industries
  o Strengthening tourism to highlight India's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 2030

Border talks between India and Bhutan

Context

- Bhutan's King is on a three-day visit to India.
- The focus during the visit will be on possible discussions on the progress of the Bhutan-China border talks.
- Recently, Bhutan's Prime Minister commented that China has equal say in resolving the border dispute in Doklam.

MOU between Bhutan and China

- In October 2021, Bhutan and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a "three-step roadmap" to expedite border resolution talks.
- The discussion centres on two valleys to Bhutan's north and the Doklam area to the west of Bhutan, close to the trijunction with India, which was the site of a stand-off between Indian and Chinese forces in 2017.
- India has been particularly watchful of any possibility of a "swap agreement" between the two countries that could affect its security at the trijunction.

Focus area of talks

- India and Bhutan will discuss the "long-standing tradition" of high-level exchanges between the two countries.
- The leaders would "review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and to further advance the close bilateral partnership, including economic and development cooperation".
- Both countries is expected to discuss India's support to Bhutan for its five year plans.
- At present, the Indian government's assistance towards Bhutan's 12th five year plan (2018-23) amounts to ₹4,500 crore.

ISRO's successfully conducts RLV landing test

Context

- Recently, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) informed that it successfully conducted the autonomous test landing mission of the Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV) at the Aeronautical Test Range (ATR).
- The autonomous landing was carried out under the exact conditions of a Space Re-entry vehicle's landing high speed, unmanned, precise landing from the same return path as if the vehicle arrives from space.

Hypersonic sub-orbital vehicle

- The re-entry of a hypersonic sub-orbital vehicle marked a major accomplishment in developing Reusable Launch Vehicles.
- With Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission (RLV LEX), the dream of an Indian Reusable Launch Vehicle arrives one step closer to reality.

Significance

- The successful RLV LEX test demonstrates that the adaptation of contemporary technologies developed for the Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission (RLV LEX) can make other operational launch vehicles of ISRO more cost-effective.
- Reusable Launch Vehicle–Technology Demonstration Programme is a series of technology demonstration missions that have been conceived by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

India's fossil fuel lessons for net zero

Context
- India's announcement that it aims to reach net zero emissions by 2070 and to meet fifty percent of its electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030.
- India is pioneering a new model of economic development that could avoid the carbon-intensive approaches.
- In 2020, the Centre introduced the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to incentivise investment, inter alia, in the minerals, components and equipment required for the generation and consumption of clean energy.

Learning from the past
- The learnings of 40 years of effort to develop a self-sufficient fossil fuel energy system as guideposts for the current effort to transition to a self-reliant (Atmanirbhar) clean energy system.
- There are four relevant learnings.
- First, the liberalisation of upstream petroleum did not bridge the gap between the domestic demand for petroleum and indigenous supply.
- On the contrary, the gap has widened.
- The surrounding economic, technical, and operating ecosystem must enable their conversion into commercially-useful products.
- The bulk of its hydrocarbon resources are in harsh terrain and complex geology. They are, therefore, difficult to locate and even when located they are difficult to produce on a commercial basis.
- This is because of the high cost of drilling and development. In consequence, a large percentage of discovered hydrocarbons have not been produced.
- Second, the recovery rate of oil and gas from India's producing fields has averaged between 25-30 per cent.
- This means that for every 100 molecules discovered, only 25-30 have been brought to the surface.
- The recovery rate of fields of comparable geology across the world is between 40-60 per cent.
- The reason for this difference is not access to Enhanced oil recovery (EOR) technologies. These are available mostly off the shelf.
- The reason is the utilization of these technologies which have not been efficiently implemented.
- Third, the liberalisation of Economic Policy triggered the expectation there would be a flood of investor interest.
- This did not happen because international companies regarded India's geology as high risk and because they did not think our fiscal and commercial terms were internationally competitive.
- Their response to the invitation to bid for exploration licences was muted.
- The endeavour should instead be to lower entry barriers, ease business conditions and remove the perception that India offers a high-cost operating environment
- Fourth, India remains dependent on the external market for supplies of petroleum. There is no geological magic wand by which to reverse this imbalance and address its vulnerability to unexpected supply disruptions.
- Further, the government has in recent years adeptly secured supplies without getting embroiled in domestic or regional politics and conflicts.

Way forward

- India should desist therefore from building a high-cost, domestic, clean energy hub that is forever dependent on subsidies.
- China is the lowest-cost supplier of clean energy components; India should continue with its two-track policy.
- One track will pit us eye-ball-to-eye-ball on the border, the other should strengthen our trading relationship.
- India and China face the storm of global warming both countries can help each other meet their net-zero carbon obligations.

India needs a national programme on autism

Context

- Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain.
- The conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication.
- At this point, India did not have any systematic estimates of autism prevalence.
- None of the hospitals kept any records of how many children got a diagnosis of autism.

Assessing autism

- The questionnaires and interviews, observational measures (e.g., where individuals are asked to perform a task) can contribute meaningfully to assessing autism-related features.
- Observational measures rely less on verbal information, and more on task performance, and are thus more easily translatable across cultures and settings.
- A combination of questionnaire/ interview measures alongside observational measures is ideal for assessing autism.
- Greater focus on areas that have historically been under-researched in autism, such as sleep, diet, sensory symptoms, and immune function need to be included within routine assessments.

Variation in autism cases

- Most children with an autism spectrum diagnosis within the United States and the United Kingdom are likely to be verbal, with average or higher than average IQ, and attending mainstream schools.
- In contrast, majority of children in India who get a clinical diagnosis of autism often also have intellectual disability, and limited verbal ability.
- This difference is likely to be driven by a range of sociological factors, such as access to appropriate clinical expertise, the allowance of provisions for inclusion in mainstream schools, as well as availability of medical insurance coverage for autism interventions.
- It raises the question of why one chooses to get an autism diagnosis in the first place.

Demand and supply in India

- According to the latest estimates, India has less than 10,000 psychiatrists, a majority of whom are concentrated in big cities.
- While the number of mental health professionals continues to grow, the current gap between demand and supply cannot be met directly by the specialists alone.
- Evidence suggests the feasibility of such an approach for both autism identification and intervention in an Indian context.
- Two pillars for such an approach to succeed are the availability of a suitable non-specialist workforce (e.g., Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA)/Anganwadi workers, parents/caregivers) and the

appropriate digital technology (e.g. apps, smartphones) that can capture both self/caregiver report as well as observational data.

Need for an all-India programme

- The overarching need of the hour is to develop a national programme on autism, to link researchers, clinicians, service providers to the end-users in the autism community in India.
- A programme of this scale needs three essential components that are joined up: assessment, intervention, and awareness.
- Research needs to focus on developing and refining appropriate assessments, as well as designing efficient implementation pathways.
- The clinical and support service workforce needs to be expanded by training non-specialists such that a stepped-care model can be rolled out effectively across the nation.
- Finally, large-scale initiatives to build public awareness can serve to reduce stigma associated with autism and related conditions.

01.04.2023

- **CERT-in may be exempted from RTI Act purview**
- **U.K. to join trans-Pacific partnership trade treaty**
- **Combined Index of Core Industries witness growth**
- **US to transfer antiques to India**
- **India's semiconductor mission might need a compass**

CERT-in may be exempted from RTI Act purview

Context

- The has informed the Parliament that Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-in) may soon be exempt from responding to queries under the Right to Information Act, 2005 on the grounds of data sensitivity
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has reviewed a proposal from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to include CERT-in in the Second Schedule to the RTI Act, 2005.
- The waiver will allow the agency to reject applications for information, even on policy matters

Second Schedule to the RTI Act 2005

- Second Schedule to the RTI Act Under this section, intelligence and security organisations specified in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act are exempted from disclosing the information except about allegations of corruption and human rights violations.

What would exemption mean

- The exemption would allow CERT-in to reject any application for information, even on policy-related matters.
- This is significant as the body had issued directions in April 2022 that required Virtual Private Network (VPN) providers and cryptocurrency firms to preserve data on all users. The directions are being challenged in the Delhi High Court, and the government has argued that absolute anonymity online is not acceptable.
- Several major VPN providers have pulled their servers out of India, arguing that the directions would compromise users' privacy on the internet.

About CERT-in

- CERT-In was established in 2004 as a functional organization of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- It is the national nodal agency for responding to computer security incidents as and when they occur.
- CERT-in coordinates with public and private organisations in India when cyber incidents like data breaches and ransomware attacks are reported.
- It also issues advisories for software vulnerabilities as guidance for organisations.

Function of CERT-In

- Collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on cyber incidents.
- Forecast and alerts of cyber security incidents
- Emergency measures for handling cyber security incidents
- Coordination of cyber incident response activities.
- Issue guidelines, advisories, vulnerability notes and whitepapers relating to
- Prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents.
- Such other functions relating to cyber security as may be prescribed

U.K. to join trans-Pacific partnership trade treaty

Context

- The United Kingdom has agreed to join an 11-country trans-Pacific trade pact as it looks to deepen ties in the region and build its global trade links after leaving the European Union.
- The country will become the first new member, and the first in Europe, to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) since it came into force in 2018.

About CPTPP

- The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is the successor to a previous trans-Pacific trade pact that the United States withdrew from under former President Donald Trump in 2017.
- Its members include fellow G7 members Canada and Japan, and historic UK allies Australia and New Zealand. The remaining members are Mexico, Chile and Peru, along with Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Brunei.
- The bloc, which is home to 500 million people, will be worth 15% of global GDP once the UK joins, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Significance of the treaty

- The United Kingdom government said the deal would mean that more than 99% of British exports — including for key markets such as cheese, cars, chocolate, machinery, gin and whisky which would have zero tariffs.
- The U.K government also claimed that the deal would add £1.8 billion ($2.2 billion) annually to the U.K. economy in the long run.
- This, however, translates to a modest boost of 0.08% to GDP.
- The government said the deal was a "gateway" to the Indo-Pacific region which would account for a majority (54%) of global economic growth in the future.
- The U.K. is currently also negotiating a "free trade" deal with India.

Combined Index of Core Industries witness growth

Context

- According to the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, the Production of eight infrastructure sectors expanded by 6% in February 2023 as against 5.9% in the same month last year.
- The growth in February is the lowest in the last three months.
- The output of core sectors had increased by 8.9 per cent in January 2023 and 7 per cent in December 2022.
- It was 5.7 per cent in November 2022.

Eight core industries

- The index measures the combined and individual performance of the production of eight core industries namely Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement and Electricity.

Sector-wise Performance

- Petroleum Refinery production (weight: 28.04 per cent) increased by 3.3 per cent
- Electricity generation (weight: 19.85 per cent) increased by 7.6 per cent
- Steel production (weight: 17.92 per cent) increased by 6.9 per cent 2023
- Coal production (weight: 10.33 per cent) increased by 8.5 per cent
- Crude Oil production (weight: 8.98 per cent) declined by 4.9 per cent
- Natural Gas production (weight: 6.88 per cent) increased by 3.2 per cent
- Cement production (weight: 5.37 per cent) increased by 7.3 per cent
- Fertilizers production (weight: 2.63 per cent) increased by 22.2 per cent
- Core sector or key infrastructure industries, which have a 40.27% weight in the overall index of industrial production (IIP).

US to transfer antiques to India

Context

- The prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art will return 15 sculptures to India after it was learnt that the antiquities were illegally removed from the country and sold by notorious smuggler Subhash Kapoor.
- The New York Supreme Court has issued a search warrant against the museum.
- Of the 15 items listed in the search warrant, 10 were flagged in The Indian Express report.

List of important sculptures

- The 15 include the 11th-century sandstone Celestial Dancer (Apsara) from Madhya Pradesh (valued at more than $1 million) and the 1st century BCE Yakshi Terracotta from West Bengal.
- The list of antiquities listed include two from J&K flagged in The Indian Express report: an 8th century stone sculpture of Kamadeva, the god of love
- 3rd-4th century Harwan floral tile made of terracotta.

Action by Court

- The search warrant stated that these items were stolen and constitute evidence of the crimes like possession of stolen property and a conspiracy to commit the crimes under US penal law.
- The value of the 15 Indian antiquities listed in the search warrant has been estimated as $1.201 million (nearly Rs 9.87 crore).
- The US Department of Homeland Security has described Kapoor as "one of the most prolific commodities smugglers in the world.

India's semiconductor mission might need a compass

Context

- India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) has been set up as an Independent Business Division within Digital India Corporation. ISM has all the administrative and financial powers and is tasked with the responsibility of catalyzing the India Semiconductor ecosystem in manufacturing, packaging and design.
- The United States Department of Commerce and its Indian counterpart have recently concluded a memorandum of understanding in March 2023 to ensure that subsidies by each country do not come in the way of India's semiconductor dreams.

Semiconductor Laboratory

- The Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL) was set up in Mohali in 1983 by the then central government, with the vision of creating an electronics ecosystem in an era when Keltron, Uptron and Webel were fledgling entities in a pre-liberalised India aimed at consumer electronics.
- SCL Mohali can be viewed as a technology stack similar to others such as Aadhaar, Aarogya Setu and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) acting as a force multiplier effect, encouraging many integrated circuit design startups in India to consider designing for India.

Attracting investment

- The focus at MeITY seems aimed at attracting Intel into India to set up a semiconductor fabrication or fab.
- The investment of $50-$100 million may result in the development of Indian solutions for automotive electronics (EV traction inverters/on board chargers), PV-Inverters, 5G infra-power amplifiers, railway electronics (traction inverters), creating the Indian equivalent of Bosch, Siemens, ABB, Mitsubishi Electric, Thales and ELTA.
- This can be inferred from the wording of the request for proposals and signalling from MeITY Ministers.

Way forward

- The recent efforts by the India Semiconductor Mission to open subsidies to global small and medium-sized enterprises in the upstream supply chain are welcome because an existing facility like the SCL will benefit from this.
- But this is not enough in itself unless coupled with the incentives defined above and also upgrades targeted at different sets of players.
- Finally, Semiconductors and displays are the foundation for next phase of digital transformation under Industry 4.0.

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MAY
2023

- **MoE analysis on student enrollment and further progress**
- **SC remarks on Article 299 of the Constitution**
- **India to host 22nd SCO summit virtually**
- **RBI releases Annual Report 2022-23**
- **The short history of a large note**

MoE analysis on student enrollment and further progress

Context

- The Ministry of Education recently concluded an analysis on the student enrollment for class 10 and its further progress.
- Approximately the analysis, 35 lakh students enrolled in Class 10 in 2021-2022 did not progress to Class 11.
- Of these 35 lakh students, 27.5 lakhs failed, and 7.5 lakh students did not appear for the Class 10 examinations.
- The purpose of analyzing results across Boards is to standardize Board exams as recommended by the National Education Policy, 2020.

The failure rate of students

- The analysis by the ministry noted that the failure rate of students in Central Boards, including the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) is as low as 5%, it can be as high as 16% in State Boards.
- Of the 35 lakh students who failed or did not appear in the Class 10 exams, only 4.5 lakh students appeared in exams through the National Institute of Open Schooling, and there too the failure rates ranged between 47% to 55%.

Barriers to national-level common tests

- The significant variance in syllabus taught in different Boards, especially related to Physics, Chemistry and Biology, creates barriers to national-level common tests, including Common University Entrance Test (CUET), Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), and the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET).

State-wise data

- Analysis of State-wise data on students passing and failing in Class 10 and 12 exams by the MoE reveals that results of students studying across up to 60 State Boards in India vary considerably from one State to another.
- Only 11 States contribute to 85% of dropouts or nearly 30 lakh students.
- They are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, and Rajasthan, Karnataka, Assam, West Bengal, Haryana and Chhattisgarh.

SC remarks on Article 299 of the Constitution

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court has held that the government, when entering a contract under the President's name, cannot claim immunity from the legal provisions of that contract under Article 299 of the Constitution.
- A Bench led by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) said, while adjudicating an application for appointment of the arbitrator, the SC held that a contract entered in the name of the President of

India, does not create immunity against the application of any statutory prescription imposing conditions on parties to an agreement when the Government chooses to enter a contract.

- The case dealt with an application filed by Glock Asia-Pacific Limited, a pistol manufacturing company, against the Centre regarding the appointment of an arbitrator in a tender-related dispute.

Provision under Article 299 of the Constitution

- Article 298 grants the Centre and the state governments the power to carry on trade or business, acquire, hold, and dispose of property, and make contracts for any purpose.
- Article 299 delineates the way these contracts will be concluded.
- Articles 298 and 299 came after the Constitution came into effect and the government entered contracts even in the pre-independence era.
- Further, Article 299 of the Constitution provides that "all contracts made in the exercise of the executive power of the Union or of a State shall be expressed to be made by the President or by the Governor of the State".

Objective

- The objective behind Article 299(1), as per the 1954 top court ruling in 'Chatturbhuj Vithaldas Jasani v. Moreshwar Parashram & Ors', is that there must be a definite procedure according to which contracts must be made by agents acting on the government's behalf; otherwise, public funds may be depleted by unauthorized or illegitimate contracts.
- It implies that contracts not adhering to the manner given in Article 299(1) cannot be enforced by any contracting party.
- However, Article 299 (2) says that essentially, neither the President nor the Governor can be personally held liable for such contracts.

India to host 22nd SCO summit virtually

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced that, the 22nd Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) will be held in a virtual mode on 4 July, 2023.
- Earlier, it was widely reported that the meeting would take place in New Delhi, which could have seen the physical attendance of Russian President, Chinese President, Pakistan Prime Minister among others.
- According to a statement from the MEA, invitations were sent to heads of state of all SCO member countries — China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- Iran, Belarus and Mongolia were invited as Observer States for the upcoming meeting.

Five major approaches of SCO

- Confidence Building Efforts in Asia
- Collective Responsibility Approach
- Expanding Cooperation in Communication and Information Sharing
- Identification of Priority Areas
- Use of newly developed technology in disaster resilience capacity building

International organisations participation

- Apart from heads of state from the eight member countries, heads of six international and regional organisations such as the UN, ASEAN, CIS, CSTO, EAEU and CICA have also been invited for the upcoming summit.

About SCO

- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 2001.
- The SCO members include Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan besides India.
- SCO pursues its policy based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, non-interference in internal affairs, equality of all member States and mutual understanding and respect for the opinions of each of them.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization will probably be the largest regional organisation in the world at this time, representing 40% of the global population, 25% of the global GDP and 22% of the world's total land area.

India's SCO journey

- India has been associated with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization since 2005 and plays an important role as an observer country.
- At the 17th Summit in 2017, India became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as part of an important step in the process of expansion of this organization.

RBI releases Annual Report 2022-23

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its latest Annual Report 2022-23, said that India's growth momentum is likely to sustain in 2023-24 in an atmosphere of easing inflationary pressures.
- The central bank noted that the economy will be supported by:
- Sound macroeconomic policies
- Softer commodity prices
- Robust financial sector
- New growth opportunities stemming from global realignment of supply chains.

Factors that risk to growth

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report said that slowing global growth, protracted geopolitical tensions and a possible upsurge in financial market volatility following new stress events in the global financial system could pose downside risks to growth.

Growth forecast

- As per the anticipation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)Amid strong global headwinds, the Indian economy is expected to have grown by 7% in real GDP in 2022-23.
- Agriculture and allied activities were resilient in FY23, with sectoral gross value added (GVA) seen posting growth of 3.3%.

Digital payments

- According to RBI, In 2022-23, total digital payments recorded growth of 57.8 per cent and 19.2 per cent in volume and value terms, respectively, on top of growth of 63.8 per cent and 23.1 per cent, respectively, in the previous year.
- India outpaced other nations to emerge as the largest player in real-time transactions at the global level, with a 46 per cent share in 2022.

The short history of a large note

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced that it will withdraw the Rs 2000 denomination banknotes from circulation.
- The ₹2000 denomination banknote was introduced in November 2016 under Section 24(1) of RBI Act, 1934.
- The presence of the ₹2,000 note in circulation was a constant reminder of the horrors of a "nation in the queue".

Many errors

- In 2016, the ₹2,000 note had emerged as the centrepiece of demonetisation, a policy that was illogical in conception and mismanaged in execution.
- The note had to be printed in larger numbers because the government had not checked whether it had enough notes to replace what was withdrawn.
- On November 8, 2016, the total stock of notes of ₹2,000 — with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and currency chests was 473.3 million pieces worth ₹94,660 crore.
- This amount constituted just 6% of the value of Specified Bank Notes (SBN) withdrawn. People were dying in the queues, and the realisation dawned that more ₹2,000 notes were required for faster remonetisation.

Issue of re-calibration

- The RBI printed the new ₹2,000 notes in a new size.
- Normally, an automated teller machine (ATM) contained four cassettes; two cassettes held ₹500 notes and the other two cassettes held ₹1,000 and ₹100 notes.
- The new ₹2,000 note would not fit into any of these cassettes. Consequently, every one of the 2.2 lakh ATMs in India had to be "re-calibrated."
- Re-calibration was a massive and complex exercise that required coordination across banks, ATM manufacturers, the National Payments Corporation of India, and switch operators.
- Engineers had to personally visit each ATM and spend between two to four hours with an ATM to complete the re-calibration.

Need for a larger note

- All this while, the public was stuck with one basic question: if, as the government claimed, most illegal transactions and stocks of cash were in notes of ₹500 and ₹1,000, why did the government release new notes of ₹2,000?
- No credible explanation was ever provided.
- In fact, the RBI had suggested to the government, in October, 2014, that new notes of the denomination ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 be introduced in view of rising inflation and problems of managing currency logistics.
- However, the government declined this request in May, 2016 and advised the RBI to introduce new notes of ₹2,000.

What next

- The highest denomination note in an economy serves as a store of value and is scarcely used in day-to-day transactions.
- But as per capita incomes and inflation rise, the highest denomination note sheds value and becomes a note for day-to-day transactions.
- Typically, the economy would then need a new higher denomination note to act as a store of value.
- This was why the RBI had requested the government to let it issue ₹5,000 and ₹10,000 notes in 2014.
- To be a stable and acceptable store of value, a digital currency must meet the properties, among others, of anonymity, general purpose use, and exchangeability.

30.05.2023

- **India to train women from ASEAN for UN peacekeeping mission**
- **India, Singapore to focus on education & skill development**
- **China to send astronauts to Moon by 2030**
- **CAG voted in as WHO auditor for a second term**
- **From Master of the Roster to Master of all Judges**

India to train women from ASEAN for UN peacekeeping mission

Context
- Following Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's proposal last year for an initiative on 'women in United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPK) operations' as part of expanding India-ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) defence cooperation, India is set to conduct two initiatives for women personnel from South East Asia later this year.

U.N. Peacekeepers Day and India
- The Indian army commemorated the 75th anniversary of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers by paying homage to the fallen soldiers at the National War Memorial here.
- March 29 marked the 75th U.N. Peacekeepers Day and India, one of the largest troop contributing nations to the UNPK, currently has around 5,900 troops deployed in 12 U.N. missions.
- This is the day when in 1948, the first UN peacekeeping mission, "U.N. Truce Supervision Organisation", began operations in Palestine.
- India has contributed 2,75,000 troops to peacekeeping missions so far and 159 Indian Army soldiers have lost their lives across the globe.

Women's participation in peacekeeping missions
- The United Nations has said with more women being a part of peacekeeping missions, the operations have become more effective.
- According to the UN, of around 95,000 peacekeepers in 2020, women comprised 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units.
- Meanwhile, around 34% of personnel in peacekeeping missions were women.

Model exercise
- According to an official statement from the Ministry of Defence, in all 20 peacekeepers, two from each country would be trained.
- The other is a 'tabletop exercise' for women officers from ASEAN, incorporating facets of UNPK challenges to be conducted in December.
- Tailor-made courses are to be offered to two candidates from each of the member states.

India, Singapore to focus on education & skill development

Context

- Recently, India and Singapore agreed to create opportunities for lifelong learning, building a future-ready workforce, and making knowledge and skill development a key pillar of strategic partnership.
- This was discussed during the three-day visit of the Union Education Minister to Singapore. The minister also stressed learning from the best practices of Singapore, collaborating and customising them to meet Indian needs.

Focus area

- Union Education Minister discussed the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which specifically focuses on providing early exposure to vocational education in middle schools, ensuring market relevance of training as well as building the capacity of the institutions to provide technical and vocational education.
- Both countries further discussed the work towards integrating the skills qualifications framework with the higher education qualification framework and investing in developing short-term and long-term training programs to provide skilling, re-skilling, and upskilling opportunities.

G20 Future of Work workshop

- Building on the outcomes of the G20 Future of Work workshop in Bhubaneswar, India and Singapore also discussed ways in which India can leverage the expertise and knowledge of Singapore for addressing common challenges and transforming the Indian skills ecosystem.
- India and Singapore agreed to advance mutual priorities in skilling, create new opportunities for lifelong learning and collaborate together for the benefit of our countries as well as other emerging economies.

China to send astronauts to Moon by 2030

Context

- Recently, China announced its plans to send a manned mission to the moon by 2030 for lunar scientific exploration, amid its deepening space race with the West.
- The announcement was made by, Deputy Director of the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA), as China is preparing to send a third set of astronauts to its space station.
- China in the past successfully launched uncrewed missions to the moon which included a rover.
- China has also sent a rover to Mars.

Goal

- The goal of China's moon mission also includes mastering the key technologies such as earth-moon manned roundtrip, lunar surface short-term stay, human-robot joint exploration, accomplishing multiple tasks of landing, roving, sampling, researching, returning, and forming an independent capability of manned lunar exploration.
- The overall goal is to achieve China's first manned landing on the moon by 2030 and carry out lunar scientific exploration and related technological experiments, he was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.
- China's manned lunar mission came as the US space agency NASA aims to send a second manned mission to the moon by 2025 to explore the south pole for frozen water.

India's Chandrayaan-3 mission

- For its part, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced plans to launch its ambitious Chandrayaan-3 mission aimed at demonstrating critical technologies to land the spacecraft on the south pole.

- Chandrayaan-3 mission carries scientific instruments to study the thermo-physical properties of the lunar regolith, lunar seismicity, lunar surface plasma environment and elemental composition in the vicinity of the landing site.

China-Russia Collaboration

- In 2021, China and Russia announced plans to set up an International Lunar Research Station.
- Russian space agency Ros cosmos said in March 2021 that it has signed an agreement with China's National Space Administration to develop research facilities on the surface of the moon, in orbit or both.

CAG voted in as WHO auditor for a second term

Context

- Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India was re-elected as the external auditor of the World Health Organization (WHO) for a four-year term from 2024 to 2027.
- Currently, CAG is already holding this position in WHO for a four-year term from 2019 to 2023.
- CAG is a Member of the United Nations Panel of External Auditors.
- He is also a member of the Governing Boards of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) and ASOSAI.

Significance

- CAG's appointment is a recognition of its standing among the international community as well as its professionalism, high standards, global audit experience and strong national credentials.
- This is the second major international audit assignment for the CAG this year following his selection for the post of external auditor (2024-2027) of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva in March 2023.

Audit of other international organisations

- Besides WHO, the CAG is currently the external auditor of:
  o Food and Agriculture Organization (2020-2025)
  o International Atomic Energy Agency (2022-2027)
  o Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (2021-2023)

From Master of the Roster to Master of all Judges

Context
- Recently, a Division Bench of the Supreme Court, in Ritu Chhabria v. Union of India, affirmed an undertrial's right to be released on default bail in the event of the investigation remaining incomplete and proceeding beyond the statutory time limit.
- It frowned upon the practice of investigative agencies charge-sheeting an accused despite the investigation being unfinished.
- It held that the right to be released on bail would not be extinguished by filing a preliminary charge sheet.
- The apex court concluded that an accused's right to seek default bail would be terminated only upon competition of the investigation within the statutory time limit.

An extraordinary decision
- Subsequently, in a surprising turn of events, the Court of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) entertained a recall application moved by the Union of India against this judgment.
- It then passed an interim order directing courts to decide bail applications without relying on the decision laid down in Ritu Chhabria for a short period of time.
- In a nutshell, the Court of the CJI indirectly stayed the decision despite not having any connection with the verdict

Right to default bail
- The right to statutory bail, often known as default bail, is available to accused persons in cases when the investigating agency fails to complete its investigation within the stipulated time.
- Under Section 167(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), the maximum time available to investigators is 60 or 90 days, depending on the seriousness of the offence. If the authorities are unable to complete the investigation within this time period, the accused can seek to be released from custody by applying for default bail under the first proviso to Section 167(2) of the CrPC.
- The right to default bail has been characterised by the Court in multiple judgments as an indefeasible right, flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.

First amongst equals
- Within the constitutional scheme of things, all judges of the Supreme Court are equal in terms of their judicial powers.
- However, the CJI enjoys special administrative powers such as constituting Benches and assigning matters and references for reconsideration of a larger Bench.
- The CJI is known as the 'Master of the Roster.'
- This is why he is regarded as 'first amongst equals' in relation to companion judges.
- But in any given Bench including the CJI, the vote or power given to the CJI is the same as that given to his companion judges.

Cause for concern
- Despite the administrative use of the 'Master of the Roster' system, the many recorded instances of abuse cause concern.
- Just five years ago, four senior judges of the Supreme Court alleged serious infirmities and irregularities in the administration and assigning of cases for hearing to Benches of the Court.
- The powers vested in the CJI by his virtue of being the Master of the Roster are unending.

- It is impractical to lay any limits on these powers, meant for the smooth administrative functioning of the Court.

- It is imperative that the CJI himself refrains from expanding his powers as Master of the Roster; the practice of constituting Benches and allocating cases should be completely computerized and left out of the hands of the CJI.

Bottom line
- The CJI's powers as the Master of the Roster are meant only for administrative decision-making.
- The order has the effect of enlarging the powers of the CJI on the judicial side and of creating an unprecedented intra-court appellate mechanism within the Supreme Court in total disregard of the established procedure, which is a review petition.
- A recent Supreme Court order has the effect of enlarging the powers of the CJI on the judicial side.

29.05.2023

- **Dengue now nationwide infection after surge in cases**
- **ISRO launched the GSLV NVS-1 NavIC satellite**
- **Model Prisons Act 2023**
- **Joint Malnutrition Estimates released**
- **Nutrition in a warmer world**

Dengue now nationwide infection after surge in cases

Context
- The cumulative dengue diseases burden has attained an unprecedented proportion in recent times with sharp increase in the size of human population at risk.
- Dengue disease presents highly complex pathophysiological, economic, and ecologic problems.
- As the country gets ready to welcome the southwest monsoon, which is associated with the rise of certain diseases, including malaria, dengue and zika, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) confirmed that dengue's infection geography has grown.
- Rural areas contributed approximately 32% of the total cases in 2015-16 and have increased to 41%-45% now.

Cases in India
- India has recorded 63,280 dengue cases as of September 30, 2022, according to the latest data from the National Center for Vector Borne Diseases Control (NCVBDC).
- Every state and Union territory (UT) has reported dengue cases so in year 2022.
- This has been the case for the past five years, at least.
- The virus is endemic in India.
- However, only five states — Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu — had reported more than 100 dengue cases at the turn of this century.
- Cases began increasing rapidly in Maharashtra and Kerala in the next decade and largely remained concentrated in these seven areas.
- Nagaland was the only state and Lakshadweep the only UT to report zero dengue cases at the time.

Factor
- The increasing burden of dengue has often been linked with climate change, among other factors.
- ICMR-National Institute of Malaria Research, notes that the problems in the control of the Aedes-borne disease are manifold.

- Day-biting habit, multiple biting, long incubation period, fast transport, eggs retained up to one year, container breeding, human environment, and intermittent water supply and poor waste management at construction sites add to the problem.

WHO estimates

- The World Health Organization estimates the global incidence of dengue has grown over recent decades, with half of the world population now at risk.
- The ICMR said that this risk from dengue, which is now endemic in more than 100 countries, has been propelled by several factors, including climate change, increased urbanisation and increased travel.

Coase of action

- According to the ICMR, the experts are working on the development of the vaccines, they were also looking at increasing awareness and promoting prevention, people's participation, and the use of the latest technology, including satellite imaging and drones to map vulnerable areas.

ISRO launched the GSLV NVS-1 NavIC satellite

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the first of the second-generation satellites for its navigation constellation.
- NVS-1 is the inaugural satellite of the second-generation satellites planned for the NavIC series, intended to enhance the services and introduce new features to the system.

About NavIC

- NavIC, developed by ISRO, is a regional navigation satellite system consisting of seven satellites in orbit, working in conjunction with ground stations.
- It offers navigational services for both general and strategic users, including the armed forces.
- The system was developed to meet the growing needs of the Civil Aviation sector in India, specifically for improved positioning, navigation, and timing.
- The coverage area extends beyond India's borders, reaching up to 1500 km.
- NavIC is utilised in various domains such as terrestrial, aerial, and marine transportation, location-based services, personal mobility, resource monitoring, surveying and geodesy, scientific research, time dissemination and synchronization, as well as safety-of-life alert distribution.

What's new in the second-generation NavIC satellite

- The second-generation satellite NVS-01, the first of ISRO's NVS series of payloads — is heavier. Other importance feature include:
- **Atomic clock:** The satellite will have a Rubidium atomic clock onboard, a significant technology developed by India.
- The space-qualified Rubidium atomic clock indigenously developed by Space Application Centre-Ahmedabad is an important technology which only a handful of countries possess.

- **L1 signals for better use in wearable devices:** The L1 frequency is among the most commonly used in the Global Positioning System (GPS), and will increase the use of the regional navigation system in wearable devices and personal trackers that use low-power, single-frequency chips.
- **Longer mission life:** The second-generation satellites will also have a longer mission life of more than 12 years. The existing satellites have a mission life of 10 years.

Advantage of having a regional navigation system

- India is the only country that has a regional satellite-based navigation system.

- There are four global satellite-based navigation systems — the American GPS, the Russian GLONASS (GLObalnaya NAvigatsionnaya Sputnikovaya Sistema), the European Galileo, and the Chinese Beidou.
- Japan has a four-satellite system that can augment GPS signals over the country, like India's GAGAN (GPS Aided GEO Augmented Navigation).
- NavIC provides coverage over the Indian landmass and up to a radius of 1,500 km around it.
- NavIC signals come to India at a 90-degree angle, making it easier for them to reach devices located even in congested areas, dense forests, or mountains.
- GPS signals are received over India at an angle.

Total IRNSS in operation

- Each of the seven satellites currently in the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) constellation, operationally named NavIC, weighed much less — around 1,425 kg — at liftoff. They all rode the lighter PSLV, ISRO's workhorse launch rocket.
- GSLV NVS-1 is 2,232 kg satellite, the heaviest in the constellation.
- The last IRNSS satellite, IRNSS-1I was launched in April 2018 to replace an older, partially defunct satellite in the constellation.

Model Prisons Act 2023

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) announced that it has finalized the preparation of the Model Prisons Act, 2023, to replace the existing 130-year-old colonial law to shift the focus of incarceration from "retributive deterrence" to "reform and rehabilitation".

Salient features new Model Prisons Act

- Some salient features of the new Model Prisons Act include:
  o Provision for security assessment and segregation of prisoners
  o Individual sentence planning
  o Grievance redressal
  o Establishment of a prison development board
  o Focus on the physical and mental well-being of prisoners
- The Act also includes provisions for the use of technology in prison administration, such as video conferencing with courts and scientific and technological interventions in prisons.
- It also includes provisions for the punishment of prisoners and jail staff for using prohibited items like mobile phones in jails.
- The Act focuses on vocational training and skill development of prisoners to facilitate their reintegration into society.

What were the previous prison laws

- The first legislation that governed the management and administration of prisons in India was the Prisons Act, of 1894.
- It defined a "prison" as "any jail or place used permanently or temporarily under the general or special orders of a State Government for the detention of prisoners", excluding police custody and subsidiary jails.
- The 1894 Act dealt with provisions for accommodation, food, clothing, bedding segregation, and the discipline of prisoners, including solitary confinement.
- The Prisoners Act 1900 was introduced with the objective of consolidating the "several acts relating to prisoners" and replacing the "separate enactments by a single act, expressed more simply and intelligibly."

Is the Model Prisons Act, 2023, binding on states

- As per the provisions of the Constitution, 'prisons' and 'persons detained therein' fall under the State List.
- This means that the responsibility of prison management and administration solely vests with the state government, which alone is competent to make appropriate legislative provisions in this regard.
- However, the MHA stated that owing to the critical role played by "efficient prison management" in the criminal justice system, the Centre finds it crucial to support the States and UTs in this regard.
- The ministry also clarified while announcing the 2023 Act that it "may serve as a guiding document for the States" so that they may benefit from its adoption in their jurisdictions.

Joint Malnutrition Estimates released

Context

- According to the Joint Malnutrition Estimates, corresponding with global and regional trends, India continues to show a reduction in stunting and recorded 1.6 crore fewer stunted children under five years in 2022 than in 2012.
- However, wasting continues to remain a concern and so does growing levels of obesity.
- The Joint Malnutrition Estimates released by the UNICEF, the WHO and the World Bank.

Finding of Joint Malnutrition Estimates

- **Stunning:** Stunting among children under five years in India dropped from a prevalence rate of 41.6% in 2012 to 31.7% in 2022 with the numbers dropping from 52 lakh to 36 lakh. This was accompanied by India's share of the global burden of stunting declining from 30% to 25% in the past decade.
- Globally, stunting declined from a prevalence rate of 26.3% in 2012 to 22.3% in 2022.
- **Wasting:** The overall prevalence of wasting in 2022 was 18.7% in India, with a share of 49% in the global burden.
- **Obesity:** The prevalence of obesity marginally increased in a decade from 2.2% in 2012 to 2.8% in 2022 with the numbers growing to 31.8 lakh from 27.5 lakh, thereby contributing to 8.8% of the global share.
- But the overall classification for obesity is low and much lower than the global prevalence of 5.6%.

In line with NFHS

- The decline in stunting in India is commensurate with National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 (2019-2021) data which estimated its prevalence at 35.5% as against 38% in NFHS-4 (2016) and 48% in NFHS-3 (2006).
- The relative contribution of India's global burden from 29 to 24 was interesting.
- NFHS-5 showed evidence of continued reduction of stunting and instances of underweight children, though anaemia was disappointing.

Nutrition in a warmer world

Context

- At the Hiroshima Summit 2023, the G7 nations stressed that the peak for global Green House Gas (GHG) emissions should be reached by 2025.
- They also committed to an "Acceleration Agenda" for G7 countries to reach net-zero emissions by around 2040 and urged emerging economies to do so by around 2050. China has committed to net zero by 2060 and India by 2070.

Immediate impact of climate change

- The emerging trends in climate change may not give humanity the luxury of being too late.
- Severe costs are likely to be inflicted in terms of human lives and livelihoods, especially for those working in the agriculture sector, with every 1-degree Celsius increase in temperature compared to pre-industrial levels.
- India has the largest workforce (45.6 per cent in 2021-22) engaged in agriculture amongst G20 countries.
- The impact of climate change may be disproportionate for India.

WMO forecast

- There is renewed urgency in this matter as the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has forecast that global near-surface temperatures are likely to increase by 1.1°C to 1.8°C annually from 2023 to 2027.
- It also anticipates that temperatures will exceed 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for at least one year within this period.
- According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), India experienced its fifth hottest year on record in 2022.

What can Indian policymakers do

- The need of hour is to focus on agricultural research, development, education and extension (ARDE).
- ARDE is critical for improving resource use efficiency, especially for natural resources such as soil, water, and air.
- The development of seeds that are more heat resistant is already a reality.
- Precision agriculture, such as drip irrigation, can result in large water savings. Implementing sensor-based irrigation systems, for example, enables automated control, improving resource use efficiency.
- Fertigation and development of nano-fertilisers can not only save on the fertiliser subsidy but also reduce its carbon footprint.

Way forward

- It is crucial to acknowledge that despite the expenditure on agricultural research, development, education and extension (ARDE).
- India needs to almost double its budgetary allocations for ARDE.
- In this context, if the Union government can reduce its fertiliser subsidy, and state governments their power subsidy, and redirect those savings to agri-R&D, ensuring research intensity to be at least 1 per cent, the results would be much better in terms of food and nutritional security in the face of climate change.
- Along with the substantial increase in the budgets for ARDE, government needs to realign not just expenditures but also policies (such as fertiliser subsidy, power subsidy, etc) towards meeting the climate change challenge.

26.05.2023

- **All-in-one policy plan to spread insurance in India**
- **New committee to keep watch on Cheetah project**
- **Energy security biggest worry in sustaining growth**
- **Centre anticipates record foodgrains & oilseed harvests**
- **An ordinance, its constitutionality, and scrutiny**

All-in-one policy plan to spread insurance in India

Context

- In an ambitious bid to expand the poor insurance penetration in the country, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) is devising a new affordable insurance product to give citizens protection against multiple risks, and seeking to expedite claim settlements by linking death registries onto a common industry platform.
- IRDA is devising an affordable product covering health, life, property, and accident risks to give citizens protection and expedite claim settlements by linking death registries onto one industry platform.

Bima Sugam platform

- A new Bima Sugam platform will integrate insurers and distributors onto one platform to make it a one-stop shop for customers, who at a later stage can pursue service requests and settlement of claims through the same portal.
- Bima Sugam is expected to usher in greater simplicity, security, transparency, trigger innovation, and level the playing field for all players.
- It is expected to do for insurance what UPI has done for payments.

Amendments to attract investments

- These initiatives by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) are part of a broader overhaul including legislative amendments to attract more investments through differentiated licences for niche players similar to the banking sector with an eye on making insurance "available, affordable and accessible" to all citizens with a "gram panchayat- to the district- to State-level approach.
- The amendments will also enable the entry of new players in the form of micro, regional, small, captive players, specialised players, and even composite licences.

Roadmap

- To meet the target of providing insurance cover for all by 2047, the IRDA is also looking to form State-level insurance committees like the ones prevalent in the banking sector, and rope in State governments to formulate district-level plans, he said at the Confederation of Indian Industry's annual meeting.

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Rank 2, UPSC CSE 2022

New committee to keep watch on Cheetah project

Context

- Following the death of three cheetah cubs this week, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) recently appointed a new steering committee, comprising national and international experts, to oversee the implementation of Project Cheetah.
- The screening committee comprising of 11 members.

Task of the Committee

- The committee, tasked to review the progress of cheetahs brought from Namibia and South Africa, will "be in force for a period of two years and will hold at least one meeting every month, besides taking field visits as and when required.
- The committee will also take a decision on opening cheetah habitats for ecotourism and will suggest regulations in this regard.
- The Committee will also be empowered to invite wildlife experts for consultation.
- The committee will be in force for two years and will convene at least one meeting every month, besides conducting field visits to the Kuno National Park.

Project of reintroducing cheetahs

- As part of the Union government's ambitious project of reintroducing cheetahs in Indian wilds, seven decades after they went officially extinct in the same land due to rampant hunting, the first set of 8 Namibian cheetahs was flown from Namibia to India on the PM's 72nd birthday on September 17, 2022.
- The same day, the PM released them at KNP in MP's Sheopur district.
- Five months later, in february 12 more South African cheetahs were released.

Energy security biggest worry in sustaining growth

Context

- While addressing an event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry, Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) said Issues around energy security are among the biggest worries in sustaining high economic growth that India witnessed in the last two years.
- The CEA said India does have a target to balance the proportion of non-fossil fuels and fossil fuels in the energy mix in terms of installed capacity by the year 2030.
- He also said that there are signs of private investment picking up, with sectors such as steel, and cement reaching a stage where greenfield investment will take place.

Issue of Funding

- The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) stressed the importance of continued funding for fossil fuels, even as India moves towards a better balance of renewables in the energy mix.
- He said financial institutions should look at the overall environmental costs when evaluating green projects, and be aware of 'green washing'—projects that pass off as green but end up damaging the environment through unintended consequences.
- The financial sector must make investments in digital transformation for not only financial inclusion but also credit assessment and credit judgement.

Need for privatization

- The CEA on the need for undertaking privatization said that both privatization and monetization are important for unlocking the efficiency of assets.
- The need for keeping the momentum of privatization was critical.

- He added that public sector banks were being capitalized and in good shape and were hence going to be more valuable, and stressed that adopting private sector mechanisms within the public sector framework would provide better outcomes.
- On capital inflows in the form of investments into various sectors, $66 billion grossed in the first 11 months of FY23 compared to $84 in FY22 due to rising interest rates and geopolitical uncertainties was not a bad performance.

Centre anticipates record food grains & oilseed harvests

Context

- According to the "third advance estimates of production of major crops" released by the Union Agriculture Ministry, the Centre is estimating a record production of paddy, wheat, maize, soybean, rapeseed, mustard and sugar cane.
- Food grain production in the crop year ending June is likely to hit an all-time high of 330.5 million tonnes against last year's 315.6 mt.
- This is mainly because of the estimated record production of wheat, rice and maize.
- Also, this is despite a hot February and unseasonal rains during the harvesting period in March and early April.

Estimates of production major crops

- Production of maize in the country is projected to be 35.9 MT, which is 2.2 MT higher than the previous year.
- In addition to food grains, the ministry sees total oilseeds production rise to a record 40.9 MT as compared to 37.9 MT in 2021-22 (July-June).
- The output of sugarcane also has seen a boom.
- Its production in 2022-23 is estimated to be a record high of 494.2 MT against last season's 439.4 MT.
- Among food grains, the Centre expects cultivation of 1,355.42 lt of rice, 1,127.43 lt of wheat, 111.66 lt of bajra, 547.48 lt of coarse cereals and 359.13 lt of maize.
- The production of cotton is estimated at 343.47 lakh bales (of 170 kg each) and production of jute and Mesta is at 94.94 lakh bales (180 kg).

An ordinance, its constitutionality, and scrutiny

Context

- On May 19, 2023, the President of India exercised legislative power under Article 123 of the Constitution, during the period Parliament was in recess, to promulgate "The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023" (Ordinance).
- The ordinance negates a Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court of India, which was delivered on May 11, that brought "services" under the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD).
- Article 123 deals with the ordinance-making power of the President.

Observation by SC

- The Supreme Court held that the National Capital Territory of Delhi has legislative and executive power over administrative services in the National Capital, excluding matters relating to public order, police and land.
- The Lieutenant Governor shall be bound by the decision of Delhi government over services, apart from public order, police, and land.

Key issues

- There are two issues here that require analysis:
- First, the scope of the Court's verdict

- Second, the constitutionality of the ordinance
- While interpreting Article 239AA(3)(a), the Court ruled, inter alia, that these were the points:
- The Legislative Assembly of the NCTD has competence over entries in List II and List III, except for expressly excluded entries of List II (entries 1, 2, 18 are excluded).
- The executive power of NCTD is co-extensive with its legislative power, that is, it shall extend to all matters with respect to which it has the power to legislate.
- The Union of India has executive power only over three entries in List II over which the NCTD does not have legislative competence (entries 1, 2, 18).

Alteration needs an amendment

- The power conferred on Parliament under Article 239AA(7)(a) is to make laws for giving effect to or supplementing the provisions contained in various clauses of Article 239AA and for all matters incidental or consequential thereto.
- Such a power cannot be pressed into action to amend Article 239AA(3)(a) of the Constitution.
- Significantly, Article 239AA(7)(b) stipulates that Parliament's law making under Article 239AA(7)(a) shall not be deemed to be an amendment of the Constitution for the purposes of Article 368.
- Consequently, the ordinance promulgated under Article 123 of the Constitution to expand the scope of excepted matters in Article 239AA(3)(a) is void.

A perspective

- The Union of India's decision to prefer review (Article 137) and promulgate an ordinance (Article 123) simultaneously is ill-conceived; if the ordinance is challenged, the Union of India is unlikely to succeed through either route to wrest the power of "services" in Delhi.
- In the landmark seven-judge Bench verdict of the Supreme Court in the matter of Krishna Kumar Singh vs State of Bihar (2017) 2 SCC 136, the Court held that the satisfaction of the President under Article 123 is not immune from judicial scrutiny; powers under Article 123 is not a parallel source of law-making or an independent legislative authority.
- The ordinance is likely to be struck down since it expands excepted matters in Article 239AA(3)(a).
- Parliament alone can do this under Article 368.

25.05.2023

- **India set to triple speed of its fastest supercomputers**
- **New tax rules for online gaming**
- **Independence of the judiciary is part of basic structure**
- **G-20 to take up the effect of graft on women**
- **How to meet a disaster**

India set to triple speed of its fastest super computers

Context

- The Union minister of Earth Sciences said that India is set to dramatically scale up its supercomputing prowess and install an 18-petaflop system over the course of this year.
- Flops (floating point operations per second) are an indicator of the processing speed of computers and a petaflop refers to 1,000 trillion flops.
- Processing power to such a degree greatly eases complex mathematical calculations required, for, among other things, forecasting how the weather will be over the next few days all the way up to two or three months ahead.

India's most powerful supercomputers

- Currently India's most powerful, civilian supercomputers are Pratyush and Mihir with a combined capacity of 6.8 petaflops are housed at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune, and the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), Noida, respectively.
- They were made operational in 2018 at an investment of ₹438 crore.
- Both these organisations are affiliated to the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES).

Imported from France

- The new supercomputers, yet to be named, will be imported from French corporation, ATOS — an information technology service and consulting company.
- The government of India had signed a deal in December 2018 with France to procure high-performance computers worth ₹4,500 crore by 2025.
- The new MoES computers are likely to cost ₹900 crore.

World most powerful supercomputers

- The fastest high-performance computing system in the world is currently the Frontier-Cray system at Oakridge National Laboratory, United States. This has a peak speed of one exaflop (or about 1,000 petaflops).
- The top 10 other systems, based on speed, range from about 400 petaflops to 60 petaflops.

New tax rules for online gaming

Context

- Recently, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) issued a new set of guidelines on online gaming platforms, stating that the platforms need not deduct tax at source (TDS) on winnings withdrawn by players if the amount is less than Rs 100 a month and meets certain riders.
- The CBDT circular also said that bonus, referral bonus, incentives etc are given by the online gaming company to the intermediate user and they are to be considered as taxable deposits under Rule 133 of the Income-tax Act.
- The guidelines were aimed at addressing difficulties faced by taxpayers.

Calculation of net winnings

- The CBDT said that under Rule 133 every user account will be included, by whatever name it is registered with the online gaming intermediary and where any taxable deposit, non-taxable deposit, or the winning of the user is credited and withdrawal is debited.
- When there are multiple accounts of a user, each user account shall be considered for the purposes of calculating net winnings.
- The deposit, withdrawal or balance in the user account shall mean the aggregate of deposits, withdrawals, or balances in all user accounts.

TDS provision for online gaming

- The online gaming industry has been under the lens of tax authorities for the last few years.
- With an aim to track such transactions, the government had inserted a new section 194BA in the Income-tax Act, 1961 through Finance Act 2023, which mandated online gaming platforms to deduct income-tax on the net winnings in the person's user account.

Independence of judiciary is part of basic structure of Constitution

Context

- The Supreme Court has held that the independence of district judiciary is part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

- The apex court noted that underlining that the access to justice would remain illusory without impartial and independent judges at the grassroots level.
- The court said judicial independence from the executive and the legislature requires the judiciary to have a say in matters of finances.
- The judgment, based on a petition filed by the All-India Judges Association, gave a series of directions to amend the service rules of the district judiciary and for payment of arrears of pension, additional pension, gratuity and other retiral benefits.

Basic structure of Constitution

- The 'basic structure' doctrine has since been interpreted to include:
    o Supremacy of the Constitution
    o Rule of law
    o Independence of the judiciary
    o Doctrine of separation of powers
    o Sovereign democratic republic
    o Parliamentary system of government
    o Principle of free and fair elections
    o Welfare state

Independence of the district judiciary

- The independence of the district judiciary must also be equally a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.
- Without impartial and independent judges in the district judiciary, justice would remain illusory.
- The Supreme Court noted that the district judiciary is, in most cases, also the court which is most accessible to the litigant.

G-20 to take up the effect of graft on women

Context

- On India's request, a G-20 working group on fighting corruption will discuss how graft impacts women.
- The role of audit institutions and attempts to build a consensus on a common definition of economic offenders are also among the topics that will be discussed at the second G-20 anti-corruption working group meeting scheduled to begin in Rishikesh.
- G-20 working group meeting will focus on how G-20 countries can come together and build an operational framework.

Experience sharing

- India's plan to highlight its own experiences where anti-corruption efforts have helped in the empowerment of women.
- India is organising a unique event on exploring "G-20's perspective on synergising gender sensitivity with anti-corruption strategies" on the sidelines of the second G-20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) meeting.
- The meeting will focus on how G-20 countries can come together and build an informational as well as operational framework for networking, sharing information and preventing the creation of safe havens that fugitive economic offenders can exploit.
- It is a unique step in taking forward India's priority of strengthening the fight against corruption.

How to meet a disaster

Context

- The G20 nations, with a population of 4.7 billion, have a large exposure, the risk from asset concentration, and vulnerability to natural disasters.
- In the current World Risk Index, four out of the top 10 vulnerable countries are G20 nations.
- The combined estimated annual average loss in the G20 countries alone is $218 billion, equivalent to 9 per cent of the average annual investment in infrastructure made by them.

Measure for Disaster risk reduction

- Disaster risk reduction measures can play an important role in preventing such losses. Reducing risk can be achieved mainly by reducing vulnerability and exposure to risk through measures such as better economic and urban development choices and practices, protection of the environment, reduction of poverty and inequality, etc.
- Setting up early warning systems, undertaking periodic risk assessments, constructing disaster-resilient infrastructure, etc, are important strategies.

Efforts by Working Group of G20

- India has highlighted the importance of disaster risk reduction by initiating a new workstream in G20.
- The five priorities outlined in the first meeting of the working group include:
  o Coverage of early warning systems to all
  o Focus on disaster and climate-resilient infrastructure
  o Improving financing frameworks for national disaster risk reduction
  o Improving systems and capabilities for response to disasters
  o Application of ecosystem-based approaches to disaster risk

Roadmap and board theme

- A second meeting of the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group was held in Mumbai, Maharashtra.
- This is an opportune time to focus and deliver on the goals of disaster risk reduction. The five broad themes include:
- First, we need to re-imagine financing disaster risk reduction.
- The financing requirements flowing through government budgets are not independent of a country's fiscal position and hence may be limited.
- Innovative financing tools including creating reserve funds, dedicated lines of credit and tapping resources globally should be explored.
- While green financing has gained traction in global financial markets, the same cannot be said of disaster risk financing.
- Second, There is a need for differential strategies to deal with extensive risk (risk of losses from frequent but moderate impacts) and intensive risk (from low frequency and high impact events), should be worked out.
- Third, bringing about a meaningful convergence of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation efforts is another vital component.
- Four, Access to early warning systems should be treated as global public goods, with all populations irrespective of their economic strength, having reliable access to systems such as cyclone early warning.
- Finally, we must view disaster risk reduction as a multi-tiered, multi-sectoral effort.

Implementation of the Sendai Framework

- The recently concluded high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the midterm review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (HLM) held in New York mentions the importance of G20's efforts in the implementation of the Sendai Framework.
- The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure is presently chaired by India and the United States.
- The creation of the new workstream under the G20 is reflective of the prime minister's commitment towards disaster preparedness.

Way Forward

- The G20 provides a broader platform to drive global goals on disaster risk reduction. The perspectives that G20 as a group will bring to the table would be unique.
- The Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction is an opportunity for the G20 to take a lead in the implementation of the Sendai framework over the next seven years.

24.05.2023

- **India-Australia bilateral ties built on trust**
- **EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism**
- **India provides railway infrastructure to Bangladesh**
- **Draft of Digital India Bill to be released in June**
- **Health of the Hinterland**

India-Australia bilateral ties built on trust

Context

- Recently while addressing a special community event in Sydney Australia, the Prime minister of India noted that foundation of India-Australia relationship is based on mutual trust and respect.
- Asserting that the strategic partnership between India and Australia is constantly deepening, the PM said, "We hope the bilateral trade between the two sides will more than double in the next five years".
- Both countries signed the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement last year.

Evolving India-Australia relations

- India-Australia relations have gone beyond the time they were defined by "three Cs" — Commonwealth, cricket, and curry; "three Ds" — democracy, diaspora and dosti; and "three Es" — energy, economy and education.
- The Prime minister of India also highlighted the achievements of his government, ranging from direct benefit transfers to millions to ambitious renewable energy targets.
- The Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), signed in 2022, is expected to double trade between India and Australia in five years, and the two sides are now working on a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA) and building resilient and reliable supply chains.

Indian Community In Australia

- The Indian community in Australia continues to grow in size and importance, with the population of nearly half seven lakhs.
- India is one of the top sources of skilled immigrants to Australia.
- India is now the third largest source of immigrants to Australia, after the UK and New Zealand and the largest source of skilled professionals for Australia.
- The Prime Minister also said the two countries have moved forward in recognizing degrees issued by each other and this will benefit students of both sides.

EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism

Context

- In May, co-legislators at the European Commission signed the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
- CBAM is a measure to prevent "carbon leakage" of carbon-intensive products.
- It has been described as a "landmark tool" to put a "fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon-intensive goods that are entering the EU, and to encourage cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries."

About CBAM

- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is landmark tool to put a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods that are entering the EU.
- The mechanism encourages cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries.
- Its primary objective is to avert 'carbon leakage'.
- It refers to a phenomenon where an EU manufacturer moves carbon-intensive production to countries outside the region with less stringent climate policies.
- From 2026, once the CBAM is fully implemented, importers in the EU would have to buy carbon certificates corresponding to the payable carbon price of the import had the product been produced in the continent, under its carbon pricing rules.

Why are countries worried

- CBAM would initially apply to imports of certain goods and selected precursors, whose production is carbon-intensive and are at risk of 'leakage' such as the cement, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizers, electricity and hydrogen sectors.
- In 2021, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had concluded that Russia, China and Turkey were most exposed to the mechanism. Considering the level of exports to the union in these sectors, it stated India, Brazil and South Africa would be most affected among the developing countries.

Impact on India

- India's exports in the five segments represented less than 2% of the total exports to the EU between 2019 and 2021.
- EU is India's third largest trade partner.
- India's products have a higher carbon intensity than its European counterparts, the carbon tariffs imposed will be proportionally higher making Indian exports substantially uncompetitive.

India provides key railway infrastructure to Bangladesh

Context

- With an aim to further enhance bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh, Minister of Railways flagged off 20 Broad Gauge (BG) locomotives virtually to Bangladesh.
- The government of India had also offered Bangladesh the use of the IT system deployed by PM-GATI SHAKTI scheme, which has 1,600 layers of information based on satellite imagery.

Train operations in Bangladesh

- In keeping with the requirements of Bangladesh Railway, the locomotives have been suitably modified by the Indian side.
- These locomotives will help handle the increasing volume of passenger and freight train operations in Bangladesh.
- In June 2020, India had provided 10 locomotives to Bangladesh as grant.
- The Indian Railways is playing a vital role in improving and strengthening rail connectivity across the border and improving trade between both the countries.
- Trade between the countries via rail has seen a consistent growth with interchange of close to 100 cargo trains a month.
- Approximately 2.66 tonnes of cargo was sent to Bangladesh in the previous financial year.

Draft of Digital India Bill to be released in June

Context

- According to the Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology, A full-fledged draft of the Digital India Bill, set to be the biggest revamp of laws governing the Internet in India since the Information Technology Act, 2000, and subsequent amendments, will be published in the first week of June.
- This was the second such consultation after the first pre-consultation in Bengaluru in March.

About Digital India Act

- The Digital India Act is expected to replace the Information Technology Act, of 2000, taking into consideration the need to regulate and safeguard users in the burgeoning internet economy in India.
- The Act aims to create new regulations surrounding the newest, most relevant technology today as India approaches the threshold of most-internet connected country in the world.
- The government aims to enable the digital economy in India to cross $1 trillion by 2025-26.

Syncing with the global norms

- Not just focused on India, the government is also taking into consideration the discussions and actions being taken globally to regulate the growing digital economy to protect users and avoid market monopoly by technology giants.
- Referring to the European Union's imposition of a record fine of 1.2 billion euros ($1.3 billion) on Meta on May 22, for violating Global Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) on cross-border data transfers, the minister highlighted that the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 has similar measures.

Intermediaries may lose safe harbour

- In India, the government is looking to do away with the Section 79 provision under the IT Act, 2000 entirely, which provides immunity to intermediary's platforms from not getting prosecuted for hosting third-party content that spreads disinformation, hate speech, religious incitement etc.

Health of the Hinterland

Context

- In over seven decades since Independence, India has made remarkable strides, emerging as the world's fifth-largest economy and a leader in the digital realm.
- Even as economic and geopolitical headwinds cast a shadow on global economies, India's growth story is a reminder of our resilience.

The concept of One World, One Family

- India, at various points, has demonstrated the ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — One World, One Family.
- One example is India's contribution towards the global vaccination drive during the pandemic, when it supplied vaccines to countries across the globe.
- Under the government's initiative, "Vaccine Maitri", India provided over 60 million vaccine doses to neighbouring countries and other parts of the world.
- For a country with an over 1.4 billion population, India's healthcare ecosystem is truly a feat to be proud of.

Neglecting the tribal communities

- The tribal communities in India constitute 8.9 per cent of the population and remain the most neglected and deprived group when it comes to access to healthcare.
- As per a report by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the mortality rate in tribal areas is 44 per cent higher than the national average, and infant mortality is 63 per cent higher.
- This underlines the urgent need to empower tribal communities and ensure they receive equitable healthcare access.
- The challenges they face are multifaceted — lack of infrastructure, medical professionals, connectivity, affordability, equipment, insurance, funding, and much more.

Need for Intervention

- Empowering tribal communities must be done strategically, keeping in mind their traditions and other intangible heritage touchpoints.
- The health of communities is influenced by various factors.
- These factors differ significantly for tribal communities, with a more communitarian social setup, an underdeveloped economy dependent on forest resources and unique geographic conditions, among others.

Way forward

- A long-term solution to the tribal healthcare challenge, investing in medical colleges and training centres across such remote areas is essential.
- It has the potential to bridge the gap in healthcare infrastructure and provide employment opportunities for the local population.
- Through inclusive leadership and investments in healthcare infrastructure in tribal areas, we can empower our tribal communities, achieve sustainable development, and fulfil the United Nations SDGs.
- With suitable investments, public policy, and governance, we can make healthcare affordable and accessible to all.

23.05.2023

- **3rd India-Pacific Islands Cooperation Summit**
- **Centre seeks stricter implementation of ban on e-cigarettes**
- **Education Ministry holds meet on PARAKH platform**
- **Govt to bring bill to link birth, death data with electoral rolls**
- **It's time to ensure safer skies**

3rd India-Pacific Islands Cooperation Summit

Context

- The Prime Minister while recently addressing the 3rd India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) Summit in Papua New Guinea call for free and open Indo-Pacific region and focused on India's commitment to assist the development goals of the member-countries.
- The summit took place at a time when China is making efforts to enhance its military and diplomatic influence in the region.
- The Prime Minister also emphasized the need for multilateralism and respecting the sovereignty and integrity of all countries.

India's Initiatives for Pacific Island Countries

- At that summit, India announced initiatives across a wide array of areas to assist the PICs in facing challenges and achieving aspirations for the well-being and development of its people.
- The Prime Minister of India said that India would continue to help the Pacific island states in "every possible" way, like Climate change, natural calamities, poverty and famine already existed but now new challenges are emerging as supply chains of food, fuel fertilizer and pharma are facing hurdles.
- He also assured the FIPIC members of India's support in the field of sustainable development, science and technology and space application.

India's Act East Policy

- India's engagement with the 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) is part of India's Act East Policy.
- A major part of India's engagement with PICs is through development assistance under South-South Cooperation which is mainly in the form of capacity building and community development projects.
- A major initiative launched under the rubric of the Act East Policy for the PICs is the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).
- Prime Minister of India hosted the first FIPIC summit in Suva on November 19, 2014, during his visit to Fiji.
- The second FIPIC summit was held in Jaipur on August 21, with all 14 PICs participating.

Centre seeks stricter implementation of ban on e-cigarettes

Context

- Recently, the Union Health Ministry issued a public notice to strengthen the enforcement of the Act which prohibits the manufacture, sale and advertisements of electronic cigarettes.
- With e-cigarettes still being easily accessible online and at tobacco shops despite the ban, the ministry has directed all stakeholders, including producers, manufacturers, importers, distributors, advertisers, and retailers, to strictly comply with the Act's provisions.

About e-cigarettes

- Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, are devices powered by batteries that heat a substance, usually in liquid or solid form, containing nicotine and various flavours.
- This heating process creates an aerosol that can be inhaled.
- As a result, the vapour, which contains nicotine, is drawn deep into the lungs and enters the bloodstream.
- In comparison to traditional tobacco smoking, where tobacco leaves are physically burned, e-cigarettes operate differently.
- While tobacco smoking produces harmful byproducts such as tar, carbon monoxide, and numerous other chemicals, e-cigarettes primarily deliver nicotine without the combustion process.

Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act 2019

- The public notice issued by the Health Ministry aims to raise awareness about the banned product and strengthen the implementation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Act 2019.
- The Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act came into force in 2019. The Finance Ministry had introduced the ban on sale, storage, and manufacturing of E-cigarettes, saying it was aimed at protecting the young from the health hazards.
- In February, the ministry had written to all states and UTs to ensure effective compliance of the ban on e-cigarettes, expressing concern that these devices are still available online and at local vendors.

Concern over Weak Enforcement

- The ban on electronic cigarettes was introduced to protect younger generation from a new form of toxic addiction.
- However, its enforcement has been weak, resulting in the market being flooded with cheap and unbranded Chinese-made electronic cigarettes.

Education Ministry holds meet on PARAKH platform

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Education and national assessment regulator PARAKH, organised the first workshop to brainstorm school assessments, examination practices and equivalence of boards across the country.
- In India, currently, there are around 60 school examination boards that are operating in different states and Union Territories.
- The Ministry of Education's aim is to establish a unified framework that enables seamless transitions for students moving between different boards or regions.
- The mandate of PARAKH is to work on bringing the school Boards across States and Union Territories on a common platform.

About PARAKH
- PARAKH Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development), has been launched as part of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020 that envisaged a standard-setting body to advise school boards regarding new assessment patterns and latest research, and promote collaborations between them.
- It will function as a component of the NCERT.
- It will also be responsible for conducting recurring learning outcome assessments like the National Achievement Survey (NAS) and State Achievement Surveys.
- It will focus on three main assessment areas: extensive assessments, school-based assessments, and examination improvements.
- The government is expecting PARAKH to conduct the National Achievement Survey (NAS) in 2024.

Focus of the workshop
- The workshop focused on a discussion on equivalence across educational boards. Multiple stakeholders were informed regarding the conception of PARAKH.
- The discussion revolved around the need to reassess the prevailing rote examination culture in our education system.
- There is a growing realization that holistic assessments, encompassing various dimensions of a student's abilities and potential, are equally important.
- The workshop will study school assessments, examination practices and equivalence of Boards across the country.

Govt to bring bill to link birth, death data with electoral rolls

Context
- The Centre is planning to bring a bill in Parliament to link data related to birth and death with electoral rolls and the overall development process.
- Under this process, when a person turns 18, his or her name will be automatically included in the electoral rolls.
- Similarly, when a person dies, that information automatically will go to the Election Commission, which will start the process of deleting the name from the voters' list.

Amendment the Registration of Birth and Death Act (RBD), 1969
- According to the officials, the bill to amendment the Registration of Birth and Death Act (RBD), 1969, will also facilitate matters related to the issuance of driving licence and passport and giving benefits of the government welfare schemes to people besides others.
- If the data of birth and death certificate is preserved in a special way, then by estimating the time between the census, planning of development works can be done properly.
- The decennial census that was to be completed in 2021 was indefinitely postponed, initially due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Upgraded sample registration system
- The Union Minister also launched an upgraded sample registration system (SRS) mobile application system.
- The SRS is a large-scale demographic survey conducted every year by the Registrar-General of India (RGI) office to estimate the birth rate, death rate and other fertility and mortality indicators.

It's time to ensure safer skies

Context

- An Air India Express Boeing 737-800 aircraft arriving from Dubai with 167 on board 2010 tragically crashed at Mangalore International Airport.
- A series of Public Interest Litigations were fought by the undersigned to stop the construction of this 2nd runway in Mangalore airport on grounds that the design simply did not conform to the most basic national and international standards of airport design. The PILs also highlighted that the airport does not conform with the most minimum safeguards for emergency situations – particularly during landings and takeoffs, and could not have emergency approach roads within a kilometre on all sides of the airport as required.

Background

- In 1997, a Bangalore-based NGO called the Environment Support Group filed a public interest litigation (PIL) in the Karnataka High Court.
- A key concern of the group was that the second runway in Mangalore airport would not be able to meet the standards required while dealing with an emergency, particularly during landings and take-offs.
- The court dismissed the PIL.
- The group challenged this verdict in the Supreme Court, which said, "We see no reason to interfere... We, however, clarify that in constructing the Airport, the Government shall comply with all applicable laws and with environmental norms."

No lessons learned

- The PIL which highlighted all the violations was also dismissed by the Supreme Court, showing the judiciary's reluctance to act against government agencies.
- The AIE aircraft was too high and fast and the touchdown was late.
- It crashed into the illegal concrete structure on which the Instrument Landing System Localiser antenna was mounted.
- The International Civil Aviation Organization had set January 1, 2010 as the deadline to ensure that all localiser structures were frangible.
- To make matters worse, the structure was replaced with steel girders. The court of inquiry team, headed by an Air Marshall, ignored both these violations.
- This is where the investigations by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) have failed.

Formation of Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council

- The Ministry of Civil Aviation constituted the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC) after the Mangalore crash.
- Members of operations, aerodromes and Air Traffic Control (ATC) were tasked with identifying deficiencies and providing corrective steps.
- The focus was on critical runways, such as in Mangalore and Calicut.
- The CASAC pointed out the failure of the court of inquiry report in identifying serious errors and taking corrective steps.
- But the Ministry and the DGCA ignored our warnings. An accident on August 7, 2020 cost 21 lives.

Conclusion

- The protection of safety information is significant to the sharing and exchange of
- safety information initiatives, and the guidance related is included in DGCA Civil
- Aviation Requirements on "Safety Management System".
- The Government need to focus on infrastructure development to contribute to the growth of the aviation sector.

22.05.2023

- **PM ask to raise voice against unilateral change in status quo**
- **Understanding a human pangenome map**
- **India, U.S. to hike technology cooperation**
- **Return of ₹2,000 currency notes to bolster bank & market liquidity**
- **India as a Quad-led biomanufacturing hub**

PM ask to raise voice against unilateral change in status quo

Context

- During a G7 Working session address, the Prime Minister of India, reaffirmed India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine crisis and said that he views Ukraine's current situation as an issue of humanity and human values instead of politics or economy.
- He urged the international community to collectively raise voices against any unilateral attempt to change the 'status quo'.
- In his remarks, the PM also referred to his talks about his recent with the Ukrainian President.

Adherence to UN Charter and international law

- In an address at a G7 session in Hiroshima, the Prime Minister of India said all countries must respect the UN Charter, international law and sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations and called for raising voices together against unilateral attempts to change the status quo.
- The prime minister's comments came against the backdrop of the lingering border row with China in eastern Ladakh and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

India's stand on the Russia-Ukraine conflict

- The Prime Minister of India said India has always been of the opinion that any tension and any dispute should be resolved peacefully through dialogue.
- The prime minister said that in the current global situation, the maximum and most profound effects of the food, fuel and fertilizer crisis are being felt by the developing countries.
- Global peace, stability and prosperity are a common objective of all of us.

Understanding a human pangenome map

Context

- Recently, a new study published in the May issue of the Nature Journal describes a pangenome reference map, built using genomes from 47 anonymous individuals (19 men and 28 women), mainly from Africa but also from the Caribbean, Americas, East Asia, and Europe.

About genome

- The genome is the blueprint of life, a collection of all the genes and the regions between the genes contained in our 23 pairs of chromosomes.
- The genome is an identity card like Aadhaar. As each of our Aadhar cards is unique, so is our genome.
- Each chromosome is a contiguous stretch of DNA string.
- The human genome consists of 23 different strings, each composed of millions of individual building blocks called nucleotides or bases.
- The four types of building blocks (A, T, G and C) are arranged and repeated millions of times in different combinations to make all of our 23 chromosomes.

Genome sequencing

- Genome sequencing is the method used to determine the precise order of the four letters and how they are arranged in chromosomes.
- Sequencing individual genomes helps us understand human diversity at the genetic level and how prone we are to certain diseases.

About the pangenome map

- Unlike the earlier reference genome, which is a linear sequence, the pangenome is a graph.
- The graph of each chromosome is like a bamboo stem with nodes where a stretch of sequences of all 47 individuals converges (similar), and with internodes of varying lengths representing genetic variations among those individuals from different ancestries.
- To create complete and contiguous chromosome maps in the pangenome project, the researchers used long-read DNA sequencing technologies, which produce strings of contiguous DNA strands of tens of thousands of nucleotides long.

Importance of pangenome map

- Although any two humans are more than 99% similar in their DNA, there is still about a 0.4% difference between any two individuals.
- A complete and error-free human pangenome map will help us understand those differences and explain human diversity better.
- It also helps to understand genetic variants in some populations, which result in underlying health conditions.
- Future pangenome maps that include high-quality genomes from Indians, including from many endogamous and isolated populations within the country, will shed light on disease prevalence, help discover new genes for rare diseases, design better diagnostic methods, and help discover novel drugs against those diseases.

India, U.S. to hike technology cooperation

Context

- India and the U.S. are discussing possibilities of co-producing jet engines, long-range artillery and infantry vehicles under the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) announced earlier this year.
- According to officials, some high-technology initiatives are expected to be announced during the Prime Minister of India's upcoming visit to the U.S. in June 2023.
- Ahead of the visit, the launch of INDUS-X under the iCET to promote partnerships between the two countries' defence innovation ecosystems is scheduled in Washington.
- The dialogue advanced an ambitious agenda — including industrial cooperation, information-sharing, maritime security, and technological collaboration that reflects the robust and comprehensive defence ties between the United States and India.

Enhancing cooperation

- The considerable focus was given on the ways and means to enhance defence industrial cooperation, including technology partnership, long-term research and development, and improving supply chain security.
- Both sides confirmed that the jet engine collaboration was discussed during DPG along with other collaboration mechanisms within co-production and co-development.

Priorities in the Indian Ocean Region

- The officials exchanged views about shared priorities in the Indian Ocean Region and aligning the US-India partnership with other like-minded partnerships to sustain a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- The leaders reinforced their commitment to strengthening cooperation and interoperability between the US and Indian militaries to work together in all domains and across all services.

Return of ₹2,000 currency notes to bolster bank & market liquidity

Context

- According to a research report, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to withdraw ₹2,000 notes could boost banks' deposit base and liquidity in the money markets by anywhere between ₹40,000 crore to ₹1.1 lakh crore, even if just about a third of these heavily hoarded high currency notes are flushed out by the exercise.
- A part of those notes which are being hoarded to avoid taxes on unaccounted-for incomes could be funneled into assets such as real estate and jewellery.

RBI's advisory

- The RBI has advised members of the public to deposit Rs 2,000 banknotes into their bank accounts or exchange them for banknotes of other denominations at any bank branch.
- The RBI further said the exchange of Rs 2,000 banknotes into banknotes of other denominations can be made up to a limit of Rs 20,000 at a time at any bank starting from May 23, 2023.
- The facility for the exchange of Rs 2,000 notes, up to the limit of Rs 20,000 at a time, will also be provided at the 19 regional offices of the RBI having issue departments.

Significance of the move

- The move provides a fiscal buffer of about 0.13%-0.15% of GDP to the Centre and will help mitigate some of the expenditure spillovers that could potentially take place through the year.
- More importantly, this strong dividend transfer would provide a bonanza for core money market liquidity with the central government eventually using this for its expenditure in the coming months.

India as a Quad-led biomanufacturing hub

Context

- In March 2021, the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) set up a Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group to facilitate cooperation, monitor trends, and scout for opportunities related to developments in critical and emerging technologies, that included biotechnology.
- However, the potential for Quad cooperation in biotechnology remains insufficiently tapped.
- The establishment of a Quad-led biomanufacturing hub in India will give the necessary fillip to enhance this cooperation.

About Biomanufacturing

- Biomanufacturing is a type of manufacturing or biotechnology that utilizes biological systems to produce commercially important biomaterials and biomolecules for use in medicines, food and beverage processing, and industrial applications.
- Biomanufacturing uses living systems, particularly microorganisms and cell cultures, to produce molecules and materials on a commercial scale.
- It has the potential to transform the global industrial system, with up to 60% of physical inputs to the global economy expected to be producible using this technology.
- Many countries, including the United States and China, recognise the need to optimise this ecosystem and have designed specific policies to shape their bio-economies.

Quad and complementary strengths

- India's National Biotechnology Development Strategy also envisions the country as a "Global Biomanufacturing Hub" by 2025.
- While the strategy sets a target of $100 billion for the hub, it is important to recognise that India's ambitions require external support, particularly through its Quad partners, to enable its initial development.
- Specifically, the Quad should establish a biomanufacturing hub in India to benefit from the country's economic potential and address supply-chain vulnerabilities.
- The U.S. has significant funding capability, while all three (Japan, Australia and the U.S.) also possess advanced biotechnology innovation ecosystems and intellectual property.

India's strength in bio manufacturing

- India has skilled manpower and the potential to provide affordable scale.
- According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, India is among the top performers in the field of bio manufacturing in both the quality of research output and in the share among research publications.
- India also has significant potential in low-cost bio manufacturing, particularly in the production of enzymes, reagents, research materials, and equipment.
- According to at least one analysis, the cost of manufacturing in India is around 33% lower when compared to that in the U.S.
- Indeed, India is the ideal choice to host the bio manufacturing hub thanks to its existing infrastructure, pharmaceutical manufacturing expertise, and available workforce.

Strengthening physical infrastructure

- India also aims to become a leading bio manufacturing hub with plans to increase fermentation capacity tenfold to 10 million litres in the next three to five years.
- China has also expressed its intention to capture this market, like how it dominated small-molecule active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

- In fact, concerns about China's dominance in APIs pushed India to launch a production-linked incentive scheme that allocated $2 billion to the pharmaceutical sector to make biopharmaceuticals, APIs, key starting materials, and related products.

Way forward

- To facilitate cross-Quad collaboration, the bio manufacturing hub can house all current bilateral government efforts and establish a research collaboration office for this purpose.
- The hub can also harmonise language, regulations, and data-sharing regarding bio manufacturing to secure supply chains for Quad nations and facilitate international collaboration.
- The proposed hub in India can capitalise on the economic potential of the bio manufacturing industry and address existing and potential vulnerabilities in the global system.
- India is an ideal choice because of its existing infrastructure, pharmaceutical manufacturing expertise, and workforce.

20.05.2023

- **RBI withdraws Rs 2,000 notes from circulation**
- **Panel recommends overarching agency to grade varsities**
- **India calls for attention to funding disaster risk reduction**
- **Limited arsenic exposure can mar cognitive ability**
- **Tracking SDG progress the Bhopal way**

RBI withdraws Rs 2,000 notes from circulation

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to withdraw the Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes from circulation.
- However, the Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes will continue to be legal tender.
- It said the existing Rs 2,000 notes can be deposited or exchanged in banks until September 30 but set a limit of "Rs 20,000 at a time".

RBI's advisory

- The RBI has advised members of the public to deposit Rs 2,000 banknotes into their bank accounts or exchange them for banknotes of other denominations at any bank branch.
- The RBI further said the exchange of Rs 2,000 banknotes into banknotes of other denominations can be made upto a limit of Rs 20,000 at a time at any bank starting from May 23, 2023.
- The facility for the exchange of Rs 2,000 notes, up to the limit of Rs 20,000 at a time, will also be provided at the 19 regional offices of the RBI having issue departments.

Objective

- The objective of introducing Rs 2,000 banknotes was met once banknotes in other denominations became available in adequate quantities.
- Therefore, the printing of Rs 2,000 banknotes was stopped in 2018-19.
- About 89 percent of the Rs 2000 denomination banknotes were issued prior to March 2017 and are at the end of their estimated life-span of 4-5 years, the release said.
- The total value of these banknotes in circulation has declined from Rs 6.73 lakh crore at its peak of March 31, 2018 (37.3 percent of Notes in Circulation) to Rs 3.62 lakh crore constituting only 10.8 percent of Notes in Circulation on March 31, 2023.

Panel recommends overarching agency to grade varsities

Context

- A central government-appointed high-level committee has recommended that the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) be brought under the ambit of the umbrella accreditation and assessment system proposed in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 by the end of this year along with all other higher education institutions (HEIs).
- The country's premier engineering institutions follow their internal systems for periodic peer evaluation and assessment of programmes, while other HEIs are assessed and accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).
- According to the report, the idea to bring IITs under the ambit of the unified accreditation process was discussed during the 55th IIT Council meeting held at IIT Bhubaneswar in April.

Recommendation by high-level committee

- The Ministry of Education in November last year constituted the four-member panel, headed by K Radhakrishnan, to suggest measures for strengthening the assessment and accreditation of HEIs in the country.
- According to a draft report the panel suggested to include all HEIs and every programme in the newly proposed assessment and accreditation system under the NEP 2020 with due regard for their statutory dispensations, including IITs.
- The process of encouraging IITs to migrate from their internal peer review system to an appropriate national accreditation system.
- The panel was tasked to suggest measures to streamline the assessment and accreditation followed by all agencies under the ministry including NAAC, NIRF, NBA and AICTE.

Reforms in the current accreditation

- The committee also suggested various reforms in the current accreditation and assessment purposes including "crowdsourcing" for verification of input data and trust-enhancement measures instead of the current manual verifications, and a "binary accreditation" process instead of present score-based, and eight-point grading accreditation process followed by the NAAC.
- It suggested to Introduce maximally the technology-driven modern systems, to replace the existing manual/hybrid systems of assessment and accreditation thereby minimizing subjectivity and enhancing transparency and credibility.

India calls for attention to funding disaster risk reduction

Context

- In a recent address High-Level Meeting (HLM) of the General Assembly on the Midterm Review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) 2015-2030, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister of India said there is a need to pay adequate attention to financing disaster risk mitigation and disaster preparedness.
- The Principal Secretary emphasises that states must evolve a financial architecture that can address the entire spectrum of disaster risk reduction needs in a balanced way.
- The side event on 'The Roles of States for Promoting Investments in Disaster Risk Reduction Towards Resilient and Sustainable Future' was organised by India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Outcomes of the meeting

- The Midterm Review of the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) 2015-2030 outlined the primary role of States in promoting investments in disaster risk reduction as a fundamental requirement for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for minimising the damages and impacts associated with climate change and thereby building a resilient society.
- It called for each State's responsibility to reduce existing risks and prevent future threats towards building a resilient and sustainable society.
- The tates also must contend with complex issues, such as working out the mechanism to increase the absorptive capacity, effectively utilising resources allocated for disaster risk mitigation and what kinds of institutional mechanisms, technical capacities and expertise are needed to develop for it.
- The G7 and G20 accorded priority to disaster risk reduction, indicating that the issue is now getting attention at the highest level in the global policy discourse.

G20 Working Group

- The G20 Working Group will meet for the second time next week and devote one full day to discussing issues of financing.
- The G20, under India's Presidency 2023 under the Sherpa Track, has taken an important step in establishing a Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction to help accelerate member countries' efforts in achieving the goals of the SFDRR and the SDGs.
- In line with the SFDRR, the G20 Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRRWG) proposed five priorities:
  o Global coverage of early warning systems for all hydro-meteorological disasters
  o Increased commitment towards making infrastructure systems disaster and climate resilient
  o Stronger national financial frameworks for disaster risk reduction
  o Strengthened national and global disaster response systems including "Build Back Better"
  o Increased application of ecosystem-based approaches

Limited arsenic exposure can mar cognitive ability

Context

- According to research study, which is part of a bigger investigation into how a range of environmental and biological factors affect neurological and cognitive development in young people, also found that those exposed to arsenic had reduced grey matter (brain tissue that is vital to cognitive functions) and weaker connections within key regions of the brain that enable concentration, switching between tasks, and temporary storage of information.
- Arsenic caused a reduction in grey matter in the brain and affected concentration in children and young adults, say researchers who worked with 1,014 participants from five regions across India.

Prevention

- A common strategy to prevent contamination is to encourage piped water access rather than groundwater extraction.
- Though it is well known that ingesting high levels of arsenic from contaminated groundwater in India has been linked to a range of ailments.

Government measures

- Since the 1990s, both the Central and State governments in Bihar and West Bengal have sought to address arsenic contamination.
- A common strategy employed is to encourage piped water access rather than groundwater extraction and install arsenic removal plants.

Tracking SDG progress the Bhopal way

Context

- Bhopal has become the first city in India to join the growing global movement on localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) following the release of its Voluntary Local Review (VLR).
- In 2015, the 193 member-states of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets as a plan of action for 'people', 'the planet', and 'prosperity'.

Voluntary National Review

- The resolution specifies mechanisms for the monitoring, review, and reporting of progress as a measure of accountability towards the people.
- To this end, member-states submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the UN's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), and, more recently, VLRs as a means for driving and reporting local implementation of SDGs at the sub-national and city levels.

India's progress

- India has made commendable efforts towards the adoption, localisation, and achievement of the SDGs.
- NITI Aayog presented India's second Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) convened in 2020.
- India's Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI) has published a National Indicator Framework (NIF) for the review and monitoring of the SDGs, which contextualizes the UN's Global Indicator Framework to represent India's unique development journey.
- As noted in a NITI Aayog report, at least 23 States and Union Territories have prepared a vision document based on SDGs.
- Almost all of them have initiated steps to localise the SDGs.

Engagement of local urban stakeholders

- Cities are the most important stakeholders in Agenda 2030 as at least 65% of the 169 targets could not possibly be achieved without the engagement of local urban stakeholders.
- A Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a tool to demonstrate how local actions are leading the way in equitable and sustainable transformations for people and building a coalition of partners towards this endeavour.

The Bhopal Plan

- Bhopal's Voluntary National Review (VNR) is the result of a collaboration between the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, UN-Habitat, and a collective of over 23 local stakeholders.
- It has mapped 56 developmental projects to the SDGs across the three pillars, of 'people' (SDGs 1,3,4,5), 'planet' (SDGs 6,13,15) and 'prosperity' (SDGs 7,8,11).
- The objectives of building basic infrastructure and resilience emerge as a priority for the city from the number of projects mapped to the SDGs.

Way forward

- It is a remarkable opportunity for Indian cities to tell their stories in their own vocabulary, using a framework of their choice to forefront their work at a global platform.
- It is expected that other Indian cities will follow Bhopal's lead, to showcase urban innovations and collaborations emerging from India on the global map.

19.05.2023

- **Centre pushes for vaccination as lumpy skin cases surge**
- **SC gives nod to TN law permitting Jallikattu**
- **PM to attend G7 meeting in Japan**
- **Joint efforts needed to stop smuggling of artefacts**
- **Our Quantum leaps**

Centre pushes for vaccination as lumpy skin cases surge

Context

- Recently the Union Ministry of Animal Husbandry reviewed the situation lumpy skin disease in the country.
- With states like Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Karnataka and Sikkim reporting fresh cases of lumpy skin disease.
- The concluded that it was under control despite 10,000 cases being reported in the past two weeks.
- The government looks forward to increase the vaccination drive.

Direction to states

- In the meeting, the Ministry urged the States to ensure that the vaccination drive is stepped up.
- The Centre has also asked States to take precautions during the monsoon.
- Apart from vaccination, the Centre has asked the States to do fogging and disinfection drives in risky areas.
- A Central team has visited Maharashtra and another team will visit Uttarakhand and Karnataka soon to monitor the situation.

About Lumpy Skin Disease

- LSD is caused by infection with the Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV) in cattle or water buffalo.
- LSD is primarily spread between animals through the bite of vectors, such as mosquitoes and flies.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that its mortality rate is less than 10%.
- The first reported outbreak of LSD occurred in Zambia in 1929, and it was initially believed to be caused by poisoning or an allergic reaction to insect bites.

SC gives nod to TN law permitting Jallikattu

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court upheld upheld the practice of Jallikattu in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka.
- The apex court said the state laws governing the sport are valid.
- It further directed state governments to ensure the safety and protection of animals under the law.

Observation by SC

- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has upheld the amendments made by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka to The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, allowing Jallikattu, Kambala, and bullock-cart races.
- The Court noted that "Cultural heritage borne out by texts and evidence, the court cannot intervene into the matter".
- The top court was hearing a bunch of petitions including one by the animal rights organisation People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) challenging the state law which allowed the bull-taming sport in Tamil Nadu
- Earlier In the 2014 'Nagaraja' judgment, an SC Bench of Justices K S Radhakrishnan and Pinaki Chandra Ghose had ruled that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 "over-shadows or overrides the so-called tradition and culture".

Pongal and the culture of Jallikattu

- Pongal in Tamil Nadu is a celebration of nature, and thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. Similar harvest festivals of Makara Sankranti, Maghi, and Magh Bihu are observed in other parts of the country at the same time, in mid-January.
- In Tamil Nadu, the festival lasts for three or four days, and on the third day, Mattu Pongal, cattle are worshipped.
- The bull-taming events then start, especially in the southern districts of the state, when the elite Jallikattu breeds test the strength and skill of farm hands in especially constructed arenas.

PM to attend G7 meeting in Japan

Context

- Prime Minister will attending the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Japan.
- The prime minister is visiting the East Asian country at the invitation of his Japanese counterpart.
- The Prime Minister of India will also visit to Papua New Guinea where he will jointly lead the summit of the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC).
- He is expected to speak on global challenges, including food, fertiliser and energy security.

G7 chair 2023

- Japan is hosting the G7 summit as the current chair of the powerful grouping.
- The broad agenda of the G7 meeting will revolve around nuclear disarmament, economic resilience, economic security, regional issues, climate change, energy security, food and health.

Session of meeting

- The first session will focus on food, development, health, and gender equality.
- The second session will be on climate, energy, and environment, and the third will be on the theme 'peaceful, stable and prosperous world'.
- Meanwhile, ahead of the G7 summit, the United States and the United Kingdom have separately said they plan to impose sanctions on Russia over its repeated strikes in neighbouring Ukraine.
- The Ukraine war, now in its second year, is expected to be high on the agenda during the G7 summit.

About G7 grouping

- G7 is an intergovernmental organisation that was formed in 1975.
- The G7 is an informal grouping of advanced democracies that meets annually to coordinate global economic policy and address other transnational issues.
- The G7 comprises highly advanced countries which include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US, and the European Union (EU).
- Russia's membership was suspended in 2014 over the annexation of Crimea.

Joint efforts needed to stop smuggling of artefacts

Context

- The Prime Minister while speaking at the inauguration of the International Museum Expo said that ancient cultures like India have been struggling with the collective challenges of smuggling and appropriation of artefacts, and such crimes can be put to an end only with concerted efforts.
- He noted that with India's increasing prestige in the world, various countries have started returning the country's artefacts.
- He cited examples of the repatriation of the idol of Nataraja dating back to the Chola period and the idol of Annapurna stolen from Varanasi.

Global museum expo

- Inaugurating the International Museum Expo in the New Delhi, PM said that the smuggling of cultural artefacts from India has reduced considerably since 2014 and urged art connoisseurs from around the world, especially those associated with museums, to increase cooperation in this matter.
- There should not be any such artwork in any museum of any country which has reached there in an unethical way.
- Around 1,200 museums are participating in various segments in the expo.

Our Quantum leap

Context

- The Union Cabinet approved the National Quantum Mission (NQM) at a total cost of Rs.6003.65 crore from 2023-24 to 2030-31.
- The mission aim to seed, nurture and scale up scientific and industrial R&D and create a vibrant & innovative ecosystem in Quantum Technology (QT).
- This will accelerate QT led economic growth, nurture the ecosystem in the country and make India one of the leading nations in the development of Quantum Technologies & Applications (QTA).

Target under mission

- The new mission targets developing intermediate scale quantum computers with 50-1000 physical qubits in 8 years in various platforms like superconducting and photonic technology.
- The mission will help develop magnetometers with high sensitivity in atomic systems and Atomic Clocks for precision timing, communications and navigation.
- It will also support design and synthesis of quantum materials such as superconductors, novel semiconductor structures and topological materials for fabrication of quantum devices.

Thematic Hubs

- Four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs) will be set up in top academic and National R&D institutes on the domains - Quantum Computing, Quantum Communication, Quantum Sensing & Metrology and Quantum Materials & Devices.

- The hubs which will focus on generation of new knowledge through basic and applied research as well as promote R&D in areas that are mandated to them.

Quantum materials

- Quantum materials are a class of matter or systems that allow us to exploit some of the unique properties of quantum physics and accomplish tasks that classical technology is incapable of.
- The concept of "quantum materials" was originally introduced to identify some of the exotic quantum systems, including unconventional superconductors, heavy-fermion systems, and multifunctional oxides.
- R&D in quantum materials today embraces traditional semiconductors, superconductors, and non-linear optical crystals directly relevant to computing, communication, and sensing.
- The quantum materials and devices component of the National Quantum Mission will bring innovation in the field under a common umbrella.

Building scientific infrastructure

- To achieve the test as envisaged under National Quantum Mission (NQM), it will require leveraging the evolving scientific infrastructure in the country and aligning with some of the key national mandates.
- However, India do not have enough infrastructure that can support the entire chain of operation from working out the proof-of-principle to developing working prototypes.
- The sub-critical size of the country's R&D community is a matter of equal concern.

Way forward

- As India gears to become the world's third-largest economy by 2027, a strongly networked material infrastructure in the country will be crucial.

- It will cater to not just quantum technologies but also other major scientific megaprojects ranging from the semiconductor mission to neutrino observatory and gravitational wave detection.
- The infrastructure will play a key role in building self-reliance in energy and electronics industries
- The National Quantum mission will require a significant component of materials research to be carried out in goal-oriented multi-institutional consortia.

18.05.2023

- **Centre launches IT hardware PLI 2.0**
- **WMO report highlight likely surger in Global temperatures**
- **Cabinet approved fertilizer subsidy for kharif**
- **Centre seeks hysterectomy data from all states**
- **A new pension pact**

Centre launches IT hardware PLI 2.0

Context

- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Production Linked Incentive Scheme 2.0 for IT Hardware with a budgetary outlay more than doubled to ₹17,000 crores.
- The PLI scheme for IT hardware, first notified in March 2021, provides upwards of 4% in incentives for incremental investment in domestic manufacturing for eligible firms, which include companies like Dell and Flextronics.

About PLI 2.0

- The cabinet's approval of IT hardware PLI 2.0 is focused on expanding India's production and presence in the global value chains of IT hardware.
- PLI Scheme 2.0 for IT hardware covers laptops, tablets, all-in-one PCs, servers and ultra-small form factor devices.
- PLI 2.0 for IT hardware will be a catalyst for India's $300 billion electronics manufacturing mission, an important part of India's trillion-dollar digital economy goal.

Salient features

- PLI Scheme 2.0 for IT hardware covers laptops, tablets, all-in-one PCs, servers and ultra small form factor devices
  o The budgetary outlay of the scheme is Rs. 17,000 crores
  o The tenure of this scheme is 6 years
  o Expected incremental production is Rs. 3.35 Lakh crore
  o Expected incremental investment is Rs. 2,430 crores
  o Expected incremental direct employment is 75,000
- Electronics manufacturing in India has witnessed consistent growth with a 17 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in the last 8 years to cross a major benchmark in production USD 105 billion (about Rs 9 lakh crore) — this year.

Merits of the decision

- Production Linked Incentive Scheme 2.0 will help more Indian companies grow and they can combine design and manufacturing to become global brands.
- In the telecom PLI scheme, the expected investment was Rs 900 crore for the first year, but it reached Rs 1,600 crore in just one year.

- It will create additional incentives for companies to invest and set up their manufacturing base in India and also the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) that incorporate Indian-designed IP into their systems and their products.

WMO report highlight likely surger in Global temperatures

Context
- According to a new update issued by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Global temperatures are likely to surge to record levels in the next five years, fuelled by heat-trapping greenhouse gases and a naturally occurring El Niño event.
- In addition to increasing global temperatures, human-induced greenhouse gases are leading to more ocean heating and acidification, sea ice and glacier melt, sea level rise and more extreme weather.

About El Nino
- El Nino is the large-scale warming of surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- The weather phenomenon normally occurs every two to seven years.
- Typically, El Nino increases global temperatures in the year after it develops — which in this cycle would be 2024.

About the report
- The WMO said there was a 66% chance that annual global surface temperatures will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the years 2023-2027, with a range of 1.1 degrees Celsius to 1.8 degrees Celsius forecasted for each of those five years.
- According to the report, as climate breakdown and the impact of a developing El Niño weather system combine to create heatwaves across the globe.
- El Niño is part of an oscillating weather system that develops in the Pacific.
- The hottest eight years ever recorded were all between 2015 and 2022, with 2016 the warmest.
- The new report was released ahead of the World Meteorological Congress (22 May to 2 June) which will discuss how to strengthen weather and climate services to support climate change adaptation.

Paris Agreement
- The Paris Agreement sets long-term goals to guide all nations to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 °C while pursuing efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5 °C, to avoid or reduce adverse impacts and related losses and damages.
- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says that climate-related risks for natural and human systems are higher for global warming of 1.5 °C than at present, but lower than at 2 °C.

Cabinet approved fertilizer subsidy for kharif

Context
- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved a Rs 1.08 lakh crore for the fertiliser subsidy for the 2023-24 Kharif season, to ensure the availability of fertilisers to farmers at subsidised, affordable, and reasonable prices.
- Out of this, ₹38,000 crore will subsidise phosphatic and potassic (P&K) fertilizers, while ₹70,000 crore will go toward the urea subsidy.
- Last year, the total fertilizer subsidy was about ₹2.56 lakh crore.
- The government will not increase the price of fertilisers and will spend Rs 70,000 crores for urea and Rs 38,000 crores for Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP).

Total consumption of urea

- The total consumption of urea in the country is about 325 to 350 lakh tonnes (lt).
- Apart from this, 100 to 125 lt of DAP; 100 to 125 lt of NPK; and 50 to 60 lt of muriate of potash (MoP) are also sold in the country.
- The fertilizer subsidy usually ranged between ₹1 lakh crore and ₹1.25 lakh crore.

Centre seeks hysterectomy data from all states

Context

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has asked all states to send the status of hysterectomies conducted in private and public hospitals.
- Hysterectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the uterus.
- The Ministry has advised all states and Union Territories to undertake compulsory audit for all hysterectomies as is being done for maternal mortality in all healthcare institutions, both public and private.

Hysterectomy trend

- In India, there is increasing concern about patterns of hysterectomy at a population level, the Centre said last year, adding that community-based studies have consistently found rising hysterectomy rates among young women, between 28 and 36 years.
- According to National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16), the prevalence of hysterectomy was 3.6 per cent among women 30 to 39 years of age and 9.2 per cent among those who were between 40 and 49.
- The median age of hysterectomy was 37 years (among women who were 40 to 49 years at the time of the survey) and two-thirds of procedures were conducted in private facilities.
- Prevalence varied greatly across states, with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana recording 20 to 23 per in the age group 40 to 49.

Petition filed before the Supreme Court

- The Central Government recently placed before the Supreme Court an Action Plan to deal with the issue of unlawful and unnecessary hysterectomies.
- A Public Interest Litigation pertaining to the inadequacy of government healthcare programmes in the states of Rajasthan, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, highlighting the issue of unlawful hysterectomies.
- The action comes following the Supreme Court's direction where the States and Union Territories were instructed to implement health guidelines formulated by the Centre to monitor "unnecessary" hysterectomies within three months.
- The apex court noted that, the right to health is an intrinsic element of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.

A new pension pact

Context

- In recent time the issue of government employees' pension has become a serious political issue.
- Five states have already announced a reversion from the New Pension Scheme (NPS) to the defined-benefit (DB) Old Pension Scheme (OPS), and some more may be waiting to do so.
- In an acknowledgement of the importance of the issue, the Government of India has constituted a committee to "improve" the NPS.

Background on NPS

- The contributory NPS was adopted in 2004 by the central and state governments in India following the global trend, across public and private sectors.
- Thanks to a combination of ageing populations and fiscal strains, a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) DB pension was becoming unsustainable.
- The latest examples are France and Spain, where efforts to address fiscal unsustainability by raising retirement age and increasing contributions from younger workers respectively have sparked massive public protests.

Contribution and Return under NPS

- Under the NPS, the employee contributes 10 per cent and the government 10-14 per cent of the salary to a pension fund.
- The fund invests in securities; therefore, its returns are market-linked.
- At retirement, pensioners must buy a fixed annuity from the market, whose value depends on the accumulated corpus and expected future returns.
- The NPS has shown impressive annual returns above 9 per cent since its inception.
- In contrast, pension funds in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies have grown at 3-5 per cent over the last 15 years.

Return to Old Pension Scheme

- As far as a return in OPS is concerned it has limited scope.
- The OPS suffers from the twin problem of being unfunded and fiscally unsustainable.
- In the absence of any employer and employee contributions, it's a pure Pay as you go (PAYG) instalments system where present workers finance the retired.
- This becomes a problem as birth rates decline and people start to live longer.
- Then there is the issue of fiscal sustainability.
- At retirement, the OPS employees currently get pension at 50 per cent of their last drawn salary.
- This pension increases twice every year with a dearness allowance (DA) to account for inflation.

Conclusion

- A fuller understanding of the NPS scheme and actions necessary to enable it to perform to its potential will go a long way in dispelling some of the existing notions about the scheme.
- The fiscal risks involved in the transition of NPS-borne employees to OPS regime are substantive and to a great extent unsustainable keeping in view the existing share of pensionary liability in government expenditure.
- The contribution should be modelled to ensure the same benefits as the OPS, thereby requiring the government to suitably vary its contributions keeping in view the portfolio return, financial market conditions and life expectancy of retiring employee.

17.05.2023

- **First indigenous vaccine against dengue soon**
- **Centre to finalise Telecom bill by July**
- **PM to attend G7 leaders' summit**
- **Changes in recruitment system ended corruption & nepotism**
- **Rajasthan's move spells some hope for gig workers**

First indigenous vaccine against dengue soon

Context

- On National Dengue Day, ICMR experts move closer to getting its first indigenous vaccine against dengue.

- The experts have called for intensified efforts to fight the mosquito-borne disease.
- The ICMR had sought the Drugs Controller General of India's (DCGI's) approval for phase-3 trials of the dengue vaccine in November 2022.

Dengue cases in India

- India had witnessed a significant increase in dengue cases over the past decade.
- The most recent data published in The Lancet journal notes that the country documented a total of 1,10,473 (Over 1.1 lakh) dengue cases between January and October 2022.
- According to ICMR, dengue viral disease causes significant morbidity and mortality across the globe and in India, 2 to 2.5 lakh cases are reported annually.
- The global incidence of dengue has grown dramatically with about half the world's population now at risk.

Challenges

- As per experts one of the main challenges in developing a vaccine for dengue is that the virus has four different serotypes or variants, making it difficult to create a vaccine that can target all four equally.
- With the virus evolving faster during intense transmission, new variants can emerge and lead to massive outbreaks, causing an increase in disease severity.
- While efforts have been made to develop dengue vaccines, the development of treatments for dengue has been largely neglected, mainly due to inadequate funding as dengue primarily affects low- and middle-income countries.

Phase 3 trial Progress

- Moving a step closer to developing India's first vaccine against dengue, drug-makers Serum Institute of India and Panacea Biotec have submitted their responses to the call by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for an Expression of Interest for collaborative Phase 3 clinical trials for indigenous manufacturers.
- The Phase 3 trial is being done for evaluation of efficacy, along with safety and immunogenicity of tetravalent dengue vaccine candidate developed by Indian manufacturers.
- Trials could start close to August for the adult vaccine.

Centre to finalise Telecom bill by July

Context

- The telecom sector in India is poised for significant advancements with the expected finalisation of the Indian Telecommunication Bill.
- As per the latest update from Union Telecom Minister, the government is on track to finalise the bill by July, following substantial progress in its development.
- The government has held extensive consultations with a wide range of stakeholders.
- He also expressed the government's commitment to simplifying regulations governing the telecom industry.
- The telecom industry in India is currently on a healthy trajectory, exhibiting encouraging signs of growth.

Aim of the bill

- The Telecom Bill aims to establish India as a global benchmark by focusing on user protection and fostering innovation.
- It seeks to address the increasing menace of fraudulent calls originating from overseas numbers.
- Fraudulent calls generated with overseas numbers have become a significant concern for our citizens.
- Moreover, it is anticipated to surge in investments in the telecom sector.

- Over the next two to three years, an estimated Rs 2 lakh crore is expected to be invested, with the potential for investment to reach as high as Rs 3 lakh crores.
- These investments signify the confidence placed in the industry's growth potential and are anticipated to drive overall revenue expansion.

Deregistration of mobile numbers

- As per the provision under the draft bill, WhatsApp has agreed to deregister mobile numbers from its platform that have been detected as fraud users, and whose mobile services have been disconnected.

PM to attend G7 leaders' summit

Context

- Prime Minister is on a visit to Hiroshima for the G7 leaders' summit.
- This is the first visit to the Japanese city by an Indian Prime Minister since India conducted nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1974.
- The last Indian PM to visit Hiroshima was Jawaharlal Nehru in 1957.
- India's Prime Minister presence at Hiroshima is significant since India is one of the few countries which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Japan's perspective

- From Japan's perspective, it is an important moment since the current Japanese PM hails from Hiroshima, and his constituency is located in central Hiroshima city.
- Sources said the Indian side is cognizant of the sensitivities of the people of Japan, and Hiroshima in particular, with regard to India's nuclear tests and India not being a signatory to the NPT.
- Japan is likely to arrange a meeting of the G7 leaders and other invitees with families of the atomic bomb victims.

India's stand

- India is preparing to underline that it views the NPT as discriminatory, its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes, its commitment to unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests and no first-use policy when it comes to nuclear weapons.
- India will also project its track record as a responsible nuclear power – even recently, it has expressed concern at the nuclear war rhetoric by Russian leaders in the context of the war in Ukraine.

Changes in recruitment system ended corruption & nepotism

Context

- Recently, the Prime Minister asserted that changes brought in by government in the recruitment system have ended the possibility of corruption and nepotism.
- The Prime Minister has distributed appointment letters to over 71,000 people at a 'Rozgar Mela'.

Online recruitment process

- The Prime Minister noted that from applying for government jobs to the announcement of results, the entire process has been made online.
- The possibility of corruption and nepotism in recruitment for government jobs has now ended.

Next course of action

- The Prime Minister in recent meetings with CEOs of leading global companies, including Walmart, Apple, Foxconn and Cisco, to assert that there is "unprecedented positivity" about industry and investment in the country.

- The prime minister cited EPFO net payroll figures to say that over 4.5 crore people have got jobs since 2018-19 as formal employment has been growing.
- The country has seen a revolution in the start-up sector.

Rajasthan's move spells some hope for gig workers

Context

- Earlier this year, the Chief Minister of Rajasthan announced that the State would set up India's first welfare fund called the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Social Security and Welfare Fund.
- This is the first real instance of a regulatory move to unburden gig and platform workers' vulnerabilities since the Code on Social Security was passed in 2020.
- The code came amid the COVID-19 pandemic when platform workers became the backbone of metropolitan logistics, acting to serve customers, and working with and for State governments in their food relief schemes.

Aim

- The Rajasthan Platform-based Gig Workers Welfare Board aims to deliver social security benefits to between three to four lakh workers in the State.
- The Code on Social Security gives State labour ministries the mandate of choosing from a narrow bouquet of programmes on provident fund, employment injury benefit, housing, educational schemes for children of workers, skill upgrading and funeral assistance.
- Key protection schemes such as life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection and education will only be started and funded by the central government.

Significance

- The Rajasthan Platform-based Gig Workers Welfare Board will be a familiar institution that can be used to serve the needs of a technology-mediated workforce.
- The board, a tripartite institution with representatives from bureaucracy, employers or clients, and workers' unions or associations.
- This relationship is meant to ensure quick communication in moments of failure where workers or employers do not get their due, and enable better communication between the parties.

Many States are yet to act

- In 2023, many State governments are yet to pass rules that govern how they will implement the Code on Social Security.
- This has raised concerns over how fast gig and platform workers can gain benefits in a scenario.
- Rajasthan stands out as a first mover making haste, with the State facing Assembly elections next year.

Challenge

- There has been a lot of criticism against the construction board — that it does not provide benefits that are useful enough to offset the time, money and other resources workers have to spend in order to register and access benefits.
- There has been a significant challenge for collectivisation attempts.
- It is also unclear whether Rajasthan or any other State board will be able to fill the gap in labour rights for platform and gig workers.

Conclusion

- The Code on Social Security does not consider how to handle the labour rights of gig and platform workers; rather, it only seeks to give them protections from vulnerable aspects of their work.
- Nonetheless, the initiation of the board is a big win for platform workers and unions who/which have been fighting to get their issues heard.
- The initiation of a board is a win for platform workers, but there are many challenges ahead such as covering the gaps in labour rights.

16.05 2023

- **Campaign to promote reuse and recycle of items**
- **Indian Railways to overhaul signage system**
- **The new Alzheimer's drug**
- **India trade deficit in April falls to lowest**
- **A Court recall that impacts the rights of the accused**

Campaign to promote reuse and recycle of items

Context
- Recently, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister launched a campaign — "Meri LiFE, Mera Swachh Shehar" — to promote reuse and recycle of old items such as clothes, shoes, toys, and books.
- Urban India is increasingly adopting the principles of making wealth from waste with citizens actively refurbishing old items for reuse.
- This is giving an impetus to the overall zero-waste ecosystem under the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0.
- The campaign will culminate on World Environment Day on June 5.

RRR centres
- The special "Reduce, Recycle and Reuse" centres are to be launched nationwide on May 20.
- This nationwide campaign aims to highlight cities to set up "reduce, reuse, recycle (RRR) centres"- one-stop centres for citizens to contribute clothes, shoes, old books, toys and used plastic to be reused or recycled.

SBM-U 2.0
- These 'RRR' centres would be set up as part of a nationwide campaign 'Meri LiFE, Mera Swachh Shehar' ('My Life, My Clean City') under the aegis of the Swacch Bharat Mission – Urban 2.0 (SBM-U 2.0) to strengthen citizens' resolve to reduce, reuse, and recycle.
- Used clothes can be deposited at the one-stop centres for repurposing.
- Individuals, institutions, and commercial enterprises can deposit the items at these hubs.
- The items will then be given to different stakeholders to be refurbished for reuse or would be made into new products contributing to a circular economy.

Objective
- The objective of the campaign is to take collective action for the protection and conservation of the environment by adopting sustainable daily habits.
- The 3Rs form the backbone of 'Waste to Wealth' and has empowered many craftsmen, recyclers, self-help Groups, entrepreneurs, startups, etc. to recycle waste into a host of products.

Indian Railways to overhaul signage system

Context

- The Indian Railways is planning to overhaul the signage system at railway stations for better travelling comfort of passengers, based on fresh design principles.
- Up to 1,275 stations have been selected under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.
- They are those located in major cities and places of tourist and pilgrimage importance.

Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

- The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme has been formulated based on a long-term master plan that will redevelop stations according to the demands and usage of the station.
- The scheme aims to preparation of Master Plans of the Railway stations and implementation of the Master Plan in phases to enhance the facilities.
- Key features for these proposed stations:
    o Provisions for roof top plazas
    o Longer platforms
    o Ballast less tracks
    o 5G connectivity

Gaps in current system

- The current system of signage is inconsistent and inadequate, it was felt.
- An internal presentation of the Ministry of Railways had pointed out that there is lack of uniformity in some cases.
- In others, signage overlaps with advertisements and not in the visual scheme of commuters. Some signage are not aesthetically designed and at other places, they are absent.
- Emphasis has been laid on providing intuitive signage at key decision-making points.

Grouping of signage

- The concept of grouping of signage has been introduced to help commuters find their way easily.
- Grouping would provide the hierarchy of how information is shared starting with essential journey information, including:
    o Train travel and platform
    o Directional information like transport interchange and navigating the station
    o Amenities and facilities like toilets and water; commercial facilities like restaurants and retail
    o Exit information
    o Pictograms for water taps
    o Wheelchair assistance, ramps, tourist information, mobile-charging points, escalators etc.
- Three railway stations— Rani Kamalapati, Gandhinagar Capital, and Sir M. Visvesvaraya Terminal have already been commissioned along these lines.

The new Alzheimer's drug

Context

- Just five months after the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted "accelerated" approval for a Lecanemab drug (developed by Biogen and Eisai) to treat Alzheimer's disease another pharmaceutical company, Eli Lilly, has released its own candidate Alzheimer's treatment, donanemab.

Efficacy of donanemab

- The pharmaceutical company, Eli Lilly said donanemab had "significantly slowed cognitive and functional decline in people with early symptomatic Alzheimer's disease." Eli Lilly has yet to

publish the full results, which means the data has not been peer-reviewed or independently verified.

How does donanemab work

- Donanemab is not the first of its kind.
- As with similar antibody-based therapies such as lecanemab, donanemab is not a cure for Alzheimer's.
- Instead, they are antibodies that target different forms of amyloid-beta (Aβ) proteins that can clump together to form amyloid plaques in people's brains, resulting in their cognitive decline.
- The drug aims to remove the plaques from the brain and slow the progression of the disease.

About Alzheimer's disease

- Alzheimer's disease is a brain disorder that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest tasks.
- The World Health Organization says Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia.
- Dementia is the seventh leading cause of death and one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people globally.
- Dementia is one of the hardest conditions to treat.

India trade deficit in April falls to lowest

Context

- As per initial estimates the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India's merchandise exports shrank 12.7% in April to a six-month low of $34.66 billion but imports fell by a sharper 14% to hit $49.90 billion.
- Consequently, the monthly goods trade deficit cooled 17% in April to touch a 20 month-low of $15.24 billion, from $18.35 billion a year earlier.
- Sequentially, outbound shipments fell 17.3% from March's $41.9 billion, which was the highest exports level since June 2022.

Reasons

- The officials and stakeholders had attributed the decline in exports to faltering demand in key markets and a decline in commodity prices.
- Global demand is not looking good from markets like the EU and the U.S. for the next two, three months, the demand scenario doesn't look very optimistic.
- The government would initiate inter-ministerial talks to find ways to sustain the export momentum.

A Court recall that impacts the rights of the accused

Context

- A special bench of the Supreme Court has ordered today that trial courts and high courts across the country, while considering an application for the grant of default bail under section 167(2) of Criminal Procedure Code, shall decide the same independent of and without relying on the judgment of Ritu Chhabria vs. Union Of India & Ors.
- Notably, the Solicitor General of India had informed the top court that central probe agencies were under a lot of difficulties due to the said judgment.
- Court had then ordered that the judgment shall stand deferred.

Ritu Chhabaria v. Union of India And Ors.

- In Ritu Chhabaria, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court had held that a
- chargesheet filed on the basis of an incomplete investigation, though filed within
- time, will not defeat the right of an accused to seek default bail.

- The Enforcement Directorate has approached the Supreme Court challenging a Delhi High Court judgment which granted default bail to an accused based on Ritu Chhabaria
- judgment. The Centre has also filed an application seeking recall of the Ritu Chhabaria judgment

Right to default bail

- The right to statutory bail, often known as default bail, is available to accused persons in cases when the investigating agency fails to complete its investigation within the stipulated time.
- Under Section 167(2) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), the maximum time available to investigators is 60 or 90 days, depending on the seriousness of the offence. If the authorities are unable to complete the investigation within this time period, the accused can seek to be released from custody by applying for default bail under the first proviso to Section 167(2) of the CrPC.
- The right to default bail has been characterised by the Court in multiple judgments as an indefeasible right, flowing from Article 21 of the Constitution which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.

Supreme Court's intensions

- The Supreme Court's decision in Ritu Chhabaria delegitimised such illegal practices and held that incomplete charge sheets filed by the police would not bar an accused from applying for default bail.
- The Court emphasised that the preliminary or incomplete nature of these police reports revealed that the investigation was not complete.

Bottom line

- This decision is particularly alarming because the right to default bail, which has been interpreted so far as flowing from the Indian Constitution, could possibly be made subservient to concerns of 'difficulties' faced by investigative authorities.
- What makes the matter even more serious is the Supreme Court also agreed to defer decisions on default bail for accused persons across the country which would have been decided as per Ritu Chhabaria.
- The top court's order seeking to recall its decision in the Ritu Chhabaria case would deviate from fundamental principles of criminal procedure.

15.05.2023

- **The nutritional value of millets**
- **India imposes phased import ban on defence items**
- **IMD issues heatwave alert for the Konkan region**
- **India floats global digital system to face pandemic challenges**

- **This strategic-economic bloc will only tighten the leash**

The nutritional value of millets

Context

- The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has declared 2023 to be the 'International Year of Millets'.
- Millets are becoming more popular in India as well because of their low input requirements and high nutritional density, both of which are valuable for a country whose food security is expected to face significant challenges in the coming decades.

About millets

- Millets are fundamentally grasses.
- They are cultivated worldwide, but especially in the tropical parts of Africa and Asia, as cereal crops.
- Some of the more common varieties include pearl millet (Cenchrus americanus), barnyard millet (Echinochloa utilis), finger millet (Eleusine coracana), and foxtail millet (Setaria italica).
- According to the Agricultural and Processed Foods Development Authority, India is the world's largest producer of millets.

Millet production

- In 2021-2022, the country accounted for 40.51% of the world's pearl millet production and 8.09% of sorghum.
- Within the country, pearl millet made up 60% of all the millet production, sorghum 27%, and ragi 11%.
- Sorghum (Sorghum bicolor), adlay millet (Coix lacryma-jobi), and teff (Eragrostis tef), among others, are grasses that differ in some respects from millets but are grouped together with them.

Significance

- Millets have two broad features that render them attractive — their nutritional value being comparable to that of major extant food crops (and better on some counts) and their ability to reliably withstand harsh, resource-poor conditions.
- They are drought-tolerant, adapted to growing in warm weather, and require low moisture and loamy soil.
- They do not grow well in water-logged or extremely dry soil which might occur after heavy rainfall or particularly bad droughts, respectively.
- Nonetheless, millets have the upper hand over crops like rice and maize with more drought-like conditions expected in many parts of the world, including the newly realised prospect of 'flash droughts.

Nutritional value of millets

- The nutritional content of millets include carbohydrates, proteins, fibre, amino acids, and various minerals.
- Different millet varieties have different nutrient profiles.
- According to various studies:
  - Foxtail millet is rich in the amino acid lysine
  - Finger millet has more crude fibre than wheat and rice
  - Proso millet has a significant amount of the amino acids leucine, isoleucine, and methionine
- Overall, millets have been found to be important sources of micronutrients and phytochemicals.

Processing and its affect

- Processing and preparing millets for consumption can affect nutrients in three ways — enhance them, suppress/remove them, and ignore them.
- In this context, 'whole grain' refers to the endosperm, germ, and bran (pericarp + aleurone) whereas 'refined grain' refers only to the endosperm.
- The husk is removed from the grains because it is composed of cellulosic matter that the human body cannot digest.

India imposes phased import ban on defence items

Context
- The Union Ministry of Defence (MoD) has recently imposed phased ban on the import of 928 military items to promote self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector.
- The Ministry approved the fourth and the largest positive indigenisation list of 928 strategically-important Line Replacement Units (LRUs), sub-systems, spares and components, including high-end materials and spares, with import substitution value worth Rs 715 crore.
- The list means that defence PSUs cannot import these items beyond the timelines indicated against them, varying from December 2024 to December 2029.

4th Positive Indigenisation List
- This so-called 4th Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) which restricted the import of a range of line-replaceable units (LRUs), sub-systems, assemblies, spares, and components of defence systems.
- The 1st PIL comprising 101 items, was promulgated in August 2020.
- The 2nd PIL comprising 108 items, was promulgated in May 2021.
- The 3rd PIL comprising 101 items, was promulgated in April 2022.

Merits of the decision
- According to Ministry of Defence data, defence imports have reduced from 36.7 per cent of capital expenditure (capex) in 2018–19 to 46 per cent of capex until December 2022.
- The implementation of import bans is expected to give impetus to economic growth, enhance investment in defence, and reduce DPSUs' import dependence.
- It has been planned that the DPSUs will undertake indigenisation of these items through different routes under the 'Make' category, in addition to developing in-house through capabilities of medium, small, and micro enterprises that are part of private Indian industry.
- This is also expected to augment the design capabilities of the domestic defence industry by involving academia and research institutions.

Items under positive indigenisation list
- The latest list which is also the largest among the positive indigenisation list — includes digital map generator for the IAF's Sukhoi-30 fighter aircraft, voyage data recorder for naval ships, smart multifunction display for the indigenous HTT-40 aircraft, flexible fuel tanks for the Light Combat Helicopter, gearbox and a variety of valves and tyres among others.
- Indian Shipyard Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited has provided the maximum number of items on the list.

IMD issues heatwave alert for the Konkan region

Context
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has declared a heatwave in various regions of Maharashtra, including Mumbai, Palghar, Thane, Konkan, central Maharashtra and Vidarbha.
- This is the fourth heatwave alert for the Konkan region and the first in May.

- The State is currently experiencing high temperatures, with the mercury soaring above normal levels.

About Heat Wave

- A heat wave is a period of abnormally and uncomfortably hot and usually humid weather.
- According to the World Meteorological, a heat wave is when the daily maximum temperature for more than five consecutive days exceeds the average maximum temperature by 9 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Heat Waves typically occur between March and June, and in some rare cases even extend till July.
- With regard to Konkan region, there is an anti-cyclone circulation that has formed due to which the temperatures have gone up.
- The formation is expected to move northwards within next two days, following which the temperature in Mumbai may come down a bit.

Konkan Coast

- It stretches from Daman in the north to Goa in the south on the Konkan coast.
- Rice and cashew are the two main crops grown in this area.

Preventive measures

- India Meteorological Department (IMD) has asked the authorities and individuals to take immediate preventive measures and follow necessary guidelines to mitigate the impact of the heatwave and ensure the safety of residents in these affected areas.
- Several areas in central Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha have been reeling under above-normal temperatures for the past three weeks.

India floats global digital system to face pandemic challenges

Context

- Addressing the G7 health ministers' meeting in Japan, the Union Health Minister expressed commitment to provide India's digital tools such as CoWIN to other countries for free.
- He said India's G20 presidency has recognised digital health as a priority area.

Convergence of all digital initiatives

- Union Health Minister proposed the convergence of all digital initiatives through a "global initiative on digital health" housed at the World Health Organisation (WHO) headquarters.
- He also stressed the need for a collaborative global health architecture that can assure the power of digital solutions to all countries to combat the challenges posed by a future pandemic.
- He cautioned against fragmented and isolated efforts and said that there was a need for a more collaborative approach to ensure health equity.

Low vaccine Penetration

- Highlighting the case of Covid-19 vaccination programme, the minister raised concern
- that more than two years after vaccines were rolled out in December 2020, only 34% of the populations in low and middle income countries have access to them as compared to 73% in high income countries as on April 2023.

This strategic-economic bloc will only tighten the leash

Context

- In November 2019, India walked out from the trade pact called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

- The RECP comprises China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-state Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping.
- Fast forward to 2023, and now India along with many of the same countries, but with China replaced by the United States, is getting into the U.S.-driven Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).

About IPEF

- In May 2022, the United States launched the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF).
- Currently, India and 13 countries located in the Pacific Ocean are its members which includes Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam.
- This framework will advance resilience, sustainability, inclusiveness, economic growth, fairness, and competitiveness for our economies.

The devil and deep sea

- The one clear difference is of China versus the U.S. Developing a strategic partnership with the U.S. is India's top foreign policy priority.
- Its relationship with China has, meanwhile, further deteriorated. But a strategic partnership with the U.S. need not come at the cost of economic dependency on it.
- With China, the big economic fear was any trade deal's impact on India's manufacturing sector; of cheap Chinese goods flooding Indian markets.
- The U.S.'s IPEF proposal completely removes the tariff element of typical trade deals, and is entirely about all these other areas.

Aim of IPEF

- Through this initiative, the IPEF partners aim to contribute to cooperation, stability, prosperity, development, and peace within the region.
- This framework offer tangible benefits that fuel economic activity and investment, promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and benefit workers and consumers across the region.
- The 14 IPEF partners represent 40 percent of global GDP and 28 percent of global goods and services trade.

Pillars of IPEF

- The launch began discussions of future negotiations on the following pillars:
  o Trade
  o Supply Chains
  o Clean Energy, Decarbonization, and Infrastructure
  o Tax and Anti-Corruption
- India has joined three pillars except trade.

Way forward

- The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) partners have committed to an aggressive negotiating with the objective of realizing concrete benefits to enhance a shared vision for economic competitiveness and prosperity in their respective economies.
- The U.S.-driven Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity would result in a complete stranglehold over the economic systems of the participating countries.

- **Centre prepares new Model Prisons Act 2023**
- **6th Indian Ocean Conference**
- **Industrial Production growth falls To 5-month low**
- **Inflation slips to an 18-month low**
- **Diagnostic imaging of the Rajasthan Right to Health Act**

Centre prepares new Model Prisons Act 2023

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Home Affairs has finalised a comprehensive 'Model Prisons Act, 2023' to replace the pre-independence era 'Prisons Act, 1894' which mainly focused on keeping criminals in custody and enforcing discipline and order in prisons.
- The MHA assigned the task of revising the outdated Prison Act to the Bureau of Police Research and Development.
- The Bureau, after holding wide-ranging discussions with state prison authorities and correctional experts, prepared a draft.

Prisons Act, 1894

- The current 'Prisons Act, 1894' is almost 130 years old and mainly focuses on keeping criminals in custody and enforcing discipline and order in prisons, with no provision for reform and rehabilitation.

New Model Prisons Act 2023

- Under the new Act, prisons will be viewed as reformative and correctional institutions, with a focus on transforming and rehabilitating inmates back into society as law-abiding citizens.
- The Model Prisons Act, 2023 aims to address the gaps in the existing Prisons Act by providing guidance on:
  o Use of technology in prison management
  o Making provisions for parole
  o Furlough and remission to prisoners to encourage good conduct
  o Special provisions for women and transgender inmates
  o Focus on the reformation and rehabilitation of inmates

Salient features new Model Prisons Act

- Some salient features of the new Model Prisons Act include:
  o Provision for security assessment and segregation of prisoners
  o Individual sentence planning
  o Grievance redressal
  o Establishment of a prison development board
  o Focus on the physical and mental well-being of prisoners
- The Act also includes provisions for the use of technology in prison administration, such as video conferencing with courts and scientific and technological interventions in prisons.
- It also includes provisions for the punishment of prisoners and jail staff for using prohibited items like mobile phones in jails.

Other important features

- The new Model Prisons Act 2023 Act provides for the establishment and management of high-security jails, open jails (open and semi-open), and the protection of society from the criminal activities of hardened criminals and habitual offenders.
- The Act also provides for legal aid to prisoners and provisions for parole, furlough, and premature release to incentivise good conduct.
- The Act focuses on vocational training and skill development of prisoners to facilitate their reintegration into society.

6th Indian Ocean Conference

Context

- Bangladesh will host the 6th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) scheduled to be held between May 12-13 in Dhaka.
- The Conference will discuss aspects strengthening cooperation between the countries of the Indian Ocean region.
- Theme: "Peace, Prosperity and Partnership for a Resilient Future"
- The first edition of the Conference was held in Singapore in 2016.
- The 6th edition of the Conference is being organised by India Foundation in association with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

Significance

- The Conference endeavour to bring critical states and principal maritime partners of the region together on a common platform to deliberate upon the prospects of regional cooperation for Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR).
- Improving and enhancing connectivity will be the priority of the countries in the Indian Ocean region.
- Indian urged the nations in the Indian Ocean region to see that maritime security is a shared responsibility.

About Indian Ocean Region

- The Indian Ocean Region has significant economic, political, and strategic implications in the Asia-Pacific and African regions.
- It shares 64% of the global population and 60% of the global GDP.

Industrial Production growth falls To 5-month low

Context

- India's industrial production growth slipped to five-month low of 1.1 per cent in March from 5.8 per cent in February 2023.
- The fall is mainly due to poor performance of power and manufacturing sectors.
- The previous lowest level of growth was recorded in October 2022 at a contraction of 4.1 per cent.

Sector wise performance

- Power generation declined by 1.6 per cent in March 2023 against a growth of 6.1 per cent.
- Mining output rose by 6.8 per cent during the month under review compared to a growth of 3.9 in the year-ago period.
- Consumer durables output during the month declined by 8.4 per cent against a contraction of 3.1 per cent a year ago.
- Infrastructure/construction goods posted a growth of 5.4 per cent compared to a 6.7 per cent expansion in the same period a year ago.
- Electricity generation contracted 1.6%, marking the first decline in at least a year.

About Index of Industrial Production

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is an index which shows the growth rates in different industry groups of the economy in a stipulated period of time.
- The IIP index is computed and published by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on a monthly basis.
- The factory output growth measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) stood at 2.2 per cent in March 2022.

Inflation slips to an 18-month low

Context

- Acoording to latest data released by the government, inflation declined to an 18-month low of 4.7 per cent in April, 2023.
- The decline in inflation is mainly due to falling prices of vegetables, oils and fats.
- On the other hand, spices, cereals and products, and 'milk and milk products' became dearer.
- It was for the second month in a row that Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation remained within the RBI's comfort zone of below 6 per cent.
- The government has tasked the central bank to ensure retail inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

Retail inflation trend

- The retail inflation was 5.66 per cent in March 2023 and 7.79 per cent in the year-ago period.
- Later month's inflation is the lowest reading since October 2021, when it stood at 4.48 per cent.
- According to the National Statistical Office, the inflation in the food basket was 3.84 per cent in April, as against 4.79 per cent in March and 8.31 per cent in the year-ago period. The food basket accounts for nearly half of the CPI.

Diagnostic imaging of the Rajasthan Right to Health Act

Context
- The Right to Health (RTH) bill passed by Rajasthan amid mass protests and criticism is touted to be a step in the pursuit of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the state.
- The bill, which aims to ensure health as a fundamental right, has good intentions but is vastly misdirected in its approach.
- But the act had caused a bitter row following which the State government agreed on some exclusions.

Iterations, before and after
- Comparing the two iterations of the RTH Bill, one before and another after the select committee review, is a good starting point for a review.
- The primary iteration was sent for the select committee's review in 2022, and the amended Bill was passed on March 21, 2023, which stoked protests.
- Following the select committee amendments, some definitions (accidental emergency, emergency care, and first aid), were added to the Bill.
- In addition, the term 'designated health care centres' was introduced, and a reimbursement clause for unpaid emergency care was added.
- These additions are commendable. However, most other changes in the amended Bill were not so salutary at least as far as protecting public health interests is concerned.

Grievance redress system
- The grievance redress system proposed in the initial iteration was also significantly overhauled in the amended Bill.
- Initially proposed to be handled through web portals, helpline centres, and officers concerned within 24 hours, patient grievances will now be handled by the very health-care institution in question within three days.
- This introduces conspicuous conflicts of interest.

Shortcoming
- The current RTH Act lacking in public health representation is ill positioned to achieve these ends or to serve as a template for other States or a pan-India legislation.
- The State government has assured that private multispecialty hospitals with less than 50 beds, and those that have not availed of concessions or subsidised land/buildings from the government, will be kept out of the ambit of the law, even if temporarily.
- It effectively excludes the plethora of small and medium hospitals which predominate in the health-care landscape, particularly outside the urban agglomerations.
- Health legislation embraces not just curative medical care but also health promotion, disease prevention, and important social determinants such as nutrition, which have a stronger bearing on health than medical care.

Conclusion
- The foremost lesson for the state is that such legal pronouncements should be meticulously drafted to pre-empt opposition from arising in the first place.

- Governments and the medical community should sensitise themselves to the broader social dimensions of health and health legislation.
- The governments should realise that getting onto such radical pieces of legislation without threshold levels of enough financial preparedness can backfire, as it is the state's obligation to provide health care.

12.05.2023

- **ICMR, AYUSH Ministry sign agreement on research**
- **GST e-invoicing to include smaller firms**
- **IIM-Ranchi to study Mann Ki Baat**
- **U.S. engages with India on human rights**
- **With great Power, respect**

ICMR, AYUSH Ministry sign agreement on research

Context
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Ministry of Ayush have signed an agreement for collaboration and cooperation for research in the field of integrated medicine.
- Integrated medicine refers to using alternative medicine systems such as Ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, unani, Siddha and homeopathy with orthodox systems as part of a treatment plan.

Details of MoU
- The agreement envisages cooperation and collaboration between the ministry and the ICMR for exploring areas of convergence and synergy for integrated health research and strengthening research capacity.
- The agreement will focus on promoting high-impact scientific research in identified areas of national importance in healthcare.
- According to the Ministry of Health, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will combine traditional knowledge with modern research and boost ayurveda's identity on the basis of scientific evidence.

Significance
- The agreement between the Ministry of Ayush and ICMR will also look into the possibility of conducting high-quality joint clinical trials on certain diseases with promising therapies of the AYUSH system to generate evidence for wider acceptance.
- Both institutions will formulate and implement joint research projects and programmes and allow for joint supervision of activities.
- They will design and conduct conferences, workshops and seminars with the participation of researchers interested in the field of integrated healthcare.

## GST e-invoicing to include smaller firms

Context
- The Central government has made it mandatory for small firms with an annual turnover of ₹5 crore or more to issue e-invoices for business-to-business supplies from August 1, 2023.
- The decision is aimed to check Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion, reduce disputes over input-tax credit and make compliance easy.
- Currently, this threshold is ₹10 crore.

About e-invoicing under GST

- 'e-Invoicing' or 'electronic invoicing' is a system in which B2B invoices and a few other documents are authenticated electronically by GSTN for further use on the common GST portal.
- In its 35th meeting, the GST Council decided to implement a system of e-Invoicing, covering specific categories of persons, mostly large enterprises.
- Later on, it has been expanded to cover mid-sized businesses and small businesses as well.

Benefits of using e-invoice

- E-invoice resolves and plugs a major gap in data reconciliation under GST to reduce mismatch errors.
- E-invoices created on one software can be read by another, allowing interoperability and help reduce data entry errors.
- Real-time tracking of invoices prepared by the supplier is enabled by e-invoice.
- Faster availability of genuine input tax credit.
- Lesser possibility of audits/surveys by the tax authorities since the information they require is available at a transaction level.
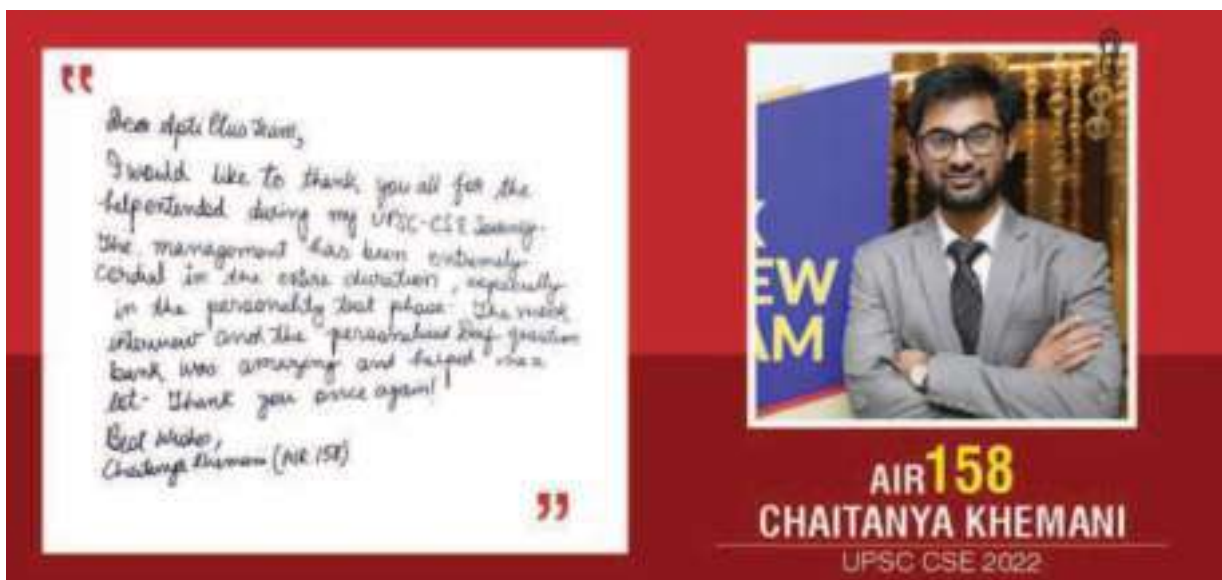
IIM-Ranchi to study Mann Ki Baat

Context

- Days after the Indian Institute of Management, Rohtak, released a study claiming that Prime Minister's 'Mann Ki Baat' has reached 100 crore people over the last eight years, and nearly 96 per cent of the country's population is aware of it, IIM Ranchi will study all the episodes of the monthly radio programme and make the data public with an "aim to help policymakers and researchers".
- IIM Ranchi director said the programme has been selected for study as it has emerged as a unique initiative in helping the government establish connect with people and played a crucial role in creating a national discourse on these issues.

Conduct a study

- The study intends to understand the key themes and keywords to comprehend the different issues.
- Indian Management Institute (IIM), Ranchi, would conduct a study on analyzing the themes and issues addressed in 100 episodes of 'Mann Ki Baat'- a radio programme of Prime Minister.
- This study would not be a survey and assessment of any government scheme.
- Rather, this study would focus on creating an archive of the issues raised during the different episodes of the programme and create an archive, which would be useful for researchers and policymakers alike.
- The director said the study would be completed in a month and the report would be made public soon after.

U.S. engages with India on human rights

Context
- U.S. will host Prime Minister of India for an official state visit on June 22,2023.
- Both countries will work to deepen Bilateral ties.
- The visit will strengthen our two countries' shared commitment to a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific and our shared resolve to elevate our strategic technology partnership, including in defense, clean energy, and space.

Human rights concerns
- During the Prime minister visit both counties will also discuss the issues related to human rights.
- United States administration noted that it encourage all countries to uphold their human rights obligations, commitments, and to work towards building inclusive societies.

Other priority area
- United States and India launched a partnership to deepen ties on military equipment, semiconductors and artificial intelligence.

With great Power, respect

Context
- In a unanimous verdict, the Supreme Court has recently ruled that the Delhi government has legislative and executive powers over services.
- While hearing the petition on Centre versus the Delhi government over the issue of demarcation of power, a constitution bench headed by Chief Justice said an elected government needs to have control over the administration.
- It refused to agree with the 2019 judgement of Justice Ashok Bhushan that the Delhi government has no power over the issue of services.

Observation of Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi
- The apex court also noted that the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) to abide by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers on all matters except police, land and law and order.
- The Court has also made it clear that there is no requirement of the concurrence of the Lt. Governor and that he has no power to overrule the decisions of the State government.

Amendment to the NCTD Act
- This amendment to the National Capital Territory of Delhi (NCTD) Act was passed as a supplement to the constitutional provision under Article 239 AA.
- It calls for creation of local Legislatures or Council of Ministers or both for certain Union territories.
- The Supreme Court says, "Article 239AA (3)(a) reserves the Parliament's legislative power on all matters in the State List and Concurrent List but clause (4) explicitly grants to the Government of

Delhi executive powers in relation to matters for which the Legislative Assembly has powers to legislate.

Matters of jurisdiction

- The Court further says, "the Lieutenant Governor should not act in a mechanical manner without due application of mind so as to refer every decision of the Council of Ministers to the President."
- Parliament can legislate for Delhi on any matter in the State List and the Concurrent List but the executive power in relation to Delhi except the 'Police', 'Land' and 'Public Orders' vests only in the State government headed by the Chief Minister.

Bottom line

- The Supreme Court gives wise advice to the Lt. Governor: "We may reiterate that the Constitutional scheme adopted for the NCT of Delhi conceives of the Council of Ministers as the representatives of the people on the one hand and the Lt. Governor as the nominee of the President on the other who are required to function in harmony within the Constitutional parameters.
- It is against constitutional morality which requires strict adherence to the constitutional principles of collaborative federalism, constitutional balance and the concept of constitutional governance.

11.05.2023

- **India, U.S. to strengthen G-20 cooperation**
- **Study on Indian sewage treatment plants**
- **Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi flagship programme**
- **EPFO to work on priorities to clear subscriber's dues**
- **A ground view of the Indian Space Policy 2023**

India, U.S. to strengthen G-20 cooperation

Context

- The Prime Minister's forthcoming official state visit to the US, at the invitation by U.S. significant for new vigor and momentum to bilateral ties India and United States.
- The Prime Minister's visit will show that the partnership between the two nations is people-centric, and people-driven, and is good for the world at large.

Significance of the Visit

- The Prime Minister's visit to the U.S. will strengthen the two countries' shared commitment to a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific.
- It aims to resolve to **elevate strategic technology partnership, including in defence, clean energy, and space.**
- The other focus area of discussion include:
  - Expanding educational exchanges
  - People-to-people ties
  - Confront common challenges from climate change
  - Workforce development
  - Health security

About G20

- The G20 was founded in 1999 after the Asian financial crisis as a forum for the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to discuss global economic and financial issues.
- It aims to secure global financial stability by involving middle-income countries.
- The G20 members represent:
  - 85% of the global GDP
  - 75% of the global trade
  - Two-thirds of the world population
- The G20 does not have a permanent secretariat or staff. Instead, the G20 Presidency rotates annually among the members and is selected from a different regional grouping of countries Each year another country from a different group assumes the G20 Presidency.

Study on Indian sewage treatment plants

Context
- A first-of-its-kind analysis of the sludge found in Indian sewage treatment plants (STP),
- set up to treat polluted water from the Ganga, found that most of it had "high potential" for use as fertilizer.
- But this polluted water first required treatment before it could be used unrestricted on farms or as a potential biofuel.

National Mission for Clean Ganga,
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga, a flagship programme of the government to establish treatment facilities and prevent pollution of the river, is to derive livelihood opportunities from the river rejuvenation programme.
- One of the measures under this, "Arth Ganga" (economic value from Ganga), is to "monetise" and reuse treated wastewater and sludge.
- This means converting sludge a thick residue that while rich in organic chemicals is also a repository of heavy metals, industrial effluents and bacterial contaminants into usable products such as manure and bricks.

Classification of sludge
- Treated sludge can be classified as class A or B as per the standards of the United States Environment Protection Agency.
- The class A being safe to be disposed of in the open and useful as organic fertilizer. The Class B means that the sludge can be used in "restricted" agricultural applications, the edible parts of the crop not be exposed to the sludge-mixed soil, and animals and people not come into extensive contact.
- India does not yet have standards classifying sludge as class A or B.

IIT Roorkee Study on Sludges
- A study by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Roorkee found that most of the sludge analysed after drying fell into the class B category.
- Nitrogen and phosphorous levels which is the basic soil nutrients, were higher than those recommended by India's fertilizer standards (FCO, 2009).
- However, potassium levels in some samples were less than recommended.
- The total organic carbon was more than 16%, again higher than FCO recommendations, but the degree of pathogens, as well as heavy metal contamination, was above the recommended standard.

Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi flagship programme

Context

- Recently, the Ministry for Women and Child Development launched the Centre's flagship programme 'Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi'.
- The ministry has allocated Rs 600 crore for the training of anganwadi workers to implement the ECCE.
- The National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) has been roped in for the training of Anganwadi workers.

Aim of programme
- Poshan Bhi, Padhai Bhi flagship programme aim to make anganwadi centres nutrition hubs and education-imparting centres.
- The programme will focus on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) at anganwadis across the country
- The ECCE will focus on education in the mother tongue, as per the New Education Policy 2020.

Focusing on NEP 2020
- In line with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the government has taken up the goal of strengthening the foundations of the country's future generations.
- The initiative targets children's development in every domain mentioned in the National Curriculum Framework, like physical and motor development, cognitive development, and socio-emotional-ethical development, among others.

EPFO to work on priorities to clear subscriber's dues

Context
- The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has issued an internal circular directing its regional offices on the method to calculate the dues of subscribers who apply for higher Provident Fund (PF) pension.
- According to the circular, 8.33% of employer share on higher pay from November 16, 1995, or from the date the pay exceeds the wage ceiling of ₹6,500 and 1.16% of employer share on higher pay above ₹15,000 a month will be added for calculating dues.
- The EPFO had recently extended the date for submitting joint options with employers for availing higher pension till June 26.

Current provision
- Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) members are entitled to a pension after retirement.
- Currently, the employees and employers contribute 12% of their basic salary and dearness allowance to the EPF.
- Of the employer's 12% contribution, 8.33% goes to the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) and 3.67% to the EPF.
- However, the 8.33% EPS contribution is capped at the maximum amount of Rs.15,000 even when the employee draws a higher salary.
- The cap on the EPS contribution was introduced in 2014 through an amendment to the EPS.

SC directive
- The court had also struck down the requirement in the 2014 amendments mandating employee contribution of 1.16 per cent of the salary exceeding Rs 15,000 per month. This will facilitate the subscribers to contribute higher to the scheme and get enhanced benefits accordingly.
- EPFO has provided an important clarification that the 1.16 % additional contribution will be diverted from within the overall 12% the of the employer's PF contribution.

A ground view of the Indian Space Policy 2023

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the Indian Space Policy, 2023.
- The policy is expected to provide a framework for the space sector in India over the next decade.
- The Department of Space shall oversee the implementation of this Policy and be the nodal department for the same.

Private sector involvement

- Until the early 1990s, India's space industry and space economy were defined by ISRO. Private sector involvement was limited to building to ISRO designs and specifications. The Second Space Age began with licensing private TV channels, the explosive growth of the Internet, mobile telephony, and the emergence of the smartphone.
- Today, while ISRO's budget is approximately $1.6 billion, India's space economy is over $9.6 billion.
- Broadband, OTT and 5G promise a double-digit annual growth in satellite-based services.
- It is estimated that with an enabling environment, the Indian space industry could grow to $60 billion by 2030, directly creating more than two lakh jobs.

Remote sensing data policy

- A remote sensing data policy was introduced in 2001, which was amended in 2011; in 2016, it was replaced by a National Geospatial Policy that has been further liberalised in 2022.
- Yet, Indian users including the security and defence agencies spend nearly a billion dollars annually to procure earth observation data and imagery from foreign sources.
- To streamline matters, a draft Space Activities Bill was brought out in 2017, which went through a long consultative process.
- It lapsed in 2019 with the outgoing Lok Sabha.
- The government was expected to introduce a new Bill by 2021, but it appears to have contented itself with the new policy statement.

Feature of new Space Policy 2023

- The policy lays out a strategy and roll out the Department of Space, ISRO, the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) set up in 2020, and the NewSpace India Limited (NSIL),as the commercial arm of ISRO to replace the now defunct Antrix.
- ISRO will "transition out of the existing practice of being present in the manufacturing of operational space systems.
- ISRO shall focus on R&D in advanced technology, proving newer systems and realisation of space objects for meeting national prerogatives.
- The policy focus is on civilian and peaceful applications.

Non-Government Entities

- These entities will be able to undertake end-to-end activities in the space sector by establishing and operating:
  - Space objects
  - Ground-based assets
  - Related services such as communications, remote sensing, and navigation
- IN-SPACe is expected to create a "stable and predictable regulatory framework" that will ensure a level playing field for the NGEs.
- It will act as a promoter by setting up industry clusters and as the regulator, issue guidelines on liability issues.

The gaps

- The policy sets out an ambitious role for IN-SPACe but provides no time frame for the necessary steps ahead.
- Neither is there an indicative timeline for ISRO's transitioning out of its current practices nor is there a schedule for IN-SPACe to create the regulatory framework.
- The policy framework envisaged will need clear rules and regulations pertaining to FDI and an appellate framework for dispute settlement.

Way forward

- The Space Policy 2023 is a forward-looking document reflecting good intentions and a vision.
- But there is a urgent need frame policy to provide the necessary legal framework to translate this vision into reality, to successfully launch India into the Second Space Age.

10.05.2023

- **Cyclone Mocha expected to develop in Bay of Bengal**
- **Common uniform for Indian Army Officers**
- **Challenge To ED Chief's Tenure Extension**
- **India among top 5 countries in Preterm birth problems**
- **Securing the migrant vote**

Cyclone Mocha expected to develop in Bay of Bengal

Context

- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Cyclone Mocha is expected to develop in Bay of Bengal.
- The cyclone's name was suggested by Yemen after the Red Sea port city, which is known to have introduced coffee to the world over 500 years ago.
- The cyclone will likely to intensify into a depression and further into Cyclone Mocha.
- The storm is expected to move towards the Bangladesh and Myanmar coasts.

About cyclone

- A cyclone is any low-pressure area with winds spiralling inwards.
- Cyclones rotate anti-clockwise in Northern Hemisphere and rotate clockwise in Southern Hemisphere.

Low-pressure area

- According to the IMD, a low-pressure area has already formed over the southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining the South Andaman Sea.
- The details of its path and intensification will be provided after the formation of the low-pressure area.
- The formation of a low-pressure system and its potential transformation into a cyclone is a cause for concern for coastal areas across the region, including those in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Warning for heavy rainfall

- The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a warning for heavy rainfall in Andaman and Nicobar from May 8 to May 12 under the influence of a cyclonic circulation over the southeast Bay of Bengal that is likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm in the coming days.
- In the wake of the impending cyclone, the IMD has issued a warning in 18 districts of Odisha.

Common uniform for Indian Army Officers

Context

- In a significant move, the Indian Army has decided to adopt a common uniform for officers in brigadier rank and above to bolster a common identity, and approach in service matters among seniors.
- The decision was taken after detailed deliberations during last month's Army Commanders' Conference and extensive consultations with all stakeholders.
- The changes will come into effect from August 1, 2023

Rationale behind the decision

- The standard uniform will ensure a common identity for all senior-rank officers, while reflecting the true ethos of the Indian Army.
- This will also reinforce the Indian Army's character to be a fair and equitable organisation.
- There will be no change to the uniform worn by Colonels and below-rank officers.
- In the Army, officers of the rank of Brigadier and above are mostly posted at headquarters or establishments where those from all arms and services work and function together.

Challenge To ED Chief's Tenure Extension

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court said it might revisit its 2021 ruling that the tenure of a superannuated officer may be extended only in exceptional circumstances.
- In 2021, the court was dealing with the appointment of Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

SC ruling on 2021

- In September 2021, a Bench of Justices SC, upheld the Centre's order extending the tenure of Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) beyond two years.
- However, the Bench said that "extension of tenure to officers who have attained the age of superannuation should be done only in rare and exceptional cases.
- On Section 25(d) of the Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003, which lays down the minimum tenure of an ED Director, the SC said, "The words 'not less than two years' cannot be read to mean 'not more than two years."

Director of the Enforcement Directorate tenure

- The current Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was appointed to the post for two years by an order dated November 19, 2018.
- On November 13, 2020, the Centre extended its tenure by a year.
- The NGO Common Cause filed a PIL asking for the November 13, 2020 order to be set aside, on the ground that overall tenure of three years violated Section 25 of the CVC Act.
- In November 2021, with the one-year ED chief extension to coming to an end, then President of India signed ordinances that amended the laws governing the CBI and ED, enabling the government to keep the two chiefs in their posts for one year after the completion of their two-year terms and to keep giving these one-year extensions until they complete five years as chiefs.

Observation by the SC

- The Supreme Court said the prima facie view that the 2021 case had not been rightly decided, and required reconsideration.
- The case did not involve a question of extension then.
- The Bench was hearing a challenge to the extension given to ED chief on the grounds that it violated the 2021 ruling.

India among top 5 countries in Preterm birth problems

Context
- As per a latest UN report, India is among the top five countries with the highest rates of preterm births in 2020, with an estimated 13 per cent.
- Preterm birth problems are one of the biggest causes of mortality among children.
- Other countries on the list were Bangladesh, Malawi, Pakistan, and South Africa
- The global pre-term birth rate was 9.9 per cent in 2020, compared to 9.8 per cent in 2010.

More about Report
- According to a new report released by the United Nations (UN) agencies, almost half of all pre-term births (babies born before the 37th week of pregnancy) in 2020 happened in five countries — India, Pakistan, Nigeria, China and Ethiopia.
- Together these countries accounted for 45 per cent of babies born too soon around the world, exposing them to a high mortality risk.
- This indicates a "silent emergency" for children's survival and health.
- Every two seconds, a baby is born too soon. Every 40 seconds, one of those babies dies.
- An estimated 13.4 million babies were born pre-term in 2020 with nearly one million dying from complications.

Country-wise data
- In 2020, Bangladesh had the highest estimated pre-term birth rate (16.2 per cent), followed by Malawi (14.5 per cent) and Pakistan (14.4 per cent).
- India and South Africa, at an estimated 13 per cent each, were among the top five countries with high pre-term birth rates.
- The total pre-term birth numbers for the five countries are alarming indeed as India tops the list with 30.16 lakh births, Pakistan is at 9.14 lakh, Nigeria at 7.74 lakh and China at 7.52 lakh.
- The report includes updated estimates from WHO and UNICEF.

Government Intervention
- The government has launched many programmes such as the India Newborn Action Plan and Rashtriya Bal Suraksha Karyakram and has set up many Speciality Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) across the country.

Securing the migrant vote

Context
- The Legislative Assembly elections of Karnataka are scheduled to be held in Karnataka on 10 May 2023 to elect all 224 members of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly.
- As per a report in this newspaper, the number of migrants in Karnataka increased from the previous decade.
- Also, 42.12% of Greater Bengaluru's population originates from outside the district or the State.

Survey on migrant voters
- The Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies conducted a study between April 28 and May 1 among the migrant voters of Bengaluru to find out their voting patterns.
- The localities of migrant workers from north and north-east India showed that nearly 99% of them were not registered as voters in Karnataka.
- Some of them were not able to adequately exercise their political voting rights due to geographical constraints; they found it difficult to travel home for every election.

- Migrant workers across India are often apprehensive about registering themselves as voters in any other State apart from their home State.
- This is due to various reasons such as frequent changes in residence, fear of losing property in their home State, and their inability or unwillingness to bring their families with them as well.

Remote Voting Machines

- The Election Commission of India (ECI)'s proposal for introducing Remote Voting Machines (RVMs) seeks to extend voting facilities to such migrant workers who find it difficult to travel to their native place to vote, and thus prevent the loss of votes.
- There was little awareness among the migrant workers about the ECI's proposal to introduce RVMs, 80% of them supported the proposal when they were told about it.
- Less than 10% expressed their apprehensions about this mode of voting.
- Many voiced their concerns and anxieties about the system's accuracy.

A minimum standard of living

- Many of the migrant workers from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam, who were living in Bengaluru and its outskirts, said low and irregular wages and lack of opportunities in their home States were motivating and compelling reasons for them to move to a new place without their families.
- Even though a sizeable proportion of the migrant workers had worked in Bengaluru for decades, they were happy to move to their home States if they were offered comparatively lower pay.
- The most popular reason for this was to be closer to home and to their families and meet fewer expenses.

Conclusion

- Elections are an opportunity for people to exercise their fundamental rights, the votes of migrant voters have been missing for years.
- While the ECI's move provides a ray of hope to millions of migrant workers, two crucial priorities ahead are to create awareness about the initiative and ensure transparency.
- While the Election Commission's RVM proposal provides hope to millions of migrant workers, two crucial priorities ahead are to create awareness about the initiative and ensure transparency.

09.05.2023

- **Regulations to curtail misleading food ads**
- **High Court has no power to direct changes to ST List**
- **Five more to be released in Kuno National Park**
- **27th Financial Stability and Development Council meeting**
- **Buddhism, India's soft power projection tool**

Regulations to curtail misleading food ads

Context

- Recently, the Advertisement Monitoring Committee at the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) flagged fresh cases of food business operators (FBOs) making misleading claims and advertisements.
- As per the regulator, the count of such offences has shot up to 170 in the last six months.

Food Safety Regulations

- The FSSAI uses the Food Safety and Standards (Advertising & Claims) Regulations, 2018 which specifically deals with food (and related products) while the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA)'s regulations cover goods, products and services.
- Further, the Programme and Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 stipulate that advertisements must not imply that the products have some special or miraculous or supernatural property or quality, which is difficult of being proved.
- Product claims suggesting a prevention, alleviation, treatment or cure of a disease, disorder or psychological condition is prohibited unless specifically permitted under the regulations of the FSS Act, 2006.

Criteria for natural and fresh

- A food product can be referred to as 'natural' if it is a single food derived from a recognised natural source and has nothing added to it.
- It should only have been processed to render it suitable for human consumption.
- The packaging too must be done sans chemicals and preservatives.
- Composite foods, which are essentially a mixture of plant and processed constituents, cannot call themselves 'natural', instead, they can say 'made from natural ingredients.'
- 'Fresh' can be used for products which are not processed in any manner other than washing, peeling, chilling, trimming, cutting or irradiation.

About nutritional claims

- Nutritional claims may either be about the specific contents of a product or comparisons with some other foodstuff.
- According to the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), most complaints of misleading ads were related to the nutrition of a product, its benefits and the ingredient mix not being based on adequate evidence.
- A lot of claim data is to be based on technical data. For example, Vitamin D in any product.

High Court has no power to direct changes to ST List

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court orally remarked that the High Court of Manipur did
- not have the power to direct the state government to recommend a tribe for the
- Scheduled Tribes List.
- The remark came while a bench comprising headed by the Chief Justice of India, was hearing the petition pertaining to the ongoing unrest in the State of Manipur.

Observation made by SC

- The bench led by the Chief Justice of India asked why a 23-year-old Constitution Bench judgment which clearly held that no court or State had the power to "add, subtract or modify" the Scheduled Tribes List was not "shown" to the Manipur High Court in the first place.
- CJI orally said a High Court does not have the power to direct changes to the Scheduled Tribes List.
- He noted that It is a Presidential power to designate a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe.

Constitutional Provision

- The President of India is the constitutional authority vested with the power of declaring castes and tribes as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 341 deals with the above provision in the Indian Constitution.
- Article-341 empowers the President to include the names of various castes and tribes in a special list.

- There are two main provisions in this article:
- The first clause states that the President can include a caste in a Scheduled Caste
- and a Scheduled Tribe through public notification of a State or Union Territory.
- The second clause states that the Indian Parliament can, by public notification of the
- President, remove any caste or community included in the Scheduled Castes or
- Tribes from this list.

Five more to be released in Kuno National Park

Context

- According to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, five more cheetahs will be released in the wild in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park (KNP) before the onset of monsoon.
- Three females and two males will be set free from their enclosures, joining three others who are already out in KNP.
- The statement by ministry was based on a report submitted by an expert committee to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), which is the nodal body for Project Cheetah.
- The committee members visited the KNP on April 30 and reviewed the current status of Project Cheetah.

Total strength

- Now, 15 cheetahs, including the five to be released soon, are spending time in larger fenced enclosures as they acclimatise to their surroundings.
- Ten cheetahs will stay in their enclosures till September, when the monsoons subside, after which "the situation will be reassessed," and "further releases into KNP.
- The cheetahs from South Africa, which were airlifted to India in February, were kept in quarantine there since June 2022.

Carrying capacity of Kuno National Park

- The cheetah translocation project – the biggest conservation experiment of its kind – has been criticised by wildlife conservationists for the costs and risks involved in the process.
- A point of controversy has been the "carrying capacity" of Kuno National Park, which is housing the first tranche of cheetahs.
- According to the Cheetah Action Plan, Kuno can host "up to 21 cheetahs based on its existing prey base," and 36 if "the potential cheetah habitat covering over 3200 km²" is properly restored.

27th Financial Stability and Development Council meeting

Context

- Recently, the union finance minister chaired the 27th Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) meeting in New Delhi.
- The meeting of the FSDC noted that though the Indian economy is well insulated from global shocks and spillover effects of the prevailing geopolitical situation, there is a need to be cautious and therefore early warning signals mechanism needs to be evolved in order to be alert to any fiscal risks.
- This was the first meeting of the FSDC after presentation of the union Budget for 2023-24.

Special drive for unclaimed deposits and claims

- The meeting noted that all regulators should conduct a special drive to facilitate the settlement of unclaimed deposits and claims in the financial sector across all segments.
- The Ministry of finance directed that that all details related to unclaimed deposits need to be shared with nominees of depositors.

- Regulators were also asked to reach out to nominees of depositors for distributing unclaimed deposits like banking deposits, shares and dividends, mutual funds and other such instruments.

Strengthening financial stability

- The finance minister further directed that regulators should maintain a constant vigil as ensuring "financial sector stability is a shared responsibility" of the regulators.
- Regulators must take appropriate and timely action to mitigate any vulnerability and strengthen financial stability.
- The regulators need to be proactive and ensure cyber-security preparedness of the information technology systems to reduce the risk of cyber-attacks, protect sensitive financial data, and maintain overall system integrity, thus safeguarding the stability and resilience of the Indian financial ecosystem.

KYC framework

- The council also deliberated debt levels of corporates and households in the country, simplification and streamlining of KYC framework to meet the needs of digital India, as well as seamless experience for retail investors in government securities.

About FSDC

- The Financial Stability and Development Council is an apex-level body (non-statutory body) constituted by the government of India.
- The Chairperson of FSDSC is Union Finance Minister of India.
- It envisages to strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism of maintaining financial stability, financial sector development, inter-regulatory coordination along with monitoring macro-prudential regulation' of economy.
- No funds are separately allocated to the council for undertaking its activities.

Buddhism, India's soft power projection tool

Context

- Recently, the Ministry of Culture in partnership with International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) has organized the 1st Global Buddhist Summit 2023, which aims to enhance cultural and diplomatic relations with other countries.
- The summit saw the participation of key figures from the global Buddhist community, including the Dalai Lama.
- It was at this summit that the Prime Minister, laid emphasis on the continuing relevance of the Buddha's teachings in today's world.
- The summit was a significant opportunity for India to project and connect with the Buddhist population around the world, thereby strengthening the country's soft power.

India's efforts so far

- The Indian government has been actively investing in its Buddhist diplomacy efforts, with a focus on promoting tourism through the development of the "Buddhist tourist circuit".
- By hosting such a high-profile event, the Indian government hopes to demonstrate its commitment to preserving and promoting Buddhist culture and heritage, as well as strengthening ties with the global Buddhist community.
- With its strong historical and cultural ties to Buddhism, India is well-positioned to play a leading role in shaping the discourse around Buddhist issues on the global stage.

Buddhist diplomacy

- Buddhist diplomacy has the potential to promote regional cohesion, given that nearly 97% of the global Buddhist population is based in Asia.
- During the Cold War, China effectively used Buddhist diplomacy to engage with its neighbouring countries, and it continues to employ this approach to gain legitimacy for its Belt and Road Initiative.
- As India and China compete to dominate the Buddhist heritage as a tool for soft power, India holds an advantage due to the faith's origins in the country.
- However, despite being home to a number of key Buddhist sites, such as Bodhgaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar, India has struggled to attract Buddhist tourists, who tend to favour sites in Thailand and Cambodia.

Guiding principle and China factor

- India's efforts to position itself as a great power committed to cooperation rather than coercion are rooted in its deep historical and cultural ties to the region.
- The current government's guiding principles for foreign policy, Panchamrit principles include "Sanskriti Evam Sabhyata" which means cultural and civilizational links, which were highlighted during the Delhi summit, which saw a diverse group of 171 foreign delegates from South Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, and Taiwan, along with 150 delegates from Indian Buddhist organisations.
- India recognises the importance of Buddhism as a means of conducting public diplomacy and has utilised it to its advantage. However, to maintain its edge over China, more action is needed.

Way forward

- To further strengthen its Buddhist diplomacy, India should continue promoting Buddhism at the highest levels of government, while also organising cultural events to showcase the country's rich Buddhist history.
- India also needs to utilise the reach of Bollywood in promoting its Buddhist heritage.
- India's G-20 presidency this year could be used to promote Buddhist diplomacy on a bigger scale through various cultural meetings, especially as Buddhist teachings align with the motto of India's G-20 presidency, 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'.

08.05.2023

- **Modification in Prevention of Money Laundering Act**
- **ISRO to start online programme for college students**
- **All-women contingents at Republic Day parade**
- **Fresh data for export-import 2022-23**
- **Beyond the Optics**

Modification in Prevention of Money Laundering Act

Context

- Over the last few months, the government has been undertaking changes in the money laundering law, the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act (PMLA).
- In the latest tweak the Finance Ministry brought in practicing chartered accountants, company secretaries, and cost and works accountants carrying out financial transactions on behalf of their clients into the ambit of the money laundering law.

Tracking financial transactions

- The ministry has specified financial transactions carried out on behalf of chartered accountants' clients will get covered under the PMLA.
- The transactions include buying and selling of any immovable property; managing of client money, securities or other assets; management of bank, savings or securities accounts; organisation of contributions for the creation, operation or management of companies; creation, operation or management of companies, limited liability partnerships or trusts, and buying and selling of business entities.

Changes incorporated under PMLA

- In March, the Finance Ministry amended the money laundering rules to incorporate more disclosures for non-governmental organisations by reporting entities like financial institutions, banking companies or intermediaries.
- In addition, it also defined "politically exposed persons" (PEPs) under PMLA as individuals who have been "entrusted with prominent public functions by a foreign country, including the heads of States or Governments, senior politicians, senior government or judicial or military officers, senior executives of state-owned corporations and important political party officials.
- The amendment was in relation to foreign PEPs and not domestic ones.

Verification of Aadhar by non-banking reporting entities

- Recently the Finance Ministry widened the list of non-banking reporting entities to verify the identity of their customers via Aadhaar under the ambit of the money laundering law.
- The centre allowed 22 financial entities — including Amazon Pay (India) Pvt. Ltd, Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd and IIFL Finance Ltd to verify the identity of their customers via Aadhaar.
- Last month, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) had proposed allowing a wide range of private entities to carry out Aadhaar authentication for several services, expanding the use of the digital identity beyond its ministries and departments.

Why these changes in PMLA

- The amendments in the money laundering law aims to plug loopholes ahead of India's proposed assessment later this year under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.
- The FATF has 40 recommendations related to anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) which the member countries have to comply with.

ISRO to start online programme for college students

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced a new introductory-level online training programme called space science and technology awareness training (START).
- Space Science and Technology Awareness Training (START)' aimed at post-graduate and final-year undergraduate students of physical sciences and technology.

Domain of programme

- The programme will cover various domains of space science, including Astronomy & Astrophysics, Heliophysics & Sun-Earth interaction, Instrumentation, and Aeronomy.
- Academic institutions can submit applications for the programme through the Jigyasa portal by May 20.

Significance

- The Space science and technology awareness training (START) programme is part of the ISRO's efforts to enable Indian students to become professionals in space science and technology, as the organisation's space science exploration programme continues to expand into new domains.
- The programme is intended to give them an overview of the different facets of the field, research opportunities and career options.

Remote sensing courses

- The ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) has also announced two short courses remote sensing data acquisition and remote sensing data processing.
- The courses are scheduled to be held from August 21 to September 1 and October 9 to 20 respectively, at NRSC's Earth Station at Shadnagar near Hyderabad.

All-women contingents at Republic Day parade

Context

- The government is working on a plan to ensure maximum participation of women in next year's Republic Day parade, 2024 in line with the increased roles being assigned to women in the armed forces, paramilitary and police to advance their empowerment and break gender barriers.
- In March, the defence ministry wrote a letter to the armed forces and other government ministries and departments involved in the parade.

Promoting gender equality

- The armed forces have taken several measures for the first time this year to promote gender equality including assigning women to command roles, grooming them for future leadership roles, and allowing them to join the regiment of artillery.
- The Republic Day-2024 parade will reflect the growing contribution of women in the service of the nation.
- After the detailed deliberations, it has been decided that the Republic Day Parade, 2024 will be having only women participants in the contingents (marching and band), tableaux and other performances during the Parade at Kartavya Path, New Delhi.

Republic Day parade 2023

- This year's parade saw a woman officer leading the Indian Air Force marching contingent of 144 air warriors.
- In the 2023 parade, 'Nari Shakti' was the dominant theme in the tableaux of Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Tripura.

Fresh data for export-import 2022-23

Context

- India's goods trade numbers for February and March have been revised by over $10 billion from initial estimates, and the overall export-import figures for last year have been scaled down by around $3 billion dollars each.
- The experts noted that petroleum shipments as the main driver for the extraordinarily high revisions of recent export data.

Trade deficit data

- The trade deficit for the year has risen 40.8% to $267.45 bn, slightly higher than the 40% estimated earlier.
- For February, goods exports have been revised higher by almost $3.1 billion from the initial estimate of $33.9 billion to about $37 billion.

- Imports for the last month of 2022-23 have also been revised downward by around $2.4 billion to $55.72 billion.

India's oil imports

- India's oil imports from Russia went up after the Ukraine conflict may be part of the trigger for the fluctuating petroleum trade numbers.
- However, the sharp revisions on the petroleum exports front had begun four-five months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022.
- With average monthly upward revision in net trade deficit to the tune of $1.5 bn, the cumulative for the year could add up to $18 bn.

Beyond the Optics

Context

- The year 2023 is truly multilateral moment for India.
- India will host to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit scheduled for July 3-4, 2023.
- It is also host to the subsequent G20 summit to be held on September 9-10.
- No host country of previous SCO and G-20 summits has convened as many meetings as India has.

Showing India heritage via summits

- The locations have covered major cities of India, both ancient and modern.
- The summits themselves promise to be major, even spectacular events, showcasing India's rich cultural heritage and its contemporary achievements.
- India playing host to the SCO and G-20 summits this year has boosted its regional and international profile, expanded its diplomatic space, and created opportunities to advance its interests in a congested and contested geopolitical space.

Challenges

- An inordinate focus on the optics and preoccupation with event management may well impinge on India's capacity to manage both substance and spectacle.
- Developing countries are always at a disadvantage because they are unable to field large delegations with knowledgeable and experienced negotiators.
- But India's effort to mount an impressive international event, hosting important leaders from across the world, should not take away valuable human resources from the real drama of upholding India's interests in negotiating forums away from public glare.

India's external engagement

- India's external engagement has expanded at a blistering pace.

- India needs a much larger corps of international negotiators with knowledge and expertise in multiple domains.
- Today norm setting is taking place not just in trade and investment and climate change, but in newer areas such as cyber security, the security of space-based assets, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing.
- These are critical to India's future and we should endeavour to be rule makers rather than rule takers.
- While multilateralism has value, the convening of meetings under the aegis of the SCO and G20 provide opportunities for bilateral engagement.

Way forward

- The recent meetings of the SCO Defence Ministers and of Foreign Ministers enabled the Indian side to have a high-level dialogue with China, explore the possibilities of resolving the residual military confrontation in eastern Ladakh and gauge Chinese perspectives on a range of regional and international issues.
- As host to both the G20 and the SCO and equally as a member of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific, India can pursue a foreign policy agenda consistent with its interests in each of these forums.
- Diplomacy is all about engagement, about conversations and navigating the areas of grey where compromise may be possible.

06.05.2023

- **IIT-Madras launches wellness survey**
- **Centre widens Aadhaar ambit to verify customers**
- **China's update on Border situation**
- **Projects to enhance operational efficiency of Indian Army**
- **Switching on India's smart electricity future**

IIT-Madras launches wellness survey

Context

- Recently, the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M) has launched a comprehensive wellness survey in response to growing mental health concerns and a series of suicides on campus.
- After witnessing four student suicides in a span of two months, IIT Madras has launched a wellness survey programme for students, staffers and faculty members, where more than 30 counsellors have been deployed.

Survey under NHM

- The survey is being conducted under the aegis of the National Health Mission, Tamil Nadu Government, where a one-to-one conversation with a well-qualified wellness specialist assigned by the NHM will be conducted.
- The survey aims to reach all students, staff, and faculty members.
- Over 30 trained counsellors have been appointed for the initiative, which involves one-to-one conversations with wellness specialists assigned by the NHM.

Kushal Programme

- IIT-M director launched the wellness survey- 'Kushal Programme' and said that happiness is a collective responsibility.

- The 'Kushal Programme' aims to foster closer associations between individual students and faculty members, creating a support network for students who may be struggling academically or emotionally.
- The institute has also launched a 'Be Happy' website to provide resources and guidance to support mental health and overall well-being.

Centre widens Aadhaar ambit to verify customers

Context

- Widening the list of non-banking reporting entities, the Finance Ministry has allowed 22 financial entities to verify the identity of their customers via Aadhaar under the ambit of the money laundering law.
- The list of non-banking reporting entities includes Amazon Pay (India) Pvt. Ltd, Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd and IIFL Finance Ltd.
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) proposed allowing a wide range of private entities to carry out Aadhaar authentication for several services, expanding the use of the digital identity beyond its ministries and departments.

Compliance norms

- The Ministry of Finace vide a notification said non-banking reporting entities, other than banking companies mentioned, shall comply with the standards of privacy and security under the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsides, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016.
- Section 11A of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act provides for verification of identity by reporting entities.
- The amendment is a part of a series of changes being undertaken in the money laundering law to plug loopholes ahead of India's proposed assessment later this year under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog.

Terms and Condition

- E-KYC (know your customer) carried out through OTP-based Aadhaar authentication allows entities to offer a limited set of services to their users.
- Such a KYC has to be renewed every year and the aggregate amount of term loans sanctioned shall not exceed Rs 60,000 in a year.

Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance

- According to amendments proposed to the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020 by the IT Ministry in April, private entities and state governments would be allowed to conduct Aadhaar-based authentication for promoting "ease of living" of residents and enabling better access to services for them, among other things.
- In 2019, the government had amended the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, under which it had allowed only banking and telecom companies to carry out such authentications for KYC requirements.

China's update on Border situation

Context

- During the ongoing Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in a statement said that the current situation on the China-India border is generally stable".
- He also noted that both sides should:
- Continue to implement the important consensus between the leaders of the two countries
- Consolidate the achievements made
- Strictly abide by the relevant agreements and protocols

- Promote further cooling and easing of the border situation, and maintain sustainable peace and tranquillity in the border area".

India's stand

- India's External Affair minster said that a detailed discussion with State Councillor and Foreign Minister was held and the "focus remains on resolving outstanding issues and ensuring peace and tranquillity in the border areas.
- Indian officials have reiterated their view that relations with China remained "abnormal" and have called for urgency in completing the disengagement process in the two remaining friction areas in Depsang and Demchok.
- China has dragged its feet in the slow-moving disengagement talks that have continued for three years.

Lessons from history

- India should draw lessons from history, approach, and bilateral relations.
- Meanwhile, tens of thousands of troops remain in forward areas.
- India has also called for de-induction of these troops and de-escalation to return to the April 2020 status quo, which China has rejected.
- India has, however, maintained that this would only be possible if the Line of Actual Control (LAC) disengagement is completed and peace is restored on the borders.

Projects to enhance operational efficiency of Indian Army

Context

- The Indian Army will soon have a real-time, common operating picture, with data from various sensors and inputs fused into one comprehensive image for quicker decision-making, at all levels - ranging from the ground commander to the Corps level.
- The implementation of this automation project is part of a series of initiatives being rolled out by the Army.
- 'Project Sanjay' is in the process of being deployed after extensive validation carried out in plains, deserts and mountains.

Battlefield Surveillance System

- A new Battlefield Surveillance System (BSS) under Project Sanjay is in the process of being deployed, after extensive validation carried out in the plains, deserts, and mountains.
- The BSS, the aim is to have surveillance centres for all field formations by December 2025.
- It will integrate thousands of sensors which will enable provision of an integrated surveillance picture to commanders and staff at all levels, besides completing the sensor-shooter grid by integrating with the Artillery Combat Command and Control System (ACCCS).
- The system also integrates data on the movements of India's adversaries received from various sources across borders, including sensors, satellites, UAVs or unmanned aerial vehicles, and patrols.

Significance of the move

- The automation project of the Indian Army are expected to cumulatively improve:
  o Operational efficiency
  o Enhance battlefield awareness for Commanders on the ground
  o Medical services
  o Other administrative functions
  o Provide functional efficiency for human resource management, logistics, inventory management

Switching on India's smart electricity future

Context

- India is witnessing the smart future unfold in electricity sector.
- More than 5.5 million smart meters have been installed in India, and over 100 million sanctioned.
- The target is to replace 250 million conventional electric meters with prepaid smart meters by 2025-26.
- India is supporting this initiative through a results-linked grant-cum-financing to help power distribution companies (discoms) become financially sound and efficient to deliver better services to consumers. However, there are also on-ground challenges.

Reaping technology benefits

- A recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) found that most smart meter users have already begun to experience some of the technology benefits.
- The study covered about 2,700 urban households that use prepaid or postpaid smart meters across six States.
- Half the users reported improvements in billing regularity, and two-thirds said paying bills had become easier.
- Around 40% of users alluded to multiple co-benefits such as a greater sense of control over their electricity expenses, a drop in instances of electricity theft, and improved power supply to the locality.

Roadmap to achieve the targets

- **First,** the Ministry of Power should drive a nationwide campaign to educate consumers about smart meter benefits and improve the uptake of smart meter apps.
- The apps should be accessible to users from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and provide actionable tips and information.
- This is important, as user satisfaction with smart meters is linked to their ability to access and decipher online bills and perceived technology benefits.
- **Second,** discoms must co-own the programme and take the driving seat.
- The majority of smart meters in India are being deployed by the Advanced Metering Infrastructure Service Providers (AMISPs), responsible for installation and operation of the AMI system for the project lifetime (10 years).
- **Third**, discoms, system integrators and technology providers should collaborate to devise innovative and scalable data solutions.
- Effective use of smart meter data is fundamental to unlocking their true value proposition.
- This would require an ecosystem that fosters innovation in analytics, data hosting and sharing platforms, and enables key actors to collaboratively test and scale new solutions.
- **Fourth,** policymakers and regulators must strengthen regulations to empower consumers to unlock new retail markets.
- Currently, important provisions concerning phase-out of paper bills, arrear adjustment, frequency of recharge alerts, buffer time, rebates, and data privacy are scattered across different regulatory orders or simply missing.
- Their incorporation within existing State frameworks will be crucial for a positive technology experience for end users.
- Regulators must also enable simplification and innovation in tariff design and open the retail market to new business models and prosumagers (producers, consumers, and storage users).

Way forward

- In a progressive step, last month, the Ministry of Power proposed amendments to the Electricity Rules to enable time-variable tariffs for all smart meter users.

- India is on a unique journey of meeting its growing electricity demand while decarbonising its generation sources.
- A user-centric design and deployment philosophy will be crucial for the success of India's smart metering initiative.

05.05.2023

- **SCO Ministers meet to discuss economic ties**
- **India, Russia to suspend talks to settle trade in rupees**
- **Additional Contribution for Higher Pension from Employers' Payout**
- **A boost for science, a wider window to the universe**
- **Bridging the gulf**

SCO Ministers meet to discuss economic ties

Context

- The Foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member countries are expected to finalise in their deliberations in a set of 15 decisions or proposals for the consideration of the grouping's upcoming summit in July 2023.
- The proposals are aimed at expanding cooperation among the SCO member countries in the areas of trade, technology, commerce, security and socio-cultural ties.

Economic cooperation

- The discussion on stepping up economic cooperation, including discussing national currency payments for mutual trade, will be on the agenda for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Foreign Ministers meeting.

Other key Issues

- Russia and the West over the war in Ukraine
- Concerns over China's expansionist behaviour.
- The overall situation in Afghanistan including apprehensions that the country may turn into a breeding ground for terrorism under the Taliban rule.
- India has shown a keen interest in deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence.

About the SCO

- The SCO is an influential economic and security bloc and has emerged as one of the largest transregional international organisations. The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan became its permanent members in 2017.
- Since its inception in 1996, SCO has grown, expanded, and emerged as one of the largest regional organisations. SCO member countries account for about 30 percent of global GDP and 40 percent of the world's population.

India, Russia to suspend talks to settle trade in rupees

Context

- India and Russia have suspended efforts to settle bilateral trade in rupees after months of negotiations failed between both countries.

- The rupee is not fully convertible.
- India's share of global exports of goods also is just about 2% and these factors reduce the necessity for other countries to hold rupees.

Impact of suspension
- The move would be a major setback for Indian importers of cheap oil and coal from Russia who were awaiting a permanent rupee payment mechanism to help lower currency conversion costs.
- Russia is not comfortable holding rupees and wants to be paid in Chinese yuan or other currencies.

India's imports from Russia
- India's imports from Russia have reportedly risen to from $10.6 billion the previous year to $51.3 billion until April 5 since the Ukraine war began.
- Discounted oil has made up a significant portion of India's imports, surging twelve-fold during this period. Meanwhile, India's exports to Russia slightly declined from $3.61 billion to $3.43 billion.

Additional Contribution for Higher Pension from Employers' Payout

Context
- The EPFO has finally come up with long awaited replacement methodology for contribution towards higher EPS pension.
- The members opting for higher pension will no longer have to contribute the additional 1.16% of their salary that is above the wage ceiling which was necessitated due to an EPFO amendment that came into effect from September 1, 2014.

SC directive
- The Supreme Court, in its judgement announced on November 4, 2022, had declared this rule as invalid and asked EPFO to come up with a replacement mechanism.
- "It has been decided to draw 1.16 % additional contribution from within the overall 12% of the contribution of the employers into the provident fund," the Ministry of Labour & Employment stated in a press release issued on May 3, 2023.
- "EPFO has provided an important clarification that the 1.16 % additional contribution will be diverted from within the overall 12% of the of the employer's PF contribution.

Why this ruling is important
- Employees who have their wages below the wage ceiling are mandated to join EPFO and contribute towards EPF and EPS up to the prevailing ceiling.
- EPFO notifies the wage ceiling time to time.
- Employees who were members of EPFO prior to September 1, 2014 and continue to remain a member on or after September 1, 2014 are eligible to opt for higher pension if their salary was or is above the wage ceiling as per the recent SC judgement. However, if any eligible member opts for higher EPS pension, then he/she needs to contribute on
- actual wages, which is above the prevailing wage ceiling.
- For employees opting for higher pension, the EPFO had asked them to pay additional 1.16% on the part of their basic salary which was above the wage ceiling. But after the SC judgement and the current notification, employees will have to pay only 12% of the actual basic salary and not any additional amount for higher pension. Though SC had scrapped the additional 1.16% rule in November last year, EPFO came up with the methodology only on the last day of previous deadline of May 3 for applying for higher pension.

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- **Cabinet approves PM-PRANAM Scheme**
- **Exploring Assam's delimitation draft**
- **All panchayats to be declared UPI-enabled**
- **Centre notifies draft rules for 'Green Credit' scheme**
- **The uniform civil code moment**

Cabinet approves PM-PRANAM Scheme

Context
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) recently approved the PM-PRANAM (PM Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Generation, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother Earth) scheme.
- PM-PRANAM was first announced in the 2023-24 Budget by the Union government.
- The approved scheme incentivises states to promote alternative fertilisers and reduce the use of chemical fertilisers.
- PM-PRANAM is aimed at saving the soil and promoting sustainable balanced use of fertilisers.

Budget allocation
- The government approved an outlay of Rs 1,451 crore subsidy to promote organic manure, taking the total package to over Rs 3.70 lakh crore.
- The centre also decided to continue the current urea subsidy scheme for three years ending March 2025, with an outlay of Rs 3.68 lakh crore.

Introduction Sulphur-coated urea
- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) also decided to introduce sulphur-coated urea (Urea Gold) in the country for the first time to address sulphur deficiency in the soil.
- On sulphur-coated urea, the country has been using only urea, DAP and NPK fertilisers for the last 67 years.

Benefits of Sulphur-coated urea
- Sulphur-coated urea is more economical and efficient than the other kinds of urea.
- For instance, the nitrogen absorption in conventional urea is 30 per cent, neem-coated urea is 50 per cent, and nano urea is 80 per cent.
- Sulphur-coated urea will increase nitrogen absorption efficiency to 78 per cent. '
- It will address Sulphur deficiency in the soil in the country.
- It will also save input costs for the farmers, and also raise incomes for farmers with enhanced production and productivity.

Exploring Assam's delimitation draft

Context
- Recently, the Election Commission (EC) released a draft proposal on the delimitation of the Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam.
- The number of Assembly and Parliamentary seats remains unchanged at 126 and 14 but many constituencies were proposed to be reshaped and the number of reserved seats has been increased.

- This has led to a churning among various organisations and political parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies, with the fortunes of many MLAs likely to be affected.
- There have been protests across Assam since the EC announced the draft proposal.

How did the delimitation exercise come about

- Delimitation is the process of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies based on a recent Census to ensure each seat has an almost equal number of voters.
- It is ideally carried out every few years after a Census by an independent Delimitation Commission formed under the provisions of the Delimitation Commission Act.
- Such panels were set up in 1952, 1962, and 1972 before the exercise was suspended in 1976 due to the family planning programme.
- The Centre reconstituted the Delimitation Commission for the four north-eastern States and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir on March 6, 2020.
- The EC notified the initiation of Assam's delimitation on December 27, 2022, following which four districts were re-merged with the ones they were carved out of.

How would the proposal pan out

- If the draft is accepted, 24 Assembly seats would be reshaped and renamed while the number of reserved seats for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Scheduled Castes (SC) would be increased from 16 to 19 and eight to nine respectively.
- The reserved seats would also be juggled – six each for the SCs and STs would become unreserved while nine ST and seven SC general seats would become reserved.
- The number of reserved Lok Sabha seats (two ST, one SC) would remain the same but Silchar would become reserved for SCs in place of Karimganj.

Can there be further changes

- The EC said the proposal was based on suggestions from 11 political parties and 71 other organisations although Congress skipped a meeting with the election panel team that visited Assam a few months ago.
- The EC has sought "suggestions and omissions" by July before visiting the State again for meeting various stakeholders.
- The AIUDF has threatened to go to court if the draft is accepted.

All panchayats to be declared UPI-enabled

Context

- As per the latest letter issue by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, all panchayats across the country will mandatorily use digital payments for all development work and revenue collection this Independence Day onwards, and will be declared UPI-enabled.
- The ministry noted that states should "announce and inaugurate" the UPI-compliant panchayats in the presence of prominent dignitaries, like chief ministers, MPs, and MLAs.

Stats of UPI payments in Panchayats

- Presently, almost 98 per cent panchayats have already started using UPI-based payments.
- Payments worth almost Rs 1.5 lakh crore have been made through the Public Financial Management System (PMFS).
- Payments to panchayats will now be made digitally.
- Payments in cheques and cash have almost been stopped.

Execution plan

- Panchayats have also been asked to hold meetings with service providers and vendors on June 30.
- A list with details of contact persons from UPI platforms GPay, PhonePay, PayTm, BHIM, Mobikwik, WhatsApp Pay, Amazon Pay and Bharat Pe has been shared by the ministry.
- As per guidelines by the ministry, by July 15, panchayats have to choose appropriate service providers and finalise vendors by July 30.
- Panchayats have also been asked to choose a single vendor which covers the whole area so as to allow economies of scale.
- It has also been recommended to create a centralised dashboard for monitoring transactions in real time.
- Training camps will be held at the district and block levels for officials.

PFMS-eGram Swaraj interface

- According to the ministry, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are making digital payments through PFMS-eGram Swaraj interface, and over 90 per cent of PRIs have been audited online.
- According to government data, 806.3 crore transactions worth Rs 12.98 lakh crore were made through BHIM in January 2023 alone.
- The contribution of rural and peri-urban areas in digital transactions is around 50 per cent.

Centre notifies draft rules for 'Green Credit' scheme

Context

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified the draft 'Green Credit Programme (GCP)' implementation rules 2023.
- The scheme is aligned with the centre's vision of the 'Green Credits Programme' which was unveiled in the Union Budget 2023.
- Under Mission LiFE, one of India's nationally determined contributions (NDC) to the UNFCC.

Beneficiary of the scheme

- Under this scheme, individuals, industries, farmers producers' organisations (FPOs), urban local bodies (ULB), gram panchayats and private sectors, among a host of other entities, will be able to earn "green credit" for undertaking environment-friendly actions. These include planting trees, conserving water, waste management and reducing air pollution.

Aim

- The programme aims to create a market-based mechanism for these entities to earn incentives in the form of green credits.
- It aims at incentivising a host of activities such as afforestation, water conservation and waste management by generating 'green credits'
- The idea is to "incentivize voluntary environmental actions.
- The green credits will be tradable and those earning it will be able to put these credits up for sale on a proposed domestic market platform.

Activities that are allowed

- The environment ministry has identified eight select activities under The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, for which green credit can be earned, which include:
  o Tree plantation
  o Water conservation
  o Water harvesting and water use efficiency/savings

- o   Promoting natural and regenerative agricultural practice
- o   Waste management
- o   Air pollution reduction
- o   Mangrove conservation and restoration
- o   Eco mark based green credit and construction of buildings

The uniform civil code moment

Context
- The concept of a uniform civil code involves the formulation and implementation of personal laws that would apply to all citizens of India, irrespective of their religion, sex, gender, or sexual orientation.
- At present, personal laws are governed by religious scriptures within various communities.
- The Union government at present has argued in favor of uniform laws for all citizens, highlighting the importance of equality as enshrined in the Constitution.

Purpose of enacting a Uniform Civil Code
- The sole purpose of enacting a Uniform Civil Code ought to be the creation of a just society, guided by the constitutional values of freedom, equality and dignity of the individual.
- Generally, a Uniform Civil Code refers to a set of laws that govern personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, among others, with the aim of providing a uniform legal framework for all citizens regardless of their religious or cultural background.
- One of the primary objectives of a UCC is to promote equality and eliminate discrimination on the basis of religion or other personal characteristics.

Case of triple talaq
- In the case of triple talaq, Parliament was right to abolish the practice. But the criminalization of the practice was widely seen as majoritarian when no equivalent provisions exist for other communities.
- With the case of triple talaq it was learnt that when you enact community-specific laws that don't apply to all, and do not pass an equality test, it will be easier to enact majoritarianism.

Law Commission Paper
- The 2018 Law Commission Paper on Reform of Family Law opted for the recommendation that all codes be internally reformed to make them more gender equal. This proposal is attractive if it makes it easier to secure consensus.
- But the substance of the Law Commission's paper suggests that in the areas of marriage and divorce, guardianship, adoption and maintenance and succession and inheritance, is a de facto uniform code.

Way forward
- It is important to recognize that the debate around the UCC in India is multifaceted, with diverse perspectives and considerations.
- The decision to implement a UCC requires a careful examination of constitutional principles, societal dynamics, and the aspirations of different religious communities.
- The Indian constitutional vision is not that of a power play of a federation of communities but to create a zone of individual freedom, equality and reciprocity.
- This is a truer foundation of both identity and diversity.

28.06.2023

- **QS World University Ranking 2023**
- **Partnership for the future**
- **Registration of birth, death by Aadhaar authentication**
- **PM flags off Vande Bharat trains**
- **China denies visa extension to last Indian journalist**
- **A model for quality and inclusive education**

QS World University Ranking 2023

Context

- According to latest edition of the QS World University Ranking 2023, Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay has been ranked 1st in India and 47th globally in Engineering and Technology with an overall score of 80.4 out of 100 in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings by Subject for 2023.
- This marks the first time in eight years that an Indian higher education institution has made it to the top 150 list, with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore previously achieving this feat in 2016 with a ranking of 147.

Three new indicators

- The UK-based ranking agency, QS Quacquarelli Symonds, has partly attributed the fluctuation to a revision of the assessment parameters this year.
- It introduced three new indicators:
  o Sustainability
  o Employment outcome
  o International research network
- Each carrying a weightage of 5 per cent

Adjustment in other parameters

- To accommodate the three new indicators, QS made adjustments to the importance assigned to other parameters.
- The weightage given to the academic reputation indicator has been lowered from 40 per cent to 30 per cent.
- Similarly, the emphasis on faculty-student ratio has also been decreased from 15% to 10% and the significance attributed to the employer reputation indicator has been increased from 10% to 15%.

Partnership for the future

Context

- India and the Philippines formally established diplomatic relations on 26 November 1949, shortly after both countries gained independence.
- In present context, both Philippines and India have embarked on a fresh page in cooperation.
- The visit by India's External Affairs Minister to Manila in February 2022, followed by a meeting with the then Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary on the sidelines of the 2022 Raisina Dialogue, as well as the 13th Philippine-India Policy Consultations in Manila, have infused new energy in the relationship.

India and Philippines economic growth

- India's economic trajectory is highly promising, with projections indicating it will become the world's third-largest economy by 2027.
- With an average GDP growth of 5.5 per cent over the past decade, India is the fastest-growing among the large economies.
- Meanwhile, the Philippines is on the threshold of achieving upper-middle-income status and becoming a trillion-dollar economy by 2033.
- Both nations are deep into fostering greater inclusion and the empowerment.
- The prospects for expanding trade and economic cooperation in innovation, new technologies and clean energy for supporting goals to successfully transition vital sectors of Philippine Economy.

Development of renewable energy

- Business-to-business partnerships can be upscaled to leverage synergies between Philippines economies in light of India's leadership in the development of renewable energy, particularly wind and solar power.
- Between 2009 and 2022, some 280 billion Philippine pesos were invested in renewable energy technologies in the Philippines, almost half of them going to solar energy.

Other sector collaboration

- Synergies can also be unlocked in the context of the "Digital India" project and the Philippines' spirited shoring up of digital infrastructure.
- Additionally, as the Philippines works to become a spacefaring country by 2030, more vigorous capacity-building and collaboration between the Philippine Space Agency and the ISRO are on the horizon.
- In defense sector, a $374-million was signed for the procurement by the Philippines' defence forces of India's BrahMos Shore-based Anti-Ship Missile System in January 2022.
- India's "Act East Policy", which aims to strengthen economic, strategic, and cultural relations in the Indo-Pacific region.

Way forward

- To harness the power of the Indo-Pacific as a catalyst for growth, more intensified regional cooperation is essential.
- Stronger economic integration, improved connectivity, and increased innovation are key to buttressing the region as a global economic powerhouse.
- As champions of the rule of law and inclusive multilateralism, the Philippines and India play important roles in this respect.

Registration of birth, death by Aadhaar authentication allowed

Context

- According to a Gazette notification, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEiTY) has allowed the RGI office to use the Aadhaar database for authenticating the identity details provided during registration of births and deaths.
- However, it is not mandatory.
- The State governments and Union Territories shall adhere to the guidelines with respect to the use of Aadhaar authentication as laid down by the Ministry.

Rules notified

- In 2020, it notified rules stating that the Centre may allow Aadhaar authentication by requesting entities, in the interest of good governance, prevention of leakage of public funds and to promote ease of living.

- The Ministry or States desirous of utilizing Aadhaar authentication shall prepare a proposal to justify such authentication and submit it to the Centre for making a reference to the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

Upgraded sample registration system

- The Union Minister had also launched an upgraded sample registration system (SRS) mobile application system.
- The SRS is a large-scale demographic survey conducted every year by the Registrar-General of India (RGI) office to estimate the birth rate, death rate and other fertility and mortality indicators.

PM flags off Vande Bharat trains

Context

- In a move to enhance state of art train service to citizen, the Prime Minister recently flagged off five Vande Bharat trains in Madhya Pradesh.
- He gave a go ahead to these trains from Rani Kamalapati railway station in Bhopal.
- The five Vande Bharat trains that was flagged off are:
  o Rani Kamalapati-Jabalpur Vande Bharat Express
  o Khajuraho-Bhopal-Indore Vande Bharat Express
  o Madgaon (Goa)-Mumbai Vande Bharat Express
  o Dharwad-Bengaluru Vande Bharat Express
  o Hatia-Patna Vande Bharat Express

Connectivity details

- The Rani Kamalapati-Jabalpur Vande Bharat Express will connect Mahakaushal region (Jabalpur) to the Central region (Bhopal) of Madhya Pradesh.
- Tourist places like Bheraghat, Pachmarhi, and Satpura, etc. will also be benefitted by the improved connectivity.
- The Khajuraho-Bhopal-Indore Vande Bharat Express will improve connectivity of Malwa region (Indore) and Bundelkhand region (Khajuraho) to Central region (Bhopal).
- It will benefit important tourist sites like Mahakaleshwar, Mandu, Maheshwar, Khajuraho and Panna.
- The train will be about two hours and 30 minutes faster than the existing fastest train on the route.
- The Madgaon (Goa)-Mumbai Vande Bharat Express will be Goa's first Vande Bharat Express.
- It will run between Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus and Goa's Madgaon station.
- It will help save about an hour as compared to the current fastest train connecting the two places
- The Dharwad-Bengaluru Vande Bharat Express will connect important cities in Karnataka - Dharwad, Hubballi and Davangere - with the state capital Bengaluru.
- The Hatia-Patna Vande Bharat Express will be the first Vande Bharat train for Jharkhand and Bihar.

China denies visa extension to last Indian journalist

Context

- The Chinese Foreign Ministry asked the last Indian journalist working in China to leave the country by the end of June 2023.
- The last Indian journalist in China was associated with the Press Trust of India (PTI) and will have to leave the country when his visa expires by the end of the month.
- There are no Chinese journalists in India as of now.
- This marks the first instance of there being no Chinese journalists in India since the normalization of relations in the 1980s.

Further development

- In the beginning of 2023, there were 4 Indian journalists working in China, out of which two were barred from returning in April as their visas were frozen.
- As a result, India will soon have no media representatives present in the world's second-largest economy.
- China accused India of discrimination and unfair treatment of its journalists working in the country.
- According to a report by Reuters, India approved temporary visas last month of some Chinese reporters for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) foreign ministers' meeting.

A model for quality and inclusive education

Context

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) Ranking 2023 was announced recently, showcasing the excellence and achievements of various educational institutions in India.
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras secured the top spot in the overall ranking for the fifth consecutive year.
- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), adopted by the Ministry of Education to rank institutions of higher education in India, shows a noteworthy feature of Tamil Nadu.
- Specifically, the 2023 NIRF ranking of the top 100 colleges in India reveals the consistent success of Tamil Nadu in providing higher education that is both of good quality and inclusive.

Parameters of NIRF

- The NIRF employs a ranking metric comprising five parameters with varying weightage to assess the quality of colleges:
  - Teaching, Learning and Resources (40%)
  - Graduation Outcome (25%)
  - Research and Professional Practices (15%)
  - Outreach and Inclusivity (10%)
  - Perception (10%)
- Each of these parameters has several components, which again have varying weightage.

Surge in NIRF enrollment

- The number of colleges participating in the NIRF ranking has grown from 535 in 2017 to 1,659 in 2020, and 2,746 in 2023.
- This five-fold increase notwithstanding, the participating colleges constitute only a paltry proportion of the actual number of colleges in India.
- Since NIRF ranking has already gained wide traction and credibility, it is likely that many good-quality colleges participate in the exercise.

Share of colleges

- Of the top 100 NIRF-ranked colleges in 2023, Tamil Nadu has the largest share (35). Delhi (32) comes next, followed by Kerala (14) and West Bengal (8).
- These four States collectively contribute to 89% of the top colleges, which speaks volumes about other regions.
- Bigger States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Odisha do not have a single college in the top 100.

Performance of Tamil Nadu

- The big question is whether the performance of Tamil Nadu in congruence with its motto of development with social justice.
- Specifically, are the top-ranked colleges largely confined to Chennai and thereby catering primarily to the urban elites and advantaged social groups or are they dispersed and catering to rural and socially disadvantaged groups?
- Chennai accounts for only nine (26%) colleges.
- Coimbatore, with an equal share, competes with Chennai quite consistently. Tiruchirappalli, with five colleges (14%), is next.
- The remaining 12 (out of 35) colleges are widely spread across 11 places.

Conclusion

- Tamil Nadu's impressive and consistent performance in higher education shows that quality and inclusion can be achieved together and consistently.
- This finding should prompt other southern States, which also have a reasonably inclusive and effective social welfare architecture, to introspect why they lag far behind and inspire them to take action to rectify issues.
- The 2023 National Institutional Ranking Framework shows the consistent success of Tamil Nadu in providing both good quality and inclusive higher education.

27.06.2023

- **Centre approves Special Assistance to States**
- **Centre extend deadline to apply for higher PF pension**
- **Sri Lanka to restructure its domestic debt**
- **High-level meeting in Manipur Violence**
- **Laying the foundation for a future-ready digital India**

Centre approves Special Assistance to States

Context
- The Department of Expenditure under the Ministry of Finance recently approved capital investment proposals of Rs. 56,415 crore in 16 States in the current financial year. Approval has been given under the scheme entitled 'Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment 2023-24'.
- The scheme, which was announced in the Budget for 2023-24 in continuation of a similar push for capex from the last three years.

Aim
- The approval aimed at bolstering capital expenditure by state governments, recognizing its potential for generating a multiplier effect on the economy.
- Under this initiative, state governments are provided interest-free loans for a duration of 50 years, amounting to a total sum of ₹1.3 trillion for the fiscal year 2023-24.

Beneficiary states
- The amount has been approved for 16 states including Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and West Bengal.

Sector approval
- According to Ministry of finance, capital investment projects in diverse sectors have been approved including health, education, irrigation, water supply, power, roads, bridges and railways.
- Funds for meeting the State share of Jal Jeevan Mission and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana have also been provided to the States under this scheme to enhance pace of the projects in these sectors.

Scheme comprises several parts
- The scheme comprises several parts, with Part-I being the largest, receiving an allocation of ₹1 trillion.
- The distribution of this amount among the states is based on their respective shares of central taxes and duties, as determined by the 15th Finance Commission.
- Other components of the scheme are either linked to reforms or target specific projects in various sectors.
- **Part-II** of the scheme has set aside ₹3,000 crore for offering incentives to states for scrapping of state government vehicles and ambulances, waiving liabilities related to old vehicles, providing tax concessions to individuals for disposing of old vehicles, and establishing automated vehicle testing facilities.
- **Part-III** and Part-IV focus on incentivizing states for urban planning reforms and urban finance reforms, with allocations of ₹15,000 crore and an additional ₹5,000 crore, respectively.
- **Part-V** of the scheme aims to enhance housing facilities for police personnel and their families within urban police stations, with an allocation of ₹2,000 crore.
- **Part-VI** also aims to promote national integration and the "Make in India" concept by constructing Unity Malls in each state, with ₹5,000 crore earmarked under Part-VI.

- **Part-VII** of the scheme allocates Rs. 5,000 crore to provide financial assistance to states for establishing libraries with digital infrastructure at the Panchayat and Ward levels, catering specifically to children and adolescents.

Centre extend deadline to apply for higher PF pension

Context
- The labour ministry and the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) have decided to extend the deadline to apply for higher pension to July 11, 2023.
- The current deadline was set to expire on June 26.
- The Employers who need to verify the wage details have been granted another three months to complete the process.
- The representatives of both employers and employees had requested the Union government to extend the deadline again, given the plight of pensioners and the amount of work involved in validating the forms.
- This is the third time the deadline has been extended.

Present provision
- Currently, 8.33 percent of your provident fund (EPF) contributions made by employers are directed to the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995 to provide for regular pension income post-retirement.
- However, the basic salary (or wages) considered for the calculation is Rs 15,000, the statutory limit.
- So, only Rs 1,250 (8.33 percent of Rs 15,000) goes towards EPS, with the balance being directed to your EPF.
- If employees were to opt for contribution on their actual basic salary (the component on which EPF contributions are calculated), their pension income is likely to be much higher.
- An employee is eligible to draw pension after completing at least ten years of service.

Who is eligible for EPS
- The employees who were members of the EPF and EPS on September 1, 2014 and remained to be after the said date.
- Also, the employees who retired before September 1, 2014 and previously had opted for higher pensions but applications were rejected by the EPFO authorities.

Calculate higher pension
- Higher pension for those who retired before September 1, 2014 is calculated on the basis of average monthly pay drawn during the contributory period of service in 12 months preceding the date of exit from the membership.
- For those employees who retired/will retire on or after 1 September 2014, the pension will be calculated on the basis of average monthly pay drawn during the contributory period of service in 60 months preceding the date of exit from the membership.

Sri Lanka to restructure its domestic debt

Context
- In a major move to restructure the government's domestic debt, the Sri Lankan authorities have declared a five-day closure of financial markets which aimed to restructure the government's domestic debt amounting to more than $51 billion.
- The restructuring affects government bonds in line with an IMF bailout agreed in March, after Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt in April last year and declared bankruptcy.

Worst economic crisis
- Sri Lanka is witnessing worst economic crisis since Independence.

- The government subsequently entered an agreement with the International Monetary Fund and secured a nearly $3 billion package from it, while agreeing to restructure both its foreign and domestic debt that the Fund estimated at about $41 billion and $42 billion, respectively, as of March 2023.

Longer timeframe
- The President of Sri Lanka said Sri Lanka's debt restructuring programme will be presented to the Cabinet.
- Sri Lanka was looking at obtaining a longer timeframe to repay its loans.

Impact on savings
- Restructuring domestic debt could mean there is an extension of tenure or maturity, an interest rate or coupon adjustment or a haircut.
- The value of people's savings has gone down tremendously.
- Domestic lenders taking a haircut could adversely affect the elderly, by impacting benefits such as Employees' Provident Fund, Trust Fund and pensions.

High-level meeting in Manipur Violence

Context
- Amid the worst situation in Manipur and continued ethnic violence for more than months, the Prime Minister recently chaired a high-level meeting.
- The Centre decided to ensure distribution of essential resources including petrol and cooking gas in Manipur as part of measures to return normalcy in the state roiled by ethnic violence.
- The Centre will also see that other essential commodities are available to people.
- The direction to ensure essential supplies reach the people of Manipur is part of steps being taken to restore peace in the state where ethnic clashes erupted on May 3.
- The meeting was followed after an all-party meeting convened by the union home minister to discuss the ground situation and measures that could be taken immediately.

Failure of governance
- Earlier this month, eight MLAs from the BJP and an Independent supporting the Manipur government submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister's Office, underlining that the "public has lost complete faith in the present state government".
- The government is taking all kinds of measures to restore normalcy.
- The changing nature of violence from the exchange of fire in the peripheral areas to the civil unrest in the valley districts has become a matter of concern for the government.

Laying the foundation for a future-ready digital India

Context
- The Ministry of Electronics and IT has been actively organizing consultations on the proposed "Digital India Bill" to build conceptual alignment on a new law that will replace India's 23-year-old Information Technology (IT) Act.
- The goal is to upgrade the current legal regime to tackle emerging challenges such as user harm, competition and misinformation in the digital space.
- This is a much-anticipated piece of legislation that is likely to redefine the contours of how technology is regulated, not just in India but also globally.

Challenges in present regime

- The current IT Act defines an "intermediary" to include any entity between a user and the Internet, and the IT Rules sub-classify intermediaries into three main categories:
  - o   Social Media Intermediaries (SMIs)
  - o   Significant Social Media Intermediaries (SSMIs)
  - o   Online Gaming Intermediaries
- SMIs are platforms that facilitate communication and sharing of information between users, and SMIs that have a very large user base are designated as SSMIs.
- Consider platforms such as Microsoft Teams or customer management solutions such as Zoho.
- By virtue of being licensed, these intermediaries have a closed user base and present a lower risk of harm from information going viral.
- Treating these intermediaries like conventional social media platforms not only adds to their cost of doing business but also exposes them to greater liability without meaningfully reducing risks presented by the Internet.

Global practice

- Presently limited countries have taken a clear position on the issue of proportionate regulation of intermediaries.
- The European Union's Digital Services Act is probably one of the most developed frameworks.
- It introduces some exemptions and creates three tiers of intermediaries — hosting services, online platforms and very large online platforms, with increasing legal obligations.
- Australia has created an eight-fold classification system, with separate industry-drafted codes governing categories such as social media platforms and search engines. Intermediaries are required to conduct risk assessments, based on the potential for exposure to harmful content such as child sexual abuse material (CSAM) or terrorism.

Focus areas for India

- The need of the hour is a classification framework that creates a few defined categories, requires intermediaries to undertake risk assessments and uses that information to bucket them into relevant categories.
- As far as possible, the goal should also be to minimize obligations on intermediaries and ensure that regulatory asks are proportionate to ability and size.
- One way to do this would be to exempt micro and small enterprises, and caching and conduit services from any major obligations.
- The largest communication services (platforms such as Twitter) could then be required to adhere to special obligations such as appointing India-based officers and setting up in-house grievance appellate mechanisms.

Way forward

- The proposed 'Digital India Bill' holds out the promise of not only upgrading the current legal regime but also redefining the contours of how technology is regulated.
- For the proposed approach to be effective, metrics for risk assessment and appropriate thresholds would have to be defined and reviewed on a periodic basis in consultation with industry.
- The vision of a future India must aim at holistic development in all sectors of the economy and society so that overall human development and quality of life is improved in the country.

26.06.2023

- **India, Egypt Ink Strategic Partnership Declaration**
- **India's third moon exploration mission**
- **MQ-9B drone deal with U.S. to be finalized**
- **Banks to track spends on outward remittances**
- **Manipur — this is not a time for finger-pointing**

India, Egypt Ink Strategic Partnership Declaration

Context
- India and Egypt recently signed an agreement on a strategic partnership as the Prime Minister of India held bilateral talks with the Egyptian President.
- Relations with Egypt are seen as one of India's fastest-growing ties with a North African nation.
- The two countries elevated their ties to a Strategic Partnership in January when the Egyptian President visited India.
- With the Strategic Partnership, both countries will increase cooperation in political and security matters, economics and trade, cultural affairs, defence, agriculture, and scientific and academic ties.

Egypt's highest state honor
- The Government of Egypt bestowed the highest honor of the land — the Order of the Nile.
- The Order of the Nile (Kiladat El Nil) was established in 1915 by Sultan Hussein Kamel of Egypt for award to persons who had rendered useful service to the country.
- It was one of the Kingdom of Egypt's principal orders until the monarchy was abolished in 1953.
- After Egypt became a republic in 1953 the Order of the Nile was reconstituted to serve as Egypt's highest state honor.

Bilateral ties
- India and Egypt reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties.
- The two leaders focused on:
- Trade and investment
- Defence and security
- Renewable energy
- Cultural, and people-to-people ties
- India and Egypt also signed a pact to elevate the bilateral relationship to a 'Strategic Partnership.'
- Three MoUs in the fields of Agriculture, Archaeology and Antiquities and Competition Law were also signed.

Trade value between India and Egypt
- India and Egypt were swiftly moving towards achieving the $12 billion target in bilateral trade within the next five years.
- In the past six months alone, Indian companies have invested around $170 million in Egypt.
- India emphasized that the increasing cooperation between the two sides in the field of renewable energy reflects a joint commitment to environmental protection.
- In fact, many Indian companies are investing in green hydrogen and electric vehicles.

Defence and strategic ties

- India and Egypt are on an upswing in the last few years.
- The Indian and Egyptian Armies conducted the first-ever joint exercise in January this year.
- Egypt has already shown interest in procuring Tejas light combat aircraft, radars, military helicopters, and other platforms from India.
- In July last year, the IAF participated in a month-long tactical leadership programme in Egypt with three Su-30 MKI jets and two C-17 transport aircraft.
- In September, the Defence Minister of India paid a three-day visit to Egypt.

India's third moon exploration mission

Context

- India's third moon exploration mission, slated for a mid-July launch, will share the names associated with the 2019 Chandrayaan-2 lunar adventure.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) plans to retain the names of the Chandrayaan-2 lander and rover for their Chandrayaan-3 equivalents as well.
- This means, the Chandrayaan-3 lander will bear the name Vikram (after Vikram Sarabhai, the father of the Indian space programme) and the rover, Pragyan.

More about launching

- ISRO's plans to launch the third moon mission in mid-July aboard the LVM3 (formerly GSLV Mk-III) rocket from Sriharikota.
- The six-wheeled rover will have two payloads the Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS) and the LASER Induced Breakdown Spectroscope (LIBS).
- In addition to these, there will be one payload on the propulsion module, the Spectro- polarimetry of HAbitable Planet Earth (SHAPE).
- A propulsion module will carry the lander-rover configuration to a 100-km lunar orbit.

Scientific experiments

- The lander, rover and the propulsion module will have payloads for performing experiments designed to give scientists new insights into the characteristics of earth's lone natural satellite.
- The lander will have four payloads:
  - Radio Anatomy of Moon Bound Hypersensitive Ionosphere and Atmosphere (RAMBHA)
  - Chandra's Surface Thermo physical Experiment (ChaSTE)
  - Instrument for Lunar Seismic Activity (ILSA)
  - LASER Retro reflector Array (LRA).

MQ-9B drone deal with U.S. to be finalized

Context

- The Ministry of Defense (MoD) on Sunday said that the cost of 31 MQ-9B drones to be acquired from the United States is yet to be finalized.
- The price of these drones will be decided upon only after a comparison of the "best price" offered to other countries.
- The Defense Ministry will compare the acquisition cost with the best price offered by General Atomics, an American defence corporation, to other countries.
- India is also negotiating to increase the indigenous content in the deal, from the current 8%-9% to 15%-20% which will significantly increase sourcing from the Indian industry.

Procurement in progress

- The procurement is in progress and will be completed according to the laid down procedure.
- The price and other terms of the purchase are yet to be finalized and subject to negotiations.
- The government of India will send a Letter of Request (LOR) to the US Government where Tri-services requirements.
- Based on the LOR, the US Government and MoD will finalise the Letter of Offer and Acceptance (LOA, where details of equipment and terms of the procurement would be negotiated and finalized in accordance with the FMS program and the price and terms offered by the US Government and GA to other countries.

Acceptance of Necessity for acquisition

- The Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for acquisition of 31 MQ-9B long endurance drones was accorded to the procurement by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), on June 15.
- These include 16 Sky Guardian and 15 Sea Guardian long endurance drones from the US.
- AoN noted the estimated cost of 3,072 million US dollars, as provided by the US government. It said the price will be negotiated once policy approval from the US government is received.

Banks to track spends on outward remittances

Context

- With the 20 per cent tax on Liberalised Remittances Scheme (LRS) of the Reserve Bank of India set to kick off from July 1, banks are gearing up to get ready with the systems to track the spends on international cards and mobilise the tax collected at source (TCS) on outward remittances.
- Banks were finding the going tough in assessing and collecting TCS on exemptions while using credit and debit cards outside India.

Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)

- he Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) scheme was introduced by Reserve Bank of India in 2004.
- The Scheme is part of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 1999 which lays down the guidelines for outward remittance from India.
- The Union Budget had raised the tax collected at source (TCS) rate to 20% from 5% on overseas tour packages and outflows under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) that permits $2.5 lakh dollars a year to be sent abroad.

Concern

- The notification evoked criticism following which the finance ministry issued a statement saying that credit card spends above Rs 7 lakh per annum only would come under LRS. However, a formal notification detailing the threshold is yet to be issued by the government.
- The issue concerns payments through credit cards only as debit cards payouts were treated under LRS even earlier.

Manipur — this is not a time for finger-pointing

Context

- Manipur's unfolding and extended tragedy, in which two of the State's major communities, the Kukis and Meiteis, have been on a bloody communal clash since May 3, is proving how utterly meaningless.
- After nearly two months, the State remains tense, with over 120 lives lost.
- While this cannot be reversed, there are also another estimated 45,000 displaced people in several temporary community-run relief camps on both sides of the divide.

The interlink in mutual welfare

- The current standoff in Manipur should have already shown how much the hills and valley depend on each other for their mutual welfare.
- In this relationship, it is also to be expected that the valley would feel a little more vulnerable, though this is also where topographical and agricultural advantages resulted in State formation first.
- The Meiteis' near paranoic concern about Manipur's territorial integrity must be understood in this light.

Acknowledge Meitei pain

- Many now talk of an ethnic cleansing happening in Manipur, and this may actually become so if nothing is done to ensure the displaced can return home safely.
- What most miss, however, is a silent and seemingly non-aggressive ethnic cleansing of Meiteis from Manipur's hills in the decades since India's Independence.
- It is time to also acknowledge the accumulated pain and humiliation of confinement Meiteis would have had to bear, which is not trivial.

For the Kukis

- The Kukis too have been made to suffer long from unjust humiliations and a sense of persecution by the insensitive manner in which the government pushed policies such as drives against poppy plantations, illegal migration and encroachment into reserved forests.

Conclusion

- The return of normalcy must be the priority, and this initiative should begin from the leadership at the very top.
- Even if they have scores left to be settled, they must end the duelling for now.
- Along with this, to dispel all doubt of involvement of Kuki militants under the Suspension of Operation agreement in this conflict, the Assam Rifles must provide conclusive evidence of all cadres being back in their designated camps.
- The priority of the government and stakeholder must be to restore normalcy.

24.06.2023

- **G-20 trade unions meet emphasises global social security**
- **Micron to produce first semiconductor chip at India plant**
- **FCI reject States request for more food grains**
- **India- U.S. Partnerships & initiatives**
- **Quaring the circle at the India-Egypt summit**

G-20 trade unions meet emphasises global social security

Context

- While addressing the G-20 Labour Engagement Group, the Union Minister for Labour and Employment said the two statements adopted by the unions on universalisation of social security and the portability of social security funds, and on empowering women in the future of work and upskilling the women workforce in tech-intensive environments were a testament to the spirit of social dialogue.
- The Labour20 Summit held in Patna from June 21–23, 2023, resolved for a multilateral mechanism among G20 member states and other associated countries on the portability of social security benefits.

Task forces

- The inception meeting of Labour20 held in Amritsar on 18, 19 and 20 March 2023 had formed 5 task forces related to burning issues in the world of work namely:
  o Universal Social Security
  o Women And Future Of Work
  o International Migration of labour - International Portability of social security funds
  o Changing World of Work: New Employment opportunities and Challenges in G20 Countries
  o Skill Development: Role and responsibilities of stakeholders

Recommendation

- The task force on 'International Portability of social security funds' recommended that data on the susceptibilities and needs of migrants should be collected and analysed for the efficiency of social protection systems.
- Private and social partnerships should be considered to implement the portability of funds through third-party service providers.
- The task force report on 'Changing World of Work: New Employment Opportunities and Challenges in G20 Countries' proposed a roadmap to address the issues.
- Labour market policies need to be designed for promoting re-entry into employment, and the legal obstacles hindering re-entering in employment should be removed.

Gender parity

- With the efforts to equip women with the necessary skills and knowledge, governments could ensure their engagement in the job market and promote gender parity.

Micron to produce first semiconductor chip at India plant

Context

- According to the Union Minister for Communications and IT, the First Made-in-India chips are expected to be rolled out by December 2024.
- The government plans for 4-5 semiconductor plants that are expected to be set up in the country within a year.
- India is focusing on developing an ecosystem for semiconductor manufacturing, with the government actively engaging with several companies, including those supplying acrylic resins, aluminium nitride, chemicals, and gases required for chip making.

Semiconductor assembly and testing plant

- The first semiconductor unit in India will be set up by Micron Technologies in Sanand, Gujarat.
- The $2.7-billion semiconductor assembly and testing plant in India will produce its first chip in six quarters, that is, by December 2024.
- The plant would create 5,000 direct and 15,000 indirect jobs.
- Micron leads the memory chip manufacturing used by laptops, mobiles, servers, electric vehicles and telecom equipment and is the fifth-largest semiconductor company in the world.

Investment

- Micron's investment will come ahead of those proposed by Vedanta-Foxconn JV, International Semiconductor Consortium (ISMC) and Singapore's IGSS Ventures, which submitted their proposals last year.

- The government subsequently modified the incentive scheme to attract more chipmakers in October and in June 2023.

FCI reject States request for more food grains

Context

- In a bid to curb inflation and stabilize the rising prices, the Centre has announced an open market sale of wheat and rice through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as part of its market intervention program.
- This decision by the Centre was criticised by the State governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- They said that the Union government's decision to restrict the supply of food grains through the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) to 100 tonnes.
- The Food Corporation of India (FCI) made it clear that the Centre's priority was to curb inflation.

FCI's response

- The Chairman and Managing Director of the FCI said that the maximum quantity to be sold through Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) was limited to accommodate small wheat processors and traders.
- State governments had alleged that such a move was against the interest of the poor. When asked about the complaint of the State governments.

Government Roadmap

- The Government of India is already providing foodgrains for 80 crore people. Additionally, 60 crore consumers need to be taken care of.
- OMSS operations would be carried out in the interest of those 60 crore people so that inflation remains under control for the rest of the country.
- The State governments are going to give the foodgrains to the same beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana or they would be using the foodgrains for State schemes where identified beneficiaries are there.

India- U.S. Partnerships & initiatives

Context

- The Official State Visit of Prime Minister of India to the US vision for strengthening the bilateral relationship between both countries.
- Some of important area upon which agreement was done between the both counties include:

Technology

- $2.75 billion semiconductor assembly and test facility in India
- Semiconductor Centre for Commercialization and Innovation
- Training of 60,000 Indian engineers by Lam Research
- Induction of India in the US-led Minerals Security Partnership
- Investment of $650 mn by India's Epsilon Carbon Limited in a US greenfield electric vehicle (EV) battery component factory
- Advanced training to ISRO astronauts by NASA for a joint effort to the ISS in 2024 and the development of a strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation by the end of 2023

Defence

- Proposal for joint production of F414 jet engines in India by GE, HAL
- Procurement of armed MQ-9B Sea Guardian UAVs by India to Conclusion of a Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRA) between the US Navy with L&T Shipyard in Chennai

- Resolution to operationalise tools to increase defence cooperation, strengthen undersea domain awareness cooperation and agreement to place three Indian liaison officers in US commands
- Inauguration of INDUS-X for joint innovation on defence technologies

Sustainable development

- Continued work by both India-US to achieve national climate and energy goals
- Reinforcement of commitment to creating innovative investment platforms to lower the cost of capital and attract international private finance at scale for renewable energy, battery storage, and emerging green technology projects in India

Indo-pacific deal

- Joining of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative by the US.
- The initiative seeks to promote a safe, secure, and stable domain and promote its conservation and sustainable use

Health

- Collaboration between US and Indian scientists to develop an AI- enabled digital pathology platform to be utilized for cancer diagnosis
- Proposed signing of an agreement between the US National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases with the ICMR to further basic, clinical and translational research on diabetes

Countering global terrorism

- Call for concerted action against all UN-listed terrorist groups including al-Qa'ida, ISIS/Daesh, LeT, JeM, and Hizb- ul- Mujhahideen
- Condemnation of cross-border terrorism, the use of terrorist proxies and urging Pakistan to take immediate action to ensure that no territory under its control is used for launching terrorist attacks
- Call for the trial of perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks
- Development of a broader and deeper bilateral counter narcotics framework to disrupt the illicit production and international trafficking of illicit drugs

Quiring the circle at the India-Egypt summit

Context

- The Prime Minister of India is scheduled to visit, Egypt on June 24-25. 2023.
- This visit is being seen as a game changer for bilateral ties, with the two sides expected to put in place arrangements to ramp up cooperation in areas ranging from security to trade and investment.
- This is PM Modi's first trip to Egypt, the first official bilateral visit by an Indian PM since 1997.

Background

- Historically, India-Egypt ties are perhaps the oldest civilisational link.
- In 2750 BCE, the Pharaoh Sahure sent ships to the "Land of Punt", which historians identify with peninsular India.
- By the middle of the second millennium BCE, Egyptian mummies were wrapped in muslin dyed with indigo, both from India.

India-Egypt trade relation

- India was Egypt's sixth largest trading partner, while Egypt was India's 38th.

- Indian investments in Egypt were spread over 50 projects totalling $3.15 billion, half of the sum contributed by a single company.
- Egypt has invested only $37 million in India.
- There are less than 5,000 Indians in Egypt, nearly a fifth of them being students.
- India has a Joint Commission, Foreign Office Consultations and at least nine joint working groups.

Opportunities

- If the forthcoming Egypt Summit is not to become yet another event management exercise, it would need to leverage the opportunities while avoiding the pitfalls.
- Egypt is a large country (population 105 million) and economy ($378 billion).
- It is politically stable and its socio-economic conditions are quite similar to India.
- Egypt's largest imports are refined petroleum, wheat (world's largest importer), cars, corn and pharmaceuticals — all of which India has the potential to supply.

Plan and Projects

- The Egyptian government has an ambitious infrastructure development agenda, with 49 mega projects including the construction of a New Cairo ($58 billion), a $25 billion nuclear power plant and a $23 billion high-speed rail network.
- During 2015-19, Egypt was the world's third-largest arms importer.
- These present opportunities for India.

Challenges

- The Egyptian economy is in a serious crisis.
- The huge financial commitments have coincided with a static economy, pandemic, global slowdown and the Ukraine conflict.
- Consequently, tourism has dropped and imports such as cereals have become costly. Annual inflation is above 30% and the currency has lost more than half its value since February 2022.
- Foreign exchange scarcity has forced the deferral of payments for such essentials as wheat.
- While a $3 billion bailout package was negotiated with the International Monetary Fund six months ago.
- Egypt's foreign debt is over $163 billion (43% of the GDP) and its net foreign assets are minus $24.1 billion.

Way forward

- India and Egypt need to carefully balance their exposure to explore opportunities on hand.
- India may countenance manageable eco-political risks to partake Egypt's lucrative opportunities through various innovations such as the EXIM line of credit, barter, and rupee trading.
- India may, instead, consider trilateral funding arrangements for such projects in Egypt or elsewhere with its partners in the Gulf, the G-20 or the multilateral financial institutions

23.06.2023

- **G-20 Education Ministers agree on equitable use of AI**
- **PM-KISAN Mobile App Introduces Face Authentication Feature**
- **Medicines Patent Pool deal to make cancer drug cheaper**
- **Centre grants approval for Kalaignar pen monument**
- **A doorway to an entrepreneurial university**

G-20 Education Ministers agree on equitable use of AI

Context
- A meeting of the Education Ministers of G-20 countries held in Pune agreed to equitable and inclusive use of Artificial Intelligence in education and skills that respects human rights.
- All G-20 members also agreed to the critical role that education plays as an enabler of human dignity and empowerment globally.

Significant potential of artificial intelligence
- While speaking at the G20 education ministers' meet, Prime Minister emphasized the significant potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in the fields of learning, skilling, and education.
- He highlighted the transformative power of technology and its role in shaping the future of education.
- The Prime Minister underscored the foundational importance of education in the development of civilizations and the progress of humanity.
- He referred to the education ministers as "Sherpas" leading mankind towards development, peace, and prosperity.

Holistic approach to education
- The Prime Minister outlined India's holistic approach to education, focusing on the significance of foundational literacy as the bedrock of youth development.
- The government's "Nipun Bharat" initiative, which aims to promote proficiency in reading with understanding and numeracy.
- G20 has also recognized the priority of foundational literacy and numeracy.
- The prime minister emphasized the need for innovative e-learning methods to provide quality education with effective governance.
- The "Diksha Portal," which enables school education through distance learning, providing support in 29 Indian and 7 foreign languages.

PM-KISAN Mobile App Introduces Face Authentication Feature

Context
- Recently, the Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister has launched the PM Kisan mobile app with a face authentication feature, under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme.
- PM-Kisan scheme has become the first scheme of the government to do e-KYC through facial authentication mobile app.
- PM Kisan scheme is one of the world's largest direct benefit transfer (DBT) schemes.

Aim
- The app aims to resolve difficulties related to Aadhaar verification and updating bank account details on the PM Kisan Portal through the effective use of digital public goods. Through the app, farmers can complete electronic 'know your customer' (e-KYC) processes remotely by scanning their face.
- This eliminated the need for one time passwords (OTPs) or fingerprint verification.
- Furthermore, the app enables farmers to assist up to 100 other farmers in completing their e-KYC from home.

e-KYC facility
- The government has extended the e-KYC ability to state government officers, enabling them to complete the process for up to 500 farmers.

- The department has also collaborated with India Post Payment Bank (IPPB) to open Aadhaar-linked bank accounts for beneficiaries and urged Common Service Centers (CSCs) to organise village-level e-KYC camps with the help of states and union territories.

PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme

- The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) is a Central Sector Scheme that provides income support to the families of landholding farmers in India.
- This scheme provides supplemental financial support to the farmers to procure various inputs related to agriculture and allied activities and their domestic needs.
- Under the scheme an income support of 6,000/- per year in three equal installments will be provided to all land holding farmer families.
- PM-Kisan provides income support to all landholding farmers' families who have cultivable lands.
- Under this scheme, 100% of funding is provided by the Government of India.
- The State Government and UT administration identify the farmer families eligible for financial support under the scheme guidelines.

Medicines Patent Pool deal to make cancer drug cheaper

Context

- In a move that will make certain cancer drugs more accessible and cheaper for patients, the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) has signed sub-licence agreements.
- The agreements were signed with the India-based companies Eugia, Hetero and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, along with the Indonesian firm BrightGene, to make generic versions of the drug Nilotinib of the Switzerland-based pharmaceutical corporation Novartis.
- Nilotinib drug is used for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia, a type of blood cancer.
- Nilotinib is sold under the brand name Tasigna and marketed worldwide by Novartis.

About Medicines Patent Pool

- The Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) is a Unitaid-backed international organisation founded in July 2010, based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- MPP's mandate is to accelerate access to affordable quality treatments for people living with HIV, hepatitis C and tuberculosis, as well as HIV-associated co-morbidities.
- Its goal is to improve access to affordable and appropriate HIV, hepatitis C and tuberculosis medicines in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).
- Economics research finds evidence that the pool increases generic diffusion in LMIC and upstream innovation.
- In 2021, MPP expanded its mandate into the licensing of technology with an initial focus on COVID-19 vaccines and pandemic preparedness.

First sub-licence agreements

- This is first sub-licence agreements by MPP for facilitating the development of, life-saving medicines for low- and middle-income countries, has signed for a cancer treatment drug are the result of a licence agreement signed between it and Novartis Pharma AG in October 2022 for their patented cancer medicine.
- Information released by the MPP said the selected manufacturers can make generic versions of Nilotinib in India and seven middle-income countries.
- They can also supply it in 44 territories included in the licence through a non-exclusive licence agreement, subject to local regulatory authorisation.

Centre grants approval for Kalaignar pen monument

Context
- The Union Ministry of Environment has given Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) clearance for the Tamil Nadu government's proposal to construct Kalaignar pen monument in Bay of Bengal, off the Marina beach in Chennai, but with 15 conditions.
- With this final approval, the State government may begin the process to implement the proposal.
- It has also noted that the Ministry may revoke or suspend the clearance if the implementation of the conditions were not found satisfactory.

About
- It is a proposed offshore memorial to honour the late M Karunanidhi, a former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and a prolific writer, poet, and orator.
- The monument, which will be shaped like a giant pen, will symbolize his contributions to Tamil literature and culture, as well as his political legacy.
- The project was announced in 2022 and is expected to cost Rs 81 crore and cover an area of 8,551 sq m in the Bay of Bengal, about 360 m from Marina Beach in Chennai.

Conditions compliance
- The environment statement would have to be submitted to the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board every year and the compliance of conditions need to be uploaded on PWD website.
- The Department had proposed the pen monument to be 30-metre high and it would be spread over 8,551 sq.m.
- This would include pen pedestal, lattice bridge above beach and land and pedestrian pathway above sea.
- The 7-metre wide bridge would be 290-metre over the land and 360-metre over the sea.
- Some of the conditions laid by the Union Ministry include no objection certificate from
- INS Adyar that is situated 800 metres away from the project site before the construction.

Green panel order
- Any order or direction of court and tribunal must be complied with, the Ministry added that the CRZ clearance letter is subject to the final order of the National Green Tribunal, southern zone.
- The PWD would prepare a detailed project report for executing the project based on the Ministry's approval.

A doorway to an entrepreneurial university

Context
- The Higher education institutions' role as drivers for social and economic development is inevitably more pronounced in the globalized world.
- New knowledge is always the result of interactions between disparate or competing disciplines.
- Whenever diverse players from different endeavours come together, institutions and organisations make gains because these joint ventures lead to the creation of a whole new platform of knowledge.

Modern university system
- The modern university system, which is a result of large efforts to institutionalise and scale up research and study in many disciplines, keeps evolving.
- Over the years, multidisciplinary studies have seen new disciplines such as biochemistry and computing science, which in turn are spawning dozens of new sub-disciplines including the current rage, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI.

- While the modern university system has accelerated the growth and the rise of new disciplines across the globe, innovations that bring together academic and industrial research work are creating economic and intellectual value for universities.

A new phase

- This joint enterprise of academia and industry, for creating innovations that lead to new products, services, platforms and patents, is entering a new phase.
- This brings us to the next possible evolution of universities, namely, the entrepreneurial university.
- But, globally, the thinking among new-age universities, and 'educational entrepreneurs' is to ensure a fine balance between education and enterprise, where learners pay an optimal price of attaining knowledge, gaining employable skills, or pursuing serious research.

UGC's initiative of PoP

- In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC)'s initiative to institutionalise the concept of 'Professor of Practice' is perhaps a right pointer towards an entrepreneurial university.
- The objective behind introducing Professor of Practice (PoP) is to enhance the quality of higher education by bringing practitioners, policymakers, skilled professionals, etc. into higher education system.
- The initiative wants to bring industry and other professional expertise into academic institutions through a new category of positions viz. PoP.
- This will help take real world practices and experiences into classrooms and also augment faculty resources in higher education institutions.
- PoPs can be found in fields that include business, engineering, law, journalism, and the arts.

Significance of Professor of Practice (PoP)

- Professor of Practice (PoP) can serve as ambassadors for their universities, building relationships with industry partners and helping to connect students with internship and job opportunities.
- They can also participate in professional organisations and conferences to stay up-to-date on industry trends and best practices.
- Thus, PoPs can reshape a university's commercial thinking and energise the actions that add vividity to a university's culture.
- Teaching and research were the foundational pillars of a university in the industrial era. In today's post-knowledge societies, innovation is the third pillar in universities.

Way forward

- The PoP portal will bridge the gap between academia and industry by facilitating the hiring of experienced professionals in different domains.
- These university-based start-ups would not only incubate ideas but also convert ideas into patents and transform patents into commercial products.
- Perhaps, one day, PoPs will lead to a new generation of 'entrepreneurs in residence', showing the way for bright students to create the next Google on campus

22.06.2023

- **Gender Gap Report 2023**
- **India-US Jet engine deal**
- **Changes in MBBS curriculum**

- **Industry eyes access to Gati Shakti portal**
- **Who pays up for the clean up**

Gender Gap Report 2023

Context

- According to the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report, 2023, India has ranked at 127 out of 146 countries in terms of gender parity an improvement of eight places from last year.
- The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked India at 135 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index in the report's 2022 edition.

India's performance

- India has improved by 1.4 percentage points and eight positions since the last edition, marking a partial recovery towards its 2020 parity level.
- The country has attained parity in enrolment across all levels of education.
- India has closed 64.3 per cent of the overall gender gap.
- However, it underlined that India has reached only 36.7 per cent parity in the economy participation and opportunity.
- In India, while there has been an uptick in parity in wages and income, the share of women in senior positions and technical roles has dropped slightly since the last edition.
- On political empowerment, India has registered 25.3 per cent parity, with women representing 15.1 per cent of parliamentarians — the highest for the country since the inaugural report in 2006.

Other Counties Performance

- The index ranked India's neighbours Pakistan at 142, Bangladesh at 59, China at 107, Nepal at 116, Sri Lanka at 115 and Bhutan at 103.
- Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world for the 14th consecutive year and the only one to have closed more than 90 per cent of its gender gap.
- Out of the 117 countries with available data since 2017, 18 countries — including Bolivia (50.4 per cent), India (44.4 per cent) and France (42.3 per cent) have achieved women's representation of over 40 per cent in local governance.

Gender parity and Sex ratio

- India's earlier this year said the WEF recognised the need to enumerate women's participation in local government bodies in its Gender Gap Report after the government raised the with it in Geneva.
- Overall, the Southern Asian region has achieved 63.4 per cent gender parity, the second-lowest of the eight regions.
- In terms of the share of women in ministerial positions, 75 countries have 20 per cent or less female ministers.
- Populous countries such as India, Turkey and China have less than seven per cent women ministers while those like Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon have none.
- For India, the 1.9 percentage point improvement in sex ratio at birth has driven up parity after more than a decade of slow progress.

India-US Jet engine deal

Context

- A landmark agreement to facilitate the transfer of at least 11 critical jet engine technologies is likely to be announced during Prime Minister India's ongoing official State Visit to the United States.

- It is anticipated that a deal will be announced between the American multinational corporation General Electric (GE) and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for the manufacture under licence in India of GE's F414 engine for the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk2.
- The likely agreement for the transfer of technology was discussed recently between the Defence Minister of India and the US Secretary of Defense.
- The US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) was operationalised recently.

About GE-414 engine

- The turbofan engine, part of GE's suite of military aircraft engines has been in use by the US Navy for more than 30 years.
- More than 1,600 F414 engines have been delivered, adding up to more than 5 million engine flight hours on a wide variety of missions.
- The engines are in the thrust class of 22,000 lb or 98 kN, and feature advanced technology such as Full Authority Digital Electronic Control (FADEC), the latest aircraft ignition and engine control system that controls engine performance digitally.
- The use of advanced materials and cooling techniques improve performance and extend component life, the manufacturer's website says.

For Indian Aircraft

- The India-specific version of the engine, F414-INS6, was selected by the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) of the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) for the LCA Tejas Mk2.
- The LCA Tejas is powered by a single GE-404-IN20 engine.
- F414 engines may also power the prototypes and the initial batch of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), India's futuristic fifth-generation fighter aircraft for its Air Force.

Significance of the deal

- Only a handful of countries such as the US, Russia, the UK, and France have mastered the technology.
- India is not in this list, its push for self-reliance in manufacturing several critical technologies, including cryogenic rocket engines, notwithstanding.
- The DRDO's Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) first worked on developing the GTX-37 engine for the LCA.
- Nine full prototype engines and four core engines have been developed, 3,217 hours of engine testing has been carried out, and Altitude Tests and Flying Test Bed (FTB) trials have been completed.

Changes in MBBS curriculum

Context

- Recently, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has also brought in changes in the undergraduate medical curriculum with the latest overhaul bringing in a time limit for completing the MBBS course (nine years).
- The common has fixed number of attempts to clear failed papers, compulsory attendance for both theory and practical papers and a family outreach programme.

Proposed changes

- In the MBBS curriculum some subjects, including biochemistry and microbiology, have seen a reduction in the number of papers that need to be taken by the students.
- As per the latest format, the four-and-half-year MBBS course will be divided into three phases with the first and second of 12 months each, and the third of 30 months.
- Each academic year will have at least 39 teaching weeks with a minimum of eight hours of study on each day.
- Clinical posting is necessary for 15 hours a week from the second year.
- A minimum of 75% attendance in theory and 80% in practical or clinical is must for eligibility to appear for the examinations in that subject.
- Students failing in university examinations at the end of each professional year will appear in supplementary exams.
- The council has also specified the time that can be taken for clearing the supplementary papers at various stages.

Industry eyes access to Gati Shakti portal

Context

- Industry is hopeful that the government may soon agree to open up access to the PM Gati Shakti portal developed for planning multi-modal infrastructure projects, thus helping facilitate greater private capital investments especially in connectivity projects that are seen as critical to sustain the economy's momentum.

PM Gati Shakti diplatform

- The PM Gati Shakti diplatform was unveiled in October 2021.
- It brings together 16 ministries, including Railways and Roadways, so as to spur an integrated and coordinated approach to planning and implementing infrastructure connectivity projects.
- So far, access to the portal's data is restricted to Central and State government agencies.
- The portal data include detailed maps with existing economic and social infrastructure as well as upcoming projects,

Why industry demand access

- According to industry experts' access to the portal's information trove would help not just logistics firms plan operations, but also enable fresh capital spending across allied sectors.
- The access to Gati Shakti portal can be a big benefit for all of the planning of the private sector as well and that will actually help attract more capex and outside funding.

Who pays up for the clean up

Context

- Historically, the primary responsibility for climate change been with the advanced economies, and their process of industrialisation.

- The Kyoto Protocol recognised the "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the fight against climate change.
- The Paris Agreement, asked countries to set voluntary emission targets but required the richer countries to make financial transfers to the developing economies for the latter to cope with the problem.
- It set a floor of $100 billion per year for these transfers.

New Global Financing Pact

- On June 22-23, 2023, France is set to host an international Summit for a New Global Financing Pact. Theme: Building a new consensus for a more inclusive international financial system.
- The aim of this Summit is to concurrently tackle the challenges of climate change, biodiversity protection, and the fight against inequality in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The Summit is co-organized by France and India, with the latter holding the presidency of the G20 this year.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

- In May, the European Commission signed the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
- CBAM is a measure to prevent "carbon leakage" of carbon-intensive products.
- It has been described as a "landmark tool" to put a "fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon-intensive goods that are entering the EU, and to encourage cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries."
- This effort brings to the forefront the interlinkages between trade and the environment.

Objective of CBAM

- The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is expected to achieve three objectives.
- First, reduce EU's emissions
- Second, for the EU not to lose competitiveness in carbon-intensive goods
- Third, to make the targeted countries reduce the carbon intensity of their exports.
- This mechanism, starting in 2026, will cover products such as cement, steel, aluminium, oil refinery, paper, glass, chemicals and electricity generation.
- The countries most affected will be Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, India and China.
- Only three of the 12 exporters to the EU, have a mechanism for "pricing carbon".

Way forward

- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is also an important issue in the ongoing India-EU free trade agreement negotiations.
- India should work with the EU to secure gains on CBAM and ensure smooth onboarding for Indian exporters to maximise the benefits of a bilateral deal, even as the possibility of a WTO challenge remains open
- The proposal has been touted as a solution to trade and climate issues at one go, there are some difficulties, such as the problem of measurement.

21.06.2023

- **India's first mRNA vaccine against Omicron approved**
- **Government measure to combat heatwave deaths**
- **Telecom regulator suggests norms for undersea cables**
- **Railways to improve travel amenities in unreserved coaches**
- **The New Asana**

India's first mRNA vaccine against Omicron approved

Context
- The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved the country's first GEMCOVAC-OM, mRNA-based Omicron-specific booster vaccine, which is developed by Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd, for emergency use.

About GEMCOVAC-OM
- It is manufactured by Gennova Biopharmaceuticals of Pune, in collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), the vaccine has received restricted emergency use approval for individuals aged 18 and above.
- Gennova Biopharmaceuticals Ltd recently announced that its mRNA COVID-19 booster vaccine has received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI).
- GEMCOVAC-OM has demonstrated robust immune responses in phase 3 clinical trial conducted at 20 centres across 13 cities in India In Phase-II/ III trials, approximately 3000 individuals received GEMCOVAC-OM and the vaccine was safe and well tolerated.

About mRNA vaccines
- Messenger RNA is a type of RNA that is necessary for protein production.
- In cells, mRNA uses the information in genes to create a blueprint for making proteins. Once cells finish making a protein, they quickly break down the mRNA.
- mRNA from vaccines does not enter the nucleus and does not alter DNA.

How mRNA Covid-19 vaccines work
- First, mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are given in the upper arm muscle. After vaccination, the mRNA will enter the muscle cells. Once inside, they use the cells' machinery to produce a harmless piece of what is called the spike protein.
- The spike protein is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. After the protein piece is made, our cells break down the mRNA and remove it.
- Next, human cells display the spike protein piece on their surface. Our immune system recognizes that the protein does not belong there. This triggers our immune system to produce antibodies and activate other immune cells to fight off what it thinks is an infection.

Government measure to combat heatwave deaths

Context
- Amid heatwave deaths being reported in parts of the country, the union Health minister held a meeting with senior officials of the India Meteorological Department, and National Disaster Management Authority.
- As per the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, central teams would be rushed to the affected states to guide the governments.
- The union Health minister had asked the Indian Council of Medical Research to develop short-term and long-term plans in coordination with other agencies to prevent such deaths.

How does heat affect the body
- Human being feel drained and tired after stepping out on an extremely hot day.
- This is referred to as heat exhaustion, which happens when the body sweats excessively to keep the core temperature low.
- A heat stroke happens when the ambient temperature is so high that the body is unable to sweat to regulate the core temperature, which shoots up to 40 degrees C (or 104 degrees F).

- In these cases, there is a severe imbalance of salts such as sodium and potassium in the body.
- The high core temperature coupled with salt imbalances disrupts organs, leading to a host of symptoms.
- This is the reason we advise people to stay well-hydrated on hot days.

When hospitalisation is required

- According to doctors a person should be taken to a hospital immediately if they are exhibiting these symptoms: their body temperature is very high but they are not sweating at all, they are feeling drowsy, they are vomiting, they are not passing urine, and they are not breathing properly.
- Special care should be given to those who are old and very young and those who have comorbidities as they are more prone to the impacts of heat.

Preventive measures

- To prevent heat stroke, it is better to avoid stepping out in direct sunlight, especially between noon and 3 pm.
- Ensure you keep drinking water even if you do not feel thirsty.
- Drink other hydrating fluids like lemon water, buttermilk or ORS that can maintain electrolyte levels.
- An advisory by the National Disaster Management Authority says that people should try to keep their homes cool by using curtains or shades and to keep body temperature low by using a damp cloth or taking cold baths frequently.

Telecom regulator suggests norms for undersea cables

Context

- In a move to ease the rules for setting up submarine (undersea) cable landing stations (CLS) in India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released its recommendations on the licensing framework and regulatory mechanism for the sector.

Recommendation

- TRAI recommended amending the existing system of permits to include two categories of cable landing station (CLS) locations.
- These include the main facility and the fibre distribution point, known as the 'point of presence' (PoP) in the industry.
- It has called for the international long distance/Internet service provider category-A (ILD/ISP-A) rules to be changed.

Advantages

- This will enable licensees to get access, and extend their owned or leased dark fibre pair(s) in the undersea cable from the main CLS to their respective CLS-PoP location.
- However, owners of CLS-PoPs will be required to fulfil all other security and regulatory/licence obligations.
- These include reporting requirements.
- It has also called on the government to give all CLS-related operations (including associated activities such as layout, maintenance and repair of subsea cable systems) the status of essential services.
- This is owing to their critical role in the nation's high-speed data architecture.
- In an important move, TRAI has said that a section should be added in the upcoming Telecom Bill to promote, protect and prioritise 'CLS' and 'submarine cable' in India.

Permission for dark fibre
- TRAI also submitted 'dark fibre' should be permitted on existing cable landing stations, and 'stubs' short cables in Indian waters for potential future expansion be permitted.
- Finally, the regulator suggested undersea cables be notified as critical information infrastructure, and thus, benefit from protection by the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre.

Railways to improve travel amenities in unreserved coaches

Context
- Recently, Indian Railways has embarked on a mission to bring about a change in the experience by extending adequate facilities for passengers travelling in unreserved coaches.
- At present travelling in unreserved coaches, especially on long-distance routes, can be a nightmarish experience for many passengers due to the congestion caused by overcrowding and lack of basic amenities.

Action Plan by Railway Board
- According to official sources, the Railway Board has devised a strategy to make journeys comfortable for passengers travelling in the general second-class coaches that are attached in the front and rear of all mail and express trains.
- To start with, instructions have been given to the General Managers of all Zonal Railways to arrange for the availability of affordable meals, drinking water and vending trolleys near unreserved coaches at all stops.

On-board housekeeping
- To ensure the cleanliness and availability of water on board, the housekeeping staff will be deployed at regular intervals to clean the coaches.
- Train managers have to plan to fill water in the toilets of the unreserved coaches at watering stations en route.
- Drinking water booths will also be established at either end of stations for the benefit of passengers in unreserved coaches.
- The carrying capacity of unreserved general class coaches is 90 in Integral Coach Factory (ICF) designed coaches, and 99 in Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches.

The New Asana

Context
- The International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2023 is being celebrated at the UN headquarters in New York with Prime Minister of India in attendance, has a special significance.
- The year 2023 marked nine years after June 21 was declared the International Day of Yoga in 2014, the IDY has been receiving a huge response.
- There is now greater awareness about the benefits of practising yoga for physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Yoga: a global phenomenon
- Yoga is now a global phenomenon.
- With the rise of social media and digital platforms, yoga has transcended geographical boundaries to reach people across the world.
- Around 192 countries, including 44 Islamic countries, celebrated the first IDY in 2015 reveals its popularity.
- According to an informal assessment, over 400 million people participated in the 2022 IDY celebrations.
- The impact has been positive with a number of people in many countries practising yoga for wellness and health benefits.

Promotion of Yoga

- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Ministry of External Affairs with the support of the AYUSH ministry have been promoting yoga.
- Since 2018, the ICCR has been organising an annual international conference aimed at creating a sound understanding of the holistic nature of yoga.
- This conference has also sought to trace the similarities between yoga and other traditional wellness practices in Africa and Southeast Asia.
- In general, the IDY has helped to demystify one of our precious knowledge traditions.
- The integrative and holistic approach central to yogic science is now more intelligible than before.
- Yoga is more about practice and less about preaching.

mYoga mobile app

- The World Health Organisation in collaboration with the Ministry of AYUSH and major yoga institutions, has developed a new mobile app (mYoga) to educate people about the therapeutic benefits of yoga.
- The IDY has also helped to promote research in yoga.
- Research has established that the regular practice of yoga can help reduce stress, improve flexibility and balance, and lead to better physical and mental health.
- Many countries have incorporated yoga into their healthcare systems.
- The WHO has now initiated the process of developing a benchmark document for standards in yoga training.

Yoga and academic Centres

- After IDY 2015, the Government of India established 150 Swami Vivekanand District Yoga Health Centres and 1,25,000 AYUSH Health & Wellness Centres.
- Yoga therapy has become popular for post-Covid rehabilitation.
- The department of AYUSH in collaboration with NIMHANS and S-VYASA University has developed a Tele Yoga Advisory.
- Six central universities have started full-fledged departments of yoga.
- Over 30 per cent of private, state and deemed universities have started either a certificate, diploma or UG/PG programmes in yoga, since 2015.
- The first full-fledged yoga university — Vivekananda Yoga University, California — started a master's programme in 2019.

Opportunity for start-ups

- Yoga, apart from being a wellness strategy, has also facilitated the creation of start-ups focused on yoga accessories (such as apparel, mats, props, etc.) and yoga services (studios, therapy centres, lifestyle centres etc.).
- With the global yoga industry revenues crossing $100 billion, yoga-based start-ups are expected to increase significantly in the next one decade.
- Meditation-based mobile applications, specialised yoga mats, speciality yoga therapy and integrative medicine centres/Mind Body Medicine centres within conventional medical hospitals also have gone up substantially.

Way forward

- The International Day of Yoga (IDY) has helped create a sense of community among yoga practitioners and enthusiasts.
- With lifestyle issues posing health and wellness challenges, yoga could offer solutions derived from Indian traditional knowledge traditions.

- With yoga spreading globally, the next challenge could be about protecting the purity of yoga and preventing trivialisation, adulteration and distortion of the science.

20.06.2023

- **Manipur High Court admits review plea by Meitei body**
- **India, US to discuss every issue relevant**
- **WHO Toxic syrups probe flags concerns**
- **FM calls for efforts to push farmers to cultivate millets**
- **A fair Settlement**

Manipur High Court admits review plea by Meitei body

Context
- Recently, the Manipur High Court admitted a review petition to modify its contentious March 27 order which had directed the State government to recommend the inclusion of the Meitei community on the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list.
- The court issued notice to the Union and State governments seeking their response by July 5, the next date of hearing.
- The review petition filed by the Meitei Tribes Union (MTU).

Manipur High Court's Ruling
- The court directed the government to consider the inclusion of the Meitei community in the tribe list of Manipur.
- It observed that the petitioners and other groups have been fighting for a long time for this inclusion, suggesting that it is an important issue for the community.
- The court has directed the government to submit its recommendation after considering the case of the petitioners, preferably within four weeks of receipt of the order.

Ethnic violence
- The conflict between the Meiteis and the tribals has a long history of political, economic and cultural grievances.
- The valley, which accounts for roughly 10% of Manipur's geography, is dominated by non--tribal Meitei, who account for more than 64% of the state's population.
- The hills, which cover 90% of the geographical region, are home to more than 35% of the officially recognised tribes.
- Manipur has been seeing continuous ethnic violence between the dominant valley-based Meitei people and the hill-based Kuki-Zomi tribal people since May 3, 2023.

India, US to discuss every issue relevant

Context
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in the United States on a state visit from June 21 to June 24.
- During his visit to the US, PM will be hosted by US President.
- Additionally, PM Modi will also address a joint session of the United States Congress on the same day.
- The discussions between PM Modi and President Joe Biden will likely focus on their commitment to upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific, deepening trade, and enhancing security cooperation.

Focus area

- **Countering China vis-à-vis the Quad**
- The US is trying to bolster India as a democratic bulwark to a rising China.
- The cornerstone of that strategy is to ensure a free, open, prosperous, and secure Indo-Pacific region.

Defence cooperation

- Defence would be a major part of the discussion between the two leaders as the US is trying to woo India away from Russian military hardware.
- The US and India are expected to sign agreements on bilateral defence cooperation, especially in areas of transfer of critical technologies for the co-development of cutting-edge military hardware.
- India is expected to sign the deal for procuring at least 18 armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones.

Ukraine-Russia conflict

- India has maintained neutrality in the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia.
- US President might bring up the issue during their meeting seeking India's PM to take a more principled stand on the issue.

WTO farm subsidies

- India has consistently maintained that the World Trade Organisation (WTO) should have a relook at the issue of farm subsidies.
- This issue impacts the food security needs of developing countries like India.
- India wants a revision of the formula WTO uses to calculate current domestic farm subsidies extended by developing nations.

Yoga Day celebrations at UN

- The Prime Minister will lead the International Yoga Day celebrations at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and later address a joint sitting of the US Congress marking 9th International Day of Yoga.

WHO Toxic syrups probe flags concerns

Context

- The World Health Organization's probe into contaminated cough syrups, which have been linked to nearly 300 worldwide deaths so far, has flagged 20 such toxic medicines originating from two countries — India and Indonesia.
- As per the probe all the medicines are syrups — cough medicine, paracetamol or vitamins.
- These would include the 15 previously identified contaminated syrups, seven of which were manufactured in India by Haryana-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals (4), Noida-based Marion Biotech (2), and Punjab-based QP Pharmachem (1).
- The rest were made in Indonesia.

Medical product alerts

- The WHO has already raised 'medical product alerts' on the 15 medicines in Gambia and Uzbekistan, where Indian-made syrups were linked to at least 88 deaths last year, as well as in Micronesia and the Marshall Islands.
- It also raised an alert in Indonesia, where the syrups, sold domestically, were linked to the death of more than 200 children.
- Earlier this June, the Nigerian drug controller raised an alert after it found a paracetamol syrup sold in Liberia contaminated with diethylene glycol or ethylene glycol.

- The syrup was manufactured by a Mumbai-based company.
- Medical product alerts are raised to ensure that more people do not consume the contaminated medicine and that the products are removed from the supply chain.

Report of death cases
- Uzbekistan reported the deaths of at least 18 children due to acute kidney injury linked to two syrups manufactured by Noida-based Marion Biotech.
- In a similar instance in Indonesia, the death of around 200 children due to acute kidney injury were linked to eight contaminated syrups.

Intervention by government of India
- Following the incidents of Indian syrups being flagged by other countries, the Government has put in place a mechanism for all cough syrups meant for export to be tested before they are shipped out.
- In a notification issued in May, the Government said only those cough syrups that receive a 'certificate of analysis' from the country's four central drug testing laboratories, two regional testing laboratories, or any of the NABL-accredited state testing laboratories, will be allowed for export.

FM calls for efforts to push farmers to cultivate millets

Context
- The Union Finance Minister called for concerted efforts to sensitise farmers to shift towards more remunerative but less water-guzzling crops like millets, pulses and oilseeds, and enhance the digital capabilities of rural financial institutions.
- The minister directed National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) to sensitise farmers to shift towards more remunerative but less water-guzzling crops, especially millets, pulses and oilseeds.
- The production and marketing of Shree Anna being a national priority in the International Year of Millets 2023.

Digital capabilities of rural financial institutions
- The Union Finance Minister said that improving the digital capabilities of rural financial institutions, including regional rural banks (RRBs), be facilitated on a priority basis for augmenting financial inclusion.
- NABARD should take steps to augment rural credit by correcting regional imbalances for better productivity in rural areas, including in the non-farm sector.
- The finance minister directed Nabard to facilitate the aggregation of organic producers by farmer-producer organisations, with a focus on Northeast, besides taking steps to augment rural credit.

A fair Settlement

Context
- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a circular on the wilful defaulters and companies involved in fraud can go for a compromise settlement or technical write-offs by banks and finance companies.
- In order to ensure maximum recovery from distressed assets, the Reserve Bank of India has allowed banks to go for compromise settlement of fraud accounts and wilful defaults.

Who are willful defaulters
- As per the Reserve Bank of India's classification, a 'wilful default' would be deemed to have occurred if the borrower has defaulted in meeting their repayment obligations to the lender even when they have the capacity to honour the said obligations.

Minimum cooling period

- The central bank has also directed banks to fix a minimum cooling period of at least 12 months before making fresh exposures to borrowers who had undergone compromise settlements.
- This means a wilful defaulter or a company involved in fraud can get new loans after 12 months of executing a compromise settlement.
- Regulated entities like banks and finance companies are free to stipulate higher cooling periods in terms of their board-approved policies.

Compromise settlements

- A compromise settlement refers to a negotiated settlement where a borrower offers to pay and the bank agrees to accept in full and final, settlement of its dues an amount less than the total amount due to them under the relative loan contract.
- This settlement invariably involves a certain sacrifice by way of write off and/or waiver of a portion of its dues on a one-time basis.

Concern

- A section of bankers say the RBI decision may be detrimental to the banking system and depositors as the wrongful actions of such defaulters and fraudsters are being condoned, placing the burden of their misdeeds on the shoulders of ordinary citizens, especially depositors.
- In the last two decades, banks have approved several compromise settlements, running into hundreds of crores with huge haircuts – or the reduction of outstanding payment or loans that will not be repaid by the borrowers – leading to huge losses for banks.

Way forward

- A year ago, the RBI's Regulations Review Authority 2.0 recommended that the RBI place all draft instructions on its website for stakeholder comments and finalise them after considering the feedback.
- Banks are commercial enterprises and should be allowed to operate accordingly.
- Future public discourse should focus on these fundamental problems, and not on how banks or the RBI could play the role of moral police.

19.06.2023

- **Gandhi Peace Prize 2021 to be conferred on Gita Press**
- **PM lauded Miyawaki forests in farming**
- **States look for alternatives as centre restricts FCI purchase**
- **India, UK seeking equal treatment for services sector**
- **The Risk Threshold**

Gandhi Peace Prize 2021 to be conferred on Gita Press

Context

- According to the Ministry of Culture, the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2021 will be conferred on Gita Press, Gorakhpur, in recognition of its "outstanding contribution towards social, economic and political transformation through non-violent and other Gandhian methods".
- The jury headed by Prime Minister unanimously decided to select Gita Press, Gorakhpur as the recipient of the Gandhi Peace Prize.

Contribution of Gita Press

- The Prime Minister recalled the contribution of Gita Press in promoting the Gandhian ideals of peace and social harmony.
- He observed that the conferment of the Gandhi Peace Prize on Gita Press, on completion of hundred years of its establishment, is a recognition of the work done by the institution in community service.

About Gita Press

- Gita Press was established in 1923.
- It is one of the world's largest publishers, having published 41.7 crore books in 14 languages, including 16.21 crore Shrimad Bhagvad Gita.
- Gita Press main objective is to "promote and spread the principles of Sanatana Dharma, the Hindu religion among the general public by publishing Gita, Ramayana, Upanishads, Puranas, Discourses of eminent Saints and other character-building books and magazines and marketing them at highly subsidised prices.

Gandhi Peace Prize

- The Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by the government in 1995, on 125th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi as a tribute to the ideals espoused by Mahatma Gandhi.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or gender.
- The award carries an amount of Rs 1 crore, a citation, a plaque and an exquisite traditional handicraft/handloom item, the ministry said.

Awardees

- The previous awardees include organisations such as the Indian Space Research Organisation, Ramakrishna Mission, Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, Vivekananda Kendra, Kanyakumari and Sulabh International, New Delhi.
- Recent awardees include Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said, Oman (2019) and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (2020), Bangladesh.

PM lauded Miyawaki forests in farming

Context

- Addressing citizens during the 102nd episode of his monthly radio address 'Mann Ki Baat', Prime Minister lauded Japanese technique 'Miyawaki' in the farming process.
- Miyawaki is the Japanese method of creating dense urban forests in a small area.
- The PM also cited the example of a Kerala-based teacher, Raafi Ramnath, who used the Miyawaki technique to transform a barren land into a mini forest called Vidyavanam by planting 115 varieties of trees.

About Miyawaki plantation method

- Miyawaki is named after Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki.
- The methodology was developed in the 1970s, with the basic objective to densify green cover within a small parcel of land.
- The method involves planting two to four different types of indigenous trees within every square metre.
- In this method, the trees become self-sustaining and they grow to their full length within three years.
- The plants used in the Miyawaki method are mostly self-sustaining and don't require regular maintenance like manuring and watering.

How is Miyawaki useful

- The dense green cover of indigenous trees plays a key role in absorbing the dust particles of the area where the garden has been set up.

- The plants also help in regulating surface temperature.
- Some of the common indigenous plants that are used for these forests include Anjan, Amala, Bel, Arjun and Gunj.

States look for alternatives as centre restricts FCI purchase

Context
- The Union government will not allow state governments to bid for federally held food grains.
- The Centre recently said the purchase quantities had been reduced to accommodate more small and marginal buyers.
- The move to reduce quantity of foodgrains to be purchased under OMSS is aimed at curbing inflation.
- India's federally held food stockpile stands at 72.5 million tonne, which includes a large surplus

Reduction in quantity
- The Centre recently decided that the quantity that a bidder can purchase in a single bid under the OMSS(D) from the Food Corporation of India (FCI) will range from 10-100 tonnes.
- Earlier, the maximum quantity allowed was 3,000 tonnes per bid for a buyer.
- The quantities have been reduced this time to accommodate more small and marginal buyers and to ensure wider reach of the scheme.

Inter-ministerial committee recommendation
- An inter ministerial committee meeting recently recommended to discontinue sale to states was made.
- The government will distribute free grains to 800 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act 2013.
- However, the committee decided to continue the sale of rice for northeastern states, hilly states and states facing law-and-order situations and natural calamities at an existing rate of ₹3,400 per quintal (100kg).

India, UK seeking equal treatment for services sector

Context
- India and the UK are seeking equal treatment in each other's market for their respective companies engaged in the services sector under the proposed free trade agreement, which is under negotiations.
- The two countries are looking at promoting trade in services through this agreement, negotiations for which was launched on January 13, 2021.
- As many as ten rounds of talks have been completed till June this year and both sides are aiming to conclude the negotiations at the earliest.

Service sector
- In the services sector, the official said the UK is showing keen interest in areas such as financial sectors, while India is looking at areas such as education and movement of skilled professionals.
- Under the services chapter of the free trade agreement, there are no customs duty concessions given to each other.
- Both sides have exchanged the list of services where they are keen to promote exports. The negotiations between the two countries for the agreement covers as many as 26 policy areas/ chapters.

Indian student Population in UK
- According to the country's official immigration statistics released in November,2022,
- Indian students have for the first-time overtaken Chinese as the largest group of foreign students studying in the UK with a massive 273 per cent hike in visas granted over the past few years.

- The UK Home Office data collated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had shown that Indians also continue to be the top nationality granted visas in the skilled worker category, with 56,042 granted work visas in the past year.
- Indian nationals also represented the highest number of visas at 36 per cent of the total under the tailored Skilled Worker Health and Care visa targeted at medical professionals, reinforcing Indian contribution to the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

Bilateral trade

- The bilateral trade between the countries has increased to USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23, as compared to USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22.
- India's exports to the UK stood at USD 11.4 billion last fiscal, as against USD 10.5 billion in 20210-22.
- Imports aggregated at USD 8.96 billion in 2022-23, as compared to USD 7 billion in the previous fiscal.
- India's main exports to the UK are ready-made garments and textiles, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, petroleum and petrochemical products, transport equipment, spices, machinery and instruments, pharmaceuticals and marine products.

Import and FDI

- The main imports include precious and semi-precious stones, ores and metal scraps, engineering goods, and professional instruments other than electronics, chemicals and machinery.
- The top sectors attracting FDI from the UK are petroleum, ports, services, roads and highways, and computer software. There are around 700 Indian companies like the Tata Group in the UK.

The Risk Threshold

Context

- India Meteorological Department (IMD) has been issuing the operational long-range forecast (LRF) for the southwest monsoon seasonal (June-September) rainfall averaged over the country as a whole in two stages. The first stage forecast is issued in April and the second stage or update forecast is issued by the end of May.
- Reports of the southwest monsoon have brought bittersweet news for India with some analysts claiming it is subpar whilst the IMD predicts normal rains this year.

Impact of irregular rain

- Irregular rains have a bigger impact on the economy and market sentiment than deficient or delayed monsoons.
- The condition of Floods, droughts, extreme rains and subsequent crop damage and health impacts today pose challenges like never before.
- The World Meteorological Organisation's recent report on global temperatures touching 1.5 degrees Celsius in early June is a warning that the climate emergency is upon us.

IPCC's 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report

- The IPCC's 2023 Climate Change Synthesis Report reiterates that governments are just not doing enough to tackle the crisis.
- The current pace of remedial measures will see the global average temperature rise to 2.7 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels by 2100, and all the international net-zero targets put together would still warm the planet by 2.2 degrees Celsius.
- An estimated two million people lost their lives between 1970 and 2019 to extreme weather and the economic loss hovers around $6.5 trillion.

- Delaying climate action to even 2030 is likely to push temperatures beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Need for emissions reduction

- If the major economies of the world want to lead, they will have to do so by making a long-term commitment to reducing emissions.
- The quantum of climate finance has grown only slightly over the past decade, reaching about $ 579 billion in 2017-18.
- This is about 10 times less than the estimated $ 6.3 trillion needed every year by 2030 to stay aligned with the Paris Agreement.
- The nearly $ 11 million in subsidies that the oil and gas industry benefits from delays the transition even more.

Way forward

- The switch to clean energy is viable option available for both develop and developing countries.
- The governments must view the challenge as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shake off reliance on fossil fuels and build self-sufficient energy systems that are more cost-effective.
- The race to 2050 must not be about net-zero or carbon neutrality alone but towards zero life cycle emissions, because it is a matter of survival.

17.06.2023

- **G20 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting**
- **Massive die-off of fish in coast**
- **Academics defend NCERT efforts to update syllabus**
- **PM to lead Yoga Day celebrations at UN**
- **The World in WTO**

G20 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting

Context

- While virtually addressing the G20 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting, the Prime Minister said that the agriculture sector is facing several challenges globally due to disruptions in supply chain by pandemic and "geo-political tensions".
- The supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic have been worsened by the impact of geo-political tensions.
- Climate change is causing extreme weather events more and more frequently.

Importance of Agriculture

- The Prime Minister noted that Agriculture is at the heart of human civilization. Agriculture provides a livelihood for over 2.5 billion people globally and accounts for almost 30 percent of GDP and over 60 percent of jobs in the Global South.
- Throwing light on India's contribution to the agricultural sector, the Prime Minister highlighted India's policy of a fusion of 'back to basics' and 'march to future' and said that India is promoting Natural Farming as well as Technology-enabled Farming.

Call for collective action

- The prime minister urged the Agriculture Ministers to deliberate on how to undertake collective action to achieve global food security.
- He suggested finding ways to build a sustainable and inclusive food system that focuses on marginal farmers and strengthens global fertilizer supply chains.
- At the same time, the Prime Minister asked for adopting agricultural practices for better soil health, crop health and yield.
- He emphasized the need to empower the farmers with innovation and digital technology and make solutions affordable for small and marginal farmers in the Global South.

International Year of Millets 2023

- The Prime Minister noted that the year 2023 is being celebrated as the International Year of Millets.
- This was adopted by a United Nations Resolution for which India took the lead and was supported by over 70 nations.
- Millets are less expensive and nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their high protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals like iron content.
- India, Nigeria and China are the largest producers of millets in the world.
- India is developing an Institute of Millets Research as a Centre of Excellence for sharing best practices, research and technologies in millets.

Massive die-off of fish in coast

Context

- According to US officials, Thousands of fish washed ashore along the Texas Gulf Coast due to "a low dissolved oxygen event" in warm water.
- Quintana Beach County Park officials said that the species most impacted by this fish kill was the Gulf menhaden, adding that the pedestrian beach is mostly cleared with the "exception of a spattering of fish that the machinery couldn't get".

Impact of warm weather

- Fish kills lare common in the summer when temperatures increase.
- If there isn't enough oxygen in the water, fish can't breathe.
- Warm water holds much less oxygen than cold water, and fish that find themselves in warm water could end up in big trouble.
- When the water temperature rises above 21 degrees Celsius (70 degrees Fahrenheit), it becomes hard for fish to receive enough oxygen to survive.

Academics defend NCERT efforts to update syllabus

Context

- Amid the row over the substantive revision of the original syllabus National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks, 73 academicians including vice-chancellors of central universities released a statement alleging that a 'false propaganda is being spread against the council.
- The statement said that the process of selection of scholars for this task was thoroughly liberal, democratic and humanistic.

Concern by the experts

- The statement comes days after 33 academicians, who were members of the textbook development committee for books drafted in 2006-07 based on the 2005 version of the National Curriculum Framework

(NCF) and are currently in use, wrote to the council stating that the recent syllabus rationalisation exercise has jeopardised their creative collective effort, and asked the council to remove their names from the current textbooks.

NCERT's view
- The NCERT core official said that the school curriculum in India has not been updated for nearly for two decades.
- The last update of textbooks was undertaken in 2006.
- The current NCERT team has been making consistent efforts for reducing the burden on students and improving learning outcomes by rationalising the syllabus and making the content relevant according to current needs.
- The academicians said that unlike the selection process of authors in the previous times, the selection process this time, during the rationalisaion exercise, was far more transparent and ethically justified.

PM to lead Yoga Day celebrations at UN

Context
- The Prime Minister will lead the International Yoga Day celebrations at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and later address a joint sitting of the US Congress marking 9th International Day of Yoga.
- The PM will be on a two-nation visit from June 20 to 25 covering the United States and Egypt.
- This will be India PM's eighth visit to the US after becoming Prime Minister and the second since US President Joe Biden took office.

International Day of Yoga
- The UN General Assembly, in December 2014, adopted a resolution proclaiming June 21 as the International Day of Yoga.
- The draft resolution was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 UN member states.
- The Prime Minster will receive a ceremonial welcome at the White House on June 22, and meet US President to continue their high-level dialogue.

Global endorsement and health benefits
- The Prime Minister in his address during the 69th session of the General Assembly, highlighted the holistic nature of yoga, stressing its role in promoting unity and fostering good health.
- The World Health Organization has also emphasized the significance of physical activity in combating non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular ailments, cancer, and diabetes.
- Yoga, with its ability to reduce physical inactivity and enhance well-being, aligns perfectly with the global call for healthier lifestyle choices.

The World in WTO

Context
- The recently concluded meeting of the G20 working group on trade and investment focused on the important issue of WTO reform.
- This has been on the global agenda for a while including that of the G20, whose members are key players in the WTO.
- However, any talk of WTO reform should not lose sight of the larger global context.
- The WTO, created in that era, was aimed at legalising and policing economic interdependence.

About WTO

- The World Trade Organization is the international organization whose primary purpose is to open trade for the benefit of all.
- The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations.
- The WTO has 164 members (including European Union) and 23 observer governments (like Iran, Iraq, Bhutan, Libya etc).

WTO reform

- The WTO reforms must come from G20's "middle powers" such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa.
- While the term WTO reform means different things to different people, there are four critical areas that developing countries should focus on.
- **First,** one of the cardinal pillars of the international trading regime is the presence of special and differential treatment (SDT) principle in WTO agreements.
- Given the varying levels of development of different WTO member countries, SDT provisions give special rights to developing countries and obligate developed countries to treat the former more favourably.
- The SDT provisions need to be given more teeth and efforts to weaken this treaty-embedded right in the name of WTO reform should be opposed tooth and nail.
- **Second**, the appellate body which is the second tier of the WTO's two-tiered dispute settlement body remains paralysed since 2019 because of the US's continued nonchalance.
- This is part of Washington's overall game plan to dilute the policing part of the WTO, which, in turn, allows it to pursue trade unilateralism without many checks. However, the remaining G20 countries need to either persuade the US to change its position or resurrect the appellate body without the US.
- **Third,** given the slowness of the consensus-based decision-making in the WTO, from 2017 onward, there has been a shift away from this principle toward plurilateral discussions on select issues such as investment facilitation.
- This governance framework should include key principles of non-discrimination, transparency, and inclusivity in incorporating the results of plurilateral negotiations in the WTO rulebook.
- **Fourth,** it is imperative to address the transparency gap in the WTO, especially in terms of notification requirements. Although WTO member countries are obliged to notify all their laws and regulations that affect trade, compliance with this obligation is poor. This increases the cost of trade, especially for developing countries.

Conclusion

- Trade multilateralism might be out of fashion, but remains of vital salience for countries like India.
- Hence, India, under its Presidency of the G20, should work with others to drive the WTO reforms agenda aimed at making trade multilateralism inclusive.

Garima Lohia

16.06.2023

- **BIMSTEC to adopt Bangkok Vision 2030**
- **DAC clears MQ-9 Reaper armed drone deal**
- **RBI's wilful defaulter loan settlement move**
- **Centre stops sale of foodgrains under OMSS**
- **Jumpstarting the next phase of U.S.-India defence ties**

BIMSTEC to adopt Bangkok Vision 2030

Context
- During the upcoming, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit, Bangkok vision 2030 will be adopted a by BIMSTEC.
- The vision will have an overarching effect and give direction to the organisation.

Bangkok Vision 2030
- The Bangkok Vision 2030 would be an overarching kind of document and would give direction to the organisation.
- The vision will focus on the area of
  o **Climate change**
  o **Promotion of digital technology**
  o **Health and wellness sectors**
  o **SMEs**
  o **Quality tourism**
  o **Marine transport cooperation**

About BIMSTEC
- It is a regional organization that was established on 06 June 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- It mainly aims to create an enabling environment for rapid economic development; accelerate social progress; and promote collaboration on matters of common interest in the region.
- Member countries: Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal
- The Chairmanship of BIMSTEC rotates according to the alphabetical order.

DAC clears MQ-9 Reaper armed drone deal

Context
- Ahead of Prime Minister visit to the U.S., the Defence Acquisition Council approved the procurement of 31 armed MQ-9 Reaper Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from General Atomics, defence sources confirmed.
- The long-pending proposal to buy the high-altitude long-endurance armed UAVs was on the agenda of the council.

Roadmap for procurement
- India will procure 31 armable MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones made by General Atomics, an American energy and defence company.
- The three services are likely to each receive an equal number of these drones, which are designed for border region surveillance.

Key features of MQ-9B

- The MQ-9B has two variants — Sky Guardian and its sibling Sea Guardian. The Indian Navy has been operating the MQ-9B Sea Guardian since 2020.
- MQ-9B Sea Guardian can support land, maritime surveillance, anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, strike, electronic warfare and expeditionary roles.
- The MQ-9B Sea Guardian is also capable of automatic take-offs and landings.
- The MQ-9 and other UAVs are referred to as remotely piloted vehicles/aircraft (RPV/RPA) by the USAF.

Why does India need Predators

- The procurement of these drones holds significance as the Indian government aims to use them to ramp up its surveillance apparatus along the frontier with China as well as in the Indian Ocean region.
- Since 2020, India and China had been at military standoffs at several points along the 3,488 km-long border, with several reports claiming that both sides have deployed close to two lakh troops each.
- India has stepped up surveillance considerably along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), using a fleet of unmanned drones and the addition of these drones would be a big upgrade in India's monitoring programme.

RBI's willful defaulter loan settlement move

Context

- Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a circular on the will ful defaulters and companies involved in fraud can go for a compromise settlement or technical write-offs by banks and finance companies.
- In order to ensure maximum recovery from distressed assets, the Reserve Bank of India has allowed banks to go for compromise settlement of fraud accounts and will ful defaults.
- The central bank has also directed banks to fix a minimum cooling period of at least 12 months before making fresh exposures to borrowers who had undergone compromise settlements.
- This means a will ful defaulter or a company involved in fraud can get fresh loans after 12 months of executing a compromise settlement.

Compromise settlements

- A compromise settlement refers to a negotiated settlement where a borrower offers to pay and the bank agrees to accept in full and final, settlement of its dues an amount less than the total amount due to them under the relative loan contract.
- This settlement invariably involves a certain sacrifice by way of write off and/or waiver of a portion of its dues on a one-time basis.

Concern

- A section of bankers say the RBI decision may be detrimental to the banking system and depositors as the wrongful actions of such defaulters and fraudsters are being condoned, placing the burden of their misdeeds on the shoulders of ordinary citizens, especially depositors.
- In the last two decades, banks have approved several compromise settlements, running into hundreds of crores with huge haircuts – or the reduction of outstanding payment or loans that will not be repaid by the borrowers – leading to huge losses for banks.

Who are willful defaulters

- As per the Reserve Bank of India's classification, a 'willful default' would be deemed to have occurred if the borrower has defaulted in meeting their repayment obligations to the lender even when they have the capacity to honour the said obligations.
- State Bank of India (SBI) leads with 1,883 willful default accounts for Rs 79,296 crore, followed by PNB at Rs 38,360 crore, Union Bank of India Rs 35,266 crore, IDBI Bank Rs 23,601 crore and Bank of Baroda Rs 23,879 crore, according to data from Cibil website.

Centre stops sale of food grains under OMSS

Context

- In a bid to curb inflation and stabilize the rising prices, the Centre has announced an open market sale of wheat and rice through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) as part of its market intervention program.
- This reduction in quantities aims to accommodate more small and marginal buyers, ensuring a wider reach of the scheme and immediate availability of stocks to the public.
- The government aims to maintain a comfortable level of overall stock while ensuring effective control of inflationary trends.

Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic)

- Under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) or OMSS(D), the maximum quantity that a bidder can purchase in a single bid range from 10 to 100 metric tons.
- Usually, OMSS is operationalised to sell food grains, especially wheat and rice, at pre-determined prices in the open market from time to time to bulk consumers and private traders during the lean season to improve domestic availability of these two key grains and cool down the open market prices, especially in deficit regions.

Revised policy

- As part of the revised policy dated June 13, 2023, the government has decided to exclude state governments from the purview of the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) to maintain adequate stock levels in the central pool while controlling prices.
- The decision was made following the recommendation of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) meeting held on 8 June.
- The IMC proposed discontinuing the sale of wheat and rice under OMSS(D) to state governments, except for the North-Eastern states, hilly states, and states facing law and order issues or natural calamities.

Jumpstarting the next phase of U.S.-India defence ties

Context

- Over the last few years, there has been incredible momentum in U.S.-India ties, driven primarily by their defence relationship.
- Recently, India and the U.S. concluded a road map for 'Defence Industrial Cooperation' which shall guide the policy direction for the next few years towards cooperation in high technology areas and identify opportunities for co-development and co-production.
- This was concluded during the bilateral meeting between the Defence Minister of India and visiting U.S. Secretary of Defence.

US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology

- In a major move, India and U.S. announced the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) in May last year to elevate and expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the two countries.
- The iCET is expected to forge closer linkages between the government, academia and industry of the two countries in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G and 6G, biotech, space and semiconductors.

Indus-X Initiative

- INDUS-X stands for enhanced strategic and defence partnership between India and the US.
- It is aimed at deepening the partnership between the US and Indian defence innovation sectors.
- INDUS-X will focus on advancing high-tech cooperation and fostering joint research, development, and production opportunities in the defence sector.
- initiative aims to explore possibilities for co-producing jet engines, long-range artillery, and infantry vehicles.

The Indo-Pacific Imperative

- During the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in April 2022, the U.S. Defence Secretary referred to the U.S.-India defence partnership as the cornerstone of their engagement in the Indo-Pacific.
- The combined threat assessments by India and the U.S. in the region point to China as a common and most conspicuous challenge.
- China's Military Power Report 2022 brought out by the U.S. The People's Liberation Army Navy is the world's largest navy by number of ships.
- With the Indo-Pacific region getting more contested, it is estimated that the subsurface presence of China is likely to increase in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Bottom line

- The upcoming meeting between the Prime Minister of India and U.S. President in Washington D.C. is likely to see the United States lifting restrictions that in the past hindered its cooperation with India in advanced technology, including in the fields of defence, artificial intelligence, space, quantum computing and telecommunication.

15.06.2023

- **Inter-Ministerial Committee for Grain Storage**
- **Centre to develop new HDI for PVTG**
- **Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023**
- **Centre wants social media firms to follow laws**
- **Strengthening the ICDS Scheme**

Inter-Ministerial Committee for Grain Storage

Context

- The Union Cabinet approved the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for facilitating "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector" by the convergence of various schemes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

Implementation of the scheme

- This scheme will be implemented at a cost of Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Under this scheme, a godown of a capacity of 2,000 tonnes will be constructed in every block.
- An inter-ministerial committee will be formed for this.
- A decision has also been taken to start City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain – CITIIS 2.0 program.
- In order to ensure time-bound and uniform implementation of the plan in a professional manner, the Ministry of Cooperation will implement a pilot project in at least 10 selected districts of different states and union territories in the country.

Why does India need a grain storage plan

- India, the most populous country in the world, accounts for 18 per cent (1.4 billion) of the global population (7.9 billion).
- However, it accounts for only 11 per cent (160 million hectare) of the arable land (1,380 million hectare) in the world.
- Also, India runs the world's largest food programme under the National Food Security Act, 2013, that covers about 81 crore people.
- Therefore, to ensure food security of a billion plus population, a robust network of foodgrain storage facilities becomes essential.
- At present, India has a foodgrain storage capacity of 145 million metric tonnes (MMT) against the total food production of 311 MMT—leaving a gap of 166 MMT.

Roadmap for grain storage plan

- At present, multiple government agencies, like the Food Corporation of India (FCI), Central Warehouse Corporation, Warehouse Development Regulatory Authority, Railways, and the civil supply departments of states are involved in grain management. However, that has not yielded the desired results.
- Under the new plan, the Ministry of Cooperation aims to set up a network of integrated grain storage facilities through Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) across the country.
- According to the ministry, there are more than 1,00,000 PACS spread across the country with a huge member base of more than 13 crore farmers.

Advantages

- The plan is multifaceted, addressing the shortage of agricultural storage infrastructure by establishing godowns at the PACS level.
- It will enable PACS to undertake various activities, including serving as procurement centres, fair price shops, custom hiring centres, and setting up common processing units.
- The decentralized storage capacity at the local level will reduce food grain wastage, strengthen food security, prevent distress sales of crops, and reduce transportation costs.

Centre to develop new HDI for PVTG

Context

- According to Ministry of Tribal Affairs the , Union government is now looking to design a survey that can gauge the living in over 22,000 villages across the country.
- This is a first ever attempt, through which government will collect information about the changes in the lives of the tribal group make a database from it at the village-level.
- The centre want to draw up an HDI for primitive tribal groups.

PM-PVTG Development Mission

- The Union Budget, 2023, announced a Mission "Pradhan Mantri PVTG Mission" for the welfare of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- A fund of Rs 15,000 crore for the next three years has been allocated for the socio-economic development of the group.
- The programme envisions connecting all 22,544 PVTG villages to basic government services like communications, electricity, public education, healthcare, water supply, and connectivity.

Criteria for identification of PVTGs

- Pre-agricultural level of technology
- Low level of literacy
- Economic backwardness
- A declining or stagnant population

PVTGs population

- In India, tribal population makes up for 8.6% of the total population.
- PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups who are in need of greater support and development.
- Out of the 705 Scheduled Tribes in India, 75 have been identified as PVTGs and are spread across 17 states and one Union Territory.

Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023

Context

- According to latest the Reuters Institute Digital News Report, 2023, overall consumption and sharing of news declined in India from last year's figures, along with a sharp decrease in access to online news (-12 percentage points), while television, too, saw a 10 percentage points decline as a news source.
- The 12th edition of the report, produced in collaboration with the Asian College of Journalism, surveys the news consumption habits of consumers across 46 markets.

Finding of the report

- As per the report, India registered a small decrease of 3 percentage points in overall trust in news (38%) from last year's figure, and was ranked 24th among 46 countries in this regard.
- Finland remained the country with the highest levels of overall trust in news (69%), while Greece had the lowest levels (19%), globally.
- Among individual news brands, public broadcasters like DD India, All India Radio, and BBC News retained high levels of trust among survey respondents in India, emphasising the importance of public service media.

Podcast viewership

- The report also found that news podcasting continued to resonate with educated and younger audiences though it remained a minority activity overall.
- About 34% of the respondents accessed a podcast monthly, while 12% accessed a show on news and current affairs.

Social media preference

- YouTube was the most preferred social media platform for news with 56% of the respondents accessing it.
- WhatsApp (47%) and Facebook (39%) were the next two preferred social media platforms for news in India among the survey respondents.

- Dainik Bhaskar, a Hindi daily, featured among the top 10 brands accessed both online and offline by the survey respondents.
- Globally, the report found that "video-based content, distributed via networks such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, is becoming more important for news, especially in parts of the Global South, while legacy platforms such as Facebook are losing influence.

Worrying signs

- The survey found that users of TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat paid more attention to celebrities and social media influencers than they did to journalists and media companies when it came to news topics.
- This was in sharp contrast to legacy social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, where news organisations still attracted the most attention.

Centre wants social media firms to follow laws

Context

- A day after he called Twitter co-founder allegations about the Indian government's pressure to censor content, the Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT said that the government only requires social media platforms to comply with the country's laws, and that their relationship is not adversarial.
- The minister said that government's relationship with any platform is simply through the prism of compliance with the laws and rules.
- There is nothing adversarial against any platform.

IT Amendment Rules, 2023

- The Central Government has notified the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 aiming to regulate online gaming.
- The new rules for online gaming prohibit any game that involves betting and wagering, and entail a framework of multiple self-regulatory organisations (SROs).
- Exercising power under Section 87(1), Section 87(2)(z) and Section 87(2) of the Information Technology Act it has amended the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules,2021 (2021 Rules).

Strengthening the ICDS Scheme

Context

- The Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Scheme was launched in 1975.
- It is one of the world's largest programmes providing for an integrated package of services for the holistic development of the child.
- ICDS is a centrally sponsored scheme implemented by state governments and union territories.
- The Scheme has been renamed as Anganwadi Services.
- The services are now offerered as part of the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 (Poshan 2.0) - an Integrated Nutrition Support Programme for the duration of the 15th Finance Commission period i.e. from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

Aim

- The ICDS targets children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers; addresses non-formal pre-school education; and breaks the cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality.
- It aims to provide supplementary nutrition, immunization and pre-school education to the children is a popular flagship programme of the government.

What studies show

- Empirical research highlights the correlation between early-life poverty, malnutrition, and later cognitive and economic challenges.
- A study published in World Development demonstrated the ICDS's positive impact on cognitive achievements, especially among girls and those from economically disadvantaged families.
- In a study published in the Natural Library of Medicine, it was found that adolescents aged 13-18, who born in villages with proper ICDS implementation, showed a 7.8% increased likelihood of school enrolment and completed an average of 0.8 additional grades compared to their peers who did not have access to the ICDS.

Approach required

- Implementing the below-mentioned approach could yield at least five advantages.
- First, it would lead to better health and educational outcomes.
- Second, children who remained enrolled also exhibited reduced rates of child stunting and severe malnutrition.
- Third, the cost of a nationwide roll-out of this model is relatively insignificant in comparison to the potential advantages it offers.
- The estimated long-term benefits, based on expected improvements in lifetime earnings, would be around 13 to 21 times the expenses.
- Fourth, the new Anganwadi worker can be given the responsibility of concentrating only on preschool and early childhood education.
- This would allow existing workers to dedicate more time to child health and nutrition.
- Fifth, apart from improving the well-being of rural communities, this would create job opportunities for local residents, particularly women.
- It would lead to the creation of 1.3 million new jobs for women across India.

Way forward

- The operationalization of the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 proposal hinges on its status as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme, State governments oversee its execution, including administration, management, and monitoring.
- To unlock the ICDS' full potential and address persistent issues, it is essential to revisit and re-evaluate its strategies and implementation.
- Empowering Anganwadi workers is just a start.

14.06.2023

- **India, U.S. to diversify semi-conductor supply chain**
- **US decides to rejoin UNESCO**
- **UN needs to be more democratic and representative**
- **Disinflation to be slow and long**
- **Tax law in the shadow of the higher judiciary**

India, U.S. to diversify semi-conductor supply chain

Context

- India's National Security Adviser (NSA) meet the U.S. NSA in New Delhi recently to discussed regional and global issues of mutual relevance.

- U.S. NSA is on a two-day India visit, attended a round table on "Advancing India-U.S. initiative on critical and emerging technologies (iCET)" organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).
- iCET is going to be a very important pillar of our bilateral strategic partnership.

About iCET

- India and the U.S. announced the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) in May 2022 to elevate and expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the two countries.
- The iCET is expected to forge closer linkages between the government, academia and industry of the two countries in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G and 6G, biotech, space and semiconductors.

Clean energy transformation

- The U.S. and India are poised to lead in clean energy transformation, shore up and diversify global semi-conductor supply chains and supply chains in other critical goods and lead the revolution in AI (Artificial Intelligence), advanced computing, biotech, and quantum computing.

Next course of action

- The upcoming meeting between Prime Minister of India and U.S. President in Washington D.C. is likely to see the United States lifting restrictions that in the past hindered its cooperation with India in advanced technology, including in the fields of defence, artificial intelligence, space, quantum computing and telecommunication.

US decides to rejoin UNESCO

Context

- Recently, the UNESCO announced that the United States plans to rejoin the U.N. cultural and scientific agency and look forward to pay more than $600 million in back dues after a decade-long dispute sparked by the organization's move to include Palestine as a member.
- The move will face a vote by UNESCO's member states.

Why did US leave UNESCO

- The U.S. and Israel stopped financing UNESCO after it voted to include Palestine as a
- member state in 2011.
- This led to the US halting the agency's funding, worth millions of dollars, under then President Barack Obama.
- The Trump administration decided in 2017 to withdraw from the agency altogether the following year, citing long-running anti-Israel bias and management problems.
- Notably, Palestine is not recognised as a sovereign state by the United Nations.
- It was included as a non-member observer State over Israel's objections in 2012, meaning it could participate in General Assembly proceedings but lacked voting rights.

Countering China

- US aims to rejoin the UN scientific and educational organizations to push back on China.
- U.S. officials say the decision to return was motivated by concern that China is filling the gap left by the U.S. in UNESCO policymaking, notably in setting standards for artificial intelligence and technology education around the world.

Big boost for UNESCO

- The decision of U.S. to rejoin the U.N. cultural and scientific agency is a big boost to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, known for its World Heritage program as well as projects to fight climate change and teach girls to read.

About UNESCO

- UNESCO is a UN agency tasked with furthering international cooperation and peace through the promotion of educational, scientific and cultural causes.
- For instance, it designates locations globally as World Heritage Sites, which means international recognition and possible funding.
- The United States was a founding member of UNESCO in 1945.

UN needs to be more democratic and representative

Context

- While addressing a special commemorative seminar organised by the Army to mark 75 years of UN Peacekeeping, India Defence Minister said there is a need to invest more in training, technology and resources for the safety and productivity of United Nations (UN) Peacekeepers deployed in conflict-torn regions and called for the "meaningful participation" of women in peacekeeping operations.

India's contribution

- India is one of the largest contributors of troops to UN Peacekeeping operations.
- It has contributed 2.75 lakh troops to peacekeeping missions so far, with around 5,900 troops currently deployed in 12 UN missions.
- India has been one of the top troop contributing nations to UN peacekeeping operations.

Better investment

- The Defence minister highlighting the emerging challenges being faced by the peacekeepers at present.
- He stressed on the need to invest more in training, technology and resources for their safety and productivity.
- He also emphasised that the unique contribution of women in such missions must be recognised.

Women's participation in peacekeeping missions

- The United Nations has said with more women being a part of peacekeeping missions, the operations have become more effective.
- According to the UN, of around 95,000 peacekeepers in 2020, women comprised 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units.
- Meanwhile, around 34% of personnel in peacekeeping missions were women.

Disinflation to be slow and long

Context

- A day after India's CPI inflation touched over 2-year low of 4.25%, Reserve Bank of India said, the disinflation process is likely to be low.
- Disinflation is a situation of decrease in the rate of inflation over successive time period. It is simply slowing of inflation.
- As per RBI governor, India's disinflation process is "likely to be slow and protracted" and the central bank may meet its 4% target only in the medium term.
- India's central bank expects the nation to grow 6.5% in the current fiscal year.

- The government's continued thrust on capital expenditure is creating additional capacity and triggering private investment.

RBI policy measures
- The RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC), headed by the RBI chief, is tasked with bringing down inflation to 4% over the medium term and holding it between 2% and 6% over the long term.
- Latest data showed India's annual retail inflation cooled to 4.25% in May from 4.7% in April, but analysts expect prices to remain sticky in the coming months.

Tax law in the shadow of the higher judiciary

Context
- India's law of taxation is built on two central precepts.
- First, on the idea captured in Article 265 of the Constitution, that a tax may be imposed only with the authority of law.
- Second, on a principle of sureness, that any levy ought to be clear, consistent, and predictable.
- Both these precepts emanate out of a larger commitment to the rule of law, in particular to values of legality and certainty.

A reversal of judgments
- Upholding the Article 265 of the Constitution and principles of sureness requires a commitment not only from the legislature but also from our courts too.
- But over the course of the last 12 months, there have been instances where the Supreme Court of India has undermined this commitment, by reversing well-reasoned judgments of High Courts, and by virtually enacting into existence taxes that lack legislative support.

Recent SC judgment
- In the more recent of the rulings, in ITO vs Vikram Sujitkumar Bhatia, the question before the Court concerned whether an amendment to a provision of the Income Tax Act, 1961, could have retrospective effect in the absence of legislative mandate.
- The provision at stake, Section 153C of the Act, which stipulates the conditions under which a search made on a person's premises could result in the opening of proceedings against other persons and entities.
- Before an amendment to the law in 2015, Section 153C allowed the Revenue to proceed against third parties to a search, if material seized (such as money, bullion, jewellery, or books of accounts) "belongs or belong to" a person other than the one who was subject to the search.
- At least three different High Courts held that the terms, "belongs or belong to," ought to be narrowly construed.

Amendments to Section 153C
- In a significant judgment on taxation law, the Supreme Court held that
- the amendment brought to Section 153C of the Income Tax Act 1961 by the
- Finance Act 2015 will retrospectively apply to searches conducted prior to the date of amendments.
- Section 153C allows the revenue department to proceed against a party other than
- the person who is being searched, if incriminating articles against the "other
- person" is found during the search.
- Section 153C now stipulated that assessments could be made against third parties to a search, even if the material seized — in the case of documents and books of accounts — "pertains or pertain to" the person or if information contained in those items "relates" to the person.

Conclusion

- The object and purpose of Section 153-C is to address the persons other than the searched person.
- Article 142 of the Constitution, which allows it to pass orders for "doing complete justice to a cause".
- It has previously been held that this power ought not to be applied in breach of statutory law.
- Article 265 of the Constitution forbids taxation without legislation. But if the Supreme Court is willing to play Parliament, this peremptory promise will remain illusory.

13.06.2023

- **CoWIN vaccination data leak**
- **India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement**
- **Second SAI20 Summit**
- **Poshan app helps migrant workers during relocation**
- **An Atmanirbhar move**

CoWIN vaccination data leak

Context

- The personal data of individuals who registered on the central government's CoWIN portal to receive COVID-19 vaccines was accidentally made available on messaging platform Telegram for a certain period.
- According to multiple reports, when a mobile number registered with the CoWIN portal is entered, the Telegram bot reveals the number of the identity card (such as Aadhaar, passport, or PAN card) used for vaccination including details like gender, date of birth and the vaccination centre where the shot was administered.
- With this major data leak, the PAN Card, voter ID and Aadhaar card numbers of Indian citizens are accessible to anyone on Telegram.
- In 2021, reports came out that the CoWIN portal got hacked and resulting in the sale of data of 15 crore citizens.

Government response

- The Union Health Ministry denied the breach saying that the data cannot be shared with any bot without authenticating using a one-time password.
- The government's nodal agency, Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has initiated an inquiry into the matter after the reports.
- The government said the bot may be showing information from "previously stolen data".
- In June 2021, a hacker group named 'Dark Leak Market' claimed that it had the database of about 15 crore Indians who registered themselves on the CoWIN portal.

Is data leak possible

- As per reports, the data breach is possible if the mobile number of a person is entered — details such as the identification number of the document submitted (Aadhaar, passport, PAN and so forth), gender, date of birth, and the centre where the vaccine was administered, are provided as reply in an instant by the messenger bot in question.
- These details could be accessed even if the Aadhaar number was entered instead of the phone number.
- The passport numbers of those who had updated the CoWIN portal for travel abroad were also leaked.

India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

Context

- During the first meeting of the Joint Committee of India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), India and the UAE look to more than double non-oil bilateral trade to $100 billion by 2030.
- At present, the non-oil bilateral trade stands at $48 billion.
- India-UAE CEPA council will be set up to further facilitate the implementation of the agreement.

Progress trend

- The India-UAE CEPA came into force on May 1, 2022.
- UAE's minister of state for foreign trade said initial figures suggest that in the first 12 months of CEPA, bilateral non-oil trade rose 5.8 per cent from a year ago.
- In FY23, UAE was India's third largest crude oil import partner, with a share of over 10 per cent.

Future roadmap

- India is also discussing the UPI platform being made available to UAE businesses for payments.
- The two countries will be setting up new committees to look at expansion of services trade, customs facilitation, investment, rules of origin, tariff rate quota, etc.
- A large portion of the bilateral trade consists of oil imports by India.
- UAE is also the second largest supplier of gold to India.
- Both countries have offered enhanced market access for each other's service providers across sectors.

Second SAI20 Summit

Context

- Addressing the second SAI20 Summit of the SAI20 Engagement Group under the Indian Presidency of the G20, India's Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) said that Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) must inevitably prepare themselves for auditing AI-based governance systems, and look for opportunities to adopt AI into their audit techniques to increase their effectiveness.

Need of responsible AI

- The CAG highlighted the need of responsible AI.
- He said it is essential that policy makers put in place processes to responsibly harness the potential of this technology.
- Responsible AI stands on four pillars:
  o Organizational democratization that empowers and encourages individuals to raise concern
  o Systems that enable AI to flourish
  o Systems and platforms that are trustworthy and explainable by design
  o Articulation of responsible AI Mission that is anchored in organisational values and ethical guardrails

About SAI20 Engagement Group

- The SAI20 Engagement Group of G20 was established during 2022 during Indonesia's Presidency of the G20.
- The constitution of SAI20 stems from a recognition of the role of SAIs in promoting the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of public administration, and supporting SDG implementation.
- This mandate is achieved through engaging actively and effectively with the entire spectrum of stakeholders, from audited entities and governments to media and the civil society.
- This engagement group aims to strengthen and empower audit engagements of SAIs through policy dialogue and identification of best practices.

Poshan app helps migrant workers during relocation

Context

- According to Ministry of Women and Child Development, more than 57,000 migrant workers have registered for the One Nation, One Anganwadi programme.
- Under this program, even if people relocate to another State, they can receive benefits given by the government to children under six years of age and pregnant and lactating women.
- The Ministry said this was possible through coordination between the Central and the State governments by using the Poshan Tracker app on mobile phones.

About POSHAN Tracker Application

- Poshan Tracker management application provides a 360-degree view of the activities of the Anganwadi Centre (AWC), service deliveries of Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and complete beneficiary management for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children. Simultaneously, the mobile application also digitizes and automates physical registers used by AWWs which helps improving their quality of work.
- The app provides a view of the activities of the Anganwadi centres (child care centres), service deliveries of Anganwadi workers and complete beneficiary management for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under six.
- It also digitises and automates physical registers used by workers that helps improve the quality of their work.

Smartphone for efficient service delivery

- The Anganwadi workers are being provided smartphones procured through the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) for efficient service delivery.
- A total of 8.66 lakh such phones have been procured by all States and Union Territories. More than 6.5 lakh Anganwadi workers have been trained so far.
- Since the launch of the Poshan Abhiyan in 2018, a total of 10.6 crore beneficiaries have been registered out of which 47.6 lakh were lactating mothers, 7.48 crore pregnant women and the rest children.

An Atmanirbhar move

Context

- With a endeavor to make India self-reliance in fertiliser, the centre aims to improve the availability of phosphatic fertilisers (DAP and NPK) and to reduce the dependence on imports by making India self-reliant in fertilisers.
- An Action Plan was chalked out for making India self-reliant in phosphatic fertilisers production through indigenous resources.

Current production of phosphatic fertilisers in India

- The fertiliser industry is highly regulated and monitored by the Indian government. According to government data, the overall fertilisers production stood at 37 million metric tonnes, a 3% increase in the first 10 months of FY2021 compared with 36 million in the first 10 months of FY2020. Moreover, the country's import dependence (i.e., imports as a proportion of production plus imports) rose from 36% in first 10 months of FY2020 to 38% in the first 10 months of FY2021.

Overcoming the challenges

- India's department of fertilisers has made significant strides in achieving self-reliance in the sector.
- The government has shown foresightedness in securing fertiliser supplies during the crisis precipitated by the Russia-Ukraine war.

- Despite facing challenges such as scarcity of raw materials, gas, oil, rock phosphate and potash, the government has forged long-term agreements and created joint ventures with resource-rich nations.
- It is supporting industry in identifying opportunities across the value chain by strengthening domestic operations, building long-term partnerships, investing in resource-rich geographies for securing raw materials and promoting alternate fertilisers and natural farming.

Government interventions

- Industry has been encouraged to set up overseas joint ventures to secure raw materials.
- The government has also encouraged the domestic industry and public sector undertakings to sign long-term agreements for the import of raw materials/intermediates such as ammonia, phosphoric acid, and sulphur.
- These initiatives have enabled India to diversify its product portfolio and produce more NPK complexes, which offer not only a wider range of products to farmers but also ensure balanced nutrition.
- As a result of strategic partnerships with countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Canada, Russia, Morocco, Israel, Senegal, Tunisia and South Africa.

Way forward

- The Department of Fertilisers has positioned India as a key player in the global fertiliser supply chain.
- India's bold move towards self-reliance in fertiliser is a testament to the government's commitment to ensuring food security for its citizens and fulfilling vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.

12.06.2023

- **G20 Development Ministers' conclave**
- **Centre to complete 3D digitisation of museums**
- **IAF and Army joint exercise in the central sector**
- **RBI circular on Willful defaulters and fraudsters loan settlement**
- **The caring city**

G20 Development Ministers' conclave

Context

- Recently, India's External Affairs Minister held separate talks with German Development Minister and Australian counterpart focusing on bilateral relations and cooperation under the G20 framework.
- The meetings took place on the margins of the G20 Development Ministers' conclave in Varanasi.
- The G20 Development Ministers' Meeting will participate with a total of 200 delegates.

Two main sessions

- According to the official release, the meeting will consist of two main sessions:
  o Multilateralism: Collective Actions for Accelerating Progress towards SDGs
  o Green Development: A LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) Approach

Key Focus area

- Developmental challenges
- Slowdown in the global economy
- Debt distress
- Effects of climate change

- Pollution
- Biodiversity loss
- Rising poverty and inequality
- Cost of living crisis, supply chain disruptions around the world
- Geopolitical tensions and conflicts

Significance of the meeting
- The G20 Development Ministerial meeting is an opportunity to collectively agree on actions for accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The platform will also aim to foster synergies between the development, environment and climate agendas while avoiding costly trade-offs that hold back progress for developing countries.

Centre to complete 3D digitisation of museums

Context
- In order to ensure better conservation of artefacts, the Union government plans to complete 3D digitisation of all museums under its administrative control by 2023-end.
- 3D digitization is the process by which digital museums is created.

List of museums for 3D digitization
- The 3D digitisation of museums will include:
  o Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad
  o Allahabad Museum in Prayagraj
  o Indian Museum, Kolkata
  o Victoria Memorial Hall
  o National Museum
  o National Gallery of Modern Art
- The Culture Ministry has 10 museums within its ambit, including those mentioned above.
- Apart from these, the Archaeological Survey of India has site museums at 44 locations spread throughout the country in proximity to key archaeological sites.

Merits of 3D digitisation
- Besides aiding conservation, 3D digitisation of the museums can offer visitors new ways to access and explore the collection.
- 3D models can be used in augmented reality and virtual reality learning experiences, and facilitate 3D printing.
- The digitisation process involves 3D scanning which means analysing a real-world object or environment to collect three-dimensional data of its shape and possibly its appearance.
- The collected data is then used to construct digital 3D models.

Execution
- The 3D digitisation would be done using the JATAN virtual museum builder software, which has been designed by Human Centres Design and Computing Group, Centre for Development of Smart Computing, Pune.
- JATAN is a client server application with features such as image cropping, watermarking, unique numbering, management of digital objects with multimedia representations.
- It can create 3D virtual galleries and provide public access through web, mobile or touchscreen kiosks.

IAF and Army joint exercise in the central sector

Context

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has carried out a joint exercise with the Indian Army in the central sector with deployment of multiple combat assets to check the operational readiness of the two forces.
- The exercise follows the IAF's two strategic missions over the Indian Ocean region that involved Rafale and Su-30MKI jets.

Earlier missions

- A few days back, a fleet of Su-30MKI jets of the IAF carried out a strategic mission over the Indian Ocean region for eight hours, days after a similar operation was carried out by four Rafale aircraft.
- Recently, Su-30MKI jets flew over the South Western region of the Indian Ocean demonstrating their operational prowess and capability to carry out long-range missions.
- The IAF carried out the two missions at a time China has been ramping up its presence in the Indian Ocean region, which is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy.
- The Rafale jets are India's first major acquisition of fighter planes in 23 year after the Sukhoi jets were imported from Russia.

The Rafale jets are capable of carrying a range of potent weapons.

RBI circular on Wilful defaulters and fraudsters loan settlement

Context

- As per a latest circular by Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the wilful defaulters and companies involved in fraud can go for a compromise settlement or technical write-offs by banks and finance companies.
- Banks can undertake compromise settlements or technical write-offs regarding accounts categorised as wilful defaulters or fraud without prejudice to the criminal proceedings against such debtors.

Minimum cooling period

- The central bank has also directed banks to fix a minimum cooling period of at least 12 months before making fresh exposures to borrowers who had undergone compromise settlements.
- This means a wilful defaulter or a company involved in fraud can get new loans after 12 months of executing a compromise settlement.
- Regulated entities like banks and finance companies are free to stipulate higher cooling periods in terms of their board-approved policies.

Compromise settlements

- Banks had approved several compromise settlements running into hundreds of crores with huge reduction of outstanding payments or loans that will not be repaid by the borrowers leading to huge losses for banks.
- A compromise settlement with the borrowers, with or without involving remission or sacrifices, is negotiated by the bank, provided it is ensured that such compromise results not only in early recovery of dues but also saves cost to the bank in terms of legal expenses and other costs.

The caring city

Context

- One billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability, and disability prevalence is higher for developing countries.
- A variety of societal barriers is prevalent in society for Persons with disabilities.
- These barriers include limited accessibility, inadequate educational structures, and poverty.
- Persons with disabilities face many challenges in participating fully in urban life.

- An enabling environment, with inclusive infrastructure, is needed to allow them the same opportunities to enjoy cultural, economic, and social life as non-disabled persons. This includes things many of us take for granted, like the freedom to move independently and access places of work, education and sports.

Example and lesson
- Manasi Joshi, a para-badminton player, who underwent a double leg amputation following a road accident at age 22.
- Her strong will and determination were complemented by an accessible built environment and the availability of assistive technology.
- These not only helped her overcome obstacles she faced in everyday tasks, but also encouraged her to realise her dream of playing professional badminton, which she now competes in at the highest international level.
- While everyone cannot be a world champion, removing barriers can give us all the chance to reach our full potential.

Need for inclusive cities
- Two mega-trends make the need for inclusive cities increasingly urgent.
- **First**, India is urbanising rapidly and is projected to add four new megacities by 2030. The country's urban population is estimated to cross 675 million.
- According to the 2011 Census, one in three persons with disabilities in India or roughly eight million people already live in cities.
- **Second,** the number of persons with recognised disabilities as a share of the population could rise due to disaster and climate risks, demographic changes and broader definitions of disability in line with global norms.

Possible solution
- One powerful solution to these challenges lies in innovative technology and ICT.
- These are key to ensuring an inclusive urban transformation and essential for improving and increasing the quality of life of all citizens.
- Nowhere is this more evident than in India, where a world-class digital governance system and dynamic tech sector are converging to deliver inclusive prosperity and resilience.
- This spirit of solidarity and inclusivity is reflected in India's G20 presidency theme of One Earth, One Family and One Future.

India's opportunity at G20 Presidency
- As part of its G20 Presidency, India has initiated the Start-up 20 Engagement Group to provide a global platform to enable the start-up ecosystem across the member nations.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has also launched the G20 Digital Innovation Alliance' (G20-DIA) to showcase innovative solutions and create an alliance of players in the innovation ecosystem.
- And 'Catalysing Digital Urban Futures', one of the priority themes for Urban-20 Engagement Group under G20, seeks to discuss how data and technology can be best utilised for making city management more effective and inclusive.

Way Forward
- Creating an inclusive and accessible India will require behavioural changes, capacity building, investments in accessible infrastructure and inclusive and accessible innovations.

- This will help inform policies for the country's progress towards an equitable urban future as envisioned for the Amrit Kaal — an inclusive, accessible, safe, resilient, and sustainable India@2047.

10.06.2023

- **ISRO to launch Chandrayaan-3 by mid-July**
- **WHO new study on diarrhoea disease deaths**
- **Govt. to clarify TCS on foreign spends**
- **CEA GDP growth estimate forecast**
- **A pragmatic approach, for better India-Nepal ties**

ISRO to launch Chandrayaan-3 by mid-July

Context
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will begin a fresh bid to land a rover on the moon in the middle of July this year through the launch of the Chandrayaan-3 mission.
- The Chandrayaan-3 mission is identical to the Chandrayaan-2 mission, which failed in the final stage of its launch on September 7, 2019 when the Vikram lander crashed on the surface of the moon while negotiating an automated soft landing.

About Chandrayaan-2 mission
- The Chandrayaan-2 mission had failed within a few kilometres of the surface of the moon.
- The mission was aimed to develop and demonstrate the key technologies for end-to-end lunar mission capability, including soft-landing and roving on the lunar surface.
- The mission consisted of an Orbiter of the Moon, Vikram (after Vikram Sarabhai) – the lander and Pragyan (wisdom) – the rover, all equipped with scientific instruments to study the moon.
- The first phase of descent was performed nominally from an altitude of 30 km to 7.4 km above the moon's surface.

Chandrayaan-3 mission
- Chandrayaan-3 is a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2 to demonstrate end-to-end capability in safe landing and roving on the moon.
- It consists of Lander and Rover configuration. It would launch by LVM3 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- It consists of an indigenous lander module, a propulsion module and a rover. The lander and the rover will have scientific payloads to carry out experiments on the lunar surface.

Objectives of Chandrayaan-3
- To demonstrate Safe and Soft Landing on Lunar Surface
- To demonstrate Rover roving on the moon and
- To conduct in-situ scientific experiments

WHO new study on diarrhoea disease deaths

Context
- According to a new study by the World Health Organisation, almost 4 lakh diarrhoeal disease deaths can be averted if Jal Jeevan Mission' meets its target of providing clean water to all rural households.

- The World Health Organization (WHO) was requested by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation to conduct a study to assess potential health gains and associated cost savings due to increased access in safely-managed drinking water services in India.
- The government launched the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in 2019, a nationwide programme that aims to provide all houses in rural areas with safe and adequate drinking water through individual tap connections by next year.

Finding of the study

- The study found that, on an estimate, if the Jal Jeevan Mission provided safely-managed drinking water to all of India, this would result in averting almost 4 lakh deaths caused by diarrhoeal disease.
- Additionally, this would avoid 14 million DALYs (Disability Adjusted Life Years) from diarrhoea.
- According to official figures, till now 62 per cent rural households have been provided with tap water connection.
- Also, the study said that providing a tap connection to every household would result in significant time saved on water collection (66.6 million hours each day), especially among women.

Target and achievement

- The Centre says it will achieve 100% coverage under the Jal Jeevan Mission by 2024; so far five States, including Gujarat, Telangana, Haryana and Punjab, have reported full coverage
- If the Centre succeeds in its Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), a nearly ₹3.6 trillion enterprise to provide piped potable water to all of India.
- Currently about 12.3 crore rural households, or 62%, have piped water connections up from 3.2 crore or about 16.6% from 2019 when the scheme was launched.
- The Centre has claimed that it will achieve 100% coverage by 2024.

Govt. to clarify TCS on foreign spends

Context

- The Ministry of Finace will issue a fresh clarification, in another bid to address the persistent doubts over the applicability of the new 20% tax levy on overseas spends from July 1, 2023.
- The Union Budget had raised the tax collected at source (TCS) rate to 20% from 5% on overseas tour packages and outflows under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) that permits $2.5 lakh dollars a year to be sent abroad.

Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)

- he Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) scheme was introduced by Reserve Bank of India in 2004.
- The Scheme is part of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) 1999 which lays down the guidelines for outward remittance from India.
- Under LRS, all resident individuals, including minors, are allowed to freely remit up to USD250,000 per financial year (April – March).
- This can be for any permissible current or capital account transaction, or a combination of both.

Concern

- The notification evoked criticism following which the finance ministry issued a statement saying that credit card spends above Rs 7 lakh per annum only would come under LRS. However, a formal notification detailing the threshold is yet to be issued by the government.
- The issue concerns payments through credit cards only as debit cards payouts were treated under LRS even earlier.

CEA GDP growth estimate forecast

Context
- According to the Chief Economic Adviser (CEA), the Indian economy is now on "autopilot" mode and will grow steadily in the range of 6.5-7% till 2030, even without further reforms.
- He noted that the initial assessment of 7.2% GDP growth for 2022-23 could be an underestimate.

Growth trend
- The Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) Noted that the economy had been prone to 'overheating' after three-four years of strong growth over the past three decades.
- India could now grow for a longer period of "seven or 10 or 15 years like China did between 1979 and 2008" without "running into overheating problems".
- While the 7.2% GDP growth estimate for last year was higher than what many expected.

Budget Forecast
- The Union Budget of 2022-23 had four priorities PM GatiShakti, Inclusive Development, Productivity Enhancement and Investment, and Financing of Investments.
- In the Union Budget 2022-23, effective capital expenditure is expected to increase by 27% at Rs. 10.68 lakh crore (US$ 142.93 billion) to boost the economy.
- This will be 4.1% of the total Gross Domestic Production (GDP).

A pragmatic approach, for better India-Nepal ties

Context
- Recently, India and Nepal launched several connectivity and energy cooperation initiatives, including a cross-border passenger train duing Prime Minister of Nepal visit to India.
- The Prime Minister of Nepal, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda's first bilateral visit to India since assuming office in the current term is notable.
- India and Nepal were able to review the entire spectrum of the bilateral agenda covering political, economic, trade, energy, security and developmental cooperation.

Agreements in different setor
- India and Nepal signed a series of agreements on energy and transport, including export of Nepal's hydropower to Bangladesh through Indian territory.
- Both country also look forward to resolve a boundary dispute.
- The two sides signed a number of agreements, including an MoU between NHPC and VUCL (Vidyut Utpadan Company Ltd.) of Nepal, for the development of Phukot Karnali Hydroelectric Project and a Project Development Agreement for Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project between SJVN (India) and Investment Board of Nepal.
- They also inaugurated integrated checkposts (ICPs) at Nepalgunj in Nepal and Rupaidiha on the Indian side.

Towards economic integration
- The visit has helped in underlining the real priorities — the "game changers" which can transform the economic landscape of the sub-region, such as hydropower projects to supply energy to India (and eventually to Bangladesh), infrastructure, access to Indian river transport, innovative tourism circuits, and better connectivity.

- The joint vision statement on power cooperation committed the two sides to work for joint development of power generation projects in Nepal, development of cross-border transmission infrastructure, bi-directional power trade based on market demand and coordinated operation of national grids.
- Nepal invited Indian firms to invest in development, construction and operation of renewable and hydropower projects.

Cooperation for payment, technology

- Enhancing digital financial connectivity is another crucial development.
- The MoU between the National Payments Corporation of India and the Nepal Clearing House Ltd. for facilitating cross-border digital payments.
- India offer to create a ground station and supply 300 user terminals to offer the services of the South Asia Satellite to Nepal under grant assistance are important.
- Thses would promote regional cooperation in the space sector, and space technology applications in telecommunication and broadcasting, tele-medicine, tele-education, e-governance, banking and ATM services, meteorological data transmission, disaster response and the networking of academic and research institutions.

Conclusion

- The real challenge for Nepal is to depoliticise cooperation with India, especially in water resources cooperation, improve the quality of democracy and governance at home, and check unbridled corruption, which is alarming even by South Asian standards.
- For India, it may be necessary to address the perception in Nepal that it is no longer a foreign policy priority, and to give a sense of ownership, equality and credit for major forward movement in sectors such as hydropower to parties across the political spectrum, rather than only to the government of the day.
- A steady focus on development will boost bilateral ties.

09.06.2023

- **New-gen ballistic missile 'Agni Prime'**
- **RBI allows first loss default guarantee framework**
- **EV two-wheeler firms express financial stress**
- **RBI's MPC holds key policy rates**
- **Getting railway safety back on track after Odisha**

New-gen ballistic missile 'Agni Prime'

Context

- Recently, India successfully carried out the night launch of the new generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from the Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.
- As per the official statement, during the flight test, all objectives were successfully demonstrated.

First-night launch

- This was the first night launch conducted by the users after three successful developmental trials of the missile, validating the accuracy and reliability of the system.
- The pre-induction night launch of 'Agni Prime', was successfully flight-tested by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

About Agni Prime

- The 'Agni Prime', or 'Agni-P', is a nuclear-capable new-gen advanced variant of the Agni class of missiles.
- It is a two-stage canisterised missile with a maximum range of 2,000 km.
- It weighs 50 per cent less than the Agni 3 missile and has new guidance and propulsion systems.

RBI allows first loss default guarantee framework

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) allowed a 'first loss default guarantee' (FLDG) arrangement between regulated entities and lending service providers for digital lending.
- The announcement was made during second bi-monthly monetary policy outcomes.

Guideline for digital lenders

- The RBI issued first loss default guarantee (FLDG) guidelines for digital lenders.
- The central bank has allowed a 5% default loss cover for bank-fintech deals.
- Under FLDG a credit-risk sharing agreement- a third party guarantees to compensate up to a certain percentage of default in a loan portfolio of the regulated entities (banks and NBFCs).
- According to the new guidelines, the entities may enter into default loss guarantee arrangements only with a lending service provider or other entities with which it has entered into an outsourcing arrangement.
- Further, the lending service provider (LSP) providing default loss guarantee must be incorporated as a company under the Companies Act, 2013.
- It indicates that entities can accept default loss guarantee in forms like cash deposited with the entities, fixed deposits maintained with a scheduled commercial bank with a lien marked in favour of the entities and bank guarantee in favour of the registered entities.

Advantages

- FLDG scheme allows Indian fintechs to partner with banks and NBFCs.
- This decision is seen as a big positive for data-tech NBFCs and fintechs.
- Further, the move will strengthen the digital lending ecosystem.
- This is considered as a major relief to financial technology (fintech) companies that were seeking clarity on their lending arrangements with banks and non-banking financial companies.

EV two-wheeler firms express financial stress

Context

- Electric vehicle (EV) producers have sought Finance Minister intervention for tiding over the financial stress caused by the delay in the release of ₹1,200 crore in subsidies due to two-wheeler EV manufacturers.
- The producer have highlighted that banks had stopped extending credit to these firms and losses were piling up.
- The secretary general of Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles (SMEV) secretary said that even as the subsidies were due from the Ministry of Heavy Industries since January 2022.
- The ministry had also sought the return of subventions paid under the FAME II scheme. Companies had also been asked to refund some money to their customers.

About FAME II

- In 2019, the Union cabinet approved the proposal for implementation of scheme titled 'Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II)' for promotion of Electric Mobility in the country.
- Some of salient feature of scheme include:

- Allocation of Rs 10,000 crores for a period of 3 years from 2019 to 2022.
- Rs 1,000 crores has been set aside for setting up charging stations for electric vehicles. It has given a proposal of providing 1 slow charging unit for every electric bus and 1 fast charging station for 10 electric buses.
- The Central Government will incentivize the purchase of approximately 5 lakh three-wheelers, 7000 electric buses and 35,000 four-wheelers.

RBI's MPC holds key policy rates

Context

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), recently announced its decision to keep the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent.
- RBI governor noted that the committee took the decision unanimously.
- The gross domestic product (GDP) forecast for 2023-24 (FY24) has also been kept unchanged at 6.5 per cent.
- However, the inflation target for FY24 has been lowered marginally to 5.1 per cent from 5.2 per cent earlier.
- The RBI also retained FY24 GDP growth forecast at 6.5%, while expects FY24 CPI inflation to be at 5.1%.

Headline inflation

- RBI Governor said that CPI headline inflation is projected at 5.1 per cent for FY2023 after taking into account a normal monsoon in the country.
- He said that the Indian economy and financial sector come out as strong and resilient. The domestic macroeconomic fundamentals are strengthening.
- The current account deficit is expected to have moderated and remain eminently manageable in 2023-24.
- The rupee remained stable since January this year and India's foreign exchange reserves stood at $595.1 billion as on June, 2023.

Getting railway safety back on track after Odisha

Context

- The collision of train in Balasore, Odisha, on June 2, between two express passenger trains and a stopped freight train, is perhaps the deadliest train accident on record in the last 20 years.
- But the key question that many panellists have failed to address convincingly, barring the familiar platitudes, is about how the Indian Railways can work to ensure that such catastrophes are never repeated.

Possible causes

- First, a recap of what happened. Broadly, the interlocking of signals and routes through a series of relays and logic gates, ensures that a train is guided by signals to a route amid a maze of railway tracks in a manner that would never cause it to encounter another train, ahead or in the rear.
- In this case, this interlocking was overridden by manual intervention.
- The possible two causes: in the first, it was most likely done by a signal maintainer who has access to the equipment hut or relay room, who may have been cutting corners to expedite his maintenance work so that the running train is not affected.
- Second instance, as the Indian Railways seems to believe, it is the handiwork of 'a saboteur' with the criminal intention to cause an accident.

Subject of double investigation

- The Odisha train accident is now a subject of double investigation; the first, the statutory probe by the Commissioner of Rail Safety, and the second by the Central Bureau of Investigation, which is an unprecedented move by the government.

- Whatever be the findings, it is not premature to examine the question that has been raised above.

Strengthening access to systems

- This is an age of mobile phones and IT applications and it should be possible to think of a system of multiple digital authorisations to access such equipment without the physical movement of staff other than the maintainers.
- These are the things the inquiry should look into, going beyond merely identifying the culprits.
- Work towards devising a safer system should actually begin in earnest without waiting for any inquiry reports.
- It is important to accept that the general reduction in the accident rate is a result of some positive actions such as the elimination of unmanned level crossings as well as improved track renewal and maintenance.

Way forward

- The provision of Kavach, the indigenous comprehensive signalling system, could not have prevented this accident.
- But other aspects of safety do demand faster implementation of Kavach; this would not only enhance rail safety but also improve the sectional capacity to run more trains. While the government having its share of the limelight following the introduction of more Vande Bharat trains and creating hype around railway station modernisation cannot be grudged, faster execution of track and signalling work is exclusive to this.
- There is no dearth of funds as the capex investment by the central government in the Indian Railways is at an extraordinary high.
- Therefore, the least one can ask for is to make the Indian Railways much safer than it is today.

08.06.2023

- **1st India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue meeting**
- **UGC committee proposes new university degree names**
- **Pension scheme with minimum assured returns in the works**
- **Kharif crop MSP hike unlikely to impact inflation**
- **Sedition: illogical equation of government with state**

1st India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue meeting

Context

- The first meeting of the India-US Strategic Trade Dialogue (IUSSTD) was held in Washington.
- India-US acknowledged that the dialogue would be instrumental to enabling co-production, co-development and enhanced industrial collaborations in critical technologies.

Focus area

- The dialogue focus on ways in which both governments can facilitate the development and trade of technologies in critical domains.
- Both sides reviewed the relevant bilateral export control regulations with the objective of building and diversifying resilient supply chains for these strategic technologies.
- They reviewed ongoing cooperation in multilateral export control regimes and agreed to share best practices.
- India and US also agreed to enhance awareness among the industry, academia and other stakeholders about the export control regimes through workshops and other activities.

Establishment of regular monitoring group

- India and US agreed to set up a regular monitoring group which will review progress in deepening cooperation in the bilateral high-tech trade and technology partnership.
- The co-chairs agreed to continue the dialogue with the objective of strengthening the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.
- Together we will grow our economies and create jobs through increased bilateral trade and better high-tech collaboration.

About IUSSTD

- IUSSTD is a key mechanism to take forward the strategic technology and trade collaborations envisaged under the India-US initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET).
- The iCET, which is helmed by the national security advisers in both countries, aims to build up cooperation in a host of critical technologies like semiconductors, biotechnology, advanced materials and rare-earth processing technology among others.

UGC committee proposes new university degree names

Context

- Keeping in line with global norms and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the University Grants Commission (UGC) introduce a new range of college degree names, including a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in disciplines like arts, humanities, management and commerce.

Present provision

- Currently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) permits universities to offer a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in arts, humanities and social sciences, and the Bachelor of Science (more commonly abbreviated in India as BSc) degree is typically for science subjects.

Changes aligned with NEP 2020

- The NEP 2020 advocating a restructuring of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, a committee set up by the UGC to review degree nomenclatures has recommended that the new four-year undergraduate honours (or honours with research) degree programme, irrespective of the discipline, can also be offered as a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree.
- Similarly, universities can adopt the Master of Science (MS) nomenclature for both the one and two-year postgraduate programmes, even for disciplines such as arts, humanities, management, and commerce.

Follows NEP roadmap

- SECTION 22 of the UGC Act empowers the Commission to notify degree nomenclature. The decision, which offers more flexibility to students, is in line with global norms and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- The committee's report was discussed during the UGC meeting held in the last week of May.
- After discussions, the Commission decided to publicly disclose its recommendations for feedback before finalising the new degree names.
- Currently, undergraduate programmes, except for professional degrees such as engineering and medicine, typically are of three years, while master's programmes extend over two years.

Recommendations

- The committee has also made the following recommendations:

i) The four-year undergraduate honours degree programme will include 'Hons' in brackets, such as BA (Hons), BCom (Hons), or BS (Hons).

Additionally, a four-year honours programme with research components will have 'Hons with Research' in parentheses, like BA (Hons with Research) and BCom (Hons with Research).

ii) The notification of new degree nomenclatures will be an ongoing process.

Universities can propose new degree names that are relevant to contemporary and emerging societal needs to the UGC. Upon approval, the higher education regulator will notify the new degree nomenclature.

iii) The committee recommends discontinuing the nomenclature of the 'MPhil' degree, as per the NEP 2020's recommendation to scrap the MPhil programme.

Pension scheme with minimum assured returns in the works

Context
- Recently, Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) chairman said on that the regulator is working on a pension scheme that could provide a minimum assured return.
- The minimum assured returns scheme has been in the works for some time.
- The guaranteed return will have to be alluring enough to attract subscribers who might be risk-averse.

Atal Pension Yojana
- Currently, there are about 5.3 crore subscribers of Atal Pension Yojana (APY).
- For this year, the target for enrollment is 1.3 crore against 1.2 crore last year.
- The PFRDA aims to increase enrollment under the APY scheme aided by regional rural banks.
- The scheme has generated a 9 per cent return, and the government has assured gap funding.

National Pension Scheme
- National Pension System (NPS) is a voluntary, defined contribution retirement savings scheme designed to enable the subscribers to make optimum decisions regarding their future through systematic savings during their working life.
- The NPS was initially launched for central and state government employees on January 1, 2004.
- Subsequently, in 2009, it was offered to all individuals, whereby citizens could voluntarily contribute to build a retirement kitty and ensure regular pension income.

Kharif crop MSP hike unlikely to impact inflation

Context
- According to economy experts, the increase in minimum support prices (MSP) by government for kharif crops by 5-to 11% is unlikely to have a significant impact on inflation.
- The spillover effects on consumer food prices from higher assured remuneration to farmers would hinge on the government's procurement strategy and prevailing market prices, but any output shortages could lead to higher prices.

Forecast
- The 7% increase in paddy MSP could lead to higher prices if the crop did not exceed last year's output.
- Procurement takes place for rice, whose inflation is already high at 11%.
- An increase of 7% will add to benchmark prices.
- Similarly, jowar, bajra and maize are all running inflation of 13-15% and hence, also run a risk of higher prices in case of crop failure.
- The food prices were the major risk to inflation so the Reserve Bank of India would be cautious until there was more clarity on kharif crop prospects.

- The inflationary impact of higher MSPs "will be negligible" depending on the prices prevailing in the e-National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) as well as procurement levels.

Sedition: illogical equation of government with state

Context
- The Law Commission of India released its 279th Report which recommended retaining the provision of Sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- Nearly a year after the Supreme Court stayed the operation of the sedition law, the Law Commission of India has recommended that the provision be retained with procedural safeguards and enhanced jail term

Recommendation by the Commission
- It has also recommended enhanced punishment for this offence in the name of national security.
- While Section 124A provides for a minimum imprisonment of three years, the commission recommends a minimum of seven.
- In 2022, the Supreme Court of India had ordered a stay on all existing proceedings and also on the registration of fresh cases (S.G. Vombatkere vs Union of India) under sedition upon the Union Government assuring the Court of a review of this law at the earliest.

An offence against government, not country
- The law of sedition in India has a long and infamous history.
- Section 124A was incorporated in the Indian Penal Code in 1870.
- The purpose was to suppress the voice of Indians who spoke against the British Raj, as the government did not want any voice of dissent or protest.
- The wording of Section 124A clearly reveals the intention of the colonial government. Sedition is an offence against the government and not against the country, as many think.

Kedarnath and constitutionality of sedition
- The brief journey into the British era is necessary to better understand the judgment in Kedarnath vs State of Bihar (1962) by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court and the Law Commission's recommendations for incorporating the essence of that judgment.
- The Law Commission report states that the essence of Kedar Nath v State of Bihar (1962) needs to be incorporated in Section 124A. Kedar Nath upheld the constitutionality of the Sedition Law stating that it falls within the 'reasonable restrictions' on freedom of speech mentioned under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

Conclusion
- The real issue is that the law of sedition contained in Section 124A of the IPC is unconstitutional.
- The Law Commission failed or did not want to see the fallacy in the Kedarnath judgment which did not in effect soften this harsh law but declared that it is constitutionally valid. Kedarnath equates government with state, which is illogical in the context of a democratic republic.
- Therefore, its attempt to bring sedition within the framework of reasonable restriction under Article 19(2) is constitutionally impermissible.
- In a democratic republic where the people have the freedom to change a bad government, disaffection towards a government cannot be an offence.

07.06.2023

- **Ministry of Social Justice report on manual scavenging**
- **Internet economy to hit $1 trillion by 2030**
- **India and Germany to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation**
- **China, Russia conduct air patrol over Sea of Japan, East China Sea**
- **Seeing India's energy transition through its States**

Ministry of Social Justice report on manual scavenging

Context

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in its report on manual scavenging said that only 508 of the 766 districts in the country have been declared free of manual scavenging.
- Decades after Independence and despite its leaps in science and technology, India is yet to find an alternative to manual scavenging.

The finding of the report

- The manual scavenging from the hazardous cleaning of sewers, maintaining that the surveys conducted in 2013 and 2018 identified all existing manual scavengers (nearly 58,000) and hence, manual scavenging no longer existed in the country.
- Around 22,000 of them have been connected to skills training programmes.
- Subsidies and loans are available to any of them wishing to set up their own business.

NAMASTE scheme

- NAMASTE is a Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MoSJE) as a joint initiative of the MoSJE and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).
- NAMASTE envisages the safety and dignity of sanitation workers in urban India by creating an enabling ecosystem that recognizes sanitation workers as one of the key contributors to the operations and maintenance of sanitation infrastructure.
- The Scheme has been approved for four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26
- The Union Budget for 2023-24 showed ₹100-crore allocation for the NAMASTE scheme and no allocation for the rehabilitation scheme.

Internet economy to hit $1 trillion by 2030

Context

- According a latest report from Google, Temasek and Bain & Company, India's internet economy is expected to grow sixfold to $1 trillion by 2030 from $175 billion in 2022.

More about the report

- India's Internet economy- B2C e-commerce firms, online service providers, ed-tech companies, and so on will hit $1 trillion in value by 2030.
- This mark the up from $175 billion in 2022.
- As per report the growth would be driven by more Indians starting to transact online and the overall expansion of digital businesses.
- The key thrust would come from "Tier 2+ locations."

- The report noted that the HealthTech and InsurTech, both sized at or less than $2 billion today, will demonstrate the largest expansion.

Internet contribution to economy

- Consequently, the contribution of the internet economy to India's technology sector is set to expand, from the present 48% to 62% in 2030, while its share in India's GDP will increase from 4-5% to nearly 12-13%.
- The pace of digital disruption is expected to accelerate as traditional businesses and MSMEs increase investments in digitization, in addition to startups continuing to play a strong role in driving the internet economy.

India and Germany to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation

Context

- India and Germany have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation and explore ways to further enhance the defence-industrial partnership. The decision was taken during a delegation-level talk between the Defence Minister of and the German Defence Minister meeting in New Delhi.
- India and Germany have had a strategic partnership since 2000, which is being strengthened through inter-governmental consultations since 2011 at the level of heads of government.

Priority area

- Both India and Germany highlighted the opportunities that have opened up in the defence production sector, including the possibilities for German investments in the two Defence Industrial Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- Focus on bilateral defence cooperation activities and ways to enhance the collaboration, particularly defence industrial partnership.
- Germany discussed the Indian Navy's Project 75 India (P75I) under which six conventional submarines are to be built under a strategic partnership.

Memorandum of understanding

- A memorandum of understanding (MoU) is likely to be concluded by TKMS and state-run Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders.
- Such an agreement would be a step towards the two firms bidding for the multibillion-dollar submarine deal.

China, Russia conducts air patrol over Sea of Japan, East China Sea

Context

- China and Russia recently conducted joint air force patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea as South Korea said it had deployed fighter jets in response to warplanes near its airspace.
- Both countries staged the sixth joint aerial patrol in accordance with an annual military cooperation plan between China and Russia.
- The statement gave no further details of the manoeuvres, which took place over waters bordering Japan, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan.

Air defence identification zone

- South Korea said four Russian and four Chinese military aircraft had entered its air defence identification zone (ADIZ) prompting it to scramble fighter planes.

- An ADIZ is an area wider than a country's airspace in which it tries to control aircraft for security reasons, but the concept is not defined in any international treaty.
- The South Korean military "identified the Chinese and Russian jets before their entry into the air identification zone".

South Korea's and China stand on Russia

- South Korea has supported Western sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine and has sent humanitarian aid to Kyiv.
- But it is bound by its own regulations prohibiting the supply of lethal aid to countries in conflict.
- China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine war.
- It has been criticised by Western countries for refusing to condemn Moscow and for its close strategic partnership with Russia.

Seeing India's energy transition through its States

Context

- India has scaled up its renewable energy capacity by 250% between 2014 and 2021.
- It now ranks fourth in renewable energy capacity in the world.
- In the upcoming G20 forum, India is planning to propose a multiple energy pathways approach to accommodate the diverse contexts and development trajectories of countries.
- The diversity of India's States, which necessitates multiple pathways, will determine its own domestic energy transition.
- India's global climate pledges — 50% non-fossil electricity generation capacity by 2030 and net-zero emissions by 2070 are backed by domestic energy targets at the national level.

Importance and significance of States

- India's achievements on its 2022 target for 175 GW renewable energy offer some insights into the complexities.
- While it achieved a significant portion of the target, only Gujarat, Karnataka, and Rajasthan met their individual targets.
- Moreover, about 80% of the current renewable energy capacity is confined to Six states in the west and south of India.

State function in energy transition

- In a federal setting, States matter for four functions critical to the energy transition.
- First, States as spheres of implementation are critical to the realisation of national targets.
- While the Centre may set goals, and use carrots and sticks to help achieve them, the realisation of these goals often depends on how they are aligned with State priorities and capabilities.
- Second, the legacy issues in the electricity sector, such as high losses, unreliable supply and service quality, if left addressed, could be exacerbated by the transition. These are embedded in the State political economy and must be addressed at the State level.
- Third, States as laboratories of policy innovations have been instrumental to India's energy transition.
- For example, early initiatives by Gujarat and Rajasthan on solar, and Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu on wind energy technologies, have contributed significantly to renewable energy uptake at the national level.
- Similarly, PM KUSUM is adoption of successful State experiments on the solarisation of agriculture at a national scale.
- Fourth, States could also be roadblocks to national goals, particularly when the goals are perceived to be misaligned with State priorities.

A State-level framework

- As a complement to the techno-economic discourse, there is a need for a State-level framework to understand plans, actions, and governance processes towards an energy transition.
- Applying such a framework will enable an expedited transition in multiple ways.
- It helps to broaden the transition discourse from a narrow set of outcomes and to include the processes that shape the outcomes.
- It leads to greater transparency which could enable participation of stakeholders in the processes and ensure public legitimacy and buy-in to complex decisions.

Way forward

- States are critical actors in India's energy transition as there is a multi-tier governance of energy production and usage.
- States are critical actors in India's energy transition as there is a multi-tier governance of energy production and usage.
- An effective transition will require bridging the ambitions and implementation gaps between the Centre and the States.

06.06.2023

- **National Institutional Ranking Framework Rankings 2023**
- **Draft of cybersecurity agreement for G-20 countries**
- **Health Working Group of G-20 meeting**
- **India, U.S. finalise road map for defence industrial cooperation**
- **Its time for Africa**

National Institutional Ranking Framework Rankings 2023

Context

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) Rankings 2023 were released by the Ministry of Education.
- The latest rankings include four categories: Overall, Colleges, Universities, and Research Institutions.
- The subject domains now consist of Engineering, Management, Pharmacy, Law, Medical, Architecture and Planning, Dental, and a new addition Agriculture and Allied Sectors.

Category-wise institution ranking

- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras retained its position as the best educational institution in the overall ranking for the fifth consecutive term.
- while the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru was rated the best university in the country for eight years in a row.
- Miranda House, Delhi was ranked the best college
- Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad the top management institute
- The National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, Hyderabad was named the best institute in the field.
- The All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi was ranked the best medical college
- Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Chennai got the honour of top dental college.
- The National Law School of India University, Bengaluru was rated the best law college in the country.

- The Indian Institute of Technology, Madras also received the honour of best engineering college for the eighth consecutive year.

Research category

- The Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru also stood first in the research institutions category for the third consecutive year.
- The IISc was followed by Jawaharlal Nehru University
- Jamia Millia Islamia as the second and third best universities.
- National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research, Hyderabad topped the ranking in pharmacy for the first time, pushing Jamia Hamdard to the second slot.
- Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi took the top slot in agriculture and allied sectors.
- The Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur topped the innovation category.

Parameters in the NIRF

- The five broad categories of parameters identified in the NIRF are teaching, learning and resources, research and professional practice, graduation outcome, outreach and inclusivity, and perception.
- For the 2023 rankings, 5,543 unique institutions applied for ranking.

About NIRF

- The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has been launched by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in September 2015.
- This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The methodology draws from the overall recommendations and broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MoE, to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions.

Draft of cyber security agreement for G-20 countries

Context

- Lieutenant-General of the National Cyber security Coordinator outlined a draft called the "Delhi Declaration".
- The declaration calls for a series of commitments to "responsible state behaviour in cyberspace" for G-20 member countries, drawn from existing non-binding norms that they have already signed onto under the auspices of the United Nations.

India G20 presidency

- On 1 December 2022, India assumed the presidency of G20, the grouping which brings together 20 of the world's largest economies.
- One such critical area that sustained focus at the level of G20 is cyber security.
- The need for a secure cyberspace is vital as there has been an exponential surge in the number and type of cyber threats, particularly to critical infrastructure.

Priorities

- The G-20 member countries would commit to "not damage critical infrastructure or other essential systems.
- The focus will include:
  o Commit to cooperate, mitigate and investigate cyber incidents, and other malicious activities in cyberspace
  o Commit to protect and not disrupt software supply chains

- o   Commit to respect international law and rule of law in cyberspace
- o   Commit to protecting the humanitarian sector

Health Working Group of G-20 meeting

- While addressing the Health Working Group of G-20 meeting, the union health secretary cautioning that the next pandemic would not "wait for us to make global treaties" and called upon countries to work together.
- He said that the need of the hour to ensure that the next pandemic sees us adequately prepared as billions of lives and livelihoods will be at stake.

WHO response

- The World Health Organization health emergency programme director said that it was time countries came together to ensure drugs, vaccines and diagnostics reached those who needed them the most, in an equitable manner.
- India is a global player with a strong manufacturing base for pharmaceuticals, and fantastic innovations in the digital health arena.
- It is in a strong position to provide healthcare services to the last mile, It's very appropriate that in this G-20 presidency, India is focused on the issue.

Digital health

- The Digital health is about strengthening primary healthcare systems, improving universal health coverage, and providing timely and relevant data for decision-making and resource allocation.
- Digital health is a proven pathway to achieve universal health goals.
- The NITI Aayog, stated that digital health enabled universal health coverage through the seamless exchange of health information among providers, systems, patients, policymakers and so on, through multiple systems.

India, U.S. finalise road map for defence industrial cooperation

Context

- Recently, India and the U.S. concluded a road map for 'Defence Industrial Cooperation' which shall guide the policy direction for the next few years towards cooperation in high technology areas and identify opportunities for co-development and co-production.
- This was concluded during the bilateral meeting between the Defence Minister of India and visiting U.S. Secretary of Defence.

Roadmap

- The projects engagement between both countries will provide for cooperation in areas of intelligence sharing, surveillance and reconnaissance, munitions and the undersea domain.
- Both sides will identify opportunities for the co-development of new technologies and the co-production of existing and new systems besides facilitating increasing collaboration between defence start-up ecosystems of the two countries.
- India-US partnership is critical for ensuring a free, open and rules-bound Indo-Pacific region.

US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology

- In a major move, India and U.S. announced the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) in May last year to elevate and expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the two countries.

- The iCET is expected to forge closer linkages between the government, academia and industry of the two countries in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G and 6G, biotech, space and semiconductors.

It's time for Africa

Context

- With the resurgence in India's support for the priorities of the Global South, there is an expectation of a revival of institutional arrangements with regional fora.
- The recent visit of the Prime Minister of India to Papua New Guinea in conjunction with his visit to Australia revived the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation.
- The External Affairs Minister has revived consultations with the 15-member Caribbean community and the eight-member SICA of Central America.

India's cooperation with the Global South

- The most visible aspect of India's cooperation with the Global South is its engagement with Africa.
- After three India Africa Forum Summits in 2008, 2011 and 2015, the fourth has been considerably delayed due to the pandemic.
- The African Union is holding summits with its partners, it is time for India to hold India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) IV during its G20 presidency in 2023.

Significance of IAFS IV

- First, it is Africa's turn to host India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) IV.
- The first and third summits were in India, while the second was in Addis Ababa, the seat of the AU Commission.
- Three years ago, the AU had recommended holding the IAFS IV in Mauritania.
- Second, the size of the fourth summit.
- The first two summits were held under the Banjul formula with 15 African countries and the AU Commission participating.
- At IAFS III a massive event for all 54 African countries was held.
- The IAFS has a three-tier platform of the AU, the eight regional economic communities of Africa and important bilateral participants.
- Third, who will attend the summit.
- The Banjul format has permanent and rotational members.
- The five permanent members are the founders of the New Economic Partnership for African Development. South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, Algeria and Egypt are important countries, but lack adequate regional representation from all parts of Africa; the Regional Economic Communities (REC) provide that balance.

Conclusion

- It is unclear who chairs this organisation since no summit has been held for years. Inviting Morocco will be the best since Algeria and Egypt are already on the list.
- This format, along with locating the summit in Addis Ababa will be a feasible way forward.
- It will augment India's G20 presidency in real terms.

05.06.2023

- **Law Commission recommendation on sedition law**

- **Why does North Korea want spy satellites**
- **E-commerce policy to boost exports, streamline regulation**
- **Railway flagged flaw in signalling system**
- **Repairing a lifeline**

Law Commission recommendation on sedition law

Context
- The Law Commission of India released its 279th Report which recommended retaining the provision of Sedition under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- Nearly a year after the Supreme Court stayed the operation of the sedition law, the Law Commission of India has recommended that the provision be retained with procedural safeguards and enhanced jail term

Recommendation by the Commission
- The 22nd Law Commission of India, headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, stated that the Commission had received a reference from the Ministry of Home Affairs in March 2016, for a study of the usage of the sedition law and suggest amendments, if any.

i) Incorporating the Kedar Nath Judgement
- The Law Commission report states that the essence of Kedar Nath v State of Bihar (1962) needs to be incorporated in Section 124A. Kedar Nath upheld the constitutionality of the Sedition Law stating that it falls within the 'reasonable restrictions' on freedom of speech mentioned under Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

ii) Increasing the term of punishment
- The Commission recommends enhancing the punishment to a period of seven years or life imprisonment, along with a fine. Currently, the punishment is a period of imprisonment of either three years or life imprisonment.

iii) Installing a New Procedural 'Safeguard'
- The Commission recommends a major procedural amendment to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (CrPC) to prevent the 'alleged misuse' of the law. It suggests that a police officer, holding the rank of an Inspector or higher, must conduct a preliminary inquiry before the First Information Report (FIR) is filed.

About sedition law
- Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code penalises a crime against the state.
- It defines the crime as bringing "into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India."

Reasons for Retaining
- It is necessary to protect national security from the threat of radical, anti-national, and secessionist elements.
- It is a 'reasonable restriction' to the fundamental right of speech and expression found under Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution. They reasoned that the restrictions of 'public order', and 'incitement to an offence' fall within the ambit of Sedition law.
- The Report states that the 'colonial legacy' is not a strong enough basis for striking down the law in India's modern democratic context. It points out that other colonial legacies like the Police Forces and All India Civil Services are still retained without opposition on this ground.
- The Report highlights that in countries where sedition laws have been struck down, other laws addressing seditious activities have been incorporated within their treason and counter-terrorism laws.

Why does North Korea want spy satellites

Context
- North Korea in its latest attempt to launch the country's first spy satellite has failed.
- On May 31, a North Korean military satellite Malligyong-1 was launched through a new type of rocket named Chollima-1.
- The satellite is said to have flown for about 10 minutes before crashing into the Yellow Sea.

About N. Korea's space programme
- North Korea in the past decade has had an active space program that is closely related to its missile program.
- Starting in 1998, North Korea successfully orbited its first satellite in 2012 after three failed attempts.
- The launch vehicle used was Unha-3, a likely variant of Taepodong-2 ICBM.
- The Unha-type launch vehicle was also used in the 2016 launch of Pyongyang's Earth Observation satellite.
- The flight on May 31 was the sixth satellite launch byNorth Korea.
- Additionally, in April, North Korea announced that it had completed the construction of its first spy satellite.

What is need for spy satellites
- The North Korean spy satellites are expected to play a crucial role in providing advanced surveillance technology, that covers a large portion of the region, to improve the ability to strike targets during conflict.
- The Supreme Leader of North Korea stated that the nation would have the capability to "use preemptive military force when the situation demands."
- Moreover, North Korea's space programme is a response to other strategic developments in the region.

What does this mean for East Asia
- The security anxiety in East Asia in response to the North Korean satellite launch reveals a sense of urgency among the regional powers.
- North Korea seems unafraid to reveal its technological intentions and strengthen its security apparatus in the region.
- While the launch is a breach of the UN Security Council resolutions, it is unlikely to attract additional economic sanctions.
- This displays the weak effectiveness of sanctions imposed on North Korea.

E-commerce policy to boost exports, streamline regulation

Context
- According to the department for promotion of industry and internal trade secretary, the national e-commerce policy will seek to create a conducive environment for the overall development of the sector and boost exports.
- The policy is expected to streamlined the regulatory framework for the ease of doing business, adoption of modern technologies and the integration of supply chains.

Roadmap
- In 2025, global cross-border e-commerce exports will touch $2 trillion, as per an estimate.
- According to the foreign trade policy, India's e-commerce export potential is in the range of $200 billion to $300 billion annually by 2030.
- The policy will address some of the issues concerning effective enforcement. It will clarify a lot of the issues.

Demands of traders

- The Local traders' associations have been demanding an empowered regulatory body to check against the violation of e-commerce rules.
- India allows 100% FDI in the marketplace model of e-commerce but no FDI is permitted for the inventory-based model.
- From time to time, traders have been alleging that the policy of barring deep discounts and preference to select sellers are being flouted by e-commerce platforms.
- They have also been seeking greater clarity on the rules on FDI in e-commerce.

Railway flagged flaw in signaling system

Context

- The preliminary inquiry in Odisha train tragedy has found that the likely caused devasting train accident was due to the failure of the signaling system.
- As many as 275 people were killed and many injured in the collision involving three trains in Odisha's Balasore district.
- This latest incident has been noted as India's worst railway accident since the 1995 Firozabad rail tragedy that had over 350 fatalities.

Leniency on Railway safety

- The brainstorming session headed by Railway Minister just hours before the accident, presentations by various zones on railway safety were skipped.
- Only one zone was allowed to make the presentation on safety while the discussion on the launch of Vande Bharat trains and increasing revenue were allowed.
- According to railway official, alarms over recent derailments of goods trains were also raised at the meeting.

Lack of manpower, ailing infrastructure

- There is a sheer dearth of gangmen, the foot soldiers of the Indian Railways who inspect tracks every day, while station masters are working overtime.
- The post of a station master is crucial in maintaining railway safety.
- They are being made to work 12-hour shifts.

- Their role is one of the most crucial in maintaining safety.
- The stationmaster must keep tabs on everything from the wheels to even the sound the train makes as it passes through, to detect any irregularities.
- Officials in the railway ministry said the low-cost anti-collision system KAVACH has also not been implemented across zones yet.

Concern over vacant post

- More than 3.11 lakh posts out of 14,75,623 Group C posts (traffic assistant, good guard, junior and senior timekeeper, junior and senior clerk-cum-typist, and station master) and 3,018 out of the sanctioned 18,881 gazetted cadre positions (senior officials) are vacant in various departments of the Indian Railways.

Repairing a lifeline

Context

- The collision of train in Balasore, Odisha, on June 2, between two express passenger trains and a stopped freight train, is perhaps the deadliest train accident on record in the last 20 years.
- It resulted in 275 fatalities and more than 1,000 injuries.
- The last train accident with so many fatalities occurred in Tanzania on June 24, 2002, when a passenger train and a freight train collided on a hill railway, leaving 281 people dead.

Rail safety situation in India

- The seriousness of the rail safety situation in India can be understood by considering the following facts.
- Accidents involving passenger trains are extremely uncommon in countries with developed railway systems like Japan, China, Turkey, and several European nations like France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
- In these railways, most passenger trains travel at a maximum speed of 200–350 kmph, clocking an average speed of 150–250 kmph, which is three to five times faster than the speed in India, which is roughly 50 kmph.
- Despite the slow speed of trains, fatal train accidents happen frequently in India.
- India would probably place slightly higher than Egypt, Mexico, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and Pakistan if a ranking of the world's major railways were to be made based on safety performance.

Project Mission Raftar

- Project Mission Raftar was announced by the Indian Railway Board in 2017–18 with the goal of doubling the average speed of freight trains from 25 kmph to 50 kmph and achieving a 50 per cent increase in passenger train speed from 50 kmph to 75 kmph in five years.
- It aims to offer semi-high-speed trains to passengers, by running trains at a speed of 160-200 km/h in the selected corridors of the country.

Challenges

- The severe congestion on Indian Railways' main trunk routes is the primary factor contributing to the trains' stagnant speeds and their subpar safety record.
- Over the past 20 years, rail has consistently lost market share to the competition from air and road transportation.
- Track, electrical, and signaling infrastructure maintenance and fault diagnosis have suffered because of this severe congestion.

- Another result is a lack of punctuality, which has a negative impact on safety due to the overworked drivers, station masters, and trackmen.
- In 2005, the Railway Board decided to build two dedicated freight corridors (DFCs) with a combined route length of 2,843 km, with plans to build three more in the future.
- These DFCs are still incomplete and may take 2 to 4 more years.

Ultra-high-speed Train

- In 2017, India began construction of a standalone ultra-high speed (Bullet Train) line on the Standard Gauge between Mumbai and Ahmedabad.
- Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for scores of more such lines were prepared. According to the most recent unofficial estimates, this line will cost an absurd Rs 350 crore per km, which is about 10 times as much as a 160 kmph semi-highspeed line and seven times as much as a 200–250 kmph high speed line.
- While the progress of construction of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train line is slow, the plan to build more bullet train lines is also in the doldrums.

Conclusion

- The need of the hour is that the Railways should go for long term planning.
- It should invest in its infrastructure in a way that the improved infrastructure will not only support faster trains but will also benefit country economic-wise and environment-wise.
- Rail will thus be able to reclaim its role as the lifeline of India's transportation.
- With fairness and transparency, accountability needs to be fixed.

03.06.2023

- **RBI draft cyber security norms for payment system operators**
- **OTT players seek satellite bandwidth for better streaming**
- **UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2023**
- **Centre ask platform to submit details of telcos**
- **International trade has a carbon problem**

RBI draft cyber security norms for payment system operators

Context

- In a move to ensure safety and security of digital payments amid emerging cyber risks, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently announced draft regulations for payment system operators (PSOs).
- It proposed that such norms would be implemented from April 1, 2024, for large non-bank-PSOs.
- The draft directions issued by the regulator cover robust governance mechanisms for the identification, assessment, monitoring, and management of cyber security risks.

Draft norms

- According to the draft norms, the payment system operators (PSOs) will define appropriate key risk indicators (KRIs) to identify potential risk events and key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the effectiveness of security controls.
- The board of the PSOs has been made responsible for ensuring adequate oversight over information security risk, though the primary oversight can be delegated to a sub-committee of the board, which should meet once in a quarter.

Cyber-risk assessment

- According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), payment system operators (PSOs)should undertake a cyber-risk assessment exercise relating to the launch of new products, services, and technologies or undertaking major changes to the infrastructure or processes of existing products, or services.
- The central bank has sought feedback on the draft norms by June 30.
- The draft norms said existing instructions concerning security and risk mitigation for card payments, prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) and mobile banking will remain in effect.

Information Security Policy

- The payment system operators (PSOs) has been asked to formulate a board-approved Information Security (IS) policy to manage potential information security risks covering all applications and products concerning payment systems as well as management of risks that have materialized.
- The policy should be reviewed annually.
- The draft norms mandated that the PSO should develop a business continuity plan (BCP) based on different cyber threat scenarios, including extreme but plausible events to which it may be exposed.
- The PSO also has to put in place a comprehensive data leak prevention policy for confidentiality, integrity, availability and protection of business and customer information.

OTT players seek satellite bandwidth for better streaming

Context

- In a consultation about satellite spectrum pricing, OTT streaming players pitched for greater use of satellite bandwidth to reach viewers.
- Asia Video Industry Association (AVIA) while responding to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India consultation paper said that There is no other country on the globe that actually auctions satellite frequency assignments.
- AVIA represents Netflix, Amazon, Disney+ Hotstar, and other Asian OTT players.

Shared resource

- According to Asia Video Industry Association (AVIA) The satellite spectrum is a completely shared resource among different satellite operators.
- Satellite frequencies are today re-used many, many times at the same geographic location.
- This re-use is governed by ITU [International Telecommunication Union] international rules.
- AVIA urged the government to encourage satellite broadband systems, which usually rely on a constellation of Internet-connected satellites to deliver Internet access to remote areas.

Current usage

- India currently only uses satellite broadband as 'backhaul' in places like Lakshadweep, which is not yet connected terrestrially or with an undersea cable to the Indian mainland's networks.

UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations, 2023

Context

- Recently, the Centre released the revised guidelines for existing higher education institutions to get the deemed to be status by simplifying the eligibility criteria in order to establish more quality-focused deemed universities.
- According to the University Grants Commission's revised guidelines, Higher education institutions which are less than 20 years old will now be eligible to apply for deemed university status and private universities will have to create executive councils like central universities.

- The new rules are built on the principle of a "light but tight" regulatory framework envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020.

First set of regulations

- The first set of regulations in this regard was notified in 2010 and these were subsequently revised in 2016 and 2019.
- Under the 2019 guidelines, the higher education institutions having "existence for not less than 20 years" were eligible for applying for the status.
- However, the revised guidelines have now replaced it with multi-disciplinarity, NAAC grading, NIRF ranking and NBA grading.

New category introduced

- The new regulations also introduce the "Distinct Institution" category, where an existing institution or an institution starts from the beginning with a focus on teaching and research in unique disciplines and/or addressing the strategic needs of the country or engaged in the preservation of Indian cultural heritage or preservation of the environment or dedicated to skill development or dedicated to sports or languages or any other discipline, so determined by the Expert Committee of Commission, will be exempted from eligibility criteria.

Academic Bank of Credits

- The revised guidelines have also made it mandatory for deemed universities to register on Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).
- The institutions can offer twinning programmes, joint degree programmes, and dual degree programmes in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the regulations concerned.

Significance of the move

- The new simplified guidelines will encourage universities to focus on quality and excellence, strengthen the research ecosystem and have a long-term impact in transforming our higher education landscape.
- The norms will facilitate the creation of many more quality-focused deemed to be universities in an objective and transparent manner.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC) Act provides for the central government to declare any institution other than a university the status of institution deemed to be university.
- There are around 170 deemed institutions in the country currently.

Centre ask Platform to submit details of telcos

Context

- After millions of Indians received a spate of scam calls on WhatsApp last month — with some of them getting defrauded — the Union government has directed the messaging company to submit a report detailing the telecom carriers that were predominantly used to create fraudulent accounts.
- It is understood that once WhatsApp shares the report with the IT Ministry, it could take action against those telecom carriers' phone numbers.
- WhatsApp has agreed to share the report with the government.
- Many countries do not have stringent know-your-customer norms for issuing phone numbers to users.

Measure to reduce scam calls

- After the platform was abused by fraudsters, prompting the government to send a notice to the company, WhatsApp said that it ramped up its artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI/ML) systems to reduce international scam calls by at least 50 per cent. The scam calls have reduced since then.
- Minister of State for IT had earlier told that the IT Ministry will work with the Telecom Department to ensure that platforms generating such cloned numbers are blocked in the country.

How fraudsters get access

- The investigation revealed this scam is a multi-million-dollar industry where fraudsters get their hands on international numbers, largely through three ways:
- Free access websites that generate virtual phone numbers of any country
- Platforms that create such numbers for a fee that's paid through cryptocurrency
- Thriving ecosystem of people on platforms such as Telegram and eBay that generate such numbers.

International trade has a carbon problem

Context

- In May, the European Commission signed the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
- CBAM is a measure to prevent "carbon leakage" of carbon-intensive products.
- It has been described as a "landmark tool" to put a "fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon-intensive goods that are entering the EU, and to encourage cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries."
- This effort brings to the forefront the interlinkages between trade and the environment.

About CBAM

- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is landmark tool to put a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods that are entering the EU.
- The mechanism encourages cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries.
- Its primary objective is to avert 'carbon leakage'.
- It refers to a phenomenon where an EU manufacturer moves carbon-intensive production to countries outside the region with less stringent climate policies.
- From 2026, once the CBAM is fully implemented, importers in the EU would have to buy carbon certificates corresponding to the payable carbon price of the import had the product been produced in the continent, under its carbon pricing rules.

Why are countries worried

- CBAM would initially apply to imports of certain goods and selected precursors, whose production is carbon-intensive and are at risk of 'leakage' such as the cement, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizers, electricity and hydrogen sectors.
- In 2021, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) had concluded that Russia, China and Turkey were most exposed to the mechanism. Considering the level of exports to the union in these sectors, it stated India, Brazil and South Africa would be most affected among the developing countries.

Impact on India

- India fears that Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) will cripple the export of its carbon-intensive products to the EU.

- While India's exports may be limited to aluminum, iron, and steel, and affect only 1.8% of its total exports to the EU.
- EU is India's third largest trade partner.
- India's products have a higher carbon intensity than its European counterparts, the carbon tariffs imposed will be proportionally higher making Indian exports substantially uncompetitive.

Conclusion

- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is also an important issue in the ongoing India-EU free trade agreement negotiations.
- India should work with the EU to secure gains on CBAM and ensure smooth onboarding for Indian exporters to maximize the benefits of a bilateral deal, even as the possibility of a WTO challenge remains open.

02.06.2023

- **Who should own the world's lithium**
- **India, Nepal sign pacts on energy, transport**
- **Law Commission views on Sedition law retention**
- **Manufacturing PMI hits 31-month high in May**
- **At the root of India's manufacturing challenge**

Who should own the world's lithium

Context

- The news of potentially significant reserves of lithium in Jammu and Kashmir has been welcomed universally.
- Lithium an element needed to manufacture batteries used in electric cars and other renewable energy infrastructure.

Status of India's lithium industry

- India's electric-vehicle (EV) market was valued at $383.5 million in 2021, and is expected to expand to $152.21 billion in 2030.
- India imported 450 million units of lithium batteries valued at $929.26 million (₹6,600 crore) in 2019-2020, which makes the development of the country's domestic lithium reserves a matter of high stakes.
- Amid the ongoing global transition to low-carbon economies, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI), and 5G networks will greatly reshape global and regional geopolitics.

IN LITHIUM SEARCH

Jammu & Kashmir
Arunachal Pradesh
Rajasthan
Jharkhand
Meghalaya
Nagaland
Chhattisgarh

Note: During field season programme 2022-23, GSI has taken up 18 projects on Lithium and associated elements in these states.

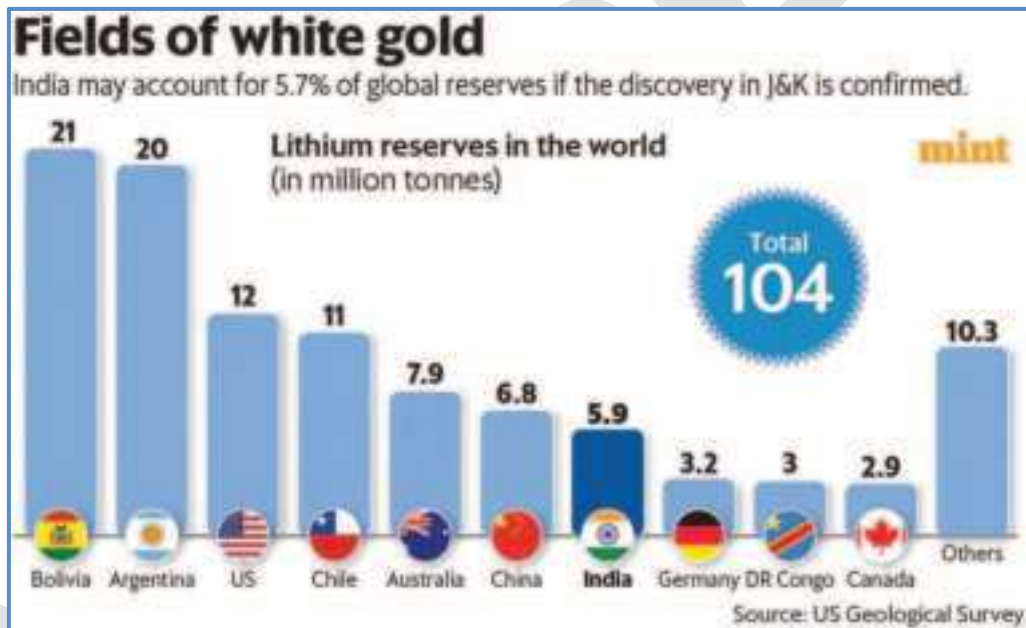Source: Ministry of Mines, Lok Sabh reply, 08.02.2023

Who should own these minerals

- In July 2013, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India ruled that the owner of the land has rights to everything beneath, "down to the centre of the earth".
- Yet, large areas of land, including forests which make up more than 22% of India's landmass hills, mountains, and revenue wasteland are publicly owned.
- The Supreme Court also recalled that the Union government could always ban private actors from mining sensitive minerals, as is already the case with uranium under the Atomic Energy Act 1962.

Management of lithium reserves globally

- The South American countries, Chile and Bolivia have the largest known reserves of lithium are particularly instructive.
- In Chile, the government has designated lithium as a strategic resource and its development has been made the exclusive prerogative of the state.
- In April 2023, Chile's president announced a new "National Lithium Strategy", which many in the corporate sector took to be a declaration of his intention to nationalise the industry.
- Bolivia's new constitution (2009), gave the state "the control and direction over the exploration, exploitation, industrialisation, transport, and commercialisation of natural resources."

Fields of white gold

India may account for 5.7% of global reserves if the discovery in J&K is confirmed.

Lithium reserves in the world (in million tonnes)

Total **104**

Bolivia	Argentina	US	Chile	Australia	China	India	Germany	DR Congo	Canada	Others
21	20	12	11	7.9	6.8	5.9	3.2	3	2.9	10.3

Source: US Geological Survey

What next

- As India explores and develops its own lithium reserves, it is notable that the appropriate development of this sector will require a very high level of effectiveness on the part of the Indian state.
- Much of India's mineral wealth is mined from regions with very high levels of poverty, environmental degradation, and lax regulation.
- Effective and careful management of the sector should be paramount if India's rare minerals development is to meet its multiple goals social wellbeing, environmental safety, and national energy security.

India, Nepal sign pacts on energy, transport

Context

- Recently, India and Nepal launched several connectivity and energy cooperation initiatives, including a cross-border passenger train.
- The Prime Minister of Nepal is on a four-day visit to India.

Joint vision statement

- The joint vision statement on power cooperation committed the two sides to work for joint development of power generation projects in Nepal, development of cross-border transmission infrastructure, bi-directional power trade based on market demand and coordinated operation of national grids.
- Nepal invited Indian firms to invest in development, construction, and operation of renewable and hydropower projects.

Agreements in different sector

- India and Nepal signed a series of agreements on energy and transport, including export of Nepal's hydropower to Bangladesh through Indian territory.
- Both countries also look forward to resolve a boundary dispute.
- The two sides signed a number of agreements, including an MoU between NHPC and VUCL (Vidyut Utpadan Company Ltd.) of Nepal, for the development of Phukot Karnali Hydroelectric Project and a Project Development Agreement for Lower Arun Hydroelectric Project between SJVN (India) and Investment Board of Nepal.
- They also inaugurated integrated checkposts (ICPs) at Nepalgunj in Nepal and Rupaidiha on the Indian side

Law Commission views on Sedition law retention

Context

- The Law Commission has submitted its report on the sedition law to the Central Government.
- The report states that section 124A of the IPC, which deals with sedition, should be retained with some safeguards to prevent its misuse.
- However, some amendments can be made for greater clarity regarding the use of the provision.
- In May 2022, the Supreme Court stayed the invocation of the sedition charge until the provisions of the law under Section-124 of the Indian Penal Code are examined.

Recommendation

- The Law Commission panel in its report submitted to the government said that taking cognizance of the views on the misuse of Section 124A, it recommends that guidelines be issued by the Center to prevent them.
- The Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) dealing with sedition needs to be retained but certain amendments could be made for greater clarity regarding its usage.
- The commission said sedition being a "colonial legacy" is not a valid ground for its repeal but in view of the misuse of Section 124A, the panel has recommended that the Centre issue model guidelines to curb any misuse.
- The Law Commission said the existence of laws such as Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the National Security Act (NSA) does not by implication cover all elements of the offence envisaged under Section 124A of the IPC.

About sedition law

- The sedition law in India is covered under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). It defines sedition as any act that brings or attempts to bring hatred or contempt towards the Indian government, or excites disaffection against it.

Manufacturing PMI hits 31-month high in May

Context
- According to latest S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's manufacturing activity in May increased to a 31-month high of 58.7 from 57.2 in April, driven by record expansion in input stocks and a strong increase in new orders and output

Finding of the survey
- A survey prints above 50 indicates manufacturing expansion and below marks contraction.
- In October 2020, PMI for manufacturing was recorded at 58.9.
- The May data pointed to a consecutive 23-month rise in factory orders, with firms associating the upturn with advertising, demand strength and favorable economic climate.
- The survey noted that out of the five PMI sub-components, stocks of purchases showed vigor, increasing at an unprecedented pace in May as monitored companies indicated that better supply-chain conditions and sustained increases in input purchasing boosted inventory growth.

India's gross domestic product
- The May PMI comes a day after data showed that India's gross domestic product (GDP) expanded at 6.1 per cent in the January-March 2023 quarter, in turn pushing up the growth estimate to 7.2 per cent for the full year 2022-23.
- The manufacturing sector registered a year-on-year growth of 4.5 per cent in Q4 FY2023.
- The May data indicated a sharp and accelerated increase in quantities of purchases, with the rate of expansion quickening to the strongest in over 12 years.

NSO latest data
- The latest data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) showed that the country's GDP clocked a higher-than-expected growth rate of 6.1 per cent in January-March 2023, lifting the growth estimate for FY2023 to 7.2 per cent.
- This growth was supported by a pickup in services sector growth led by construction, and trade, hotels, transport sectors along with higher investment even as private final consumption expenditure registered a muted growth.

At the root of India's manufacturing challenge

Context
- The issue of manufacturing or services as the desirable path for India's economy makes the rounds in public fora periodically.
- In the early part of this century, when India's software exports were booming, it had been asked why India's services sector should not leapfrog over manufacturing to propel the economy forward.
- This proposal challenged the standard model of economic development, for, in most successful economies, industrial expansion had come first.

Economic reforms of 1991
- The economic reforms of 1991 had almost exclusively focused on manufacturing, but the significant scaling down of tariffs and the dismantling of the 'licence-permit Raj' did not lead to an increase in the share of manufacturing in the economy.
- Of course, India's manufacturing sector ought not to be seen only in terms of its size. There has been a qualitative change after 1991.
- The range and quality of products manufactured in India have undergone an impressive increase.

- The rising quality and variety of the goods produced, without the expansion of manufacturing in relation to the economy, suggests a rising inequality of income.

Unimpressive record

- After the economic reforms of 1991, the next time manufacturing came into the government's view was after 2014, when 'Make in India', with its emphasis on foreign direct investment, was launched.
- More recently, there has been the Production-Linked Incentive scheme, which essentially subsidizes production of certain products.
- The first advance estimates of the national income for 2022-23 show manufacturing growth to be 1.3% for the year, less than that for agriculture and all main segments of services.
- While the demonetisation of 2016 has resulted in the slowing of the manufacturing sector.

The price of food

- The relationship between per capita income and the share of food in household expenditure is strongly negative globally, with the richest countries, such as the United States and Singapore, having low such shares.
- Of the large economies of the world, the share of food is the largest in India, and its GDP per capita the lowest.
- Industry leaders have no control over the demand side of the equation.
- However, the possibility of exporting means that the manufacturing sector of an economy can sidestep a narrow domestic market.

Focus on export

- In a comparison with the economies of East Asia, we can see what is necessary for an economy to be a successful exporter.
- One is infrastructure and the other is the skill level of the workforce.
- These determine the cost of production and the type of products that a country can produce, respectively.
- The export of manufactures is largely by sea.
- The competitive disadvantage faced by India's exporters can be seen in the much higher turnaround time for ships in India's ports with that in Singapore.

Educational outcomes in India

- With respect to education that India has fallen most behind the countries that are the manufacturing successes of the world.
- The ranking of countries by the Programme for International Student Assessment reveals this directly.
- In India, there is no formal assessment available of the state of the vocational training institutes.
- The erstwhile, Planning Commission had released data showing that only about 5% of Indian youth have had any kind of technical training.
- The figure for South Korea was over 85%.
- It would be naïve to expect India to make a mark on the global stage for manufacturing with such a labour force.

Conclusion

- The economic reforms of 1991 were undertaken with a view to raising the presence of manufacturing.
- To this effect, the trade and industrial policy regime had been overhauled.
- However, it overlooked the need for an entire ecosystem, including schooling, training and infrastructure for manufacturing to flourish.

01.06.2023

- **Inter-ministerial panel for food grain storage capacity**
- **Cabinet nod for second phase of CITIIS programme**
- **India, Nepal likely to ink number of pacts on energy, trade**
- **OTT platforms mandated to show anti-tobacco warnings**
- **Is India missing the graphene bus**

Inter-ministerial panel for food grain storage capacity

Context
- The Union Cabinet approved the formation of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for facilitating "World's Largest Grain Storage Plan in Cooperative Sector" by the convergence of various schemes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Ministry of Food Processing Industries.

Implementation of the scheme
- This scheme will be implemented at a cost of Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Under this scheme, a godown of a capacity of 2,000 tonnes will be constructed in every block.
- An inter-ministerial committee will be formed for this.
- A decision has also been taken to start City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain – CITIIS 2.0 program.
- To ensure time-bound and uniform implementation of the plan in a professional manner, the Ministry of Cooperation will implement a pilot project in at least 10 selected districts of different states and union territories in the country.

Creating Infrastructure
- The plan focuses on creating infrastructure such as godowns for agriculture and allied purposes at viable Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS).
- The plan will utilize the available funds provided under identified schemes of the respective ministries.
- These include the:
  - Agriculture infrastructure fund (AIF)
  - Agricultural marketing infrastructure scheme (AMI)
  - Mission for integrated development of Horticulture (MIDH)
  - Submission on agricultural mechanization (SMAM)
  - Pradhan Mantri formalization of micro food processing enterprises scheme (PMFME)
  - Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana (PMKSY)

Advantages
- The plan is multifaceted, addressing the shortage of agricultural storage infrastructure by establishing godowns at the PACS level.
- It will enable PACS to undertake various activities, including serving as procurement centres, fair price shops, custom hiring centres, and setting up common processing units.
- The decentralized storage capacity at the local level will reduce food grain wastage, strengthen food security, prevent distress sales of crops, and reduce transportation costs.

Cabinet nod for second phase of CITIIS programme

Context

- Recently, the Union government approved the second phase of the City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) project, a programme under the ambit of the Smart Cities Mission.
- The Smart Cities Mission aims to promote integrated waste management and climate-oriented reform actions.
- The CITIIS 2.0 will be implemented in 18 cities which would be selected based on a competition.
- The scheme will run for a period of four years, from 2023 till 2027

Provision under the Programme

- The programme will include the construction of a circular economy with related projects such as:
  o Combined waste management
  o Climate change observatories
  o Institutional strengthening
  o Knowledge dissemination at the national level

About CITIIS 2.0

- CITIIS 2.0 is a program conceived by the Ministry of housing and Urban affairs (MoHUA) in partnership with the French Development Agency (AFD), the European Union (EU), and National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA).

Components of the programme

- The programme has three components.
- The first components of the programme include:
  o Financial and technical support for developing projects focused on building climate resilience
  o Adaptation and mitigation in up to 18 smart cities through the selection of competitively selected projects promoting a circular economy with a focus on integrated waste management.
- Second, all states and Union Territories will be eligible for support on-demand basis. The states will be provided support to:
  o Set up/strengthen their existing state climate centres/ climate cells/ equivalents
  o Create state and city-level climate data observatories
  o Facilitate climate-data-driven planning, develop climate action plans
  o Build capacities of municipal functionaries
- To achieve these objectives, the Program Management Unit (PMU) at NIUA will coordinate the provision of technical assistance and strategic support to state governments.
- Third components include interventions at all three levels– Centre, State and City– to further climate governance in urban India through institutional strengthening, knowledge dissemination, partnerships, building capacity, research and development to support scale-up across all States and Cities.
- The new scheme aims to leverage and scale up the learnings and successes of CITIIS 1.0 which was launched in 2018.

India, Nepal likely to ink number of pacts on energy, trade

Context

- The Prime Minister of India is set to hold a meeting with Nepal's Prime Minister in New Delhi.
- This engagement comes as part of Nepal's Prime Minister official four-day visit to India, aimed at bolstering the longstanding and friendly relationship between the two nations.

- Nepal holds strategic importance for India in the region, and both countries share deep-rooted historical and cultural ties.

Focus area

- Boosting cooperation in areas of energy, connectivity, and trade will be the central focus of discussions between India and Nepal.
- One of the key priority areas would be to further deepen the power sector cooperation through new initiatives across the entire spectrum of cooperation.
- The India-Nepal joint vision statement on power sector cooperation of April last year is considered a milestone and Nepal has been exporting over 450 MW of electricity to India.
- Strengthening the financial connectivity between the two countries
- In April last year, RuPay card was launched in Nepal during the visit of the then Nepalese prime minister visit to India.

Power sector cooperation

- The power sector cooperation between India and Nepal will be a significant area of focus, building upon the India-Nepal joint vision statement on power sector cooperation from April last year.
- Nepal has been exporting over 450 MW of electricity to India, highlighting the progress made in this sector.

OTT platforms mandated to show anti-tobacco warnings

Context

- The Union Health Ministry recently mandated anti-tobacco warnings for OTT platforms. The ministry's notification laid down new rules for anti-tobacco warnings for publishers and a failure to comply with new rules will lead to strict action against them.

Proposed notification and mandate

- The OTT platforms will be required to display anti-tobacco warnings and disclaimers similar to the ones we see in movies screened in theatres and in television programmes.
- The OTT platform shall also be required to exhibit an anti-tobacco health warning as a prominent static message at the bottom of the screen when tobacco products or their use are displayed during the programme.

COTPA rule 2004

- The government enacted Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Rules, 2004, (COTPA) to discourage tobacco use by eliminating all direct and indirect advertisements of tobacco.
- India will become a global leader in tobacco regulation by implementing the regulation on OTT.

Is India missing the graphene bus

Context

- What Artificial Intelligence (AI) is to software and quantum computing is to computers, graphene is to materials.
- These three emerging technologies will disrupt the existing human-machine interface in the next couple of decades.
- While India is among the leaders in AI and a potential challenger in quantum computing, it needs to catch up in the area of graphene.

- Graphene is projected to emerge as a possible sustainable material, improving sustainability in a variety of industries.

Feature of Graphene

- Graphene is the world's thinnest, strongest, and most conductive material of both electricity and heat.
- It conducts electricity better than copper.
- It is 200 times stronger than steel but six times lighter.
- It is almost perfectly transparent as it absorbs only 2% of light.
- It is impermeable to gases, even those as light as hydrogen and helium.
- It has the potential to revolutionize electricity, conductivity, energy generation, batteries, sensors and more.
- Also, when added to other materials, graphene even in small quantities produces composite materials with dramatically transformed qualities.

Potential use of Graphene

- Graphene composites are used in aerospace, automotive, sports equipment and construction.
- It is used for high-performance batteries and super-capacitors, touchscreens, and conductive inks.
- Graphene-based sensors are used for environmental monitoring, healthcare and wearable devices.
- Graphene oxide membranes are used for water purification and desalination.
- Even Graphene-based masks were made during COVID.
- Graphene is highly sensitive to environmental changes, which makes it an excellent candidate for sensing chemical and biological agents, explosives, radiation, and other hazardous substances.
- Besides, graphene-based materials can also protect us against chemical and biological attacks.

Global graphene market size

- According to Grand View Research, the global graphene market size was valued at $175.9 million in 2022 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 46.6% between 2023 and 2030.
- Over 300 companies are now producing graphene or its derivatives.
- Among the leading countries in graphene research are China, the U.S., the U.K., Japan, South Korea, Russia, and Singapore.
- China and Brazil are global leaders in the commercial production of graphene.
- At the Beijing Graphene Institute, set up in 2018, several companies produce industry-grade graphene products.
- India produces about one-twentieth compared to China and one-third compared to Brazil.

India's progress

- India's Graphene market is growing at a high rate because of driving factors such as increasing demand for graphene in the electronics and automobile industry and growing investment towards the development of renewable energy sources.
- The Centre for Nano Science and Engineering at IISc Bangalore along with KAS Tech produced a graphene-based system several years ago.
- Some start-ups and foreign subsidiaries have started graphene or graphene derivatives in India.
- India's niche is going to be innovation using graphene.
- The IIT Roorkee-incubated Log 9 has patented a technology for graphene-based ultracapacitors, and the IIT Kanpur-incubated RF Nanocomposites has developed EMI shielding and stealth technology using graphene-based nanotubes.

Way forward

JULY
2023

31.07.2023

- **ISRO's PSLV puts satellites in orbit**
- **Semiconductor mission aims to meet global demand**
- **Indian military aircraft visit Australia's strategic Cocos Islands**
- **Railways to study route viability of Vande Bharat trains**
- **Data Beyond Survey**

ISRO's PSLV puts satellites in orbit

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the PSLV-C56 carrying Singapore's DS-SAR and six other satellites.
- The rocket lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

PSLV-C56

- PSLV-C56 takes seven satellites including the primary satellite DS-SAR and six co-passengers have been successfully placed in the right orbit.
- This is a PSLV mission for New Space India Limited [NSIL].

Co-passengers satellite

- VELOX-AM, a 23 kg technology demonstration microsatellite.
- ARCADE Atmospheric Coupling and Dynamics Explorer (ARCADE), an experimental satellite.
- SCOOB-II, a 3U nanosatellite flying a technology demonstrator payload NuLIoN by NuSpace, an advanced 3U nanosatellite enabling seamless IoT connectivity in both urban & remote locations.
- Galassia-2, a 3U nanosatellite that will be orbiting at low earth orbit.
- ORB-12 STRIDER, satellite is developed under an international collaboration.

DS-SAR

- The DS-SAR satellite is developed under a partnership between DSTA (representing the Government of Singapore) and ST Engineering.
- Once deployed and operational, it will be used to support the satellite imagery requirements of various agencies within the Government of Singapore.
- ST Engineering will use it for multi-modal and higher responsiveness imagery and geospatial services for their commercial customers.
- The ISRO added that New Space India Limited (NSIL) has procured PSLV-C56 to deploy the DS-SAR satellite.

Features

- DS-SAR carries a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) payload developed by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).
- This allows the DS-SAR to provide for all-weather day and night coverage, and capable of imaging at 1m resolution at full polarimetry.
- According to the ISRO, the primary payload, DS-SAR satellite, which weighs 360kg

Semiconductor mission aims to meet global demand

Context

- Addressing the second day of the on-going Semicon India event, India's Minister of External Affairs, shed light on the nation's strategic vision and on-going efforts to secure a pivotal role in critical and emerging technology.
- Emphasizing India's ambitious goals, the minister underscored the country's determination to become the world's third-largest economy and enhance the quality and quantity of its exports.

Semiconductor industry and India's growth

- The Minister of External Affairs acknowledging the key role played by the semiconductor industry in driving innovation and powering various technological advancements.
- He highlighted India's intensified focus on this critical sector.
- He said that the country's aim is not solely confined to meeting domestic requirements but to establish itself as a trusted and influential semiconductor manufacturer for the global market.

Investments partnerships

- The recent partnership promising developments that have bolstered India's standing in the semiconductor space.
- Several renowned multinational companies, including Micron, Lam Research, and Applied Materials, have recently announced substantial investments in India.
- These investments are expected to fortify India's semiconductor manufacturing capabilities and foster the growth of the semiconductor ecosystem within the country.
- Furthermore, Japan has emerged as a significant partner in India's semiconductor endeavors.
- The two countries have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to foster a robust semiconductor partnership, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing between them.

Securing supply chain

- Recognizing the importance of securing essential resources for the semiconductor industry, the external affairs minister highlighted India's critical mineral partnership with Australia.
- The collaboration aims to ensure a steady supply of crucial minerals required for semiconductor manufacturing, thus safeguarding India's semiconductor mission against any resource constraints.

Indian military aircraft visit Australia's strategic Cocos Islands

Context

- Expanding the strategic reach of the Indian military and improving interoperability with Australia, an Indian Navy Dornier maritime patrol aircraft and an Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130 transport aircraft visited Australia's Cocos (Keeling) Islands (CKI) in the Southern Indian Ocean.
- Cocos can be an important base for refueling and operational turnaround for the Indian military, especially once the runway there is expanded to accommodate large aircraft like the P-8 long range maritime patrol aircraft.

India-Australia military engagements

- The Indian Navy Dornier maritime patrol aircraft and a C-130 Hercules from the IAF effectively elevate Cocos Islands as a staging point for Australian and Indian air surveillance of the maritime choke points through Southeast Asia and the entire eastern Indian Ocean.
- This is the latest in a series of India's growing military-to-military engagements, deepening interoperability broadly in the region and especially with Australia.

- Australia's active support in establishing a temporary ground station at CKI for:
  o Gaganyaan missions
  o Potential opportunities for cooperation in earth observation
  o Satellite navigation
  o Space situational awareness
  o Weather and climate studies using satellite data

Railways to study route viability of Vande Bharat trains

Context

- According to Centre, senior railway officials will conduct a survey along potential routes to analyse the existing train or bus services, and give their recommendations on introducing the premium Vande Bharat Express.
- The Railway Ministry has directed Chief Passenger Transportation Managers of Zonal Railways across the network to identify viable Origin-Destination (OD) pairs based on demand.
- Venues such as tourist destinations, IT hubs, business Centres, and State or district headquarters could be considered.
- A policy decision had been taken to fence tracks where trains are operated at a speed of 130 kmph.

Introduction of Vande Bharat trains

- For the introduction of Vande Bharat trains, senior railway officers were instructed to:
  o Identify OD routes, particularly chair car segment
  o Compile information regarding several trains or buses being currently operated on the route
  o Comparison of fare
  o Travel time of road and rail sector
  o Availability of maintenance facility
- While basic infrastructure such as maintenance facilities, catering, platforms would already be available, the railways would have to ensure safety in terms of trespass and other obstacles since Vande Bharat is operated at a speed of 130 kmph on certain sections.

Data Beyond Survey

Context

- The statistical system of a country acts as its mirror.
- It generates statistics that allow observers to see how well a country is performing on key socioeconomic parameters such as per capita income, inflation, poverty, life expectancy, and average years of schooling.
- Fast-tracking reforms and investment in the national statistical system in a mission mode is the need of the hour and cannot be delayed if India wants to play an active role once again in the international statistical fraternity.

Statistical system

- In most countries, a single agency or a handful of agencies produce the bulk of official statistics.
- The statistical system provides citizens with an impartial view of the state of their country's progress.
- It enables policymakers and investors to make informed decisions.

Identifying shortcomings

- First, we should recognize that there is a problem in the statistical system that needs to be fixed.
- Defending the statistical system is no solution at all.

- The National Statistical Office (NSO) has been collecting data primarily through administrative and sample surveys, both of which have their own strengths and challenges.
- The data collection from administrative sources is economical and less time-consuming, but has several challenges in terms of representativeness.
- **Second,** the national statistical system needs to expand and diversify its resource base of data it should include new and emerging sources like Big Data leverage processing through machine learning and artificial intelligence.
- The efforts by the NSO for developing "standards" and "methodologies" for data validation of these new datasets are going to be extremely important, so they supplement conventional data sources.
- The UN Statistics Division has come up with guidelines for using Big Data for official purposes.
- **Third,** the strength of the national system is integrally dependent on the strength of the state statistical systems.
- In this direction, the Dholakia Committee Report 2020 on sub-national accounts is crucial — it could pave the way for state governments in pursuing and adopting a bottom-up approach, thereby strengthening the data collection capacities of the state governments.
- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) launched the India Statistical Strengthening Project with financial support from the World Bank for enhancing the capacities of state statistical systems for data collection.
- **Fourth,** some lessons may need to be drawn from our national experience of improving weather predictions.
- The Ministry of Earth Sciences established the National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting in 1988 and used India's first supercomputer to develop and evolve advanced numerical models for weather forecasting.
- There are several other instances, both in the public and private sector, like in direct taxes, GSTN, railway reservations, banking and financial sector, UPI, portal aggregators, online shopping etc where technological advances are leveraged to improve service delivery.

Way forward

- To catalyze and synergies these efforts, the National Policy on Official Statistics, announced in the Budget 2020 needs to be finalized quickly along with appropriate institutional support and resources.
- This will ensure that we are able to track India's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals using a bottom-up approach and also ensure that no one is left behind.
- The fast-tracking reforms and investment in the national statistical system in a mission mode is the need of the hour and cannot be delayed if India wants to play an active role once again in the international statistical fraternity.

29.07.2023

- **Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill 2023**
- **India, Japan to strengthen peacetime cooperation**
- **PM inaugurated Semicon India 2023**
- **Indian companies to list on foreign exchanges through IFSC**
- **Charting the path for the Sixteenth Finance Commission**

Indian Institutes of Management (Amendment) Bill 2023

Context

- The Union government tabled in Parliament a bill that proposes to make the President of India a visitor at all Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).
- The Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) (Amendment) bill 2023 seeks to make amendments in the 2017 IIM Act.
- The concept of "Visitor" in IIMs was first introduced in the draft of the 2017 act released by the Centre in 2015.
- Presently, there are 20 IIMs in the country.

Provision of the bill

Nomination Power

- The Institutes of Management (Amendment) bill 2023 empower President of India to nominate:
  - Chairperson of the board of governors
  - Oversee appointment as well as removal of the directors
  - Audit the functioning of the institutions
- The above-mentioned move that could limit the autonomy of India's premier business schools.
- Currently, the chairperson of the board of governors is appointed by the board itself, from among eminent persons distinguished in the field of industry, education, science, technology, management and public administration among others.
- The board of governors is the principal executive body of each IIM, and has the power to appoint search panels for appointments of new directors, take policy decisions, approve annual budgets and determine fees.

IIM Act 2017

- The 2017 IIM Act, which came into force in January 2018, provides the institutes a higher degree of autonomy over its functioning, with a very limited role of the government.
- The board of governors of each institute, comprise 19 members, including one representative each from the central and state governments.

India, Japan to strengthen peacetime cooperation

Context

- External Affairs Minister and his Japanese counterpart recently outline the vision how clearly both countries would are "prepared" to face China if it wages a war against Taiwan or India.
- India is working towards strengthening their defence and security cooperation to be able to "work ahead" before the "worst fears" come true.
- India and Tiwan sides vowed to enhance their partnership in the Indo-Pacific region.

- Both sides are conducting joint exercises across all three services of the respective armed forces that are "preparation" to face the China challenge.

India, Japan Defence Cooperation

- India and Japan are now planning to take a significant leap in their defence partnership as they work towards a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- The frequent multi-layered high-level contacts have been the backbone of Japan-India relations.
- High-level exchanges have acted as the driving force to push forward our security and defence cooperation.
- In January this year, the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) conducted a bilateral fighter jet training exercise – 'Veer Guardian 2023' – for the first time showing their combined air power.

PM inaugurated Semicon India 2023

Context

- Recently, Prime Minister inaugurated Semicon India 2023, in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- The Prime Minister noted that India can become a trusted chip supplier for the world.
- He also noted that India will become a great conductor for the global semiconductor sector.
- The conference was attended by the top representatives from major companies such as Micron Technology, Applied Materials, Foxconn, SEMI, Cadence, and AMD.
- This is the second edition of the conference, which was first held in 2022.
- Since then, several new products, technologies and people have joined India's semiconductor industry, boosting its growth.

Semiconductor industry

- India has a huge role to play in the global semiconductor industry.
- The nation is focused on building a chip-making ecosystem with the backing of a "stable, responsible and reform-oriented government".
- To further incentivize investors, India has one of the lowest corporate taxes and has made its taxation process faceless and seamless.
- The government has provided special incentives to the semiconductor industry.
- Additionally, India's exports of electronic manufacturing have doubled in the past few years and today has over 200 mobile manufacturing units.

Broadband users

- Broadband users in the country have increased from 60 million in 2014 to 800 million. While India had only 250 million broadband connections in 2014, it now has 850 million.
- Representatives of several major companies such as Micron Technology, Applied Materials, Foxconn, SEMI, Cadence and AMD attended the conference.
- The government of India, recently-approved National Quantum Mission through which the government has identified over 300 colleges where courses on semiconductors will be available.
- The theme of the Semicon India 2023 is "Catalysing India's Semiconductor Ecosystem".
- It aims to bring together global leaders from industry, academia and research institutions to showcase India's semiconductor strategy and policy.

Electronic manufacturing sector

- India has made huge progress in the electronic manufacturing sector which has grown from $30 billion to over $100 billion, and talked about rising electronic manufacturing exports from the country and the presence of more than 200 mobile manufacturing units in India.
- At the 'Semicon India' conference, U.S. chipmaker Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) announced plans to invest around $400 million in the country over the next five years and build its largest design centre in the tech hub of Bengaluru.

Indian companies to list on foreign exchanges through IFSC

Context

- The Union Minister of Finance said that Indian companies could now directly list their shares on foreign exchanges operating at the GIFT City-based International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Gujarat.
- The finance minister also launches a clearing mechanism and a market development fund to help in the development of a vibrant corporate bond market in India.
- The fund will be equipped with ₹33,000 crore to help stabilize the debt market

Limited Purpose Clearing Corporation

- The finance minister inaugurated a Limited Purpose Clearing Corporation (LPCC) mechanism called AMC Repo Clearing Ltd. (ARCL) and the Corporate Debt Market Development Fund (CDMDF) which will help in the development of a vibrant corporate bond market in India.
- The FM had made an announcement on this during her budget speech of 2021-22.
- This is expected to improve liquidity in the underlying corporate bond market.

Charting the path for the Sixteenth Finance Commission

Context

- The Sixteenth Finance Commission is due to be set up shortly.
- Many critical changes have taken place since the constitution of the Fifteenth Finance Commission in November 2017 that includes COVID-19 and the subsequent geopolitical challenges.

The vertical and horizontal dimensions

- The Fourteenth Finance Commission had raised the share of States in the divisible pool of central taxes to 42% from 32%.
- This was revised to 41% when the number of States in India was reduced to 28.
- During 2020-21 to 2023-24 (BE), the effective share of States in the Centre's gross tax revenues (GTR) averaged close to 31%, which was significantly lower than the corresponding share of nearly 35% during 2015-16 to 2019-20.
- This heavy reliance on cess and surcharges requires scrutiny by the Sixteenth Finance Commission.

Share of States in divisible pool

- The share of individual States in the Centre's divisible pool of taxes is determined by a set of indicators that includes population, per capita income, area, and incentive-related factors such as forest cover and demographic change.
- In the case of per capita income, it is the distance of a State's per capita income from a benchmark, usually kept at the average per capita income of the top three States that is used as a determining factor.
- This distance criterion implies relatively larger shares for relatively lower income States. At present, it has the highest weight of 45% — it had an even higher weight previously. Many of the richer States have argued for a lowering of the weight given to this criterion.

Recommendations

- The debt-GDP ratio for the combined account of central and State governments had peaked at 89.8% in 2020-21, of which the Centre's debt-GDP ratio excluding any on-lending to the States amounted to 58.7%, and that of States was 31%.
- In 2020-21, the Centre's fiscal deficit had shot up to 9.2% of GDP and that of States to 4.1%.
- One innovation which may be relevant in this context is to set up a loan council, as recommended by the Twelfth Finance Commission.
- This independent body should oversee the loan magnitudes and profiles of the central and State governments.

Way forward

- The Sixteenth Finance Commission should examine the subject of non-merit subsidies in detail.
- However, exclusion of 'unjustified' subsidies while determining grants may cause the Finance Commission to be caught in political crossfire.
- The Finance Commission should be strict about States maintaining fiscal deficit within limits.
- It should provide carrots to States maintaining fiscal deficit and sticks for those that exceed fiscal deficit limits.

28.07.2023

- **Centre may extend PLI scheme to chemicals, petrochemicals**
- **Rajya Sabha passes Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2023**
- **Manufacturing of more Vande Bharat coaches**
- **Parliamentary panel concern PwD population data**
- **Weighing in on the National Research Foundation Bill**

Centre may extend PLI scheme to chemicals, petrochemicals

Context

- The government is considering the implementation of the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for the chemicals and petrochemical sectors.
- The government also aims to be energy independent by 2047 and achieve net zero by 2070.
- India main priority is green growth, and each sector will need to contribute to lowering carbon intensity.
- The government has been focused on introducing PLI schemes in various manufacturing sectors in India to boost the production industry.

Background

- In February 2022, the ministry of Chemical and Fertilizers planned to bring a PLI scheme for the chemical sector to boost domestic production and exports.
- This effort was part of India's larger goal of becoming self-reliant.
- The government announced the opening of new PLI bids to produce 20 gigawatt hours (GWh) of advanced chemistry cells.
- The US$ 2.19 billion (Rs. 18,100 crore) plan is designed to increase domestic battery cell production.

Particularly specialty chemicals

- The finance minister emphasizing on the need to boost domestic production of chemicals, particularly specialty chemicals that include active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), dyes and pigments.
- Specialty chemicals account for nearly 22 per cent of India's chemicals and petrochemicals industry.

- However, it contributes more than half of India's total exports of chemicals and petrochemicals.

About PLI scheme

- The PLI scheme was launched in April 2020 in order to provide support to manufacturing in some selected sectors.
- So far, the benefits of this scheme have been extended to 14 sectors with an incentive outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore ($26 billion).
- Telecommunications, electronics, white goods, textiles and pharmaceuticals are among the key sectors that have been extended the benefits under the PLI scheme.

Rajya Sabha passes Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2023

Context

- The Rajya Sabha recently passed the Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill, 2023to amend the Cinematograph Act, 1952.
- The amended bill introduces stringent anti-piracy provisions, expanding the scope of the law from censorship to cover copyright also.

Provision

- The Bill intends to ensure that the film industry content "does not suffer due to piracy as the menace causes heavy loss to the industry".
- The Bill proposes a jail term of up to three years and a fine up to 5% of a film's production cost for persons who "use any audiovisual recording device in a place licensed to exhibit films with the intention of making or transmitting an infringing copy of" a film, or trying to do so.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Cinematograph Act, 1952, which authorises the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to require cuts in films and clear them for exhibition in cinemas and on television.
- The government will not have revisional powers [over the CBFC's decisions] even after this Bill.

Prohibition on unauthorised recording of films

- The Bill further seeks to introduce new sections in the Cinematograph Act with provisions to prohibit the unauthorised recording of films (section 6AA) and their exhibition (section 6AB). Provision 6AA prohibits the recording of any part of the film for the sole usage of the same device, the report further mentioned.

Age ratings for films

- The Bill introduces three age ratings for films requiring adult supervision.
- Such films now get a U/A rating, but this has been split into U/A 7+, U/A 13+ and U/A 16+.
- Films rated for adults have largely been prohibited on television, following a 2004 Bombay High Court order.
- Broadcasters often cut films voluntarily, and re-apply with the CBFC for a U/A rating. The Bill formalises this practice.

Manufacturing of more Vande Bharat coaches

Context

- As the Indian Railways prepares to overhaul its fleet completely, a total of 8,000 Vande Bharat coaches are to be manufactured over the next few years.
- Indian Railways plans to induct more of these semi-high speed trainsets.
- A Vande Bharat Express trainset typically has 16 coaches.
- It also runs with eight coaches on routes based on need.

Roadmap

- Around two-third of the 8,000 coaches planned will be sourced from the industry, under the prevailing model of manufacture and maintenance contracts, as per the coach production programme approved by the Ministry of Railways.
- A 16-coach trainset would typically cost around Rs 130 crore.

New sleeper variant

- The Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in Chennai, which is the birthplace of the Vande Bharat, has been authorised to invite tenders for 3,200 Vande Bharat coaches of the sleeper variant.
- The first sleeper version of the Vande Bharat may roll out by early 2024.
- At present, all Vande Bharat trains are seating-only variants.
- While 1,600 coaches will be made in ICF, the other two production units, MCF-Raebareli and RCF-Kapurthala will make 800 coaches each.
- The plan is to roll out these trains every year by 2030-31.

Parliamentary panel concern PwD population data

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment pulled up by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment for failing to accurately estimate the population of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).
- The government says that data on PwDs are largely taken from the Census and NSS sample surveys.
- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities went on to explain that the government had introduced a measure to provide unique disability ID cards to those covered under schemes meant for them.

Need for correctly estimate

- In its report on the action taken by the government on its recommendations made in March, the House panel, said at least until the results of Census 2021 were made available, the government ought to use every resource it has to correctly estimate the population of PwDs in the country.
- This included collaborating with State governments, using data from surveys they are conducting, consulting experts, and sensitising surveyors of the Ministry of Statistics.

Weighing in on the National Research Foundation Bill

Context

- The Union Cabinet recently has approved the introduction of the National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill in Parliament, placing once again the debate on science and technology funding in the spotlight.
- The Bill once passed, it is to establish an apex body to spearhead research and development, foster a culture of innovation, and nurture a research ecosystem across all universities and colleges in the country.
- Simultaneously, the Bill seeks to repeal the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) Act 2008, under which the SERB was established as a statutory body of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to carry out almost the same or similar functions which the NRF proposes to do.

About NRF

- The National Research Foundation (NRF) was established as per one of the key recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020.
- The NRF intends to act as a coordinating agency between researchers, various government bodies and industry, thus bringing industry into the mainstream of research.

- In addition to providing research grants to individuals, the NRF plans to seed, grow and facilitate research in India's universities, especially State universities, by funding research infrastructure and researchers.
- The idea of establishing the NRF as an independent foundation to promote and fund research was mooted by the Kasturirangan Committee in 2019 and adopted in the
- National Education Policy (NEP 2020).

The financial outlay

- Highlighting the lack of a conducive research ecosystem and underinvestment in research, the Kasturirangan Committee had said that the NRF would get an 'annual grant of Rs. 20,000 Crores.
- It did not say how long this grant would continue, but it did note that research spending in the country was a meagre 0.65% of GDP compared to 2.8% in the United States, 2.1% in China, 4.3% in Israel and 4.2% in South Korea.
- It expressed concern that research and innovation spending in the country had declined from 0.84% of GDP in 2008 to 0.69% in 2014.
- The NEP 2020 adopted the idea, but without any specific financial commitment.

Initial budget outlay

- According to Press Information Bureau release the NRF will have ₹10,000 crore for five years and thus get a total of ₹50,000 crore.
- Despite the scant details available in the public domain, it shows that the government grant or budgetary support would be at the most ₹14,000 crore while the remainder (₹36,000 crore) is to be mobilized through industry and other private philanthropic sources.

Way forward

- The criticality of research and knowledge creation and the importance of enhancing funding for research has been amply highlighted by the New Education Policy.
- The NEP argues that a robust research ecosystem acquires greater importance now due to growing challenges in the world and opportunities due to technological advancements.
- There is also the need for adequate National Research Foundation financial support to ensure growth in research and knowledge creation.

27.07.2023

- **No-confidence motion admitted against government in LS**
- **Bill to nominate Kashmiri migrants to Assembly**
- **GST Council to discuss online gaming tax treatment**
- **UNESCO calls for a global ban on smartphones in schools**
- **The SCO is a success story that can get better**

No-confidence motion admitted against government in LS

Context

- Recently, the Lok Sabha Speaker accepted the no-confidence motion against the Central government moved by Deputy Leader in the House (LS) MP Gaurav Gogoi on behalf of opposition parties of I.N.D.I.A alliance.
- The stage is set for a high-profile clash between the Opposition and the Treasury benches.

- Admitting the motion, Speaker informed that he would schedule a debate after consulting leaders of all parties.

About no-confidence motion
- The no-confidence motion signifies that one or more members of parliament have lost confidence in the appointed government.
- It allows the opposition to challenge the government's majority and ability to govern.
- If the motion is passed in the house, the Government is bound to vacate the office.

Procedure for no-confidence motion
- Any member of the Lok Sabha can move a no-confidence motion, but it must be supported by at least 50 members of the House.
- The motion must be in writing, signed by the member moving it, and then submitted to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha on a sitting day.
- The member must provide written notice of the motion before 10 am, and the Speaker will read it out in the House.
- No prior reason needs to be stated for its adoption in the Lok Sabha.

History of no-confidence motion
- Acharya Kripalani moved the first-ever no-confidence motion on the floor of the Lok Sabha in August 1963, immediately after the disastrous Sino-Indian War.
- Prime Minister Indira Gandhi faced the most no-confidence motions followed by Lal Bahadur Shastri and P. V. Narasimha Rao, Morarji Desai and Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi.
- Prime Minister Desai resigned on 12 July 1979.
- Vajpayee lost the no-confidence motion by a margin of one vote (269–270) in April 1999.
- As of July 2019, 27 no-confidence motions have been moved.

Bill to nominate Kashmiri migrants to Assembly

Context
- The Minister of Home, moved to amend the J&K Reorganisation Act 2019 to reserve two seats in the J&K Legislative Assembly for 'Kashmiri Migrants' and one for displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- One of the members will be a woman.
- These members will be nominated by the Lieutenant Governor.

Background
- The special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 was struck down by Parliament in August 2019 and the former State was bifurcated into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, the latter without an Assembly.
- Jammu and Kashmir has been under Central rule since 2018 and the Assembly election is yet to take place.

Aim
- It also proposes to nominate one member from 'Pakistan-occupied Kashmir' who was displaced in the 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan.
- The Bill aims "to preserve their political rights" and "overall social and economic development."

Data of Relief Organisation

- As per the data available with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, there are currently 46,517 families having 1,58,976 persons who registered with the Relief Organisation over past three decades.
- It said that in the wake of the 1947 Pakistani aggression, 31,779 families migrated from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- Further, during the wars of 1965 and 1971, 10,065 more families were displaced from the Chhamb Niabat area.

Delimitation Commission

- The Delimitation Commission received many representations from the two communities regarding reservation of seats in the Legislative Assembly to preserve their political rights and identity.
- The commission recommended representation by way of nomination.
- It shall be given on lines of Section 15 of the 2019 Act, which provides for the representation of women.
- The commission increased total seats of the J&K Assembly from 107 to 114 with reservation of nine seats for the Scheduled Tribes for the first time.

GST Council to discuss online gaming tax treatment

Context

- The GST Council is likely to hold an unscheduled meeting on August 2, 2023 to discuss ways in which clarity can be provided on the legal amendments required as well as on the tax treatment following the decision to levy a 28 percent tax on the face value of real-money games.
- The meeting comes less than a month after the GST Council caused an uproar on July 11 by deciding to levy a 28 percent tax on the full value of the money paid by users to play skill-based on online games in a uniform manner with no distinction made between game of skill and chance.

Current GST rates

- All online gaming platforms currently pay 18 percent GST on the platform fees, also known as the Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR), and not on the full value of the transaction, also known as the Contest Entry Amount (CEA).
- While online gaming companies have made a representation to the finance ministry seeking a review of the decision.

IAMAI views

- According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the decision to levy 28 per cent tax will result in an approximate 1,000 per cent increase in GST on the industry and will cause irreversible damage to the $2.5 billion investments in the Indian online gaming startup ecosystem.
- The decision made by the centre could lead to a complete halt on any prospective FDI.

UNESCO calls for a global ban on smartphones in schools

Context

- The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has released Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2023.
- The report warned against the negative impacts of excessive screen time on children's well-being and academic performance.
- The UN body's Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023, titled "Technology in education: a tool on whose terms?", has endorsed banning smartphones in schools in situations where "technology integration does not improve learning or if it worsens student well-being".

Findings of the study

- Global Education Monitoring Report, 2023 highlighted that "mere proximity to a mobile device was found to distract students.
- The smartphone has a negative impact on learning in 14 countries, yet less than one in four have banned smartphone use in schools.
- It also cited research studies to point out that "banning mobile phones from schools improves academic performance, especially for low-performing students".
- The report cited a study of young people between the ages of two and 17 which showed that higher screen time was associated with poorer well-being; less curiosity, self-control and emotional stability; higher anxiety; and depression diagnoses.

Digital infrastructure

- Technology is often bought to plug a gap, with no view to the long-term costs for national budgets.
- The cost of moving to basic digital learning in low-income countries and connecting all schools to the Internet in lower-middle-income countries would add 50% to their current financing gap for achieving national SDG 4 targets.

The SCO is a success story that can get better

Context

- India successfully hosted the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).
- The Leaders of the SCO member-states signed the New Delhi Declaration and issued statements on countering radicalization and exploring cooperation in digital transformation.
- The summit granted Iran full SCO membership, signed the memorandum of obligations of Belarus to join the SCO as a member-state, and adopted the SCO's economic development strategy for the period until 2030.

India's SCO theme

- India's theme for its Presidency of SCO is "SECURE" i.e., "India focused on Security, Economic development, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environmental protection".

Five new pillars

- India created five new pillars and focus areas of cooperation in SCO which include:
  o Startups and Innovation
  o Traditional Medicine
  o Digital Inclusion
  o Youth Empowerment
  o Shared Buddhist Heritage

A changing world

- In the present context the world is grappling with geopolitical tensions, an economic slowdown, energy crises, food shortage and climate change.
- These challenges require the joint response of all countries.
- The major risks to world peace and development are power politics, economic coercion, technology decoupling and ideological contest.
- The central questions revolve around unity or split; peace or conflict; cooperation or confrontation.

Goals of the SCO

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states
- Promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, economy, research and technology and culture
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order

Need for multilateralism

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) needs more engagements with its observer states, dialogue partners and other regional and international organisations such as the United Nations.
- It calls to uphold the UN-centered international system and the international order based on international law.

China's commitment

- China is committed to working with India, South Africa and other partners from the South to put into action the Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, to contribute to world peace, security and prosperity.
- There is need to pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, respect each country's independent choice of the path to development and social system, and abide by the purpose and principles of the UN Charter.
- The reasonable security interests of all countries deserve consideration.

Way forward

- Dialogue and diplomacy offer the best hope to address international disputes by peaceful means.
- Security challenges in conventional and non-conventional domains should be dealt with in a holistic manner.
- Thers is a need to forge a united, equal, balanced and inclusive global development partnership.
- The world must promote humanity's common values of peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom, and get global governance to evolve in a fairer and more reasonable direction.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization member-states should strengthen strategic communication, deepen practical cooperation, and support each other's development.

26.07.2023

- **Lok Sabha passes Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021**
- **Full-reserve banking system**
- **Centre withdraws DNA Technology Bill**
- **President opens tribal art gallery at Rashtrapati Bhavan**
- **Moving away from the 'take-make-dispose' model**

Lok Sabha passes Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021

Context

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which aims to amend the Biological Diversity Act of 2002.
- The Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was drafted in response to concerns raised by practitioners of traditional Indian medicine, various industry sectors and researchers, who felt the current biodiversity conservation law places a heavy compliance burden, making it difficult for collaborative research and investments.
- Conservationists and community rights activists have criticized the modified provisions of the legislation.

Aim of the Bill

- The legislation seeks to promote ease of doing business in the biodiversity sector and decriminalizes all offences under the conservation law.
- The modified legislation also decriminalizes all offences, prescribing penalties instead.
- The bill also encourages foreign investments in the Ayush sector and aligns the definition of a foreign company with the Companies Act, 2013.

Exemptions

- Indian medicine system has been encouraged by adding exemptions for:
  - Codified traditional knowledge as prescribed in the first schedule of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940
  - Cultivated medicinal plants and their products
  - AYUSH practitioners
- Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021 would encourage foreign investments in AYUSH Drug industry and popularize the medicines used in the Indian systems of treatment thereby earning more foreign exchange and providing better employment in our country.

Parliamentary panel recommendation

- The parliamentary panel had suggested a manifold increase in the collection of access and benefit-sharing under the bill.
- These refer to the way in which genetic resources may be accessed and how the benefits that result from their use are to be shared between people using the resources and people who provide them, according to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. India is a signatory to the convention.
- The bill also excludes Indian entities accessing raw materials derived from cultivated medicinal plants from payment of access and benefit-sharing.

Full-reserve banking system

Context

- Full-reserve banking, also known as 100% reserve banking, refers to a system of banking where banks are not allowed to lend out money that they receive from customers in the form of demand deposits.
- Demand deposits are deposits that customers can withdraw from the bank at any point in time without any prior notice.
- So, under full-reserve banking, banks are mandated to hold all money that they receive as demand deposits from customers in their vaults at all times.
- In this case, banks simply act as custodians to depositors' money and may charge a fee from depositors for the service of safekeeping that they offer to the depositors.

Contrary to existing systems

- Full-reserve banking is in contrast to today's banking system in which banks pay interest to customers on their demand deposits.
- In other words, under full-reserve banking, banks are expected to hold reserves backing 100% of their liabilities in the form of demand deposits.
- This is to ensure that banks can successfully meet redemption demands from depositors, and thus avoid a run on the bank even if all depositors someday decide to come asking for their money at the same time.

Lending under full-reserve banking

- Under a full-reserve banking system, banks can only lend money that they receive as time deposits from their customers.
- Time deposits are deposits that customers can withdraw from the bank only after a certain period of time that is agreed upon between the bank and its customers.
- This arrangement gives banks the time to lend these deposits to borrowers at a certain interest rate, collect repayments from the borrowers, and finally repay depositors their money along with a certain amount of interest.

Need for regulations

- Under a full-reserve banking system, banks are prohibited from creating loans without actual cash in their vaults to back these loans.
- In fact, some economists have argued that it should be considered as fraudulent practice if a bank issues loans without the necessary cash in its vaults to back their loans.
- Supporters of fractional-reserve banking, however, believe that full-reserve banking unnecessarily restricts bank lending.
- In other words, proponents of fractional-reserve banking believe that such banking frees the economy from having to rely on real savings from depositors to finance the huge investments required to fuel growth.

Centre withdraws DNA Technology Bill

Context

- The Union government recently withdrew the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019, from the Lok Sabha.
- The Bill seeks to create a regulatory framework for obtaining, storing and testing DNA samples of human beings, mainly for the purposes of criminal investigations, and with the objective of establishing the identity of a person.

Background

- The bill was first proposed in 2003, the Bill has gone through numerous changes, led by both the Department of Biotechnology and the Law Ministry, over the years.
- In 2019, it was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee after being introduced in the Lok Sabha.
- Two years later, the panel's report was released, in which it highlighted the fears of a number of MPs, saying the Bill could be misused to target segments of society based on religion, caste or political views.

Features of DNA Regulation Bill

- The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019 seeks to create a regulatory framework for obtaining, storing and testing DNA samples of human beings, mainly for the purposes of criminal investigations, and with the objective of establishing the identity of a person.
- The proposed law seeks to bring in a supervisory structure to oversee these practices, and frame guidelines and rules so that the DNA technology is not misused.
- The Bill proposes to set up two institutional structures i.e. a DNA regulatory board, and a DNA data bank at the national level.
- Regional Centres of the board as well as the data bank can be set up at the state level too.

Objections against the Bill

- The main debate over the proposed law has been around three issues:
  o Whether DNA technology is foolproof
  o Whether the provisions adequately address the possibility of abuse of DNA information
  o Whether the privacy of the individual is protected
- DNA information can be extremely revelatory.
- It can not only establish a person's identity but also reveal a lot about physical and biological attributes of the person like eye, hair or skin colour, susceptibility to diseases, possible medical history, and possible clues to biological relatives.
- The Standing Committee's 2021 report said, "The Committee is conscious of the fact that this Bill is very technical, complex and sensitive".

Government stand

- The government has defended the Bill by arguing that nearly 60 countries have enacted similar legislation and that all important matters related to privacy, confidentiality and data protection have been taken into account.
- It has also claimed that very limited information is proposed to be stored in the indices — just 17 sets of numbers out of billions that DNA samples can reveal.
- These can tell nothing about the individual and only acts act as a unique identifier.

President opens tribal art gallery at Rashtrapati Bhavan

Context

- On a day when India's first President from the tribal community, completed one year in office, the Rashtrapati Bhavan got a unique gallery dedicated to tribal arts, culture and heroes.
- The gallery, which is around 2,200 square feet in area, has been developed by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, an autonomous institution under the Union Culture Ministry.
- The aim of this gallery is to provide a glimpse of rich art, culture and the contributions of tribal communities in building this nation.

Janjatiya Darpan

- The new gallery 'Janjatiya Darpan' (tribal mirror) was inaugurated at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- The gallery showcases different themes such as unsung tribal freedom fighters, traditional natural resource management practices such as Halma, tribal art such as Dokra, musical instruments and various scripts such as Gunjala Gondi.
- It also houses agricultural and household implements, bamboo baskets, textiles, paintings such as Warli, Gondi and mud art, scrolls, masks and jewellery, metal work, weapons, and contemporary photographs depicting tattoos.

Moving away from the 'take-make-dispose' model

Context

- Resource efficiency and circular economy are two interconnected concepts that aim to address environmental and sustainability challenges by optimising the use of resources and reducing waste.
- In the collective global endeavour to ensure sustainable development and realise the Sustainable Development Goals, decoupling resource utilisation from economic growth will be the key.
- Recognising the need to switch from the 'take-make-dispose' to the 'reduce-reuse-recycle' model, India has prioritised 'Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy' as one of the three core themes for deliberations in the G-20 forum.

Priority Areas for the circular economy

- India has embraced four priority areas for the circular economy during its G-20 presidency:
  o Circularity in the steel sector
  o Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
  o Circular economy
  o Establishing an industry-led resource efficiency and circular economy industry coalition.
- There is now heightened recognition of resource efficiency and circular economy strategies within the G-20 community.

Moving to a circular steel sector

- Most G-20 member countries have committed to net zero ambitions and are working to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.
- In order to ensure growing resource consumption in an environmentally responsible manner, there is also a need to raise the current recycling rates of 15%-25%.
- The demand for steel is poised to grow, especially in growing economies such as India. Globally, about 7% of energy sector emission is attributed to iron and steel production. Transitioning towards a circular steel sector is a key strategy to tackle steel sector emissions.
- The key lies in ensuring collaboration among the G-20 member countries for knowledge sharing, technology co-development and technology transfer.

India's G-20 presidency

- Under India's G-20 presidency, there is an emphasis on the significance of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework in integrating circularity throughout the value chain.
- The presidency document for knowledge exchange on the 'Circular Economy in Steel Sector' is a potential blueprint for a net zero pathway for the steel industry, reducing resource utilisation and minimising wastage.
- As different countries have implemented different EPR models, it is necessary that G-20 member-countries share best practices to accelerate the transition to a circular economy.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

- Effective implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) plays a pivotal role in promoting the growth of the recycling infrastructure and establishing a streamlined waste collection system.
- With over 20,000 registered Producers, Importers, and Brand Owners (PIBOs) and over 1,900 plastic waste processors on the centralised EPR portal, India boasts one of the largest frameworks for EPR.
- The combined EPR obligation of registered PIBOs crosses 3.07 million tons. India has also notified comprehensive rules for e-waste and battery waste management.

Biowaste

- Biowaste such as municipal and industrial waste and agricultural residue has become a global issue causing pollution, biodiversity loss and global warming.
- Combined with crops well-suited for degraded lands, biowaste can serve as valuable primary raw materials and viable substitutes for mineral resources.
- Adopting a circular bioeconomy approach will reduce the need for extracting virgin resources and provide an effective waste disposal solution.

Government policy measures

- The Government of India has been working towards the adoption of biofuels.
- The Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana provides financial support to integrated bio-ethanol projects to set up second generation (2G) ethanol projects.
- 2G bioethanol technology produces bioethanol from waste feedstock such as crop residues and municipal solid waste that would otherwise have no value.
- Additionally, India has also made it mandatory for coal-burning thermal power plants to use a 5% blend of biomass pellets along with coal.
- The Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources (GOBAR) Dhan scheme was launched by the Government of India to convert cattle dung and other organic waste into compost, biogas, and biofuels to promote sustainable agriculture and reduce pollution.
- With over 500 functional biogas plants, the scheme has also helped create rural livelihoods and ensured improved sanitation.
- The Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) Scheme, launched in 2018 to promote the use of Compressed BioGas (CBG) as an alternative green transportation fuel, has aided the bioenergy sector by accelerating the development of infrastructure for the production, storage and distribution of CBG.

On industry coalition

- As industries are crucial in advancing resource efficiency and circular economy practices, India has envisioned an industry coalition in these areas.
- The coalition will also aim to achieve enhanced technological collaboration, build advanced capabilities across sectors, mobilise de-risked finance, and facilitate a proactive private sector engagement.

Way forward

- Global platforms such as the G-20 play an important role in addressing key issues and presenting solutions by adopting a collaborative approach.
- Resource efficiency and circular economy have emerged as key solutions in collective efforts in tackling triple planetary challenges.
- India's G-20 presidency has focused extensively on these approaches which offer promising pathways towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

25.07.2023

- **Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Bill 2023**
- **Centre introduces two new health Bills**
- **ICMR argues for controlled human infection studies**
- **Centre approves new interest rate for PF deposits**
- **A big step in reducing the risk of disasters**

Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill

Context
- The Rajasthan government passed the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill, 2023.
- It is the first legislation of its kind in India outlining welfare schemes for the State's approximately three lakh gig workers.
- The Bill applies to "aggregators" (digital intermediaries connecting buyers and sellers) and "primary employers" (individuals or organisations engaging platform-based workers).

Establishment of Welfare Board
- The Bill proposes a Welfare Board comprising State officials, and five representatives each from gig workers and aggregators, and two others from civil society.
- The Board will set up a welfare fund tom facilitate a guarantee of social security to platform-based gig workers.
- It will register platform-based gig workers, aggregators and primary employers.
- The Board will maintain a database of companies and workers and each worker will receive a unique ID.
- The Welfare Board is expected to formulate schemes "for social security," listing only accidental insurance and health insurance, and "other benefits concerning health, accident and education as may be prescribed."

Social Security and Welfare Fund
- According to the Bill, the Welfare Board will create a "Social Security and Welfare Fund" comprising contributions made by individual workers, State government aids, other sources.
- There is a provision of 'welfare cess' — a cut from each transaction which the aggregator is required to pay.
- The rate of the welfare cess will not exceed 2% nor fall short of 1% of the value of "each transaction," and aggregators are required to submit the amount within the first five days of a month.

Workers' grievances
- Gig workers "have an opportunity to be heard for any grievances" with "entitlements, payments and benefits provided under the Act."
- As Per Section 15, a worker can file a petition physically before an officer or online through the web portal.
- The employer can object to the order within 90 days before an 'Appellate Authority'. Several reports have documented ineffective and unresponsive redressal mechanisms. Urban Company workers are currently protesting the "arbitrary" blocking of their accounts and a lack of support.

Centre introduces two new health Bills

Context
- The union Health minister introduced two important Bills - The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill, 2023 and the National Dental Commission Bill 2023 in India.
- The bill aimed to improve quality education in the paramedical and dental sector respectively.

About the Bill
- The dental commission will be similar to that of the National Medical Commission, which had replaced the Medical Council of India (MCI).
- The other Bill that seeks to set up a National Nursing and Midwifery Commission aims to replace the Indian Nursing Council Act, 1947.
- The Bill proposes a common entrance test, mandatory registration and a temporary license for foreign nationals who are qualified nurses and midwives to practice in India.
- The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Bill, 2023 bill provides for regulation and maintenance of standards of education and services by nursing and midwifery professionals.
- It also has provisions for the assessment of institutions, maintenance of a national register, and state register and creation of a system to improve access, research and development, and adoption of the latest scientific advancement.

Proposed National Nursing and Midwifery Commission
- The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission will have three autonomous boards namely:
  o Nursing and Midwifery Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education Board
  o Nursing and Midwifery Assessment and Rating Board
  o Nursing and Midwifery Ethics and Registration Board
- The National Nursing and Midwifery Commission will frame policies and regulate standards for the governance of nursing and midwifery education and training and regulate nursing and midwifery institutions, researchers, professionals, and associates.
- It will provide a uniform mechanism for admission into the nursing and midwifery institutions.

ICMR argues for controlled human infection studies

Context
- India has taken its first step to introduce controlled human infection studies (CHIS) that are used in many countries for vaccine and treatment development.
- Riddled with ethical issues, controlled human infection studies (CHIS) have still now been a no-go area for India, but the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) Bioethics Unit is set to change this.

Consensus policy
- The ICMR's Bioethics Unit has introduced a consensus policy statement which is now open for comment and argues the case for bringing in controlled human infection studies (CHIS). The document talks of the need, benefits, and challenges associated with CHIS.
- This paper is aimed at addressing a variety of ethical issues so that research can be conducted in India without compromising on ethical principles while ensuring the protection of human participants.

Ethically sensitive
- The ICMR notes that India has so far stayed away from controlled human infection studies (CHIS), because regardless of the potential scientific benefits, these studies are ethically sensitive and raise concerns about contentious research ethics issues like:

- o Deliberate harm
- o Possible disproportionate payment and hence inducements
- o Third-party risk
- o Withdrawal from the study
- o Research with vulnerable participants

High burden of infectious diseases.

- India carries a high burden of morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases.
- They contribute about 30% of the disease burden in the country.
- Finding novel, efficient, and cost-effective alternatives to existing methods of research in these diseases and their prevention is imperative to reduce this burden.
- controlled human infection studies (CHIS) is a relatively new research model that helps provide unique insights into disease pathogenesis and can accelerate the development of novel medical interventions.

Significance

- Controlled human infection studies (CHIS) offers accelerated, cost-effective, and efficient outcomes using smaller sample sizes in comparison to large clinical trials.
- Its social value includes:
  - o Potential contributions to public health response to diseases of concern
  - o Healthcare decision-making
  - o Policies and economic benefits
  - o Improved pandemic preparedness
  - o Community empowerment

Centre approves new interest rate for PF deposits

Context

- The Centre has accepted the recommendation of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) to increase the interest rate of deposits in Provident Fund (PF) to 8.15%.
- The new rate will be applicable for Current financial year.
- In March 2022, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) had reduced the interest rate on EPF deposits for 2021-22 to a four-decade low of 8.10 per cent from 8.5 per cent in 2020-21.
- EPFO added 16.30 lakh members on a net basis in May this year, according to payroll data released last week.
- EPFO is one of the largest social security organizations.

Employees Provident Fund

- The Employees Provident Fund is a must contribution for salaried employees.
- Besides, an employer is also required to make the matching contribution to the EPF account.
- An employee makes 12 per cent of his wage's contribution to the EPF account on a monthly basis.
- The employee's full contribution is deposited to the EPF account.

A big step in reducing the risk of disasters

Context

- Reducing the risk of disasters is crucial for safeguarding lives, property, and the environment.
- Disasters around the world are claiming more and more lives.
- The consequences of climate change are already on our doorstep.

- Recently, three continents were gripped by heat waves.
- Massive forest fires have ravaged parts of Greece and Canada.
- In India, the river Yamuna breached the highest flood level, recorded 45 years ago, and inundated parts of Delhi.
- The cost of these disasters is yet to be determined.

Preventing the risk of losses

- It is evident that the world needs to do more to prevent the risk of losses from all disasters, whether they are weather-related, earthquakes, or biological like COVID-19. For too long, countries have spent billions responding to disasters rather than paying a little upfront to prevent or reduce their impact.
- Globally we are at the midpoint of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which is the global roadmap for reducing disaster risks and losses.

India's initiative

- India has elevated its priority for G20 through its presidency of the group.
- Specifically, India has established the first G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group.
- Countries that make up the G20 hold around 85% of the global GDP and about two-thirds of the world population.
- And as human vulnerability to disasters is strongly linked to economic decisions, the G20 is in a unique position to chart a new path of disaster risk-informed decision-making.

Early warning systems

- Expanding disaster early warning and early action systems is a top priority.
- Inclusive and multi-hazard early warning systems are among the most effective means of reducing disaster deaths and economic losses.
- During Cyclone Biparjoy this year in Arabian Sea, effective systems for end-to-end early warning and action helped achieve zero deaths from the event in India.
- Preparedness of the power sector helped reduce the disruption time in power supply in the aftermath of the cyclone.
- UN is working towards the goal for Early Warnings for All Initiative, which seeks to create universal coverage for everyone by the end of 2027.
- Enhancing the resilience of infrastructure to withstand climate and disaster risks is another global priority.

Way forward

- India launched with the UN in 2019 the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, to spur policy development and capacity support for disaster resilient infrastructure, especially in developing countries.
- Developing a new approach to financing disaster risk reduction is needed to transform risk reduction plans into concrete actions.
- This effort must be led by finance and economy ministries in collaboration with the private sector.
- G20 nations like Indonesia and India have used risk metrics to allocate resources at the sub-national and local levels for disaster risk reduction.
- The G20 platform must build on what India has started to prevent disasters.

24.07.2023

- **Regulation for select OTT messaging apps**

- **Issue regarding generic supply of bedaquiline**
- **Panel asks to implement welfare schemes for gig workers**
- **Japan to discuss a vision for Global South**
- **How not to tame inflation**

Regulation for select OTT messaging apps

Context

- The New Draft Indian Telecommunication Bill will contain a provision to regulate over-the-top (OTT) communication apps like WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, Skype etc, on a case-to-case basis.
- This means that not every OTT communication app will need to comply with regulations. Only some selected apps will need to take authorisation from the government to operate, based on criteria such as turnover and user base.
- The Draft Indian Telecommunications Bill, 2022 was introduced by the government for public consultation in September 2022.
- The Draft Bill seeks to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933, and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, of 1950.

Authorisation of communication apps

- The Bill is expected to have a provision for the authorisation of communication apps, whether such apps will need to pay a fee on a recurring basis as a percentage of their adjusted gross revenue (AGR), will be notified after the consultation process by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on the subject.
- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will introduce the Telecom Bill in the current monsoon session of Parliament.

Provision of penalties

- Apart from the OTT communication apps, the new version of Bill has likely reduced the penalties for breach of terms and conditions post the discussions with the Ministry of Home Affair.
- In the earlier version, the penalty proposed was up to 5 crores for the breach.
- There is more emphasis on alternate dispute mechanism, wherein mutual settlement will be encouraged rather than litigation for any dispute.

Compoundable and non-compoundable

- Further, the penalty clause, categorization of some offences have been changed to compoundable from non-compoundable.
- Compoundable offences are those specified under the Bill that can be compromised, allowing the complainant to withdraw charges against the accused. Non-compoundable offences are more serious and cannot be settled through compromise.

Issue regarding generic supply of bedaquiline

Context

- Recently, a major barrier for drug-resistant TB care ended, when Johnson & Johnson's patent on bedaquiline expired on July 18, 2023.
- This long-awaited expiry will allow generic manufacturers to supply the drug, but J&J appears intent on maintaining its monopoly over the bedaquiline market.
- Bedaquiline has now become the cornerstone to cure drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB).

What has J&J done

- J&J has filed secondary patents over bedaquiline till 2027, which were granted in 66 low-and middle-income countries.
- It includes 34 countries with a high burden of TB, multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB), and TB/HIV.
- Over the past week, J&J has faced public outrage for seeking to extend its patent on bedaquiline.
- A first of its kind deal between J&J and the Global Drug Facility (GDF), a non-profit distribution agency housed in the WHO, could expand access to the drug.

Data on threat from tuberculosis

- Tuberculosis was the world's deadliest infectious disease, as declared by the WHO, before COVID-19 swept the world.
- Each year, nearly half a million people develop drug-resistant TB and nearly 10.4 million people develop drug-sensitive TB.
- One-third of the world's population has latent TB, a version of the disease that can turn active as immunity falls.
- Nearly 2.8 million patients, the most in the world, live in India making it a national public health emergency.
- Globally, DR-TB is a major contributor to antimicrobial resistance and continues to be a public health threat.

Will the drug be available in India

- Other DR-TB drugs like linezolid have decreased in price by over 90% with generic competition once Pfizer's patent expired in 2015.
- Therefore, national TB programmes are waiting for the generic supply of bedaquiline from Indian manufacturers to reduce prices.
- In India, a 'pre-grant opposition' was filed by a patient group and two TB survivors — Nandita Venkatesan from India, and Phumeza Tisile from South Africa — both of whom had to endure the more toxic DR-TB treatments that lasted up to two years and caused excruciating side effects: they both lost their hearing.
- As a result of their legal challenge, in a landmark decision before World TB Day, the Indian Patent Office rejected the U.S. corporation J&J's secondary patent which would have extended its monopoly for four more years.
- Indian manufacturers will now be able to supply affordable, quality-assured generic versions of bedaquiline in India as the primary patent expired on July 18, 2023.

Panel asks to implement welfare schemes for gig workers

Context

- A parliamentary panel has asked the Ministry of Labour and Employment to formulate and implement welfare schemes for such workers at the earliest.
- The panel took of the absence of any specific welfare scheme by the government for gig and platform workers and unorganized sector workers despite its earlier recommendation.
- The reply of the Ministry is silent on the specific measures contemplated for framing a scheme exclusively for Gig and Platform Workers as well as workers of the unorganized sec- tor in connection with which, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed by EPFO with National Law School of India University(NLSIU), Bangalore.

Observation by committee

- In March this year, the committee noted that since gig and platform workers do not come under the purview of the Employees' Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, appropriate welfare schemes for unorganized sector workers need to be put in place by the government.
- The Ministry in its reply to the committee had then said that MoU was signed in January this year with The Centre for Labour Studies, National Law School of India University, Bangalore for assistance in framing a new scheme for the gig and platform workers as well as workers in the unorganized sector.
- The Standing Committee has also asked the Ministry/EPFO to work out the financial implications and ensure funds for higher pension.

Japan to discuss a vision for Global South

Context

- The Japanese Foreign Minister is scheduled to visit India as part of a six-nation tour in Asia and Africa.
- The visit aims to focus on Japan's cooperation with the Global South and the Indo-Pacific policy unveiled by the Japanese Prime Minister during his recent visit in March, 2023.
- The Japanese Foreign Minister will attend the Quad Foreign Minister's meeting, is expected to hold meetings with the Prime Minister External Affairs Minister and academic delegations of India.
- He will discuss bilateral ties, as well as continue efforts to coordinate priorities of Japan's Presidency of the G-7 with India's Presidency of the G-20.

Strengthening relations

- The Government of Japan intends to further strengthen relations with the countries of South West Asia and Africa toward the realization of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'.
- Japan's special focus on South Asia, including assisting Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process in a "fair and transparent" manner, as well touting Japanese cooperation with India and Bangladesh for the Bay of Bengal-Northeast India "industrial value chain concept" to foster growth in the region.

How not to tame inflation

Context

- The latest Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation figure of 4.8 per cent is discomforting for the RBI as well as the government.
- The government has imposed a ban on exports of white rice with the hope of taming cereal inflation.
- Domestically, it reflects a knee-jerk reaction and a strong pro-consumer bias, which is also anti-farmer.

Hindrance to agri-marketing reforms

- The centre decision to imposed a ban on exports of white rice and wheat, and stocking limits on wheat make a mockery of the agri-marketing reforms.
- There is no doubt that cereals and products inflation is high at 12.71 per cent.
- It contributes about 22.8 per cent to CPI inflation, as it has a high weight of 9.7 per cent in the food group in the CPI basket.
- The inflation rate for wheat stands at 12.37 per cent despite the recent ban on exports and the stocking limits on traders and processors.

Wheat and rice inflation

- What could be a better way to tame wheat and rice (non-PDS) inflation.
- Reduce the import duty on wheat from 40 per cent to say 10 per cent.

- And for rice, unload excess stocks in the open market at lower prices than what the FCI has been doing recently.
- There is also a need to revise the weight of food and beverages in the CPI basket — this is outdated and based on the 2011 consumption survey.
- This weight currently is 45.9 per cent, and food alone is 39 per cent.
- Engel's law clearly shows us that with rising per capita income, people will spend less on food.

June inflation

- Another item in June inflation that deserves attention is Tomato.
- The prices that are bothering the average household currently, show a negative inflation of (-) 34.7 per cent in June 2023.
- It is because last year in June 2022, tomatoes inflation was 158 per cent, and therefore when one compares, year-on-year (YoY) inflation, it turns out to be negative for tomatoes. B
- ut month-on-month (MoM) (June over May 2023) basis, inflation is 64.5 per cent for tomatoes.

Concern for other food items

- There is another important food item whose inflation needs to be checked milk and milk products.
- The category recorded an inflation rate of 8.56 per cent in June 2023 and contributed 11.2 per cent to the overall CPI inflation.
- Among the 299 commodities in the CPI basket, liquid milk has the highest contribution of 11 per cent to CPI inflation.
- Rising feed costs and lumpy skin disease have led to milk production stagnating (222 MT) in FY23 over (221 MT) in FY22.
- The policy solution again lies in reducing import duties on skimmed milk powder (SMP) from 60 per cent to 10 per cent and butter from 40 per cent to 10 per cent.
- Pulses and products inflation in June 2023 was also at double digits (10.53 per cent).

Way forward

- India can contain CPI inflation within 6 per cent, provided it uses import policy for food products liberally and well in time.
- Else, do not be surprised if it breaches the 6 per cent barrier of RBI's price band in September-October-November.

22.07.2023

- **Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill 2023**
- **Portal to report a violation of ban on e-cigarettes**
- **India, Sri Lanka unveil vision for deeper economic ties**
- **CBSE allows Indian languages as medium of instruction**
- **An Internet ban will not restore peace in Manipur**

Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill 2023

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence gave a go-ahead to a Bill that seeks to empower the Commander-in-Chief and Officer-in-Command of Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) with all

disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of personnel serving in or attached to such organisations.
- The bill aims to promote tri-services integration and improve the functioning of inter-services organisations.
- It is part of the ongoing theaterisation drive to optimize the military's resources for future wars.

Observation made by Standing Committee
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence cited reasons for giving assent to the bill and noted that enactment of the Bill will have various tangible benefits such as:
- Maintenance of effective discipline and efficiency in Inter-services establishments by the Heads of Inter-Services Organisations
- Abolition of the system of reverting personnel under disciplinary proceedings to their parent Service units,
- Expeditious disposal of cases of misdemeanor or indiscipline
- Saving of government expenses and time by avoiding multiple proceedings

Present Structure
- Presently, Personnel of the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force are governed in accordance with the provisions contained in their specific Service Acts — the Army Act 1950, Navy Act 1957, Air Force Act 1950.
- When these Acts were enacted, most of the service organisations largely comprised personnel from a single service.
- However, currently several Inter-Services Organisations exist such as Andaman & Nicobar Command, Strategic Forces Command, Defence Space Agency, etc. and joint training establishments like the National Defence Academy and National Defence College, where personnel of the Armed Forces and other forces serve together.
- Hence, the personnel serving in these organisations need to be reverted to their parent Service units for undergoing any disciplinary or administrative action.

Portal to report a violation of ban on e-cigarettes
Context
- The Centre has asked states to report on its portal information on the availability of e-cigarettes on online shopping sites and retail shops despite a ban on it since 2019.
- The Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act (PECA) came into force in 2019.
- In February, the ministry had written to all states and UTs to ensure effective compliance with the ban on e-cigarettes, expressing concern that these devices are still available online and at local vendors.

Aim
- The ban on electronic cigarettes was introduced to protect our younger generation from a new form of toxic addiction.
- The portal www.violation-reporting.in will help the Union Health Ministry collate information and take swift action on reported violations.
- The Centre had cautioned the States and U.T.s about the easy availability of e-cigarettes.

Need for Surveillance

- The Ministry had earlier cautioned all States and Union Territories about the weak implementation of Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (PECA) act, leading to easy availability of e-cigarettes through online, retail, convenient stores, stationery shops and near educational institutions.
- The States were also directed to review the compliance of PECA and issue necessary instructions for effective implementation of the provisions of the Act, through special drives and random checking.

About e-cigarettes

- Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigarettes, are devices powered by batteries that heat a substance, usually in liquid or solid form, containing nicotine and various flavours.
- This heating process creates an aerosol that can be inhaled.
- As a result, the vapour, which contains nicotine, is drawn deep into the lungs and enters the bloodstream.
- In comparison to traditional tobacco smoking, where tobacco leaves are physically burned, e-cigarettes operate differently.
- While tobacco smoking produces harmful byproducts such as tar, carbon monoxide, and numerous other chemicals, e-cigarettes primarily deliver nicotine without the combustion process.

India, Sri Lanka unveil vision for deeper economic ties

Context

- India and Sri Lanka unveiled a new economic partnership for maritime, air, energy and financial connectivity, including the use of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system.
- Both leaders held talks on a number of infrastructure projects that could ensure greater connectivity between the two countries.
- The Prime Minister of India calls for the implementation of the 13th Amendment and provincial elections in the island country.

Various agreements and deal

- India has announced a development assistance package for the Tamils of Indian origin who are marking the 200th anniversary of their arrival in the island nation.
- The agreement on digital transactions was signed between Lanka Pay and ECI International to facilitate acceptance of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in Sri Lanka.
- India will also contribute additionally for development programmes in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

Economic crisis

- Sri Lanka had witnessed worst economic crisis 2022-23.
- The government subsequently entered an agreement with the International Monetary Fund and secured a nearly $3 billion package from it, while agreeing to restructure both its foreign and domestic debt that the Fund estimated at about $41 billion and $42 billion, respectively, as of March 2023.

CBSE allows Indian languages as medium of instruction

Context

- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has asked its schools to consider using Indian languages as optional mediums of instruction to make multilingual education a reality.
- Noting that the Ministry of Education and the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) have taken measures to introduce education in multiple languages under the National Education Policy, 2020.

- CBSE has asked its schools to use available resources and collaborate with each other to make the best out of the multilingual education.

Education through Indian languages

- In view of the initiatives taken to facilitate education through Indian languages, the CBSE affiliated schools may consider using Indian languages, as enumerated in the Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution, as the medium of instruction from foundational stage till end of secondary stage (from pre-primary classes till class 12) as an optional medium in addition to other existing options.
- Schools may explore the available resources, consult with experts in the field, and collaborate with other schools to share best practices to make multilingual education in CBSE schools a reality.
- CBSE further said that this initiative makes it important for schools to become the foundation of multilingual education.

Challenges

- The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) noted the challenges posed by the implementation of multilingual education and utilization of mother tongue as a medium of instruction which include:
    o Availability of skilled teachers capable of teaching multilingual subjects
    o Creation of high-quality multilingual textbooks and time limitation
    o Especially in two-shift government schools

An Internet ban will not restore peace in Manipur

Context

- The ongoing ethnic clashes in Manipur became a significant part of the mainstream discourse.
- The violence in the State began on May 3, 2023.
- Manipur has been under an internet ban since violence first broke out on May 3.
- The curbs have been extended from time to time and are currently in place till July 20.
- The recent viral video clip of sexual violence by a mob to surface and go viral on social media that day and 78 days has posed serious question over the government intention for curbing the internet band.

Blanket order, no supportive data

- Data from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India show that the people of Manipur access the Internet primarily through their smartphones; and wired Internet users primarily constitute institutional, commercial, and higher socio-economic groups.
- Out of a total pie of 0.05 million wireline and 2.36 wireless million users, about 2.2 million connect to the Internet.
- The Internet shutdown in Manipur, first enforced on May 3, is a case of blanket prohibition.
- The entire State is affected, and it is not a case of some of a total of 16 districts being affected; it covers all web traffic and mediums of connectivity.

Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India

- In Anuradha Bhasin vs Union of India, the Supreme Court failed to adjudicate on even one Internet shutdown order.
- The decision by itself did not result in restoration of access but for "State/competent authorities to review all orders suspending internet services".
- Its directions for transparency (such as publication of orders) have not been implemented yet as seen in the flurry of cases and recent joint report by Human Rights Watch and the Internet Freedom Foundation.

Judicial response

- The High Court of Manipur on July 7 directs the Home Department of Manipur to allows provisional access for limited internet access.
- There are no clear definitions on terms such as "social media" or examining continuing prohibition for Internet usage primarily through smartphones.
- Hence, in effect, a ban on Internet access continues in Manipur.
- The response of the Supreme Court has been one of judicial avoidance.
- The top court had an opportunity twice to adjudicate when a petitioner challenged the Internet shutdown and later when the State government itself appealed the order of the High Court for partial restoration.

Conclusion

- Information flows are necessary to ensure the accountability of the State and central governments in taking steps to ensure truth, justice and reconciliation.
- Freedom of speech and expression and also freedom of trade and commerce through the medium of the internet are constitutionally protected rights under Articles 19(1)(a) and Articles 19(1)(g).
- There is an absence of data or specific instances of violence being prevented due to the jamming of Internet connectivity.

21.07.2023

- **Understanding Rajya Sabha Rule 176 vs Rule 267**
- **Centre bans white rice exports forthwith to control price**
- **Chandrayaan-3 completes 4th orbit-raising manoeuvre**
- **SC urges Centre to transfer cheetahs to another location**
- **India's data protection law needs refinement**

Understanding Rajya Sabha Rule 176 vs Rule 267

Context

- The Rajya Sabha witness disruption in monsoon session proceeding after the Opposition demanded that all other business be suspended for the day to take up the Manipur issue, while the government had agreed for a "Short Duration Discussion".
- The Opposition's demand had come under Rule 267, which has emerged as a thorny issue in Parliament sessions recently.
- No notice given by the Opposition under Rule 267 has been accepted in recent times.

About Rule 267 in Council of States

- According to the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha), under Rule 267, "Any member, may, with the consent of the Chairman, move that any rule may be suspended in its application to a motion related to the business listed before the Council of that day and if the motion is carried, the rule in question shall be suspended for the time being."
- Simply put, under this rule, Rajya Sabha MPs can give a written notice to suspend all listed business and discuss an issue of importance the country is facing.

About Rule 176

- Rule 176 allows for a short-duration discussion, not exceeding two-and-a-half hours, on a particular issue.
- It states that "any member desirous of raising discussion on a matter of urgent public importance may give notice in writing to the Secretary-General specifying clearly and precisely the matter to be raised.
- The notice shall be accompanied by an explanatory note stating reasons for raising discussion on the matter in question.
- The rule, however, is clear that no formal motion or voting shall be held under a short-duration discussion.

Why has Rule 267 been a contentious issue

- Rule 267 is not the only way for MPs to question the government and seek a response. They can ask questions related to any issue during the Question Hour in which the concerned minister has to provide oral or written answers.
- The Opposition has complained that none of its notices under Rule 267 are being taken up.
- TMC MP had argued that after 2016, when the House discussed demonetisation, no notice under Rule 267 had been allowed, whereas earlier, Rajya Sabha chairmen would accept such notices.

Centre bans white rice exports forthwith to control price

Context

- According to a notification of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), the Centre has prohibited the export of non-basmati white rice.
- The Directorate General of Foreign Trade announced the ban would come into effect immediately and exemptions would be given only if the loading of non-basmati rice on the ship had commenced before the notification or the shipping bill was filed and vessels had already berthed or arrived and anchored in Indian ports.

Non-basmati white rice export data
- Non-basmati white rice accounts for nearly 25-30 per cent of total rice exported from the country.
- The total exports of non-basmati white rice from India were $4.2 million in 2022-23, as against $2.62 million in the preceding year.
- Major destinations of India's non-basmati white rice exports include Thailand, Italy, Spain, Sri Lanka and the USA.

Availability of non-basmati white rice
- The Union Food Ministry, in a statement, said the step was taken to ensure adequate availability of non-basmati white rice in the domestic market and to curb the price rise. Non-basmati rice was exported under the category 'Free with export duty of 20%'.
- The retail prices have increased by 11.5% over a year and 3% over the past month.
- Export duty of 20% on non-basmati white rice was imposed last year to lower the price and to ensure availability in the domestic market.
- However, the export of this variety increased from 33.66 lakh tonnes (September-March 2021-22) to 42.12

Chandrayaan-3 completes 4th orbit-raising manoeuvre

Context
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully performed the fourth orbit-raising manoeuvre (Earth-bound perigee firing) of the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft from the ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC) in Bengaluru.
- India celebrates International Moon Day 2023 by propelling Chandrayaan-3 a step closer to the Moon.

Moon landing
- Chandrayaan-3, which is slated to make a soft landing on the Moon's surface next month, is currently going around the Earth in elliptical orbits, sequentially raising the heights of these orbits.
- The spacecraft is supposed to make five such orbit-raising manoeuvres to continuously move into higher and higher orbits before beginning to move directly towards the moon.
- Once there, it would do similar exercises to slowly get into lower and lower orbits around the moon before eventually reaching a circular orbit about 100 km from the lunar surface.
- It is from this circular orbit that the final descent to the Moon's surface would take place on August 23 or 24.

Aim of the mission
- The mission aims to expand our understanding of the Moon through detailed studies of its topography, seismography, mineral identification and distribution, surface chemical composition, thermo-physical characteristics of top soil, and the composition of the lunar atmosphere.
- Chandrayaan-3 carries scientific instruments designed to study various aspects of the lunar surface.
- These include the thermophysical properties of the lunar regolith, lunar seismicity, the lunar surface plasma environment, and the elemental composition in the vicinity of the landing site on the Moon.

SC urges Centre to transfer cheetahs to another location

Context

- Concerned over the death of 3 cheetahs in Kuno National Park (KNP) of Madhya
- Pradesh, the Supreme Court urged the Centre to consider relocating them to
- alternative sites like Rajasthan.
- On Thursday, the Supreme Court expressed its concern over the recent deaths in
- KNP of three cheetahs that had been relocated from South Africa and Namibia.
- The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday told the Union government that the deaths of 40% of the 20 cheetahs brought from South Africa and Namibia to the Kuno National Park (KNP) within a year does not present a good picture.

India's data protection law needs refinement

Context

- The Data protection laws control the gathering, use, transfer, and disclosure of personal information and the security of that information.
- India is no Europe, and this seems especially true in the face of a task such as drafting and conceptualizing a data protection law for over 1.4 billion Indians.
- The European Union's (EU) data protection law, i.e., the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), came into force in the middle of 2018 and achieved widespread popularity as arguably the most comprehensive data privacy law in the world.
- However, the GDPR has been saddled with challenges of implementation and risks being relegated to the status of a paper tiger.

Issues around data use

- The union government is likely to table India's fresh data protection law in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament.
- In 2022, the government released the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill, 2022 for public consultation.
- This is its third recent attempt at drafting a data protection law.
- While the draft released for public comments was not as comprehensive as its previous versions, news reports suggest that the government may present a Bill that is largely similar.

- Considering this, critical gaps remain in the DPDP Bill that would affect its implementation and overall success.
- In its scope and definition, the DPDP Bill only protects personal data, that is any data that has the potential to identify directly or indirectly an individual.

Limited reach of data protection board

- Another gap is the inability of the proposed data protection board to initiate a proceeding of its own accord.
- Under the Bill, the board is the authority that is entrusted with enforcing the law.
- The board can only institute a proceeding for adjudication if someone affected makes a complaint to it, or the government or a court directs it to do so.
- The only exception to this rule is when the board can take action on its own to enforce certain duties listed by the Bill for users.

Way forward

- The Competition Commission of India, which is responsible for the enforcement of India's antitrust law.
- These are not the only gaps in the DPDP Bill, but finding solutions to them would help address challenges in implementation in a significant way and make for a more future-proof legislation.
- Changes can help make the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 'future-proof' and ensure a better complaints mechanism.

20.07.2023

- **Takeaways from the NATO summit**
- **Henley Passport Index, 2023**
- **Rules relating to retirement benefits IAS, IPS, IFoS**
- **Status of nursing colleges in districts across India**
- **A job and career right the disabled cannot be denied**

Takeaways from the NATO summit

Context

- Following the Madrid Summit of 2022 when the allies agreed on new force models and adopted a Strategic Concept to drive the alliance over the next decade, the recent Vilnius Summit of 11-12 July 2023 appeared to be evaluating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) progress in the past year and preparing it for any future conflict.
- For quite a few years, many questions were asked about the relevance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

How was this summit different

- A standout of the Vilnius Summit was the attendance of Ukrainian President and the anticipation around the possibility of extending NATO membership to Ukraine.
- In this regard, the launch of the NATO-Ukraine Council as a forum for crisis consultations and decision-making indicated that NATO tried to assuage the feelings of Ukraine for not being included in the alliance by creating a mechanism for its wider engagement, support and future inclusion as a full member.
- From Ukraine's perspective, the Vilnius summit did usher promise but little immediate gains.

o   All three priorities outlined by Ukrainian President went unfulfilled:
o   New weapons packages
o   Security guarantees
o   Invitation to join NATO

Significance of the entry of new members

- The inclusion of Finland and approval of Sweden as NATO members indicates a few things.
- First, it signals that the Alliance continues to practise Article 10 of the Washington Treaty signed in April 1949 which states that member countries can invite other European countries to become members of NATO.
- It rests Ukraine's potential membership on fertile grounds and conceptually deters Russia from taking steps against members of NATO.
- Secondly, Turkey's scaling back of its long-standing opposition to Sweden's inclusion in NATO is a significant shift.

Other emerging issues

- The Vilnius summit minced no words on the challenges and threats emerging from China's stated ambitions and coercive policies.
- It stated that NATO faces threats from China's malicious hybrid cyber operations, as well as confrontational rhetoric and disinformation, which specifically aim at NATO allies and pose a threat to the security of the Alliance.
- The NATO summit emphasised that the developments in the Indo-Pacific have become increasingly consequential for Euro-Atlantic security with expanding space for Quad countries, along with other regional countries like New Zealand and South Korea.

Henley Passport Index, 2023

Context

- According to the latest Henley Passport Index 2023 ranking India's position in the passport is at the 80th position, moving it up five places from its position in 2022. Indians can now travel to 57 destinations without a visa.
- India's current rank ties it with countries like Togo and Senegal.
- The Henley Passport Index is the ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.
- The index includes 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.

Openness index

- Henley has also released an openness index, which ranks countries based on the visa-free access they provide for international travelers.
- India, along with Libya, Bhutan, Eritrea and Equatorial Guinea, is in the second-last spot as it provides visa-free arrival to passport holders from only five countries.
- At the bottom are Afghanistan, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, and Turkmenistan, which score zero for permitting no visa-free access for any passport.

Where Indians can travel visa-free

- As per the Henley Passport Index, Indian passport holders can travel to a total of 57 countries without a visa.

- This includes Iran, Jordan, Oman and Qatar in the Middle East; and Bolivia and El Salvador in South America.
- The list further includes Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Niue, Palau Islands, Samoa, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu in the Oceania region; and Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean.
- Among Asian countries, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Laos, Macao (SAR China), Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Timor-Leste offer visa-free arrival to Indian passport holders.

Strongest passports globally
- Singapore has topped the Henley Passport Index this year, knocking off Japan from the top spot for the first time in five years.
- The Singaporean passport provides visa-free travel access to a total of 192 countries.
- Germany, Italy, and Spain moved up to the second rank with visa-free access to 190 destinations, and Japanese passport holders join those of six other nations — Austria, Finland, France, Luxembourg, South Korea, and Sweden in third place with access to 189 destinations without a prior visa.

Rules relating to retirement benefits IAS, IPS, IFoS

Context
- The Central government has amended rules relating to retirement benefits of IAS, IPS (Indian Police Service) and IFoS (Indian Forest Service) pensioners empowering itself to act against them and withhold or withdraw their pension even without a reference from the state government if they are found guilty of grave misconduct or are convicted of a serious crime.
- The new rules means that the Centre may not have to wait for a reference from the state government to act against a pensioner found guilty of grave misconduct or convicted of a serious crime by a Court.

Amendmended Rules
- In a July 6 notification on the All-India Services (Death-cum-Retirement Benefits) Amendment Rules, 2023, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said a 'grave misconduct' includes communication or disclosure of any document or information mentioned in the Official Secrets Act and a 'serious crime' includes any crime involving an offence under the Official Secrets Act.

- Sources in the government pointed to an earlier rule 3(3) in the All-India Services (Death-cum-Retirement Benefits) Rules, 1958, which stated that the Central government may withhold or withdraw pension or any part of it "on a reference from the State Government concerned, if after retirement a pensioner is convicted".
- A source in the DoPT said this means that the Centre may not have to wait for a reference from the state government to act against a pensioner found guilty of grave misconduct or convicted of a serious crime by a Court.

Rationale behind the move
- The rationale behind this amendment was that sometimes state governments concerned do not send a reference for action against retired officials even after conviction by courts of law.
- On applicability of the Centre's rules related to deputation of All India Services officials also, the Central and West Bengal governments were at loggerheads two years ago and prior to that.
- Considering the nature of All India Services, the Central government is often helpless in acting against such officers without a reference from state governments.

- The amended rules reiterate that the decision of the Central Government on withholding or withdrawing the pension "shall be final".

Status of nursing colleges in districts across India

Context

- According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare data, there are no nursing colleges in 40 percent of districts across India.
- In fact, 42% of nursing institutions are clustered in five southern States, while three western States have 17%.
- India has 35 lakh nurses but only 2.06 nurses for every 1,000 people.

Government Intervention

- The Centre has attempted to correct the regional disparity with a scheme to co-locate 157 new nursing colleges in medical colleges by April 2025, and provide short-term training for nurses.
- However, it says that many States have failed to utilise the scheme properly.
- Nursing services form the backbone of any medical establishment.
- The Central government has announced a scheme to set up 157 new nursing colleges co-located with medical colleges in the next two years, with financial support of ₹10 crore a college.

Growth of the institutions

- There has been a 36% growth in the number of institutions offering undergraduate nursing education since 2014-15, resulting in a 40% growth in nursing seats, there is a regional skew within these statistics.
- About 64% of the nursing workforce is currently trained in just eight States; 42% of nursing institutions are concentrated in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.
- While 17% are in the western States of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.
- Only 2% of nursing colleges are in the northeastern States.

WHO Report

- According to the WHO, approximately 27 million men and women make up the global nursing and midwifery workforce, accounting for nearly 50% of the global health workforce.
- There is a global shortage of health workers, in particular nurses and midwives, who represent more than 50% of the current shortage in health workers.
- The largest shortages of nurses and midwives are in Southeast Asia and Africa.

A job and career right the disabled cannot be denied

Context

- Human rights are the fundamental or basic rights, which should not be taken away by any individual or government.
- The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, or the PwD Act, first recognised the right of the disabled person to be employed and promoted in government jobs on equal basis with others.

Reservation of seats for the disabled

- In order to ensure government jobs, PwD Act introduced 3% reservation for the disabled in employment.
- The reservation of seats for the disabled existed in Groups C and D prior to the introduction of the PwD Act.

- Now, the Act extended reservation for the disabled in Groups A and B a progressive step towards ensuring the dignity of and equality for the disabled at all levels including career advancement in government jobs.
- In addition to this, it also fixed the percentage of reservation of seats at 3%, which opened the gates of recruitment to disabled people in different sectors of the government.

An integral part of reservation

- Reservation for the disabled in promotion in all groups was first interpreted as an integral part of reservation by the Department of Personnel and Training, which was passed in 1998.
- This Government Order was issued by the department in 1998 after the passage of the PwD Act, 1995.
- It happened after Parliament enacted the provision of reservation of promotion for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), reversing the Supreme Court of India verdict in Indra Sawhney Etc. vs Union of India And Others, Etc., where reservation in promotion for SCs and STs was withdrawn.
- Unfortunately, another Department of Personnel and Training order in 2005 withdrew the reservation of the disabled in promotion in Groups A and B.
- The department's reversal of its own order was not only shocking but also clearly reflected the apathetic and hostile attitudes of the administration and government towards the needs and aspirations of the disabled.

Counter action, contempt filing

- The Supreme Court in 2008 in a case of Rajeev Gupta against the Union of India had hearings for around eight years, it was adjudicated to grant reservation in promotion for the disabled in Groups A and B, which, was abrogated by Department of Personnel and Training order of 2005.
- The final judgment was made in 2016, granting reservation in promotion in Groups A and B.
- But the Government of India did not make any effort or give any direction to implement the judgment.
- Mr. Gupta then filed a case of contempt in the Supreme Court in 2017; the hearing continues.

Government's response

- A miscellaneous application in Civil Appeal, Siddaraju vs State of Karnataka & Ors., was filed by the government, in this case for clarification on the ways and means to implement reservation in promotion for the disabled.
- But the miscellaneous application was an attempt to delay the process of implementation of reservation in promotion for the disabled.
- The application was subsequently dismissed in 2021.

Way forward

- The judiciary has played a significant role in granting justice and equality to the disabled especially after the enactment of the PwD Act, 1995.
- There have been several court cases where persons with disabilities have had redress of their grievances and been able to gain their meaningful and dignified place in society.
- The right of getting reservation in promotion for persons with disabilities could be ensured under Article 16(1) of the Constitution.
- By prolonging the process of final adjudication in the issue of reservation in promotion, the judiciary is only compounding government apathy towards disabled persons and their rights.

19.07.2023

- **The India-UAE deal to trade with rupees**
- **India reports a record DPT3 immunisation coverage**
- **India, France will develop new-gen military equipment**
- **Multilateral Development Banks efforts to tackle poverty**
- **A push for GM mustard disregarding science, the law**

The India-UAE deal to trade with rupees

Context

- During Prime Minister India recent visit to the UAE, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Central Bank of the UAE signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs).
- While the first established a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions, the other was for interlinking payment systems.

Promotions of local currencies

- The first of the two MoUs aims to establish a Local Currency Settlement System (LCSS) to promote the use of rupee and the dirham bilaterally.
- It will cover all current and permitted capital account transactions.
- According to RBI, it would enable exporters and importers to send invoices and pay in their respective domestic currencies, which in turn would help the development of the INR-AED foreign exchange market.
- It would also help promote investments and remittances between the two countries.
- The World Bank noted in the 2023 Migration and Development Brief that India experienced a 24.4% increase in remittances to $111 billion in 2022 on a year-over-year basis which represents 3.3% of the GDP.

Interlinking of payment systems

- The second of the two MoUs links India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) with its UAE-counterpart Instant Payment Platform (IPP).
- This is alongside the linking of card switches, that is, RuPay switch and UAESWITCH. Card switches entail facilitating communications and transactions between different payment service providers.
- The agreement would also explore linking of payment messaging systems of the two countries.

Significant for exporters

- The focus on denominating export contracts and invoices in the local currency helps avert exchange-rate risks, which further facilitates the scope to discover competitive pricing.
- The major items of export from India to the UAE include mineral fuels, mineral oils and products, bituminous substances, mineral waxes, followed by pearls, precious stones and metals, electrical machineries and equipment, among other things.
- The major items imported by India are petroleum crude and petroleum related products. India-UAE trade rose to $85 billion in 2022.
- UAE was India's third largest trading partner and second-largest export destination in FY2022-23.

India reports a record DPT3 immunisation coverage

Context

- According to latest report by report by the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), India has surpassed the pre-pandemic record of childhood immunization coverage.
- As per the report, the coverage rate for third dose of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP3), in India rose to an all-time of 93% in 2022, surpassing the previous pre-pandemic best of 91% recorded in 2019, and also marking a sharp increase from the 85% recorded in 2021.

About DPT vaccine

- DPT vaccine is a class of combination vaccines against three infectious diseases in humans: diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus. This vaccine is administered to children in 3 doses, for children below 7 years of age.
- The coverage of this vaccine is often used to assess how well countries are doing in providing routine immunisation services to children.

Finding of the report

- The WHO and UNICEF estimates for national immunisation coverage for 2022, showed that in the WHO South-East Asia Region, the coverage rate for DPT3 recovered to the pre-pandemic level of 91%, a sharp increase from the 82% recorded in 2021.
- The region also witnessed a 6% improvement in the coverage of the measles vaccine, rising to 92% in 2022 from 86% in 2021.
- The report noted that the gains could be attributed to improvements in immunisation in countries like India and Indonesia with large populations of infants, which masked the slower recovery, stagnation or ongoing declines witnessed in the majority of low- and middle-income countries.
- About 104 countries have achieved at least 90 percent coverage of DPT-3 vaccine.

Other vaccines

- The report also revealed that by 2022, only 14 percent of girls were fully protected against the Human papillomavirus (HPV) globally.
- HPV is a viral infection that can lead to cervical cancer in women.
- The report also noted that there has been a slow recovery in measles vaccine coverage.
- Global coverage against measles was 83 percent in 2022, up 2 percentage points from 2021.
- The current level is lower than the 86 percent coverage in 2019.
- The herd immunity threshold for measles is 95 percent.

India, France will develop new-gen military equipment

Context

- India and France agreed to develop new generation military equipment as part of a long-term roadmap.
- During the recent visit of the Prime Minister of India to France, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to expand overall strategic cooperation including in defence.
- Both sides unveiled an India-France Indo-Pacific roadmap for boosting cooperation in the region.

Defence deal

- The Defence Acquisition Council, headed by Defence Minister of India recently accorded the approval for the purchase of 26 Rafale-M (naval variant) and the three-Scorpene submarine from France.
- Both countries are working on a roadmap to produce next-generation military equipment and technologies.

Nuclear power project

- India and France deal on 1650 MW nuclear power project in Jaitapur in Maharashtra, has also made progress.
- Both sides are engaged in talks to resolve all issues including those relating to civil nuclear liability, cost and techno-commercial matters.

Multilateral Development Banks efforts to tackle poverty

Context

- The G20 Independent Expert Group on Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks is learnt to have recommended that the multilateral development banks (MDBs) adopt a triple mandate to address eliminating extreme poverty, inclusive growth and the financing of global public goods along with a suggestion to constitute a 'Global Challenges Funding' mechanism for 'Global Public Goods'.

MDB roadmap

- The group's co-convenor N K Singh, in his remarks at the G20 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' (FMCBG) Meeting at Gandhinagar, supported estimates based on earlier discussions that an additional spending of $3 trillion per year is needed by MDBs by 2030.
- Out of which two-thirds could come from domestic resource mobilisation.
- The group has leaned in support of a general capital increase, with the increase in official financing expected to be split between concessional and non-concessional funds.
- MDBs should be the preferred institutions; expanding to $90 billion per year for concessional finance and $300 billion in non-concessional lending.

G20 Expert Group on Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks

- Under the aegis of India's G20 Presidency, a G20 Expert Group on "Strengthening Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) has been constituted.
- The objectives of the Expert Group are:
- An evaluation of various estimates regarding the scale of funding required by and from MDBs for addressing their and member countries' increased financing needs for SDG and transboundary challenges, taking into account the additional capacity that can be derived from the CAF recommendations alongside other important sources such as the private sector and public sector funds
- Mechanisms for coordination among MDBs for them to address and finance global development and other challenges more effectively.

A push for GM mustard disregarding science, the law

Context

- A determined battle by environmentalists in the Supreme Court of India against Delhi University's genetically modified (GM) herbicide-tolerant (HT) mustard is all that stands between GM food and Indian farmers and consumers.
- GM crops are quite different from conventional varieties and hybrids, such as those developed by farmers, agricultural research institutions and companies.

GM crops in India and debate

- India has seen a robust debate on GM crops in the last two decades.
- Environmentalists, scientists, politicians, farmers, consumers, and the higher judiciary have asked probing questions about the safety, efficacy and even the very necessity of GM food.

- Many have been alarmed by the experience with Bt cotton, the first and only GM crop approved in the country.
- Long-term research suggests that Bt cotton has provided only fleeting benefits to farmers, while enormously increasing their costs of cultivation and risk.

Convergence in risk assessment

- Working across an interval of five years, the two committees unanimously highlighted major weaknesses in the regulatory system, and called for utmost caution before releasing GM food.
- The Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests made a specific reference to GM mustard, and asked the government to conduct a thorough, independent, and transparent assessment of long-term biosafety, environmental risk and socio-economic impacts.

Misleading the court

- In recent hearings in the Supreme Court, to get around the growing evidence of long-term ecological and health risks of herbicide-tolerant (HT) crops, the government has argued that GM mustard should not be considered HT at all — since the objective for developing it was to improve yields.
- The government's argument is nothing but a red herring, designed perhaps to confuse the Supreme Court.
- It would be shocking if scientists involved with developing GM mustard were to go along with misleading the Court and the public.

Concerns

- Biotechnologists insert select genes at a random location in the DNA of a plant to develop a GM crop.
- The insertion makes a GM crop express traits that it ordinarily would not.
- For instance, GM mustard has been altered to withstand the broad-spectrum plant-killer or herbicide glufosinate.
- This makes it easier to develop hybrid mustard seeds for higher yields.
- And farmers growing GM mustard can spray the herbicide to kill all plants except the mustard.

Conclusion

- Indian farmers have witnessed the disaster caused by Bt cotton.
- Their protests along consumers and scientists against the environmental release of GM mustard will hopefully be a wake-up call for the government to impose a moratorium on the release of this and all other GMOs.
- The future of farming and India's food culture and heritage hangs in the balance.
- Rather than engaging with constitutional issues involving public health, environmental protection and agricultural livelihoods, the government is disregarding facts and logic before the Supreme Court.

18.07.2023

- **SC may send Delhi dispute case to Constitution Bench**
- **India-UAE rupee-dirham deal**
- **U.S. hands over 105 antiquities to India**
- **New guidelines for designation of senior advocates in the SC**
- **A Bill that fences in the right to information**

SC may send Delhi dispute case to Constitution Bench

Context

- The Supreme Court had noted that it may refer the Delhi government's petition against a Central Ordinance to a Constitution Bench for an authoritative pronouncement.
- The Ordinance which effectively gives power over civil services in the national capital to the Lieutenant-Governor.
- The court's indication that it may refer the case to a Constitution Bench came despite a submission made by Solicitor-General for the Centre, that the Ordinance would be tabled in Parliament during the Monsoon Session.

SC observations

- The Chief Justice, however, went on to outline the questions of law that may require the attention of the Constitution Bench.
- He said a cardinal issue would be whether the National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Ordinance, 2023 amounted to an amendment of the Constitution via the Ordinance route.
- The Delhi government has argued that the Ordinance took away its control over civil servants.

Constitutional validity

- Article 239AA holds that the power and control over services should be vested in the elected government.
- The Chief Justice observed that the effective transfer of power over the civil services amounted to nullifying Entry 41 of the State List of the Constitution.
- Entry 41 deals with the State's power over the "State public services and the State Public Service Commission".

Supreme Court earlier Judgment

- In May judgment of a Constitution Bench led by the Chief Justice had limited the role of the Lieutenant-Governor, considered an arm of the Centre, over bureaucrats in the capital to three specific areas — public order, police and land.
- The Ordinance was promulgated within eight days of the Supreme Court verdict, which had upheld the authority of the Delhi government to make laws and administer civil services in the national capital.
- The Union Home Ministry contended "Parliament is competent and has overriding powers to make laws even on subjects regarding which the Legislative Assembly of Delhi would be competent to enact laws".

India-UAE rupee-dirham deal

Context

- The United Arab Emirate's Ambassador to India has said that the recent India-UAE rupee-dirham deal does not carry any agenda to "de-dollarise" the global economy.
- The deal was signed during Prime Minister recent visit to Abu Dhabi is bilateral.
- The deal would significantly ease the path for trade between India and the UAE by lowering transaction costs and making it easier to convert the currency.

UAE-India trade

- The UAE-India trade has increased approximately 15% since the implementation of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between them in May 2022.
- Bilateral trade including oil purchases have reached about $85 billion, of which UAE exports to India make up about $50 billion.

Bilateral relations

- The UAE has become a dialogue partner of the SCO, and has applied to be a member of the BRICS group of emerging economies.
- The UAE President is expected to visit New Delhi in September to attend the G-20 summit where the country is a special invitee.
- In addition, the Prime Minister of India has been invited to attend the CoP28 climate change conference in Dubai in November, 2023.

Air Service Agreement

- According to aviation experts, if Indian government's plan to revise air service agreement with UAE will constrain growth of Indian carriers and could lead to an aero political dispute.
- The talks between the UAE and India over revising the air service agreement (ASA) signed in 2014 have hit an impasse over the past few years.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation is reluctant to increase the number of seats between UAE cities, including Dubai, and some 15 Indian cities, as it could take away business from Indian airlines.

U.S. hands over 105 antiquities to India

Context

- Following the State Visit of Prime Minister India to the United States in June 2023, the Indian Consulate in New York on Monday took possession of 105 trafficked antiquities from American authorities.
- The repatriation ceremony was held at the Indian Consulate in New York and the antiquities would soon be transported to India.
- During Prime Minister of India visit to the U.S. in 2016, 16 artefacts were handed over by the U.S.
- In 2021, the U.S. government handed over 157.
- In 2022, the U.S. authorities formally handed over 307 antiquities, estimated to be worth nearly $4 million to Indian officials.

Artefacts details

- The 105 artefacts represent a wide geographical spread in terms of their origin in India with:
  o 47 from eastern India
  o 27 from southern India
  o 22 from central India
  o 06 from northern India
  o 03 from western India.
- Spanning a period from 2nd-3rd century CE to 18th-19th century CE, the artefacts are made of terracotta, stone, metal and wood.
- Around 50 of them have religious significance.

Cultural Property Agreement

- India and the U.S. have also agreed to work for a Cultural Property Agreement that would help prevent illegal trafficking of cultural artefacts in future.
- Such an understanding would add further value to the dynamic bilateral collaboration between Homeland Security and law enforcement agencies of the two countries.

New guidelines for designation of senior advocates in the SC

Context

- The Supreme Court has published new guidelines for the designation of senior advocates practicing mainly in the Apex Court.
- The Supreme Court has issued fresh guidelines for the designation of senior advocates following the May 12 judgment in Indira Jaising vs Supreme Court which modified the criteria for senior designation.

New guidelines

- The new guidelines prescribe the minimum age as 45 years to apply for the 'senior advocate' designation.
- This age limit may, however, be relaxed by the Committee, the Chief Justice of India, or a Supreme Court judge if they have recommended an advocate's name.
- However, no minimum age was prescribed under the 2017 guidelines.
- Although the 2017 guidelines say that the CJI along with "any judge" can recommend an advocate's name for designation, the 2023 guidelines specify that the CJI along with **"any Judge of the Supreme Court"** may recommend **in writing** the name of an advocate for designation.

Marks for publications

- Previously, the guidelines stated that 15 marks were set aside for publications. However, keeping in line with the May 12 ruling, the new guidelines state that only 5 marks will be given for "publication of academic articles, experience of teaching assignments in the field of law," and "guest lectures delivered in law schools and professional institutions connected with law" combined.

What are the 2018 guidelines

- In October 2018, the Apex Court released a list of "Guidelines to Regulate the Conferment of Designation of Senior Advocates" while acting on a plea filed by India's first woman Senior Advocate, Indira Jaising, for greater transparency in the designation process.
- The guidelines discouraged the system of 'voting by secret ballot", except in cases where it was "unavoidable."
- According to the 2018 guidelines, a "Committee for Designation of Senior Advocates," or "permanent committee," was created and empowered with powers of conferment.

Why are the guidelines being changed

- In February 2023, the Central Government sought to change guidelines for the designation of senior lawyers, issued by the Supreme Court after the 2017 ruling.
- In its application, the Central Government aimed at modifying the 2017 order on the designation guidelines for lawyers based on a "point-based system", which awarded 40% weightage to publications, personality, and suitability gauged through the interview. The Centre argued that this system is subjective, ineffective, and dilutes the "esteem and dignity of the honor being conferred traditionally."

A Bill that fences in the right to information

Context

- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022.
- The bill is likely to be introduced in the Monsoon Session of Parliament.
- The draft Bill was placed in the public domain in December 2022 but the final Bill has not been placed before the public.
- Citizens are concerned that if two of its provisions are not changed, it may lead to a major regression for democracy.

Inception of RTI Act

- The Indian Right to Information (RTI) Act, effective since October 12, 2005, is one of the best transparency laws in the world, empowering citizens and is a practical recognition of their role as the rulers and owners of India.
- This is the outcome of people's struggles led by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan's fight starting in rural Rajasthan which culminated in the drafting of the law in 2004.
- The RTI preamble elegantly states that democracy requires informed citizens and transparency in the affairs of their government so that they can hold it accountable and curb corruption.
- It harmonized the need for an efficient government while preserving the ideals of democracy.

Concerns over Right to Information

- The proposed Digital Personal Data Protection Bill has two provisions which would greatly weaken the Indian citizen's right to information.
- Through Section 30(2)(a), the draft Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 (DPDP Bill), proposes significantly slimming down Section 8(1)(j), one of the various exemptions where Indian citizens are not entitled to information under the RTI Act.
- Section 8(1)(j) stipulates that the Indian state is not obliged to disclose personal information under the RTI Act which has no relationship to any public interest or activity, or which causes the unwarranted invasion of the individual's privacy.
- In the proposed Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, the plan to amend Section 8(1)(j) in the RTI Act will greatly weaken the Indian citizen's right to information.
- Section 30(2)(b) of the Bill further deletes the clause's accompanying provision.

Conclusion

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill seeks to address concerns regarding data privacy and security in India.
- The bill outlines stringent provisions regarding data protection, data sharing, and data storage.
- However, there have been discussions surrounding the possibility of diluting the original proposals on data privacy within the bill, raising concerns among privacy advocates.
- The bill prohibits any private or government entity from utilizing an individual's data without their explicit consent.
- It remains to be seen how these concerns will be addressed during the parliamentary proceedings.

17.07.2023

- **Centre sets up new panel to review all NSO data**
- **Centre not to consider Lightning as natural disaster**
- **India to launch project on tax & financial crime investigation**
- **Panel recommended medical review for Kuno cheetahs**
- **Aiming for Equality**

Centre sets up new panel to review all NSO data

Context

- The Union government has constituted a new internal oversight mechanism for official data, revamping a Standing Committee on Economic Statistics (SCES) set up in late 2019.

- In an order issued recently, the Statistics Ministry said that the SCES, which was tasked with examining economic indicators only, will now be replaced by a Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) which has a broader mandate to review the framework and results of all surveys conducted under the aegis of the National Statistical Office (NSO).
- Pronab Sen, former Chairman of the National Statistical Commission (NSC), has been named the chair of the new panel.

Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS)

- The SCoS with "enhanced terms of reference" vis-à-vis the SCES aims to ensure more coverage has 10 official members, and four non-official members who are eminent academics.
- It can have up to 16 members, as per the order issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Intension behind the move

- The development of the Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) comes amid sharp critiques of India's statistical machinery by members of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, including its chairperson, Bibek Debroy.
- He had mooted an overhaul of the system, and contended that the Indian Statistical Service has "little expertise in survey design".

About National Statistical Organization

- A National Statistical Organization (NSO), also known as a National Statistics Office or National Statistical Office, is an agency or department responsible for collecting, compiling, analyzing, and disseminating official statistical data at the national level. NSOs play a crucial role in providing accurate and reliable statistical information for decision-making, policy formulation, and monitoring the progress of a country.
- NSO acts as the nodal agency under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation for the planned development of the statistical system in the country.

Centre not to consider Lightning as natural disaster

Context

- The Union government is not in favor of declaring lightning a natural disaster as deaths caused by it can be prevented by making people aware of safety steps.
- Some Indian States have recently demanded lightning to be considered a natural disaster.
- States such as Bihar and West Bengal have been demanding that lightning deaths be covered as a natural disaster.
- India is among only five countries in the world that has an early warning system for lightning — the forecast is available from five days to up to three hours.

Fund allocation under disaster

- At present, cyclones, droughts, earthquakes, fires, floods, tsunamis, hailstorms, landslides, avalanches, cloudbursts, pest attacks, frost, and cold waves are considered disasters.
- These disasters are covered under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) which is 75% funded by the Centre.
- Lightning prevalence is more at night and early hours in hilly states and more during the day in the plains.

Death cases due to lightning

- According to Bihar's Disaster Management Minister, Bihar is one of the most vulnerable States and as many as 107 had died after being struck by lightning till July 6.
- In the past few years, there has been a spurt in deaths due to lightning.
- It is possible that climate change is one of the reasons.
- In the past five years, more than 1,500 people have lost their lives in Bihar.
- On June 25, 2020, more than 100 people died in a single day after they were struck by lightning
- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data show that 2,880 people died in lightning strikes in 2021.

India to launch project on tax & financial crime investigation

Context

- Recently while addressing a 'G20 High-Level Tax Symposium on Combating Tax Evasion, Corruption and Money Laundering, Finance Minister made a case for further strengthening of global architecture to combat financial crimes, money laundering and sharing of information about different asset classes including cryptocurrencies.
- With the advancement in technologies and openness in international trade and commerce, criminals have started utilizing sophisticated measures to transfer illegal proceeds across borders through multi-layered transactions involving various forms of assets including Financial Assets, Crypto Assets and Real Estate.

Tax and financial crime investigation

- Under the G20 Presidency, Sitharaman said, India has taken the lead for building capacity in tax and financial crime investigation in the South Asian region in collaboration with OECD.
- India has decided to launch a pilot on tax and financial crime investigation in collaboration with OECD for the South Asian Region beginning at the Regional Campus of the National Academy of Direct Taxes.
- Observing that G20 has helped spearhead a number of reforms to the global tax, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering architecture.

Initiatives by India under G20

- The G20 has helped spearhead a number of reforms to the global tax, anti-corruption and anti-money laundering architecture, which has helped shape the discourse towards jurisdictions not only adopting a more holistic approach to financial crimes.
- In addition to increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies and enhanced capacity building, it is also imperative that we remain alive to the emerging risks to financial transparency.
- In this context, the progress of work towards the development of the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework and the update to the Common Reporting Standard is a welcome step.

Panel recommended medical review for Kuno cheetahs

Context

- Following the deaths of two more cheetahs at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh over the past week, the expert advisory committee overseeing the implementation of Project Cheetah has recommended that all the animals undergo a thorough physical and medical review.
- This will involve recalling even the animals released into the wild and investigating if the radio collars dangling from their necks, were indirectly abetting infections.

Fatality case

- The latest fatality; a cheetah named Surya died from a wound on its neck that was then infected with maggots.

- The larvae of the maggots were also found on the radio collar and this fatally infected the animal.
- The collars used are polystyrene and are much lighter today compared with the ones used in earlier years.

Government measures

- In a statement, the Union Environment Ministry said that reports [on deaths being due to radio collars] were not based on scientific evidence and were speculation.
- The radio collars were fitted on the animals in Namibia and South Africa itself.
- The tissue samples from all animals, to be analyzed in laboratories to examine if there are specific parasites, bacteria or viruses' infection.
- The Ministry's official statement emphasized that all the animal deaths so far could be attributed to "natural causes."

Aiming for Equality

Context

- The RBI's latest report on currency and finance recommends policy options to mitigate climate risks and achieve India's goal of net zero by 2070.
- One suggestion is mandatory geographic diversification of corporate social responsibility (CSR) spending.
- The implementation of this recommendation will require a shift in the ecosystem for a more equitable distribution of CSR funding.

Issues with CSR funding

- Section 135 of the Companies Act states that companies give preference to areas near where they operate in deploying CSR funds.
- This has resulted in more funding for social is- sues but also concentrated spending in the most industrialized states.
- As of 2020-21, 10 states received 80 per cent of all CSR funding.
- In 2021, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs had clarified that preference for local areas is not mandatory, and the spirit of the legislation is to align CSR with national priorities. However, the concentration of funding in a few states suggests that companies still prefer to direct their CSR funding locally.

Local preference

- The CSR local funding preference arises from a desire to help communities that live and work near their business operations.
- Local projects allow funders to leverage their knowledge of the region, utilise existing relationships and networks, and exert greater in- fluence over outcomes through staff visits and monitoring.
- This in return allows corporates to obtain a "social license to operate" through the greater goodwill and influence they de- rive from doing good with and for local com- munities.
- This license to operate is a strong impetus for preferring projects in local areas.

Overcoming localized challenges

- Overcoming such a strong local preference will likely require regulatory change.
- Accessing remote locations, identifying the needs of local communities, and trusted implementation partners are challenges.
- Grassroots non-profit organisations often lack the means to showcase their im- pact on national platforms, resulting in an information gap with funders.
- Achieving an equitable distribution of CSR funds will require both a regulatory shift and changes at an ecosystem level.

- This will enable companies to find trusted for-profit, social enterprises and non-profit partners.

Aligning CSR programmes with government policy

- to align with local government through initiatives like the Aspirational District Programme and the Aspirational Block Programme.
- The ADP emphasises convergence with national and state schemes, fostering collaboration among local, state and national governance entities, and with external agencies for implementation.
- Participation in such programmes is a win-win-companies develop meaningful relationships with government departments, influence local governance practices, and streamline district administration work while undertaking impactful projects in vulnerable districts.

Way forward

- Independent partnerships with local government and non-profits can also be a modus operandi for CSR programmes.
- It is critical that these collaborations balance the autonomy of non-profit organisations while providing accountability to the funders.
- Corporations that wish to be true national partners in realizing environmental and social goals will have to establish trusted partnerships with a more diverse set of non-profits and local governments.

15.07.2023

- **India, France to co-develop jet engine**
- **India Call for responsible use of AI technology**
- **Centre plans for duty on Chinese stainless-steel products**
- **Centre releases data on Goods exports**
- **Living with the deluge**

India, France to co-develop jet engine

Context

- India and France recently announced that they will be jointly developing a combat aircraft engine and engine for the Indian Multi Role Helicopter (IMRH) being developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited.
- Taking the defence cooperation between India and France to a new level, the two countries announced that they will extend their "ground-breaking" defence cooperation in advanced aeronautical technologies.
- France is an important partner in Make in India and self-reliant India.

Space sector Cooperations

- India and France also announced cooperation on small and advanced modular reactors and the finalization of the joint Earth observation satellite, among others.
- Both countries are sharing and joint development of critical components and technology building blocks, based on the successful Indo-French experience in technology transfer.

MoU for indigenous LCA

- Recently, HAL and General Electric signed an MoU to potentially manufacture the F-414 engine for the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft-MK2 subject to license approval from the U.S. Congress.
- India has been looking for a more powerful engine to power the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) under development.

India P75 Programme

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between India's Mazgon Dockyard Ltd and France's Naval Group for the construction of three additional submarines under the P75 programme.
- India and France are ready to explore more ambitious projects to develop the Indian submarine fleet and its performance.
- In view of the uptick in defence industrial collaborations between the two countries, India is setting up a technical office of the DRDO at the Indian embassy in Paris.

India Call for responsible use of AI technology

Context

- At the platform of the G-20 conference on cyber security, India noted that there is certainly some cause for concern about Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated cyber-attacks, malware, highly convincing information manipulation, and scams that can be deployed cheaply and at a formidable scale using these tools.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) conducted the G-20 Conference on 'Crime and Security in the Age of NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) AI and Metaverse' on July 13-14 at Gurugram.

Aim

- The conference aimed to address these challenges and develop an international cooperation framework for cyber security.
- Various contemporary issues concerning cyber security were discussing including:
  - o Internet governance
  - o Security of digital public infrastructure
  - o Legal and regulatory issues related to digital ownership
  - o Responsible use of AI
  - o International cooperation framework for the Dark Net

Focus area

- G-20 conference on cyber security calls for analysis of capabilities and applications of AI technologies used by malicious actors that can be exploited for malicious purposes.
- Focused discussions on the need for transparent and accountable AI governance frameworks.
- The emerging challenges and risks associated with the misuse of Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs) to be explored.
- Discussions, knowledge exchange, and the formulation of strategies to address this evolving threat landscape is necessary.
- Challenges in tackling illicit activities associated with Metaverse technologies

Centre plans for duty on Chinese stainless-steel products

Context

- The Ministry of Steel has written to the Finance Ministry asking it to look at the possibility of levying customs duty on Chinese stainless-steel shipments coming into India.
- Such a duty will benefit the domestic stainless-steel industry which has been badly hit by such imports and is "facing low-capacity utilisation".
- The import of stainless steel from China increased from about 20% to about 60% of overall imports into the country.

Industry hit

- In Budget 2022-23, countervailing duties on imports of certain hot-rolled and cold-rolled stainless steel flat products originating from China were revoked.
- The Ministry of Steel had acknowledged the representation from various trade bodies and noted that a surge was observed in the import of stainless-steel flat products from China.
- In 2021, the customs duty on stainless steel imports from China was revoked, stainless steel imports from China were 1,57,000 tonnes, which increased by more than 300% to 6,32,000 tonnes in 2022-23.

Anti-dumping duty

- In 2022, Centre has imposed anti-dumping duty on stainless steel seamless tubes and pipes imported from China for five years to remove "injury" to the domestic industry.
- The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has recommended the duty on imports of 'stainless-steel seamless tubes and pipes' from China after concluding in its probe that the product has been exported at dumped prices into India, which impacted the domestic industry.
- The antidumping duty imposed is effective for a period of five years (unless revoked, superseded, or amended earlier).

Centre releases data on Goods exports

Context

- According to the data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Goods exports shrank 22% year-on-year in June to hit an eight-month low of $32.97 billion, while imports declined by 17.5% to $53.1 billion.
- The goods trade deficit narrowed 8.8% from levels seen in June 2022 as well as May, to $20.13 billion.
- This was the second month in a row that the deficit exceeded $20 billion after a four-month streak of smaller shortfalls.

Reasons for decline

- The broader declining trend, was driven by slower demand for Indian goods from large markets like the U.S. and Europe, where growth was slowing down and interest rate increases to curb inflation were further denting business levels.
- The decline in goods imports was driven by lower commodity prices as well as some cooling in domestic demand.

Inventories dwindling

- There was also an inventory build-up last year to cope with supply-chain disruptions. Now, export promotion councils are reporting those inventories are gradually winding down, and orders are starting to pick up again from July 2023.
- Non-oil, non-gold imports fell by a sharp 14.5%, after rising 1.7% in May.

Living with the deluge

Context

- The experts are linking the devastating deluge in north India parts from past two days to a "deadly" union of two weather systems i.e monsoon winds and a western disturbance.
- The extreme weather could grow exponentially, much faster than current governance, planning and infrastructure systems are able to adapt to.
- This will lead to massive future disruptions across urban India – flooding, water scarcity and heatwaves that need to prepare for and adapt to.

Climate impacts

- Climate impacts and risks like flooding are felt intensely in cities.
- This is because climate impacts concentrate one-third of people and two-thirds of economic output in increasingly dense built-up areas, with poor water, sanitation, drainage and wastewater infrastructure that struggle to even deliver everyday basic services.
- Irrational land use and planning systems exacerbate these challenges and amplify the vulnerability of tens of millions who are forced to live in informal settlements and slums. Cities in sensitive regions along the coast, rivers and hills face even worse impacts, due to higher exposure and locational vulnerability.

Ensuring drainage exists and works

- Most urban civic bodies conduct a monsoon audit ahead of the season.
- This is to ensure that storm water drains, tanks and lakes exist and work, and they are not choked by construction debris, silt, garbage or blocked by encroachments.
- This is a complex task that needs planning all through the year and adequate financial and human resources, which are rarely a priority.
- The medium-term solution is the integration of drainage, water supply and wastewater systems to store the intense rain that may come over a short period as well as treat and recycle wastewater to ensure safe water and sanitation through the rest of the year.

Improving roads

- The expansion of urban areas faster than planned drainage systems means that many roads effectively become stormwater drains.
- To reduce local flooding, there is need to improve the way city roads are built and repaired.
- The road level rises above surrounding areas, buildings, and drains which are not surprisingly inundated during a downpour.
- This needs to be addressed with effective infrastructure planning and coordination by all concerned agencies, as has been demonstrated in many cities.

Greening cities and using blue-green-grey infrastructure

- Conserving and protecting urban forests, wetlands, rivers and lakes are critical to addressing climate change-induced flooding, water scarcity and heat waves and improving livability.
- Practical nature-based blue-green-grey infrastructure such as these hold the key to climate adaptation for many Indian cities.

Reducing flood vulnerability

- India has the technological capacity to map all of its cities and towns, using high-resolution satellite and local topographical data to identify areas most prone to flooding.
- The challenge is to address the vulnerability of millions of people, who live along river banks, low-lying areas and unstable slopes, whose everyday lives are dislocated during extreme events.

Improving early warning services

- After a devastating series of urban floods in cities like Mumbai and Surat in the early 2000s, India has done well to improve its forecasting, early warning and evacuation systems in many large cities.
- This has to be extended to most places that are at risk along with strengthening critical cellphone, power and water supply services so that they are resilient and can recover rapidly from extreme events.
- There is a need to protect and prepare cities for future flooding, drought and heat waves that will arrive at doorsteps with climate change.

- The most effective way to do this is to ensure that all urban residents have access to basic environmental services: Water, sanitation, drainage and solid waste management. It is time to accept that we live in a warming world, in which climate change is a harsh reality that all of us poor or rich need to adapt to.

14.07.2023

- **The first GSI survey of the Siachen**
- **DAC approves proposal to buy Rafale jet**
- **India set to launch its Chandrayaan-3 mission**
- **WHO panel views on use of Artificial sweetener**
- **Scientists need the oxygen of free speech**

The first GSI survey of the Siachen

Context

- According to the Karachi ceasefire agreement of 1949, the grid reference point NJ 9842 is the last mutually demarcated point between India and Pakistan.
- It is also the point where the Line of Control of the Shimla Agreement ends, not many people are familiar with what 5Q 131 05 084 stands for.
- This is the number assigned to the Siachen glacier by the Geological Survey of India (GSI).
- This year June-August 2023 marks the sapphire jubilee of a very important event in the history of the exploration of the Siachen glacier.

First Siachen survey

- In June 1958, V. K. Raina, a top Indian geologist, led the first Geological Survey of India expedition to the Siachen glacier.
- This event is of historical and geostrategic significance as it puts to rest all myths to the effect that Pakistan was in control of the glacier since the beginning.
- In 1956, he had been a part of the Saser Kangri expedition conducted by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute of Darjeeling.
- During this time, he studied the geology and geomorphology of the Nubra Valley upto Panamik.
- Thereafter, in 1957, he was involved in the geological survey of the alignment of the proposed Leh-Manali Highway which was only a mule track at that time.

International Geophysical Year

- In the year 1958 was an important year for geologists all over the world as it was celebrated as the International Geophysical Year.
- To commemorate this event, the GSI, with its limited resources, proposed to conduct a study of the Himalayan glacier systems which included snout monitoring of the glaciers in the Sikkim Himalayas, Kumaon Himalayas as well as the Kashmir Himalayas.

No claim to the glacier

- For a country that has long relied on incorrect maps and consequent permissions sought by various explorers from it to bolster its claim to the Siachen, Pakistan's continuous and complete silence on the first GSI expedition to the glacier in 1958.
- This expedition has immense historical and geostrategic significance as it puts to rest all myths to the effect that Pakistan was present or in control of the glacier since the beginning.

- It is pertinent to note that it is only 25 years later that Pakistan for the first time formally staked its claim to this region by unilaterally extending the Line of Control from NJ 9842 till the Karakoram Pass in its protest notes of August 1983 (contrary to the Simla Agreement).

DAC approves proposal to buy Rafale jet

Context

- Recently, the Defence Acquisition Council approved the purchase 26 Rafale fighter jets. These include 22 single-seated Rafale marine aircraft, and four twin-seater trainer versions.
- Furthermore, the council also gave nod for three additional Scorpene class submarines to be bought for the Indian navy.
- As per the report, the deals are expected to be worth around Rs 90,000 crore.
- The three Scorpene class submarines will be constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL).
- The deal is likely to be signed between India and France as Prime Minister of India visits France.

Procurement

- The Indian Navy is looking for procurement of 26 deck-based fighter jets for indigenously-built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant.
- After a lengthy process, the Navy had narrowed down on Boeing's F/A-18 Super Hornet and French aerospace major Dassault Aviation's Rafale M aircraft for the procurement.
- India has already procured 36 Rafale jets from France for the Indian Air Force.
- The Rafale jets are India's first major acquisition of fighter planes in 23 year after the Sukhoi jets were imported from Russia.
- Another important project with France would be the follow-on order of three Scorpene submarines.
- Under Project 75, six Scorpene submarines have already been made in India.

India set to launch its Chandrayaan-3 mission

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is poised to make history once again with the launch of its third lunar exploration mission, Chandrayaan-3 from the Satish Dhawan Space Station.
- The launch of the mission will make India the fourth country to land its spacecraft on the surface of the moon and demonstrate the country's abilities for safe and soft landing on the lunar surface.
- So far only three countries, the U.S., Russia and China, have successfully soft-landed on the moon.

LVM3 onboard

- The mission onboard a Launch Vehicle Mark 3 (LVM3).
- After the LVM3 lifts off from the launch pad, the satellite separation will take place and the integrated module will be placed in an Elliptic Parking Orbit (EPO).
- The six-wheeled rover will have two payloads the Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS) and the LASER Induced Breakdown Spectroscope (LIBS).
- In addition to these, there will be one payload on the propulsion module, the Spectro-polarimetry of Habitable Planet Earth (SHAPE).

Scientific experiments

- The lander, rover and the propulsion module will have payloads for performing experiments designed to give scientists new insights into the characteristics of earth's lone natural satellite.
- The lander will have four payloads:
  - Radio Anatomy of Moon Bound Hypersensitive Ionosphere and Atmosphere (RAMBHA)

- o Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment (ChaSTE)
- o Instrument for Lunar Seismic Activity (ILSA)
- o LASER Retroreflector Array (LRA).

WHO panel views on use of Artificial sweetener

- A World Health Organization's (WHO) committee categorised artificial sweetener aspartame as "possibly carcinogenic to humans".
- However, another committee simultaneously assessing the levels that can be safely consumed has said there is no need to reduce the previously established acceptable daily intake (ADI) for the sweetener.

Consumption of Aspartame Tablets

- As per the WHO second committee's analysis, consuming a couple of aspartame tablets in coffee and tea is unlikely to be harmful.
- It is the hidden aspartame in products like diet soda and ice creams that health experts are really worried about.
- The current ADI of 0-40 mg/kg body weight is pretty high.
- The analysis by WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer found the product to be "possibly carcinogenic to humans".

Cohort studies analysis

- This analysis was based on three prospective cohort studies from Europe and the United States that assumed consumption of artificially sweetened beverages as a proxy for aspartame intake and linked it to cancer incidence.
- All three studies showed a positive association between consumption of these beverages and risk of liver cancer.
- However, with the evidence being a correlation chance, biases, and confounders could not be ruled out in the study and the evidence the committee concluded.
- Three animal experimental studies also showed an increased incidence of tumours in mice and rats.

Scientists need the oxygen of free speech

Context

- Recently, more than 500 scientists and academics wrote to the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) criticising its administration for prohibiting a discussion on the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.
- In response, the director of a different research institute, the Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research (IISER) at Mohali, Punjab, issued a show cause notice to two faculty members who had signed the letter to the IISc.

Constitutional right

- Scientific research institutes are part of the broader society, and so their members have the same constitutional right as others to participate in social discussions.
- Researchers at such institutions are offered the leisure and the training to pursue critical inquiry into a variety of subjects.
- This privilege, which relies on the public support that these institutions receive, means that they have an added responsibility to educate and express themselves on matters of public interest.
- In the context of percent social change, it is significant that scientific researchers should also understand and contribute their part.

Science has multiple links

- A narrow perspective might suggest that scientists should restrict themselves to science and stay away from social questions.
- However, it is artificial to erect intellectual silos around what is considered "science" and proscribe discussions outside those limits.
- For instance, an investigation of the science of climate change can naturally flow into complex geopolitical issues about colonialism and historical responsibility.
- This, in turn, leads to broader questions about inequality and justice.
- Therefore, a broader political and historical perspective on scientific research is helpful even in pure science.

An engagement with social issues

- India has a rich and unique tradition of scientists who have engaged with social issues. Apart from prominent individuals such as the physicist, Meghnad Saha, the mathematician, D.D. Kosambi, and the chemist, Amulya Reddy, this tradition includes the peoples' science movements.
- The All-India Peoples Science Network has consistently advocated that science be used for social benefit rather than private profit.

Way forward

- The Scientific research institutes are part of the broader society and their members have the same constitutional right as others to participate in social discussion.
- A key value in science is to challenge the arbitrary use of authority.
- Unless this censorship is resisted robustly, academic freedom in scientific institutions is likely to come under further attack.
- Moreover, the Tripura High Court ruled in 2020 that even when the rules apply, they do not deprive citizens of their "right of free speech" which is "a fundamental right."

13.07.2023

- **National Research Foundation**
- **Centre rejects EU Parliament stand on Manipur situation**
- **Ukraine wins security support but no clarity for NATO membership**
- **IIP rises 5.2%, led by infrastructure**
- **Great Expectations**

National Research Foundation

Context

- The Union Cabinet has approved the introduction of the National Research Foundation (NRF) Bill in Parliament, placing once again the debate on science and technology funding in the spotlight.

About NRF

- The National Research Foundation (NRF) was established as per one of the key recommendations of the National Education Policy 2020.
- The NRF intends to act as a coordinating agency between researchers, various government bodies and industry, thus bringing industry into the mainstream of research.

- In addition to providing research grants to individuals, the NRF plans to seed, grow and facilitate research in India's universities, especially State universities, by funding research infrastructure and researchers.

Funded pattern of NIF

- The National Research Foundation (NRF) will operate with a budget of ₹50,000 crore for five years, of which 28% (₹14,000 crore) will be the government's share, and the remaining 72% (₹36,000 crore) will come from the private sector.
- The NRF draft proposes the government's share to increase eventually to ₹20,000 crore per year. Out of the government's share, ₹4,000 crore will be used from the existing Science and Engineering Research Board's budget, which will be subsumed under the NRF.
- Therefore, the government has earmarked an additional 10,000 crore over the next five years for the NRF.

How can NRF facilitate ease of doing science

- The NRF draft mentions that the peer-review process will be completed within six months, releasing funds may take time, pending financial clearance.
- First, the time between applying for a research grant and receiving the money must be minimal, preferably within six months.
- Second, all the paperwork must be digitally processed without sending stacks of papers in hard copies to the NRF.
- Third, all finance-related queries, paperwork, approval, and acceptance need to be between the NRF and the finance department of the university/research institution keeping the scientist free to focus on research.
- Fourth, the NRF needs explicit spending guidelines away from the General Financial Rules (GFR) and the government's e-Marketplace (GeM) usage.
- Finally, the release of money needs to be timely.

What next

- The proposed NRF is largely modelled after the National Science Foundation of the U.S.
- It borrows some of the best practices from the German, U.K., Swiss, Norwegian, South Korean, and Singapore science agencies.
- Even if the NRF draft discusses critical thinking, creativity, and bringing innovation to the forefront, it is unclear how the NRF will transparently seed, fund and coordinate research across institutions.
- The success of NRF will lie in how the government sets rules and implements the same, different from what already exists.

Centre rejects EU Parliament stand on Manipur situation

Context

- India has rejected the European Parliament's plan to hold an "urgent debate" on the violence in Manipur, calling it an issue "totally internal" to India.
- Ahead of Prime Minister of India arrival in Paris, the European Parliament was scheduled to discuss the situation in Manipur despite India's efforts to stall the inclusion of six resolutions on the situation in the northeastern state in the agenda of the ongoing plenary in, France.
- The EU debate seeks to condemn the violence and direct the EU's top officials to speak to India about remedying the situation.
- At least 142 have been killed and more than 54,000 driven from their homes since violence erupted on May 3 this year.

ECR Group resolution

- The ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists) Group resolution states that religious freedom in India has declined in recent years, marked by the promotion and enforcement of discriminatory laws and practices that negatively impact the country's minorities of Christian, Muslim, Sikh, and Adivasis populations.
- The Socialists & Democrats' resolution mentions "concerns over shrinking space for civil society, detentions, and harassment of those exercising their legitimate rights.
- The European Parliament's resolutions are not binding on member states but act as recommendations and send a message to governments across Europe that parties from the entire political spectrum are supportive of this process.

Postponement of Citizenship Amendment Act

- In 2020, India managed to get a vote on a joint resolution on the Citizenship Amendment Act postponed on the plea that the matter was sub-judice and Indian minister's ought to be given an opportunity to explain it since the India-EU Summit was around the corner.

Ukraine wins security support but no clarity for NATO membership

Context

- Ukrainian President welcomed fresh pledges of weapons and ammunition to fight Russia's invasion along with longer-term security commitments from the West.
- On NATO membership Ukrainian President has expressed disappointment over the lack of a clear path for his country to join NATO as the alliance.

G7 joint declaration

- A joint declaration issued by the G7 lays the groundwork for each nation to negotiate agreements to help Ukraine bolster its military over the long term.
- Ukrainian President described the initiative as a bridge toward eventual NATO membership and a deterrent against Russia.
- The Ukrainian and American presidents also met privately along with their advisers, and Biden acknowledged that Zelenskyy is sometimes "frustrated" by the pace of military assistance.

NATO Summit

- On the final day of NATO's summit, the alliance launched a new forum for deepening ties with Ukraine: the NATO-Ukraine Council.

- It's intended to serve as a permanent body where the alliance's 31 members and Ukraine can hold consultations and call for meetings in emergency situations.
- The setting is part of NATO's effort to bring Ukraine as close as possible to the military alliance without joining it.

About NATO
- NATO was established aftermath of World War II, the organization implemented the North Atlantic Treaty, signed in Washington, D.C., on 4th April 1949.
- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 31 member states – 29 European and two North American.
- Finland joins NATO has 31 members recently.
- Its aim is to protect the security and freedom of all the countries that are members (the Allies).

IIP rises 5.2%, led by infrastructure

Context
- According to Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India's industrial output, as measured by the index of Industrial production or IIP, in May rose to 5.2 percent from 4.2 percent in April.
- The growth rates over corresponding period of previous year are to be interpreted, considering the unusual circumstances on account of COVID 19 pandemic since March 2020.
- The factory output growth measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) stood at 19.7 per cent in May 2022, mainly due to a lower base effect.

Sector wise performance
- As per the IIP data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the manufacturing sector's output grew 5.7 per cent in May 2023 against a 20.7 per cent expansion a year ago.
- Infrastructure/construction goods posted a growth of 14 per cent over an 18.4 per cent expansion in the same period a year ago.
- Power generation rose 0.9 per cent in May 2023 compared to a growth of 23.5 per cent a year ago.
- Mining output rose by 6.4 per cent during the month under review against an 11.2 per cent expansion in the year-ago period.
- As per user-based classification, the capital goods segment grew 8.2 per cent in May this year compared to 53.3 per cent a year ago.
- Consumer durables output during the month rose 1.1 per cent against a 59.1 per cent growth in the year-ago period.

Great Expectations

Context
- The 13th Finance Commission (FC) was set up in 2007 and its recommendations were for 2010 to 2015.
- A FC is set up under Article 280 of the Constitution and its recommendations cover one, vertical devolution (Union to state transfers), two, horizontal distribution (between states, on the basis of a formula varying from FC to FC) and three, grant-in-aid (usually written as grants-in-aid).

Grant-in-aid
- Grant-in-aid is covered under Article 275: "Such sums as Parliament may by law provide shall be charged on the Consolidated Fund of India in each year as grants-in-aid of the revenues of such states as

Parliament may determine to be in need of assistance, and different sums may be fixed for different states."
- There is a difference between grant (Article 282) and grant-in-aid.
- The latter is when recipient operates at arm's length.
- Thus, grant-in-aid is not subject to as many tight controls as a grant is.

13th Finance Commission
- As per 13th FC report, on grants-in-aid: "Grants-in-aid are an important component of Finance Commission transfers.
- They have argued that grants have been directed to sectors and with conditionalities that restrict the expenditure options of the states.
- Grants-in-aid are an important instrument which enables the Commission to make its scheme of transfers more comprehensive and address various issues spelt out in the ToR.

13th Finance Commission on justice delivery
- The Department of Justice has identified several initiatives which are part of this action plan and need support.
- The first is increasing the number of courts working hours using the existing infrastructure by holding morning/evening shift courts.
- The second entails enhancing support to Lok Adalats.
- The third initiative involves providing additional funding to State Legal Services Authorities to enable them to enhance legal aid to the marginalised and empower them to access justice.
- The fourth is promoting the Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism to resolve part of the disputes outside the court system.
- The fifth is enhancing the capacity of judicial officers and public prosecutors through training programmes.
- The sixth relates to supporting the creation of a judicial academy in every state to facilitate such training.

15th Finance Commission
- The 15th FC had a four-volume report and it has more than a hundred recommendations.
- The 15th FC suggested reforms at Union and state levels and there were performance-based grants.
- At the risk of sounding negative, all such homilies are generally ignored as pious intentions.

Criteria	14th Finance Commission Weightage (2015-20)	15th Finance Commission Weightage (2021-26)
Income Distance	50.0	45.0
Population - 1971	17.5	-----
Population - 2011	10.0	15.0
Area	15.0	15.0
Forest Cover	7.5	-----
Forest & Ecology	-----	10.0
Demographic Performance	-----	12.5
Tax Effort	-----	2.5
Total	100.00	100.00

12.07.2023

- **GST Council finalise tax on online gaming firms**
- **Legal row between farmers and PepsiCo**
- **Supreme Court Invalidates Extensions Of ED Director**
- **SC seeks response on delimitation in Arunachal Pradesh**
- **Taking Digital Next Steps**

GST Council finalise tax on online gaming firms

Context

- Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, during its 50th meeting, has decided to impose a 28% indirect tax on the turnover of online gaming companies.
- The GST Council had earlier formed a panel to look into taxing casinos, horse racing and online gaming.
- It has not previously been able to decide whether to impose a 28% GST on the face value of bets, gross gaming revenue, or just on platform fees.
- Currently, online betting and gambling attract 28 percent GST, irrespective of whether it is a game of skill or chance.
- Other games attract an 18 percent levy on gross gaming revenue (GGR).

GST appellate tribunals

- GST appellate tribunals are to be formed in phases.
- GST appellate tribunals in the first phase are to be mostly set up in capital cities of states and were high court benches functional.
- GST appellate tribunal would start functioning in this fiscal year.

Items exempted from GST rates

- The GST Council also decided to exempt cancer-fighting drugs and medicines for rare diseases from the levy.
- Also, GST on satellite launch services provided by private operators has been exempted.

Revised tax rates

- Rates on fish soluble paste, LD slag from 18% to 5%
- Rates have been brought down on four items, including fish soluble paste and LD slag from 18 percent to 5 percent.
- Tax on food and beverages in cinemas will be 5%
- GST cess has been increased from the current 20% to 22% in MUVs that meet the length, and engine criteria.

Legal row between farmers and PepsiCo

Context

- Recently, the Delhi High Court held that there was "no merit" in the appeal filed by PepsiCo over the patent rights for its 'unique potato' variety.
- The appeal was against an order passed by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights' Authority (PPVFRA), revoking PepsiCo's registration vis-a-vis the unique potato variety developed by it.

About the case

- The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights' Authority (PPVFRA) revoked PepsiCo's registration with respect to its potato plant variety, 'FL 2027' (used in Lay's chips), on the grounds provided under Section 34 (grounds for revocation of registration) of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Act, 2001 (PPV&FR).
- FL 2027 is a 'chipping potato' variety with low external defects, high dry matter/high solids content and stable sugars, all of which make it highly suitable for the manufacture of chips.

About PPV&FR Act

- The Act provides an effective framework to conserve and encourage the development of various plant varieties.
- It established an effective system to safeguard and recognise the rights of breeders, researchers and farmers to promote agricultural development in the country.
- Additionally, it also facilitates the mushrooming of the Indian seed industry to ensure the availability of high-quality seeds and planting materials to farmers.

Criteria for revocation

- According to Section 34 of the PPV&FR Act, the protection granted to a breeder may be revoked by the authority on the following grounds:
  o If the grant of a registration certificate is based on incorrect information furnished by the applicant
  o If the registration certificate was granted to an ineligible person
  o If breeder does not provide the registrar with the required documents
  o Failure to provide an alternative denomination for variety registration in case the earlier variety provided is not permissible for registration
  o Failure of the breeder to provide the required seeds for compulsory licence
  o Failure to comply with the acts, rules, regulations and directions issued by the Authority

Why did the court reject the appeal

- In relation to Section 34(a) (incorrect information furnished), it was discovered that PepsiCo had sought the registration of FL 2027 variety as a "new variant" instead of an "extant variant" in its application dated February 16, 2012, despite furnishing the date of its commercialisation in India to be December 17, 2009.
- However, to be registered as a "new variant" an additional requirement of 'novelty' in addition to 'distinctiveness', 'uniformity' and 'stability' must be satisfied one year before the date of filing of the application for registration.
- The court held that FL 2027 could not fulfil the criteria of novelty and was only eligible for registration under "extant variety".

What next

- India is an agri-based economy with the agriculture sector having the highest workforce, nearly 152 million as of FY2021.
- Multinational food processing companies and investors must prioritise the well-being of farmers and their rights by developing a comprehensive understanding of India's local laws, particularly the PPV&FR Act 2001, and recognise the safeguards and protections it provides to farmers.

Supreme Court Invalidates Extensions Of ED Director

Context

- The Supreme Court (SC) has struck down the one-year extension given Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in November 2022.
- The court has held that the extension is invalid in law, and has directed incumbent Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to demit office by July 31, 2023.
- In May, the SC reserved its judgment on a plea challenging the extension term.
- This was the third extension granted to Director of the Enforcement Directorate, having first been appointed in November 2018 for a two-year term.

Earlier extension

- While extending the tenure of the Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in November 2022 extension, the Centre had submitted to the court that his term would not be extended again beyond November 2023.
- The November 2022 extension had been challenged in court on grounds that the extension goes against a 2021 SC judgment that barred any more extension.
- However, the Centre had promulgated an ordinance in November 2021 that effectively nullified this judgment.
- In court, the Centre defended the November 2022 extension on the grounds that India's evaluation by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was still pending.

Supreme Court direction

- In its latest judgment, the three bench of Justices has held that while the government was at liberty to amend the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Act to allow extraordinary extensions to appointment tenures and while the legislature is competent to legislate on the issue, it cannot annul orders issued by the Supreme Court.
- The apex court has held that its 2021 order was clear that no further extension should be granted to present ED director.

Tenure of CBI and ED

- CBI and ED chiefs have fixed tenures of two years.
- However, amendments introduced in 2021 to the Central Vigilance Commission Act, the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act and the Fundamental Rules allow them three annual extensions.

Need for committees' recommendation

- Instead, the 2021 amendments require high-level committees to recommend the officers for service extensions.
- A five-member panel composed of the Central Vigilance Commissioner and Vigilance Commissioners had to recommend if an ED Director was worthy of an extension in service.
- When the same committees could be trusted with the initial appointments of the ED and CBI Directors, there was no reason to distrust them about properly advising the government on an extension, the court reasoned.
- The court further said the 2021 amendments were enacted by Parliament.

SC seeks response on delimitation in Arunachal Pradesh

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) on prima facie disagreed with the legal stand of the Election Commission (EC) of India that it can only begin the delimitation process in Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh after only getting an authorisation from the Centre.

- The apex court noted that it does not appear the Election Commission requires the authorisation of the Government of India.
- Unlike other States, the EC, and not the Delimitation Commission, has to conduct the delimitation exercise in these four States.

Section 8A of RPA 1950

- The CJI's prima facie comment was based on a reading of Section 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- The provision deals with the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur or Nagaland.
- Section 8A(1) says that subject to being satisfied that the conditions were conducive, the President can rescind the deferment of the delimitation exercise in the four States and provide for the conduct of the delimitation exercise by the Election Commission.
- Section 8A(2) provides that the Election Commission has to start the delimitation process to determine Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies in the four States as soon as the President rescinds the order.

Taking Digital Next Steps

Context

- With the second largest online market in the world, cheapest data rates, and the fastest growing fintech landscape, India is in the midst of a massive digital transformation.
- India's digital acceleration has also created the potential for new divides.
- For instance, inequitable access to technology has exacerbated the divide in the ability to work from home, as well as in learning outcomes for children during the pandemic.

State of India's Digital Economy Report

- The State of India's Digital Economy Report had highlighted the role of missing analogue foundations that support and drive the digital economy.
- This includes physical and social infrastructure.
- For instance, poor power supply impacts the quality of internet access.
- Usage gap, on the other hand, is driven by poor levels of literacy, affordability and lack of digital skills.

Digital literacy initiatives

- The Indian government has set a target to provide 4G network to all uncovered villages by 2024.
- Digital literacy initiatives are being strengthened for various target groups to skill, upskill and reskill users through training, internships, and apprenticeship programmes.
- The government is also working towards addressing the weakness of the ecosystem exposed through rising cybercrimes and financial frauds by raising awareness and building technical security.
- The recent launch of Sanchar Saathi is one such initiative.

Roadmap

- As India approaches its 100th year of independence, digital ecosystems will become inseparable from economic growth.
- Policies and digital strategies of today will have long-lasting impact.
- There are four principles that policymakers could consider.
- **One**, not everything needs a digital solution, especially when the building blocks are not ready.
- Software is available for everything, but why and what we are building needs careful examination.
- The preoccupation with "digital only" must be challenged.

- **Second** is the need for consultative policymaking that keeps beneficiaries at the centre of the process.
- Despite the government's efforts, very often those who are impacted by technology are unable to participate effectively.
- Efforts should be made to strengthen the consultation process, moving towards a ground-up approach to policy formulation.
- **Third,** focus on adaptive policy and agile regulatory frameworks.
- Policy makers and regulators have been playing catch up with rapidly evolving technologies and changes in business models.
- Emerging trends in regulatory sandboxing, participative or co-regulation, are instruments that governments need to foster.
- **Finally,** policy should be grounded in evidence.
- Data on the digital economy is inadequate for any meaningful analysis or assessment of the digital ecosystem.
- Even basic data on internet users or smartphone users is available intermittently through government surveys.
- The success of any transformative process rests on transparency, regular monitoring and impact assessments, which must be institutionalized.

11.07.2023

- **The Global South: origins and significance**
- **France riots and Protest**
- **India aims to end urea imports from 2025**
- **Cancellation of Vedanta-Foxconn's chip deal**
- **Do not waste the wastewater**

The Global South: origins and significance

Context

- The Global South generally refers to countries that are less economically developed and have lower levels of industrialization compared to the more economically advanced and industrialized countries of the Global North.
- These countries are often characterized by high poverty rates, limited access to education and healthcare, and underdeveloped infrastructure.
- The Global South encompasses a diverse group of countries from different regions, including parts of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.
- The term "Global South" denotes a mix of political, geopolitical and economic commonalities between nations

Background

- The term Global South appears to have been first used in 1969 by political activist Carl Oglesby.
- But it was only after the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union which marked the end of the so-called "Second World" that the term gained momentum.
- Until then, the more common term for developing nations countries that had yet to industrialize fully was 'Third World'.
- The fall of the Soviet Union and with it the end of the so-called Second World — gave a convenient pretext for the term 'Third World' to disappear, too.

Geopolitical, not geographical

- The term 'Global South' is not geographical.
- In fact, the Global South's two largest countries China and India lie entirely in the Northern Hemisphere.
- Rather, its usage denotes a mix of political, geopolitical, and economic commonalities between nations.
- Countries in the Global South were mostly at the receiving end of imperialism and colonial rule, with African countries as perhaps the most visible example of this.
- It gives them a very different outlook on what dependency theorists have described as the relationship between the centre and periphery in the world political economy — or, to put it in simple terms, the relationship between "the West and the rest."

Growth Forecast of Global South

- By 2030 it is projected that three of the four largest economies will be from the Global South with the order being China, India, the U.S. and Indonesia.
- Already the GDP in terms of purchasing power of the Global South-dominated BRICS nations — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa surpasses that of the Global North's G-7 club.
- And there are now more billionaires in Beijing than in New York City.

France riots and Protest

Context

- On June 27, a 17-year-old unarmed French citizen of Algerian and Moroccan descent, was fatally shot by police after being stopped for a traffic violation in a western suburb of Paris.
- While initially, the police justified the shooting, citing safety concerns, conflicting accounts emerged.
- A Twitter video shows the officers pointing a gun at the stopped car, which then sped away before crashing.
- France witnessed violence across the country despite authorities detaining the police officer on charges of voluntary homicide.

Nature of violence

- The violence was primarily attributed to young individuals, including minors and migrants from Black and Arab communities.
- Over a span of five consecutive nights, France witnessed widespread riots, resulting in over 3,000 arrests nationwide.
- In response to the riots, mayors of affected cities organised rallies at town halls to condemn the violence, looting, and destruction of infrastructure.

What fueled the violence

- Despite positive economic indicators, such as a low unemployment rate and increased foreign investment, France remains deeply divided.
- This incident has brought to the fore the extent of racial polarization in France.
- Recent studies have highlighted the disproportionate targeting of individuals perceived as Black or Arab by police during identity checks.
- These unrests frequently originated from societal challenges such as unemployment, poverty, discrimination, and strained relations between minority communities and law enforcement.

Measures by the authorities

- The Minister of the Interior of France deployed more than 40,000 law enforcement officers, resulting in injuries to both officers and protesters.

- Keeping in mind the young age of the rioters, President called on parents to take responsibility and keep their children indoors.
- He also suggested imposing restrictions on social media usage, leading to increased scrutiny of social media companies accused of exacerbating the unrest.

India aims to end urea imports from 2025

Context

- According to Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, India will not need to import urea by 2025-end as the domestic production of conventional urea and nano liquid urea is expected to be sufficient to meet the country's annual demand
- The Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers said that a special package estimated at ₹3.7 lakh crore for farmers have to be brought in as the use of fertilizers has become unbalanced in the country.
- The fertilizer must have nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium in a ratio i.e. 4:2:1, instead, it is 8:3:1 in the country now.

Concern

- Due to excessive use of fertilizer the balance of the soil has been damaged and production has become saturated as a result.
- Soil health, human health, animal health, and environmental health are connected with one another.
- According to a study, overover of fertlizer resulted in a 16% decrease in production in Punjab despite a 10% increase in the use of fertilizers in the State during the same period.
- This is leading to the deterioration of soil health over a period of time.

Government intervention

- The government is making available fertilisers, namely urea and 25 grades of P&K fertilisers to farmers at subsidised prices through fertiliser manufacturers/importers.
- The subsidy of urea alone is seen at about Rs 70,000 crore this fiscal year.
- Under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) scheme, which is being implemented since April 2010, a fixed rate of subsidy (in Rs per kg basis) is announced for nutrients namely Nitrogen (N), Phosphate (P), Potash (K) and Sulphur (S) by the government on an annual basis.
- The subsidy rates per kg for the nutrients N, P, K, and S are converted into per tonne subsidies on the various P&K fertilisers covered under the NBS.

Cancellation of Vedanta-Foxconn's chip deal

Context

- The world's largest technology manufacturer and service provider, Taiwan-based based company Foxconn has withdrawn from a $19.5 billion joint venture with Indian metals-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta.
- In September 2022, the Centre hailed Vedanta and Foxconn's semiconductor manufacturing plant in Gujarat as a landmark.
- Less than a year later, the partnership between the two companies to set up the $19.5 billion plant has come to an abrupt halt.

Why has Foxconn pulled out of the partnership

- Foxconn had not cited any reason for the cancellation of the deal with Vedanta.
- But it is understood that the ability of Vedanta, which is reeling under a heavy debt load, to pay for acquiring the necessary technology for chipmaking played a key role.

- The joint venture was not going well, there were some differences, and it became clear that Foxconn was going to pull out.
- The government is in touch with Foxconn, and is "encouraging it to set up a fab [lab] independently".

What about the other proposals

- It is not just the Vedanta-Foxconn proposal, the two other proposals for India's $10 billion chip incentive scheme too remain uncertain.
- ISMC, backed by Abu Dhabi-based Next Orbit and Israel's Tower Semiconductor, has asked the Centre not to consider its proposal owing to a pending merger between Intel and Tower Semiconductor.
- The merger was announced more than a year ago but has not moved ahead.
- The other proposal, by Singapore-based IGSS Venture, was not found up to the mark by the advisory committee of the government and is on the back burner, it is learnt.

Why is chipmaking crucial for India

- India has identified electronics manufacturing as a key sector in the coming years — both to produce goods for the domestic market, and for export.
- The government of India has made chip manufacturing a top priority for India's economic strategy.
- Building semiconductors in India is crucial for the government's vision to develop a domestic electronics supply chain and eventually reduce imports — especially from China which, despite some challenges, remains the number one destination for such manufacturing.
- The US passed the CHIPS Act last August, providing a $280 billion subsidy for manufacturing chips in the country.
- It has also imposed additional restrictions and sanctions that impact China' semiconductor industry.

Don't waste the wastewater

Context

- Wastewater surveillance, also known as wastewater-based epidemiology or sewage epidemiology, is a technique used to monitor and analyze wastewater to gain insights into the health and well-being of a population.
- It involves sampling and analyzing wastewater for various chemical and biological markers, such as viruses, bacteria, pharmaceuticals, illicit drugs, and environmental contaminants

Study conducted by Lancet

- A recently published study in The Lancet Global Health reiterated the promise of using wastewater for public health surveillance.
- This strategy originally proposed more than 80 years ago to monitor the spread of poliovirus within communities, played a role in confirming India's victory over poliovirus. It gained fresh relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic when it was identified as an approach for tracking the spread of SARS-CoV-2.

Wastewater surveillance

- Wastewater surveillance for known or new health threats offers many benefits for enhancing public health efforts.
- In practical terms, wastewater surveillance in India could involve systematic sampling and analysis of samples from varied sources such as wastewater ponds in rural areas and centralised sewage systems in urban localities.
- These samples would undergo testing at designated laboratories to identify markers of disease-causing agents, such as genetic fragments of bacteria or viruses.

- Incorporating wastewater surveillance will not fix these issues, but it could help reduce the reliance on any one source of data.

Government measures

- Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, which aims to create a seamless online platform for healthcare services, offer an opportunity for the integration of wastewater surveillance.
- This would allow for real-time tracking of disease spread and facilitate more effective, targeted public health responses.
- It is encouraging that India has already championed public health surveillance and mobilised resources accordingly.
- The integration of wastewater surveillance is fully aligned with Niti Aayog's current vision. Other innovative forms of disease surveillance include social media surveillance and occupational health surveillance.

Way forward

- India's leadership at international platforms like the G20 could serve as an opportunity to elevate the significance of innovative approaches to disease surveillance.
- With the world's attention focused on global health security in the wake of recent pandemics, these forums provide an opportunity to advocate for enhanced public health surveillance that integrates wastewater sampling as an essential component of health infrastructure.
- India could not only call for international commitments and support, but also position itself as a leader and coordinator in this field.
- With a dedicated public health and management cadre driving implementation, India can enhance public health efforts.

10.07.2023

- **Parliamentary committee proposed amendments to forest Act**
- **Data protection Bill may lower age of consent and norms**
- **Report highlights impact of pandemic on education**
- **Centre plans to hire agency to estimate size of digital economy**
- **Restoring the World Trade Organization's crown jewel**

Parliamentary committee proposed amendments to forest Act

Context

- A parliamentary committee, set up to examine the controversial proposed amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, has endorsed the amendment Bill in its entirety.
- The report was prepared by the 31-member joint committee on the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023, which is expected to be tabled in Parliament during the Monsoon Session starting on July 20.
- The Bill seeks to amend the pivotal 1980 law which was enacted to ensure that India's forest land is not wantonly usurped for non-forestry purposes.

Power to issue directions

- The Act empowers the Centre to require that any forest land diverted for non-forestry purposes be duly compensated.

- It also extends its remit to the land which is not officially classified as "forest" in State or Union government records.
- The Bill adds that the central government may issue directions for the implementation of the Act to any other authority/ organisation under or recognised by the centre, state, or union territory.

Restrictions on activities in forest
- The Act restricts the de-reservation of forests or the use of forest land for non-forest purposes.
- Such restrictions may be lifted with the prior approval of the central government. Non-forest purposes include the use of land for cultivating horticultural crops or for any purpose other than reafforestation.
- The Act specifies certain activities that will be excluded from non-forest purposes, i.e., the restrictions on the de-reservation of forest or use of forest land for non-forest purposes will not apply.
- These activities include works related to the conservation, management, and development of forests and wildlife such as establishing check posts, fire lines, fencing, and wireless communication.

Exempted categories of land
- The Bill also exempts certain types of land from the provisions of the Act such as forest land along a rail line or a public road maintained by the government providing access to a habitation, or to a rail, and roadside amenity up to a maximum size of 0.10 hectare. Forest land that will also be exempted includes:
  - Land situated within 100 km along the international borders, Line of Control, or Line of Actual Control, proposed to be used for construction of strategic linear project for national importance or security
  - Land up to 10 hectares, proposed to be used for constructing security related infrastructure
  - Land proposed to be used for constructing defence related project, camp for paramilitary forces, or public utility projects as specified by central government (not exceeding five hectares in a left-wing extremism affected area).

Data protection Bill may lower age of consent and norms

Context
- The upcoming data protection Bill could empower the central government to lower the age of consent from 18, and also exempt certain companies from adhering to additional obligations for protecting kids' privacy if they can process their data in a "verifiably safe" manner.
- The change was made on account of considerations that children can be independent stakeholders on the Internet, and might want to access services without always needing their parents' consent.

Change from earlier provision
- The change is a major departure from the draft Digital Data Protection Bill, 2022 that was floated last November, under which the age of consent was hardcoded at 18 years which means that for processing data of individuals below the age of 18, companies were required to seek their parents' consent.
- The upcoming Bill, it is understood, will take a graded approach to defining the age of consent on a case-by-case basis.

Global practice
- Under the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), age of consent has been kept at 16, but it allows member states to lower it to as much as 13. The United States Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) has capped the age of consent at 13, and verifiable parental consent is needed only for those who are younger.

- The changes will allow platforms that develop strong, proven and verified safeguards for children an option of dealing with children's data without parental consent, for instance, online education-related services.

Report highlights impact of pandemic on education

Context

- The Ministry on Education has released the Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) as a combined report for 2020-21 and 2021-22 assesses the performance of school education system at the district level.
- The report noted that pandemic led to a decline in educational performance of many districts in the country.
- The school closures due to COVID-19 have brought significant disruptions to education across India.
- The ultimate objective of PGI-D is to help the districts to prioritize areas for intervention in school education and thus improve to reach the highest grade.

Performance Grading Index for States

- Much like the PGI for States released earlier, this report too has 10 grades under which districts are categorised, with Daksh being the highest grade (above 90%), followed by Utkarsh (81%-90%); Ati-Uttam (71%-80%); Uttam (61%-70%); Prachesta-1 (51%-60%); Prachesta-2 (41%-50%); Prachesta-3 (31%-40%); Akanshi-1 (21% to 30%); and Akanshi-2 (11% to 20%).
- The lowest grade is Akanshi-3, for districts that score less than 10%.
- While none of the districts were able to earn Daksh and Utkarsh.

PGI ranking

- In Performance Grading Index for States 2021-22, Chandigarh retained its Ati-Uttam status, as well as some districts of Delhi and Gujarat.
- In Maharashtra, Satara, Kolhapur, Nashik and Mumbai achieved this status as did Kolkata.
- Tamil Nadu has several districts in the fourth-best grade (Uttam) and three — Ramanathapuram, Pudukkottai and Theni — in Prachesta-1.
- Uttar Pradesh has several districts under Uttam and Prachesta-1, and four under Prachesta-2.
- Most of the districts of Jammu and Kashmir fall under the Prachesta 1 and 2 grades.

About PGI-D report

- The Performance Grading Index for Districts (PGI-D) report is expected to help State education departments identify gaps at the district level and improve their performance in a decentralised manner.
- There are indicator-wise PGI scores that show the areas where a district needs to improve.
- The PGI-D structure has a total weightage of 600 points.
- It comprises of 83 indicators under six categories:
  - Outcomes
  - Effective classroom transaction
  - Infrastructure and student entitlements
  - School safety and child protection
  - Digital learning
  - Governance process

Domains under categories

- These categories are further divided into 12 domains:

- o Learning outcomes and quality
- o Access outcome, teacher availability
- o professional development outcomes
- o Learning management
- o Learning enrichment activities
- o Infrastructure
- o Facilities
- o Student entitlement
- o School safety and child protection
- o Digital learning
- o Funds convergence and utilisation
- o Attendance monitoring systems
- o School leadership development

Centre plans to hire agency to estimate size of digital economy

Context

- The Centre is reportedly in talks to hire an agency that will measure the actual size of the digital economy which is estimated to be around USD 1 trillion by 2025.
- The assigned agency will be roped in for a period of nine months for the completion of task, the report said additionally.

Mandate of agency

- The agency would be liable to submit the draft report on the estimation of the digital economy size and its projections from the current financial year to FY 2029-2030.
- The submission will be undertaken by the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) within 32 weeks from the date of selection, as per the report.
- The Centre in its request for proposal aims to invite propositions in the area of estimation and measurement of India's digital economy including the formulation and its framework.
- It underlined the process to be done capturing data and identifying the digital interventions.

State rankings and their share

- The agency will look into state rankings and their share in the digital economy, along with the e-commerce's impact and economy in emerging technology.
- The report even mentioned that collective action will be required to work in collaboration with the government and private/social sectors.
- Earlier, MeitY published a report titled 'India's Trillion Dollar Digital Opportunity' which identified 30 digital themes ranging from IT infrastructure, software capabilities and healthcare education to next-generation financial services.

Restoring the World Trade Organization's crown jewel

Context

- Dispute settlement is the central pillar of the multilateral trading system and the WTO's unique contribution to the stability of the global economy.
- In June 2022, the member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) managed to hammer out a face-saving deal.
- India played a vital role at the Geneva ministerial conference, thereby keeping faith in trade multilateralism alive.

Resurrecting the WTO's dispute settlement system

- Since 2019, the WTO's two-tiered DSS remains paralyzed.
- The appellate body, which is the second tier of the WTO's DSS that hears appeals from WTO panels, is non-functional because the United States, single-handedly, has blocked the appointment of its members.
- The appellate body, from 1995-2019, has upheld the international rule of law by holding powerful countries such as the U.S. and the European Union accountable for international law breaches.
- However, the appellate body has become a victim of its success.
- Its one-time supporter, the U.S., has become its most acerbic critic.

The 'precedent' problem

- The U.S. reproaches the appellate body for judicial overreach and exceeding its assigned institutional mandate.
- Thus, it argues that till the time the appellate body's role is defined precisely, it cannot be revived.
- One major problem that the U.S. identifies is that the appellate body, contrary to the text of the WTO's dispute settlement understanding (DSU), has been creating binding precedents through its decisions.
- It is well-established that there is no rule of stare decisis — i.e., no rule of precedent in international law.

WTO's Article 3.2

- The WTO's dispute settlement understanding (DSU) in Article 3.2 mention that the appellate body rulings can neither add nor diminish the rights and obligations of WTO member-countries.
- The Article also says: "The dispute settlement system of the WTO is a central element in providing security and predictability to the multilateral trading system."
- Thus, it is incumbent on the appellate body to ensure that there is consistency in the interpretation and application of the WTO agreements without creating a binding precedent.
- This requires striking a fine balance — precisely what the appellate body has tried to do. It has encouraged the WTO panels to rely on previous interpretations especially where the issues are the same.

De-judicialization of trade multilateralism

- The larger game plan of the U.S. seems to be the de-judicialization of trade multilateralism.
- The WTO was created in a world that was resplendent with the neoliberal consensus that emerged after the Cold War and the collapse of communism.
- The WTO became this 'visible hand' of the law to regulate global trade.
- This period saw not only the legalisation of international relations but also its judicialization.

Conclusion

- With the United States now hostile towards the WTO's dispute settlement system, the recovery of the mechanism by 2024 could face trouble
- The WTO's procedure underscores the rule of law, and it makes the trading system more secure and predictable.
- The system is based on clearly-defined rules, with timetables for completing a case. An important part is to rejuvenate the WTO's dispute settlement system (DSS), also called WTO's 'crown jewel', by 2024.

08.07.2023

- **Centre to share PM Gati Shakti data**
- **UGC's changed rule to hire entry-level professors**
- **Sri Lanka banks on Indian tourists for economic recovery**

- **TRAI seeks input on banning internet calls and messaging apps**
- **Ten military lessons from the Ukraine conflict for India**

Centre to share PM Gati Shakti data

Context

- The government is working out a mechanism to share data with industry and potential investors about multi-modal connectivity as well as other physical and social infrastructure captured on the PM Gati Shakti platform.
- The Network Planning Group (NPG) under the platform which has multiple layers of geospatial data from across the country, has so far managed to evaluate and facilitate 85 large central infrastructure projects worth nearly ₹5.4 lakh crore so far.

Roadmap

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT has been asked to examine issues relating to Geospatial data sharing has to be compatible with the Science Ministry's policy and other issues of protection and privacy.
- All ministries are working out what data can be shared.
- The Gati Shakti portal may be opened up for investors and other stakeholders outside the government.

About PM Gati Shakti Master Plan

- The Prime Minister on August 15, 2021, announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Gati Shakti National Master Plan' worth Rs 100 lakh crore.
- The holistic infrastructure development programme known as 'Gatishakti', plans to improve the productivity of industries and employment opportunities.
- This national master plan lays the foundation of the overall infrastructure in the country and provides an integrated and holistic path to the economy.
- The GatiShakti plan will become the basis of India's rejuvenation to manufacture world-class products using new-age technology and cutting-edge innovation.

UGC's changed rule to hire entry-level professors

Context

- According to the UGC's new standard, a Doctorate is no longer mandatory to have a PhD degree to apply for the post of assistant professor in colleges and universities.
- It is enough to clear the National Eligibility Test (NET), State Eligibility Test (SET), or State Level Eligibility Test (SLET) to be eligible for appointment.
- The University Grants Commission (UGC), India's higher education regulator, notified this change on June 30, reversing a decision it made in 2018.
- The new minimum criteria for direct recruitment of college and university teachers at the entry-level came into effect on July 1.

What was the system earlier

- In revised regulations on 'Minimum Qualifications for Appointment of Teachers and Other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges' released in June 2010, the UGC said that candidates for assistant professor must qualify in the NET, SET, or SLET. However, candidates who had PhDs were exempted from this eligibility condition.
- In other words, if a candidate had a doctoral degree, she could apply for an appointment even if she had not cleared NET, SET, or SLET.

- As per the changed rule in 2018, PhD Degree was a mandatory qualification for direct recruitment to the post of Assistant Professor in Universities from July 2021.

Response from the academic community

- Teachers acknowledges that removing the PhD requirement could help candidates from marginalised sections.
- But there are apprehensions over how the selection process will work in practice — and whether candidates with research degrees might be overlooked for those with just a NET/SET/SLET.
- Candidates having a postgraduate degree and UGC NET qualification will be able to
- apply for Assistant Professor jobs across the Colleges and universities in the country.

Sri Lanka banks on Indian tourists for economic recovery

Context

- Sri Lanka's government currently hosting the 67th convention of the Travel Agents Association of India, in a bid to further boost Indian tourist arrivals in the coming years.
- According to the President of Sri Lanka, tourism would emerge as Sri Lanka's chief foreign exchange earning sector in the next decade.
- Sri Lanka is counting on tourists from India, its primary source market, to boost foreign exchange earnings and aid economic recovery, as the island expects fewer tourists from Europe amid the ongoing recession.

Bouncing back

- Until May this year, the tourism industry has brought in $3.5 billion into the island, showing signs of bouncing back.
- Sri Lanka's tourism sector took a big hit after the Easter Sunday terror attacks in April 2019.
- Before it could recover, it suffered successive blows such as the pandemic and last year's financial meltdown.
- Prior to that, in 2018, the sector's foreign exchange earnings totalled $4.3 billion, according to the Tourism Development Authority.
- India has consistently topped Sri Lanka's tourist arrival charts in recent years, including during the time of COVID-19 and later, during the island nation's economic crisis.
- Meanwhile, Air India subsidiary Alliance Air has announced the introduction of daily direct flights between Chennai and Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka.

Economic Crisis

- In 2022, when Sri Lanka experienced its worst financial downturn since Independence — citizens suffered amidst acute shortages of essentials and long power cuts that triggered a mass anti-government uprising, authorities recorded as many as 1,23,004 tourists from India, or 24% of the total arrivals, followed by Russia and the United Kingdom.
- The focus on India and strategic partnerships between the two countries is therefore vital in ensuring a successful recovery for Sri Lanka's tourism industry.

TRAI seeks input on banning internet calls and messaging apps

Context

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on Friday put out a consultation paper asking if it would be possible for messaging apps such as WhatsApp to be brought under a licensing framework, and

whether such apps can be banned "selectively" in places where an Internet shutdown would otherwise have been imposed.

- The Telecom Regulator, TRAI floated a consultation paper to explore a framework for internet-based calls and messaging apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Apple's FaceTime etc. and selectively ban their services in special situations.

Suggestion of a parliamentary panel

- The consultation paper on "Regulatory Mechanism for Over-The-Top (OTT) Communication Services, and Selective Banning of OTT Services" follows a suggestion of a parliamentary panel to the Department of Telecom (DoT) to "explore the option of banning selective services such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram etc. instead of banning the internet as a whole" in an emergency situation.
- The panel has recommended the DoT examine the recommendation of TRAI and come out with a policy which will enable the selective banning of OTT services such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram during unrest and crisis as these apps are prone to be used by terrorists or anti-national elements in specified regions.

Regulations for OTTs

- The regulator in the consultation paper has sought views on the requirement of a framework for OTTs encompassing lawful interception, privacy and security, customer verification, pesky calls and messages, technical challenges in banning specific service etc.
- TRAI had recommended in September 2020 that there was no need to regulate "OTT communication services.

Ten military lessons from the Ukraine conflict for India

Context

- According to defence experts, the Russia-Ukraine war has thrown up multiple lessons for militaries across the world, including that of India.
- A big takeaway from the Russia-Ukraine conflict for India, has been the need to become self-sufficient in the defence sector.
- It has been pointed out that India needs to have an ecosystem in place so that there is an uninterrupted flow of defence supplies.
- The government's push for the indigenization of various equipment and ammunition has been a step in the right direction by defence experts.

10 Important military lessons

- The conflict in Ukraine has provided several military lessons that countries like India can learn from.
- The important 10 military lessons include.
- **First,** unstable deterrence upended by big-power geopolitical conflict is inherently escalatory.
- How well Russia fares on the battlefield remains key to the fate of Ukraine as an independent state and the future of NATO. Given the high stakes, all parties to the conflict are in escalation mode, with its consequential deeply worrying risks.
- Short of membership, NATO may double down on supporting Ukraine.
- **Second,** prolonged wars are more than deadlock wars due to their escalating aims. Russia's ability to defy numerous predictions of its defeat has come as a surprise. Counting on Russia's defeat has been a bad bet.
- **Third,** prolonged wars require a steady hand on the battlefield and a stable domestic front.
- **Fourth,** battlefield and political resilience are two sides of the same coin.
- Despite military setbacks of the last year — Kyiv, Kharkiv and Kherson to regroup and refit well enough to turn the military tide in their favor, Russian forces in Donbas have been like a coconut grater

decimating oncoming Ukrainian offensives, thus showing good fighting armies are also good learning armies.

- **Fifth,** prolonged wars are wars of reserves of political will, military capacity and reserves, civilian-industry fusion, industrial logistics, fresh and rotated manpower and role of paramilitaries.
- The Russian arms industry has bounced back, and its arsenal now has some of the best battle-tested equipment globally.
- **Sixth,** wars are not linear but overlapping in lineage. The Ukraine conflict is a 21st-century war intersecting with the 20th-century use of artillery and dug-in defence.
- **Seventh,** Increased use of AI and quantum computing would compress combat engagement windows from hours to minutes.
- Escalation within the domain or jumping across domains cyber, space or the electromagnetic spectrum or even the threat of eco-warfare — would offer new margins of strategic surprise.
- **Eighth,** maintaining control over widely dispersed forces will require integration of command of an entirely new order.
- Beyond Visual Range (BVR) capabilities of the Russian Air Force are now proving deadly and will be even more so in tech-rich militaries like that of the US or China.
- **Ninth**, the appeal of technology is universal, but its application is doctrine specific.
- By adapting technology to its doctrinal needs, Russia secured battlefield gains, while Ukraine has been caught midstream between its own doctrine and that imported from NATO.
- Networked warfare enables substantial benefits but also locks in huge risks of drawing us into combat situations not of our choosing.
- India should prepare to fight its wars; not those of others.
- **Finally,** India's quiet military revolution, in terms of changes to higher defence management, procurement, and recruitment as well as on operational principles of jointness, integration and the aterisation, will greatly benefit our armed forces.
- Independence in thought and action in matters of war and peace is, after all, the true meaning of strategic autonomy and for our defence reform process, its true litmus test.

07.07.2023

Provisions of the High Seas Treaty

Context

- The UN adopted the Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) or the High Seas Treaty.
- It became the third agreement to be approved under UNCLOS, after the 1994 and 1995 treaties, which established the International Seabed Authority and the Fish Stocks Agreement.

Background

- The idea of protecting the marine environment emerged in 2002.

- By 2008, the need for implementing an agreement was recognised, which led to the UNGA resolution in 2015 to form a Preparatory Committee to create the treaty.
- The Committee recommended the holding of intergovernmental conferences (IGC) and after five prolonged IGC negotiations, the treaty was adopted in 2023.

Aim of treaty

- The treaty's objective is to implement international regulations to protect life in oceans beyond national jurisdiction through international cooperation.
- The treaty aims to address critical issues such as:
  o Increasing sea surface temperatures
  o Overexploitation of marine biodiversity
  o Overfishing
  o Coastal pollution
  o Unsustainable practices beyond national jurisdiction

Other important provision

- The first step is establishing marine protected areas to protect oceans from human activities through "three-quarterly majority vote," which prevents the decision from getting blocked by one or two parties.
- On the fair sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources, the treaty mandates sharing of scientific information and monetary benefits through installing a "clear house mechanism."
- Through the mechanism, information on marine protected areas, marine genetic resources, and "area-based management tools" will be open to access for all parties.
- This is to bring transparency and boost cooperation.
- The last pillar of the treaty is capacity building and marine technology.

Why did it take so long to sign

- The negotiations on the subject were prolonged due to the absence of a provision to monitor information sharing.
- In intergovernmental conferences (IGC-2), small island states supported the idea of having a licensing scheme for monitoring, but were opposed by the likes of the U.S., and Russia, stating its notification system would hinder "bio prospecting research."

Who opposed the treaty

- Many developed countries opposed the treaty as they stand by private entities which are at the forefront of advanced research and development in marine technology (patents relating to marine genetic resources are held by a small group of private companies).
- Russia and China also are not in favor of the treaty.
- Russia withdrew from the last stage of reaching a consensus in intergovernmental conferences (IGC-5), arguing that the treaty does not balance conservation and sustainability.

Understanding dark patterns

Context

- The Department of Consumer Affairs and the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) recently held a joint consultation with stakeholders on the menace of 'dark patterns.
- The ASCI has come up with guidelines for the same, with the central government also working towards norms against 'dark patterns.

About dark patterns

- Dark patterns refer to user interface design choices or techniques intentionally used to manipulate or deceive users, often leading them to make decisions or take actions they might not have otherwise taken.
- These patterns exploit cognitive biases and psychological tendencies to trick or coerce users into performing actions that benefit the business or organization behind the design
- Harry Brignull, a user experience researcher in the U.K., introduced the phrase 'dark pattern' in 2010 to characterise deceptive strategies used to trick clients.

Different types of Patterns
- Businesses are using various techniques and deceptive patterns to downgrade the user experience to their own advantage.
- Some of the common practices are:
  - o Creating a sense of urgency or scarcity while online shopping
  - o Hidden costs where the bill is revised or costs are added when the consumer is almost certain to purchase the product
  - o Forced action of signing up for a service to access content
  - o Advertising one product or service but delivering another, often of lower quality, known as the bait and switch technique
  - o Disguised advertisements of a particular product by way of depicting it as news and many more.

Legal status of dark patterns
- Many believe that the use of dark patterns is a business strategy.
- The legality of dark patterns is a complex matter as distinguishing between manipulation and fraudulent intent can be challenging.
- As of now, there are no specific regulations in place in most nations against dark patterns.
- Nonetheless, individuals who have experienced harm as a result of dark patterns may potentially seek compensation for damages.
- In 2022, Google and Facebook faced repercussions due to their cookie banners.

Global Regulation and Practice
- Major international authorities are acting and formulating rules to address the issue.
- Guidelines from the European Data Protection Board were released in 2022 and offered designers and users of social media platforms practical guidance on how to spot and avoid so-called "dark patterns" in social media interfaces that are in violation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) laws.

India's Stand on dark patterns
- The Department of Consumer Affairs and the ASCI have identified the issue and recently taken certain steps to handle the same.
- As of now, companies are being asked to desist from using such tactics in the e-market.
- Major Indian online marketplaces received a letter from the Department of Consumer Affairs warning them against engaging in "unfair trade practices" by implementing "dark patterns" in their user interfaces to influence consumer choice and infringe on "consumer rights" as stated in Section 2(9) of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Centre pushes for reforms to spur FDI

Context
- The Ministry of Finance has made a strong pitch for measures to facilitate Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows, that dipped last year and may remain subdued in the coming months.

- It mooted greater attention from policymakers to resolve challenges faced by global investors, including last-mile infrastructure issues and difficulties in setting up large-scale factories.

Reason for a dip in FDI

- The Ministry of Finance noted that the dip in FDI inflows in FY23 was mainly due to inflationary pressures and tighter monetary policies.
- Some of the other reasons include:
- Escalation of geopolitical stress
- Enhanced volatility in global financial systems
- Sharp price correction in global stock markets
- High magnitude of El-Nino impact
- Modest trade activity
- Gross FDI flows slid 16% last year from the record high of $84.8 billion in FY22, while net inflows fell a sharper 27.4%.

Rising inclusivity

- The Ministry of Finance said that job creation played a key role in boosting demand in the economy from FY21 to FY23.
- Going forward, employment levels are expected to remain buoyant, mainly driven by rapid digitalisation, technological advancement, and the expanding implementation of the PLI [production-linked incentive] scheme, thereby creating employment avenues for both semi-skilled and skilled workers.
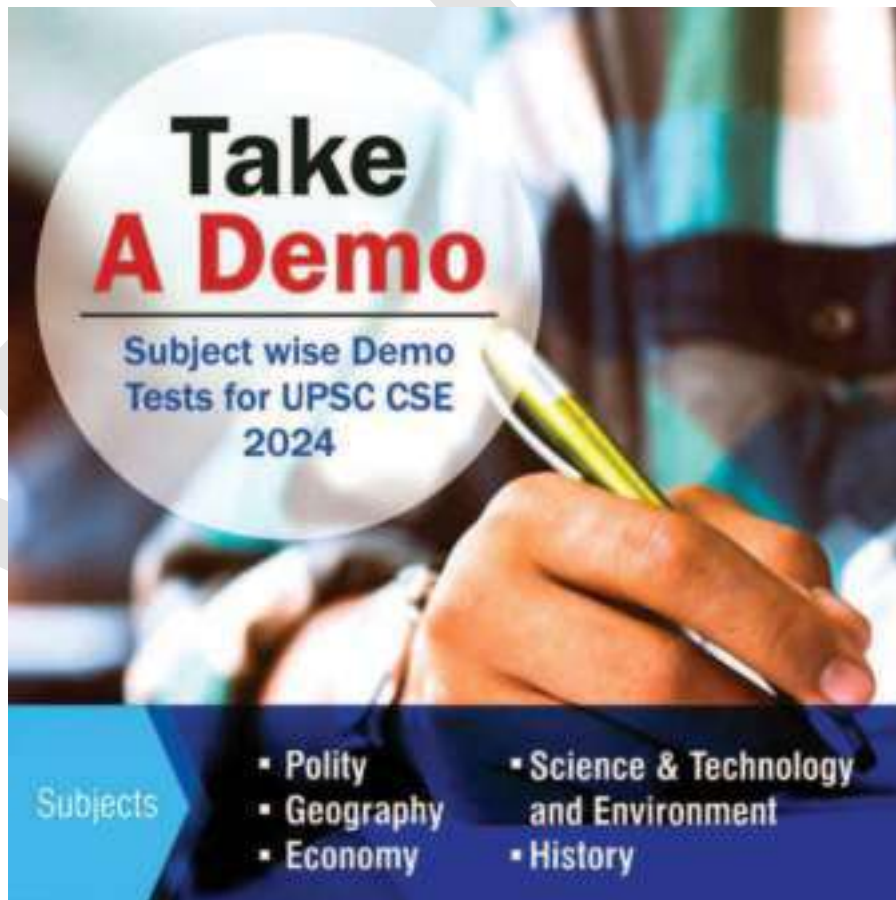
MoU with Tanzania to set up IIT Madras campus

Context
- In a significant development that sets the ball rolling for IIT Madras' global campus to start operations this year, India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Tanzania to establish the first IIT branch abroad, in Tanzania.
- The campus is expected to open in October 2023, welcoming 50 undergraduate and 20 master's students in its first batch.

Programmes
- IIT Madras is expected to launch four undergraduate and five postgraduate programmes from the Zanzibar campus.
- While IIT Madras will have the last word on academic programmes, curricula and student selection criteria, the capital and operating expenditure will be met by the government of Zanzibar-Tanzania.

Vision
- The IIT campus in Zanzibar is envisioned as a world-class education and research institution with a broader mission to develop competencies in response to emerging global requirements, deepen ties between the countries, and support research and innovation in the region.
- The move is also in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which recommends that "high performing Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses in other countries."

About Zanzibar
- Zanzibar is an archipelago off the coast of east Africa that united with Tanganyika in 1964 to form the United Republic of Tanzania. It is a semi-autonomous region of Tanzania.

India needs a Uniform Civil Code

Context
- The latest Law Commission of India's notification have revived the debate around the Uniform Civil Code in India.
- Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is defined in Constitution under Article 44 of Directive Principles of State Policy.
- It states that it is the duty of the state to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India.
- India, being a diverse nation, is home to many religions, each with its distinct personal laws governing marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance and succession.

In the Constituent Assembly
- The debate on the UCC goes back to the Constituent Assembly debates.
- In fact, one could assert that the legality of UCC is rooted in the Constitution of India, Constituent Assembly debates and also Supreme Court of India judgments.
- Constituent Assembly debates shed light on the need and the objective behind promoting a common civil code.
- Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, had made a strong case in the Constituent Assembly for framing a UCC.
- He stressed the importance of a UCC in ensuring gender equality and eradicating prevailing social evils.

Constitutional Provision and Court observation

- UCC is found a place under Article 44 of the Directive Principles of states policy.
- Article 44, in a sense, is the Constitutional mandate which requires the state to enact a UCC that applies to all citizens cutting across faiths, practices and personal laws.
- It would be also pertinent to point out here that the Supreme Court had dwelt on the matter on more than one occasion.
- The top court had observed in the Shah Bano case that "It is a matter of regret that Article 44 has remained a dead letter."
- The Court had pointed out that a UCC would help the cause of national integration.

The essence

- The UCC is a step in the right direction, long overdue, to safeguard the fundamental rights of all citizens and reduce social inequalities and gender discrimination.
- It should be seen and understood as an attempt at creating a unified legal framework that upholds the principles enshrined in the Constitution and reaffirmed by Supreme Court judgments.
- The doubts in the minds of some and the opposition to this initiative stemming from unfounded apprehensions need to be addressed through enlightened debate and constructive engagement.
- The overarching objective is to ensure that there is no gender discrimination, everyone enjoys the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Way forward

- India's diverse society calls for a unified legal framework to foster social cohesion and national integration.
- The Constituent Assembly members recognised the existing challenges and stressed the need for a UCC to bridge the gaps and promote a sense of unity among diverse communities.
- A UCC would eliminate discriminatory practices that deprive women of their rights and provide them with equal opportunities and protections.

06.07.2023

- **Cabinet gives nod to Data Protection Bill**
- **Iran's induction into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**
- **GST Council to discuss budgetary support and cess**
- **Measures for internationalization of the rupee**
- **Choose a new palette for India's creative economy**

Cabinet gives nod to Data Protection Bill

Context

- Recently, the Union Cabinet gave its nod to the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill.
- In the next course of action, the bill will be tabled during the monsoon session of Parliament.
- The monsoon session of Parliament is scheduled to be held from July 20 to August 11.

Aim

- The bill aims to make entities like internet companies, mobile apps, and business houses more accountable and answerable about the collection, storage and processing of the data of citizens as part of the "Right to Privacy".

- The work on the data protection bill started after the Supreme Court in August ruled that the "Right to Privacy" is a fundamental right.
- The Data Protection Board (DPB) will decide on the disputes as per the clause in the bill but victims will have the right to claim compensation by approaching civil courts.
- The bill proposes to levy a penalty of up to Rs 250 crore on entities for every instance of violation of norms in the bill.

Grievances redressal

- The Bill essentially allows laypersons to complain to a Data Protection Board, consisting of technical experts, constituted by the government if they have reason to believe that their personal data has been used without their consent (for example, mobile phone numbers or Aadhaar details).
- The Board will institute an investigation into the breach.
- Citizens will have the right to claim compensation by approaching the civil court.
- There are a lot of things that will evolve gradually.
- According to the source, individuals will have the right to seek details about their data collection, storage, and processing once the law is implemented.

Inference from EU law

- The Bill draws from an EU law, the General Data Protection Regulation and benchmarks 23 instances in which taking consent for recording data is not possible. These are special circumstances like a golden hour during an accident or natural disaster and so on.
- The Bill has a clause for offering voluntary undertaking in case an entity wants to admit that a breach has occurred and pays a penalty as a mitigation measure to avoid court litigation.
- As per the draft, the Data Protection Board of India could fine firms which do not protect user data with fines for individual offences ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹500 crore, which may apply in case of data breaches.

Concern by RTI activists

- Right to Information activists have raised concerns on an amendment to the RTI Act, 2005 in the DPDP Bill that would prohibit government departments from sharing personal information, arguing government departments may refuse to share information that could hold public officeholders accountable.
- Any personal data will not be shared with a third party, however, a person whose data has been breached can ask for their own information through RTI.

Iran's induction into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

Context

- Recently, India has chaired the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Virtual Summit.
- During this 23rd Summit, Iran officially joined the SCO as the Ninth Member Country.

About SCO

- The SCO was built on the 'Shanghai Five' grouping of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which had come together in the post-Soviet era in 1996, in order to work on regional security, reduction of border troops, and terrorism.
- In 2001, the Shanghai Five inducted Uzbekistan into the group and named it the SCO. The organisation has two permanent bodies — the SCO Secretariat based in Beijing and the Executive Committee of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure in Tashkent.

Goals of the SCO

- Strengthening mutual trust and neighborliness among the member states
- Promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, economy, research and technology and culture
- Making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region
- Moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order

SCO and bilateral issues

- India and Pakistan joined the SCO as observers in 2005, and were admitted as full members in 2017.
- Since 2014, India and Pakistan have cut all ties, talks and trade with each other. However, both countries have consistently attended all meetings of the SCO's three councils — the Heads of State, Heads of Government, Council of Foreign Ministers.
- Despite the fact that India accuses Pakistan of perpetrating cross-border terrorism at every other forum, at the SCO, Indian and Pakistani armed forces take part in military and anti-terrorism exercises together, as part of the SCO-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure.
- Not only Pakistan, the SCO has also facilitated talks between India and China on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) border issue.

Why is Iran's induction significant

- Iran's presence ensures support for India's moves to circumvent land-based trade through Pakistan, which has blocked transit trade for India.
- Central Asian states that are double land-locked will seek to build a multimodal trade route via Afghanistan to ports in both Pakistan and Iran.
- It also allows India to conduct trade with the region while staying out of China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- In addition, the induction of Iran, a historically close partner of India that has also suffered from terrorism emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan will bolster India's push for an end to terror safe havens.

GST Council to discuss budgetary support and cess

Context

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, in its upcoming meeting, is likely to discuss the scope of the budgetary support policy for the eligible manufacturing units operating in hilly areas, such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Northeast states.
- In addition, the Council is also expected to discuss ministerial report on online gaming, outline the details for operationalizing the appellate tribunal mechanism and clarify on the definition of multi-utility vehicles (MUVs), putting them at par with sports utility vehicles (SUVs) for similar tax treatment with compensation cess of 22 per cent.

Background

- Area-based exemptions for excise for eligible manufacturing units in the Himalayan and north-eastern regions were removed under the GST regime, which got rolled out from July 1, 2017.
- In the second GST Council meeting held in September 2016, it was discussed that all entities exempted from payment of indirect tax would pay tax in the GST regime and in case the state or central government decides to continue any existing exemption/incentive/deferral scheme, then it would be by way of a reimbursement mechanism through the budgetary route.
- As of now, among the 11 hilly and north-eastern states, only Jammu & Kashmir is reimbursing balance 42 per cent CGST, while none of the states are reimbursing the balance 21 per cent IGST.

GST compensation cess for SUVs

- The GST Council clarified the definition of SUVs (sports utility vehicles) for levy of 22% compensation cess and decided to come out with parameters to define MUVs (multi-utility vehicles).
- Currently cars with engine capacity exceeding 1500 cc, length exceeding 4000 mm and having ground clearance of 170 mm attract a GST of 28% and a 22% cess, taking the effective tax rate to 50%.
- However, states do not have a consistent definition define a vehicle as an SUV, leading to confusion among automakers.

Measures for internationalization of the rupee

Context

- Reserve Bank of India appointed committee suggested a host of short-term and long-term measures for internationalization of Indian rupee, including efforts for inclusion of the Indian currency in IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket.
- The Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) headed by the RBI executive director in its report said that internationalization is a process rather than an event, with continuous efforts to build upon all the initiatives that have been taken in the past.
- The Inter-Departmental Group (IDG) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was formed in December 2021.

About SDR

- Special Drawing Rights (SDR) is an international reserve asset created by the IMF to supplement the official reserves of its member countries.
- It is a potential claim on the freely usable currencies of IMF members.
- As such, SDRs can provide a country with liquidity.
- A basket of currencies defines the SDR: the US dollar, euro, Chinese yuan, Japanese yen, and British pound.

Short-term measures

- The committee while suggesting short-term measures noted that, there is a need to design a template and adopt a standardised approach for examining the proposals on bilateral and multilateral trade arrangements for invoicing, settlement and payment in INR and local currencies and encourage opening of INR accounts for non-residents (other than nostro accounts of overseas banks) both in India and outside India.
- It also recommended integrating Indian payment systems with other countries for cross-border transactions and strengthening financial markets by fostering a global 24x5 INR market and promoting India as the hub for INR transactions and price discovery.

Medium-term strategy

- With regard to medium-term strategy, the panel said, there is a need to review taxes on Masala bonds and international use of Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) for cross-border trade transactions and inclusion of INR as a direct settlement currency in the Continuous Linked Settlement (CLS) system.
- Examination of taxation issues in financial markets to harmonise tax regimes of India and other financial centres and allowing banking services in INR outside India through off-shore branches of Indian banks were part of medium-term suggestion given by the Reserve Bank panel.

Choose a new palette for India's creative economy

Context

- Digital learning platforms are powerful tools to support and extend paradigm shifts.

- A digital learning platform can create and analyse data, providing real-time support to a learning experience. This is relevant at both personal and collective levels.
- Digital learning platforms can be the gateway to capturing a learner's journey, making any learning visible to any audience.

Challenges and solutions

- Indian artists and artisans play a vital role in preserving traditional art forms and creating contemporary artworks.
- However, they face challenges that are related to economic sustainability, market access, the digital divide, crime in the art world and preservation.
- There are challenges in the selection of artists for financial assistance in organising cultural events.
- Lack of transparency in the selection process creates inequality in representation.
- A collaborative model promoting a cultural economy can help encourage India's soft power by creating an ecosystem of innovative technology-based start-ups, providing guidance, technical support, infrastructure, access to investors, and networking opportunities.

Economic importance of culture

- Recognizing the economic importance of culture, the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT 2022) was held to address contemporary issues in multicultural societies.
- The goal was to share a vision for the future of cultural policies and to reaffirm the international community's commitment to leveraging culture's transformative power for sustainable development.

A workable solution

- Having a collaborative model promoting the cultural economy is an effective solution to address the challenges faced by the creative economy and promote the economic contribution of culture.
- To promote economic growth, a solution can be to encourage India's soft power by having a capacity-building centre.
- There is need to create an ecosystem of innovative technology-based start-ups in the arts and crafts sector, providing guidance, technical support, infrastructure, access to investors, and networking opportunities.

Way forward

- The government along with private players can empower artists, help bridge industry gaps, and contribute to the overall development of the creative economy by providing support, resources, and opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship.
- A facilitation mechanism should operate by focusing on fostering knowledge sharing, networking, and economic empowerment for individual artists.
- Finally, the economic and cultural significance of art, culture, and the creative economy in India, while addressing challenges and proposing solutions, should support the growth and development of artists and artisans as a whole.

05.07.2023

- **Digital India Bill to promote digital competition**
- **India refuses China's BRI project at SCO**
- **Shelter homes for trafficked women in border areas**
- **Tribute to Alluri Sitarama Raju**

- **Antibiotics with promise: a lifeline India awaits**

Digital India Bill to promote digital competition

Context

- As a committee set up by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) readies a draft law on digital competition, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the nodal entity for the Internet space in India, is expected to prescribe broad principles for the competition space.
- While the Ministry of Corporate Affairs takes the lead in formulating and enforcing specific rules related to the sector.

Ex-ante regulations

- A committee was set up by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and is understood, to be considering proposing "ex ante" competition regulations for the digital space.
- India's current regulatory structure for competition issues follows the 'ex-post' approach, meaning that the regulator, the Competition Commission of India can only take action against an entity once anti-competitive practice has been established.
- However, under the 'ex-ante' framework, companies will have to put in place mechanisms to prevent any abusive anti-competitive practices.

Internet and Mobile Association of India

- The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) – whose members include companies like Google, Meta, and Microsoft earlier sent a note to the committee set up by the MCA, opposing ex-ante regulations for the sector, saying it will disincentivise companies from scaling beyond a particular limit.
- Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) is a not-for-profit industry body representing the interests of online and mobile value-added services industry. It is registered under The Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- IAMAI is a specialized industry body in India representing the interests of the online and mobile value-added services industry since 2004.

Digital and innovation economy

- The government's vision and goal of a $1 trillion and vibrant and rapidly growing digital and innovation economy requires global standard cyber laws – a framework that is future-ready and can adapt to new challenges, rapid changes and disruptions.
- The Digital India Bill is expected to deal with various competition issues in the digital space and establish broad-based principles related to the sector, including defining market power, and market imbalances.

India refuses China's BRI project at SCO

Context

- During the recent Virtual meeting of SCO, 2023, India on Tuesday once again refused to endorse China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- India has become the only country in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) not to support the project.
- A declaration issued at the end of an India-hosted virtual summit of the grouping said Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan reaffirmed their support to the BRI.

Economic Development Strategy 2030

- The member states also considered it important to ensure the implementation of the SCO Economic Development Strategy 2030 adopted by "interested member states" and projects aimed at promoting cooperation in areas of digital economy, high technology and modernisation of existing international routes for road and rail transport.
- India highlighted the need for boosting connectivity, but asserted that it is essential to respect the basic principles of the SCO charter, especially the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, while making such efforts.
-

About SCO

Shelter homes for trafficked women in border areas

Context

- The Centre has decided to help build infrastructure in border areas to combat child trafficking and help in rehabilitation and protection of victims.
- India is a source as well as destination country for trafficking of persons.
- According to official sources countries like Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar are the list of countries from where women and girls are trafficked in the guise of providing a better life, jobs and good living conditions in India.
- The trafficking victims in the border areas will also be produced before the child welfare committees to declare them fit for availing sponsorship as per the Mission Vatsalya Scheme.

Provision of financial assistance

- As part of this initiative, the Women and Child Development Ministry will provide financial assistance to the States and Union Territories (U.T.) along the border areas to set up homes for the protection and rehabilitation of trafficking victims from neighboring countries.
- These homes would provide shelter, food, clothing, counseling, primary health facilities and other daily needs for the trafficking victims, most of whom are children and minors, officials in the Ministry said.
- The Centre had asked the states of bordering countries to be more vigilant and have adequate facilities to provide relief and rehabilitation.
- Till now, the Women and Child Development Ministry has been providing financial assistance to all States and Union Territories under the Nirbhaya Fund to set up and strengthen Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU) in every district of the country.
- Funding has also been provided for setting up these units in border guarding forces such as the Border Security Force (BSF) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB).
- As of now, 788 AHTUs are functional.

Tribute to Alluri Sitarama Raju

Context

- The President of India graced and addressed the closing ceremony of the 125th Birth Anniversary of Alluri Sitarama Raju at Hyderabad.
- Speaking on the occasion, the President said that Alluri Sitarama Raju's struggle against injustice and exploitation is a proud chapter of the Indian freedom struggle.
- She said that all the people, especially the younger generation, should be aware of his patriotism and courage.

About Alluri Sitarama Raju

- The life-character of Alluri Sitarama Raju is an example of uniting society without any discrimination based on caste and class.
- He was adopted by the tribal society completely and he also made the happiness and sorrow of the tribal society his own happiness and sorrow.
- He is being remembered as a tribal warrior.
- He kept fighting for the rights of the tribal society till his martyrdom.
- He was nicknamed "Manyam Veerudu" (Hero of the Jungle) by local villagers for his heroic exploits.

Freedom Movement

- At a very young age, Raju channeled the discontent of the hill people in Ganjam, Visakhapatnam, and Godavari into a highly effective guerrilla resistance against the British.
- He became involved in anti-British activities in response to the 1882 Madras Forest Act.
- The Rampa Rebellion coincided with Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. He persuaded people to wear khadi and give up drinking.
- In 1924, Raju was taken into police custody, tied to a tree, and shot by a public execution, effectively ending the armed rebellion.

Antibiotics with promise: a lifeline India awaits

Context

- In the relentless battle against highly drug-resistant infections, a team of doctors recently witnessed a glimmer of hope amid the challenges they faced.
- Their extraordinary efforts and the life they saved highlight the critical need for action.

- There is an earnest plea for Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) for essential antibiotics that can make a profound difference between life and death.
- Recently in major achievement, 18-year-old patient fought against T-cell leukemia.
- Despite the administration of last-resort antibiotics, the patient's condition deteriorated rapidly.

An Indian innovation

- In their quest for a lifeline, the doctors turned to a promising antibiotic, cefepime/zidebactam.
- Developed by Indian researchers, this antibiotic combines two active components to combat drug-resistant gram-negative pathogens, including Pseudomonas aeruginosa. While still undergoing phase 3 trials internationally, this Indian innovation has shown remarkable potential.
- This extraordinary case underscores the urgent importance of granting EUA for antibiotics currently in phase 3 trials or licensed from other countries.

A dire situation

- Infection specialists, intensivists, oncologists, and doctors treating severe infections in critically ill and immune compromised patients are confronted with a grave reality.
- The scarcity of potent antibiotics to combat drug-resistant infections poses a direct threat to countless lives.
- It is distressing to witness patients succumb to infections just because the available antibiotics have lost their effectiveness due to rising resistance.
- Each year, millions of lives are lost due to the inadequacy of available antibiotics in the face of these formidable pathogens.

Cefiderocol antibiotic

- Cefiderocol, a licensed antibiotic in several countries, developed by a Japanese company, has demonstrated excellent efficacy against drug-resistant infections.
- It is disheartening that it remains unavailable within India.
- The gravity of the cases faced by patients in India demands access to this life-saving antibiotic.
- Doctor at India firmly believe it should be made accessible without delay.

Way forward

- The government need to implore the authorities to recognise the urgent need for action and acknowledge the immense potential of these life-saving antibiotics.
- By granting EUA for cefepime/zidebactam, an Indian innovation, and cefiderocol, a globally recognised antibiotic, we can strengthen our arsenal against drug-resistant infections.
- As a nation known for its scientific achievements, India has the opportunity to make a substantial impact on the world stage.

04.07.2023

- **India to host virtual SCO summit**
- **Centre announces scheme to help minor rape victims**
- **Manufacturing growth eased in June**
- **India should refuse America's 'NATO Plus' bait**
- **Extending Ayushman Bharat**

India to host virtual SCO summit

Context

- India is all set to host the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for the first time on 04 July 2023.
- The virtual summit will be completed in a single session that will last for a little over two hours and will also see remarks made by the Russian President his Chinese counterpart and Pakistan PM.
- The summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) under India's presidency is also set to welcome Iran as the new permanent member of the grouping.

India's SCO journey

- India joined the SCO in 2005 and became a full member of the group at the Astana Summit in 2017.
- In the last six years, India has taken an active and positive role in all SCO operations.
- At the SCO Summit in Samarkand in September 2022, India took over the chairmanship of the SCO for the first time from Uzbekistan.

India's SCO theme

- India's theme for its Presidency of SCO is "SECURE" i.e. "India focused on Security, Economic development, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environmental protection".

Five new pillars

- India created five new pillars and focus areas of cooperation in SCO which include:
  o Startups and Innovation
  o Traditional Medicine
  o Digital Inclusion
  o Youth Empowerment
  o Shared Buddhist Heritage
- Two new mechanisms in SCO Special Working Group on Startups and Innovation and Experts Working Group on Traditional Medicine were created at India's initiative.

Focus areas

- The instability in Afghanistan
- Ukraine conflict
- Boosting connectivity and trade
- India's border standoff with China

Centre announces scheme to help minor rape victims

Context

- The Women and child development (WCD) ministry announced that the Centre has approved a scheme that will provide support to minor rape survivors who have been abandoned by their family, often due to pregnancy, and have no other means to support themselves.
- The scheme for critical care and support for accessing justice to rape/gang rape survivors.
- This scheme aims to provide integrated support to girl child victims under one roof, and facilitate immediate, emergency, and non-emergency access to a range of services.

Provision under the scheme

- Under the scheme, immediate, emergency, and non-emergency access to a range of services including access to education, police assistance, maternity, neonatal and infant care, and psychological and mental counselling.
- Legal support and insurance cover will be provided to the girl child victim and her newborn under one roof to enable access to justice and rehabilitation of such girl child victims.
- It will not be mandatory for the girl child victim to have a copy of a first information report to avail of benefits under the scheme.

Fund allocation

- A fund of ₹74.1 crore has been allocated for the scheme.
- The ministry had decided to provide medical, infrastructure and financial support to such minor victims under the aegis of the Nirbhaya scheme.
- We have additionally leveraged the administrative structure of Mission Vatsalya in collaboration with state governments and child care institutions (CCIs) to actualize this support to minor victims on the ground.

NCRB's sexual assault data

- According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 51,863 cases were reported under the Pocso Act in 2021, and of them, 33,348 or 64% cases were of sexual assault. Around 99% of these 33,348 cases were committed against girls and in many of these cases girls become pregnant and bear several physical and mental health concerns, which are further aggravated when they are disowned or abandoned by their own families or are orphaned.

Manufacturing growth eased in June

Context

- According to the latest data from the Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's manufacturing sector demonstrated significant growth, positioning itself as the second-fastest expansion of the year, albeit at a slightly slower pace compared to May.
- The latest data from the Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, revealed a reading of 57.8 in June, a slight decrease from May's figure of 58.7.
- This result was slightly below the Reuters poll expectation of 58.0.

Inference to be drawn

- Notably, the PMI has remained above the crucial 50-mark for two consecutive years, indicating expansion rather than contraction in the sector.
- This sustained growth is a positive sign for India's manufacturing industry, showcasing resilience and strength despite facing higher inflationary pressures.
- New orders and output rose sharply despite the sub-indexes easing moderately from May, driven by both domestic and international demand.
- Foreign demand grew for the 15th straight month.
- Strong underlying demand also stoked business confidence and optimism around future business activity rose to its highest this year.

Inflation status

- Inflation is well within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) comfort zone of 2%-6% but the central bank had left the door open for future interest rate hikes.
- The RBI has raised rates by 250 basis points since May 2022 but held the repo rate at 6.50% since April.
- It is predicted to remain unchanged until next year.

India should refuse America's 'NATO Plus' bait

Context

- A US Congressional Committee has recommended the inclusion of India in "NATO Plus" to further boost global defence cooperation.
- The move comes ahead of India's Prime Minister visit to U.S.
- NATO Plus is a US-led, defense-oriented group consisting of all NATO members and five other nations: Australia, Japan, Israel, New Zealand, and South Korea.
- It seeks to guarantee the territorial integrity of member states by supporting each other in the event of a direct attack.
- It would also help India access the latest technology for its military faster and more smoothly.

About NATO

- NATO is a transatlantic military alliance of 31 countries, with the majority of members from Europe.
- After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many thought that NATO would lose its relevance.
- On the contrary, NATO has not only survived but also expanded, with Finland joining as its 31st member (April 2023), and Sweden waiting in the wings.
- NATO appears to be getting the much-needed ground for survival, thanks to Russia's tirade against it and the invasion of Ukraine.
- With NATO swelling its expanse, some analysts even see the onset of Cold War 2.0.

AUGUST
2023

31.08.2023

- **Revision to the process for sale of SIM cards**
- **Railways to expedite installation of safety systems**
- **Big tech giants' firms apply for IT hardware PLI scheme**
- **The need for an Indian system to regulate AI**

Understanding curbs on rice exports

Context
- The government of India has prohibited the export of non-basmati white rice with immediate effect,
- In a move to check domestic rice prices and ensure domestic food security, the government of India levied a 20% export duty on par-boiled rice till October, 2023.
- The centre also permitted the export of Basmati rice for contracts with value of $1,200 a ton or above.

Rice production estimate
- According to the third Advanced Estimate of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, during the Rabi season 2022-2023, rice production was 13.8% less, at 158.95 lakh tonnes against 184.71 lakh tonnes during Rabi 2021-2022.
- Kharif sowing data show that rice is sown on 384.05 lakh hectares this year as on August 25 compared with 367.83 lakh hectares during the same period last year.

Rice exports
- India is the largest rice exporter globally with a 45% share in the world rice market. Overall rice exports in April-May of 2023 were 21.1% higher compared with the same period last financial year.
- The shipment of non-Basmati rice has been on the rise for the last three years and the export of Basmati rice in 2022-2023.
- The data shared by the government says that till August 17 this year, total rice exports (except broken rice) were 15% more at 7.3 million tonnes as against the 6.3 million tonnes during the corresponding period last year.

Indian farmers expectation
- The government has increased the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for rice, and the paddy procured now by rice millers are at a price higher than the MSP.
- The prices will not decline for farmers.
- The restrictions on exports will ensure that there is no steep climb in rice prices in the market.
- For domestic consumers, though there is a slight increase in rice prices at present, in the long run, availability is secured and prices are not expected to spiral.

Exporter's opinion
- Prices of Indian par-boiled rice in the international market is competitive even with the levy of a 20% duty.
- Countries such as Indonesia, which are rice exporters, are looking at imports (raw rice) now.
- The government should look at classifying rice as common rice and specialty rice for export policy decisions rather than classifying as Basmati and non-Basmati.
- As many as 12 varieties of rice have Geographical Indication (GI) recognition and these should be insulated from general market interventions.

Revision to the process for sale of SIM cards

Context

- In a move to curb frauds using mobile phone sim cards, the union government said that bulk sales of sim cards will be barred.
- To further tackle the menace of cybercrimes and financial fraud, the centre has introduced two reforms.
- These entail a revision of norms for bulk procurement of SIM cards and registering the final point of sale (PoS) by the licensees (or providers).
- The reforms are meant to strengthen the citizen-centric portal Sanchar Saathi that was launched in May this year with the same objective.

About Sanchar Saathi

- Sanchar Saathi is a the citizen-centric portal that allows citizens to check the connections registered against their names, block mobile phones which are stolen or lost, report fraudulent or unrequired connections and verify the genuineness of a device (before a purchase) using the IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity).
- The portal aims to provide various reforms and services related to mobile connections and telecommunications.
- It has been developed by C-DoT under the Department of Tele-communications (DoT) to prevent frauds such as identity theft, forged KYC, banking frauds etc.
- Sanchar Saathi has, till date, analyzed 114 crore active mobile connections.

Reform on PoS

- From now on, it will be mandatory for franchisee, agents and distributors of SIM cards — all PoS to be registered with the licensees or the telecom network operator.
- The onus would be on the operator to carry out an "indisputable" verification of the PoS. Importantly, police verification (of the dealer) is mandatory.
- Existing SIM card providers have been given 12 months to comply with the registration requirements.
- If the PoS is found to be involved in any illegal activity, the agreement would be terminated with the entity being blacklisted for three years. It would also draw a penalty of ₹10 lakh.

Bulk SIM cards procurement

- The latest provisions would replace the system of 'bulk procurement' of SIM cards (by businesses, corporates or those meant for specific events) with a system of entailing 'business' connections — sizeable procurement by a registered business entity or enterprise.
- The new norms maintain that though businesses can procure any number of connections, it would be subject to completing KYC requirements for all end-users.
- In order to prevent the misuse of printed Aadhaar, the provisions mandate that demographic details would be required by scanning the QR code of the printed Aadhaar.
- Subscribers would also have to undergo the entire KYC procedure for replacing their SIM.

Railways to expedite installation of safety systems

Context

- Indian Railways would expedite work for installing equipment for bolstering the security of the passengers.
- To strengthen the surveillance over sensitive and vulnerable stations, Indian Railways is installing integrated security system.

- Railways is also strengthening its internal systems by ensuring maintenance of its assets, be it rolling stock or fixed assets.

Fire safety systems

- The Indian Railways will take up expeditious installation of three types of fire safety systems on all types of passenger coaches.
- The decision to speed up provision of fire-fighting infrastructure on trains was taken by the government.
- The Railway Board has directed the General Managers of all Zonal Railways to expeditiously complete the process of providing fire and smoke detection system in AC coaches, fire detection and suppression system in pantry cars and power cars and fire extinguishers in non-AC coaches.

Major Indian Railways accidents

- **Balasore train accident (2023):** In June 2023, three trains collided in Balasore district, in the state of Odisha in eastern India. Over 290 passengers lost their lives while around 1000 were injured in the train crash.
- **Amritsar Train Accident (2018):** In October 2018, a train plowed into a crowd of people watching Dussehra celebrations near Amritsar, Punjab. The accident resulted in a significant number of casualties.
- **Kalinga Utkal Express Derailment (2017):** In August 2017, the Kalinga Utkal Express derailed near Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Indore-Patna Express Derailment (2016):** In November 2016, the Indore-Patna Express derailed near Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh.
- **Hirakhand Express Derailment (2017):** In January 2017, the Hirakhand Express derailed in Andhra Pradesh, leading to fatalities and injuries.

Big tech giants' firms apply for IT hardware PLI scheme

Context

- The central government has received 32 applications, including big names like Foxconn, HP, Dell and Lenovo, for participation in the Production Linked Incentive Scheme 2.0 for IT Hardware.
- The ambitious scheme has generated significant interest in the centre's PLI scheme.

Participating Company

- Prominent global companies like Foxconn, HP, Dell, Lenovo, Thompson, Acer and Asus, have submitted their applications for participation in the scheme.
- These industry giants are poised to play a significant role in reshaping India's IT hardware landscape and the Centre is hopeful of a major change similar to what is being seen in the smartphone sector.

Significance

- According to ministry Communications and IT, the scheme aims to generate incremental production worth Rs 3.35 trillion over the next six years.
- Of the 38 applications received under PLI 2.0, approximately eight companies have applied under the newly introduced 'hybrid' category of the scheme.
- Around 25 applications have been submitted by local companies, confirmed an official from the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY).
- The scheme is likely to attract incremental investment of over Rs 4000 crore.
- The revised scheme offers additional incentives for assembling devices using locally manufactured components.
- The minister has highlighted that this added impetus will boost local value addition in production to a range of 35-48 per cent.

The need for an Indian system to regulate AI

Context

- India had been taking steps to explore the regulation of AI and related technologies.
- AI possesses the capability to fundamentally change the way in which we work; AI can, by assimilation of data from multifarious online sources, present far more powerful solutions than any human can.

Global regulation of AI

- Governments across the world are grappling with the regulation of AI.
- Till recently, the greatest advances in the regulation of AI have been made in the European Union (EU), Brazil, Canada, Japan and now, China. Countries in the EU, Brazil and the United Kingdom have adopted regulatory measures with differences which, on a closer study, are superficial.
- Regulations in Japan and China, however, are fundamentally different from the western system.
- The western systems have all adopted means of regulation which are intrinsically western in character.

Risk-based approach for west

- The western model focuses on a risk-based approach.
- First, lawmakers create a pyramid of risks and identify the risks posed by every type of AI-based application.
- The pyramid of risks then proceeds to be divided into four categories: **'unacceptable risk', 'high risk', 'limited risk' and 'low risk'.**

- In the EU, lawmakers have gone about prescribing prohibited classes of activities for the 'unacceptable risks', a regulated class of activities for the 'high risks', and a simple set of disclosure-based obligations for the 'low risks.
- Brazil too has followed a system of categorisation of risks and regulations to address those risks.
- Canada too follows a similar pattern of identifying activities to be prohibited, and clear regulations on how AI-based applications must function.

Risk-based approach for East

- As far as the eastern models are concerned, the Japanese government's Integrated Innovation Strategy Promotion Council has framed a set of rules called the "Social Principles of Human-Human-Centric AI".
- It was published by the Japanese government in March 2019 and manifests the basic principles of an AI-capable society.
- The first part contains seven social principles that society and the state must respect when dealing with AI:
  - Human-centricity
  - Education/literacy
  - Data protection
  - Ensuring safety
  - Fair competition
  - Fairness, accountability and transparency
  - Innovation
- The Chinese regulations opening lines of Article 4 of these regulations are: "The provision and use of generative artificial intelligence services shall abide by laws and administrative regulations, respect social morality and ethics, and abide by the following provisions".

Western model vs Eastern model

- The western model is perfect for the West a clear set of rules, which a rule-abiding society will undoubtedly comply with, along with a set of proscriptions and punishments for the few who violate the law.
- The eastern model is more open, and embraces the overlap between the legality of the rules and the morality of the rules.
- Legal systems which possess this overlap have even been given the name, "Hindu Jurisprudence".

Cue from the judiciary

- Justice V. Ramasubramaniam, who retired recently from the Supreme Court of India has lamented in more than one judgment that our slavish tendency is to ape western legal systems.
- One would expect regulators to take the cue from our judges and frame our newest regulations based on our eastern models of jurisprudence.
- Thus, systems based on AI must be regulated.

Way forward

- NITI Aayog has circulated three discussion papers which touch upon AI.
- In each of these, there are references only to the AI regulations in the EU, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.
- The time has come for India to have regulations in a manner that is consistent with the Indian ethos, by and for Indians.
- Let us hope that AI regulation is done better than indications suggest.
- India must look east.

30.08.2023

- **Chandrayaan rover detects sulphur, other elements on Moon**
- **Fourth extension for mandatory payments under the MGNREGS**
- **Cyclone frequency may rise over Indian coast**
- **Capex growth in roads and renewable energy**
- **The Election Commission: Autonomy in the crosshairs**

Chandrayaan rover detects sulphur, other elements on Moon

Context

- In a milestone achievement for moon exploration, the Chandrayaan-3 Pragyan rover detected sulphur and several other elements near the south pole of the moon.
- Sulphur is known to originate in volcanic activities.
- Presence of the element on moon can provide more insights into the formation and evolution of the earth's natural satellite.

Identification of other elements

- The Laser-Induced Breakdown Spectroscopy (LIBS) instrument aboard the rover has made the first-ever in-situ measurements on the elemental composition of the lunar surface near the south pole.
- The LIBS instrument installed in the rover also detected aluminum, iron, calcium, chromium, titanium, manganese, oxygen and silicon on the lunar surface.
- The instrument on the rover used a scientific technique to analyze the composition of materials by exposing them to intense laser pulses.
- A high-energy laser pulse is focused onto the surface of a material, such as a rock or soil which generates an extremely hot and localized plasma.

Fourth extension for mandatory payments under the MGNREGS

Context

- The fourth extension for mandatory payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) through the Aadhaar-based Payments System (ABPS) ends on August 31.
- As the numbers stand, out of the total 26 crore job card holders, 41.1% are still not eligible for this mode of payment.
- The Ministry of Rural Development has ruled out any more extensions, saying that of the 14.4 crore who are active workers, only 18.3% are ineligible.

Aadhaar-based Payments System

- The ABPS uses the worker's unique 12-digit Aadhaar number as his or her financial address.
- The worker's Aadhaar details must be seeded with the job card and bank account. Aadhaar details should be mapped with the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) database.
- The bank's institutional identification number (IIN) must itself be mapped with the NPCI database.

Data on ineligible workers

- An analysis done by the non-profit organisation LibTech India shows that even among the active workers, the percentage of ineligibility varies from State to State.

- From the top five States — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan — with active MGNREGA workers, 1.2 crore will no longer be eligible for payments because they do not have ABPS-enabled accounts.
- The picture from Northeast India too is dismal. In Assam, which has more than 63 lakh workers, 61.2% are not eligible and in Nagaland with 6 lakh beneficiaries, nearly 80% lack an ABPS account.
- As per the paper, which is an analysis of payments to normal accounts versus Aadhaar-linked accounts, 36% of transactions were processed in seven days for normal account payments and 39% for ABPS.

Cyclone frequency may rise over Indian coast

Context
- A new study has revealed that Low-latitude cyclones, those forming in the near-equatorial region, will increase in frequency and intensity in the coming years during a favorable phase of a Pacific climate phenomenon called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO).
- A combination of global warming and Pacific Decadal Oscillation can lead to more cyclones.
- The study found that there is a 43% decline in the frequency of low-latitude cyclones (originating between 5°N and 11°N) during the post-monsoon season in the north Indian Ocean in recent decades.

Tropical cyclones
- Tropical cyclones, commonly referred to as hurricanes or typhoons depending on their location, are powerful and destructive storm systems that form over warm ocean waters near the equator.
- Tropical cyclones that originate near the Equator, while being devastating, have been unusually subdued in recent decades.
- The last major cyclone of this kind in India was Cyclone Okchi, which devastated parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka in 2017.
- However, a combination of global warming and a cyclical event called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO) that repeats every 20 to 30 years, could make such cyclones more frequent in the coming years.
- An El Nino is developing in the Pacific, the effects of which are manifested in central and southern India, which have recorded rainfall deficits of 7% and 17%, respectively.

Capex growth in roads and renewable energy

Context
- According to report by Crisil Ratings, the total capital outlay for roads and renewables in 2023-24 and 2024-25 is likely to jump by 35 per cent to Rs 13 lakh crore compared to that in the last two fiscal years.
- The pace of road construction and capacity addition in renewables is seen growing by 25 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively, in the current and next fiscal.

Finding of the report
- The report noted that conducive policies, rising investor interest and strong execution speed are expected to drive the capital outlay in the sectors.
- The pace of execution of renewable energy projects is set to increase 33 per cent to 20 GW per annum over the current and next fiscal as compared to 15 GW per annum in the past two fiscal years.
- Similarly, road construction is set to improve 25 per cent to 12,500-13,000 km annually over the current and next fiscal.

Recommendation
- The report by Crisil Ratings noted that continued focus on asset monetisation and equity raising, along with healthy cash flows, will keep the capital structure balanced in both sectors.

- According to Crisil, the growth is expected to sustain over the medium term, supported by conducive policies, strong investor interest and healthy financial profiles, leading to stable credit quality of companies in the Crisil Ratings portfolio in both sectors.

The Election Commission: Autonomy in the crosshairs

Context
- Of late, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has been a focal point of differences between the government and the judiciary.
- This time, the clash of opinions is over its appointment.
- Article 324 of the Constitution contains a provision for such a law to be enacted by Parliament.

SC judgment of SCI
- The Supreme Court of India, in a judgment on March 2, directed that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the Election Commissioners (EC) will be appointed by the President of India based on the advice of a committee made up of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the leader of the single largest Opposition party and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- This judgment of the Constitution Bench was a major step towards broad basing the ECI and enhancing its constitutional status.
- The significance of this judgment also lies in the fact that this was a unanimous judgment of a five-judge Bench.

CEC and EC bill 2023
- The Union government introduced a bill in the Rajya Sabha that seeks to negate a Supreme Court verdict on the selection of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and other election commissioners (ECs) in the Election Commission.
- The Bill seeks to replace the Chief Justice of India from the high-powered selection committee, meaning the committee will be made up of the Prime Minister (Chairperson), Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Member) and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister (Member).

Constituent Assembly Debates
- The procedure of appointments of the CEC and the ECs has seen much debate in policy and political circles ever since the Constituent Assembly debates and much has been written about it.
- A suggestion during the Constituent Assembly Debates was that the appointment of the CEC should be subject to confirmation by two-thirds majority in a joint session of both Houses of Parliament (Constituent Assembly debates, June 15, 1949).
- However, Parliament was entrusted with the charge of making appropriate laws on the matter.

Recommendation by various committee
- The V.M. Tarkunde Committee appointed in 1975, the Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms set up by the then Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, in the 1990s, and the second Administrative Reforms Commission in its fourth report in 2009 among others made recommendations that the appointments of members of the ECI should be more broad based (through a collegium) than leaving this solely to the government on whose advice the President made these appointments.
- In 2006, a suggestion was made by a former CEC, B.B. Tandon, to the former President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam that a seven- member committee headed by the Prime Minister should choose the CEC and the other ECs.

Way forward
- The ECI has been held to be a reliable, responsible and trustworthy institution by the people of India.
- Handling elections that involve about 900 million voters (2019 election data) through a machinery of 11 million personnel in a setting of economic hardship and inequalities is a remarkable feat.
- Nevertheless, the point remains that the present regime still sees the ECI as an institution with autonomy.

29.08.2023

- **China releases new map showing territorial claims**
- **Naming of sites on moon**
- **Moody's Investors Service report population growth**
- **SC observation on Article 35A in J&K**
- **At Delhi summit, demonstrate climate leadership**

China releases new map showing territorial claims

Context
- The Chinese government recently released the "2023 edition of the standard map of China", which continues to show the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region within China's borders.
- The map was released by China's Ministry of Natural Resources during the celebration of Surveying and Mapping Publicity Day and the National Mapping Awareness Publicity Week.

What in the new standard map
- The map released recently shows Arunachal Pradesh which China claims as South Tibet and Aksai Chin occupied by it in the 1962 war as part of its territory.
- The standard map includes Taiwan and the disputed South China Sea within the Chinese territory.
- The map also incorporates China's claims over the nine-dash line thus laying claim to a large part of the South China Sea.
- Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei have all claims over the South China Sea areas.

What next
- The next step will be to accelerate the application of geographic information data such as digital maps and navigation and positioning in the development of the digital economy, such as location-based services, precision agriculture, platform economy and intelligent connected vehicles.
- China has territorial disputes with more countries than it shares its borders with.

India's response
- Previously, the official spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), while commenting on China's attempt to show its domination in places belonging to India's Arunachal Pradesh said: "This is not the first time that China has attempted something like this and we have already condemned any such attempts.
- Regarding Arunachal Pradesh, the government of India had also said that Arunachal Pradesh is an inseparable part of India) and imposing invented names like these will not at all change the reality.

Naming of sites on moon

Context

- With India's Chandrayaan-3 successfully landing on the south pole of the moon, Prime Minister Narendra Modi named the landing site as 'Shiv Shakti Point'.
- The Moon does not come under the jurisdiction of any one country – it's what makes global exploration and landing missions possible.

Who names the landing sites on Moon

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU) determines some other rules for Space activities. India is among its 92 members.
- As per the IAU's website, its Working Groups usually handle the naming process.

India naming sites on Moon

- After the 2008 Chandrayaan-1 mission, the site where the probe was made to crash as part of the mission was named "Jawahar Sthal" after the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.
- The spot where Chandrayaan-2 crashed in 2019 is believed that should happen only once the next mission succeeds in soft-landing. That point has now been named "Tiranga"
- The ISRO chief said India has "every right" to naming the Chandrayaan-3 landing site.
- The naming of the landing site is not the first incident.
- Several Indian names are already there on the Moon.
- All places related to even minor experiments would be named. That is a tradition.

Moody's Investors Service report population growth

Context

- According to Moody's Investors Service recent report, India's population growth would raise its labour force availability but that alone won't be enough to make the economy stronger or improve fiscal outcomes, due to the quality of education in the country.

Recommendation and suggestion

- Moody's Investors Service report emphasized that better educational outcomes will help countries like India avoid potential job losses from digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence in the long run, especially in services like call centers and BPOs.
- Moody's bracketed India's current education outcome levels with that of Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- It expects continued population growth in the region to support economic expansion as working-age populations will remain large compared with younger and older citizens.

Global population increase

- India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam will account for a third of the global population increase over the next 20 years and 40% of the uptick in working age population.
- The report said the difference in the proportion of the male and female population that has completed an upper secondary education was most pronounced in India and Bangladesh.

SC observation on Article 35A in J&K

Context

- Recently, the Chief Justice of India said that Article 35A of the Indian Constitution that was scrapped in 2019, 'took away fundamental rights.

- The CJI made the comments during the hearing of petition challenging the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status.
- A Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India and other judges continued hearing petitions challenging the Centre's decision to repeal the special status of Jammu and Kashmir by diluting Article 370 and Article 35A.

What is Article 35A

- Article 35A grants special rights and privileges to citizens of Jammu and Kashmir, was incorporated into the Indian Constitution in 1954.
- Article 35A of the Indian Constitution was an article that empowered the Jammu and Kashmir state's legislature to define "permanent residents" of the state and provide special rights and privileges to them.
- The state of Jammu and Kashmir defined these privileges to include the ability to purchase land and immovable property, ability to vote and contest elections, seeking government employment and availing oneself of other state benefits such as higher education and health care.

Observation by CJI

- The CJI said that When centre introduce Article 35A, it took away 3 fundamental rights- Article 16(1), right to acquire immovable property which was then a fundamental right under 19(1)(f), A 31, & settlement in the state which was a fundamental right under 19(1)(e)".
- Article 35A which creates exception under three areas - employment under State government, acquisition of immovable properties and settlement in the State.

Background

- In 2019, union Home Minister proposed that Article 370 and Article 35A be scrapped. The then President of India issued an order, the Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 2019, stating that the provisions of the Indian Constitution will henceforth be applicable to Jammu and Kashmir, which according to experts brought the northern state 'at par' with other states of India.

At Delhi summit, demonstrate climate leadership

Context

- The upcoming G-20 summit in New Delhi (September 9-10) is a crucial moment to demonstrate climate leadership.
- The G-20 members emit most of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and produce the bulk of its fossil fuels.
- But, most of them have also pledged to be "net-zero", cutting back on emissions and fossil fuel use.
- It is time for the G-20 to act as a united group that drives its own collective climate ambition through collaboration, coordination and competition.

Commitment to towards clean energy

- Recently, G-20 members have shown a degree of commitment to shift towards clean energy: renewable energy sources provided 29% of their energy mix in 2021, an increase from 19% in 2010.
- India has made significant steps in the last decade to become the world's third largest producer of renewable energy and setting targets to continue the expansion of installed renewables to account for 50% of energy production by 2030.

Ensure clear governance structures

- At the national and local levels, G-20 countries need to improve their governance processes for just energy transitions.
- Governments should establish clear governance structures to ensure that the transition process is inclusive and the results equitable, and avoid siloed working.
- This includes clarifying responsibilities and mandates between ministries and across government levels with the goal of having coherent delivery plans that can attract investment.
- The G-20 countries could establish a multi-ministerial task force or joint working groups between government and non-government actors to coordinate just energy transition efforts.
- Other G-20 members can learn from this approach, to accelerate their own just energy transitions by developing concrete frameworks, road maps, or action plans.

Aiding decarbonisation

- India's G-20 presidency has acknowledged, the G-20 should see this transition as a way to diversify G-20 member economies to ensure long-term economic stability, livelihoods and public revenue streams.
- International financial institutions have a critical role to play by aligning their investments and risk-taking to rapidly deploy vast amounts of renewable energy and grid infrastructure, and to target support to energy efficiency and very low-carbon industrial technologies.
- For example, the global increase in demand for and production of green steel necessitates the immediate transition to low carbon steel production pathways.
- The G-20 countries, representing 90% of global steel production and 80% of consumption, have a pivotal role in advancing global low-carbon steel production.

Need for transparency

- The G-20 should take a lead in streamlining international efforts to achieve just energy transitions.
- These efforts will be aided by radically improved transparency and accountability, for example by setting up disclosure mechanisms on energy transitions-related data through existing mechanisms, such as the G-20 Energy Transitions and Sustainable Finance Working Groups, and the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JET-Ps).

Way forward

- The G-20 summit is a crucial moment for the Heads of State and Government present at the meeting to adopt a strong leader's declaration, committing to collective ambition to combat climate change.
- The G-20 Summit must strongly commit to collective action to combat climate change.

28.08.2023

- **Creating global framework for ethical use of AI**
- **Dengue vaccines in India: ongoing trials and development**
- **IAF holds study to identify transport fleet requirement**
- **Graph of temperature variation of topsoil in lunar South Pole**
- **BRICS 2.0**

Creating global framework for ethical use of AI

Context

- Addressing the B20 Summit India 2023, Prime Minister called for a global framework on cryptocurrencies and the ethical usage of artificial intelligence (AI).
- The PM flagged concerns over algorithmic bias and its disruptive impact on society.
- The Prime Minister also reiterated the importance of India's role in setting up resilient and inclusive global supply chains.

Cryptocurrencies and supply chain

- The Prime Minister also called for a integrated approach to deal with issues related to cryptocurrencies.
- He suggested to create a global framework where issues of all stakeholders can be addressed.
- The Prime Minister said India is now a trusted and efficient global supply chain partner. When the world needed medicines, during the Covid pandemic, India, as the 'Pharmacy of the World', provided life-saving drugs to more than 150 countries.
- He also said that India has become the face of the digital revolution at the time of Industry 4.0.

Concerning issues

- The Prime Minister highlighted issues concerning climate change, energy sector crisis, food supply chain imbalance, water security.
- He also urged business leaders to look beyond consumer rights, and focus on consumer care.

Dengue vaccines in India: ongoing trials and development

Context

- With the expanding geography of dengue infections in India as well as the world an increasing need has been felt for an effective vaccine that can protect against all four serotypes.
- Nearly half the population of the world lives at risk of the disease at present.
- The disease in India has spread from just eight states and union territories in 2001 to all states by 2022.
- There have been 31,464 cases and 36 deaths due to dengue reported across the country till the end of July 2023.

Vaccine in human trials

- At present, there are three vaccine candidates that are being tested in humans in India.

- First, a vaccine developed by Panacea Biotech based on live weakened versions of the four dengue serotypes developed by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases in the United States.
- The company has already completed a phase I/II study in 100 healthy adults between 18 and 60 years of age.
- A second vaccine candidate was developed by the Serum Institute of India with the same weakened virus from the United States.
- A phase I trial with 60 healthy adults of 18 to 45 years has already been completed, showing the vaccine to be safe and well tolerated.
- After phase 2, the company with ICMR will conduct a large-scale study with the help of ICMR in children between the ages of 2 to 18 years.

Vaccines in early stages of development
- There are at least two indigenous vaccines against dengue under development in research institutes.
- Both have used similar ideas to come up with different types of vaccines.
- One of the main challenges of developing a dengue vaccine is antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE).
- The team from the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) created a Virus-Like Particle using these parts of the virus.
- The other team from Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology among other institutes again used the same envelope parts of the four-dengue virus along with another part called non-structural-1 and constructed a genetic sequence out of it.

IAF holds study to identify transport fleet requirement

Context
- The Indian Air Force (IAF), which is looking to procure medium transport aircraft (MTA), is carrying out a comprehensive study to identify the current and future payload-carrying requirements of the force.
- IAF has already issued a Request for Information (RFI) to global manufacturers for an aircraft with load-carrying capacity between 18 tonnes and 30 tonnes.
- The 2020 stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh has changed the nature of airlift and support for the Army required in high-altitude areas.

Talks with vendors
- There is a need to identify the current payload-carrying capacity.
- IAF is also in discussions with vendors.
- The study is ongoing and should take about six months to be completed.
- This comes as several of the legacy transport fleets are in need of replacement.
- The medium transport aircraft (MTA) could become a potential replacement for a part of the much-smaller AN-32s in service and could also replace the larger IL-76, which is also being looked into.

IAF's transport fleet
- The transport fleet of the IAF currently consists of over 100 AN-32s, Avros, IL-76 heavy transporters, IL-78 mid-air refueling tankers from Russia, as well as 12 C-130J Super Hercules and 11 C-17 Globemaster strategic airlift aircraft from the U.S.
- Of these, the IL-76 has a capacity to lift 45-50 tonnes and the C-17 up to 70 tonnes.
- In September 2021, the Defence Ministry signed a contract with Airbus and Space S.A., Spain, for procurement of 56 C-295 MW transport aircraft to replace the Avro aircraft in service which is being executed in partnership with Tata Advanced Systems Ltd.

Graph of temperature variation of topsoil in lunar South Pole

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently released a graph of the temperature variation on the lunar surface with an increase in depth measured by the Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment (ChaSTE) payload aboard Chandrayaan-3's Vikram lander module.

Temperature profile of lunar topsoil

- According to the space agency, Chandra's Surface Thermophysical Experiment (ChaSTE) measured the temperature profile of the lunar topsoil around the South Pole, to understand the thermal behavior of the moon's surface.
- The payload has a temperature probe equipped with a controlled penetration mechanism capable of reaching a depth of 10 cm beneath the surface.
- The probe is fitted with 10 individual temperature sensors.
- The presented graph illustrates the temperature variations of the lunar surface/near-surface at various depths, as recorded during the probe's penetration.
- This is the first such profile for the lunar South Pole.
- The payload was developed by a team led by the Space Physics Laboratory (SPL) of the ISRO's Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), in collaboration with the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Ahmedabad.

BRICS 2.0

Context

- Among the 15 BRICS summits held so far, the meet that concluded in Johannesburg last week received the most attention globally.
- It was a milestone that probably outshone the founding summit in Yekaterinburg (Russia) in 2009 and the third summit in Sanya (China) in 2011 when South Africa joined the grouping.

About BRICS

- BRICS is the group composed of the five major emerging countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The BRICS nations represent 42% of the world's population along with a significant 27% of the global GDP.
- The theme of the summit this year is BRICS and Africa: Partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism.

Countries joining BRICS

- The decision to invite six countries — Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE — to join BRICS as full members and keep its doors open for further expansion has opened a new era.
- BRICS 2.0 will have global repercussions: On the role of the US-led Western alliance centered around G7, the emerging economies and developing countries, and the engagements between the two worlds.

The big questions

- Two questions need answers.
- First, is the expansion good for BRICS?
- The new BRICS-XI will have more political clout, but the extent of its increased influence will depend on building inner unity.
- Second, why were these six countries chosen?

- BRICS 2.0 will also have six of the top 10 oil-producing countries of Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, UAE, Brazil, and Iran a definite global power shift and one not defined by the West.

Welfare of the Global South

- Addressing the 15th BRICS Summit, the Prime Minister urged member states to take advantage of India's digital solutions and to work for the welfare of the Global South.
- The Prime Minister said the BRICS embarked on a long and amazing journey in the last two decades and highlighted how the New Development Bank of the grouping is playing an important role in carrying forward developmental activities in the Global South.
- India suggested measures in areas of Railway research networks, and cooperation among MSMEs and start-ups and there has been significant progress.

26.08.2023

- **India, Greece upgrade ties to strategic partnership**
- **G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial concludes**
- **India Smart Cities Award Contest 2022**
- **Highly mutated Covid-19 variant detected**
- **Cleantech, for an inclusive green future in India**

India, Greece upgrade ties to strategic partnership

Context

- India and Greece recently upgraded their relations to a strategic partnership and agreed to expand bilateral cooperation in the political, security and economic spheres.
- The events took place during Prime Minister of India visit to the European country, the first by an Indian premier in four decades.
- The last Indian Prime Minister to visit Greece was Indira Gandhi who toured Athens in 1983.

Focus Area

- India and Greece further decided to speedily finalize a mobility and migration partnership agreement to facilitate skilled migration.
- Both countries will strengthen the strategic partnership by expanding cooperation in defence, security, infrastructure, agriculture, education, new and emerging technologies and skill development.
- The two sides also discussed the importance of direct air connectivity and opportunities in tourism, agri-food, pharmaceuticals and technology.
- India and Greece will have an institutional platform for dialogue between their national security advisers.

Doubling bilateral trade

- In order to further augment trade, India and Greece will work to double bilateral trade by 2030.
- Two-way trade has grown from $507 million in 2016-17 to $1.94 billion in 2022-23.
- Both leaders agreed the early finalization of a mobility and migration partnership agreement will be mutually beneficial, facilitating the free movement of workforce between the two countries.

Maritime security

- India and Greece are united in maintaining maritime security and on the need to adhere to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is crucial in view of concerns over the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indo-Pacific.

G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial concludes

Context

- The two-day G20 Trade Ministerial concluded with consensus on issues like:
  - Digitization of trade documents
  - Increased access to information for small businesses
  - Mapping global value chains (GVCs) to identify critical sectors and products
- All G20 member nations "unanimously agreed" on the outcome document, except for a disagreement over "one paragraph" on "geopolitical issues" pertaining to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, as taken from the G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration in November last year.

Voluntary and Non-binding framework

- The G20 nations endorsed the voluntary and non-binding "G20 Generic Framework for Mapping GVCs", based on building blocks such as collecting timely high-quality sector-level data and voluntarily provided firm-level data, as well as the use of models and indicators for key insights from such GVC data.

Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing MSMEs

- Under the 'Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing MSMEs' access to information', India called upon the International Trade Centre, Geneva, to work on a detailed implementation plan, in consultation with UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization (WTO), for the upgrade of the centre's global trade helpdesk to address the informational gaps faced by MSMEs.
- The G20 nations also identified "high-level principles on digitisation of trade documents" and enunciated 10 broad principles that cover an effective transition to paperless trade.

Reform of the WTO

- The trade minister also reaffirmed the outcomes of MC12, where all WTO members committed to working towards the necessary reform of the WTO to improve all its functions.
- The ongoing discussions on Dispute Settlement reform, and remain committed to conducting discussions with a view to having a fully and well-functioning Dispute Settlement System, accessible to all members by 2024.

India Smart Cities Award Contest 2022

Context

- The ministry of housing and urban affairs (MoHUA) announced the India Smart Cities Award Contest (ISAC) 2022 under the Smart Cities Mission (SCM), that felicitated 66 winners in various categories.
- The President of India will give away the awards on September 27, 2023 at Indore in Madhya Pradesh.
- The fourth edition of the India Smart Cities Award Contest (ISAC) winners were announced by the central government.
- In the past, the ISAC has witnessed three editions in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

About ISAC

- The India Smart Cities Award Contest (ISAC) is organized under the Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.

- This is one of the important activities initiated under the Mission, where pioneering city strategies, projects and ideas are recognized to award the exemplary performance, enable peer-peer learning and disseminate best practices.
- The ISAC recognizes and reward the cities, projects and innovative ideas that are promoting sustainable development across the 100 smart cities, as well as stimulating inclusive, equitable, safe, healthy and collaborative cities, thus enhancing quality of life for all.

Cities performance under ISAC
- Madhya Pradesh was recognized as the top-performing state in this edition of ISAC.
- Indore, a city in Madhya Pradesh, retained its position as the winner of the National Smart City Award.
- Tamil Nadu secured the second position among states, while Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh jointly held the third position.
- Among cities, Surat and Agra ranked second and third respectively, following Indore.
- Chandigarh received the Union Territory award in the contest.
- In the previous edition of the contest held in 2020, Uttar Pradesh was the best-performing state, and Surat and Indore were joint winners in the city category.

Highly mutated Covid-19 variant detected

Context
- According to a leading World Health Organization (WHO) official, a highly mutated Covid-19 variant named BA.2.86 has been identified in Switzerland and South Africa, along with Israel, Denmark, the US, and the UK.
- This offshoot of Omicron has over 35 mutations in crucial parts of the virus when compared to XBB.1.5, which was the predominant variant through most of 2023.
- The mutation count is roughly on par with the Omicron variant that led to a surge in infections compared to its predecessor.

About BA.2.86 variant
- BA.2.86 is the latest coronavirus variant.
- It was first spotted in Denmark on July 24 when it infected a patient at risk of severe illness.
- Subsequently, it has been detected in symptomatic patients, in routine airport screening, and in wastewater samples.
- Scientists are currently testing the effectiveness of updated Covid-19 vaccines against BA.2.86.

Tests and treatments
- Current tests and treatments seem effective against BA.2.86, although the variant might have an increased capability to cause infection in vaccinated individuals and those with prior Covid-19 infections.
- Based on BA.2.86's mutation profile, the anticipated impact on molecular and antigen-based is low.

Cleantech, for an inclusive green future in India

Context
- In his address to the nation on 77th Independence Day, Prime Minister talked about India showing the world how to combat climate change.
- The green economy paradigm provides an optimistic pathway to align development and environmental outcomes.
- Building a solar park or an electric vehicle charging station helps expand the much-needed infrastructure in a developing economy while furthering climate action.

- Similarly, reviving millets helps improve farm incomes in rain-fed areas while making our agriculture climate resilient.

Initiatives in hinterlands

- In recent years, different initiatives have taken the green economy approach to the hinterlands of India by enabling access to cleantech solutions for livelihoods among the rural population.
- For instance
  - o Solar dryers converting throwaway tomatoes into sun-dried ones in Andhra Pradesh
  - o Biomass-powered cold storages helping farmers in Maharashtra selling lemons make a gain that is three to five times that of the original price
  - o Solar silk reeling machines reducing drudgery for thigh-reelers and doubling their income in Odisha are some of the 50,000-plus
- The above examples forecast how cleantech solutions are already contributing to the jobs and incomes of rural women and men.

Sustainable rural economy

- India's rural economy that comprises 120 million farmers and 34 million microenterprises often struggles with unreliable electricity access and a dependence on expensive and imported diesel.
- These cleantech solutions that are powered by renewable energy can help India reduce its diesel imports, avoid the loss of perishable food and enhance rural livelihood opportunities while posing an investment opportunity worth $50 billion for investors and financiers.
- There needs to be a three-fold approach to traverse this journey from 50,000-plus to tens of millions.

Steps to scale up

- First, leverage existing government programmes supporting livelihoods.
- For instance, the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana that extends collateral-free loans for microenterprises can be used to enable the adoption of cleantech solutions.
- Likewise, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana can be leveraged towards adopting solar refrigerators and dryers for fishing communities.
- The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, which has only seen a 15% fund utilization against a target of ₹1,00,000 crore, can support the adoption of biomass-powered cold storage and beyond.
- Second, enable large-scale financing of cleantech solutions.
- It requires supporting bankers' capacity on credit assessment for cleantech because they have not come across such solutions and the associated cash flows before to make an informed assessment.
- Third, enable multi-actor partnerships between technology innovators, manufacturers, distributors and service providers, financiers, and market-linkage players to enable an overall ecosystem.

Way forward

- Cleantech manufacturers often need help bringing their products to customers.
- India has massive ambitions for a clean and green future.
- By focusing on cleantech for livelihoods and jobs, especially in rural areas, we can make that green future inclusive.

Cleantech can deliver on development and climate action in the country's rural areas.

25.08.2023

- **India and the Northern Sea Route**

- **BRICS agrees to add six new members**
- **India seeks level playing field for smaller e-com companies**
- **PM raises LAC concerns with China**
- **The real purpose of the medical college**

India and the Northern Sea Route

Context

- The Northern Sea Route (NSR), the shortest shipping route for freight transportation between Europe and countries of the Asia-Pacific region, straddles four seas of the Arctic Ocean.
- Murmansk, popularly called the capital of the Arctic region and the beginning point of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), is witnessing the rising trend of Indian involvement in cargo traffic.
- India has been showing greater interest regarding the NSR for a variety of reasons.

Significance of Arctic region for India

- The Arctic region, which is above the Arctic Circle includes the Arctic Ocean with the North Pole may have an impact on India in terms of economic security, water security and sustainability.
- The region also constitutes the largest unexplored prospective area for hydrocarbons remaining on the Earth.
- It is estimated that the region may hold over 40 per cent of the current global reserves of oil and gas.
- There may also be significant reserves of coal, zinc and silver.
- However, the government's Arctic Policy of 2022 mentions that the country's approach to economic development of the region is guided by UN Sustainable Development Goals.

India's engagement with the Arctic

- India's engagement with the Arctic can be traced to the signing of the Svalbard Treaty in February 1920 in Paris.
- India is undertaking several scientific studies and research in the Arctic region.
- This encompasses atmospheric, biological, marine, hydrological and glaciological studies.
- Apart from setting up a research station, Himadri,Svalbard, in 2008, the country launched its inaugural multi-sensor moored observatory and northernmost atmospheric laboratory in 2014 and 2016 respectively.
- Till last year, thirteen expeditions to the Arctic were successfully conducted.
- In May 2013, India became an observer-State of the Arctic Council along with five others including China.

How is Russia making the NSR navigable

- As the seas of the Arctic Ocean remain icebound during most of the year, the icebreaking assistance is organized to ensure safe navigation along the NSR.
- Russia is the only country in the world with a nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet, according to Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation.
- In December 1959, the world's first nuclear icebreaker, "Lenin," was put into operation, unveiling the new chapter in the NSR development.
- It was decommissioned 30 years later.

Driving factors for India to participate in NSR

- Primarily, the growth in cargo traffic along the NSR is on the constant rise and during 2018-2022, the growth rate was around 73%.

- With India increasingly importing crude oil and coal from Russia in recent years, "the record supplies of energy resources for the Indian economy are possible due to such a reliable and safe transport artery as the NSR."
- Secondly, the NSR assumes importance, given India's geographical position and the major share of its trade associated with sea transportation.
- Thirdly, experts are discussing the possibility of China and Russia gaining collective influence over the NSR.

BRICS agrees to add six new members

Context
- The five-nation group of emerging economies known as BRICS, which views itself as a counterweight to the West, has invited six more countries to join during its summit in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Argentina, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates is likely to become full members from January 1. 2024
- The current members include Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- By doubling its number of members from five to 11 in one quick sweep, the BRICS grouping has strengthened its position as a global grouping to be reckoned with.

Countries joining BRICS
- The news countries in BRICS includes Iran, which joined three other Middle Eastern states: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.
- Argentina and Ethiopia rounded out the half-dozen nations tapped for inclusion, while Indonesia, which was thought to be among the top candidates for admission, did not make the cut.
- India and China have border disputes and tend to consider each other potential adversaries.

India seeks level playing field for smaller e-com companies

Context
- The Prime Minister recently made a strong pitch to ensure "equitable" competition between large and small vendors in the e-commerce space and to empower small enterprises to integrate with global supply chains.
- Seeking more attention from global policy makers on the needs of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Prime Minister pointed out that they accounted for 60% to 70% of employment and 50% of the global gross domestic product (GDP).

Participation in global trade
- The PM said that enhancing e-com companies' participation in global trade and global value chains had been a priority of the Indian G20 presidency.
- The proposed 'Jaipur Initiative to foster seamless flow of information to MSMEs will address the challenge of inadequate access to market and business-related information faced by MSMEs.
- We need to work collectively to ensure equitable competition between large and small sellers.

PM raises LAC concerns with China

Context
- The Prime Minister recently spoke to Chinese president Xi Jinping and highlighted India's concerns on the unresolved issues along the LAC.
- PM meets Chinese President on the sidelines of the BRICS summit.

Efforts for the disengagement

- India and China have agreed to step up efforts for the disengagement of troops and de-escalation of tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) after a conversation between Prime Minister and Chinese President on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in South Africa.
- The prime minister underlined that the maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas and observing and respecting the LAC are essential for the normalization of the India-China relationship.

One on one counter

- This is the first time that Indian Prime Minister has brought up the issue directly with the Chinese President, India's stand that has been shared with China multiple times.
- At least 19 rounds of talks involving diplomats and military officials have made incremental progress in resolving the standoff.
- While the two sides said the talks had been positive, there was no word on any pullback of troops on the ground.

The real purpose of the medical college

Context

- A recent report of a patient having suffered for almost a year before she found out that a surgical instrument had been left behind in her stomach — a case of medical negligence in one of the leading medical colleges in Kerala.
- The State has one of the most advanced health care systems in the country.
- Although growing vacancies in seats to Bachelor of Dental Surgery and Master of Dental Surgery courses in dental colleges across the country are two happenings that raise questions about the potential role played by medical colleges in India.

Purpose of medical college

- A medical college is an institution that has dual purposes:
- first and foremost is its educational role: as primarily an institution for the education and training of students to become medical professionals through teaching and apprenticeship (internship).
- A medical college hospital with state-of-the-art facilities is established with a view to ensure bedside care, a mandatory requirement for apprenticeship, and is the most crucial component in medical training.
- Its secondary purpose is to offer medical care.

Policy proposal of 2019

- The policy proposal of 2019 by the Union government to convert district hospitals to medical colleges, that is being pursued along with a policy of sanctioning an All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)-like institution in every State, highlights the need to examine the contribution of medical colleges in patient care from a public health perspective.

Colleges and myths

- There is a myth that having a medical college sanctioned for a district would take care of every health-care need of the people there.
- The popular support and goodwill for a medical college is supplemented with another myth that producing more medical professionals is the solution to the issue of inadequate access to health care.

Tertiary care needs

- The advanced tertiary care will comprise approximately 1% of the total population annually.

- So, for a district with a population of three million, this would mean a bed requirement of 575-700 specialized beds.
- Most district hospitals are expected to cater to this need for specialized tertiary care.
- Most importantly, there is an overload of all kinds of patients who await treatment from these higher-level facilities, i.e., district hospitals or medical colleges.
- On the contrary, some of the well-functioning medical colleges across the country face problems such as crowding of patients in need of primary and secondary care which could otherwise have been handled by the lower-level facilities.

Way forward
- There is a need to shatter the myth of medical colleges being the ideal site for health-care solutions as far as the masses are concerned.
- Instead, strengthening secondary-level curative care can be the best policy for governments to strengthen their health-care system.
- Even setting up a medical college in a district is a popular policy response that masks the real problem of the inadequate provisioning of secondary-level health care.

24.08.2023

- **India supports consensus-based expansion of BRICS**
- **NCF proposes Board exams twice a year**
- **India seeks revival of WTO dispute resolution mechanism**
- **No end to shortage of TB drugs**
- **Needed, a well-crafted social security net for all**

India supports consensus-based expansion of BRICS

Context
- Addressing the annual summit of leaders of BRICS, the Prime Minister of India asserted that for a "future-ready" BRICS, the societies of these five countries will have to be "future-ready" and extended India's support to the expansion of the grouping based on consensus.
- India is hopeful that proposal to make the African Union a permanent member of the G20 will be supported by BRICS member nations.
- India fully supports the expansion of BRICS and welcomes the move to take forward the proposal based on consensus.

Intra-BRICS Cooperation
- The Indian Prime Minister also proposed five areas to strengthen cooperation among the BRICS states
  - space
  - education and skill development
  - skill-mapping
  - shared efforts to protect 'Big Cats'
  - traditional medicine
- The Prime Minister expressed optimism over the significant progress made in increasing intra-BRICS cooperation in areas of railways, MSMEs and start-ups.

Welfare of the Global South

- Addressing the 15th BRICS Summit, the Prime Minister urged member states to take advantage of India's digital solutions and to work for the welfare of the Global South.
- The Prime Minister said the BRICS embarked on a long and amazing journey in the last two decades and highlighted how the New Development Bank of the grouping is playing an important role in carrying forward developmental activities in the Global South.
- India suggested measures in areas of Railway research networks, and cooperation among MSMEs and start-ups and there has been significant progress.

NCF proposes Board exams twice a year

Context
- The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) finalized by the union Education Ministry has recommended that Class 10 and 12 board examinations be held twice every year and students be allowed to retain the best score.

New curriculum framework highlights
- The NCF is developed on the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and suggests the following things:

More languages
- Students in Grades 9-10 will now have to study three languages, including two Indian languages; Grades 11-12 will have to study two languages, including one Indian

School system redesigned from 10+2 to 5+3+3+4
- School curriculum is now divided into four stages — Foundational (3 to 8 years), Preparatory (8 to 11 years), Middle Age (11 to 14 years), and Secondary (14 to 18)

No textbooks till Grade 1
- Toys, puzzles, picture books, and manipulatives to be teaching material during first three years

Routine exams
- In 10 years, Examination Boards should be prepared to offer certification through 'modular examinations'

Promotion of ancient traditions of India
- Schools will use local resources of learning, including language, practices, experts, histories as well as environment as rich sources of illustrations or case studies.

India to seek revival of WTO dispute resolution mechanism

Context
- India is aiming to seek a revival of the WTO's defunct dispute resolution mechanism at the G20 Trade and Investment Ministerial Meeting (TIMM) in Jaipur.

Rules-based multilateral trading system
- Emphasizing on the rules-based multilateral trading system, India aims to deepen its engagement at the WTO to further the voice of the developing world and build global consensus for people in these countries.

- India while acknowledging the contribution of all G20 member countries, invoked a "Jaipur call for action" at the G20 meet to promote the MSME sector and bridge gaps for them to expand trade across geographies.

Priority and its aims
- In addition, referring to the five priority aims of the meet:
  - Trade for Growth and Prosperity
  - Resilient Trade and Global Value Chains
  - Integrating Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises MSMEs in World Trade
  - Logistics for Trade
  - World Trade Organisation (WTO) Reforms

No end to shortage of TB drugs

Context
- India is facing an acute shortage of tuberculosis drugs, including medicines used for treating drug-resistant TB such as Linezolid, Clofazimine, and Cyclomerize.
- The Union government has not supplied adequate doses of Rifampicin and some drugs used for treating people with multidrug-resistant TB [MDR-TB].
- The States have been asked to procure the drugs themselves but no additional funding has been provided.

Less focus
- During the pandemic, there was a sharp fall in new cases being detected and hence, notification of TB cases by the public sector dipped.
- All TB drugs were supplied by the Union government during the pandemic without any glitch.
- With TB notification by the public sector improving and nearly reaching pre-pandemic levels, drug procurement and supply by the Union government to States has not kept pace, resulting in a shortage.

Needed, a well-crafted social security net for all

Context
- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2021-22, around 53% of all of the salaried workforce does not have any social security benefits in India.
- In effect, this means that such employees have no access to a provident fund, pension, and health care and disability insurance.
- Meanwhile, gig workers, or approximately 1.3% of India's active labour force, rarely have access to any social security benefit.

Ignoring social security
- India's policymakers have largely ignored social security.
- In FY11, the National Social Security Fund was set up for unorganized sector workers, with an initial allocation of just ₹1,000 crore to support schemes for weavers, rickshaw pullers and bidi workers to name a few.
- A Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit on the scheme in FY17 identified ₹1,927 crore (the entire amount accumulated since inception) had just not been utilized.

Schemes overseas

- Brazil's General Social Security Scheme is contribution-based, substituting income loss for a worker (and his family), whether in partial or full.
- This covers any situation due to an accident at work, a disability that prevents the worker from working, death, an illness/medical treatment that leads to time away from work, family burdens, or the prospect of unemployment (Brazilian Good Practices in Social Security, International Labour Organization, or ILO, 2013).
- The Constitution itself has established that if there is a lack of funds, the National Treasury will step in (ILO, 2013).

Steps for India to take

- India should aspire to provide social security to all of its workforce, in a manner that is fiscally and administratively feasible.
- The government must expand employer and employee contribution under the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) system for formal workers.
- The government must push for a Code on Social Security in 2020, which sought to proposed the provision of life insurance, disability insurance, accident insurance, as well as maternity and health-care benefits along with old-age protection and crèche facilities for gig workers.

Digitisation under e-Shram platform

- A push for greater digitisation under the e-Shram platform has enabled the enrolment of approximately 300 million workers while expanding coverage of accident insurance (of ₹2 lakh cover) and disability (of ₹1 lakh cover).
- e-Shram puts the burden of registration on informal workers, who are required to furnish a self-declaration and share their Aadhaar card; there is no responsibility/incentive given to their employer (even temporary) to foster registration.

On existing schemes

- The Centre may also strengthen existing schemes, for example the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), the Employees' State Insurance Scheme (ESI), and the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), with budgetary support and expansion of coverage.

Way forward

- There is a need for a more significant push to raise awareness about social security to ensure that more workers are aware of the available benefits.
- Organisations such as the Self-Employed Women's Association which run Shakti Kendras (worker facilitation centers), may be funded to run campaigns (especially for women) to provide greater information on social security rights, along with services and schemes that the government offers.
- India needs to aspire to provide social security to all of its workforce, in a manner that is fiscally and administratively feasible.

23.08.2023

- **On protecting the biodiversity of the northeast**
- **BRICS is a platform for Global South**
- **Chandrayaan-3 lander all set for touchdown**

- **Bharat New Car Assessment Programme**
- **A strong case to restore Section 8(4) of the RP Act**

On protecting the biodiversity of the northeast

Context

- In the recent case of Re: Cleanliness of Umiam Lake versus State of Meghalaya (2023), the division Bench of Chief Justice of Meghalaya High Court in its order, stated that "In the absence of any other employment opportunities and in the name of promoting tourism, the natural beauty of the State should not be destroyed".
- The Meghalaya High Court was hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on the cleanliness of the Umiam Lake.

Umiam Lake

- Umiam Lake is one of the largest artificial lakes in Meghalaya.
- Umiam Lake is a reservoir in the hills 15 km north of Shillong in the state of Meghalaya,
- Recently, the Government of Assam and Meghalaya has announced to jointly develop it as a 'world class' water sports venue.
- It was initially established as a dam or reservoir for hydroelectric power generation, but currently it is a popular tourist destination.
- It is locally known as Bara Pani or Large Water.

Biodiversity status in Northeast

- Northeast India is a green belt region due to its abundant natural resources such as oil, natural gas, minerals and fresh water.
- The Garo-Khasi-Jaintia hills and the Brahmaputra valley are some of the most important biodiversity hotspots.
- Northeast India lies within ecologically fragile, biologically rich region, highly prone to climatic changes, located in trans boundary river basins.
- Both flora and fauna of the areas are under threat due to deforestation, mining, quarrying, shifting cultivation.

Environmental laws

- A considerable number of environmental laws and policies have been developed in the country, especially during the 1980s.
- The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution grants autonomy to District Councils, it limits the authority of the State over matters pertaining to the jurisdiction of the District Councils, including the use of land.
- Offenses related to or against the environment have also taken the shape of "public nuisance" under Sections 268 to 290 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, dealing with pollution of land, air, and water.

The pressing priority

- The Central and State governments have to develop infrastructure, generate revenue and create employment through sustainable policies.
- The 'Negative List' in the North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS), 2017 is a step in the right direction.
- The government should consider the case of creating a uniform environmental legislation, which caters to environmental issues at all levels of governance.

BRICS is a platform for Global South

Context

- Prime Minister of India before leaving for BRICS Summit to held in Johannesburg, South Africa has said that BRICS is pursuing a strong cooperation agenda across various sectors and has emerged as a platform for discussing and deliberating on issues of concern for the entire Global South.
- The BRICS grouping has become a platform for discussing the challenges facing the Global South.
- BRICS has been pursuing a strong cooperation agenda across various sectors.

15th BRICS summit

- The 15th BRICS summit is the first in-person meet since 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The presidency of the group which consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa is a rotational one.
- Russian President will take part in the summit via video-conference.
- The Johannesburg meeting has additional significance as it will discuss expansion of the grouping by including countries like Iran, Bangladesh and other developing economies.

About BRICS

- BRICS is the group composed of the five major emerging countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The BRICS nations represent 42% of the world's population along with a significant 27% of the global GDP.
- The theme of the summit this year is BRICS and Africa: Partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism.

Chandrayaan-3 lander all set for touchdown

Contex

- India is at the cusp of scripting history, as ISRO's ambitious third Moon mission Chandrayaan-3's Lander Module (LM) is all set to touch down on the lunar surface on 23 August 2023.
- The LM comprising the lander (Vikram) and the rover (Pragyan), is scheduled to make a touch down near the south polar region of the Moon.
- India is the only the fourth country to do so, and first to reach the uncharted south pole of Earth's only natural satellite.

About

- Chandrayaan-3 is a follow-on mission to Chandrayaan-2 and its objectives are to demonstrate safe and soft-landing on the lunar surface, roving on the Moon, and to conduct in-situ scientific experiments.
- The Rs 600 crore Chandrayaan-3 mission was launched on July 14 onboard Launch Vehicle Mark-III (LVM-3) rocket, for a 41-day voyage to reach near the lunar south pole.
- The soft-landing is being attempted days after Russia's Luna-25 spacecraft crashed into the Moon after spinning out of control.

Task of rover

- The rover, after the soft-landing, would ramp down of the lander module and study the surface of the moon through its payloads APXS - Alpha Particle X-Ray Spectrometer - to derive the chemical composition and infer mineralogical composition to further enhance understanding of the lunar surface.
- The rover also has another payload Laser Induced Breakdown Spectroscope (LIBS) to determine the elemental composition of lunar soil and rocks around the lunar landing site.

Bharat New Car Assessment Programme

Context

- Recently, the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways launched the Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP).
- Bharat NCAP is a significant step forward in the government's commitment to improve road safety by raising the safety standards of motor vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes.

Aim

- Bharat NCAP programme aims to provide a tool to the car customers to make a comparative assessment of crash safety of motor vehicles available in the market. Under this programme, car manufacturers can voluntarily offer their cars tested as per Automotive Industry Standard (AIS) 197.
- Based on the performance of the car in the tests, car will be awarded star ratings for Adult Occupants (AOP) and Child Occupant (COP).
- Potential car customers can refer to these star ratings to compare the safety standards of different vehicles and accordingly make their purchase-decision.

Parameters

- A rating between one to five stars will be assigned to a vehicle after an evaluation of three parameters:
  - Adult occupant protection
  - Child occupant protection
  - Safety assist technologies present in the car

Significance

- With the Bharat NCAP programme is expected that the demand for safer cars will increase, encouraging car manufacturers to comply with customer needs.
- With high safety standards, Indian cars will be able to compete better in the global market, increasing the export potential of car manufacturers in India.
- The Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP) is modeled on the Global New Car Assessment Programme (Global NCAP), a project of the Towards Zero Foundation, which is a U.K.-registered charity that promotes the universal adoption of the United Nation's motor vehicle safety standards worldwide.

A strong case to restore Section 8(4) of the RP Act

Context

- The Representation of People Act, 1951 which provides sitting MPs and MLAs an additional layer of protection from disqualification in case s/he is convicted of certain offenses.
- Senior Congress leader was disqualified on being convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment in a 2019 defamation case.
- The disqualification was instant because of the Supreme Court of India's judgment in Lily Thomas vs Union of India (2013).
- Through this judgment, the Court invalidated Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act 1951, which had allowed a three-month period within which to appeal.

Disqualification under RPA, 1951

- Section 8(3) disqualifies MPs and MLAs convicted and jailed for 2 or more years, leading to 6-year disqualification after release.
- Convicted individuals on bail with pending appeals are ineligible for contesting elections.
- Section 8(4) previously allowed convicted legislators to continue if they appealed within 3 months.
- In Lily Thomas's case, Supreme Court, July 2013, declared 8(4) unconstitutional, disqualifying on the date of conviction.

Concerns

- The judgment in Lily Thomas can play havoc with the careers of sitting legislators in the country.
- Instant disqualification on conviction and sentence will upset their entire legislative career without giving them breathing space because the courts in general have a very dilatory system in dealing with appeals, revisions and such.

No qualitative change

- In fact, the judgment in Lily Thomas has not resulted in any perceptible qualitative change in the criminal proclivity of politicians.
- Politicians belonging to the powerful ruling dispensation at a particular time may be able to get a conviction stayed within a few hours, thus saving themselves from instant disqualification.
- The judgment in the Lily Thomas case, which invalidated Section 8(4) of the Representation of People Act, can play havoc with the careers of sitting legislators.

22.08.2023

- **Concerns about drilling in the North Sea**

- **SC to constitute new bench for Cauvery water issue**
- **ICSSR to develop Indianized research methodology tools**
- **SC to lay guidelines on summoning of officials**
- **How to Govern data**

Concerns about drilling in the North Sea

Context

- The U.K. Prime Minister recently backed plans for new fossil fuel drilling off Britain's coast.
- According to an official statement released in July, the move will help Britain become more energy independent.
- The decision is worrying environment experts even as the world continues its stride towards irreversible climate change.
- The North Sea Transition Authority (NTSA), responsible for regulating oil, gas and carbon storage industries, expects the first of the new licenses to be awarded in autumn, with the round expected to award over 100 licenses in total.

History of drilling North Sea

- The 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf was the first international legislation to establish the rights of countries over the continental shelves adjacent to their coastlines and paved the way for exploration in the North Sea.
- The treaty came into force in 1964, shortly after the U.K. Parliament passed the Continental Shelf Act in April of the same year.
- The Act provides for exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf based on the 1958 convention.
- It delineated the jurisdiction the U.K. had over oil and gas resources under the seabed near its shores.
- The first license for exploration in the U.K. North Sea was awarded to British Petroleum (BP) in September 1964.
- By 2022, the total production declined to 38,037 thousand tonnes, according to official figures.

Problem with offshore drilling

- According to the U.S.-based advocacy group Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC), offshore drilling puts "workers, waters, and wildlife" at risk.
- Drilling in seas and oceans for fossil fuels not only aggravates the threat of climate change but also warms oceans and raises sea levels.
- Offshore drilling is associated with a direct risk to marine biodiversity, as well as with indirect risks to coral reefs, shellfish and the marine ecosystem from acidic waters because of carbon pollution settling into oceans.

Climate commitments

- In its March 2023 Progress Report to the U.K. Parliament, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) which advises the U.K. and devolved governments on emissions targets, said that the U.K. has not adequately prepared for climate change under the second National Adaptation Programme.
- In the U.K., National Adaptation Programmes are statutory programmes that the government must follow to help prepare the country for climate change, as required under the Climate Change Act.
- The second National Adaptation Programme covered the period from 2018-2023.

SC to constitute new bench for Cauvery water issue

Context

- The Supreme Court said that it will constitute a bench to hear the decades-old dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over sharing Cauvery River water.
- The matter was mentioned by the counsel representing Tamil Nadu for urgent listing before a bench comprising Chief Justice of India.
- Senior advocate appearing for Tamil Nadu, said an application has been filed by the state seeking release of water for the month of August which has been ordered by the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA).

Dire necessity

- The Tamil Nadu State government said the release of water was a dire necessity to meet the pressing demands of the standing crops.
- Tamil Nadu has urged the court to direct Karnataka to ensure the stipulated releases for September (36.76 tmcft) under the Cauvery Tribunal award as modified by the Supreme Court in 2018.
- The State said Karnataka should make good the shortfall of 28.849 tmcft of water during the current irrigation year for the period between June 1 to July 31.

SC as a last resort

- Recently, the Tamil Nadu had said it had no other option but to approach the apex court to get its genuine share of Cauvery water.
- It had contended that in a change of stand, Karnataka was prepared to release only a reduced quantum of 8,000 cusecs (cubic foot per second) every day.
- Referring to the deliberations of the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) in the national capital in August, Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister had said the requirement for Cauvery water was emphatically put forth by state officials during the discussions.
- The minister had said it was unanimously decided at a meeting of the Cauvery Water Regulatory Committee on August 10 that 15,000 cusecs per day would be released by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu for 15 days.

ICSSR to develop Indianized research methodology tools

Context

- The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) will soon announce the results of the research award proposals it had invited to study the impact of various schemes and public policy initiatives of the Union government.
- About 500 researchers will get funding for the studies based on fieldwork focused on a specific geographical region.
- The ICSSR also plans to develop "Indianized research methodology tools" to study the country's social and economic changes.

- The specific research outcome is to recommend the government about the direction in which these schemes are moving and to inform the people about these policies.

Policy for study

- The schemes and policy initiatives for empirical research include:
  - PM Ujjwala Yojana
  - PM Awas Yojana
  - Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana
  - PM Krishi Sinchai Yojana
  - PM Fasal Bima Yojana
  - PM Kisan Samman Nidhi
  - Year of Millet 2023
  - Ayushman Bharat
  - Jan Aushadhi Yojana
  - Swachh Bharat Abhiyan
  - Make-in-India
  - PM Gati Shakti
  - New Education Policy 2020
  - Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015
  - Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016

New mandate

- The ICSSR has a mandate to carry out primary data-driven empirical research on the social and economic impact of the policies of the government.
- Under the scheme, there will be two types of studies.
- Collaborative studies with institutions [₹30 lakh for six months]
- Individual studies [₹6 lakh for six months] by encouraging researchers from peripheral areas and underprivileged institutions.
- About 500 proposals will be selected by an expert committee.

SC to lay guidelines on summoning of officials

Context

- The Supreme Court Monday said that it will lay down guidelines for courts across the country to adhere to when summoning government officers to courts in cases involving government.
- A bench of headed by Chief Justice of India noted that there must be a different set of standards to be followed when seeking personal presence of government officials in pending cases and cases which have already been adjudicated since the latter involves an element of contempt of court.
- The Court was hearing a case relating to summoning of two government officials by the Allahabad High Court for contempt of court.

Draft SOP

- The Central government had submitted a a draft standard operating procedure (SOP) containing suggestions which could be followed by the Court while summoning government officials.
- The SOP suggested that the personal appearance of public officials in court proceedings should be called for only in exceptional cases and not as a matter of routine.
- As per the draft SOP, courts should practice restraint while summoning such officials in cases, including in writ proceedings, public interest litigation and contempt cases.

- The SOP also suggested that contempt of court proceedings against officials can only lie with respect to enforceable orders and not for matters lying in the executive domain, merely to ensure a particular outcome.

How to Govern data

Context
- Recently, the Rajya Sabha "unanimously" passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill (DPDP), 2023.
- In the process, it has predictably provoked mixed reactions.
- The Bill will apply to the processing of digital personal data within India where such data is collected online, or collected offline and is digitized.
- It will also apply to such processing outside India, if it is for offering goods or services in India.

Empowering Centre
- The Bill grants certain rights to individuals including the right to obtain information, seek correction and erasure, and grievance redressal.
- The central government may exempt government agencies from the application of provisions of the Bill in the interest of specified grounds such as security of the state, public order, and prevention of offenses.
- The Act also provides that the central government notify a Significant Data Fiduciary (SDF), and impose obligations on it, including periodic audits and data protection impact assessments, among others.

Data Protection Board
- The central government will establish the Data Protection Board of India to adjudicate on non-compliance with the provisions of the Bill.
- Data Protection Board (DPB), that will enjoy quasi-judicial powers and will be wholly appointed by the central government.
- The letters in the law are unambiguous.
- Through this legislation, the government has signalled an intent to lay down ex ante rules to keep a check on the power enjoyed by certain platforms that exercise immense influence.

Conclusion
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2023 extends substantial rights to individuals and provides them with better visibility, awareness, decisional autonomy and control over their data.
- The Act empowers the government to exempt any private entity from additional obligations imposed on Significant Data Fiduciary (SDF).
- This leaves room open for arbitrariness and regulatory asymmetry.
- Data is vastly more than just telecom and arguably more complex.
- Data governance is serious business and if the government is serious about it, then it needs to delegate, in letter and spirit.

21.08.2023

- **RBI's new pilot programme for frictionless credit**
- **India, Asian decision on review of FTA in goods**
- **Panel calls for uniformity in tenures and selection process**
- **Russia's first lunar mission crashes into the moon**
- **Pilot fatigue in India, a wake-up call for airlines**

RBI's new pilot for frictionless credit

Context
- Recently, the RBI commenced a pilot programme endeavoring to evaluate the feasibility and functionality of the 'Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit'.
- The suggested platform would strive to "enable delivery of frictionless credit by facilitating seamless flow of required digital information to lenders."

About Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit
- It is an end-to-end digital platform that will have an open architecture, open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), and standards to which all banks can connect in a "plug and play" model.
- The Reserve Bank Innovation Hub, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the central bank, has developed the platform.

About frictionless credit
- Frictionless credit is a borrowing approach that seeks to streamline the lending process for consumers.
- Unlike the traditional credit systems, where individuals need to go through extensive paperwork, credit checks and lengthy approval procedures, frictionless credit promises a smoother and faster experience.

What is the platform for
- Digital delivery of credit (delivering credit/loans though digital means) or any loan is preceded by a process of scrutiny known as credit appraisal.
- The process attempts to evaluate and accordingly predict the prospective borrowers' ability for repayment of credit/loan and adhering to the credit agreement.
- This pre-disbursal process is particularly important for banks since it would in turn determine their interest income and impact on the balance sheet.
- The pilot is currently ongoing in select districts of Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
- It provides for doorstep disbursement of loans in assisted or self-service mode without any paperwork.

Extending loan to different sector
- RBI's new pilot for frictionless credit, with the participation from certain banks, the platform would extend its focus also towards dairy loans, MSME loans (without collateral), personal loans and home loans.
- It is expected to link with services like Aadhar e-KYC, Aadhar e-signing, land records from onboarded State governments, satellite data, PAN validation, transliteration, account aggregation by account aggregators (AAs), milk pouring data from select dairy co-operatives, and house/property search data.

Significance of the pilot programme
- The pilot project will ensure that credit is extended to a larger set of borrowers with good credit history.
- The borrowers too would benefit by the resulting lower cost of accessing capital, which would translate into productive investment spending.
- As per media reports, an RBI survey indicated that processing of farm loans used to take two to four weeks and cost about 6% of the loan's total value.
- All in all, the lending platform would bring about reduction of costs, quicker disbursement and scalability.

India, Asian decision on review of FTA in goods

Context

- A decision on a long pending issue of initiating a review of the existing free trade agreement on goods between India and the 10-nation ASEAN bloc may be taken up during a meeting in Indonesia.
- The meeting is being held on the sidelines of the ongoing meeting of the Economic ministers of ASEAN.

India's calls for review

- India has asked for the review of the agreement with an aim to eliminate barriers and misuse of the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement, which came into effect on January 1, 2010.
- An Indian delegation is already there for the deliberations.
- India has asked for the review of the agreement with an aim to eliminate barriers and misuse of the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement, which came into effect on January 1, 2010.
- The agenda will come up for discussion and decision recently during the India-Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) economic ministers meeting.

Focus of review exercise

- In general, review exercise includes matters like:
  - Implementation issues
  - Rules of origin
  - Verification process and release of consignments
  - Customs procedures
  - Liberalization of trade in goods
  - Sharing and exchange of trade data

Panel calls for uniformity in tenures and selection process

Context

- The department-related Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, in its report, "Functioning of national akademis and other cultural institutions", evaluated bodies under the Culture Ministry such as the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Sahitya Akademi and the National School of Drama.
- The committee noted that as of now only the chairman of the Sahitya Akademi is elected.
- The process for appointment of the heads of the various other institutes and their governing bodies as well as their tenures vary.
- For example, the term of office for the governing body of the Lalit Kala Akademi is three years, while that of the Kalakshetra Foundation is 10 years.

Lack of guidelines

- The committee noted that there were no fixed guidelines with regard to the number of members in the governing council or the number of meetings to be held.
- Also, there are no people's representatives in the governing council of the Akademis, the committee said in its report.
- This lack of uniformity is not desirable as it leads to administrative and organisational inconsistencies among the various Akademis and institutions," it said in the report submitted in Parliament last month.

Recommendations

- The Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture has recommended that the government formulate a policy emphasising uniformity among all the Akademis in terms of the tenure of the

chairman or president, representation and election of the general council and the minimum number of meetings to be held each year.
- It said that if required, the legislation governing the akademis or institutions may be amended to ensure uniformity.
- The committee suggested that one MP be included on the governing Board of each of the Institutions on the lines of the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences and other such institutions to assist in the working of the akademis and to provide them ground reports.
- It recommends that one MP be included in the governing bodies to provide 'ground reports'

Russia's first lunar mission crashes into the moon

Context
- Russia's first moon mission in 47 years failed after its Luna-25 spacecraft spun out of control and smashed into the moon.
- In a statement, Roskosmos, the country's state space corporation, said that it had lost contact with the craft shortly after a problem occurred as the craft was shunted into pre-landing orbit.
- On August 19, in accordance with the Luna-25 flight programme, an impulse was provided to form its pre-landing elliptical orbit.

About
- The pilotless spacecraft was aiming to land in the south pole area of the moon where scientists believe there could be important reserves of frozen water and precious elements.
- It had been expected to land on August 21.
- India's Chandrayaan 3 mission, launched on July 14, is also hoping to land in the moon's south pole area.

Russia's waning influence in space
- The setback in the prestigious mission highlights Russia's waning influence in space exploration since the heyday of Cold War rivalry.
- During that era, Russia achieved significant milestones such as launching the pioneering satellite Sputnik 1 into Earth's orbit in 1957 and sending Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin as the first human to venture into space in 1961.
- Russia was in competition with India, as the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft from India is set to touch down on the moon's southern pole this week.
- Additionally, Russia is in a broader rivalry with China and the United States, both of which possess ambitious lunar exploration plans.

Pilot fatigue in India, a wake-up call for airlines

Context
- In October, 1976, an Indian Airlines Caravelle flight from Bombay to Madras (IC 171) crashed shortly after take-off at Bombay and while attempting an emergency landing, killing all 95 passengers on board.
- Among the last words of the flight Captain, the commander, picked up by the cockpit voice recorder was that he "was feeling sleepy".
- He had done the early morning Boeing departure to Delhi and back, spent the whole day in office and opted to operate the delayed Caravelle flight.

Recent crew incidents
- In the past weeks, there have been reports of some Indian pilots who passed away due to cardiac arrest.
- One of them was a pilot of Indian origin flying for an airline in West Asia.

- Another was a pilot employed in a major private airline in India who collapsed and died at the boarding gate in Nagpur just before his flight.
- The third incident involved a pilot on a Latin American airline flight from Miami to Santiago, Chile, who collapsed on the flight and where the co-pilot had to land the aircraft.
- Ten years ago, another Indian pilot passed away as he stepped out of a simulator after training pilots.

Fatigue and sleep deprivation

- The most important question is that do airline managements and the aviation regulator in India understand the importance of fatigue and sleep deprivation?
- Are profits and passenger numbers the only important factor in the airline business?
- India has one of the worst sets of rules on Flight and Duty Time Limitations and rest periods.
- The people who drafted and implemented these rules have no clue about the risks involved.
- Analysis of accidents involving highly experienced crew identified this as a cause.
- Sleep deprivation and a micro-sleep condition for between five to 15 seconds during the approach and landing phase have also been identified as a cause for accidents.
- The subject is an urgent matter to be addressed before precious lives are lost.

A different category of staff

- Pilots are not in the same work category as airline ground staff, including management staff.
- Those on ground can avail two days off every week for 52 weeks (a year) in addition to public holidays and annual leave.
- Flying crew in India on the other hand, get one day off in a week and just their annual leave.
- 'Safe airlines' worldwide provide at least two days off every week and proper rest periods between flights for the body clock to unwind.
- DGCA regulations lay down the absolute minimum.
- Nothing prevents an airline from providing more rest days if their interest in safety and the human factor of the flight crew is to be addressed.

Conclusion

- Pilot fatigue is a critical concern in aviation safety worldwide, including in India.
- The DGCA in India, like aviation regulatory bodies in other countries need to recognizes the importance of managing pilot fatigue and also requires to implemented various measures to mitigate the side effects of work fatigue.
- It's important to note that addressing pilot fatigue is an ongoing process that involves collaboration between aviation regulatory bodies, airlines, pilot associations, and other stakeholders.

19.08.2023

- **PM urges G20 nations to open innovations for public good**
- **India's first 3D-printed post office inaugurated**
- **Summit to bolster security in Pacific region**
- **Student suicides cases due to ragging-related in campus**
- **Mediation Bill: An incomplete settlement**

PM urges G20 nations to open innovations for public good

Context

- While virtually addressing the G20 Health Ministers' meet, the Prime Minister of India urged G20 nations to facilitate equitable availability of technology and also appealed to them to open innovations for public good.
- The Prime Minister called opening innovations for public good, avoiding duplication of funding and facilitate equitable availability of technology.
- The Prime Minister said this initiative will allow countries in the Global South to close the gap in health-care delivery, and "will take us one step closer to our goal of achieving universal health coverage."

Eradicating tuberculosis
- India informed the G20 members that India will eradicate tuberculosis (TB) well before the global deadline with the help of people's participation.
- The government has called upon the people of the country to be Ni-kshay Mitra or Friends for Eradication of TB.
- Under this, nearly 1 million patients have been adopted by citizens.

Roadmap
- During the the meet, the Prime Minister said that we must be ready to prevent, prepare and respond to the next health emergency (like COVID-19)."
- Underlining that health and environment are organically linked, the prime minister said clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient nutrition, and secure shelter are major factors of health.
- He congratulated the dignitaries for the steps they have taken towards the launch of the Climate and Health Initiative.
- The Prime Minister said the steps taken to address the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) are also commendable.
- The G20 Health Working Group has prioritized ''One Health ''. Our vision of ''One Earth, One Health ''.
- The establishment of the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

India's first 3D-printed post office inaugurated
Context
- India's first 3D-printed post office was virtually inaugurated in Bengaluru's Cambridge Layout.
- Its construction was completed in just 43 days two days ahead of the deadline by the Multinational company Larsen & Toubro Limited.
- The construction of post office has received technological support from IIT Madras.

About 3D printing
- 3D printing, also known as additive manufacturing, is a process that uses computer-created design to make three-dimensional objects layer by layer.
- It is an additive process, in which layers of a material like plastic, composites or bio-materials are built up to construct objects that range in shape, size, rigidity and color.

How is 3D printing done
- To carry out 3D printing, a personal computer connected to a 3D printer.
- There is need to design a 3D model of the required object on computer-aid design (CAD) software and press 'print'.
- The 3D printer does the rest of the job.
- 3D printers construct the desired object by using a layering method, which is the complete opposite of the subtractive manufacturing processes.

- Notably, these machines are capable of printing anything from ordinary objects like a ball or a spoon to complex moving parts like hinges and wheels.

Notable examples of 3D printing
- The 3D printing is being used in a host of different industries like healthcare, automobile and aerospace.
- In May this year, aerospace manufacturing company Relativity Space launched a test rocket made entirely from 3D-printed parts, measuring 100 feet tall and 7.5 feet wide. Shortly after its take off, however, it suffered a failure.

Summit to bolster security in Pacific region

Context
- The U.S. President opened a historic summit with Japan and South Korea at Camp David on recently.
- The summit focused on strengthening security and economic ties at a time of increasing concerns about North Korea's persistent nuclear threats and China's provocations in the Pacific.

New security pledge
- The U.S., Japan and South Korea have agreed to a new security pledge committing the three countries to consult with each other in the event of a security crisis or threat in the Pacific.
- The partnership is for a vision of the Indo-Pacific that is free, open, secure and prosperous.
- Under the pledge, the three countries agree to consult, share information and align their messaging with each other in the face of a threat or crisis.
- The leaders are also likely to discuss the long-running territorial conflicts in the disputed South China Sea involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei.

Student suicides cases due to ragging-related in campus

Context
- In reply to a Right to Information (RTI) query filed by RTI activist, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has revealed that over the last five and a half years, at least 25 students have died by suicide after they were subjected to ragging.
- Of the 25 cases, eight were reported in 2018, two in 2019, two in 2020, four in 2022 and nine in 2023.

Report of death cases
- Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have reported four deaths each followed by Odisha with three deaths.
- Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Telangana have reported two deaths each.
- Of the four cases of suicide in T.N., three were reported from Chennai - two from the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras and one from Jayagovind Harigopal Agarwal Agarsen College.
- The fourth suicide was reported from the Government Medical College in Thoothukudi district.

Anti-ragging helpline
- The UGC Chairman said that UGC maintains a dedicated 24x7 anti-ragging helpline for students.
- The UGC anti-ragging cell serves as a bridge between the students and educational authorities.
- Reports and complaints received through the helpline are escalated to appropriate authorities for timely action.

Distress calls
- The UGC gets information from the helpline on the type of assistance requested by students, such as those related to distress calls.

- The issue of student suicides is a complex and multifaceted challenge.
- UGC regulations on curbing the menace of ragging in higher educational institutions provide clear guidelines and mandates all institutions to prevent ragging and help students avoid taking extreme steps.
- Those in distress may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide prevention helpline 011-40769002.

Mediation Bill: An incomplete settlement

Context

- The Mediation Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in the year 2021 with the aim of encouraging and regulating the practice of mediation and to reduce the burden of courts.
- The Bill seeks to institutionalize mediation by establishing the Mediation Council of India, recognize mediation service providers and to regulate mediators.
- Recognition and enforcement of settlement agreements arising out of mediation is a welcome move.
- This is also in line with India's commitment as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (Singapore Convention).

Settlement via Mediation

- The Bill requires persons to try to settle civil or commercial disputes through mediation before approaching any court or tribunal.
- A party may withdraw from mediation after two mediation sessions.
- The mediation process must be completed within 180 days, which may be extended by another 180 days by the parties.
- For starters, the Union cabinet has done well to accept the recommendations of the standing committee by reducing the time for concluding a mediation from 180 to 90 days.

Technical flaws

- There are also some technical flaws, for instance, Clause 8 of the Bill entitles a party to move the Court, before the commencement or during mediation, for interim relief, only in "exceptional circumstances".
- The term "exceptional circumstances" is not only undefined in the Bill but is also anomalous to the settled principles of seeking interim relief before the civil courts — establishing prima facie case, the balance of convenience and irreparable injury. Moreover, there is no remedy of appeal available against an order passed under this proposed section.
- Even our arbitration regime provides an appellate recourse.

Online and community mediation

- The Bill introduces the concepts of "online" and "community" mediation.
- A recent Niti Aayog report reveals that only 55 per cent of India have access to the internet and only 27 per cent possess compatible devices.
- For online mediation to be a success, there is a need to scale our bandwidth accessibility to remote parts of the country.
- Setting up legal aid or access to justice clinics with adequate IT infrastructure could address this issue.
- As for community mediation, the Bill makes it mandatory to have a panel of three mediators.
- This requirement is unnecessary and impinges on the flexibility that mediation brings.

Way forward

- The standing committee had also recommended that government-related disputes be included in the Bill.
- The common litigant sees the government as an adversary before the court of law.

- The Bill provided a golden opportunity to the government to change that perception. This would not only have inspired confidence amongst all stakeholders but would have also helped in reducing pendency backlog.
- Mediation should be promoted as a preferred and voluntary mode of securing justice.

18.08.2023

- **Centre bans bulk sale of SIM cards**
- **UGC drafts guidelines to recognise foreign degrees**
- **Gaps in Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment) Act 2023**
- **Drones to monitor progress of MGNREGS worksites**
- **Gaps in Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment) Act 2023**

Centre bans bulk sale of SIM cards

Context

- In a move to curb frauds using mobile phone sim cards, the union government said that bulk sales of sim cards will be barred.
- The government has mandated registration of franchisee, agents and distributors or point of sales by telecom companies besides police verification for sim dealers.
- During observation the ministry in the past few months has came across a big role of SIM card dealers in the country.

What is the New rule

- The new rules mandate dealers to register themselves, and go through police verification and biometric process.
- The rule will come into effect from 1 October 2023, and the dealers will be given six months' time to register and complete the process.
- As per the proposed rule, the Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) will only issue SIMs to the registered dealers, and in case of any foul play the telcos can fine Rs 10 lakh on them.

Cyber frauds

- To reduce cyber frauds performed through fraudulently acquired SIM cards, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will now mandate registration and "indisputable verification" of SIM dealers.
- According to complaints received on telecom grievance portal Sanchar Saathi,
- the government has also detected and deactivated 52 lakh connections that were fraudulently obtained by showing wrong IDs, he said. "We have also blacklisted 67,000 SIM dealers and 300 FIRs have also been registered.

UGC drafts guidelines to recognised foreign degrees

Context

- The University Grants Commission released the draft UGC (Recognition and Grant of Equivalence to Qualifications obtained from Foreign Educational Institutions) Regulations, 2023.
- The UGC informed that many foreign universities have reached stages of setting up campuses in India's GIFT city.
- On the other hand some Indian universities are collaborating with foreign universities to offer joint degrees.
- Indian students acquiring qualifications from foreign higher education institutions through collaborative arrangements, such as MoUs or Agreements between the Indian Government or University Grants Commission and foreign counterparts, will now find a streamlined path

NEP 2020

- According to the ministry of education, the national education policy 2020 recommends several reforms in Indian higher education and intends to promote India as a "global study destination", providing quality education at affordable cost and attracting a greater number of international students.
- The UGC has drafted enabling regulations to provide a robust and transparent mechanism for recognising foreign qualifications and granting equivalence to such qualifications.
- The regulations will not be applicable to professional qualifications awarded by foreign educational institutions" in disciplines such as Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing, Law, and Architecture.

Major Hits of NEP 2020 in the Indian Education Sector

Restrictions on online and distance mode

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has drafted guidelines for granting equivalence and for recognition of degrees obtained from foreign universities, restricting degrees obtained through distance and online mode as well as through any franchise agreement.
- UGC said that while granting equivalence, the student must have pursued the programme through regular, in-person instruction and not through online or distance learning. It lays down minimum credit requirements, minimum duration, evaluation processes etc.
- The draft norms also recognise qualifications obtained in the off-shore campus of Indian higher educational institutions, giving more flexibility to students.

Online portal for applications

- A dedicated online portal to receive applications for granting equivalence to qualifications received from foreign institutions will be created for a smooth movement of students to the Indian setup, according to UGC.
- This equivalence certificate will certify the "parity of a qualification" between a foreign qualification and that awarded by an Indian board or university at the same level.
- The certificate will be valid for admission to Indian universities or employment purposes.

NEP 2020 flexible, not imposed on states

Context

- Union Finance Minister has asserted that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is flexible and is not imposed on states by the Centre.
- The minister said that states can adopt the policy according to their requirements.
- NEP is a flexible policy. It is not something that the Centre decides and imposes on all the states.
- It is a broad framework and the states can adopt it according to their requirements.

Education in mother tongue

- National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 puts emphasis on education in the mother tongue or local language.
- There is always a discussion on three language policy, which most Indian States have agreed to.
- There are some States that don't want a third language.
- Teachers will be encouraged to adopt a bi-lingual approach with those students whose language could be different from the medium of instruction.

Drones to monitor progress of MGNREGS worksites

Context

- The Union Ministry of Rural Development will be pressing drones into service to monitor both the progress and quality of assets produced of worksites under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
- There are several complaints about corruption in MNREGS works.

Types of monitoring

- According to a standard operating procedure (SOP) recently issued by the Ministry, the drones will be used for four types of monitoring:
  - Surveying the ongoing works
  - Inspecting the completed works
  - Impact assessment
  - Special inspection in case of complaints.

Significance

- Drones will be especially helpful in such cases for real-time monitoring and for garnering evidence.
- The SOP stipulates that the drones will be used by the ombudsperson in every district, who is responsible for registering suo moto complaints and disposing of them within 30 days.
- It has directed State governments to provide the facility to ombudspersons, as needed.

Gaps in Births and Deaths Registration (Amendment) Act 2023

Context

- The Lok Sabha has recently approved the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2023, which introduces a significant shift towards digital birth certificates.

Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969

- The Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969 provides for compulsory registration of births and deaths under a uniform law across India.
- The registration of births and deaths falls under the Concurrent List, giving powers to both Parliament and state legislatures to make laws on the subject.
- As of 2019, the national level of registration of births was 93% and death registration was at 92%.
- The Law Commission (2018) recommended the inclusion of marriage registration in the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969.

Objectives

- One of the major objectives that has been stated in the 'Statement of Objects and Reasons' attached to the Bill is "to create a National and State level database of registered births and deaths which would help in

updating other databases resulting in efficient and transparent delivery of public services and social benefits".

Building databases
- The Bill makes it compulsory that the Registrar General of India maintains a national level database of births and deaths, and that the Chief Registrar of births and deaths in every State is required to maintain a State-level database of registered births and deaths 'using the portal approved by the Registrar General of India'.
- These databases are to provide information to update the National Population Register, the Aadhaar database, electoral rolls, ration card, passport, and other databases at the national level, as may be notified.
- In the case of birth, the amendments provide for collecting the Aadhaar number of the parents.
- The national database is going to be a collection of State-level databases.
- The Registrar General of India needs to specify the standards for the data structures and transfer protocols.

Certificate of cause of death
- With regard to the facilities available now, the State government could decide that a cause of death certificate should be issued by the medical practitioner who attended the deceased person so that the certificate can be sent along with the death report.
- The areas/hospitals where such a certificate has been made mandatory varies across States, but is generally restricted to deaths in medical institutions.
- The amendments make it compulsory that for all deaths in medical institutions, a cause of death certificate be sent to the Registrar of Births and Deaths and a copy of the certificate is provided to the closest relative.

Concerns
- For deaths that occur outside hospitals, the medical practitioner who attended to the deceased during the person's recent illness has to issue such a certificate. This is fraught with problems:
- First, the medical practitioner may not have always arrived at a definite diagnosis before the person died.
- Second, the forms for cause of death that are being used are in conformity with World Health Organization recommendations. If the deceased was attended by a practitioner of the AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homoeopathy) systems of medicine, the cause of death recorded may not be usable for cause of death statistics since they may not be classifiable under the International Classification of Diseases.

- Third, a person who was under treatment for a certain disease can die of an entirely different cause outside a medical facility when the medical practitioner was not available for consultation. How can the practitioner be expected to issue a certificate of cause of death in such cases?
- Fourth, while Section 17 of the Act prohibits the inclusion of cause of death in any certificate issued under the Act, it now says that the cause of death certificate should be given to the relative of the deceased.
- These are contradictory as the cause of death in the death register is taken from the same cause of death certificate issued by the medical practitioner

Way forward
- It is provided that the birth certificate alone would be accepted as proof of date and place of birth for many purposes such as school admission, issue of passport, and issue of Aadhaar number.
- This may not require any amendment in this Act or any other Act.

- It should be possible to achieve this through amendments in the rules relating to those databases or even executive orders.
- The objective of national and State-level databases of registered births and deaths helping to update important databases seems distant.

17.08.2023

- **Centre approved PM-eBus Sewa scheme**
- **Bihar's caste-based survey and its legal challenges**
- **Understanding the MoEFCC's U-turn**
- **Centre and WHO to launch Global Initiative on Digital Health**
- **The future will not forgive the government**

Centre approved PM-eBus Sewa scheme

Context

- In a move to promote green mobility across, the Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister approved the PM-eBus Sewa scheme.
- The scheme calls for operation of 10,000 electric buses in 100 cities, with priority to those without an organized bus service.
- The Prime Minister said it will "redefine urban mobility".
- It will strengthen our urban transport infrastructure.
- The Scheme will support bus operations for 10 years.

Coverage

- The scheme will cover cities of Three lakh and above population as per census 2011 including all the Capital cities of Union Territories, North Eastern Region and Hill States. Under this scheme priority will be given to cities having no organized bus service.

Two Segments of Scheme

- **Segment A:** Augmenting the City bus services:(169 cities)
- The approved bus scheme will augment city bus operations with 10,000 e-buses on Public Private Partnership (PPP) model.
- Associated Infrastructure will provide support for Development/ up-gradation of depot infrastructure; and Creation of behind-the-meter power infrastructure (substation, etc.) for e-buses.
- **Segment B:** Green Urban Mobility Initiatives (GUMI): (181 cities)
- The scheme envisages green initiatives like bus priority, infrastructure, multimodal interchange facilities, NCMC-based Automated Fare Collection Systems, Charging infrastructure, etc.

Significance

- **Boost to E-Mobility:** The scheme will promote e-mobility and provide full support for behind-the-meter power infrastructure.
- Cities will also be supported for development of charging infrastructure under Green Urban Mobility Initiatives.
- Adoption to Electric mobility will reduce noise and air pollution and curb carbon emission.
- Modal shift due to increased share of bus-based public transportation will lead to GHG reduction.
- **Direct Employment Generation:** The scheme will generate 45,000 to 55,000 direct jobs through deployment of around 10,000 buses in city bus operation.

- **Support for Operation:** Under the scheme, States/Cities shall be responsible for running the bus services and making payments to the bus operators. The Central Government will support these bus operations by providing subsidy to the extent specified in the proposed scheme.

Bihar's caste-based survey and its legal challenges

Context

- The Supreme Court is set to hear on August 18, petitions challenging the Patna High Court (HC)'s verdict upholding the Bihar government's ongoing caste survey.
- In January, the Bihar government began conducting a survey of households to collect and publish data on caste with the aim of "ensuring all-round development of all sections of the State."

About caste-based survey

- In January, 2023 the State government launched a two-phase caste survey in Bihar, stating that detailed information on socio-economic conditions would help create better government policies for disadvantaged groups.
- The survey is estimated to collect the socio-economic data for a population of 12.70 crore in the 38 districts of Bihar.
- The first phase of the survey, which involved a house listing exercise.

Challenges of caste census

- The Census conducted at the beginning of every decade does not record any caste data other than for those listed as Scheduled Castes (SCs).
- In the absence of such a census, there is no proper estimate for the population of OBCs, various groups within the OBCs, and others.
- Despite this ambiguity, the Union government has categorically ruled out conducting a socio-economic caste census.
- The Union government in 2011 had undertaken a survey of castes through the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011.
- In 1992, with the Supreme Court ruling in Indra Sawhney & Others versus Union of India (1992) that caste was an acceptable indicator of backwardness, the recommendations of the Mandal Commission were finally implemented.
- The Mandal Commission estimated the OBC population at 52%.

Why is it being challenged

- The petitions in the Supreme Court contend that the Bihar government's June, 2022 order notifying the survey is unconstitutional since only the Centre is exclusively authorized to conduct a census under the Constitution.
- They also point out that the State Government does not have any independent power to appoint District Magistrates and local authorities for collating data, without a notification under Section 3 of the Census Act, 1948 by the Centre.
- The HC verdict has also been assailed on the ground that it violates the Puttaswamy judgment as it permits the collection of personal data by the State under an executive order.

Understanding the MoEFCC's U-turn

Context

- In June, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) issued a notification to establish integrated regional offices by merging offices of the Forest Survey of India (FSI), the National

Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), and the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), and thus bring them under the Ministry.

Plan by the Ministry

- The idea for such reorganization was announced during the COVID-19 lockdown and came under criticism from activists that it would render key environmental organisations "toothless".
- For example, in the existing structure, the NTCA can oppose a forest clearance for an infrastructure project for diverting Tiger Reserve areas.
- The proposed merger would have rendered this difficult as the NTCA would have come under the Deputy Director General of Forests, who is in charge of the Integrated Regional Office and reports to the Ministry.

What was the Ministry's rationale

- Giridhar Kulkarni, a Belgaum-based wildlife conservationist, had filed a petition against this reorganization plan in the Karnataka High Court in 2020, arguing that it would amount to a merger of entities and authorities that is impermissible in law.
- The MoEFCC replied that the notification does not amount to a merger and that the intention was to get the various authorities to function at 19 regional offices, under one roof.
- Following this assurance, the Karnataka High Court disposed of the petition but gave the petitioner the liberty to approach the Court if the merger was found to adversely affect the functioning of the various bodies.
- But more than two years later, the MoEFCC dropped the merger plan, likely owing to technical and administrative difficulties in merging the institutions in question.

How is the Ministry changing

- In recent years, the role and functions of regional offices of the Ministry have been widened both to process environmental approvals and monitor compliance of legally mandated safeguards during project construction, operation, and closures.
- As a result, such widened roles require additional funding and infrastructural support, but it remains unclear if such support has been provided.
- Indeed decentralised infrastructure is essential as it increases accessibility to regulators and can potentially enhance legal enforcement.

Centre and WHO to launch Global Initiative on Digital Health

Context

- India, along with the World Health Organisation (WHO), will launch the Global Initiative on Digital Health.
- The Initiative aim to converge efforts and investments in the digital health space around the globe.
- According to the officials, the initiative on Digital Health, a first of its kind, was introduced at the first Health Working Group meeting held in January this year, after India took over the G20 presidency.

Advantages

- The global initiative to be launched on August 19 will help in converging digital health innovations and solutions to improve healthcare service delivery.
- The global digital platform will include an investment tracker, an ask tracker (to understand who needs what kind of products and services), and a library of existing digital health platforms.
- India has focused on affordability, accessibility, and usability as the main aspects of the health sector.
- The G20 co-branded event on Advantage Health Care India 2023 will focus on global collaborations and partnerships for building resilient healthcare systems.

Focus of G20 Health Ministers meeting

- G20 Health Ministers meeting will focus on three key priorities:
  o Health emergency prevention, preparedness, and response with a focus on antimicrobial resistance and the One Health framework
  o Strengthening cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector with a focus on access and availability to safe, effective, quality, and affordable medical countermeasures (vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics)
  o Digital Health innovations and solutions to aid universal health coverage and improve healthcare service delivery.
- The summit is also working at garnering support for setting up a Climate and Health Initiative in India, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank and the launch of patient and healthcare workforce mobility portal.

The future will not forgive the government

Context

- Two new Bills mooted by the Union government grave impact on the environment.
- The Union government completed its process of passing the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.
- The previous day, the government completed the legislative formalities regarding the biodiversity (Amendment) Bill, 2023 too.
- At the Consultative Committee meeting, Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change talk about the importance of the conservation of wetlands in the country.

Not walking the talk

- The timing of the Bill has to be noted for it has been mooted in the run-up to the G-20 summit which is set to take place in India in September.
- Climate change and the environment have been given due importance on the G-20 agenda.
- Moreover, as a signatory of the Paris Agreement, India has all along lectured about the necessity to protect the environment, forest and biodiversity.

Shortcoming

- Both these Bills collectively undermine the Forest Rights Act, 2006 which guarantees the rights of the tribals and other traditional forest dwellers.
- The government is trying to push back India's well-founded ideas on conservation going back to the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.
- Ease of doing business is the watchword of governance in the Modi era and the arithmetic and calculations of business guide the government in all its activities.

'Businesses of conservation

- Safeguarding the rights of the people is the primary 'businesses of conservation.
- Any development causing peril to the environment cannot be sustainable.
- The amendments made to the Forest Conservation Act widen the way for forest clearance for all developmental projects.
- One of the consequences of the Bill is the overturning of the celebrated judgments of TN Godavarman vs Union of India (1996).

Conclusion

- The assault on 'mother earth' propelled by the unending greed of humans is causing unbearable havoc on nature and human life itself.
- The repeated floods and landslides in the Himalayas tell us about the impending danger.
- The famous saying of Mahatma Gandhi: "The Earth has enough resources to meet the needs of all but not enough to satisfy the greed of even one person."
- When the government itself is feeding to the greed of crony corporates, the country has to become more vigilant.

16.08.2023

- **Cauvery water sharing issue flaring up again**
- **PM announces new housing scheme for urban poor**
- **CJI announces plans to expand Supreme Court**
- **Steady growth in new Jan Dhan accounts**
- **Consumption-based poverty estimates have relevance**

Cauvery water sharing issue flaring up again

Context

- Recently, the Tamil Nadu government sought the Supreme Court's intervention to make Karnataka immediately release 24,000 cubic feet per second (cusecs) from its reservoirs.
- It called to ensure the availability of the specified quantity of water at Biligundlu on the inter-State border for the remainder of the month.
- It also urged the Court to direct Karnataka to ensure the release of 36.76 TMC stipulated for September 2023 as per the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)'s final award of February 2007 which was modified by the SC in 2018.

How is the water being shared

- A monthly schedule is in place for Karnataka, the upper riparian State of the Cauvery basin, to release water to Tamil Nadu.

- As per the schedule, Karnataka is to make available to Tamil Nadu at Biligundlu a total quantity of 177.25 TMC in a "normal" water year (June to May).
- Of this quantity, 123.14 TMC is to be given during the period from June to September, also marking the season of the southwest monsoon.
- After the SC gave its judgment in February 2018 on the CWDT's 2007 award, the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) were established four months later to ensure the implementation of the judgment.
- Since then, the two bodies have been holding meetings to take stock of the situation.

Why has T.N. approached the SC

- Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister said that the state has no other option but to approach the Supreme Court over Karnataka not releasing the due share of water to the state.
- This comes after officials from the Tamil Nadu government walked out of the meeting of the Cauvery Water Management Board as Karnataka refused to release the required water, including the shortfall, to Tamil Nadu on a daily basis.
- According to the water resources minister, based on the Supreme Court order, from June 1 to August 11, Karnataka should have provided 53.7703 Thousand Million Cubic Feet (TMC) of water to Tamil Nadu.

What lies next

- The farmers of Tamil Nadu, especially in the Cauvery delta, are eagerly awaiting to see whether Karnataka will go at least by the decision of the Authority.
- The present storage of the Mettur reservoir in Tamil Nadu is precariously low with about 20 TMC, which will last only 10 days after giving allowance for dead storage and drinking water requirements, even though water will be required for at least one more month for the standing short-term crop, kuruvai.
- It remains to be seen how the Supreme Court will view the matter.
- A distress-sharing formula, acceptable to all, seems to be the need of the hour.

PM announces new housing scheme for urban poor

Context

- The Prime Minister announced that the government will soon launch a scheme to provide relief in interest of bank loans to those dreaming of their own house in cities.
- Addressing the nation on the 77th Independence Day, PM said his government will soon launch the scheme for middle-class families who live in cities but do not own a house.
- The prime minister said that poor people living in cities without a house face difficulty.
- Prime Minister said the government has decided to give relief in bank loan interest by providing help of lakhs of rupees to families living in rented houses, unauthorized colonies and shanties in cities, to build their own house,

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban

- There is already a housing scheme Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Urban (PMAY-U) -- for the urban poor.
- The prime minister launched the PMAY-U on June 25, 2015, to provide pucca houses with basic amenities to all eligible urban beneficiaries across the country.
- The PMAY-U aims to address the urban housing shortage among the economically backward sections, including the slum dwellers by ensuring a pucca house to all eligible urban households by 2022.
- The scheme period though now has been extended up to December 2024 to complete all the houses sanctioned without changing the funding pattern and implementation methodology.

Project proposals

- According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, 118.90 lakh houses have been sanctioned as on July 31, 2023, based on the project proposals submitted by states and Union territories.
- Of the sanctioned houses, 76.02 lakh units have been completed or delivered to beneficiaries.
- The scheme is implemented through four verticals:
  o Beneficiary-led construction
  o Affordable housing in partnership
  o In-situ slum redevelopment
  o Credit-linked subsidy scheme based on eligibility criteria.

Financial assistance

- The Central government provides its fixed share of Rs 1 lakh under the in-situ slum redevelopment vertical of PMAY-U and Rs 1.5 lakh under the affordable housing in partnership and beneficiary-led construction verticals of the scheme.
- Under the credit-linked subsidy scheme vertical vertical of PMAY-U, an interest subsidy at the rate of 6.5 per cent, which amounted up to Rs 2.67 lakh per house, used to be provided for beneficiaries of the economically weaker section and low-income group categories.

CJI announces plans to expand Supreme Court

Context

- The Chief Justice of India announced the plan to expand the Supreme Court with the construction of a new building.
- The CJI said that a plan has been drawn up to expand the Supreme Court of India which will incorporate the construction of a new building to accommodate 27 additional courts, 51 judges' chambers, four registrar courtrooms, 16 registrar chambers, and other requisite facilities for lawyers and litigants.

Plan of action

- The Chief Justice of India shared details about how the expansion is proposed to happen.
- In the first phase, the Museum and the Annexe Building will be demolished to construct a new building to accommodate 15 courtrooms, judges' chambers, and the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) Library.
- In the next phase, a portion of the existing court complex will be demolished for the construction of the second part of the new building to accommodate 12 courtrooms, judges' chambers, registrar courts, and a lounge.
- The CJI said that the new building will reflect the constitutional aspirations, beliefs, and priorities of the Indian people.

Use of technology

- The CJI said that technology is the best tool at our disposal to eliminate the inefficiency and opacity surrounding judicial processes.
- The Supreme Court is implementing Phase 3 of the e-Courts project, which seeks to revolutionize the working of courts in India by inter-linking courts across the country.
- It also includes setting up an infrastructure of paperless courts, digitisation of court records, and setting up advanced e-sewa kendras in all court complexes.
- In recent times the Supreme Court has developed and deployed numerous IT projects.
- He cited projects such as the online portal for RTI, eSCR, an online appearance portal for advocates, iJuris, and neutral citations.

Steady growth in new Jan Dhan accounts

Context

- According to the latest estimate the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) bank accounts, with an accumulated Rs 2.03 trillion cash balance, continues to rise steadily nine years after its launch.
- As many as 35.9 million new PMJDY accounts were opened in FY23 compared with 28.6 million in FY22 and 38.7 million in FY21.
- With nearly 10 million new accounts opened in the first four months of FY24, the cumulative PMJDY accounts stood at 496.3 million by end-July.

Contribution by Banks

- Most of the PMJDY accounts are with the public sector banks that have steered the financial inclusion drive.
- The number of PMJDY accounts opened by PSBs rose from 332.62 million in March 2021 to 385.89 million in May 2023, an increase of 16 per cent.
- The government-managed Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) have a 21 per cent increase in their PMJDY accounts to around 91 million in May 2023 from 71 million in March 2021.

About PM Jan Dhan Yojana

- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is the National Mission for Financial Inclusion.
- The scheme was launched in 2014 is a scheme run by the Ministry of Finance of the Government of India.
- This scheme assists underprivileged and needy sections of our society with simple access to financial services such as remittance, credit, insurance, pension, savings, and deposit accounts.
- The main features of the scheme include one basic savings bank deposit (BSBD) account to every unbanked adult, an overdraft (OD) limit of Rs 10,000 and a free RuPay debit card with inbuilt accident insurance cover of up to Rs 2,00,000.

Consumption-based poverty estimates have relevance

Context

- A recent report by NITI Aayog on multidimensional poverty shows that the percentage of the poor has gone down from 25% in 2015-16 to 15% in 2019-21.
- Around 135 million people were lifted out of poverty during this period.
- The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index report of 2023 of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI), which was released recently, also shows that the incidence of the multidimensional poverty index declined from 27.5% in 2015-16 to 16.2% in 2019-21.

Comparison of results

- Multidimensional poverty estimates are not substitutes for National Sample Survey (NSS) consumption-based poverty ratios.
- The report of the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2018 says: "India has made momentous progress in reducing multidimensional poverty.
- According to the Rangarajan Committee methodology, the decline between 2009-10 and 2011-12 is 92 million, which is 46 million per annum.

Expert Group for Methodology for Measuring Poverty

- The Expert Group to Review the Methodology for Measuring Poverty (2014), pointed out that there are reservations on using multiple indicators as these multidimensional indicators/measures raise several

issues regarding their measurability, aggregation across indicators, and, crucially, of databases that provide the requisite information at reasonably short intervals.

- On multidimensional issues, Srinivasan (2007) says viewing public services as another dimension besides consumption in a multidimensional conceptualisation of poverty is more fruitful.

Income as indicators of poverty

- In the minds of most people, being rich or poor is associated with levels of income.
- The various non-income indicators of poverty are in fact reflections of inadequate income.
- Defining poverty in terms of income or in the absence of such data in terms of expenditure seems most appropriate, and it is this method which is followed in most countries.
- The survey data on consumption expenditures done in 2017-18 have not been released officially.

Need for changes in surveys

- The consumption expenditure survey is being conducted in the current year.
- Earlier surveys clearly indicate that the poverty ratio comes down strongly during a period of high growth.
- An important issue is the differences in aggregate consumption estimates between National Accounts Statistics (NAS) and NSS data.
- These two estimates of consumption (NSS and NAS) do not match in any country; India is no exception.
- In addition, there is a need to supplement the results of consumption surveys with a study of the impact of public expenditure on health and education of different expenditure classes.

14.08.2023

- **Centre to replace Microsoft Operating System with Maya OS**
- **Parliamentary panel report on SC, HCs judges' vacation**
- **SC proposes permanent security units for all courts**
- **India, China to hold Corps Commander talks**
- **Erasing Macaulay's mark**

Centre to replace Microsoft Operating System with Maya OS

Context

- The Ministry of Defence has announced that it will replace the Microsoft Windows operating system (OS) with an indigenously developed Maya OS by the end of this year. The move is aimed at improving the security of the ministry's computer systems against malware and ransomware attacks.
- The new OS is currently being rolled out only in the Defence Ministry computers, and not the three Services.

Maya OS

- Maya OS is based on Ubuntu, Linux.
- Ubuntu is a popular operating system that runs on computers, servers, and other devices.
- Maya has been developed by a team of experts from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), and the National Informatics Centre (NIC) within six months.
- It is said to be easy to use and manage, with a user interface that looks similar to Windows.
- The new OS will be backed by a protection system called Chakravyuh.

How effective is this new Maya OS

- While the two operating systems provide a platform for the user to interact with computer hardware, Maya and Windows differ significantly, both in terms of cost and build.
- It runs on a computer's Random Access Memory (RAM) and gives the device instructions on how to perform specific tasks.
- Maya OS offers a number of features such as cloud storage integration, full disk encryption, digital signature, biometric authentication, and a feature named "Chakravyuh."

Cyber threats and malware

- India's switch to the Ubuntu-based Maya OS comes at a time when cyberspace is increasingly becoming vulnerable to malware and ransomware attacks. An almost three-year old cyberattack made governments around the world rethink their cyber strategy.

Parliamentary panel report on SC, HCs judges vacation

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice recently presented its 133rd report on "Judicial Processes and their reform" to both the Houses of the Parliament.
- The report highlights that in order to reduce pendency of cases in SC and HC, there is a need to have a multi-pronged strategy.
- The report stated that vacations in the judiciary are a 'colonial legacy' andentire court going on vacation causes deep inconvenience to the litigants.

About the report

- In its 133rd report, "on the subject of judicial processes and their reforms", the parliamentary panel reiterated a suggestion made by former Chief Justice of India (CJI) R M Lodha on court vacations earlier.
- The Committee is of the view that the suggestion of justice Lodha on court vacations, that instead of all the judges going on vacation, all at one time, individual judges should take their leave at different times through the year.
- This will ensure that the courts are constantly open and there are always benches present to hear cases.
- The report has recorded that the "Department of Justice has stated that court vacations particularly summer vacations spanning 7 weeks (10 weeks prior to 2013) are customary practice continuing from colonial days.

Current Courts Vacations

- The current working days for the judiciary are
  - Supreme Court – 193 days/year
  - High Courts – 210 days/year
  - Trial Courts – 245 days/year
- The Supreme Court breaks for its annual summer vacation, which is typically for seven weeks starting at the end of May. The court reopens in July.
- The Supreme Court also takes week-long breaks for Dussehra and Diwali, and two weeks at the end of December.

Recommendation by other report

- In 2009, the Law Commission, in its 230th report on 'Reforms in the Judiciary Some suggested that court vacations be cut down by 10-15 days at all levels of the judiciary to help cut the backlog of cases.

- Before that, in 2000, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government appointed a "Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System" under Justice V S Malimath, former Chief Justice of the Karnataka and Kerala High Courts, which in its report submitted in 2003, recommended that the period of vacation should be reduced by 21 days, keeping in mind the long pendency of cases.
- The Malimath Committee suggested that the Supreme Court should work for 206 days, and the High Courts for 231 days every year.

SC proposes permanent security units for all courts

Context

- Voicing concern over the recent incidents of firing in Delhi courts, the Supreme Court has underlined the need for a security plan.
- The Supreme Court has proposed "permanent security units" to guard court complexes across the country, recalling incidents of gunfire and violence on court premises.
- The apex court said the sanctity of a court as a space where justice is administered and the rule of law upheld is non-negotiable.

Concerns

- Such recent incident pose significant risks to the safety of not only judges but lawyers, court staff, litigants and the general public, and issued a raft of directions for strengthening security on court premises.

Court directives

- The court has asked the High Courts to prepare "security plans" in consultation with the Principal Home Secretaries, Directors-General of Police and Police Commissioners to protect the courts.
- The Bench said the security plan ought to indicate the strength and source of manpower for these security units, including:
  o Armed and unarmed personnel and supervisory officers for each unit
  o Minimum term and mode of deployment of manpower
  o List of duties and additional financial benefits
  o Special modules for training and sensitizing personnel in matters of court security and so on.
- The Bench said the schematics of CCTV camera installation should be laid down on a district-wise basis where the State governments have to provide funds.
- The court stressed the need for digitisation of judicial infrastructure, particularly at the district level.

India, China to hold Corps Commander talks

Context

- India and China are set to hold the 19th round of Corps Commander talks at Chushul as part of the ongoing efforts to resolve the stand-off in eastern Ladakh.
- The talks come less than a month ahead of the G-20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi. The President of China is expected to attend the summit in person.

Previous talks

- The 18th round of Corps Commander talks were held at the Chushul-Moldo meeting point on the Chinese side on April 23 just ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' Meeting.
- Since the Corps Commander-level talks began in 2020, the two sides have so far undertaken disengagement from five friction points — from Galwan after the violent clash in June 2020, from the

north and south banks of Pangong Tso in February 2021, from Patrolling Point (PP) 17 in the Gogra-Hot Springs area in August 2022, and from PP15 in September 2022.

- On the Depsang Plains and Demchok, there are fundamental disagreements between the two countries.
- India maintains that they are the two additional friction points that still remain, while China has refused to accept it, terming them legacy issues predating the 2020 stand-off.

G-20 Summit

- Ahead of the G-20 Summit in New Delhi on September 9 and 10, Prime Minister of India and President of China are scheduled to attend the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in August 2023.
- The two leaders have not had formal bilateral talks since November 2019, when they met on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Brazil.

Erasing Macaulay's mark

Context

- Union Home Minister introduced three bills in the Lok Sabha to replace the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, and Indian Evidence Act, which were all enacted during the British Raj, in a complete overhaul of the country criminal laws.
- The three bills:
  o Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023
  o Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023
  o Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023
- These three bills will be sent to a parliamentary panel for further scrutiny.

Significant of the bill

- There are several reasons why these bills are important.
- One, erasing colonial legacies.
- This reason is clearly articulated. Before analyzing any Bill, one should read the Statement of Objects and Reasons (SOR) that accompanies the Bill.
- To quote the SOR of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita: "In the year 1834, the first Indian Law Commission was constituted under the Chairmanship of Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay to examine the jurisdiction, power and rules of the existing Courts as well as the police establishments and the laws in force in India.
- One of the important recommendations made by the Commission was on Indian Penal Code which was enacted in 1860 and the said Code is still continuing in the country with some amendments made thereto from time to time.
- Two, the move to reform these laws is not merely a legal imperative, but a philosophical one.
- It is a journey toward self-realization.
- Replacing outdated and unjust provisions with laws that reflect the ethos, needs, and aspirations of contemporary India is a stride towards fulfilling that contract.
- Three, when societies progress, they require laws that mirror their current values and needs.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a staggering 77 per cent of India's prisoners in 2021 were undertrials.
- Prolonged postponement in reforming the criminal justice system is an injustice. An injustice to the countless undertrials, awaiting their day in court.
- Four, the Indian criminal justice system's inconsistencies have led to confusion.
- For example, Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code criminalises attempted suicide, while the Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 presumes such an attempt is due to severe stress and needs care instead of punishment.

- This conflict, while practically decriminalising the act, leaves Section 309 in the IPC, creating legal ambiguity and room for interpretation.

Pending cases

- There is a backlog of almost 50 million cases stuck in Indian courts (including quasi-judicial forums).
- Two-thirds are criminal cases, concentrated in lower courts. An efficient resolution of these is a function of the definition of "crime" (for instance, 377 in IPC) and procedures for criminal trials.
- Pendency won't come down only because of these three Bills. But they will help. Section by section, the Bills have redefined "crime" and made procedures simpler.

Conclusion

- The legal reforms bring the perfect example of India back into its law books.
- By adopting the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and related reforms, India is not just changing the numbers it's reclaiming its identity from within.
- The new proposed code is expected to bring about a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system of India, by making it more fair, efficient, and responsive to the needs of the people.

13.08.2023

- **Centre proposed new Bills to Overhaul Criminal Laws**
- **Bills amending GST laws on online gaming**
- **India to strengthen MDBs to address global challenges**
- **EC publishes final delimitation report on Assam**
- **The Right to treatment**

Centre proposed new Bills to Overhaul Criminal Laws

Context

- The Centre recently introduced three bills in the Lok Sabha which completely overhauls the British-era Indian criminal laws, the Indian Penal Code (1860), Code of Criminal Procedure (1898), and the Indian Evidence Act (1872).
- The union minister introduced:
  o Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023 which seeks to replace the IPC
  o Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023 which seeks to replace the CrPC
  o Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023 which seeks to replace the Indian Evidence Act
- The Bill proposes 313 amendments that will bring revolutionary changes to the criminal justice system.

Provision of the bill

- **Sedition law to be replaced by another section**
- The legislation proposed to replace the sedition law, which came into force in 1860.
- The British used the provision to punish Indian leaders seeking independence during the 19th and early 20th century.
- There were 30 cases of sedition in 2015 and 236 cases of sedition between 2018 and 2020, according to the National Crime Records Bureau.
- A conviction under sedition charges currently carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.
- The proposed bill seeks to replace the sedition provision with a section on acts seen as endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India.

Other proposed changes

- The proposed bills also contain provisions allowing capital punishment for perpetrators of mob lynchings.
- They also prescribe minimum sentences of 20 years for gang rape.
- Furthermore, it would make sexual exploitation on the pretext of marriage, employment or promotion, or through the use of a hidden identity, a crime.
- The bills also introduce community service provisions for petty crimes rather than custodial sentences.
- And fixed timelines would be imposed for trials and criminal investigations.

Bills amending GST laws on online gaming

Context

- The Union finance Minister introduced bills to amend the Central and Integrated GST laws to facilitate the levy of 28% GST on the face value of all bets made in casinos, horse-racing and online gaming.
- The Central Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023, and The Integrated Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2023, were introduced by the finance minister.
- Once the amendments to CGST and IGST laws are passed, states will get similar amendments in state GST law cleared by the respective assemblies.

Amendments

- The amendments pertain to insertion of a provision in the Schedule III of the CGST Act, 2017, to provide clarity on the taxation of supplies in casinos, horse racing and online gaming.
- The amendment in IGST Act relates to inserting a provision to impose GST liability on online money gaming provided by offshore entities. Such entities would be required to get GST registration in India.

Blocking access to online gaming

- The amendments will also provide for blocking access to online gaming platforms located overseas in case of failure to comply with registration and tax payment provisions.
- The amendments to the Central GST (CGST) and Integrated GST (IGST) laws were approved by the GST Council last week.
- The council had approved levy of 28 per cent GST on full face value of entry level bets in online gaming, casinos and horse racing.

India to strengthen MDBs to address global challenges

Context

- The Union Minister for Finance noted that the primary focus of India's G-20 Presidency in 2023 has been to strengthen Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) in order to address shared global challenges.
- MDBs are also facing increasing demands from donor and borrowing countries to expand their lending operations beyond their core development mandates.
- However, MDBs are not currently equipped to address this rising demand for their resources adequately.
- The Minister also mentioned that an independent expert group on strengthening MDBs had been set up under India's G-20 Presidency.

Multilateral Development Banks

- Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) are international financial institutions that provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries for various development projects and programs.

- These institutions aim to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve living standards in the recipient countries.
- MDBs include the World Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank the Inter-American Development Bank, etc.
- Multilateral Development Banks play a crucial role in supporting infrastructure projects, social programs, and sustainable development initiatives.

G-20 Finance Track

- The FM said another issue discussed in the G-20 Finance Track was the escalation of debt issues in vulnerable economies, which posed significant economic risks.
- The Indian G-20 Presidency has given great importance to the management of global debt vulnerabilities, demonstrating a commitment to voicing the concerns of the Global South.

EC publishes final delimitation report on Assam

Context

- The Election Commission of India (EC) published the final delimitation order for Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies in Assam, retaining the number of seats at 126 and 14, respectively.
- The commission stated over 1,200 representations were considered before finalising the proposal and 45% of suggestions and objections have been addressed in the report.
- The final proposal was prepared by the commission after an extensive consultative exercise with diverse stakeholders, which included three days of public hearings in Guwahati on the draft proposal in July 2023 and a pre-meeting before the drafting of the report in March 2023.

Reservation of constituencies

- The reservation of constituencies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has been done on the basis of the provisions laid down in Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution
- The poll panel has stuck to the delimitation draft, which proposed major changes to 30 of the state's 126 assembly constituencies.
- It was not immediately clear what these changes were.
- A total of 19 assembly constituencies and two Parliament constituencies have been reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

Earlier delimitation exercise

- The delimitation of the assembly and Parliamentary seats in the Assam was last carried out in 1976 based on the 1971 Census.
- The exercise could not be carried out in 2002, along with the rest of India, because of the law-and-order situation in the region.

The Right to treatment

Context

- Tuberculosis was the world's deadliest infectious disease, as declared by the WHO, before COVID-19 swept the world.
- Each year, nearly half a million people develop drug-resistant TB and nearly 10.4 million people develop drug-sensitive TB.
- One-third of the world's population has latent TB, a version of the disease that can turn active as immunity falls.

Drug-resistant tuberculosis

- Globally, DR-TB is a major contributor to antimicrobial resistance and continues to be a public health threat.
- Drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) is a huge challenge that demands our urgent attention.
- With a quarter of the world's DR-TB cases, India's response can shape how other countries deal with this growing threat.
- The WHO estimates that 119,000 new cases of multidrug/rifampicin resistant TB (MDR/RR-TB) emerge in India each year.

Improvements in diagnosis

- In the recent times, there is new hope for people with Drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB).
- Huge improvements have been made in diagnosis.
- Presently it is possible to rapidly detect TB as well as drug-resistance using rapid molecular diagnostics.
- These tests were extensively used for Covid-19 during the pandemic.

Universal Access to Rapid TB Diagnostics

- Recently the WHO released a Standard on Universal Access to Rapid TB Diagnostics, recommending the use of molecular diagnostics as the initial test as these are highly accurate, detect resistance to drugs, are cost-effective, and reduce treatment-related delay.
- Last year in India, only about 23 per cent of those presumed with TB underwent these initial diagnostics tests (traditional sputum smear microscopy) was the initial diagnostic investigation for 77 per cent of the suspected patients.
- Microscopy, a century-old tool, cannot detect drug-resistance, and detects only half of all people with these tests.
- As per the India TB Report 2023, over 22,000 Indian MDR/RR-TB patients in 2021 were on treatment regimens which contained injectables.

Way Forward

- India is the only global supplier of pretomanid, a key drug within the BPaL regimen.
- Public awareness campaigns can help educate communities about TB symptoms, transmission, and the importance of early diagnosis and treatment.
- India as of now India have highly accurate tools to detect DR-TB, and it can cure DR-TB within six-months with oral medications.
- In 2023, these new tools must be easily and widely available to all people with DR-TB in India.
- Building and strengthening healthcare infrastructure can lead to better TB management and improved overall public health.

11.08.2023

- **The CEC and EC (Appointment, Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023**
- **Federal fund hike and its impact on Economy**
- **India, Japan to restart trilateral cooperation with Sri Lanka**
- **Monetary Policy Committee holds rates**
- **India Myanmtmar quandary,its paradoxical**

The CEC and EC (Appointment, Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023

Context

- The Union government introduced the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023 in the Rajya Sabha.
- It repeals the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of Election Commissioners and Transaction of Business) Act, 1991.
- The bills seek to replace the Chief Justice of India with a Union Cabinet minister in the panel for selection of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners.

Selection Committee

- The Selection Committee will consist of:
- Prime Minister as Chairperson
- Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha as member
- Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister as member
- If the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha has not been recognised, the leader of the single largest opposition party in Lok Sabha will assume the role.

Search Committee

- A Search Committee will prepare a panel of five persons for the consideration of the Selection Committee.
- The Search Committee will be headed by the Cabinet Secretary.
- It will have two other members, not below the rank of Secretary to the central government, having knowledge and experience in matters related to elections.
- The Selection Committee may also consider candidates who have not been included in the panel prepared by the Search Committee.

Election Commission

- As per Article 324 of the Constitution, the Election Commission consists of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of other Election Commissioners (ECs), as the President may decide.
- The CEC and other ECs are appointed by the President. The Bill specifies the same composition of the Election Commission.
- It adds that the CEC and other ECs will be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.

Concerns

- The Opposition protested the introduction of the Bill, accusing the government of attempting to erode the Election Commission of India's (ECI's) independence and diluting a Supreme Court Constitution Bench order.

- In March, a five-judge constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled that the selection panel should comprise the prime minister, the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) till Parliament frames a law on the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (ECs).

Federal fund hike and its impact on Economy

Context

- In the recently concluded Federal Open Market Committee meeting on July 26, 2023, the targeted federal funds rate was raised to 5.25-5.5%, a 25 basis points increase.
- This puts the rate at a 21-year high, surpassing the levels seen in 2001.
- Fed Reserve President said that the decision was aimed at reducing inflation to 2%. Despite the interest rate hike, he pointed out that employment numbers have been on the rise.

federal funds rate

- The federal funds rate, currently set between 5.25% to 5.5%, plays a crucial role in the economy as it determines lending rates among banks.
- Following the global financial crisis, rates were near zero until 2015.
- However, with the pandemic, rates dropped to 0.05%.
- The Federal Reserve intervenes in the market through bond purchases or sales to maintain the targeted rate range.

Global consequences

- The rest of the world faces a different situation compared to the green shoots of growth seen in the U.S. economy; they are yet to come out of the pandemic and are battling with growing debt servicing concerns.
- The large-scale expansion of the balance sheets of the advanced country central banks since the global financial crisis had reduced interest rates to abysmally low levels.
- This has facilitated carry trade, with agents borrowing in dollars and investing in emerging markets to benefit from interest margins due to the higher interest in developing countries.

Rate hike impacts on corporates

- In the international economy, there has been a substantial increase in private non-guaranteed (PNG) debt taken by corporations, while governments continue to be important borrowers.
- As interest rates in advanced countries rise, foreign investors may abandon government securities in developing economies, leading to currency depreciation and increased borrowing costs.
- The World Bank's recent debt report reveals that the poorest countries borrowing through the International Development Association (IDA) spend 10% of export earnings on servicing debt, the highest since 2000.

India, Japan to restart trilateral cooperation with Sri Lanka

Context

- More than two years after Sri Lanka canceled a joint India-Japan MoU for the East Container Terminal (ECT) project in Colombo, the three countries are studying ways of restarting trilateral cooperation.
- The cancellation of the MoU, estimated at about $500 million.
- The suspension of the Japanese-funded light rail transit (LRT) project by the previous Sri Lanka government, had led to a freeze in ties between Japan and Sri Lanka.

Background

- In 2019, India and Sri Lanka signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for "co-operation on economic projects".
- The development and operation of the container terminal was one of the projects in the MoU:
- Container Terminal in Colombo Port as a Joint Venture includes Indian investments considering that majority of transshipment in Colombo Port is related to India
- The MoU did not mention the Eastern Container Terminal.
- Nevertheless, India and Sri Lanka had already been in discussion for its development and operation.

Monetary Policy Committee holds rates

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has increased its CPI inflation forecast for FY24 to 5.4 percent from 5.1 percent.
- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India, unanimously decided to keep the policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5% even as it raised the projection for retail inflation in the current fiscal year by 30 basis points to 5.4%.

Headline inflation

- Headline inflation after reaching a low of 4.3% in May 2023, rose in June and is expected to surge during July-August led by vegetable prices.
- While the vegetable price shock may reverse quickly, possible El Niño weather conditions along with global food prices need to be watched closely against the backdrop of a skewed south-west monsoon so far.
- These developments warrant a heightened vigil on the evolving inflation trajectory.
- The CPI inflation projection for 2023-24, assuming a normal monsoon, was revised upwards to 5.4% from the 5.1% forecast in June, with Q2 at 6.2%, Q3 at 5.7%, and Q4 at 5.2%.

Measures

- To address the problem of excess liquidity with banks, the RBI decided that scheduled banks would maintain an incremental cash reserve ratio of 10% on the increase in their net demand and time liabilities (NDTL).
- This measure is intended to absorb the surplus liquidity generated by various factors including the return of ₹2000 notes to the banking system.
- This is purely a temporary measure for managing the liquidity overhang.

India's Myanmar quandary, its paradoxical policy

Context

- August, 2023 will be recorded as the crucial dates when the history of Myanmar's ongoing tragedy was written.
- Myanmar's expelled civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been moved to house arrest after the military confined her following an overthrow in February 2021.
- she is serving a 33-year punishment, subsequent to being imprisoned in closed-door, military-run trials.
- However, these developments do not signal the dawn of a democratic and peaceful Myanmar.

Emergency and elections

- The extension of the emergency further delays the elections proposed by the military.

- However, it is this pursuit of 'normalcy' that has resulted in suffering, with ACLED, or the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project reporting that Myanmar civilians witness two and a half times more violence than those in Afghanistan.
- The military regime's relentless campaign includes an average of over 30 airstrikes per month in 2023.
- The decision by the National League for Democracy decision not to participate in the new elections, combined with the exclusion of smaller parties through the new party registration laws, leaves no viable opposition to the USDP in a parliament whose constitutional structure gives the military a practical veto.

India's policy

- At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup, India took a proactive approach by providing food and vaccine assistance.
- However, the plight of the Myanmarese people seems to have faded from memory, with accusations of instigating violence in Manipur replacing it.
- Communities along the border have already defied the Home Ministry by providing shelter to the refugees.
- Concerns over trafficking and drug smuggling in Myanmar led to India suspending the Free Movement Regime in September 2022.

Way forward

- India's policy options in Myanmar are challenging, but not limited.
- The relaxation of Ms. Suu Kyi's prison sentence may provide an opportunity for India to engage with her and pro-democracy actors.
- Additionally, the government and media must avoid blanket securitisation and profiling of incoming refugees, many of whom have ties of kinship in India.
- This approach is essential to prevent further violence and foster an environment of care and compassion.

10.08.2023

- **Can SMRs help India achieve net zero**
- **Panel concerns for availability of fertilizers and a subsidy policy**
- **Centre to release more foodgrain stock by open market sale**
- **CAG performance audit report of NSAP**
- **Seeds for growth**

Can SMRs help India achieve net zero

Context

- In its quest to achieve net zero, there is need for comprehensive plans to promote green transition and has made significant progress in low-carbon development.
- The recent uptick in coal consumption in Europe, despite the increase in solar and wind power, suggests that reliable, 24/7 low-carbon electricity resources are critical to ensure the deep decarbonisation of power generation, along with grid stability and energy security.
- Small modular reactors a type of nuclear reactor can be helpful to India in this regard.
- The Centre is examining the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, to allow the participation of the private sector and startups to set up small modular reactors (SMRs) in the country.

About SMRs

- Small modular reactors (SMRs) are advanced nuclear reactors that have a power capacity of up to 300 MW(e) per unit, which is about one-third of the generating capacity of traditional nuclear power reactors. SMRs, which can produce a large amount of low-carbon electricity, are:
  o Small – physically a fraction of the size of a conventional nuclear power reactor.
  o Modular – making it possible for systems and components to be factory-assembled and transported as a unit to a location for installation.
  o Reactors – harnessing nuclear fission to generate heat to produce energy.

Advantages of SMRs

- SMRs are designed to be smaller and modular, allowing for easier scaling based on electricity demand.
- They typically have a smaller environmental footprint and generate less waste compared to larger reactors.
- SMRs can be manufactured and assembled in a factory-controlled environment, allowing for standardized components and streamlined construction processes.
- SMRs generally have lower upfront capital costs compared to larger reactors.
- The compact size of SMRs makes them more adaptable to various geographical and environmental conditions.
- SMRs enable decentralized power generation, reducing the need for long-distance power transmission and minimizing transmission losses.

Decarbonising power sector

- The UN Sustainable Development Goal 7 calls for: "to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all".
- Since the world still depends on fossil fuels for 82% of its energy supply, decarbonising the power sector is critical.
- The share of electricity in final energy consumption will also increase by 80%-150% by 2050.

Challenges of decarbonisation

- The transition from coal-fired power generation to clean energy poses major challenges, and there is a widespread consensus among policymakers in several countries that solar and wind energy alone will not suffice to provide affordable energy for everyone.
- In decarbonised electricity systems with a significant share of renewable energy, the addition of at least one firm power-generating technology can improve grid reliability and reduce costs.
- According to the International Energy Agency, the demand for critical minerals like lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements, required for clean-energy production technologies, is likely to increase by up to 3.5 times by 2030.

Issues with nuclear power

- Nuclear power plants (NPPs) generate 10% of the world's electricity and help it avoid 180 billion cubic meters of natural gas demand and 1.5 billion tonnes of CO_2 emissions every year.
- NPPs generate power 24x7 in all kinds of weather.
- Nuclear power also provides valuable co-benefits like high-skill jobs in technology, manufacturing, and operations.

Legal and regulatory changes required

- To ensure safety, security, and safeguards, control of nuclear fuel and radioactive waste must continue to lie with the Government of India.
- The Atomic Energy Act will need to be amended to allow the private sector to set up Small modular reactors (SMRs).
- Finally, the Department of Atomic Energy must improve the public perception of nuclear power in India by better disseminating comprehensive environmental and public health data of the civilian reactors, which are operating under international safeguards, in India.

Panel concerns for availability of fertilizers and a subsidy policy

Context

- The Standing Committee of Parliament on Chemicals and Fertilizers has tabled its two reports in parliament.
- The panel has posed questions on the availability of fertilizers and a subsidy policy.
- The reports have also called for ending the import dependence on fertilizers such as:
  - Urea
  - Diammonium phosphate (DAP)
  - Muriate of potash (MOP)
  - Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (NPK)
- The production of these fertilizers up to November 2022 was 281.83 lakh tonnes but the consumption was 401.46 lt.

Finding reasons for shortage

- The panel asked the Department of Fertilizers to ascertain the reasons for a shortage of fertilizers being reported in some of the States and ensure availability of fertilizers in every State by taking corrective steps.
- The panel sought the review of a nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) that covers fertilizers such as P&K fertilizers.
- The committee noted that GST for fertilizers is at 5% and GST on raw materials such as sulphuric acid and ammonia are at 18%.

Centre to release more foodgrain stock by open market sale

Context

- Concerned over the increase in prices of foodgrains, the Centre has decided to additionally sell 50 lakh tonnes of wheat and 25 lt of rice through the Open Market Sales Scheme for Food Corporation of India stocks.
- The government hoped that the sale would ensure adequate domestic availability of rice, wheat and atta and check their prices.

Reserve price of rice

- The Centre has decided to lower the base price of rice being auctioned by the Food Corporations of India (FCI) under a scheme for bulk buyers, millers, processors and traders, after receiving muted response in the six auctions held so far.
- In July, the government had set a reserve price of ₹3,100 per quintal for rice under the so-called open market sale scheme domestic (OMSS-D), which did not find many takers given that it was priced above market rates.
- Keeping in view the experience of the past five e-auctions for rice by FCI, it has been decided that the reserve price will be brought down by ₹200 a quintal and the effective price now will be ₹2900 per quintal.
- The cost of this reduction would be adjusted from the price stabilization fund of the Department of Consumer Affairs.

Wheat import duty

- About 7-8 lakh tonnes of wheat has been auctioned under the OMSS so far.
- Initially, wheat offered for sale used to be 4 lakh tonnes and now, it has been reduced to 1 lakh ton in today's e-auction.
- About 8 lakh tonnes of wheat has been sold till date.
- The weighted average selling price of wheat on June 28 was ₹2,136.36 a quintal, which had now gone up to ₹2,254.71 a quintal.

CAG performance audit report of NSAP

Context

- Recently, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India tabled audit report of National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) from 2017-18 to 2020-21.
- National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), which includes old age pension schemes, for publicizing some of its other schemes.
- The allocation under NSAP to the states/ UTs were meant for the disbursal of pension under various sub-schemes of NSAP.

About Audit report

- The CAG performance audit report of NSAP noted that the ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) diverted funds from the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), for publicizing some of its other schemes.
- Out of the total allocation to a state/ UT, three per cent fund was meant for administrative expenditure.
- During the audit, instances of diversion of funds by the ministry and states/ UTs out of allocated funds for NSAP were noticed.
- The Ministry of Rural Development in January 2017 decided to campaign through hoardings in states and UTs for giving due publicity to all programmes/ schemes of the ministry.

National Social Assistance Programme

- National Social Assistance Programme was launched on 15th August, 1995.
- The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) represents a significant step towards the fulfillment of the Directive Principles in Article 41 and 42 of the Constitution recognizing the concurrent responsibility of the Central and the State Governments in the matter.
- National Social Assistance Programme is a social security and welfare programme to provide support to aged persons, widows, disabled persons and bereaved families on the death of the primary breadwinner, belonging to below poverty line households.

Seeds for growth

Context

- Agriculture and allied sectors are central to the Indian economy.
- Keeping this and a sustainable future in mind, the union government is promoting technology-enabled sustainable farming, including natural, regenerative and organic systems, during its G20 presidency.
- Though India has achieved food security with the production of food grains reaching 330 MT, the demand for coarse cereals, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables is not fully met.
- In addition, they are not affordable for a large part of the population, leading to a high proportion of the under/malnourished population, with a sizable percentage of child wasting (19.3 per cent).

Share of export in Global Market

- Alongside fulfilling its goal of increasing profitability in agriculture and its share of export in the world market, India needs to:
  - Close the gap between potential and achievable productivity in most grain crops and vegetables
  - Reduce the cost of production
  - Promote cultivation and consumption of nutritionally-rich crops like millets
  - Focus on the quality of the agricultural produce

Indian seed industry

- The Indian seed industry was built on a strong foundation in the 1960s with the establishment of the National Seeds Corporation and further boosted with several enabling policies and regulatory support from the late '80s.
- The introduction of the Protection of Plant Varieties & Farmers Rights Act, 2001, and the release of Bt cotton hybrids for commercial cultivation in 2002 were important milestones towards the era of a technology-driven seed sector, which boosted the industry and helped Indian farmers with better productivity.
- The focus of the seed industry should be to promote varieties and technologies to combat the serious threats posed by climate change.
- The costs of inputs such as seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides, besides land, labour and water, are the major determinants of profitability in agriculture.

Government Interventions

- A robust regulatory mechanism covering quality seedlings and planting materials is needed under the newly proposed "Clean Green Mission" by the Government of India as part of its G20 commitment to "Green Development".
- "Next Gen" technologies may also introduce AI-based responses from seeds under specific external conditions (for example, moisture, temperature); or incorporate such molecules or metabolites that act as metabolic cues in biological pathways, which will require appropriate guidelines for application.

Way forward

- The Fertiliser (Inorganic, Organic or Mixed) (Control Order, 1985, has been amended to Fertiliser (Inorganic, Organic or Mixed) (Control) Amendment Order, 2021 now includes bio-stimulants, which is an important component in seed-enhancement technology. Necessary guidelines are being formulated by concerned departments with extensive consultations with stakeholders for registration and use of bio-stimulants.
- The new seed technologies supported by scientific validation and enabling regulatory mechanisms offer significant advantages for sustainable agriculture at little additional cost.

09.08.2023

- **State of Elementary Education in Rural India report**
- **Supreme Court hearing on Article 370 abrogation**
- **Reducing Activation of Tuberculosis by Improvement of Nutritional Status**
- **MOD to switch to locally built OS in computers**
- **Five years of Ayushman Bharat**

State of Elementary Education in Rural India report

Context

- The State of Elementary Education in Rural India report was recently released by Union Education Minister.
- The survey was conducted by the Development Intelligence Unit (DIU), a collaboration between Transform Rural India and Sambodhi Research and Communications.

Finding of the Survey

Access to gadgets

- The survey revealed that 49.3% of students in rural India have access to smartphones. However, among parents whose children have access to gadgets, 76.7% said the latter primarily used mobile phones to play video games.
- Of the students with access to gadgets, 56.6% used the devices for downloading and watching movies, while 47.3% used them to download and listen to music.
- Students in Class 8 and above had more access to smartphones (58.32%), while students in Classes 1 to 3 also had access (42.1%).
- Only 34% use gadgets for downloading study material and 18% access online learning through tutorials.

Parent participation

- The survey showed that only 40% of parents have conversations with their children about learning in school every day, while 32% have such conversations with their children a few days a week.
- Additionally, 31.6% of parents mentioned their child's lack of interest in studies.
- On parent participation, the survey revealed that 84% of parents stated that they regularly attend parent-teacher meetings at school.
- The top two reasons for parents not attending meetings were short notice and a lack of willingness.
- 40% of the surveyed parents have conversations with their children around learning in school every day.

Supreme Court hearing on Article 370 abrogation

Context

- The Chief Justice of India while responding to a petition in Article 370 has said a Brexit-type referendum cannot be envisaged in India.
- The Court noted that Article 370 was read down through a series of "executive acts" without considering the will of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The apex Court said that as a constitutional democracy, India seeks its public opinions through established institutions such as Parliament and not through Brexit-type referendums.

Government's malafide intentions

- While arguing the petition in Article 370, a Senior advocate accused the Union government of playing fraud upon the Constitution by tweaking Article 370(3) and sidestepping the precondition of getting the recommendation of the now-defunct Jammu and Kashmir constituent assembly before declaring Article 370 inoperative.

Public opinion

- In a constitutional democracy, seeking the opinions of the people should be done through established institutions.
- Any recourse to public opinion has to be sought through established institutions.
- The Union government had diluted Article 370 through a series of "executive acts", starting with the dissolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly and the State government.

Reducing Activation of Tuberculosis by Improvement of Nutritional Status

Context

- A first-of-its-kind trial supported by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has found that improving the nutrition of the family members of a tuberculosis patient can lead to a 39–48 per cent reduction in the incidence of the disease in the household.
- According a study, published in The Lancet on 9 August, was based on the findings of the Reducing Activation of Tuberculosis by Improvement of Nutritional Status (RATIONS) trial, conducted by the Yenepoya Medical College, Mangaluru, and supported by the Union government's National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis (NIRT), Chennai, and ICMR.

Findings

- The study showed that improving nutrition levels in family members of patients with lung TB substantially mitigated their risk of developing the disease.
- This is the first time a study assessed the link between nutrition and preventing new TB cases.
- The trial, says the study, showed that nutritional supplementation reduced the incidence rate among household contacts by 39 per cent in "all forms of tuberculosis", and by 48 per cent in cases of microbiologically confirmed pulmonary tuberculosis (MCBT).

Tuberculosis cases

- India has one of the largest burdens of tuberculosis globally, with an annual estimated incidence of 27.7 lakh cases in 2022, according to a government report.
- The country is aiming for an 80 percent reduction in TB incidence and 90 percent reduction in TB mortality by 2025.
- Tuberculosis is an infectious bacterial disease, which most commonly affects the lungs (pulmonary TB), but can damage other parts of the body too.

Impact of 'food baskets'

- The trial spanned three years, from August 2019 to August 2022, and took place in four districts of Jharkhand.
- It followed a cluster-randomized design, where groups of individuals were randomly assigned to different treatment arms.
- According to the papers, the trial was aimed at studying the effect of nutritional supplementation on TB incidence in 10,345 household contacts of 2,800 patients who were undergoing treatment with the National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP).

MOD to switch to locally built OS in computers

Context

- The Ministry of Defence has said that they are going to switch to Operating System Maya in all their computers in place of the Microsoft OS to prevent cyber and malware attacks.
- OS Maya was built locally based on open-source Ubuntu.
- Reportedly, a Chakravyuh will also be installed in the systems to avail an 'endpoint detection and protection system'.
- Currently, Maya is being installed only in Defence Ministry systems and not on computers connected to the networks of the three Services.

OS Maya

- Maya has the interface and all functionality like Windows and users will not feel much difference as they transition to it.
- The OS Maya is being installed on the computers of the Defence Ministry only and not on the rest of the Services. But the report says that the three other Services will soon adopt the operating system as the Navy has already cleared it and currently it is being evaluated by the Army and the Air Force.
- The government agencies developed Operating System Maya within six months, reportedly and aims to prevent the sharp increase of cyberattacks and malware attacks.

Malware and ransom attacks

- There have been a series of malware and ransom attacks in the country, including on critical infrastructure in the recent past.
- There have been several efforts in the past as well in the Defence Ministry to replace Windows OS with an Indian one.

Five years of Ayushman Bharat

Context

- Ayushman Bharat, a flagship scheme of the Government of India, was launched as recommended by the National Health Policy 2017.
- India took a giant leap toward ensuring access to quality healthcare services agnostic of economic status by launching the flagship health protection scheme, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) in September 2018.
- The scheme has taken the country closer to Sustainable Development Goal 3.8, which envisions universal health coverage.

Features of the scheme

- The scheme provides a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization to more than 12 crore families (bottom 40 per cent of the population), making it the world's largest health assurance scheme.
- About 15.5 crore families are covered under AB-PMJAY and states' schemes are being implemented in convergence with it.
- Eleven states/UTs have pushed for 100 per cent coverage of their respective population.
- The scheme has tried to bridge the shortfall between healthcare providers and service-takers.
- The Ayushman Card is like a pre-paid card worth Rs 5 lakh, which can be used to avail free treatment at more than 27,000 empaneled hospitals.

Beneficiary of Scheme

- The scheme has catered to more than 5.39 crore admission events worth Rs 66,284 crore in the last five years.
- If the beneficiaries had availed the same care outside AB-PMJAY's ambit, the total cost of treatment would have been nearly two times higher.
- This has resulted in savings of more than Rs 1 lakh crore.
- Currently, daily, nearly 45,000 hospital admissions are authorized under the scheme — in other words, roughly 31 treatments per minute.
- It is heartening that 48 per cent of treatments under the scheme have been availed by women.

- The scheme caters to the poor and underprivileged sections of society.
- Staying true to its promise of inclusivity, the AB-PMJDY scheme added people from the transgender community to its list of beneficiaries.
- Around 50 packages were designed specifically for the community, including packages on Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS).

Way Forward

- AB-PMJAY guarantees cashless secondary and tertiary inpatient care for almost all health conditions to its beneficiaries.
- This ambitious scheme has extraordinary potential to protect people from serious health hazards and safeguard families against financial shocks due to healthcare expenditure.

08.08.2023

- **India's mining policy shift**
- **SC to appoint an all-woman panel for Manipur**
- **WHO issues alert about contaminated Indian-made cold syrup**
- **International cheetah experts to be consulted**
- **Neither the right to privacy nor the right to information**

India's mining policy shift

Context

- Recently, Parliament passed the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023.

- The bill aims to attract private sector investment in the exploration of critical and deep-seated minerals in the country.

Categorization
- The Bill puts six minerals, including lithium used in electric vehicle batteries and other energy storage solutions into a list of "critical and strategic" minerals.
- The exploration and mining of these six minerals, previously classified as atomic minerals, were restricted to government-owned entities.
- A variety of minerals, besides those used in creating fuel, are crucial to a country's manufacturing, infrastructure, and advancement.

Deep-seated minerals
- For deep-seated minerals like gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, nickel, cobalt, platinum group elements (PGEs) and diamonds, which are difficult and expensive to explore and mine as compared to surficial or bulk minerals, India depends largely on imports.
- For instance, in 2022-23, India imported close to 12 lakh tonnes of copper (and its concentrates) worth over ₹ 27,000 crore as per official figures.

Role of the private sector in minerals exploration
- According to studies India's unique geological and tectonic setting is conducive to hosting potential mineral resources and that its geological history is similar to the mining-rich regions of Western Australia and Eastern Africa.
- The primary step to discovering mineral resources and eventually finding economically viable reserves is mineral exploration, which comes in various stages before mining. The stages of exploration are divided as per the United Nations Framework for Classification of Resources into G4 (Reconnaissance), G3 (Prospecting), G2 (General Exploration), and G1 (Detailed Exploration).

New Mines and Minerals Bill 2023 and Private Players
- Firstly, the Bill omits at least six previously mentioned atomic minerals from a list of 12 which cannot be commercially mined.
- Being on the atomic minerals list, the exploration and mining of these six — lithium, beryllium, niobium, titanium, tantalum, and zirconium, was previously reserved for government entities.
- Secondly, the Act prohibits pitting, trenching, drilling, and sub-surface excavation as part of reconnaissance, which included mapping and surveys.
- The Bill allows these prohibited activities.
- The Bill also proposes a new type of license to encourage reconnaissance—level and or prospective stage exploration by the private sector.

SC to appoint an all-woman panel for Manipur
Context
- The Supreme Court (SC) has formed an all-women judicial panel to address the aftermath of the Manipur violence.
- This move aims to oversee various aspects beyond the investigation, such as relief, rehabilitation, and compensation for those affected by the violence.

Composition of Pannel

- The panel is led by former Jammu & Kashmir High Court Chief Justice Gita Mittal, the committee includes Justices (retd) Shalini P Joshi and Asha Menon.
- The SC has also appointed former IPS officer Datta Padsalgikar to supervise the investigation and report back to the court.
- Furthermore, the apex court plans to direct 42 Special Investigation Teams (SITs), established by the government, to be under the supervision of six DIG rank officers from outside Manipur.
- These SITs will include an inspector from outside Manipur to ensure an unbiased and thorough examination of the incidents.

WHO issues alert about contaminated Indian-made cold syrup

Context

- The World Health Organization flagged a batch of contaminated common cold syrup it found in Iraq that was manufactured by an Indian company.
- The United Nations agency in its medical products alert said the batch of the syrup, branded Cold Out, had a higher than acceptable limit of contaminants diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol.
- The batch was manufactured by Fourrts (India) Laboratories Pvt. Ltd for Dabilife Pharma Pvt. Ltd.

Compositions

- One batch of COLD OUT paracetamol and chlorpheniramine combination syrups used to treat symptoms of the common cold and allergy manufactured by Fourrts India for Dabilife Pharma Private Limited has been reported to the World Health Organization (by a third party) as substandard or contaminated.
- A sample of the COLD OUT Syrup was obtained from one location in Iraq and submitted for laboratory analysis.
- The sample was found to contain unacceptable amounts of diethylene glycol (0.25%) and ethylene glycol (2.1%) as contaminants.
- The substandard batch of the product referenced in this alert is unsafe and its use may result in serious injury or death.

Recent cases

- India-made cough syrups were allegedly linked to the deaths of 66 and 18 children in The Gambia and Uzbekistan, respectively, last year.
- Another alleged episode of cough-syrup-related contamination was recently reported from Cameroon.
- In the US, children suffered severe eye infection allegedly after using India-made eye drops.
- The substandard batch of the product found in Iraq is unsafe, WHO said, and its use, especially in children, may result in serious injury or death.

International cheetah experts to be consulted

Context

- Recently, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to address the "public concern" about the deaths of six of the 20 adult cheetahs, translocated from South Africa and Namibia, at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh.
- Appearing before a three-judge Bench headed Additional Solicitor-General said the deaths, though unfortunate, were expected.

Expert Committee

- The government has formed an 11-member expert committee had been formed by the Centre to monitor the health of the surviving cheetahs.
- The law officer assured the court that the government would take inputs from international cheetah conservationists.
- The court was hearing an application by conservationists who complained that the Centre was not taking effective steps to prevent cheetah deaths at the Kuno National Park.
- They alleged that the government had stopped consulting an international task force set up to ease the acclimatization of the big cats.

Clarification from Ministry

- A recent affidavit by the Environment Ministry and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) informed the Supreme Court that a provisional diagnosis of the cheetahs at Kuno National Park "points towards natural causes".
- The government said the big cats had low survival rates of 50%, even in adults.
- In an "introduced population" of cheetahs, cubs have about 10% survival.

Neither the right to privacy nor the right to information

Context

- The Union Cabinet gave its nod to the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill.
- In the next course of action, the bill will be tabled during the monsoon session of Parliament.

Aim

- The bill aims to make entities like internet companies, mobile apps, and business houses more accountable and answerable about the collection, storage and processing of the data of citizens as part of the "Right to Privacy".
- The work on the data protection bill started after the Supreme Court in August ruled that the "Right to Privacy" is a fundamental right.
- The Data Protection Board (DPB) will decide on the disputes as per the clause in the bill but victims will have the right to claim compensation by approaching civil courts.
- The bill proposes to levy a penalty of up to Rs 250 crore on entities for every instance of violation of norms in the bill.

Right to privacy

- The right to privacy was reaffirmed by a nine-judge Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court in 2017.
- It set an international benchmark and illustrated the new challenges to the right to privacy posed by the digital age.
- The DPDP Bill 2023, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha last week, is an outcome of the debate around the right to privacy.

Undermining the Right to Information

- The right to information provides us access to government documents to ensure transparency and accountability of the government. Enacted as a law, the Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005 has played a critical role in deepening democratic practices. The much-awaited DPDP Bill 2023 ends up undermining our right to information, without doing much to protect our right to privacy.
- However, the recently introduced DPDP Bill 2023 makes little attempt to deal with these hard questions.

Conclusion

- The DPDP 2023 suffers from other shortcomings.
- For instance, the Data Protection Board, an oversight body will be under the boot of the government as the chairperson and members are to be appointed by the central government (Section 19).
- The DPDP Bill 2023 attempts to pass off a lame-duck as a watchdog.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2023 makes the government less transparent to the people and ends up making them transparent to both the government and private interests.

07.08.2023

- **PM launches revamp Amrit Bharat stations**
- **Revised Good Manufacturing Practices rules for drug firms**
- **Monetary policy: RBI likely to maintain status quo**
- **Endemic Birds of India report**
- **The bureaucracy as prosecutor and judge**

PM launches revamp Amrit Bharat stations

Context

- In a significant development for India's rail infrastructure, Prime Minister lay the foundation stone for the ambitious redevelopment of 508 railway stations across the country.
- This monumental endeavor falls under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme and comes with a hefty price tag of over ₹24,470 crores from the exchequer.

About Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

- The Amrit Bharat Station Scheme's comprehensive approach to station redevelopment signifies a significant step forward in India's infrastructure development and is expected to contribute significantly to the country's overall progress.
- The scheme envisages the development of stations on a continuous basis with a long-term vision.
- It aims at preparation of Master Plans of the Railway stations and implementation of the Master Plan in phases to enhance the facilities.
- Key features for these proposed stations:
  o Provisions for roof top plazas
  o Longer platforms
  o 5G connectivity
  o Ballastless tracks

Significance

- The rejuvenation of these railway stations is poised to revolutionize the nation's rail infrastructure, aiming to enhance 'Ease of Living' for citizens while prioritizing comfort and convenience.
- Notably, each station's design is meticulously crafted to harmonize with the local culture, heritage, and architecture, reflecting a blend of modernity and tradition.

Distribution of railway stations

- The distribution of these 508 railway stations spans 27 states and union territories, with Uttar Pradesh leading the count with 55 stations earmarked for redevelopment.

- Bihar follows closely with 49 stations, while Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh each contribute a significant number to the initiative.
- States such as Assam, Odisha, Punjab, Gujarat, Telangana, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, and Karnataka are also set to benefit from this transformative project.

Revised Good Manufacturing Practices rules for drug firms

Context

- The government recently directed all pharmaceutical companies in the country to implement the revised Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), bringing their processes at par with global standards.
- Larger companies with a turnover of over Rs 250 crore have been asked to implement the changes within six months, while medium and small-scale enterprises with a turnover of less than Rs 250 crore have been asked to do so within a year.
- This comes at a time when India is promoting itself as the global manufacturing hub for generic medicines.
- According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare the implementation of changes would begin August 1, 2023 onwards.

Reasons behind improved standards

- The foremost reasons for the implementation of the new norms was aimed to bring the Indian industry on par with global standards.
- In the recent past, there have been a string of incidents where other countries have reported alleged contamination in India-manufactured syrups, eye-drops, and eye ointments.
- The deaths of 70 children in the Gambia, 18 children in Uzbekistan, three persons in the United States, and six deaths in the Cameroon have been linked to these products.
- Also, a risk-based inspection of 162 manufacturing units by the government found several deficiencies which includes:
  - Incoming raw materials not being tested before use
  - Product quality not being reviewed
  - Absence of quality failure investigation
  - Infrastructure deficiency to prevent cross-contamination
  - Faulty design of manufacturing and testing areas
  - Missing qualified professionals
  - Poor documentation

Purpose of rules

- The improved standards will ensure that pharmaceutical companies follow standard processes, quality control measures, and do not cut corners, improving quality of medicines available in India as well as sold in global market.
- In addition, it will improve the quality of drugs in the domestic markets. Most of the 8,500 manufacturing units that are not WHO-GMP certified supply medicine within India.

Major changes

- The revised Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) guidelines focus on quality control measures, proper documentation, and IT backing to maintain quality of medicines produced.
- The new guideline introduces pharmaceutical quality system, quality risk management, product quality review, and validation of equipment.
- This will mean companies will have to carry out regular quality reviews of all its products.

- It also suggests a change control system to evaluate all changes that may affect the production or quality of the product.
- The guidelines also state that companies should have GMP-related computerized systems, which ensure that there is no tampering of data related to the processes.

Monetary policy: RBI likely to maintain status quo

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) which will meet between August 8-10 is widely expected to keep the policy repo rate unchanged for the third consecutive time at 6.5 per cent.
- While there are concerns over higher consumer price index (CPI) inflation, driven by an increase in prices of vegetables and pulses, the central bank may continue with its policy stance of 'withdrawal of accommodation' amidst surplus liquidity in the banking system.
- In June policy, the central bank again left the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent.

Why will RBI extend the pause in August

- Analysts and economists are of the view that the six-member MPC will leave the repo rate unchanged with hawkish guidance.
- Apart from vagaries arising from monsoon and agriculture-related issues, a recent spike in international crude oil prices due to supply cuts from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) could also put upward pressure on inflation.
- The RBI's move to extend the pause in August policy will come at a time when other major central banks such as the US Federal Reserves and European Central Bank (ECB) have raised interest rates by 25 bps.

Inflation forecast

- In the June monetary policy, the RBI revised its FY2024 inflation projection to 5.1 per cent from 5.2 per cent announced in April.
- For July, inflation is likely to rise in the range of 6-6.8 per cent from 4.81 per cent in June. Some economists believe that the RBI will revise its FY2024 CPI inflation projection upwards.

Change in lending and deposit rates

- In case the RBI maintains the status quo, there will be no change in external benchmark lending rates (EBLR) that are linked to the repo rate, giving relief to borrowers as their equated monthly installments (EMIs) will not rise. However, borrowers whose loans are linked to MCLR (marginal cost of fund-based lending rate), may see some upward revisions.

Endemic Birds of India report

Context

- A recent publication by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) points out that about 5% of the birds found in the country are endemic and not reported in other parts of the world. The publication, 75 Endemic Birds of India, was recently released on the 108th foundation day of the ZSI.
- India is home to 1,353 bird species, which represents approximately 12.4% of the global bird diversity. Of these, 78 (5%) are endemic to the country.
- The highest number of endemic species have been recorded in the Western Ghats, with 28 bird species.
- According to one of the authors of the publication, three of the 78 species have not been recorded in the past few decades. They are the:

- o Manipur bush quail (Perdicula manipurensis), listed as "endangered" by IUCN its last recorded sighting in 1907
- o Himalayan quail (Ophrysia superciliosa), listed as "critically endangered" with its last recorded sighting in 1876
- o Jerdon's courser (Rhinoptilus bitorquatus), listed as "critically endangered" with its last confirmed sighting in 2009
- ZSI Director pointed out that the publication highlighted the importance of endemic bird species in the country.

The bureaucracy as prosecutor and judge

Context
- Recently, the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2023 was passed in Lok Sabha during the monsoon session and aims at giving a boost to Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business.
- The fine print which has received attention is that while the legislation has mostly replaced criminal imprisonment with penalties.
- The amended bill has transferred the power to impose these monetary penalties from the judiciary to the bureaucracy.

Conferring power to bureaucrats
- The Jan Vishwas Act amends the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 to replace imprisonment as a punishment for certain offences with penalties of up to ₹15 lakh that can be imposed by designated bureaucrats (Joint Secretaries).
- Under amendments to the Indian Forest Act, 1927 forest officers have the power to not just conduct an inquiry to determine the "damage done to the forest" by anybody but also order the offender to pay a hitherto uncapped "compensation" for said damage.
- The larger question is whether giving the bureaucracy, rather than the courts, the power to not just adjudicate a factual dispute but also penalise or order compensation, goes against the constitutional scheme of separation of powers.

Separation of powers
- Although the Constitution does not mandate a separation of powers between the judiciary and the executive.
- Under Article 50 the state must take the necessary steps to separate the judiciary from the executive in the public services of the state
- Such a separation was not achieved until several years after the Constitution came into effect because the criminal magistracy was part of the executive at Independence.
- It took till approximately 1970, for several State legislatures to affect the separation of power at the level of the criminal magistracy through laws such as The West Bengal Separation of Judicial and Executive Functions Act, 1970 which separated the roles of the judicial and executive magistrates in the Criminal Procedure Code, 1898.

Attempt to capture judicial power
- Since the 1980s, the bureaucracy has tried three different routes to capture judicial power.
- First, different Ministries began creating judicial tribunals to take over various judicial functions hitherto exercised by the judiciary.
- Most of these tribunals were created in a manner to give bureaucrats an opportunity to be appointed to the tribunals as "technical members".

- Second, the Union government began creating a new class of statutory regulators such as the Securities and Exchange Board of India, and the Competition Commission of India (CCI) which had powers to punish the private sector with punishing fines.
- Virtually all these regulators ended up being headed by senior bureaucrats.

- Third, the Union government started creating the role of adjudicatory officers in a number of legislations such as the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, the Information Technology Act, 2001 and the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.
- These adjudicatory officers were always bureaucrats who were given powers to either confirm "attachment orders" for properties or impose penalties on businesses.

Conclusion

- The Jan Vishwas Act carries forward this specific model of creating "adjudicatory officers" within the bureaucracy to impose penalties.
- The larger issue which must worry about is that the Republic of India is backsliding on the separation of powers because of constant efforts by the bureaucracy of the Union executive to encroach upon judicial powers with the aid of elected Ministers who are either indifferent or clueless.
- The Jan Vishwas Act allows bureaucrats in charge of enforcing the law to also conduct an inquiry and impose the statutory penalty on a finding of wrongdoing is constitutionally suspect.

05.08.2023

- **Cabinet clears Indian telecommunication Bill 2023**
- **Lok Sabha passes Inter-Services Organisation Bill 2023**
- **Pannel suggest lowering age for contesting assembly poll**
- **Nursing students can opt to study foreign language**
- **The Cheetah's Return**

Cabinet clears Indian telecommunication Bill 2023

Context

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill 2023, which contains certain relaxations in regulating communication services such as WhatsApp and Google Meet.
- The Bill, however, is unlikely to be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament.
- There are significant relaxations to the process of regulating over-the-top (OTT) communication services by requiring them to obtain a licence from the government among the most contentious issues in the Bill.

Provision

- The bill proposes to enlarge the scope of telecommunication services by including OTT, Internet-based and satellite-based communication services, broadcasting, internet and broadband services within its ambit.
- The draft Bill also accords the Centre powers to defer, convert into equity, write off or grant relief to any licensee under extraordinary circumstances, including financial stress, consumer interest, and maintaining competition, among other things.
- It seeks to replace three laws – the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933 and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950.

Background

- The Bill was first released last year and, in that version, it proposed to include services like WhatsApp, Signal and Telegram in the definition of telecommunication services.
- As per the initial draft, providers of telecommunication services will be covered under the licensing regime and will be subjected to similar rules as other telecom operators.

Demand for level-playing field

- This issue has been under contention for several years now with telecom service providers seeking a level-playing field with OTT apps over communication services such as voice calls, messages, etc. where operators had to incur high costs of licences and spectrum, while OTT players rode on their infrastructure to offer free services.
- Another contentious provision in the initial Bill was its attempt to amend the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act (TRAI Act) to dilute the sectoral watchdog's function of being a recommendatory body.

Lok Sabha passes Inter-Services Organisation Bill 2023

Context

- In a major step towards building integrated theatre commands, the Lok Sabha has passed the Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill, 2023.
- The Standing Committee on Defence has approved all the provisions of the bill.

- The House panel recommended that the bill should be passed without any amendments.
- The Bill was under the subject of the Standing Committee's 39th Report in the 17th Lok Sabha.

Empowering the military chief

- The bill empowers the Commander-in-Chief and Officer-in-Command of Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) with all disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of the personnel serving in or attached to such organisations.
- Currently, the Armed Forces personnel are governed in accordance with the provisions contained in their specific Service Acts – Army Act 1950, Navy Act 1957, and Air Force Act 1950.
- The 'ISO Bill – 2023' shall be applicable to all personnel of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and to persons of other forces as notified by the central government, who are serving in or attached to an Inter-Services Organisation.

Various tangible benefits

- According to the statement from the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the enactment of the Bill will have various tangible benefits such as:
  - Maintenance of effective discipline in inter-service establishments by the Heads of ISOs
  - No requirement of reverting personnel under disciplinary proceedings to their parent Service units
  - Expeditious disposal of cases of misdemeanor or indiscipline and saving of public money & time by avoiding multiple proceedings.

Pannel suggests lowering age for contesting assembly poll

Context

- A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice has suggested reducing the minimum age required to run in national elections, particularly Assembly elections, from 25 to 18 years.
- However, the Election Commission (EC) has resisted this proposal, arguing it's "unrealistic" to expect individuals of such a young age to manage the responsibilities of public representation.
- Currently, the minimum age to stand for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections is 25 years, while the voting age threshold stands at 18.

Global practice

- The parliamentary panel pointed to examples from the UK, Australia, and Canada, where the minimum age to contest any elected public office is 18, as proof that young people can be reliable and responsible political participants.

Recommendation

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law, and Justice suggested that younger candidates could bridge the gap between different generations, facilitating dialogue and cooperation.
- It recommended that the Election Commission and government implement civic education programs to provide young individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for political engagement.

Average age group of MP

- According to a report by PRS Legislative Research, 47 per cent of Lok Sabha MPs were over 55 in 2019.
- The panel described this trend as particularly troubling, considering that India's median age is just 27.9 years.

- Only 2.2 per cent of Lok Sabha MPs are under 30. Currently, in the 17th Lok Sabha, there are 34 sitting MPs aged between 30 and 40.

Nursing students can opt to study foreign language

Context

- The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the first time has initiated the addition of foreign languages as an optional subject/course in B.Sc. Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) programmes.
- The Indian Nursing Council (INC) has issued a notification on August 2, announcing the new initiative aimed at promoting internationalization in education.
- The programme also hopes to enhance the overall personality development of nursing students and equip them with a valuable skill set for their future careers.

Optional of foreign language

- The optional foreign language courses will provide nursing students with an additional advantage during their degree/diploma programme.
- Students will have the opportunity to choose from a range of foreign languages including French, German, Greek, Latin, Irish, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese, among others.
- This diverse array of language options ensures that students can select a language that aligns with their interests and career aspirations, said a senior official.

Equitable education

- The language courses will be conducted by hiring specific language teachers, and the expenses for hiring these teachers will be borne by the respective nursing institutions. The Indian Nursing Council (INC) has emphasized that participating students shall not be charged exorbitant fees for these optional language modules.
- Nursing students can now opt to study a foreign language as an added advantage for overall personality development while pursuing their degree.

The Cheetah's Return

Context

- One more cheetah has been confirmed dead by wildlife authorities at the Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh.
- In modern times, human impacts are primarily responsible for species extinctions and biodiversity loss.
- The cheetah, the only large carnivore made extinct in independent India by human actions, was recently reintroduced by Prime Minister in September 2022.
- Kuno National Park was restored for the reintroduction of lions. About 20 villages were relocated to create 748 sq km of human-free national park.

Origin of Indian cheetah

- Recent genetic analysis of the extinct Indian cheetah shows the animal's origin in Persia.
- The cheetah, the lion, the striped hyena, honey badger, caracal, and gazelles are some examples of Ethiopian fauna that colonised India through Persia in ancient times.
- The cheetah served as an evolutionary force and was responsible for the fast speed of the blackbuck, its major prey.

Concerns

- Unfortunately, Indian conservationists have failed to provide the correct narrative to the government in using indigenous species as flagships and investing in their conservation.
- The last population of the Great Indian Bustard, a grassland flagship, is dwindling as they die from collisions with power lines.
- However, successful reintroductions require long-term commitments in several areas. Re-wilding ecosystems requires a reduction in biotic pressures by incentivized voluntary relocation of communities, as has been done in tiger reserves, control of bushmeat consumption and restoration of prey.

Conclusion

- A scheme to compensate for livestock predation that is transparent needs to be implemented.
- Unfortunately, the inexperience of the field staff did not allow detection of the infection in time which could have led to an easy cure.
- The deaths are a setback for the project, but not a cause for its failure.
- The MoUs between India-Namibia and India-South Africa allow us to import more cheetahs – provided India is making its best efforts and will continue to do so to maintain the welfare of individual cheetahs.
- The reintroduction project is much required for the ecological security of India.

04.08.2023

- **Biological Diversity Bill: Challenges and concerns**
- **The Jan Vishwas Bill passed in the Rajya Sabha**
- **Centre impose curbs on import of laptops, tablets**
- **Captive breeding of Endangered Himalayan vulture**
- **India needs evidence-based, ethics-driven medicine**

Biological Diversity Bill: Challenges and concerns

Context

- Recently, the Rajya Sabha passed the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021.
- The bill aims to conserve biodiversity, promote its sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits that arise therein.

Why is the Bill considered problematic

- The Bill exempts "codified traditional knowledge" and the AYUSH industry from benefit sharing, denying local communities' benefits from accessing biological resources.
- The term "codified traditional knowledge" lacks a clear definition, leading to potential exploitation.
- It decriminalises offences and proposes monetary penalties instead, raising concerns over resource exploitation.
- The Bill also decriminalises offences under the Act and proposes monetary penalties, raising concerns about the potential exploitation of biological resources without accountability.
- Experts regard this exemption as regressive because the legislation was enacted in the first place to ensure "fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

How does the industry view the Act

- The industry has been unhappy with the regulations and has run to courts and sought relaxation.

- Consider the 2016 case where the Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board sent a notice to Divya Pharmacy, stating that the company was in violation of the Act for using biological resources without prior intimation to the Board.
- The company challenged the notice in the Uttarakhand high court, although it ultimately lost the case.
- In 2015, representatives from Gujarat's Ayurveda industry urged the central government to provide some relief to the sector by postponing the implementation of access and benefit-sharing provisions.
- The fact that the Environment Ministry has given precedence to "ease of doing business" rather than its mandate to protect the environment is a cause for concern.

Jan Vishwas Bill passed in the Rajya Sabha

Context
- The Rajya Sabha passed the Jan Vishwas Bill.
- The bill will amend two provisions of the law governing the manufacture, storage, and sale of medicines in India.
- One of the amendments has led to a debate on whether manufacturers of substandard medicines would be let off easy by paying a fine instead of imprisonment.

Aim
- The Jan Vishwas bill was brought to the parliament with the aim to improve the ease of doing business.
- It will amend 183 provisions across 42 laws to do away with imprisonment or fines for certain offences.

Changes to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act
- The Jan Vishwas Bill will make two changes to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, of 1940.
- The first amendment will do away with imprisonment under section 30 (2) of the current law for companies repeatedly using government analysis or test reports for promoting their products.
- At present, companies face up to two years imprisonment and a fine of not less than ten thousand rupees for a repeated violation.
- This will change to only a fine but not less than five lakh rupees as per the amendment proposed in the Jan Vishwas bill.

- The second amendment will change section 32B (1) of the existing law to allow "compounding" of offences under section 27 (d).
- Compounding is a legal provision that allows one to pay a fine instead of undergoing criminal proceedings.
- What this essentially means is that companies violating the provisions of 27 (d) will continue to face imprisonment between one and two years and a fine not less than 20,000.

Impact on drug manufacturers
- The drug act in the schedule M lists all the requirements such as space or processes for drug manufacturers.
- The changes that were made to this schedule in 2018 to improve drug manufacturing in the country are yet to be adopted by a majority of drug manufacturers.
- The health ministry said that bigger companies with a turnover of over 250 crores will need to implement these measures within six months and smaller companies within a year.

Manufacturer's Opinion

- According to Manufacturers, allowing compounding is actually a good move and prevents companies from being stuck in litigation for years for minor offences.
- It has been a long-standing demand of the industry that minor offences be decriminalised to reduce harassment of the business owners.

Centre imposes curbs on import of laptops, tablets

Context

- The central government has placed restrictions on the import of laptops, tablets, and computers with immediate effect, the Ministry of Commerce said in a notification on August 3, adding that the import would be allowed against a valid licence for restricted imports.
- Any entity or company planning to bring laptops and computers for sale in India will now have to seek permission or license from the government for their inbound shipments. The notification in this regard was issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).
- The restrictions have been imposed under HSN Code 8471 on seven categories of electronic gadgets.

About HSN Code 8471

- The Harmonised System of Nomenclature (HSN) code is a classification system used to identify products for taxation purposes.
- Data processing machines are classified under HSN code 8471.
- This code is used to identify devices that are designed to perform data processing tasks.

Reason behind these restrictions

- The move has been announced with an aim to promote domestic manufacturing of these products under the recently renewed production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for IT hardware.
- The last date to apply for the so-called production-linked incentives in this product category is August 30.
- The government has curtailed inbound shipments of these goods from countries like China and Korea.
- Further, the government's announcement is expected to impact companies that import bulk of their products from outside India.
- Tech giants like Apple will have to either start manufacturing their laptops in India or stop importing their gadgets to India.

Captive breeding of Endangered Himalayan vulture

Context

- Researchers have recorded the first instance of captive breeding of the Himalayan vulture (Gyps himalayensis) in India at the Assam State Zoo, Guwahati.
- The captive breeding was a joint project undertaken by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Assam forest department, and was carried out with the help of Assam State Zoo.

Habitat

- Categorized as 'near threatened' on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of threatened species, the Himalayan vulture is a common winter migrant to the Indian plains, and a resident of the high Himalayas.
- Along with the housing for nestling, the food, frequency of feed, and the growth and colouration of the nestling were observed.

Conservation status

- The vulture is listed as "Near Threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species.
- The species is covered by a Multi-species Action Plan (MsAP) for the conservation of African-Eurasian vultures and by national Action Plans in India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Cambodia.

India needs evidence-based, ethics-driven medicine

Context

- The recent push to integrate 'AYUSH' medicinal systems into mainstream health care to achieve universal health coverage and 'decolonise medicine' is a pluralistic approach by the government.
- This move would require every participating system to meet basic safety and efficacy standards.
- Homoeopathy was introduced in 1839 in India by Austrian physician J.M. Honigberger.

Efficacy and safety of homeopathy

- Evidence on homeopathy's efficacy is weak.
- The first carefully conducted and well-reported double-blind randomized controlled trial (RCT), the Nuremberg Salt Test (1835), noted that "the symptoms or changes which the homeopaths claimed to observe as an effect of their medicines were the fruit of imagination, self-deception and preconceived opinion.
- Recently, researchers demonstrated that more than half of the 193 homeopathic trials in the last two decades were not registered.

World Health Organization waning

- Further, World Health Organization (WHO) has warned against homeopathic treatments for HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria, as well as flu and diarrhea in infants, saying it has "no place" in their treatment.
- Evidence is accumulating that homeopathy does not work for cancers and may not help to reduce the adverse effects of cancer treatments, contrary to lay belief.
- Instead, treatments have been linked to both non-fatal and fatal adverse events as well as their aggravation.
- Seeking homeopathic care also delays the application of evidence-based clinical care. In several cases, it has caused injuries and sometimes death.

Standards and efficacy

- Homoeopathy's supporters argue that the standards commonly used in evidence-based medicine are not suitable for judging the "holistic effects" of homeopathy.
- This claim can be debunked.
- First Homoeopathy advocates have failed to invent valid alternative evidence synthesis frameworks suited for testing its efficacy and safety, which are also acceptable to the critics.
- Second, the claim about homeopathy being holistic is typically paired with evidence-based medicine being "reductionist."
- In 2023, most exponents of evidence-based medicine are aware and accepting of biopsychosocial approaches toward health endorsed by WHO predominantly composed of evidence-based medicine practitioners and supporters.
- Third, evidence-based medicine does not and should not stop at establishing empirical evidence.
- The quest is also to discover and explain the mechanisms underlying the evidence.

- In several allopathic/modern medicine practices have updated themselves based on growing scientific evidence.

Way forward
- Adopting a pluralistic approach in medicine can decolonise medicine.
- India's path to universal health care must be grounded in evidence-based and ethics-driven medicine.
- The argument to reject homeopathy is not just based on its coloniality but chiefly on the lack of evidence for efficacy.

03.08.2023

- **Centre launches Vivad se Vishwas-2 scheme**
- **Panel to revise anti-discrimination guidelines on campuses**
- **Centre stays GST rates on online gaming and casinos**
- **Paramilitary forces witness surge in psychiatric cases**
- **The trajectory of progress must change**

Centre launches Vivad se Vishwas-2 scheme
Context
- The Central government launched the Vivad se Vishwas-2 scheme for settling contractual disputes involving the government and government undertakings. Announced in the Union Budget 2023-24.
- The scheme aims to resolve the government's contractual disputes with private parties, clear the backlog of litigation, and improve the ease of doing business.
- The deadline for submitting claims under the scheme is 31 October 2023.

Applicability
- The scheme will apply to all domestic contractual disputes where one of the parties is either the Government of India or an organisation operating under its control.
- The central government is aiming to resolve approximately 500 cases, involving an estimated Rs 1 trillion, under this new voluntary settlement scheme, according to officials.

Coverage of Court order
- The one-time settlement scheme will cover cases where the court order was passed by 30 April 2023, and the arbitral order was given by 30 January 2023.
- Under the scheme, for court orders passed on or before 30 April 2023, the settlement amount offered to the contractor will be up to 85 per cent of the net amount awarded or upheld by the court.
- For arbitral orders passed on or before 1 January 2023, the settlement amount offered is up to 65 per cent of the net amount awarded.

Panel to revise anti-discrimination guidelines on campuses
Context
- The Ministry of Education of India has informed parliament that, the ministry recently constituted an expert committee to revisit its regulations and norms on anti-discrimination with respect to the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Classes, Persons with Disabilities, and other minorities in higher educational institutions.

- The University Grants Commission had taken this step in pursuance of a Supreme Court direction in July 2023 where it had asked the government to clarify the affirmative steps it had taken to make campuses free of caste discrimination.

Objective of Committee

- The committee will revisit the UGC regulations/schemes concerning the SC/ST/OBC/PwD and minority communities in Higher Educational Institutions and suggest further remedial measures if required to make the non-discriminatory environment for SC/ST students in HEIs.

Suicide Cases

- In the last six months, at least half a dozen students from marginalised backgrounds have died of suicide on campuses of IIT-Madras, IIT-Bombay, and IIT-Delhi.
- In order to proactively address any issues of SC/ ST students, institutes have set up mechanisms such as SC/ ST students' cells, equal opportunity cells, student grievance cells, student grievance committees, student social clubs, liaison officers, liaison committees etc.

Centre stays GST rates on online gaming and casinos

Context

- Recently, the GST Council decided to levy a 28 per cent GST on online gaming and casinos on the face value of bets at entry level, even though three states - Delhi, Goa and Sikkim expressed dissent.
- Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, during its 50th meeting, has decided to impose a 28% indirect tax on the turnover of online gaming companies.
- The GST Council had earlier formed a panel to look into taxing casinos, horse racing and online gaming.

Amendments to Central GST law

- The Centre will bring amendments to the Central GST law in the ongoing monsoon session of Parliament, following which states will pass the amendments in their respective assemblies to pave the way for the introduction of changes in law by October 1.
- A review of the taxation of online gaming and casinos will be undertaken after 6 months or around April 2024 to see if any change in rules is required.
- The offshore gaming platforms will have to register themselves with the GST authorities.

Review after 6 months

- The new tax levy is now expected to be effective from October 1.
- A review would be undertaken after six months of the implementation.
- Other states such as Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar asked the Council to implement its decision from the last meeting at the earliest.
- Offshore gaming platforms will have to register themselves with the GST authorities.

Paramilitary forces witness surge in psychiatric cases

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs informed Rajya Sabha that, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) have witnessed an almost 40 per cent increase in the number of reported psychiatric cases over the past three years.
- CAPFs, which function under the MHA, include the BSF, Indo-Tibetan Border Police and Shashtra Seema Bal, which are primarily border guarding forces, the CRPF and the Central Industrial Security Force

(CISF), which are for internal law and order duties, and the Assam Rifles which has a dual role of guarding the border with Myanmar as well as undertaking internal security duties in the north-east.

Surge in Cases

- From 3,548 cases reported in 2020, the figure rose to 3,964 in 2021 and touched 4,940 in 2022, accounting for a spike by 39.23 per cent according to the Ministry's data.
- With a total of 4,858 cases during the aforementioned three years, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) topped the list followed by the Border Security Force (BSF) with 3,559 cases.

Combined strength of the CAPFs

- The combined strength of the CAPFs is about 10 lakh personnel. To cater to this number only 14 psychiatric doctors are available across five forces except the CISF, which has no psychiatrist on its posted strength, according to the ministry.
- CAPFs are deployed across the length and breadth of the country on security duties, disaster management and aid to civil authorities.
- A large element of border guarding forces are also deployed for anti-naxal operations and internal security duties.

Several corrective steps

- The minister added that to curb such types of cases several corrective steps are being taken by all CAPFs.
- These include:
  - o All personnel being checked up thoroughly every year by an authorised medical attendant during annual medical examination
  - o Diseases detected being properly treated and if required cases are referred to specialists in well-equipped hospitals for detailed investigations and opinions etc.
  - o Periodical follow-up of chronic cases
  - o A record of each personnel's health is being kept in their personal health card and reviewed time to time.
  - o Yoga has been made a part of physical training to reduce the stress and anxiety

The trajectory of progress must change

Context

- India holds the Presidency of the G20 from December 1, 2022, to November 30, 2023.
- The G-20 has provided an opportune stage for India.
- The G-20 is at an impasse because the U.S. wants its members to shut Russia and China which it sees as threats to its global hegemony.

Governance is facing trouble

- Global governance is in bad shape and the trajectory of progress must change.
- The trajectory of progress must be changed to make economic growth more equitable and sustainable.
- Economists try to prove with numbers that poverty is reducing, and incomes are increasing for everyone.
- India, as chair of the G-20, has offered a vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (One Earth, One Family, One Future) to bring all citizens of the world together and make the world better for everyone.
- In 2015, all countries adopted the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to be achieved by 2030.

Achieving SDGs targets

- The SDGs describe 17 complex combinations of environmental, social, and economic problems.

- All 17 problems do not appear in every country, and when they do, they do not appear in the same form.
- For example, problems of the oceans are immediately life-threatening to island countries but not to land-locked countries as yet.
- No country has only one of the SDG problems; every country has at least six or seven.

A map of ground realities

- The McKinsey Global Institute has produced a detailed map of realities on the ground, in its report, "Pixels of Progress: A granular look at human development around the world" (December 7, 2022).
- It divides the world into 40,000 micro-regions.
- Using advanced statistical techniques, it zooms in to examine actual progress on the ground which statistical averages at a country level and growth of GDP cannot reveal.
- It applies the yardsticks of life expectancy and income to compare the well-being of people in these regions.
- The report concludes that the growth of GDP at a country level explains only 20% of the progress on the ground.

On local governance

- Democracy is the government of, for, and by people.
- A government elected by the people that provide benefits top-down to people is not a complete democracy.
- Government must be by the people themselves too.
- India has elections, but its citizens do not have "poorna swaraj" yet.

Way forward

- India has proposed an approach of LiFE (lifestyles for sustainable development) to the G-20.
- It requires "coherent actions amongst stakeholders at all levels rooted in collective actions across society".
- Principle 7 of LiFE also requires the world's leaders to "recognize and amplify the role of local communities, local and regional governments and traditional knowledge in supporting sustainable lifestyles".
- Mere economic growth will not solve the world's problems; it needs to be sustainable and equitable too.

02.08.2023

- **What can amend Forest (Conservation) Act change**
- **Projects to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions**
- **All-India Tiger Estimate Report**
- **Centre update on pending MGNREGS wages to States**
- **The dangers in the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill**

What can amended Forest (Conservation) Act change

Context

- The controversial Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha with limited debate, awaits discussion in the Rajya Sabha.
- The bill aims to restrict conservation scope, exempt border lands for strategic projects, and allow some non-forest activities.
- The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in March.

- Thereafter, it was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) comprising 32 members from both Houses of Parliament and across party lines.

Bill restricts the scope of the Act

- The Bill stipulates that only those lands that were notified as 'forest' under the Indian Forest Act 1927, which were recorded as 'forests' in government records will be acknowledged as 'forests' under this Act as well.
- This revision stands in stark contrast to the wide applicability of the extant Act at present.
- A Supreme Court judgment in 1996 reiterated such a broad application.
- It said, that a 'forest' includes all land recorded as such in government records regardless of ownership as well as "deemed forests".
- The court had also asked States to undertake an exercise to identify and notify their own deemed forests.
- But even after almost 30 years, many States are yet to complete this exercise.

Exemption for border infrastructure

- The Bill seeks to exempt linear infrastructure projects like roads and highways from seeking forest clearance permissions if they are located within 100 km of the national border.
- Experts have raised concerns because "strategic linear projects of national importance" is an undefined term and can thus be misused to push through infrastructure projects that are devastating for the local ecology.

JPC flag concerns

- This Bill was not referred to the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committee.
- The JPC did not propose a single change to the Bill in its report despite receiving objections from tribal groups, conservationists, environmental lawyers, activists, and citizen groups.
- Six members of the JPC itself wrote dissent notes.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs also raised concerns about the amendment's implications on community rights enshrined in the Forest Rights Act 2006.

Projects to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions

Context

- Recently, the UK government reaffirmed its support for projects to capture and store carbon dioxide emissions as part of its efforts to reach net zero goals.

Carbon capture and storage

- There are two main types of carbon capture and storage.
- Point-source carbon capture and storage (CCS) which captures CO_2 produced at the source, such as a smokestack, while direct air capture (DAC) removes carbon dioxide (CO_2) that has already been released into the atmosphere.
- They are both designed to capture emissions from heavy-emitting sectors, such as oil and gas refining and steel manufacturing, and store them underground off the coast of Britain in depleted oil and gas fields.
- Carbon capture, utilization and storage: instead of just storing the CO_2 - re-uses it in industrial processes such as plastics, concrete or biofuel manufacture.

Working

- Firstly, the CO_2 has to be separated from other gasses produced in industrial processes or during power generation.

- Once captured it has to be compressed and transported to sites for storage often via pipelines.
- After that, it has to be injected into rock formations underground - typically 1 km (0.62 mile) or more under the ground - for storage for decades.

All-India Tiger Estimate Report

Context

- The latest All-India Tiger Estimate (AITE) report was recently released by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- As per the report One-fifth of India's tiger area spanning 16 tiger reserves harbors only 25 or less than one per cent of India's 3,682 tigers.
- In all, there are 53 tiger reserves covering a combined area of 75,797 sq km.

Finding of the report

- **Net gains in populations:** The latest quadrennial AITE records a net gain of 715 tigers over the previous estimate in 2018, the national count shows the shrinking range of the big cat since 45% of India's tigers are concentrated in another set of 16 reserves that also account for roughly one-fifth of India's tiger area.
- **State data:** The situation is not good in states such as Jharkhand (only one tiger recorded), Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and many areas in the Northeast.
- The latest AITE reported a significant loss of tiger range in Wayanad, northern Karnataka, Jharkhand, Goa, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland since 2018.
- The largest tiger population of 785 is in MP, followed by Karnataka (563) and Uttarakhand (560), and Maharashtra (444).
- The tiger abundance within the Tiger Reserve is highest in Corbett (260), followed by Bandipur (150), Nagarhole (141), Bandhavgarh (135), Dudhwa (135).

Centre update on pending MGNREGS wages to States

Context

- The Union Rural Development Ministry informed Parliament that it owed ₹6,366 crore under the wage component of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) to States.
- There are a total of 14.42 crore active MGNREGS workers, most of them women, dependent on wages to supplement their family's income.
- Of the total sum, ₹2,770 crore is owed to West Bengal alone.

Payment blocked for Non-Compliance

- Invoking Section 27 of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Centre has blocked payment of over ₹7,500 crore to West Bengal for "non-compliance of directives of the Central government.
- The government said that barring West Bengal, there is no pendency for more than five months in wage disbursal for any MGNREGS worker.
- After West Bengal, the highest amount of funds for wages are owed to Rajasthan, a total of ₹979 crore.
- Bihar is owed ₹669 crore.
- The Centre has pending payments under the wage component for a total of 18 States and Union Territories.
- Section 3(3) of the MGNREGA says "the disbursement of daily wages shall be made on a weekly basis or in any case not later than a fortnight after the date on which such work was done".

Domino effect

- The delay in the material component has a domino impact, affecting future projects. When there are continuous delays in the material component payout, the local vendors who supply raw materials become reluctant to supply goods, thereby breaking the work cycle.
- In material component payments, the Centre owes ₹2,813 crore to West Bengal, followed by ₹777 crore to Uttar Pradesh and ₹634 crore to Karnataka.

The dangers in the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill

Context

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 introduces a new framework for personal data protection, making it paramount to comprehend and understand its applicability and functions.
- The Government of India sees this released bill as one of the parts of its larger vision of a Digital Economy, this vision will include a comprehensive "Digital India Act" that would in due course of time replace the existing Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The government is set to introduce the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill in Parliament.

Do not repeat the errors

- It is imperative that the data protection law does not suffer from the infirmities that the previous draft had and safeguards peoples' fundamental rights, i.e., both the right to information and the right to privacy.
- The Data Protection Bill of 2022 includes a provision to amend the Right to Information (RTI) Act, which has empowered millions of Indian citizens since its enactment in 2005. To effectively hold their governments accountable in a democracy, people need access to information, including various categories of personal data.

Threat to transparency and accountability

- The RTI Act includes a provision to harmonize peoples' right to information with their right to privacy through an exemption clause under Section 8(1)(j).
- Personal information is exempt from disclosure if it has no relationship to any public activity; or has no relationship to any public interest.
- The DPDP Bill 2022, proposes amendments to Section 8(1)(j) to expand its purview and exempt all personal information from disclosure.
- This threatens the very foundations of the transparency and accountability regime in the country.

Objective of data protection law

- A primary objective of any data protection law is to curtail the misuse of personal data, including financial fraud.
- Given that the government is the biggest data repository, an effective data protection law must not give wide discretionary powers to the government.
- The DPDP Bill, 2022, unfortunately, empowers the executive to draft rules and notifications on a vast range of issues.
- For instance, the central government can exempt any government or even private sector entity from the application of provisions of the law by merely issuing a notification.
- This would potentially allow the government to arbitrarily exempt its cronies and government bodies such as the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), resulting in immense violations of citizens' privacy.

No autonomy

- In order to meet its objective of protecting personal data, it is critical that the oversight body set up under the legislation be adequately independent to act on violations of the law by government entities.
- The draft Bill does not even make a pretense to ensure the autonomy of the Data Protection Board — the institution responsible for the enforcement of provisions of the law. The central government is empowered to determine the strength and composition of the board, as well as the process of selection and removal of its chairperson and other members. The chief executive responsible for managing the board is to be appointed by the government, giving it direct control over the institution.
- The creation of a totally government-controlled Data Protection Board, empowered to impose fines up to ₹500 crore, is bound to raise serious apprehensions.

Conclusion

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022, marks a significant milestone in protecting individuals' privacy rights and regulating data practices.
- With the executive vastly empowered to draft rules and notifications on a range of issues, India might end up with a law that takes away the right to seek personal information.

01.08.2023

- **Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy**
- **ISRO rocket debris on Australian shore**
- **Centre allows relief to sugar cooperatives over excess payments**
- **India's core sector growth touches high mark**
- **Recalibrating India's clean-cooking strategy**

Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy

Context

- The Central government recently released the draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP).
- A deep tech startup involves early-stage technologies based on scientific or engineering advancements, which are yet to be developed for any commercial applications.
- The draft policy was shaped by the National Consortium and Working Group set up by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC), which received inputs from over 200 stakeholders within and outside the deep tech startup ecosystem.

Focus area

- The policy outlines a nine-point programme to create a conducive ecosystem for the sector, which is crucial for enhancing India's capability and global competitiveness.
- The draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP) suggests necessary changes in nine policy areas such as:
  - Nurturing research, Development and innovation
  - Strengthening the intellectual property regime
  - Facilitating access to funding
  - Enabling shared infrastructure and resource sharing
  - Creating conducive regulations, standards, and certifications
  - Attracting human resources and initiating capacity building
  - Promoting procurement and adoption

- o Ensuring policy and program interlinkages
- o Sustaining deep tech startups

Aim

- The policy seeks to "ensure India's position in the global deep tech value chain," in areas such as semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and space technology.
- This policy complements and adds value to the existing Startup India policies, programmes, and initiatives, by fostering a conducive ecosystem for deep tech startups to thrive and address their unique and complex challenges.
- The policy also seeks to find approaches to provide financing to deep tech start-ups at critical moments, such as before they go to market with their products or ideas.
- The policy aims to simplify the intellectual property regime for such start-ups, ease regulatory requirements, and propose measures to promote these firms.

ISRO rocket debris on Australian shore

Context

- The Australian Space Agency has revealed that a mysterious object that washed up on an Australian beach recently was most likely third-stage debris from a recently launched Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- The Australian Space Agency said it had stored the debris and was working with ISRO, "who will provide further communication to determine the next steps, including considering obligations under the United Nations space treaties".

ISRO agrees for assessment

- ISRO has agreed with the assessment, saying the debris could be from one of its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rockets.
- ISRO has agreed with the assessment, saying the debris could be from one of its Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rockets.
- The ISRO official said the agency was still to decide on the future course of action.

Are such incidents normal

- Junk from space objects falling to the earth is not unheard of.
- Most such incidents involve relatively small fragments from rockets that survive the friction of the atmosphere.
- These usually do not make big news. Also, most of the times, the space junk falls into oceans, thus posing little danger to human populations.
- In recent times, a large chunk of a 25-tonne Chinese rocket fell into the Indian Ocean in May 2021.
- The most famous such case remains that of the Skylab space station, a predecessor to the currently operational International Space Station, which disintegrated in 1979.

Are debris dangerous

- The threat to life and property from falling space junk is not negligible.
- Even when falling into the oceans, which is more likely since 70 per cent of the earth's surface is ocean, large objects can be a threat to marine life, and a source of pollution.
- However, there are no recorded incidents of these falling objects causing any appreciable damage anywhere on Earth.
- When they have dropped over land, so far, it has been over uninhabited areas.

Centre allows relief to sugar cooperatives over excess payments

Context

- The Ministry of Finance has notified the rules enabling cooperative sugar mills to claim past cane price payments made to farmers, in excess of the government's statutory minimum price (SMP), as "business expenditure".
- The move is expected to provide mills with a relief of almost Rs 10,000 crore, against pending tax demands and litigation in respect of payments made before the 2015-16 financial year.
- The Cooperative factories, particularly in Maharashtra, usually pay farmers a final cane price that is more than the Centre's SMP now called fair and remunerative price or FRP.

Exemptions

- This extra price paid has resulted in tax litigation, with mills claiming the excess payment as business expenditure.
- The Income Tax Department, on the other hand, has disallowed this and treats the excess price paid for sugarcane over and above the SMP as appropriation/distribution of profits, and thus not allowable as a deduction.

Amendment to the Finance Act

- The 2015-16 Union Budget introduced an amendment to the Finance Act that provided for excess cane price payments made by cooperative sugar mills to be allowed as a deduction for computing their business income.
- However, such deduction was made applicable only prospectively from the 2016-17 assessment year.
- It did not end demands and litigation regarding previous assessment years.
- The Finance ministry in 2023-24 Budget sought to conclude the matter and to extend the benefit of deduction to all financial years prior to 2015-16.
- This was done by amending Section 155 of Income Tax Act through insertion of a new subsection (19).

India's core sector growth touches high mark

Context

- According to the latest data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India's eight core sectors posted a growth of 8.2 per cent.
- At 8.2 per cent, the growth in India's eight key infrastructure sectors - coal, crude oil, steel, cement, electricity, fertilisers, refinery products, and natural gas.

Earlier growth data

- Core sector growth for May has been revised up to 5.0 percent from 4.3 percent.
- In June 2022, core sector growth was 13.1 percent, thanks to a favorable base effect.
- For April-June, core sector growth has been 5.8 percent, down from 13.9 percent in the first three months of 2022-23.
- The sharp improvement in performance last month was down to improved output growth in six of the eight sectors, with only fertiliser and cement output growing at a slower pace in June compared to May on a year-on-year basis.

Sector performance

- Electricity production was up 3.3 percent in June compared to a growth of 0.8 percent in May, while coal output increased by 9.8 percent.

- The sector to post the highest growth was steel, whose output jumped by 21.9 percent - double the May growth rate of 10.9 percent.
- With the eight core industries making up more than 40 percent of the weight of the Index of Industrial Production.

Recalibrating India's clean-cooking strategy

Context

- India's clean-cooking strategy aimed to address the issue of indoor air pollution and its associated health impacts by promoting the adoption of clean cooking technologies and fuels.
- Over the last 15 years, the Government of India has attempted to replicate the success that liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) adoption has seen in urban households, in poorer and rural households.
- The Grameen Vitrak Yojana, launched in 2009, has helped grow the rural distributor base from 18% to 60% of the total LPG distributor base today.
- The ambitious Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has provided more than 9.5 crore new households with LPG connections since 2016.

The LPG stories

- According to the India Residential Energy Consumption Survey (IRES) conducted by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), the share of Indian households using LPG as the primary cooking fuel had risen to 71% in 2020 from 33% in 2011,
- It was a clear indication that Indian households wanted to adopt clean cooking solutions, and policy could overcome 'preferences and financial barriers.
- However, global events that unfolded since the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing loss of livelihoods and income on the one hand and the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting surge and volatility in crude and product prices on the other, have dented even a near-term prospect of universal use of LPG in Indian households.
- In 2020, with the onset of COVID-19, subsidy for LPG consumption was withdrawn for all consumers.

Nominal subsidy under PMUY

- A nominal subsidy of ₹200 per cylinder was reinstated for Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana consumers in September 2022, and it helped improve refill rates in FY23 (4.09) versus FY22 (3.68).
- Average refill rates for active non-PMUY consumers are in slow decline 40% of PMUY consumers choose to get two or less refills in a year now.
- These outcomes suggest that despite significant efforts, home delivery and distribution channel issues remain and more budgetary outlay will be needed for subsidies to entice the poor to consume LPG and avail its health benefits.

Diversity in clean cooking

- India's clean cooking policy must actively pivot towards the adoption of a suite of clean-cooking technologies and shift from an LPG-only strategy.
- For example, electric cooking, including induction cook-tops, can significantly offset the need for flame-based cooking.
- With near 100% access to electricity connections, rural households can also shift specific cooking needs to electricity.
- A CEEW study finds that even at a high tariff of ₹8 for each unit of electricity, e-cooking would still be cheaper than cooking using LPG at today's prices.

Way forward

- The government requires targeted support in the interim for manufacturers to embrace efficiency and design for the needs of Indian households.
- Displacement of 'chulhas' by e-cooking would also avoid climate pollutant release.
- With the newly launched carbon market, India can monetise these avoided emissions and help finance the capital needed by poorer rural communities to adopt e-cooking.
- The debate needs to move from LPG subsidy alone to financing and business models that value India's clean cooking transition for its climate and clean air benefits, through a bouquet of solutions.

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SEPTEMBER
2023

30.09.2023

- **World take note of India's political and military resolve**
- **India discuss Canada issues with US**
- **Law Commission recommends on POCSO Act**
- **India's core sector growth rises high in August**
- **Global dispute settlement, India and appellate review**

World take note of India's political and military resolve

Context

- Indian Army Chief said that the firm way the Indian troops stood up to the Chinese forces during the Galwan Valley stand-off in May 2020 made the world take note of India's political and military resolve.

About

- Addressing the 118th annual session of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Indian Army Chief said, India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a fine example of how India stood "steadfast and clear" towards addressing "legitimate pursuits" of its national interests.
- The Army chief noted that resolute and firm manner with which the country stood up to its northern adversary, during the events of April-May 2020, made the world take notice of the "political and military resolve of a rising India".

India's foreign policy and diplomacy

- Indian Army Chief said that India foreign policy and diplomacy are playing a crucial role at this moment.
- The dividends are evident in pursuits as part of:
  o Bilateral and multilateral grouping
  o International solar alliance
  o Global biofuel alliance
  o Coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure
  o Trade agreement extending line of credit and championing initiatives for finding solutions to global problems.

Indigenous defence industries

- The Army chief said 340 indigenous defence industries are working towards fructification of 230 contracts by 2025.
- The Army's transformation endeavor stood on five pillars:
  o Force restructuring and optimisation
  o Modernisation and tech infusion
  o Systems, processes, and functions
  o Human resource management
  o Jointness and integration

India discuss Canada issues with US
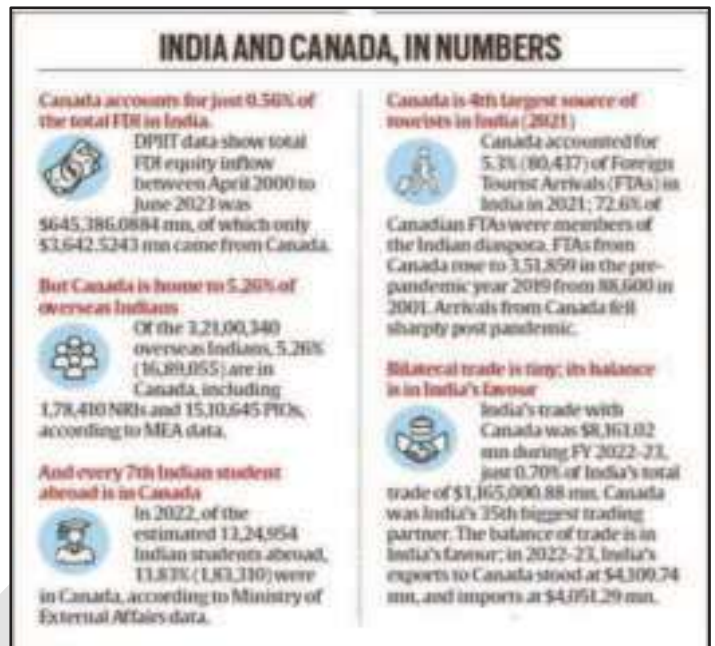
Context

- External Affairs Minister said that the Canadian allegations with regard to the death of a Khalistani separatist was discussed during his meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State.

Deterioration in Ties

- Recently, the Canada's prime minister announced that there was "credible" information linking Indian government agents to the murder of a Sikh separatist leader in British Columbia.
- India-Canada ties have deteriorated rapidly in recent years.
- The Canadian government is soft on Khalistani supporters in Canada and working against Indian interests.
- Khalistan elements have incited violence against Indian diplomats, including putting the officials' photos and other details on posters, and targeted Indian diplomatic facilities several times in recent years.

INDIA AND CANADA, IN NUMBERS

Canada accounts for just 0.50% of the total FDI in India.
DPIIT data show total FDI equity inflow between April 2000 to June 2023 was $645,386.0884 mn, of which only $3,642.5243 mn came from Canada.

But Canada is home to 5.26% of overseas Indians
Of the 3,21,00,340 overseas Indians, 5.26% (16,89,055) are in Canada, including 1,78,410 NRIs and 15,10,645 PIOs, according to MEA data.

And every 7th Indian student abroad is in Canada
In 2022, of the estimated 13,24,954 Indian students abroad, 11.83% (1,83,310) were in Canada, according to Ministry of External Affairs data.

Canada is 4th largest source of tourists in India (2021)
Canada accounted for 5.3% (80,437) of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India in 2021; 72.6% of Canadian FTAs were members of the Indian diaspora. FTAs from Canada rose to 3,51,859 in the pre-pandemic year 2019 from 88,600 in 2001. Arrivals from Canada fell sharply post pandemic.

Bilateral trade is tiny; its balance is in India's favour
India's trade with Canada was $8,161.02 mn during FY 2022-23, just 0.70% of India's total trade of $1,165,000.88 mn. Canada was India's 35th biggest trading partner. The balance of trade is in India's favour; in 2022-23, India's exports to Canada stood at $4,309.74 mn, and imports at $4,051.29 mn.

Canada's Sikh community

- Canada is home to one of the largest overseas communities of Indian origin, which number approximately 1.4 million out of an overall Canadian population of 40 million. About 770,000 people reported Sikhism as their religion in the 2021 census.
- Canada has the highest population of Sikhs outside their home state of Punjab.

Law Commission recommends on POCSO Act

Context

- The Law Commission of India has stated to the union government that it is "not advisable to tinker" with the existing age of consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Recommendation

- Under the recommended amendments, special courts would be allowed to impose a lesser sentence than the minimum prescribed under sub-section (1) of the POCSO Act. The decision would be based on a thorough evaluation of the facts and circumstances surrounding each case.
- The panel said that reducing the age of consent will have direct and negative bearing on the fight against child marriage and child trafficking.
- Accordingly, the Commission recommended that amendments be made to Sections 4 and 8 of the POCSO Act dealing respectively with punishment for penetrative sexual assault and sexual assault, so as to allow the Special Court to give lesser sentence in cases where the child is of the age 16 or above, subject to a checklist.

Guided judicial discretion

- The Commission headed by former Karnataka High Court Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi, in its Report No. 283 on 'Age of Consent under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012', has instead favored introducing "guided judicial discretion in the matter of sentencing" in cases involving those in the 16-18 age group.

E-FIRs registration

- Additionally, the Law Commission has recommended rolling out registration of e-FIRs in a phased manner beginning with offenses bearing up to three years jail term, and setting up a centralised national portal to facilitate it.

India's core sector growth rises high in August

Context

- According to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry India's eight core sectors posted a growth of 12.1 percent in August.

Growth trend

- The figure for July has been revised upwards to 8.4 percent from 8.0 percent.
- In August 2022, core sector growth was 4.2 percent.
- For April-August, growth in core sector output is 7.7 percent compared to 10.0 percent in the first five months of 2022-23.

Sector wise performance

- India's eight key infrastructure industries - coal, crude oil, steel, cement, electricity, fertilisers, refinery products, and natural gas.
- The jump in core sector growth in August was because of double-digit increases in the output of five of the eight industries:
  - Cement (18.9 percent)
  - Coal (17.9 percent)
  - Electricity (14.9 percent)
  - Steel (10.9 percent)
  - Natural gas (10.0 percent)
- The eight core industries make up more than 40 percent of the weight of the Index of Industrial Production, or IIP.

Global dispute settlement, India and appellate review

Context

- The recently concluded G-20 Declaration reaffirms commitment to World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, emphasizing the improvement of its functions and a proactive approach to discussions.
- A fully accessible dispute settlement system for all members is targeted by 2024

Function of WTO Dispute Settlement System

- Resolve Disputes: Addresses trade conflicts among member countries.
- Enforce Rulings: Issues binding decisions, ensuring compliance.
- Appellate Review: Provides a mechanism for appeals, ensuring fairness.
- Maintain Stability: Ensures coherence and predictability in global trade.

Dysfunctional dispute settlement system

- The WTO's dispute settlement system, conceived as a two-tier panel cum appellate body structure, has been dysfunctional since 2019, because the United States has blocked the appointment of appellate body members.
- The WTO's dispute settlement system, often praised as its crown jewel, has issued 493 rulings since 1995, surpassing the International Court of Justice's 190 cases since 1947.
- With appellate review and enforcement mechanisms, it ensures coherence and predictability in rulings, instilling confidence in the WTO process

Consequences

- A critical structural facet of the Investor-State Dispute Settlement Mechanism (ISDS) mechanism is that it operates through ad hoc or one-off arbitration tribunals without any appellate review.
- The absence of an appellate review mechanism has meant that inconsistent and incoherent decisions and legal reasoning dot the landscape of international investment law.
- This has caused instability and improbability for states and foreign investors, making the regime chaotic.

India's stand

- Although India has not made a formal statement on this issue, India, presumably, supports the idea of an appellate review in the Investor-State Dispute Settlement Mechanism (ISDS).
- Given India's concerns about inconsistency and incoherence in the ISDS system, supporting the creation of an appellate review mechanism will be in India's interest.
- Since India's quest has been to establish a rule-based global order, its support for an appellate review will ensure more state and investor confidence in international investment law.

29.09.2023

- **Five Eyes Alliance**
- **Nipah virus outbreak and monoclonal antibodies**
- **Transport Ministry crafting Municipal Waste Road policy**
- **MGNREGS Social audit units stalled in several states**
- **Reform can address India's kidney transplant deficit**

Five Eyes Alliance

Context

- The recent India-Canada standoff over alleged Indian government involvement in a separatist leader's killing in Canada highlights the role of the Five Eyes Alliance.

Five Eyes intelligence alliance

- The 'Five Eyes' is a multilateral intelligence-sharing network of five countries, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K. and the U.S.
- It is both surveillance-based and tracks signals intelligence (SIGINT).
- Intelligence documents shared between the member countries are classified 'Secret—AUS/CAN/NZ/UK/US Eyes Only,' which gave the group its title 'Five Eyes.'
- The alliance's origins can be traced back to the Second World War.

Focus area

- The Five Eyes have become involved in:
  - Ocean and maritime surveillance
  - Scientific and defence intelligence analysis
  - Medical intelligence
  - Geospatial intelligence
  - Counterintelligence
  - Counterterrorism
- Continuous sharing of intelligence products via a secret collective database known as 'Stone Ghost'

Nipah virus outbreak and monoclonal antibodies

Context
- India has reached out to Australia seeking to restock monoclonal antibody doses to combat the Nipah virus.

Assistance from Australia
- According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) director general, India has sought 20 doses of a monoclonal antibody from Australia's University of Queensland for the treatment of Nipah virus infection.
- India currently has the antibody doses available for ten persons only.
- India at present has the therapy procured from Australia in 2018 during the first Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala.

monoclonal antibody
- Monoclonal antibodies are laboratory-made proteins that mimic the behavior of antibodies produced by the immune system to protect against diseases and foreign substances.
- These antibodies are designed to target specific proteins on the surface of cells, including infected or cancerous cells.
- They can be used for various medical purposes, including treating diseases like cancer, autoimmune disorders, and viral infections like COVID-19.

About m102.4
- According to research published in the Lancet journal of Infectious Diseases, m102.4 is a "potent, fully human" monoclonal antibody that neutralizes Hendra and Nipah viruses, both outside and inside of living organisms.
- The antibody has cleared phase-one clinical trials, indicating successful testing on a small group to determine the right dosage without causing side effects.

How do monoclonal antibodies work
- Monoclonal antibodies are specifically engineered and generated to target a disease. They are meant to attach themselves to the specific disease-causing antigen.
  - **Target Specific Proteins:** Monoclonal antibodies bind to specific proteins on cells.
  - **Neutralize Pathogens:** They neutralize viruses and other harmful substances.
  - **Stimulate Immune Response:** Can trigger the immune system to attack targeted cells.
  - **Treat Diseases:** Used in cancer, autoimmune diseases, and infections like COVID-19.

Transport Ministry crafting Municipal Waste Road policy

Context
- The Union Road Transport and Highways Minister announced plans for a policy utilizing municipal waste in road construction.

Promoting Green Technology
- The initiative aims to address waste management while promoting sustainable infrastructure development.
- The government is considering incentives for construction equipment manufacturers to discourage the use of fossil fuels.
- This step aligns with global efforts to reduce carbon emissions and combat climate change.

Electric Highways
- The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways is actively working on developing electric highways between Delhi and Jaipur.

- Electric highways involve the installation of power cables, enabling vehicles to utilize electric traction, a technology widely adopted in countries like Sweden and Norway.
- The project signifies a significant shift toward eco-friendly transportation methods.

Exploring Innovative Solutions

- Currently, the ministry is in the process of evaluating various technologies to ensure the most efficient and environmentally friendly practices are adopted.
- Ongoing efforts underscore the government's commitment to sustainable development and reducing the environmental impact of transportation.

MGNREGS Social audit units stalled in several states

Context

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) faces persistent criticism due to alleged corruption.

Effectiveness is in question

- As per the statistics available with the Union Rural Development Ministry in the ongoing financial year, less than 14% of the amount flagged by the auditors has been recovered so far.
- In the ongoing fiscal year, these units flagged ₹27.5 crore in misappropriation, but only ₹1.31 crore (13.8%) has been recovered.
- Despite the presence of social audit units meant to detect malpractice, their effectiveness is in question.
- States like Karnataka and Bihar have not received funds for years, hindering their ability to conduct audits.

Fund-starved units

- Section 17 of the Act governing the scheme says that the gram sabha "shall monitor the execution of works".
- Each State has social audit units that are supposed to work independently of the implementing authorities.
- To take stock of the situation, the Ministry on Tuesday held a seminar for the social audit units from the States, MGNREGA commissioners, civil society, and other stakeholders.

Reform can address India's kidney transplant deficit

Context

- India faces a severe kidney transplant shortage, with only 3.4% of the 2 lakh patients receiving transplants in 2022.
- According to the Ministry of Health, the annual requirement for kidneys could range between 2-3 Lakh with a mere 6,000 transplants occurring.

Chronic Kidney Disease

- High prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) due to factors like diabetes, malnourishment, overcrowding, and poor sanitation, affecting 17% of the population.
- CKD often leads to end-stage renal disease (ESRD); kidney transplant is the best treatment, offering better quality of life, convenience, life expectancy, and cost-effectiveness.

STAGES OF CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE
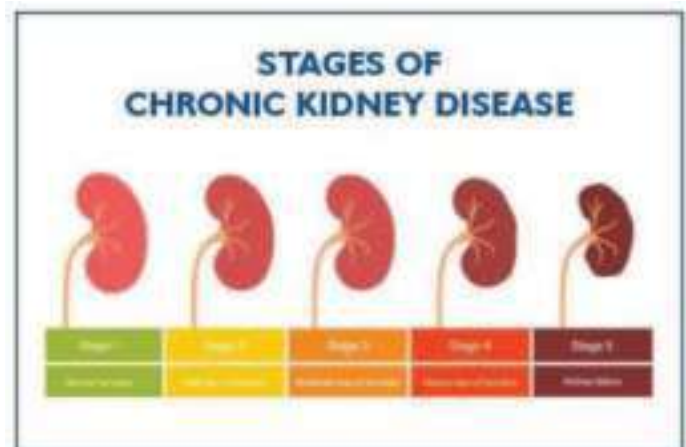
Ways to obtain a kidney for patient

- These are several ways a patient can obtain a kidney.

- The first is to get a kidney from a deceased person.
- This is constrained due to a lack of donations, the particular conditions required on the nature of death, and the infrastructure needed to collect and store kidneys.
- The second is to request a relative or friend to donate.
- However, donor and recipient have to be compatible in terms of blood type and tissue type; such relative/friend donors are often incompatible.

Need for urgent reform
- The regulations for kidney exchange are needed as kidney exchange must often occur across family units.
- The two innovative kidney exchange methods: kidney 'swaps' and kidney 'chains' also need a overhaul.
- Kidney 'Swaps' involves two pairs of donors and recipients, where each donor gives to the other's recipient.
- Kidney 'Chains' involves a sequence of transplants, where a non-matching donor gives to another recipient, and their incompatible donor gives to the next recipient, forming a chain.

Conclusion
- Kidney exchange laws have evolved slowly in India since the 1994 Transplantation Act. The recent 2023 reforms expanded eligibility criteria, but the core issue of kidney shortage persists.
- Sufficient precedents have been set globally.
- The U.S. has specially made progress in facilitating thousands of swaps and chains.
- India must adopt and implement successful regulations from other countries to enhance the lives of its citizens, facing this significant challenge.

28.09.2023

- **UN's India Ageing Report 2023**
- **Digital Bill may expand online censorship**
- **Code of Conduct in Lower House of Parliament**
- **Manipur government extends AFSPA in hill districts**
- **From women's reservation to gender equality**

UN's India Ageing Report 2023
Context
- A report published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has projected that the share of the elderly in India's population will double by 2050.

UNFPA report
- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has projected that the number of older persons in the world is likely to double to 2.1 billion by 2050, taking the elderly population to 22 per cent of the total population.

Population shifts in Asia
- Asia is home to about 58 per cent of the global population of older persons, with 649 million individuals aged above 60.
- In the next three decades, the share of older persons and their absolute numbers will double and reach 1.3 billion, which will be 25 per cent of the total population by 2050.

India's demographics in 2050
- According to the UNFPA India Ageing Report 2023 report, India is not an exception to the phenomenon of the rising population of the elderly.
- As per 2022 data, India is home to 149 million individuals aged above 60, which is 10.5 per cent of the country's population.

- By 2050, the share of the elderly will likely double to reach 20.8 per cent of the total population at 347 million.

India's Ageing Index

- The report says southern states — Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana and select northern states such as Himachal Pradesh and Punjab reported a higher share of the elderly population than the national average of 10.1 percent in 2021.
- This gap is expected to widen by 2036.
- India's 'Ageing Index', which is a measure of the number of elderly per 100 children in the population, was 39 in 2021.

Recommendation

- Government schemes for elderly health, finance, and capacity building
- Community organizations promoting digital literacy
- Ministerial committees shaping elderly welfare policies
- Corporate initiatives for joyful aging, social assistance, and elder abuse awareness
- The UNFPA report underlined the need for strengthening social security, including old-age pension, across a landscape where most workers are employed in the informal sector devoid of such benefits.

Digital Bill may expand online censorship

Context

- Under the upcoming Digital India Bill, the Centre is considering some tweaks to the Section 69 (A) of the IT Act.

Digital India Bill 2023

- The Digital India Bill 2023 aims to replace India's existing Information Technology Act of 2000 and provide comprehensive oversight of the digital landscape.
- It seeks to address modern challenges like cybercrime, data protection, deepfakes, and online safety.
- The Bill introduces a classification system for intermediaries based on risk and size, allowing tailored regulations.
- The bill proposes a dedicated internet regulatory authority for effective governance.

Section 69A of the IT Act

- Currently, Section 69 (A) of the IT Act allows the government to issue content-blocking orders to online platforms such as social media sites if it is "necessary or expedient" to do so on account of national security, public order, and friendly relations with foreign governments, among other things.

Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022

- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 introduces a new framework for personal data protection, making it paramount to comprehend and understand its applicability and functions.
- The Government of India sees this released bill as one of the parts of its larger vision of a Digital Economy, this vision will include a comprehensive "Digital India Act" that would in due course of time replace the existing Information Technology Act, 2000.
- The government is set to introduce the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Bill in Parliament.

Framework of Global Standard Cyber Laws — Digital India Act (Digital Personal Data Protection Act, National Data Governance Policy, DIA Rules, IPC Amendments for Cyber Crimes)

Code of Conduct in Lower House of Parliament

Context

- Recently, as Parliament moved to a new building, Lok Sabha members brought up two long-pending issues.

Pending issues

- The first is the formulation of a Code of Conduct for members of Lok Sabha
- Second is regarding the declaration of members' business interests.
- Both conditions have long been applicable to members of Rajya Sabha.
- These issues involve MPs seeking a commitment to their own good behavior and proper conduct.

Code of Conduct for Lok Sabha

- In 2014, the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee proposed rule amendments to the Speaker, and these recommendations became part of the Lok Sabha Rules Committee's report. The Ethics Committee's mandate includes creating and updating a Member Code of Conduct. Meanwhile, the Rajya Sabha already maintains a register of its members' interests.

Ethics Committee in Rajya Sabha

- The Rajya Sabha's first Ethics Committee, inaugurated by Chairman K R Narayanan on May 30, 1997.
- Its purpose was to oversee moral and ethical conduct, examine cases of misconduct.
- The Rule 293 mandates a 'Register of Member's Interests' for member inspection.
- Fourth Report adopted on April 20, 2005, introduced a 14-point Code of Conduct for members, still in effect.

Manipur government extends AFSPA in hill districts

Context

- Recently, the Manipur government extended Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the hill areas of the state for six months beginning October 1.

About

- The Manipur government extended the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the whole State except in the jurisdiction of 19 police stations in seven districts of the Imphal valley for another six months.
- The "disturbed area" status under the Act will remain applicable in all the hill districts, which are dominated by tribal communities.
- Since 2022, AFSPA has been gradually removed from Meitei-dominated valley districts due to improved security.
- With the extension of AFSPA, the Army and Assam Rifles cannot operate inside the areas under the 19 police stations without the consent of the state police.

Authority for AFSPA notifications

- AFSPA notifications can be issued by both the State and Union governments.
- Currently, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has issued such notifications only for Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, while Manipur and Assam have issued their own notifications.

From women's reservation to gender equality

Context

- Recently, Parliament passed the women's reservation Bill which grants one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies.
- India's current female parliamentary representation is only around 15%.
- India ranks 141 out of 193 countries in global women's representation.
- Even countries like Pakistan, South Africa, and Kenya have higher women's representation.

- Reservation for women in elections to the local bodies in India has resulted in increasing their participation in governance.

Delimitation exercise
- Implementation of the women's reservation law depends on the next census and delimitation.
- Delimitation has been frozen since 1976 to promote population control.
- The Southern States have succeeded in reducing population growth through women-focused measures.
- Ironically, states with better women empowerment indicators may lose parliamentary seats in a delimitation exercise.
- This legislative reform is now connected to another future law, possibly delayed until after the next Lok Sabha general elections.

Societal approach
- Despite the law's good intentions, the real change depends on altering societal views on gender roles.
- Women's representation in elected bodies is linked to India's low female labor force participation.
- True gender justice requires equitable sharing of household and domestic responsibilities, including unpaid labor.
- Recent research from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Time Use Survey (2019) shows that for 97 minutes spent daily by men on unpaid domestic services for household members, women spend 299 minutes.
- Women bear a disproportionate burden of household responsibilities.
- This is a result of a patriarchal societal mindset, which will need to change if women are to participate in the labour force fully and effectively, let alone hold the highest elected representative positions. In this context, government programmes which recognise unpaid labour done by women within households, such as the Magalir Urimai Thogai in Tamil Nadu, are designed to recognise and address the vast gulf in unpaid household labour.

Magalir Urimai Thogai
- The Urimai Thogai scheme (Women's Rights Movement) is a monthly cash transfer programme of Tamil Nadu government.
- The primary aim of the program is to deposit the government's financial aid payment into women's bank accounts, removing their need on others to pay for domestic expenses.

Way forward
- Increasing women's representation raises questions about capacity building for first-time representatives.
- Governments must take the responsibility to ensure the reservation model leads to success.
- The roles of the National Commission for Women and the Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women need revision.
- The recognizing unpaid labor and equitable sharing of household duties are crucial for gender equality reform.

27.09.2023

- **Law panel readies report on simultaneous polls**
- **ICMR survey on salt intake**
- **Centre softens angel tax rules**
- **Lancet report on gender and cancer treatment**
- **With climate change, tackling new disease scenarios**

Law panel readies report on simultaneous polls

Context

- The Law Commission of India is set to submit a report recommending simultaneous elections in the country.

22nd Law Commission

- The 22nd Law Commission was constituted for a period of three years in February 2020 with Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi as its chairperson.
- The report by the 22nd Law Commission, which will be submitted to the Law Ministry.
- The Commission is likely to frame tentative timelines for simultaneous polls for the 2024 and 2029 cycles.

Recent development

- The Union government has formed a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'.
- It aims at holding of general and state elections simultaneously.
- The move comes a day after the government recently called a special session of Parliament.
- The centre has been pushing the idea of simultaneous Lok Sabha and state assembly polls for a while.

One Nation, One Election

- The idea has been mooted several times previously and has been studied by the Law Commission of India.
- In 2018, the 21st Law Commission headed by Justice B S Chauhan (retired), in a draft report, had also recommended the 'One Nation, One Election' idea.
- The main idea is that polls for Lok Sabha and all state assemblies across India will be held simultaneously.

ICMR survey on salt intake

Context

- According to a new study done by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Indians consume more salt than the WHO-recommendation.

Finding of the study

- A study published in the Nature Journal has found that Indian consume 8 grams of salt daily, which is 3 grams more than the WHO recommendation.
- A survey undertaken by the Indian Council of Medical Research found that salt intake was higher among the employed sections, tobacco users and those with elevated blood pressure.
- The salt intake was significantly higher among men, those in rural areas and overweight and obese.

How can we cut down on salt

- Regulations on how much salt can be used in commercially packaged food and informative food labeling can also help.
- Avoid sprinkling extra salt on food.
- One must not go too overboard and ensure sodium levels do not follow below the recommended limit.

Centre softens angel tax rules

Context

- The government has issued revised valuation rules for non-resident and resident investors under the new angel tax framework, in line with amendments in the Finance Act 2023.

The Finance Act, 2023

- The Finance Act, 2023, brought in an amendment to bring the consideration received from non-residents for issue of shares by an unlisted company within the ambit of section 56(2) of the Income-tax Act, 1961(the Act).
- This act imposes income tax on consideration exceeding Fair Market Value (FMV) for share issuance, classifying it as 'Income from other sources.'

Ease in provision

- The government has eased some of the provisions of the angel tax introduced in this year's Budget on investments into start-ups by non-resident investors at a premium over their fair market value.
- Angel tax (income tax at the rate of 30.6 per cent) will be levied when an unlisted company issue shares to an investor at a price higher than its fair market value.
- The new rules will be effective from September 25.
- It has introduced five different valuation methods for shares and offered a 10% tolerance for deviations from the accepted share valuations.

Lancet report on gender and cancer treatment

Context

- The Lancet Commission recently released report on gender and cancer treatment based on 2020 data.

Findings

- The report, "Women, Power and Cancer", highlights:
  - Lack of awareness
  - Absence of quality expertise at the primary care level
  - Delayed their access to cancer prevention, detection, and care
  - Societal apathy towards women's health

Cases in India

- According to the latest Lancet Commission report (2020) on gender and cancer treatment in India nearly:
  - 63% of female cancer deaths preventable (risk reduction, screening, diagnosis)
  - 37% could have been averted with timely treatment
  - 6.9 million preventable cancer deaths in Indian women
  - 4.03 million treatable cancer deaths

With climate change, tackling new disease scenarios

Context

- In its latest report released this March, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) delivers a stark warning: Climate change increases the global risk of infectious diseases, with a clear link between climate and disease becoming more evident annually.
- Climate change has a negative consequence by:
  - Disrupting disease patterns
  - Making mosquito-borne outbreaks irregular
  - Affecting transmission cycles and vector distribution
- Heat has been proven to interfere with the genomic structure of pathogens, changing their infectivity and virulence.

Climate change, more infections

- Habitat loss pushes disease-carrying animals into human areas, raising the risk of pathogens transferring to humans, potentially causing deadly infections.
- Nipah virus in Kerala serves as a notable example.
- A 2022 analysis in Nature Climate Change warns of an expanded range of infectious diseases due to climate change.
- More than half of known diseases affecting humans worsen with changing climate.
- New transmission routes emerge, including environmental sources, medical tourism, and contaminated food and water.

Surveillance and reporting

- India has enhanced outbreak reporting, with the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) reporting 1,714 outbreaks in 2017, up from 553 in 2008.
- Changed disease scenarios require a revision of strategies to detect and deal with them.
- Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) was launched in seven States in 2018.
- It added 20 additional disease conditions over IDSP's 13 and could present disaggregated data to its users.
- But, the current design of surveillance is not adequate for the emerging disease scenario.

Way forward

- India must launch One Health and infectious disease control programmes by building greater synergies between the Centre and States and their varied specialized agencies.
- Convergence of animal husbandry, forest, wildlife, municipal corporations, and public health departments required.
- There is need to establish robust surveillance systems.
- In the face of a changing climate and the growing threat of infectious diseases, protecting ecosystems, fostering collaboration, and embracing the One Health paradigm are the best defenses.

26.09.2023

- **Parliament panel findings on National Education Policy**
- **First C-295 aircraft inducted into IAF**
- **WHO report on hypertension in India**
- **EAM meets UN leadership and UAE leadership**
- **A to z of GDP**

Parliament panel findings on National Education Policy

Context

- The Parliament Standing Committee on Education presented a report on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in higher education during a special Parliament session.

Finding of the report

- The report assessed NEP 2020 implementation in higher education, including progress.
- The report noted that of the 1,043 universities functioning in the country, 70% are under the State Act and that 94% of students are in State or private institutions with just 6% of students in Central higher educational institutions, stressing the importance of States in providing higher education.
- The panel consulted state governments, union ministries, and stakeholders for input.

Focus area of discussion

- The 31-member panel discuss issues such as:
  - Rigid separation of disciplines

- o Limited access to higher education in socio-economically disadvantaged areas
- o Lack of higher education institutes (HEIs) that teach in local languages
- o Limited number of faculty
- o Lack of institutional autonomy
- o Lesser emphasis on research
- o Ineffective regulatory system
- o Low standards of undergraduate education
- The panel recommended that by 2030, each district should have one multidisciplinary HEI, and the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education should reach 50% by 2035, up from 26.3% in 2018.

Recommendations

- The panel asked the Union Government and the State Governments to
- o Allocate dedicated funds for the education of Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).
- o Establish clear targets for higher Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for SEDGs.
- o Promote gender balance in admissions to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- o Expand financial assistance and scholarship opportunities for SEDGs in both public and private HEIs.
- o Enhance inclusivity in admission processes and curriculum.
- o Improve the employability potential of higher education programs.
- o Develop more degree courses taught in regional languages and bilingually.

Funding

- The Committee recommended enhancing HEFA's funding effectiveness by diversifying funding sources through private sector partnerships, philanthropic foundations, and international financial institutions.
- It also advised reviewing and reducing interest rates on HEFA loans to make them more competitive for HEIs.
- The panel noted that Indian institutions were likely to face several issues in implementing the multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) system.

First C-295 aircraft inducted into IAF

Context

- Recently, India's first C-295 medium tactical transport aircraft was inducted into the Indian Air Force (IAF).

About the C-295 aircraft

- The new generation C295 from Airbus is a versatile tactical transport designed for various missions, including troop transport, cargo, maritime patrol, signals intelligence, and medical evacuation.
- The C-295 aircraft can carry up to nine tonnes of payload or as many as 71 troops at a maximum cruise speed of 260 knots.
- The aircraft can perform special missions as well as disaster response and maritime patrol duties.

India-Airbus deal

- Under the deal, Airbus will provide the initial 16 aircraft directly from its Seville assembly line by 2025, while Tata Advanced Systems (TASL) in India will manufacture the remaining 40 aircraft under their industrial partnership.
- The production of components of these aircraft has already started in the Main Constituent Assembly (MCA) facility in Hyderabad.

Bharat Drone Shakti-2023

- The defence minister of India also inaugurated the Bharat Drone Shakti-2023 exhibition at the Hindon Air Base in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.
- The mega drone show is being hosted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Drone Federation of India (DFI).

WHO report on hypertension in India

Context
- The WHO's first report on global hypertension impact states that India could save 4.6 million lives by 2040 if half of hypertensive individuals control their blood pressure.

Finding of the report
- The report finds that In India, 188.3 million have hypertension, but only 37% are actually get diagnosed.
- Only 30% of the estimated people living with hypertension start treatment, while only 15% manage to keep their blood pressure under control.
- Globally, 33% have hypertension, with just over half diagnosed.
- Experts say that there are challenges at every level when it comes to hypertension — from getting a diagnosis to initiating treatment and controlling it successfully.

Concern
- One of the most important concerns that doctors have is that high blood pressure, per se, does not have any symptoms.
- However, uncontrolled hypertension over the years can lead to not only heart attacks and strokes, but it can also irreversibly damage the heart and the kidneys.
- What is of more concerning that even when diagnosed, people are reluctant to take the medicine.

India Hypertension Control Initiative
- India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI) focuses on:
  - Controlling hypertension by screening people
  - Ensuring protocol-based treatment
  - Providing medicines
- Through programme such as IHCI and the government's push towards non-communicable disease screening and treatment at the primary healthcare level, India aims to put 75 million patients with hypertension or diabetes on standard care by 2025.
- The IHCI has already managed to enroll 5.8 million people with hypertension from 27 states.

EAM meets UN leadership and UAE leadership

Context
- External Affairs Minister (EAM) of India met with the top UN leadership and discussed India's G20 Presidency, regional issues and global challenges, sustainable development goals and Security Council reforms.

About
- The External Affairs Minister met with UN Secretary-General and President of the 78th session of the General Assembly at the headquarters of the world organisation.
- The EAM also discussed "how India's G20 Presidency has contributed to strengthening" the UN's sustainable development agenda.
- On the reform agenda, greater lending capacity for the World Bank was also discussed.

Key issues of the 78th UNGA session
- UNSC reforms
- Building on the outcomes of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit
- Prosperity and Development
- Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda

A to z of GDP

Context
- The current GDP estimates place India as the fifth largest economy in the world.

- The union government has set a goal to make India a $5 trillion economy by 2025 which presently seems unachievable mainly due to Covid disruptions.
- India is on the path to becoming the third-largest economy around 2027 as estimated by many.

India's economy roadmap

- The Prime Minister asserted that India would be the third-largest economy.
- This effort would require constant and continuous cooperation and action on the part of all the stakeholder including the private sector, governments, policymakers and bureaucracy and, most importantly, the citizens at large through their active participation.

Measurement of GDP and base year

- The primary responsibility for the measurement of GDP is with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
- The Ministry must gear itself up to develop systems to be able to do so.
- One of the most important tasks to measure GDP accurately is the immediate revision of the base year of the national accounts statistics which has already been delayed considerably due to various reasons, including the pandemic.
- The country's GDP is presently computed with the base year of 2011-12 which is now more than 10 years old.
- Under normal circumstances, the base should have been revised after five years in 2016-17, with the readiness for another revision for 2021-22.

Challenges

- The compilation of GDP itself is a complex exercise and the revision of the base year is still more challenging.
- This requires a complete assessment of various data sources.
- Considering the time required to undertake such an exercise, MOSPI and the National Statistical Commission should initiate the process at the earliest.
- MoSPI has not come out with the results of various surveys like the consumer expenditure survey and the annual survey on unincorporated enterprises which are crucial for the base revision exercise.
- Further, the exercise to examine other available databases, especially the newly created databases from GST and digital payments, should commence immediately.

Way forward

- There are also requirements for improvements in the procedure for the compilation of GDP in the country.
- MoSPI should initiate the process by constituting an advisory committee on National Accounts Statistics with professional experts from academia, industry and civil society and set up working groups for the revision of the base year.
- A decision on the new base year should be taken at the highest level after due consideration of data availability.
- Steps should also be taken to change the base for all relevant price and production indices.

25.09.2023

- **India-UN Capacity Building Initiative**
- **Multiple entry, exit option in higher studies**
- **Navy plan for second Vikrant-like carrier**
- **New Vande Bharat trains to boost religious tourism**
- **Not Just Oil**

India-UN Capacity Building Initiative

Context
- India joins UN to launch capacity-building programme for Global South nations.

About
- The joint capacity-building initiative will operationalise development-relevant deliverables of India's G20 Presidency and aims to share the country's best practices with partner countries in the Global South.
- The initiative builds upon the extensive cooperation in development and capacity building that India already has bilaterally with the partner countries.
- The India-UN Capacity Building Initiative complements the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, which has executed 75 projects in 61 countries over the past six years.

Mandate
- This Initiative will operationalise the development-relevant deliverables of India's G20 Presidency, including:
  - G20 Action Plan for Accelerating Progress on the SDGs
  - Technological transformation
  - Building Digital Public Infrastructure
- The initiative aims to share India's development experiences, best practices and expertise with partner countries in the Global South through capacity building and training programmes.

South-South Cooperation
- India-UN Capacity Building Initiative will be a significant contribution to global efforts towards accelerating momentum for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by strengthening South-South Cooperation.
- It will reflect India's continuing efforts to strengthen its development partnership with the Global South.

Multiple entry, exit option in higher studies

Context
- Parliamentary Standing Committee has advised centre to rethink the option of multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) in the national education policy (NEP).

Observation of the panel
- The panel asked the Centre to develop comprehensive guidelines and a well-defined framework for multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) options, including specific eligibility criteria, credit transfer mechanisms providing a clear road map for students pursuing different exit points.
- The NEP proposes multi-entry and multi-exit options for the students in higher education.
- The panel recommends adopting a standardized standardized Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system for seamless credit transfer between educational levels, from certificates to doctoral programs.

Concerns

- Several organisations of students and teachers raised objections to the option of multiple entry and multiple exit (MEME) in the National Education Policy (NEP).
- The Parliamentary Standing Committee in a report titled "Implementation of the National Education Policy, 2020 in higher education.
- The Kerala government has decided not to implement MEME in colleges and universities in the State.

Navy plan for second Vikrant-like carrier

Context

- In major step towards boosting the country's indigenous military capabilities, the Indian Navy has reportedly submitted its proposal to the government to build a second aircraft carrier.

Proposal

- The Defence Procurement Board (DPB) had discussed the Navy's proposal for acquiring a second Vikrant-like aircraft carrier.
- This proposal aligns with India's vision for 'Make in India' program in the defense sector. The Cochin Shipyard Limited in Kochi is poised to undertake the construction of this second aircraft carrier.

Roadmap

- Indian Navy has long advocated for 3 new aircraft carriers to ensure that at least one carrier is fully operational on each coast to maintain a continuous presence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- The prime minister had commissioned the first-ever indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, in Kochi in 2022.
- Besides, the Indian Navy is also expected to receive 26 Rafale fighter aircraft dedicated to INS Vikrant.
- The Indian Navy strives toward self-reliance, aiming for a more domestically sourced security solution by 2047.
- To encourage such an objective, the Navy supports start-ups and MSMEs and provides incentives for fostering self-sufficiency.

INS Vikrant

- The INS Vikrant is powered by four General Electric LM2500 engines which give it a maximum speed of 28 knots and an endurance of 7,500 nautical miles.

New Vande Bharat trains to boost religious tourism

Context

- Prime Minister recently flags off nine Vande Bharat trains.

Beneficiary states

- The nine trains will provide faster connectivity across 11 states — Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal, Kerala, Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujarat.
- The new Vande Bharat trains flagged off will run between:
  - Udaipur-Jaipur
  - Jamnagar-Ahmedabad
  - Patna-Howrah
  - Ranchi-Howrah
  - Rourkela-Bhubaneswar-Puri
  - Hyderabad-Bengaluru
  - Vijayawada-Chennai (via Renigunta)
  - Tirunelveli-Madurai-Chennai
  - Kasara- god-Thiruvananthapuram.

Safety measures

- The Vande Bharat trains are equipped with advanced safety features, including Kavach, will be a key step towards providing modern, speedy and comfortable means of travel to common people, professionals, businessmen, student community and tourists.
- The new trains have a host of features incorporated after passenger feedback.
- The new features include provision for securing points for wheel chairs.
- The trains have improved aerosol-based fire detection and suppression system.

Not Just Oil

Context

- In the past decade, India's foreign relations have seen significant growth, especially in the Middle East, with a notable boost in ties with Saudi Arabia.
- The recent visit of Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (MBS) to India during the G20 Summit highlighted this significantly.

India-Middle East-European Corridor

- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) Project was signed at the G20 Summit in New Delhi and holds significant geopolitical and economic implications for India.
- Its 8 signatories are: India, the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the EU, Italy, France, and Germany.
- The proposed grand IMEC (India-Middle East-European Corridor), creating a port-railroad connectivity to link India, the Gulf countries, and the European Union to rival China's Belt-Road-Initiative.

MoUs between India-Saudi

- The India-Saudi bilateral meet immediately after the G20 summit saw the conclusion of eight major MoUs (involving vigilance, financial regulation and exim banks, desalination technology) and several other minor understandings (ranging from IT, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, new "clean" energy technology, manufacturing and defence).
- India is Saudi Arabia's second-largest trading partner; Saudi Arabia is India's fourth-largest.
- Trade between the two countries touched $52.75 billion in the 2022-23 fiscal year.
- Saudi Arabia has been India's largest source of crude imports for nearly a decade ($29 billion in the 2022-23).

Way forward

- The prospective collaboration of both the countries on the new proposed port and railroad corridor of India-Middle East-European Corridor (IMEC) is likely to integrate the two countries in a way to the global supply chain.
- India's support for the induction of Saudi Arabia as a permanent member of BRICS.
- The issue of India's energy security will also be addressed in a big way.

23.09.2023

- **QUAD Foreign Ministers meeting at UNGA**
- **Panel suggests revising construction rules near ASI sites**
- **India's imports of Saudi oil hit a multi-year low**
- **Oil price a concern but no alarm yet**
- **A clear message to industry on dispute resolution**

QUAD Foreign Ministers meeting at UNGA

Context

- The foreign ministers of Quad group met on the sidelines of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, U.S.

About Quad

- The Quad, or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a diplomatic partnership formed primarily to promote regional security and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The Quad was initially formed in 2007.
- The Quad aims to promote economic growth, trade, and investment in the Indo-Pacific.

Focus of the meeting

- The focus of the meeting was to:
  o Reiterate common ground and take stock of the Quad's existing initiatives
  o Support the Indo-Pacific region through practical cooperation
  o Commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient
  o Climate change and clean energy supply chains,
  o Infrastructure through the Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program
  o Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience

Adherence to International law

- The foreign ministers of Quad emphasized the importance of adhering to international law, particularly as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to address challenges to the global maritime rules-based order, including with respect to maritime claims, and in the South and East China Seas".
- Quad also expressed its "serious concern about the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore exploitation activities"

Black Sea Grain Initiative

- The Quad leaders also backed the UN's efforts to restart the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), a deal that secures the export of grain from Ukraine and Russia. T
- he agreement had expired in July with countries calling for its resumption, including at the G-20 in New Delhi.
- The joint statement also calls for "comprehensive" UN reform, including expanding permanent and non-permanent representation on the UN Security Council.

Panel suggests revising construction rules near ASI sites

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport Tourism and Culture has asked the government to revise the rules to make them realistic.

Concerns over regulated zones

- The panel has observed that the 100m prohibited and 300m regulated zones around ASI-protected monuments causing conflicts with local communities as they find it difficult to carry out necessary repair work of their residential spaces.
- The prohibited and restricted area provision was introduced in 2010 through an amendment to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958.
- It prohibits and regulates all activities like mining and construction around 100 metres and 300 meters.

- The Central government has already said that it was in the process of amending the Act.

Recommendations

- The parliamentary panel has recommended rationalizing the application of such rules based on the historical significance of the monuments.
- It also recommended that the list of all 3,691 ASI-protected monuments be rationalized and categorized based on their national significance, unique architectural value and specific heritage content.

About Archaeological Survey of India

- Founded in 1861 during British colonial rule.
- It is responsible for archaeological research, preservation, and protection of cultural heritage in India.
- Jurisdiction: Oversees archaeological sites and monuments across India.
- Key Functions
  - Excavation and exploration of historical sites
  - Conservation and restoration of ancient monuments
  - Documentation and research on India's cultural heritage

WHAT ARE PROTECTED MONUMENTS

Centrally Protected Monuments are **sites that are protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act)**. The Act protects monuments and sites that are more than 100 years old.

The regulations under the AMASR Act are implemented by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

Activities around such sites are strictly regulated

An area within **100 metres** of such monuments is considered a prohibited area. All construction activities are banned within this area.

The area within **200 metres** of the monument is a regulated area. Any repair or modifications of structures within this area can be done only with prior permission from the ASI.

India's imports of Saudi oil hit a multi-year low

Context

- India's oil imports from Saudi Arabia in September, 2023 slumped to a multi-year low of around 5,00,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Reasons

- Most likely due to Reliance Industries Ltd.'s (RIL) impending maintenance shutdown of some units at its Jamnagar refinery complex and Saudi Arabian crudes becoming relatively more expensive than competing grades in the wake of production cuts by Riyadh.
- RIL is the biggest Indian buyer of Saudi Arabian crude, accounting for around 35 per cent of the oil imports from that country.

India's oil imports

- Currently, Saudi Arabia is the third-biggest supplier of crude oil to India, behind Russia, the top supplier, and Iraq.
- So far in September, India's oil imports from Saudi Arabia have averaged at 4,99,688 bpd, the lowest since November of 2014.
- In August, India's Saudi Arabian oil imports stood at 8,28,486 bpd, while in September 2022, they were around 8,80,000 bpd.
- Between January 2022 and August 2023, the import volumes averaged at over 7,50,000 bpd.

TOP-FIVE SUPPLIERS OF CRUDE OIL TO INDIA*

SUPPLYING NATION	OIL IMPORT VOLUME (million barrels)	OIL IMPORT VALUE ($ million)	AVG LANDED PRICE ($/barrel)	MARKET SHARE BY VOLUME
Russia	496.39	39587.81	79.75	24.2%
Iraq	431.77	38258.55	88.61	21%
Saudi Arabia	336.07	33086.99	98.45	16.4%
UAE	176.81	18100.4	102.37	8.6%
USA	122.97	11100.12	90.27	6%

Based on analysis of data from the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCI&S), Ministry of Commerce, Government of India. *April 2022-May 2023

Oil price a concern but no alarm yet

Context
- The ministry of Finance has said that the recent run-up in global crude oil prices is a concern for the Indian economy but doesn't yet warrant alarm.

Possible reasons
- Apart from "steadily climbing" oil prices, the ministry identified the monsoon deficit, which could impact both kharif and rabi crops, as another risk to the economic outlook.
- India, the world's third-largest energy importer, purchases more than 80% of its crude oil from international markets.
- The economic outlook remained bright and on track for a "baseline estimate" of 6.5% real GDP growth this year.
- Food prices have been a key concern for policymakers since last year as erratic weather conditions have hurt the output of vegetables, milk and cereals.

Growth and performance
- The ministry cited high frequency indicators such as record e-way bills and electronic toll collections as signs of healthy economic activity.
- It pointed to a 4.2% uptick in capital goods imports in the first quarter to suggest higher public capital spending had begun to crowd in private investment.
- India's baseline estimate for economic growth is 6.5%.

A clear message to industry on dispute resolution

Context
- Industry dispute resolution refers to the process of resolving conflicts and disagreements that arise within a specific industry or sector.
- These disputes can involve various parties, including companies, organizations, employees, customers, suppliers, and regulatory bodies.
- The goal of industry dispute resolution is to find mutually acceptable solutions to these conflicts and maintain the smooth operation of the industry.

Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) refers to a set of methods and processes used to resolve disputes or conflicts outside of the traditional court system.
- ADR methods are typically faster, less formal, and more flexible than litigation in court. They aim to help parties in a dispute reach a mutually satisfactory resolution without the need for a judge or jury to make a final decision.
- In the recent monsoon session of Parliament, both Houses passed The Mediation Bill, 2023.
- The Bill requires persons to try to settle civil or commercial disputes through mediation before approaching any court or tribunal.

Significance
- The Mediation Bill, 2023 is expected to reduce the filing of frivolous claims before Indian courts.
- Iit may also mitigate the risk of deterioration of the parties' relationship due to a publicly fought dispute.
- Mediation proceedings will be confidential, and must be completed within 180 days (may be extended by 180 days by the parties).
- The bill aim is to create a balanced framework which encourages the parties to focus more on their commercial dealings and less on their disputes.

Way Forward
- This legislation will help ensure that institutional mediation becomes mainstream in resolving commercial (and other) disputes between the parties.

- The Act also places emphasis on institutional mediation in India.
- It envisages "mediation service providers" to provide not only the services of a mediator but also all the facilities, secretarial assistance, and infrastructure for the efficient conduct of mediation.
- The Mediation Act, 2023 aims to foster a link between the mediation and the arbitration of commercial disputes, thus reducing the burden on Indian courts

22.09.2023

- **U.N.'s Climate Ambition Summit**
- **TRAI outlines broadcast policy**
- **Statue of Oneness**
- **Panel suggests to reduce overcrowding in prisons**
- **Delhi need not choose**

U.N.'s Climate Ambition Summit

Context

- The United Nations' secretary general convened a special summit to highlight the efforts of the most ambitious global leaders on climate policy and to implicitly shame those who are dragging their feet.

Aim

- The Summit represents a critical political milestone for demonstrating that there is collective global will to accelerate the pace and scale of a just transition to a more equitable renewable-energy based, climate-resilient global economy.
- The latest scientific assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has once again highlighted the urgency to act.
- The damage from the climate crisis is already extensive, and global greenhouse gas emissions remain at record levels.
- The world needs immediate and deep reductions in emissions now, and over the course of the next three decades, to limit global warming to 1.5°C degrees above pre-industrial levels and prevent the worst impacts.

Greenhouse gas emissions

- China, the U.S. and India collectively account for about 42% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- The top three emitters were all absent from the summit.
- In the run-up to the summit, nearly 100 heads of state had written in response to a call from UN Secretary-General to ramp up action to address the climate crisis.
- However, Only representatives from 34 states and seven institutions were given the floor on the day of the summit.

Criteria for countries for a speaking at the summit

- The criteria for countries to be considered for a speaking slot at the summit were that they would be expected to present updated pre-2030 Nationally Determined Contributions (as agreed in Glasgow).
  - **Updated net-zero targets**
  - **Energy transition plans with commitments to**

TOTAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Country	Emissions
China	11.58 bn tonnes
United States	5.83 bn tonnes
India	3.24 bn tonnes
Russia	2.39 bn tonnes
Indonesia	2.23 bn tonnes
Brazil	1.38 bn tonnes
Japan	1.26 bn tonnes
Iran	0.87 bn tonnes
Germany	0.81 bn tonnes
Canada	0.76 bn tonnes
Global average	0.25 bn tonnes
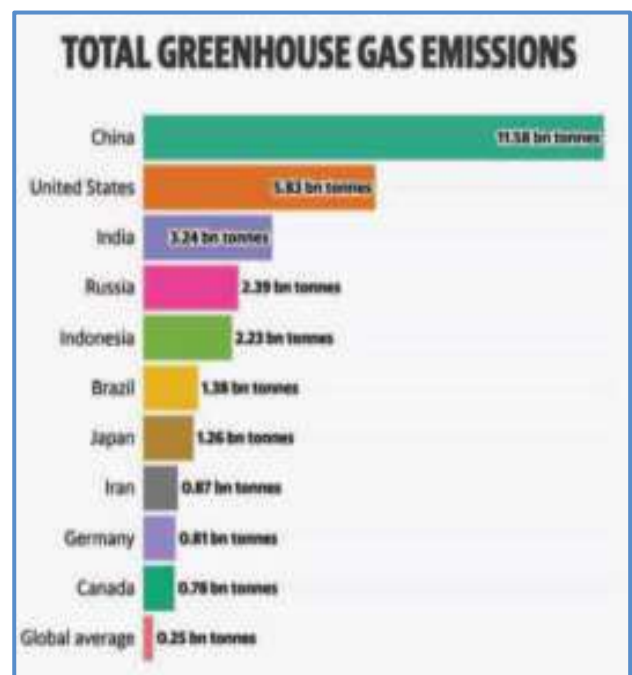
no new coal, oil and gas
- o **Fossil fuel phase-out plans**
- o **More ambitious renewable energy targets**
- o **Green Climate Fund pledges**
- o **Economy-wide plans on adaptation and resilience**

India's climate pledges

- India last updated its climate pledges in 2022 of reducing emissions intensity or the volume of emissions per unit of gross domestic product (GDP)by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030, a 10% increase from what it agreed to in 2015.

PM Modi's 5 Big Goals for India:

TRAI outlines broadcast policy

Context

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued a pre-consultation paper seeking inputs for formulation of "National Broadcasting Policy".

Aim

- This initiative aims to address key issues that should be considered in the formulation of the National Broadcasting Policy.
- The Policy may provide a common approach for licenses, oversight, and compliances," TRAI said in its paper, indicating that the government is seeking to bring further parity in how digital and legacy mediums like television and OTT streaming are regulated.
- According to TRAI the stakeholders are requested to provide their comments on the possible structure and content for National Broadcasting Policy.

Evolution of OTT in India

- The evolution of OTT (Over-The-Top) streaming in India has been a remarkable journey that has transformed the way people consume content.
- In Early 2010s - Emergence of OTT Platforms: The concept of OTT streaming began to gain traction in India in the early 2010s with the launch of platforms like YouTube, which allowed users to upload and watch videos.
- In 2012 Netflix, a major player in the global OTT industry, made its debut in India in 2012.
- In 2015 Amazon Prime Video entered the Indian market in 2015.

Components of Policy

- The "broad contours" of the proposed policy include:
- Promoting content production in India that promotes Indian culture
- Expanding institutional capacity
- Promoting research, and adopting a "coherent and modernized approach" towards legacy mediums like print, radio and television, as well as digital media.

Statue of Oneness

Context

- Recently, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister unveiled the 108-feet tall 'Statue of Oneness' of Adi Shankaracharya on the bank of the Narmada River at Omkareshwar

About

- The statue weighs 100 tons and has been installed on a 75 feet high platform.
- It is made up of bronze that contains 88% copper, 4% zinc and 8% tin.
- The statue internal structure is made-up of high-quality steel.

- The 'Statue of Oneness', conceptualized around six years ago, depicts Shankaracharya as a 12-year-old child when he is said to have visited Omkareshwar, which has one of the twelve Jyotirlinga shrines.

About Adi Shankaracharya

- He was born in Kaladi, Kerala, around 788 CE.
- Founded and propagated Advaita Vedanta, emphasizing the non-dual nature of reality.
- He wrote commentaries on Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma Sutras.
- Adi Shankaracharya traveled across India, engaging in philosophical debates and establishing monastic centers (mathas).
- He is considered as a pivotal figure in Hindu philosophy and the revival of Vedanta.

Panel suggests to reduce overcrowding in prisons

Context

- A parliamentary panel has noted that overcrowded jails and delayed justice are major concerns with serious repercussions for prisoners and the entire criminal justice system.

Recommendation

- A parliamentary panel has recommended ankle trackers or bracelets on prison inmates to reduce overcrowding in prisons.
- The panel recommended that prisoners from overcrowded jails may be transferred to other jails with vacant cells in the same State or other States.
- The panel noted that many State Prisons Departments had no jammers installed or they were capable of blocking only 2G and 3G network signals.
- The committee was informed that mobile phones are one of the major contraband articles that is most frequently smuggled into the prisons.

Prison statistics

- According to the prison statistics published by the National Crime Record Bureau for 2021, there are 1,319 prisons in India, with a total capacity of 4,25,609 prisoners.
- The actual inmates are 5,54,034 which shows that the occupancy capacity rate is 130.2%.
- Of the total inmates, the number of undertrial prisoners is 4,27,165 and the number of convicted prisoners is 1,22,852.
- The occupancy of women prisoners has been increased and the prisons are understaffed by approximately 30% of the required strength.

Delhi need not choose

Context

- The recent BRICS summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, with expanded membership, has raised high hopes for its global influence and governance impact.
- BRICS originally formed in 2009, BRICS included Brazil, Russia, India, and China.
- South Africa joined a year later in 2010.

Expansion roadmap

- At the initiative of China, supported by Russia, six new members — Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — have been inducted.
- Several other developing countries have reportedly conveyed their interest in joining the group and there could be more rounds of expansion.
- Earlier there were indications that India and Brazil were not enthusiastic about an expansion.

Global South and BRICS

- Why have so many countries of the Global South shown such unusual interest in BRICS?

- The answer lies in their desire to hedge in an increasingly uncertain world with shifting political and security equations.
- BRICS countries collectively represent a substantial portion of the world's population and economic power.
- BRICS nations have initiated development cooperation programs, such as the New Development Bank (NDB), which aims to fund infrastructure projects in emerging economies.
- There is widespread anxiety about their vulnerability to US sanctions of the kind that froze a significant part of Russia's foreign exchange reserves.

Countering west
- The interest in BRICS also reflects a growing frustration among developing countries that their interests and aspirations continue to be ignored by the developed countries. International institutions like the UN and multilateral financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank continue to be dominated by the G7.
- As the economic and security profile of the major emerging economies continues to expand, there is a more insistent demand for a greater voice in global governance.

Role of BRICS
- The role of BRICS will expand as the economic, technological, and military capabilities of its members continue to increase and narrow the gap with the G7 advanced countries.
- The expanded membership will make BRICS an energy superpower, with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Russia dominating the global energy market.
- The G7 has also matured over half a century since its birth in the wake of the oil crisis and resultant high inflation in 1973.
- BRICS has a history of only 15 years. Furthermore, while in terms of GDP, trade and investment volumes, BRICS has caught up with the G7, its members have sharper internal contestations.

Way forward
- India benefits from engaging in multiple international groups, as it allows the country to address its various interests and goals effectively.
- India can be a part of an expanded BRICS without it conflicting with its involvement in other groups like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Quad, and its regular interactions with the G7, which has been a practice for several years.
- These engagements offer India more diplomatic choices and help navigate the challenges in an increasingly divided world.

21.09.2023

- **ICMR approved Truenat test to detect Nipah**
- **State of Working India report**
- **Strained ties with Canada to hit hospitality sector**
- **Constitution Bench to examine validity of extending quota**
- **Three years of the Abraham Accords**

ICMR approved Truenat test to detect Nipah
Context
- The Indian Council for Medical Research has allowed the Kerala to conduct Truenat tests to detect Nipah virus cases

Truenat tests
- The test kit, called Truenat, is a point of care real-time PCR platform, which is the first in India to receive regulatory approval for Nipah virus testing.
- Truenat tests are a type of molecular diagnostic test used for the detection of various infectious diseases, including tuberculosis (TB) and COVID-19.
- These tests are based on nucleic acid amplification techniques, such as polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

ICMR approval
- Kerala has been accorded sanction by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) to use Truenat test to diagnose Nipah.
- Hospitals only with BSL 2 level labs can perform the test.
- The test uses portable, smart chip-based, battery-operated RT-PCR kits, in certain hospitals.

NiV diagnostics
- NiV diagnostics refers to diagnostic tests and procedures used to detect and diagnose infections caused by the Nipah virus (NiV)
- These diagnostics typically involve methods such as:
  o PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) tests
  o Antibody detection assays
  o Virus isolation techniques
- The above test is done to confirm the presence of the virus in clinical samples.

Current situation
- No new cases of Nipah have been reported in recent time.
- Of the 323 samples tested for Nipah so far, 317 have been found to be negative.
- Four people who tested to be positive continue to be under treatment.
- Till now, six cases have been found to be positive, including two deaths.

State of Working India report

Context
- State of Working India report 2023: Social Identities and Labour Market Outcomes was released by Azim Premji University.

Findings
- **Unemployment rate:** The unemployment rate among graduates under 25 years of age touched a huge 42 percent post-Covid, compared to higher secondary (21.4 percent), secondary (18.1 percent), middle (15 percent) and others.
- **Women workforce:** With regards to women's participation in the workforce, the report stated that after the coronavirus pandemic, 60% of women were self-employed as compared to 50% before the pandemic.
- **Caste-based segregation:** The report noted that there has been an upward trend in intergenerational mobility, but the trend has been weaker for workers belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes categories as compared to workers belonging to general castes.

Periodic Labour Force Survey
- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2021-22, the overall unemployment rate reduced to 6.6% in 2021-22 from 8.7% in 2017-18.

Strained ties with Canada to hit hospitality sector

Context
- The strained diplomatic ties between India and Canada is a major cause for concern for the hospitality sector.

Background

- Recently the Canada's prime minister, announced that there was "credible" information linking Indian government agents to the murder of a Sikh separatist leader in British Columbia.
- The announcement marks a significant worsening of bilateral ties.

Deterioration in Ties

- India-Canada ties have deteriorated rapidly in recent years.
- The Canadian government is soft on Khalistani supporters in Canada and working against Indian interests.
- Indian diplomacy has been consistently raising the issue of Hindu temples in Canada being allegedly vandalized and defaced by Khalistani groups.
- Khalistan elements have incited violence against Indian diplomats, including putting the officials' photos and other details on posters, and targeted Indian diplomatic facilities several times in recent years.

Tourism

- Indo-Canadian relations have hit a new low with both countries issuing advisories urging citizens to be cautious while traveling.
- Kerala receives around 25,000 to 30,000 Canadian tourists every year.
- For Kerala, Canada is one of the top 10 countries to contribute to foreign tourist arrivals in the State.
- Canada has a sizable Keralite diaspora, with many Keralites having migrated to Canada for various reasons, including education, employment, and family reunification.

Constitution Bench to examine validity of extending quota

Context

- A Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India decided to examine the validity on reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies.

Reservation for SC/STs

- Originally, the Constituent Assembly had meant reservation for SC/STs only for a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution in 1950.
- Article 334 of the Constitution, which dealt with the time period to cease reserving seats for SC/STs and Anglo-Indians, was amended multiple times over the decades.
- The 104th Constitution Amendment in 2019 had extended reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Lok Sabha till 2030.

Article 334

- Article 334 of the Indian Constitution mentions about the special provision of reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes, and the special representation of the Anglo-Indian community by nomination in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to cease after a certain period.

Three years of the Abraham Accords

Context

- The Abraham Accords are a series of agreements aimed at normalizing diplomatic, economic, and cultural relations between Israel and several Arab and Muslim-majority countries.
- These agreements mark a significant shift in Middle East diplomacy and have the potential to reshape the geopolitical landscape of the region.

Abraham Accords

- These are a joint statement made between Israel, the United States and the United Arab Emirates on August 13, 2020.
- It also refers to the agreement reached between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE to normalize relations between them.

- The accords are named after the patriarch Abraham regards as a prophet in both Judaism and Islam.

New era of normalization and peace
- The Abraham Accords have fostered peace, connecting nations and people across language, religion, and culture differences.
- The Accords have also opened exciting opportunities for India and its thriving business community.
- So far, the Abraham Accords have offered a mere glimpse into the full potential of regional cooperation.

Benefits for Indians
- The enhanced regional connectivity has also brought significant benefits to the people of India.
- Indian students gain easier access to universities and international study programs.
- The Accords have also had a significant influence on reinforcing Israel's relations with neighboring countries.
- Furthermore, the Accords have laid the foundation for expanded regional and multinational cooperation, and this has resulted in a flow of economic opportunities reaching India.
- The Abraham Accords made the I2U2 Group possible, and its primary focus will be on joint investments in critical areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security.

Way forward
- The Abraham Accords have shown unity's power to inspire.
- They offer a window into the potential future for West Asia.
- India holds a significant position among partners, and collaboration including championing a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding trade, addressing climate change, and countering threats to international security.
- The agreement between Israel, Bahrain and the UAE has improved not just regional ties but has also brought better opportunities for Indians.

20.09.2023

- **Centre introduces women's quota Bill**
- **Centre floats new science awards**
- **WHO releases report on global impact of high BP**
- **Centre to discuss Data Protection Act transition with Industry**
- **Facilitating degrees within a degree**

Centre introduces women's quota Bill

Context
- The Centre has recently introduced a constitutional amendment bill reserving 33 per cent seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies.

Key features of the Bill

Reservation for women
- The Bill reserves one-third of all seats for women in Lok Sabha, state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- This will also apply to the seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and states legislatures.
- The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth) Amendment Bill, 2023, would be implemented only after the 2026 delimitation exercise using data from the Census to be conducted after the passage of the Bill this year.
- The reservation in the Lok Sabha can hence be implemented only in the Lok Sabha election in 2029 and not in 2024.

Commencement of reservation

- The reservation will be effective after the census conducted after the commencement of this Bill has been published.
- Based on the census, delimitation will be undertaken to reserve seats for women.
- The reservation will be provided for a period of 15 years.
- However, it shall continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.

Legislative Process for Bill

- First, both houses of the Parliament need to pass the Bill by a special majority.
- Then, according to provisions of Article 368, the Constitution Amendment Bill will require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the States.
- Their consent is needed as it affects their rights.

Centre floats new science awards

Context

- The Union government is set to institute the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar.
- The winners will be announced every year on May 11, which is National Technology Day.

About

- The Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar to have three Vigyan Ratna, 25 Vigyan Shri, 25 Vigyan Yuva-Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar and three Vigyan Team awards.
- The Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar prizes will felicitate scientists, technologists and innovators.
- Akin to the prestigious Padma awards, these awards will not include any cash component; instead, they will likely bestow a certificate and a medallion on the awardee.
- The new awards will also be open to persons of Indian origin (PIOs), though a maximum of one such may be awarded the Vigyan Ratna.

Multidisciplinary prizes

- These prizes will be awarded annually for physics, chemistry, biological sciences, mathematics and computer science, earth science, medicine, engineering science, agricultural science, environmental science, technology and innovation, atomic energy, space science and technology, and a 13th category, simply called "others".
- The 56 proposed awards are a stark reduction from the almost 300 science prizes that used to be given by Union Ministries.

Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar Award

- The Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar (SSB) awards, given by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) since 1958.
- SSB Prizes, each of the value of five lakh rupees are awarded annually for notable and outstanding research applied or fundamental, in the following disciplines:
  - o Biological Sciences
  - o Chemical Sciences
  - o Earth, Atmosphere, Ocean and Planetary Sciences
  - o Engineering Sciences
  - o Mathematical Sciences
  - o Medical Sciences
  - o Physical Sciences

WHO releases report on global impact of high BP

Context

- The World Health Organization (WHO) released its first-ever report on the devastating global impact of high blood pressure, along with recommendations on the ways to win the race against this silent killer.

Finding of the report

- The report shows approximately 4 out of every 5 people with hypertension are not adequately treated, but if countries can scale up coverage, 76 million deaths could be averted between 2023 and 2050.
- Hypertension affects 1 in 3 adults worldwide.
- This common, deadly condition leads to stroke, heart attack, heart failure, kidney damage and many other health problems.

Hypertension cases in India and response

- Hypertension is the most important risk factor for death and disability in India, according to a paper in The Lancet, regional health (Southeast Asia), published late last year.
- The Lancet paper says the 2019-20 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reported a hypertension prevalence of 24% in men and 21% among women, an increase from 19% and 17%, respectively, from the previous round (2015-16).
- The India Hypertension Control Initiative, a large-scale hypertension intervention under the National Health Mission, has been recognised for its positive work done within the primary healthcare system.

WHO recommendation

- **Prevention:** early detection and effective management of hypertension are among the most cost-effective interventions in health care and should be prioritised by countries as part of their national health benefit package offered at a primary care level.
- **Patient-centered services:** to reduce barriers to care by providing easy-to-take medication regimens, free medications, and close-to-home follow-up visits, and making blood pressure monitoring readily available.
- **Information systems:** user-centered, simple information systems facilitate rapid recording of essential patient-level data, reduce health care worker data entry burden, and support rapid scale-up while maintaining or improving the quality of care.

Centre to discuss Data Protection Act transition with Industry

Context

- According to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the Union government may give around six months to industry to align with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.

Roadmap

- The Centre will introduce "detailed safeguards" for the protection of personal data in rules issued after the data protection Act while operationalizing exemptions for the government and its agencies.
- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will meet representatives of top tech companies such as Meta Google, Apple and Amazon.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, even though notified as law, depends heavily on subordinate legislation.
- The law requires companies to gather personal data of users through a consent-based mechanism, even as it allows some relaxations to that end for certain "legitimate uses".

Penalty and exemption

- The penalty for not being able to take enough safeguards for preventing a data breach could go as high as Rs 250 crore.
- It empowers the Central government to block any platform that has violated its provisions on at least two different instances.
- The Act also allows the central government to exempt any and all provisions of the law while processing citizens' personal data for reasons including national security, and public order, among other things.

Facilitating degrees within a degree

Context

- While global efforts to establish frameworks for higher education qualifications were progressing in the late 1990s, India did not have a National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) until recently.
- The NHEQF is welcome step, but the UGC must remove all the confusion about higher education qualifications, which arise because of the multiplicity of guidelines, frameworks and documents in the country.

The problem of plenty

- Globally, higher education qualification frameworks include details of the definition and requirements of credits.
- The UGC has chosen to prescribe two separate frameworks:
  - National Higher Education Qualifications Framework
  - National Credit Framework
- Higher educational institutions are separately required to implement the Academic Bank of Credits as a mandated modality for recognising, accepting, and transferring credits across courses and institutions.
- All of these could have been integrated into the NHEQF.

Regulatory measures

- By definition, a national higher education qualification must encompass all disciplines and must clearly provide for the eligibility conditions for the entry into, and completion of, all programmes of studies.
- National higher education qualifications should cover all fields and have clear entry and completion criteria.
- The NHEQF lacks specific entry requirements and pathways.
- Notably absent are qualifications in agriculture, law, medicine, and pharmacy.
- These disciplines, despite having separate regulators, could have been included with consensus among regulatory bodies.

Difficulties in implementation

- At a practical level, there might be some serious difficulties in implementing the NHEQF.
- The credit framework document of the UGC mandates that each semester must have a minimum of 20 credits.
- The document suggests that one credit must comprise 15 hours of direct and 30 hours of indirect teaching.
- This means that students are required to study for a minimum of 900 hours per semester or close to 10 hours a day.
- This is ambitious even for fully residential higher educational institutions.
- A National Higher Education Qualifications Framework is welcome, but the UGC must remove all the confusion around it.

18.09.2023

- **Final meet of G-20 Framework Working Group**
- **Santiniketan on UNESCO's World Heritage List**
- **Army likely to induct 114 Dhanush guns by 2026**
- **District-level officers to attend counter-terror grid meetings**
- **India is at a pivotal moment in its health-care journey**

Final meet of G-20 Framework Working Group

Context
- The fourth and final meeting of the G20 Framework Working Group (FWG) under India's G20 Presidency will be held in Raipur, Chhattisgarh.
- More than 65 delegates from G20 member and invitee countries and various international and regional organisations will participate in the two-day meeting.

Jan Bhagidari events
- On the sidelines of the meeting, the Reserve Bank of India will host a series of Jan Bhagidari events, including panel discussions on digital banking and financial inclusion, financial literacy programmes, a G20 awareness programme, a painting contest and a slogan-writing contest.

Roadmap
- The FWG facilitates discussions on the latest global economic outlook and policy guidance on key macroeconomic issues.
- The deliverables from this working group under the 2023 Indian Presidency have been successfully concluded, and are referred to in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration — G-20 Report on Macroeconomic Impacts of Food and Energy Insecurity, and G-20 Report on Macroeconomic Risks Stemming from Climate Change and Transition Pathways.

Santiniketan on UNESCO's World Heritage List

Context
- Santiniketan, the town in West Bengal's Birbhum district where Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore spent much of his life, has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.
- India had been striving for long to get a UNESCO tag for this cultural site located in the Birbhum district.
- The Ministry of Culture in its proposal to UNESCO for Santiniketan's inclusion on the World Heritage List, emphasized that this place represents a significant exchange of human values.

Visva Bharati University
- Visva Bharati University, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, is the centerpiece of Santiniketan.
- It is known for its unique educational philosophy, which emphasizes the integration of eastern and western cultures.
- The university attracts students and scholars from all over the world.

About Santiniketan
- Santiniketan is a town located in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, India.
- It is famous for its cultural and educational heritage, and it holds a special place in the history of India's cultural and artistic development.
- Santiniketan represents approaches toward a pan-Asian modernity, drawing on ancient, medieval and folk traditions from across the region.
- Santiniketan is closely associated with the renowned poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, who established an educational institution called Visva Bharati University here in 1921.

Army likely to induct 114 Dhanush guns by 2026

Context
- According to defense sources, the Indian Army has placed an order for 114 Dhanush artillery guns and has already commissioned one regiment with expectations to receive the full complement of guns by the year 2026.
- With focus on long-range and augmented firepower, the Army is also looking at vastly increasing the range of the Pinaka Multi-Rocket Launch Systems (MRLS) and the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) is working on it.

Pralay missile

- The Pralay is an indigenous short-range ballistic surface-to-surface (SRBM) missile.
- It has a range of 150 to 500 kilometers, is propelled by a solid-propellant rocket motor and other novel technologies.
- It
- The missile will be India's first tactical quasi-ballistic missile and will give the armed forces the capability to hit enemy positions and key installations in actual battlefield areas.
- It is capable of carrying a conventional warhead of about 350 kg to 700 kg, which gives it a deadly punitive capability.
- It can carry a high explosive preformed fragmentation warhead, penetration-cum-blast (PCB) and runaway denial penetration submunition (RDPS).

Dhanush artillery guns

- Dhanush is the first ever indigenous 155mm x 45 caliber artillery guns.
- The weapon is the first long rang artillery gun to be produced in India and it is a major success story of the 'Make in India' initiative.
- It is compatible with all North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) 155 mm ammunition system.
- The gun is equipped with inertial navigation-based sighting system, auto-laying facility, on-board ballistic computation and an advanced day and night direct firing system.
- The guns can travel in all terrains viz desert and high altitude.

District-level officers to attend counter-terror grid meetings

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs is learnt to have directed the Intelligence Bureau's (IB) district-level officers to be part of meetings of the multi-agency centre (MAC), a common counter-terrorism grid, in order to get real-time intelligence updates.
- The intelligence establishment said this is part of the Centre's strategy to improve the intelligence-sharing mechanism and get real-time updates.

Multi-agency centre meeting

- The Meetings of the MAC, which functions under the IB, are typically attended by state-level officers who share inputs on their respective areas.
- In response to the recent ethnic clashes in Manipur, the government made the decision to involve SP-rank officers at the district level in the meetings.

Measures by government

- In the Union budget 2023-24, the allocation for National Intelligence Grid was increased from Rs 87.77 crore to Rs 200.52 crore.
- Among other key agencies, Rs 3,418 crore was allocated for the Intelligence Bureau in the budget, from Rs 3,168 crore of the last year.
- The union home minister had stressed on the need to further strengthen the process of information sharing and enhancing liaison between counter-terrorism and anti-drug agencies of the states.

India is at a pivotal moment in its health-care journey

Context

- The journey of healthcare in India has been marked by significant developments and challenges over the years.
- In the last few years, India has steadily become a strong voice for various critical issues.
- The recently concluded G-20 meeting put several impetuses on fostering global alignment on a range of key health issues at global level.

India's NCD burden

- India faces a significant and growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- India is now the world's diabetes capital; also, millions have hypertension, and its youth are succumbing to heart attacks, cancer, respiratory issues, depression and more.
- If left unchecked, India's non-communicable diseases (NCD) burden will be nearly $4 trillion by 2030.
- This is one of the biggest roadblocks to India's development and will create an 'age tax' on India's demographic dividend.

Intervention to counter NCD

- There is a dire need from the health-care industry to join hands and protect India from this menace.
- The initial intervention required include:
    - Increasing awareness
    - Advocating better lifestyle choices
    - Enabling comprehensive health checks

India and its healthcare potential

- India has emerged as a global medical value travel (MVT), hub, particularly in the fields of oncology, orthopedics, and robotic surgery.
- A significant milestone in this journey is the introduction of proton beam therapy technology, making India a regional leader in cancer treatment.
- Patients from across the globe are drawn to India for its world-class medical expertise, state-of-the-art infrastructure, and cost-effective care.
- Robotic surgery has also gained popularity, with India's hospitals adopting robotic-assisted techniques for precision and faster recovery.

AI in health care

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been making significant strides in transforming healthcare in various ways.
- India possesses a vast pool of talented data scientists, engineers, and health-care professionals who can drive innovation in AI-driven health-care solutions.
- AI-powered tools can enhance the accuracy and efficiency of medical diagnoses, leading to faster treatment decisions and better patient outcomes.
- AI expenditure in India is expected to reach $11.78 billion by 2025. It is expected to add $1 trillion to India's economy by 2035.

Way forward

- India stands at a pivotal moment in its health-care journey.
- To achieve AI-driven health-care solutions vision, India must prioritize community health, foster public-private partnerships, and invest in innovation and research.
- A reimagination of its health-care model can lead the country to becoming a powerhouse in AI-driven health-care solutions and a leader in combating non- communicable diseases.

16.09.2023

- **India seeks Australia's aid against Nipah virus**
- **DAC nod procurement of Su-30 jets, other military equipment**
- **India-Canada Free Trade talks put on hold**
- **Relook at GST rates on millets**
- **A GM crop decision that cuts the mustard**

India seeks Australia's aid against Nipah virus

Context

- India has reached out to Australia seeking to restock monoclonal antibody doses to combat the Nipah virus.
- According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) director general, India has sought 20 doses of a monoclonal antibody from Australia's University of Queensland for the treatment of Nipah virus infection.
- India at present has the therapy — procured from Australia in 2018 during the first Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala — that can be used in 10 patients.

Recent case
- The Union Health Ministry has confirmed that the 2 unnatural deaths reported in the Kozhikode district were due to the Nipah virus.
- Six cases of Nipah virus have been confirmed in Kerala so far.
- India is currently seeing the sixth outbreak of Nipah virus, which kills 40 to 70 percent of the infected.

About Nipah virus
- Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus that can cause severe illness in both animals and humans.
- It was first identified in 1999 during an outbreak in Malaysia and Singapore.
- Nipah virus is a highly dangerous pathogen that causes brain damage and spreads to humans when they come into direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected bats, pigs, or individuals.
- As of now, there is no treatment or vaccine against the Nipah virus.

Next course of action
- India will have a stock of the treatment that can be used in 20 Nipah virus patients, once the fresh doses from Australia arrive.
- Australia procured the therapy from the US as it has seen occasional outbreaks of Hendra virus, a pathogen very similar to Nipah, which spills over from horses to humans.
- The Biosafety level 3 (BSL3) mobile laboratory that can tackle highly infectious pathogens capable of causing lethal infections has been stationed in Kozhikode where the outbreak has been reported to test samples from the suspects.

DAC nod procurement of Su-30 jets, other military equipment

Context

- In a major boost to indigenous manufacturing of weapons, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved procurement includes 12 Su-30 MKI fighter jets, Dhruvastra short range air-to-surface missile, and other weapons systems and platforms.

Next Generation Survey Vessels

- The DAC also approved procurement of Next Generation Survey Vessels for the Indian Navy which will greatly enhance its capabilities in performing Hydrographic Operations.
- The DAC also gave the nod for proposals of the Indian Air Force which included avionic upgradation of Dornier Aircraft to improve the accuracy and reliability for operations.

Dhruvastra Missile

- The procurement of Dhruvastra short range Air-to-Surface Missile as a potent Indigenous Precision Guided Weapon for indigenously built ALH Mk-IV Helicopters was also cleared by the DAC.

Budget allocation

- In the Union Budget 2023 set aside Rs 5.94 lakh crore for defence spending in 2023-24, with the allocation almost 12 per cent higher than that in last year's budget estimates, and about 2 per cent more compared to that in the revised estimates for 2022-23.
- India allocated Rs 5.25 lakh crore for military spending in last year's budget, Rs 4.78 lakh crore in 2021-22, and Rs 4.71 lakh crore the year before.

India-Canada Free Trade talks put on hold

Context

- In the latest setback to already complicated relations, Canada's trade commission announced that the trade mission to India had been postponed.
- There were reports earlier that the two countries could reach an interim trade deal by the end of this year.
- India's total exports to Canada added up to US$ 4.10 billion in 2022-23, up from US$ 3.76 billion in 2021-22.
- India's imports from Canada added up to US$ 4.05 billion in 2022-23, up from US$ 3.13 billion in 2021-22.

Anti-India activities

- The increasing anti-India activities by pro-Khalistan elements in Canada have cast a shadow on the bilateral ties.
- Recently during sidelines of the G20 Summit, India issued a strongly-worded statement.
- The Prime Minister of India highlighted that India-Canada relations are anchored in shared democratic values, respect for rule of law and strong people-to-people ties.

CEPA negotiations

- In March 2022, the India and Canada had agreed to re-launch the CEPA negotiations and consider an interim agreement or Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) that could bring commercial gains to both.
- Negotiations on CEPA/ EPTA resumed in April 2022; nine rounds of talks were held till July this year.
- So far, the two countries have held discussions on tracks related to goods, trade remedies, rules of origin, origin procedures, services, institutional and core provisions.

Exports and Import items

- Major items of exports to Canada include gems, jewellery and precious stones, pharmaceutical products, ready-made garments, mechanical appliances, organic chemicals, light engineering goods, iron & steel articles.
- On the other hand, India imports pulses, newsprint, wood pulp, asbestos, potash, iron scrap, copper, minerals and industrial chemicals from Canada.

Relook at GST rates on millets

Context

- With millets set to play a crucial role in India's nutritional and food security, stakeholders in nutri-cereals are looking at sustaining efforts to promote the cereal in a big way.
- Recently, the Bharat Biotech Chairman raised the issue of exempting millet products from GST to boost consumption.
- India target to produce 45 million tonne (mt) of millets by 2030, from the 17 mt now.

Global millet production

- India is the largest producer and second largest exporter of millets in the world.
- India accounts for 41% of global millet production.
- After India, Niger is the second highest producer accounting for about 11% followed by China accounting for 9%.
- Global millets output was about 100 mt from almost 80 million hectares of land.

International Year of Millets

- The year 2023 is declared the 'International Year of Millets' by the UN, following India's proposal.
- India has earlier observed the year 2018 as the 'National Year of Millets'.
- The declarations are aimed at spreading awareness on the contribution of millets to food security and nutrition and also scaling up the sustainable production and quality of millets.

A GM crop decision that cuts the mustard

Context

- The use of genetic engineering alongside traditional breeding methods is crucial to address global food security and nutrition challenges in the face of climate change and global food and nutritional security.
- According to the global Food Security and Nutrition Report, 2019, it is difficult to achieve the 'Zero Hunger' target by 2030.

Focusing on food production

- In order to increase food production and become self-reliant, India require superior crop varieties and hybrids that provide enhanced yields and wide adaptability across environments, and require fewer inputs of natural resources.
- The advent of the Green Revolution in the 1960s-70s resulted in enhanced food production from a mere 50 million tonnes in 1950-51 to over 300 million tonnes in 2020-21.
- However, new biotech/GM crops with improved traits are a must in order to mitigate climate change and produce nutrient-dense food.

More crops under GM

- In 2020, 72 countries adopted GM crops for various uses, with 56% of global GM crop area in developing countries. GM crops have positively impacted 1.95 billion people in five countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, India, and the United States), equivalent to 26% of the world's population.
- Bt cotton was commercialized as the first GM crop in India more than 20 years ago, and has been viewed globally as a great success story in terms of economic advantage to farmers and to the nation.
- Globally, genetic modification has expanded its reach, beyond the major four crops, maize, soybean, cotton and canola, to other economically important food crops for various traits such as insect and herbicide resistance, climate resilience and nutritional quality improvement.

Focus on mustard

- India faces a major deficit in edible oils, with 60% of its demand being met by imports. Mustard is one of the most important edible oil crops in India; however, its per hectare yield is very low when compared to the global average.

- Thus, increasing the productivity of mustard in the country is vital for the economic well-being of farmers and self-sufficiency in edible oil production.
- The Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP) at the University of Delhi South Campus conducted research to develop GM mustard hybrid DMH-11.
- This hybrid promises higher vigor and yields, aiming to boost domestic edible oil production and increase farm incomes.

Way Forward

- In October, 2022, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Government of India, made a landmark decision of approving the release of DMH-11 and its parental line for cultivation.
- This decision is a significant step that will boost genetic engineering research in India, leading to the development of improved crop varieties.
- This advancement will benefit farmers by increasing yield per hectare, also leading to an increase in their incomes.
- The environmental release of GM mustard DMH-11 marks a new era in self-reliance and sustainability in agriculture in India.

15.09.2023

- **The importance of Saudi Arabia to India**
- **SC data onboard National Judicial Data Grid portal**
- **PMMSY bridging gaps in fisheries sector**
- **Rubber Board to increase area in Northeast States**
- **The Post Office Bill, 2023**

The importance of Saudi Arabia to India

Context

- India and Saudi Arabia enjoy cordial and friendly relations reflecting the centuries old economic and socio-cultural ties. The establishment of diplomatic relations in 1947 was followed by high-level visits from both sides.
- The visit of Prime Minister to Riyadh in April 2016 captured the spirit of enhanced cooperation in the political, economic, security and defence realms.

India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor

- Recently, the Prime Minister of India announced the launch of the India-Middle East-Europe mega economic corridor.
- The project includes India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, France, Italy, Germany and the US.
- The corridor will give a new direction to connectivity and sustainable development of entire world.
- The corridor will consist of two separate corridors:
- Eastern Corridor, connecting India to West Asia/Middle East
- Northern Corridor, connecting West Asia/Middle East to Europe

India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council

- The two sides signed eight agreements, including on upgrading their hydrocarbon energy partnership to a comprehensive energy partnership for renewable, petroleum and strategic reserves, and to create a joint task force for $100 billion in Saudi investment.
- They also discussed the possibility of trading in local currencies, and expediting negotiations for a free trade agreement between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council of which Saudi Arabia is a member.

<u>Pillars of the relationship</u>

Economic ties

- India is Saudi Arabia's second largest trade partner; Saudi Arabia is India's fourth largest trade partner. Bilateral trade in FY 2022-23 was valued at $52.76 billion.
- Trade with Saudi Arabia accounted for 4.53% of India's total trade in FY23.
- Among the major proposed investments is the $44 billion West Coast Refinery & Petrochemicals Project in Maharashtra, which is being jointly built by Saudi Aramco, Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, and an Indian consortium that includes Indian Oil Corporation, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation, and Bharat Petroleum Corporation.

Energy cooperation

- Saudi Arabia is a key partner for ensuring India's energy security, and was its third largest crude and petroleum products source for FY23. India imported 39.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of crude from the country in FY23, amounting to 16.7% of India's total crude imports.
- India's LPG imports from Saudi Arabia stood at 7.85 MMT, and 11.2% of its total petroleum product imports, in FY 23.

Defence partnership

- The defence partnership has witnessed tremendous growth in recent years.
- Then Army Chief General made a landmark visit to Saudi Arabia in December 2020.
- There is extensive naval cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia, and two editions of the bilateral naval exercise, Al Mohed al Hindi, have been concluded so far. Both sides also cooperate closely in the domain of defence industries and capacity-building.

Indian Diaspora

- The Indian community in the kingdom is more than 2.4 million strong, widely respected for its contribution to the development of Saudi Arabia, and seen as a living bridge between the two countries.
- The joint statement said the Indian side thanked the Saudi side for taking excellent care of the Indian diaspora residing in the kingdom, supporting the evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in Sudan through Jeddah under Operation Kaveri, and for facilitating Indian Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.

SC data onboard National Judicial Data Grid portal

Context

- The Chief Justice of India recently announced that the Supreme Court is now "onboard" the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) portal.
- The CJI said the step was taken to bring in transparency and accountability
- and the platform will aid in tracking of pendency of cases

National Judicial Data Grid

- The National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) is an initiative in India that aims to provide transparent and efficient access to information about the country's judicial system.
- It was launched by the Supreme Court of India in 2012 with the goal of improving the efficiency and transparency of the Indian judiciary.
- NJDG, a national repository of data relating to cases instituted, pending and disposed of by courts across the country.

Key features and objectives

- **Transparency:** Provides transparent access to case information from all levels of the Indian judiciary.
- **Efficiency:** Aims to improve the efficiency of the legal system by promoting uniform case management practices.
- **Real-time Updates:** Offers real-time updates on case statuses and statistics.
- **Accountability:** Enhances accountability in the judiciary and reduces the potential for corruption.

- **Accessibility:** Allows lawyers, litigants, judges, and the public to access case-related information easily.

NJDG portal

- The NJDG, an online platform within the eCourts Project, serves as a comprehensive repository for orders, judgments, and case information from 18,735 district and subordinate courts as well as high courts.
- This database is continuously updated in near real-time by the affiliated district and taluka courts.
- By offering information on judicial proceedings and outcomes across the computerized district and subordinate courts nationwide, the NJDG has facilitated easy access for the general public, with all high courts participating in this initiative via web services.

PMMSY bridging gaps in fisheries sector

Context

- In 2020, Indian fisheries sector was preparing for a big leap due to the reforms initiated central government under the immense potential of the Blue Economy.
- A significant sum of ₹20,050 crore was allocated for the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) in 2020, committing the biggest-ever investment in the history of Indian fisheries.
- India is now counted among the world's top three countries in fish and aquaculture production.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana

- The Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India is implementing Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.
- PMMSY is being implemented in all the States and Union Territories for a period of 5 years from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25.
- It is designed to address critical gaps in the fisheries value chain from fish production, productivity and quality to technology, post-harvest infrastructure and marketing.

Aim

- Modernize and strengthen the value chain
- Enhance traceability and establish a robust fisheries management framework
- Ensuring the socio-economic welfare of fishers and fish farmers
- Post-harvest infrastructure and marketing.

Expanding non-traditional areas

- The PMMSY has also helped to expand fisheries to non-traditional areas.
- Almost 20,000 hectares of fresh pond area is being brought under inland aquaculture, and even in landlocked Haryana and Rajasthan, farmers are successfully converting their saline waste lands into wealth lands through aquaculture.
- The PMMSY has empowered fisher women to explore remunerative options and alternative livelihoods, such as ornamental fisheries, pearl culture, and seaweed cultivation.

Rubber Board to increase area in Northeast States

Context

- The Rubber Board, jointly with the Central government and the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association, is implementing a project to expand the area under natural rubber in the Northeastern States.

Rubber production in india

- India was one of the largest producers of natural rubber in the world. Rubber production in India primarily takes place in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, as well as in some northeastern states like Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya.

Policy for Northeastern states

- In a move to expand the area in non-traditional States, the Rubber Board was implementing a project to bring 2 lakh hectares under natural rubber in the Northeastern States, except Sikkim, but including West Bengal.
- The type manufacturers, who were the main consumers of rubber, were investing ₹1,000 crore in the five-year project that commenced in 2021.
- The project was expected to bring in socio-economic benefits and States such as Chhattisgarh were also evincing interest in rubber cultivation.

The Post Office Bill, 2023

Context
- The Post Office Act 2023 was introduced in the Rajya Sabha to consolidate and amend the existing laws related to the Indian Post Office Act (1898).
- This bill aims to modernize and update the legal framework for the functioning of the Post Office to better suit the changing landscape of postal services in India.
- The Bill provides for matters related to the functioning of the Post Office, an undertaking of the central government (also known as India Post).

Key changes

Exclusive privileges of the central government
- The Act provides that wherever the central government establishes posts, it will have the exclusive privilege.
- The Act provides for the issuance of postage stamps as per the rules prescribed by the central government.
- The Bill also states that the Post Office will have the exclusive privilege of issuing postage stamps.

Services to be prescribed
- The Act specifies the services provided by the Post Office to include: (i) the delivery of postal articles including letters, postcards, and parcels, and (ii) money orders.
- The Bill provides that the Post Office will provide services prescribed by the central government.

Powers to intercept shipments
- The Union government's proposed revamp of the Indian Post Office Act will allow employees to open postal parcels in the interest of national security or public security, apart from also giving officers the power to divert them to the authorities concerned if there is suspicion of duty evasion.

Way Forward
- The Post Office Bill, 2023 provides the central government "standards for addressing on the items, address identifiers and usage of post codes".
- This provision will have a far-reaching impact as the physical address may be replaced by a digital code using geo-spatial coordinates to identify a specific premise.
- The new Post Office Bill 2023 ensures that various citizen-centric services will have a strong legal framework.

14.09.2023

- **Analyzing the Global Stock take Report**
- **Ayushman Bhav health campaign**
- **Special Session of Parliament**
- **Lancet Commission concern for tuberculosis deaths**
- **The complex path to biofuel sustainability**

Analyzing the Global Stock take Report

Context

- Ahead of the recently concluded G-20 summit, the United Nations climate secretariat made public a 'synthesis report' on the results of three meetings held so far to discuss progress achieved by countries in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement of 2015.
- The G20 Leaders Declaration noted the need for USD 5.8-5.9 trillion in the pre-2030 period required for developing countries as well as USD 4 trillion per year for clean energy technologies by 2030 to reach net zero by 2050.
- The report lays out 17 'key findings' that overall suggests that the world is not on track to achieve Paris Agreement targets, though there was still a "rapidly narrowing" window for countries to get their act together.

About global stock take report

- The United Nations' Global Stock take report serves as a blueprint for discussions during the Conference of Parties and aims to assess countries' progress in curbing greenhouse gas emissions since 2015 achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement of 2015.
- The first report this year is expected to significantly influence discussions in November when country representatives converge in Dubai for the 28th edition of the UN climate Conference of Parties (COP) in November.

United Nations Emissions Gap Report

- The United Nations Emissions Gap Report, also released last year, reported that 23 billion tonnes of CO_2 were required to be cut to keep emissions in line with Paris agreements, whereas current pledges by countries even if fully implemented would only cut 2-3 billion tonnes, leaving an emissions gap of around 20 billion tonnes.
- This too has been highlighted in the global stock take report.

Key findings

- These 17 headline statements say that the Paris Agreement has galvanized countries into setting goals and signaling the urgency of the climate crisis.
- It stated that much more ambition was needed to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030 and further by 60% in 2035 and reach net zero CO_2 emissions by 2050 globally.
- Transparent reporting on adaptation could facilitate and enhance understanding, implementation and international cooperation.
- Averting, minimizing and addressing 'loss and damage,' requires urgent action across climate and development policies to manage risks comprehensively and provide support to impacted communities.

Global stock take report

- While the report is expected to set the template for the forthcoming conference, it did resonate in the G20 Leaders Declaration last week — said to be among the most significant outcomes of the summit. This document for the first time formally recognises the massive jump in finance necessary for the world to transition to a renewable energy economy.

Ayushman Bhav health campaign

Context

- In a significant move towards improving healthcare accessibility and awareness, President of India is set to inaugurate the "Ayushman Bhava" campaign.
- The initiative aimed to ensure the optimal delivery of health schemes to every intended beneficiary, even those in remote areas.

About

- The 'Ayushman Bhav' campaign is a comprehensive nationwide healthcare initiative that aims to provide saturation coverage of healthcare services, reaching every village and town in the country.
- This initiative builds upon the success of the Ayushman Bharat program and signifies a paradigm shift in healthcare services.
- Its core objective is to extend comprehensive healthcare coverage to every village and town, transcending geographical barriers and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Collaboration

- The campaign is a collaborative effort spearheaded by gram panchayats in coordination with the Department of Health, other government departments, and local elected bodies in the rural and urban areas.
- This synergistic approach aims to saturate coverage of health services through its three components Ayushman - Apke Dwar 3.0, Ayushman Melas at Health, and Wellness Centres (HWCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Ayushman Sabhas in every village and panchayat.

Special Session of Parliament

Context

- The Centre released a 'tentative list' of the agenda for Parliament's special session from September 18 to 22.
- The tentative agenda included two bills to be taken up in the Lok Sabha:
  - The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023
  - The Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023
- They were passed in the Rajya Sabha on August 3.

Another important bill

- The Rajya Sabha are set to discuss:
  - The Post Office Bill, 2023.
  - The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023.
- Although there were speculations about the government proposing a 'One Nation, One Election' bill, but there was no mention of it.

Parliamentary Journey

- Apart from formal parliamentary business, a discussion will be held on the subject 'Parliamentary Journey of 75 years starting from Samvidhan Sabha - Achievements, Experiences, Memories and Learnings".
- The government has called an all-party meeting on September 17, a day before the special session of Parliament begins.

Lancet Commission concern for tuberculosis deaths

Context

- According to the new Lancet Commission report, the world is not on course towards ending tuberculosis.
- The commission flag concerns over the increase in TB deaths for the first time in 20 years.
- The report comes at a time when a United Nations High Level Meeting on TB will be held on September 22 and makes a strong case for focusing on a new menu of tools to revolutionize TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Findings

- According to the Commission's review report, there has been a deterioration in the rate of decline in TB mortality and two-thirds of tuberculosis deaths occurred in just eight countries, and over half occurred in India (33%), Indonesia (10%), and Nigeria (8%).

- As per the Global TB report 2022, India reported 5.04 lakh deaths in 2021 as against 5.52 lakh in 2010.
- This new report is a follow-up to the 2019 Lancet Commission on tuberculosis.
- In a large study in India, better nutrition in patients with TB reduced incidence of infection by nearly 50% while reducing mortality among those treated for TB by nearly 60%.

The complex path to biofuel sustainability

Context

- Biofuel sustainability refers to the environmental, social, and economic aspects of producing and using biofuels in a way that minimizes negative impacts and promotes long-term viability.
- Biofuels are derived from renewable biomass sources, such as crops, algae, or waste materials, and can be used as alternatives to fossil fuels in transportation, heating, and electricity generation.
- In recent years, electric vehicles (EVs) have gained significant traction, but it's now clear that no decarbonization strategy is without trade-offs.
- Biofuels is a blanket term that includes both sustainable and unsustainable fuels, and an understanding of their difference will be essential to drive effective Decarbonisation action.

Challenges in India

- In India, biofuel is synonymous with first-generation (1G) ethanol, which is primarily sourced from food crops.
- The policy target in India of achieving 20% ethanol blending with petrol (E20) by 2025-26 is expected to be met almost entirely by 1G ethanol made from sugar cane and foodgrains.
- Second-generation (2G) ethanol, which is made from crop wastes and residues, is unlikely to contribute much to achieving this target due to several challenges related to feedstock supply chain and scaling up.

Sustainable strategy

- A recent study led by the University of Michigan projected that the rates of groundwater depletion could triple during 2040-81 compared with the current rate.
- The agriculture sector is one of the hardest-to-abate in terms of direct greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- In India, the ethanol blending policy has been a good strategy to deal with the surplus sugar production.
- Another good strategy to deal with the surplus sugar production would be to reduce surplus sugar cane cultivation.
- The Global Biofuels Alliance that was formed at the G-20 Summit is expected to strengthen the development of sustainable biofuels, in addition to promoting ethanol uptake.

Way forward

- According to the International Energy Agency, to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 globally, sustainable biofuel production needs to triple by 2030 to fuel modes that have few other mitigation options.
- The Global Biofuels Alliance could help drive innovation and technology development in establishing an efficient biomass supply chain and smaller-scale decentralised biofuel production units.
- There is a need for strategy to be carefully examined in the context of the larger ecosystem to avoid unintended negative consequences.

13.09.2023

- **Nipah breaks out in Kerala**
- **South Korea keen on joining Quad**
- **IISc develops technique to detect cancer**
- **Russian sellers stop fertiliser discounts to India**
- **Drop the bad idea of simultaneous elections**

Nipah breaks out in Kerala

Context

- The Union Health Ministry has confirmed that the 2 unnatural deaths reported in the Kozhikode district were due to the Nipah virus.
- With the confirmation Centre dispatched a team to Kerala to assist the health department and also take stock of the situation.

State government measure

- The state government has also established a control room in Kozhikode district.
- It advised people to take precautionary measures and not unnecessarily worry about the virus.
- Kerala, especially the Kozhikode and Malappuram districts have been particularly vulnerable to the Nipah virus as the areas have seen outbreaks in 2018 and 2021.

About Nipah virus

- Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus that can cause severe illness in both animals and humans.
- It was first identified in 1999 during an outbreak in Malaysia and Singapore.
- Nipah virus is a highly dangerous pathogen that causes brain damage and spreads to humans when they come into direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected bats, pigs, or individuals.
- As of now, there is no treatment or vaccine against the Nipah virus.
- As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), the infection has a high fatality rate of 73%.

South Korea keen on joining Quad

Context

- According to South Korean Ambassador to India, South Korea would like to be a part of the Quad.
- Korea is already an important partner for all Quad countries.
- There are also plans to upgrade the existing Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

- The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is a type of trade agreement that aims to facilitate economic cooperation and integration between two or more countries or regions.
- CEPA is a broad and comprehensive agreement that covers various aspects of economic relations, including trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights, and other areas of economic cooperation.
- CEPA between India and Korea was signed in 2009 and became effective in 2010. Later, both nations realized that it should be upgraded.
- South Korea has also extended a $4 billion loan under the Economic Development Fund by its ministry of economy for development of infrastructure in India.

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

- The Quad, short for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a strategic forum consisting of four major Indo-Pacific nations: the United States, Japan, India, and Australia.
- The Quad is not a formal military alliance but rather a diplomatic and security arrangement aimed at promoting regional stability and addressing common challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

IISc develops technique to detect cancer

Context

- In a boost to cancer research, scientists at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have proposed a novel approach for cancer treatment with a potential of early detection and killing of lung and cervical cancer cells.
- World over, cancer is one of the highest causes of mortality.
- Numerous studies have warned about its rising burden in both developing and developed countries.

Cancer cases in India

- A study published in the Bio Medical Central Journal in May 2022 has estimated India's cancer cases to touch 29.8 million by 2025.
- It stated that the disease burden would be the highest among the populations in North and northeast India.
- Moreover, over 40 per cent of India's total cancer burden would be contributed by the seven leading cancer sites — lung (10.6%), breast (10.5%), esophagus (5.8%), mouth (5.7%), stomach (5.2%), liver (4.6%), and cervix uteri (4.3%).

Russian sellers stop fertiliser discounts to India

Context

- Russian companies have ceased offering fertiliser such as di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) to India at discounted prices due to tightening global supplies after becoming the biggest suppliers to the country last year.
- The move in August by Russian companies to instead offer fertilisers at market prices could increase India's import costs and subsidy burden amid a rally in global prices, as a top exporter, China, tries to curtail overseas sales.
- Russian companies are offering fertilisers at the market prices.

India's fertiliser imports

- India's fertiliser imports from Russia more than tripled to a record 4.35 million tons in the 2022-23 financial year as suppliers gave discounts to the global market price for DAP, urea and NPK fertilisers.
- The current price of Russian DAP is approximately $570 per ton on a cost and freight (CFR) basis for Indian buyers, which is the same price offered to other Asian buyers.

Gained market share

- Russia's aggressive selling last year eroded the Indian market share of other fertiliser exporters including China, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- Global fertiliser prices have been surging over the past two months, making it challenging for Indian companies to accumulate stocks for the upcoming winter season when demand for DAP rises for the wheat crop.

Drop the bad idea of simultaneous elections

Context

- The Union government has recently formed a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'.
- The centre has been pushing the idea of simultaneous Lok Sabha and state assembly polls for a while.

Upcoming elections

- Assembly polls in five states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram - are due in November-December, and the Lok Sabha polls are expected to be held around May next year.

Arguments in favor

- The primary arguments in favor of simultaneous elections are twofold:
- First, that it will decrease the costs of conducting elections (and of electioneering)
- Second, that it will free up political parties from being in 'permanent campaign mode', and allow them to focus on governance (and, for that matter, constructive opposition) for a five-year period.

Disadvantages

- For incorporating One Nation, One Election, changes would be required in the Constitution and other legal frameworks.
- Critics of simultaneous elections have raised a few other objections.

- First, the logistical nightmare of conducting simultaneous elections in a country of a little over 1.4 billion people.
- Second is the incompatibility of a rigid election timetable with some of the fundamentals of parliamentary democracy.

Concern for horse-trading

- "Horse-trading" in the context of elections refers to the practice of political parties or individuals engaging in unethical or corrupt activities to secure votes or political support in exchange for personal gain.
- Horse-trading is typically associated with attempts to form a government or gain majority support in a legislative body.

Way Forward

- The federal structure is an important check upon the concentration of power.
- Simultaneous elections risk undermining that plurality, and risk precisely the kind of concentration of power that federalism is meant to be a bulwark against.
- Unlike many other Constitutions, where public participation in law-making is a guaranteed right, along with other rights such as the right to recall, in the Indian constitutional scheme, elections are the only form of public participation in the public sphere.

12.09.2023

- **Understanding Gresham's law**
- **Brazil to focus on inequality during G-20 presidency**
- **India to explore London Stock Exchange for direct listing**
- **CBI does not require permission to probe pre-2014 cases**
- **Cautiously on AI: challenges and responsibility**

Understanding Gresham's law

Context

- Gresham's law became relevant in a recent economic crisis in Sri Lanka, where the Central Bank of Sri Lanka established a fixed exchange rate between the Sri Lankan rupee and the U.S. dollar

About Gresham's law

- Gresham's law is an economic principle that is often summarized with the aphorism: "Bad money drives out good."
- It was named after Sir Thomas Gresham, an English financier and merchant in the 16th century.
- The essence of Gresham's law is that when two forms of money with different intrinsic values are in circulation and are both accepted as legal tender, people will tend to hoard or save the money that is of higher intrinsic value and use the money of lower intrinsic value for transactions.
- This happens because rational individuals will choose to keep the better money for themselves and spend or circulate the inferior money.
- Gresham's law, however, holds true only when the exchange rate between currencies is fixed under law by the government and the law is implemented effectively by authorities.

Exchange rate between Sri Lankan and US

- Gresham's law came into play most recently during the economic crisis in Sri Lanka last year, during which the Sri Lankan central bank fixed the exchange rate between the Sri Lankan rupee and the U.S. dollar.
- The Central Bank of Sri Lanka, at a certain point, mandated that the price of the U.S. dollar in terms of the Sri Lankan rupee should not rise beyond 200 rupees per dollar.

- In effect, people were banned from paying more than 200 Sri Lankan rupees for a dollar, thus causing the rupee to be overvalued and the U.S. dollar to be undervalued when compared to the market exchange rate.
- This caused the supply of dollars in the market to fall and the U.S. dollar to be gradually driven out of the formal foreign exchange market.

Brazil to focus on inequality during G-20 presidency

Context
- Brazilian President said that Brazil will put inequality as the core issue during the G20 Summit under its Presidency and said it was a huge challenge for Brazil to take over the G20 presidency.
- The 2024 Group of 20 (G20) Summit will take place from 12-14 July in Brazil.

Priorities for Brazil
- The G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil is expected to continue conversations on finance, sustainable infrastructure, and climate change, among other topics.
- Among the priorities for his government are the energy transition, especially the development of ethanol-based fuel that Brazil has championed.
- Brazil has extraordinary potential in the production of clean energy.
- The reform of multilateral banks and the expansion of the UN Security Council.

Brazil foreign policy
- In the past two decades, Brazil has pursued a foreign policy that aims to expand the country's presence in global political and economic negotiations, multilateral institutions and regional affairs.
- It has strengthened its relations with India, China and the United States and remains engaged with Russia and the European Union.
- Brazil has stressed on the reforms of international institutional structures and make them the representative of the present realities.

India to explore London Stock Exchange for direct listing

Context
- During the recently concluded 12th India-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue, in a joint India noted that it will explore the possibility of direct listing of Indian companies at the London Stock Exchange (LSE),
- The finance minister said that India will first rollout the proposal to allow Indian companies, both listed and unlisted, to list their shares directly on the exchanges at the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) before considering other exchanges.

Regulations for payments and settlements
- The government of India has been working on framing regulations pertaining to payments and settlements for direct listing of companies on IFSC exchanges, which is expected to be finalized in the next few months.
- London is the world's most international financial centre - the second largest financial centre in the world.

UK-India Infrastructure Financing Bridge
- India announced the launch of the "new UK-India Infrastructure Financing Bridge". This is a collaborative venture co-led by India's topmost government think-tank NITI Aayog and the City of London Corporation "aimed at harnessing collective expertise in planning and implementing major infrastructure projects", the Indian finance minister explained.
- India and the UK are highly encouraged by the intensified collaboration in financial services.
- The UK expressed willingness to further extend its footprint in the GIFT City IFSC and foster a robust fintech partnership.

CBI does not require permission to probe pre-2014 cases

Context

- The Supreme Court recently ruled that Central government officers at the rank of joint secretary and above can be investigated and prosecuted in corruption cases without requiring prior approval from authorities, and this rule applies retrospectively from September 11, 2003.
- A five-judge Constitution bench, unanimously held that its 2014 verdict, which had invalidated a provision of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946 that provided immunity to such officers in corruption cases, would have a retrospective effect.

Background

- In its May 2014 judgment, the Supreme Court had declared Section 6A(1) of the Act invalid and noted that the protection in Section 6A had the potential to shield corrupt officials.
- The top court clarified that the 2014 judgment would take effect from September 11, 2003, the date when section 6(A) of the DSPE Act, which pertained to the Central government's approval for conducting inquiries or investigations, was inserted into the DSPE Act.
- Bureaucrats lose immunity in pre-2014 corruption cases.
-

Cautiously on AI: Challenges and responsibility

Context

- The G20 Delhi Declaration stresses the importance of responsible artificial intelligence (AI) practices, including the protection of human rights, transparency, fairness, and accountability.
- This month, the G7 nations agreed to draft an international AI code of conduct, focusing on drawing voluntary company commitments to prevent harm.
- Approximately 700 policy instruments are being discussed to regulate AI.
- A broad agreement exists on the regulatory principles even though there is minimal intervention in the mechanism to realize them.

Global report on AI

- According to Stanford's Artificial Index Report of 2023, private investment in AI has increased 18-fold since 2013, and company adoption has doubled since 2017. McKinsey projects that the annual value of AI could range from $17.1 trillion to $25.6 trillion.
- AI is on the ascent, with rising capabilities, affordable access, and widespread applications.
- AI presents well-documented challenges in biased models, privacy issues, and opaque decision-making, impacting diverse sectors.

Concerns

- Within the web of challenges, the possibility of Artificial General Intelligence has been cited as the towering danger.
- Concerns around rogue yet powerful AI systems, or those hijacked by malicious actors, have risen.
- The chilling potential for AI to autonomously chart its course, duplicate its capabilities and evolve unchecked has been articulated as a very real possibility in the years ahead.

Global response and regulation

- In 2023, in response various challenges possessed to AI, global institutions undertook pivotal interventions.
- The draft EU AI Act and the US's voluntary safeguards framework announced in concurrence with seven AI firms are two such interventions.

Way forward

- There is a dire need to establish worldwide consensus regarding the risks of AI.
- It would be prudent to set up an international commission focused on iteratively working towards identifying risks associated with AI.

- It is critical to conceptualize standards which must be met by any public AI service.
- For AI, governments need to conceive socio-technical standards, which describe ideals and, equally importantly, the technical mechanisms to achieve them.

11.09.2023

- **G-20 plans to explore crypto regulation**
- **G20 declaration on health**
- **African Union becomes permanent member of G20**
- **HP gets ground ready for cannabis cultivation**
- **Redouble efforts to reduce disaster risks**

G-20 plans to explore crypto regulation

Context

- The G-20 leaders unanimously decided on swift implementation of the reporting framework for crypto assets.
- Many member nations want information exchange on such non-financial assets to start by 2027.
- The Crypto Asset Reporting Framework (CARF) or template is being developed to make sure that such assets are not used by tax evaders to conceal their unaccounted wealth.

India to work on domestic regulations

- With the G-20 countries agreeing to explore a coordinated regulatory framework for crypto assets, India could wait a while longer before firming up its domestic regulations for cryptocurrencies, and initiate a dialogue with stakeholders on the way forward.
- An outright ban on cryptocurrencies that was mooted by the Reserve Bank of India, and under consideration by the government.

FSB recommendations

- The G-20 leaders' declaration has endorsed the Financial Stability Board (FSB) recommendations to regulate and supervise crypto-assets' activities.
- It welcomed a synthesis paper from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the FSB, which includes a road map for a coordinated regulatory framework that factors in risks, including those specific to emerging markets, and pertaining to money laundering and terror financing.

G20 declaration on health

Context

- The recently released G20 Leaders' Declaration released found all three health priorities of as envisaged during India's G20 presidency.
- India's G20 presidency also pushed for integration of evidence-based traditional medicine practices with modern medicine.
- A global summit on traditional medicine was hosted on the sidelines of the health ministers' meeting last month.

About declaration

- The declaration spoke of strengthening primary healthcare, health workforce, and essential health services to better-than-pre-pandemic levels, ideally within the next two to three years.
- In addition to focusing on epidemics such as tuberculosis and AIDS, the G20 recognised the importance of research on long COVID.
- The declaration also stressed the importance of one health approach where diseases in animals, plants, and humans are tracked by the same mechanism with focus on tackling antimicrobial resistance.

Three priorities

- The three priorities kept in mind the economic and social disruption caused by Covid-19, and what could be done to prevent such losses in the future.
- The priorities included:
- Building resilient systems for health emergency prevention, preparedness, and response.
- Strengthening cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector with focus on ensuring equitable availability and access to vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics during a pandemic.
- Creating a platform for sharing digital health innovations and solutions to ensure better and universal health coverage, like CoWIN and e-Sanjeevani.

Digital health programme

- India committed to developing a platform for sharing scalable solutions under the World Health Organisation (WHO) that can be utilized by its member states.
- This culminated in the launch of Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH), with four main pillars:
  - Investment tracker
  - Repository of existing digital health solutions
  - Knowledge sharing for implementation and country-specific adaptation of these solutions
  - Tracker to monitor the needs of different countries
- While a $200-million fund proposed by India did not find consensus among countries, several non-profits have committed to the fund.

Interim medical countermeasure platform

- While there was no consensus on creating a permanent platform for ensuring equitable access to medical countermeasures during a pandemic, the committees agreed to develop an interim platform to promote an end-to-end network for research and manufacturing them till a legally binding pandemic treaty can be agreed upon.
- Although there is an in-principle agreement by the G20 member countries on the need for such a platform, there is no clarity yet on how soon the platform can be developed.

African Union becomes permanent member of G20

Context

- The African Union (AU) on became a permanent member of the Group of 20 largest economies (G20) of the world with Prime Minister of India announcing its entry into the G20.
- The African Union (AU) was admitted as a new member barely three months after India floated the idea of including the organisation.

About African Union

- The African Union (AU) is an intergovernmental organisation of the 55 member states located on the continent of Africa.
- The grouping was launched in July, 2002, the grouping is the successor of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was formed in 1963.
- The AU seeks to build "an Integrated, Prosperous and Peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens".
- The AU's secretariat, the African Union Commission, is based in Addis Ababa. Collectively the group has a gross domestic product (GDP) of $3 trillion with some 1.4 billion people.

Objectives of the AU

- Unlike the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the AU concentrates its energy and resources on achieving greater unity and solidarity between African countries and their people.
- It seeks to accelerate the process of the political and socio-economic integration of the continent.
- Its key objectives also include promoting peace, stability, and security across the region. Protecting and promoting human rights are also part of the agenda.

Achievements of the AU

- Many of the AU's peacekeeping missions have helped governments tackle terrorism across Africa, from the Sahel to northern Mozambique.
- Over the years, the organization's interventions have prevented violence in countries like Burundi, the Central African Republic, Comoros, Darfur, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Mali.
- The establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which came into force in 2021, is yet another achievement of the organisation.

Shortcomings of the AU

- One the major failure of the AU has been its inability to thwart coups in Africa.
- Since the 1960s, the continent has witnessed more than 200 coups, the most recent ones took place in Gabon and Niger.
- The organisation has also been unable to get its member countries to pay their annual dues, leaving it starved of funds.
- As a result, it must depend on external funding, which impacts its autonomy.

HP gets ground ready for cannabis cultivation

Context

- With the Himachal Pradesh government taking steps to legalise cannabis (hemp) cultivation in the State, growers are upbeat and optimistic about getting an economic boost.
- A committee comprising lawmakers that explored the possibility of legal cultivation of cannabis recently recommended cultivation of cannabis for "non-narcotic use of cannabis for medicinal, industrial, and scientific use".

About Hemp

- Hemp is a botanical class of Cannabis sativa cultivars grown specifically for industrial or medicinal use.
- It is produced in parts of Himachal Pradesh, though it is illegal under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.
- Hemp is grown in temperate zones as an annual cultivated from seed.
- People typically process industrial hemp into one of three forms.
    - hemp seeds and seed extracts
    - hemp oil
    - hemp fibers

Health Benefits

- The vitamins, minerals, and nutrients in hemp seeds can provide some significant health benefits.
- For example, hemp oil is rich in vitamin E, which is useful for helping keep your immune system functioning.
- It also acts as an antioxidant, helping reduce free radicals that can cause cell damage in your body.

Concerns

- The move by state government has raised social concerns, especially of adolescents and youth being drawn towards the use and abuse of cannabis, the nexus between illegal producers and suppliers of cannabis getting stronger, the risk of pilferage, and the occurrence of amotivational syndrome.

Redouble efforts to reduce disaster risks

Context

- Established under India's Presidency of the G20 in 2023, the Working Group aims to integrate disaster risk reduction across the work of the G20 and in its support to developing countries.
- As leaders underscored at the G20 summit in New Delhi ahead of the United Nations General Assembly SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) summit in New York next week, the world stands at a critical juncture.

High-impact areas

- The Working Group's activities focus on five high-impact areas for disaster risk reduction:
  - Universal Coverage or Early Warning Systems
  - Disaster and Climate Resilient Infrastructure
  - Financing Frameworks for Disaster Risk Reduction
  - Disaster Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction
  - Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem-Based Approaches for Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster in India

- India, already among the world's most disaster-prone countries, is experiencing this new reality acutely.
- In 2022, the country was battered by disasters or extreme weather nearly every day, while this year's severe monsoon has caused widespread loss of livelihood and lives.

Solutions and Measures

- There is need for the solutions for both adaptation and mitigation.
- The SDGs remain best blueprint for peace and prosperity, together with commitments.
- Eight years into the implementation of the Sendai Framework, progress is severely lacking.
- Many lessons are being learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the importance of systems-wide disaster risk reduction, resilience, and adaptation.
- Another reason for optimism is India's stewardship on disaster risk reduction.

15th FC on disaster risk financing

- The 15th Finance Commission in India introduced significant reforms to disaster risk financing.
- With a total allocation of $28.6 billion at the national and State levels for a period of five years, the Government of India has provided sufficient resources for disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and capacity development.

Way forward

- On the international stage, India is promoting disaster resilience and sustainability, including through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, a global partnership for building resilience in infrastructure.
- Improving global data capabilities will help us predict and respond to the risks we are facing.
- The G20 Summit and India's success in disaster risk reduction are an opportunity to accelerate international cooperation and build resilience to risks.

09.09.2023

- **India ready with New Delhi declaration**
- **India - US to deepen and progress defence ties**
- **African Union to become full member of G-20**
- **RBI to discontinue I-CRR**
- **India's G20 presidency shows the way**

India ready with New Delhi declaration

Context

- A day before the G20 Summit kicks off, India's G-20 'Sherpa' Amitabh Kant said that the New Delhi leaders' declaration will have the voice of the Global South and the developing countries.
- The G20 Leaders' Summit will be held on September 9-10.
- The mega summit will be attended by more than 30 heads of state and top officials from the European Union and invited guest countries and 14 heads of international organisations.

Theme of India G20

- The theme for India's G20 presidency, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – One Earth, One Family, One Future', is a global roadmap for sustainable, inclusive and human-centric development.
- India's key priorities for India's G20 presidency, which included sustainable development goals and climate action.

Priorities

- The sherpas and heads of delegations covered six priorities, including:
  - Bold, sustainable, and inclusive growth
  - Sustainable development goals
  - Multilateral-development-bank reforms
  - Digital public infrastructure
  - Women-led development and gender equality
  - Green development

Green Development

- India wanted the world to take the lead on Green Development in the context of climate action and climate finance.
- India has prioritized green development, climate action, climate finance was our third priority.
- Because both SDG and climate action require finance, particularly for developing and emerging markets in the global south.

India - US to deepen and progress defence ties

Context

- The Prime Minister India and US President vowed to "deepen and diversify" the bilateral major defence partnership while welcoming forward movement in India's procurement of 31 drones and joint development of jet engines.
- The two leaders deliberated on India's G20 presidency, cooperation in nuclear energy, critical and emerging technologies such as 6G and artificial intelligence, and ways to fundamentally reshape multilateral development banks.
- India and US discussed ways to strengthen the Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership (CGSP) that "spans the seas to the stars."

Defence cooperation

- India and US issued a joint statement on defence cooperation.

- The Congressional notification process had been completed on August 29 and negotiations had commenced for a commercial agreement between GE Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) to manufacture GE F-414 jet engines in India.
- United States welcomed India issuing a letter of request to procure 31 General Atomics MQ-9B (16 Sky Guardian and 15 Sea Guardian) remotely piloted aircraft and their associated equipment.
- The two leaders also reaffirmed the importance of Quad in supporting a free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific.

India-US strategic partnership

- The two leaders also called on their governments to continue work on transforming the India-US strategic partnership across all dimensions and reiterated their support for building resilient global semiconductor supply chains.
- The leaders re-emphasized that the shared values of freedom, democracy, human rights, inclusion, pluralism, and equal opportunities for all citizens are critical to the success for both countries.

African Union to become full member of G-20

Context

- During the inaugural session of the two-day G20 Summit, Prime Minister of India declared that the African Union (AU) had been granted permanent membership in the Group of 20 largest economies (G20) worldwide.
- This announcement marked the AU's accession as a new member of this prominent global organization, consisting of 55 nations.

Initiation of process

- The idea of the AU joining the G20 came up during a recent meeting of important people from G20 countries.
- The countries in the AU together makes them the 11th biggest economy in the world. This means they have a say in important global financial decisions.
- Countries like Russia and the United States already said they like the idea of the AU joining the G20.
- Africa is growing fast economically, with six of the world's fastest-growing countries located there.

War and shortage

- He also said that the African Union has been discussing ways to deal with the fallout of the Ukraine war, which has hit supplies of agricultural products and fertilizers to Africa.
- Calling for an end to the violence, African Union chief said "What is happening in Ukraine is a violation of the UN Charter. There is insecurity all over the world and this war is not setting a good example. The war in Ukraine has food and security consequences for us."

Rice export ban

- Flagging the recent ban on export of rice imposed by India, African Union chief said that the food situation in Africa requires India to step in by ensuring supplies as there is a crisis-like situation in multiple African countries.
- African Union are planning to talk to the Indian authorities as we depend on Indian rice. India has a lot to provide to Africa like capacity building.

RBI to discontinue I-CRR

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the phased discontinuation of the Incremental Cash Reserve Ratio (I-CRR) on September 8, 2023.
- This measure aimed to absorb surplus liquidity created by factors such as the return of Rs 2,000 notes to the banking system.

About I-CRR

- The Incremental Cash Reserve Ratio (I-CRR) was introduced on August 10, 2023, by the RBI to absorb the surplus liquidity generated by various factors, including the return of Rs 2,000 notes to the banking system.
- The regulator had said that I-CRR was a temporary measure, which will be reviewed on September 8, 2023 or before.
- ICRR is employed during periods characterized by excess liquidity in the financial system.

Why was I-CRR needed
- The RBI announced I-CRR as a temporary measure to absorb excess liquidity from the banking system.
- The level of surplus liquidity in the system surged because of the return of Rs 2,000 banknotes to the banking system, RBI's surplus transfer to the government, pick up in government spending and capital inflows.
- The daily absorption of liquidity by the RBI in July was Rs 1.8 lakh crore.
- I-CRR was expected to absorb over Rs 1 lakh crore of excess liquidity from the banking system.

About CRR
- The Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) is the minimum amount of the total deposits which banks have to maintain as cash reserve with the Reserve Bank of India.
- It is an essential tool to maintain the health of the banking system.
- Banks cannot use this amount for lending or for any investment purposes. Currently, CRR stands at 4.5 per cent.

India's G20 presidency shows the way
Context
- The 18th G20 Leaders' Summit started on a positive note, with the strengthening bilateral of two important G20 members host India and the US.
- It is therefore a good time to assess how much India has learned about becoming a multilateral leader, and how much multilateral leaders have learned to accommodate emerging powers.
- The exercise is necessary, for as the "economic steering committee of the world," the G20 multilateral carries a heavy responsibility, especially as the United Nations is no longer seen to be a global problem-solver.

Tough journey
- India's goals for the year are international, domestic, and specific to G20.
- Its presidency began with two parallel crises — the overhang of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, both affecting economies and geopolitics.
- On the pandemic, India had a head start, having managed the Covid-19 crisis well, and making pandemic preparedness the focus of its presidency.
- The presidency year was used to take a leadership position in digital inclusion, through digital public infrastructure (DPI), India's unique offering for the G20.

Russia-Ukraine war
- The Russia-Ukraine war, 2023 will be remembered as the year of the Great Divide, as developed and developing worlds are separated over issues of ideology and economic necessity.
- A regional border disagreement has been aggravated by ignoring legitimate Russian security interests, forcing countries to take sides.
- India has maintained a fine balance, managing its relationship with Russia, and even enhancing its bilateral with the US.
- India's neutral position on Russia-Ukraine has kept international equilibrium.

Creating equitable multilateral order

- Efforts to create a more equitable multilateral order will continue for the next two G20 presidencies led by Brazil and South Africa.
- The India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) grouping already has a trilateral agenda in place, a good portion of which now overlaps with the G20 agenda.
- The G20 is not a treaty alliance, it is a forum for dialogue and cooperation.
- It is also now the platform best suited to adjust for, and accommodate, a world in transition.

Way forward

- The event of G20 has been great success for India.
- It has democratized the G20 process from intention and necessity.
- The rigorous policy emphasis is educative for bureaucrats and politicians presiding over a domestic transformation.
- India needs to be more material to global outcomes and incomes, to gain influence as a rule-maker.
- If absorbed well, the experience of its G20 presidency will certainly take the country and its cohorts along that path.

08.09.2023

- **12-point proposal to expand India-ASEAN relations**
- **Draft guidelines for Dark Patterns**
- **G20 on reviving the Black Sea Grain Initiative**
- **Heat index it importance to measure**
- **Critical for a green future**

12-point proposal to expand India-ASEAN relations

Context

- The Prime Minister of India presented a 12-point proposal to expand cooperation between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- The proposal focuses in areas such as connectivity, trade, and digital transformation even as he called for building a rules-based post-COVID world order, at the annual ASEAN-India Summit.
- India also called for a cooperative approach to address global challenges including terrorism, climate change and resilient supply chains for essential items including food and medicines, and for energy security.

12-point proposal by India

- Enhanced Connectivity: Establishing multi-modal connectivity and economic corridor that links South-East Asia-India-West Asia-Europe
- Digital Infrastructure Sharing: Offered to share India's Digital Public Infrastructure Stack with ASEAN partners.
- Digital Future Fund: Announced ASEAN-India fund for Digital Future focusing on cooperation in digital transformation and financial connectivity.
- Support for Research: Announced renewal of support to Economic and Research Institute of ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) to act as knowledge partner for enhancing our engagement.
- Global South Advocacy: Called for collectively raising issues being faced by Global South in multilateral fora.
- Traditional Medicine Centre: Invited ASEAN countries to join Global Centre for Traditional Medicine being established by WHO in India.
- Mission LIFE: Called for working together on Mission LiFE
- Affordable Medicines: Offered to share India's experience in providing affordable and quality medicines to people through Jan-Aushadhi Kendras
- Counterterrorism Cooperation: Called for collective fight against terrorism, terror financing and cyber-disinformation

- Disaster Resilience: Invited ASEAN countries to join Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- Disaster Management: Called for cooperation in disaster management.
- Maritime Security: Called for enhanced cooperation on maritime safety, security and domain awareness.

India-ASEAN relations
- ASEAN-India dialogue relations started with the establishment of a sectoral partnership in 1992.
- The Prime Minister of India noted that ASEAN plays a central role in India's Act East policy, acknowledging that the partnership between ASEAN and India has now entered its fourth decade, underscoring the enduring nature of their relationship and the strategic importance of ASEAN in India's regional engagement.

Draft guidelines for Dark Patterns
Context
- In a bid to protect consumers from deceptive and misleading practices, the Department of Consumer Affairs, has sought public comments on draft guidelines for the prevention and regulation of dark patterns.
- These draft guidelines define dark patterns as deceptive design elements that manipulate consumers, using user interface, user experience interactions on any platform, into actions they did not originally intend.
- The pattern subverts consumer autonomy, decision making or choice, potentially violating consumer rights.

10 dark patterns
- The draft guidelines have specified about 10 dark patterns, which include:
  - False urgency
  - Basket sneaking
  - Confirm shaming
  - Forced action
  - Subscription trap
  - Interface interference
  - Bait and switch
  - Drip pricing
  - Disguised advertisement
  - Nagging

Objective
- The objective of the guidelines is to identify and regulate such practices which tend to manipulate or alter consumer choices, often by using deceptive or misleading techniques or manipulated user interfaces/web designs.
- The Guidelines would be made applicable to all the persons and online platforms including sellers and advertisers.

G20 on reviving the Black Sea Grain Initiative
Context
- As world leaders gather in New Delhi, India for the G-20 Summit, United Nations Secretary-General is on a mission to revive the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI or BSI), in talks on the sidelines of the summit.
- The deal that facilitates export of grain from Russia and Ukraine lapsed in July.
- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials said they were unaware of any meetings on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit, but underlined India's position in support of the initiative.

About Black Sea Grain Initiative

- The Black Sea Grain initiative endeavors to tackle escalating food prices emanating from supply chain disruptions because of Russian actions in the world's 'breadbasket'.
- The deal brokered by the United Nations (UN) and Turkey, was signed in Istanbul in July, 2022.
- The BSI, which was signed to avert massive shortages of wheat, sunflower oil, and other commodities due to the Ukraine conflict, lapsed on July 17 after Russia refused to renew the deal citing "unkept promises" by Western countries.

Agreement under BSGI

- The Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) consists of two agreements:
  o One signed by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey
  o Other by the UN for the resumption of exports of grains, other foodstuffs, and fertilizers, including ammonia, through a "safe maritime humanitarian corridor" from three key Ukrainian ports.
- There is an MoU between Russia and the UN on promoting Russian food products and fertilizers in the world markets.

Heat index it importance to measure

Context

- Earlier in August, Iran recorded a scorching heat index of 70 degrees Celsius (°C) in the coastal part of the country.
- Iran had also declared public holidays on August 2 and 3 on account of "unprecedented heat.
- This is not the first time this year that Iran is dealing with extreme heat.
- In July, U.S.-based weather observer Colin McCarthy reported that the Persian Gulf Airport recorded a heat index of 66.7 °C.

Heat index

- Heat index, also known as apparent temperature, is a measure of how the temperature feels to humans.
- Relative humidity is an important factor that determines heat index, along with air temperature.

How is the heat index calculated

- A complex formula to calculate heat index was published by Dr. Robert Steadman, a professor in the textiles and clothing department of Colorado State University, in 1979. He published two papers titled The Assessment of Sultriness:
- Part I: A Temperature-Humidity Index Based on Human Physiology and Clothing Science.
- Part II: Effects of Wind, Extra Radiation and Barometric Pressure on Apparent Temperature, both describing his calculations of heat index.
- Dew point, which is the temperature at which gas is transformed into a liquid state, is an important factor in the calculation of heat index.

Impact of high humidity on human body

- High humidity can lead to heat stress, meaning the body is unable to get rid of excess heat.
- Humans usually maintain a core temperature in the range of 36.1 to 37.2 °C.
- When the body is unable to get rid of excess heat, the heart rate increases due to a rise in core temperature, leading to heat-related exhaustion and rashes, among other symptoms.

Critical for a green future

Context

- As India approach the G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, there is a growing consensus on the importance of critical minerals for the clean energy transition.
- The outcome document of the G20 Energy Transitions Ministers' meeting in Goa notes the "need to maintain reliable, responsible and sustainable supply chains of such critical minerals and materials".

Critical minerals and green target

- Critical minerals such as cobalt, lithium, silicon, graphite, and rare earth elements (REE) are used in clean technologies like solar modules, wind turbines, and batteries.
- The deployment of these technologies can help meet India's sustainability targets of 500 GW of non-fossil power capacity by 2030 as well as the emissions-intensity target of 45 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.
- Therefore, these minerals can be termed as the building blocks of modern civilisation.

Demand for clean technologies

- The growing demand for clean technologies has led to an uptick in global mining of various critical minerals.
- According to a study conducted by the Union Ministry of Mines in collaboration with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), the annual production of key minerals such as lithium, rare earth elements (REE), and cobalt registered an increase of 240 per cent, 134 per cent, and 67 per cent respectively, between 2016 and 2022.
- In the case of minerals such as cobalt, copper, and nickel, the current mine production is already more than 2 per cent of global reserves.

Global supply chains of critical minerals

- Global supply chains of critical minerals play a crucial role in various industries, including technology, renewable energy, defense, and manufacturing.
- These minerals are essential for the production of various high-tech devices, batteries, and other products.
- However, global supply chains of critical minerals are complex and can be vulnerable to unforeseen disruptions caused by the vagaries of trade treaties, geopolitical factors and natural disasters.
- Securing the supply chain of critical minerals is important for reducing India's import dependence, strengthening national security, and developing a domestic value chain to cater to the growing demand.

Government Policy measures

- Policy reforms have been undertaken through key amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Act, 1957 in 2015, 2020, 2021, and recently in 2023.
- The MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 also facilitates mining by including a provision of Exploration Licenses (EL) for deep-seated and critical minerals.
- It also omitted six minerals including lithium, from the list of 12 atomic minerals.
- To increase the domestic source of production, the Ministry of Mines came up with a new auction regime in 2015.
- Moreover, the National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) is supporting the exploration of critical minerals with private agencies being empaneled to receive funding for such activities.

Way forward

- With an endeavor to augment cooperative federalism, the government has taken the responsibility to exclusively auction concessions related to 24 critical minerals, while making sure that the revenues accrue to the concerned state governments.
- This measure will improve the revenue receipts of state governments, giving a healthy boost to their fiscal position.
- Collective action is important to achieve India's targets and the government is forming new partnerships and alliances related to critical minerals.
- The Prime Minister's vision of "One Earth, One Family, One Future" under India's G20 presidency, highlights the importance of our shared goals related to emission reduction and climate change mitigation for a shared future.

07.09.2023

- **How unemployment is measured**
- **G20 pave way for crypto regulation, financial inclusion**
- **RBI calls for self-regulatory organisation for FinTech**
- **Removal of retaliatory customs tariffs on US products**
- **Bridging the malnutrition gap, the Bemetara way**

How unemployment is measured

Context
- The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) in 2017 reported India's highest-ever recorded unemployment rate at 6.1%. In contrast, the 2021-22 PLFS revealed a decrease in unemployment to 4.1%, although it remained higher than the rates in some developed economies.
- The U.S unemployment rate fluctuated between 3.5% in July 2022 to 3.7% in July 2023.

Defining unemployment
- Unemployment refers to the condition in which individuals who are capable of working, actively seeking employment, and willing to work are unable to find suitable job opportunities.
- The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines unemployment as being out of a job; being available to take a job; and actively engaged in searching for work.

Measurement of unemployment rate
- The unemployment rate is measured as the ratio of the unemployed to the labour force.
- According to a 2009-10 survey undertaken by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), 33.3% of rural women and 27.2% of urban women aged 15 and above who were engaged in domestic work reported willingness to work if it were made available within the premises of the household.
- This represents 18.8% of the rural female population aged 15 and up; the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for rural women that year was 26.5%.
- These women would not be counted among the unemployed because they are not actively looking for work.

Lockdown effect
- The lockdown announced in March 2020 was a profound disruption to the Indian economy.
- But this wasn't reflected in the PLFS unemployment rates, which covers a period between July of one year to June of the next.
- The lockdown would have been covered in the last quarter of the 2019-20 PLFS, its after-effects seen in the 2020-21 PLFS.
- Measuring unemployment in India is difficult due to the informal nature of jobs.
- Unlike developed economies, individuals do not hold one job year-round.

G20 pave way for crypto regulation, financial inclusion

Context
- The G20 finance track has laid down the roadmap and building blocks of a common framework around the treatment of cryptocurrencies, which will now be presented at the leaders' summit in upcoming G20 summit.
- The next step on cryptocurrencies would be implementing the common framework developed by the International Monetary Fund, the Financial Stability Board, and the Bureau of Indian Standards.

India's G20 presidency
- India's G20 presidency could leave a lasting legacy for the world's financial architecture by paving the way for a global template to regulate crypto assets, steering a shake-up of multilateral development banks

that could yield additional financing of $200 billion over eight years to help countries deal with emerging challenges, and advancing financial inclusion.

- The G20 leaders at the upcoming summit include a plan to enhance the capacity of countries to understand the proposed two-pillar framework to tax revenues of multinational firms and global tech giants for urban administrations around the world to finance city development plans.
- India has brought the regulation of these assets on the agenda of G20, whose role gained greater importance amid global financial sector woes in 1999 and 2008.

Crypto challenge

- A single country cannot regulate crypto currencies effectively.
- A building blocks for such regulation and a road map, arrived at in consultation with the International Monetary Fund.
- India has also been appointed the co-chair of the Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion till 2026 to help implement a Financial Inclusion Action Plan using digital public infrastructure, which G20 members have recognised as being supportive of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

RBI calls for self-regulatory organisation for FinTech

Context

- RBI Governor while addressing the industry at the Global Fintech Fest said that Fintech players should form a self regulatory organisation for an orderly growth of the industry.
- The Fintech industry is projected to have revenues of USD 200 billion by 2030.

Invoking best practice

- RBI governor also noted that fintech players need to evolve industry best practices to avoid mis selling, stress on ethical practices, pricing transparency and take care of privacy and data protection concerns.
- RBI urged fintech players to focus on customer satisfaction rather than on revenue and valuation.
- Besides customer centricity, fintechs to pay close attention to governance and self-regulation.
- The Governor said digital innovations, at times, have also led to cyber-risk and data security related issues.

Indian fintech industry

- The Indian fintech industry has experienced significant growth and transformation in recent years.
- According to RBI governor, the Indian fintech industry is projected to generate around $200 billion in revenue by the year 2030.
- This projection indicates that by 2030, the country's fintech sector could potentially contribute to approximately 13 per cent of the global fintech industry's total revenue
- India has pioneered a layered approach to Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), with the concept of the India Stack.

Unified Payments Interface

- According to National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions, for the first time, crossed 10 billion mark in August.
- As of August 30, UPI reported 10.24 billion transactions during the month and the transaction value stood at Rs 15.18 lakh crore
- NPCI is targeting around 30 billion transactions a month or one billion transactions a day within the next two to three years.

Removal of retaliatory customs tariffs on US products

Context

- Ahead of upcoming G20 Summit and visit of US President, India has made a noteworthy move by removing retaliatory customs tariffs imposed on specific American imports, like almonds and lentils effective September 6, 2023.

Import duties

- India raised import duties on 28 products from the U.S. in June 2019, after the latter had increased its customs duties on certain steel and aluminum products.
- In a notification issued on September 5, the Finance Ministry dropped some of these tariff increases "on being satisfied that it is necessary in the public interest so to do".

Reduction in tariff

- The Prime Minister of India recent visit to U.S. in June had agreed to resolve six bilateral trade disputes that were pending at the World Trade Organization and unwind the tariff hikes imposed on some U.S. products, including walnuts, almonds, and apples.
- The Almond Board of California (ABC) welcomed the move in a statement, noting that the import duties on their almond shipments to India will now go back to ₹35 a kg on in-shell and ₹100 a kg of kernels.
- India had raised the applied tariff rates on U.S. almonds to ₹41 a kg on in-shell and ₹120 a kg on kernels.

Bridging the malnutrition gap, the Bemetara way

Context

- Malnutrition has been a longstanding issue in India, affecting a significant portion of its population, particularly children and women.
- The "malnutrition gap" refers to the gap between the nutritional needs of the population and the actual nutritional intake.
- This gap is typically measured in terms of key indicators such as stunting, wasting, and underweight rates among children, as well as the prevalence of anemia among women.

Government measures

- Over the years, the government has made painstaking efforts to ensure food security.
- Now, children have mid-day-meals in their schools and people receive monthly rations through an ever-improving Public Distribution System.
- Ready-to-eat packets and hot meals are served to mothers and children at Anganwadi Centres (AWCs), under the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) Abhiyaan.

Lessons from Bemetara

- Bemetara in Chhattisgarh is a puzzling district in the context of its malnutrition status. The number of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) children there was as high as 3,299 in December 2022.
- This figure bears a striking resemblance to the situation in tribal-dominated and Naxal-affected districts such as Bastar.
- It points to the lack of proper knowledge about feeding practices.
- The problem is not about access but improper knowledge around when, how and what to eat.
- This is why nutrition counseling combined with robust monitoring was chosen as the modus operandi for this area.

Progress report

- As a result of the simple mantra of nutrition counseling along with regular monitoring and evaluation, as many as 53.77% of targeted children were brought out of malnutrition by the Potth Laika Abhiyaan (nutrition counseling program), in a span of nine months, i.e., from December 2022 to July, 2023 — 599 out of 1,114 children. Further, 61.5% of MAM children and 14.67% of SAM children have been brought out of malnutrition.
- These figures are both encouraging and statistically significant.

Way forward

- From the experiences highlighted, there is no doubt that this model needs to be replicated on a larger scale across districts and States.
- Providing food to the poor needs to be supported with nutrition counseling and monitoring in order to truly accelerate the eradication of malnutrition.
- It's important to note that efforts have been made by the government and various non-governmental organizations to address malnutrition through programs like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the National Health Mission (NHM).

06.09.2023

- **Strategies of vaccine diplomacy**
- **ASEAN-India Summit and East Asia Summit**
- **MoU with Adobe to train children in classroom**
- **Major threats to the global financial ecosystem**
- **The implications of the expansion of BRICS**

Strategies of vaccine diplomacy

Context

- In this paper, the authors (Suzuki, Mao & Yang, Shiming (2023)) argue that during the COVID-19 pandemic, for the first time in history, three non-Western powers — Russia, China and India dominated international vaccine aid.
- The paper was published in Political Economy of vaccine diplomacy: Explaining varying strategies of China, India, and Russia's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy'.

Vaccine diplomacy

- Vaccine diplomacy refers to the use of COVID-19 vaccines as a tool for diplomacy and foreign policy.
- It involves countries and organizations distributing vaccines to other nations to achieve strategic, diplomatic, or geopolitical goals.

Finding of the paper

- The research paper noted that for the first time in history, three non-Western powers — Russia, China and India dominated international vaccine diplomacy.
- These countries, which had long been recipients of health aid, finally made their debut on the world stage as vaccine inventors.
- These countries did so at a time that was remarkable for two reasons — one, many countries were in desperate need of vaccines; and two, Western nations were hoarding vaccines.
- The authors profile the three powers on their relative strengths along three axes: vaccine R&D, manufacturing, and delivery.

Russia's technology transfer

- Russia, which is strong in vaccine R&D and weak in production and distribution, has relied on outsourcing vaccine production with technology transfer.
- This has two advantages.
- First, a country with home-grown vaccines "can use technology transfer to either promote sales when its vaccines have low global credibility or encourage offshore production when the country has limited domestic production capacity."
- Second, "because technology transfer is welcomed by many developing countries striving to secure vaccine supply and to develop their pharmaceutical industry, it can also be used to enhance soft power of the giving country."

India's massive donations

- The research paper noted that India was producing 60% of the world's vaccines even before the pandemic.
- So India's vaccine diplomacy was "characterized by mass-production of Western-invented vaccines, prompt bilateral donations, and large-scale sales to bilateral buyers and multilateral COVAX initiative."
- India quickly rolled out large scale bilateral programs called 'Vaccine Maitri' (Vaccine Friendship).
- With more than 90 countries swiftly approaching India, neighboring countries got priority access to India's donations.
- One of India's largest donations was to Nepal (1.1 million doses).

China's costly investments

- The paper points out that "China's vaccine diplomacy is the costliest, with tremendous investments in vaccine development, production, and distribution".
- Though it arranged its clinical trials, sales and donations across the developing world, it provided preferential access only to African and ASEAN countries — regions that are focus areas of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

ASEAN-India Summit and East Asia Summit

Context

- Prime Minister of India will be on a two-day visit to Indonesia to attend the 20th ASEAN-India Summit and 18th East Asia Summit.
- The two Summits will be hosted in Jakarta by Indonesia the current Chair of ASEAN.
- Indonesia is hosting the summit as the current Chair of the ASEAN.

India's relations with ASEAN

- India's relations with ASEAN are the central pillar of our Act East policy as well as India's vision for wider Indo-Pacific.
- India and ASEAN have a comprehensive engagement covering a wide array of areas.
- On economic ties, India-ASEAN trade volume in 2022-23 was USD 131.5 billion.
- The ties between India and ASEAN have been on a significant upswing in the last few years with focus being on boosting cooperation in the areas of trade and investment as well as security and defence.

About ASEAN

- ASEAN is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten Southeast Asian countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- The ASEAN is considered one of the most influential groupings in the region, and India and several other countries including the US, China, Japan and Australia are its dialogue partners.

About East Asia Summit

- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a regional forum for dialogue and cooperation among countries in East Asia.
- It is an annual event that brings together leaders from 18 member states to discuss a wide range of political, economic, and security issues facing the region.
- The EAS is an important component of the regional architecture in East Asia and serves as a platform for promoting peace, stability, and economic development in the region.

MoU with Adobe to train children in classroom

Context

- The Union Education Ministry signed an agreement with global software major Adobe to help children develop creative expression in classrooms using the application Adobe Express.
- Training and certification in creativity and digital literacy will be provided to about 20 million students and five lakh teachers by 2027 using Adobe Express-based curriculum.
- Adobe, the American multinational computer software company.

- The partnership was announced ahead of the G20 Leaders' Summit in India.

Digital literacy

- The digital literacy initiative aims to revolutionize creative expression in classrooms using Adobe Express.
- The initiative is expected to impact 20 million students and 500,000 educators across India by 2027.
- Under the programme, Adobe will provide schools across the country with free access to Adobe Express Premium and professional development of educators.
- The program will roll out to empower students and educators with topics covering creativity, generative AI, design, video, animation and other emerging technologies.

Significance

- According to Union Education Minister in the time of digitization, new ideas, new innovation and creativity, the partnership will create a new standard and benchmark for students.
- India's classrooms with the latest technology to revolutionize how students and educators can use creativity to turn ideas into stunning content.

Major threats to the global financial ecosystem

Context

- The union minister for Finance while addressing delegates at the Global Fintech Fest (GFF) 2023 said cryptocurrencies (crypto), drug mafias, tax havens and cyber intrusions posed major threats to the global financial ecosystem and a global collaborative effort was needed to counter such challenges.
- Also threats of drug, drug wars and drug mafias, tax havens, round tripping of resources and tax evasion; we need to work on all these so that we can address them.

Strengthening financial ecosystem

- India can lead in making the financial ecosystem inclusive, resilient and sustainable. We have the tools but we must make it responsible.
- Creating a financial ecosystem that is inclusive, resilient, and sustainable is a complex and multifaceted goal.
- It requires a combination of policies, practices, and innovations aimed at promoting economic stability, reducing inequality, and mitigating environmental impacts.

The implications of the expansion of BRICS

Context

- The 15th BRICS summit in Johannesburg, South Africa announced a plan to add six new members — Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from West Asia; Egypt and Ethiopia from Africa, and Argentina from Latin America.
- It was reported that 40 countries have shown interest in BRICS' membership, with 22 having submitted formal applications.

About BRICS

- BRICS represents a group of five major emerging economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.
- These countries come together to form a political and economic association known as BRICS.
- The group was originally known as "BRIC" before South Africa joined in 2010, after which it became BRICS.
- The BRICS nations collaborate on various issues, including economic development, trade, political cooperation, and global governance.

Agenda of the BRICS

- The regular annual summit and deliberation of BRICS has considerably widened over the years to encompass topical global issues such as:

- o International terrorism
- o Climate change
- o Food and energy security
- o International economic and financial situation
- o Reform of the Bretton Woods Institutions
- o Trade protectionism and the WTO

Roadmap

- With the proposed expansion, BRICS will have 46% of world population, while its share of the global GDP will go from 31.5% in PPP terms to 37%, far ahead of the GDP of 30.7% of the G-7.
- The five core members account for 23% of global exports and 19% of global imports; with the new members, these figures will be boosted by 3.7% and 3%, respectively.

Countering West-dominated international institutions

- BRICS members have been united in their dissatisfaction with the West-dominated international institutions that had emerged after the Second World War, these inlcude:
- o World Bank
- o International Monetary Fund
- o United Nations bodies, particularly the Security Council
- BRICS challenges this West-led world order via:
- o Promotes intra-BRICS economic and political cooperation
- o Builds institutions outside western control
- o Agitates robustly for wide-ranging reforms to accommodate the presence and interests of emerging economies

Johannesburg Declaration

- In the Johannesburg Declaration several paragraphs call for wide-ranging reforms in international organisations, the bulk of the document focuses on intra-BRICS cooperation and outreach to other developing countries.
- The Declaration also reflects the shared views of its members on several political issues — the centrality of the United Nations.

Way forward

- The new BRICS members, particularly those from West Asia, naturally fit into this political and economic framework.
- India is an important member of the BRICS group, and its participation in the organisation has been beneficial in many ways.
- BRICS expansion may facilitate increased trade and investment among member countries, leading to economic growth and development.

05.09.2023

- **Workstreams of G20**
- **Role of CBDCs in cross-border payments**
- **IPBES report finds invasive alien species**
- **IAF begins Western Air Command's annual exercise**
- **Emerging countries need women-led climate action**

Workstreams of G20

Context

- The G20 or Group of Twenty is a unique intergovernmental forum comprising key global stakeholders which include world's leading developed nations and emerging economies.
- It is aimed at achieving economic transformations through creative synergies and socio-institutional innovation.
- The 18th annual G20 Heads of State and Government Summit is less than a week away. It will take place at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, in New Delhi on September 9 and 10.

Major tracks of G20

- The G20 works in three major tracks.
  - o Sherpa Track
  - o Finance Track
  - o Official tracks
- The Engagement groups come under the unofficial track.

How is the G20 structured

Finance Track

- The Finance Track is headed by the finance ministers and central bank governors, who usually meet four times a year, with two meetings being held on the sidelines of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings.
- It mainly focuses on fiscal and monetary policy issues such as the global economy, infrastructure, financial regulation, financial inclusion, international financial architecture, and international taxation.

Sherpa Track

- The Sherpa Track was established after the forum became a leaders' summit in 2008.
- It consists of representatives of heads of state, and it focuses on socio-economic issues such as agriculture, anti-corruption, climate, digital economy, education, employment, energy, environment, health, tourism, trade, and investment.
- There are 13 working groups within the Sherpa Track.
  - o Agriculture Working Group
  - o Anti-corruption Working Group
  - o Culture Working Group
  - o Development Working Group
  - o Digital Economy Working Group
  - o Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group
  - o Education Working Group
  - o Employment Working Group
  - o Energy Transitions Working Group
  - o Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group
  - o Health Working Group
  - o Tourism Working Group
  - o Trade and Investment Working Group.

Indian presidency

- The Indian presidency has taken remarkable initiative in establishing two new projects a new working group on Disaster Risk Reduction to enable global preparedness against disaster and the Startup-20 Engagement Group to effectively engage key ecosystem stakeholders.
- With the theme of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (One Earth, One Family, One Future), India's Presidency of the G20 offers a stellar hope of delivering innovative solutions to the world's most pressing problems.

Role of CBDCs in cross-border payments

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor recently said that cross-border payments can be made more efficient through adoption of digital currencies.
- He noted that faster and cheaper cross-border payment services would deliver widespread benefits to people.
- The RBI Governor said that high cost, low speed, limited access and insufficient transparency remained key challenges to existing cross-border payments, and that adoption of the Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) can make such payments efficient.

About CBDC

- CBDC is a digital currency that is issued by the central bank of a sovereign nation. By definition, it is freely convertible against the physical currency issued by the same central bank. Similar to physical currency, one need not have a bank account to transact using CBDCs either.
- However, one major distinguishing factor between CBDCs and physical currency is that CBDCs will have an infinite life, in the sense that they cannot be damaged or lost in any physical form. It will be managed on a digital ledger that may or may not be blockchain-enabled.

Features of Digital Rupee

- CBDC is a sovereign currency issued by central banks in alignment with their monetary policy.
- It appears as a liability on the central bank's balance sheet.
- It must be accepted as a medium of payment, legal tender, and a safe store of value by all citizens, enterprises, and government agencies.
- It is freely convertible against commercial bank money and cash.
- It is a fungible legal tender for which holders need not have a bank account.
- CBDC is expected to lower the cost of issuance of money and transactions.

CBDCs around the World

- A study by Atlantic Council Geo Economics Center has found that close to 105 countries are considering the possibility of launching a CBDC that would be primarily used for interbank transactions. From an estimated 35 nations in as recently as 2020, this is a significant jump.
- About 19 of the Group of Twenty (G20) countries are exploring the issuing of CBDCs and most of them have made progress beyond the initial research stage.

IPBES report finds invasive alien species

Context

- According to a major new report by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), more than 3,500 out of the 37,000 alien species that have been introduced by many human activities to regions and biomes around the world.
- The invasive alien species pose major global threats to nature, economy, food security and human health.

What is Invasive species

- Invasive species refer to non-native organisms that, when introduced to a new ecosystem, can cause significant harm to the environment, economy, or human health. These species often outcompete native

species for resources, disrupt ecological balances, and can lead to the decline or extinction of native species.

About IPBES

- Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an independent intergovernmental body established to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services, working in a similar way to the IPCC, which is the UN's climate science body.
- It was established in 2012.
- It was created to assess the state of biodiversity, the ecosystems that support it, and the contributions of biodiversity to people, as well as to promote the sustainable use of biodiversity and the conservation of ecosystems.

Finding of the report

- The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report, which noted that invasive alien species are one of the five major direct drivers of biodiversity loss globally, alongside land and sea use change, direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, and pollution.
- The water hyacinth is the world's most widespread invasive alien species on land. Lantana, a flowering shrub, and the black rat are the second and third most widespread globally.
- The brown rat and the house mouse are also widespread invasive alien species.

Region wise data

- The report found that 34% of the impacts of biological invasions were reported from the Americas, 31% from Europe and Central Asia, 25% from Asia and the Pacific and about 7% from Africa.
- Most negative impacts are reported on land (about 75%) especially in forests, woodlands and cultivated areas with considerably fewer reported in freshwater (14%) and marine (10%) habitats.
- Invasive alien species are most damaging on islands, with numbers of alien plants now exceeding the number of native plants on more than 25% of all islands.

IAF begins Western Air Command's annual exercise

Context

- The annual training exercise, Trishul, of the Western Air Command (WAC) of the Indian Air Force (IAF) began recently.
- The exercise will see activation of all air assets and force multipliers spread across the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China.
- The exercise is scheduled from September 4 to 14, 2023.
- The exercise will largely cover frontline bases in Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand.

Aim

- The aim of the exercise is to test the combat capabilities of the force and assess various operational dimensions.
- It will be one of the largest air exercises to be carried out by the Indian Air Force (IAF) in recent times.
- The exercise 'Trishul' is taking place amid the over three-year confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops as well as India's continuing frosty ties with Pakistan.

Emerging countries need women-led climate action

Context

- Gender equality and environmental goals are mutually reinforcing and create a virtuous circle that will help accelerate the achievement of the SDGs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021)
- The impact of climate change is one that has profound consequences for humans and has emerged as one of the biggest global challenges in recent decades.

- The effects of climate change vary according to location, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Impact of climate change on women

- An International Labour Organization study (2019) said that in 2030, 2.2 percent of total working hours worldwide will be lost to high temperatures, a productivity loss equivalent to 80 million full-time jobs".
- The United Nations (2009) highlighted that across genders, women are considered to be highly vulnerable and disproportionately affected by climate change than men to the impact of climate change.

Status in low-income countries

- Women across the world face severe risks to their health, safety, and quality of life.
- However, women in developing and less developed countries (especially in low-income areas) are more vulnerable to climate change because of their dependence on natural resources and labor-intensive work for their livelihood.
- Women are more likely to live in poverty than men.
- Women from low-income households are more at risk because they are more responsible for food, water, and other homely unpaid work.
- According to the ILO, over 60% of working women in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are still in agriculture, where they are often underpaid and overworked.

Gender-specific issues

- According to a UN study, most (80%) of those displaced by climate-related disasters are women and girls.
- Women, especially those from vulnerable communities, face particular difficulties during and after natural disasters.
- Women make up a disproportionately large portion of the agricultural workforce in emerging countries.
- Climate change impacts agricultural productivity negatively and significantly.
- Women engaged in agriculture do not have access to quality inputs and possess low education and technical knowledge.

Women's education and training

- When it comes to adjusting to a changing climate, women have a lot to offer. Investments in women's education, training, and access to resources are essential if we are to be resilient to the impact of climate change.
- For example, in India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) teaches women farmers how to respond to shifting climate patterns to support themselves better financially.
- Therefore, it is essential to support groups that educate the public, train people to adapt to climate change and invest in women's education and training in environmentally-friendly farming methods.

Way forward

- Women's participation in climate policy decision-making at all levels is crucial for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies as well as getting decent employment.
- As women face greater risks in climate change, gender parity in decision-making bodies is essential.
- Globally, similar efforts are required for efficient climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- In this context developing and emerging countries urgently need women-led climate action.

DATE- 04 SEP 2023

- **Status of the Right to Information Act**
- **DIKSHA e-education platform to offer AI help**
- **UPI crosses 10 billion transactions-mark**
- **Aditya-L1 'healthy', in new orbit**
- **Measuring hunger across States**

Status of the Right to Information Act

Context

- Right to Information Act, 2005 is an important milestone in the growth of the democratic system in our country.
- For 13 years, the Right to Information Act, 2005, helped citizens obtain information and data from Central and State institutions that are not readily available in the public domain.
- RTI mandates the government to provide a mechanism for timely response to the citizen who seeks information.
- The success of the RTI Act can be borne out from the fact that nearly 60 lakhs applications are filed every year.

Has the RTI Act been amended?

- Apart from allowing certain information to be kept secret for national security and sovereignty reasons, the RTI Act makes one exemption i.e. it prohibits the personal data disclosure of citizens by the government, unless there is an overriding public interest in doing so.
- The Right to Information (Amendment) Act, 2019 gave the Union Government unilateral power in deciding how long information commissioners, who hear appeals against unsatisfactory or absent RTI responses, can serve, and what their salaries are.
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, amended this qualified prohibition into a total prohibition.

Undermining of the RTI Act

- The RTI Act itself is not the only way activists see the transparency it has ushered in undermined.
- The RTI Act's implementation is dependent on subordinate rules made by the Union Government and State Governments.
- For instance, the simple matter of what payment method a public authority can accept is left to the States to decide.
- Some States like Tamil Nadu do not accept Indian Postal Orders (IPOs), which are cheques that can be bought at post offices and attached to an application as payment. IPOs are generally the easiest payment method to obtain.

Online RTIs

- Allowing RTI applications to be filed online largely removes some barriers — instead of obtaining uncommon financial instruments, citizens can simply file a request online and pay with UPI.
- However, many States do not have an online RTI portal, and even if they do, it is common for many State Government bodies to simply not be registered on the portal.
- The Union Government's RTI portal was launched in 2013 is also past its prime.
- The RTI online portal allowed citizens to have their personal particulars filled in on each application by default.

What next

- Beyond the evident structural problems that institutions and websites for RTI pose, dissatisfaction is growing at the most basic level.
- This indicates that people are increasingly dissatisfied with the information they are receiving from public officials.
- While activists have long warned of the weakening of the RTI Act, most of the damage they have seen is not merely from changes in the text of the law, but from the ways that various institutions across different Government apparatuses discharge their duties.

DIKSHA e-education platform to offer AI help

Context
- The National e-Governance Division (NeGD) of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) is set to integrate Personalised Adaptive Learning (PAL) into its existing Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing (DIKSHA) platform.
- The PAL's software-based approach is expected to allow each student to have an individualized learning experience over the course of the curriculum based on their unique needs and abilities.

About DIKSHA
- DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing) is a national platform for school education, an initiative of National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), Ministry of Education.
- It was developed based on the core principles of open architecture, open access, open licensing, choice and autonomy.
- DIKSHA is built on open source technology that is made in India and for India, incorporating internet scale technologies and allowing for a variety of use-cases and solutions for teaching and learning.
- However, DIKSHA is a static content repository.

Massive exercise
- Building the Personalized Adaptive Learning (PAL) is a massive exercise.
- Content from across subjects will have to be categorized and different chunks will have to be tagged.
- New content may also have to be created.
- The Tagging of content is important to create learning loops.

Experiments in States
- Andhra Pradesh has signed contracts with three privately owned edtech companies — Reliance Jio Platform's start-up Embibe, ConveGenius, and Mindspark for training teachers to use IT applications in the classroom, provide analytics for remedial learning, and help students improve their conceptual understanding.
- Madhya Pradesh is also mulling over introducing PAL for students from Classes 6 to 10 on its flagship State education portal, the CM-RISE.

UPI crosses 10 billion transactions -mark

Context
- According to National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions, for the first time, crossed 10 billion mark in August.
- As of August 30, UPI reported 10.24 billion transactions during the month and the transaction value stood at Rs 15.18 lakh crore
- UPI is a real-time payment system developed by the NPCI.
- NPCI is an umbrella organisation for all retail payment systems in India.

Future target
- The 10 billion milestone for August, 2023 was a forgone conclusion when the platform reached 9.89 billion in July.
- NPCI is targeting around 30 billion transactions a month or one billion transactions a day within the next two to three years.
- During festive season months like in October and November, the platform sees outperformance compared to other months.

Digital public infrastructure
- India's presidency of the G20 has played up the country's efforts at creating digital public infrastructure of which UPI is a key part.

- The platform has also explored other nations' interest to adopt the underlying technologies that power India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) push, which it brands as the India Stack.

Marketing openness strategy

- A model that India has come to pioneer has been to create underlying technology – which remains under the government's control and allow private entities to use it to offer services and build products.
- The same is true of UPI, and Aadhaar, two crucial elements of the India Stack.
- India Stack is the moniker for a set of digital codes and digital public goods that aim to unlock the economic primitives of identity, data, and payments at population scale.
- The overall architecture has three key layers – identity, payments, and data management.

Aditya-L1 'healthy', in new orbit

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) today stated it has successfully performed the first earth-bound manoeuvre of the country's maiden solar mission, Aditya L1, from ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network Work (ISTRAC) in Bengaluru, Karnataka.
- The space agency also said the satellite is healthy and operating nominally.

Operations

- After the successful launch, the ISRO said that Aditya-L1 started generating power as the solar panels were deployed.
- Aditya-L1 will stay on earth-bound orbits for 16 days, during which it will undergo five manoeuvres to gain the necessary velocity for its journey.
- Subsequently, Aditya-L1 undergoes a Trans-Lagrangian1 insertion manoeuvre, marking the beginning of its 110-day trajectory to the destination around the L1 Lagrange point.

Objectives of Aditya-L1 mission

- Study of Solar upper atmospheric (chromosphere and corona) dynamics.
- Study of chromosphere and coronal heating, physics of the partially ionized plasma, initiation of the coronal mass ejections, and flares
- Observe the in-situ particle and plasma environment providing data for the study of particle dynamics from the Sun.
- Physics of solar corona and its heating mechanism.
- Diagnostics of the coronal and coronal loops plasma: Temperature, velocity, and density.
- Magnetic field topology and magnetic field measurements in the solar corona.
- Drivers for space weather (origin, composition and dynamics of solar wind.

Measuring hunger across States

Context

- Food insecurity, hunger, and child malnutrition have been persistent challenges in India for many years.
- These issues are complex and multifaceted, with various factors contributing to their prevalence.
- Food insecurity refers to the lack of consistent access to enough safe and nutritious food to lead an active and healthy life.

Poor outcome

- Despite being a major food producer with extensive food security schemes and the largest public distribution system in the world, India still grapples with significant levels of food insecurity, hunger, and child malnutrition.
- The Global Hunger Index (GHI), 2022, ranked India 107 among 121 countries, behind Nigeria (103) and Pakistan (99). The GHI provides a composite measurement and tracks undernourishment and hunger at the national level across three dimensions: calorie undernourishment, child malnutrition, and under-five mortality.

- According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report of 2022, India is home to 224.3 million undernourished people.

The State Hunger Index

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is computed using four indicators:
  - Prevalence of calorie undernourishment
  - Stunting
  - Wasting, and mortality among children below the age of five
  - Under-five mortality rate
- The State Hunger Index (SHI) is calculated using the same indicators except calorie undernourishment, which is replaced by body mass index (BMI) undernourishment among the working-age population, as data on calorie undernourishment are not available since 2012.

National Family Health Survey-V

- The Data for stunting, wasting, and mortality among children below the age of five are sourced from the fifth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), while the prevalence of BMI undernourishment is computed using NFHS-5 (2019-21) and Wave 1 of the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (2017-18).
- As per report of NFHS-5 (2019-21), the nutrition indicators for children under 5 years have improved as compared with NFHS-4 (2015-16).
- Stunting has reduced from 38.4% to 35.5%, Wasting has reduced from 21.0% to 19.3% and Underweight prevalence has reduced from 35.8% to 32.1%.

States's SHI performance

- In the State Hunger Index report, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh scored 35, which places them in the 'alarming' category. Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, and West Bengal all scored above the national average (29).
- The performance of these States resembles that of African nations such as Haiti, Niger, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- On the other hand, Chandigarh scored 12, and Sikkim, Puducherry, and Kerala all scored below 16.
- These States, along with Manipur, Mizoram, Punjab, Delhi, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Tamil Nadu, fall under the 'moderate hunger' category.
- All the other States, which scored below the national average and above 20, have a problem of 'serious hunger'.
- No State falls under the 'low hunger' category.

Facing the reality

- Over the last half a decade, India's GHI score has deteriorated primarily due to the increasing prevalence of calorie undernourishment. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the proportion of calorie undernourishment in India has been escalating since 2017, reaching 16.3% in 2020, equivalent to the 2009 statistic.
- While the GHI has faced significant criticism from experts regarding its conceptualization, indicator selection, and aggregation methods, it does provide critical insight into the state of undernourishment and child nutrition.

Conclusion

- Despite the efforts made by the government of India and various NGOs, these issues persist in many parts of the country.
- Factors such as population growth, regional disparities, and environmental challenges like droughts and floods also contribute to the complexity of addressing food insecurity, hunger, and child malnutrition in India.
- Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes economic development, agricultural reforms, healthcare improvements, and social safety nets to ensure that all citizens have access to nutritious food and can lead healthy lives.

02.09.2023

- **Aditya-L1: India's first solar observatory mission**
- **Panel to explore possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'**
- **Progress report for mission to clean the Ganga**
- **GST revenue eases to 3-month low**
- **Ahead of G20, India's road safety challenge**

Aditya-L1: India's first solar observatory mission

Context

- India's first solar observatory mission, Aditya-L1, will be launched on board the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set for the launch of the Aditya-L1 mission from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.
- Fifteen years in the making, this is the first time ISRO is sending out back-to-back space exploration missions.

Aditya-L1 mission

- Aditya L1 is India's first space-based solar probe that aims to study solar winds, which can cause disturbance on earth and are commonly seen as "auroras".
- This PSLV-C57/Aditya-L1 mission can be counted as one of the longest missions involving ISRO's workhorse launch vehicle.
- Aditya L1 will aim for Lagrange 1 or L1 point between Earth and the Sun, which is roughly 1% of the 150 million km distance between the two

Aim and significance

- The Aditya L-1 payloads are expected to provide crucial information to understand the problem of:
  - Coronal heating
  - Coronal mass ejection
  - Pre-flare and flare activities and their characteristics
  - Dynamics of space weather
  - Propagation of particles and fields etc.

Panel to explore the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'

Context

- The Union government has formed a panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the possibility of 'One Nation, One Election'.
- It aims at holding of general and state elections simultaneously.
- The move comes a day after the government recently called a special session of Parliament.
- The centre has been pushing the idea of simultaneous Lok Sabha and state assembly polls for a while.

Upcoming elections

- Assembly polls in five states - Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram - are due in November-December, and the Lok Sabha polls are expected to be held around May next year.

One Nation, One Election

- The idea has been mooted several times previously and has been studied by the Law Commission of India.
- The main idea is that polls for Lok Sabha and all state assemblies across India will be held simultaneously.

- The central government has been citing financial burden caused by the continuous election cycle and an obstacle to development work during polls.

Advantages

- The concept of One Nation, One Election calls for reduction in the cost of conducting elections
- It will also ease the burden on administrative and security forces who otherwise are engaged multiple times in election duties
- Government can focus more on governance rather than being in an election mode
- Simultaneous elections, according to the Law Commission, will increase voter turnout because it will be more easy for people to cast many ballots at once.

Disadvantages

- For incorporating One Nation, One Election, changes would be required in the Constitution and other legal frameworks
- Regional issues might get overshadowed by the national issues
- Agreement among all political parties remains a significant hurdle

Progress report for mission to clean the Ganga

Context

- In the seven years since the government unveiled its ambitious ₹20,000-crore National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), it has installed treatment plants capable of treating just 20% of the sewage estimated to be generated in the five major States that lie along the river.
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) is a government initiative in India aimed at cleaning and rejuvenating the Ganges River, one of the most sacred and culturally significant rivers in India.
- This is expected to increase to about 33% by 2024.

Treatment plants

- According to the latest projections by the NMCG, the treatment plants will be capable of treating 60% of sewage by December 2026.
- These calculations are premised on sewage to the tune of 11,765 million liters per day (MLD) being generated in the five States — Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and West Bengal.
- This figure derives from a report submitted to the National Green Tribunal earlier this year.

National Mission for Clean Ganga

- The National Mission for Clean Ganga was launched in 2014 as a comprehensive and integrated effort to address the pollution and degradation of the Ganges River.
- The mission was established as a part of the Namami Gange program, which seeks to achieve the twin objectives of cleaning the Ganges and conserving its ecosystem.
- The main objective of the Namami Gange mission is to ensure that no untreated sewage flows into the river.

STPs and sewerage networks

- Projects to set up Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) and sewerage networks are at the heart of the Namami Gange mission and account for about 80% of the overall project outlay.
- As of July 2023, STPs capable of treating 2,665 MLD have actually been commissioned, and are now functional.
- From 2014, when the mission was first announced, to 2021, only 811 MLD of capacity was completed.

GST revenue eases to 3-month low

Context

- According to the data from ministry of finance ministry, the central and state governments collected ₹1.59 trillion in Goods and Service Tax (GST) revenue in August, an increase of 11% year-on-year, but lower than the mop-up in June.
- Monthly GST collection was at ₹1.65 trillion in June, 2023.
- The ministry said that revenue from import of goods was 3% higher year-on-year in August while revenues from domestic transactions (including import of services) was 14% higher.

States Performance
- Major state economies Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu reported double digit annual growth rate in GST collections.
- While Maharashtra reported a strong 23% jump in GST revenue to ₹23,282 crores in August, Karnataka saw a 16% jump in revenue to ₹11,116 crores and Gujarat a 12% jump to ₹9,765 crores.

Expert opinion
- Experts also said that while GST collections remain robust, there are some factors that could dampen revenue receipts in the future.
- The headline GST number is marginally lower than the agency's forecast, dampened by imports, which is a matter of commodity prices.
- The overall collection so far this year remains robust.

Ahead of G20, India's road safety challenge

Context
- India faces significant road safety challenges due to a combination of factors, including rapid urbanization, a large and diverse population, inadequate infrastructure, lax enforcement of traffic rules, and a growing number of vehicles on the road.

Death toll in road crashes in India
- According to ministry of road and transport, India witnessed as many as 4,12,432 road accidents in 2021 in which 1,53,972 people were killed.
- Road accidents decreased by 8.1 percent and injuries decreased by 14.8 percent in 2021 compared to 2019.
- Fatalities, however, on accounts of road accidents increased by 1.9 percent in 2021 corresponding to the same period in 2019.
- While the death toll in road crashes in India and several other developing countries continues to be high, the level of public awareness today is greater than ever.

World Bank on road safety
- The World Bank notes that improving road safety in India is vital to the nation's health, well-being, and economic growth.
- The already-deprived sections of society are the most vulnerable to road crashes — they include road users like pedestrians, cyclists, two-wheelers, and unprotected children.
- Close to 70 per cent of the fatalities on the roads are people belonging to the economically productive section of the population.

G20 and Road safety
- Road safety is intrinsically linked with the G20's main agenda of economic growth and prosperity.
- However, the issue does not seem to have received headline space on the group's agenda so far.
- In 2016, international road safety organisations requested G20 leaders to support the UN goal of halving the death toll on roads by 2030.
- The ongoing events of the G20 under India's presidency raise fresh hopes of tackling the persisting challenges of road safety.

Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019

- In 2019, India enacted the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 a powerful modern tool, which, if systematically implemented, would make the country's roads significantly safer.
- However, several well-framed public programmes do not give the desired results because their implementation is not systematically monitored and evaluated, and accountability is not fixed.
- The Centre and some state governments do have an excellent record in completing development projects, including by making imaginative use of information technology.

Need of the hour

- There is a pressing necessity to think afresh and bring about a significant reduction in the number of road crashes.
- An approach that fixes accountability needs to be drawn up urgently.
- The G20 countries can convene a special meeting to formally take note of this grave challenge and deliberate on possible result-oriented solutions.
- G20 members with commendable road safety records can partner with some of the countries struggling to tackle this challenge.
- The G20 should urge the countries concerned to frame a plan that sets targets for reducing the number of road accidents.

Conclusion

- The road safety situation in India is a matter of great concern, and addressing these challenges is crucial to reducing the high number of road traffic accidents and fatalities in the country.
- It is high time to remind all global stakeholders to pay special attention to road safety. Individual nations, and the international community at large, seem to realize the urgency of the matter.
- There is also a case for the G20 to pay attention to the issue.

01.09.2023

- **Centre calls for special session of Parliament**
- **India sees the lowest August rainfall in a century**
- **ONDC a pivotal force set to enhance digital commerce**
- **Other Asian countries reject China's new map**
- **Omission of disability-related questions from NFHS-6**

Centre calls for special session of Parliament

Context

- The Union government recently announced a "special session" of Parliament for five days between September 18 and 22, 203023.
- The Special Session of Parliament (13th Session of 17th Lok Sabha and 261st Session of Rajya Sabha) is having five sittings.
- The "special session" could see parliamentary operations being shifted to the new Parliament building.

First such special session

- The upcoming session will be the first such special session under the nine years of the NDA-led government.
- Earlier to this government had convened a special joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to mark the midnight GST roll-out in June, 2017.
- Generally, three parliamentary sessions are held in a year- Budget, Monsoon and Winter sessions.

Possible Area of discussion

- Reservation for women in directly elected legislatures like Lok Sabha and assemblies.

- Recent historic success of the Chandrayaan-3 missions
- India's goals for 'Amrit Kaal'

Concern by Oppositions
- The Opposition leaders questioned the way the session was announced through a social media post without a proper notification.
- The Shiv Sena questioned the dates of the session as it clashed with Ganesh Chaturthi.

India sees the lowest August rainfall in a century

Context
- According to data compiled by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), India witnessed the driest August in more than a century as the country received 36% less rainfall than normal in 2023.
- As per the data, the country has received 10% lower rainfall than normal from June 1 to August 31.
- The monsoon, vital for Indian economy, delivers nearly 70% of the rain India needs to water farms and refill reservoirs and aquifers.

Geographic phenomenon
- With the strengthening of the El Nino and unfavorable conditions in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, August rainfall has been markedly deficient in most of India, except in northeastern India.
- El Nino refers to a warming of the central Pacific that usually translates to deficient monsoon rainfall over India.
- The Himalayan States, and parts of Tamil Nadu, show data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Earlier rainfall deficits
- The last time India recorded such severe deficits in August was in 2005, when the shortfall was about 25% of the normal, and in 2009, when India saw its biggest drought in half a century and August rainfall was 24% less than normal.
- Rainfall in August has brought the overall national deficit to 10%, with the regional deficits being 17% in east and northeast India, 10% in central India, and 17% in southern India.

ONDC a pivotal force set to enhance digital commerce

Context
- The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) has emerged as a transformative initiative by the Government of India to revolutionize the digital commerce landscape.
- ONDC holds tremendous potential for nurturing a hyper-local digital commerce environment.
- By leveraging technology, collaboration, and inclusion, ONDC aims to empower businesses and consumers alike, driving economic growth and innovation across India.

Deloitte's whitepaper
- The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) will be a pivotal force enhancing India's digital commerce sector, which is projected to touch $350 billion by 2030.
- The ONDC framework, building on India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), presents an opportunity for businesses of all sizes to connect and transact seamlessly, the paper observed.

Contributions
- On the agriculture front, through ONDC farmers could gain direct access to buyers while Farmers Producer Organisations (FPOs) can establish direct connections with potential clients, bypassing intermediaries.
- This integration optimizes the value chain, facilitating trade amongst stakeholders, as per the study.
- At present, e-commerce represents just about 4.3% of retail commerce in India.

About ONDC

- ONDC is a freely accessible government-backed platform that aims to democratize e-commerce by moving it from a platform-centric model to an open network for buying and selling of goods and services.
- Under ONDC, it is envisaged that a buyer registered on one participating e-commerce site (like, Amazon) may purchase goods from a seller on another participating e-commerce site (Flipkart).

Other Asian countries reject China's new map

Context

- The Chinese government recently released the "2023 edition of the standard map of China", which continues to show the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin region within China's borders.
- After India, governments of Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan have joined rejected China's new national map, issuing strongly worded statements accusing China of claiming their territory.
- The Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources issued on August 28 a controversial map that includes the nine-dash line, now a 10-dash line, that supposedly shows China's boundaries in the South China Sea.

Response by India and Philippine

- India on lodged a strong protest with China over its so-called "standard map" laying claim over Arunachal Pradesh and the Aksai Chin, and asserted that such steps only complicate the resolution of the boundary question.
- The External Affairs Ministry also rejected China's claims as having "no basis".
- The Philippine government slammed China's 2023 edition of its so-called "standard map" that still shows swaths of Philippine features in the West Philippine Sea.
- The Philippines, therefore, calls on China to act responsibly and abide by its obligations under UNCLOS and the final and binding 2016 Arbitral Award.

Omission of disability-related questions from NFHS-6

Context

- In May, the government decided to omit disability-related questions from the sixth round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6).
- This decision seems to have been taken discounting the fact that persons with disabilities constitute approximately 2.21 per cent of the country's population 2.68 crore people as per the 2011 Census.
- These numbers are under-representative today, owing not only to the population upsurge in the last decade but also since they represent only the seven defined categories of disabilities.

Disability in NFHS-6

- The NFHS is carried out every 3 years with countrywide sampling to collect data on health, education, nutrition, mortality and sanitation, among others.
- Disability was one of the new topics included in the 2019-2021 NFHS-5.
- The reason for this omission is, reportedly, the difficulty the surveyors faced last time in processing accurate data.

Concept of invisible disabilities

- The 2021 Statistical Profile report, which documented that nearly 24 lakh persons were affected by mental health-related illnesses, also failed to identify or acknowledge the concept of invisible disabilities.
- Only the symptoms which may accompany invisible disabilities were alluded to under the categories of "mental retardation", "mental" and "any other".

Concerns

- Despite the passage of a decade since the 2011 Census, the Government of India (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation) report on 'Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) in India — A Statistical Profile: 2021' refers to only eight categories of disabilities.

- It fails to acknowledge and account for the 21 categories of disabilities recognised in law after the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPWDA).
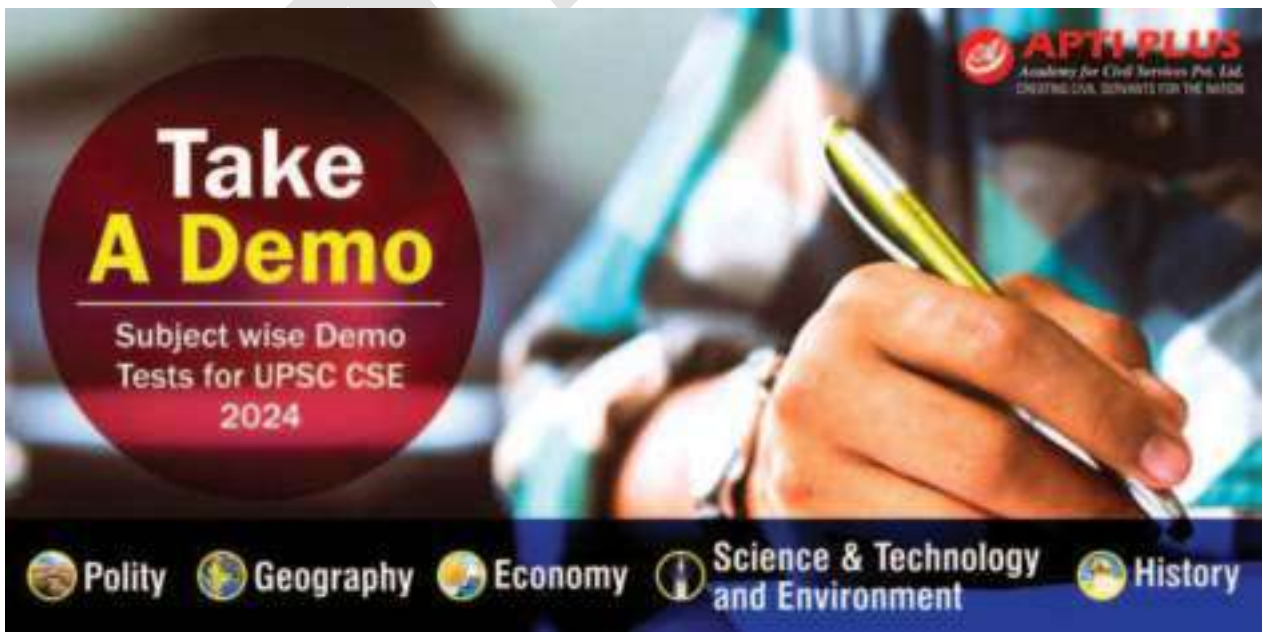
Regular data collection

- The need for regular data collection is significant not only for meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also for compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Sections 28 and 27 of the RPWDA mandate the government to promote research and formulate schemes to safeguard and empower persons with disabilities.
- Section 25 calls for surveys, investigations, and disability-centreing research by the government.

Strategy for New India @ 75

- The Niti Aayog's visionary blueprint, 'Strategy for New India @ 75', which delineates the government's goals for 2022-23, recognizes the challenges posed due to a lack of detailed data in drafting policies for persons with disabilities.
- Recent reports highlight the pressing need for inclusive measures to transcend beyond handrails, ramps, and tactile flooring, and become an integral policy aspect.

Way forward

- Activists point out that data collected as part of the NFHS is valuable to shaping policies and the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for vulnerable groups.
- The dropping of disability-related questions is questionable considering the 2030 deadline for realizing the SDG targets.
- It is particularly regressive given that India is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and SGDs Article 31.
- NFHS is collecting a broad range of data on family, health status, health services, access to sanitation, domestic violence etc. that feed into various country wide policies and programmes.
- It is therefore vital that they include disability in the questionnaire.

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OCTOBER
2023

31.10.2023

- **ICMR study on consequences of COVID-19 vaccines**
- **India seeks formal talks on WTO dispute settlement reform**
- **Expansion of settlements into flood-prone areas**
- **New mushroom species from the Western Ghats**
- **Indians are choking on pollution**

ICMR study on consequences of COVID-19 vaccines

Context

- The study by the Indian Council of Medical Research, which investigated sudden deaths among healthy adults aged 18-45 in India, also revealed that Covid-19 vaccination did not increase the risk of sudden death.

Findings and observation

- According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study, titled **"Factors associated with sudden deaths among adults aged 18 to 45 in India",** COVID-19 vaccination did not increase the risk of sudden death among young adults, but health issues and lifestyle factors appear to play a more prominent role in these events.
- In fact, the study finds that COVID-19 vaccination reduced the risk of sudden deaths among adults.
- The study noted that factors that did increase the chances of sudden death includes:
  o Having a family history of sudden death
  o Being in the hospital for COVID-19 in the past
  o Certain behaviors such as binge drinking and intense physical activity shortly before death.

Caution for physical activity

- The union Health minister quoted the study of ICMR, and warned that those who had severe COVID-19 should avoid intense physical activity for 1-2 years to lower heart attack risks.
- Recently, there have been multiple reports of heart-related deaths in Gujarat during the Navratri festivities.

India seeks formal talks on WTO dispute settlement reform

Context

- India has called WTO members to begin formal negotiations on reforming the World Trade Organization's Dispute Settlement Body, highlighting that current informal discussions hinder participation for many nations.

India's proactive efforts

- The recently concluded G-20 Declaration reaffirms commitment to World Trade Organization (WTO) reform, emphasizing the improvement of its functions and a proactive approach to discussions.
- A fully accessible dispute settlement system for all members is targeted by 2024.
- India pitches for clear definition of e-commerce trade in goods, services in WTO
- At the 'Senior Officials' meeting of the WTO in Geneva.
- India asked for shifting of negotiations to a more formal setting of a committee so that other members can deploy resources and participate in the discussions.

Function of WTO Dispute Settlement System

- Resolve Disputes: Addresses trade conflicts among member countries.
- Enforce Rulings: Issues binding decisions, ensuring compliance.
- Appellate Review: Provides a mechanism for appeals, ensuring fairness.
- Maintain Stability: Ensures coherence and predictability in global trade.

Dysfunctional dispute settlement system

- The dispute settlement system at the WTO has been in limbo since the US in 2017 started blocking appointments to the appellate body of the dispute settlement system as the judges there retired.
- By 2019 the system became non-functional.
- Since 2020 all seven seats of the appellate body have been vacant.
- This has resulted in a situation where rulings by the dispute settlement body of the WTO cannot be implemented as the system of appeal is not available.

Expansion of settlements into flood-prone areas

Context

- According to a study led by the World Bank and published in Nature in October, flood risk in many cities is rising because they are expanding into flood-prone areas.

Finding of the study

- According to the paper, since 1985, human settlements in flood-prone areas have more than doubled.
- Experts say the findings spotlight the risk of unsustainable urbanization in India.
- The study also found that middle-income countries like India have more urban settlements in flood-prone zones than low- and high-income countries.
- India's urban areas have been flooding more and more often, destroying lives and livelihoods.

How is India at risk

- According to researcher at the Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS), India is not among the 20 countries whose settlements are most exposed to flood hazards, but it was the third highest contributor to global settlements, after China and the U.S., and also third after China and Vietnam.
- The risks are disproportionately higher for those living in informal structures.

Way out

- As cities continue to expand, we can no longer avoid expanding into flood-prone areas. Market forces tend to push expansion into flood-prone areas.
- We need to differentiate between low-income residents and unauthorized structures erected for the elite.
- Every city needs to do a proper scientific mapping of the flood prone areas.

New mushroom species from the Western Ghats

Context

- A new species of mushroom found on the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) at Palode in Thiruvananthapuram.

About

- The new species has been named Candolleomyces albosquamosus.
- A tiny, fragile-looking mushroom sporting a honey-yellow 'cap' found on the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute (JNTBGRI) in Thiruvananthapuram.
- The discovery gives fresh impetus to the study of the region's fungal diversity.
- The new species had turned the spotlight once again on the remarkable Western Ghats biodiversity.
- The discovery of a new species of the genus Candolleomyces in India is special given that there are only 35 species in this genus worldwide.

# Indians are choking on pollution

Context

- A recent report of the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI), published by Michael Greenstone from the Energy Policy Institute of the University of Chicago (EPIC), estimated that Indians were losing 5.3 years of life expectancy on average due to the health effects of air pollution.
- The estimate for Delhi was worse, with life lost estimated to be 11.9 years.
- Delhi features at the top or near the top of the world's most polluted cities.

IQAir list

- Delhi is not alone among the Indian cities.
- In a 2022 list of the 50 most polluted cities put out by IQAir, a Swiss air quality information platform, 39 of them are Indian.
- Rural areas too are not free of pollution, as dust from unpaved roads and smoke from burnt biomass fuels meet fossil fuel emissions of vehicular intrusions from encroaching modernity.

Major pollutants

- Pollutants that are monitored for air quality include particulate matter less than 10 and 2.5 microns per cubic meter (PM 10 and PM 2.5 respectively), nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, ammonia and lead.
- Besides these, benzene and formaldehyde from wildfire emissions can lead to cancer. Cadmium too is an air pollutant, especially from cigarette smoke.
- "Fine particulate pollution" refers to particles less than 2.5 microns being suspended in the air.
- There is growing concern about "ultra-fine particles" that are smaller than 0.1 microns in diameter and can bypass entrapment in the lungs to enter the bloodstream.
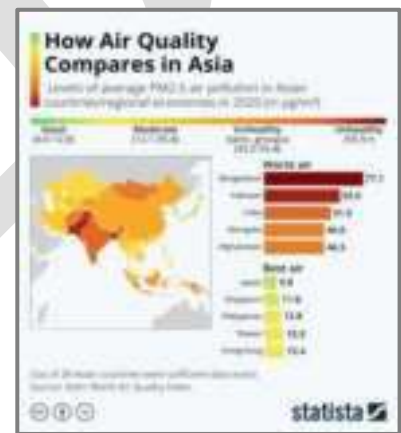
Sources of Particulate matter

- Particulate matter comes from line sources (vehicles), point sources (power plants, factories), area sources (garbage dump sites, sewage treatment plants) and natural sources (forest fires, volcanic eruptions).
- Diesel fuel emissions, and road and construction dust are important contributors year-round, with stubble burning as a seasonal culprit.
- Household air pollution comes from the use of biomass fuels and open fire-cooking stoves.

Consequences of air pollution

- It is now known that long-term exposure to air pollution can raise:
  o Blood pressure (hypertension)
  o Cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, and peripheral vascular disease
  o Cancers
  o Risk of diabetes
  o Dementia and cataracts
  o Risks of chronic lung disease and asthma

Way forward

- The protection will come from:
  o Clean transport (like electric vehicles)
  o Increased use of public transport in place of personal vehicles
  o Rapid transition to renewable energy sources from fossil fuels
  o Cessation of stubble
  o Garbage burning
  o Good construction practices

- o Efficient debris disposal
- To safeguard public health, India must intensify efforts against ambient air pollution.
- Strong public policies, strict enforcement, continuous monitoring, and adaptive innovations based on reliable data are essential to improve outdoor air quality and protect people from health issues.

30.10.2023

- **The Indian Railways' revenue problem**
- **Developed Countries failing to Meet 2030 carbon emissions goal**
- **India discusses west Asia security with Egypt**
- **Study on hypertension flags disparities in care**
- **A war where humanity is on trial now**

The Indian Railways' revenue problem

Context

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report presented in Parliament on i in August, 2023 states that there was a loss of ₹68,269 crore in all classes of passenger services during 2021-22.

Capital expenditure

- Indian Railways has significantly increased capital expenditure since merging its rail budget with the main budget.
- Despite this, the operating ratio, indicating expenses versus revenue, hasn't improved. A lower ratio signifies better profitability and funds for investments.

Capex spending in Indian Railways

Trap of rising debt

- Since the Indian Railways continues to have a total lack of surplus, it has been augmenting the funds raised through Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) and Extra Budgetary Resources (EBS).
- The merging of budgets helped this cause as GBS from the central government could be increased without much scrutiny.
- Debt repayment now takes up 17% of revenue, up from 10% in 2015-16.
- Despite this, heavy investment in railways is seen as essential for economic growth, creating jobs and boosting tax revenue.

Identifying the problem

- The IR's freight segment is profitable whereas the passenger segment makes huge losses.
- The latest CAG report noted that there was a loss of ₹68,269 crore in all classes of passenger services during 2021-22.
- The annual growth in freight volume and revenue of the IR in the period April-July 2023 stand at 1% and 3% respectively, while the economy grows at 7%.

IR's transport basket

- The 11 commodities in the IR's transport basket account for 90% of tonnage and revenue, of which coal is around 45% and iron ore and cement are around 10% each. Although these three still account for two thirds of the IR's total freight volume.
- The share of Exim containers moving in and out of ports hovered between 10% and 18% since its introduction in 2009-10, with the 2021-22 figure being 13%.

- The private container train operation policy, initiated in 2006 to boost the rail share of container movement, has not made any significant dent in improving the share.
- Further, IR is the constantly fluctuating key index of Net Tonne Kilometres (NTKM), which fell for two successive years in 2015-16 and 2016-17 by 4% and 5% over the preceding years.

Developed Countries failing to Meet 2030 carbon emissions goal

Context

- A recent study by Council for Energy Environment and Water (CEEW) revealed that developed countries, which are accountable for three-fourths of current carbon emissions, will end up emitting 38% more carbon in 2030 than their committed targets, based on current trends.

28th Conference of Parties

- The study, which comes ahead of the 28th Conference of Parties (COP-28) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to be held in Dubai in November and December, shows that 83% of this overshoot will be caused by the U.S., Russia, and the European Union.
- At COP-28, countries are expected to give an account of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which are their commitments to the UN on emission cuts.

Finding

- The Council for Energy Environment and Water (CEEW) study highlighted that the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of developed nations are insufficient to meet the necessary global average emission reduction of 43% below 2019 levels required to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Currently, developed countries' combined NDCs only achieve a 36% reduction.
- To prevent crossing critical climate thresholds, developed nations have been mandated through years of negotiations to take the lead in global greenhouse gas reduction efforts by setting legally binding emission targets.
- Collectively, developed countries were to reduce emissions by 5% from their 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012, and by 18% during 2013 to 2020.

Net zero carbon emissions

- Many nations aim for net zero carbon emissions by 2050, demanding consistent, substantial reductions each decade.
- To limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, developed countries must cut emissions by 43% below 2019 levels by 2030.
- However, the CEEW study indicates their current paths suggest only an 11% reduction by that time.
- Except for two countries — Belarus and Norway none of the developed countries seem to be on the path to meet their 2030 targets, though Japan and Kazakhstan are close, and are expected to miss their targets by only a single percentage point.

# India discusses west Asia security with Egypt

Context

- The Prime Minister of India spoke to Egyptian President to discuss the security and humanitarian situation in West Asia amid the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Call for peace and stability

- Both, India and Egypt underscored the urgent need for restoring peace and stability while facilitating humanitarian assistance in the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict.
- The leaders emphasized the seriousness of the ongoing escalation, noting its significant impact on civilian lives and the region's overall security.

India abstained from resolution

- India abstained in the UN General Assembly on the resolution as India underscored that terrorism is a "malignancy" and the world should not buy into any justification of terror acts.
- The resolution titled 'Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations' was overwhelmingly adopted with 121 nations voting in favor, 14 against and 44 abstentions.
- Along with India, countries abstaining on the resolution included Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.
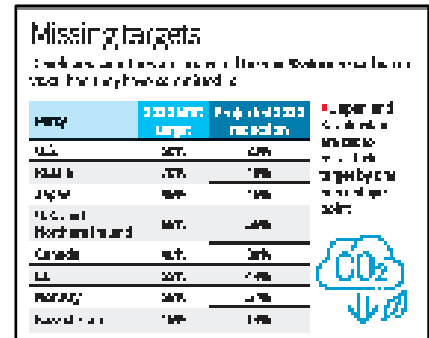
Study on hypertension flags disparities in care

Context

- India's first district-level study on hypertension published in JAMA Network, a journal published by the American Medical Association flags disparities in care.

Variations in blood pressure diagnosis

- The study found that there were substantial variations across districts in blood pressure diagnosis, treatment, and control.
- The researchers said that the national mean values of hypertension "hide considerable" variation at the district level.
- It recommended a critical public health strategy to improve care "targeted, decentralised solutions" at the district level.
- The findings of the study showed that despite health being a state subject, there was a need for more autonomy at the district level.
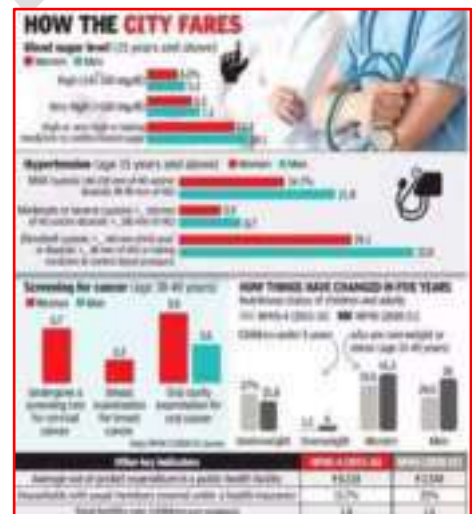
WHO report

- According to a recent WHO report, 188.3 million people in India suffer from hypertension.
- But only 37% get diagnosed, only 30% start treatment, and only 15% manage to keep their blood pressure under control.
- It estimated that at least 4.6 million deaths in India can be prevented by 2040 if half of those with the condition manage to keep their blood pressure under control.

A war where humanity is on trial now

Context

- On October 7, 2023, on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, Hamas launched a brutal attack on Israel, killing more than a thousand people, mostly civilians, and kidnapping over 200 more.
- The unprecedented attack was devastating for Israel.
- The power of the Israeli state is now focused on exacting revenge from a population that is largely as helpless as it is blameless.

Indiscriminate destruction
- The ongoing war between Hamas and Israel is now described, entire families have been wiped out and neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble.
- Palestinian population faces a severe humanitarian crisis with inadequate medical facilities, lack of essential resources like water, food, and electricity.
- This denial amounts to collective punishment.
- The prospects for the future are ominous.

Concern
- The Israeli government is making a grievous error in equating the actions of Hamas with the Palestinian people.
- In its determination to destroy Hamas, it has unleashed indiscriminate death and destruction against the ordinary people of Gaza.
- There can be no peace without justice.
- Israel's ongoing 15-year blockade has turned Gaza into an "open-air prison" for its densely populated two million inhabitants, trapped in cities and refugee camps.

The world must act
- There are voices on both sides speaking for an end to human suffering war.
- Many Israelis, having lost friends and family in the terror attacks, still believe that a dialogue with the Palestinians is the only way forward.
- Many Palestinians acknowledge that violence will only lead to more suffering and take them further away from their dream of a life of self-respect, equality, and dignity.
- The loudest and most powerful voices should be for a cessation of military activity.

27.10.2023

- **Foundation for Amrit Vatika**
- **Panel holds back report on crime bills**
- **After 5G success, India aims to lead in 6G**
- **PM calls for self-reliance in cybersecurity**
- **Women can make the world better**

Foundation for Amrit Vatika

Context
- Prime Minister will lay foundation for Amrit Vatika which is a finale event of the Meri Maati Mera Desh campaign at Kartavya Path in New Delhi.

About Amrit Vatika
- The Amrit Vatika will be situated adjacent to the Netaji Bose statue under the Grand Canopy and the National War Memorial.
- This will be the newest landmark will celebrate 75 years of Independence and honor the valor of the unsung freedom fighters.
- The Amrit Vatika, a memorial lawn will have an area of 12,000 sqm.
- The soil from across 766 districts has been collected.

Amrit Kalash Yatris
- The government has arranged for over 20,000 Amrit Kalash Yatris from the states and UTs to arrive at the national capital by special trains and buses, who will be led by their respective MPs for the two-day carnival at Kartavya Path.

Meri Maati Mera Desh campaign

- The 'Meri Maati Mera Desh' campaign is a part of the larger 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' initiative launched by the Centre earlier this year to commemorate 75 years of India's independence.
- The initiative aims to showcase India's progress and potential in various fields, as well as to inspire and empower the youth to contribute towards nation-building.
- This initiative aims to honor and commemorate the sacrifices of martyrs.
- It includes freedom fighters, defense personnel, and members of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and State Police, who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

Panel holds back report on crime bills

Context

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs postponed its adoption of a draft report on three Bills seeking to replace the existing criminal laws, after pressure from the Opposition parties seeking more time to examine it.

About the new crime bills

- The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill 2023 were introduced in the Lower House of Parliament on August 11.
- These bills seek to replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 respectively.
- The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, which will replace CrPC, will now have 533 sections.
- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, which will replace the IPC, will have 356 sections instead of the earlier 511 sections.
- Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, which will replace the Evidence Act, will now have 170 sections instead of the earlier 167.

Provision of organised crime

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, reviewing the three Bills to replace existing criminal codes, is likely to recommend redrafting key provisions that were brought in for the first time to tackle organized crime.
- The Bharatiya Nyana Sanhita, 2023, which seeks to replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860, introduced new provisions to define and penalize "organised crime".
- Section 109 of the proposed law defines an organised crime syndicate to include a "gang, mafia or (crime) ring" involved in "gang, criminality, racketeering and syndicated organised crime."

Point of contention

- They are demanding several changes in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 that will replace the Indian Penal Code, and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 that will replace the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).
- One key point of contention, the Hindi nomenclature of the Bills, has not been accepted in the draft reports.
- The panel's report states that since the text of the Bill is in English it does not violate provisions of Article 348 of Constitution.

After 5G success, India aims to lead in 6G

Context

- While addressing the India Mobile Congress the the Prime Minster praised the rollout of 5G telecom networks in the country and said that India is moving towards becoming a leader in 6G technology.

Tech Labs

- The Union Budget announced labs this year.
- The telecommunications department has set up the labs for which the government will provide 80% of the capital expenditure and 100% of operational expenses for the next four years.
- Institutions, including the Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Institutes of Information Technology, National Institutes of Technology, and other selected higher education institutions, will foot 20% of capital expenditure for the labs.
- Within a year of 5G launch, about 4 lakh 5G base stations have been built in India.

Mandate of the Labs

- Each lab will have at least 10 faculty members and 50 students and at least five start-ups or Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises will be engaged with each to test or develop solutions.
- Each lab must develop or test at least 10 products or solutions annually.

PM calls for self-reliance in cybersecurity

Context

- Prime Minister stressed on the need on self-reliance in the entire manufacturing chain spread across hardware, software, and cyber security.

Self-reliant in cybersecurity

- Prime Minister has called for India to become self-reliant in cybersecurity across hardware and software, highlighting that having a control over the value chain will ensure security of the country's digital infrastructure.
- The prime minister also said that India should establish itself as a thought leader as a natural progression from being an adopter and implementer of technology.
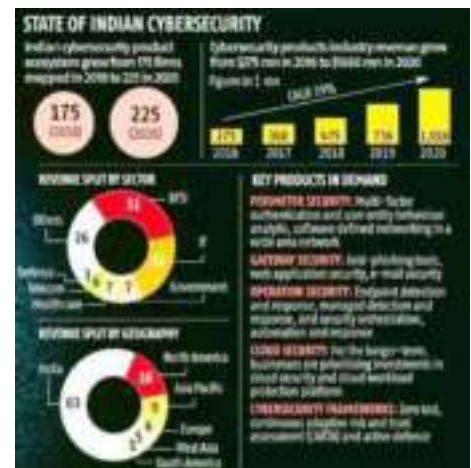
Women can make the world better

Context

- Economic history has long been chronicled through a male lens, emphasizing the contributions of men and their viewpoints.
- The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences has been awarded to 90 men since 1969 — and just three women.
- The first, Elinor Ostrom, won in 2009 for explaining how local communities, most of them in developing countries, govern themselves.
- The second, Esther Duflo, won in 2019, for her experimental work in alleviating global poverty.
- Claudia Goldin was the third woman awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2023 for her work explaining why women earn less money than men even when they do the same work.

Future of work and India

- Global economic growth patterns have changed.

- Long-term industrial jobs are scarce, even in rich countries.
- Gig economy and short-term contracts dominate employment.
- This shift poses a challenge for India, despite its fast-growing economy, especially for its youth who struggle to find stable, well-paying jobs and social security.
- India, ranked 132 in human development, must invest in caregiving services.
- Women in domestic and community caregiving roles, like ASHA and anganwadi workers, are severely underpaid.

The SDG goals

- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be achieved by 2030, addressing environmental, social, and economic issues simultaneously.
- However, the G-20 reports only 12% of targets are on track, highlighting the need to change our approach for achieving the SDGs effectively.
- Local systems solutions cooperatively developed by communities are the only way the goals of the SDGs can be achieved.

Way forward

- The global, male dominated, money-driven, system of institutions of business and society needs an overhaul.
- Women must be given freedom, not just to be promoted within male-dominated institutions, but rather to shape better, family-spirited institutions for governance.
- Without such fundamental institutional reforms, the vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: "One Family, One Earth, One Future" will soon fade along with the G-20's banners.

27.10.2023

- **Former Navy officers get death penalty in Qatar**
- **BBSSL to provide scientifically produced certified seeds**
- **Green Hydrogen Initiative concerns over Pollution**
- **UK calls for global stand on AI safety**
- **Manipur needs a platform for 'samvad'**

Former Navy officers get death penalty in Qatar

Context

- A Qatar court announced a death penalty to eight former Indian Navy personnel who have been detained in the country for over a year.

Background

- The navy men were working for a defence service provider organisation — Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services owned by a retired member of the Royal Omani Air Force.
- The owner of the firm was also arrested along with the men but was released in November last year.
- The eight men have been in the custody of Qatari authorities since August 2022.
- The Court of First Instance of Qatar passed the judgment against them.

On death row
The events that led to the Qatari court's verdict on Thursday

What are India's options now?
- Pursue legal appeals in the case
- Resolve case diplomatically
- Political intervention at the Prime Minister's level to request a pardon
- Build an international campaign to appeal for clemency

August 30, 2022: Eight former Indian Navy personnel arrested by Qatari authorities, believed to be on charges of espionage

March 2023: Trial begins in the case

October 1: Indian Ambassador to Qatar meets the eight men in prison

October 26: Qatari court pronounces death sentence to all of them

Allegation

- The Indian nationals were employed by Dahra Global Technologies and Consultant Services in Doha, and were allegedly

accused of breaching sensitive secrets.
- They were reportedly involved in training various security-related service providers of the State of Qatar.
- According to local media reports, the detentions was based on suspicion of leaking confidential information to Israel.

India's reactions and legal option
- The government of India in reaction to the judgment said that it is 'deeply shocked'.
- The government is exploring legal options.
- The Ministry of external affairs said that they are waiting for the details of the judgment, and they will continue to provide consular access to the officers.
- The first consular access was granted in October last year.
- The minister of state for external affairs informed Lok Sabha this year that the expenses that Indian government has spent on the legal aid on Doha has increased from Rs 7.4 lakh in 2022 to Rs 8.41 crore (until June 2023).

# BBSSL to provide scientifically produced certified seeds
Context
- The Union Cooperation Minister while speaking at the 'National Symposium on Production of Improved and Traditional Seeds through Cooperative Sector' stressed the need to provide quality seeds to farmers for increasing crop production.

About BBSSL
- The centre had formed the Bharatiya Beej Sahakari Samiti Limited (BBSSL) under Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002.
- BBSSL has been established to boost domestic production as well as exports of certified seeds.
- The society will focus on production, testing, certification, procurement, processing, storage, branding, labelling and packaging.

India's share in global seeds exports
- India's share in total global seeds exports is less than one per cent.
- If India's agricultural scientists get a good platform then they can make the maximum production yielding seeds in the world.
- BBSSL would focus on enhancing exports of certified seeds from India.
- The entire profit made by this cooperative will be distributed among farmers.
- The total production of certified seeds is 465 lakh quintals.
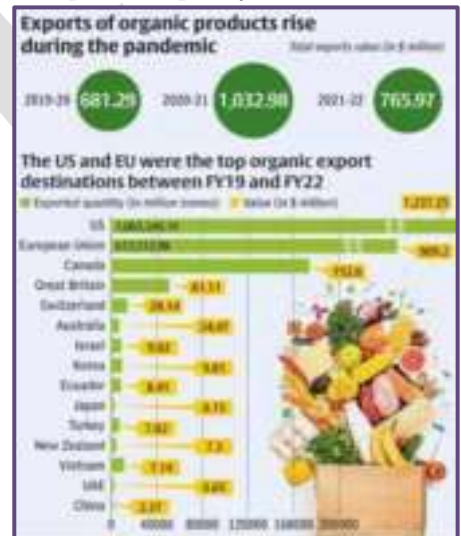
Green Hydrogen Initiative concerns over Pollution
Context
- According to a study by Climate Risk Horizons (CRH), India's push for 'green hydrogen' production, free from fossil fuel emissions, could backfire without adequate oversight, potentially worsening pollution.

India's plan
- The National Green Hydrogen Mission, piloted by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), expects to manufacture five million tonnes by 2030.
- This would require the installation of renewable energy capacity worth 125 GW and the use of 250,000 gigawatt-hour units of power, equivalent to about 13% of India's present electricity generation.

India's renewable energy capacity

- As of August 2023, India's total renewable energy (RE) capacity stood at 131 GW.
- The 2030 green hydrogen plan thus envisages adding an equivalent RE capacity by 2030.
- This is over and above the 500 GW of RE capacity that India has committed to install by 2030 as part of the Paris Agreement.
- To put that in perspective, India installed only 15 GW of new solar and wind capacity in 2023, against the 45 GW per year needed to reach the 2030 target.

UK calls for global stand on AI safety

Context

- The United Kingdom government has published a new report into the capabilities and risks from frontier Artificial Intelligence (AI), ahead of UK's Prime Minister speech on the global responsibility to address the risks head on and make the most of the opportunities.

Report on frontier AI

- The UK government has published a report on "frontier" AI, the cutting-edge general-purpose models that the summit will focus on.
- The report will inform discussions about risks such as societal harms, misuse and loss of control.
- It forms part of the UK Government's action to take long-term decisions for a brighter future, leading the way globally on AI safety.

Artificial intelligence safety institute

- Britain will set up an artificial intelligence (AI) safety institute to "examine, evaluate and test new types of AI so that we understand what each new model is capable of, exploring all the risks from social harms like bias and misinformation through to the most extreme risks.
- Britain wants to be a global leader in AI safety, carving out a role after Brexit between the competing economic blocs of the United States, China, and the European Union.

Manipur needs a platform for 'samvad'

Context

- India's intellectual tradition values understanding opponents' perspectives through dialogue, not out of affection but to enhance arguments.
- That is how the tradition of samvad (dialogue) constitutes a major component of this long-standing tradition.
- Today it is found among conflicting nationalities, religious communities, or ethnicity — whether it is in Israel, Nuh, or Manipur.

Crisis in Manipur

- The ongoing ethnic clashes in Manipur became a significant part of the mainstream discourse.
- The violence in the State began on May 3, 2023.
- Manipur has been under an internet ban since violence first broke out on May 3.
- The Manipur crisis has been running for over five months now.

The hardliners and their politics

- Most worrisome is the politics driven by the hardliners, whose narratives are to show the opposite camps as being the perpetrators of violence.
- There were instances where armed militants have inspired members of their affiliated community to call themselves as a 'people' vis-à-vis an 'enemy' in the other community. The torching of houses, cold-

blooded killings, and the inhuman treatment of women and children are influenced by the presence of armed militants and a false sense of impunity among some people.

Way out
- Amidst these complex narratives, there is a need to arrive at a holistic truth; a truth that preferably must be agreed by all.
- There is not only a need for dialogue but also a verification of the facts claimed in these narratives.
- The search for a holistic truth cannot be done without the presence of the contending parties.
- Negotiated truth is possible when the contesting parties recognise amiability in arguments, and show an openness to the outcome.

Conclusion
- The government should foster the participation of the people of the region in the decision-making process to instill a sense of ownership and belonging.
- India's intellectual tradition of samvad is an invitation to an openness with truth.
- The crisis in the State is far from over with many complex narratives; there is a need to arrive at a negotiated truth.

26.10.2023

- **Gender gap in earnings**
- **India-Japan chip supply chain partnership**
- **ISA to release report on global adoption of solar technology**
- **India resumes visa services for Canadians**
- **Unhealthy urban India must get into street fight mode**

Gender gap in earnings

Context
- The Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) have been monitoring the gender earnings gap across various forms of employment from April-June 2019 to 2023.

Latest PLF Survey
- This latest round has introduced a crucial focus on weekly hours worked, revealing that the inequality in total earnings might not capture the full picture.
- Women, on average, work fewer hours than men, attributed to a combination of social pressures and personal choices, highlighting the complex interplay between societal norms and individual decisions in shaping gender disparities in the workforce.

How does gender earnings gap differ
- Claudia Goldin's Nobel Prize-winning research analyzed factors causing gender inequalities in the U.S., inspiring similar studies in India.
- Indian scholars have extensively explored disparities in work participation and wages for women, making Goldin's work relevant and significant in the Indian context too.
- The research noted that Men earn more than women across all forms of work, the gap greatest for the self-employed.
- In 2023, male self-employed workers earned 2.8 times that of women.
- Male regular wage workers earned 34% more
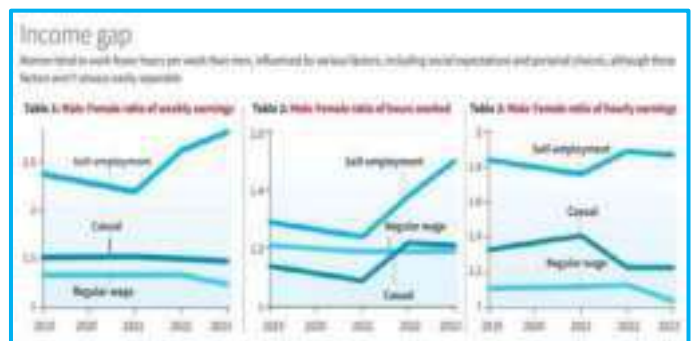
than women from 2019 to 2022, with the gap falling to 24% in 2023.

Average weekly work hours
- These gaps do not fully indicate inequalities in earnings per work effort.
- In 2023, the gap in work hours was largest for self-employed workers, where men worked 50% more hours than women, and lowest for regular wage workers (19%).
- Labour force participation rates (LFPRs) for rural women have increased, with a significant rise in the proportion of self-employed women.

What influences hours of work
- Reduced wage inequality among regular workers does not necessarily mean women chooses shorter hours.
- Limited options, shaped by societal norms mandating domestic duties, often force women into jobs with fewer hours.
- Working hours are not always a free choice, highlighting the impact of social expectations on women's employment decisions.

India-Japan chip supply chain partnership

Context
- The Union Cabinet approved a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between India and Japan on developing a semiconductor supply chain partnership.

Focus area
- The partnership focusing on research and development (R&D), manufacturing, design, and talent development for the industry.
- The Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) intends to strengthen cooperation between India and Japan towards enhancement of the:
  - Semiconductor supply chain
  - Recognising the importance of semiconductors for the advancement of industries and digital technologies

India's roadmap
- India is looking to establish itself as a reliable presence in the semiconductor supply chain, especially at a time when companies are looking to diversify from China.
- India has rolled out a $10 billion plan to boost local chip manufacturing.
- India is also working with the United States on chip supply chains.

Foreign firm in India
- The US memory maker Micron Technology is constructing an assembly and packaging plant in Gujarat under the plan.
- Microchip Technology will invest $300 million in India, opening an R&D facility in Hyderabad.
- Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) plans a $400 million investment, establishing its largest design facility in Bengaluru.

ISA to release report on global adoption of solar technology

Context
- The International Solar Alliance (ISA), consisting of 116 member countries, will publish its inaugural 'global solar stocktake report,' aiming to boost worldwide solar technology adoption.

Global Stocktake
- This is inspired by the first ever 'Global Stocktake' of the United Nations Conference of Parties, scheduled to be held in Dubai later this year.

- The stocktake will also look at ways to broaden manufacturing of solar energy equipment, which is currently concentrated in China.
- The Global Stocktake follows from the Paris Agreement signed in 2015 and is expected to be held once in five years.
- The International Solar Alliance will meet in November 2023 in Delhi

Focus area

- The ISA, which is steered by India and France, is scheduled to hold its sixth annual meeting in November 2023 in Delhi.
- A key focus area for the organisation is expanding solar installations in Africa and to that end the organisation has set up the Global Solar Facility.
- The aim is to boost the scale of solar investment there and following that expand to West Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Different funds

- The Global Solar Facility will have three funds:
  o Payment guarantee fund
  o Insurance fund to mitigate project risks
  o Investment fund for technical assistance

Solar photovoltaic installations

- Solar photovoltaic installations globally touched 1,133 gigawatts (GW) as of 2022, with 191 GW being added in 2022.
- Nearly a fourth, or about 350 MW, is installed in China, which is not a member of the ISA.
- China is followed by the United States, a member country, at 111 GW.
- India ranks among the top five countries globally with 62 GW.

India resumes visa services for Canadians

Context

- India resumed visa services for certain categories for Canadian citizens, nearly a month after they were suspended.

Background

- India's relations with Canada have hit a new low after Canadian Prime Minister linked Indian agents to the killing of Khalistani separatist and raised the matter in the House of Commons.

Visa services

- A month after suspension, India partially resumes visa services for Canadians.
- The Indian High Commission in Canada has announced that it will begin accepting applications for visas.
- Entry visa is granted to persons of Indian origin and to dependent family members of an Indian citizen or persons of Indian origin.
- While tourist visas and e-visas are still held in abeyance, the Indian High Commission in Canada announced that it would begin accepting applications for visas for entry, business, medical, and conference purposes.

Unhealthy urban India must get into street fight mode

Context

- India's urban population is estimated to reach 675 million in 2035, the second highest in the world.

- Although there is widespread recognition that cities have been fueling India's rapid rise to economic superpower status, almost all are failing their inhabitants in terms of delivering on health, environmental and equity targets.

Urban India and multiple health risks

- Urban residents in India face severe health risks due to high levels of air and noise pollution, limited green spaces, inadequate access to amenities like sidewalks and parks, outdated transportation contributing to pollution, and unhealthy food options.
- Despite this, cities face a concerning epidemic due to insufficient physical activity.
- Physical activity, a potent preventive measure, is crucial in mitigating these health challenges, yet cities in India are experiencing an unprecedented epidemic of these disorders.

Double or triple-duty actions

- India's investments in clean energy and electric mobility present a unique chance to enhance public health by significantly reducing air pollution.
- These efforts align with India's climate and equity objectives.
- However, to maximize their impact on health, these initiatives must be complemented by changes in other sectors such as food, mobility, and green infrastructure.
- A comprehensive approach is essential for substantial and lasting improvements in public health outcomes.

Holistic urban policy

- Current studies analyzing the economic and health effects of transitioning to clean energy in transportation primarily focus on reduced air pollution.
- However, integrating active transport options like walking paths and bicycling lanes alongside electric cars not only addresses the "last mile" connectivity but also adds extra health and economic benefits beyond air pollution reduction.
- This comprehensive approach enhances the economic viability of such investments by combining multiple health and environmental advantages.

25.10.2023

How are Olympic hosts selected

Context

- Prime Minister of India recently inaugurated the 141st Session of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in Mumbai, making a formal declaration of India's interest in hosting the Olympics in 2036.

India's Intension

- Prime Minister of India publicly declared India's intention to host the Olympic Games, preferably in 2036.
- He also mentioned India's ambition to host the Youth Olympics in 2029 although the quadrennial event is currently scheduled for 2030.
- Only three Asian countries have ever hosted the Olympics — China, South Korea and Japan, with Japan hosting the games twice in 1964 and 2020.

Earlier selection process

- Under the older Olympic host selection system, cities submitted letters of interest to the IOC, initiating a lengthy evaluation process.
- Bidding cities filled out detailed questionnaires, evaluated by the IOC.
- The Evaluation Commission scrutinized the cities and inspected venues.
- The final decision was made seven years in advance at an IOC session.
- This process often led to overspending, debts, corruption, and scandals among bidders.

New approach

- The new process placed emphasis on three main aspects — flexibility, sustainability and cost-effectiveness.
- With the motto being 'The Games adapt to the region; the region does not adapt to the Games'.
- With respect to flexibility, the seven-year rule was done away with and there has been greater flexibility in deciding the hosts.
- The IOC has said that the 2036 edition could be decided even as late as after 2030.
- There is now a two-stage process — a continuous dialogue and a targeted dialogue without any fixed deadlines, to assess, discuss and guide potential hosts.

Sustainability and cost-effectiveness

- To promote sustainability and prevent public backlash, Olympic hosts are urged to utilize existing and temporary venues.
- New constructions must align with ongoing developmental plans and have long-term purposes beyond the Games.
- Additionally, starting from 2030, all Olympic Games must align with the IOC's climate positive commitment.
- The IOC's emphasis on existing and temporary venues resulted in an 80% reduction in bid budgets for the 2026 Winter

Games compared to previous editions.

- The IOC assists preferred hosts with marketing, venue development, and sustainability, further cutting costs.

Potential bidders apart from India for 2036 Games

- Besides India, the other confirmed nations interested are Mexico , Indonesia, Turkey (Istanbul) and Poland (Warsaw).
- India is yet to decide the city/cities where the Games will be organised.
- Of these, Mexico is the only one to have previously hosted the Games in 1968.
- Other potential bidders include Egypt, Seoul, China, Qatar, Hungary, Italy, Denmark, Canada and Germany.
- While Qatar has been on a hosting spree for large-scale events in recent times, with the football World Cup in 2022, and is scheduled to host the 2030 Asian Games.

SIM Card: Understanding its functions and working

Context

- Understanding the components of a SIM card, its functions and working with the evolving technology.

About SIM card

- 'SIM' stands for 'subscriber identification module'.
- Specifically, it is an integrated circuit, or a microchip, that identifies the subscriber on a given network.
- In order for a mobile phone to connect to any cellular network that follows the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) standard, a SIM card is mandatory.
- Three different sim card sizes — standard or normal, micro and nano.
- SIM cards also store information about its:
  o **Own ID number**
  o **IMSI**
  o **Subscriber's location area identity**
  o **List of preferred networks**
  o **Emergency numbers**
  o **Subscriber's contacts**
  o **SMS messages**

How does a SIM card work

- SIM cards adhere to the ISO/IEC 7816 international standard, overseen by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC).
- This standard is applicable to electronic identification cards, including smart cards.
- On the network side, the SIM helps a phone establish its place within a cellular network.

What is an eSIM

- Over time, the SIM card has evolved from the standard SIM to mini-SIM, micro SIM, and nano SIM.
- The latest development in this progression is the eSIM, defined by the GSM Association.
- In the eSIM system, SIM software is embedded onto a UICC (Universal Integrated Circuit Card) during the manufacturing process, making it inseparable from the mobile device and impossible to remove.

Advantages of eSIM

- An eSIM has two immediate advantages.
- First, it is environmentally friendlier than a physical SIM: its reprogrammability means no need for more plastic and metal for a new SIM.

- Second, if a malicious person gains access to your phone, they won't be able to separately access the SIM application nor be able to duplicate it.

Centre to introduce DNA and Face Matching Systems

Context
- In an ambitious step towards modernizing crime investigation, the Union government is poised to roll out DNA and facial recognition systems in 1,300 police stations across the country.

Implementation
- The introduction of DNA and Face Matching Systems will be implemented under the Criminal Procedure Identification Act which was passed in 2022.
- The Act replaced the 100-year-old Identification of Prisoners Act, whose scope was limited.
- The law enables police and Central investigating agencies to collect, store, and analyze physical and biological samples, including retina and iris scan of arrested persons; NCRB to prepare the SOPs.

Nodal Agency
- The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a Central organisation tasked with rolling out the Act, was assigned the task of finalizing the standard operating procedures (SOP) to be followed by police officials.
- The Union Home Ministry has constituted a Domain Committee for the successful implementation of the Act with representatives from the State Police, Central law enforcement agencies, and other key stakeholders.

Sri Lankan approves free tourist visas for visitors

Context
- The Sri Lankan Cabinet has approved the policy to issue free tourist visas to travelers from India and six other countries including Russia, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Japan.

Pilot programme
- The Sri Lankan foreign ministry announced Indians will get free visas to the nation as part of a pilot programme which will extend till March 31, 2024.
- The move is aimed at reviving the country's fledgling tourism industry.
- Tourists from these seven countries will be able to obtain visas without any fee to Sri Lanka.
- The move was made to generate a target of five million arrivals by 2026.

Indian Tourist data
- India has traditionally been Sri Lanka's top inbound tourism market, followed by China. As per latest data from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, India is the largest source for tourists with 2,00,310 arrivals so far this year, followed by Russia with 1,32,300.
- In September 2023, India topped with over 30,000 visitors, making up for 26 per cent arrivals, followed by China at around 8,000 arrivals.

Reasons for deteriorating tourism
- Sri Lanka saw its low footfall in tourism due to
    - Easter Sunday bombings 2019
    - Covid pandemic in 2020
    - Financial crisis 2022 which saw mass protests and shortages of essentials such as fuel

Where do tourists to Sri Lanka come from?
(breakdown in percent)
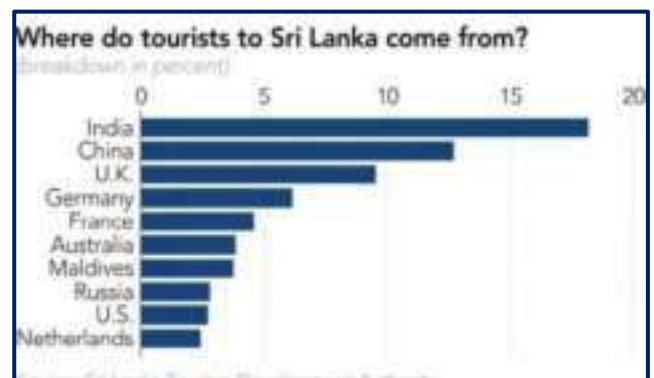
Mitigating tragedies in the Himalayan region

Context

- The recent glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in Sikkim caused significant damage along the Teesta river, highlighting the escalating threat of climate change-induced GLOFs in the Indian Himalayan Region.
- A study published in Nature this year revealed that 90 million people in 30 countries reside in 1,089 basins containing glacial lakes.
- Among them, one-sixth live within 50 km of a glacial lake and 1 km of potential GOLF runout channels, indicating the vulnerability of these populations to GLOF events.

Early warning systems

- The October 3 tragedy at South Lhonak glacial lake in Sikkim is still unfolding.
- In September, the NDMA led a mission to install automated cameras and monitoring equipment, aiding in weather data transmission.
- The mission identified spots for sensors and suggested mitigation measures like small check dams for future early warning systems.

Susceptibility in Himalayan Region

- The Himalayan Region is susceptible to a range of hydro-meteorological, tectonic, climate and human-induced mountain hazards.
- Each of them requires an extensive set of monitoring, mitigation, and early warning strategies.
- The process chain of glacial melting is adequately mapped.
- Three major river basins, of the Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra, are host to 28,000 glacial lakes.
- Of these, 27% are in India, in six States and Union Territories.

Mitigation of GLOFs

- Many geo-technical solutions for mitigation of glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) have been tried globally, including:
  - Excavating channels for regulated discharge
  - Drainage using pipes and pumps
  - Spillway construction
  - Setting up small catchment dams to cut the speed of outflow

Multi-disciplinary effort

- Various institutions are collaborating on a multidisciplinary effort for effective monitoring and management.
- National Remote Sensing Centre atlases have provided high-resolution data via remote sensing, which allows for monitoring spatial change.
- The Central Water Commission is conducting hydro-dynamic assessments of high-risk lakes, mapping water flow, height and routing simulations using digital elevation models.
- Institutional awareness of risks is increasing, but the challenge is to evolve a system to mitigate such risks and provide early warnings.

20.10.2023

Why are earthquakes frequent in Afghanistan

Context

- A earthquake of magnitude 6.3 struck western Afghanistan just over a week after a series of strong quakes and killed at least a thousand people in the Herat province.

Earthquakes in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan has faced widespread destruction from intense earthquakes over the years. In June 2022, more than 1,000 people were killed when an earthquake of magnitude 6.1 struck Khost and Paktika provinces.
- In 2015, a major earthquake that struck the country's northeast killed over 200 people in Afghanistan and neighboring northern Pakistan.
- A 6.1-magnitude earthquake in 2002 killed about 1,000 people in northern Afghanistan. In 1998, another earthquake and subsequent tremors in northeast Afghanistan killed at least 4,500 people.

How do earthquakes occur

- Earthquakes result from tectonic plate movement along fault lines, releasing energy as seismic waves.
- An earthquake occurs when blocks of lithosphere suddenly slip past one another, releasing energy and sending seismic waves through the ground.
- The point inside the earth where this movement begins is the focus, with the corresponding point on the surface being the epicenter.
- Earth's heat energy drives constant plate motion, causing earthquakes primarily at plate boundaries.

Why do frequent earthquakes occur in Afghanistan

- Afghanistan is located over multiple fault lines in the region where the Indian and the Eurasian tectonic plates meet.
- These plates collide often, leading to significant tectonic activity.
- Afghanistan is located on the Eurasian plate.
- Towards western Afghanistan, the Arabian plate subducts northward under Eurasia, and towards eastern Afghanistan the Indian plate does the same.
- In southern Afghanistan, the Arabian and Indian plates adjoin and both subduct northward under the Eurasian plate.
- The Hindu Kush Mountain range and the Pamir Knot are geologically complex regions where tectonic plates meet.

Population-Based Cancer Registries across India

Context

- According to latest study by Lancet nearly 52% of patients diagnosed with cervical cancer between 2012 and 2015 survived.

About the study

- The study focused on a total of 5,591 cervical cancer cases diagnosed between 2012 and 2015 in 11 Population-Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs).
- The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia, based on data from the Population-Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs) across India.
- Various urban PBCRs from different regions of India were assessed to find the survival rates of cervical cancer patients.
- The study found that there was significant variations in survival rates across these regions.

Survival rate

- Among those that participated in the study, the Ahmedabad urban registry demonstrated the highest survival rate at 61.5%, followed by Thiruvananthapuram with 58.8% and Kollam at 56.1% and in contrast, Tripura reported a survival rate of 31.6%.
- Survival rates were notably lower in India's northeastern region.

Factors behind survival rate

- Access to diagnostic services
- Effective treatment varied across the population
- Distance from clinical care facilities
- Travel costs
- Co-morbidities
- Poverty contributed to survival rates

India's share of growth to rise

Context

- According to IMF, India's contribution to global economic growth will rise by 2 percentage points in 5 years as the Indian economy is projected to grow faster in the coming years.

Global economic growth

- Currently China and India's contribution to global growth is 50%.
- Out of this India's is 16% and the rest by China.
- The current 16% contribution of India is expected to grow to 18% in the next five years.
- India's government was likely to meet its 5.9% fiscal deficit target in FY24.
- The IMF has asked countries to retain a sufficiently restrictive monetary stance until inflation is firmly on track.
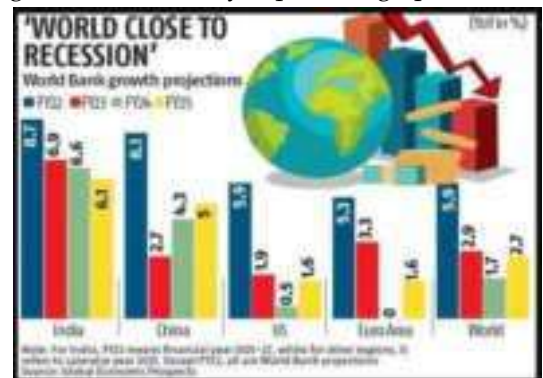
Centre tweaks licensing norms for import IT hardware

Context

- The union government has decided to roll back its decision to impose restrictions on laptop imports.

Reconsideration of decision

- The development comes months after the Centre imposed immediate restrictions on the import of laptops, tablets, and personal computers in August 2023.
- In August, the government had attempted to impose a licensing requirement on the imports of laptops and personal computers.
- However, the government faced criticism from the industry on the move.

- US-based tech majors, including Apple, Intel, Google, and Dell, sought help from the US government and urged US President to intervene and make India reconsider these restrictions.

Imports of electronic goods

- India has seen an increase in imports of electronic goods and laptops/ computers in the last few years.
- During April-June this year, the import of electronic goods increased to $6.96 billion from $4.73 billion in the year-ago period, with a share of 4-7 per cent in overall imports.
- The highest share of imports is in the category of personal computers including laptops, and palmtops, under which imports from China stood at $558.36 million in April-May this year as against $618.26 million in the year-ago period.
- China accounts for roughly 70-80 per cent of the share of India's imports of personal computers, laptops.

An opportunity to recast India's food system

Context

- The World Food Day (October 16) was celebrated globally, but we rarely look at food as a system.
- No country can better understand the challenges of a food system than India, which feeds the largest population in the world.
- While the primary goal of a food system is to ensure nutrition security for all.

Nutrition, livelihoods, environment security

- On the nutrition front, India faces a double burden of malnutrition.
- At one end, despite making great progress over the years, a sizable proportion of Indians exhibit nutrient deficiencies.
- As in the National Family Health Survey, 2019-21, 35% of children are stunted, and 57% of women and 25% of men are anaemic.
- At the other end, due to imbalanced diets and sedentary lifestyles, 24% of adult women and 23% of adult men are now obese.
- Further, depleting natural resources and changing climate are making India's food production highly vulnerable.

Three-sided approach

- To solve these interconnected challenges, we need a triad approach that engages all three sides of the food system: consumers, producers, and middlemen.
- First, consumer demand needs to be shifted towards healthy and sustainable diets.
- Second, to ensure resilient incomes, we must support farmers' transition towards remunerative and regenerative agricultural practices.
- Third, shift farm-to-fork value chains towards more sustainable and inclusive ones.
- A critical approach to enhance rural (farm) incomes is to enable more value addition of agricultural produce in rural areas.

Conclusion

- If we act fast, India has a unique opportunity to showcase to the rest of the world how to get its food system right.
- There needs to be a triad approach that engages the consumer, the producer, and the middleman.

19.10.2023

- **Committee to explore large language models**
- **4th Agriculture Road Map of Bihar**
- **FCRA approval to Ram temple trust**
- **Cabinet approves MSP for Rabi Crops**
- **The explosion of digital uncertainty**

Committee to explore large language models

Context
- The Union government's Principal Scientific Adviser said that High-powered committee will explore large language models and will study their development for Indian languages.

Mandate
- The high-powered committee will study large language models development for Indian languages.
- It will explore the tools that harness artificial intelligence to create applications that can understand and process human language.
- LLMs are a cornerstone technology underlying several pieces of 'intelligent' software.

Large Language Models
- Large Language Models (LLMs) are advanced computer programs.
- They are trained on massive amounts of text data.
- They understand and generate human-like text.
- GPT-3 is an example of a popular LLM.
- They are used in various applications like chatbots, content creation, and more.

Evolution of Large Language Models

Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy
- The Central government recently released the draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP).
- A deep tech startup involves early-stage technologies based on scientific or engineering advancements, which are yet to be developed for any commercial applications.
- The draft policy was shaped by the National Consortium and Working Group set up by the Prime Minister's Science, Technology, and Innovation Advisory Council (PM-STIAC).

Focus area
- The policy outlines a nine-point programme to create a conducive ecosystem for the sector, which is crucial for enhancing India's capability and global competitiveness.
- The draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP) suggests necessary changes in nine policy areas such as:
  - o Nurturing research, Development, and innovation
  - o Strengthening the intellectual property regime
  - o Facilitating access to funding
  - o Enabling shared infrastructure and resource sharing
  - o Creating conducive regulations, standards, and certifications
  - o Attracting human resources and initiating capacity building
  - o Promoting procurement and adoption
  - o Ensuring policy and program interlinkages
  - o Sustaining deep tech startups

4th Agriculture Road Map of Bihar

Context

- The President of India launched the fourth Agricultural Road Map (2023-2028) of Bihar.

Focus area

- The focus of the fourth edition of the agricultural road map is on:
  o Crop diversification
  o Doorstep delivery of veterinary services
  o Higher foodgrain production
  o Better agricultural marketing

Roadmap

- The new Agriculture Roadmap which will be implemented during 2023 to 2028.
- The five-year, blueprint for agriculture has a special focus on climate change resilient farming and increasing the income of farmers with technological and scientific interventions.
- The State Agriculture Roadmap envisages different innovative ideas, programmes, and ideas for the development of agriculture in Bihar.
- The Agriculture Roadmap is a collective effort of the Agriculture Department and 11 other departments.

Agricultural progress in Bihar

- Agriculture is an important part of the folk culture of Bihar.
- It is the basis of Bihar's economy.
- Agriculture and allied sectors employ almost half of the state's workforce and contribute significantly to the state's GDP.
- Bihar has become a leading state in the production of mushroom, honey, makhana and fish.
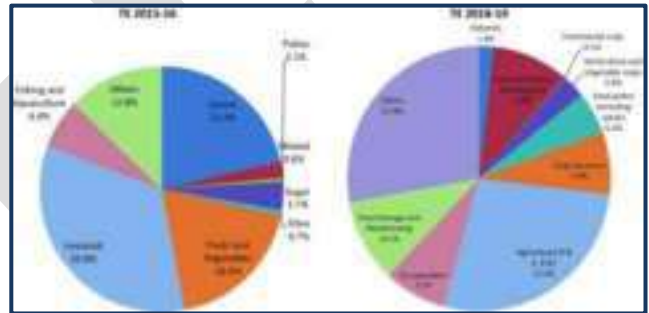
Organic farming states in India

- **Sikkim:** Sikkim is often cited as the first fully organic state in India. In 2016, Sikkim was declared as the first organic state in the country, and the state government has been actively promoting organic farming practices.
- **Himachal Pradesh:** Himachal Pradesh has been promoting organic farming in the state. The state government has implemented several programs and schemes to encourage farmers to switch to organic farming methods.
- **Kerala:** Kerala has been promoting organic farming through its "Jaiva Karshaka Samithi" (Organic Farmers' Association) program. The state government has been providing training and financial assistance to farmers to adopt organic farming practices.
- **Madhya Pradesh:** Madhya Pradesh has implemented the "M.P. Jaivik Krishak Samridhi Yojana," a scheme to promote organic farming. Under this scheme, farmers are encouraged to adopt organic farming practices and are provided financial assistance.

FCRA approval to Ram temple trust

Context

- The Ministry of Home has allowed the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust
- to accept foreign donations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Fund collection

- The trust has already collected ₹3,500 crore in donations given by people across India. The FCRA section of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, has allotted the FCRA license to Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust to accept the voluntary contribution from the foreign sources.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

- The FCRA was enacted in 1976 to regulate foreign money into the country through independent organizations.
- The act is to effectively regulate the foreign contribution by individuals or associations or companies.
- The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act was amended by the Indian Parliament in 2010.
- The Union Minister of Home Affairs introduced the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill in 2020, which made several changes.

The FCRA Timeline

Cabinet approves MSP for Rabi Crops

Context

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has increased the Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for all Rabi crops for the financial year 2024-25.

Government measures

- The Union cabinet approved a 2-7% increase in the minimum support price (MSP) of six rabi crops.
- The MSP increase for the 2024-25 rabi marketing season is in line with the government's goal of doubling farmer incomes.
- Besides the Price Policy, the Government has undertaken various initiatives such as the National Food Security Mission (NFSM), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), and the National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP) with the objective to provide financial support, quality seeds to encourage farmers to cultivate oilseeds and pulses.

Purpose of MSP

- MSP serves as a crucial safety net for farmers by guaranteeing them a minimum income regardless of market prices.
- It also helps ensure food security by encouraging farmers to cultivate certain crops, helping stabilize prices of staples such as wheat, rice and pulses.
- MSP changes for kharif and rabi crops are based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices.

The explosion of digital uncertainty

Context

- Recent advances in Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) have captured the imagination of the public, businesses and governments alike. The Government of India recently released a comprehensive report on the opportunities afforded by this current wave of AI.
- IT industry leaders anticipate significant skill landscape changes and recognize potential threats from this AI wave.
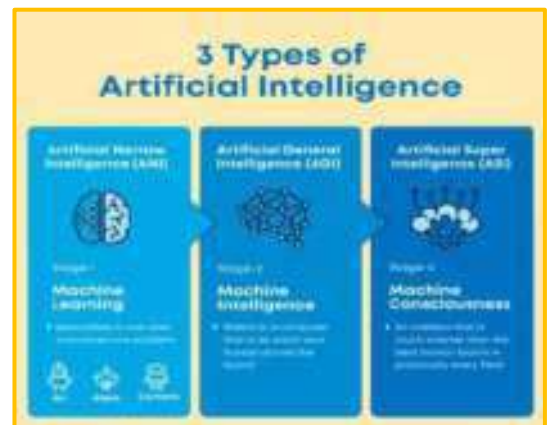
Cognitive warfare

- Cognitive warfare refers to the use of psychological and

3 Types of Artificial Intelligence

information tactics to influence and manipulate the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals or groups.
- This type of warfare aims to disrupt the cognitive processes of the target, often utilizing misinformation, propaganda, and psychological manipulation techniques to achieve strategic objectives.
- Cognitive warfare can occur in various contexts, including politics, military operations, and cyber warfare.
- Cognitive warfare involves sophisticated tactics to destabilize institutions, particularly governments, and manipulate news media by influential non-state actors.

Emergence of AGI
- Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) means AI systems with human-like abilities, understanding, learning, and adapting across tasks at a human intelligence level.
- AGI would have the capacity to learn and adapt to new challenges and problem-solving scenarios without human intervention.
- The development of AGI is a significant area of research and is the ultimate goal of artificial intelligence.
- The emergence of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) that is equal and or superior to human intelligence, which will penetrate whole new sectors and replace human judgement, intuition and creativity.

Significance
- AGI will enable highly autonomous systems that outperform humans in many areas, including economically (valuable) work, education, social welfare and the like.
- AGI systems will have the potential to be able to make decisions that are unpredictable and uncontrollable which could have unintended consequences, often with harmful outcomes.
- Hence, AGI could prove to be as radical a game-changer in the world of the 21st century.

18.10.2023

- **Global Maritime India Summit 2023**
- **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**
- **ISRO to land man on moon by 2040**
- **India's PC import curbs draw concerns**
- **Women reservation**

Global Maritime India Summit 2023

Context
- The Prime Minister has inaugurated the third edition of the Global Maritime India Summit 2023.

Blueprint for Indian Maritime blue economy
- The Prime Minister unveiled the 'Amrit Kaal Vision 2047', a long-term blueprint for the Indian maritime blue economy.
- The blueprint outlines strategic initiatives aimed at:
  o Enhancing port facilities
  o Promoting sustainable practices
  o Facilitating global collaboration
- The foundation stone for projects worth more than ₹23,000 crore that align with India's maritime blue economy.
- The maritime conference is expected to witness about 300 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth more than ₹7 lakh crore for global and national partnerships.

India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)

Focus on key issues

- The summit will discuss and deliberate key issues of the maritime sector including:
    o Ports of the future
    o Decarbonisation
    o Coastal shipping and inland water transportation
    o Shipbuilding, repair, and recycling
    o Maritime clusters and maritime tourism
- The summit will see participation of ministers from across the globe representing countries from Europe, Africa, South America, and Asia (including central Asia, Middle East and BIMSTEC region).
- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of Tuna-Tekra all-weather deep-draft terminal, to be built at a cost of more than Rs 4,500 crore at Deendayal Port Authority in Gujarat.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

Context

- The Prime Minister while addressing the Global Maritime India Summit 2023 said that
- India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor will reduce business costs, increase logistical efficiency, and create many jobs.

India-Middle East-European Corridor

- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) Project was signed at the G20 Summit in New Delhi and holds significant geopolitical and economic implications for India.
- Its 8 signatories are: India, the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the EU, Italy, France, and Germany.
- The proposed grand IMEC (India-Middle East-European Corridor), creating a port-railroad connectivity to link India, the Gulf countries, and the European Union to rival China's Belt-Road-Initiative.

Significance of IMEC Project

- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) Project will:
    o Reduce business cost
    o Increase logistical efficiency
    o Reduce impact on environment
    o Help in creation of huge number of jobs

ISRO to land man on moon by 2040

Context

- The Prime Minister has directed the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) to aim for a manned mission to the Moon by 2040 and to establish an Indian Space Station by 2035.

Roadmap for future Moon missions

- The Prime Minister called for the development of a roadmap for:
    o Future Moon missions
    o Construction of a new launch pad
    o Setting up of human-centric laboratories
- ISRO's test flight for India's first human spaceflight, Gaganyaan, is scheduled for 21 October.
- The mission will demonstrate India's ability to send manned space missions.
- The upcoming Test Vehicle Development Flight (TV-D1) plays a pivotal role in these preparations.

Next Generation Launch Vehicle

- The department of space, which oversees the operations of ISRO, has also been directed to develop a roadmap for India's future Moon missions, the development of a Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV).
- The NGLV would be equipped to undertake return missions, the construction of a new launch pad, and the setting up human-centric laboratories and associated technologies.
- The Prime Minister also called upon Indian scientists to work towards interplanetary missions including a Venus orbiter mission and a Mars lander.

India's PC import curbs draw concerns

Context

- The U.S., China, South Korea and Chinese Taipei have raised concerns on India's decision to impose import restrictions on laptops, and computers, in a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Restrictions on the import

- The central government has placed restrictions on the import of laptops, tablets, and computers with immediate effect, the Ministry of Commerce said in a notification on August 3, adding that the import would be allowed against a valid license for restricted imports.
- Any entity or company planning to bring laptops and computers for sale in India will now have to seek permission or license from the government for their inbound shipments. The notification in this regard was issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT).
- The restrictions have been imposed under HSN Code 8471 on seven categories of electronic gadgets.

About HSN Code 8471

- The Harmonised System of Nomenclature (HSN) code is a classification system used to identify products for taxation purposes.
- Data processing machines are classified under HSN code 8471.
- This code is used to identify devices that are designed to perform data processing tasks.

Reason behind these restrictions

- The move has been announced with an aim to promote domestic manufacturing of these products under the recently renewed production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for IT hardware.
- The last date to apply for the so-called production-linked incentives in this product category is August 30.
- The government has curtailed inbound shipments of these goods from countries like China and Korea.
- Further, the government's announcement is expected to impact companies that import bulk of their products from outside India.
- Tech giants like Apple will have to either start manufacturing their laptops in India or stop importing their gadgets to India.

Women reservation

Context

- Recently, Parliament passed the women's reservation Bill which grants one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies.
- India's current female parliamentary representation is only around 15%.
- The latest Bihar caste survey highlights a factor that remains invisible in the women's reservation issue, that of caste, and the significance of the "quotas within quotas" position.

Background

- The reservation for women in Parliament was first introduced in 1996 by the Deve Gowda United Front government and its last lapsed in 2014 with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha.
- Reservation for women had come up in the Constituent Assembly but been rejected by women representatives as it was seen to underestimate the strength of women to compete as equals.
- In 1974, the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) considered the same question.
- Finally, the CSWI by a majority decided to uphold the position taken in the Constituent Assembly and rejected reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

Advantage of reservation

- An immediate reservation of one-third of the existing seats for women, is likely to benefit largely those women who already have the cultural and political capital to contest elections, and these are bound to be elite women.
- The experience of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) since 1992 has been positive for many women, but another consequence is the strengthening of the entrenched power of dominant caste groups of the area.
- It seems that the sudden passing of this legislation after 27 years reflects at some level the ethical crisis of the political elite.

Conclusion

- There are 3 essential, non-negotiable concepts that form the basis of women's political empowerment: gender equality, the right of women to realize their full potential, and the right of women to self-representation and self-determination.
- India urgently needs to feminize politics to boost the number of women representatives. It would involve women's participation in decision-making, power sharing, running political parties, holding political office, and formulating policies at all levels of governance.

17.10.2023

- **Angel tax for start-ups**
- **SC refers electoral bonds case to Constitution Bench**
- **Rupee at all-time low against dollar**
- **Laboratories testing for cough syrup samples**
- **The Indian Himalayan Region needs its own EIA**

Angel tax for start-ups

Context

- The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has notified to not carry out scrutiny of angel tax provisions for start-ups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade.

About Angel taxes

- Angel taxes are taxes funds raised by startups if they exceed the fair market value of the company.
- It is a 30.6 per cent tax that is levied on the funding received by startups from an external investor.
- The 'angel tax,' introduced in 2012, aims to prevent the use of undisclosed money by closely held companies.
- The tax aim to discourage laundering of unaccounted money via unlisted firms disguised as capital investments.

New tax directive on start-ups
- The government, through CBDT, has set up a process for assessing startup companies that are recognized by DPIIT.
- If a startup is verified by DPIIT, it won't face checks related to the new angel tax rules. Scrutiny notices will be issued to startups using a computer-based system called CASS.
- In a directive issued recently, the tax department has asked its field officials to not do verification for the recognised start-ups for cases pertaining to Section 56 (2) (viib) of the Income-tax Act.

Two scenarios by CBDT
- firstly, If a startup is scrutinized for section 56 (2) (viib) of Income-tax Act, no verification will be done. Recognized startups' concerns will be accepted without checks in proceedings under sections 143(2) or 147/143(2).
- Secondly, If a startup is scrutinized for multiple issues, including section 56 (2) (viib) of Income-tax Act, this specific issue won't be pursued during the assessment proceedings.

Changes for angel tax in Budget 2023-24
- The 2023 Finance Act amended the Income-tax Act's Section 56(2)(viib).
- Earlier, unlisted companies receiving investments exceeding share face value from residents were taxed.
- The amendment expanded this to include foreign investors.
- However, startups recognized by DPIIT were exempted.
- In September, the Finance Ministry introduced new rules allowing fair market value-based valuation for investments in unlisted companies, easing industry concerns.

SC refers electoral bonds case to Constitution Bench

Context
- The Supreme Court refer a batch of pleas challenging the Centre's electoral bond programme permitting anonymous funding to political parties to a constitution bench of at least five members.

About Electoral bonds
- Electoral bonds are monetary instruments that citizens or corporate groups can buy from a bank and donate to a political party, which is then free to redeem these for money.
- The electoral bonds system was introduced in 2017 by way of a Finance bill and it was implemented in 2018.

Earliest hearing
- Advocate Prashant Bhushan, for petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms, had pressed the court to hear and decide the electoral bonds issue before the Lok Sabha election in 2024.
- The court has agreed to the petitioners' urging to focus primarily the legalization of anonymous donations to political parties and the violation of citizens' right to information about the funding of political parties, promoting corruption.
- The two issues concern violation of Articles 19, 14, and 21 of the Constitution.

Electoral bonds concerns
- Lack of Transparency
- Potential for Money Laundering
- Reduced Accountability
- Undermining Democratic Principles
- Legal Challenges

Rupee at all-time low against dollar

Context
- The Indian Rupee recently hit a one-year low of 83.28 against the US dollar.

Why is Rupee falling

- Like most Asian currencies, the partially convertible Indian rupee, fell in recent months as risk aversion rose on expectations of the U.S. Federal Reserve raising rates to curb inflation, prompting investors to flee riskier assets.
- The Indian rupee on Monday ended at its lifetime closing low of 83.28 against the dollar as a jump in crude oil prices and weakness in other Asian currencies pressured the currency.

Impact

- India's foreign exchange reserves have declined by $14.154 billion in almost one month due to valuation loss and the RBI intervention in the currency spot market to curb the fall in the rupee against the dollar.
- India's overall trade deficit is expected to widen to over $130 billion this fiscal year, driven by global crude oil prices, from $87 billion a year earlier

Consequences of weakening of Rupee

- **Imported Inflation:** Cost of imported goods rises, leading to increased inflationary pressure.
- **Current Account Deficit:** Trade imbalance widens as imports become more expensive compared to exports.
- **Foreign Debt Burden**: Higher repayment costs for foreign-denominated debt, straining government finances.
- **Tourism and Services**: Boost in tourism as India becomes a more affordable destination; outsourcing services become more competitive globally.
- **Investor Confidence**: Reduced investor confidence due to currency instability, affecting both domestic and foreign investors.
- **Exporters' Dilemma:** Exporters benefit from cheaper goods for foreign buyers but might face higher input costs if relying on imported raw materials.

Laboratories testing for cough syrup samples

Context

- Two laboratories, one Central and one State are analyzing the bulk of cough syrup samples brought in for testing before they are exported.

Cough syrup sample testing

- The Union government issued a notification early this year making it compulsory from June 1 for cough syrup manufacturers to secure a certificate of analysis from government-approved laboratories.
- The country has 15 Central and State-run laboratories engaged in cough syrup sample testing.
- The order came following a World Health Organization product alert in cases of syrup products being exported from India.

Proposed amendments

- India is the world's third largest maker of drugs by volume after the U.S. and China.
- The amendments include mandating that before the grant of a manufacturing licence, the manufacturing establishment is to be inspected jointly by the drugs inspectors of the Union government and State government.
- Also, the number of sanctioned posts in the CDSCO has been significantly increased in the last 10 years.

Measures and Quality check

- The CDSCO and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have brought in various measures to maintain the standard of drugs being exported from India.
- A senior Health Ministry official noted that

regulatory measures that have been undertaken include amending the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945.
- According to the CDSCO, the number of batches of cough syrup samples received for testing in Central/ State drug testing laboratories in two centers — CDTL, Mumbai; and the Food and Drug Laboratory, Gujarat is 176.

The Indian Himalayan Region needs its own EIA

Context

- The Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) is a geographically diverse and ecologically sensitive area that spans across several states in northern India.
- It is characterized by unique biodiversity, fragile ecosystems, and susceptibility to natural disasters like landslides and flash floods.
- Due to its ecological importance, any developmental activities in this region must undergo rigorous Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) to evaluate their potential environmental, social, and economic impacts.
- The Teesta dam breach in Sikkim and recent Himachal Pradesh floods highlight the environmental toll of our mountain development.

Basis of the EIA

- Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) is one such process defined by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as a tool to identify the environmental, social, and economic impacts of a project before it is implemented.
- It compares project options, analyzes potential environmental consequences, and guides the development of mitigation strategies.
- The EIA process would need comprehensive, reliable data and would deliver results only if it is designed to seek the most appropriate, relevant and reliable information regarding the project.

EIA in India

- In India, the precursor to Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) started in 1976-77 when river valley projects were assessed by the Department of Science and Technology under the Planning Commission's directive.
- Initially applied to projects needing approval from the Public Investment Board, environmental clearance was an administrative decision.
- In January, 1994, the Ministry of Environment issued the first EIA notification under the EPA, making Environmental Clearance mandatory for specific new projects and expansions.
- The notification underwent 12 amendments in 11 years before being replaced by the EIA 2006 notification.
- The hallmark of the 2006 notification was the decentralization of the process of Environment Clearance.
- The 2020 draft EIA by the Ministry of Environment sparked controversy for being seen as pro-industry and neglecting ecological concerns.

Concerns

- Despite the awareness of the unique needs of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), its vulnerabilities haven't been addressed separately.
- Certain industries in the notification's schedule are barred in IHR states due to state policies.
- However, other industries in IHR must meet the same national standards.
- The 2020 draft doesn't differentiate the IHR, neglecting its distinctive developmental requirements.

Way forward

- The needs of these mountains could be addressed at all four stages of the EIA — screening, scoping, public consultation, and appraisal.

- In many cases, the EIA is done in a 'box ticking approach' manner, as a mere formality that needs to be done for EC before a project can be started.
- Policymakers would do well to explore other tools such as the strategic environmental assessment which takes into account the cumulative impact of development in an area to address the needs of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) as a fundamental policy.

16.10.2023

- **Centre likely to raise age of retirement of scientists**
- **UN approved Kenya-led security mission to Haiti**
- **Study recommended procurement of UAVs**
- **Centre to allocated addition fund for MGNREGS**
- **The world needs to stop taking water for granted**

Centre likely to raise age of retirement of scientists

Context

- The Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) is working on a proposal to increase the retirement age of scientists to 65.

## Proposal for enhancement of retirement

- A note by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST) issued said that a "proposal for enhancement of retirement age of scientists in autonomous bodies of science departments/Ministries is under way.
- This note, sent to 14 autonomous bodies funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST), seeking advice from the heads of institutes to furnish the total sanctioned strength of scientists in their AB (autonomous bodies), the number of scientists retiring in the next five years (November 2023 to March 2028), and the "additional financial implication of the enhanced retirement age".
- Scientists who work in autonomous institutions of the Ministry of Earth Sciences are also likely to come within the ambit of the proposal.

Current retirement age

- At present, scientists in most wings of the government retire at 60, while those working at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) retire at 62.
- Its larger purpose is to stem the flight of its top senior scientists to universities and the Indian Institutes of Technology, where the retirement age is 65.

Retaining talent

- The aim behind this move is to stem the flight of top scientists to universities and IITs; Science Ministry sends note to 14 bodies seeking details of those nearing retirement and financial implication of enhanced tenures
- The other aim is to bring parity.
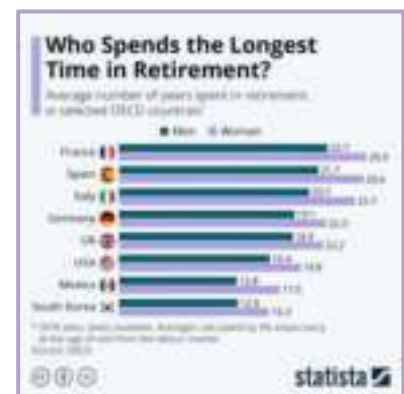
UN approved Kenya-led security mission to Haiti

Context

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has approved a international foreign security mission led by Kenya to restore peace, protect vital infrastructure, and curb escalating violence in the country.

Background

- Around a year after Haiti approached the United Nations seeking urgent help to combat deadly gang violence.
- Haiti has experienced a surge in violence over the past year as armed groups took control of large parts of the country, including the capital Port-au-Prince.
- This has resulted in the killings of nearly 2,800 people, including 80 minors, between October 2022 and June 2023.
- The UN peacekeeping mission to Haiti that ended in 2017.

Main gang territories in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas

Objective of the mission

- Other countries like the Bahamas, Jamaica and Antigua and Barbuda have also offered support.
- The resolution says that the force will provide "operational support" to the Haitian National Police, including:
  - Building its capacity to counter gangs
  - Improve security conditions in the country
  - Secure ports, airports and critical intersections
- The resolution adds that the forces will have the authority to make arrests in coordination with Haitian police.
- It also intends to create favorable conditions in the country to pave the way for elections.

Reasons behind mission to Haiti

- The UNSC has approved international intervention in the form of a foreign security mission, led by Kenya, to restore security, protect critical infrastructure and control spiraling violence in the country.
- Haitian Prime Minister first sought international support to assist the national police in October 2022 after the country plunged into a crisis.
- A UNICEF report at the time claimed that the operations of three-quarters of the country's major hospitals were hit due to the blockade.
- In assistance to the mission, the U.S. said that it won't send its troops, but it has pledged $100 million in support like intelligence, communications, airlift operations and medical aid.

Study recommended procurement of UAVs

Context

- The study undertaken by tri-Service teams has recommended procurement of MQ-9B high-altitude UAVs and medium-altitude UAVs.

Recommendation

- The study has recommended procurement of 31 MQ-9B high-altitude UAVs and 155 medium-altitude UAVs.
- It recommended to acquire 31 MQ-9B high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) UAVs and 155 medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) UAVs.
- The studies are meant to optimize the number of platforms required as well as the resources and avoid duplication.

Major upgrade

- In June, the Defence Ministry cleared the procurement of 31 MQ-9B UAVs from General Atomics — 15 Sea Guardians for the Navy and eight Sky Guardians each for the Army and the Air Force — at an estimated cost of $3,072 million though the U.S. foreign military sales route.
- The three Services operate a large number of Israeli Heron MALE

UAVs.
- The Army Aviation Corps recently inducted the first batch of light combat helicopter (LCH).
- Both the Army and the Air Force are inducting the initial batch of 15 LCH.
- The Cabinet Committee on Security has already given in-principal sanction for the procurement of 39 AH-64 Apache attack helicopters from the U.S.

Centre to allocated addition fund for MGNREGS

Context
- The Centre is likely provide an additional Rs 30,000-40,000 crore for the flagship MGNREGS scheme.

Budget allocation
- An amount of ₹60,000 crore was sanctioned for the scheme for 2023-24, which was 18% lower than the ₹73,000-crore budget estimates.
- According to Ministry of Rural Development statistics Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), has run out of funds and 95 per cent of the Budget allocation has been utilized.
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), is running a deficit of ₹6,146.93 crore.

About MGNREGA
- MGNREGA is one of the largest work guarantee programmes in the world which was launched in 2005.
- The primary objective of the scheme is to guarantee 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work.
- The Wages under the scheme is paid as per he Minimum Wages Act, 1948.
- The Scheme call for at least one-third of beneficiaries to be women.

The world needs to stop taking water for granted

Context
- The theme for World Food Day 2023 is 'Water is Life, Water is Food'.
- It calls for urgent action in managing water wisely.
- Availability or a lack of water has become even more critical with increasing climate extremes.
- Water availability affects every aspect of human life, especially food and nutrition security.

Innovative and collaborative approaches
- With less than seven years left to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) — the UN's food agencies lay stress on the need to adopt innovative and collaborative approaches for improved management, conservation and availability of scarce water resources.

Water and crop production
- About 60% of India's net sown area is rainfed, contributing to 40% of the total food production.
- About 40% of the planet's total land area is degraded, leaving farmers with less productive land.
- Extreme weather events and variability in water availability are severely affecting agricultural production, changing agro-ecological conditions and shifting growing seasons.
- Changes in rainfall and higher temperatures also affect crop productivity, reducing food availability.

Impact of climate change

- The Government of India has assessed the impact of climate change in 2050 and 2080 using climate projections and crop simulation models.
- Wheat yields are projected to decrease by 19.3% in 2050 and 40% in 2080, while kharif maize yields could decline by 18% and 23%.

Climate change adaptation

- The FAO also supports the sustainable transformation of agrifood systems and climate-smart agriculture practices to improve water-use efficiency.
- It supported the farmer water school programme in Uttar Pradesh, which helped smallholder farmers.
- At the same time, the Andhra Pradesh Farmer Managed Groundwater Systems project reached out to 638 habitations in seven drought-prone districts, that included a hydrological monitoring programme.

Way forward

- There is an urgent need to adapt to climate change by promoting technologies and practices that make rainfed production more resilient and sustainable.
- Sustainable water management is critical to address the impending food and nutrition security threats.
- To achieve global food and nutrition security, political commitment is needed as much as concrete investment.

13.10.2023

- **Operation Ajay**
- **India, UK FTA trade pact**
- **G20 Roadmap on Crypto Assets**
- **Centre mulls partnerships to make semiconductor chips**
- **India and Maldives ties**

Operation Ajay

Context

- India had recently launched Operation Ajay to bring back Indians from Israel as the conflict escalated with Israel retaliating against Hamas's attack.

About Operation Ajay

- Operation Ajay is not technically an evacuation operation. It is an operation to repatriate its citizens from Israel.
- Special chartered flights will bring back the Indians. If required, Indian Navy ships will also be deployed.
- Indians in Israel who wish to return will be facilitated in this operation. There are around 18,000 Indians in Israel, including students, professionals, and traders.

Progress

- India brought back the first batch of citizens from crisis-hit Israel under Operation Ajay.
- According to the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Israel has nearly 18,000 Indians and the airlift operation is aiming to cater to those who are willing to be evacuated.
- People are being accommodated in aircraft on a "first-come, first-serve" basis.
- Officials have indicated that the number of evacuees may increase if the crisis prolongs.

Recent Evacuation operation by India

- **Operation Ganga**: In February 2022, India launched an evacuation mission to bring back all its stranded citizens in Ukraine.
- **Operation Devi Shakti:** India evacuated hundreds of Indians from Afghanistan in August 2021 following the takeover of the Taliban and collapse of the country.
- **Operation Samudra Setu:** This was a naval operation in 2020 to bring back over 3,000 Indians stranded in various countries due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Operation Raahat:** India evacuated nearly 5,600 people from conflict-hit Yemen in 2015. It involved evacuation via sea and air.
- **Operation Maitri:** The op was launched in 2015 as a joint relief and rescue operation in the aftermath of the Nepal earthquake. Over 5,000 Indians and 170 foreign nationals were brought back from Nepal.

India, UK FTA trade pact

Context

- The negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement between India and the UK are at an advanced stage, and both sides are working to iron out differences on the remaining issues.

Proposed FTA

- The proposed FTA negotiations between India and UK which were started in January of 2022 covers 26 chapters of policy areas.
- Majority of chapters are closed or are in advanced stages of negotiations.
- Protracted negotiations are still on issues of interest to India like greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties.
- On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, automobiles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Bilateral trade

- The UK is an important trade and investment partner for India.
- The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to $ 20.36 billion in 2022-23 from $17.5 billion in 2021-22.
- UK is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).
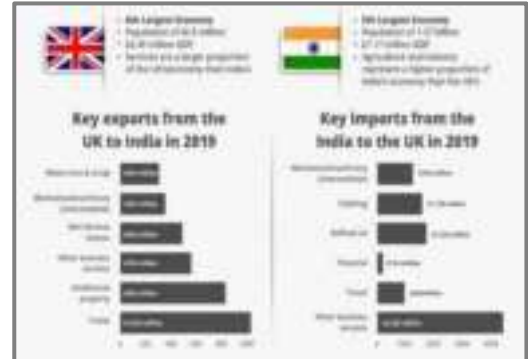
G20 Roadmap on Crypto Assets

Context

- The G20 finance ministers and central bank governors have called for swift and coordinated implementation of the G20 roadmap to deal with the issues related to crypto assets.

Action-oriented roadmap on crypto assets

- The G20 roadmap on crypto assets is a detailed and action-oriented roadmap that will help coordinate global policy.
- The roadmap will develop mitigating strategies and regulations on such assets while also taking into consideration the specific implications on emerging markets and developing economies.
- The G20 Finance Ministers agreed to continue implementation of the G20 roadmap for enhancing cross-border payments.
- The G20 Roadmap on Crypto Assets adopted by the G20

Finance Ministers was spelt out in a Synthesis Paper prepared jointly by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Financial Stability Board (FSB).

Centre mulls partnerships to make semiconductor chips

Context
- The working groups on artificial intelligence (AI) roadmap have submitted the first edition of report to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

About Working group
- Six working groups formed to advise Centre on roadmap for artificial intelligence have submitted report.
- The working groups recommendations inclusion of public-private partnerships to make semiconductors for AI applications.

Diverse collections
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the use cases for AI that the India AI initiative would look at spanned "**agriculture, healthcare, education, fintech, security, and governance.**"
- The India Dataset Platform, a planned "collection which will be among the largest and most diverse collections of anonymized datasets for Indian researchers and startups to train their multi-parameter models.

National Strategy on Robotics
- The draft National Strategy on Robotics, which was circulated for public input in September.
- The draft strategy recommends fiscal interventions to facilitate local manufacturing of robotics hardware, building of 'demonstration facilities' to test and show off technologies, and building capacity in the robotics sector.

India and Maldives ties

Context
- India and the Maldives have long-standing and robust relations, shaped by their geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and common strategic goals.
- The relationship between the two countries has been characterized by cooperation in various fields such as trade, defense, security, and development assistance.
- With the formation of new Maldives government, India looks forward to engaging with the new Maldivian government on all issues, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening the "time-tested" bilateral ties.

Diplomatic Relations
- High-level visits between the leaders of the two countries have been frequent, fostering diplomatic relations and understanding.
- India and the Maldives collaborate in various international forums, including the United Nations and regional organizations like SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).

Economic Cooperation
- India is one of the major trading partners of the Maldives.
- Both countries engage in bilateral trade, primarily in sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and maritime trade.
- India has provided economic assistance to the Maldives in the form of grants and credit lines for various development projects, including infrastructure and healthcare.

China's policy of interference
- For India, Maldives is a first line of defence against terrorism, piracy on the high seas, drug trafficking, narcotics, and other maritime crime.

- On the other hand, China's entry is solely to advance its own interests.
- It has done so through debt financing, leading to debt traps and consequent hegemony of China.
- China's policy of interference in the internal politics and support to conservative elements in Maldives has the potential of becoming a barrier to the development of a vibrant democracy in Maldives.
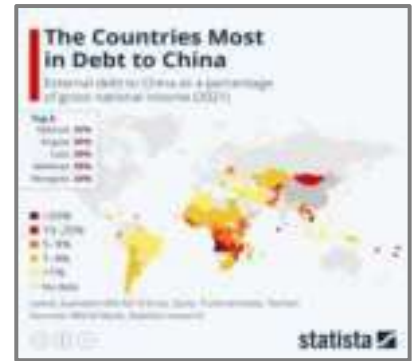
Way forward

- India is steadfast in its commitments towards Maldives and has always walked the extra mile towards building relations.
- Any impulsive steps to undo the carefully nurtured all encompassing partnership is likely to harm Maldives more than it would India.
- Constructively engaging with the ruling government will contribute to a stronger and more resilient partnership between the two nations.

13.10.2023

- **Global Hunger Index 2023**
- **Indian tea industry experiencing acute financial crisis**
- **G20 MDB panel suggest shift from project-based approach**
- **Industrial growth hits high in August**
- **P20: A parliamentary dimension to global governance**

Global Hunger Index 2023

Context

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2023 ranked India at 111th out of 125 countries.

Finding about India

- The GHI 2023 report that the:
- Child stunting rate in India is 35.5%
- Rate of undernourishment in the country stood at 16.6%
- Under-five mortality rate at 3.1%.
- Highest child-wasting rate at 18.7%.
- India has scored 28.7 on the Index, has a level of hunger described as "serious".

Centre's stand

- The center's Women and Child Development Ministry said that the Global Hunger Index suffers from "serious methodological issues and shows a malafide intent".
- The report is prepared and released by Irish NGO Concern Worldwide and German NGO Welt Hunger Hilfe.

Neighbours countries performance

- India's neighboring countries have fared better than it in the index.
  - Pakistan -102nd
  - Bangladesh -81st)
  - Nepal - 69th
  - Sri Lanka - 60th

About GHI Index

- The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels.
- South Asia and Africa South of the Sahara have been cited as the world regions with the highest hunger levels. The duo shares a GHI score of 27 each.
- India ranked 107th out of 121 countries in 2022.

# Indian tea industry experiencing acute financial crisis

Context

- The Indian Tea Association (ITA) said the industry is passing through a phase of acute financial crisis with prices not keeping pace with the rising cost of production.

Tea scenario 2023

- The Indian Tea Association (ITA) in its 2023 report noted a 4% annual increase in tea prices over the past decade.
- In contrast, vital inputs like coal and gas grew at a higher rate of 9-15% during the same period.
- The rise in production due to small tea growers has led to surplus teas in the market, as domestic consumption and exports haven't kept pace with the increase.
- During the current fiscal year, the Indian Tea Association reported a significant decline in tea prices in 2023 compared to 2022.

Drop in exports

- The export scenario remains grim as shipments to Iran remain uncertain due to the payment's issues.
- The Iran market constitutes nearly 20% of total tea exports from India.
- To mitigate the situation, the industry urged the government to consider enhancing RoDTEP (remission of duties or taxes on export products) incentive cap for high quality CTC, orthodox and Darjeeling teas.
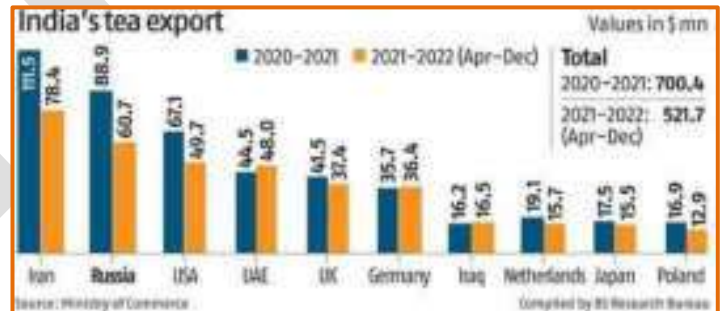
G20 MDB panel suggest shift from project-based approach

Context

- In the second volume of its report, G20 panel on MDBs suggests shift from project-based approach to country platforms

More about Report

- In the second volume of its report, the G20 panel on MDBs recommended that multilateral development banks (MDBs) should focus on helping countries build and operationalise "country platforms".
- The G20 expert panel advocates for multilateral development banks to prioritize national government-led programs focused on sectors and long-term transformation, moving away from individual projects.
- The expert group called for bringing private sector engagement to the centre of MDB operations, and significantly raising MDB financing.

Recommendations

- The multilateral development banks (MDBs) need to operate more in sync with developmental priorities of individual nations and co-create multi-year programmes
- Bringing private sector engagement to the centre of MDB operations

- Significantly raising MDB financing
- Suggestions on how to achieve these goals

Multilateral Development Banks

- Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) are international financial institutions that provide financial and technical assistance to developing countries for various development projects and programs.
- These institutions aim to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve living standards in the recipient countries.
- MDBs include the World Bank Group, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank the Inter-American Development Bank, etc.
- Multilateral Development Banks play a crucial role in supporting infrastructure projects, social programs, and sustainable development initiatives.

Industrial growth hits high in August

Context

- According to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India's industrial output grew by 10.3 percent in August, 2023.

Upward industrial growth

- At 10.3 percent, the latest industrial growth figure as per the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is the highest in 14 months.
- It is also well above the consensus estimate of 9.1 percent.
- Industrial growth had come in at 5.7 percent in July.
- Industrial growth in August was supported by an improvement in the output of all three sectors - mining, manufacturing, and electricity.

Sector wise growth

- Primary goods: 12.4 percent versus 7.6 percent in July
- Capital goods: 12.6 percent versus 4.5 percent in July
- Intermediate goods: 6.5 percent versus 2.4 percent in July
- Infrastructure goods: 14.9 percent versus 12.4 percent in July
- Consumer durable goods: 5.7 percent versus -2.6 percent in July
- Consumer non-durable goods: 9.0 percent versus 7.9 percent in July
- Export demand revived in August and supported IIP growth for petroleum products, machinery and equipment, textiles, and pharmaceuticals.

P20: A parliamentary dimension to global governance

Context

- India is going to hold the P20 conference, which will see the attendance of the speakers of G20 countries.
- The P20, since its inception in Canada in 2010, has come a long way.
- It is sanctified through elected representatives and becomes socially acceptable and legally tenable
- The G20 meetings held across India provided unique opportunities to present and share the Indian story with the global community, including its diversity, culture, democracy, development, and technological transformation.

High-level sessions

- There will be four high-level sessions organized during the P20 Summit, to be hosted by Parliament:
    1. Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Showcasing Achievements, Accelerating Progress
    2. Sustainable Energy Transition — Gateway to Green Future
    3. Mainstreaming Gender Equality, From Women's Development to Women-led Development
    4. Transformation in people's lives through Public Digital Platforms
- These sessions will bring together the G20 members and guest countries for wide-ranging discussions on "How Parliaments can effectively advance the objectives of the P20".

Focus of P20 summit

- The P20 summit, 2023 will also emphasize the "LiFE is Beautiful" initiative, through a pre-summit event.
- This initiative recognises communities that practice environmentally conscious lifestyles as "Pro-Planet People" (P-3), and seeks to leverage these practices to build a sustainable ecosystem based on the principle of "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle".
- The theme of this year's P20 Summit, "One Earth, One Family, One Future", embodies the spirit of unity, collaboration and shared destiny.

G20 and its success

- The G20 New Delhi Summit provided an occasion for the demonstration of India's contemporary technology advancement as well as our heritage, culture, and traditions. The energizing of the international economy, availability of greater resources for development, expansion of tourism, global workplace opportunities, stronger food security through millet production and consumption, and a deeper commitment to biofuels are among the prominent outcomes of the G20 Summit that will benefit the entire nation.

12.10.2023

- **Mera Yuva Bharat Platform**
- **Concerns over center's fact check unit**
- **Performance of Information Commissions in India**
- **20th round of Commander-level talks**
- **UN Security Council reform is a song in a loop**

Mera Yuva Bharat Platform

Context

- The Union cabinet approved the establishment of an autonomous body known as 'Mera Yuva Bharat' (MY Bharat).

About

- Mera Yuva Bharat will be autonomous body meant to harness technology's potential to drive youth development and youth-led progress.

- The primary objective of Mera Yuva Bharat is to make it a whole of government platform for youth development.
- It will also lead to investing more in youth to make them social innovators, and leaders in the communities.
- The body will be dedicated to the nation on October 31, the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Beneficiaries

- Mera Yuva Bharat will benefit the youth in the age-group of 15-29 years, in line with the definition of 'Youth' in the National Youth Policy.
- In case of programme components specifically meant for the adolescents, the beneficiaries will be in the age-group of 10-19 years.

Outcome

- As per the government's vision, the establishment of MY Bharat is set to achieve several key outcomes which include:
  o Leadership Development in the Youth and Improve the leadership skill
  o Better alignment between youth aspirations and community needs
  o Enhanced efficiency through Convergence of existing programme.
  o Act as a one stop shop for young people and Ministries
  o Create a centralized youth data base
  o Improved two-way communication to connect youth government initiatives and activities of other stakeholder that engage with youth
  o Ensuring accessibility b creating a physical ecosystem

Concerns over center's fact check unit

Context

- The Bombay High Court on September 29 reserved its verdict in a batch of petitions challenging the constitutionality of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 (IT Rules).

Background

- In April this year, the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MEiTY) promulgated the 2023 IT Rules, which amended the Information Technology Rules, 2021, and allowed the Ministry to appoint a fact checking unit.
- Subsequently, Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, and the Association of Indian Magazines filed writ petitions before the Bombay High Court challenging Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the IT Rules that permit the constitution of a FCU.
- The IT Rules permit a Fact Check Unit (FCU) of the Union Government to identify "fake or false or misleading" online content "related to the business of the Central Government" and demand its removal.

Concerns

- The Petitioners argue that the provision would enable government-led censorship online and empower the government to be the "prosecutor and the judge"
- A Bombay High Court bench said that it will pass its ruling on the controversial Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 (IT Rules) on December 1, 2023.
- The Court expressed the opinion that prima facie, the Rules do not seem to offer protection for fair criticism of the government like parody and satire.
- The government has apprised the Court that the FCU will not be notified until the judgment is delivered.

Performance of Information Commissions in India

Context

- The 'Report Card on the Performance of Information Commissions in India, 2022-23' noted that as on 2019 assessment a total of 2.18 lakhs appeals/complaints were pending in the 26 Information Commissions.

Pending appeals

- According to the performance report, published on the eve of the 18th anniversary of the Right to Information Act, found that more than three lakh appeals and complaints are pending in 27 State Information Commissions across the country.
- Of the 3,21,537 pending appeals, the maximum number was reported in Maharashtra (1,15,524) followed by Karnataka (41,047).
- Tamil Nadu declined to provide the information.
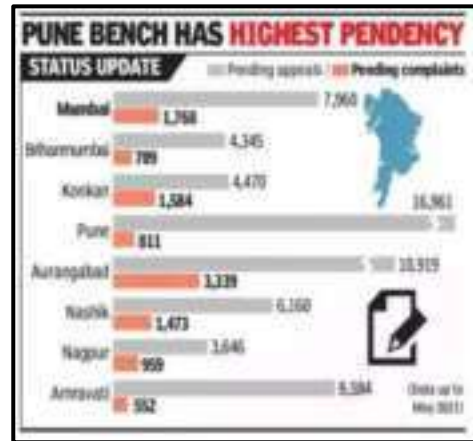
Many defunct

- Four Information Commissions — Jharkhand, Telangana, Mizoram and Tripura are defunct.
- Till date no new Information Commissioners were appointed upon incumbents demitting office.
- Six Information Commissions are currently headless — the Central Information Commission, and the State Information Commissions of Manipur, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Punjab.

20th round of Commander-level talks

Context

- India and China's 20th round of talks at Chushul-Moldo border failed to resolve the stand-off along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh

Outcome of the meeting

- India and China agreed to maintain the momentum of "dialogue and negotiations" while also committing to "maintain" peace and tranquility on the ground.
- The two sides exchanged views in a frank, open and constructive manner for an early and mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in the western sector.

19th round of talks

- At the 19th round of talks, which came before the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation virtual summit and ahead of the G-20 Summit hosted by India, there were high expectations of a breakthrough on the stalemate at Depsang Plains and Demchok in eastern Ladakh.

India-China standoff

- The standoff between the Indian and the Chinese troops erupted in the eastern Ladakh border region on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area.
- The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.
- As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process in 2021 on the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area.

UN Security Council reform is a song in a loop

Context

- More than three decades after the debate first started over fundamental reforms at the United Nations (UN), the issue appears to have resurfaced at the ongoing General Assembly session of the world body.

- President of Turkey said that "The Security Council has ceased to be the guarantor of world security and has become a battleground for the political strategies of only five countries."
- Even the UN's Secretary-General, issued a stern warning: "The world has changed. Our institutions have not.

United Nations Security Council

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN) founded in 1945.
- It is charged with ensuring international peace and security, recommending the admission of new UN members to the General Assembly, and approving any changes to the UN Charter.
- The Composition of UN Security Council include 15 members, including five permanent member states - China, France, Russian Federation, the United States, and the United Kingdom - and10 non-permanent member states elected by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

An unjust situation in terms of equity

- Presently, there are 193 member-states of the UN, and only 15 members of the Council fewer than 8%.
- The one change ever made to the original Charter was in 1965 when the Security Council was expanded from 11 members to 15 by adding four more elected non-permanent members.
- So, many more countries, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the membership, do not feel adequately represented on the body.

India and UNSC

- India has been actively pursuing its quest to be included in the reformed United Nations Security Council for many years.
- India has served seven times in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member and in January 2021, India entered the UNSC for the eighth time in 2022.
- India's agenda is to focus on UN reforms for a more equitable representation of the new global order.

Bottom line

- The reform of the Security Council can only take place if two-thirds of UN member states vote in favor, along with an affirmative vote from all the permanent members.
- India's bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council has support from four of the five P5 nations, namely the US, UK, France and Russia.
- China is the only permanent member which is yet to officially back India's bid.

11.10.2023

- **First test flight of Gaganyaan mission scheduled**
- **National Academy of Sciences study on Climate change**
- **IMF raises India's GDP growth forecast**
- **Success of Tele-MANAS cells platform**
- **Women want change, society needs change**

First test flight of Gaganyaan mission scheduled

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is scheduled to carry out the first of several test flights ahead of the Gaganyaan mission on October 21, 2023.

About the test

- The exercise is intended to test the 'crew module' which also involves launching the module to outer space, bringing it back to earth, and recovering it after touchdown in the Bay of Bengal.

- Before the ultimate manned "Gaganyaan" mission, there will be a test flight next year, which will carry "Vyommitra", the female robot astronaut.

Crew Escape Systems

- The TV-D1 test vehicle is a single-stage liquid-fueled rocket developed for this abort mission.
- The payloads consist of the Crew Module [CM] and Crew Escape Systems [CES] and will simulate the abort condition during the ascent trajectory corresponding to a Mach number of 1.2 expected in the Gaganyaan mission.
- The test vehicle development flight (TV-D1) will be conducted at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh to test the crew module that is scheduled to house Indian astronauts during human spaceflight late next year.

Gaganyaan mission

- The Gaganyaan mission is aimed at developing a human-habitable space capsule that will carry a three-member crew into an orbit of 400 km (250 miles) for three days, before returning to safety in a planned splashdown in the Indian Ocean.
- It will be for the first time that India will launch its manned mission to space, making the country fourth in line to have sent a human to space.

National Academy of Sciences study on Climate change

Context

- A new study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) warns that up to 2.2 billion people in India's Indus Valley and Pakistan could be exposed to extreme heat beyond human tolerance.

More about the study

- The study, published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), warns that a 1°C temperature rise could expose billions to lethal heat and humidity so extreme they will be unable to naturally cool themselves.
- Rising global temperatures due to climate change could push billions of people beyond their heat tolerance limits, leading to serious health issues like heat stroke and heart attacks.

Recommendations

- The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for global action to combat climate change and protect vulnerable populations from the detrimental effects of extreme heat. Without immediate and coordinated efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate, the consequences for billions of people worldwide could be dire.
- In 2015, 196 nations signed the Paris Agreement which aims to limit worldwide temperature increases to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels.

IMF raises India's GDP growth forecast

Context

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has raised its India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year by 20 basis points (bps) to 6.3%.

Growth projection

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised its FY24 growth projection for India by 20 basis points to 6.3 per cent, citing stronger than expected consumption between April and June.
- The IMF also left its forecast for global real GDP growth in 2023 unchanged at 3.0%.
- As per IMF retail inflation in the South Asian nation quickening to 5.5% in 2023/24 before easing to 4.6% in 2024/25.
- India's current account deficit is expected to remain at 1.8% of GDP in FY24 and FY25.

RBI growth forecast

- The RBI has projected CPI-based inflation for the current fiscal year at 5.4% while GDP growth is seen at 6.5%.
- Monetary policy projections are consistent with achieving the Indian central bank's inflation target over the medium term.

Global recovery

- The global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains slow and uneven.
- Economic activity still falls short of its pre-pandemic path, especially in emerging market and developing economies, and there are widening divergences among regions.

Success of Tele-MANAS cells platform

Context

- The union Health minister has said that the Tele-MANAS cells programme had provided Counseling to 2,000 people.

Tele-MANAS cells

- In 2022, occasion of World Mental Health Day, the Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States (Tele MANAS) was launched across the country.
- The cells aim to provide free tele-mental health services all over the country round the clock, particularly catering to people in remote or under-served areas.
- The service is accessible through the toll-free numbers.
- There are 42 active Tele Manas cells across 31 states and Union Territories.

Two-tier system

- Tele-MANAS to be organized in a two-tier system:
  o Tier 1 - State Tele-MANAS cells which include trained counsellors and mental health specialists.
  o Tier 2 - Specialists at District Mental Health Programme (DMHP)/Medical College resources for physical consultation and/or e-Sanjeevani for audio-visual consultation.

Women want change, society needs change

Context

- The 17th edition of the Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum states that at the current pace, it will take 131 years to close the global gender gap, with populous South Asian countries like India needing 149 years to achieve gender equality.
- Reservation is the most effective form of affirmative action and equity is the first step to equality.

A fresh start

- In September 2023, India's new Parliament building marked a fresh start with the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill, a historic event after significant delays.

- The bill, officially named the Constitution (One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, received overwhelming support in both Houses, making it a rare legislation in independent India.
- Despite early adoption of universal adult suffrage, women's role in shaping the country's political future has remained minimal.
- Across the world, women are appreciated by society in supportive and emotional roles, but very seldom in leadership roles.

Related Constitutional provision

- The 73rd and 74th Amendments passed in 1993, which introduced panchayats and municipalities in the Constitution, reserve one-third of seats for women in these bodies.
- The Constitution also provides for reservation of seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in proportion to their number in the population.
- The Constitution does not provide for reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies. Some members of the Constituent Assembly had opposed reserving seats for women in legislatures.

Conclusion

- Increasing women's representation raises questions about capacity building for first-time representatives.
- The Governments should ensure reservation models succeed and revise roles of key bodies like the National Commission for Women.
- Recognizing unpaid labor and equal sharing of household duties are vital for gender equality reform.

10.10.2023

- **Multimodal artificial intelligence**
- **ICMR to study develop solutions for childhood undernutrition**
- **EC announces election schedule for 5 states**
- **Periodic Labour Force Survey on urban unemployment**
- **Mental health and the floundering informal worker**

Multimodal artificial intelligence

Context

- The past couple of years have seen a stream of such AI systems being released globally.

Multimodal artificial intelligence

- Multimodal artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the integration of multiple forms of sensory input and data processing to enable machines to understand and interact with the world in a more human-like way.
- In multimodal systems, users can engage with AI in several ways.
- If AI systems are to be as close a likeness of the human mind as possible, the natural course would have to be multimodal.

A new race

- Recently, ChatGPT-maker OpenAI announced that it had enabled its GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 models to study images and analyze them in words, while its mobile apps will have speech synthesis so that people can have full-fledged conversations with the chatbot.
- The Microsoft-backed company had promised multimodality in March, during the release of GPT-4.
- It is expected that Google is set for release of new multimodal large language model called Gemini.

Working of multimodality

- Multimodal AI, a concept not new, has seen a surge in recent years. OpenAI's DALL.E, a text-to-image model released in 2021, forms the basis for ChatGPT's vision abilities. DALL.E itself builds upon CLIP, another multimodal text-to-image model introduced by OpenAI in the same year.

Applications of multimodal AI

- Some of the earlier multimodal systems combined computer vision and natural language processing models to perform some of the simpler functions like automatic image caption generation etc.
- In May, 2023, Meta announced a new open-source AI multimodal system called ImageBind that had many modes — text, visual data, audio, temperature, and movement readings.
- The model can perform text-to-speech, speech-to-text, speech-to-speech and text-to-text translations for around 100 languages.

ICMR to study develop solutions for childhood undernutrition

Context

- ICMR is forming a team for a nationwide study on children's nutrition and to explore the impact of providing take-home foods and behavior interventions for healthy feeding practices.

Child's growth

- A child's main growth period occurs during their formative years, typically from infancy to adolescence.
- Time between six and 24 months is a critical age-window that influences subsequent growth trajectory and heightens the risk of wasting, stunting and undernutrition if the diet and care environment of children is not optimal.
- During this time, proper nutrition, physical activity, and emotional well-being play crucial roles in their overall development and growth.

Challenges

- Listing out the challenges in complementary feeding, the ICMR noted that there are often suboptimal practices, including:
  o Inadequate quality or quantity of foods
  o Poor feeding practices
  o Complementary feeding being initiated too early or too late

Suggestions

- ICMR noted that the Take Home Ration (THR) programme aims to play a critical role in improving the nutritional intake of children.
- It suggested that apart from providing the right food, ensuring that an infant or a young child is actually eating it is equally critical.

EC announces election schedule for 5 states

Context

- The Election Commission of India announced recently the assembly election schedule for five states- Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Mizoram.

Assembly Election schedule

Constitutional Provisions

- Part XV of the Indian constitution deals with elections, and establishes a commission for

Battle lines drawn

Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana will go to the polls in November this year. A look at the key dates.

Counting day for all the States: December 3, 2023

	Chhattisgarh	Mizoram	Madhya Pradesh	Rajasthan	Telangana
Election day	November 7, 17	November 7	November 17	November 23	November 30
Last date for nominations	October 20	October 20	October 30	November 6	November 10

these matters.
- Article 324 to 329 of the constitution deals with powers, function, tenure, eligibility, etc of the commission and the member.
- The Election Commission was established in accordance with the Constitution on 25th January 1950.

Model Code of Conduct
- The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India to regulate political parties and candidates during elections.
- It helps EC in keeping with the mandate it has been given under Article 324 of the Constitution, which gives it the power to supervise and conduct free and fair elections to the Parliament and State Legislatures.
- The MCC is operational from the date on which the election schedule is announced until the date of the result announcement.

Periodic Labour Force Survey on urban unemployment
Context
- The latest bulletin on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) was released by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

About survey
- The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), carried out by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), has reported that unemployment rate in urban areas of the country has shown a decrease during the period April-June 2023.
- According to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme, India's urban unemployment rate fell to 6.6 percent in the first quarter of 2023-24 from 6.8 percent in January-March.
- The survey, published on a quarterly basis for urban data, measures the unemployment rate in terms of Current Weekly Status (CWS).

Low quality female jobs
- While the unemployment and Labour Force Participation rates for females improved in April-June, the type of jobs they took on posed worrying questions about the country's job situation.
- In April-June, the percentage of females employed in casual labour fell to 6.8 percent from 7.3 percent in the first quarter of 2023.
- Meanwhile, the percentage of males with salaried jobs rose by 50 basis points to 47.8 percent.

Key indicators
- The Centre also claimed improvement in key labour market indicators in urban areas compared with those in pre-pandemic period (April-June 2018 to October–December 2019).
- The LFPR ranged from 46.2% to 47.8% during the pre-pandemic period and in the latest report it was 48.8%.
- The unemployment rate ranged between 7.8% and 9.7% during the pre-pandemic period and at the latest survey it was 6.6%.

Mental health and the floundering informal worker
Context
- World Mental Health Day focuses on 'mental health as a universal human right.'
- A study by ILO reveals 15% of working-age adults globally have mental disorders.
- The Informal workers are often overlooked in mental health discussions.
- Decent work positively impacts mental health, but unemployment, discrimination, and unsafe workplaces pose risks.
- It was observed that Low-paid, insecure jobs and isolation increase psychosocial risks, compromising mental health.

The Indian experience

- India's informal workforce accounts for more than 90% of the working population.
- The Informal workforce lack regulatory protection, endure unsafe conditions, long hours, and face discrimination, worsening mental health and limiting access to care.
- Gender disparities are severe, with 95% of India's working women in precarious, low-paying jobs, lacking social support and facing patriarchal pressures in both social and family spheres.
- According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), unemployment and poor-quality employment have consistently been detrimental to mental health.

ILO report on mental health

- An ILO report highlights that young workers in India are turning to insecure, low-paying jobs due to desperation, with some leaving the labor force entirely.
- The State of Inequality in India Report 2022 reveals alarming trends, including rising unemployment rates with higher education levels, especially for educated young women (42% unemployment rate).
- This is concerning given India's large working-age population.
- ILO recommended that ensuring quality employment and long-term social security is vital in this demographic phase.

On social security

- Informal workers in India, especially migrants, are struggling with mental distress due to debt and healthcare costs.
- Post-COVID-19 recovery is uneven, with many facing food insecurity and reduced consumption.
- Factors like food security and financial stability significantly impact mental health. Despite some increased funding, crucial schemes like MNREGS overall budget allocation as been redacted in budget 2023.
- Employment guarantee programs can enhance mental health outcomes, emphasizing the need for social security measures to boost income and prevent economic distress.
- The Code on Social Security 2020 fails to address critical issues for India's informal workforce.

Conclusion

- Informal workers in India face economic, physical, and mental vulnerabilities.
- The country's mental health budget, currently below 1%, has overly emphasized digital programs.
- To address mental health effectively, community-based and human rights-oriented care must be prioritized.
- Proactive policies are crucial to uphold the human right to good health, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good health and well-being) and 8 (Decent work and economic growth).

09.10.2023

- **Digital India Act 2023**
- **Indian Air Force unveils its new ensign**
- **ISRO performs trajectory correction for Aditya-L1**
- **52nd GST Council Meeting**
- **The rise of services**

Digital India Act 2023

Context

- The recent announcement of the Digital India Act 2023 (DIA) represents a significant step towards establishing a future-ready legal framework for the country's burgeoning digital ecosystem.

About

- The upcoming Digital India Act (or Digital India Bill) is expected to be India's newest legislation and legal framework for regulating the country's online environment and digital data protection policies.
- The Digital India Act will fully replace the current Information Technology Act (IT Act) of 2000.
- The primary motivation behind the DIA is to bring India's regulatory landscape in sync with the digital revolution of the 21st century.
- This move by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) signals a proactive approach to regulating and shaping the digital future of the nation.

Key provisions

- Digital Infrastructure Development: Outlines plans for enhancing digital infrastructure, including widespread internet access and advanced communication networks.
- Data Privacy and Security: Defines protocols for handling sensitive data, both by government agencies and private entities.
- Cybersecurity Measures: Introduces measures to strengthen cybersecurity, safeguarding against cyber threats and attacks.
- Digital Literacy and Skill Development: Focuses on skill development initiatives to nurture a workforce adept in digital technologies.
- Promotion of Emerging Technologies: Supports research and development in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and IoT (Internet of Things).
- Additionally, the DIA mandates stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for wearable devices, accompanied by criminal law sanctions.

Challenges

- One key concern is the potential impact on innovation and the ease of doing business. Stricter regulations, particularly in emerging technologies, could inadvertently stifle entrepreneurial initiatives and deter foreign investments.
- Balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including tech giants, while ensuring the protection of citizen rights, poses a significant challenge.

Indian Air Force unveils its new ensign

Context

- The Indian Air Force unveiled its new Ensign at the annual Air Force Day parade as it marks its 91st anniversary.

New Ensign of Indian Air Force

- The Chief of the Air Staff, unveiled a new Ensign for the force, as it marked its 91st anniversary, by the inclusion of the Air Force Crest in the top right corner of the Ensign, towards the fly side.
- IAF Crest has the national symbol, the Ashoka lion, on the top with the words Satyameva Jayate in Devanagari below it.
- Below the Ashoka lion is a Himalayan eagle with its wings spread, denoting the fighting qualities of the IAF.
- The theme for this year's Air Force Day was "IAF — air power beyond boundaries",
- A new IAF ensign has been crafted to better represent the values and ethos of the Indian Air Force.

ISRO performs trajectory correction for Aditya-L1

Context

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) shared an update on Aditya-L1 and said that it successfully performed Trajectory Correction Manoeuvre (TCM).

About Aditya-L1

- India's first solar observatory mission, Aditya-L1, was successfully launched on September 2 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) in Sriharikota.
- The spacecraft, after traveling about 1.5 million km from the Earth over 125 days, is expected to be placed in a Halo orbit around the Lagrangian point L1 which is considered closest to the Sun.
- Among others, it will send pictures of the sun for scientific experiments.
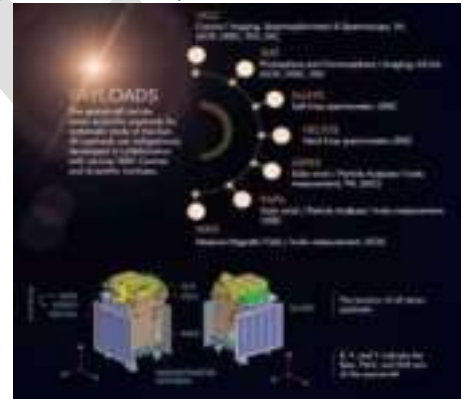
Status of Aditya-L1 spacecraft

- The Aditya-L1 spacecraft is headed to the Lagrangian-1 (L1) point between sun and earth.
- According to ISRO the spacecraft is healthy and on its way to Sun-Earth L1.
- L1 is about 1.5 million km from earth and the distance of L1 from earth is approximately 1% of the earth-sun distance.
- Aditya-L1 continues to move ahead, the magnetometer payload will be turned on again within a few days.

Aim and significance

- The Aditya L-1 payloads are expected to provide crucial information to understand the problem of:
  o Coronal heating
  o Coronal mass ejection
  o Pre-flare and flare activities and their characteristics
  o Dynamics of space weather
  o Propagation of particles and fields etc.

52nd GST Council Meeting

Context

- The 52nd GST Council meeting chaired by Union Minister for Finance gave several recommendations regarding changes in GST tax rates, simplifying trade processes, and streamlining GST compliance.

Recommendations

- Amendments in conditions of appointment of President and Member of the proposed GST Appellate Tribunals regarding eligibility and age
- GST Council suggests no tax on loose millet flour with 70% millets; 5% tax for pre-packaged, labelled millet flour.
- The Council excludes Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) for human consumption from GST.
- GST Council lowers GST on molasses from 28% to 5% to aid cane farmers and reduce cattle feed manufacturing costs.
- The Council suggests limited-time IGST exemption for foreign vessels transitioning to coastal runs to boost tourism.

Other Law and Procedure Measures

- The GST Council additionally, recommended amendments for Input Service Distributor (ISD) procedures, making them mandatory for certain scenarios, with corresponding changes in the CGST Act and Rules.
- These recommendations aim to simplify GST processes, reduce tax burdens, and facilitate trade while ensuring compliance with GST regulations.

Building an India for manufacturers

Context

- India's services sector is experiencing significant growth, with exports and domestic services evolving rapidly.
- These changes are modernizing the sector and extending into manufacturing, marking an exciting development for the nation.

Services exports

- India's services sector has surged, generating $60 billion more annually than three years ago.
- The pandemic boosted IT services, with increased demand due to remote work.
- The sector has diversified, offering a wide array of professional services beyond call centers and software solutions, including accounting, legal, HR, business development, design, and R&D.
- India's services sector thrives with large and mid-sized IT firms, consulting companies, and Global Capability Centres (GCC) leading the way.
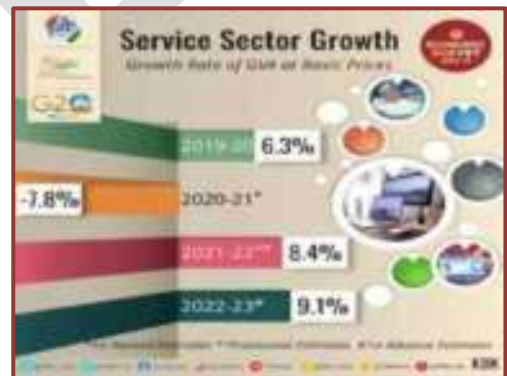
About GCCs

- Global Capability Centers (GCCs) are specialized units set up by multinational companies in countries like India for efficient and innovative business operations, particularly in areas like IT services and research.
- These centers are set up to handle specific business functions and processes, leveraging the country's skilled workforce, cost-efficiency, and favorable business environment.
- In 2022-23, around 1,600 GCCs made up a market of $46 billion, employing 1.7 million.

Global trend

- India's services exports are poised for rapid growth, akin to leading economies like the US, UK, Germany, and Ireland.
- Scale is a key factor driving this growth, along with pull and push factors once exports reach a certain size.
- Moreover, multinational companies in India are expanding their services, with some venturing into manufacturing, highlighting the synergy between the two sectors.

Digital infrastructure

- Digital infrastructure aids small manufacturers by solving key issues such as:
  - Access to credit
  - Affordable raw materials
  - Larger markets
  - Efficient logistics
  - Improved quality checks
- India's robust digital infrastructure fuels tech startups in the services sector.
- These startups might expand into manufacturing and agriculture, potentially transforming not just "new India" but also uplifting "old India."
- Digital tools help small manufacturers simulate scale, spurring expansion.
- Reforms are vital to eliminate obstacles hindering manufacturers' growth.

Conclusion

- The manufacturing sector in the country has achieved a significant competitive edge as a result of increasing demands, and positive market conditions and government policies.
- To ensure a potential growth, policy action is critical.
- The rise in modern services can energize manufacturing.

07.10.2023

- **TRAI can't regulate OTT platforms**
- **SC to hear money bill issue**
- **Canada to participate in G20 Parliament Speakers' Summit**
- **MGNREGS runs out of funds**
- **Aligning higher education with the United Nations SDGs**

TRAI can't regulate OTT platforms

Context

- The Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) stated on Over the Top (OTT) platforms, such as Hotstar, are not governed by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act but by Information Technology (IT) Rules 2021.

TDSAT's Order

- In an interim order passed by the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) said that OTT platforms are outside the purview of the TRAI Act since they do not require any permission or a license from the central government.
- This order was in response to a petition by the All-India Digital Cable Federation (AIDCF) against Star India Pvt Ltd (STAR).
- AIDCF claims Star India's free mobile streaming of ICC Cricket World Cup on Disney+Hotstar is discriminatory under TRAI rules. Matches are accessible on Star Sports TV only for paying subscribers.

Significant of the order

- Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) decision holds significance due to ongoing debates over the
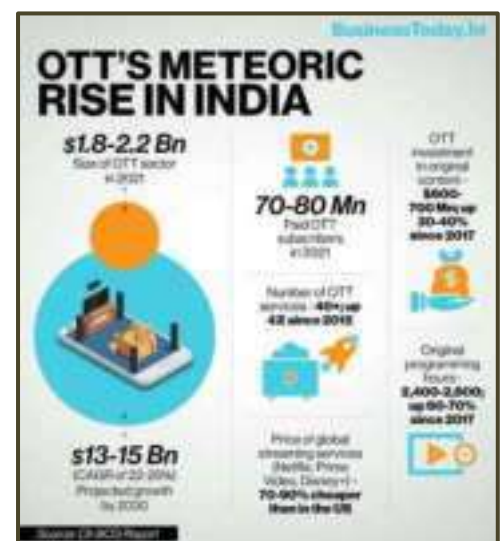
regulation of OTT services.

- TRAI and the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) have been attempting to regulate OTT platforms, while the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology opposes these efforts.

IT Ministry vs DoT over OTT regulation

- The IT Ministry believes that under the Allocation of Business Rules, Internet-based communications services are not part of DoT's jurisdiction.
- However, in this case, the conversation is centered around OTT communications services like WhatsApp.
- A copy of the draft Telecommunication Bill was sent to an inter-ministerial group for consultations in May.
- Following the objections raised by MeitY, the DoT is learnt to have gone back to the drawing board to reframe portions of the Bill which regulated OTT communication services.

SC to hear money bill issue

Context

- The Supreme Court set hearing date for the case concerning passage of laws as money bills by the parliament [Sweta Mangal vs Union of India].

About the SC bench

- The seven-judge bench including the Chief Justice of India will soon be set up to hear a batch of pleas challenging the Centre's use of the money bill route to pass certain key legislations.
- In recent years, some major legislations have been passed via the money bill route.
- The setting up a a seven-judge bench came during the hearing challenging set of amendments to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).
- The Finance Acts passed in 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 brought in crucial amendments to the PMLA.

Money bill

- Money Bill is defined in Article 110 of the Indian Constitution.
- In India, a Money Bill is a type of legislation that relates to the appropriation of money from the Consolidated Fund of India, which is the main fund of the government.
- Money Bills are typically related to financial matters such as taxation, public expenditure, and public debt.
- A money Bill can only be introduced in Lok Sabha and does not need the consent of Rajya Sabha.
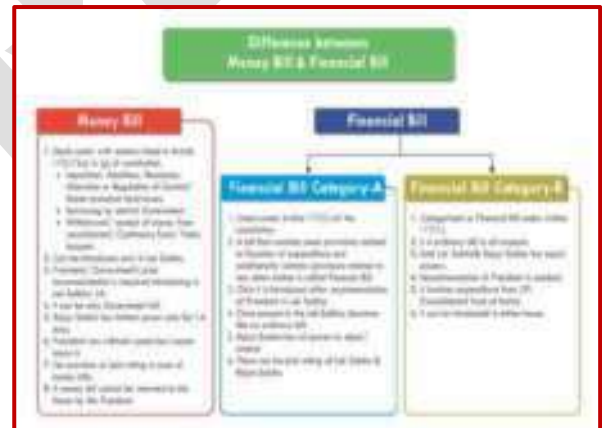
Other challenges

Aadhaar

- In 2018, the Supreme Court of India upheld the government's classification of the Aadhaar Act as a money bill under Article 110 of the Constitution in a 4:1 majority decision.
- This ruling set a crucial precedent for interpreting money bills in India.

Tribunal reform

- In November 2019, in Roger Matthew vs Union of India, the Supreme Court heard the challenge against tweaks in the service conditions of tribunal members which was also introduced as a money bill in the Finance Act, 2017.
- While a five-judge bench of the court struck down the law as unconstitutional for interfering with judicial independence, it referred the money bill aspect to a larger constitution bench.

Canada to participate in G20 Parliament Speakers' Summit

Context

- In the midst of strained diplomatic ties between India and Canada, the government of is set to raise concerns with the Canadian speaker of the Senate during G20 Parliament Speakers' Summit.

What on the agenda

- Lok Sabha Speaker said that India will raise "all issues" with the Canadian Speaker of the Senate during the upcoming Parliament-20 meeting of the G-20 nations' presiding officers in New Delhi.
- The presiding officers of 25 countries and 10 Deputy Speakers from the G-20 member nations and invitee countries are expected to attend the summit.
- India's relations with Canada have hit a new low after Canadian Prime Minister linked Indian agents to the killing of Khalistani separatist and raised the matter in the House of Commons.

Sustainable growth

- The main theme of the 9th P-20 is proposed to be 'Parliaments for One Earth, One Family, One Future'.
- The P-20 summit will have sessions on:
  - Accelerating Sustainable Development Goals
  - Sustainable Energy Transition
  - Transformation in People's Lives through Public Digital Platforms
  - Women-led Development

MGNREGS runs out of funds

Context

- According to Ministry of Rural Development statistics Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), has run out of funds.

Budget allocation

- An amount of ₹60,000 crore was sanctioned for the scheme for 2023-24, which was 18% lower than the ₹73,000-crore budget estimates and 33% lower than the ₹89,000 crore revised estimates for the financial year 2022-23.
- Six months into the financial year, the flagship rural employment programme, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), is running a deficit of ₹6,146.93 crore.
- According to sources, on September 15, the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) had approached the Finance Ministry, asking for a supplementary budget of ₹23,000 crore.

Demand-driven wage employment programme

- The MoRD has reiterated that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act [MGNREGA] is a demand-driven wage employment programme and fund release to States/union territories is a continuous process.
- Every adult member of a household in a rural area with a job card is eligible for a job under the scheme.
- The scheme envisages providing 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to adult member volunteers for unskilled manual work.

Budget allocation to MGNREGA over last five years

- It covers all districts of India except the ones with 100% urban population.
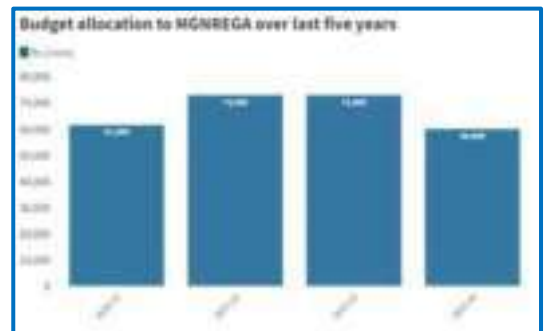
Aligning higher education with the United Nations SDGs

Context

- The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 goals and 169 targets agreed upon by 193 member states.

- These goals aim to address urgent issues like poverty, inequality, education, and environmental problems by 2030, requiring global cooperation and strategic actions for a better future.
- Eight years after their launch, the 2023 SDGs Report highlights sluggish progress. COVID-19, climate crisis, conflict, and a weak economy have hindered advancements, painting a grim picture of global efforts.

NEP 2020 and SDGs

- In recent actions and policies indicate that India is committed towards realizing SDGs. SDG4 pertains to access to quality education.
- India, with a long-standing history of equitable and inclusive education, has accelerated efforts to ensure the achievement of SDGs through various reforms.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 should be given credit to a great extent.
- NEP 2020 has been prepared in tune with most of the SDGs.
- Though NEP 2020 calls for:
  o Changes at all levels of education
  o Priority should be accorded to higher education as it accelerates social mobility
  o Empowers people through creativity and critical thinking
  o Grants them employment skills

Strengthen research-teaching

- Universities should strengthen the research-teaching nexus in university education. Through this student will become direct benefactors of the knowledge generated from research.
- Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary systems of education produce multitalented people who can pursue research, and find innovative solutions to global challenges such as:
  o Affordable and clean energy (SDG7)
  o Sustainable cities and communities (SDG11)
  o Climate change and global warming (SDG13)
- Introducing Value-Based Education (VBE) will help citizens become responsible towards self, society, and the planet and help our nation achieve "Life on Land" (SDG15).

Bottom line

- NEP 2020 demands that Indian higher education be committed to mapping its day-to-day operations with SDGs.
- To accelerate the progress towards achieving the 2030 agenda, stakeholders of higher education should be educated and oriented.
- It is high time that universities adopted sustainability as a mantra and incorporated SDGs into their institutional strategies, both in daily administration and in teaching and research.
- Educational institutions have to rethink their approach so that it is in tune with the NEP which will be crucial in realizing the 2030 deadline for SDGs.

06.10.2023

- **Uniform anti-terrorism structure under NIA in all States**
- **India looks forward to engaging with new Maldivian govt.**
- **Re-examining ruling on immunity to MPs & MLAs**
- **Services PMI signals September boost**
- **Defusing the ticking time bomb called diabetes**

Uniform anti-terrorism structure under NIA in all States

Context
- The Union home minister inaugurated the third anti-terror conference.

Third anti-terror conference
- During the third anti-terror conference, intelligence and investigation agencies of the country discussed current and emerging threats to the national security, including violent activities and funding of pro-Khalistani extremists (PKEs) operating from foreign soil.
- The Central and State agencies had succeeded in firmly curbing all forms of terrorism in the country in the past nine years.
- The conference also stressed that central and state agencies to utilize multidimensional AI-based databases for successful counterterrorism efforts.

Uniform anti-terrorism structure
- The union home minister said that along with a ruthless approach, a uniform anti-terrorism structure should be established under the purview of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in all the States.
- The hierarchy, structure, and standard operating procedure of investigation of all anti-terrorism agencies in all States would be made uniform for better coordination between Central and State agencies.
- The task of NIA, ATS, and STF should not be limited to investigation but they should also think out of the box and take innovative measures to counter the terrorism.

India looks forward to engaging with new Maldives govt.

Context
- The government of India said that it was looking forward to engaging with the new Maldivian government on all issues, reaffirming its commitment to strengthening the "time-tested" bilateral ties.

India-Maldives partnership
- India and Maldives share strong diplomatic ties.
- Maldives holds strategic importance in the Indian Ocean region.
- India supports various infrastructure and developmental projects in Maldives. The focus of partnership between India-Maldives has always been on capacity building and working together to address our shared challenges and priorities.
- There is a need to collaborate closely to address the challenges confronting our region such as transnational crimes and Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR).

Re-examining ruling on immunity to MPs & MLAs

Context
- A seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court reserved its verdict on reconsideration of its 1998 judgement which had held that MPs and MLAs enjoy immunity from prosecution for taking bribe to make a speech or vote in legislature.

About
- A constitution bench of the Supreme Court questioned whether immunity should be granted to legislators accused of corruption, merely on an apprehension that the absence of such immunity could be misused by the executive to target political opposition.

- The Bench also question whether the immunity available to MPs and MLAs under Articles 105 (2) and 194 (2) of the Constitution from prosecution will extend to cases of bribery as well.

Sources of Privileges

- The Parliament, till now, has not made any special law to exhaustively codify all the privileges.
- At Present, all the privileges are based on 5 sources:
  - Constitutional provisions
  - Various laws made by Parliament
  - Rules of both Houses
  - Parliamentary conventions
  - Judicial interpretations

PV Narasimha Rao v/s State,1998

- The P V Narasimha Rao case involved the 1993 JMM bribery scandal, where MPs were accused of taking bribes to vote against a no-confidence motion against the then P V Narasimha Rao government.
- The Supreme Court quashed the case, citing parliamentary immunity under Article 105(2) of the Constitution.
- **Article 105:** There shall be freedom of speech in **Parliament**. No member of Parliament shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in Parliament or any committee thereof.
- **Article 194:** There shall be freedom of speech in the **State Legislature**. No member of the State Legislature shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in the State Legislature or any committee thereof.

Services PMI signals September boost

Context

- According to the S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's services sector activity gained momentum in September, with new orders rising at the second-fastest rate since June 2010.

Findings

- Growth in new international orders slowed to a three-month low, yet was one of the quickest since September 2014.
- As per the S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which rose to 61 from 60.1 in August.
- With the input cost inflation slowing to one of the lowest levels since late 2010, services firms raised prices at the slowest pace in six months.

About Services PMI

- In order to get an economic insight into a sector, the purchasing managers' index (PMI) provides an indicator based on surveys of businesses.
- The most common PMI surveys are the Manufacturing PMI and the Services PMI.
- The Services PMI provides advanced insight into the services sector, giving investors a better understanding of business conditions and valuable information about the economic backdrop of various markets.
- The PMI data are also used by the Reserve Bank of India to help make interest rate decisions.

Defusing the ticking time bomb called diabetes

Context

- In June 2023 study by Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Union Health Ministry revealed 11.4% (10.13 crore) Indians have diabetes, 15.3% (13.6 crore) are pre-diabetic, and 28.6% are obese based on Body mass index (BMI).

Consumption of ultra-processed foods

- According to the World Health Organization, rising diabetes rates in India are linked to widespread consumption of unhealthy ultra-processed foods like sugary drinks, chips, cookies, and processed meats.
- Diets rich in ultra-processed foods, high in sugar, fat, and salt increase the risk of diabetes.
- A 10% rise in ultra-processed food consumption leads to a 15% higher diabetes risk. Ultra-processed foods promote overeating, weight gain, and diabetes.
- Obesity and diabetes elevate heart disease and mortality risks.

Food industry

- It is reported that the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages has fallen in the last 20 years in many high-income countries but actually surged in low- and middle-income nations like India.
- Aggressive marketing of ultra-processed foods, especially targeting children and the middle class, drives unhealthy consumption.
- Industry tactics outweigh individual choice, blaming the environment, not people, for poor dietary decisions.

Concerns

- The food industry also participates in programmes such as 'Eat Right', making false promises.
- Such partnerships do not allow us to make a strong regulation that could reduce the consumption of ultra-processed food and beverages.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has shown a lackluster response to the crisis and allowed a dominating role to the food industry while suggesting front-of-package labeling, which is still not in place.

Way forward

- The Government intervention, such as legal measures or ordinances, is crucial to counter manipulative food industry tactics.
- This could involve defining healthy food, implementing warning labels, and restricting promotions of unhealthy products.
- The people must be informed of the risk of consuming such food.
- South Africa, Norway, and Mexico have set examples by regulating food labeling and marketing.
- The Government of India can show its strength to regulate food labeling and marketing.
- A legal framework or ordinance is essential to protect people from food industry strategies and reduce ultra-processed food consumption.

05.10.2023

- **New defence indigenisation list**
- **Centre eases aircraft recovery rules**
- **National Action Plan for Green Shipping**
- **GST on e-gaming and regulation**
- **Women's quota, panchayats to Parliament**

New defence indigenisation list

Context

- The Fifth Positive Indigenisation List has been prepared by department of military affair's (DMA).

Roadmap

- The Defence Minister released the fifth Positive Indigenisation List of 98 items to be procured by the three Services from domestic sources in a staggered manner on specified timelines.
- It lays special focus on import substitution of components of major systems, besides important platforms, weapon systems, sensors and munitions which are being developed and likely to translate into firm orders in the next five to 10 years.

Items on the indigenisation

- The items on the indigenisation list include futuristic infantry combat vehicle, articulated all-terrain vehicles, several types of unmanned aerial vehicles, medium-range precision kill system for artillery, test equipment for guided weapon system for T-90 S/SK tanks, radars, armor plates for cabin nose section for Mi-17 helicopter, automated mobile test system for OSA-AK-M air defence system, gravity rollers for Mi-17V5 helicopter and flares of P-8I and MiG 29-K aircraft.

Swavlamban 2.0

- At the plenary session of "Swavlamban 2.0", the two-day seminar of the Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO), the defence minister launched 76 challenges for the industry under the "10th Defence India Start-up Challenges (DISC-10) and DISC 10 PRIME of Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and five problem statements under iDEX for soldiers".
- In addition, two INDUS X challenges under "INDUS-X Mutual Promotion of Advanced Collaborative Technologies" (IMPACT) challenges jointly finalized by iDEX and the U.S. Department of Defence were launched.

Centre eases aircraft recovery rules

Context

- The Ministry of Corporate Affairs exempted aircraft, engines, and parts from certain Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code provisions, impacting Go First airline's revival prospects.

Exemption

- The provisions of sub-section (1) of section 14 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (31 of 2016), would not be applicable to transactions, arrangements, or agreements, under the Convention and the Protocol, relating to aircraft, aircraft engines, airframes and helicopters.
- The government's notification to exempt transactions involving aircraft, aircraft engines, and helicopters from the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) comes amid the ongoing insolvency proceedings of Go First, the Wadia Group-owned airline.
- Go First had 54 aircraft in its fleet, and lessors of nearly all aircraft had sought de-registration of their assets over pending dues.

Insolvency declaration

- Go First had filed for voluntary insolvency in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) in May under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, blaming US engine maker Pratt and Whitney for its troubles. The airline said it was forced to ground half of its fleet because of faulty engines supplied by Pratt & Whitney.

- In May, the principal bench of NCLT at Delhi admitted Go First's voluntary plea to initiate an insolvency resolution process.
- The tribunal appointed an IRP while suspending the board and putting a moratorium on the debt-ridden airline's financial obligations.

National Action Plan for Green Shipping

Context

- The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways has noted that the national action plan for green shipping promoting eco-friendly practices and incentives for low emission ships, will help position India's maritime sector as environmentally responsible.

India's maritime sector

- India has a vast coastline of approximately 7,500 kilometers, making it one of the largest maritime nations in the world.
- The country has 12 major ports and around 200 notified minor and intermediate ports.
- India's maritime sector contributes significantly to the economy, handling about 95% of the country's trade by volume and 70% by value.
- India's maritime sector will play a pivotal role in achieving a $20 trillion economy by 2047.

National Action Plan for Green Shipping

- The National Action Plan for Green Shipping promotes:
  - Eco-friendly practices and incentives for low emission ships
  - Positioning India's maritime sector for a prosperous and environmentally responsible future
- The recent achievements in the shipping sector include doubling major ports' capacity, substantial waterway growth, increased cruise passengers and seafarers, expanded solar power, and lighthouse tourism.
- This progress is fueled by transformative reforms like Sagarmala and digitization initiatives.

GST on e-gaming and regulation

Context

- The industry experts have warned that the online gaming firms are compensating customers for GST deductions deduction of 28 per cent, but this could shut smaller companies and deter new entrants.

Cashback schemes

- Companies like Dream11, Mobile Premier League (MPL), and WinZO have all started cashback schemes to foot the bill for the GST deduction of 28 per cent.
- Companies like Dream11, Mobile Premier League (MPL), and WinZO have all started cashback schemes to foot the bill for the GST deduction of 28 per cent.
- The industry deals with the fallout of the new GST regime, online gaming companies have come up with a new idea to avoid losing customers – by absorbing the GST deduction and compensating users for it for at least the next two to three years.

Amendment to GST laws

- The Union finance Minister introduced bills to amend the Central and Integrated GST laws to facilitate the levy of 28% GST on the face value of all bets made in casinos, horse-racing and online gaming.
- The amendments pertain to insertion of a provision in the Schedule III of the CGST Act, 2017, to provide clarity on the taxation of supplies in casinos, horse racing and online gaming.

Women's quota, panchayats to Parliament

Context

- Recently, Parliament passed the women's reservation Bill which grants one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies.
- India's current female parliamentary representation is only around 15%.
- Reservation for women in elections to the local bodies in India will result in increasing participation in governance.

128th Amendment Bill, 2023

- The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty Eighth) Amendment Bill, 2023, would be implemented only after the 2026 delimitation exercise using data from the Census to be conducted after the passage of the Bill this year.
- This will also apply to the seats reserved for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and states legislatures.
- The reservation in the Lok Sabha can hence be implemented only in the Lok Sabha election in 2029 and not in 2024.

Impact of reservations

- Beyond representation, women's reservation in local governments yielded substantive benefits.
- A 2004 paper by Esther Duflo and Raghabendra Chattopadhyay on panchayats in West Bengal and Rajasthan found that women leaders invest more in public goods and ensure increased women's participation in panchayat meetings.
- A 2008 study by Rao and Ban revealed no performance difference between male and female leaders in South India, Infact Institutional factors, like the maturity of the State's panchayat system, were more significant.

Uncertain future

- The impact of women's reservation is not straightforward.
- The design of women's reservations in Parliament and State Assemblies should have ideally been informed by its 30-year experience in panchayats and municipalities.
- Since the role that women play in local governments is different from their role in Parliament, the impact of reservation may play out differently.
- The design of women's reservation should have ideally been informed by its 30-year experience in local governments.

Conclusion

- Increasing women's representation raises questions about capacity building for first-time representatives.
- The Governments should ensure reservation models succeed and revise roles of key bodies like the National Commission for Women.
- Recognizing unpaid labor and equal sharing of household duties are vital for gender equality reform.

04.10.2023

- **The shutdown of the Afghan embassy**
- **ICMR project to accelerate cancer screening measures**
- **World Bank India's growth forecast**
- **India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index**
- **Using AI for audit techniques**

The shutdown of the Afghan embassy

Context

- The Afghanistan embassy in India suspended operations citing an inability to serve the country's interests and a shortage of staff and resources.

Afghanistan government statement

- The embassy of Afghanistan blamed India for its shutdown, citing a lack of support from India, and a reduction in personnel and resources.
- It also said a failure to meet expectations in serving Afghanistan's interests is another crucial factor in shutting off the embassy.

Turning point for Afghanistan-India relations

- The embassy represented the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan that was deposed through a military campaign by the Taliban on August 15, 2021.
- India did not recognize the Taliban as rulers after their swift takeover of Afghanistan amidst the U.S. forces withdrawal.
- The Afghan embassy in India operated as a symbolic entity, assisting Afghan citizens without diplomatic ties between the two countries.
- The previous ambassador, left India and hasn't been seen for over three months.
- The mission had stopped representing an active state since August 2021 and was working as a coordinating agency.

Consulates in operation

- Afghanistan has traditionally maintained an embassy in Delhi and two consulates in Hyderabad and Mumbai.
- The consulates in Hyderabad and Mumbai have not shut down.
- The announcement of the embassy of Afghanistan is expected to trigger confusion among Afghans in India but the consulates are expected to help them.

Impact on India and Afghanistan relations

- Despite the closure of the embassy in Delhi, India and Afghanistan are continuing engagement with each other in a curious way.
- India has been maintaining a "technical team" in Kabul where the staff provides visas to Afghan traders and travelers to India.
- There are two weekly flights that carry Afghan citizens and items to India.
- The Taliban has been urging India to support it with its economic revitalization through projects like electricity generation and road building works. India, however, has not yet indicated that it will review its position on the Taliban.

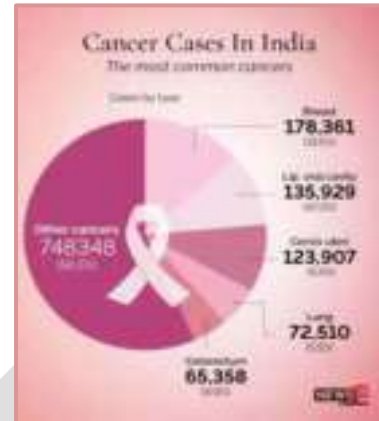# ICMR project to accelerate cancer screening measures

Context

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is gearing up to bring in remedial measures for cancer screening and treatment at district level.

Measures by ICMR

- With only a few districts across India being able to effectively implement cancer screening measures in accordance with Health Ministry norms, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is gearing up to bring in remedial measures.
- It has invited Expressions of Interest on the implementation of research to accelerate cancer screening, early diagnosis, and treatment.

Cancer cases in India

- The ICMR noted cancer poses a significant and pressing public health challenge in India, which currently ranks third in cancer incidence after China and the United States.
- According to Global Cancer Observatory projections, however, India is expected to witness a substantial 57.5% increase in cancer cases between 2020 and 2040.

Cancer Cases In India
The most common cancers

Breast 178,361
Lip, oral cavity 135,929
Cervix uteri 123,907
Lung 72,510
65,358
Other cancers 748,348

Roadmap

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) aims to enhance cancer screening by involving non-specialist healthcare workers, ensuring quality and coverage.
- The Council also wants to ensure that all those who test positive are linked to facilities for early diagnosis and treatment.
- The involvement of local communities is key to encourage the target population to undergo screening for early diagnosis and treatment.
- Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), have the potential to play a crucial role in promoting and conducting home-based cancer screening.

World Bank India's growth forecast

Context

- The World Bank on Tuesday retained India's economic growth forecast for 2023-24 at 6.3% in its biannual review.

India's growth

- The World Bank noted that service sector activity was expected to remain strong with a growth of 7.4% and investment growth was also projected to remain robust at 8.9%.
- The Bank said despite significant global challenges, India was one of the fastest-growing major economies in 2022-23 at 7.2%.
- The World Bank had in April too projected 6.3% GDP growth for 2023-24.
- India's growth rate was the second-highest among G20 countries and almost twice the average for emerging market economies.
- According to the RBI's latest forecast, the economy would grow at 6.5% in 2023-24.

Inflation Projection

- Inflation is expected to cool as food prices normalize and government measures increase the supply of key commodities.
- India's retail inflation accelerated to 7.8% in July due to a surge in prices of food items like wheat and rice due to adverse weather conditions.
- The government of India took several measures, including banning exports of some commodities that had cooled food prices in recent months.
- Global economic growth is set to slow down over the medium term due to high global interest rates, geopolitical tensions, and sluggish global demand.

India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index

Context

- India's manufacturing activity eased to a five-month low in September with new orders slowing down, as per the seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

Findings

- As per the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), India's manufacturing activity eased to a five-month low in September with new orders slowing down.
- Input cost inflation slowed, but firms raised output charges sharply, potentially impacting sales.
- Manufacturers cited higher labor costs, positive business confidence, and strong demand for price hikes in September.

Reasons for slowdown

- India's manufacturing industry showed mild signs of a slowdown in September, primarily due to a softer increase in new orders which tempered production growth.
- The appreciable increase in output charges, despite receding cost pressures, could restrict sales in the coming months.

Using AI for audit techniques

Context

- The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), warned that absolute dependence on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for auditing purposes may lead to inaccurate findings, and emphasized ethics as the cornerstone of responsible AI.
- The CAG is the chair for the Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) of the G20.
- The CAG conducts financial audits, compliance audits, and performance audits.

Concerns

- The auditing challenges of AI include ensuring transparency, objectivity, fairness, and avoiding bias.
  - Accuracy concerns: AI may produce inaccurate results, leading to auditing challenges.
  - Ethical dilemmas: Ensuring ethical AI use is crucial to maintain integrity in audits.
  - Data security risks: AI systems are vulnerable to data breaches, posing a threat to audit confidentiality.

India needs AI regulation

- In June, the European Parliament approved the EU AI Act, the first of its kind in the world.
- The Act ensures that generative AI tools such as ChatGPT will be placed under greater restrictions and scrutiny.
- Developers will have to submit their systems for review and approval before releasing them commercially.
- Parliament also prohibited real-time biometric surveillance from all public settings and "social scoring" systems.
- AI bias is an inherent risk originating from the human bias that is added to the data sets of machine learning.

Challenges before the CAG

- The CAG faces challenges in auditing AI due to data discrepancies and platform diversity.
- Regulations and standardized data are crucial.

- Integrating data from various sources is complex task.
- A new IT application aims for digital audits starting April 1, 2023, except for defense audits due to security concerns.
- Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) G20 conference stresses the necessity of a global AI audit framework.

Compliance issues

- Global organizations have created various AI auditing frameworks like COBIT, US Government Accountability Office, and COSO ERM Framework.
- The UK's Information Commissioner's Office offers draft guidance.
- Legal Data Protection Impact Assessments are required for AI systems processing personal data to mitigate risks.
- AI auditors must ensure secure personal data processing.
- Limited AI auditing frameworks mean auditors assess risks, controls, and governance effectiveness for evaluation.

03.10.2023

- **Nobel Prize in Medicine 2023**
- **IAF likely to induct Astra BVR air-to-air missile**
- **WHO approves R21 malaria vaccine**
- **Edible oil firms suffer big losses amid import surge**
- **Building BRICS for the future**

Nobel Prize in Medicine 2023

Context

- The 2023 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to Katalin Karikó and Drew Weissman for their breakthroughs in nucleoside base modifications, enabling the development of highly effective mRNA vaccines for COVID-19.

Development of mRNA vaccines

- The discoveries by the two Nobel Laureates were critical "for developing effective mRNA vaccines against COVID-19 during the pandemic that began in early 2020.
- In vitro produced mRNA is seen by dendritic cells as a foreign material, which causes them to become activated and release inflammatory signaling molecules.

Future of mRNA

- mRNA in vaccines has an established safety profile.
- mRNA vaccines target COVID-19 and other diseases like HIV and Zika.
- They are also used in cancer immunotherapy, training the body to recognize cancer cells.
- mRNA technology is cost-effective and safe, does not alter DNA, showing promise for future treatments.

Nobel Prize awards

- The Nobel Prize awards, first handed out in 1901, were created by Swedish inventor and philanthropist Alfred Nobel in his 1895 will to celebrate those who have "conferred the greatest benefit on mankind."
- The award in Physiology or Medicine is given for a significant discovery in either biology or medicine.
- The Nobel Prize is given for discoveries that have profoundly benefited humanity and altered the course of science; lifetime achievements or positions of scientific leadership are not eligible.
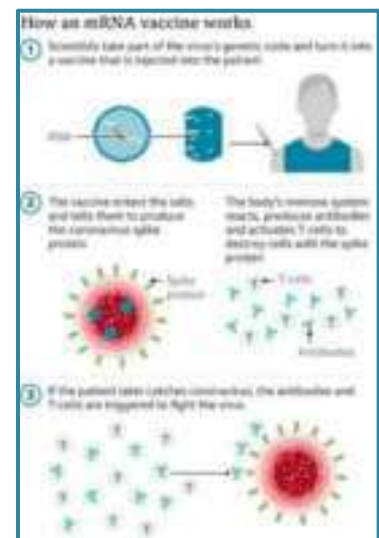
IAF likely to induct Astra BVR air-to-air missile

Context

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) has placed two contracts with Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL) for the indigenous Astra Beyond Visual Range (BVR) Air to Air Missile and the first batch is expected to be inducted by the end of 2023.

About Astra missile

- Astra is a state-of-the-art BVR air-to-air missile with a range of over 100 km designed to engage and destroy highly maneuverable supersonic aerial targets.
- It is designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Research Centre Imarat (RCI) and other DRDO laboratories.
- Astra, an indigenous Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missile, being test-fired by TEJAS Light Combat Aircraft (LCA).
- Astra is fully integrated on the Su-30MKI.

Supply of Astra missiles

- In May 2022, the Defence Ministry signed a contract with BDL for supply of Astra Mk-I missiles and associated equipment for the IAF and the Navy at a cost of ₹2,971 crore. As reported by The Hindu earlier, the IAF has expressed satisfaction with the Astra's performance and officials have stated that they were looking for over 200 Mk-1 missiles initially.

WHO approves R21 malaria vaccine

Context

- The World Health Organization (WHO) announced its recommendation of the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine to prevent malaria in children.

R21/Matrix malaria vaccine

- The R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and the Serum Institute of India, leveraging Novavax's adjuvant is critical to reducing over half a million malaria-related deaths annually.
- R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine marks the culmination of 30 years of malaria vaccine research at the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute
- The R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine is an easily deployable vaccine that can be manufactured at mass scale and modest cost.

Production targets

- The Serum Institute has already established production capacity for 100 million doses a year, which will be doubled over the next two years.
- This scale of production is critical because vaccinating those at high risk of malaria will be important in stemming the spread of disease, as well as protecting the vaccinated.

Edible oil firms suffer big losses amid import surge

Context

- There has been a marginal increase in edible oil prices in the September quarter.

Edible oil imports

- There has been a surge in edible oil imports, notably refined palm oil.
- Adani Wilmar, which makes the Fortune brand of edible oils, for instance, posted a net loss of Rs 79 crore in Q1FY24.
- The company's quarterly revenue declined 12%.

- This is despite a 25% rise in volumes from 1.19 million tons (MT) to 1.49 MT during the period.
- The share of domestic edible oil includes mustard (40%), soyabean (24%), groundnut (7%) and others.

Import duty

- Currently, the effective import duty on crude edible oil is 5.5% and that on refined oil is 13.75%.
- The government, however, is walking a tight rope, as it seeks to balance international prices on one hand and local production and inflationary concerns on the other hand by tweaking import duty structures from time to time.
- The Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA), an apex body of top edible oil companies, has urged the government to increase the gap between effective import duty on crude and refined edible oils.

Building BRICS for the future

Context

- Recently, during the 15th BRICS summit held in Johannesburg, the existing five-member group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) expanded by inviting six new countries: Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia (from Africa), and Argentina (from Latin America).

Economic compulsion

- BRICS emerged out of an economic compulsion. It does not provide military or security support to various countries, is not involved in the policing of nations, and does not provide peacekeepers.
- With a combined GDP at 36% of the global total and its members set to be 47% of the world's population by 2050, BRICS presents long-term opportunities.

India-China

- The two members of BRICS are China and India, which together contain one-third of the world's population.
- The two countries are the fastest-growing economies and are expected to be among the top three economies of the world by 2030.
- While India and China have bilateral challenges at the political and diplomatic levels since their stand-off at Doklam in 2017, trade between the two countries has continued to grow significantly.

Search for an alternative

- There has been some polarization between the U.S. and other parts of the world.
- Global tensions rose during the Trump era, particularly between the U.S. and China. Disputes included trade restrictions and U.S. efforts to limit China's progress in communication infrastructure and electric mobility.
- Countries explore alternatives like the Non-Aligned Movement amid Cold War challenges, sparking interest and membership applications.
- BRICS expansion promises new trade and investment agreements, akin to existing economic blocs.

Continent of the future

- Finally, the continent that promises economic growth this century is Africa.
- Visa restrictions have pushed Africans to travel to travel to China and see its development more closely than to Europe or the U.S.
- African countries continue to talk about the freedom they need in choosing partners for investment or trade.
- India proposed full membership for the African Union at the G20 summit in New Delhi.

NOVEMBER
2023

30th November 2023

- Centre approves 'ToR' for 16th Finance Commission
- Cabinet approves fund for tribal welfare
- Cabinet nod scheme to provide drones to women SHGs
- PLFS finding on unemployment rate
- Women's political empowerment — more talk, less action

Centre approves 'ToR' for 16th Finance Commission
Context
- The Union Cabinet approved the terms of reference (ToR) for the Sixteenth Finance Commission, which will recommend the formula for sharing revenues between the Centre and the States for the five-year period beginning on April 1, 2026.

Components of ToR
- The terms of reference (ToR) will include:
  o Distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Centre and the states
  o Allocation between the states of the respective shares of such proceeds
  o Principles, grants-in-aid, and the revenues of the states
  o Measures needed to supplement the resources of the panchayats
- The Commission will assess current funding structures for Disaster Management initiatives, particularly those outlined in the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (53 of 2005), and provide relevant recommendations.
- The panel will suggest ways to increase a State's Consolidated Fund, supporting resources for panchayats and local bodies as per State Finance Commission recommendations.
- The government has set a deadline of October 31, 2025, for the panel to submit its recommendations.

About Finance Commission
- The Finance Commissions are periodically constituted by the President of India under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution.
- The First Commission was established in 1951 under The Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1951.
- As per the constitution, the commission is appointed every five years and consists of a chairman and four other members.
- The 15th Finance Commission, chaired by NK Singh, was set up on November 27, 2017 and made recommendations for a period of six years from April 1, 2020. Its recommendations remain valid till the financial year 2025-26.

HOW THE BOOTY IS DIVIDED

FORMULA THAT DECIDES A STATE'S SHARE

STATES' SHARE IN DIVISIBLE POOL (%)

Cabinet approves fund for tribal welfare
Context
- The Union Cabinet has approved the wide-ranging Rs 24,104-crore tribal welfare scheme.
  o The Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) is one of the largest Central schemes and the largest targeting the tribal community in terms of outlay.

Aim of scheme
- The scheme aims to provide a number of facilities to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).
- These include housing, drinking water and sanitation, access to education, health and nutrition, road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- The scheme provides for:
  o Around 4.9 lakh pucca houses
  o 500 hostels
  o 2,500 Anganwadi centres
  o Installation of mobile towers in 3,000 villages
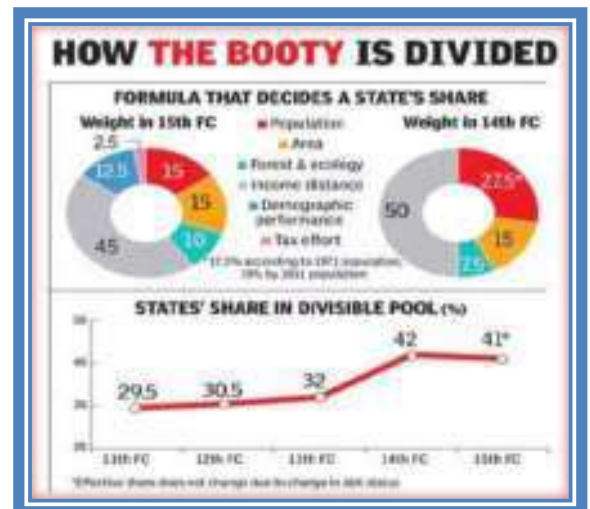
- o 8,000 km of road connectivity
- The Skill Development Ministry will facilitate the skills and vocational training in the selected villages.
- The PM Janjati Adivasi Nyay Maha Abhiyaan (PM-JANMAN), which was announced in the Union Budget and launched by Prime Minister on Birsa Munda's birth anniversary.

PVTGs populations
- As many as 75 tribal communities in 18 states and the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands have been categorised as PVTGs, which are backward in social, economic and education indicators.
- As per the 2011 Census, India has a total Scheduled Tribe population of 10.45 crore.
- According to data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the 2011 Census, Odisha has the largest population of PVTGs at 8.66 lakh, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 6.09 lakh and Andhra Pradesh (which then included Telangana) at 5.39 lakh.
- The total PVTG population is more than 40 lakhs.

Cabinet nod scheme to provide drones to women SHGs
Context
- The Union Cabinet has approved Central Sector Scheme for providing Drones to the Women Self Help Groups (SHGs), with an outlay of Rs. 1261 Crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2025-26.

Aim
- The Centre will provide drones to 15,000 progressive women self-help groups (SHG) to be rented out to farmers for agricultural purposes.
- The drone services are envisaged to be used by the farmers for nano fertilizer and pesticide applications.
- The groups would be identified from the total 89 lakh SHGs formed under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana.
- The approved initiatives under the scheme is expected to help these self-help groups earn an additional income of at least ₹1 lakh a year.

Financial assistance and training
- The groups would get Central financial assistance at 80% of the cost of drone. The total expense of a drone and its accessories is about ₹10 lakh.
- About 80% of the cost or up to ₹8 lakh, will be provided by the Centre.
- The drone pilot will get an honorarium of ₹15,000 and a co-pilot about ₹10,000.
- A well-qualified member of the SHG, aged 18 and above, will be elected for a 15-day training, comprising five-day mandatory drone pilot training and additional 10-day training for agriculture purpose of nutrient and pesticide application.

PLFS finding on unemployment rate
Context
- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), the unemployment rate in urban areas of the country decreased from 7.2% in July-September 2022 to 6.6% in July–September 2023.

Finding of survey
- The survey noted that the the jobless rate in urban areas has been steadily declining since the high of 12.6 per cent recorded in the Covid-affected April-June quarter of FY22.

- However after falling for two consecutive quarters, India's urban unemployment rate stagnated at 6.6 per cent in Q2 (July-September),
- The unemployment rate among men increased slightly to 6 per cent during the quarter from 5.9 per cent in the previous quarter.
- Whereas the jobless rate among women declined to 8.6 per cent from 9.1 per cent.
- The labour force participation rate (LFPR) in urban areas increased to 49.3% in July– September 2023 for persons aged 15 years and above.

Women's political empowerment — more talk, less action
- In any country, the political empowerment of women is generally possible with two routes.
- First is to reserve seats for women in legislature by means of legislation.
- Second is to have provision for quotas for women candidates within political parties while nominating candidates.

Reservation policy on neighboring countries
- Neighbouring Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan have opted for the legislative route and are faring better in terms of representation of women in their legislatures.
- For example, in Pakistan, 17% seats are reserved for women in its national assembly
  o Bangladesh has reserved 50 out of 350 seats in its Jatiya Sangsad
  o Nepal has reserved 33% of the total seats for women

The world and India
- There are many countries where there are no laws mandating quotas for women, but political parties are required to give a certain percentage of tickets to women candidates.
- Australia (38%), Canada (31%), South Africa (45%), and Sweden (46%) have no legislatively-backed quotas in their Parliament, yet most of these countries have more than 30% women in their respective Parliaments.
- This is clear evidence that quota is not the only route for women's political representation.
- There is another route of reservation within parties while giving tickets, which is equally effective for women's political representation.

Debate over women political representation
- The discussion on women's political representation in India has been ongoing.
- Although the bill proposing a 33% reservation of seats for women was approved in the Upper House in March, 2010, it faced challenges in the Lower House due to the United Progressive Alliance Government's lack of majority.
- The BJP-led NDA government in India enacted the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act of 2023, implementing a quota system to empower women politically by reserving 33% of seats in State Assemblies and Parliament.
- The bill received overwhelming support in the Lok Sabha, with only two members opposing it.

Bottom line
- The initiative of enacting the women reservation Act, 2023 is a commendable move by the parliamentarians of the day. But, due to its linkage with the new delimitation which will be done after 2026, we can say that the law looks good only on paper.
- While progress has been made, there is still work to be done to achieve true gender equality in Indian politics.
- The reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies has been a noteworthy step.
- The journey towards women's political empowerment is ongoing, requiring sustained efforts from government institutions, political parties, civil society, and the general public.

- **UK detects first human case of new swine flu strain**
- **RBI's new risk-weight rules**
- **NASA to train an Indian astronaut for ISS mission**
- **Peace and stability in Arab countries**
- **The challenge of maritime security in the Global South**

UK detects first human case of new swine flu strain

Context
- According to UK Health officials, a new type of swine flu has been detected in a United Kingdom human for the first time.

Screening and testing
- The health officials in the UK are investigating the first confirmed case of a new strain of swine flu, identified as Influenza A(H1N2).
- The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said the virus strain is like flu viruses currently circulating in pigs in the UK.

Background
- Influenza A(H1) viruses are enzootic in swine populations in most regions of the world.
- H1N1, H1N2 and H3N2 are major subtypes of swine influenza A viruses in pigs and occasionally infect humans, usually after direct or indirect exposure to pigs or contaminated environments.
- There has been a total of 50 human cases of influenza A(H1N2) reported globally since 2005; none of them related genetically to this strain.

Influenza viruses
- Influenza viruses are a group of RNA viruses belonging to the family Orthomyxoviridae. These viruses are responsible for causing influenza, a contagious respiratory illness commonly known as the flu.
- There are four types of influenza viruses: A, B, C, and D. Influenza A and B viruses are the ones that typically cause seasonal flu epidemics in humans.

RBI's new risk-weight rules

Context
- The RBI recently decided to revise the risk weight norms for NBFCs to 125 per cent from 100 per cent.
- This would be applicable to unsecured personal loans, credit cards and lending to NBFCs.

RBI proposal
- The idea is to address the notion of 'credit risk.'
- It refers to the risk entailed by a borrower being unable to meet their obligations or defaulting on commitments.
- 'Risk weights' are an essential tool for banks to manage this risk.
- This metric, in percentage factors, adjusts for the risk associated with a certain asset type.
- In other words, it is an indicator of the essential holding the lender should ideally have to adjust the associated risk. This is what the RBI has directed to be increased.

Increased in risk weights
- In a notification issued by the RBI, it has increased the risk weights on unsecured consumer loans, including credit cards, by 25% for both banks and NBFCs.
- Consumer credit of commercial banks and NBFCs attracts a risk weight of 100 percent, which now has been revised to 125 percent.

- Risk weight is the number of money banks must keep aside for large loans as required by the Reserve Bank of India.
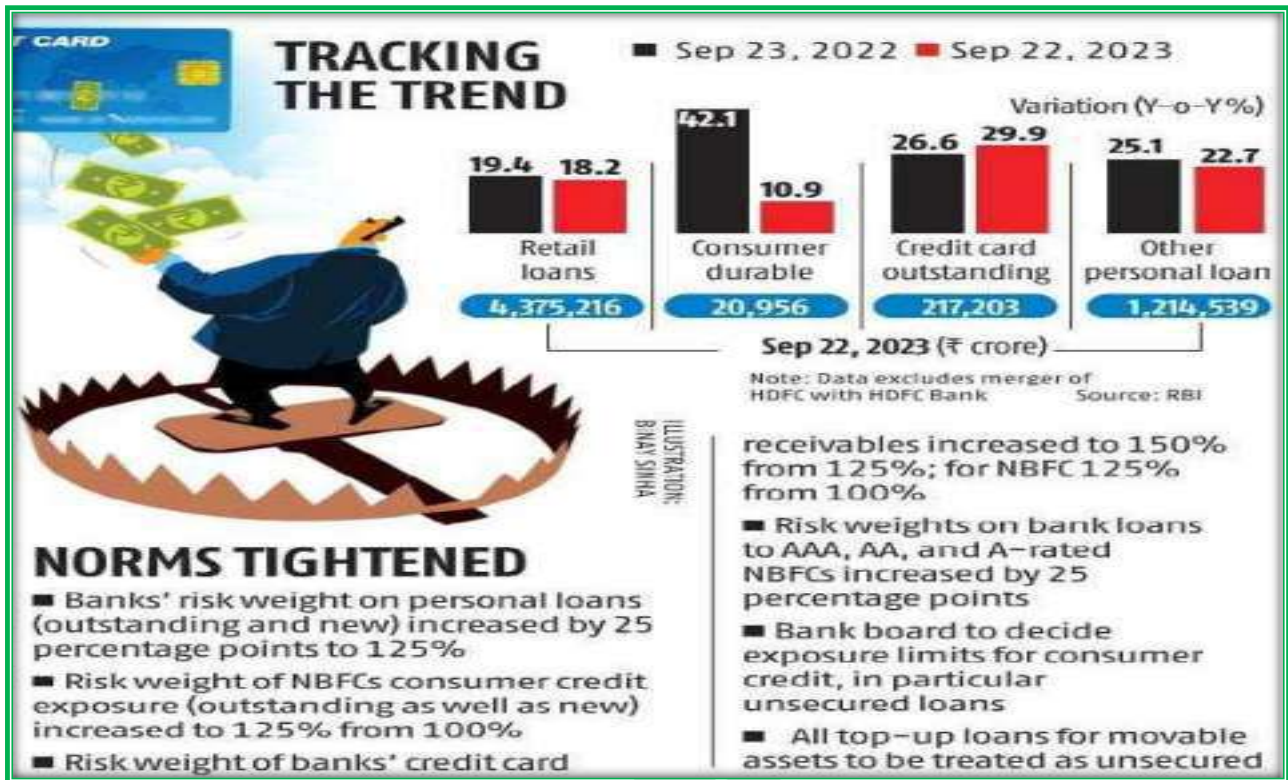
Why were the changes necessary
- RBI Governor had flagged concerns about the "high growth" in "certain components of consumer credit."
- He advised banks and NBFCs to "strengthen their internal surveillance mechanisms, address the build-up of risks, if any, and institute suitable safeguards, in their own interest."

Major concerns
- The primary concerns relate to the impact on capital adequacy and the bank's overall profitability.
- The immediate effect will likely be higher interest rates for borrowers, slower loan growth for lenders, reduced capital adequacy, and some hit on profits.
- NBFCs face a "double-whammy" because of higher risk weights on their unsecured loans and on account of the bank lending mandates to NBFCs.
- Bank lending to NBFCs remained the principal source of funding for NBFCs — constituting 41.2% of the total borrowing of entities as of March end.

NASA to train an Indian astronaut for ISS mission
Context
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a US space agency will train an Indian astronaut for a mission to the International Space Station by the end of 2024.

Training
- An Indian astronaut set to journey to the International Space Station in late 2024 will receive training assistance from NASA.
- The astronaut would be selected by ISRO.
- The selection will likely be from among the four persons who have undergone basic space astronaut training in preparation for the Gaganyaan mission.
- The science objectives for the two-week long mission will be decided by India.

Bharatiya Antariksha Station
- India's planned space station called the Bharatiya Antariksha Station.

- It will be built by India and operated by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- The station is expected to be completed by 2035.
- NISAR (NASA ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) is an equal collaboration between NASA and ISRO and marks the first time the two agencies have cooperated on hardware development for an Earth-observing mission.

Peace and stability in Arab countries

Context

- According to senior Arab diplomat, Arab countries expect India to play an important role in sustaining peace and stability in the world.

International Day of Solidarity

- The League of Arab States on recently commemorated the 'International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People' at the Palestinian Embassy in New Delhi.
- On November 11, Saudi Arabia hosted an extraordinary joint Arab Islamic summit.
- The Summit has formed a delegation which has a mission of outreach to all major capitals to explain the need for peace and ceasefire.

About Arab League

- Arab League, also called League of Arab States (LAS) is a regional organization of Arab states in the Middle East and parts of Africa.
- It was formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945.
- The founding member states were Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan (now Jordan), Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.
- The league aims to strengthen ties among member states, coordinate their policies and direct them towards a common good.
- Members:
- Currently it has 22 members including Palestine, which the League regards as an independent state.

The challenge of maritime security in the Global South

- Maritime security in the Global South is a complex and multifaceted issue that involves a range of challenges and considerations.
- The term "Global South" generally refers to countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania, which often face unique maritime security concerns.
- In recent years, hard security challenges in the maritime domain have acquired a new, menacing dimension.

Unconventional security threats

- The bulk of the demand for maritime security in recent years has come from states facing unconventional security threats, such as illegal fishing, natural disasters, marine pollution, human and drug trafficking, and the impact of climate change.
- These are difficult to fight using only military means.
- India during its G20 presidency emphasized the concerns of the Global South in discussions to find solutions to the most pressing issues in the maritime domain.

Belief about Global South

- In the Global South, there's a widespread belief that intense competition among powerful nations in the Indo-Pacific has negatively affected developing countries.
- The current security agenda involves interconnected goals related to national, environmental, economic, and human security, making it challenging to manage.
- Moreover, less developed states in this region face disproportionate impacts from rising sea levels, marine pollution, climate change, and natural disasters, leaving them vulnerable.

Creative models
- India's Maritime Vision 2030 sets out a creative model.
- This 10-year blueprint for the maritime sector envisages the development of ports, shipping, and inland waterways as a way of generating growth and livelihoods.
- Dhaka's inaugural official document on the Indo-Pacific details guiding principles and objectives that demonstrate a developmental approach to maritime security, focused on the provisioning of goods and services, and the protection of marine resources.

Way forward
- Among the proposals that set out ways to deal with maritime challenges is India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.
- It rests on seven pillars including maritime ecology, marine resources, capacity building, disaster risk reduction, and maritime connectivity.
- Implementing a collaborative strategy is challenging since it requires maritime agencies to improve interoperability, share intelligence, and agree on a regional rules-based order.

28th November 2023

- **Fibre optic cables: its origins, working and different functions**
- **ILO report urges safety net for work-related deaths rise**
- **Measures to combat cyber and digital fraud**
- **India's space road map for up to 2047**
- **It's time to revamp the structure of the Supreme Court**

Fibre optic cables: its origins, working and different functions
Context
- During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the one thing that connected us virtually was the internet.
- The use of fiber optic cables became even more crucial as people relied heavily on internet connectivity for work, education, entertainment, and communication.

About Optical fibres
- Optical fibres are made of thin cylindrical strands of glass.
- The diameter of a typical fibre is close to the diameter of a human hair.
- They are widely used for high-speed data transmission, telecommunications, internet connectivity, and various other applications
- For his ground-breaking achievements concerning fibre optic communication, Dr. Kao received a part of the 2009 Nobel Prize in physics.

Working of optical fibres
- The optical fibres work based on the principle of total internal reflection, which allows light to be transmitted through the core of the fiber without significant loss of signal strength.
- Light is an electromagnetic wave with a spectrum of frequencies.
- Visible light, X-rays, radio waves, and thermal radiation (heat) all lie on this spectrum.
- A fibre optic communication system consists of three parts:
  o Transmitter which encodes information into optical signals (in the form of rapidly blinking light pulses of zeros and ones)
  o Optical fibre that carries the signal to its destination
  o Receiver which reproduces the information from the encoded signal
  o Optical waves allow a high data-transmission rate, up to several terabits per second in a single fibre.

Basic Operation of an Optical Fiber

Light entering the fiber within this angular range will undergo total internal reflection and travel down the fiber.

Optical fiber cross section

Lower index cladding

Light entering the fiber at higher angles will exit through the cladding.

Total internal reflection

Higher index core
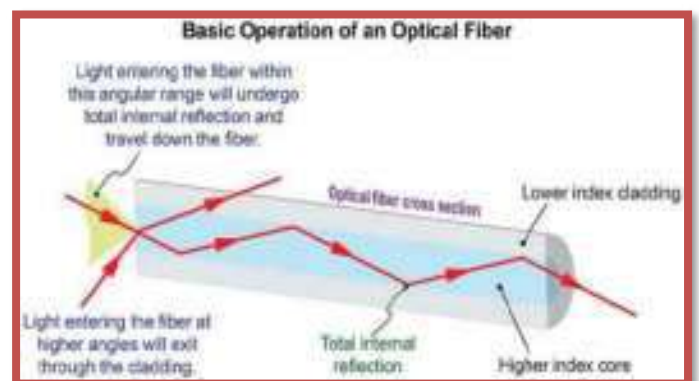
Discovery of fibre optic cables

- The basic idea of using light for communication can be traced back to the 19th century. In the 1840s, Daniel Colladon and Jacques Babinet conducted early experiments that demonstrated light could be guided through streams of water.
- However, it was not until the 20th century that practical applications emerged.
- The concept of using glass or plastic fibers for optical communication began to take shape in the 1950s.
- Physicist Narinder Singh Kapany is often credited with coining the term "fiber optics" and conducting key experiments in the transmission of light through fibers.
- The commercial use of fiber optic cables expanded rapidly in 1980's.

Future of fibre cables

- Fibre optics technology has since been used in telecommunication, medical science, laser technology, and sensing.
- In 2020, India introduced a ₹8,000 crore budget over five years for the 'National Mission on Quantum Technologies and Applications.
- This initiative focuses on securing communication and advancing quantum science.
- The rapid expansion of fiber optic networks, extending into homes, signals a new era in communication, coupled with the transformative potential of quantum optics.

ILO report urges safety net for work-related deaths rise

Context

- A recent report from the International Labour Organization (ILO) reveals that approximately 30 lakh workers worldwide succumb to work-related accidents and diseases annually.
  - The Asia-Pacific region accounts for over 63% of these fatalities.

Finding of the report

- The report noted that in 2016, the leading cause of work-related deaths was prolonged working hours (55 hours or more per week), claiming the lives of nearly 7.45 lakh individuals.
- This was followed by exposure to occupational particulate matter, gases, and fumes, resulting in 4.5 lakh deaths, and occupational injuries, causing 3.63 lakh deaths.
- The report said that the rate of trachea, bronchus, and lung cancers attributable to occupational exposure to chromium doubled between 2000 and 2016.
- Mesothelioma, attributable to asbestos exposure, has risen by 40%.
- The rate of non-melanoma skin cancer increased by over 37% between 2000 and 2020.

ILO conventions

- The report said of the 187 member countries, 79 have ratified the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155), and 62 have ratified the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).
- Notably, India has not ratified either of these conventions.
- In the wake of the Uttarkashi tunnel collapse in which 41 workers have been trapped, the Central trade unions had urged the Union government to ratify the conventions.
- The findings from the report titled "A Call for Safer and Healthier Working Environments" will be deliberated upon at the 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work.
- This congress stands as one of the largest international conferences addressing the topic of workplace safety and health.

Recommendations

- The report also recommended five categories of "Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" for ensuring safety and health at work. These include:
  I. Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
  II. Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour
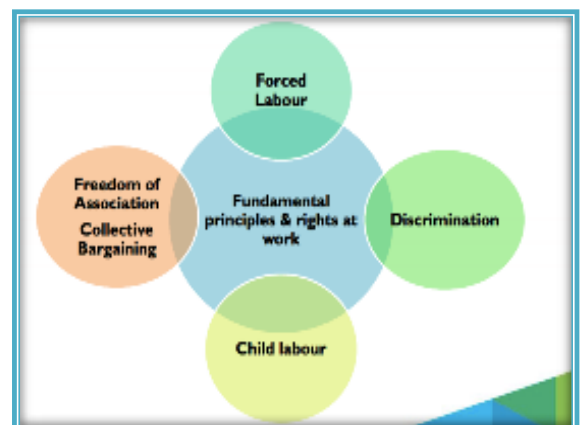
III. Abolition of child labour
IV. Elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation
V. Safe and healthy working environment

Measures to combat cyber and digital fraud

Context
- Following a recent case of erroneous money transfers at UCO Bank, the Finance Ministry has convened a meeting to address digital payment frauds, financial crimes, and cybersecurity measures needed to combat such activities.

Focus area
- Strengthening the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP)
- Monitoring when dormant accounts become operational
- Taking stock of the illegal loan app fiasco
- During the meeting the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Home Ministry, will make a presentation on the latest statistics of digital payment frauds as reported in the NCRP, including challenges and issues faced in countering such issues.

Time delay in UPI transaction
- The Centre is also considering a plan to impose a time delay, and an amount limit, for first time digital transactions between two people in order to curb rising instances of payment fraud in the country.
- The current consideration includes introducing a four-hour window to process the first transaction between two parties for payments over Rs 2,000.
- While the process is expected to add friction in digital payments, government officials believe it is necessary to mitigate cybersecurity concerns.

UPI STATISTICS (TOP PICKS)

India's space road map for up to 2047

Context
- Chandrayaan-3 Project Director said that the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chose to land Chandrayaan in the south pole of the moon because of the availability of more resources for fuel.

Roadmap
- India had a road map for its space programmes till 2047.
- The ISRO wanted to set up its space station by 2035.
- Water molecules could be used as a resource for fuel and the organisation could make the best use of the moon's escape velocity of 2.38 km per second to reach other planets, making the moon a gateway.

Chandrayaan-3
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) had made history with the launch of its third lunar exploration mission, Chandrayaan-3.
- The launch of the mission made India the fourth country to land its spacecraft on the surface of the moon and demonstrate the country's abilities for safe and soft landing on the lunar surface.
- So far only three countries, the U.S., Russia and China, have successfully soft-landed on the moon.

# It's time to revamp the structure of the Supreme Court
- The Supreme Court of India has three jurisdictions under the Constitution: original, appellate, and advisory.
- The Supreme Court serves as a Constitutional Court as well as a Court of Appeal.
- The Court sits in benches of varying sizes, as determined by the Registry on the directions of the Chief Justice of India (CJI), who is the Master of the Roster.

Constitution Bench

- Constitution Benches of the Supreme Court typically comprise five, seven, or nine judges who deliberate on a specific issue related to constitutional law.
- Article 145(3) of the Constitution provides for the setting up of a Constitution Bench.
- It says a minimum of five judges need to sit for deciding a case involving a "substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution", or for hearing any reference under Article 143, which deals with the power of the President to consult the Court.
- Recently, CJI announced his intent to create Constitution Benches of varied strengths as a permanent feature of the Court.

Discourse on a separate Constitution Bench

- In March 1984, India's Tenth Law Commission suggested dividing the Supreme Court into two divisions: the Constitutional Division and the Legal Division.
- The proposal specified that only matters related to constitutional law would be handled by the proposed Constitutional Division.
- Reiterating this, the Eleventh Law Commission stated in 1988 that dividing the Supreme Court into parts would make justice more widely available and would significantly decrease the fees that litigants have to pay.
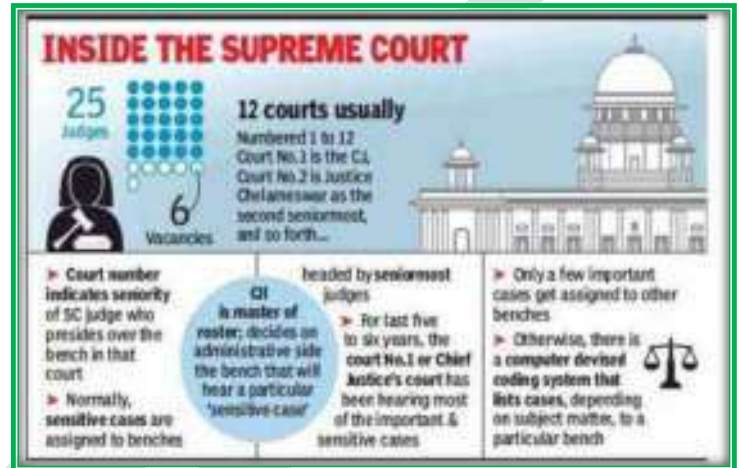
Inception of Supreme Court

- During colonial times, there were three Supreme Courts: in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.
- The Indian High Courts Act of 1861 replaced the Supreme Courts with High Courts for separate regions.
- The Government of India Act, 1935, created the Federal Court of India as an appellate body for the Privy Council and High Courts. India approved the Constitution in 1949. The Supreme Court, as we know it now, was founded on January 28, 1950, under Article 124 of the Constitution, two days after India became an independent, democratic republic.
- It came into being in Delhi because of Article 130.

An overburdened court

- The Supreme Court currently issues around 8-10 decisions annually through Constitution Benches of five or more judges, mainly functioning as an appeals court.
- In 2022, only four out of 1,263 decisions were issued by a Constitution Bench.
- Today's Supreme Court issues around 8-10 decisions each year through Constitution Benches of five or more judges.
- The Supreme Court hears matters between the Centre and the States, as well as between two or more States; rules on civil and criminal appeals; and provides legal and factual advice to the President.
- Any person can immediately petition the Supreme Court if they consider their basic rights have been infringed.

Way forward

- The work of the Supreme Court could be split so that there is a Final Court of Appeal and a permanent Constitution Bench to ensure greater judicial stability and consistency.
- This would ensure greater judicial stability and consistency by explicitly distinguishing cases filed under constitutional authority from those filed under appellate and review jurisdiction.
- Under the guidance of the CJI, there is an opportunity to address this structural gap in the Supreme Court by designating several of the court's appeal benches as regional benches.

27th November 2023

- President calls for all-India judicial service
- PM to attend World Climate Action Summit
- Centre directs State to monitor cases of respiratory illness
- S. Korea, Japan and China to resume leaders' summit
- Fleet electrification to tackle urban pollution

President calls for All-India judicial service

Context
- In the inaugural session of Constitution Day, President of India called for the establishment of an All-India Judicial Service examination as a way to ensure equal representation of India's diversity in the judiciary.

Citizen-centric approach
- The President proposed a "citizen-centric approach" to improve access to justice.
- She said the rest of the de-colonisation could be sped up with conscious efforts.
- The President noted that "The values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity are the principles on which we have agreed to conduct ourselves as a nation. These values helped us win Independence. It is no wonder these find a special mention in the Preamble and continue to guide our nation-building efforts."

All India Judicial Service
- The All-India Judicial Service (AIJS) is a reform push to centralize the recruitment of judges.
- It would work at the level of additional district judges and district judges for all states.
- The idea of a centralised judicial service was first mooted in the Law Commission's 1958 'Report on Reforms on Judicial Administration'.
- All India Judicial Service is important to strengthen overall justice delivery system.

COURT BACKLOG
- A record 21 lakh cases across the country are more than 10 years old and 15 lakh out of them are criminal cases
- Cases disposed of by subordinate courts were 1.81cr in 2012, which went up to 1.90cr in 2014, a rise of 4.5%
- Disposal rates of cases in HCs have slipped into negative domain by almost (-)3%
- Total pendency of cases in all courts was 3.07 crore in 2014

Constitutional Provision
- Article 312 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of All India Judicial Service (AIJS).
- The constitutional provision enables creation of the AIJS at District Judge level.
- The All-India Judicial Services (AIJS) was first mooted in the 1950s by the Law Commission.
- Articles 233 and 234 of the Constitution of India deal with the appointment of district judges, and place it in the domain of the states.

Significance
- Optimizing the effectiveness of the lower judiciary
- Resolve structural issues like disparities in pay and compensation among different states
- Expedite the process of filling vacant positions
- Establish uniform training standards across states

PM to attend World Climate Action Summit

Context
- The Prime Minister will attend the World Climate Action Summit or COP 28 which is being held from 28th November to 12th December under the Presidency of the UAE.

UNFCCC COP and India
- The Conference of Parties to the UNFCCC provides a unique opportunity to impart momentum for collective action towards combating the shared challenge of climate change.
- During COP-26 in Glasgow, Prime Minister had announced five specific targets, titled "Panchamrit", as India's unprecedented contribution to climate action.

- Prime Minister had also announced Mission Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) on that occasion.
- Climate change has been an important priority area of India's G20 Presidency, and significant new steps have been captured in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration and other outcomes during India's Presidency.

India's road to 'net zero'

At COP-27, India announced its long-term strategy to transition to a 'low emissions' pathway to become carbon neutral by 2070

KEY MILESTONES

- The National Hydrogen Mission, launched in 2021, aims to make India a green hydrogen hub
- At least a three-fold increase in nuclear capacity by 2032
- Achieving an ethanol blending target of 20% by 2025
- Maximising the use of electric vehicles, increase public transport
- Increased climate finance to be provided by developed nations
- The long-term strategy aims at keeping global temperatures well below 2 degrees Celsius and, ambitiously, 1.5 degrees Celsius by the century-end

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav at the COP-27 summit in Egypt on Monday. REUTERS

About COP-28

- The World Climate Action Summit is the high-level segment of the 28th Conference of Parties (COP-28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- The 28th session of the annual climate talks (COP28) will focus upon:
  o Finance for climate goals
  o Emissions reduction
  o Adaptation to climate impacts
  o Transitioning to a green economy with inclusivity
- The 28th UN Climate Conference, hosted by the UAE, features a high-level summit. A key aspect is the Global Stocktake, evaluating each country's actions.

Centre directs State to monitor cases of respiratory illness

Context

- The Union health ministry has asked the states and Union Territories (UTs) to closely monitor trends of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illness (SARI), following reports indicating a surge in respiratory illness among children in northern China.

Integrated Disease Surveillance Project

- The Union health ministry asked the district and State surveillance units of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project to keep a watch on the cases.
- The guidelines require surveillance of respiratory pathogens presenting as cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory illness.
- The States have also been directed to send nasal and throat swabs of patients with to virus research and diagnostic laboratories for testing for respiratory pathogens.
- The Ministry advised the States to immediately review public health and hospital preparedness measures such as ensuring the availability of trained hands, hospital beds, drugs and vaccines for influenza, medical oxygen, antibiotics, personal protective equipment, testing kits and reagents, functionality of oxygen plants and ventilators, and infection control practices in health facilities.

Advisory by WHO
- Recently, information shared by WHO has indicated an increase in respiratory illness in northern parts of China.
- This is predominantly attributed to usual causes like Influenza, Mycoplasma pneumonia, SARS-CoV-2 etc.
- The WHO attributes the recent surge in COVID-19 cases to the lifting of restrictions coinciding with the onset of winter and the typical increase in respiratory illnesses like Mycoplasma pneumonia during this season.
- Although the WHO has requested more information from Chinese authorities, there is currently no reason for alarm.

S. Korea, Japan and China to resume leaders' summit
Context
- Recently, China, Japan and South Korea agreed to restart cooperation and pave the way for a summit in the latest move to ease tensions between the Asian neighbors.

Roadmap
- Meeting for the first time in about four years, the top diplomats from South Korea, Japan and China agreed to revive cooperation among the Asian neighbors and resume their leaders' trilateral summit but without a specific timing.
- Closely linked economically and culturally with one another, the three countries together account for about 25% of the global gross domestic product.
- The three also agreed to push for diverse cooperation projects in areas such as people-to-people exchange, trade, technology, public health, sustainable development and security.

Fleet electrification to tackle urban pollution
- The air quality index (AQI) in many Indian cities has entered the red zone several days this year.
- Millions of people have to face serious health hazards due to recurring increases in air pollution.
- It is clear that mitigation strategies have to be prioritized.
- Two influential studies related to Delhi, the Urban Emission (2015) and the TERI study (2018), identify a notable source of urban smog: PM2.5 and PM10 pollution.
- These pollutants are predominantly attributed to the transport and construction sectors.

Increase in truck fleet
- India adds around 9 lakh new trucks annually to its existing fleet of 70 lakh trucks.
- The country handles over 2 trillion tonne-kilometers of freight on trucks each year.
- These trucks consume over one-fourth of Indian oil imports and contribute to over 90% of road transport CO2 emissions.
- With the expanding road network in a growing economy, the rate of truck fleet increase is expected to rise.
- However, if these new trucks continue to rely on diesel-fired internal combustion engines, as is the current norm, the cities will experience a heightened impact of PM2.5 pollution.

India electrified rail freight transportation
- India has successfully electrified about 20% of its rail freight transportation, but this addresses only a fraction of the country's total freight.
- While electric vehicle penetration on roads has surpassed 6%, electric trucks face challenges related to upfront costs and charging infrastructure limitations.
- The government's commendable efforts include aggressive electrification of the bus fleet and setting electrification targets for bus aggregators.

Need of the hour
- The recent call for 7,750 e-trucks in India by 2030, if realized, could lead to savings of over 800 billion liters of diesel until 2050.
- However, considering the projected truck fleet of 1.7 crore in 2050, there's an urgent need to accelerate the transition to e-trucks.
- A pipeline of bankable projects, effectively structured, which can attract private and institutional capital at a ratio of at least six rupees for every rupee of public money is the need of the hour.
- While achieving over 50% electric vehicle penetration in three-wheelers is a

significant milestone for India's 2070 net-zero agenda, it is crucial for the decarbonization of the transport sector to be spearheaded by the electrification of trucks.

Conclusion
- To establish these corridors, it's essential to expedite feasibility studies, aggregate demand, prepare suppliers, and implement a strategic risk allocation approach.
- Designating certain expressways and national highways as green freight corridors can showcase the potential for environmentally friendly transportation in India.
- To catalyze truck electrification in India, leverage innovative financing, incentivize charging infrastructure, support entrepreneurship, and establish a favorable regulatory environment.
- These measures are crucial for achieving the necessary breakthrough in the transition to electric trucks.

25th November 2023

- **World's first CRISPR–Cas9 gene editing therapy**
- **India, EU sign pact for semiconductor ties**
- **Indigenous Generic drugs for rare diseases**
- **Centre exempts CERT-In from ambit of RTI Act**
- **Need for climate-smart agriculture in India**

World's first CRISPR–Cas9 gene editing therapy

Context
- The UK's regulator has approved the world's first CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) – Cas9 gene editing therapy, which aims to cure sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent β-thalassemia.

About the therapy
- The therapy, called Casgevy, will treat the blood conditions sickle-cell disease and β-thalassaemia.
- This is the first licensed therapy in the world based on the gene editing technology Crispr-Cas9 that earned its innovators a Nobel Prize in 2020.
- Sickle-cell disease, also known as sickle-cell anaemia, can cause debilitating pain, and people with β-thalassaemia often require regular blood transfusions.
- The "genetic scissors" that became available for the first time in 2012 have revolutionized the field of biotechnology.

How does the therapy work
- Both sickle cell disease and thalassaemia are caused by errors in the gene for hemoglobin, a protein in the red blood cells that carry oxygen to organs and tissues.
- The therapy uses the patient's own blood stem cells, which are precisely edited using Crispr-Cas9.
- A gene called BCL11A, which is crucial for switching from foetal to adult hemoglobin, is targeted by the therapy.
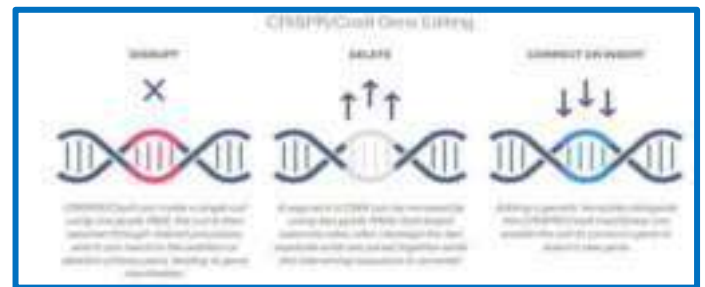
Sickle cell disease and Thalassaemia
- The genetic error in sickle cell disease leads to red blood cells assuming a crescent shape.
- An estimated 30,000-40,000 children in India are born with the disorder every year.
- Thalassaemia leads to low levels of hemoglobin, leading to fatigue, shortness of breath, and irregular heartbeats.
- People with the condition need blood transfusions throughout their life.
- India also has the largest number of children with thalassaemia major in the world — about 1-1.5 lakh.
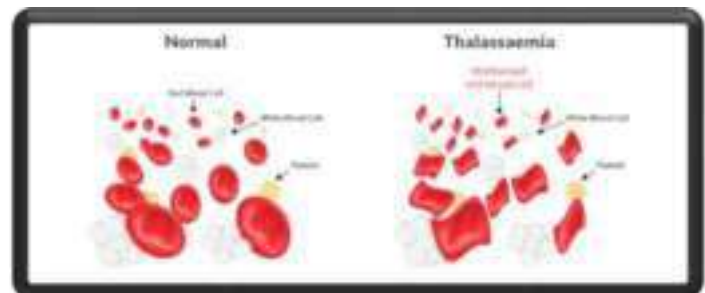
India, EU sign pact for semiconductor ties

Context
- India and the European Union have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on semiconductors.

Aim
- The MoU, aims at increasing resilience of semi-conductor's value chain in India and EU and covers cooperation in wide areas covering research and innovation, talent development, partnerships and exchange of market information.
- Both sides will also identify areas for mutually beneficial collaboration in research, development and innovation in semiconductor technologies, including advanced packaging technologies, design and raw materials.
- The MoU symbolizes the strong commitment between India and EU to work towards building robust semiconductor supply chains and work together on innovation.
- The move is in sync with India's plan to provide incentives worth $10 billion for chip manufacturing in the country.

Trade and Technology Council meeting
- The MoU was signed at the second India -EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) meeting held virtually is for deepening cooperation on semiconductors ecosystem, supply chain and innovation.
- The first meeting of the TTC was held in May in Brussels, Belgium.
- The role of TTC is to deepen strategic engagement on trade and technology between both partners.
- India is the second country after the US with which the EU has a TTC mechanism.

Indigenous Generic drugs for rare diseases

Context
- The Union Health Ministry said the production of four generic cost-effective medicines has begun in the country to bring down the exorbitant cost and provide relief to patients with rare diseases.

List of rare diseases
- These drugs are now available in the market for the treatment of four types of rare diseases which are:
  o Tyrosinemia Type 1 - rare autosomal recessive genetic metabolic disorder
  o Gaucher's Disease - buildup of certain fatty substances in certain organs, particularly your spleen and liver
  o Wilson's Disease - rare, autosomal recessive disorder caused by abnormal copper accumulation in the body particularly involving the brain, liver, and cornea.
  o Dravet-Lennox Gastaut Syndrome - severe condition characterized by repeated seizures (epilepsy) that begin early in life.

Roadmap
- The Centre has come up with a game-changer special initiative by manufacturing four types of homegrown 'Made in India' drugs for rare diseases for the first time.
- All drugs used for treating rare diseases were so far being imported and were prohibitively expensive, often forcing people to crowdfund treatment.
- s part of the National Policy on Rare Disease, an initiative in collaboration with government agencies and drugmakers had been started last year and 13 priority rare diseases, along with sickle cell anemia, had been identified for which India made drugs were to be developed.

Centre exempts CERT-In from ambit of RTI Act

Context
- The Union government has added the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) among a list of organisations that are exempted from the ambit of the Right to Information Act (RTI).

About CERT-In
- CERT-In is India's nodal agency that responds to computer security breaches

- It is a functional organisation of the Ministry of Information & Electronics Technology.
- CERT-In has been operational since January 2004.
- It collects, analyses and disseminates information on cyber incidents, and also issues alert on cybersecurity incidents.
- CERT-IN provides Incident Prevention and Response Services as well as Security Quality Management Services.

Other agencies exempt under RTI
- There are 26 other intelligence and security organisations established by the Union government such as the Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, Directorate of Enforcement, National Technical Research Organisation that are exempt under RTI.
- Two other organisations of the Ministry of Defence – the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Border Roads Development Board are also in this category.

Need for climate-smart agriculture in India
- Climate change and food insecurity are the paramount challenges of the 21st century. The repercussions of climate change, including heat waves, floods, droughts, and cyclones, are adversely affecting lives and livelihoods.
- Southern continents are grappling with severe droughts, disrupting agricultural production and farmers' well-being.
- Climate change is increasing the dangers faced by farmers, prompting them to re-evaluate their practices.

Climate-smart agriculture
- Climate-smart agriculture (CSA) provides a holistic framework.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization said in 2019: "Climate-smart agriculture is an approach for transforming food and agriculture systems to support sustainable development and safeguard food security under climate change.
- CSA comprises three pillars or objectives:
  o Sustainably increase agricultural productivity and incomes
  o Adapt and build resilience to climate change
  o Reduce/remove GHG (greenhouse gases) emissions, where possible.
- Dimensions of climate-smart practices include water-smart, weather-smart, energy-smart, and carbon-smart practices.
- They improve productivity, deal with land degradation, and improve soil health.

Climate change and measures
- The future impacts of climate change on agricultural productivity could be substantial.
- In India, crop yield decline owing to climate change (between 2010 and 2039) could be as high as 9%.
- The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals aim to end hunger and enhance environmental management.
- The National Action Plan on Climate Change emphasizes the role of climate-resilient agriculture in India's adaptation measures.
- Programmes such as the Soil Health Card Scheme use precision nutrient management to optimize agricultural methods.

Community-supported efforts
- Community-supported efforts (CSA) value in minimising and adjusting to the effects of climate change on agriculture is becoming widely acknowledged on a global scale.
- These efforts are made in an attempt to create agricultural systems that are both resilient and environmentally friendly.
- CSA promotes crop diversification, increases water efficiency, and integrates drought-resistant crop types, all of which help lessen the disruptive effects of climate change.
- The increasing popularity of CSA is a promising indicator for the future of biodiversity conservation.

Policy as per CSA

- The National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change, National Innovation on Climate Resilient Agriculture, Soil Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, Biotech-KISAN, and Climate Smart Village are a few examples of government initiatives in India focusing on Community-supported efforts.

Conclusion

- Climate-smart agriculture has the potential to assure food security, empower farmers, and protect our delicate ecosystems.
- Farmers are taking a variety of adaptation measures to reduce the negative effects of climate change.
- Additionally, there's a critical need for a 60% increase in agricultural production by 2050 to meet growing food demands.

24th November 2023

- **Mysterious Pneumonia outbreak in China**
- **Need a regulator like SEBI for AI**
- **MGNREGS social audit in States**
- **Governor holds no veto power over Bills**
- **To beat China, India must engage with APEC**

Mysterious Pneumonia outbreak in China

Context

- A mysterious pneumonia outbreak has surged in Chines raising a serious apprehension from global health experts.

WHO response

- The World Health Organization has asked China to provide more information on an increase in respiratory illnesses and reported clusters of undiagnosed pneumonia in children.
- WHO cited unspecified media reports and a global infectious disease monitoring service as reporting clusters of undiagnosed pneumonia in children in northern China.
- The emergence of new flu strains or other viruses capable of triggering pandemics typically starts with undiagnosed clusters of respiratory illness.
- The WHO noted that authorities at China's National Health Commission on November 13 reported an increase in respiratory diseases.
- Both SARS and COVID-19 were first reported as unusual types of pneumonia.

What Causes Pneumonia in Children?

WHO issues guidelines

- WHO recommend that people in China follow measures to reduce the risk of respiratory illness, which include recommended vaccination; keeping distance from people who are ill; staying home when ill; getting tested and medical care as needed; wearing masks as appropriate; ensuring good ventilation; and regular hand-washing.

China's Clarifications

- China says no unusual or new pathogens have been detected in the upsurge in child respiratory illnesses in the north China.
- WHO is closely monitoring the situation and is in close contact with national authorities in China.

Fighting for breath
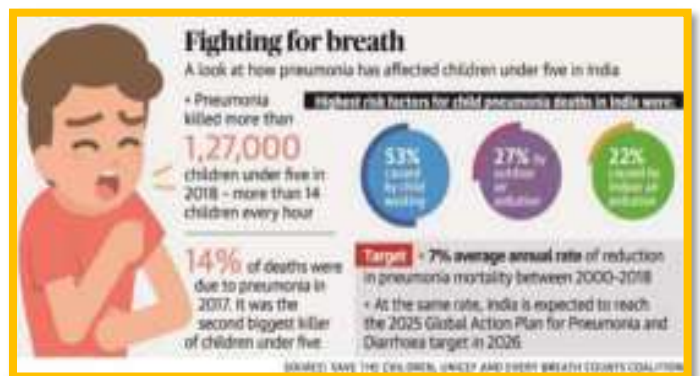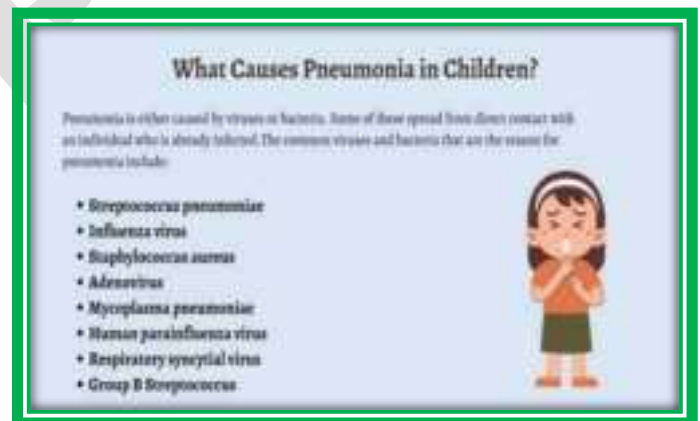
Need a regulator like SEBI for AI

- Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council (PMEAC) member said that India will evolve norms for regulating artificial intelligence (AI), and the AI regulator could function as regulator SEBI.

Recommendation and measures

- PMEAC member said that India needs a regulator that understands AI and pays attention to how it is evolving.
- The Union Information Technology Minister also said the government will form regulations to control the spread of deepfakes on social media platforms, terming them a "new threat to democracy".
- He said that the plan will have four key pillars:
  o Detection of deepfakes
  o Prevention by removing or reducing their virality
  o Strengthening reporting mechanisms
  o Spreading awareness about the technology
- The government had recently issued a notice to companies on the issue, and while the platforms responded, the minister made it clear that firms will have to be more aggressive in taking action on such content.

MGNREGS social audit in States

Context

- Of the Total states and Union Territories, only six have completed social audit of works done under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in more than 50% of gram panchayats.

Provision of monitoring work

- Section 17 of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) says the gram sabha "shall monitor the execution of works".
- Each State has social audit units which are supposed to work independent of the implementing authorities.
- The auditing standards laid down by the Comptroller and Auditor General were issued only on December 19, 2016.
- Under these, every Social Audit Unit is entitled to funds equivalent to 0.5% of the MGNREGA expenditure incurred by the State in the previous year.
- These numbers are sourced from the Management Information System (MIS) on Social Audit maintained by the Union Ministry of Rural Development.

States performance

- Kerala is the only State to cover 100%-gram panchayats
- Other than Kerala, the States to cross the 50% mark are Bihar (64.4%), Gujarat (58.8%), Jammu and Kashmir (64.1%), Odisha (60.42%) and Uttar Pradesh (54.97%).
- Only three States have covered 40% or more villages — Telangana (40.5%), Himachal Pradesh (45.32%) and Andhra Pradesh (49.7%).

Audited panchayats

Uniform problem

- Other than Telangana, among the poll-bound States, the numbers are really low — Madhya Pradesh (1.73%), Mizoram (17.5%) Chhattisgarh (25.06%), and Rajasthan (34.74%).
- The problem is uniform irrespective of the party in power across the country.
- The Centre has, multiple times, reminded the States that if the social audits are not conducted regularly, then the funds under the MGNREGS will be withheld.
- The States complain that the audit is delayed because the Centre does not release the funds for the social audit units, which work independent of the State governments, in time.

Governor holds no veto power over Bills

Context

- The Supreme Court has said the Governor, who is a part of the legislature, cannot withhold assent to bills without any further recourse, i.e., to virtually veto the functioning of the legislative domain by a duly elected legislature.

Guideline by the bench
- The SC Bench said that if a Governor withholds assent to a Bill, it must be returned to the State Legislature 'as soon as possible'; if Assembly re-enacts it, as in the case of Tamil Nadu, then the Governor must give nod
- If the Assembly reiterates the Bill "with or without amendments", the Governor has no choice or discretion, and has to give his assent to it.

Ultimate authority
- The SC noted that the ultimate decision on whether or not to accept the advice of the Governor as contained in the message belongs to the legislature alone.
- The court held that a Governor who chooses to withhold a Bill without doing anything further would be acting in contravention of the Constitution.
- The Governor as the unelected Head of State would be in a position to virtually veto the functioning of the legislative domain by a duly elected legislature by simply declaring that assent is withheld without any further recourse.

Constitutional Provision
- Article 163 under constitution of India deals with the powers of the Governor.
- Article 200 specifically deals with the issue of granting assent to Bills. Both the provisions are read together to determine the contours of the power the Governor holds on this issue.
- Article 200 of the Constitution lays down that when a Bill, passed by a State Legislature, is presented to the Governor for their assent, they have four alternatives
  - Grant assent to the Bill
  - Withhold assent to the Bills
  - Return the Bills for reconsideration
  - Reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President

To beat China, India must engage with APEC
- Recently the US hosted APEC hosted Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2023 summit in San Francisco after a gap of 12 years.
- The summit concluded with the adoption of the Golden Gate Declaration.

Golden Gate Declaration

- The declaration underscores the commitment to creating a resilient and sustainable future for all member economies.
- The Golden Gate Statement says that APEC will seek a well-functioning dispute settlement system for WTO, accessible to all members by 2024, and pursue a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific.
- India must reconsider its absence from regional trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific and with the US to benefit from supply-chain initiatives and enhance export resilience, despite its significant focus on the WTO.
- APEC is among the early institutions in the Indo-Pacific, but since it does not include India.

China and US relations

- The outcome of the APEC summit process is that China and US are talking again after nearly a year.
- The US-China Summit restored communications, including military, which was suspended by China.
- There is no new agreement because China still wants its way of dealing with the world to be accepted.
- The US believes that China's way and its values need challenge.
- APEC emphasized the rivalry between them but perhaps reduced the rough edge of confrontation.

Opportunity for Taiwan

- For Taiwan, APEC is important as it is the highest level of interaction it gets under any institution.
- Taiwan discussed the issue of Chinese economic coercion, but mainly focused on admission into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).
- The CPTPP member countries met around APEC.
- The US is missing from this and Taiwan and China are applicants.
- The UK is the latest inclusion into it.
- The CPTPP trade ministers looked ahead since the trade aspect of Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) had failed to materialise.

Conclusion

- India has similar objectives to that of APEC which focus was on sustainability, inclusion, resilience and innovation.
- In order to attain these, a peaceful engagement between China and the US is imperative.
- If successful, these can make APEC the locomotive for sustainable growth and shared benefits.
- This can make India a better alternative to new FDI in China.

23rd November 2023

- **Migration and Economic Development Partnership**
- **Haryana's employment reservation law**
- **NMC clarifies norms for foreign medical graduates**
- **RBI tougher stance on unsecured loans**
- **Reporting animal cruelty makes children safer**

Migration and Economic Development Partnership

Context

- In a significant legal development, the United Kingdom Supreme Court recently issued a ruling, declaring the UK government's policy of relocating asylum seekers to Rwanda unlawful.

About Rwanda deal

- The "Migration and Economic Development Partnership" was announced in April 2022 by former Prime Minister of Britain.
- The objective of the deal is to "create a mechanism" for the transfer of asylum seekers not considered by the UK into Rwanda.
- According to the Memorandum of Understanding between the two nations, the U.K. will screen asylum seeker applications and arrange for safe transport to Rwanda.
- On arrival of the refugees, Rwanda is obliged to provide accommodation for every individual and protect them from ill-treatment and

MIGRATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

refoulement.
- Rwanda will be the sole authority to recognise or not recognise the refugee status of an individual.
- If an individual is not recognised, they will be moved to their country of origin.

Why U.K. Court it ruled unlawful
- In a unanimous judgment, the Supreme Court agreed with the Court of Appeal that there are substantial grounds for believing that asylum seekers removed to Rwanda would face a real risk of being returned to their home country where they could face ill-treatment, known as refoulement.
- This would put the UK in breach of its obligations of non-refoulement under international and domestic law.
- The Supreme Court drew attention to Rwanda's poor human rights record, including threats to Rwandans living in the UK, alongside extrajudicial killings, deaths in custody, enforced disappearances, torture, and restrictions on media and political freedoms.

Why did the U.K. choose Rwanda
- Rwanda offers three solutions for those sent out by the U.K.
- o It facilitates returning them to their country of origin
- o Helps in moving them to a third country
- o Helps them settle in Rwanda with decent housing, access to universal health insurance and the right to work.
- The U.K. will bear the accommodation and transit costs.

People crossing the English Channel in boats
Cumulative total people detected by year
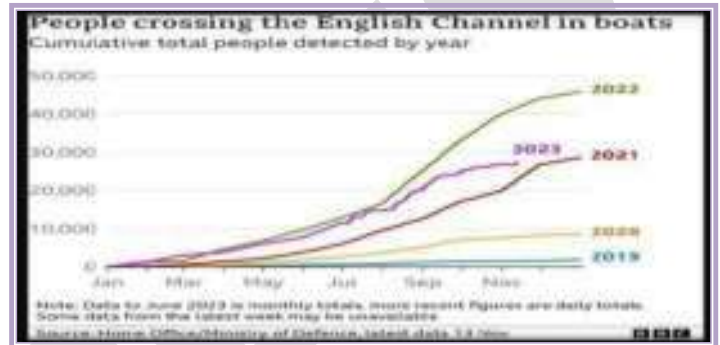
Haryana's employment reservation law
Context
- The Punjab and Haryana High Court recently quashed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020, stating that it is unconstitutional and violated fundamental rights.

About New reservation law
- Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 made it mandatory for employers in the State to reserve 75% of jobs paying a monthly salary of less than ₹30,000 (originally ₹50,000) for local residents of the State.
- The law is applicable to all private entities in the State including companies, trusts, societies, partnerships, and limited liability partnerships.
- It also covers any person employing 10 or more persons for the purpose of manufacturing or providing any service.
- The Bill received the Governor's assent in March, 2021, and came into effect in January last year.
- Employers found to be violating the Act are liable to a fine between ₹10,000 and ₹2 lakh.

HOW HARYANA'S 75% RESERVATION RULE HURTS JOBS
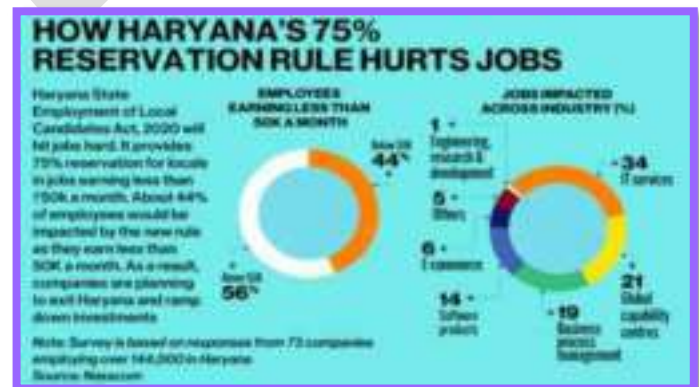
Why was the law challenged
- Several industry associations challenged the legality of a law, arguing that it infringes upon Article 19 of the Constitution, which safeguards the right to freedom, including the right to reside anywhere in India and engage in any profession, business, or trade.
- They further argued that the law violates Article 14 (equality before the law) and Article 15, which prohibits discrimination based on factors such as religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- The court has acknowledged that fact that reservation creates division among individuals from different states, contradicting the Constitution's vision of common citizenship.
- But, the state government of Haryana argued that the law aims to safeguard the livelihood rights of residents and is a response to increasing unemployment in Haryana.

Reservations policy attempts in other states
- Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh have implemented laws that reserve jobs for local residents in the private sector.
- In November 2019, the Andhra Pradesh Assembly passed the Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Bill, 2019, which reserves three-fourths of jobs for local candidates within three years of the Act's commencement.
- The law was subsequently challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, which opined that 'it may be unconstitutional'.
- However, the challenge is yet to be heard on its merits.

Why did the High Court quash it
- The court declared the law unconstitutional as it impeded a person's right to engage in occupation, trade, or business under Article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution.
- It emphasized that the law fosters discrimination by erecting artificial barriers for individuals not belonging to a specific state across the country.
- Citing Article 35 of the Constitution, the court stated that the State legislature is prohibited from legislating on topics covered by Article 16(3) (equality of opportunity in public employment), as only Parliament has the authority to enact laws on such matters.

NMC clarifies norms for foreign medical graduates
Context
- The National Medical Commission (NMC) has set a time limit for appearing in the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE) in order to practice in India.

Norm and Guideline
- The Undergraduate Medical Education Board and the Ethics and Medical Registration Board, National Medical Commission (NMC) issued a clarification specifying the provisions under which foreign medical graduates, especially students from Ukraine and the Philippines, can register, work, and study in India.
- As per the NMC, the foreign medical graduates are required to appear in the licensing exam within ten years of completing their course.
- The clarification comes after various problems and representations were received from these graduates.

National Exit Test
- The government is soon going to introduce National Exit Test (NExT) by replacing NEET PG and FMGE exams for admission to postgraduate courses.
- The exam will be a common qualifying test for Foreign Medical Graduates as well as Indian Medical Graduates for appearing in postgraduate courses.

DOCTORS' DREAD

How Indians with overseas MBBS degrees did between 2015 and 2018 in the Foreign Medical Graduate Exam, which such medical graduates need to crack to be able to practise in India. (List of countries not exhaustive)

Country	Appeared	Passed	Pass rate
China	20314	2370	11.67
Russia	11007	1510	12.01
Ukraine	8021	1193	14.87
Georgia	1662	346	20.69
Armenia	1096	237	21.62
Nepal	6194	1042	16.82
Bangladesh	1265	343	27.11
Pakistan	162	45	29.00
Total	**61708**	**9764**	**14.20**

(Medical graduates from Britain, the US, Australia, Canada and New Zealand are exempted from this FMGE.)
Source: National Board of Examinations

RBI tougher stance on unsecured loans
Context
- Reserve Bank of India Governor, termed the central bank's recent tightening of norms on unsecured lending as a "preemptive and targeted move" in the overall interest of sustainability.

Unsecured consumer lending
- The RBI came out with a notification increasing the risk weight for consumer credit exposure of banks and non-banking financial companies, in an apparent move to check the sudden growth in unsecured consumer lending.
- The central bank also barred Bajaj Finance Limited from sanctioning and disbursing loans under its two lending products – eCOM and Insta EMI Card.
- While expressing the absence of immediate stress in the banking sector, Das urged lenders to persist with stress testing to fortify the system against unforeseen challenges.
- The RBI governor also pointed out that banks, NBFCs and other financial entities must continue to do stress testing of their books.

Reporting animal cruelty makes children safer

- Child abuse is grave and rampant in India.
- In 2007, the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development published the largest empirical study about the incidence of child abuse in India.
- The study focused on the occurrence of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect of girl children in India.
- Results indicated that two-thirds of children experienced physical abuse, over half reported one or more forms of sexual abuse, and every second child faced emotional abuse.
- Despite these troubling statistics, the factors contributing to child abuse remain unaddressed.

Factor contributing to Child abuse
- Child abuse in India has been attributed to the:
  o Structure and size of the family
  o Lack of effective implementation of law
  o Poverty
  o Illiteracy
  o Cultural factors
- One crucial element that has been missing from the discourse on child protection in India is the link between victims of child abuse and animal cruelty.

Animal cruelty and child abuse
- The link between animal cruelty and human violence first came to light in 1751 with William Hogarth's Four Stages of Cruelty.
- Since then, there have been a plethora of studies highlighting this undeniable link.
- In a 1980 pilot study in England, evidence indicated that households engaging in family pet abuse also posed a risk of child abuse.
- In a study involving 23 families with a history of animal abuse, 83% were flagged by human social service agencies due to concerns about child abuse or neglect.

Lack of data on Animals Cruelty
- In fact, the National Crime Records Bureau does not collect data on offenses under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- Research in other countries underscores the importance of aggregating such data, serving as a valuable tool for law enforcement to comprehend the intersection of various crimes and prevent their occurrence.

Enforcing anti-cruelty laws
- Inadequate enforcement of anti-cruelty laws harms both animals and human victims of violence.
- Reporting and consistently enforcing these laws can deter further acts of violence against both animals and humans.
- It is crucial to report, register, and prosecute cases of animal cruelty.
- There is an opportunity for stakeholders in the child protection and animal protection movements to collaborate to meet their collective objective of reducing abuse.

WHY WERE NEW RULES NECESSARY

➤ At present, most livestock markets or pashu haat or melas are open markets, selling milch cattle for slaughter

➤ These markets do not have facilities for veterinary inspections or even facilities such as water troughs and ramps for loading and unloading

➤ Animals being sold for slaughter are generally unfit, making markets a major hub for spread of infectious diseases

➤ Since there are no records in livestock markets, cattle suffering from foot & mouth disease or mad cow disease may be sold

➤ Absence of record and traceability help illegal slaughter houses to run with impunity

WHAT DO THE NEW NORMS SAY

➤ Prohibit sale of animals for slaughter through livestock markets

➤ Animals for slaughter must be sourced directly from farms to ensure traceability

➤ To ensure only healthy animals are traded for agricultural purposes or milk

➤ Do's and don'ts to end cruelty while transporting animals

22nd November 2023

- **The OECD report on climate finance**
- **States to encourage use of SATHEE portal**
- **UGC set to revise NET syllabus**
- **First-Ever Express Train Services from Badampahar**
- **Recognising the impact of climate change on health**

The OECD report on climate finance
Context
- A new report, published by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), showed that economically developed countries fell short of their promise to jointly mobilise $100 billion a year towards climate mitigation and adaptation needs of developing countries in 2021.
  - The OECD is largely a group of rich countries including the U.S., the U.K., Germany, France, Switzerland, Canada, and others.

Significance of OECD report
- The report offers a peek into their idea of climate finance ahead of the upcoming COP28 climate talks in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- The report also comes against the backdrop of a pledge by the bloc of developed nations at the COP26 talks in Glasgow, in 2020, to double adaptation finance.
- Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) had also said at Glasgow, "with deep regret", that the developed nations bloc hadn't met the $100 billion climate finance goal in due time in 2020.

Concern
- The failure to mobilise adequate climate finance lowers capacity in developing countries to address climate mitigation (like emissions reduction with renewable energy) and adaptation needs (like developing and incentivising climate-resilient agriculture), and reduces trust among the world's poorer countries that the developed world is serious about tackling the climate crisis.

Vagueness in climate finance
- At present, there is no commonly agreed definition of 'climate finance' because developed countries have endeavored to keep it vague.
- For example, at the COP27 in Egypt last year, Australia and the U.K. even sought to end discussions to define 'climate finance'.
- In the run up to the COP26 in Glasgow, the U.S. led an effort to block debate on a common definition, alongside Switzerland, Sweden, and some other developed countries.

How much financial assistance is required
- The $100 billion target for climate finance, established during COP15 talks, lacks a foundation in an assessment of the actual climate investment needs of developing countries.
- The OECD report added that by 2025, developing countries are estimated to require around $1 trillion a year in climate investments, rising to roughly $2.4 trillion each year between 2026 and 2030.
- The $100 billion goal pales in comparison, dwarfed further by the fact that it remains unmet.
- The OECD report suggested de-risking with government intervention and called on MDBs to integrate private finance mobilization strategies as part of their core objective.

States to encourage use of SATHEE portal
Context
- The ministry of Education that it would urge all States to encourage aspirants to utilize the newly launched portal — SATHEE (Self-Assessment Test and Help for Entrance Exams) for exam preparation.

About SATHEE
- SATHEE is an initiative by the Ministry of Education to give students free learning and assessment platform.
- The preparation material will be available in English, Hindi and other regional languages of India to prepare for competitive exams like JEE and NEET.
- The online coaching platform has been launched by the Ministry and the IIT-Kanpur.
- SATHEE has launched a 45-day crash course for aspirants to test their level of preparation.
- Nearly 5,000 students have registered on the platform so far.
- SATHEE hosts lectures and video content prepared by Professors and students of the IITs, and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS).

SATHEE Features
- Preparation material for entrance exams including JEE and NEET
- Video solutions in regional languages for entrance exams
- JEE and NEET entrance exam preparation ideas webinars
- Students' stories of struggles and achievement
- Solve with me sessions
- Motivational sessions

UGC set to revise NET syllabus

Context
- The chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC) has announced plans to revise the National Eligibility Test (NET) syllabus and establish an expert panel for the task.

Next course of actions
- The UGC-NET is held in 83 subjects twice a year, usually in June and December, and thousands of students take the test.
- The University Grants Commission Chairman said that the commission last initiated the process to update the syllabi in 2017.
- Since the launch of National Education Policy in 2020, there have been considerable developments in higher education to impart multi-disciplinary curricula and holistic education.
- The commission will form an expert committee and undertake this exercise.
- The National Testing Agency (NTA) conducts the UGC-NET.

About UGC
- UGC is a statutory Organisation of the Government of India that is responsible for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research in university education.
- It came into existence in 1953.

- It oversees various universities and colleges, disburses funds, and formulates policies to enhance the quality of education in the country.

First-Ever Express Train Services from Badampahar

Context
- President of India flagged off three trains including two express trains in Odisha's tribal belt of Badampahar and Rairangpur, the first set of long-distance passenger trains to operate in the section in 112 years.

- During her visit to Odisha, President Murmu flagged off three new trains from Badampahar station that includes:
  - Shalimar-Badampahar Weekly Express
  - Badampahar-Rourkela Weekly Express
  - Tatanagar-Badampahar MEMU train are the trains
- On this occasion, addressing the gathering, the President said that the development of any area depends on the connectivity of that area.
- Be it rail, roads, or postal services – all these services make people's lives easier.

Redevelopment of the station
- The President also laid the foundation stone for redevelopment of the station under the Amrit Bharat Station scheme.
- Redevelopment will enhance rail-transport infrastructure and boost tourism in the region.
- She urged the tribal youth to take advantage of government schemes and stressed that one's effort was also necessary for self-development.

Recognising the impact of climate change on health

- As India gets ready for the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28), it is important to examine how climate change affects the country's health.
- India's vulnerable health systems expose the population to the direct consequences of climate risks, leading to increased sickness and mortality.
- An estimation indicates that a 2°C global temperature rise could render many parts of India uninhabitable.
- The Paris Agreement, supported by all nations, aims to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.
- However, in 2023, the world experienced the highest temperatures and heat waves on record, posing threats to food security, livelihoods, and exacerbating health challenges.

Double burden
- Climate change exacerbates India's dual health burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.
- It fosters the expansion and altered seasonality of disease vectors like mosquitoes, sandflies, ticks, and potentially new ones.
- The introduction of vectors and pathogens to new areas, like mosquitoes in the Himalayan States, becomes a concern.
- Epidemics, often linked to floods, can also arise during prolonged warm periods, fostering water and food-borne pathogens and diseases.

Other concerns
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases are exacerbated by increased and extended episodes of air pollution.
- Diminished food and water availability, coupled with reduced nutritional value, heighten susceptibility to diseases.
- The risk of dying from pulmonary disease increases by 1.8–8.2% during a heat wave and hospitalization rates will go up by 8% for every 1% increase in temperature above 29°C.
- India is urbanizing at a rapid pace, in an unplanned manner.

Action at all levels

- Action to control climate change needs to happen at global, regional, and local levels.
- To achieve this, India has to recognise climate change and its impact on health as a problem that can be and needs to be addressed.
- National, State, and local governments have to decide to act on the policy options that have been generated by research.
- Continued unabated climate change has the potential to exacerbate India's dual health burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

CHANGES IN CLIMATE	EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE	HEALTH IMPACTS	INTERVENTIONS & STRATEGIES
Increased global temperature	Extreme heat	Heat related illness	Early warning and preparedness
Extreme weather and disasters	Air and water pollution	Cardiovascular disease, stroke, and other chronic conditions	Prevention or reduction of disease, illness and injury
Precipitation extremes	Reduced food and water quality	Injuries and death	Community engagement
Sea level rise	Changes in infectious diseases and vector transmissions	Mental and neurological disorders	Education and awareness raising
Changes in land use and growing seasons	Increasing allergens	Zoonotic, vector- and water-borne diseases	Adoption and integration
		Respiratory diseases and asthma	

21st November 2023

- **National Pharmacy Commission Bill 2023**
- **India, Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**
- **UN Emissions Gap report 2023**
- **Philippines invites neighbors to frame S China sea conduct rules**
- **Making sense of the employment challenge**

National Pharmacy Commission Bill 2023

Context

- The Union Health Ministry has released the draft National Pharmacy Commission Bill, 2023, which seeks to repeal the Pharmacy Act of 1948 and replace the Pharmacy Council of India with a national commission.

Aim of bill

- The Bill aims to improve access to affordable and high-quality pharmacy education and ensure the availability of pharmacy professionals nationwide.
- It seeks to promote equitable healthcare by making pharmacy services accessible to all citizens.
- It also calls for a periodic and transparent assessment of pharmacy institutions and facilitating maintenance of a pharmacy register for India.
- The Bill encourages professionals to integrate the latest research into their work, contribute to research, and uphold high ethical standards.

Pharmacy Ethics and Registration Board

- According to the draft, the Pharmacy Ethics and Registration Board will maintain a National Pharmacy Register which will have details of pharmacy professionals to ensure transparency.

- The draft bill proposes flexibility to adapt to changing needs and seeks to set up an effective grievance redressal mechanism.


India, Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue
Context
- India and Australia held a 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue to step up defence cooperation and deepen the strategic partnership in sectors such as critical minerals and trade and investment.

Focus area
- India and Australia had discussed deepening:
  - Military cooperation in critical areas including anti-submarine warfare and air-to-air refueling
  - Security in the vast Indo-Pacific region amid China's rising influence
  - Hydrography cooperation and strengthening ties in sectors such as critical minerals, space, education, and science and technology
  - Aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO)
  - Joint research in underwater technologies as potential collaborative areas.
- The two sides also discussed pressing geopolitical issues, including the crisis in West Asia and the war in Ukraine.
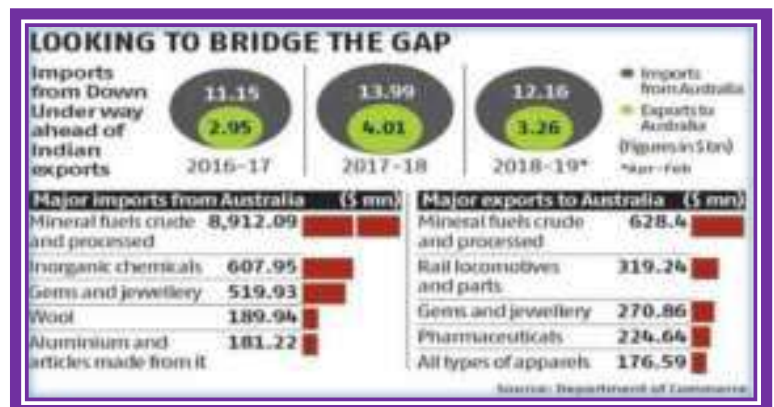
Mutual Logistics Support agreement
- India and Australia signed a Mutual Logistics Support agreement in 2020, and the two Navies signed the 'Joint Guidance for the India-Australia Navy to Navy Relationship' document in August 2021.
- Australia also has a Liaison Officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region.
- There have been several firsts this year in bilateral defence cooperation — the maiden visit of an Indian Navy submarine to Australia; Canberra hosting the Malabar naval exercise.
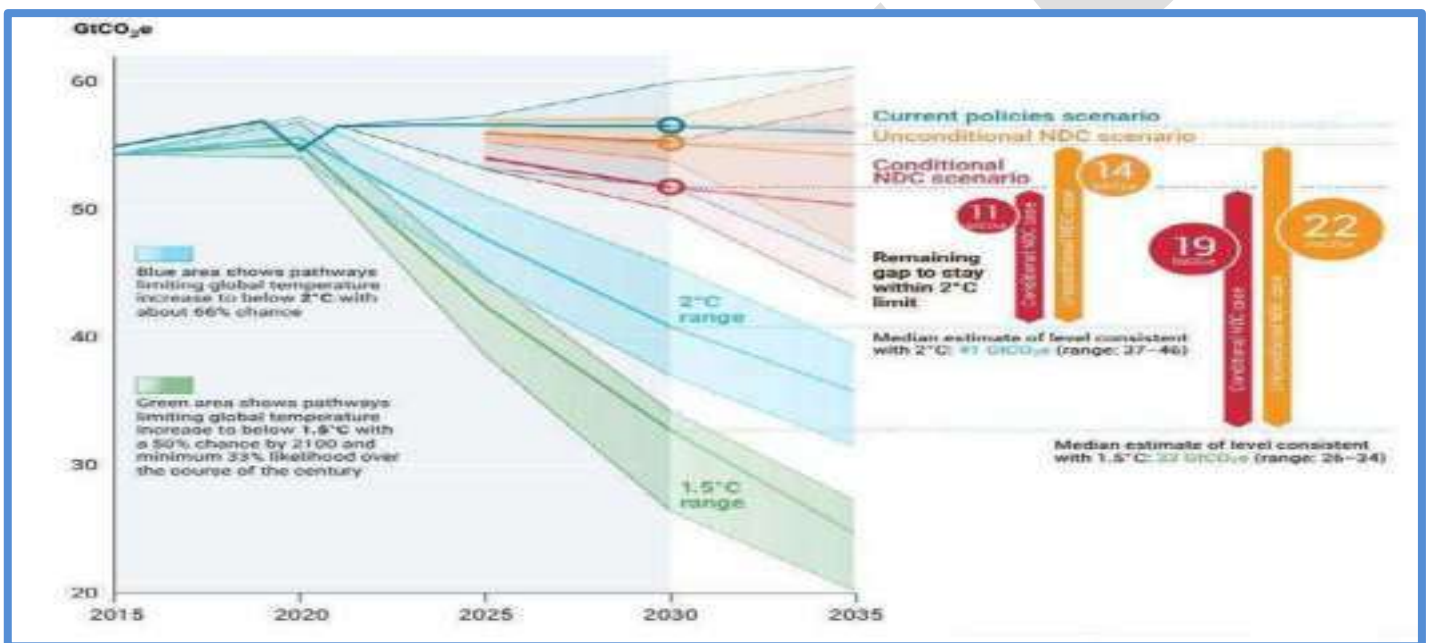
UN Emissions Gap report 2023

Context

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the 2023 edition of the Emissions Gap Report tilted 'Broken Record — Temperatures hit new highs, yet world fails to cut emissions (again)'.

Finding of the report

- **Temperature threshold:** A recent UN report reveals that 86 days this year surpassed the 1.5-degree Celsius temperature limit due to record-high global greenhouse gas emissions in 2022.
- **World to become warmer:** The report noted that with current climate policies of countries, the world was set to become warmer by at least 3 degree Celsius by the end of the century.
- **Carbon dioxide emission:** In 2022, global carbon dioxide emissions totaled 57.4 billion tonnes, marking a 1.2% increase from the previous year and surpassing the 2019 record. The Covid pandemic had caused a dip in global emissions in 2020, due to the abrupt shock to economic activities, but the 2021 emissions had climbed back almost to the 2019 levels.

- **Biggest emitters countries:** The emissions of China and the United States, the world's two biggest emitters, also rose in 2022, as did that of India, the third largest emitter.
- But the European Union, Russia and Brazil saw emissions go down a bit.

Recommendation

- The Emissions Gap Report noted 4 key areas where Proactive action is required to mitigate global warming.
- These 4 areas are:
- Developing robust measurement, reporting and verification systems to enhance credibility
- Setting and signaling Carbon dioxide removal priorities
- Accelerating innovation
- Harnessing synergies and co-benefits with other efforts

Philippines invites neighbors to frame S China sea conduct rules

Context

- The Philippines has approached neighbors such as Malaysia and Vietnam to discuss a separate code of conduct regarding the South China Sea,citing limited progress towards striking a broader regional pact with China.

Code on South China Sea

- The president of the Philippines stated that there has been no progress in negotiating a wider regional agreement with China and that the country has reached out to neighbors like Malaysia and Vietnam to talk about a separate code of conduct pertaining to the South China Sea.
- Since China has grown more active in pursuing its maritime claims, frightening neighbors and other countries operating in the vital commerce route, such the United States, Manila and Beijing have been involved in intermittent confrontations for years.


Concern

- China uses a 'nine-dash line' to mark its territory on maps, looping as far south as 1,500 km (900 miles) and cutting through the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia.
- China stated that creating a code of conduct for the South China Sea was a crucial responsibility for both ASEAN nations and China.
- Since China has grown more active in pursuing its maritime claims, frightening neighbors and other countries operating in the vital commerce route.

Making sense of the employment challenge

- Infosys founder Narayana Murthy suggested that Indian youth should work 70 hours a week to improve the country's productivity.
- He emphasizes the need to improve India's work productivity, citing Germany and Japan as examples.
- A 70-hour work week, translating to nearly 12 hours of work for six days, raises both support and criticism.
- The crucial question is can Indians simply choose to work longer hours to replicate their experience? This is not obvious.

Output, demand and labour

- Ever since the Keynesian Revolution in economics, we understand that output is influenced by aggregate demand, representing the total demand for goods and services in an economy.
- There is no demand for labour independent of the demand for goods.
- Firms are guided by the profit motive and will employ more labour only if there is increased demand for their product.
- The role of demand for goods and services in determining the demand for labour may be seen in the lay-offs in the 'tech' sector globally at the beginning of this year.
- The bigger firm like Google and Amazon have downsized by letting go of numerous employees who were hired during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by increased demand for their products amid lockdowns and the rise of remote work.
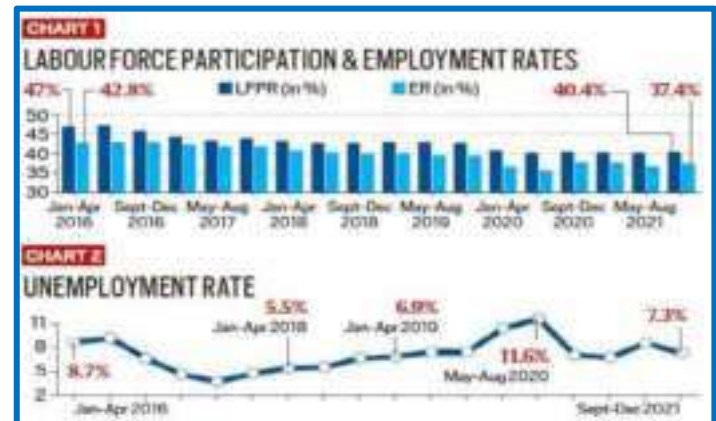
The case of South Korea

- South Korea also experienced extended working hours during a period similar to that of Germany and Japan.
- Like these countries, South Korea was recovering from a different war, supported by substantial U.S. aid as an ally.
- Beyond financial aspects, all three nations shared a strong post-war nationalistic drive, possibly leading to a voluntary effort to rebuild after a common catastrophe caused by external forces.
- The economic rise of Germany and East Asia in the mid-20th century was rooted in post-war reconstruction, creating demand for increased output, which in turn led to longer workdays.

Economic strategies for India
- There are two strategies economic policy here can attempt.
- One approach for growing the domestic economy is leveraging the global market or world demand, requiring India's goods to be globally competitive.
- India's competitiveness is ultimately determined by the productivity of its workforce and the physical infrastructure that complements labour.
- A second route to greater output and employment is to expand the domestic market — and thus aggregate demand.

Conclusion
- Ethnographic studies on India's informal sector reveal that in certain segments, unorganized workers are already working extended hours for minimal wages and lacking proper protections.
- The task at hand is to enforce legal measures to guarantee improved working conditions, including shorter hours, better pay, and increased access to equipment to alleviate the physical toll of labor.

20th November 2023

- **The role of the Governor in legislature**
- **Indian military personnel stationed in Maldives**
- **Divided opinion on draft broadcasting Bill 2023**
- **GTRI views on Indian rupees**
- **How to solve the problem of stubble burning**

The role of the Governor in legislature

Context
- Tamil Nadu's Governor's decision to withhold assent to 10 pending Bills has raised fresh legal questions on the powers of the Governor. This follows the Supreme Court expressing 'serious concern' over inaction by the Governor on Bills presented for his assent.
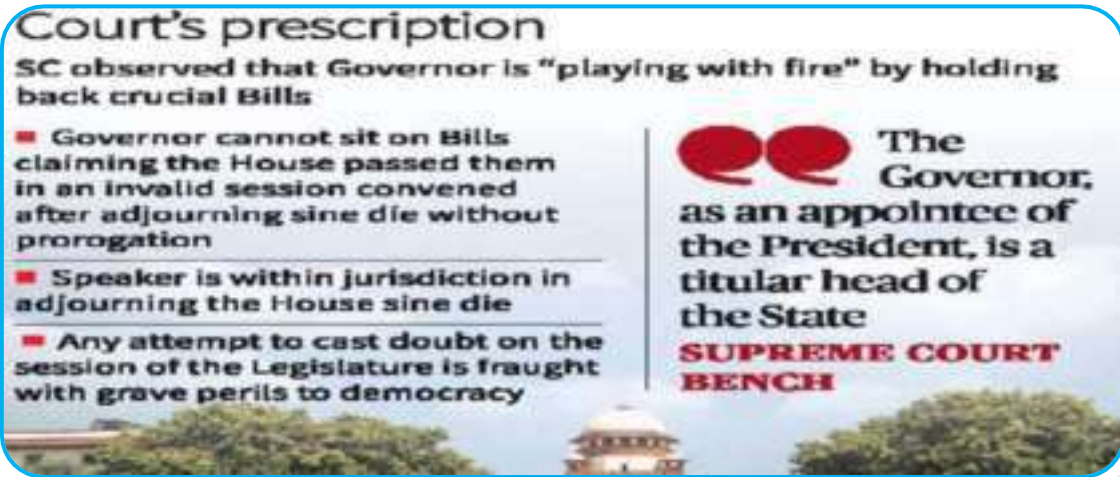
Constitutional Provision
- Article 163 under constitution of India deals with the powers of the Governor.
- Article 200 specifically deals with the issue of granting assent to Bills. Both the provisions are read together to determine the contours of the power the Governor holds on this issue.
- Article 200 of the Constitution lays down that when a Bill, passed by a State Legislature, is presented to the Governor for their assent, they have four alternatives
  - Grant assent to the Bill
  - Withhold assent to the Bills
  - Return the Bills for reconsideration
  - Reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President

Discretionary powers

CONSTITUTIONAL DISCRETION OF GOVERNORS INCLUDES	SITUATIONAL DISCRETION OF GOVERNORS	Execution of discretion beyond the constitutional permissibility is considered an attack on the elected government of the State and people's mandate
When they have to reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President	For appointing Chief Minister after no party get clear majority or when the incumbent dies in the office	
When he has to recommend for President's rule in the State	When he dismisses Council of Ministers on an inability to prove confidence in the legislative Assembly	
When given additional charge as administrator of union Territory	When he dissolves the Assembly when it loses its majority	

Observation by SC
- The Supreme Court in various cases including the Shamsher Singh case (1974) held that the Governor does not exercise their discretionary powers while withholding assent or returning a Bill to the State Legislature.
- They are required to act as per the advice of the Council of Ministers.
- The situation of 'withholding assent' may arise in case of a Private Members' Bill (any Member of State Legislature other than a Minister) passed by the State Legislature, which the council of ministers do not want to be enacted into a law.
- In such an instance, they would advise the Governor to 'withhold assent'.

Court's prescription

SC observed that Governor is "playing with fire" by holding back crucial Bills

■ Governor cannot sit on Bills claiming the House passed them in an invalid session convened after adjourning sine die without prorogation

■ Speaker is within jurisdiction in adjourning the House sine die

■ Any attempt to cast doubt on the session of the Legislature is fraught with grave perils to democracy

❝❝ The Governor, as an appointee of the President, is a titular head of the State

SUPREME COURT BENCH

Recommendations

- The Sarkaria Commission (1987) asserts that the Governor's discretionary power is limited to reserving Bills for the consideration of the President, specifically in rare cases of unconstitutionality.
- In such exceptional cases, the Governor must discharge his functions under Article 200 as per the advice of ministers.
- It further recommended that the President should dispose of such Bills within a maximum period of six months.
- In the event of the President 'withholding assent', the reasons should be communicated to the State Government wherever possible.
- The Punchhi Commission (2010), had recommended that the Governor should take a decision with respect to a Bill presented for their assent within a period of six months. However, these recommendations have not been implemented till date.

Balancing the power

- The Supreme Court observed, it is necessary for the Governors and Chief Ministers to do 'a little bit of soul-searching'.
- The Constitution may be amended to provide that the Chief Ministers shall be consulted before appointment of the Governors.
- The recommendation of the Punchhi Commission that Governors may be removed through an impeachment by the State Legislature can also be considered.
- This would arm the State legislatures with the power to remove an uncooperative Governor.

Indian military personnel stationed in Maldives

Context

- According to senior Maldivian official, there are 77 Indian military personnel in the Maldives and the new government is reviewing more than 100 agreements signed with India.

Independence and sovereignty

- The newly elected President asserted that he was firmly committed to ensuring that Maldives remains "free" of any "foreign military presence" to preserve its independence and sovereignty.
- There were 24 Indian military personnel to manage the first helicopter, 25 to manage the Dornier aircraft, and 26 to manage the second helicopter, and two more for maintenance and engineering.

Key maritime neighbors

- The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbors in the strategic Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties, including in areas of defence and security.
- The Maldives is also one of the biggest beneficiaries of India's Neighbourhood First policy.
- Maldives is India's key maritime neighbor in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and occupies a special place in the Prime Minister's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy.

Divided opinion on draft broadcasting Bill 2023

Context
- The proposed provisions in the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, pertaining to self-regulation by broadcasters and broadcasting network operators have elicited diverse views from experts.

Background
- The Information & Broadcasting Ministry recently released the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023, which aims to bring a consolidated legal framework for the broadcasting sector and extend it to OTT content, digital news, and current affairs as well.
- The Bill aims to modernizes broadcasting sector's regulatory framework, replacing outdated Acts, Rules, and Guidelines with a unified, future-focused approach.
- It adapts to the dynamic world of OTT, Digital Media, DTH, IPTV, and more, promoting technological advancement and service evolution.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting proposes
Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023

- Consolidated Legal Framework for Broadcasting sector
- Content Evaluation Committees for adherence to Programme & Advertisement Code
- Broadcast Advisory Council to replace Inter-Departmental Committee
- Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities

Concerns
- The draft raises concerns that the proposed bill could lead to the erasure or selective representation of Indian minority communities.
- The regulatory framework might influence how minority communities are portrayed in broadcasting, potentially shaping a dominant narrative.
- The bill authorized officers the authority to block any program or channel that violates specified codes or may foster disharmony.
- Experts worry about the government's potential influence on the regulatory process and the independence of authorized officers operating under government directives.
- The enhancement of self-regulation with the introduction of 'Content evaluation committees' also posses serious concern.

GTRI views on Indian rupees

Context
- Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggests that India should first achieve middle-income status, then strive to establish the INR (rupee) as a hard currency. During this process, it advocates promoting global trade settlements in the local currency.

Hard currencies
- Hard currencies refer to stable and widely accepted currencies that are recognized and trusted on the global stage.
- The presence of a currency as a hard currency reflects perceived stability, reliability, and economic strength of its issuing country.
- The US Dollar is the most dominant hard currency, often considered the world's primary reserve currency.
- It is used in a significant majority of international transactions and as a benchmark currency for most commodities.

Hard Currency

Japanese Yen 8.11%
Other 5.35%
Euro 25.02%
US Dollar 62.16%
Pound Sterling 3.83%

Recommendation
- Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that transforming a currency into a hard currency is a complex process that hinges on several pivotal factors.
- First and foremost, economic stability is crucial, requiring low and stable inflation, consistent growth, and a balanced trade environment in a country.
- Political stability also plays a critical role, as it reassures external entities of the nation's economic consistency.

How to solve the problem of stubble burning

- Stubble burning is a method of removing paddy crop residues from the field to sow wheat from the last week of September to November.
- Stubble burning is a process of setting on fire the straw stubble, left after the harvesting of grains, like paddy, wheat, etc.
- Stubble burning is a major source of air pollution in India, with serious health consequences for millions of people.
- Paddy harvesting in India is a significant agricultural activity, given the country's prominence as one of the largest producers of rice in the world.

Reason behind the stubble burning

- The major reason behind the stubble burning is the short time available between rice harvesting and sowing of wheat as delay in sowing wheat affects the wheat crop. Between the harvesting of the paddy crop and the sowing of the next crop, there is only a two to three weeks' time window is left.
- The rice stubble burning is highest in the state of Punjab followed by Haryana, whereas Uttar Pradesh ranks higher in wheat stubble burning.
- Crop residue burning is practiced by the farmers to prepare the land for the next cultivation.
- Stubble burning is considered one of the cheapest methods to clean the field after the harvesting season.
- Paddy straw has high silica content and is not preferred as animal feed.

Initiatives

- The Centre or state governments have taken several measure to alleviate the problem.
- There have been multiple initiatives including applying a decomposer to encourage in-situ management of stubble or using the direct seeding of rice (DSR) technique, but the problem remains intractable.

Possible solutions

Policy interventions

- Rethinking the policy of providing free power
- This is also needed to avert the over-exploitation of groundwater.
- However, a simple shift to a metered supply of power will not be acceptable without compensating farmers' income for the cost of power.
- One possibility is to give a direct cash/benefit transfer (DBT) instead of a power subsidy. This will make diversification away from paddy feasible.

Creating a market for paddy straw/stubble

- Unless stubble is made valuable for farmers, they will continue to burn it.

- There is need to create an effective market for stubble that at least compensates them for the extra effort and cost involved in its harvest, collection and disposal.
- A small market for paddy straw sold in compact bales has already emerged in both the states for production of biofuel such as BioCNG and ethanol and as direct fuel in brick kilns, furnaces, and thermal plants.

Way ahead
- To address the farm-fire problem associated with paddy cultivation in India, exploring alternatives or shortening the rice crop duration, such as early harvesting, is believed to be a potential solution.
- The modifications and subsidized supply of machinery for in-situ use of paddy stubble will also be very helpful in preventing farm fires in some areas.

18th November 2023

- **COP28 in Dubai: What to expect**
- **India invites Global South to join biofuel alliance**
- **PM against misuse of deepfakes**
- **Bank stocks fall as RBI tightens lending rules**
- **State of the economy — temper the euphoria**

COP28 in Dubai: What to expect
Context
- The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference - COP28 will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Context of the conference
- The devastating impacts of climate change have been evident for several years now.
- The World Meteorological Organization called in July for governments to adopt heat action plans to "protect hundreds of thousands of people dying from preventable heat-related causes each year."
- The initial Global Stocktake report, released in September, marks the beginning of a five-year evaluation process.
- This periodic assessment aims to measure global progress in achieving the 2015 Paris Agreement goals and suggest corrective actions for any shortcomings.
- This year is set to be the hottest on record, with historic heatwaves hitting the United States, China and southern Europe this summer.

What can be done at COP28
Tripling of Renewable Energy
- The current global installed capacity of renewable energy is just under 3,400 GW. The goal is to triple this capacity by 2030, aiming for renewable sources to contribute to almost 70% of the world's electricity, a significant increase from the current 28%.
- The proposal has received backing from G20 nations, and with explicit support from 60 other countries, it is highly probable that the proposal will be included in the final outcome of the Dubai meeting.

Delivery of $100 billion
- This figure has been doing the rounds for more than a decade. Rich countries have promised to mobilise (at least) this much in climate finance every year from 2020 — a promise they have not met.

Finance for Loss and Damage Fund
- At COP27, a Loss and Damage fund was created to aid developing nations in addressing climate change impacts.
- The fund, meant to provide financial help to countries damaged by impacts of climate change, had

been a long pending demand.
- The Dubai meeting is expected to result in funding for the Loss and Damage fund, serving as a significant signal to small island nations — the primary beneficiaries — that their climate concerns are being addressed.

Global Stocktake
- The Dubai meeting is set to feature the presentation of the first stocktake findings, as mandated by the 2015 Paris Agreement.
- Countries will evaluate their progress in combating climate change and determine the necessary actions for the next five years to enhance the effectiveness of this effort.
- The year-long stocktake exercise results will guide the discussions in Dubai.
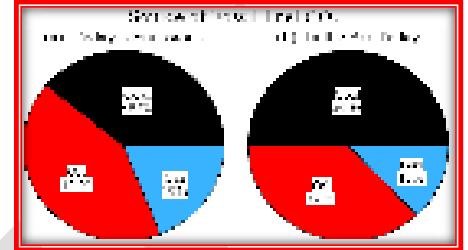
Phase-down of Fossil Fuels
- The scheduled phase-down or phase-out of fossil fuels, especially coal, is a contentious issue expected to be a recurring topic at the Dubai meeting.
- Disagreements persist among countries, making a resolution in Dubai unlikely.

India invites Global South to join biofuel alliance
Context
- India has extended an invitation to countries in the Global South to join the recently inaugurated Global Biofuels Alliance.

Global Biofuels Alliance
- Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) is an India-led Initiative to develop an alliance of Governments, International organisations and Industry to facilitate the adoption of biofuels.
- A global alliance for promoting biofuels was launched at the Group of 20 leaders meeting in September with a view to reducing emissions in the transportation and industrial sectors.
- The GBA aims to facilitate the adoption of biofuels worldwide.
- The Global Biofuel Alliance, which includes top producers Brazil and the US, will help build the worldwide market for trade in biofuel, which is obtained from biomass.
- The alliance presently has 22 member countries and 12 international organisations and is continuously expanding.
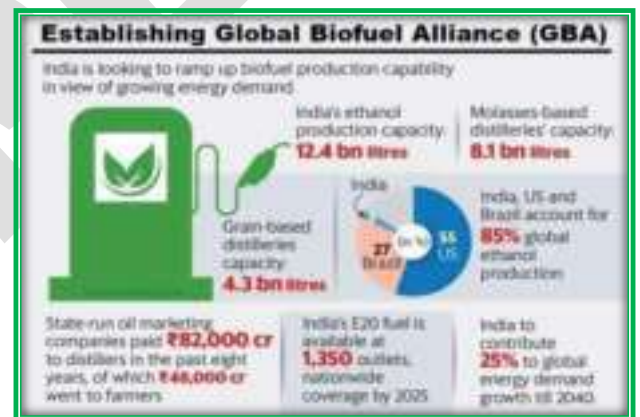
India's biofuels blending journey
- Going up from a 1.4 per cent biofuels blending in petrol in 2014, India achieved 10 per cent blending of ethanol in petrol in May 2022, helping boost farmers' income with a payment of USD 8.7 billion and also lowering carbon dioxide emission by more than 40 million metric tonnes in last 9 years.
- India is keen to collaborate with countries of the global south, including for knowledge sharing, technology transfer, joint R&D activities, and development of human capabilities to name just a few areas.
- India stands committed to achieving net zero by 2070, reaching the nation's non-fossil energy capacity of 500 GW and meeting 50 per cent of our energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030.

PM against misuse of deepfakes
Context
- Prime Minister flagged the misuse of AI or artificial intelligence for creating deepfake videos.

Government's measures
- In response to the growing concern over deepfake content, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued an advisory to social media companies.
- Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000, deals with penalties for cheating through impersonation using computer resources.
- It stipulates a maximum punishment of three years imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh

- The advisory also pointed to the "IT Intermediary Rules: Rule 3(1)(b)(vii)," which mandates social media intermediaries to exercise due diligence.
- Furthermore, as per "Rule 3(2)(b)," intermediaries must promptly take action, within 24 hours of receiving a complaint related to content involving impersonation in an electronic form.

Media to educate people
- Prime Minister said that the misuse of artificial intelligence for creating deepfakes was problematic, and asked the media to educate people about such activities.
- He said many deepfakes generated with AI assistance appeared real, and the consequent disinformation could lead to much harm.
- The Prime Minister said that he had himself been inserted into a deepfake video of a Garba event during the Navratri season.

Bank stocks fall as RBI tightens lending rules
Context
- Recently, Shares of banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) were reeling under selling stress in early trade after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) tightened norms for consumer loans.

Increased in risk weights
- In a notification issued by the RBI, it has increased the risk weights on unsecured consumer loans, including credit cards, by 25% for both banks and NBFCs.
- Consumer credit of commercial banks and NBFCs attracts a risk weight of 100 percent, which now has been revised to 125 percent.
- Risk weight is the number of money banks must keep aside for large loans as required by the Reserve Bank of India.

Impact of decision
- The increase in the risk weights of consumer credit exposure of commercial banks (outstanding as well as new), includes personal loans, but excludes housing loans, education loans, vehicle loans and loans secured by gold and gold jewellery, circular said.
- In addition, risk weight on credit card receivables for banks have been increased by 25 percentage points to 150% for banks 125% for NBFCs (only two NBFCs are permitted to issue credit cards viz. SBI Cards and Payment Services Private Limited and BOB Financial Solutions Limited).

State of the economy — temper the euphoria
- In its semi-annual report titled 'Navigating Global Divergences' for October 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has increased its projected GDP growth rate for India in 2023-24 to 6.3%, up from the previous estimate of 6.1%.
- This positive revision is seen as a validation of India's short-term economic management by policymakers.
- Notably, the success is accentuated by the fact that the IMF also lowered the global GDP growth projection, including China's, by 0.3 percentage points to 4.2%.

COVID-19 effects on economy
- The economies were worst affected during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- India, which was one of the worst affected, has followed the pattern.
- During the second quarter of 2020, India's GDP contracted by 25.6%, quarter on quarter.basis.
- India's real (inflation adjusted) annual GDP growth rate slowed down from 6.8% in 2016-17 to 2.8% in 2019-20, immediately prior to the pandemic.

Growing deficit with China
- The immediate concern is India's susceptibility to its soaring deficit with China.
- India's economic frailty has increased even as the net exports (exports minus imports) to GDP ratio has declined sharply.
- India's dependence on Chinese imports of manufactures seems structural, and not easily corrected by changes in relative prices.
- The mirror image of rising Chinese imports is a steady decline in industrial growth rate, from 13.1% per year in 2015-16 to negative 3.5% per year in 2019-20 (before COVID-19).

Credibility of the HDI

- In discussions on social development, there is ongoing contention between official spokespersons and critics regarding the reliability of contested multidimensional poverty measures and the perceived inadequacies of the Global Hunger Index.
- Instead, the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index may be more credible and an acceptable measure.
- The value of India's HDI index moderated from 0.645 in 2018 to 0.633 in 2021.

Way forward

- India is one of the fastest growing economies of the world and is poised to continue on this path, with aspirations to reach high middle-income status by 2047, the centenary of Indian independence.
- India's aspiration to achieve high income status by 2047 will need to be realized through a climate-resilient growth process that delivers broad-based gains to the bottom half of the population.

17th November 2023

- **World's first vaccine for chikungunya**
- **2nd Voice of Global South Summit**
- **Upcoming IT platform to track medicines end-to-end**
- **Draft framework for curriculum for PG courses**
- **Branded, generic and the missing ingredient of quality**

World's first vaccine for chikungunya

Context

- The US Food and Drug Administration has approved the world's first vaccine- **Ixchiq** for chikungunya, which it sees as an "emerging global health threat".

About Ixchiq vaccine

- Ixchiq is a chikungunya virus vaccine used to prevent chikungunya disease.
- It contains a live, weakened version of the chikungunya virus that helps build up an immune response to the chikungunya virus.
- The vaccine is used for people 18 and older who have an increased risk of being exposed to chikungunya virus (CHIKV).
- Ixchiq is administered as a single dose by injection into the muscle.

What is chikungunya

- Chikungunya is a viral disease that is primarily transmitted to humans through the bites of infected mosquitoes, particularly Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus.
- Chikungunya is caused by the chikungunya virus (CHIKV).
- Chikungunya disease is characterized by severe joint pain and impaired mobility, and comes with fever.

Global prevalence

- Chikungunya is an emerging global health threat with at least 5 million cases of chikungunya virus infection reported during the past 15 years.
- The highest risk of infection is in tropical and subtropical regions of Africa, Southeast Asia, and parts of the Americas where chikungunya virus-carrying mosquitos are endemic.

2nd Voice of Global South Summit

Context

- India is hosting the second Voice of Global South Summit to discuss challenges posed by global developments and to sustain momentum for a more inclusive world order ahead of a virtual G20 Summit.

VOGSS vision

- This unique initiative brought together 125 countries of the Global South to share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform.
- The 2nd Voice of Global South Summit is expected to generate further momentum for achieving a "more inclusive, representative and progressive world order".
- The key focus would be to share the beneficial outcomes and progress achieved in the concerns/priorities of the Global South during India's G20 Presidency.
- The 2nd VOGSS will be structured into 10 sessions with the inaugural and concluding sessions at the Head of State or Government level.

1st VOGSS Summit

- India hosted the inaugural Voice of Global South Summit (VOGSS) on January 12-13 in 2023, also in a virtual format.
- The theme for the first Voice of Global South Summit was "Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose".
- These had then been compiled and integrated by India into its agenda for the G20 Presidency.
- One of the key recommendations that had emerged from African nations was a demand for representation in the G20.
- This was achieved after the African Union became the 21st member of the body after the New Delhi Summit.

What is Global South

- The term "Global South" refers to a geopolitical concept that encompasses countries located in the southern hemisphere, primarily in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania.
- The Global South also refers to nations regarded as having a relatively low level of economic and industrial development, and are typically located to the south of more industrialized nations.

Upcoming IT platform to track medicines end-to-end

Context

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization is developing an integrated IT platform to enhance transparency and uniformity to track medicines end-to-end processes.

About IT platform

- The IT platform by CDSCO will track pharmaceutical products from raw material procurement through the supply chain to consumption patterns, promoting confidence in domestic and international markets.
- The portal will play a crucial role in sharing information about substandard and counterfeit medicines with state regulators.
- This aims to address the issue of these drugs circulating across state boundaries.
- The portal will create searchable registries of manufacturers, marketeers, retailers, pharmacies, and even subject matter experts.
- The portal will create provisions to capture information from various stakeholders routinely "similar to ITR returns and GST filing".

Next course of action

- The government has called for software service providers to develop the system.
- Once operational, all other portals used by drug regulators will be discontinued.
- The IT portal will become a single window for all drug regulatory activities.
- In February, a collaborative brainstorming session was held, bringing together various stakeholders to address concerns over the regulatory framework.
- This initiative was prompted by incidents revealing contamination in Indian-manufactured syrups, which were implicated in the deaths of children in the Gambia and Uzbekistan.

Draft framework for curriculum for PG courses

Context

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has prepared a draft curriculum and credit framework for PG courses which will be put in public domain soon.
- The curriculum, in line with the National Education Policy, offers flexibility to students to move from one discipline of study to another.

Framework under NEP 2020

- According to recommendations by UGC Students with a four-year undergraduate degree may be allowed to pursue one-year masters, and all PG students will be able to change disciplines or switch to alternative modes of learning including offline, distance, online and hybrid postgraduate courses.
- This framework allows the students to do their Master's in any stream they choose as a major or minor in their undergraduate programme.
- As per the draft, undergraduate students can opt for a double major or opt for any of the two subjects they have majored in.

Flexibility to study

- Further, the Commission has proposed enabling students who completed a four-year UG, three-year UG, two-year PG or five-year integrated programmes (UG PG) in STEM subjects to be eligible for admissions into ME, MTech and allied areas.
- Students taking up a two-year PG programme have also been provided an exit option after the first year.
- Such students will be awarded a postgraduate diploma.

Branded, generic and the missing ingredient of quality

- Many patients seek a second opinion in a medical shop — that of the seller.
- Any school finalist or school drop-out can read a doctor's prescription and need not be a qualified pharmacist.
- The prescription may have been written out by the most famous cardiologist, neurologist or gastroenterologist, but it is the verdict in the medical shop that is accepted without any doubt.
- The same person will not ask any questions at a bar counter or liquor shop on whether alcohol is injurious to health.
- In a supermarket, customers ignore the insecticide coating on vegetables and fruits and will never ask a question about safer alternatives.

Generic over brand

- This is the reality of over-the-counter sales in India, where a salesperson can decide which brand of generic medicine can be given to a patient.
- The prescribing doctor has no freedom to mention his favorite brand in which he has invested his faith in terms of quality.
- On August 3, 2023, the National Medical Council (NMC) directed all doctors to prescribe only generic names and not brand names which led to protests.
- Brand names are shunned because many brands are costly.

Hathi Committee

- In 1975, the Hathi Committee demanded that all brand names should be weeded out gradually.
- That only certain renowned and branded companies have quality is a myth propagated by the big pharma companies, with their expensive propaganda and unethical marketing techniques at work.
- There is an alleged nexus between pharmaceutical companies and doctors who can be influenced to give in to unethical marketing and promotional offers.
- A doctor's reputation on successful treatment depends on the reliability of the quantity and quality of the active pharmaceutical ingredient in a tablet, syrup or injection available in a pharmacy.

No compromise on quality

- The prevalence rate of spurious and "not standard quality" medicines (NSQs), stands at 4.5% and 3.4 %, respectively.
- In safeguarding a patient and enabling complete healing, drugs must be 100% quality test-passed.
- Having even 5% of medicines failing to pass quality tests is simply unacceptable.
- The government must ensure the quality of medicines produced, procured, and supplied through its Universal Health Coverage system as well as the private health-care network.
- For this, there must be periodic lifting of samples for testing.

Conclusion

- To ensure affordable medicines for all under Universal Health Care, free medicines and free diagnostics are acceptable policy, but implementation needs to be monitored.
- The network of Janaushadhikendras needs to be expanded.
- Approved norms of the profit margin for wholesale agents must be limited to 15%.
- The government must ensure the quality of medicines produced, procured, and supplied.

16ᵗʰ November 2023

- **FATF team in India to hold on-site review meetings**
- **WMO report on Greenhouse gases concentrations**
- **Proposed criminal code gives more immunity to defence personnel**
- **Gold import widen India's trade deficit**
- **Ease of Control**

FATF team in India to hold on-site review meetings

Context

- A FATF team is currently in India for mutual evaluations, assessing the country's implementation of legal measures against money laundering and terrorist financing.

About FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) provides standards for countries to plug the holes in their financial systems, mitigating vulnerability to illegal financial activities.
- The evaluations aim to ensure that authorities have implemented necessary measures to counter money laundering and terrorist financing.
- It conducts regular peer-reviewed evaluations called Mutual Evaluations (ME) of countries to check their performance on standards prescribed by it.
- FATF's evaluations play a crucial role in maintaining global financial integrity and security.
- Non-compliance with FATF standards can have significant economic and reputational consequences for a country.

Mutual evaluations and review

- According to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), mutual evaluations are peer reviews where members from different countries assess another country.
- The process starts with the selection of the legal, financial and law enforcement experts for the assessment team.
- The country concerned provides to them all relevant laws and regulations that are in place to prevent criminal abuse of the financial system.
- The FATF official are likely to meet with civil society representatives.

The Mutual Evaluation Process

FATF list

- FATF has two types of lists:
- **Grey List:** The grey list comprises countries considered safe havens for supporting terror -funding and money-laundering and including in this list serves as a warning.

- **Black List:** Countries known as Non-Cooperative Countries or Territories (NCCTs) are put on the blacklist and are seen as supporting terror-funding and money-laundering activities.

WMO report on Greenhouse gases concentrations
Context
- According to the GHG bulletin released by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the Earth's atmosphere rose to record levels in 2022.

Findings
- The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), said global concentrations of carbon dioxide were 50 percent higher than the pre-industrial average.
- UN's World Meteorological Organization reported record-breaking levels of the three primary greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide compared to last year.
- About 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions come from the G20, a group of the world's major economies.
- The surge in greenhouse gas emissions will be accompanied by more extreme weather, including intense heat and rainfall, ice melt, sea level rise and ocean heat and acidification.
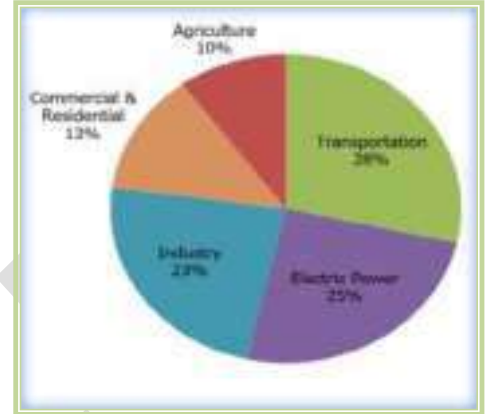
Paris Agreement targets
- The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" 2 degree Celsius above average levels measured between 1850 and 1900 — and degree Celsius if possible.
- The concentrations of the other two major GHGs — methane and nitrous oxide grew in 2022.
- Methane, which has the second-highest concentration in the atmosphere, reached 1,923 parts per billion.

Proposed criminal code gives more immunity to defence personnel
Context
- The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) Bill, 2023, expected to replace the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), provides further immunity to armed forces personnel.

Proposed changes
- According to Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) Bill, 2023 no case can be registered against defence personnel without the sanction of the Union or the State government for acts performed in the line of duty.
- The CrPC, introduced in 1898 and amended in 1973, provides protection to members of the armed forces only from arrest and there are no conditions regarding registration of a criminal case.
- The Bill modernises the court structure as it simplifies the court system by eliminating British-era designations such as "Metropolitan Magistrate" and "Metropolitan Area".
- It also empowers the Union government to appoint Public Prosecutors for trial, appeal, and other proceedings in the National Capital Territory of Delhi in consultation with the High Court.

Besides AFSPA
- The proposed provision will be in addition to the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that gives unbridled power to the armed forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to arrest or kill anyone acting in contravention of law, and search any premises without a warrant, and protection from prosecution and legal suits without Central government's sanction.
- At present, the AFSPA is applicable in parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and whole of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Earlier this year, the Defence Ministry denied sanction to prosecute 30 Army personnel including a Major who were accused of killing six coal miners in Nagaland's Mon district in December 2021 out of "mistaken identity."

Gold import widen India's trade deficit
Context
- India's merchandise trade deficit in October widened to a record level, partly due to a sharp rise in gold imports during the festival season.

Import data
- According to data released by the commerce department, merchandise exports grew at the fastest pace (6.2 per cent) in 11 months to $33.6 billion in October.
- Imports rose at the fastest pace (12.3 per cent) in 13 months to $65.03 billion.
- Gold imports rose by 95.4 per cent to $7.2 billion and silver imports increased by 124.6 per cent to $1.3 billion during the month.
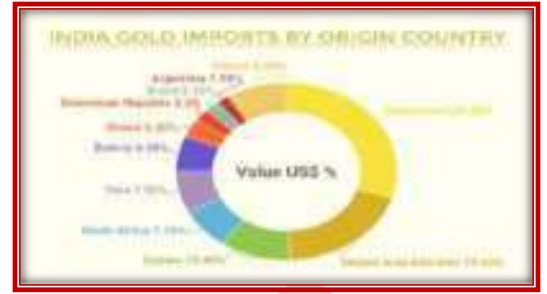
India's goods exports
- India's goods exports grew only for the second time in 2023-24 in October, albeit on a low base, rising 6.2% to $33.6 billion, but imports jumped to a record high of $65.03 billion, 12.3% over last year, fuelled by higher gold inflows.
- Consequently, India's monthly goods trade deficit widened to an all-time high of $31.46 billion, eclipsing the previous record of $29.23 billion in September 2022.

Ease of Control
- After the contentious IT Rules 2021, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has recently introduced the draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023.
- The proposed bill aims to replace the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995, consolidating regulations for broadcasting, OTT, digital media, DTH, and IPTV.

Features
- The Bill streamlines regulatory processes, extends its purview to cover the Over-the-Top (OTT) content and digital news, and introduces contemporary definitions and provisions for emerging technologies.
- It seeks to provide for Content Evaluation Committees and a Broadcast Advisory Council for self-regulation, different program and advertisement code for different Broadcasting Network Operators, Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities, and statutory penalties, etc.

Key Highlights
- **Consolidation and Modernization:** It addresses a long-standing need of consolidating and updating the regulatory provisions for various broadcasting services under a single legislative framework.
- It extends its regulatory purview to encompass broadcasting over-the-top (OTT) content and digital news and current affairs currently regulated through IT Act, 2000.
- **Strengthens the Self-Regulation Regime:** It enhances self-regulation with the introduction of 'Content evaluation committees' and evolves the existing Inter-Departmental Committee into a more participative and broader 'Broadcast Advisory Council'.
- **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities:** The bill addresses the specific needs of persons with disabilities by providing for enabling provisions for issue of comprehensive accessibility guidelines.
- **Statutory Penalties and Fines:** The draft Bill introduces statutory penalties such as: advisory, warning, censure, or monetary penalties, for operators and broadcasters.

Conclusion
- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting seeks to introduce a new era of transparency, self-regulation, and technologically advanced broadcasting services in India with the comprehensive measures outlined in the proposed Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023.

15th November 2023

- **PM to launch Scheme for Tribal Welfare**
- **Panel on criminal law Bill leaves decision on death penalty to Centre**
- **Centre plan to access the anonymised data of big tech firms**
- **Army holds study to address suicides**
- **The Qatar death row and India's options**

PM to launch Scheme For Tribal Welfare

Context
- The Prime Minister will launch the Rs 24,000-crore Pradhan Mantri Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PM-PVTG) Mission on the birth anniversary of tribal icon Birsa Munda on in Jharkhand on November 15.

Focus
- The mission will focus on the delivery of 11 interventions under nine ministries for the holistic development of 75 PVTGs across 18 states and Union Territories.
- According to the 2011 census, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh have a PVTG population of around 4.1 lakh and 1.1 lakh respectively.
- The Pradhan Mantri Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PM-PVTG) Mission is "first-of-its-kind initiative" for vulnerable tribal groups.
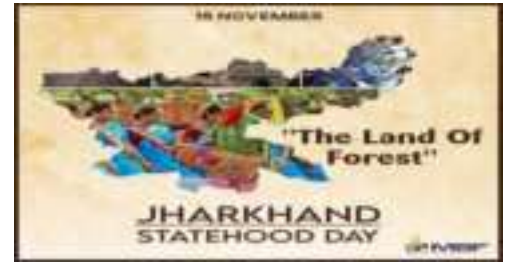
Who are PVTGs
- Among various tribal groups, PVTGs are the more vulnerable groups who usually live in remote locations and are shy of contact with other communities.
- The estimated population of 75 PVTGs in India is around 28 lakh.
- According to data from the tribal affairs ministry, these marginalized groups live in 22,544 villages across 220 districts in 18 states and UTs.
- Most of these groups live in remote regions with little or limited facilities, such as roads, electricity, housing, drinking water, sanitation, and livelihood opportunities.

PM-PVTG Mission
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs plans to implement this mission over a period of three years through the convergence of the current Central government schemes.
- Under the Rs 24,000-crore scheme, Rs 15,000 crore will be the Centre's contribution and the rest will be contributed by states and UTs with PVTG population.
- The states are contributing to the implementation of various central schemes, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and PM Gram Sadak Yojana.

Priority and interventions
- The ministry identified 11 interventions, such as the provision of housing, healthcare facilities, water supply, road connectivity, 4G and mobile network, electrification of houses, education, Anganwadi centers, multipurpose facility centers, and livelihood options in PVTG villages.
- Around 3,000 PVTG villages do not have any mobile or 4G network.
- Nine central government ministries will ensure the implementation of these 11 interventions.
- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs will be the nodal ministry.

Panel on criminal law Bill leaves decision on death penalty to Centre

Context
- The parliamentary standing committee on Home Affairs, examining criminal law Bill leaves decision on death penalty to Centre.

Panel recommendation
- The proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) Bill, 2023, which seeks to replace the British-era Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- Notably, the proposed bill expands the scope of offenses eligible for the death penalty, increasing the count from 11 to 15.
- The report adds that the domain experts consulted by the committee "deliberated at great length about the need to abolish death penalty".
- India has in the past voted against a United Nations General Assembly's draft resolution on the abolition of the death penalty.

Annual Statistics Report 2022
- According to the Annual Statistics Report 2022 by Project 39A, based on a study conducted by the National Law University, Delhi, the number of prisoners on death row in India reached 539 by December 31, 2022.
- This marks the highest count since at least 2016.
- The parliamentary panel recommended that the matter be left to the Union government to consider.

Centre plan to access the anonymised data of big tech firms
Context
- The government is considering issuing a directive to major tech giants such as Facebook, Google, and Amazon, instructing them to share anonymized personal data they hold with a government-supported database.
Course of action
- If implemented, this initiative might lead these companies to assert intellectual property rights over the data shared, sparking discussions regarding the ownership of such information.
- As part of the upcoming Digital India Bill, the successor to the Information Technology Act, 2000, the IT Ministry is reportedly including a provision that will require major tech companies to deposit all the non-personal data they possess into the India datasets platform.

Features of the Digital India Act
- Online Safety and Trust: The Digital India Bill prioritizes online safety, aiming to protect citizens' digital rights and combat user harms like cyberstalking, trolling, and doxing.

- **Know Your Customer (KYC) for Wearable Devices:** The DIA mandates stringent KYC requirements for wearable devices, which is essential for ensuring data security and privacy in the growing wearables market.
- **Open Internet:** DIA upholds the concept of an open internet while ensuring necessary regulations to protect users.
- **Responsible Technology Adoption:** It provides guidelines for the responsible use of technologies like artificial intelligence and blockchain, promoting ethical practices and accountability.
- **Review of Safe Harbor Principle:** The DIA contemplates a review of the "safe harbour" principle, potentially altering online accountability standards.

Comprehensive legal framework
- The Digital India Bill is a key part of a comprehensive legal framework which encompasses various legislative measures such as the recently-notified Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022, and a policy addressing the governance of non-personal data.
- Non-personal data held by the Indian datasets platform could also be monetised.
- The platform will play a crucial role in boosting the artificial intelligence ecosystem in India by providing a "robust foundation" for data-driven innovation and development.

Army holds study to address suicides
Context
- As part of measures to address stress and psychological issues and reduce the number of suicides and fratricides in the force, the Army launched a study in August 2023 in collaboration with the Defence Institute of Psychological Research (DIPR) to assess the mental health of troops and their families.

Annual training for mental health
- In ongoing efforts to address mental health concerns, 30 officers undergo annual training at DIPR.
- "Religious teachers counselor courses" are held for four weeks at Command Hospitals, Base Hospitals, and Military Hospitals.

- Additionally, a 12-week Unit Psychological Counsellor Course is conducted for Junior Commissioned Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers.
- In addition, the Indian Army is also employing civilian counsellors in all major military stations to address the mental well-being of all ranks.

Fratricide and suicide data

- As per information given in Parliament in April 2022, there were two cases of fratricide each year from 2019 to 2021 and one case in 2021.
- In an older reply in the Rajya Sabha on suspected suicide cases in the Army, the Government said that from 2016 to 2018, there were 104, 75 and 80 cases, respectively.
- In the latest incident of fratricide in early October 2023 involving an officer, a Major of a Rashtriya Rifles Units deployed in Jammu and Kashmir lobbed grenades and opened fire on personnel of his unit.

The Qatar death row and India's options

- Recently, Qatar court announced a death penalty to eight former Indian Navy personnel who have been detained in the country for over a year.

Background

- In August 2022, the eight officers were detained in Doha by Qatari intelligence authorities.
- The navy men were working for a defence service provider organisation — Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services owned by a retired member of the Royal Omani Air Force. The eight men have been in the custody of Qatari authorities since August 2022.
- The first trial was held in March 2023.
- In October, consular access was granted, and the Indian Ambassador met the detainees.

Similar incidents

- The case shares similarities with other incidents involving the arrest of Indian nationals by foreign authorities.
- One such example is Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was sentenced to death in Pakistan in 2017 on charges of espionage and sabotage.
- It ordered Pakistan to review the process of Jadhav's trial and conviction, and provide India with consular access.
- In a separate incident, Indian Air Force pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's aircraft was shot down by Pakistani fighter jets after he took down a Pakistani F-16 fighter jet.

Vienna Convention on Consular Relations

- The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations provides the framework for consular relations between sovereign states.
- Article 36 of the Convention is central to this case, as it deals with communication and contact with nationals of the sending state.
- Article 36 of the Vienna Convention requires immediate notification of an arrest and the right to consulate access.

India's options

- India has the option to initiate legal appeals within the Qatari legal system.
- As per Article 110 of the Penal Code of Qatar, engaging in espionage is regarded as a serious criminal offense.
- Espionage is legally defined as the act of finding out secret information about another country or organization.
- Penalties can result in imprisonment not exceeding 15 years, depending on the gravity of the offense.
- India has the capacity to initiate diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the case.

Agreement on transfer of sentenced prisoners
- In 2015, India and Qatar signed an agreement pertaining to the transfer of sentenced prisoners.
- Under the agreement, Indian citizens who are sentenced in Qatar have the choice to serve their prison sentence in their home country.
- If the legal appeals in Qatar's judiciary do not yield the desired outcome, India could turn to the ICJ as a means of redress.

Conclusion
- This is a challenging diplomatic issue that requires careful consideration and strategic action.
- India's response should consider the implications of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, international precedents, and the broader context of India-Qatar relations.
- Whether through diplomatic dialogues, political interventions, legal appeals, or a blend of these strategies, India has the potential to seek a resolution.

14ᵗʰ November 2023

- **Community rights and forest conservation**
- **India, ADB sign loan pact to build urban infrastructure**
- **MoD holds talks with UK defence secretary**
- **IQAir survey on air pollutions**
- **Remission of diabetes, desirable, but not essential**

Community rights and forest conservation
Context
- The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, 2023 passed by the Lok Sabha in July 2023 seeks to amend the decades old Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 has received limited attention and little discussion about its impact on forests and its inhabitants.

What are new amendment
- The amendment primarily addresses climate change and deforestation by emphasizing effective management and afforestation.
- According to the amendment, the forest law will now exclusively apply to areas defined by the Forest Act of 1927 and those designated as such on or after October, 1980.
- The Act excludes forests converted for non-forest use after December, 1996, and land within 100 kilometers of the China-Pakistan border, where the central government can undertake linear projects.
- The central government is authorized to build security infrastructure and surveillance facilities in areas up to ten hectares.
- Initiatives like ecotourism and safari, aimed at improving the livelihoods of those dependent on forest resources, face criticism from tribal communities and human rights activists.

Compensatory afforestation
- The new legislation on compensatory afforestation allows private individuals and organizations, including large corporations, to undertake various projects and schemes for afforestation or reforestation purposes.
- The law requires that for every parcel of land lost to afforestation efforts, an equivalent amount of land must be afforested elsewhere.
- It does not specify the type of trees that should be planted, leaving room for discretion.

How does this affect the Forest Rights Act

- The FRA has had notable impacts in various regions, such as the Mendha-Lekha in Maharashtra, Loyendi in Odisha, and Malakkappara in Kerala.
- Many consider the Act as an impediment to convert forest land for non-forest purposes.
- The amendment also fails to address the growing issue of human-animal conflicts in forest areas, particularly in the Adivasi hamlets of the Western Ghats region.
- The State government and its bureaucracy hold the view that granting community rights under the FRA could weaken the State's authority over the forest.
- It appears that both the Central and State governments have become less enthusiastic about implementing the FRA in their States.

India, ADB sign loan pact to build urban infrastructure

Context

- The central government on Monday signed a USD 400 million policy-based loan with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to support its urban reform agenda to create high-quality urban infrastructure, improve service delivery, and promote efficient governance systems.

Sub-programme

- Sub-programme 1 was approved in 2021 with a $350 million budget to implement national-level policies and guidelines to strengthen urban services.
- Sub-programme 2 supports investment planning and reform measures at the state and urban local body (ULB) levels.
- The program supports India's urban strategy, aiming for livable cities and economic growth through inclusive, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure.
- The sub-program supports broader mission objectives by ensuring urban water security through measures such as minimizing water losses, recycling treated sewage for non-domestic use, revitalizing water bodies, and sustaining groundwater levels.

MoD holds talks with UK defence secretary

Context

- India's Union Defence held a telephonic conversation with his British counterpart and discussed means to bolster closer defence relations as well as the security issues in the Indo-Pacific region.

Focus Area

- Both India and UK Ministers discussed a range of defence and security issues with particular emphasis on the Indo-Pacific.
- The two leaders explored ways and means to develop closer defence relations.

Development in India-UK relationship

- The India-UK relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the India-UK virtual summit held between Prime Minister of India and his then-British counterpart in May 2021.
- During the summit, the two sides agreed on a 10-year roadmap to enhance cooperation in key areas such as trade and economy, defense and security, climate change, and people-to-people connections.
- Recently, the first India-UK '2+2' foreign and defence dialogue took place that saw the two sides focusing on ways to boost cooperation in a range of key areas such as trade and investment, defence, critical technologies, civil aviation, health and energy.

IQAir survey on air pollutions

Context

- The three Indian metropolises figured on the list of the most polluted cities in the world compiled by the Swiss air purifier company IQAir.

Air quality index

- Delhi was the most polluted city in the world with an air quality index (AQI) of 287 followed by Lahore, Pakistan, at 195.

- Air pollution in parts of Delhi was 30 times higher than the safe limits prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Mumbai, at 153, and Kolkata, 166, were among the top 10.
- The IQAir's AQI measures data from 109 countries, and the readings change hourly.
- It follows a U.S. methodology and varies slightly from the Indian one.

Continuing worry
- The values are a measure of the quantities of PM [particulate matter] 2.5, considered most harmful for respiratory health.
- Though pollution from firecrackers are short-lived compared with those from persistent sources such as vehicle emission and waste and biomass burning, the spike in pollutants has a pronounced effect on health.

Remission of diabetes, desirable, but not essential
- The concept of a reversal of diabetes has become very popular recently.
- Several commercial organizations are promoting the concept of 'reversal of diabetes' with lofty claims.
- Hence, it is essential to evaluate the pros and cons associated with this approach.

Pros and cons of a reversal of diabetes
- First, the term 'reversal' of diabetes is scientifically incorrect; the appropriate term is 'remission' of diabetes.
- Reversal implies that the condition has permanently reverted to normal and a cure has been achieved.
- 'Remission' implies that diabetes has only gone away temporarily.

Remission and type 2 diabetes
- Diabetes is not a single condition but consists of several types.
- When we talk of remission of diabetes, we are referring most often to type 2 diabetes. However, there are other forms of diabetes such as type 1 diabetes where long-term remission is very unlikely to occur.
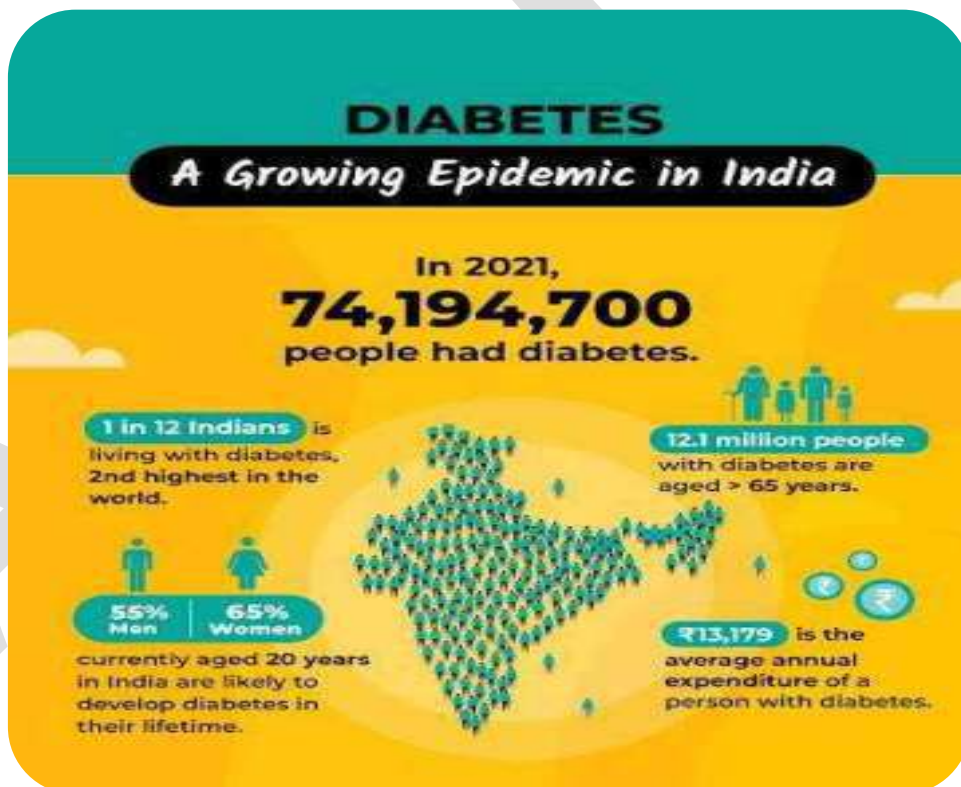
ABCDE concept of remission
- There are certain individuals with type 2 diabetes who are more likely to achieve remission.
- This can be identified by the letters ABCDE.
  - A refers to A1c (glycated hemoglobin) which should not be very high
  - B refers to Body Mass Index (BMI) or body weight
  - C stands for C-Peptide, a measure of insulin secretion
  - D stands for Duration of diabetes; the shorter the duration, the greater the chances of remission
  - E stands for an Enthusiastic individual who is keen to achieve remission.

Data on India
- According to recent Indian Council of Medical Research–India Diabetes (ICMR-INDIAB) study, there are currently 101 million people with diabetes and 136 million people with prediabetes in India.
- In India, there are estimated 77 million people above the age of 18 years are suffering from diabetes (type 2) and nearly 25 million are prediabetics.
- More than 50% of people are unaware of their diabetic status which leads to health complications if not detected and treated early.

11th November 2023

- **Governor's Power over State Bills**
- **PM may attend COP-28 summit in Dubai**
- **India, UK FTA Negotiations**
- **IIP growth slows down to 3-month low**
- **The rice of the matter**

Governor's Power over State Bills
Context
- Recently, Supreme Court ruled that a Governor is titular head of the state he cannot withhold approval of crucial Bills passed by a State Legislature. The decision questioned the validity of the Assembly session in which these laws were overwhelmingly approved by elected representatives.

Background
- The apex court settled the law in a writ petition filed by the Punjab government, complaining that Governor of Punjab has held back crucial Bills on Sikh gurdwaras, the police and higher education passed in a special sitting of the Budget Session of the Vidhan Sabha on June 19 and June 20.

Supreme court observation
- The apex court noted that In a Parliamentary form of democracy, real power rests with the elected representatives of the people.
- The Governor, as an appointee of the President, is a nominal head of the State.
- The Governor acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers save in areas where the Constitution gives him discretion.
- The power to take decisions affecting the governance of the State or the nation is essentially entrusted to the elected arm of the state.

Constitutional provision
Article 200
- Article 200 of the Indian Constitution outlines the procedure for a Bill approved by a State Legislative Assembly to be submitted to the Governor for assent.
- The Governor can either grant assent, refuse assent, or reserve the Bill for the President's consideration.
- The Governor may also return the Bill with a message requesting reconsideration by the House or Houses.

Article 201
- It states that when a Bill is reserved for the consideration of the President, the President may assent to or withhold assent from the Bill.

- The President may also direct the Governor to return the Bill to the House or Houses of the Legislature of the State for reconsideration.

PM may attend COP-28 summit in Dubai
Context
- The Prime Minister of India is likely be present at the 28th edition of the United Nations Conference of Parties (COP-28), which will begin in Dubai on November 30, 2023.

About COP- 28
- The 2023 UN Climate Change Conference or COP 28 will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- It will comprise:
- 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28)
- Fifth meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 5)
- 18th meeting of the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 18)
- 59th meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI 59)
- 59th meeting of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA 59)

Global Stocktake
- The Global Stocktake is a fundamental component of the Paris Agreement which is used to monitor its implementation and evaluate the collective progress made in achieving the agreed goals.
- The countries are expected to present the steps they have undertaken to meet commitments towards achieving goals of the Paris Agreement.
- COP28 UAE will be a milestone moment when the world will take stock of its progress on the Paris Agreement.
- Countries are also expected to deliberate on the Loss and Damages Fund, to compensate countries already bearing the brunt of climate change.

India, UK FTA Negotiations
Context
- The signing of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA), initially planned for last year's Diwali, is expected to be delayed again this year. The Negotiators are addressing contentious issues, including rules of origin and intellectual property rights (IPR).

Proposed FTA
- The proposed FTA negotiations between India and UK which were started in January of 2022 covers 26 chapters of policy areas.
- Majority of chapters are closed or are in advanced stages of negotiations.
- Protracted negotiations are still on issues of interest to India like greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like **IT, and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duties.**
- On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, automobiles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Mode 4 category
- A government official said India has been able to secure "limited" short-term work permits for its service sector workforce under the movement of natural persons (mode 4) category.
- Mode 4 refers to services traded by individuals of one WTO member through their presence in the territory of another. It covers employees of services firms and self-employed service suppliers.
- Mode 4 market access is deemed "very limited," focusing on commitments that grant entry and stay rights solely to highly skilled individuals and those transferred from an affiliate of a company with a commercial presence in the UK.

India services exports
- After the US, the UK is the largest importer of India's services.
- It makes up 17% of India's total services exports including travel, transportation, insurance, software, and financial services.
- Services are among India's fastest growing exports, registering a jump of nearly 30% to $267.79 billion from April to January in FY23 compared to $206.27 billion during the comparable period in FY22.

Free Trade Agreement Pro and Cons

PROS	CONS
Increased economic growth	Increased job outsourcing
Lower government spending	Poor working conditions
Technology transfer	Degradation of natural resources

the balance

IIP growth slows down to 3-month low

Context

According to data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation India's industrial output grew by 5.8 percent in September 2023.

Disappointing growth

An unfavourable base, excess rainfall and a shift in the festival calendar caused a fall in industrial output in September

- The furniture and apparel segments were the worst hit, declining by a sharp 20.2% and 17.9%, respectively

- Most economists expected September's Index of Industrial Production or IIP to reflect much sharper growth

- Consumption demand appeared to be weak in September with the production of consumer durables rising just 1%

Industrial growth
- Growth in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) cooled to a three-month low of 5.8 per cent in September from 10.3 per cent in August, 2023.
- The growth in manufacturing output decelerated to 4.5 per cent, whereas the output in electricity and mining accelerated to 9.9 per cent and 11.5 per cent respectively from last month.
- Nine out of 23 manufacturing sectors in the IIP, such as food products, tobacco, apparel, paper products, recorded media, chemicals, computers, and furniture among others registered a contraction in output growth during September.

Sectoral Estimates (YoY)
- Mining output grew 11.5%
- Manufacturing output expanded by 4.5%
- Electricity generation rose 9.9%

Industrial output, as classified by the end use of goods, showed:
- Primary goods output rose 8%
- Capital goods output grew 7.4%
- Intermediate goods output rose 5.8%
- Infrastructure and construction goods output rose 7.5%
- Consumer durables output rose 1%
- Consumer non durables output grew 2.7%

The rice of the matter
- With the air quality index (AQI) (PM 2.5) breaching the 400 mark in Delhi for most days this week, the Supreme Court (SC) bench has come down heavily on the adjoining states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
- The bench has asked them to stop stubble burning in paddy fields forthwith, and then find long-term solutions.
- It also suggested making the local Station House Office (SHO) responsible for its implementation.
- How far this will be implemented is yet to be seen.

Air Quality Life Index report 2023
- If Delhi's pollution due stubble burning is not controlled, people in the city are likely to lose 11.9 years of their life, as per the Air Quality Life Index report (2023) of the University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute.
- Given that our life expectancy hovers around 71 years, losing 11.9 years of life for a population of about 22 million people in the National Capital Territory, is like killing 3.7 million people through polluted air.

Effect on other cities
- The area under paddy in the Punjab-Haryana belt needs to be drastically cut from 4.7 million hectares (m ha) to just 2.5 m ha.
- The SC rightly pointed out that it is not a suitable crop for this region and is depleting the water table fast.
- In a district like Sangrur, the water table has gone down by 25 meters in the last 20 years. And it is in this district that there are the most farm fires.
- The quantum of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from paddy in Punjab is still not counted.
- It is estimated that paddy cultivation in Punjab produces at least 5 tonnes of CO_2 eq/ha.

Need for diversion
- How do farmers in the Punjab-Haryana belt can be away from paddy?
- One, there should be provisions of a subsidy Rs 25,000/ha to farmers switching from paddy to pulses, oilseeds and millets, or even maize.
- This will help create a crop-neutral incentive structure and will not cost the government as it will save that subsidy from paddy cultivation.
- Two, incentivise the private sector to set up ethanol plants based on maize, starting from Sangrur, where water table depletion needs to be arrested as soon as possible.
- This will help create a market for ethanol blending with fossil fuels, and help in lowering air pollution from vehicular traffic.

Need of the hour
- The State agencies should reduce paddy procurement from those farmers burning stubble, and also in those blocks where the water table is depleting fast.
- The FCI should make it clear that they will not pay more than 3 per cent on top of MSP for any mandi fee and commissions for Commission Agent.
- The PM needs to sit down with chief ministers of the states adjoining Delhi and offer a package to move towards more nutritious crops, millets, oilseeds, and pulses by assuring a procurement of these at MSP.

Conclusion
- India's reliance on rice and wheat in the Public Distribution System is excessive, causing diabetes and harming the environment.
- Of more than 5 lakh fair price shops, at least 10 per cent (50,000) can be made nutrition hubs where these nutritious crops will also be supplied along with wheat and rice.

- The consumers should be given a choice whether they want rice and wheat or other crops costing the same money through food vouchers.
- This will create a more diversified market, save water, minimize GHG emissions from the crop sector, and reduce pollution in Delhi coming from stubble burning.

10th November 2023

- **5th India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**
- **Why centre issued a directive on deepfakes**
- **Aadhaar authentication continues to face glitches**
- **Food price shocks, a risk to inflation**
- **India, US and the AI bridge**

5th India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue
Context
- The US defence secretary and Secretary of State arrived in New Delhi to co-chair the 5th India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue.
- The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue is a diplomatic summit held every year since 2018.

India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue
- The India-US 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue is a high-level diplomatic meeting between the foreign and defense ministers of India and the United States.
- The dialogue aims to strengthen bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various areas such as defense, counterterrorism, regional security, technology, and climate change.
- Key focus area includes defense agreements, cybersecurity, trade, pandemic response, and collaborative efforts in emerging technologies.

2+2 Ministerial Dialogue	
Official languages	Hindi · English · Japanese · Russian
Membership	India
	United States
	Japan
	Australia
	Russia

Two major deals
- On the defence front, there are two major deals in the pipeline between the two countries:
- First is the 31 MQ-9B high altitude long endurance drones
- Second is about the manufacture of the General Electric F-414 jet engines in India, which has been chosen to power the indigenous light combat aircraft (LCA-Mk2).
- The process is under way and is expected to be concluded early next year.
- The '2+2' dialogue will enable a high-level review of progress being made in cross-cutting aspects of defence and security cooperation, technology value chain collaborations and people-to-people ties.

Why centre issued a directive on deepfakes
Context
- On November 8, the Union Government has mandated social media platforms to delete morphed videos or deepfakes within 24 hours of receiving a complaint, as per the IT Rules 2021.
- The instructions came as deepfake videos of actors surfaced online within the span of one week.

What is Deepfakes
- Deepfakes are videos or other types of media that have been manipulated using artificial intelligence technology.
- Deepfakes are videos creating delusion with the use of deep learning, AI, and photoshopping techniques to make images of fake events.
- Deepfakes have been around since 2017 and refer to videos, audios or images created using a form of artificial intelligence called deep learning.

Working of deepfake technology
- The technology involves modifying or creating images and videos using a machine learning technique called generative adversarial network (GAN).
- The AI-driven software detects and learns the subjects' movements and facial expressions from the source material and then duplicates these in another video or image.

Laws in India
- India's IT Rules, 2021 require that all content reported to be fake or produced using deep fake be taken down by intermediary platforms within 36 hours.
- The Indian IT ministry has also issued notices to social media platforms stating that impersonating online was illegal under Section 66D of the Information Technology Act of 2000.
- The IT Rules, 2021, also prohibit hosting any content that impersonates another person and requires social media firms to take down artificially morphed images when alerted.

Global response
- The EU has issued guidelines for the creation of an independent network of fact-checkers to help analyze the sources and processes of content creation.
- The U.S. has also introduced the bipartisan Deepfake Task Force Act to counter deepfake technology.

Aadhaar authentication continues to face glitches
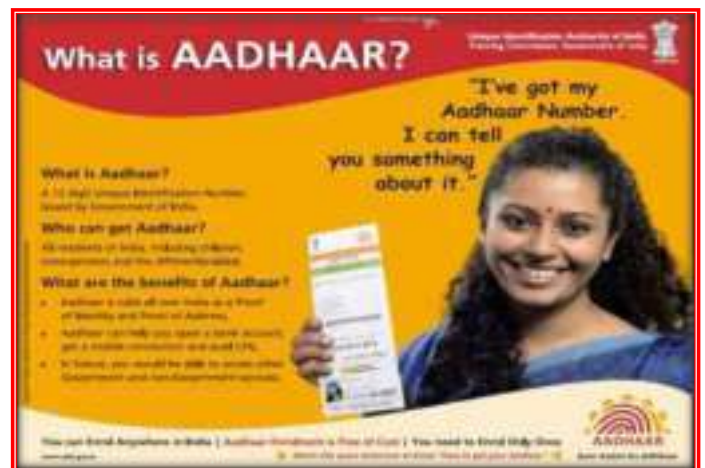### Context
- According to a Right to Information (RTI) response, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) disclosed that Aadhaar servers experienced delays in sending one-time passcodes (OTPs) via SMS and intermittent minor fluctuations in authentication, totaling 54 hours and 33 minutes of disruptions until September, 2023.

Technical uncertainty
- Aadhaar authentication services were interrupted for over 54 hours in 2023, representing a significant outage for the largest identity platform in the world.
- Authentication which has many uses like Aadhaar-enabled ATM machines and daily employee attendance at some government offices relies on servers administered by the UIDAI and linkages with telecom operators, which may not always work when needed.
- Prolonged and repeated outages throw up uncertainty on the reliability of Aadhaar services when they are needed.
- Since Aadhaar was launched back in 2009, over 100 billion authentications have taken place.

About Aadhaar
- It is a unique 12-digit identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to residents of India.
- It serves as a proof of identity and address, making it easier for people to access various government and private sector services.
- Aadhaar is based on biometric and demographic data, including fingerprints and iris scans, which are collected from individuals during the enrollment process.
- The Aadhaar number is linked to the individual's biometric data and serves as a digital identity that can be used for verification purposes across different services and sectors in India.

Food price shocks, a risk to inflation
Context
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor said India remains vulnerable to "recurring and overlapping" food price shocks despite the recent moderation in inflation.
- Headline inflation is projected to fall from 6.7% in 2022-23 to 5.4% in 2023-24 but it remains prone to food price shocks.

Retail inflation
- In September, retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, fell to a three-month low of 5.02%, mainly due to lower vegetable prices, despite the decrease, it remained above the RBI's target of 4%.
- The government has directed the RBI to maintain Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation at 4%, allowing for a margin of 2% on both sides.
- The retail inflation was 6.83 per cent in August.
- The central bank has kept the key rate unchanged over the last four meetings.
- The panel has projected inflation to average at 5.4 per cent in 2023-24, a moderation from 6.7 per cent in 2022-23.

Persisting threats

RBI Governor notes that policymakers have managed to temper price gains, but risks to inflation still remain

- RBI Governor says the global economy continues to face multiple macroeconomic and geopolitical shocks
- Policymaking in the current scenario is extremely challenging given a difficult trade-off between growth and inflation, he adds
- Mr. Das notes while core inflation has moderated, monetary policy still remains disinflationary to align inflation to target

India, US and the AI bridge
- The meeting between India and the US foreign and defense ministers in Delhi this week highlights the need for a robust discussion on artificial intelligence (AI) cooperation. Recent developments, including US President's Executive Order on AI and the Pentagon's updated AI adoption strategy, underscore the urgency for an in-depth India-US dialogue on AI in the defense and security partnership.

Focus of executive order
- US President's executive order focuses on securing AI in civilian applications, whereas the US strategy emphasizes integrating AI developments into military doctrine and operations.
- These initiatives address the inherent tension of staying ahead in a technology that could reshape global power dynamics while mitigating the risks of its uncontrolled use.
- AI is not the first technology to present this kind of tension, its potential for misuse and social consequences are far more sweeping.

US not new to AI
- According to the US Deputy Secretary of Defence, the Pentagon is not new to AI and has been among the earliest funders of AI research and has developed military uses for AI over the last six decades.
- The last few years have seen an intensification of the US investments in AI for defence. The main objective in developing AI for defence is to build on the "decision advantage" that it offers the US armed forces.
- AI-enabled systems can help accelerate the speed of commanders' decisions and improve the quality and accuracy of those decisions.

India-US engagement imperatives
- **First**, advanced technology cooperation has been put at the very heart of the India-US partnership with the launch of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies in January this year.
- **Second**, the foreign and defence ministers of the two countries should also elevate cooperation in AI to a higher level in the bilateral defence partnership.
- Both countries are looking to AI to redress their growing vulnerabilities vis a vis the growing size and sophistication of China's military power.
- **Third**, the biggest constraint on the US need to accelerate AI development is the shortage of scientists, technologists, and engineers.
- The framework for such cooperation already exists under the iCET, and it needs to be expanded and intensified in the AI domain.
- **Fourth**, one of the essential features of the US President's Executive Order is the emphasis on the "responsible" development and use of AI.
- India-US collaboration on promoting sensible domestic and global governance of AI is critical for separating the use and abuse of this powerful technology that is evolving at a rapid pace.

9th November 2023

- **Significance of Loss and Damage Funds**
- **Maiden INDUS-X investors meet**
- **QS Asia University Rankings 2024**
- **Aadhaar authentication of prisoners and jail visitors**
- **Move towards e-FIR, but with caution**

Significance of Loss and Damage Funds
Context
- As the climate crisis intensifies, two terms are in sharp focus adaptation and 'loss and damage' (L&D) and Loss and Damage Funds in this regard play a significant role.
- L&D includes economic losses, human casualties, and the degradation of ecosystems and cultural heritage.

About Loss and Damage fund
- The 27th Conference of Parties (COP27) of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, was held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt call for the provision of Loss and Damage fund.
- The call for affluent nations to acknowledge their accountability for historic pollution is more than 30 years old.
- The fund is able to receive contributions from a wide variety of sources of funding, including grants and concessional loans from public, private and innovative sources, as appropriate.

What is "loss and damage"?

Journey of L&D fund
- At the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP 19) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Warsaw, Poland, in 2013, representatives of member countries formally agreed to establish the L&D fund.
- At COP 25, the Santiago Network for L&D was set up, but countries didn't commit any funds.
- Subsequently, at COP 26, the Glasgow Dialogue on finance for L&D was established to continue discussions over the next three years on the fund.
- Finally, at COP 27 (November 2022), UNFCCC members established L&D fund and Transitional Committee (TC) to develop funding mechanisms.

Deadlock at the TC meetings
- The fourth meeting of the Transitional Committee (TC), or TC4, concluded on October 20, 2023, with no clear consensus on operationalizing the L&D fund.
- The principal bones of contention had to do with hosting the fund at the World Bank, the foundational principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), climate reparations, and the eligibility of all developing nations for the funds.
- An impromptu fifth meeting of the TC, that is TC5, in Abu Dhabi concluded a few days back, and a set of recommendations have been drafted and forwarded to COP 28.

How will L&D funds ensure climate justice
- Adaptation and L&D are not mutually exclusive in addressing climate change impacts.
- They exist on a continuum of climate resilience, and both have a place in our collective efforts to combat climate change.
- The L&D fund was conceived as a critical component of global climate action, recognising that some of the consequences of climate change are irreversible and beyond the capacity of vulnerable nations to handle.

Maiden INDUS-X investors meet
Context
- Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) under the Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence and US Department of Defence, organised the maiden INDUS-X Investors Meet today as a precursor to the 2+2 Indo-US Ministerial Dialogue.

First-ever INDUS-X Investors Event
- The inaugural INDUS-X Investors Event showcased investor enthusiasm for startups and MSMEs in the defense sector, highlighting emerging opportunities under the INDUS-X initiative.
- The interactive event gathered startups, MSMEs, investors, incubators, and industry representatives from both sides to discuss collaborative agendas and explore opportunities together.

Focus Area
- The event had focused panel discussions with a select audience of 50 thought leaders, including start-ups, investors, government officials and business leaders from the defence industry.
- The panel discussed on 'Investment Opportunities in the Defence Sector', elaborating upon establishing a sustainable commercial foundation for defence collaboration and co-production.
- The INDUS-X Educational Series (Gurukul) was also launched during the event.

Gurukul initiative
- The Gurukul initiative is aimed to help the innovators /startups to navigate in the defence ecosystem of the US and India.
- The Gurukul (Education) series will have sessions for the startups/innovators by the experts from both sides including Govt Officials, Corporate Leaders, Industry Forums, Incubators/ Accelerators etc.

QS Asia University Rankings 2024
Context
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay has retained its top position in India in the QS World University Rankings-Asia and India has surpassed China in the number of ranked universities.

About
- As many as 148 Indian universities have been featured in the rankings which 37 more than last year.
- The country is followed by China with 133 and Japan with 96.
- The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a UK-based company specialized in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world, ranked institutions on the basis of 10 indicators — **academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, international relation network, citations per paper, paper per faculty, staff with PhD, international faculty, international students, and outbound exchange students.**

India university ranking
- The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay has retained its top position in India and is placed 40th in the Asia ranking with an overall score of 67.2 out of 100.
- Seven universities from the country have found their place in the elite top 100 institutes in Asia.
- They are IISc Bangalore, Delhi University and five Indian Institutes of Technology—Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Kharagpur and Kanpur.
- IIT Delhi has been ranked 46th, IIT Madras 53rd and IIT Kharagpur 59th. IISC Bangalore has secured the 58th rank.

QS RANKING (INDIAN INSTITUTIONS)

National Rank	2024 Rank	2023 Rank	Institution Name
1	149	172	IIT, Bombay (IITB)
2	197	174	IIT, Delhi (IITD)
3	225	155	Indian Institute of Science
4	271	270	IIT, Kharagpur (IIT-KGP)
5	278	264	IIT, Kanpur (IITK)
6	285	250	IIT, Madras (IITM)
7	364	384	IIT, Guwahati (IITG)
8	369	369	IIT, Roorkee (IITR)
9	407	521-530	University of Delhi
10	427	551-560	Anna University

Aadhaar authentication of prisoners and jail visitors
Context
- The Ministry of Home Affairs has issued a notification allowing jail authorities across the country to carry out Aadhaar authentication of all visitors of prison inmates on voluntary basis.

Procedure of operations
- The Union Home Ministry announced that the National Informatics Centre's (NIC) ePrisons team has developed a procedure of operations for the Aadhaar authentication of inmates and visitors through the ePrisons platform for the security and safety of inmates.
- The notification, issued under Rule 5 of the Aadhaar Authentication for Good Governance (Social Welfare, Innovation, Knowledge) Rules, 2020, allows for voluntary Aadhaar authentication to authenticate visitors to prison inmates, using the Yes/No authentication facility.

- The Home Ministry instructed prison departments in states and Union Territories to follow Aadhaar Act sections 3A and 8 for authenticating individuals below 18 years of age.

Strengthening safety of prisoners

- The MHA has written to the States and Union Territories asking them to utilize the Aadhaar authentication of prison inmates and their visitors with a view to strengthening the safe and secure custody of prisoners, and also to ensure the delivery of the Aadhaar benefits to which they are entitled.
- Following the notification authorizing Aadhaar authentication for prison inmates and visitors, the MHA announced the development of a standard operating procedure (SOP) for Aadhaar linking/authentication by the National Informatics Centre (NIC)/ePrisons.

Move towards e-FIR, but with caution

- The Law Commission of India, in Report No. 282, suggested allowing e-FIR registration for all cognizable offenses when the accused is not known.
- If the accused is identified and the punishment under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other laws is up to three years, e-FIR registration may be permitted as a preliminary step.
- As per the commission, the verification of the complainant could be done by verifying the mobile number through an OTP and mandating the uploading of valid ID proof such as Aadhaar.
- It also said that the name of the suspect on the centralised national portal is to be secured until the e-FIR is signed by the complainant.

An e-FIR

- The Commission has not demystified the concept of an 'e-FIR'.
- The police station will check the contents of information received from the portal to verify whether a cognisable offense is made out as recommended.
- For known accused, information must be entered within three days.
- If punishable by over three years, IPC provision need to taken into considerations.
- The Complainant's signature will be needed within three days for e-FIR.
- The procedure is given only for cases where the accused is known.

Advantages of e-complains

- First, the police will have to take cognisance of the complaint as the system will automatically generate receipt.
- This will ensure almost free registration of crime.
- Second, they will not be able to change the contents of the complaint.

Human intervention is crucial

- Most states use online systems for FIRs, especially in property offenses with unknown culprits.
- The Law Commission suggested e-FIR for all unknown accused cases, overlooking crucial aspects like immediate medical exams in cases like kidnapping.
- In fact, interaction with a police officer is valuable in solving blind crimes.
- An experienced police officer may extract a lot of information from the complainant or victim, which may help in finding the culprit.

E-authentication technique

- In 2015, 'e-authentication technique using Aadhaar e-KYC services' was notified in the Second Schedule as a legally recognised technique.
- This is widely used by the income tax department to facilitate filing of returns electronically.
- The law also recognises 'digital signature' which uses an asymmetric cryptosystem and hash function.
- It would be better if the use of e-authentication technique is mandated for the verification of complainant, and an e-FIR is registered immediately.

- **WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2023**
- **Centre's advisory for social media platforms on deepfakes**
- **CAFRAL raises concern over borrowing by NBFCs**
- **GST regime has brought tax rates down**
- **A verdict that hampers international law obligations**

WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2023

Context
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has released Global Tuberculosis Report 2023.

About
- The WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2023 offers a thorough evaluation of the TB epidemic and advancements in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment globally, regionally, and nationally. This assessment aligns with global TB commitments, strategies, and targets.
- The 2023 edition of the report is, as usual, based primarily on data gathered by WHO from national ministries of health in annual rounds of data collection.
- In 2023, 192 countries and territories with more than 99% of the world's population and TB cases reported data.

Findings of the report
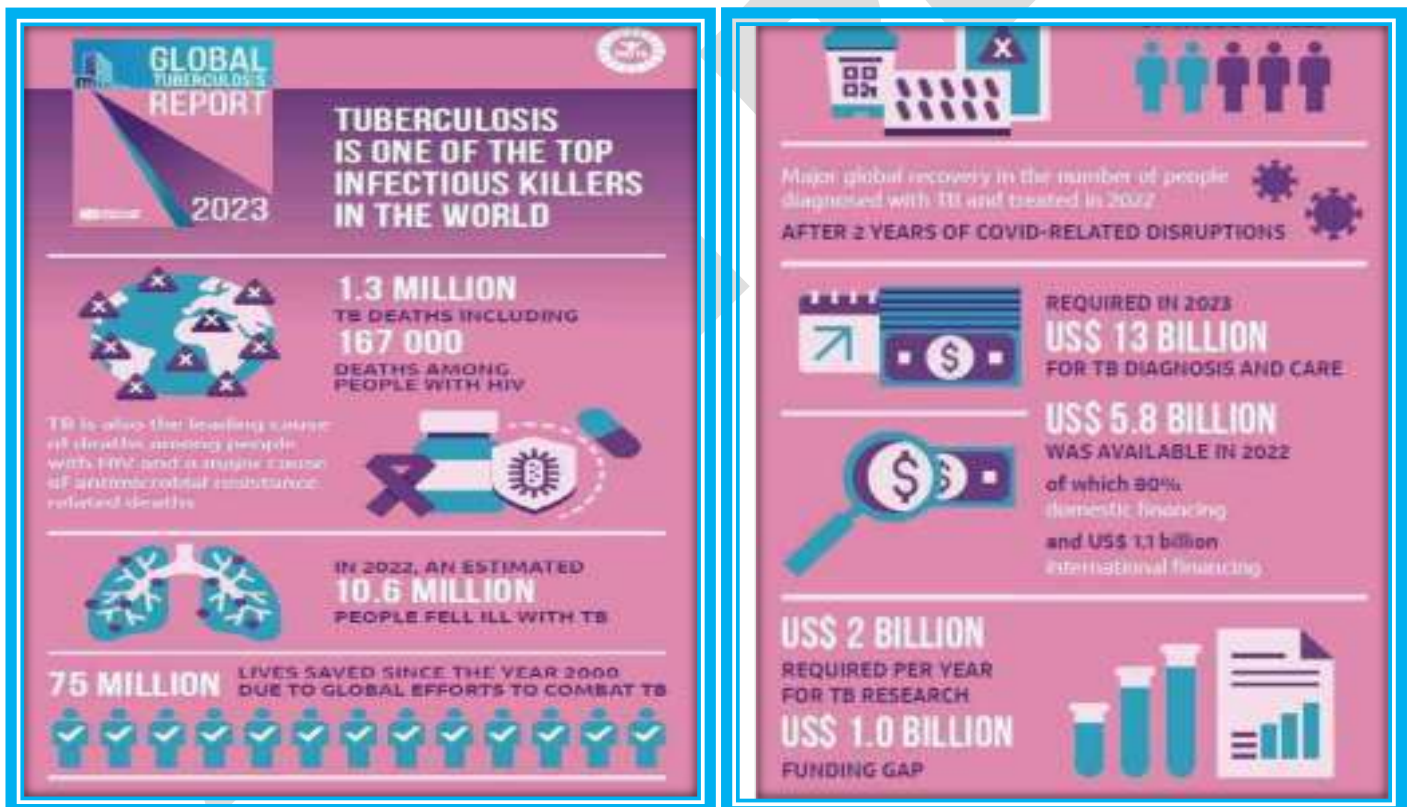
Global recovery
- There was a major global recovery in the number of people diagnosed with TB and treated in 2022, after two years of COVID-related disruptions.
- But TB still remains the world's second leading cause of death from a single infectious agent, and global TB targets have either been missed or remain off track.
- The net reduction from 2015 to 2022 was 8.7%, far from the WHO End TB Strategy milestone of a 50% reduction by 2025.

- India, Indonesia and the Philippines, which collectively accounted for nearly 60% of the reduction in the number of people newly diagnosed with TB in 2020 and 2021, recovered to above 2019 levels in 2022.
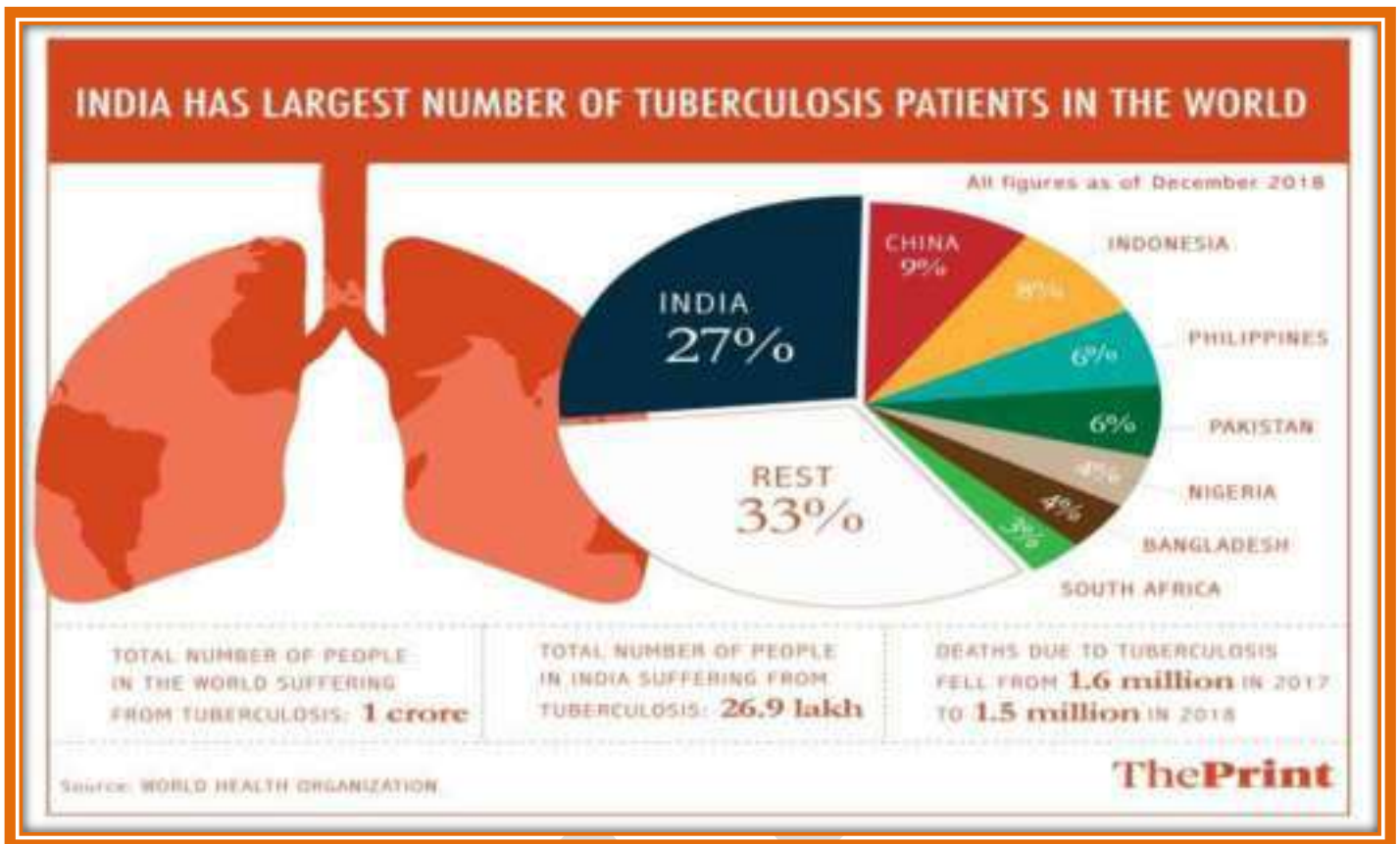
Centre's advisory for social media platforms on deepfakes
Context
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has issued an advisory to all social media platforms, reminding them of their legal obligations to promptly identify and remove misinformation.
- The government's response came after a deepfake video of female actor went viral.

Advisory
- The advisory by the MeitY, mentioned due diligence requirements prescribed under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.
- The Ministry warned platforms to take down such content within 36 hours, a requirement outlined in the IT Rules, 2021.
- The IT Rules, 2021, also prohibit "hosting any content that impersonates another person.
- The government reiterated that violations of the related laws would cause the organisation to lose the protection available under Section 79(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

What is Deepfakes
- Deepfakes are videos or other types of media that have been manipulated using artificial intelligence technology.
- Deepfakes are videos creating delusion with the use of deep learning, AI, and photoshopping techniques to make images of fake events.
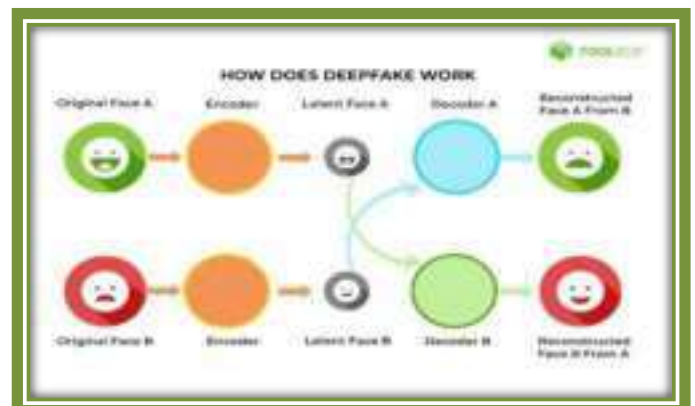
CAFRAL raises concern over borrowing by NBFCs

Context

- The Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning (CAFRAL), set up by the RBI, has raised concern over the rise in the bank financing for non-banking finance companies.

Observation by CAFRAL

- Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning (CAFRAL) which is a RBI body raises concern over rise in bank borrowing by the NBFCs.
- CAFRAL also warns against many fake, illegal lending apps.
- There is a large fall in secured borrowings and a marginal increase in unsecured borrowings, showing increased exposure to riskier finance.
- Both secured and unsecured bank borrowings fall and unsecured debentures increase.
- As per latest RBI data, banks' exposure to NBFCs rose by 25.8 per cent to Rs 13.83 lakh crore as of August 2023 as against Rs 10.99 lakh crore a year ago.

GST regime has brought tax rates down

Context

- The union finance minister said that tax rates of essential goods and services have come down since the inception of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2016.

Joining the GST system

- The finance minister emphasized the importance of businesses joining the GST (Goods and Services Tax) system.
- She warned that businesses staying outside the GST system could lose potential customers.
- The informal economic activity is not accurately recorded, and it is crucial to formalize these businesses to assess the real strength of India's economy.
- The minister also pointed out that state governments' revenue buoyancy too has improved after introduction of GST, even without considering Centre's transfers of compensation.

A verdict that hampers international law obligations

- One of the foremost challenges foreign investors faces in India is the uncertainty in taxation measures.
- The Supreme Court of India's recent judgment in the Assessing Officer Circle (International Taxation) New Delhi vs M/s Nestle SA case deserves to be seen in this light.
- The critical question in the case was whether the most favored nation (MFN) clause in tax treaties such as the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs) that India has signed, could be given effect in India without notification for the same under Section 90 of the Income-Tax Act.
- This provision allows India to sign tax treaties with other countries to avoid an income being taxed twice.

On Most Favored Nation status

- India's bilateral Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements (DTAAs) with the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland all three countries are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) require imposing a 10% withholding tax (tax on dividends paid by Indian entities of foreign companies to the residents of Netherlands, France, and Switzerland).

Pros and Cons of Most-Favored-Nation Status

- These DTAAs also contain an MFN provision.
- India's DTAAs with Slovenia, Colombia, and Lithuania have a lower withholding tax requirement of 5%.

Dualism strikes back

- The Supreme Court ruled that enforcing the MFN provision in the DTAA requires mandatory notification under Section 90(1) of the Income Tax Act.
- The decision upheld the dualism doctrine, stating that international law must be transformed into domestic law through legislation.

- However, the Court has also embraced the monist tradition, incorporating international law into domestic legal systems if it aligns with domestic laws.
- In other words, wherever possible, domestic law should be interpreted in a manner that does not contradict India's obligations under international law.

Conclusion
- The recent judgment in the Assessing Officer vs Nestle case rationalizes a violation of international law and leaves India vulnerable.
- The court should have read the DTAA provision as part of Indian law.
- This judgment has once again proved the adage that the Supreme Court is supreme because it is final, not because it is infallible.

7th November 2023

- **Aadhaar Massive data leak**
- **House panel adopts reports on new criminal law Bills**
- **FM calls for Integrating G20 outcomes into policymaking**
- **India-Iran discusses Israel-Hamas conflict**
- **Telco double dip attempt that threatens Net neutrality**

Aadhaar Massive data leak

Context
- Resecurity, a US-based cybersecurity solutions have said that the personally identifiable information more than 800 million Indians, including Aadhaar and passport details, has been put up for sale on the dark web by a threat actor by the name of pwn0001.

Nature of Personally Identifiable Information
- Personally Identifiable Information (PII) refers to any data that can be used to identify a specific individual.
- This information includes a wide range of identifiers, such as names, addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers, email addresses, passport numbers, and biometric data like fingerprints or facial recognition data.
- PII is sensitive information and is often targeted by cybercriminals for identity theft, fraud, or other malicious activities.

Government response
- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology said that the India's Computer Emergency Response Team is investigating reports of the data leak, and that the government is still working on moving massive amounts of data.
- Data samples observed by researchers contain multiple references to UIDAI and Aadhaar cards, as well as voter ID cards. It is also possible that threat actors successfully breached a third-party aggregating these details.

Threats arising from the leaked information
- India, a rapidly growing economy, ranked fourth globally in malware detection in the first half of 2023, as per a survey by Resecurity.
- Another survey of 200 Indian IT decision makers revealed that 45% of businesses experienced a significant increase in disruptive cyberattacks last year.
- Additionally, 67% of government and essential services organizations reported a similar rise in disruptive cyberattacks.

How can users safeguard their personal information
- Users must be cautious with emails from unknown sources, as stolen information can be used in phishing attempts.
- Changing existing user IDs and passwords is recommended to prevent stolen data from being used in brute force attacks.
- Users should enable two-factor authentication for all accounts and report any suspicious activity to the authorities.

House panel adopts reports on new criminal law Bills
Context
- The parliamentary standing committee on Home Affairs, examining three bills, which seek to replace as many "colonial" era laws, adopted its draft report, offering a slew of amendments, but sticking to their Hindi names, with nearly 10 opposition members likely to submit dissent notes.

Opposition sought more time
- The committee could not adopt the report in its last meeting on October 27, after several Opposition leaders sought more time to read the three reports on the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) that will replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.PC), 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, respectively.

Three bills introduced in Lok Sabha

Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023
- It will have **356 sections** (instead of 511 sections in IPC)
- 175 sections have been amended
- 8 sections have been added, and 22 sections have been repealed

Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023
- It will have **533 sections** (instead of 478 sections in CrPC)
- 160 sections have been changed
- 9 sections have been added, and 9 sections have been repealed

Indian Evidence Act, 1872
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023
- It will have **170 sections** (instead of 167 sections in IEA)
- 23 sections have been changed
- 1 section has been added, and 5 sections have been repealed

"From 1860 to 2023, the country's criminal justice system functioned as per the laws made by the British. I can assure the House that these bills will transform our criminal justice system. The aim will not be to punish, it will be to provide justice."
— **AMIT SHAH**

WHAT NEXT
The three bills will be studied by the standing committee on home affairs, which is chaired by BJP MP Brijlal (who is a retd IPS officer).

Punishment for murder and mob lynching
- The draft report has also recommended that there should be parity in punishment for murder and mob lynching.
- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) lays down a minimum of seven years of punishment for cases of mob lynching, while the cases of murders are punishable by life imprisonment or death.
- To remove this disparity, the committee has suggested that the minimum punishment clause should be removed for mob lynching.

FM calls for Integrating G20 outcomes into policymaking
Context
- The union Finance minister said India should take the lead to integrate the outcomes of the G20 Presidency i.e. New Delhi Leaders' Declaration into its policymaking.

Macroeconomic perspective
- The minister noted that India's role as G20 Presidency comes to an end, momentum must be maintained on the policy guidance in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration.
- The Declaration emphasized the need for strategic macroeconomic and structural policies, given the slow global recovery below the pre-pandemic 3.8% average. Ongoing crises were also impacting global growth and future prospects.

THE NEW DELHI DECLARATION

Policy coordination

- The better policy coordination, both global as well as domestic, is critical to ensure that growth comes back on track and remains strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive.
- The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration underscores the urgency of implementing well-calibrated macroeconomic and structural policies to bolster equitable growth and enhance macroeconomic and financial stability.
- India's G20 Presidency has provided a clear policy direction for addressing the needs of the majority of the global population.

India-Iran discusses Israel-Hamas conflict

Context

- Prime Minister of India and Iranian President exchanged their views on the "difficult situation" in the West Asia region and the Israel-Hamas conflict with the PM expressing deep concern at the "terrorist incidents, violence and loss of civilian lives".

India's response

- While assessing the volatile situation, India is reaching to major stakeholders in the West Asian region who have deep stakes, some credibility and influence on the situation.
- The Prime Minister also reiterated India's longstanding and consistent position on the Israel-Palestine issue.
- Iran has also urged the BRICS member states – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – to intervene in an active, constructive and responsible manner to stop the Israeli regime's war crimes against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip.

India abstained from resolution

- India abstained in the UN General Assembly on the resolution as India underscored that terrorism is a "malignancy" and the world should not buy into any justification of terror acts.
- The resolution titled 'Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations' was overwhelmingly adopted with 121 nations voting in favor, 14 against and 44 abstentions.
- Along with India, countries abstaining on the resolution included Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Telco double dip attempt that threatens Net neutrality

- In July this year, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), at the request of the government, invited a comprehensive consultation on the need and possible mechanisms for regulation of Over-The-Top (OTT) services.
- For over a decade, telecom companies have faced declining revenue from traditional services like voice calls and SMS due to the popularity of free OTT services, putting pressure on their earnings.
- On the flip side, the use of OTT services has led to a surge in data consumption, which is a growing revenue stream for telecom companies.

Flawed argument affecting net neutrality

- The OTT consultation has led to increased demands from telecom companies for content providers like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ Hotstar to share the costs of bandwidth.
- Telecom companies argue that streaming platforms are free riders, benefiting from their infrastructure.
- However, this argument is flawed and threatens net neutrality principles.

Net neutrality principle

- Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers (ISPs) must treat all data on the Internet the same way and not discriminate or charge differently based on user, content, website, platform, application, or method of communication.
- Net neutrality aims to maintain a level playing field on the Internet, allowing users to access and use online services without restrictions imposed by ISPs.

TRAI regulation

- Net neutrality formed the basis of TRAI's regulation on prohibition of discriminatory tariffs for data services brought out on February 8, 2016.
- The regulator's action forced the withdrawal of Facebook's Free Basics platform and some other offerings in India.
- Later, on November 28, 2017, TRAI released its comprehensive recommendations, which have largely guided the adoption of this principle in India.
- These steps taken by TRAI were noted elsewhere in the world.

Conclusion

- It is crucial for all stakeholders, including policymakers, to understand the long-term consequences of giving in to the short-sighted demands of telecom companies.
- Upholding the principles of net neutrality is essential to foster a conducive environment for innovation, competition, and consumer welfare, especially in India.

6th November 2023

- Leave Benefits at Par with Officers in Armed Forces
- Five-year extension for PMGKAY
- Bhutan King to meet PM
- Centre bans 22 betting apps
- The threat of antimicrobial resistance

Leave Benefits at Par with Officers in Armed Forces

Context

- The ministry of defence has announced new rules for women recruited under the Agniveer scheme in the armed forces, granting them maternity, childcare and child adoption benefits at par with women officers.

Proposed changes

- The new rules will bring equality between female personnel of all ranks, aligning the benefits of these leaves with their officer counterparts.
- The ministry of Defence introduces new rules allowing women soldiers, sailors & air warriors 360 days of childcare leave in their career. 180 days of maternity leave also allowed for pregnancies.
- At present, women officers get maternity leave of 180 days with full pay for each child, subject to a maximum of two children.

Significance

- The extension of leave rules is poised to address a range of family and social issues relevant to women serving in the military and will have a profound impact on improving their work conditions, allowing them to balance their professional and family lives more effectively
- The decision signifies a monumental shift in the Armed Forces' approach to gender equality, acknowledging the importance of supporting female service members throughout their careers.

Five-year extension for PMGKAY

Context

- The Prime Minister has recently announced an extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) free ration scheme for another five years.

About PMGKAY

- The PMGKAY was introduced in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic to provide 5 kg free foodgrains to eligible ration card holders under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA).
- The NFSA, introduced by the UPA government at the time, entitled beneficiaries to receive subsidized foodgrains (at Rs 3, Rs 2 and Rs 1 per kilogram of rice, wheat and coarse grains, respectively) through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).

PMGKAY merged with NFSA

- In January, 2023, the PMGKAY was merged with the NFSA, providing all ration for AAY and PHH families for free and eliminating the additional provisions introduced during the pandemic.
- The free portion of that scheme has been added to the NFSA.
- Now, the entire quantity of 5 kg and 35 kg under the NFSA would be available free of cost.
- The discontinuation of the separate PMGKAY provisions came amid depleting stocks of foodgrains in the central pool and saved the government an estimated Rs 15,000 crore every month.

RELIEF TO THE POOR
The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana might be extended due to inflation and geopolitical uncertainties, officials said

| March 2020 Scheme introduced | The scheme was initially launched for 3 months 1st extension July'20 -Nov'20 2nd extension May'21-June'21 | 800mn covered under the scheme |
| Sept 2022 Expiration date | 3rd extension July'21-Nov'21 4th extension Dec'21-March'22 5th extension Apr'22-Sept'22 | |

SCHEME BENEFITS
5kg free ration per person per month | Cooking gas and cash subsidies

Scope of PMGKAY

- The PMGKAY covers two kinds of ration card holders under the NFSA for the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and Priority Households (PHH).
- The NFSA covers about 20 crore families, or a total 81.35 crore beneficiaries, who account for two-thirds of the country's population – 50% for urban and 75% for rural.
- While the AAY households are entitled to 35 kg of foodgrains per month irrespective of the number of family members, the priority households get foodgrains depending on the number of family members (each member 5 kg per month).

Bhutan King to meet PM

Context

- Bhutan King is on visit to India where both sides will review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and further advance the "exemplary" partnership.

Strengthen bilateral relations

- The visit of Bhutan King will strengthen close bonds of friendship and cooperation.
- The King is expected to formally announce the project, and his visit to India before that is a significant indicator of Bhutan's hopes for India's involvement in the regional hub project.
- The MEA said that India and Bhutan enjoy unique ties of friendship and cooperation which are characterized by understanding and mutual trust.
- The Bhutan King's visit to India comes against the backdrop of new momentum in boundary talks between Bhutan and China.

Security and Economic Cooperation

- India has played a significant role in ensuring the security of Bhutan.
- The Indian military has assisted Bhutan in maintaining peace and stability in the region, especially in border areas.
- India is Bhutan's largest trading partner and a major source of foreign direct investment.
- Projects like hydroelectric power plants, roads, and other infrastructure development initiatives have been undertaken by India in Bhutan, contributing to the country's economic growth.

Centre bans 22 betting apps

Context

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has issued blocking orders against 22 illegal betting apps and websites, including Mahadev Book Online.

Money laundering case

- This action was taken on the request of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is investigating a money laundering case related to these illegal betting platforms.
- The ED is probing an allegation that the promoters of the Mahadev app had facilitated a ₹508-crore payment to incumbent Chhattisgarh Chief Minister.
- The owners of Mahadev Book are currently in detention after being arrested under Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for allegedly laundering money.

Government earlier actions

- In March 2023, the IT ministry had issued similar orders to bar the operations of 138 betting and gambling apps on an "urgent" and "emergency" basis.
- Over the last two years, the government has banned close to 400 gaming, gambling, betting, photo editing and other apps and websites for either having links with China or being involved in money laundering as well as improper storage of data of Indian citizens.

The threat of antimicrobial resistance

- During India's G20 presidency, the Delhi Declaration emphasized enhancing the global health framework.
- The commitment was made to bolster resilient, equitable, sustainable, and inclusive health systems, implementing the One Health approach.

- The focus was on improving pandemic preparedness and strengthening existing infectious diseases surveillance systems.

Delhi Declaration

- The Delhi Declaration during India's G20 presidency saw a commitment to strengthen the global health architecture by building more resilient, equitable, sustainable and inclusive health systems to implement the One Health approach, enhance pandemic preparedness and strengthen existing infectious diseases surveillance systems.
- Another important part of this agreement was to:
- Prioritize tackling Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) through research and development (R&D)
- Infection prevention and control
- Antimicrobial stewardship efforts within respective National Action Plans (NAPs)

Lancet report on death due to AMR

- A 2021 report by Lancet, documenting data from 204 countries, estimated that 4.95 million deaths were associated with bacterial AMR, and 1.27 million deaths were directly attributed to bacterial AMR.
- The magnitude is equal to that of diseases such as HIV and malaria.
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had the highest death rates, signifying high susceptibility to AMR.

Need for global efforts

- At the global level, some key areas can be prioritized.
- First would be to work with developing countries to create regional AMR action plans.
- Second, G20 countries should consider championing an international funding mechanism that focuses on AMR R&D.
- Third is to promote patent reforms to encourage innovation and affordability in new antibiotics.
- Fourth is to facilitate dialogue among developing countries to explore models like the Medicines Patent Pool for effective solutions.

Way forward

- India has also taken steps in the right direction by expanding the scope of existing surveillance and monitoring networks, promoting responsible behavior among citizens.
- India has encouraging collaboration among nations; India can lead the way in reducing the burden of AMR.
- India as current G-20 president as a country with vulnerable silent pandemic of AMR, ensured considering this concern as global public health agenda.

4th November 2023

- **Direct listing of domestic companies on foreign exchanges**
- **India will collaborate with Sri Lanka on debt treatment**
- **India and British discuss Gaza, FTA progress**
- **Services PMI falls to 7-month low**
- **The IITs are overcommitted, in crisis**

Direct listing of domestic companies on foreign exchanges

Context

- The government recently permitted certain Indian companies to directly list on select foreign stock exchanges, which will allow these companies to access global capital and boost capital outflows.

Government decision

- In July, 2023 the Finance Ministry had announced that the government had decided to enable listed and unlisted domestic companies to directly list their equity shares on the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), Ahmedabad.
- This essentially means certain classes of domestic public companies can be listed on prescribed foreign stock exchanges, including GIFT IFSC, Ahmedabad.

How do companies currently list on foreign bourses

- Currently, Domestic listed companies use depository receipts — American Depository Receipts (ADR) or Global Depository Receipts (GDR) to list in the overseas market.
- These depository receipts represent shares of the company and allow international investors to trade them on foreign bourses without directly holding the company's stock.
- Indian companies seeking foreign listings would transfer their shares to an Indian custodian, who would then issue depository receipts to international investors.

	GDR	ADR
Issued in	The United States	European Countries
Purpose	Help Acquire Resources in the USA	Help Acquire Resources in Different Countries
Objective	Invest in Foreign Companies	Invest in Different Countries
Restrictions	The USA	Other Countries
Listing of Stock	The USA	Other Countries
Disclosure of Terms	Onerous	Less Onerous

GDR VERSUS ADR

Advantages of direct foreign listing

- With the new provision, domestic companies can tap foreign markets to raise funds.
- It will offer them better valuation and exposure to trade in foreign currency.
- It may also benefit the startup and unicorn community as another avenue to raise funds and increase their profile globally.
- It will also add to India's foreign exchange kitty.
- This allows Indian companies another medium of raising capital.
- It would also need them to meet governance norms at such specified jurisdictions.

India will collaborate with Sri Lanka on debt treatment

Context
- India has assured Sri Lanka that it will continue to work very closely with the Sri Lanka on debt restructuring discussions and extend support for the economic recovery.

Focus area
- The Finance Minister of India talks with Sri Lankan President and discussion were made on several crucial area which includes:
  - Cooperation in inter-grid connectivity
  - Aviation
  Power projects
  - Oil exploration in town of Mannar
  - MoU exchanged on $15 million assistance for the promotion of Buddhist ties
- India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding offering a $15 million grant to enhance Buddhist relations with another country.
- Notably, $10 million of this fund will support the solar electrification of religious sites.

Second tranche of IMF
- Sri Lanka must bring its major creditors, including China, India, and Japan, on board for a debt treatment plan agreeable to all, to unlock the second tranche of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

Naam 200
- The President of Sri Lanka thanked government of India for the nearly $4 billion Indian assistance to Sri Lanka during the country's painful economic crash.
- When Sri Lanka faced its unprecedented economic crisis last year, India felt duty-bound to stand with its neighbor.
- The Sri Lankan President and the Union Minister virtually launched the foundation stone laying ceremony for 10,000 houses being built in the hill country with Indian grant assistance.

India and British discuss Gaza, FTA progress

Context
- The Prime Minister of India and British discussed the need to de-escalate tensions in the Israel-Gaza conflict and the importance of protecting innocent civilians.

Strengthen bilateral relations
- India and British also reiterated their commitment to continuing to strengthen bilateral comprehensive strategic partnership, including in the areas of trade, investment, emerging technology, defence, security, health and others.

Deep concern
- Prime Minister of India and British expressed deep concern at terrorism, worsening security situation and the loss of civilian lives.
- They agreed on the need for regional peace, security, stability and continued humanitarian assistance.

Services PMI falls to 7-month low

Context
- According to S&P Global survey, growth in India's services sector lost steam in October as the headline Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) figure fell to a seven-month low of 58.4 from 61 in September, due to tapered demand, price pressures, and competitive conditions.

Findings
- The new business grew at the weakest pace since May, with certain types of services seeing subdued demand.
- New jobs were created during October, but at the slowest pace in three months.
- The international orders saw the second-fastest upturn since the PMI series started in September 2014, with new orders from Asia, Europe and the U.S.

- The survey polled around 400 companies in non-retail consumer services, transport, communication, finance, insurance, real estate, and business services.

information,

Factors responsible
- Inflationary forces in the Indian service sector intensified, primarily as a result of surging food, fuel, and staff costs.
- The rise in charges could have been the trigger of the deceleration in sales growth

The IITs are overcommitted, in crisis
- The Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) are highly regarded globally, representing the pinnacle of India's higher education system.
- They have produced leaders in high tech and related fields in India and abroad.
- Despite their prestige, gaining entry into IITs is incredibly challenging, with millions of students competing for a limited number of seats.
- However, the IIT system faces significant challenges, even as some institutes expand overseas as part of India's soft power initiatives.
- Examining the current situation reveals an impending crisis.

Foreign adventures
- A branch campus of IIT-Madras has just opened in Zanzibar and IIT Delhi will be launching programmes from its Abu Dhabi campus in 2024.
- The tiny first entering class of 70 students has been accepted.
- The admission standards are not like those in India.
- Admission is based on the IIT Madras Zanzibar Selection Test (IITMZST) 2023 screening test followed by an interview.
- Some of the screening test centres offered to potential applicants were located not only in Tanzania but also in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and the United Arab Emirates (which has a strong presence of the Indian diaspora).

Overexpansion at home
- The first IIT was established in 1950 at Kharagpur in West Bengal.
- Most of IIT partnered with top foreign technological universities in the United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and Germany to get started, and they quickly achieved both excellence and top reputations.
- They hired Indians trained at the best foreign universities who were eager to contribute to national development.
- But these were small institutions — the total student enrolment was about 20,000 in the original six IITs.

New IITs
- Since 2015, the government has expanded the IIT system by establishing seven new institutions, many situated outside major cities.
- However, these new IITs have faced challenges in maintaining the rigorous standards set by the original institutes.
- Some were formed by upgrading existing institutions like the Indian School of Mines Dhanbad, while others were entirely new ventures.
- The enrolment in all the 23 IITs has expanded to more than 1,20,000, with 25,237 students graduating in 2022-23, a clear indicator of more access and opportunity.

Faculty challenges, future prospects
- At the heart of any academic institution are the professors.
- Attracting the best and the brightest is increasingly difficult.
- Salaries are dramatically below international standards.
- Foreign trained Indians are generally reluctant to return to uncompetitive salaries, often inferior work environments, and more academic bureaucracy.

- Top Indian talent is increasingly attracted to the emerging IT sector, emerging biotech, and related field both within India and abroad.

Conclusion
- Ensuring high-quality faculty and attracting dedicated professors who align with the IIT vision and India's development goals are significant challenges.
- Expanding the IIT system domestically might not have been a wise decision, and establishing overseas branch campuses presents significant challenges.
- Developing quality education in the new IITs is a major challenge.
- Failing to address this issue could harm the prestige of the entire IIT system in the long run.

3rd November 2023

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit**
- **Upcoming India and US 2+2 ministerial dialogue**
- **India raise concern over EU's CBAM**
- **NCERT to introduce electoral literacy content in textbooks**
- **How to build an innovation ecosystem**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit
Context
Recently, United Kingdom prime minister hosted Artificial Intelligence (AI) Safety Summit where more than 100 representatives from the worlds of business and politics discussed the potential and pitfalls of artificial intelligence.

First ever AI Safety Summit
- The summit was held at Bletchley Park near London, the once top-secret base where codebreakers cracked the German 'Enigma Code,' accelerating the end of World War II.
- The two-day summit that has drawn in global leaders, computer scientists, and tech executives.
- Twenty-eight major countries, including the United States, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, India, and the European Union, agreed to sign a declaration emphasizing the necessity of global action to address the potential risks of AI.

Bletchley Declaration
- The Bletchley Declaration offers a comprehensive snapshot of the global understanding of artificial intelligence's promises and risks.
- The central objective of the Bletchley Declaration is to address risks and responsibilities associated with frontier AI in a comprehensive and collaborative manner.
- Furthermore, it acknowledges the potential for severe, even catastrophic, harm caused by AI, whether intentional or unintentional.
- The declaration, which was also endorsed by Brazil, Ireland, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and the United Arab Emirates.

Significance
- It highlights the importance of safeguarding human rights, transparency, explain ability, fairness, accountability, regulation, safety, human oversight, ethics, bias mitigation, privacy, and data protection.
- The new rule seeks to codify the use of watermarks that alert consumers to a product enabled by AI, which could potentially limit the threat posed by content such as deepfakes.

Different Countries, Varied Approaches
- **European Union:** The EU has proposed a stringent AI Act categorizing artificial intelligence based on use-case scenarios, considering invasiveness and risk levels.
- **United States:** The US approach aims to define AI regulations, building on the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights unveiled in October 2022.
- **China:** China has released its own set of measures to regulate AI.

- **India:** The government of India noted that the weaponization represented by social media must be overcome, and steps should be taken to ensure AI represents safety and trust.
- India has been progressively pushing the envelope on AI regulation.

Upcoming India and US 2+2 ministerial dialogue
Context
- U.S. Secretary of State and U.S. Defence Secretary will travel to New Delhi next week for the '2+2' meeting.

Agenda of Meeting
- The group of Ministers will discuss 'both bilateral and global concerns and developments in the Indo-Pacific.
- Other subjects are likely to include Ukraine and Russia.
- Reform of international financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- The meetings come a few months before India is expected to host the Quad Summit in New Delhi, with the leaders of the U.S., Japan and Australia.

U.S.-India Defence Cooperation
- In the defence sector, the two sides discussed the implementation of the road map for U.S.-India Defence Industrial Cooperation during their intercessional meeting in Washington in September.
- The U.S. and India have also been negotiating Security of Supply Arrangement and the Reciprocal Defence Procurement agreement.
- India is also moving forward with a purchase of 31 MQ-9B Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, with the countries hoping to finalize the deal by February 2024.

India raises concern over EU's CBAM
Context
- The minister for Commerce and Industry asserted that the European Union's proposed carbon tax on imports is an 'ill-conceived' move that would become the "death knell" for its manufacturing sector.

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
- The European Union (EU) has announced that its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the same is effective from October 2023.
- The mechanism will levy a carbon tax on imports of products made from the processes which are not Environmentally sustainable or non-Green.
- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) puts a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods entering the EU.

CBAM
Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

July 2021
European Commission adopted its proposal for a CBAM. The key objective of the measure is to reduce risk of carbon leakage by equalising the price of carbon between domestic products and imports in selected sectors.

Dec 2022
The EU Parliament reached a provisional agreement with the EU Council on the draft text of the CBAM.

May 2023
The CBAM was finally adopted by the EU Parliament and the Council and entered into force on 17 May 2023.

August 2023
The European Commission published an implementing regulation to the CBAM, laying down reporting obligations for the purposes of CBAM during the transitional period.

October 2023
CBAM transitional period is to start from 1 October 2023

India's concern
- The implementation of the EU's CBAM will impact India's exports of steel, aluminium, cement, and fertilizers.
- Indian companies selling these products to the EU are expected to face higher prices, reducing their competitiveness and potentially lowering demand in the EU market.

RISING TENSION

The proposed tax has raised concerns among Indian metal producers, who fear it will create a new trade barrier for exports to Europe.

Share (%) of CBAM products in India's exports

	To world	To EU
	6.9	11.2

India's total exports of CBAM products to EU:

$8.22 bn

Impact on sectors covered under CBAM

		Number of tariff lines affected	EU's share (%) in India's exports of CBAM products
↑ **HIGH**			
	Iron ore, concentrates	16	19.9
	Steel products	163	20
	Iron and steel	473	31.4
	Aluminium and products	85	27.7
↓ **LOW**			
	Cement	14	6.1
	Fertilizer	24	0.7
	Hydrogen	1	0
	Electrical energy	1	0

CBAM: Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
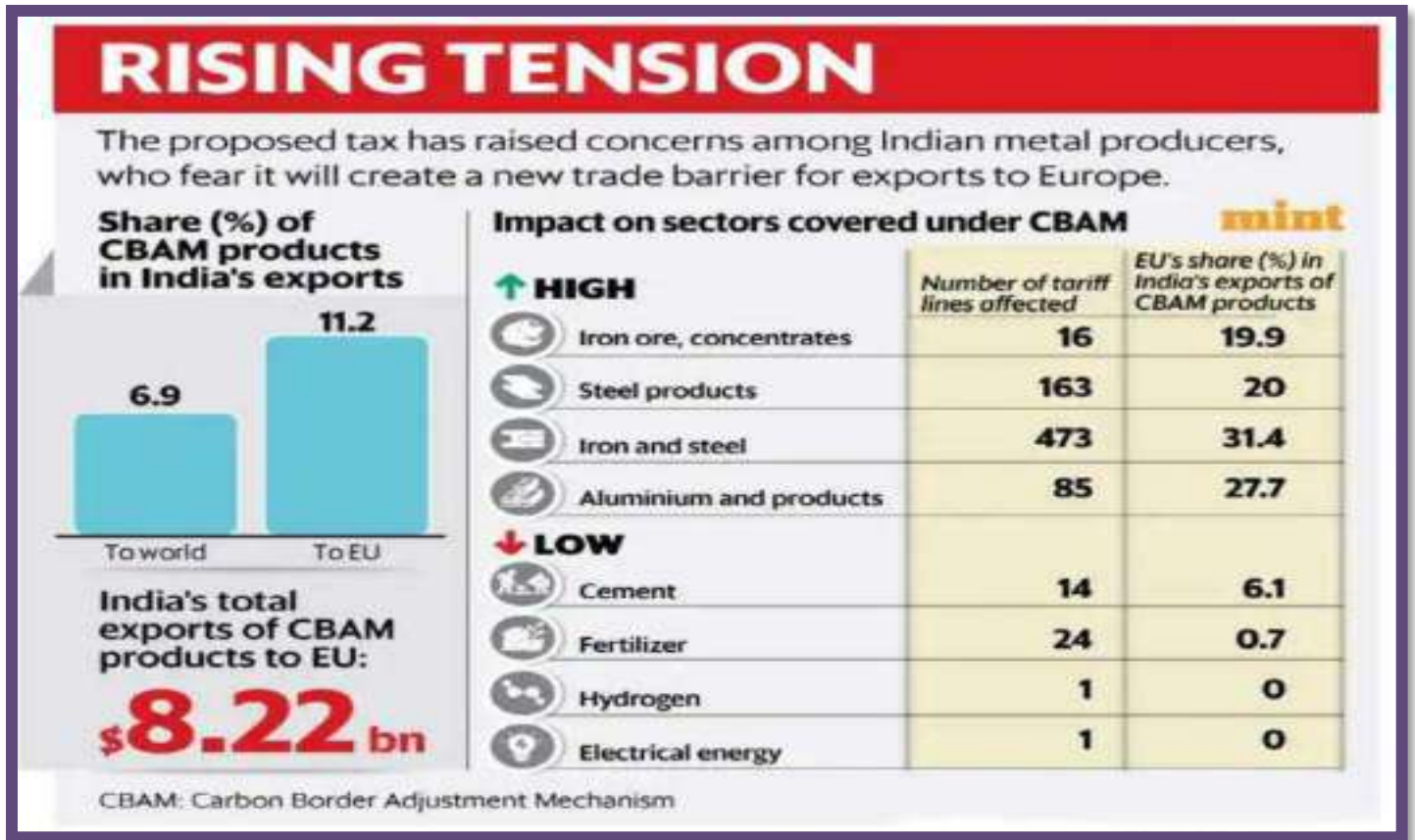
NCERT to introduce electoral literacy content in textbooks

Context
- The Election Commission of India signs MoU with the Ministry of Education to bring Electoral Literacy to Classrooms across the country.

Memorandum of understanding
- The measures are part of a memorandum of understanding signed between the poll panel and the Education Ministry, aiming to address issues such as voter apathy among young Indians
- The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) will introduce and update textbooks to include content on electoral literacy and will advise the State Education Boards and other Boards to follow suit.

Long-term vision
- The MoU is signed with the long-term vision of instilling electoral literacy in the young people through the educational institutions.
- This initiative is expected to help in the Election Commission's endeavor to address the urban and youth apathy, leading to better electoral participation in the next general elections.
- According to the EC almost 297 million of the 910 million electors did not vote in the Lok Sabha election in 2019, causing concern.

How to build an innovation ecosystem

- Building an innovation ecosystem involves creating a supportive environment where ideas can flourish, entrepreneurs can thrive, and collaboration can foster breakthrough solutions.
- The inspiring success story of Amul, the community-based dairy cooperative society which made India the world's largest milk producer, lies in building a strong community-based value chain.

Innovation and bottlenecks

- India retains 40th rank out of 132 economies in the Global Innovation Index 2023.
- The big question is that can we keep rising on the GII and strengthening our innovation ecosystem merely through top-down efforts? Perhaps not.
- For example Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs), the initiative aspires to instil in young minds the curiosity, creativity, and adaptive learning required to become entrepreneurs.
- So far, 10,000 ATLs have been established over six years engaging more than 75 lakh students.
- But how does one ensure that such infrastructure remains efficient and evolving?

The ground reality

- In a cluster, there are 20-30 schools with ATLs, where typically two-thirds are performing well but one-third may be struggling.
- The ATL Sarthi experiment reveals that when schools form clusters with dedicated mentors, over 90% of schools achieve high teacher and student attendance. Additionally, more than 85% of these schools show improved performance through effective processes and learning support.
- The communities must take ownership, regardless of the topic, to unleash their full potential.

2nd November 2023

- **India's first CAR-T cell therapy**
- **Understanding the U.S.-Israel relations**
- **Kozhikode and Gwalior in UNESCO Creative Cities Network**
- **CARRS Surveillance Study**
- **AI and the issue of human-centricity in copyright law**

India's first CAR-T cell therapy

Context

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) recently granted market authorisation for NexCAR19, India's first indigenously-developed CAR-T cell therapy.

Development

- ImmunoACT – an IIT Bombay incubated company developed the treatment.
- The development paves the way for the commercial launch of this therapy in India, where it is expected to be available to cancer patients at a tenth of the cost abroad.

About NexCAR19

- NexCar19 is a type of CAR-T and gene therapy developed indigenously in India by ImmunoACT, which is a company incubated at IIT Bombay.
- The therapy is designed to target cancer cells that carry the CD19 protein.
- This protein acts like a flag on cancer cells, which allows CAR-T cells to recognise and attach themselves to the cancer cells and start the process of elimination.
- India is among the first developing countries with its own CAR-T and gene therapy.
- Even some developed nations don't have their own CAR-T therapies; they import them from the United States or Europe.

About CAR-T cell therapy

- CAR-T cell therapy stands for Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy.
- It is a type of immunotherapy that uses a patient's own T cells (a type of immune cell) to fight cancer.
- T cells are extracted from the patient's blood and genetically modified to express a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) on their surface.
- In CAR-T therapy, patient's own T cells are genetically modify into cancer-fighting cells. These supercharged cells are then put back into the body, and they go after cancer cells — especially in blood cancers like leukemia and lymphomas.

Who can get NexCAR19 therapy

- The therapy is for people with B-cell lymphomas who didn't respond to standard treatments like chemotherapy, leading to relapse or recurrence of the cancer.
- The patient's journey starts with a doctor's prescription at the clinic, followed by donation of blood by the patient at a transfusion centre.
- Recovery typically occurs within two weeks after one cycle of the treatment.

Will the treatment be covered by insurance

- When a therapy is approved by regulatory agencies like CDSCO or DCGI, it typically should be covered by national insurance schemes and private insurance companies. However, since this is an expensive treatment, the extent of coverage and accessibility to insurance may vary.

Understanding the U.S.-Israel relations

Context
- The United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have called for "humanitarian pauses" to deliver lifesaving aid to millions in Gaza.

Origins of U.S.-Israel ties
- The United States and Israel share a strong and multifaceted relationship, characterized by diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation.
- The U.S. had supported the idea of a Jewish homeland even before the state of Israel was declared within historical Palestine in 1948.
- In 1922 and 1944, the U.S. Congress passed resolutions endorsing the Balfour Declaration.
- The U.S. was the first country that recognised Israel in 1948.

Current status of the U.S.-Israel ties
- Currently, Israel is an exceptional ally of Washington.
- The U.S. offers practically unconditional financial, military and political support for Israel, which has been occupying Palestinian territories since 1967.
- Israel is an undeclared nuclear power but has never faced any global scrutiny or pushback.
- The U.S. is also Israel's largest trading partner, with annual two-way trade hovering around $50 billion.
- Both Israel and the U.S. also have a deep defence partnership, which involves joint research and development and weapons production.

Why does U.S. always back Israel
- Historically, Israel has enjoyed near unanimous support in the U.S. Congress, and a vast majority of Americans have favorable views about Israel.
- American Jews and evangelical Christians are two powerful, politically active groups in the U.S.
- They are important constituencies for both parties and they are both pro-Israel.
- A host of other factors, including America's public opinion, electoral politics and the powerful Israel lobby in the U.S., play a role in shaping the country's Israel policy.

Kozhikode and Gwalior in UNESCO Creative Cities Network
Context
- Recently, Kozhikode in Kerala and Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh have made it to the prestigious creative cities list of UNESCO for contributions in the fields of literature and music, respectively.

About
- On World Cities Day, 55 cities join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN).
- New cities were acknowledged for their strong commitment to harnessing culture and creativity as part of their development strategies, and displaying innovative practices in human-centered urban planning.
- The newly designated Creative Cities are invited to participate in the 2024 UCCN Annual Conference (July 1-5, 2024) in Braga, Portugal, the UNESCO statement said.

Kozhikode's Literary Triumph
- Kozhikode, known for its vibrant literary culture, now proudly holds the title of 'City of Literature,' marking a significant milestone for India.
- The city's journey towards this achievement began in 2022.
- The city's role as a permanent venue for the annual Kerala Literature Festival and numerous book festivals further bolstered its claim.

Gwalior's Musical Legacy
- Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, has been bestowed the coveted 'City of Music' title.
- The city's rich musical history, encompassing legends like Tansen and Baliti Bawra, along with the esteemed Gwalior Gharana, earned it this prestigious recognition.
- Recent developments in the region have focused on enhancing the city's aesthetics and bringing it up to the standards of a world-class metropolis.

About UNESCO UCCN

- The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.
- Its objective is to place creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.
- The Network covers seven creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.

CARRS Surveillance Study

Context

- Two studies published in international journals have reported a worrying link between air pollution levels and the incidence of type 2 diabetes in Chennai and Delhi.

Finding of the study

- The new studies are part of the Centre for cArdiometabolic Risk Reduction in South Asia (CARRS) Surveillance Study.
- The study noted that Indian cities consistently rank at the top of lists for having the worst air quality, often surpassing limits set by the World Health Organization by several times.
- The researchers roped in 6,722 adults in Chennai and 5,342 in Delhi and tracked their health through questionnaires and blood samples.
- Based on their findings, the researchers reported that 10g/m3 (micrograms per cubic meter air) difference "in annual average PM2.5" could be related to a 9-36% higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

AI and the issue of human-centricity in copyright law

- In October, 2023 an executive order issued by the US administration, highlights the shifting global stance on regulating Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- Leaders recognize the significance of regulating AI to avoid potential risks.
- Changes in regulatory approaches, like this order, are crucial steps toward ensuring the safe and responsible use of AI technology.

Ownership and enforcement

- AI, particularly generative tools like ChatGPT and Midjourney, has sparked debates about intellectual property rights, specifically in the context of copyright.
- Questions have arisen regarding the use of copyrighted materials in AI training data, potentially infringing the rights of numerous authors and artists online.
- A recent decision of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia in Stephen Thaler vs Shira Perlmutter is remarkable because it provides some insights on whether copyright can exist in work autonomously created by AI.

Legal question

- The primary legal question before the Court was whether a work autonomously generated by an AI system could be copyrightable.
- After reviewing the relevant statutory provisions, case laws, and theoretical justifications for copyright protection, the court concluded that human creativity was essential to copyright protection.
- The court's line of reasoning is in tune with the general position of the U.S. Copyright Office thus far vis-à-vis work created autonomously by an AI system.

Case in India

- In 2020, the Indian Copyright Office registered an artwork called 'Suryast', listing the AI system "RAGHAV Artificial Intelligence Painting App" as a coauthor.

- This decision deviated from the traditional understanding of authorship, bypassing the requirement of human authorship in Indian copyright law.
- A previous application listing the same AI system as the sole author had been rejected.
- This move signifies a unique approach in India, acknowledging AI's creative contribution without legislative changes in the Copyright Act of 1957.

Conclusion
- The Copyright Office is also yet to articulate mandatory disclosure requirements on the use of AI or even initiate broader consultations on this important issue.
- It may also be useful to review the current scenario in light of the recommendations of the 161st Report of the Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committee.
- The report had suggested reviewing the Copyright Act 1957 and the Patent Act 1970 to "incorporate the emerging technologies of AI and AI-related inventions in their ambit".
- In sum, policymakers and courts in India also need to assume a more cautious approach against diluting the human-centricity in copyright law.
- There needs to be a cautious approach in extending existing IP protections to work generated by Artificial Intelligence.

1st November 2023

- **Akhaura-Agartala rail link**
- **One Nation, One Registration' Platform**
- **Road Accidents in India-2022**
- **Core sector growth hits 4-month low**
- **Stocktaking climate finance**

Akhaura-Agartala rail link
Context
- The much-awaited Agartala-Akhaura rail link project will be inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister of India and his Bangladesh counterpart.

History of Akhaura-Agartala rail link project
- Akhaura-Agartala rail link project was first conceptualized in January 2010, where the two countries agreed to lay the tracks from Akhaura in Brahmanbaria to Nischintapur of Agartala.
- The construction of a 15.064-km-long new railway line was started in 2018.
- Of these, a 5.05-km-long rail route falls in India and the remaining 10.014-km-long rail route falls in Bangladesh.

Significance of the project
- The project is an example of India's vision of 'Act East Policy'.
- The Agartala-Akhaura railway link will boost the bilateral relations and promote tourism, trade and cultural exchange between the India and Bangladesh.
- It will also help in growth of small-scale industries in the border area and boost tourism of the NE region.
- It will also help in export and import of commodities faster and help the local producers to export their products outside the country faster.
- This project will strengthen business relations between two nations and create direct access from the landlocked northeast to Chittagong port in the neighboring country.

One Nation, One Registration' Platform

Context
- The National Medical Commission (NMC), is all set to launch its "one nation, one registration platform" for doctors across the country.

National Medical Register
- The National Medical Commission is establishing a National Medical Register, serving as a centralized database for all practicing doctors in India.
- All doctors in the country will have a unique identification number by the end of 2024.
- The NMC will unveil a patch pilot of the National Medical Register (NMR) in the next six months.
- The commission issued a Gazette notification titled "Registration of Medical Practitioners and Licence to Practice Medicine Regulations, 2023," aiming to provide undergraduate students on the NMR with an ID.
- This ID can be utilized to update any additional qualifications.
- It will be one of the biggest reforms in the medical sector.

Rationale
- one nation, one registration platform platform aims to eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies and pave the way for transparency.
- The initiative also aims at eliminating duplication.
- The public will have access to comprehensive information on any physician working in India, a significant step towards ensuring accountability in the healthcare system.
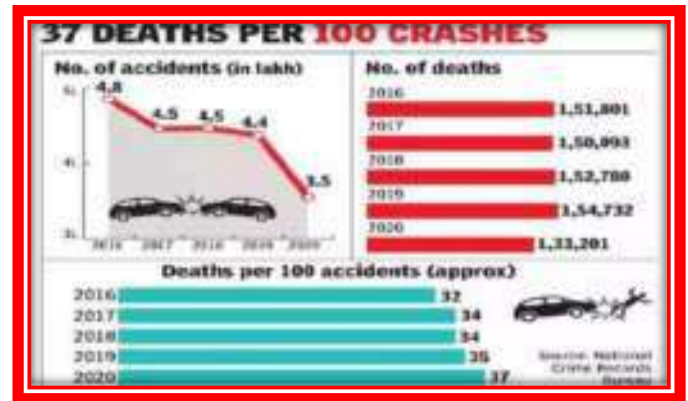
Road Accidents in India-2022

Context
- The Annual Report on 'Road Accidents in India-2022" published by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in October highlighted that Road safety in India remains a concern as fatalities rise by 9% on-year in 2022.

Data on Road accidents
- According to the 'Road accidents in India -2022' report, 32.9 percent of accidents took place on national highways including expressways, 23.1 percent on state highways, and the remaining 43.9 percent on other roads.
- Out of the total of 1,68,491 fatalities reported in 2022, 36.2 percent were on national highways, 24.3 percent were on state highways and the remaining 39.4 percent were on other roads.
- Uttar Pradesh continued to account for the largest share of fatalities at 13.4 percent, followed by Tamil Nadu with 10.6 percent, Maharashtra with 9 percent, Madhya Pradesh with 8 percent, and Karnataka with 6.9 percent.

Finding of the report
- As many as 1,68,491 people died in India due to road accidents in 2022, marking a 9.4 percent rise when compared to 2021.
- In 2022, India witnessed a 2.75% increase in road accidents compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019.
- Fatalities rose by 11.5%, while injuries resulting from road accidents decreased by 1.8%.
- Injuries on account of road accidents also increased by 15.3 percent in 2022 compared to the previous year.

Need of the hour
- The rise in road accidents and fatalities due to road accidents in India seen in 2022 reinforces the perception that the quality of Indian infrastructure is inferior compared to global standards and that Indian citizens do not adhere to traffic rules.
- The government is considering various measures, including having road project consultants sign 'Integrity Pacts' and establishing a dedicated cadre for agencies like NHAI and NHIDCL.

Government intervention

- The Union Minister of Minister for Road Transport and Highways had earlier said that the government aims to reduce the number of road accidents in India by 50 percent by next year.
- The minister had earlier said that the government is spending Rs 40,000 crore for removing black spots, or accident-prone sites, on Indian roads.

Core sector growth hits 4-month low

Context

- According to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India's eight core sectors posted a growth of 8.1 percent in September which is the lowest in four months.

Index of Core Industries (ICI)

- The Output growth across India's eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to a four-month low of 8.1% in September, from 12.5% in August, with the Index of Core Industries (ICI) sliding to a seven-month low.
- While coal, steel and electricity registered healthy year-on-year growth, crude oil output slid back into contraction mode after two months, snapping a two-month streak when all sectors recorded growth.
- Barring fertilizers, output slowed at all the sectors vis-à-vis their pace in August.

Sector wise growth

- Cement production hit a low of 4.7%
- Fertilizers output rose 4.2%
- Coal production grew 16.1%
- Steel and electricity rose 9.6% and 9.3%
- Natural gas output rose 6.5%
- Refinery products increased by 5.5%
- Sequentially, September's average output was 4.8% below August with each of the eight sectors logging month-on-month dips in production.
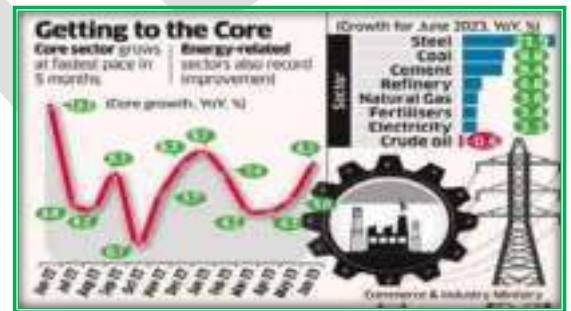
Stocktaking climate finance

- Climate finance plays a vital role in maintaining the trust of developing countries in future climate change negotiations.
- Concerns related to climate finance are expected to take center stage at the upcoming Conference of the Parties (COP 28) meeting in Dubai from November 30 to December 12, 2023.
- These discussions will be informed by the Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report, which provides crucial scientific input for the global stocktake at COP.

Current temperature increase

- The Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report says that the current temperature increases at 1.1° Celsius is responsible for frequent hazardous weather will feed into the global stocktake.
- The developed countries and climate-vulnerable nations are expected to call for increased mitigation efforts by developing countries.
- In response, developing countries may demand action from developed nations, pointing out their failure to meet the $100 billion climate finance mobilization target.

Estimating adequate climate finance

- Under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, developed countries are obligated to provide financial resources to developing country parties.
- Entire NDCs put together project a picture of overshooting the 1.5° C temperature goal.
- At the Copenhagen Change Conference in 2009, the developed countries made the commitment to mobilise $100 billion per year by 2020.
- As per the Paris Agreement decision, developed countries must mobilize $100 billion by 2025.
- A new collective quantified goal (NCQG) is to be established at the end of 2024, starting from a minimum of $100 billion per year.

India's commitments

1. Achieving net-zero by 2070

2. Reducing total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes starting now till 2030

3. Increasing renewable energy component to 50% of our total energy requirements by 2030

4. Reducing carbon intensity by 45% by 2030

5. Increasing non-fossil energy capacity to reach 500 GW by 2030

Global

Environment Facility

- It was established on the eve of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit of UNFCC to help tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems.
- The GCF, set up to administer a portion of the $100 billion for developing country parties to switch over to low-emissions and climate resilient development path.
- The GCF includes voluntary contributions by nine developing countries.
- More contributions in the GCF serve the purpose of counting international public climate finance more easily as it has been subject of debate as to what counts as international public climate finance.

Way forward

- The developed world must show the same determination and urgency demonstrated in 2009-10 to safeguard the atmosphere and combat climate change, mirroring the actions taken to save the global financial system.
- In 2009-10, the Global North displayed strong political will and urgency to address the global financial crisis, swiftly providing $1.1 trillion to stabilize the financial system. However, a similar sense of urgency and support is lacking for climate finance transfers to help developing countries combat climate change and protect the atmosphere.

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DECEMBER
2023

30.12.2023

- **Centre, Assam sign peace pact with ULFA faction**
- **ISRO all set to launch XPoSat**
- **India to acquire lithium blocks in Argentina**
- **Indian Navy unveils new epaulettes for admirals**
- **A call for disability inclusion that must be heeded**

Centre, Assam sign peace pact with ULFA faction

Context
- After years of ceasefire, the pro-talks faction of ULFA has officially signed an agreement with the Ministry of Home Affairs to renounce violence and dissolve the outfit.

Memorandum of settlement
- Recently, The Union Home Ministry and the Assam government signed a memorandum of settlement with the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA).
- The tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) agreement will mark the end of the armed struggle of the ULFA faction.
- The 12 points of the agreement included:
  o Political demands
  o ST status for communities
  o Reservation in education and employment
  o NRC/illegal immigration
  o Land and forest, identity, culture and heritage, tea gardens, rehabilitation
  o Resettlement of armed cadres of the outfit
  o Special development package
  o Planned development in the state

About ULFA
- The ULFA, one of the oldest separatist armed outfits of the country.
- It was launched in 1979 in Upper Assam.
- It had launched armed operations in 1980s.
- By the 1990s, it was considered one of the deadliest outfits, second only to LTTE, and to some extent the NSCN-IM.

ISRO all set to launch XPoSat

Context
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to launch its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) to investigate the intense polarisation of X-ray sources in space.

C58 XPoSat Mission
- The Space tech startups Dhruva Space, Bellatrix Aerospace, TM2Space are set to launch their payloads aboard Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) upcoming Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) - C58 XPoSat Mission on January 1, 2024.
- ISRO's PSLV-C58 Mission is to launch XPoSAT Satellite into an eastward low inclination orbit.
- The PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-3 experiment will be executed meeting the objective of 10 identified payloads, supplied by ISRO and IN-SPACe.

Satellite for measurements of X-ray emission

- XPoSat is the first dedicated scientific satellite from ISRO to carry out research in space-based polarisation measurements of X-ray emission from celestial sources.
- It carries two payloads:
- POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays)
- XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing)
- POLIX has been developed by the Raman Research Institute and XSPECT is by the Space Astronomy Group of URSC, Bengaluru.

Significance

- XPoSat Mission aims to study the 50 brightest known sources in the universe, including pulsars, black hole X-ray binaries, active galactic nuclei, neutron stars, and non-thermal supernova remnants.
- The satellite will be placed in a circular low Earth orbit of 500–700 km, with a mission lifespan of at least five years.
- This XPoSat Mission is not only India's first dedicated polarimetry mission but also the world's second, following Nasa's Imaging X-ray Polarimetry Explorer (IXPE) launched in 2021.

India to acquire lithium blocks in Argentina

Context

- The Mines Ministry is in the final stages of negotiations to secure a deal for the exploration and development of five lithium blocks in Argentina.

Contract details

- The contract will be inked between KhanijBidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), a joint venture firm that concentrates on discovering, purchasing, developing, processing, and commercially exploiting strategic minerals from foreign locations to supply in India, and Catamarca Minera Y Energética Sociedad Del Estado (CAMYEN), a government-owned mining and energy corporation in the Catamarca province of Argentina.
- After Australia, this is India's second attempt to sign a foreign partnership for sourcing critical minerals.
- In 2022, India signed a memorandum of understanding with Australia's Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) to explore five blocks — two dedicated to lithium and three to cobalt.

Plan of action

- India is also planning to establish an overseas office of KABIL in Catamarca to facilitate smoother coordination with local regulatory authorities.
- The Centre will also invest around Rs 200 crore over five years for the exploration and development of these mines.
- Along with Argentina and Australia, KABIL is also actively engaging in talks with several other nations abundant in critical minerals, such as Bolivia and Chile.
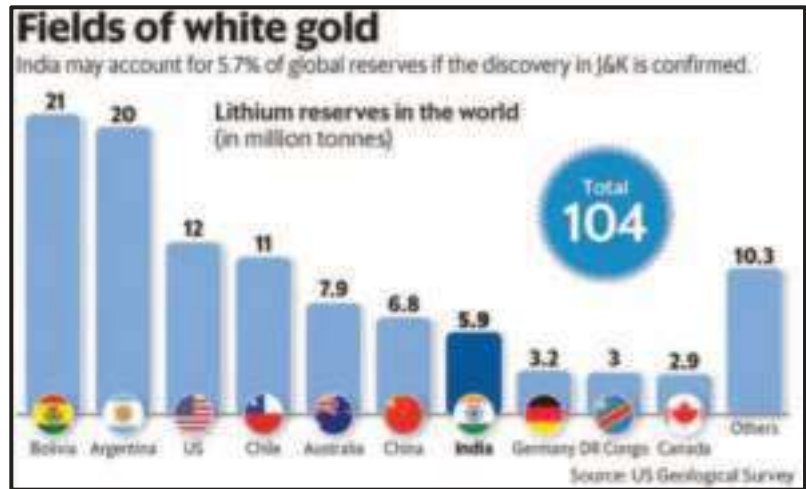- At present, India meets its lithium requirements entirely through imports.

Global lithium reserves

- Incidentally, Latin American nations, primarily Chile and Argentina, account for 30–35% of the world's supplies.

- Chile, with 11% of the world's lithium reserves, supplies 26% of the requirements
- While Argentina with nearly a fifth of the global reserves supplies about 6%-odd. Australia is among the other large producers globally.
- Argentina is home to 21 per cent of the global lithium reserves, which total 98 million tonnes.

Lithium and its applications

- Lithium is widely utilized in numerous applications, most notably in the production of lithium-ion batteries.
- These batteries are essential for powering an extensive range of devices, including smartphones, laptops, electric vehicles (EVs), and energy storage systems used for renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.
- Also, lithium is employed in certain medical treatments, ceramics, and as a component in aerospace technology.

Fields of white gold
India may account for 5.7% of global reserves if the discovery in J&K is confirmed.

Lithium reserves in the world (in million tonnes)

Total **104**

21 — Bolivia, 20 — Argentina, 12 — US, 11 — Chile, 7.9 — Australia, 6.8 — China, 5.9 — India, 3.2 — Germany, 3 — DR Congo, 2.9 — Canada, 10.3 — Others

Source: US Geological Survey

Indian Navy unveils new epaulettes for admirals

Context

- The Indian Navy has revealed a redesigned set of epaulettes for senior officers, aiming to move away from colonial influences in its customs and traditions.

Design of epaulettes

- Following Prime Minister announcement during the Navy Day celebrations in Sindhudurg on December 4, the Navy unveiled the new design of epaulettes for admirals, with the octagon in the new design drawn from the naval ensign and inspired by rajmudra of Chhatrapati Shivaji.
- The Navy is also set to rename some of the ranks now in British nomenclature to reflect an Indian connection.

Rear Admiral, Vice Rear Admiral, Admiral, Vice Admiral, Vice Vice Admiral

Decoding the new epaulette
The new epaulettes, to be worn by the navy chief, vice admirals and rear admirals, from January 1, 2024, have five modifications over the previous ones

1. **GOLDEN BUTTON** – The golden navy button on the epaulettes no longer features the foul anchor with the nautical rope, associated with the colonial era, and the design has introduced a clear anchor
2. **SHIVAJI'S SEAL** – Navy has discarded the Crown-inspired red background on which the national emblem sits and replaced it with an octagon derived from Shivaji's seal
3. **INDIAN SWORD** – The generic sword has been replaced by a straight double-edged sword of Indian origin, akin to the Khanda used by Rajput warriors
4. **TELESCOPE** – The baton (a symbol of authority) has given way to a telescope symbolising "long-term vision and foresight"
5. **STARS** – The new style of stars on the epaulettes has no particular significance other than increasing aesthetic appeal

A call for disability inclusion that must be heeded

- The International Day for Persons with Disabilities on December 3 emphasized the need for innovative solutions to improve daily activities and quality of life for individuals with disabilities.
- The United Nations has called for transformative solutions in inclusive development, shifting the focus to innovations that reduce disability.

- In the field of neuropsychiatry, which addresses the brain-mind interface, there have been notable treatment innovations with the potential to enhance outcomes.

Neuropsychiatric disorders

- Neuropsychiatric disorders are, by definition, disabling and present themselves across the lifespan.
- These range from autism, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and intellectual disability in childhood and to mental health conditions.

Revamp rehabilitation services

- The 2019 Global Burden of Disease study by the World Health Organization revealed that 2.41 billion people globally could benefit from rehabilitation, resulting in 310 million Years of Living with Disabilities.
- This marked a 63% increase from 1990 to 2019.
- Despite its significant individual and societal advantages, rehabilitation is often perceived as disability-specific, leading to insufficient prioritization and resources in many countries.
- Rehabilitation services should be comprehensive, addressing a broad range of neurological and mental health issues, rather than being narrowly focused and led by specialists.
- It's crucial to raise community awareness that disability isn't inevitable and can often be treated or even reversed in some cases.

Tap scientific advances

- Scientific advancements have led to unique paradigms of care, particularly in the realm of non-invasive brain stimulation (NIBS).
- Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS) has emerged as a mainstream treatment for depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and various conditions.
- Functional Magnetic Stimulation (FMS) is another allied technique addressing issues like pain, spasticity, and incontinence in neurological conditions.
- These innovations offer promising avenues for the care and rehabilitation of neurological and mental health conditions.

Way forward

- There is also a need to encourage medical professionals, medical service providers (government, private and non-profit) as well as public health professionals to consider rehabilitation as an essential service.
- Therefore, it is crucial for governments, the public and private sectors to collaborate and find innovative solutions for and with persons with disabilities, to make the world a more accessible and equitable place.

29 Dec 2023

- **Pegasus spyware targets Indian journalists**
- **Qatar court drops death penalty for eight Indians**
- **Covid-19-hit MSMEs can tap new relief window**
- **Centre has no power to break encryption**
- **India's stationary course in the shipping value chain**
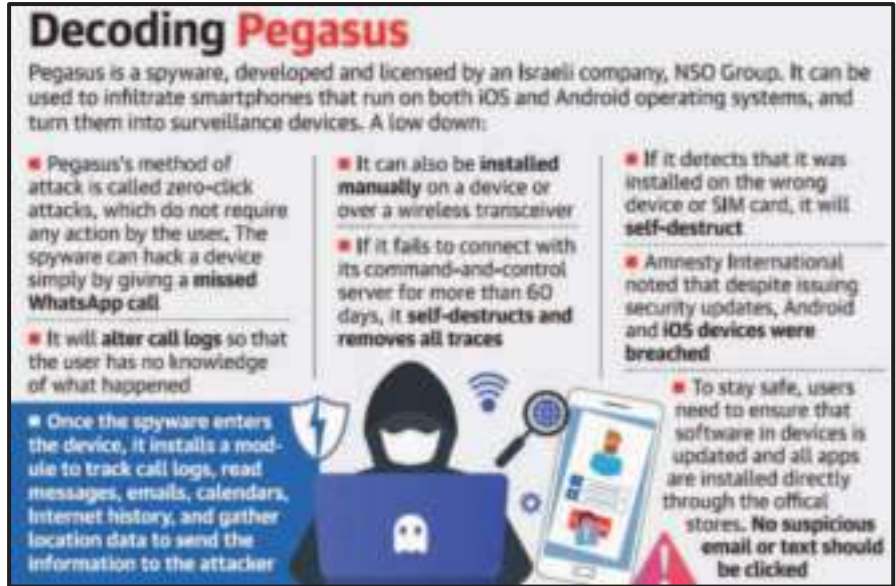
Pegasus spyware targets Indian journalists

Context

- According to a new investigation by Amnesty International and The Washington Post, the government of India has used the highly invasive Pegasus spyware to target high-profile journalists.

Amnesty International allegation

- After Apple issued a security notification to certain iPhone users, including MPs, in October, researchers at Amnesty International's Security Lab analysed the allegedly infected devices.
- At the end of their examination, they reported finding traces of Pegasus's activity on their respective devices.
- Security Lab concluded that a message to facilitate a "zero-click exploit" had been sent over iPhone's iMessage app.

Decoding Pegasus

Pegasus is a spyware, developed and licensed by an Israeli company, NSO Group. It can be used to infiltrate smartphones that run on both iOS and Android operating systems, and turn them into surveillance devices. A low down:

- Pegasus's method of attack is called zero-click attacks, which do not require any action by the user. The spyware can hack a device simply by giving a **missed WhatsApp call**
- It will **alter call logs** so that the user has no knowledge of what happened
- Once the spyware enters the device, it installs a module to track call logs, read messages, emails, calendars, internet history, and gather location data to send the information to the attacker
- It can also be **installed manually** on a device or over a wireless transceiver
- If it fails to connect with its command-and-control server for more than 60 days, it self-destructs and removes all traces
- If it detects that it was installed on the wrong device or SIM card, it will **self-destruct**
- Amnesty International noted that despite issuing security updates, Android and **iOS devices were breached**
- To stay safe, users need to ensure that software in devices is updated and all apps are installed directly through the official stores. No suspicious email or text should be clicked

- Once received, the message was designed to covertly install Pegasus on the device.

About zero-click exploit

- A zero-click exploit is a type of cyber-attack software that allows spyware to be installed on a device without the device owner's consent.
- More importantly, it doesn't require the device owner to perform any actions to initiate or complete the installation.
- The specific exploit allegedly in use on the two devices is called BLASTPAST

NSO response

- The Washington Post cited a statement from NSO, the Israeli company behind Pegasus, asserting that their technology is exclusively licensed to vetted law enforcement and intelligence agencies for combating terrorism and major crime.
- NSO claims to have no visibility into targets or collected intelligence.

Qatar court drops death penalty for eight Indians

Context

- According to ministry of External Affair, Qatar court has dropped the death sentence for eight Indian ex-navy personnel arrested in the country last year.
- The eight men were handed the death penalty in October.

Background

- In August 2022, the eight officers were detained in Doha by Qatari intelligence authorities.
- The navy men were working for a defence service provider organisation — Dahra Global Technologies and Consultancy Services owned by a retired member of the Royal Omani Air

TIMELINE: THE CASE AGAINST 8 FORMER INDIAN NAVY OFFICERS IN QATAR

2022
- 30 AUG: Eight former Indian Navy officers were arrested on undeclared charges. They were put in solitary confinement
- 1 OCT: India's ambassador to Qatar and deputy head of mission meet the veterans
- 1 OCT: First consular access was granted

2023
- 1 MARCH: The last bail plea filed for veterans rejected
- 25 MARCH: Charges filed against the men
- 29 MARCH: The trial begins
- 30 MAY: Dahra Global, where veterans worked, shut operations
- 4 AUG: The men moved out of solitary confinement to jail war
- 26 OCT: Death sentence awarded

Firstpost

Force. The eight men have been in the custody of Qatari authorities since August 2022.

- The first trial was held in March 2023.
- In October, consular access was granted, and the Indian Ambassador met the detainees.

Vienna Convention on Consular Relations

- The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations provides the framework for consular relations between sovereign states.
- Article 36 of the Convention is central to this case, as it deals with communication and contact with nationals of the sending state.
- Article 36 of the Vienna Convention requires immediate notification of an arrest and the right to consulate access.

Terms of verdict

- Neither the Ministry nor those aware of the appeals court verdict would comment the terms of the "reduced" verdict.
- The fact that the court has struck down the death sentence is the first positive development for the families of the eight men who have been on death row since they were convicted on October 26.

They filed appeals against that verdict on November 9.

Covid-19-hit MSMEs can tap new relief window

Context

- Due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre is reviving a scheme to settle Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) claims.

Fresh claims under Vivad Se Vishwas I scheme

- From January 1, 2024, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have the opportunity to submit new claims under the Vivad Se Vishwas I scheme.
- Initially accepting claims from mid-April to the end of July, the scheme has already resolved ₹650 crore in nearly 44,000 cases by early December.
- The extended window for firms to file claims will remain open until March 31.

About Vivad Se Vishwas (VSVS) I scheme

- The union Finance Minister unveiled the Vivad Se Vishwas (VSVS) I scheme in the Union Budget 2023-24, with a focus on alleviating challenges faced by MSMEs in meeting central government contract obligations during the pandemic.
- The scheme was Introduced on April 11, encompassed all government procurement contracts for goods, services, and works entered into by various government departments.

Big Relief for Borrowers Hit by Pandemic

SBI Announces COVID-19 Emergency Credit Line for MSMEs

- Loan of upto ₹200 crore or 10% of existing fund-based working capital limits can be availed till June end
- Loans will be offered to MSME borrowers at a flat rate of 7.25 %
- The entire amount can be availed at once & to be repaid in 6 instalments after a moratorium period of 6 months

Smooth settlement

The Centre launches a scheme to end disputes with suppliers by offering them a voluntary settlement amount

- The scheme applies to all domestic contractual disputes where the government is a party
- Govt. to offer contractors settlement amounts of up to 85% of net amount awarded by the court
- FM Nirmala Sitharaman had promised in this year's Budget to introduce a settlement scheme

Centre has no power to break encryption

Context

- According to the communications and IT minister, new Telecom Act does not, in any manner give either the government or the service providers, the power to break encryption of messages exchanged via over-the-top platforms or intercept them.

Telecommunication Bill 2023

- The Union Cabinet has cleared the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill 2023, which contains certain relaxations in regulating communication services such as WhatsApp and Google Meet.
- The bill proposes to enlarge the scope of telecommunication services by including OTT, Internet-based and satellite-based communication services, broadcasting, internet and broadband services within its ambit.
- The draft Bill also accords the Centre powers to defer, convert into equity, write off or grant relief to any licensee under extraordinary circumstances, including financial stress, consumer interest, and maintaining competition, among other things.
- It seeks to replace three laws – the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933 and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950.

Section 3 of the Telecom Act

- Under Section 3 of the Telecom Act, any person intending to provide telecommunication services; establish, operate, maintain or expand telecommunication network; or possess radio equipment, shall obtain an authorisation from the government.
- The minister said that rules of business in the government are very clear that telecom service relates to carriage which is the domain of the department of telecommunications, while apps fall in the domain of ministry of electronics and IT.

India's stationary course in the shipping value chain

- The Yangtze River has been China's heartbeat through its long history.
- Today, the Yangtze is modern China's lifeline while retaining its antiquity.
- The Three Gorges project has only added to its lustre.
- The Yangtze often sees multiple convoys steaming in parallel.

India versus China story

- India was actually ahead of China in the real boat until the end of the 1980s.
- India, with a rich tradition in modern ship-owning, took an early lead over China in the maritime industry.
- A uniquely Indian case stands out as the most spectacular example of ship-owning globally.
- Additionally, India maintains a close association with the International Maritime Organization.
- Private Indian shipyards, challenging public sector dominance, showed promise in global shipbuilding.
- Labor arbitrage, predating IT, saw English-speaking Indian seafarers replacing less proficient Eastern Europeans, enhancing safety—a top priority in shipping.

India's Maritime Agenda 2020

- The UPA government aimed to raise India's global shipbuilding share from under 2% to 5% by 2020 through the Maritime Agenda.

- Despite offering incentives, India's share in global shipbuilding plummeted to nearly zero, contrary to the intended increase.
- The incumbent government's Maritime India Vision 2030 outlined 10 key themes that include logistics, environment concerns, port infrastructure and increase in seafarer growth and training, but just does not mention any plan for shipbuilding and owning. There is talk of Sagarmala but the yards are seeing only naval ship orders.

Way forward

- India's extensive coastline and strategic shipping location make shipbuilding crucial for boosting manufacturing capacity and strategic influence.
- Engaging in shipbuilding not only secures a place in the global maritime industry but also enhances India's presence in international trade.
- Strengthening ship owning, chartering, financing, and building in India would propel it to the forefront of the global maritime industry and elevate its standing in international trade.

28.12.2023

- **UGC draft guidelines on recognition of colleges**
- **Cabinet approves construction new bridge on river Ganga**
- **Online platforms to delete data of inactive users**
- **Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023**
- **Making health our top priority in 2024**

UGC draft guidelines on recognition of colleges

Context

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced draft rules to modernize and simplify the college recognition process, shifting it online.

New draft regulations

- The new draft regulations titled 'University Grants Commission (Recognition of Colleges under clause (f) of Section 2 of the UGC Act) Regulations, 2023.
- The proposed guidelines will be applicable to colleges as defined under the UGC Act. The draft guidelines set conditions for UGC recognition of a college and states that it should be affiliated to a university in accordance with the provisions of UGC (Affiliation of Colleges by Universities) Regulations.

AFFILIATION PROCESS
- Request from Institute
- Issuance of Consent letter
- Submission of Documents & Affiliation fee by the Institute
- Scrutiny of Documents
- Inspection of Institute
- Submission of Inspection Report to Academic Council
- Notification of Decision

- According to the draft rules, the entire procedure from application to approval shall be done online within a stipulated period.

Streamlining the affiliation process

- According to the UGC chairperson, the new regulations are a significant step towards streamlining the affiliation process for colleges seeking recognition.
- The proposed changes will introduce online procedures, reduce documentation, and define timelines, signifying the commitment to efficiency by UGC.

- The draft regulations aim to simplify the application and verification processes, ensure a quicker and more transparent pathway for colleges seeking UGC recognition under Section 2(f).
- UGC encourages stakeholders to provide valuable feedback and collectively help enhance the quality and accessibility of higher education in the country.

Cabinet approves construction new bridge on river Ganga

Context

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the construction of a new 4.56 km long, 6-lane bridge on the river Ganga, connecting Digha and Sonepur in Bihar.

Khowai-Harina road project

- The Union Cabinet approved for widening of the 135-km stretch of Khowai-Harina road in Tripura, and construction of a new 4.56 km long, 6-lane bridge on the river Ganga, connecting Digha and Sonepur in Bihar.
- The Khowai-Harina road project involves investment of Rs 2,486.78 crore which includes a loan component of Rs 1,511.70 crore.
- The project stretch also passes very close to the Bangladesh border and it would improve connectivity to Bangladesh through Kailashahar, Kamalpur and Khowai Border Check Post.
- The bridge will make traffic faster and easier, resulting in the overall development of the state, especially north Bihar.

Loan assistance from JICA

- The loan assistance will be from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under Official Development Assistance (ODA) scheme.
- The project is envisaged to facilitate better road connectivity between various parts of Tripura and to provide alternative access to Assam and Meghalaya from Tripura apart from existing NH-8.

Online platforms to delete data of inactive users

Context

- The Central government is considering a key provision in the upcoming Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) rules, proposing the permanent deletion of user data for accounts inactive for three consecutive years.

Provision under DPDP Act

- The proposal, yet to be officially released, is part of the draft executive rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, enacted as law in August 2023.
- An early version of the draft, suggests that user data deletion may apply to e-commerce, online gaming, and social media companies with over 20 million users registered in India.
- Platforms would be required to notify users 48 hours before the expiration of the three-year period, informing them of impending data erasure due to inactivity.

New privacy Bill

India plans for a new Digital Personal Data Protection Bill to bolster online privacy. A lowdown:

- The new Bill will replace the existing Information Technology Rules
- The Bill aims at balancing the right of individuals to protect their personal data and the need to process it for lawful purposes
- Definitions of data fiduciary, data principal, and data processor are outlined within the Bill to provide clarity
- The Digital Personal Data Protection Bill 2022 was announced by the government aiming to enforce individual privacy online

- Users will also be informed that the deletion can be averted by logging into their accounts.

Intimation to Data Protection Board

- Additionally, the forthcoming rules might mandate any platform, whether private or government, processing user data to promptly inform the Data Protection Board (DPB) of any data breach upon awareness.
- The DPB, established under the DPDP Act, would require platforms to communicate breach details on a best-effort basis, including a description, date and time of awareness, breach location, extent, and potential impact.
- The Act mandates "verifiable parental consent" for individuals under 18 years, posing a challenge for the industry as it lacks specific guidelines for age verification.

Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023

Context

- The gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) fell to a decadal low of 3.9 per cent at end-March 2023 and further to 3.2 per cent at end-September 2023.

Finding of the report

- The consolidated balance sheet of banks expanded by 12.2 per cent in FY23 - the highest in nine years, driven by credit to retail and services sectors.

On a strong footing
Higher lending rates, lower provisioning needs boosted banks' profitability and shored up capital positions during 2022-23, says RBI

- UCBs' capital buffers, profitability improved
- NBFCs also showed better profitability, asset quality in 2022-23
- Capital to Risk Asset Ratio higher than the norms for NBFCs
- Combined balance sheet of UCBs expanded by 2.3% in 2022-23

- The report highlighted that higher net interest income and lower provisioning led to a boost in net interest margin (NIM) and profitability in FY23.
- The central bank said the banking system and the non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) remain resilient, backed by high capital ratios, improved asset quality and robust earnings growth.

NBFCs performance

- The balance sheets of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) expanded at a fast pace in FY23, led by double-digit credit growth.
- The RBI has asked NBFCs to broad-base their fundraising to limit reliance on banks as it called for strengthening balance sheets and guarding against frauds and data breaches.
- According to the RBI report, the Indian banking system and NBFCs remain sound and resilient, backed by high capital ratios, strengthening asset quality and robust earnings growth.

Making health our top priority in 2024

- The 2023 Navaratri celebrations in Gujarat was recently seen in reports where individuals allegedly succumbing to heart attacks within 24 hours.
- The victims, spanning from a 13-year-old to middle-aged individuals, challenge the misconception that heart-related issues only affect the elderly.
- This concerning trend extends beyond Gujarat, signaling a shift in India's disease landscape.
- While communicable diseases persist as a significant threat, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases have emerged as the predominant public health concern.

Death due to NCDs

- According to 2019 WHO report, 'Invisible Numbers,' revealed that 66% of deaths in India that year were due to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).
- The report also suggests that 22% of individuals aged 30 or older in India would succumb to NCDs before their 70th birthday, surpassing the global probability of 18%. Notably, the report emphasized that these deaths are largely preventable through lifestyle choices.

A quiet crisis

- The silent epidemic of NCDs is fuelled by common behavioural risk factors — unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, the use of tobacco and alcohol which are all on the rise in India.
- Epidemic fueled by genetic predisposition to diabetes and heart disease, coupled with sedentary lifestyles leading to stress, anxiety, and depression.
- India, diabetes capital, has 101 million diabetics and 136 million with prediabetes.
- Cardiovascular diseases top mortality charts; cancer incidence to rise by 57.5% by 2040.
- The World Economic Forum estimates that India could incur a staggering cost of $4.58 trillion between 2012 and 2030 due to NCDs and mental health conditions.
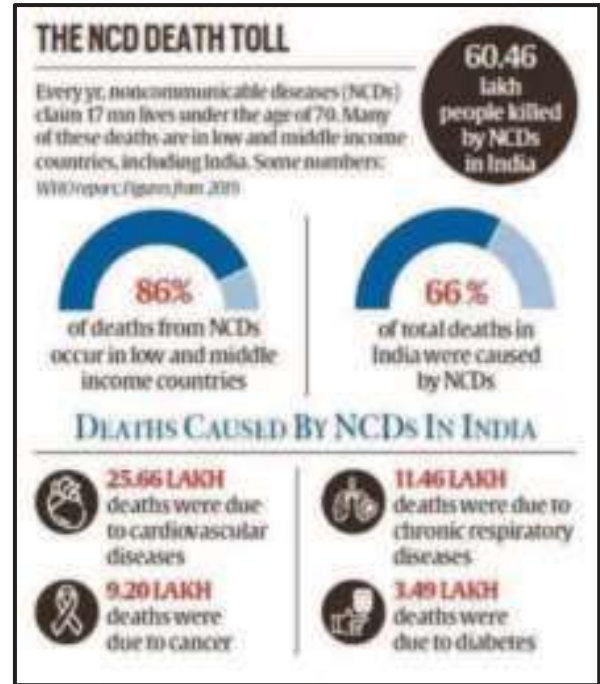
A resolution for 2024

- As India aspires to become a $5 trillion economy by 2027, the growing incidence of NCDs is a pressing concern.
- While the government has launched initiatives such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke, and the 75/25 initiative, the onus now lies on individuals to take charge of their health.
- The Micro-habits, small actions seamlessly integrated into our routines, can make a significant difference.

- First, we can integrate more natural movement into our daily lives by increasing cardiovascular fitness, strengthening our bones, reducing excess body fat, and boosting muscle power and endurance

- Second, we can choose 'slow food' over fast food. Food that is prepared with the ingredients that are right for us and food that is consumed with appreciation.

- Third, we can take out a few hours once a year and get a comprehensive health check-up.

Way forward

- The nation's transformation lies in citizens' daily choices, and understanding the direct link between individual and societal well-being.
- Resolution 2024 calls for small, consistent actions, believing in their collective power to reshape the health landscape.
- Embarking on a journey for a healthier India lays the foundation for a brighter future for current and future generations.

27.12.2023

- **Non-invasive testing method to tackle anaemia**
- **India, Russia ink pack for nuclear power plant**

- **India-Oman free trade agreement**
- **Government working on PLI 2.0 for steel sector**
- **A new economics for inclusive growth**

Non-invasive testing method to tackle anaemia

Context

- The ICMR is seeking Expression of Interest from eligible organizations, companies, and start-ups manufacturing non-invasive haemoglobinometers for efficient anaemia screening.

Non-invasive haemoglobinometers

- Non-invasive haemoglobinometers are devices designed to measure hemoglobin levels in the blood without the need for a traditional blood sample through invasive procedures like needle pricks.
- The non-invasive haemoglobinometers use different technologies, such as optical or spectroscopic methods, to estimate hemoglobin levels by analyzing specific characteristics of blood or tissues.
- Non-invasive hemoglobinometers play a crucial role in public health by enabling efficient screening for conditions like anemia.
- These devices are especially valuable for frequent hemoglobin level monitoring in managing chronic diseases and health screening programs

Anaemia cases in India

- In India, the prevalence of anaemia among six groups as per the National Family Health Survey 5 (2019-21):
  - 67.1% in children (6-59).
  - 59.1 % in adolescent girls
  - 57% in women (15-49)
  - 52.2 % in pregnant women (15-49)
  - 31.1% in adolescent boys (15-19)
  - 25% in men (15-49 age group)
- Anaemia continues to be a major public health problem in India despite the comprehensive Anaemia-mukt Bharat (AMB) programme.

India, Russia ink pack for nuclear power plant

Context

- In a major boost partnership, India and Russia signed some "very important" agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant.

Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant

- The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant is a nuclear power station located in Kudankulam in the Tirunelveli district of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- It is one of India's largest nuclear power complexes and plays a significant role in the country's nuclear energy production.
- NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW.
- It has been built in collaboration with Atomstroyexport, the Russian state company and NPCIL.
- The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027.

Nuclear Power Plants under operation in India

RAJASTHAN ATOMIC POWER PLANT-1 (RAPS-1), (RAPS-2), (RAPS-3), (RAPS-4), (RAPS-5), (RAPS-6)
KOTA, RAJASTHAN

NARORA ATOMIC POWER PLANT-1 (NAPS-1), (NAPS-2)
NARORA, UTTAR PRADESH

KAKRAPAR ATOMIC POWER PLANT-1 (KAPS-1), (KAPS-2)
TAPI, GUJARAT

TARAPUR ATOMIC POWER PLANT-1 (TAPS-1), (TAPS-2), (TAPS-3), (TAPS-4)
BOISAR, MAHARASTRA

MADRAS ATOMIC POWER PLANT-1 (MAPS-1), (MAPS-2)
KALPAKKAM, TAMIL NADU

KAIGA GENERATING STATION-1 (KGS-1), (KGS-2), (KGS-3), (KGS-4)
KAIGA, KARNATAKA

KUDANKULAM NUCLEAR POWER STATION-1 (KKNPS-1), (KKNPS-2)
KUDANKULAM, TAMIL NADU

Source: www.aerb.gov.in
Representational map. Not to scale.
Graphic: IE Design

India-Oman free trade agreement

Context

- The negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and Oman are moving at a fast pace and the pact is likely to be signed next month.

India Oman trade relations

- Oman is India's third-largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
- According to think tank GTRI's (Global Trade Research Initiative) report, Indian goods worth $3.7 billion such as gasoline, iron and steel, electronics, and machinery will get a significant boost in Oman, once both sides reach a comprehensive free trade agreement.
- Export sectors which could get a boost in Oman include:
  o   Motor gasoline: $1.7 billion
  o   Iron and steel products: $235 million
  o   Electronics: $135 million
  o   Machinery: $125 million
  o   Textiles: $110 million
  o   Plastics: $64 million
  o   Boneless meat: $50 million
  o   Essential oils: $47 million
  o   Motor cars: $28 million

Other details

- India has implemented a trade agreement with the UAE also in May 2022.
- Both Oman and UAE are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

- The bilateral trade stood at USD 12.39 billion in 2022-23.
- India's exports have increased from USD 2.25 billion in 2018-19 to USD 4.48 billion in 2022-23.
- Imports from the Gulf nation were USD 8 billion in the last fiscal.

Government working on PLI 2.0 for steel sector

Context

- The government is working on Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme 2.0 as well as looking at ways to ensure adequate raw material supply for the steel sector in 2024.

Increased steel demand

- While robust economic growth will increase steel demand, industry players are concerned about rising imports and high raw material prices amid geopolitical uncertainties.
- Production and consumption of steel have shown a strong recovery after the coronavirus pandemic impacted the sector in 2020-21.
- During April-November 2023, the cumulative production of crude steel was 94.01 Million Tonnes (MT), up 14.5% y-o-y.
- The consumption of finished steel jumped 14% to 86.97 MT on an annual basis during the same period.

Production Linked Incentive

- The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) is a scheme initiated by the government to boost domestic manufacturing across various sectors in India.
- Under the PLI scheme, eligible companies receive financial incentives based on their incremental production.
- The primary objectives of the PLI scheme include enhancing competitiveness, increasing production capacities, attracting investments, and creating employment opportunities.

TRANSFORMING INDIA INTO A MANUFACTURING HUB

CABINET APPROVES PRODUCTION LINKED INCENTIVE SCHEME FOR 10 SECTORS WITH AN OUTLAY OF NEARLY RS 2 LAKH CRORE

Sectors	Approved financial outlay for 5 years
Advance Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery	Rs 18,100 crore
Electronic/Technology products	Rs 5,000 crore
Automobiles & Auto components	Rs 57,042 crore
Pharmaceutical drugs	Rs 15,000 crore
Telecom & Networking Products	Rs 12,195 crore
Textile products	Rs 10,683 crore
Food products	Rs 10,900 crore
High-efficiency solar PV modules	Rs 4,500 crore
White goods (ACs & LEDs)	Rs 6,238 crore
Specialty Steel	Rs 6,322 crore
Total	**Rs 1,45,980 crore**

Already notified sectors

Mobile manufacturing and specified electronic components	Rs 40,951 crore
Critical Key Starting materials/Drug Intermediaries & Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients	Rs 6,940 crore
Manufacturing of medical devices	Rs 3,420 crore
Total	**Rs 1,97,291 crore**

The scheme will make Indian manufacturers globally competitive, attract investment in areas of competency & cutting-edge technology while ensuring efficiencies, pushing exports and making India a key part of the global supply chain.

Sectors under PLI

- Keeping in view India's vision of becoming 'Atmanirbhar', Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes for 14 key sectors have been announced with an outlay of Rs. 1.97 lakh crore (over US$26 billion) to enhance India's Manufacturing capabilities and Exports.
- The 14 sectors are: (i) Mobile Manufacturing and Specified Electronic Components, (ii) Critical Key Starting Materials/Drug Intermediaries & Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, (iii) Manufacturing of Medical Devices (iv) Automobiles and Auto Components, (v) Pharmaceuticals Drugs, (vi) Specialty Steel, (vii) Telecom & Networking Products, (viii) Electronic/Technology Products, (ix) White Goods (ACs and LEDs), (x) Food Products, (xi) Textile Products: MMF segment and technical textiles, (xii) High efficiency

solar PV modules, (xiii) Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) Battery, and (xiv) Drones and Drone Components.

A new economics for inclusive growth

- In the book "Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future," Raghuram Rajan and Rohit Lamba suggest that India should stop trying to make its manufacturing sector bigger and, instead, focus on selling advanced services to other countries.
- This is surprising because India has been trying to do this for the past 30 years, but it hasn't worked very well.
- The big problem is that there aren't enough jobs and people don't earn enough money in India's economy.
- The economy cannot be in good shape when 60% of Indians, are classified as "economically weaker sections" entitled to job reservations.

A growth-affecting mismatch

- The hurdle hindering India's growth is the imbalance between skills, jobs, and incomes. Two decades ago, during the "India Shining" era, economists believed India had skipped the traditional path of transitioning from agriculture to manufacturing before services.
- Unlike China, which lifted people out of poverty through a massive manufacturing sector, India faces challenges in creating a similar trajectory.

The realities are being missed

- Traditional economic theories, focused on numerical analysis, often overlook the critical element of "learning" in citizens and nations.
- Many economists fail to grasp how individuals acquire new skills, enhance incomes, and nations develop new capabilities.
- Manufacturing and value-added services extend beyond big, capital-intensive smartphone factories or large software facilities.
- Targets of trillions of dollars of GDP will not be achieved if economic growth does not become inclusive and sustainable very soon.

Conclusion

- Investing in education and skills for "high end" manufacturing and services will not benefit the masses if they cannot be employed.
- Foreign direct investment will not boost growth if it does not increase employment soon.
- India's policies must take advantage of this opportunity and make more for India in India, thus growing both jobs and incomes for India's masses.
- The policymakers must get down to the basics of inclusive economic growth.

26.12.2023

- **India and ASEAN to modernize Free Trade Agreement**
- **First rupee payment for oil to UAE**
- **Railway officers to be trained in disaster management**
- **UNHCR thanks India for taking care Rohingyas**
- **Global Goal on Adaptation and the road from Dubai**

India and ASEAN to modernize Free Trade Agreement

Context

- India and ASEAN nations will soon begin a review meeting of the existing free trade agreement (FTA) signed in August 2009 and enforced from 2010 and discuss ways to make the pact more 'modern'

Roadmap

- The first round of negotiations for reviewing the FTA, officially known as the ASEAN India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITGA), will be on February 18-19, 2024 in New Delhi.
- Negotiations will follow a quarterly schedule aiming to wrap them up by 2025.
- There will be a complete re-look at the FTA with the broad objective of bringing down the trade deficit for India.
- India wants to modernise the FTA as a lot has evolved since it was signed almost 15 years back.
- New elements such as product specific rules and trade remedies will be brought in to make the FTA more efficient.
- But new areas like labour, environment, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and gender, are likely to be kept out.

Trade deficit

- India's trade deficit with the ASEAN nations was at $7.5 billion per annum when the pact was implemented.
- This has surged to $43.57 billion in FY23.
- In 2022-23, India's exports to the region were valued at $44 billion, while its imports were at $87.57 billion.

Revamping AITGA

- Modernizing the AITGA involves updating Rules of Origin (ROO) to enhance India's market access and prevent potential rerouting of goods by China through ASEAN countries.
- ROO are the criteria to determine the origin of a product and establish if it qualifies for duty cuts under an FTA.
- Sectors that need propping up include chemicals and alloys, plastics and rubber, minerals, leather, textiles, gems and jewellery, per an industry analysis.

About ASEAN

- The 10-member ASEAN region accounted for 11.3% of India's global trade in 2022-23

First rupee payment for oil to UAE

Context

- India has made history by conducting its first-ever payment in rupees for crude oil purchased from the UAE, signaling a strategic move to promote the global use of its local currency.

Aim and significance

- This initiative aligns with the Reserve Bank of India's move on July 11, 2022, allowing importers to pay in rupees and exporters to receive payments in the local currency.
- India aims to:
  o Diversify oil suppliers
  o Reduce transaction costs
  o Promote the rupee as a trade settlement currency
- India aims to explore trade settlements in rupees rather than dollars to

streamline transactions by eliminating currency conversions.

India-UAE rupee settlements

- In July, India formalised an agreement with the UAE for rupee settlements, leading to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) making payments for purchasing one million barrels of crude oil from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) in Indian rupees.
- Additionally, some Russian oil imports have also been settled in rupees.
- With over 85 per cent of its oil needs reliant on imports, India has adopted a multifaceted strategy, emphasising sourcing from the most cost-effective suppliers, diversifying supply sources, and adhering to international obligations.

India's oil Import

- In the financial year 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023), India spent $157.5 billion on importing 232.7 million tonnes of crude oil.
- Key suppliers included Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the UAE, with West Asia contributing 58 per cent of all supplies.
- The domestic supply meets less than 15 per cent of the demand.

UNHCR thanks India for taking care Rohingyas

Context

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed gratitude to Indian authorities at Andaman and Nicobar Islands for taking care of 142 Rohingya refugees, whose boat was intercepted by coastal security agencies near Shaheed Dweep recently.

UNHCR response

- UNHCR thanks the Indian Coast Guard and the authorities for saving desperate human lives.
- The boat left from Bangladesh 14 to 15 days ago and was on its way to Indonesia. Those aboard included 47 women and 59 minors.
- This noble act of humanity brings relief to those in distress.

Call to control room

- Recently, the Port Blair police control room received a call from the local intelligence about suspicious boat movement near Shaheed Dweep (previously known as Neil Island), and multiple coastal security agencies (including the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Police) swung into action and located it.

Railway officers to be trained in disaster management

Context

- The Ministry of Railways has made training in disaster management mandatory for railway officers.

Comprehensive training programme

- Disaster management has now been incorporated as an integral component of the training module for railway officers at the induction/foundation course level and also included in refresher or mid-career training programmes.
- The National Academy of Indian Railways (NAIR), Vadodara, and the Indian Railway Institute of Disaster Management (IRIDM), Bengaluru, would work together in imparting the comprehensive training programme.
- The move comes after an investigation into the devastating Odisha train tragedy, which left about 290 passengers dead.

Global Goal on Adaptation and the road from Dubai

- The COP28 in Dubai marked a pivotal shift in the international community's attitude towards climate adaptation. Building on the momentum from COP26 and COP27, the conference successfully adopted the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework, addressing concerns outlined in the Paris Agreement.
- This signifies a significant step forward in combating climate change and promoting adaptation efforts worldwide.
- These climate change events are happening at only 1.1° Celsius as compared to pre-industrial levels.

Challenges in GGA implementation

- The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework will shape prioritized adaptation actions.
- A key target is for Parties to the Paris Agreement to conduct comprehensive assessments of climate hazards and vulnerabilities, utilizing the findings to inform national adaptation plans and strategies by 2030.
- By 2027, all the Parties have to establish:
  - Multi-hazard early warning systems
  - Climate information services for risk reduction
  - Systematic observation to support improved climate-related data, information and services

Measuring Global Goal on Adaptation

- By 2030, Parties are expected to advance in implementing national adaptation plans, policies, and strategies.
- Unlike greenhouse gas mitigation, assessing progress in adaptation lacks a universal metric, making it challenging to aggregate based on national pledges.
- The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) framework has initiated a two-year work program on indicators for tracking progress.
- The Parties are expected to have progressed in their implementation of national adaptation plans, policies and strategies by 2030.
- The GGA framework has decided to initiate a two-year work program to develop indicators for measuring progress toward the targets in paragraphs 9-10 of the GGA draft decisions.
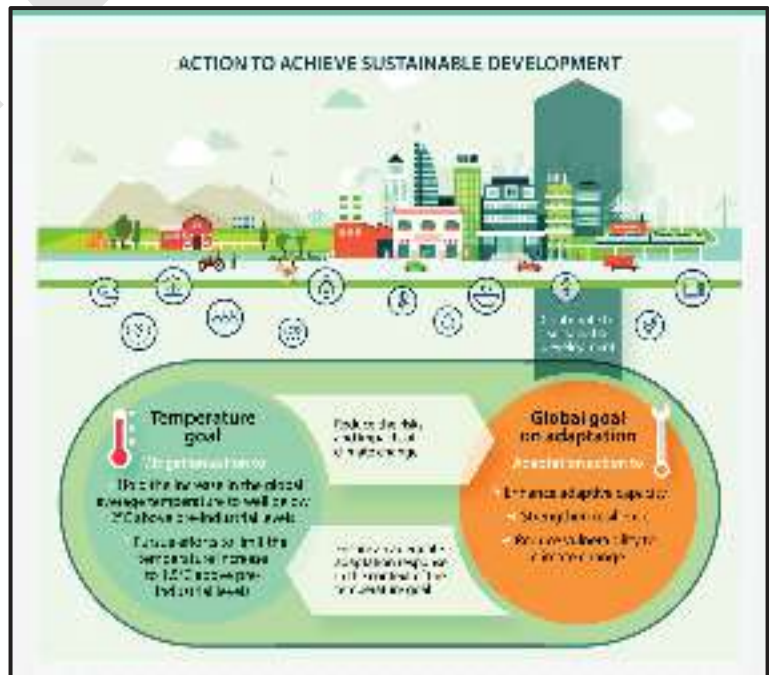
Climate financing and mitigation bias

- There is also a strong bias in climate financing in favour of mitigation as compared to adaptation.
- The COP26's urge to developed countries to double overall adaptation finance from 2019 levels by 2025 was repeated in the Draft Decision.
- Estimation made on the basis of updated NDCs or national adaptation plans indicate a figure of $71 billion per year from now to 2030.

Conclusion

- The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) is an encouraging development as it contains a number of developments that are very useful for the cause of adaptation.
- Implementing GGA needs more urgency in terms of treating adaptation on a par with mitigation in the face of extreme climate events.

23.12.2023

- **UN approves watered-down resolution**
- **Centre's targtet for creches across India**
- **Centre exploring one-stop health sector regulator**
- **India-made LCA, LCH can boost clout in Global South**
- **Telecom law upgrades for a digital authoritarian state**

UN approves watered-down resolution

Context

- The U.N. Security Council adopted a watered-down resolution calling for immediately speeding aid deliveries to hungry and desperate civilians in Gaza but without the original plea for an "urgent suspension of hostilities" between Israel and Hamas.

The resolution

- The long-delayed vote in the 15-member council was 13-0 with the United States and Russia abstaining.
- The resolution culminated a week and a half of high-level diplomacy by the United States, the UAE on behalf of Arab nations and others.
- The secretary-general reiterated his longstanding call for a humanitarian cease-fire.
- The Security Council resolutions are legally binding, but in practice many parties choose to ignore the council's requests for action.

Ground reality

- According to a report released by 23 U.N. and humanitarian agencies, Gaza's entire 2.2 million population is in a food crisis or worse and 576,600 are at the "catastrophic" starvation level.
- With supplies to Gaza cut off except for a small trickle, the U.N. World Food Program has said 90% of the population is regularly going without food for a full day.
- According to the Gaza Health Ministry, More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war started.

IPC report

- According to the report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the proportion of households in Gaza affected by high levels of acute food insecurity is the largest ever recorded globally.
- The extent of hunger in Gaza has eclipsed even the near-famines in Afghanistan and Yemen of recent years.
- The entire 2.3 million population of Gaza is facing crisis levels of hunger and the risk of famine.

Centre's target for creches across India

Context

- The Women and Child Development Ministry said it aimed to establish 17,000 creches in anganwadis across the country.

SOP for anganwadi-cum-creche

- The Centre has released a new SOP for anganwadi-cum-creche centres being set up under the 'Palna' Scheme.
- The Ministry plans to depute two additional creche workers in each anganwadi under the 'Palna' scheme.
- The union government has approved 5,222 creches; there are 13.87 lakh anganwadis, mini-anganwadis.

About Palna Scheme

- In July 2022, the Ministry of Women and Child Development reorganized and renamed the National Creche Scheme as the Palna Scheme under the 'Samarthya' sub-scheme of 'Mission Shakti'.
- Further, the crèches which were running under erstwhile National Creche Scheme have been included as Stand Alone Creches.
- The 'Palna' scheme aims to address the need for quality daycare facilities or creches for children of working women by providing a safe and secure environment for the nutritional, health and cognitive development of the children.
- According to government data, participation of women in the workforce has increased to 37% in 2022.

Centre exploring one-stop health sector regulator

Context

- The Central government is exploring setting up a health sector regulator that will bring private and government health insurance schemes under its purview to facilitate affordable insurance coverage for all.

Initial discussions

- The Ministries of Finance (MoF) and Health are in "initial discussions" over the need for a sector watchdog.
- Doctors' bodies have urged that private and government insurance be brought under a single regulator.
- Meaning, regulating government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, the Central Government Health Scheme, Employees' State Insurance Corporation, etc.

Health insurance and risk

- According to data from the National Insurance Agency over 400 million individuals do not have access to health insurance or have inadequate coverage.
- They are facing risk at a time when healthcare costs are going up.
- Presently, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) regulates insurance providers that provide health coverage among other products.
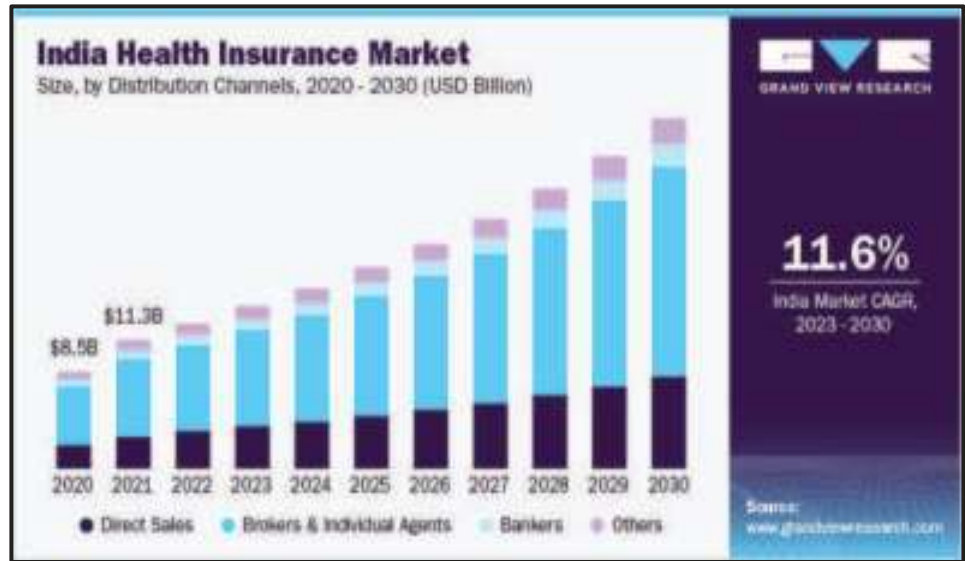
Healthcare sector

- Healthcare has become one of India's largest sectors, both in terms of revenue and employment.
- India's healthcare delivery system is categorised into two major components - public and private.
- The Indian healthcare sector is expected to record a three-fold rise, growing at a CAGR of 22% between 2016–22 to reach US$ 372 billion in 2022 from US$ 110 billion in 2016.
- The e-health market size is estimated to reach US$ 10.6 billion by 2025.

India-made LCA, LCH can boost clout in Global South

Context

- India Air Force chief said that indigenous aerospace platforms such as the Light Combat Aircraft, Light Combat Helicopter, offer competitive and reliable options for air forces of the Global South.

About

- The IAF chief highlighted that these platforms have export potential.
- He said setting up joint ventures with Global South countries can be mutually beneficial.
- He added this could include jointly developing components, sharing production facilities, creation of regional maintenance and support hubs.

Improving capabilities

- India Air Force chief said there is a need to focus on:

- o Capability development in global supply chains
- o Manufacturing hubs and establishing maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities
- o Joint research and development projects
- o Defence innovation and technological exchange

About LCA

- The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) program commenced in the 1980s as a replacement for India's aging MiG-21 fighters.
- Evolving into a crucial component of India's fleet modernization, the LCA program gained significance over time.
- In 2003, the LCA received its official designation as "Tejas."
- Achieving a significant milestone, Tejas became India's first indigenously developed fighter jet.
- In February 2019, Tejas received final operational clearance, marking its full integration into the Indian Air Force as a weaponized fighter jet.

Telecom law upgrades for a digital authoritarian state

- The 'Telecommunications Bill, 2023' has been approved by the Rajya Sabha with amendments, following its earlier passage by the Lok Sabha.
- The bill aims to transform and reform the telecommunications sector, services, and networks by amending and consolidating laws related to the development, expansion, and operation of telecommunication services.
- The Bill seeks to replace the 'Indian Telegraph Act, 1885'.

Provision of bill

- The proposed bill aims to address modern challenges and regulatory requirements in the rapidly evolving telecommunications industry.
- The draft Telecommunications Bill of 2023 proposed bringing over-the-top (OTT) services, such as internet-based calling and messaging apps, under the definition of telecommunications to strengthen user safety.

On the Table
Govt to frame rules to provide measures for user protection

1. Prior consent to be taken for receiving certain specified messages
2. DND register to be prepared
3. Online mechanism to enable users to report malware complaints

FIRST OFFENSE Civil penalty up to ₹50k

EACH SUBSEQUENT OFFENSE Civil penalty up to ₹2 lakh or suspension of service or both

- Additionally, the bill aimed to limit the authority of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), a move that raised concerns among industry players.

Ignoring the digital divide

- During public consultation, the Telecom Bill likened spectrum to a human soul, drawing inspiration from the Bhagavad Gita.
- The bill also reflects Indian influence by renaming the Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF) as "Digital Bharat Nidhi."
- The Universal Service Obligation Fund has been established under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 to provide for telecom services in underserved areas.
- The Bill retains this provision, renames the fund as Digital Bharat Nidhi, and also allows its use for research and development in telecom.

- The mere change in name does little to address the challenges of a persisting digital divide that have recently become worse.

Modern authoritarianism

- The proposed Bill empowers the government to waive entry fees, license fees, penalties, etc., in the interest of consumers, ensuring market competition, telecom network availability, and national security.
- The bill provides extensive powers to the central government on matters such as predatory pricing, sending of commercial communications through 'specified messages', encryption and data processing etc.
- To ensure the web of a surveillance state is complete, the law requires any telecommunications service provider, that may include WhatsApp or Signal, to identify the user by "any verifiable biometric based identification as may be prescribed".

22.12.2023

- **WHO prequalifies R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine**
- **India may compensate exporters against UK, EU carbon tax**
- **Rafale carrier fighters and submarines bid**
- **CISF to secure Parliament complex**
- **A valley of growth**

WHO prequalifies R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine

Context

- The World Health Organization (WHO) added the R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine, developed by Oxford University and manufactured by Serum Institute of India, to its list of prequalified vaccines.

R21/Matrix malaria vaccine

- The R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and the Serum Institute of India, leveraging Novavax's adjuvant is critical to reducing over half a million malaria-related deaths annually.
- R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine marks the culmination of 30 years of malaria vaccine research at the University of Oxford's Jenner Institute.
- The R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine is an easily deployable vaccine that can be manufactured at mass scale and modest cost.

Production targets

- The Serum Institute has already established production capacity for 100 million doses a year, which will be doubled over the next two years.
- This scale of production is critical because vaccinating those at high risk of malaria will be important in stemming the spread of disease, as well as protecting the vaccinated.

Significance of prequalification

- The prequalification means larger access to vaccines as a key tool to prevent malaria in children, with it being a prerequisite for vaccine procurement by UNICEF and funding support for deployment by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.
- The R21 vaccine is the second malaria vaccine prequalified by the WHO.

Malaria's Impact Worldwide

- Malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, places a particularly high burden on children in the African region, where nearly half a million children die from the disease each year.
- In 2022, there were an estimated 249 million malaria cases in the world, and 6,08,000 malaria deaths across 85 countries.

India may compensate exporters against UK, EU carbon tax

Context

- The Centre is exploring a range of relief measures to soften the blow of the carbon tax introduced by the European Union and the UK, which includes offering compensation to exporters affected by the tax to help them remain competitive in the global markets.

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

- The European Union (EU) has announced that its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and the same is effective from October 2023.
- The mechanism will levy a carbon tax on imports of products made from the processes which are not Environmentally sustainable or non-Green.
- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) puts a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods entering the EU.

CBAM
Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

July 2021
European Commission adopted its proposal for a CBAM. The key objective of this measure is to reduce risk of carbon leakage by equalising the price of carbon between domestic products and imports in selected sectors.

Dec 2022
The EU Parliament reached a provisional agreement with the EU Council on the draft text of the CBAM.

May 2023
The CBAM was finally adopted by the EU Parliament and the Council and entered into force on 17 May 2023.

August 2023
The European Commission published an implementing regulation to the CBAM, laying down reporting obligations for the purposes of CBAM during the transitional period.

October 2023
CBAM transitional period is to start from 1 October 2023.

India's concern

- The carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) or carbon tax is expected to have an impact on India's iron, steel, and aluminum exports worth $8-$9 billion headed into Europe and the UK.
- The implementation of the EU's CBAM will impact India's exports of steel, aluminium, cement, and fertilizers.

- Indian companies selling these products to the EU are expected to face higher prices, reducing their competitiveness and potentially lowering demand in the EU market.
- India is also exploring a range of relief measures to soften the blow of the carbon tax introduced by the European Union and the UK, which includes offering compensation to exporters affected by the tax to help them remain competitive in the global markets.

Rafale carrier fighters and submarines bid

Context

- India has received price bids from France for the purchase of 26 Rafale-M carrier-based fighters as well as three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines.

Letter of Acceptance

- France responded to India's request by submitting a Letter of Acceptance, providing pricing and other details for 26 Rafale-M jets intended for operation from the Navy's two aircraft carriers, as confirmed by sources.
- Meanwhile, Mazagon Dockyard Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) has presented its commercial offer for three additional Scorpenes to the Indian Navy.
- In July, 2023, Defence Acquisition Council accorded its Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of the 26 Rafale-M fighters and three additional Scorpene-class diesel-electric submarines from France.
- The deal includes 22 single-seater Rafale-M fighters and four twin-seater Rafale trainers (which are not carrier compatible).

RAFALE SPECIFICATIONS

Max. take-off weight **24.5 TONNES**

Wing span **10.90 M**

Height **5.30 M**

External load **9.5 TONNES**

Fuel (internal) **4.7 TONNES**

Fuel (external) **UP TO 6.7 TONNES**

Length **15.30 M**

Ferry Range **3,700 KM**

Overall empty weight **10 TONNES**

Landing ground run **450 M (1,500 FT)**

Top Speed **1.8 MACH AT HIGH ALTITUDE**

Service ceiling **50,000 FT**

The Indian EXPRESS

Inter-governmental agreement

- The Rafale-M is undergoing processing through an Inter-governmental agreement, while the submarine deal follows a previous contract with Naval Group.
- Mazagon Dockyard Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai, produced six submarines under the earlier agreement.
- The Defence Ministry has formed a committee to establish the benchmark price for the new submarine deal.

CISF to secure Parliament complex

Context

- The Union government has decided to hand over "comprehensive" security of the Parliament building complex to the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

Ensuring better security

- The decision comes days after recent security breach in the Parliament.
- The overall security inside the Parliament is administered by the Lok Sabha Secretariat.
- The Parliament Security Service, under the Lok Sabha Speaker, is the overall in-charge of security.

- The Union Home Ministry has approved the deployment of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) in the Parliament complex.
- The paramilitary force is deployed at other Central government buildings, airports, and Delhi Metro stations.
- Earlier, frisking of visitors to Parliament complex was done by Delhi Police personnel.

Deployment of CISF

- CISF is currently providing security cover to nuclear installations, space establishments, airports, seaports, power plants, sensitive Government buildings and ever heritage monuments.
- Among the important responsibilities recently entrusted to the CISF are the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, VIP Security, Disaster Management and establishment of a Formed Police Unit (FPU) of the UN at Haiti.
- Over the years, the CISF has provided Consultancy Services to more than 80 different organizations, including those in the private sector.
- After the Mumbai terrorist attack on November 2008, the mandate of the force has been broadened to provide direct security cover to private sector also.

A valley of growth

- Recently, a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the power of the President to abrogate special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution.
- The Court has confirmed that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral and inseparable part of India.
- The entire Indian Constitution, along with its safeguards, privileges, and duties applicable to any constituent of the Indian Union, is deemed valid for Jammu and Kashmir.

SUPREME DECISION
- SC directs the Centre for the restoration of statehood of J&K
- Justice S K Kaul recommends setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- The court refuses to decide on the validity of the 2019 law to bifurcate state into two UTs: J&K and Ladakh
- It also refuses to rule on the validity of the President's rule imposed on J&K in Dec 2018

"WE HAVE HELD THAT THE STATE OF JAMMU & KASHMIR DID NOT RETAIN AN ELEMENT OF SOVEREIGNTY (WHEN IT JOINED THE UNION OF INDIA)"
D Y Chandrachud, Chief Justice of India

Clarity on various aspect

- The judgment has not just ended a constitutional debate.
- It has ended a prolonged state of economic uncertainty, too.
- The ambiguity regarding Jammu and Kashmir's status wasn't just a political matter; it had long fostered a sense of "otherness," artificially isolating the region from the rest of the country.
- An important economic consequence of this insularity was the creation of roadblocks to external private capital and skills.

Status of economic development

- In 2019, J&K's per capita income was about Rs 1.25 lakh crore, less than half of neighbouring Himachal Pradesh.
- Government spending as a ratio of the GSDP was over 50 per cent.
- Despite this over-reliance on public funds, outcomes in terms of infrastructure availability were poor compared to many similarly-placed hill states.
- An over-reliance on public investment coupled with poor capacity for absorbing investment led to stunted economic development.

Infrastructure development

- A concerted push has seen massive improvements in infrastructure, such as power capacity and road networks.

- The Zojila tunnel to Ladakh is on its way to completion and the rail link to Kashmir — a project hanging fire since 2002 — is set to be completed and opened shortly.
- Government projects are getting completed faster while social security schemes are reaching those at the end of the queue.

Key to sustained growth

- The key to sustained growth is attracting and accelerating private investment capital to create high-wage productive employment.
- J&K has natural strengths in hydropower, horticulture, tourism, mineral resources, biosciences, handicrafts and services.
- It has all the ingredients to welcome and establish a world-class university ecosystem. Each of these sectors can be fertile areas for private investment and growth.

Way forward

- A vibrant land market, a transparent and effective regulatory regime, a high-quality governance ecosystem and a stable law and order will be magnets for investment.
- A change in mindset from protectionism to openness from an insular, protected ecosystem to one that welcomes investment, technology, people and skills can only accelerate this process.

21.12.2023

- **Lok Sabha Passes Criminal Law Bills**
- **Bill to raise cap on age of GSTAT president, members**
- **World Bank sets up task force on MDB reform plan**
- **Centre issues COVID alert amid JN.1 cases**
- **India's defence budgeting and the point of deterrence**

Lok Sabha Passes Criminal Law Bills

Context

- The Lok Sabha passed the three revised criminal bills to replace the colonial-era criminal laws by voice vote.

Background

- The three bills to reform criminal laws were first introduced in Lok Sabha on August 11 during the monsoon session of Parliament as Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023.

Revised criminal bills

- The Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSS) will replace the Indian Penal

THE BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA (BNS) BILL, 2023
Proposed to replace Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860

The IPC, which was framed by the British, is the official criminal code of India that lists various crimes and its punishments

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- Sedition deleted, but another provision **penalising secessionism**, separatism, rebellion and acts against sovereignty, unity and integrity of India brought in
- Provision of **death penalty** for gang rape of minors and for mob lynching
- **Community service introduced** as one of the punishments for the first time

THE BHARATIYA NAGARIK SURAKSHA SANHITA, 2023
Proposed to replace Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973

The CrPC lays down the procedure for investigation, arrest, court hearing, bail and punishment in criminal cases

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- **Time-bound investigation**, trial and judgment within 30 days of the completion of arguments
- **Video-recording** of the statement of sexual assault victims to be made mandatory
- New provision for **attachment of property and proceeds** of crime

THE BHARATIYA SAKSHYA BILL, 2023
Proposed to replace the Indian Evidence Act, 1872

The IEA applies to all judicial proceedings in the country and defines the particulars of evidence produced and admissible in courts

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- **Documents to also include** electronic or digital records, e-mails, server logs, computers, smart phones, laptops, SMS, websites, locational evidence, mails, messages on devices
- **Digitisation of all records** including case diary, FIR, charge sheet and judgement
- Electronic or digital record shall have the same legal effect, validity and enforceability as paper records

Code, 1860; the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill (BSS) will replace the Indian Evidence Act, 1872; and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSSS) will replace the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

- This criminal law reform brings terrorism offences into a general crime law for the first time, drops the crime of sedition, and makes mob lynching punishable by death.

Bill to raise cap on age of GSTAT president, members

Context
- Recently, Parliament passed a bill to raise the age cap of president and members of the GST Appellate Tribunals to 70 years and 67 years, respectively.

Key Features
- The Bill amends the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act, 2017 which provides for the levy and collection of CGST on the intra-state supply of goods and services.
- The Bill also seeks to expand the pool of candidates for appointment as judicial members to the tribunals.
- It allows advocates with at least 10 years of experience to be appointed as the judicial member.
- They must have substantial experience in matters relating to indirect taxation.
- The minimum age to be appointed as a member or president of the tribunal will be 50 years.

About GST Appellate Tribunal
- The GST Appellate Tribunal is a quasi-judicial body proposed to be established to resolve disputes related to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India.
- The tribunal is an independent body, will adjudicate appeals against decisions made by GST authorities or the Appellate Authority.
- It comprises a national bench and regional benches, with a chairperson appointed by the central government.
- The proposed tribunal is expected to help expedite the resolution of disputes related to GST and reduce the burden on the judiciary.

World Bank sets up task force on MDB reform plan

Context
- The World Bank has established a task force to examine recommendations for enhancing multilateral development banks (MDBs) proposed by an independent experts' group formed during India's G20 presidency,

What was the recommendation
- Independent Expert Group (IEG), appointed under India G20 Presidency, has recommended a triple agenda to harness the potential of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs).
- The report suggested:
  - Adopting a triple mandate of eliminating extreme poverty
  - Boosting shared prosperity, and contributing to global public goods
  - Tripling sustainable lending levels by 2030

- o Creating a third funding mechanism
- The suggestions would permit flexible and innovative arrangements for purposefully engaging with investors willing to support elements of the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) agenda.

Discussion on engagement
- Finance Minister of India met World Bank Group President to discussed engagement of multilateral banks in various sectors in India.
- World Bank Group President said that the bank has identified eight unique global challenges to focus on in the next few years as they affect many countries and require attention.
- In discussions regarding the Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR) exercise of the World Bank, Finance Minister stressed the importance of aligning the report with India's priorities and circumstances.

Centre issues COVID alert amid JN.1 cases
Context
- With the surge in covid cases and the emergence of a new strain JN.1, union health minister chaired a meeting with the state health officials.

Rise in Covid cases
- The daily COVID-19 positivity rate in some States such as Kerala, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Karnataka has risen.
- The Union Health Ministry on Wednesday issued an alert and said that no clustering of cases of the new JN.1 variant of SARS-CoV-2 had been reported.
- All JN.1 cases were found to be mild without any complications.
- NITI Aayog Member (Health) said India had detected 21 cases of the JN.1 sub-variant till now, and about 92% of those infected were opting for home-based treatment.

Ramp up testing
- The States have been requested to ramp up testing and refer large numbers of samples of COVID-19 positive cases and pneumonia-like illnesses to the INSACOG genome sequencing laboratories daily for sequencing and to track new variants, if any.
- According to the Health Ministry data updated India has recorded 614 new coronavirus infections, the highest since May, 2023.

About JN.1 variant
- The JN.1 variant is causing a surge in infections worldwide and raising alarm bells among health authorities.
- The variant was first identified in Luxembourg, JN.1 variant has since spread to over 20 countries.
- It is a descendant of the Pirola variant (BA.2.86).
- The case was first detected in the US in September 2023.
- Seven cases of the specific subvariant were found in China on December 15, 2023.

India's defence budgeting and the point of deterrence
- The Indian Air Force's Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA)

program, dubbed the 'mother of all procurements,' cost around $10 billion in 2007.

- However, a decade later, the acquisition of only 36 Rafale jets fell short of the initial requirement for 126 aircraft, diminishing its overall value.
- Consequently, many IAF chiefs have spoken of the depleting squadron strength in the IAF, which is now an abysmal 32. It would take another 10 years before it reaches 35 squadrons, as stated by the current IAF chief.
- The Indian Army and the Indian Navy fare no better either with the media reporting major deficiencies with them too.

Indigenous drive and R&D

- Ensuring a potent armed forces requires a continual focus on technological modernization.
- Balancing imports with the gradual development of a local defense industry is crucial, as the latter takes decades to mature.
- This strategic equilibrium ensures both immediate capabilities and long-term self-sufficiency.
- Despite the Atmanirbhar Bharat public relations push, a realistic assessment is needed for the armament supply chain in the near to mid-term.

India's defence Budget

- India's defense budget, adjusted for inflation, has remained largely unchanged.
- The percentage of central government expenditure allocated to defense (both revenue and capital) has decreased from 16.4% in 2012-13 to 13.3% in 2022-23.
- For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the Ministry of Defence requested ₹1,76,346 crore for capital acquisitions, but only ₹1,62,600 crore was allocated, resulting in a shortfall of ₹13,746 crore.

iDEX scheme

- iDEX is an initiative taken by the government to contribute towards modernization of the Defence Industry.
- It was launched by the Government in April 2018.
- iDEX aims to promote innovation and technology development in Defence and Aerospace by engaging Industries (which includes MSMEs, start-ups, individual innovators, R&D institutes & academia).
- The government's emphasis on indigenisation through the Innovations For Defence Excellence (iDEX) scheme.

Conclusion

- India's defense budget, adjusted for inflation, has remained largely unchanged.
- Subjecting India's defense budget and national security objectives to electoral considerations would be deemed unprofessional.
- Increased spending on research and development (R&D) will undoubtedly contribute to the creation of cutting-edge products, garnering support from the Indian armed forces and potentially expanding the industry's presence in international export markets.

20.12.2023

- **India-Israel discusses maritime threat in Red Sea**
- **RBI tightens norms for AIF investments**
- **30th WTO Trade Monitoring Report on G20 trade measures**
- **Centre raises borrowing limit for states to meet NPS commitment**
- **Tax 'HFSS' foods, view it as a public health imperative**

India-Israel discusses maritime threat in Red Sea

Context

- The Prime Minister of India and Israel discussed the Houthi threat to maritime security in Red Sea.

Ground Situation

- The situation in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait has been worrying shipping companies after several attacks by Houthi rebels on container ships.
- These attacks have prompted several major international companies to hold ships from venturing in the strait that separates Yemen from eastern Africa.

Rerouting and disruptions in shipping

- Approximately 15 per cent of global shipping traffic passes through the Suez Canal, making it a critical route between Europe and Asia.
- In response to the heightened risks, major freight firms, including MSC, are rerouting vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, causing added costs and delays.
- The London marine insurance market has expanded the Red Sea area deemed high risk, impacting premiums ships must pay.

US mobilises coalition in response

- U.S. Defense Secretary announced the creation of a multinational operation named as Operation Prosperity Guardian to safeguard commerce in the Red Sea following a series of missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis.
- The group participating countries include the U.K., Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.
- The group will conduct joint patrols in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Red Sea task force

- The U.S. Navy already had a Red Sea task force that had bolstered its presence in the critical waterway, and it is unclear how many countries will send additional ships or patrol aircraft following the creation of Operation Prosperity Guardian.

RBI tightens norms for AIF investments

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) ordered regulated entities including banks and non-banking financial companies to stop making investments in alternate investment funds (AIFs) which have downstream investments in existing and recent borrowers.

Rationale behind the decisions

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) tightened norms for lenders to curb the potential evergreening of loans through investments in alternative investment fund (AIF) schemes.
- 'Evergreening' refers to a practice where financial institutions extend new credit to cover old debts, essentially masking the true status of those loans.
- This move aims to tackle concerns regarding the substitution of direct loan exposures with indirect exposures through investments in AIFs.

TYPES OF ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS IN INDIA

Category 1
- Infrastructure Fund
- Venture Capital Fund
- Angel Fund
- Social Venture Fund

Category 2
- Private Equity Fund
- Real Estate Fund
- Debt Fund
- Fund of Funds

Category 3
- Hedge Fund
- PIPE Fund

About AIF

- Alternative investment fund (AIF) is a specialized investment category distinct from traditional investment instruments.
- It encompasses any fund established in India, serving as a privately pooled investment vehicle that attracts funds from sophisticated investors, both domestic and foreign.
- The primary purpose of AIF is to pool funds from investors and allocate them across various specified investment categories as outlined by SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) for the benefit of the investors.
- AIFs provide a range of investment options and strategies as defined by SEBI regulations.

30th WTO Trade Monitoring Report on G20 trade measures

Context

- According to a report from the World Trade Organisation (WTO), trade measures introduced by G20 member countries have become more restrictive in recent months.

Findings of the report

- According to the 30th WTO Trade Monitoring Report on G20 trade measures, G20 economies implemented more restrictive trade measures between mid-May and mid-October 2023.
- The report noted that the value of traded merchandise covered by facilitating measures continued to exceed that covered by restrictions.
- According to the trade monitoring report, export restrictions have gained prominence since 2020, initially in response to COVID-19 and more recently due to the conflict in Ukraine and the food security crisis.
- The WTO Director-General called on the G20 to show leadership and contribute to economic stability and growth by unwinding recent and longstanding restrictions on trade.

Concerns

- India's goods exports have been under pressure for the better part of the year due to weak demand from the western countries.
- Demand slowdown in China, battling a major property sector crisis, has also contributed to the slowdown.
- For the first time since 2015, the monthly average of 9.8 new trade restrictions introduced by G20 economies during the review period outpaced that of trade-facilitating measures (8.8).

About G20

- G20 members include India, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, the UK, and the US, among others.
- The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about:

- o Two-thirds of the world's population
- o 85% of global gross domestic product
- o 80% of global investment
- o 75% of global trade.

Centre raises borrowing limit for states to meet NPS commitment

Context

- The Centre has allowed complying states to borrow an additional amount to help them meet their National Pension Scheme (NPS) commitments in the current fiscal.

Permission for extra borrowing

- The Department of Expenditure under the Ministry of Finance has allowed extra borrowing of Rs 60,876.80 crore to 22 states for contribution to National Pension System (NPS) for 2023-24.
- The normal net borrowing ceiling for states is fixed at 3 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in absolute terms for FY24 as recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission.
- Additional borrowing of 0.5 per cent of GSDP linked to performance in power sector is also permitted to states.
- States are eligible to borrow Rs 1.43 lakh crore on the recommendation of the power ministry in FY24.

States reverting to OPS

- The state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh have informed the central government or the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) about their decision to revert to OPS for their state government employees.
- These state governments have requested for withdrawal/refund of contribution along with return thereon.
- However, the Government of Punjab has also informed the Government of India that it continues to pay staff and Government contributions to the NPS.

Tax 'HFSS' foods, view it as a public health imperative

- The consumption of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) foods is one of the major risk factors to a host of health issues that include obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.
- According to a World Bank report of 2019, worldwide, 70% of all overweight and obese people live in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, with a 55% rise in rural areas across the globe.

India's shift in dietary habits

- The ultra-processed food sector in India witnessed a compounded annual growth rate of 13.4% between 2011 and 2021.
- As the world's largest producer and consumer of sugar in 2022,
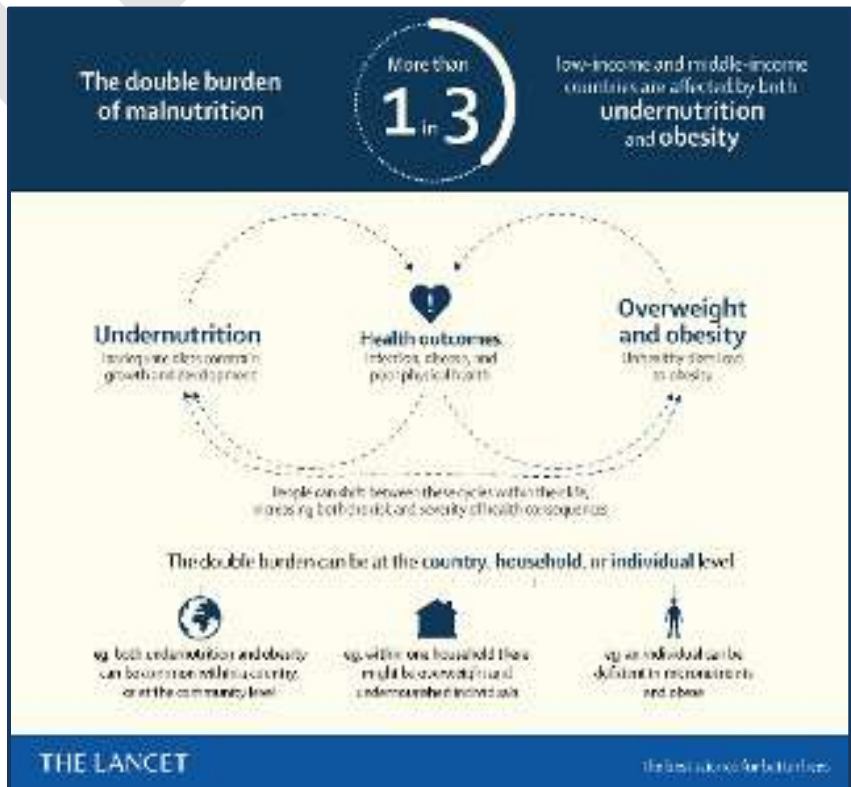
the country has seen an alarming surge in consumption of HFSS foods.

- About 50%-60% of edible sugar, salt and fat produced in India is consumed by the processed food industry.
- Over the last decade, snack and soft drink sales have tripled, surpassing $30 billion last year, signaling a concerning shift in dietary habits.
- This trend not only poses significant health risks but also hampers productivity and economic growth.
- Urgent interventions are needed to curb the escalating consumption of these products.

Non-Communicable Diseases burden
- The Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) burden in India has skyrocketed from 38% in 1990 to 65% in 2019.
- The global burden of diseases study shows that annually, 1.2 million deaths in India can be attributed to dietary risks alone.
- The economic impact of overweight and obesity in India was estimated at $23 billion in 2017.
- If unattended, this is likely to rise to $480 billion by 2060.

Combat obesity through taxation
- Taxation is considered to be an effective means to reduce the consumption of these products as most consumers are price responsive towards them.
- While taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) is far more wide and used in more than 60 countries.
- Most recently, Colombia's "junk food law" introduced a gradually increasing levy on ultra-processed foods, providing a model for other nations.
- In India, Kerala had also introduced a 'fat tax' way back in 2016, which later got subsumed into India's Goods and Services Tax in 2017.

Case for high HFSS tax
- Some 16 countries including Denmark, France, Hungary, Mexico, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States, among others, now have a dedicated tax on HFSS foods.
- The escalation of diabetes and obesity due to increased HFSS consumption leads to external costs imposed on society.
- Taxes can offer a targeted and effective means to curb detrimental consumption habits, thereby reducing societal burdens.
- Implementing such taxes has shown promise in various countries, demonstrating a reduction in the purchase of unhealthy items.

SHOULD THERE BE A WARNING SIGN ON PACKAGED FOODS?

BusinessToday.In

7 in 10 Indians in favour of RED warning sign on high fat, sugar and salt foods

39% claim there should also be green or orange sign

31% Indians say there should be 'red warning sign' on packaged products

20% say every product should have content-based star rating

8% insist packaged food products must continue without any warnings

People under age of 25 are top consumers of packaged and processed foods

5.8 mn Indians die from obesity, diabetes and heart disease every year

World Obesity Federation predicts 27 mn children may suffer from obesity by 2030

GST and nutritional content
- Current GST rates on ultra-processed foods, such as salty snacks and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), do not adequately align with nutritional content.
- For example, tax on SSBs with a 28% GST rate and 12% compensation cess, overlooks sugar content.
- All aerated beverages are taxed uniformly as well.

- Similarly, juices face a flat 12% rate, irrespective of their fruit and sugar content.
- Salty snacks are taxed at 12% regardless of their salt content.

Conclusion
- High Fat Sugar Salt taxation in India should not be merely seen as an economic or fiscal policy concern but it deserves to be considered a public health imperative. Effectively designed taxes can reap multiple benefits:
    o It can act as a deterrent to consuming HFSS
    o Promote healthier food choices
    o Prompt manufacturers to reformulate foods
    o Improve public health outcomes
    o Reduce the burden on the health-care system
    o Foster the nation's well-being
- Pairing nutrition literacy with effective food labeling, implementing a tax on High-Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) foods can contribute to enhancing health outcomes.

19.12.2023

- **Centre issues advisory amid detection of Covid new JN.1 variant**
- **Centre launches forest certification scheme**
- **The draft Telecommunications Bill of 2023**
- **India launches first winter mission to Arctic**
- **Grass-root democracy as a bulwark against Maoists**

Centre issues advisory amid detection of Covid new JN.1 variant

Context
- The Central government has issued an advisory to the states after the detection of the first JN.1 variant in India.

Advisory to states
- The Union Health Ministry has asked all states to stay vigilant amid the upcoming festive season and a recent rise in COVID-19 cases in certain areas.
- This alert follows the identification of India's first case of the new JN.1 variant in Kerala.
- The States are advised to put in place requisite public health measures and other arrangements to "minimise risk of increase in transmission by adherence to maintenance of respiratory hygiene.
- The States have been urged to ensure compliance with:
    o Detailed operational guidelines for the revised surveillance strategy for coronavirus as shared by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
    o Ensure sufficient testing per

The mutating coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has spawned several variants that have scientists worried. Here's a lowdown on those detected in India's exploding second wave

B.1.1.7 UK variant
- Between 40 and 70% more infectious than other variants
- Raises death risk by about 60%
- Vaccines seem to work against it

P1 Brazil variant
- More contagious than the initial coronavirus strain, can re-infect
- May be more virulent but further research needed
- E484K, 'escape mutation', helps the virus dodge antibodies

B.1.351 South Africa variant
- Found in at least 20 countries, including the UK
- Mutation called N501 appears to make it more contagious
- Another mutation, called E484K, could help virus dodge a person's immune system and may affect how vaccines work

B.1.617 Double Mutant
- E484Q mutation is similar to another variant, the E484K, found in fast-spreading Brazil and South Africa regions
- Includes L452R mutation, which helps the virus escape our body's natural immune response
- This variant has been detected in at least 10 other countries, including the US, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand

guidelines, maintain RT-PCR and Antigen test ratio
- o Increase RT-PCR tests, send positive samples for genome sequencing to INSACOG labs
- o Active participation of health facilities in preparedness drill by Health Ministry
- o Promote community awareness for continued support in managing COVID-19

About JN.1 variant
- The JN.1 variant is causing a surge in infections worldwide and raising alarm bells among health authorities.
- The variant was first identified in Luxembourg, JN.1 variant has since spread to over 20 countries.
- It is a descendant of the Pirola variant (BA.2.86).
- The case was first detected in the US in September 2023.
- Seven cases of the specific subvariant were found in China on December 15, 2023.

Centre launches forest certification scheme

Context
- Amid rising international concerns on deforestation and illicit trade in timber, the government has launched its own "national" forest certification scheme to validate entities that adhere to sustainable practices in management of forests and its products.

Certification Scheme
- The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme (IFWCS) will offer an alternative to the private foreign certification agencies that have been operating in the Indian market for the last two decades.
- The launch of the certification follows the development of new standards for forest management that will be mandatory for all forest divisions in the country.
- This national certification scheme comprises three types of certifications:
  - o Forest management certification
  - o Tree Outside Forest Management Certification
  - o Chain of custody certification

Key features
- The program provides market incentives to entities, including state forest departments, individual farmers, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and wood-based industries, engaging in responsible forest management and agroforestry.
- The newly launched Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme incorporates a distinct Trees Outside Forests Standard.

Objective
- Promotes sustainable forest management and agroforestry
- Encourages responsible practices throughout the wood supply chain
- Enhances market value for entities adhering to certification standards

The draft Telecommunications Bill of 2023

Context
- The Telecommunications Bill, 2023 was introduced in the Lok Sabha after President of India recommended its introduction under Article 117(1) of the Constitution of
- India.

About Article 117 (1)
- Article 117 (1) indicates that a Bill that makes provision for any of the matters specified in clauses (a) to (f) of Article 110 (1) can be introduced or moved only on the President's recommendation and cannot be

introduced in the Rajya Sabha. Examples of this first category of Financial Bills are Money Bills and other Financial Bills originating solely in the Lok Sabha.

Provision of bill

- A new legislation is set to replace the 138-year-old Indian Telegraph Act that currently oversees the telecommunications sector.
- The proposed bill aims to address modern challenges and regulatory requirements in the rapidly evolving telecommunications industry.
- The draft Telecommunications Bill of 2023 proposed bringing over-the-top (OTT) services, such as internet-based calling and messaging apps, under the definition of telecommunications to strengthen user safety.
- Additionally, the bill aimed to limit the authority of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), a move that raised concerns among industry players.

Extensive powers to centre

- The proposed Bill empowers the government to waive entry fees, license fees, penalties, etc., in the interest of consumers, ensuring market competition, telecom network availability, and national security.
- The bill provides extensive powers to the central government on matters such as predatory pricing, sending of commercial communications through 'specified messages', encryption and data processing etc.

India launches first winter mission to Arctic

Context

- The Union government recently launched India's maiden winter mission to the Arctic, which will give a major boost to the country's research around global climate, sea levels and biodiversity.

Maiden winter expedition to Arctic

- India is set to embark on its maiden winter expedition to the Arctic, making it the first Asian nation to stay at the northernmost polar region throughout the year
- A team of four scientists will embark on this maiden winter journey, aiming to conduct atmospheric observations during the polar nights, study auroral changes, and monitor variations in sea ice.
- The Raman Research Institute (RRI) here is participating in the first winter Indian expedition to the Arctic region.
- The survey will help astronomers assess the suitability of this uniquely located region for carrying out precision astronomy measurements.

India's Arctic research station

- India's first research station at the International Arctic Research base, Himadri, is located at a distance of 1,200kms from the North Pole
- India has been running its own research station, Himadri, in Svalbard since 2008.
- The winter expedition is a bid to maintain a year-long presence at the station.
- A team of scientists will embark on the journey to India's

research station in Alesund town on the Brogger peninsula, where research institutes from 10 countries have laboratories.

Grass-root democracy as a bulwark against Maoists

- The recently concluded Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh heavily revolved around tribal votes, a critical factor for each political party due to the significant 34% tribal population in the state.
- The prevailing belief in Chhattisgarh politics is that the party gaining tribal support ultimately forms the government.
- Maoist insurgency in the country presently thrives in the tribal regions of Chhattisgarh, particularly in Bastar.
- Tribals form the main cadre base of the movement.

Democracy in Maoist areas

- Media reports indicate a strikingly low voter turnout of 3% to 4% in Maoist-affected areas like Bijapur and Konta.
- The Maoists' attempt to establish a parallel government, the 'jantana sarkar,' which lacks sustainability in the mid and long term.
- While the local tribal population recognizes this, the state has struggled to sufficiently inspire them for various reasons, hindering widespread participation in the democratic process.
- Growing awareness has spurred tribal aspirations for constitutional rights, leading to increased tribal assertions.
- There were several issues that shaped the issues on which political parties contested. However, no single issue addressed the challenge of resolving the Maoist conundrum.

On PESA act

- The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, or PESA enacted in 1996, is a legislation aimed at empowering local self-governance in tribal areas of India.
- In spite of the PESA Act being passed in 1996, not one of the State governments concerned has implemented the same in the correct spirit, by issuing policy directives.
- PESA empowers gram sabhas in tribal areas to govern socio-economic aspects.
- The Act aimed to connect grassroots communities directly with the government, aligning with the historical and traditional tribal way of life.
- This gap has been exploited by the Maoists to foster their agenda and by having their writ run in their strongholds through 'jantana sarkar'.

Nurturing tribals

- Maoists portray themselves as tribal champions, a myth that must be discredited through credible means by empowering grassroots democracy.
- Nurturing tribal leadership and acknowledging their voices is essential.
- Addressing the Maoist challenge goes beyond security and development; it requires enabling grassroots democracy that recognizes tribal aspirations and exposes Maoists' hidden intentions.

Conclusion

- Government needs innovative solutions for locating armed groups in the thick forests of the naxalism-affected regions.
- Social justice and inclusive growth are the planks on which the government must build its program.
- The dismal polling turnout in the Maoist-affected areas of Chhattisgarh is a pointer that democracy needs to be strengthened at the grassroots.

18.12.2023

- **European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act**
- **IEA annual coal market report 2023**
- **Bhutan unveils plans for economic linkages with Assam**
- **Kakrapar 4 nuclear reactor attains criticality**
- **An uphill struggle to grow the Forest Rights Act**

European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act

Context
- Recently, the European Union (EU) has set the stage for the world's first comprehensive legislation aimed at regulating the use of Artificial intelligence (AI).

Aim and Objective
- The European Union's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act is a significant legislative initiative aimed at regulating artificial intelligence technologies within the EU.
- The Act seeks to strike a balance between fostering innovation and ensuring ethical and responsible AI development.
- The objectives of the EU AI Act are to create a regulatory framework for
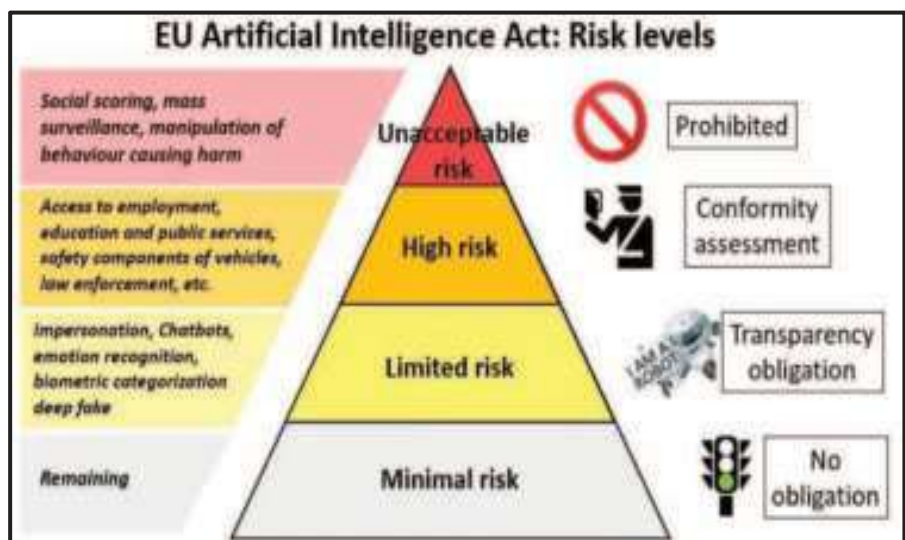
AI technologies, mitigate risks associated with AI systems, and establish clear guidelines for developers, users, and regulators.

- The act aims to ensure the responsible use of AI by protecting fundamental rights and promoting transparency in AI applications.

Strengths of the Act

- One of the notable strengths of the EU AI Act is its risk-based approach.
- The legislation categorises AI applications into different risk levels, ranging from unacceptable to low.
- This approach enables tailored regulations, with higher-risk applications subject to more stringent requirements.
- The act prohibition reflects the EU's commitment to preventing the misuse of AI technologies.
- The proposed EU legislation explicitly bans certain AI practices, including:
  o Government social credit scoring
  o Predictive policing
  o Manipulative applications like emotional recognition systems in work or education

Limitations

- The Critics argue that the EU AI Act faces challenges in defining and categorizing AI applications due to the evolving nature of the technology.
- This dynamism may hinder the establishment of clear boundaries between different risk levels, creating uncertainties in regulatory implementation.
- Additionally, compliance with the EU AI Act may impose a significant burden on smaller businesses and start-ups.
- Striking the right balance between regulation and fostering innovation is crucial, with critics arguing that the EU AI Act may lean too heavily towards stringent controls.

Potential implications of Act

- The EU AI Act is poised to globally shape AI development, much like the MiCa regulation did for crypto-assets.
- The EU's regulatory framework may set a precedent for other regions, shaping the trajectory of AI development on a global scale, just like the MiCa regulation did for crypto-assets.
- By prioritising ethical considerations and fundamental rights, the EU AI Act contributes to the establishment of global norms for AI development.
- It encourages collaboration and cooperation between regulatory authorities, fostering a unified approach to AI regulation.

The administrative side

- The EU's AI Act represents a significant step towards regulating AI technologies responsibly and ethically.
- The global impact of the EU AI Act and its potential to shape international norms make it a landmark initiative in the ongoing discourse on the responsible development and deployment of artificial intelligence.
- International collaboration in regulating AI technologies is essential to address global challenges and ensure consistent standards across borders.

IEA annual coal market report 2023

Context

- According to the International Energy Agency's annual coal market report-Coal 2023, the Global coal demand is expected to decline by 2026.

Finding of the report

- This is the first time that the report has predicted a drop in global coal consumption. Around 40% of global carbon dioxide emissions stem from coal, while oil and gas contribute to the remaining percentage.
- The report noted global demand for coal rose by 1.4% in 2023, mainly due to rising energy demand in emerging and developing economies, including India (8%) and China (5%).
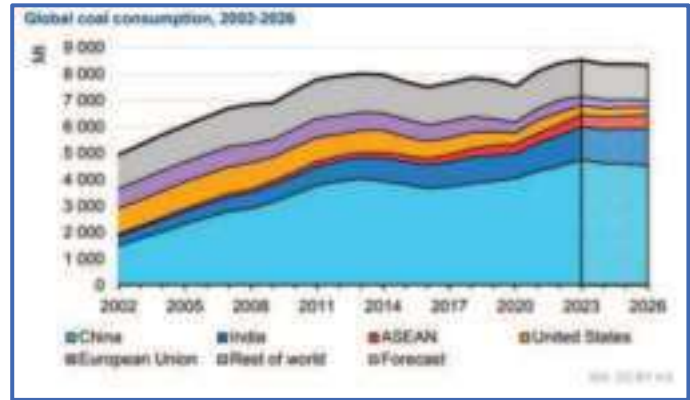
Coal and its usage

- Coal, the most important energy source for electricity generation, steel-making, and cement production, is also the largest source of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from human activity.
- Despite forecasts of a fall, global consumption is expected to remain well over 8 billion tonnes through 2026.
- China, India, and Indonesia are the three largest coal producers globally.
- These three countries now account for more than 70% of the world's coal production.
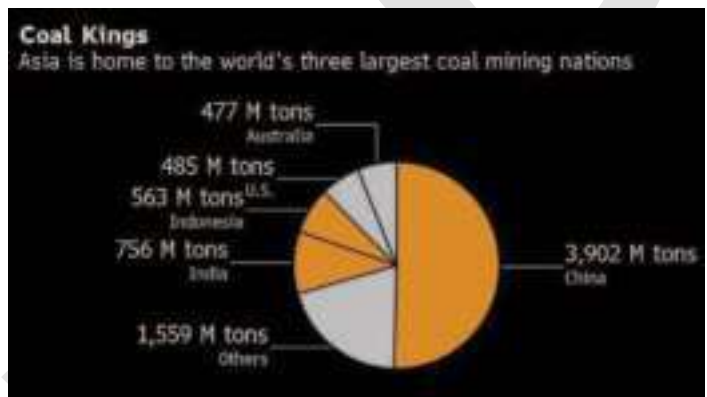
Declining consumption

- The report highlights that overall coal consumption is on course to decline in most advanced economies in 2023, including in the European Union and the United States (around 20% each).
- Both the US and the EU rely more on oil and natural gas.
- For instance, oil and natural gas accounted for 36% and 33% of the total energy production in the US in 2022.
- Global coal demand is projected to decrease by 2.3% by 2026 from 2023 levels, driven by the significant expansion of renewable energy capacity, even without stronger clean energy and climate policies.

Recommendation and suggestion

- International Energy Agency's annual coal market report-Coal 2023, urged countries to accelerate efforts to phase down unabated coal power.
- Negotiators from the Global South said developing countries, including India and China, strongly resisted the "targeting of coal" during the climate talks at COP-28.
- The IEA's expectations of a decline in coal demand is premised also on a change in global climate.

Bhutan unveils plans for economic linkages with Assam

Context

- Bhutan's King recently unveiled plans for a mega city project in an area of over 1,000 sq. km on its border with Assam.

About the project

- Bhutan plans to build a massive "international city" in an area of over 1,000 sq. km on its border with Assam.

- The project in Gelephu Special Administration Region (SAR) will link Bhutan economically with Assam to spur regional and sub-regional integration.
- The project calls to build the first India-Bhutan railway line to Gelephu, which will also connect with roadways and border-trading and crossing points into Assam and West Bengal.

Infrastructural development

- In a major achievement, Bhutan became the seventh country to graduate from the United Nations' list of Least Developed Countries (LDC) on December 13, 2023.
- The pivotal move is a nod from the global community to Bhutan's achievements in reducing poverty and realizing sustainable development over the past five decades.
- This brings the number of LDCs down to 45.
- Bhutan has largely achieved this by exporting hydropower as electricity to India, which contributes 20% of its GDP.
- This has in turn led to a better quality of life for people, including access to basic services, improved health and education, and more industry and business opportunities.

Kakrapar 4 nuclear reactor attains criticality

Context

- One of India's largest indigenously built nuclear power plants, the Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS) in Gujarat, achieved a key milestone as it reached its first criticality.

Kakrapar Atomic Power Project

- The fourth unit of the Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP) in Gujarat started controlled fission chain reaction.
- Unit-3 and Unit-4 of the KAPP are the first 700 megawatts Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR) built by India.
- Unit-3 has been operating at full capacity since August.
- The largest indigenous nuclear power reactors to be built by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL), a public sector undertaking of the Department of Atomic Energy.
- These reactors are pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), which use natural uranium as fuel and heavy water as coolant and moderator.
- These reactors will boost India's nuclear energy capacity, which is projected to reach 22,480 MW by 2031.
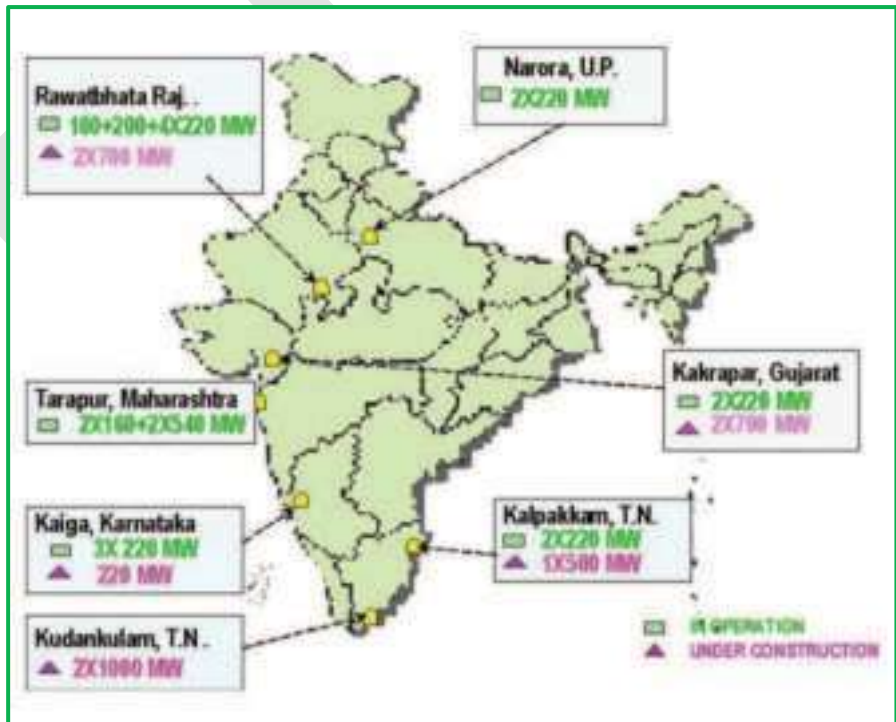
An uphill struggle to grow the Forest Rights Act

- On December 18, 2006, the Rajya Sabha approved the Forest Rights Act (FRA), also known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, enacted by the Lok Sabha.
- The act is a landmark in India's socio-environmental laws, addressing conflicts over 'forest encroachments' and aiming to bring resolution.
- Simultaneously, it seeks to create a much more democratic, bottom-up forest governance.
- The Forest Rights Act (FRA), enacted 17 years ago, faces challenges in implementation due to political opportunism, forester resistance, bureaucratic apathy, and misinformation.
- Despite its intent to address historic injustices and democratize forest governance, progress has been slow.

Historic injustices

- Before colonialism, local communities held customary rights over nearby forests, even if rulers asserted hunting rights.
- However, colonialism disrupted these traditions.
- The 1878 Indian Forest Act, based on the concept of 'eminent domain,' facilitated the colonial takeover of India's forests, altering the dynamics established by traditional practices.
- The Imperial Forest Department was established to harvest and transform the forest to maximise timber and revenue.

Colonial forest policy

- The injustices imposed by this colonial forest policy took multiple forms.
- First, forests were seen as primarily a timber resource, shifting cultivation was banned.
- Second, the so-called survey and settlement of agricultural lands was incomplete and biased in favour of the state.
- Third, forests were now state property.
- Fourth, even where access was permitted, the local community had no right to manage the forest.

Forest Rights Act

- The FRA is remarkable because it first of all acknowledges these historical (colonial) injustices and their continuation post-Independence.
- The Forest Rights Act addresses access and control by granting village communities rights to use, own, sell minor

Rights for the dwellers

What the Forest Rights Act, 2006, entails

- Tenurial security over the forestland under occupation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of community right over forest and forest products
- Protection and conservation of community forest resources
- Conversion of all forest villages and habitation located inside the forestland into revenue villages
- In situ rehabilitation of displaced persons evicted without compensation prior to December 13, 2005
- Recognition of ancestral domain (habitat) right to

Residents of Gunduribadi village in Odisha's Nayagarh district get ready for mapping their land boundaries for the Forest Rights Act implementation. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups

- Seasonal access to nomadic, pastoral and semi-nomadic communities over forestland

- Conversion of all leases granted by erstwhile governments, zamindars and king into permanent land records

forest produce, and manage forests within their customary boundaries, fostering decentralized forest governance tied to community rights

- Finally, the Act lays down a democratic procedure for identifying whether and where wildlife conservation may require curtailing or extinguishing community rights.
- This right was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in the Niyamgiri case, and although the Forest Conservation Rules 2022 and FCA Amendment 2023 seek to bypass this right, States can still put in place such consent mechanisms.

Conclusion
- Maharashtra, Odisha, and, more recently, Chhattisgarh, are the only States to recognise CFRs substantially.
- But only Maharashtra has enabled their activation by de-nationalising minor forest produce, at least in Scheduled Areas, resulting in at least a thousand villages managing their own forests.
- Without a shared understanding and support from political leaders, bureaucrats, and environmentalists for the spirit and intent of the FRA, historical injustices will persist, forest governance will lack democracy, and the potential for community-led conservation and sustainable livelihoods will go unrealized.

16 Dec 2023

- **Maldives scraps hydrographic survey agreement with India**
- **UK flags migration concerns with India**
- **IEEFA higlights coal logistical challenges for rail**
- **India's exports drop and trade deficit narrows in November**
- **A time-honoured connect that will help bridge the Gulf**

Maldives scraps hydrographic survey agreement with India
Context
- Recently, the Maldivian government announced it would terminate a hydrography agreement signed with India in 2019.

About hydrography agreement
- The hydrography agreement, initially signed in June, 2019, during the visit of Prime Minister to the Maldives.
- Under the agreement, the Indian Navy carried out three extensive hydrographic surveys in the Maldives to improve navigation safety, economic development, security and defence cooperation, environmental protection, coastal zone management, and scientific research.
- The third Joint Hydrographic survey by the India (/topic/india)n Navy and the Maldives (/topic/maldives) National Defense Force (MNDF) was carried out by India (/topic/india)n Naval Ship Investigator (INS Investigator) from January 19 to February 26, 2023.
- The hydrography agreement is set to expire in June, 2024.

Why does Maldives want to withdraw from the Agreement
- Earlier this year, new government demanded that India withdraw its military soldiers stationed in the country.

- The new administration ruled by the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) is reportedly seen as more pro-China.

UK flags migration concerns with India

Context

- The United Kingdom (UK) is not keen on providing easier mobility norms for India's services industry, a demand that India is seeking as part of the proposed Foreign Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two nations.

India's demand

- India wants easier visa norms for its companies in the services sector that function out of Britain, the UK has been reluctant given migration concerns.
- India is seeking a liberal visa regime for its services companies as those firms need to send skilled professionals to the UK.

Migration concerns

- The UK, on the other hand, is worried about easing visa restrictions, since it could lead to more migration.
- U.K. argue that post-Brexit, migration concerns have to be addressed.
- Rwanda has also become an issue.
- The UK Prime Minister earlier this week was able to push through a bill in the lower house of Parliament, which proposes to send some asylum-seekers back to Rwanda as the UK looks to clamp down on migration.

COUNTRIES WITH OVER 1 MILLION OVERSEAS INDIANS

Canada 16.8 LAKH
UK 17.6 LAKH
Kuwait 10.2 LAKH
Myanmar 20 LAKH
United States 44 LAKH
Saudi Arabia 26 LAKH
UAE 34 LAKH
South Africa 15.6 LAKH
Sri Lanka 16 LAKH
Malaysia 29.8 LAKH

Source: MEA, as on Dec 25, 2021

- The UK government has unveiled a five-point plan to decrease immigration, featuring an increase in the minimum salary for skilled overseas workers.

FTA between India and UK

- The FTA between India and the UK, originally slated for November 2022, is yet to be clinched as the two sides continue to negotiate on a few unresolved issues, including Rules of Origin, London's demand for tariff concessions on electric vehicles, and norms about services.
- There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which include goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

IEEFA highlights coal logistical challenges for rail

Context

- The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) reported that Indian Railways' goal to boost coal transportation by at least 400 million tonnes in the next eight years is hindered by congestion and logistical challenges.

Freight vs. passenger

- The IEEFA recalled the coal supply crisis in May 2022 when up to 1,900 passenger trains were cancelled to prioritise coal movement.

- This when the National Rail Plan forecast a 46% rise in the number of non-suburban passengers carried daily, from 13 million in 2021 to 19 million in 2031.
- This could pose a substantial double burden on the railway network of expanding freight and passenger capacities.
- Coal transport from mine to power plant will remain the weakest link in the coal chain in the immediate future.

Challenges to the ambitious coal-by-rail targets

India plans to **more than double coal freight** carried by Indian Railways in the next few years.

Integrated Coal Logistics Plan projections suggest coal evacuation projects and freight corridors may still leave the congested railway network **operating over capacity**.

Accelerating renewable energy could prevent **unnecessary rail network congestion** by limiting growth in coal freight - the only bulk freight commodity for which a ready substitute exists.

Prioritising coal freight imposes **opportunity costs** on a changing economy and diverts resources from vital track renewal projects, impacting **overall railway performance**.

Passenger trains experience **reduced speeds, delays** and **cancellations** as coal and other freight take precedence.

IEEFA

Focus on speed
- National Rail Plan's preferred scenario assumes freight speeds will increase from 25 km/hr to 50 km/hr by 2051, with a 30 km/hr goal by 2026.

India's exports drop and trade deficit narrows in November

Context
- India's merchandise exports contracted in November after expanding at their fastest pace in 11 months in October, indicating volatile global demand and uneven economic recovery.

Export and trade trend
- According to the data released by the commerce department, exports declined 2.8 per cent year-on-year to $33.9 billion in November.

MERCHANDISE TRADE: GLOBAL HEADWINDS
Value ($ bn)
Import 54.48
46.06
Trade Deficit
-20.58
-15.31 Export
30.75   33.9
Apr '21   Nov '23
Source: Department of Commerce

- While imports dipped 4.3 per cent to $54.5 billion, leading to the narrowing of the trade deficit at $20.6 billion.
- The deficit had widened to a record $31.5 billion in October, as festival demand led to a sharp increase in the import of gold and silver.
- The decline in exports in November and much of this year has been due to the fall petroleum and engineering products shipments.

A time-honoured connect that will help bridge the Gulf

- The Sultan of Oman is on a state visit to India starting December 16, marking his first visit to the country since assuming office in January 2020.
- The Prime Minister of India had visited Oman in February 2018 in his first visit to Oman as Prime Minister.

India- Oman relations
- India and Oman share longstanding and friendly diplomatic relations.
- Oman is the closest neighbor to India in the Arabian Gulf region.

- Oman is at the gateway of Strait of Hormuz through which India imports one-fifth of its oil imports.
- Oman's location is of utmost strategic importance to India.

Defense and strategic importance of Oman

- Defence and security engagement form a key pillar of this strategic partnership and are governed by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2005.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all the three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises.
- **Access to Gulf region:** Oman is India's closest defense partner in the Gulf region and an important nation for India's defense and strategic interests.
- Along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman completes the trio of key strategic partners of India in the Gulf region.
- **Nuclear deal:** Oman's key role in the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015 is well documented and acknowledged too.
- During the GCC-Qatar diplomatic stand-off, Oman refused to join Saudi Arabia and other countries in breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017.

India-Oman strategic partnership

- Oman is a crucial pillar of India's West Asia policy, with their multi-faceted engagement increasingly taking on a more strategic shape in recent decades.
- The India-Oman strategic partnership was signed in November 2008 and is based on twin pillars of mutual trust and shared interests.
- Oman was one of the few countries to have been invited by India to its G-20 presidency as a guest nation earlier this year.

Bilateral trade

- Trade and commerce forms yet another important pillar of engagement.
- Bilateral trade during FY2022-23 reached $12.388 billion.
- There are over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman, with an estimated investment of over $7.5 billion.
- India was the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China. In October 2022,
- India and Oman launched the Rupay debit card in Oman, a key footprint of India's initiative of promoting digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world.

Other important engagement

- India and Oman are looking forward to increased engagement in strategic areas such as space cooperation.
- The possibility of an agreement on joint exploration of rare earth metals, vital to modern electronic equipment, could add strength to the partnership.
- The proposed India-Middle-East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project to link India to Europe across West Asia

could also see Oman playing an important role.

Way forward

- India is seeking deeper engagement and collaboration in West Asia, of which Oman is an important pillar.
- Oman's Duqm Port is situated in the middle of international shipping lanes connecting East with West Asia.
- India ought to forge a strong collaboration with Oman to bolster its strategic influence in the region and reinforce its Indo-Pacific objectives within the Western and Southern sectors of the Indian Ocean
- Oman has a pivotal role to play in India seeking deeper engagement and collaboration in West Asia.

15.12.2023

- **WHO raised concern against use of e-cigarettes**
- **Central agencies to follow CBI manual on seizure of electronic devices**
- **New industrial policy now on backburner**
- **India's fastest Solar-Electric Boat launched**
- **COP28 — many a slippery slope ahead**

WHO raised concern against use of e-cigarettes

Context

- World Health Organization (WHO) calls for urgent action to control e-cigarettes to protect children, as well as non-smokers and minimise health harms to the population.

About E-cigarettes

- E-cigarettes, short for electronic cigarettes, are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid (usually containing nicotine, flavorings, and other chemicals) to create an aerosol, often referred to as vapor. Users inhale this vapor into their lungs.
- E-cigarettes are designed to simulate the act of smoking traditional cigarettes but without the combustion of tobacco.

Health concerns

- The WHO noted that e-cigarettes with nicotine are highly addictive and are harmful to health.
- Studies consistently show that young people who use e-cigarettes are almost three times more likely to use cigarettes later in life.
- It can also affect brain development and lead to learning disorders for young people.
- Fetal exposure to e-cigarettes can adversely affect the development of the foetus in pregnant women.
- Exposure to emissions from e-cigarettes also poses risks to bystanders.

Regulations

- The WHO said that e-cigarettes have been allowed on the open market and aggressively marketed to young people.
- Thirty-four countries have banned the sale of e-cigarettes, 88 countries have no minimum age at which e-cigarettes can be bought and 74 countries have no regulations in place for these harmful products.

- In India, the possession of e-cigarettes and similar devices is a violation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarette Act, 2019, according to the Union Health Ministry.

Alarming figures

- According to data, children in the age group of 13-15 years are using e-cigarettes at rates higher than that among adults in all WHO regions.
- In Canada, e-cigarette use among 16–19-year-olds doubled from 2017 to 2022, and in the U.K., young users tripled in the last three years, signaling a notable rise in youth e-cigarette use.

Recommendations

- World Health Organization calls for an urgent need to control e-cigarettes to protect children, as well as non-smokers and minimise health harms to the population.
- World Health Organization said E-cigarettes as consumer products are not shown to be effective for quitting tobacco use at the population level.
- Instead, alarming evidence has emerged on adverse population health effects.
- WHO urges immediate action to prevent e-cigarette use and combat nicotine addiction, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to tobacco control tailored to each country's context.
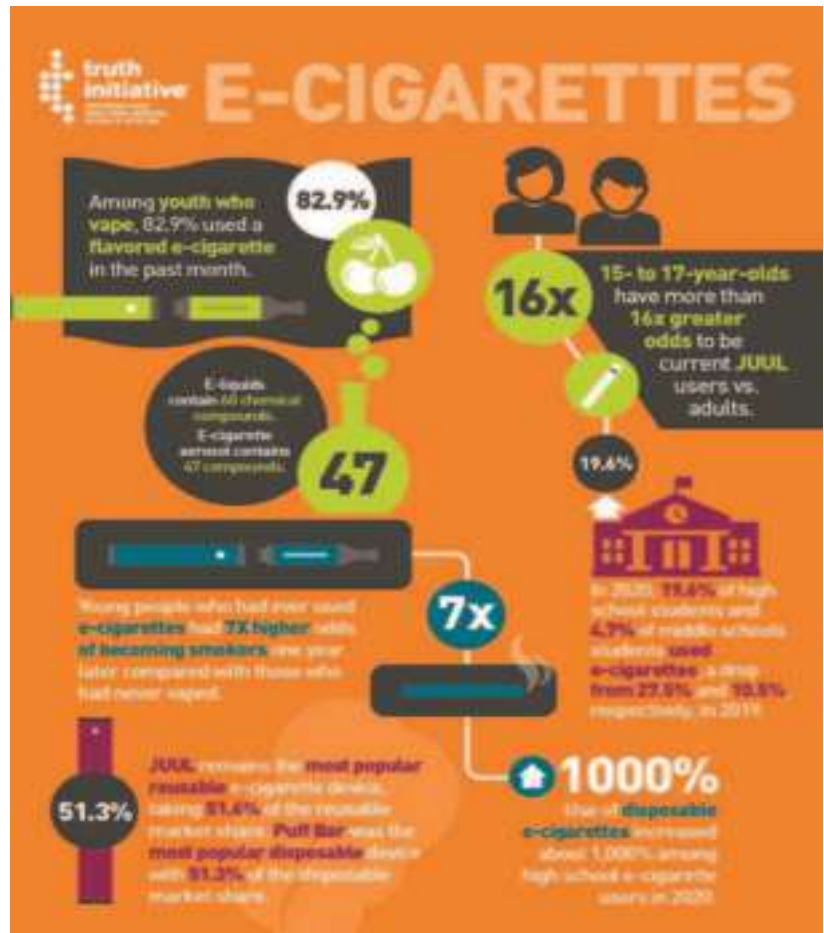
Central agencies to follow CBI manual on seizure of electronic devices

Context

- The Supreme Court ordered in its recent order said that Until the central government forms new guidelines, central agencies will follow the CBI manual for collecting digital evidence and seizure of electronic devices.

Supreme Court's Directives

- The Supreme Court ordered the Centre to adhere to directives in the CBI Manual to protect and safeguard personal data in seized electronic devices, particularly during searches involving academia and media members.
- The court said the procedure under the manual should be followed till the Centre brings out new guidelines within six weeks.
- The bench was considering a batch of pleas, including a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Foundation for Media Professionals seeking guidelines on police seizures of electronic devices of journalists.

New industrial policy now on backburner

Context

- The long-anticipated industrial policy, under development for over two years and circulated for consultation in December last year, has been sidelined.

Government roadmap

- The government is currently prioritizing its flagship production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to boost manufacturing and spur private investments.
- The union government has announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors with an outlay of incentives worth over Rs 1.90 lakh crore.
- According to Crisil, the PLI scheme will account for 13-15 per cent of the average annual investment spending in key industrial sectors over the next three to four years.

Draft industrial policy 2022

- The Commerce and Industry Ministry had circulated the draft policy, 'Industrial Policy 2022—Make in India for the World', among other ministries in December 2022 for consultation.
- The draft industrial policy also proposed setting up a technology fund that would spur pioneering companies in advanced technology.
- The industrial policy, expected to be released this year, would have been the third such framework in the history of independent India, replacing the historic policy of 1991 that came in the backdrop of the balance of payment crisis, ushering in the liberalisation of the economy.

Experts view

- Economists suggest that although the PLI addresses economic disadvantages to boost manufacturing, it may not be sufficient to attract companies seeking alternatives to China.
- Emerging geopolitical realities and persistent challenges like high logistics costs, infrastructural bottlenecks, and insufficient funds for MSMEs pose obstacles to its effectiveness.
- The National Manufacturing Policy 2011 aimed for a 25% share of manufacturing in GDP and 100 million jobs by 2022.
- The current government reaffirms the 25% target, despite manufacturing contributing around 17% to GDP presently.

India's fastest Solar-Electric Boat launched

Context

- Kerala has launched Barracuda, the fastest solar-electric boat in the country in Alappuzha in collaboration with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd and Navalt.

About Barracuda boat

- The boat is named after the swift, long fish, Barracuda was designed by Navalt and can be deployed even in the rough seas as a workboat to ferry up to 12 passengers and cargo.
- The 14-metre-long, 4.4-metre-wide vessel can attain a top speed of 12.5 knots (23 kmph) and has a range of seven hours on a single charge.
- It has twin 50 kW electric motors, a marine-grade LFP battery, and 6 kW solar power, says a release issued by Navalt.
- It is engineered to navigate through waves as tall as four metres and operates without noise, vibration and air pollution.
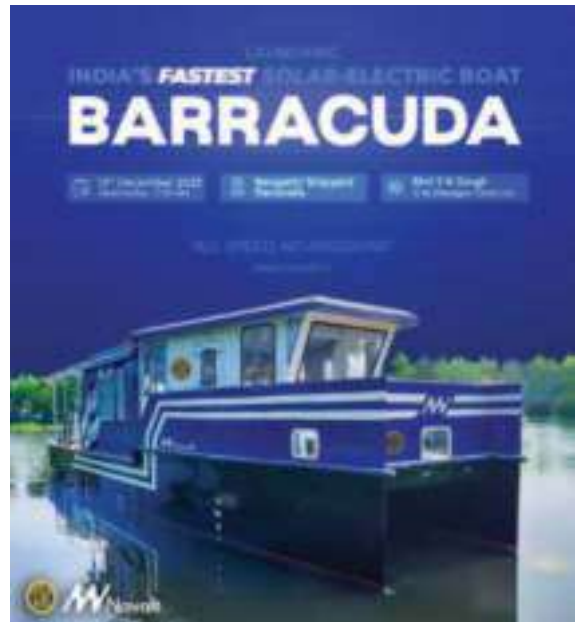
COP28 — many a slippery slope ahead

- COP28 in Dubai marked a crucial milestone for the first five-yearly global stocktake under the Paris Agreement.

- The review encompassed goals in mitigation, adaptation, financing, and support to developing countries.
- A synthesis report and technical deliberations were prepared, leading to the expectation that countries would submit enhanced emissions reduction targets by mid-2025, with finalization at COP30.

Global stocktake

- The Global Stocktake is a fundamental component of the Paris Agreement which is used to monitor its implementation and evaluate the collective progress made in achieving the agreed goals.
- Global stocktake reports reiterate findings from major scientific studies: the window to limit global heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is closing rapidly.
- The proposed draft suggests a threefold increase in global renewable capacity to 11,000 GW by 2030, compared to 2022 levels.

Focus on fossil fuels

- A new draft climate agreement released at the COP-28 climate summit for the first time explicitly called on nations to transition away from fossil fuels to avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis.
- The role of fossil fuels in causing global warming had never been even acknowledged in any earlier COP decision.
- The scheduled phase-down or phase-out of fossil fuels, especially coal, is a contentious issue expected to be a recurring topic at the Dubai meeting.

A draft with loose definitions

- The final draft contained loopholes potentially extending fossil fuel production and use, favoring both the industry and technologically advanced developed nations.
- While calling for a phase-down of "unbated" coal power, the door was left open for "low-carbon fuels", "low-emission" technologies, "low-carbon hydrogen", and "transitional fuels," (widely used in Europe and the United States to describe natural gas) — all terms with very loose definitions.
- The final draft lacked clarity on carbon capture technology's commercial viability and emission reduction impact.

Vagueness in financial support

- The COP 28 draft did not take the issue of financial support by developed countries further, causing much anguish to climate vulnerable countries.
- The draft did express concern that the earlier commitment of $100 billion per year by 2020, however inadequate, had not been met.
- No fresh targets were mentioned in the draft, not even for the new Loss and Damage fund formally set up on the first day and gathering pledges for a meagre $470 million.

Conclusion

- The COP28 Declaration has essentially left all the problems unresolved, maintaining the status quo.
- Other than recording a decision to "transition away" from fossil fuels, which countries were already doing in practice, nothing much of substance has been gained at COP28.
- The Global Goal on Adaptation was left incomplete.
- A number of other documents were not finalised or approved.

14.12.2023

- **Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023**
- **COP-28 calls for 'transition away' from fossil fuels**
- **Centre revives plan to simplify GST rates**
- **COP28: most important decisions and shortcomings**

- **The consultocracy**

Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023

Context

- The World Health Organization has released the Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023 which shows that the number of annual road traffic deaths globally.

Highlights of the report

- The report noted that annual number of road traffic deaths dropped by 5 per cent to 1.19 million road traffic deaths in 2021.
- Globally, 4-wheel vehicle occupants represent 30% of fatalities; followed by pedestrians who make up 23% of fatalities; and powered two- and three-wheeler users who make up 21% of fatalities.
- Cyclists account for 6% of fatalities while 3% of deaths are among users of micro-mobility devices such as e-scooters.
- In 2019, road traffic injuries were the primary cause of death for individuals aged 5–29 years, and they ranked as the 12th leading cause of death across all age groups.
- The risk of death is three times higher in low-income countries than high-income countries despite these countries having less than 1% of all motor vehicles.

37 DEATHS PER 100 CRASHES

No. of accidents (in lakh)	No. of deaths	
4.8	2016	1,51,801
4.5 4.5 4.4	2017	1,50,093
	2018	1,52,780
3.5	2019	1,54,732
2016 2017 2018 2019 2020	2020	1,33,201

Deaths per 100 accidents (approx)

Year	Deaths
2016	32
2017	34
2018	34
2019	35
2020	37

Source: National Crime Records Bureau
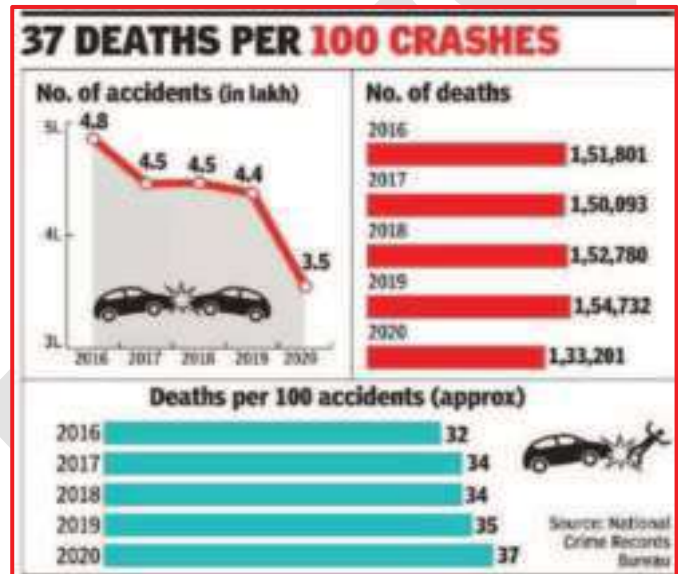
Road traffic fatalities in India

- According to 'Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023', the total number of road traffic fatalities in India went up to 1.54 lakh in 2021 from 1.34 lakh in 2010.
- Almost 92% of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries.
- According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Annual Report on 'Road Accidents in India-2022" a total of 4,61,312 road accidents have been reported by States and Union Territories (UTs) during the calendar year 2022, which claimed 1,68,491 lives and caused injuries to 4,43,366 persons.

WHO best practice criteria for legislation on the five key risk factors

Risk Factor	WHO Best Practice Criteria
Speeding	National law exists, urban limits are set at 50 km/h or lower, and local authorities can further modify this limit.
Drink driving	National law exists, alcohol levels are defined by BAC, alcohol limits per general driving population are ≤0.05 g/dl and for novice drivers ≤0.02 g/dl
Motorcycle helmet use	National law exists and it covers all riders, on all road types, and all engine types, and the helmet must be fastened and meet a standard
Seat-belt use	National law exists and it applies to all seating positions in vehicles
Child restraint system use	National law exists, children up to the age of 10 years, or 135 cm in height, must use a child restraint system meeting a standard in addition to the prohibition of children of a particular age/height being prohibited from sitting in the front seats

Countries that make progress

- Ten countries succeeded in reducing road traffic deaths by over 50%.
- These are Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Denmark, Japan, Lithuania, Norway, Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela.

- Thirty-five countries made notable progress, reducing road traffic deaths by 30% to 50%.

Vehicle growth

- The report also noted that the global motor vehicle fleet grew 160%.
- Therefore, annual fatality rates per 1 lakh vehicles fell from 79 deaths to 47 deaths, which is a 41% reduction.

COP-28 calls for 'transition away' from fossil fuels

Context

- A new draft climate agreement released at the COP-28 climate summit for the first time explicitly called on nations to transition away from fossil fuels to avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

About new proposal

- The proposal emphasizes the necessity of significant and swift cuts in greenhouse gas emissions aligned with 1.5°C goals.
- It advocates for a threefold increase in global renewable energy capacity by 2030.
- It also called for the development of a list of "zero- and low-emission technologies" including "renewables, nuclear, abatement and removal technologies such as carbon capture and utilisation and storage.

- The draft represents the collective stance of nearly 200 nations at the Dubai conference, aiming for decisive language signaling a shift away from the fossil fuel era. Despite resistance from Saudi Arabia and OPEC members, many governments insist on a strong commitment.
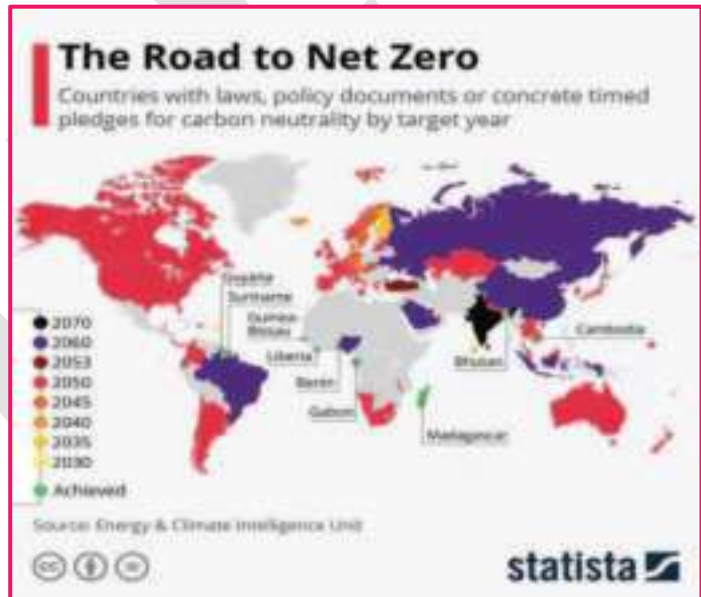
Roadmap to net zero emissions

- According to scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), creating a path to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 is humanity's best shot at keeping global temperatures from rising beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century,
- This implies cutting emissions to 43% of 2019 levels by 2030 and 60% by 2035.

Centre revives plan to simplify GST rates

Context

- The government has revived the GST rate rationalization effort, reconstituting the ministerial group within the GST Council.
- The group is tasked with simplifying the tax structure and revising multiple rates.

Group of ministers (GoM) on GST
- Top revenue officials had indicated in early 2023 that the GST rates rejig and simplification, long-awaited by the industry, was off the table for a while.
- Karnataka's revenue minister has been included in the reconstituted ministerial group, but the convenor's role for the seven-member GoM has now been assigned to Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister.

GST Slabs
- There are four main GST rate slabs of 5%, 12%, 18% and 28%, there are about a dozen different rates in practice, while some goods attract a zero rate.
- This is further complicated as some items whose tax rates depend on their packaging, like specified food products, or selling prices, for instance, in the case of footwear and hotel rooms.

Long pending demand
- Tax experts and industry captains have been urging the government to restart the stalled rate rationalisation plan, especially as GST revenues have stabilised at a healthy ₹1.6 lakh crore-plus level in recent months.
- The government also understands the need to simplify the rate structure.
- The GoM, whose terms of reference remain unchanged, may also make recommendations on the future of the GST Compensation Cess.

COP28: most important decisions and shortcomings

Context
- The COP28 annual climate conference this year saw some key resolutions on fossil fuels, methane emissions, funds to fight global warming, among others. However, many concerns still remain.

Some important outcomes
- The COP28 climate meeting delivered some important outcomes:
- First-time acknowledgement of the need to move away from fossil fuels
- First promise to reduce methane emissions
- Operationalisation and capitalisation of the loss and damage fund
- Agreement on a framework for the global goal on adaptation.

The outcomes
- **Fossil fuel phase-out:** The role of fossil fuels in causing global warming had never been even acknowledged in any earlier COP decision.
- After much deliberations, the final agreement called upon countries to contribute towards "transitioning away" from fossil fuels, "so as to achieve net zero by 2050".
- **Tripling of Renewable Energy:** This was an expected outcome, and the only one that contributes to additional emission reductions between now and 2030.
- The COP28 agreement calls upon countries to contribute to tripling of global installed capacity of renewable energy, and doubling of annual improvements in energy efficiency.
- **Phase-down of coal:** Coal, classified as a fossil fuel like oil and natural gas, is specifically addressed in the agreement due to its targeted phase-down outlined in the 2021 Glasgow conference.
- Despite efforts to require carbon capture and storage in all new coal-fired power plants, resistance from countries including India, China, and South Africa prevailed.
- **Methane emission cuts:** The agreement talks about "accelerating and substantially reducing non-carbon-dioxide emissions globally, including in particular methane emissions by 2030". Methane is the most widespread greenhouse gas apart from CO2, accounting for nearly 25 per cent of all emissions.

- **Loss and Damage Fund:** A decision to set up a Loss and Damage Fund had been taken last year in Sharm el-Shaikh but it had not been created, and no money ha d been promised.
- COP28 operationalised this fund on the opening day of the conference, and several countries, including hosts UAE, made funding commitments.
- By the end of the conference, commitments worth about US$ 800 million had been made.
- The money is meant to provide financial help to countries trying to recover from climate-induced disasters.
- **Global Goal on Adaptation:** This was another important step developing countries had been waiting for.
- Historically, adaptation hasn't received enough attention, or resources, as compared with mitigation activities, mainly because adaptation is largely a local endeavour.
- Its benefits also are mostly local.

The consultocracy

- The Centre and States in India hire consultancy firms for crafting policies and implementing programmes.
- Most government projects are usually executed these days on a bedrock of consulting support, be it cleaning the river Ganga, the Swachh Bharat and Jal Jeevan Missions, corporatising the Ordnance Factory Board or assisting Uttar Pradesh in its aspiration of growing the state's economy to $1 trillion.
- Officials tend to get comfortable and overly dependent on their consulting teams, often leading to "mission creep" and repeated redeployment.

Proliferation of consulting

- It has been reported that the Centre has recently engaged a global consulting firm to prepare a foundational Vision 2047 document for identifying the country's strategic priorities.
- In the last five years, the central government reportedly spent over ₹500 crore outsourcing critical tasks to major firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and McKinsey.
- Globally, alarms are being sounded over the proliferation of consulting firms across government.
- The word, "consultocracy" describes the permeation of consultants into the very heart of government, diminishing the traditional role, functions and capabilities of public servants.

Engagement of consultants

- Engaging consultants in government is justified for several reasons.
- The growing complexity of expertise required for program development and service delivery in diverse sectors, such as agriculture, transport, energy, and financial services, often exceeds the available skills within the government.
- The widespread digitization of public service delivery, exemplified by programs like the Direct Benefit Transfer initiative, requires specialized technical expertise.
- Deploying consultants for specific tasks is optimal due to their expertise, temporary engagements, and the avoidance of adding to the permanent institutional load.

Conclusion

- Consulting firms playing a role in public policy formulation and implementation are a lasting trend.
- It's unrealistic to expect government officials to constantly update their skills for modern governance and digitized public service delivery.
- Thoughtful incorporation of private sector expertise, within a clear regulatory framework, can enhance the quality and effectiveness of public service delivery.

13.12.2023

- **PM Inaugurates Global AI Partnership Summit**
- **Rajya Sabha passes Bill for appointment of CEC, ECs**
- **Bills for women's quota in J&K, Puducherry**
- **Food and Agriculture Organization on food and nutrition**
- **Patent exclusions — Madras High Court shows the way**

PM Inaugurates Global AI Partnership Summit

Context

- The Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

Focus area

- The Summit shed light on the need to cultivate tech talent from India in the age of AI.
- The Prime Minister also raises several pertinent issues around Artificial Intelligence – from a standardised global AI education curriculum to watermarking products at the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Summit
- The Prime Minister pointed to the dangers of terrorists getting access to AI tools, as well as the potential for increased cybersecurity and data theft incidents.
- Multiple sessions on diverse topics like AI & global health, education and skilling, AI and data governance, and ML Workshop, among others will be organised during the summit

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES
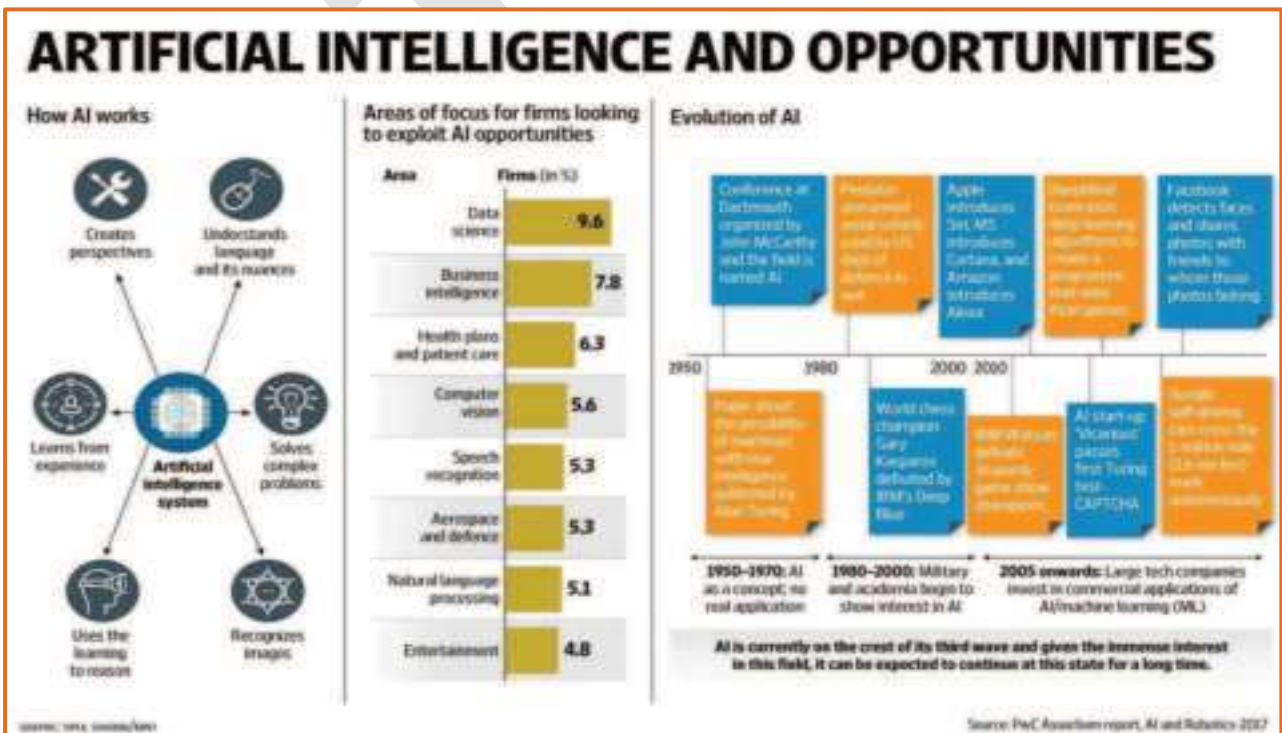
About GPAI

- The Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) is an international initiative dedicated to promoting responsible and human-centric development and use of Artificial Intelligence.
- GPAI seeks to bridge the gap between AI theory and practice by supporting cutting-edge research and applied activities focused on AI-related priorities.
- Members of GPAI include 25 countries such as the US, UK, European Union, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore.
- India joined GPAI as a founding member in 2020.
- The Secretariat of GPAI is hosted at the OECD, serving as a central coordinating body for the partnership's collaborative efforts and initiatives.

Aim and objective of GPAI

- Promote responsible development and use of AI
- Address ethical concerns in AI technologies
- Ensure safety and security of AI systems
- Encourage inclusiveness and diversity in AI development
- Foster innovation in AI research and development
- Address data governance issues related to AI
- Support the use of AI technologies for social and economic progress

Global regulating on AI

- Recently, the EU passed the AI Act which introduces safeguards on the use of AI.
- The deal includes strong restrictions on facial recognition technology, and on using AI to manipulate human behaviour, alongside provisions for tough penalties for companies breaking the rules.
- Recently, the UK hosted the AI Safety Summit where 28 major countries including the United States, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and India, and the European Union agreed to sign a declaration saying global action is needed to tackle the potential risks of AI.
- Before that, the United States issued an executive order aimed at safeguarding against threats posed by AI and exerting oversight over safety benchmarks used by companies to evaluate generative AI bots such as ChatGPT and Google Bard.

Rajya Sabha passes Bill for appointment of CEC, ECs

Context

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill 2023 with a voice vote.

Key features

- The bill to regulate the appointment and service terms of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (ECs).
- The bill incorporates key amendments like retaining their status at par with Supreme Court judges, upgrading the search committee and inserting a new clause to protect them from court cases while discharging their official duties.

Selection Committee

- The Selection Committee will consist of:
  - Prime Minister as Chairperson
  - Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha as member
  - Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister as member
  - The CJI would not be part of the panel
- If the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha has not been recognised, the leader of the single largest opposition party in Lok Sabha will assume the role.

What the new bill proposes

WHAT THE LAW IS RIGHT NOW

CEC, ECs are appointed by the PM and council of ministers, under the seal of the President.

WHAT DID SC SAY ON MARCH 2?

A bench headed by justice KM Joseph said ECs and CECs will be chosen by a panel comprising PM, LoP and CJI, till Parliament passes a law.

THE PLAN AHEAD

The government tabled the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023 that says:

- Search panel, led by the law minister with 2 secy as members, to shortlist five names.
- Selection committee – comprising PM, LoP and a Union cabinet minister – to review names and recommend appointments; the panel can also consider other names.
- President to ratify appointments.

"Functioning of ECI was and will remain impartial and transparent, and the govt is committed to ensuring that."
— **Arjun Ram Meghwal,** Union law minister

Bills for women's quota in J&K, Puducherry

Context

- The Lok Sabha passed Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023 and Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2023 in Lok Sabha.

About

- The Lok Sabha passed two Bills to extend the provisions of the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, which grants 33% reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, to the Union Territories of Puducherry and Jammu and Kashmir.
- The bills introduced by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs seek to reserve 33 percent seats in the legislative assemblies of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as well as Puducherry for women.
- This move follows the Parliament's passage of bills aimed at implementing reservation policies in the legislative assembly, employment sector, and professional institutes within the Union Territory of J&K.

Provision

- In Puducherry, provisions have been made for gender budgeting in the 2023-24 budget to the tune of Rs 1332 crore for the first time adding the 33 per cent reservation has been given to women in police, fire services and local bodies.
- The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Second Amendment) Bill seeks to provide reservation for women in the legislative assembly of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir that came into force following the enactment of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023.

Food and Agriculture Organization on food and nutrition

Context

- According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations report, more than 74% of Indians could not afford a healthy diet in 2021.
- In 2020, the percentage was 76.2.

Findings

- The FAO report is a glimpse of the progress in meeting Sustainable Development Goals and World Health Assembly (WHA) global nutrition targets.
- It said that during the pandemic and the "5Fs" crisis – food, feed, fuel, fertilizer, and finance – the Asia Pacific region witnessed harrowing statistics.
- As per the report if Rising food costs, is not matched by rising income, it would lead to more people being unable to afford a healthy diet.

Neighboring country data

- In Pakistan, the figure was 82.2% and in Bangladesh, 66.1% of the population faced difficulties in finding healthy food.
- Similarly, the Asia and the Pacific region accounts for half of the world's severe food insecurity, with more women than men being food insecure.
- The FAO report said that the regions has 16.6% population undernourished.
- Prevalence rates on stunting, wasting and overweight among children under 5 years of age, as well as anaemia among women of reproductive age, are still off the marks in terms of World Health Assembly global nutrition targets.

Patent exclusions — Madras High Court shows the way

- In the pharmaceutical patent domain, clear boundaries defining the scope of patent protection are crucial.
- This clarity ensures that all stakeholders understand the limits of patent coverage for a specific invention, promoting both innovation and accessibility to medicines.
- Clarity in defining the scope of patent protection is particularly crucial, especially concerning exclusions outlined in Section 3 of the Patents Act.
- This provision contains a set of filters that every invention must pass through for it to be patentable.

The judgments

- Against this backdrop, two recent judgments from Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy of the Madras High Court are notable.
- The first, Novozymes vs Assistant Controller of Patents and Designs, relates to Section 3(e), which excludes from protection those compositions that amount to a mere aggregation of their components.
- The court holds that Section 3(e) does not exclude from the scope of protection aggregates that are already known.
- This, therefore, means that if any ingredient independently satisfies the requirements for the grant of a patent, irrespective of its inclusion in a composition under Section 3(e), it would be patent eligible.

- In a Second case, Hong Kong and Shanghai University vs. Assistant Controller of Patents, addressing Section 3(i), the court clarified exclusions for inventions related to human or animal treatment processes.
- The judgment emphasized that the exclusion isn't limited to in vivo/invasive diagnoses but extends to processes directly related to disease diagnosis.
- The court proposed a standard of examining claims within the complete specification to determine patent eligibility

Need for bright-line rules

- Given the substantial costs of pharmaceutical research and the imperative to avoid overly broad monopolies, clear and consistent bright-line rules are crucial.

- These rules enhance decision-making efficiency at the Indian Patent Office, offering simplicity and certainty while reducing administrative burdens.
- Judgments clarifying patent boundaries offer inventors clarity and assist civil society groups opposing patents.

Conclusion
- The current complex patent prosecution process lacks certainty and may hinder innovation.
- In matters that pertain to pharmaceutical and medical patents, courts need to be conscious of the competing interests at play and find a robust balance point
- Bright-line rules can mitigate challenges for inventors and pharmaceutical companies, balancing potential issues with existing statutory safeguards.

12.12.2023

- **SC upholds abrogation of Article 370**
- **CBI, FBI discuss cooperation in tackling cyber crime**
- **Centre decides to withdraw three criminal law Bills**
- **RBI cautions public against loan waivers**
- **Harvest the Odisha story to ensure food security**

SC upholds abrogation of Article 370

Context
- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the power of the President to abrogate special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution.

Observation by SC
- A Constitution Bench headed by of Chief Justice of India unanimously upheld the decision of the government to take away Article 370 on the ground that the same was a temporary provision.
- The verdict came in a batch of petitions challenging the Central government's 2019 move to delete Article 370.
- The court held that the State of J&K had no internal sovereignty and the concurrence of the State Government was not required to apply the Indian Constitution to the State of J&K.
- The court also refused to rule on the validity of the Presidential rule imposed in Jammu and Kashmir in Dec 2018.

What next
- The Court also issued a direction to the Election Commission of India to take steps to hold elections to the J&K Legislative Assembly by September 30, 2024.

SUPREME DECISION
- SC directs the Centre for the restoration of statehood of J&K
- Justice S K Kaul recommends setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- The court refuses to decide on the validity of the 2019 law to bifurcate state into two UTs: J&K and Ladakh
- It also refuses to rule on the validity of the President's rule imposed on J&K in Dec 2018

WE HAVE HELD THAT THE STATE OF JAMMU & KASHMIR DID NOT RETAIN AN ELEMENT OF SOVEREIGNTY (WHEN IT JOINED THE UNION OF INDIA)

D Y Chandrachud, Chief Justice of India

LEGAL OPINION DIVIDED

ARTICLE 370

FOR
- Article 370 was a temporary provision of Constitution
- Special privileges were temporary, cannot confer rights
- In opposition with Article 14 which guarantees equality
- Can be revoked through Presidential order

AGAINST
- The same provision of Article 370 cannot be used to dilute it
- Parliament cannot replace state legislature with the governor
- Not seeking state legislature's nod is against spirit of consultation
- SC precedents cite Parliament's approval for abrogation

- Further, it stated that the restoration of statehood shall take place as soon as possible.

CBI, FBI discuss cooperation in tackling cyber crime

Context

- US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director met the director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently and discussed ways to bolster exchange of information to tackle threats posed by organized crime networks.

Focus area

- The meeting focused on:
  - Strengthening the exchange of information on criminal matters
  - Improving coordination in combating transnational crimes
  - Sharing expertise in the investigation of technology-enabled crimes
  - Expedite the sharing of evidence and for closer assistance in bringing criminals and fugitives to justice

U.S.'s allegations

- The high-profile visit is taking place in the backdrop of U.S.'s allegations about an Indian link to a foiled plot to kill a Sikh separatist leader on the American soil.
- India has already constituted a probe team to investigate the allegations.
- It was also decided that training academies of both the investigation agencies will share best practices with each other.

Centre decides to withdraw three criminal law Bills

Context

- The Central Government has decided to withdraw the three criminal law reform bills introduced in the Lok Sabha to replace the Indian Penal Code, the Indian Evidence Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure respectively.

Three bills introduced in Lok Sabha

Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023
- It will have 356 sections (instead of 511 sections in IPC)
- 175 sections have been amended
- 8 sections have been added, and 22 sections have been repealed

Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023
- It will have 533 sections (instead of 478 sections in CrPC)
- 160 sections have been changed
- 9 sections have been added, and 9 sections have been repealed

Indian Evidence Act, 1872
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023
- It will have 170 sections (instead of 167 sections in IEA)
- 23 sections have been changed
- 1 section has been added, and 5 sections have been repealed

"From 1860 to 2023, the country's criminal justice system functioned as per the laws made by the British. I can assure the House that these bills will transform our criminal justice system. The aim will not be to punish, it will be to provide justice" — AMIT SHAH

WHAT NEXT
The three bills will be studied by the standing committee on home affairs, which is chaired by BJP MP Brijlal (who is a retd IPS officer).

Background

- The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in August 2023 along with Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam bills.
- The three bills seek to replace the Code of Criminal Procedure Act, 1898, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, respectively.
- The new bill was referred to the department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs for consideration.

RBI cautions public against loan waivers

Context
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) raised the alarm over misleading advertisement campaigns offering loan waivers to borrowers.

Guideline by RBI
- The RBI advised the public to not fall prey to false and misleading campaigns and asked the citizens to report such incidents to law enforcement agencies.
- The RBI move came after the apex bank noticed misleading advertisements related to loan waiver offers in print media as well as on social media platforms enticing borrowers.
- The RBI urged individuals to exercise caution and refrain from engaging with entities making dubious promises of loan waivers.
- The apex bank also identified several entities engaged in promoting these dubious schemes across print and social media platforms.

Common online payment scams in India
Phishing attacks
- Fraudsters often use emails, messages, or fake websites to trick individuals into revealing sensitive information such as login credentials, credit card details, or personal information.
Identity Theft
- Scammers misuse personal information to impersonate individuals, gaining unauthorized access to their accounts and making fraudulent transactions.
Fake delivery OTP scam
- To provide more secure delivery to customers, e-commerce platforms started the One Time Password (OTP). However, frauds and scammers have managed to break this security and steal money from customers' bank accounts.
Fake QR codes
- QR code scams are one of the latest methods that fraudsters are using to steal money from people.
UPI Fraud
- Scammers manipulate individuals into making unauthorized UPI transactions or trick them into sharing UPI PINs.

Harvest the Odisha story to ensure food security
- The platform of COP 28 engages world leaders to addressing the escalating climate crisis.
- The dire consequences pose threats to the planet, peace, and prosperity.
- Projections indicate a surge in disasters to 560 annually (1.5 per day).
- Unchecked climate change may lead to a 20% rise in hunger and malnutrition, while global warming is expected to cause a 21% decline in food productivity.

Odisha's food security model
- Amidst a deepening global food crisis fueled by climate issues, conflicts, and strained livelihoods, Odisha's transformative approach is gaining recognition.
- It is seen as a model for building equitable and sustainable food security, offering ideas for global consideration.

Odisha's themes approach
- Odisha's story has three specific themes in the current scenario:

Agricultural transformation
- Over the last two decades, Odisha has shifted from importing rice to achieving a record-high food grain production of 13.606 million tonnes in 2022.

- Kalahandi district was known as the "land of hunger," but has now been transformed into Odisha's rice bowl.
- Odisha's sucessfully achieved the 'Zero Hunger' goal of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2.
- Other scheme like KALIA and digital extension boosted non-paddy crops, reducing paddy cultivation.
- Initiatives like Odisha Millet Mission promote crop diversity and climate resilience.

Resilience and sustainability

- Odisha, due to its vulnerable geographic and physical conditions, faces heightened risks from climate change.
- To tackle these challenges, Odisha has proactively implemented a comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan.
- This plan covers various sectors, including agriculture, coastal zone protection, energy, fisheries and animal resources, forests, health, industries, mining, transport, and urban and water resources.
- The approach towards climate resilience is being developed from the bottom up.

Social protection

- Odisha's agricultural strides make it a paddy surplus state, ranking fourth in Food Corporation of India contributions.
- In 2020-21, it produced 9% of India's rice and contributed 4.22% to the country's total food-grain production.
- UN World Food Programme and Odisha Government collaborated on innovative pilots, like biometric tech in Rayagada (2007) and rice fortification in Gajapati, to enhance food and nutrition security schemes.

Way forward

- Odisha's remarkable shift from food scarcity to surplus, coupled with climate-proofing, crop diversification, and prioritizing smallholders.
- The government endeavor provides a distinctive development model amid global climate challenges, serving as inspiration for other states.

11.12.2023

- **Controversy over Germany's debt brake rule**
- **COP calls for progress to climate change by 2030**
- **Nordic countries dialogue on trade negotiations**
- **Applications under PM Vishwakarma Scheme**
- **Paradigm shifts in medicine**

Controversy over Germany's debt brake rule

Context

- Recently, Germany's constitutional court declared the government's decision to transfer €60 billion, originally designated for pandemic emergency use, to a "climate and transformation fund" (CTF) as unlawful.

About debt brake rule

- The debt brake rule, or the balanced budget rule, sets a cap on how much governments can borrow to finance various public projects.

Germany's Deficit Is Set to Widen This Year
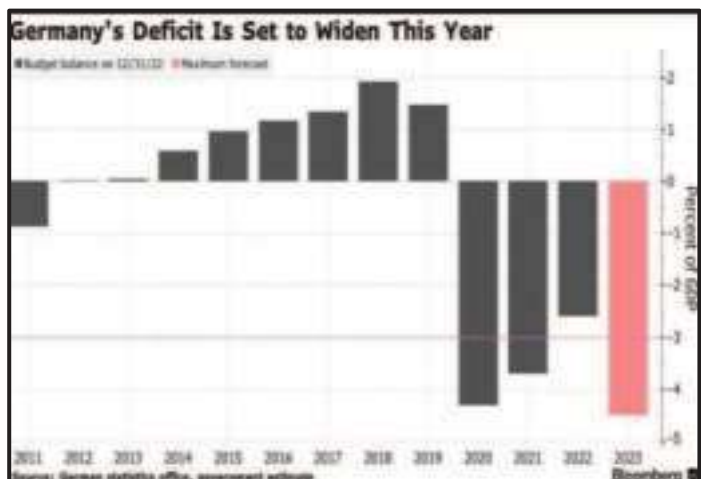
- The rule restricts the German government's fiscal deficit to 0.35% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and prohibits all 16 regions in the country from engaging in any deficit spending.
- The budget brake mirrors the borrowing and spending restrictions in the EU's Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the 2012 Fiscal Compact Treaty, serving as a domestic counterpart.
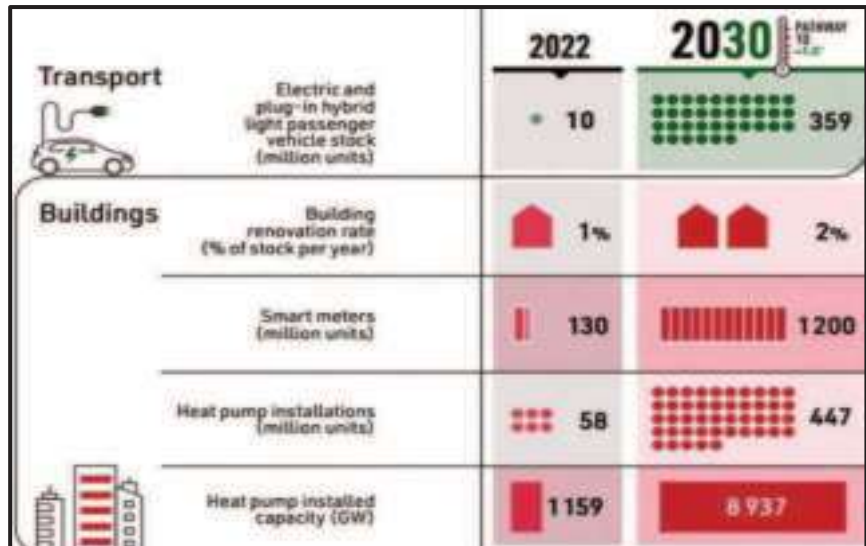
Purpose of Climate and Transformation Fund

- The climate and transformation fund (CTF) were set up as the Energy and Climate Fund
- in 2011 and operates outside the regular state budget, like other specialized funds like those for defense.
- The CTF focuses on supporting initiatives aligned with Germany's climate legislation to achieve climate targets and transition to a carbon-neutral economy.
- The government has allocated 212 billion euros from the fund for the period 2024-2027 to facilitate these efforts.

COP calls for progress to climate change by 2030

Context

- According to draft COP 28 key climate document, by 2025, all countries must have in place a detailed plan to adapt to the current and future impacts of climate change in their territory, and must demonstrate progress in implementing such a plan by 2030.

Annual climate talks

- The annual climate talks primarily concentrate on "mitigation," urging countries to commit to specific plans for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions within a set timeframe, as highlighted by the Global Stocktake process.
- However, there is an equally important process under way on "adaptation".
- "Adaptation" refers to the adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems that countries must make in response to these, and other anticipated climate effects.
- Global temperatures have already risen 1.1 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

Country-specific actions

- According to the UN climate division, the actions are country-specific and can range from building flood defenses, setting up early warning systems for cyclones, switching to drought-resistant crops, to redesigning government policies.
- A final version is expected to be part of the agreement when the United Nation's COP-28 climate summit concludes in Dubai.

Nordic countries dialogue on trade negotiations

Context

- The Swiss and Norwegian Trade Ministers expressed optimism about finalizing a trade pact with Nordic countries in the coming months.

Free trade agreements

- Despite some unresolved issues, Indian trade negotiators are actively working on closing free trade agreements with the U.K. and Australia.
- Negotiations on the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) and a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland) began 15 years ago.
- Despite 20 rounds of talks, the agreements have not been finalized.
- There are ongoing efforts to reach an agreement before India's general election in early 2024.

India-EU talks

- India-EU talks over a comprehensive Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) are also moving slowly.
- The India-U.K. FTA talks, which were earlier meant to be completed by november in 2022, are still not ready for signing.
- Prime Minister of India also met with President of the Swiss Confederation on the sidelines of the COP-28 climate summit in Dubai on December 1.
- However, cutting down trade tariffs, mobility of services and opening market access for companies on both sides remain unresolved.

Applications under PM Vishwakarma Scheme

Context

- According to data from Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), The PM Vishwakarma Scheme, launched by the Centre in September, 2023 has received over 21 lakh applications.

About PM Vishwakarma Scheme

- The PM Vishwakarma Scheme is designed to support traditional artisans and craftsmen by offering them financial assistance, skills training, and toolkits to enhance their craft and livelihoods.
- The Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprise is the

nodal ministry of the PM Vishwakarma Yojana.
- The scheme also aims at improving the quality, as well as the reach of products and services of artisans and craftspeople and to ensure that the Vishwakarmas are integrated with the domestic and global value chains.

Components of the Scheme
- Skills Training: Beneficiaries will attend a five-day skilling workshop.
- Toolkits: Artisans will receive a voucher of Rs 15,000 to purchase necessary tools for their craft.
- Interest-Free Loans: Artisans can avail themselves of an interest-free loan of Rs 1 lakh, repayable within 18 months. Upon repayment, they qualify for a second loan of Rs 2 lakh at an interest rate of 5 percent.
- Subsidy: Beneficiaries will receive a subsidy of up to 8 percent of the interest amount.
- Credit Guarantee: The scheme offers guarantee-free loans.

Applications details
- The highest number of applications had come from Karnataka (6.28 lakh), followed by West Bengal (4.04 lakh), Assam (1.83 lakh), Uttar Pradesh (1.53 lakh) and Andhra Pradesh (1.21 lakh). In contrast, 15 States including Haryana, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and northeastern States have sent fewer than 10,000 applications each.

Paradigm shifts in medicine
- India, with its diverse population, has long grappled with the burden of genetic disorders.
- Gene therapy is not just about managing symptoms — it is about rewriting the genetic code that underlies these conditions.
- Conditions like Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Anaemia have cast a long shadow over the lives of individuals and families.
- Consider the sheer magnitude of the issue: Over 40 million individuals in India are estimated to be affected by these diseases, together called haemoglobinopathies.

Gene and cell therapy
- The Traditional treatments often involve lifelong management, such as regular blood transfusions.
- Gene therapy offers a beacon of hope by addressing the root cause — the genetic mutations responsible for these conditions.
- By introducing functional genes and repairing the faulty ones, gene therapy offers not just treatment but the potential for a cure.
- Gene and cell therapy are the cutting-edge medical advancements poised to revolutionise our approach to and treatment of various health conditions, from sickle cell disease and dengue to cancer and HIV/AIDS.
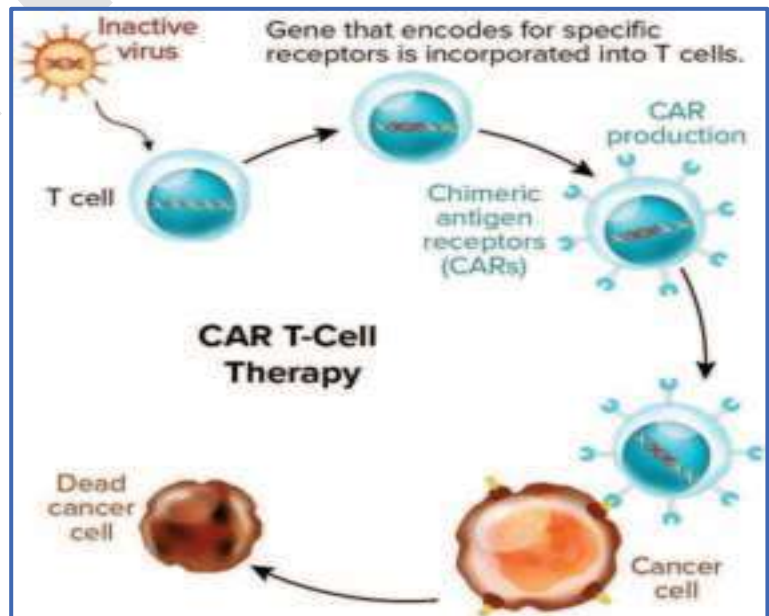
Cancer concern
- Cancer, a formidable adversary in India's healthcare landscape, demands more than traditional treatment approaches at affordable cost.
- With over 1.16 million new cancer cases reported, the critical need for gene and cell therapy is evident.

- Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy, or CAR-T therapy, exemplifies this precision. CAR-T therapy opens new frontiers in personalised cancer treatment.

Infectious diseases

- Infectious diseases always pose a major challenge to public health just like the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented dire consequences.
- Subtropical India has always been prone to infections ranging from viral pathogens like dengue to tuberculosis.
- The anti-Covid-19 mRNA vaccines, such as the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines, which are, theoretically, gene-therapy products, have been ground-breaking. By modifying immune cells to better recognise and eliminate viral threats, genetic medicine becomes a potent weapon in the fight against infectious diseases.

Way forward

- As demographic and lifestyle changes shape new health challenges, gene and cell therapies go beyond treatment and embody a vision for the future of healthcare in the nation.
- These therapies anticipate and prepare for a future where precise and personalised treatments become the norm.
- By moving towards curative solutions, long-term healthcare costs can be reduced, paving the way for a more sustainable and inclusive healthcare model.

09.12.2023

- **RBI enhances UPI payment limits**
- **U.S. FDA approves gene therapies for sickle cell disease**
- **New climate draft seeks tripling of renewable energy capacity**
- **Centre bans onion export**
- **Bridge this deficit between India and Sri Lanka**

RBI enhances UPI payment limits

Context

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced a substantial increase in the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transaction limit for hospitals and educational institutions.

New framework

RBI eases regulations on payments through UPI and bank mandates but tightens the screws on fintechs

- The central bank raises the limit on recurring e-payment mandates for credit card, insurance and mutual fund payments to ₹1 lakh from ₹15,000 currently
- RBI proposes the creation of a Fintech Repository by April as banks and NBFCs begin to partner with fintechs to offer loans
- RBI also opts to regulate web-aggregation of loan products to enhance transparency

Change in UPI limits

- The Reserve Bank of India raised the UPI payment will allow consumers to make higher UPI payments for education as well as medical purposes.
- The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) payment limit to hospitals and educational institutions has been raised to ₹5 lakh from ₹1 lakh.

Current UPI transaction limits

- According to the official website of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the UPI transaction limit for normal payments is up to Rs 1 lakh per transaction.
- For some specific categories of transactions in UPI, like capital markets, collections, insurance, and foreign inward remittances, the transaction limit is up to 2 lakh.

- For Initial Public Offering (IPO) and Retail Direct Scheme, the limit is up to Rs 5 lakh per transaction.

E-mandate for recurring payments

- In another key announcement related to digital payments, RBI Governor proposed to hike the e-mandate for recurring payments to Rs 1 lakh from current Rs 15,000 for mutual funds, insurance premiums and credit card payments.
- The RBI governor said the new measure will further accelerate the usage of e-mandates.

U.S. FDA approves gene therapies for sickle cell disease

Context

- The US Food and Drug Administration approved two gene-based treatments for sickle cell disease, including the first therapy that uses the gene-editing technique CRISPR, opening a new era of treatments for genetic conditions.

Approved treatment

- The agency approved Lyfgenia from bluebird bio, and a separate treatment called Casgevy by partners Vertex Pharmaceuticals and CRISPR Therapeutics.
- Bluebird bio's sickle cell therapy utilizes modified genes delivered via disabled viruses to enable the patient's red blood cells to produce normal hemoglobin.
- Vertex's therapy involves harvesting stem cells from the patient's bone marrow, editing them with CRISPR/Cas9 technology at manufacturing facilities, and then infusing the modified cells back into the patient during a month-long hospital stay.
- Both the therapies were approved for people aged 12 years and older.
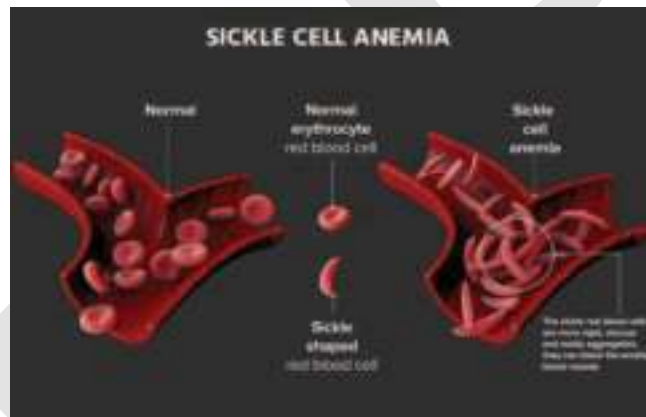
About Sickle cell disease

- Sickle cell disease is a genetic disorder affecting red blood cells, causing them to adopt a sickle shape.
- This can lead to various complications, such as pain, anemia, and organ damage.
- The condition is caused by a mutation in the hemoglobin gene and is inherited from both parents.

National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission

- The National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission aims to eliminate sickle cell anaemia from the country by 2047.
- The mission will create awareness among the public and health workers about the prevention and management of sickle cell anaemia.
- It will reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with sickle cell anaemia, and enhances the quality of life of the affected individuals and families.
- It will also contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals related to health, education and social inclusion.

New climate draft seeks tripling of renewable energy capacity

Context

- The latest draft of the Global Stocktake, one of the key documents being negotiated at the UN's climate summit in Dubai, has linked the tripling of renewable energy capacity with a "phase-out", or a time-bound ending, of the use of fossil fuels.

Tripling renewable energy capacity

- The leadership at the COP-28 climate talks to move towards ending the fossil fuel economy.
- The climate conference aims for tripling renewable energy capacity globally by 2030.
- The increase in renewable energy capacity is strategically implemented to displace fossil fuel-based energy, thereby significantly reducing global reliance on non-renewable and high-emission energy sources.
- Unchanged from an earlier version of the text is the clause on a "rapid phase-out of unabated coal power".

India's Renewable Energy Target by 2022 (By Source) — Unit: Gigawatts — 175GW — 5GW Small hydro — 60GW Wind — 10GW Biomass — 60GW Solar photovoltaic — 40GW Rooftop solar

Define climate finance

- India had focused on the other big lacuna in negotiations regarding "climate finance".
- Despite the broad need for funds to transition economies to renewable energy and address climate change impacts, only a small portion of promised amounts has reached developing countries.
- Additionally, there is a lack of clarity in defining such financing.
- The lack of a definition leads to a lack of trust and transparency on a matter.

Centre bans onion export

Context

- With food inflation remaining elevated amid concern over kharif and rabi harvests, the Central government has banned onion exports till March 31 next year to increase domestic availability and to keep prices in check.

Protest against decision

- The decisions triggered protests in the politically important state of Maharashtra with farmers taking to the streets to protest the ban on onion export.
- At present, the prices are Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 per quintal, though people are selling it at Rs 3,000 per quintal.
- On June 12, the food ministry had first imposed stockholding limits for different kinds of traders till March 2024.

ONION EXPORT FROM INDIA (Jan-Sept 2017 Report) — India is the World's 2nd Largest Onion Growing Country — Onion Exports in 2017 — Major Onion Varieties in India — Kinds of Onion Exported — Areas of Cultivation- Maharashtra is Top Onion Producer & Exporter Indian State — Indian Onion Export Destinations- Malaysia is Largest Importer Country — 60% of Onion Export Shipments Departed from India's Nhava Sheva Sea Port (JNPT). — Major Onion Exporters in India — EXPORT GENIUS

Bridge this deficit between India and Sri Lanka

- Sri Lanka's President recently announced a proposal for land connectivity with India, a timely development.
- Twenty years ago, the idea of a bridge between Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and Talaimanar in Sri Lanka's Northern Province was suggested by the then Prime Minister

during a lecture.

- This was part of his larger vision of regional economic integration, encompassing his country and the southern States of India and aimed at generating more opportunities for economic growth.
- In December 2015, India's Road Transport and Highways Minister announced to the Lok Sabha that the Asian Development Bank was ready to fund the ₹24,000 crore bridge project.
- Sri Lanka's response was subdued, accompanied by strong criticism from project opponents.

The case of a power grid

- The infrastructure development partnership between India and Sri Lanka should have been more substantial.
- The concept of linking their electricity networks was proposed as early as 1970.
- Despite signing a memorandum of understanding over 13 years ago, there has been no transmission of electricity between the two countries.
- India has consistently exported 7,000 million units (MU) annually to Bangladesh.
- The transmission network project, aiming for a 1,000 MW transfer and a High Voltage Direct Current link between Madurai (India) and New Habarana (Sri Lanka), shows slow progress.
- Both countries must prioritize efforts to meet the 2030 deadline.

Trade and Tourism

- The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement was signed in December 1998, yet the two countries have not yet been able to go beyond it despite holding talks for years on entering into an economic and technology cooperation agreement.
- After a break of five years, negotiations resumed a few weeks ago.
- In the area of tourism, which is a major source of revenue for Sri Lanka, India remained the largest single country of tourist arrivals, with its share being 17% of the overall number of arrivals.

Way forward

- Sri Lanka, known for its history of smooth power transitions, should not be hindered by historical baggage.
- Recent developments over the past year should be maintained and built upon for continued progress.
- There is every reason why Sri Lanka, once viewed as a high standard of living and stable economy, should be keen on making this a reality.
- The relationship between India and Sri Lanka in the areas of infrastructure development, energy links and trade should be much deeper than what it is now.

08.12.2023

- **UN invokes Article 99 of the UN Charter**
- **Lok Sabha passes Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2023**
- **Centre announces aid to T.N. and A.P. after cyclone wreaks havoc**
- **SC seeks details for inflow of 'illegal' migrants**
- **COP and the new abnormal**

UN invokes Article 99 of the UN Charter

Context

- The United Nations Secretary-General has invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter in a bid to establish a ceasefire.
- The rare move by United Nations Secretary-General comes as the 15-member Security Council is yet to adopt a resolution calling for a ceasefire between Israel, Hamas and their allies.

Article 99 of the UN Charter

- As per the UN Charter, Article 99 is an independent tool in the hands of the Secretary-General who "may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." The special powers allow the UN Secretary-General to call a meeting of the Security Council on an emerging situation of international concern.
- The UN Charter is the founding document of the United Nations.
- It is seen as a discretionary power.

Can Article 99 bring an end to the war

- Article 99 grants the secretary-general the authority to bring attention to threats, but it does not confer the power to force the Security Council to adopt specific resolutions.
- The Security Council, as the UN's most powerful body, has the responsibility to maintain international peace and security.
- If the council chooses to act on UN Secretary-General advice and adopts a ceasefire resolution, it gains additional powers to ensure implementation.
- These powers include the authority to impose sanctions or authorise the deployment of an international force.

Has Article 99 been invoked in the past

- Article 99 has been invoked on only four occasions in the past:
  - **Congo (1960):** UN Secretary-General invoked Article 99, leading to the Security Council adopting Resolution 143, calling for Belgium to withdraw its troops. The Congolese war continued, with deepening crises in subsequent years.
  - **East Pakistan (1971):** UN Secretary-General cited Article 99 to seek the Security Council's intervention during the conflict in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The outcome and the extent of the invocation's use remain unclear.
  - **Iran (1979):** UN Secretary-General used Article 99 during the Iran hostage crisis, but the hostages were held for 444 days until released after the Algiers Accords were signed in 1981.
  - **Lebanon (1989):** UN Secretary-General invoked Article 99 to call for a ceasefire in Lebanon's escalating civil war. However, the conflict continued despite the Security Council's call for a ceasefire.

Lok Sabha passes Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2023

Context

- The ongoing winter session of parliament has passed bill for for Central Tribal University in Telangana.
- The Central Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was passed by a voice vote.

About

- The bill amends Central Universities Act, 2009 and the new university will be called SammakkaSarakka Central Tribal University.
- It will be set up in Mulugu district in Telangana.
- The Centre has made provision of ₹889.7 crore for the university.
- A Central Tribal University in the State of Telangana is also obligatory under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014.

Significance

- The establishment of Central Tribal University in Telangana will cater to the regional aspirations for years to come.
- It will increase access and quality of higher education and facilitate and promote higher education and research facilities for the people of the state.
- It will also promote advanced knowledge by providing instructional and research facilities in tribal art, culture and customs and advancement in technology to the tribal population of India.
- Apart from bringing focus to tribal education, the Central Tribal University shall carry out all educational and other activities like any other Central University.

Centre announces aid to T.N. and A.P. after cyclone wreaks havoc

Context

- The Union government released ₹493.60 crore to Andhra Pradesh and ₹450 crore to Tamil Nadu in the wake of the damage inflicted by severe cyclonic storm Michaung.

Central assistance

- The prime minister has approved the first urban flood mitigation project of Rs 561.29 crore for Integrated Urban Flood Management Activities for Chennai Basin Project under the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF), which also includes central assistance of Rs 500 crore.
- The severe cyclonic storm Michaung left behind a trail of destruction in Andhra Pradesh, damaging 770-kilometre roads, uprooting trees and killing livestock.

Causality

- According to data shared by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), nearly 40 lakh people from 194 villages and two towns were affected by Michaung's impact, including the inundation of 25 villages.
- In Tamil Nadu's capital city Chennai, residents are grappling with stagnant water and power disruption in several areas and its suburbs after Michaung wreaked havoc in the metropolis and neighbouring districts.

SC seeks details for inflow of 'illegal' migrants

Context

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to provide information on the number of individuals granted citizenship under Section 6A of the Citizenship Act.
- The Constitution Bench is hearing a batch of challenging the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

THE IMMIGRANT TRAIL

Immigrants' details

- A Constitution Bench, headed by CJI asked the Centre to submit details regarding border fencing and estimated timelines to complete the fencing exercise.
- The 5-judge bench asked about the number of Bangladeshi immigrants granted citizenship in Assam between January 1, 1966 and March 25, 1971 under section 6A (2)of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- The Supreme Court sought details on the administrative measures taken to address illegal
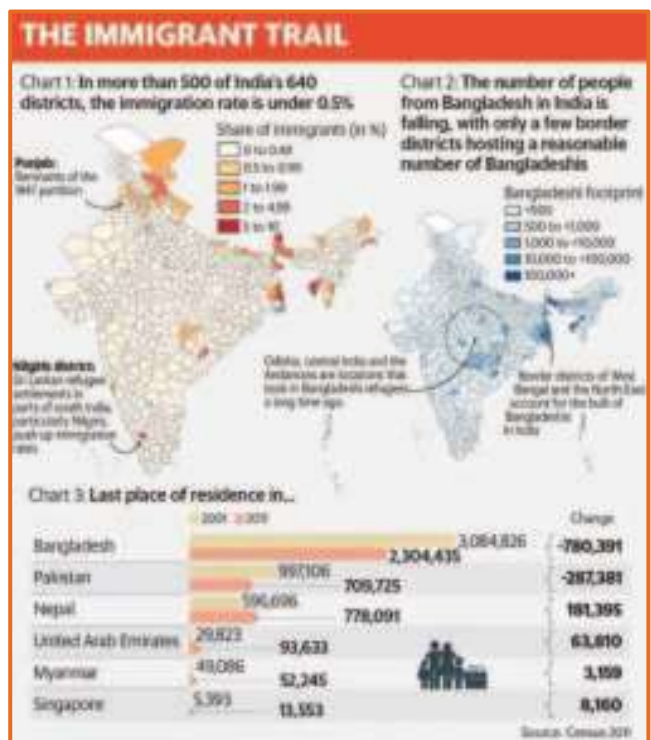
immigration, particularly in northeastern states.

Foreigners detected

- The Supreme Court also sought to know the number of foreigners detected under the Foreigners Tribunals Order during the above period and called for an estimated inflow of illegal migrants into India, including Assam, after March 25, 1971.

COP and the new abnormal

- COP28 is ongoing in Dubai with a key focus on climate change.
- A debate on fossil fuels is taking place with its wider ambit.
- The intricate relationship between air pollution and climate change is often overlooked. Continued burning of fossil fuels and biofuels will exacerbate both issues.
- Prioritizing cleaner air is essential for a healthier planet and should be a global concern.

2021 CAPITAL CITY RANKING
Average annual PM2.5 concentration in the year

Delhi tops global capital pollution chart again

- New Delhi, India — 85.0
- Dhaka, Bangladesh — 78.1
- N'Djamena, Chad — 77.6
- Dushanbe, Tajikistan — 59.5
- Muscat, Oman — 53.9
- Kathmandu, Nepal — 50.9
- Manama, Bahrain — 49.8
- Baghdad, Iraq — 49.7
- Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan — 48.3
- Tashkent, Uzbekistan — 42.8

New Delhi continues to be the world's most polluted capital city for the fourth consecutive year. A look at the report compiled by iQAir

No country met WHO air quality guideline for PM2.5, which cut the existing annual guideline value from 10 µg/m3 to 5 µg/m3 in 2021

Only 222 out of 6,475 global cities met updated PM2.5 parameters

93 cities had annual PM2.5 concentrations exceeding 10 times the WHO norms

Of 1,887 Asian cities, only four met updated PM2.5 norms

46 of 50 most polluted cities in the world are in Central and South Asia | P7

National Capital's air quality

- India's National capital city, New Delhi had witnessed dangerously poor levels of air quality in November 2023, to a degree not seen in several years.
- The city suffered an unequalled PM2.5 level (monthly average) of 243 ug/m3, the highest since 2018 and an astonishing leap of more than 50 per cent over last year's monthly average of 155 ug/m3.
- This was the scenario at a time when stubble burning counts in North India — understood to be responsible for the deterioration in Delhi's air quality.

Shift in weather patterns

- In India and across the globe, unusual natural changes are wreaking havoc on communities that previously never faced such events.
- ENSO, La Nina or El Nino are talked about in the context of the monsoon, their applications are broadening of late.
- Delhi witnessed relatively calm wind conditions during November 2023 with limited and weaker western disturbances not having much impact beyond two to three days.

A small shift makes a big difference

Probability

Previous climate

New climate

More hot weather

Less cold weather

Extreme hot weather

Cold — Average — Hot

Source: US EPA
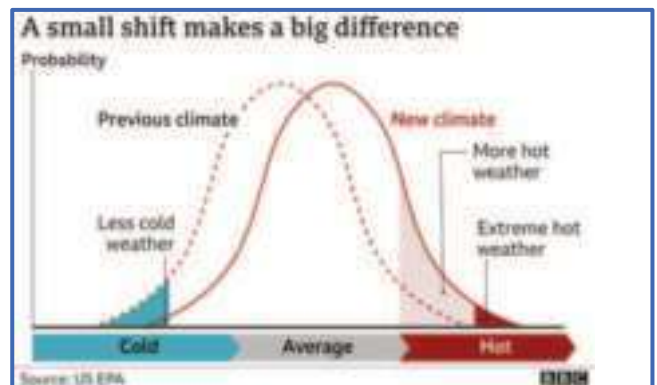
Conclusion

- While extreme weather and changing climate patterns are taking a heavier toll on the planet as a whole, the frequency of severe pollution has regional impacts, threatening health and food security.
- Emergency episodes are likely to rise unless drastic, science-backed measures are taken to address emissions at their source.
- Adopting an air shed approach is crucial to tackle the root cause of worsening air quality.

- Shifting away from cosmetic quick fixes and geoengineering is essential for more effective solutions.

07.12.2023

- **The J&K Reservation and Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023**
- **Role of special inquiry committees of Parliament**
- **Garba dance included in UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list**
- **AICTE to regulate BBA and BCA programmes**
- **Partner in an uncertain time**

The J&K Reservation and Reorganization (Amendment) Bill, 2023

Context

- The Lok Sabha passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023.

Background

- The Bills introduced in July, 2023 in the lower house of the parliament seek to implement reservations in the legislative assembly, jobs and professional institutes of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The J&K Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill, 2023 amends the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004 for reservation in jobs and admission to professional institutions to members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and other socially and educationally backward classes.
- The Bill substitutes 'weak and under-privileged classes' with 'other backward classes as such by the Government from time to time' and deletes the definition of weak and under-privileged classes.

IN BRIEF: UT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR AND LADAKH

The J&K Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2023

- The Act of 2019 specified the number of seats in the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Legislative Assembly to be 83 (excluding seats designated for areas falling in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir), with 6 of those seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs), but none for Scheduled Tribes (STs).
- The Bill increases the total number of seats to 90 while reserving 7 seats for SCs and 9 seats for STs.
- It further enables the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of J&K to nominate up to two members from the Kashmiri migrant community to the assembly. Of these, one must be a woman.
- Additionally, the Bill enables the LG to nominate to the Assembly one member to represent displaced persons from Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, as long the the displacement took place in 1947-48, 1965 or 1971.

Role of special inquiry committees of Parliament

Context

- The Lok Sabha ethics committee reportedly suggests expelling a Trinamool Congress MP due to alleged "unethical conduct" and "breach of privileges."

Role of ethics committee

- The ethics committee was constituted in 2000, to oversee the moral and ethical conduct of members and examine cases of 'unethical conduct' referred to it.
- The committee investigates complaints against House members filed by other members, outsiders through a member, or as referred by the Speaker. A preliminary inquiry is conducted before deciding to examine a complaint.

- The committee submits its report to the Speaker, who then presents it to the House for consideration.
- It must be noted that the term 'unethical' is not defined.
- It is left to the Committee to decide whether any act is unethical or not.
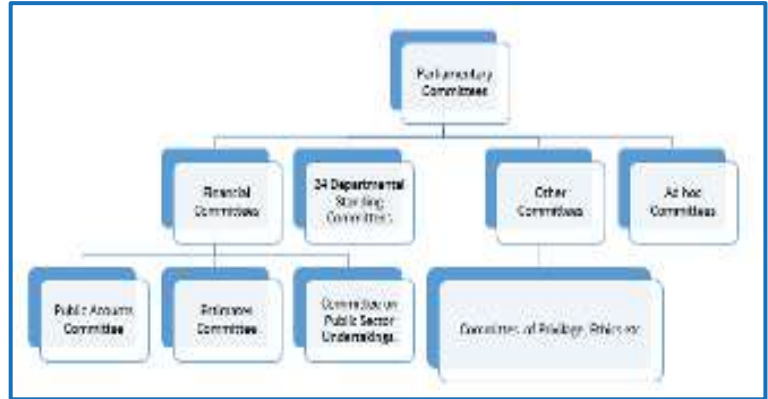
About privileges committees

- The privileges committee or special inquiry committee examines the more serious accusations against a member.
- In 1951, a special committee found a member guilty of promoting a business interest by putting questions in return for financial benefits.
- It was again a special committee that inquired into the 'cash for query' scam of 2005 where 10 MPs of Lok Sabha were recommended for expulsion.

Is an expulsion constitutional

- Article 101 of the Constitution outlines grounds for an MP to vacate a seat, such as voluntary resignation, disqualification, and continuous absence from the House for 60 sittings.
- While expulsion is not explicitly mentioned, conflicting Supreme Court judgments, like Raja Ram Pal versus Hon'ble Speaker (2007), interpreted Article 101 to uphold Parliament's power to expel members for breach of privilege.
- But in Amarinder Singh versus Special committee, Punjab Vidhan Sabha (2010), the Supreme Court held expulsion by the State Assembly as unconstitutional.
- It held that such scenarios would frustrate the objectives of Parliamentary democracy.

Garba dance included in UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list

Context

- The UNESCO on Wednesday approved the inclusion of garba, Gujarat's most popular folk-dance form, in its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.

Provisions of Inclusion

- The inclusion has been made under the provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage during the 18th meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- "Garba of Gujarat" is the 15th ICH element from India to join this list.

About Garba dance

- Garba is a traditional folk dance originating from the state of Gujarat in India.
- It is prominently performed during Navaratri.
- Garba music is characterized by traditional folk tunes and rhythms. The dance is accompanied by live music, often featuring instruments like dhol, tabla, and traditional string instruments.
- Garba fosters social equality by diluting socio-economic, gender and religious structures.

- Navratri is central to cultural identity of Gujaratis and Indians at large
- Unesco's ICH tag will ensure better protection of this cultural heritage
- The tag will also demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness globally
- Garba forms a centuries-old tradition going back to the time of Lord Krishna
- The word 'garba' is derived from the word 'garbh deep'
- The dance celebrates fertility and is performed as a tribute to femininity - Shakti

Garba is also known as 'garbha', 'garbha deep' and 'garbhi' varying with local dialects

India 's Intangible Cultural Heritage list

- The 14 other elements from India that have been inscripted to UNESCO's representative list of ICH are:
  1. Ramlila
  2. Yoga
  3. Vedic chanting
  4. Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre of Kerala
  5. Ramman, religious festival and ritual theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas
  6. Mudiyettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala
  7. Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan
  8. Chhau dance of eastern India
  9. Buddhist chanting of Ladakh
  10. Sankirtana, ritual singing, drumming and dancing of Manipur
  11. Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making in Punjab
  12. Nawrouz
  13. Kumbh Mela
  14. Durga Puja in Kolkata

AICTE to regulate BBA and BCA programmes

Context

- All India Council for Technical Education will regulate the Undergraduate (UG) courses such as Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Computer Application (BCA) from 2024-25.

New approval process

- The AICTE released its new approval process handbook, which will remain valid for three years from 2024-25 to 2026-27.
- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) is implementing changes, including:
  o Extending approval for up to three years for high-performing institutions
  o Reducing compliance requirements for land documents and no-objection certificates
  o Introducing off-campus provisions for well-performing institutions under affiliating universities.
- Of the 8,261 institutes the AICTE regulates with a total approved intake of 30.49 lakh students, a majority are engineering institutes (5857) with an approved intake of 24.73 lakh students.
- The AICTE has also laid out norms for granting autonomy to polytechnic colleges from next year.

Partner in an uncertain time

- The year 2023 marked the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Italy and India.
- The Prime Minister of Italy meeting with Prime Minister of India meeting in march this year marked a breakthrough in the relationship between the two countries.
- The joint statement set off a new framework of collaboration between Italy and India.
- It provided a crucial impetus to the bilateral dialogue by identifying avenues of partnership in sectors such as defence, space and connectivity along with mobility and energy transition.

Bilateral relations and partnership

- The partnership between India and Italy is rooted in a common view of the strategic challenges and the approach to face them.
- Italy and India share the need for a free, safe and open Indo-Pacific.
- Italy looks at the Indo-Pacific from the perspective of an "enlarged Mediterranean", which forms a geostrategic unit with the Indian Ocean.
- Italy sits at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea and acts as a natural bridge towards the Indo-Pacific.

Maritime security and Indo-Pacific

- Maritime security is a priority for both India and Italy.
- In August 2023, Italian Navy scheduled a visit to Mumbai by the patrol vessel ITS Morosini, the first time in several years that an Italian Navy ship had docked in India.

India - Italy
What does India **Export** to the Italy?

Iron & Steel	$1.8 Bn
Electrical Machinery	$1.0 Bn
Boilers & Machinery	$658 Mn
Organic Chemicals	$549 Mn
Aluminium	$505 Mn
Petroleum Products	$405 Mn
Vehicles	$340 Mn
Iron & Steel Goods	$286 Mn
Plastic Articles	$245 Mn
Precious Stones	$234 Mn

India Exported Goods worth $8.7 Billion
India Imported Goods worth $5.6 Billion
Trade Surplus: $3.1 Billion

- Cooperation in the maritime domain will also be central to the relaunched collaboration in the defence sector.
- The Maritime collaboration between both Countries will also enhance the stability of the Indo-Pacific region.
- A safe and open Indo-Pacific is a precondition for the further development of trade and connectivity.
- The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched during the G20 summit in Delhi also aims to open a new route between Asia and Europe.

People-to-people contact

- India and Italy are also looking forward to people-to-people contact.
- During India's External Affairs visit to Italy, a Migration and Mobility Agreement was signed.
- Italy already hosts one of the largest Indian communities in the European Union and has been enriched by a growing number of students and workers.
- The agreement will provide a framework to improve mobility.

Space sector

- Space sector is another noteworthy between both countries.
- Italy is looking with increasing interest at India's space initiatives.
- The success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission has been recognised and celebrated by the Italian scientific community.
- ASI (Italian Space Agency) and ISRO, along with government institutions, university research centers, and aerospace companies, have long been engaged in collaborative efforts in space exploration.
- A joint declaration recently signed between the heads of ASI and ISRO opens up new opportunities, particularly in earth observation, space exploration and helio-physics.

Way forward
- Italy and India can also converge on multilateral issues because they share the need to frame and support a new global agenda.
- Italy and India, recognizing the shared challenges affecting the Global South and global security, are poised to collaboratively address urgent contemporary issues.
- Italy, preparing for the G7 Presidency in 2024, values addressing global concerns, taking inspiration from India's example.

06.12.2023

- **Draft Global Stocktake calls for phasing out fossil fuels**
- **India announces line of credit to Kenya**
- **World Meteorological Organisation report on Glaciers**
- **Indian economy to be third largest by 2030**
- **Vows for the planet**

Draft Global Stocktake calls for phasing out fossil fuels

Context
- A new draft of the Global Stocktake, released at the ongoing UN Climate Summit (COP28), gave options on the way forward on key issues of negotiations including on mitigation, fossil fuels, equity and historical responsibility.

Draft Global Stocktake
- The proposed draft suggests a threefold increase in global renewable capacity to 11,000 GW by 2030, compared to 2022 levels.
- Additionally, it aims to double the global average annual rate of energy-efficiency improvement to 4.1% by 2030, compared to the rates observed in 2022.
- The draft acknowledges that achieving the 1.5°C global warming limit requires peaking in greenhouse gas emissions before 2025.
- It calls for substantial reductions: 43% by 2030, 60% by 2035 (compared to 2019 levels), and aims for net-zero CO_2 emissions by 2050.

Global Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Gas

F-gases 2%
Nitrous Oxide 6%
Methane 16%
Carbon Dioxide (forestry and other land use) 11%
Carbon Dioxide (fossil fuel and industrial processes) 65%

Push for a phase out of fossil fuels
- There is a mounting global push for a phase out of fossil fuels, which are the largest contributors to global climate change, accounting for more than 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions
- India and other global south countries have consistently demanded that there be phasing out of oil and gas too and not just coal, a demand in view of the fact that rich nations burn oil and gas themselves but point fingers at the burning of coal by poorer countries.
- At the Glasgow edition of the COP in 2021, India had insisted on 'phasing down' coal instead of 'phasing out'.
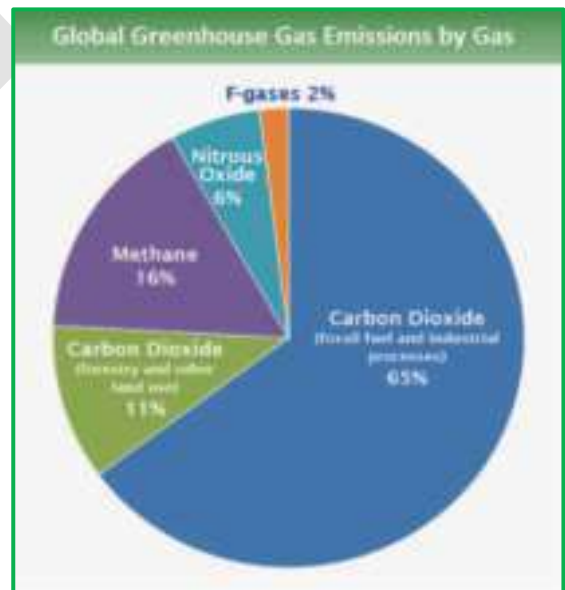
Other global measures

- The draft text of the Global Stocktake at COP28 discusses pushback against "unilateral measures," specifically like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) proposed by the EU.
- This measure, aiming to levy a carbon tax on imports from developing

nations like India, has strained diplomatic relations. Countries like India, Brazil, China, and Russia prioritised addressing this issue at COP28.

India announces line of credit to Kenya

Context

- Recently, India announced a USD 250 million line of credit to Kenya for modernisation of its agricultural sector.

Pact signed

- India and Kenya signed five pacts providing for cooperation in a range of areas including sports, education and digital solution, and unveiled a joint vision document to scale up maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean region.
- Both countries also agreed to shore up bilateral ties in areas of defence, trade, energy, digital public infrastructure and healthcare.

Defence Cooperation

- On defence cooperation, the leaders noted with appreciation the recently concluded MoU between Goa Shipyard Ltd and Kenya Shipyard Ltd.
- The prime minister said both sides also deliberated on defence cooperation and emphasised on military exercises, capacity building as well as linking the defence industries of both the countries.

World Meteorological Organisation report on Glaciers

Context

- According to World Meteorological Organisation, Glaciers have thinned by an "unprecedented" one metre per year while the Antarctic continental ice sheet lost nearly 75% more ice between 2011-2020 than it did between 2001-2010.

Finding of the report

- The World Meteorological Organisation reported that despite being the warmest decade on record (2011-2020), it had the lowest number of deaths from extreme events.
- The agency attributed this to an improvement in the "early warning system" driven by improvements in forecasting and better disaster management.
- In India, for instance, improvements in forecasting cyclone formation and the time it took to reach land have led to greater preparedness and evacuation of those most at risk.

Risk of extreme heat

- The report further underlined that human-caused climate change significantly increased the risks from extreme heat events.

- Heatwaves were responsible for the highest number of human casualties, while tropical cyclones caused the most economic damage.

Ozone hole recovery

- The World Meteorological Organisation report also says that this was the first decade that the depleted ozone hole visibly showed recovery.
- Glaciers that were measured around the world thinned by approximately 1 metre per year on an average between 2011 and 2020.
- Greenland and Antarctica lost 38% more ice during the period than during the 2001-2010 period.

Indian economy to be third largest by 2030

Context

- According to the Global Credit Outlook Report 2024 of S&P Global Ratings reports, India is set to become the world's third largest economy by 2030.

More about report

- As per S&P Global Ratings, India's GDP growth in the fiscal year 2026-27 is estimated 7 per cent.
- As of 2023, India is the world's fifth-largest economy, trailing the US, China, Germany and Japan.
- The Global Credit Outlook Report 2024 of S&P stated that India's GDP growth at the end of the current financial year is estimated to be around 6.4 per cent.
- S&P further said the GDP growth of India will be hinged on the utilisation of its labour workforce and the involvement of women in different sectors.
- The significant growth recorded in the domestic digital sector of India has the potential to drive up the economy in the coming years.
- In the automotive sector, India is poised for growth, building on infrastructure, investment, and innovation.

Vows for the planet

- India is in the middle of several extraordinary transitions, the impact of which will benefit both India and the world.
- One of those transitions is in energy, with India aiming to be the first major economy to power its rise to developed country status with increasingly clean energy.
- India's ambitious goals set the stage for climate summit talks in Dubai.
- COP28 follows COP26 in Glasgow, where the UK Presidency secured six gigatonnes of emissions reductions through updated national climate pledges.
- The negotiations focus on the future of our shared planet.

Net zero commitments

- There has been progress on climate in recent years; rapid growth in renewable energy and greater long-term clarity through many countries' ambitious net zero commitments. But there's a long way to go.
- Countries around the world are still losing lives, biodiversity, and crores in building back from climate disasters.
- The risks to all countries from climate change are huge.
- According to the IPCC, India is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change — with projected drops in crop production, water scarcity, increased sea-level rises, and extreme heat stress.

India-UK efforts for Climate

- There are three key areas the UK and India are working together to address the challenges of climate change.
- **First**, to address global temperature rise, collective efforts are crucial.
- India is actively contributing by investing significantly in renewables, promoting domestic production of solar technologies, and increasing green hydrogen production on a large scale.
- India's Mission LiFE underscores its commitment to sustainability, emphasizing people-centric climate action.
- India and U.K. are working on the latest research, policies and technologies to enable the growth of renewables and green hydrogen, and to reduce emissions from transport through our collaboration on sustainable mobility.
- **Second**, the developed economies, including the UK, must assist nations like India in building climate solutions and addressing future impacts. The UK plays a crucial role in mobilizing finance, tripling funding for climate change protection in the most vulnerable countries.
- **Third,** is the area of collaboration is in reversing the loss of biodiversity.
- Global commitments are essential to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- All countries need to make new commitments and advance the transition to clean energy, moving away from fossil fuels.

Bottom line

- There is dire need to make progress on protecting and restoring nature while building resilience to the impact of climate disasters.
- Most importantly, we must see further progress on delivering the climate finance needed to accelerate the transition.
- At COP28 is an opportunity to accelerate action and ambition.

05.12.2023

- **FAO report of agri-food systems**
- **RS passes Post Office Bill 2023**
- **Centre to increasing strength of women in armed forces**
- **India, U.S. to work through differences**
- **Centres of Inclusion**

FAO report of agri-food systems

Context

- The recent United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report revealed hidden costs in global agri-food systems, exceeding a staggering $10 trillion.

Finding of the report

- The report noted that favouring the cultivation of water-intensive cash crops like sugarcane and areca nut affecting the environment.
- In middle-income countries like India, these costs constitute nearly 11% of the GDP, which manifests as higher poverty, environmental harm, and health-related impacts, including undernourishment and unhealthy dietary patterns.
- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report blames "unsustainable business-as-usual activities and practices" for these escalating costs.

Impacts of intensive agriculture

- Intensive agriculture has significant impacts on the environment, human health, and socio-economic factors. Some key consequences include:
  - o Environmental degradation
  - o Water depletion
  - o Greenhouse gas emissions
  - o Loss of biodiversity
  - o Health concerns
  - o Social and economic issues
  - o Land use change
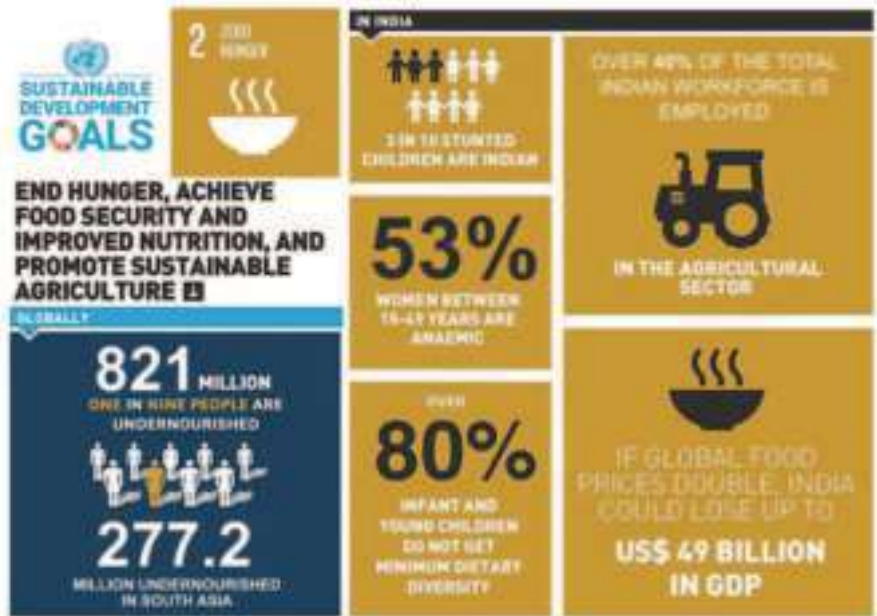
Food and nutrition insecurity

- The water-intensive cash crops like sugarcane and areca nut have also flourished under policies favouring investments in dams and canal irrigation (favourable for sugarcane) and free electricity for borewells (favourable for areca nut).
- This trend threatens food security and the production of nutritional crops.
- The expansion of sugarcane cultivation affects biodiversity, increases the pressure on groundwater resources, and contributes to air and water pollution.
- And ironically, small and marginal farmers in India are among the most food and nutrition insecure.

Recommendation

- The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report called for a need to transform agri-food systems.
- The report suggested to shift to multi-cropping systems that have the potential to protect farmers' well-being, improve nutritional outcomes for our communities, and positively impact ecological health.

Significance of crop diversification

- Biodiversity: Crop diversification enhances plant variety, promoting biodiversity in agriculture.
- Risk Mitigation: Reduces vulnerability to pests, diseases,

and adverse weather, minimizing risks for farmers.

- Soil Health: Varies crop types to improve soil fertility and reduce nutrient depletion.
- Water Management: Different crops have varied water requirements, aiding efficient water resource management.
- Nutritional Balance: Offers a diverse range of food, contributing to a balanced and nutritious diet for communities.
- Sustainable Agriculture: Promotes sustainable farming practices, fostering long-term environmental and economic benefits.

RS passes Post Office Bill 2023

Context

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Post Office Bill 2023, which repeals and replaces the Post Office Act of 1898.

Provision

- The proposed legislation allows the central government to authorize officers to intercept, open, or detain items in the interest of state security, foreign relations, public order, emergencies, public safety, or in case of legal violations.
- This kind of a provision is kept for national security.
- The bill aim is to regulate post offices efficiently, establish a modern legislative framework, and transform the postal network into a platform for citizen-centric service delivery.
- The bill seeks to empower the director general of postal services to frame regulations in respect of activities necessary to provide those services and fix the charges for such services.

INDIA POST: THE JOURNEY

No of post offices in India	No of rural branches	Staff strength Around
1,54,882	1,39,182	3 lakh

Total savings with India Post	No of India Post ATMs	No of India Post microATMs
₹7 lakh cr	1,000	40,000

Target deployment of microATMs	PLANNED OFFERINGS ○ Remittance ○ Basic savings till ₹1 lakh ○ Bill payments ○ Term insurance products ○ Investment into index based funds
1 lakh	

No of Payments Bank branches: 2, Ranchi and Raipur	No of branches set to be set up by end of year: 650	Japan Post asset size Around $2 trillion

CLOSEST COMPETITORS IN THE PAYMENTS BANKING SPACE ○ Fino Paytech ○ Airtel Payments Bank ○ Idea Payments bank ○ Paytm Payments Bank

Centre to increasing strength of women in armed forces

Context

- The Prime Minister during Navy Day event said the government is committed to increasing the strength of women in the armed forces.

Strength of Women Forces

- The number of women in the Indian armed forces has increased almost three fold over the last few years.
- No more are they just in the medical field; they are now joining the forces as not only a soldier, but also as a fighter pilot and command posting in the army.
- Unlike developed countries like the USA, UK, Germany, and Canada, India has taken a longer time to let the women in other avenues besides the usual nursing or medical roles.

WOMEN POWER
Women allowed to join armed forces as officers since the early-1990s
= Total officers

Army		42,913
Navy	10,012	409
IAF	12,142	

- Women officers now allowed permanent commission in specified branches
- Not allowed on warships and submarines as well as in infantry, armoured corps & artillery
- Allowed to fly fighter jets on an experimental basis. Six inducted so far
- IAF has around 100 women helicopter and transport aircraft pilots
- Navy's first batch of women pilots under training
- Armed forces also have 975 woman doctors, 130 dentists and 3,800 nurses

Historical Background

- The first-time women joined the Indian Armed Forces was back in 1888 when the Indian Military Nursing Service was created.
- And all the nursing staff of the Indian Army at that time played a very important role in World War I.
- Impressed by their performance, the top Army brass decided to expand and to reinforce the women's wing and formed the Women's Auxiliary Corps.
- This Corps was to facilitate women to serve in non-combatant roles like accounting, communications, and administration.

India, U.S. to work through differences

Context

- US Principal Deputy NSA said that the US and India have established a mature relationship that enables both sides to identify opportunities and work through differences.

Strategic relationship

- Reaffirming America's continued commitment to the strategic relationship with India, US principal deputy national security adviser (PDNSA) reviewed progress on the bilateral initiative on critical and emerging technologies (ICET), committed to deepening the tech partnership at a public event.
- India and U.S. undertook a "comprehensive mid-term review" of (iCET), especially around tech value chains, semiconductors, quantum, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and High-Performance Computing (HPC), defence innovation, space, and advanced telecommunications.
- Both countries had agreed to expand the scope of ICET to include "biotechnology, critical minerals and rare earths processing technologies, digital connectivity and digital public infrastructure, and advanced materials".

Centres of Inclusion

- The All-India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), New Delhi, recently announced its plans to open a Centre of Excellence for transgender healthcare in 2024.
- Historically, transgender individuals faced discrimination, being pathologized and labeled mentally ill.
- They endured unscientific practices like "conversion therapy."
- The community lacks access to healthcare because of structural barriers like exclusionary infrastructure, lack of services and trained and sensitised healthcare workers.

Legal recognition

- The community was first given legal recognition in India in NALSA v Union of India (2014). The Supreme Court endorsed their rights as fundamental rights.
- The judgment directed central and state governments to ensure medical care for transgender people and cater to their mental, sexual, and reproductive health.
- In 2019, Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, emphasizing government support for comprehensive

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
Government of India

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
announces the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights), Rules 2020

The utmost priority of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019
is to ensure the welfare of transgender persons,
for this following are included in the Rules:

- Welfare boards are to be constituted for the Transgender Persons
- All existing schemes to be reviewed to include Transgender persons in their ambit
- Separate wards for Transgender persons in the hospitals and washrooms in the establishments
- Sensitization of healthcare professionals, workplaces, teachers and faculty in school and colleges
- A List of welfare schemes have been suggested to be considered by the Governments including access to health, education, housing etc.

healthcare, including sex reassignment surgery, hormone therapy, counseling, HIV surveillance, and mental health services for the transgender community.

- It also asked for a review of the medical curriculum and medical research that caters to transgender persons.

Transgender Persons Rules, 2020

- The Transgender Persons Rules, 2020 mandate state governments to establish separate wards and washrooms for transgender individuals in hospitals by 2022.
- The rules also require sensitization of healthcare professionals, implementation of equal opportunity policies, and designation of a complaint officer in establishments.
- Additionally, it suggests that at least one government hospital in each state should offer safe and free gender-affirming surgery and related services

Way forward

- The Transgender Act makes it mandatory for a transgender person to undergo surgery to change their gender within the binaries of male and female.
- There is a misplaced focus on tertiary care and surgical procedures.
- All government medical colleges and hospitals in India should provide gender-affirming services.
- This must be in addition to quality, inclusive, and accessible primary and secondary healthcare.
- The medical curriculum needs revision to serve the needs of gender-diverse people.

04.12.2023

- **COP28 Health and Climate Declaration**
- **RBI monetary policy and repo rate**
- **India agrees to pull out soldiers from Maldives**
- **Philippines raise concern over Chinese boats**
- **India, disability inclusion and the power of 'by'**

COP28 Health and Climate Declaration

Context

- India has refused to sign the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health.

About Health and Climate Declaration

- The declaration, aimed at addressing the critical intersection between climate change and global health, emphasises the need for swift and substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.
- The declaration calls for climate action to achieve "benefits for health from deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions".
- The 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) Declaration on Climate and Health was signed by 123 countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and the European Union.

PRE-COP
SPOTLIGHT ON HEALTH
- BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AT COP28
- HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED TO TACKLE EMISSIONS AND PROTECT HEALTH
- GALVANIZING SUPPORT FOR THE COP28 CLIMATE AND HEALTH DECLARATION

COP28 UAE

Central objectives

- One of the central objectives of the declaration is the commitment to combat inequalities within and among countries.

- It emphasised the pursuit of policies that accelerate the achievement of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG3, which focuses on good health and well-being.**
- The objective is to promote sustainable practices within the health sector to contribute to broader climate goals.

India's Stand

- India's decision to refrain from the Health and Climate Declaration comes amidst concerns over the feasibility of implementing the declaration's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions used for cooling in the healthcare sector.
- India's reluctance stems from the practicality of the commitment, especially in the short term given the state of the nation's healthcare infrastructure.
- The commitment to reduce greenhouse gases used for cooling in the healthcare sector may strain the existing infrastructure and potentially disrupt healthcare services.
- This concern led to India's Health Ministry delegation abstaining from the Health Day event at COP28.

India's greenhouse gas emissions

- According to India's latest communications to the United Nations, its greenhouse gas emissions increased 4% from 2016-2019 to 2.6 billion tonnes of CO_2.
- The energy sector contributed the most to the overall anthropogenic emissions (75.81%), followed by:
  - Agriculture sector (13.44%)
  - Industrial Process and Product Use (IPPU) sector (8.41%)
  - Waste (2.34%)

Climate change and health

- The COP28 Declaration underscores the importance of addressing the broad spectrum of impacts that climate change has on health.
- This includes considerations for:
  - Mental health and psychosocial well-being
  - Preservation of traditional medicinal knowledge
  - Protection of livelihoods and culture
  - Dealing with climate-induced displacement and migration
- The declaration aims at promoting a holistic approach to understanding and mitigating the diverse health challenges posed by a changing climate.

RBI monetary policy and repo rate

Context

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India may keep the repo rate and its key lending rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent in its upcoming monetary policy review scheduled from December 6-8.

Rationale behind decision

- The central bank is expected to retain the stance of the monetary policy as 'withdrawal of accommodation'.
- The increase in vegetable prices has contributed to mounting inflationary risks, potentially causing economic challenges

- The inflation will start inching up because food inflation is going to increase.
- It is expected to see onion and tomato prices going up again.
- So, there is no case for even thinking of lowering the repo rate.

Headline inflation
- Recently, the RBI Governor said that though headline inflation has moderated, it remains vulnerable to recurring and overlapping food price shocks coming from global factors and adverse weather events.
- In such a scenario, the monetary policy needs to remain watchful and actively disinflationary while supporting growth.

GDP and inflation projections
- With the Q2FY'24 GDP growth overshooting its estimate of 6.5 per cent, the RBI may revise its FY2024 growth forecast marginally.
- The real GDP growth for FY'24 is projected at 6.5 per cent.
- The RBI may not revise the headline inflation forecast, which has been kept at 5.4 per cent for the current fiscal.
- It will provide some relief to borrowers as their equated monthly instalments (EMIs) will not increase.

India agrees to pull out soldiers from Maldives
Context
- India has agreed to withdraw its troops from the Maldives, after the newly elected President asserted for Maldives independence and sovereignty.

Withdrawal of forces
- The President of the Maldives announced that India has agreed to withdraw its army from the Maldives.
- The meeting occurred shortly after President of Maldives urged India to withdraw 77 Indian military personnel from the nation and opted to reassess over 100 bilateral agreements between the two countries.
- Maldives is India's key maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and occupies a special place in the Prime Minister's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and the 'Neighbourhood First Policy'.

China and Maldives
- China and Maldives share a good relationship and China has invested heavily there.
- China's influence in the Maldives has become visible in the past few years.
- Moreover, 10 islands in Maldives have been leased.
- According to reports, China is also stationing ships there and conducting military operations on a large scale.
- There has also been talk of a free trade agreement with the Maldives from the Chinese side.

Philippines raise concern over Chinese boats
Context
- The Philippines has accused China of "swarming" a reef off its coast after more than 135 military boats were spotted in the South China Sea.

Philippines response
- The Philippines Coastguard officials described the growing number of boats off the coast of Whitsun Reef, which the Philippines calls Julian Felipe Reef, as an "alarming development".
- The number of Chinese maritime vessels has increased in the past few weeks.
- The number had increased to 135 boats, from the counted 111 on November 13.

South China sea concern

- China claims most of the South China Sea, including waters and islands close to the shores of its neighbours, and has ignored an international tribunal decision that its assertion has no legal basis.
- The Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam have also staked claims to various islands and reefs in the sea, which is believed to have rich petroleum reserves deep beneath its waters.

- This year, China and the Philippines have been involved in a number of incidents, with Philippines accusing China of making aggressive efforts to assert its claim to almost the entire South China Sea under its so-called nine-dash line.

India, disability inclusion and the power of 'by'

- Disability is shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities in social, economic, and gender domains.
- Globally, 1.3 billion people (which is equivalent to nearly the entire population of India) live with some form of disability.
- Of them, 80% live in developing countries; further, 70% of them live in rural areas.
- Existing systems, initially designed for non-disabled individuals, unintentionally exclude people with disabilities.
- This exclusion contributes to higher rates of poverty, limited access to education and opportunities, as well as various forms of social and economic discrimination.

A case for inclusion

- At the outset, the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the economy can help boost global GDP between 3% to 7%, as per the study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), "The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work".
- Everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities at work, agnostic of any attributes other than the ability to do the job.
- The current employment scenario is limited, providing fewer jobs for persons with disabilities and perpetuating stereotypes that create further barriers for people with disabilities to access the labour market.
- Additionally, these exclusionary practices directly violate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Greater challenges in rural areas

- In India, the Central and State governments have various schemes for persons with disabilities and a unique id for persons with disabilities (UDID) card, established as part of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016).

- Creating awareness is crucial for ensuring the government's benefits reach people with disabilities.
- This process starts by building the capacity of grassroots community leaders to advocate for inclusion.
- This is especially important in rural areas, where persons with disabilities tend to face greater challenges when compared to their urban counterparts, with even more limited access to education and employment.

The SPARK projects
- The ILO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra, are implementing the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK) project.
- Through this project, persons with disabilities were put in the lead, being identified from the villages, and trained as Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs).
- DIFs actively engage with the community, persons with disabilities, caregivers, and women from self-help groups to raise awareness about disability inclusion and associated barriers.
- The SPARK project has been able to bring an attitudinal shift towards persons with disabilities, right from the societal to administrative levels.

Way forward
- A bottom-up approach to disability inclusion is crucial to build productive pathways out of poverty and ensure that persons with disabilities are recognised as active members of society and the economy.
- There need to be more inclusive opportunities and employment in the rural areas as a majority of persons with disabilities live here.
- Apart from a strong legal framework, the participation of private sector holds a key in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities.

02.12.2023

- **Green Credit Initiative**
- **India calls for durable resolution to Palestine issue**
- **UAE announces fund to boost climate investments**
- **El Nino, other factors to cause warm winter**
- **Improving the capability of the Indian state**

Green Credit Initiative

Context
- Prime Minister of India launched the 'Green Credit Initiative,' a pathbreaking program aimed at reshaping global environmental policies.
- He also launched the official portal of the green credit initiative at COP28.

Vision for sustainable future
- The Prime Minister highlighted the importance of a new holistic philosophy as the cornerstone of the Green Credits Programme during a high-level event.
- The 'Green Credit Initiative' is positioned as a pro-planet, proactive, and positive step towards fostering a sustainable future.
- Mentioning "Prakriti RakshithiRakhihitha", Prime Minister underscored the need to protect and preserve nature, emphasizing that the environment will protect those who protect it.
- He described 'Green Credit' as the Earth's health card, a crucial instrument for ensuring a greener, clearer, and better future.

Green Credit Portal

- The Prime Minister detailed the key features of the 'Green Credit' system, envisioning it as a fully digital and tradable instrument for environmental sustainability.
- He stressed the importance of launching the 'Green Credit Portal,' a repository documenting plantations and environmental projects working to shape global demand for future policies.

India offers to host 2028 climate meet

- Refraining from fresh commitments to contain global temperature rise, Prime Minister of India in his address at COP-28, offered to host the 33rd edition of the annual summit due in 2028 in India.
- He said that developed countries ought to be "vacating the carbon space" before 2050, and made a pitch for countries to join India on its "Green Credit initiative" which was a "non-commercial" effort to create a carbon sink.

India calls for durable resolution to Palestine issue

Context

- Prime Minister of India met Israeli President on the sideline of COP-28 and underscored India's support for an early and durable resolution of the Israel-Palestine issue through dialogue and diplomacy.

Call for dialogue and diplomacy

- Prime Minister of India expressed India's support for a "durable" resolution of the Israel-Palestine issue by way of dialogue and diplomacy
- He expressed condolences on the loss of lives in Israel because of the Hamas attack on October 7 and welcomed the recent release of hostages.
- He emphasized India's support for a two-state solution.
- The Prime Minister reiterated the need for continued and safe delivery of humanitarian aid for the affected population.

UAE announces fund to boost climate investments

Context

- The United Arab Emirates announced the establishment of a $30 billion climate fund for global climate solutions.

Privately managed fund

- The UAE, host of the 28th Conference of Parties (COP-28), announced a $30-billion commitment to an investment fund called ALTÉRRA.
- ALTÉRRA has been established by Lunate, an independent global investment manager, and is domiciled in the Abu Dhabi Global Market.
- The fund is designed to bridge climate finance gap and aims to stimulate $250 billion of investment by 2030.
- This includes establishing 1,200 MW of wind and solar projects that will begin producing clean power by 2025.

Key verticals

- ALTÉRRA will have four key verticals namely:
  - o Energy Transition
  - o Industrial Decarbonisation
  - o Sustainable Living

o Climate Technologies
- ALTÉRRA provides a transformational solution for attracting private capital.
- Its scale and structure will create a multiplier effect in climate focused investment, making it a vehicle like no other.
- It makes climate finance available, accessible and affordable.

El Nino, other factors to cause warm winter

Context
- According to the Director General of IMD, Currently, El Niño is approaching its peak, marked by higher-than-normal sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific.

Recent observations
- As per India Meteorological Department (IMD) recent observations, the Nino 3.4 region remained 2.4 degrees Celsius above the threshold.
- IMD has forecast a warm winter season across the country, saying minimum temperature could remain higher than normal.
- This follows an overall warming trend experienced globally, including India, which witnessed the third warmest November since 1901.
- The month of February, August and November in 2023 being the warmest months since 1901 in India.
- In addition to the regional factors like western disturbances and the upcoming cyclone developing in the Bay of Bengal, there are chances of higher-than-normal minimum temperatures.
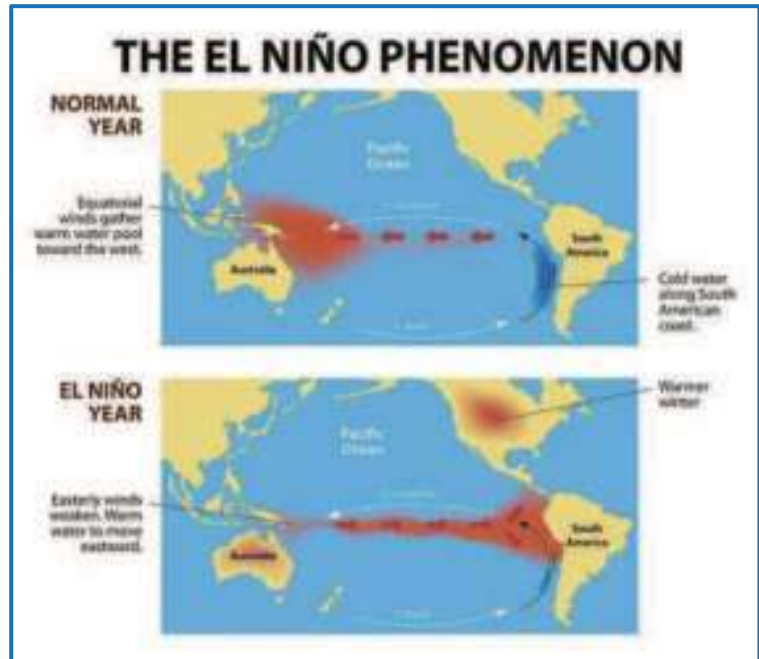
Improving the capability of the Indian state
- The Indian state is a paradox of too big and yet too small.
- Setting up a business or constructing a house in Indian cities can be a challenge.
- The numerous licenses, permits, clearances, and permissions needed create a complex and confusing process.
- The system is both too vast and too intricate, making life difficult for many.

India workforce reality check
- In the G-20 group, India has the smallest number of civil servants per capita.
- India's public sector employs only 5.77% of the workforce, half that of Indonesia and China, and a third of the United Kingdom.
- The Central government personnel in India are around 1,600 per million, much lower than the 7,500 in the United States.
- Per capita in India has the lowest number of professionals like doctors, teachers, town planners, police, judges, firefighters, and inspectors for food and drugs among countries at a similar development stage.
- The Indian state is relatively small on the other metrics, such as the tax-GDP ratio and public expenditure-GDP ratio.

Concerns

- The proponents of inclusive development rightly pitch for a bigger role for the state — increased public spending on health, education, social security and a larger officialdom to go with it.
- The Indian state is considered as 'people-thin' but 'process-thick'.
- The main problem, however, is the perverse incentives created by public institutions and the skill gap among officials.
- These factors have eroded the ability of the political executive and civil services to make and implement sound policies.

The technocratic gap

- The top policymakers exhibit a lack of technocratic skills to govern an increasingly complex economy.
- Due to a lack of expertise in economic, financial, and technical matters, both the Centre and States in India hire consultancy firms.
- In the last five years, the central government reportedly spent over ₹500 crore outsourcing critical tasks to major firms like PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and McKinsey.
- An institutionalised and regular lateral entry at the mid and senior levels can help fill the civil services' size and technocratic gap.
- Similarly, there is a need to augment the strength of professional staff with market watchdogs, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Public versus private sector

- In the public sector, the effectiveness is compromised by the political economy. Performance-linked pay and incentive schemes, successful in the private sector, often prove less effective in the public sector.
- The public sector must attract intrinsically motivated individuals to contribute to the social good.

Way forward

- To address these issues, a potential solution involves implementing moderate pay raises through future Pay Commissions and lowering the upper age limit for government jobs.
- Additionally, promoting strong economic growth and better opportunities in the private sector can decrease the attraction of government jobs for those driven by financial motives.
- Collectively, these measures aim to diminish corruption and enhance the likelihood of socially-driven individuals opting for government service.

01.12.2023

- **Loss and Damage Fund approved at COP-28 summit**
- **India to launch first X-ray Polarimeter Satellite**
- **SC observation on Governors acting as Chancellor**
- **Centre approves major defence deal**
- **Broadcast regulation 3.0, commissions and omissions**

Loss and Damage Fund approved at COP-28 summit

Context

- On the first day of the Conference of Parties (COP28) in Dubai, the landmark loss and damage fund (LDF) which is first-of-its-kind climate compensation fund was approved.

India's stand

- India, since the last COP, has been a strong advocate of the LDF.

- The Indian delegation led by the environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC) ministry voted strongly in favour of the LDF, citing the support it will give to poorer countries, especially those facing the wrath of global warming.

Background

- The Loss and Damage Fund was first suggested by Vanuatu in 1991.
- But the actual progress on the fund was evident during the COP27 in Egypt last year.
- A Transitional Committee was formed to draft the finer contours of the fund.
- The panel submitted its report earlier this month to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- Richer, polluting countries such as the US, UK, UAE, China, etc., are expected to fund the LDF.
- The details of funders and receivers are yet to be finalised.

What is "loss and damage"?
The phrase refers to costs already being incurred from climate-fuelled weather extremes or impacts, like rising sea levels

- Climate funding so far has focused on cutting CO2 emissions, while a third of it went towards helping communities adapt to future impacts
- Loss and damage funding is expected to cover the cost of damage that countries cannot avoid or adapt to
- A report by 55 vulnerable countries estimated that their combined climate-linked losses in the last two decades totalled
- $525 billion, or 20% of their collective GDP. This could go upto $580 billion per year by 2030
- Vulnerable countries and campaigners argue that rich countries that caused the bulk of climate change with their historical greenhouse gas emissions should pay

Source: Reuters

Objective

- The fund aims at supporting poor nations bearing the brunt of global warming through extreme weather events.
- The member countries agreed to make operational a Loss and Damage (L&D) Fund meant to compensate countries already dealing with climate change.
- The Fund has received commitments worth nearly $250 million from countries, though billions of dollars are still needed to meet its purpose.

Financial contributions

- The UAE, the host country, and Germany made a financial commitment of $100 million each; the U.S. $17 million, the U.K. approximately $50.6 million, and Japan $10 million for the Fund.
- The European Union committed $145 million, over and above the German contribution.

FUNDING LOSS & DAMAGE
LOSS & DAMAGE BY NUMBERS

- $435 billion — Average annual estimated cost of loss & damage to developing countries by 2030
- $525 billion — Estimated cumulative climate-linked losses of 55 vulnerable countries in last two decades
- $1 trillion — Annual estimated cost of loss and damage to developing countries by 2050
- $300 million — Pledged so far by high-income countries outside of UNFCCC

- The World Bank will be the "interim host" of the Fund for a period of four years.
- All developing countries are eligible to apply for and every country has been "invited" to contribute to the Fund.

India to launch first X-ray Polarimeter Satellite

Context

- India is gearing up to launch its inaugural X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat), as announced by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- The XPoSat is scheduled to be launched by the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) from the Satish Dhawan Space Center in Sriharikota.

Objective

- The mission objectives encompass measuring X-ray polarisation in the energy band of 8-30 keV emitted from X-ray sources and conducting long-term spectral and temporal studies of cosmic X-ray sources in the energy b and of 0.8-15 keV.
- The mission's anticipated lifespan is approximately five years, with the payloads observing X-ray sources during the spacecraft's transit through Earth's shadow, specifically during the eclipse period.
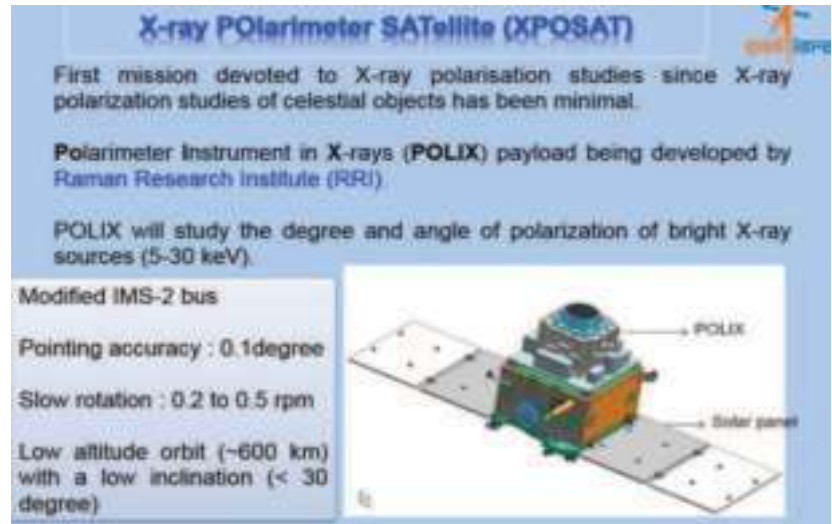
Payloads

- The primary payload, POLIX (Polarimeter Instrument in X-rays), developed by the Raman Research Institute in Bengaluru with support from various ISRO centers, is designed to measure polarimetry parameters in the medium X-ray energy range.
- The secondary payload, XSPECT (X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing), developed by the UR Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) at ISRO, will provide spectroscopic information within the energy range of 0.8-15 keV.

Significance of X-ray sources study

- X-rays, a high-energy form of electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths shorter than visible light, are emitted by celestial sources like black holes, neutron stars, active galactic nuclei, and pulsar wind nebulae.
- These cosmic X-rays reveal signatures of intense phenomena, such as matter falling into black holes or neutron stars.
- Scientists utilize X-rays to study hidden cosmic objects, gaining insights into the universe's underlying mechanisms and dynamics.

SC observation on Governors acting as Chancellor

Context

- The Supreme Court recently ruled that the Kerala Governor, being the ex-officio Chancellor of Kannur University, is not bound by the advice of the Kerala government's Council of Ministers when it comes to appointing Vice-Chancellors to the University

Observation of SC

- A bench headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) stressed that under the Kannur University Act of 1996, the Chancellor is the sole judge when it comes to Vice-Chancellor (VC) appointments, and not a mere titular head.
- The Court pointed out that the Kannur University Act makes a clear-cut distinction between the roles played by the elected government and the Governor when it comes to the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor.

Role of the Chancellor in public universities

- State public universities are established through laws passed by state legislatures.
- In most laws the Governor has been designated as the Chancellor of these universities. The Chancellor functions as the head of public universities, and appoints the Vice-Chancellor of the university.
- The Chancellor presides over the meetings of various university bodies.

- The Court/Senate decides on matters of general policy related to the development of the university, such as:
  1. establishing new university departments
  2. conferring and withdrawing degrees and titles
  3. instituting fellowships

Centre approves major defence deal

Context
- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved one of the largest defence deals of the country to boost the overall combat capability of the armed forces.

Approved deal
- The Defence Acquisition Council, headed by Defence Minister approved the deals worth around Rs 2.23 trillion making it the largest-ever fighter aircraft deal in the country.
- The DAC further accorded the acceptance of necessity (AoN) for procurement of two types of anti-tank munitions — area denial munition (ADM) type-2 and type-3.
- The top body on procurement of military hardware also cleared the acquisition and integration of automatic target tracker (ATT) and digital basaltic computer (DBC) for T-90 tanks.

Self-reliance in defence
- The Defence Ministry said 98% of the total procurement will be sourced from domestic industries and that the move will give a substantial boost to the Indian defence industry in achieving the goal of AatmaNirbharta (self-reliance).
- The DAC also approved a proposal of the Indian Air Force to upgrade its Su-30 fighter fleet by state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd.
- In February 2021, the Defence Ministry sealed a ₹48,000-crore deal with the HAL for procurement of 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF.

Broadcast regulation 3.0, commissions and omissions

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting released the Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill in November, marking a step towards integrated broadcasting regulation.

Background
- Before the current attempt in 2023, the last effort was in 2007 with the Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill.
- In 1997, the Broadcasting Bill addressed the emerging cable and satellite broadcasting, setting the stage for an integrated regulatory framework.
- The latest version follows a pre-consultation paper on 'National Broadcasting Policy' released by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India in response to a directive from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting proposes
Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, 2023

- Consolidated Legal Framework for Broadcasting sector
- Content Evaluation Committees for adherence to Programme & Advertisement Code
- Broadcast Advisory Council to replace Inter-Departmental Committee
- Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities

Key provisions
- The bill requires broadcasting network operators and broadcasters to maintain subscriber data records, following international norms and undergoing periodic external audits.

- The Bill seeks to establish a transparent methodology for audience measurement and the sale of ratings data, addressing the opaque value chain in cable and satellite television in the country.
- The provision allowing private actors in terrestrial broadcasting is viewed as promoting competition against Doordarshan, the state broadcaster, a trend observed in numerous G-20 countries.

Concerns

- A notable concern revolves around the inclusion of Over-the-Top (OTT) content suppliers in the definition of broadcasting services, a proposal in TRAI's 'National Broadcasting Policy.'
- The expanded definition of broadcasting in bill limits independent journalists and non-affiliated news outlets, restricting their professional activities outside large, multilingual TV networks.
- Mandating a 'Content Evaluation Committee' raises concerns as it requires an internal body to self-certify news programming, prompting questions about feasibility, costs, and desirability.

Question on Broadcast Advisory Council

- The Bill is equally silent on creating an independent broadcast regulator, as hinted in TRAI's paper.
- Instead, this Bill plans a 'Broadcast Advisory Council' to examine viewers' grievances and violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code.
- This raises two concerns:
- First, the capacity of such a Council to track and address grievances, genuine or motivated, raised by over 800 million TV viewers.
- Second, the lack of autonomy accorded to this body.
- Since the Bill empowers the Central government to ultimately decide on the Council's advice.

Leeway to the government

- The bill empowers the government to inspect broadcasters without intimating them in advance, and to impound their equipment, presumably including those issued to their employees.
- Furthermore, violations of the Programme Code and Advertisement Code attract deleting or modifying content, in addition to existing measures such as ceasing transmissions for durations.
- Finally, the Bill grants tremendous leeway to government to curtail broadcasting and its distribution in "public interest", a term that is distressingly left undefined.

Conclusion

- As the latest step in creating a comprehensive regulatory framework for broadcasting, this Bill must seize the chance to safeguard press freedom and diversity.
- The Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill must not lose the opportunity to protect press freedom and diversity of India.

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Centre starts survey on women's workforce participation
India nominates forts of Marathas for UNESCO World Heritage List
First scientific count of India's snow leopard
Corruption perceptions index 2023
A blurred mapping of internal female migration

Centre starts survey on women's workforce participation

Context
The Ministries of Labour & Employment and Women & Child Development have launched a collaborative survey to boost women's participation in the workforce. The initiative was introduced at an event titled "Women in the Workforce for Viksit Bharat."

Aim of survey
The survey aims to evaluate the prevalence of women-friendly practices for employees across the country. The survey also aims to address the concerns raised by international agencies and trade unions, including the International Labour Organization, about the declining participation of women in the workforce.
The government is seeking details such as the formation of an internal complaints committee for prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace, creche for children, equal pay for equal work, flexible or remote working hours for women and transportation facilities during late hours.
The Union Labour Ministry is surveying agencies like the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation.

Women participation rate
The latest results of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), released by the Labour Bureau last October, showed a considerable increase in women participation.
The latest results of the PLFS show the women's participation rate increased from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23.
The survey, conducted by the Union Labour Ministry through the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation and other government agencies, has asked questions to the subscribers of government schemes about policies or initiatives for women by the companies they are employed with.

Global Commitments
Improving Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) is related to achievements of major SDG goal such as:
SDG 1 (No Poverty)
SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)
SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities).
The increase in FLFPR not only reflects women's growing participation in the labour force but also points towards a broader societal transformation, where women are increasingly contributing to the nation's progress and their own empowerment.

India nominates forts of Marathas for UNESCO World Heritage List

Context

India has nominated the "Maratha Military Landscapes", a network of forts that showcase the strategic military powers of Maratha rule, for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List for 2024-25.

Nomination list

The Ministry of Culture announced that India is nominating the 'Maratha Military Landscape' for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the 2024-25 cycle, with a total of 12 components included in this nomination.

The 'Maratha Military Landscapes of India', which developed between 17th and 19th centuries, represent an extraordinary fortification and military system envisioned by the Maratha rulers.

The inception of the Maratha military ideology dates to 17th century during the reign of the Shivaji Maharaj from 1670 and continued through subsequent rules until the Peshwa rule till 1818 CE.

The twelve components of this nomination are Salher fort, Shivneri fort, Lohgad, Khanderi fort, Raigad, Rajgad, Pratapgad, Suvarnadurg, Panhala fort, Vijay durg, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra, and Gingee fort in Tamil Nadu.

		UNESCO World Heritage Convention	
1	Raigad fort	Lat. 18° 14', Long. 73° 26'	
2	Rajgad Fort	Lat. 18° 14', Long. 73° 40'	
3	Shivneri Fort	Lat. 19° 12', Long. 73° 52'	
4	Torna Fort	Lat. 18° 16', Long. 73° 37'	
5	Lohagad	Lat. 18° 42', Long. 73° 28'	
6	Salher Fort	Lat. 20° 72', Long. 73° 84'	
7	Mulher Fort	Lat. 20° 46', Long. 74° 03'	
8	Rangana Fort	Lat. 16° 04', Long. 73° 51'	
9	Ankai-Tankai Fort	Lat. 20° 11', Long. 74° 26'	
10	Kasa Fort	Lat. 18° 20', Long. 72° 58'	
11	Sindhudurg	Lat. 16° 02', Long. 73° 27'	
12	Alibag Fort	Lat. 18° 35', Long. 72° 50'	
13	Suvarnadurg	Lat. 17° 49', Long. 73° 06'	
14	Khanderi Fort	Lat. 18° 70', Long. 72° 81'	

About UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) founded in 1945 is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN) aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences, and culture.

Its headquartered is at the World Heritage Centre in Paris

It has 193 member states and 11 associate members, as well as partners in the non-governmental, intergovernmental, and private sector

It pursues this objective through five major program areas:

Education

- natural sciences
- social/human sciences
- culture and
- communication/information

UNESCO is governed by the General Conference, composed of member states and associate members, which meets biannually to set the agency's programmes and the budget.

First scientific count of India's snow leopard

Context

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) conducted the inaugural 'Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India' (SPAI) from 2019 to 2023, in collaboration with snow leopard range states, Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, and WWF-India.

Assessment details

As many as 718 snow leopards were reported as part of the first-ever scientific exercise that was carried out by the Wildlife

Institute of India (WII).

The highest number of cats was estimated to be in:

- Ladakh (477)
- Uttarakhand (124)
- Himachal Pradesh (51)
- Arunachal Pradesh (36)
- Sikkim (21)
- Jammu and Kashmir (09)

The assessment covered over 70 per cent of the potential snow leopard range in the country.

The current estimate puts the number of Indian snow leopards between 10% and 15% of the global population.

The snow leopard is known to be an elusive cat and located in mountainous terrain that is hard to access.

The Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) began in 2019 and involves the World Wide Fund for Nature-India and the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, along with the WII.

Snow leopard

Snow leopards act as an indicator of the health of the mountain ecosystem in which they live, due to their position as the top predator in the food web.

Snow leopard have a vast but fragmented distribution across the mountainous landscape of central Asia, which covers different parts of the Himalayas such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.

Protection Status

- UCN List of Threatened Species: Vulnerable.
- CITES: Appendix I.
- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule-I.

Corruption perceptions index 2023

Context

Transparency International unveiled the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) disclosing a list of the world's most corrupt countries.

Ranking details

India ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the corruption perceptions index (CPI) for 2023, according to the latest report released by Transparency International.

The index, which lists countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, ranked Denmark at the top, followed by Finland, New Zealand and Norway.

The report said, "The 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released shows that most countries have made little to no progress in tackling public sector corruption.

Over two-thirds of the 180 ranked countries scored below 50 on the scale, indicating a prevalence of corruption.

The index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

The bottom of the index included Myanmar (162), Afghanistan (162) and North Korea (172).

At rank 180 was Somalia with the lowest score of 11.

About Transparency International

Transparency International is a global non-governmental organization dedicated to combating corruption and promoting transparency in both public and private sectors worldwide.

It was founded in 1993 and is headquartered in Berlin, Germany.

The organization works through research, advocacy, and partnerships to raise awareness about the impact of corruption on societies and to develop initiatives for fostering accountability and integrity.

A blurred mapping of internal female migration

Internal migration is a vital aspect of physical and social movement in India, with the Periodic Labour Force Survey indicating a 27% migration rate from June 2020 to 2021.

While normative literature typically portrays it as male-dominated, women, particularly of working age, form a significant portion of the migrant population.

This is concerning, especially considering the decline in India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR).

The lack of dialogue around female migrants raises questions about potential employment barriers they may face due to post-migration conditions.

National surveys, inaccurate picture

National surveys like the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) provide information on female migrants but may present an inaccurate portrayal.

These surveys primarily inquire about the primary reason for migration, revealing that a majority of women migrate for marriage (81%), followed by family reasons (10%), employment (2.42%), and education (0.48%).

However, the surveys lack insights into secondary motivations like climate shocks and food insecurity, which are significant drivers for women's migration.

Similarly, data on migrant women's labor force participation from these surveys can be misleading.

Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) indicates that about 75% of migrant women are unemployed, with 14% in self and wage-employed jobs and 12% in casual labor.

This data, collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, may explain the low numbers but fails to address the underreporting of employment status.

Human and social capital

In is evident fact that the entry to the formal labor force is challenging for women, with low education levels (85% have less than 10 years).

This, coupled with a lack of social networks, hinders employment chances, especially for migrant women. The post-pandemic recovery for women's labor activity has been dismal, with 55% not returning to work, and those who did earning only 56% of pre-pandemic income.

Female migration for employment increased by 101% from 2001 to 2011, but these women face hurdles and marginalization, leading to unaddressed struggles and a lack of targeted policies.

Politically, women migrants are not a significant vote bank, resulting in neglect of their needs.

This lack of focus leads to poorly informed policy-making, treating migrant men and women the same. Current policies, such as One Nation One ration card, e-Shram, and affordable rental housing, primarily benefit male migrants.

Way forward

To address the issue, it is crucial to enhance national surveys by gathering more data on the socio-economic conditions of post-migration individuals.

Currently, there is limited information available, particularly regarding access to social security benefits. Only about 7% of migrants, as per the PLFS, have access to such benefits, leaving a significant portion unaccounted for.

A broader solution involves shifting the narrative and prioritizing the collection of female-specific data.

This approach will shed light on the often overlooked issues faced by these women, fostering awareness and supporting the formulation of progressive policies.

30 JAN
Improving battery technologies for speedy EV adoption
Western countries halt UNRWA funding
Indian economy to grow closer to 7% in 2024-25
India Bhutan to strengthen bilateral relations
Populism does not help public health

Improving battery technologies for speedy EV adoption

Context

In the dynamic landscape of India's automotive sector, the accelerated adoption of Electric Vehicles (EVs) hinges on overcoming challenges in battery technologies. Enhancing energy density, reducing charging times, and ensuring cost-

effectiveness are pivotal to making EVs a swift and viable choice for Indian consumers.

Growth of EVs in India

In 2023, Electric Vehicles (EVs) in India experienced a noteworthy 50% sales growth compared to 2022, though they still constitute only 6% of total vehicle registrations.

Despite the modest current volumes, the Indian EV market is poised for significant expansion, anticipated to reach $100 billion by 2030.

Central to an EV's performance is its battery, constituting 40% of the vehicle cost.

The projected market growth relies on advancements in battery technology for improved economics and enhanced user experience, including longer range, faster charging, and enhanced safety.

The lithium battery

Most electric vehicles (EVs) currently use lithium-ion batteries, comprising an anode and a cathode separated by an electrolyte.

Lithium atoms in the anode release electrons, providing current for the motor, while lithium ions move to the cathode. During charging, this process is reversed.

Lithium is favored due to its lightness and efficient electron transfer.

Despite high energy density, Li-ion batteries still face challenges: slow charging, affordability, and environmental concerns linked to mining lithium and other elements like cobalt and nickel.

Improving the EV battery

Efforts to enhance electric vehicle (EV) batteries can be categorized into three approaches.

First involves tweaking the electrodes of lithium-ion batteries for better performance, considering factors like lightweight design, high lithium storage, and cost-effective, non-toxic materials.

Second approach focuses on safety and efficiency through sensing and control systems.

Optimizing charging algorithms and control mechanisms can lead to faster charging without altering the battery's fundamental chemistry.

Third, EV battery improvements include electrode modifications for better performance and the implementation of sensing and control systems to enhance safety and charging efficiency.

Western countries halt UNRWA funding

Context

The US and eight other Western nations, contributing to UNRWA budget, have halted funding.

Request for reconsideration

Recently, The UN officials urged countries to reconsider their decision to suspend the funding for the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA), assuring that it would take strict action against any staff member found to be involved in Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.

The agency also highlighted that two million Palestinians in Gaza are dependent on UNRWA services that would be scaled back as soon as February if the funding is not restored.

The US and eight other Western countries, which together provided more than half of UNRWA's 2022 budget, cut the money after Israel accused some of the agency's staff members of involvement in the October 7 attack.

About UNRWA

UNRWA stands for UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.

It was founded in 1949 to provide aid to about 700,000 Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes in what is now Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

UNRWA operates in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, providing education, health, relief, social services, microfinance, and emergency assistance to refugees both within and outside camps in these regions.

Around 5.9 million Palestine refugees, mostly descendants of the original refugees, utilize UNRWA's services.

In Gaza, over 1 million people, who account for 85% of the population displaced by the recent Israel-Hamas conflict, seek shelter in UNRWA schools and facilities.

Israel accused UNRWA

Israel has accused UNRWA of having staff members involved in an attack, alleging that Hamas uses UNRWA funds and operates near its facilities, including tunnels.

Israel also claims UNRWA schools promote hatred towards Israel.

The UNRWA has denied all the allegations, saying it has no links to Hamas.

In the statement, UN officials said out of 12 staff members who were accused of being involved in the attack, nine have been terminated.

Indian economy to grow closer to 7% in 2024-25

Context
Ahead of the Interim Union Budget, the Finance Ministry in a report stated that India's real GDP growth at closer to 7% in 2024-25 with 'considerable scope' to outpace 7% by 2030.

Growth forecast
The economists led by Chief Economic said the Indian economy will become the third largest economy in the next three years with a $5 trillion economy.
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has projected the tag of India by 2027-28.
Indian economy grew by 7.2% in FY23 and the National Statistical Office (NSO) has pegged it at 7.3% for FY24.
The World Bank has projected India's economic growth at 6.4% for FY25.
Ten years ago, India was the 10th largest economy in the world, with a GDP of $1.9 trillion at current market prices in 2014.
Currently, India is the 5th largest economy with a GDP of $3.7 trillion in FY24.

Priority areas for future reforms
The economists said priority areas for future reforms include skilling, learning outcomes, health, energy security, reduction in compliance burden for MSMEs, and gender balancing in the labour force.
The other key reforms such as the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, along with the push to build infrastructure is also vital for economic growth.

India Bhutan to strengthen bilateral relations

Context
India's Foreign Secretary commenced a three-day visit to Bhutan to further strengthen the bilateral relationship.

Background
In 2021, Bhutan and China agreed to a three-step roadmap to address their unresolved border dispute.
This roadmap involves delineating the border on maps, followed by surveys and formal demarcation, according to some observers.
Progress in these border talks has been relatively swift, with the establishment of technical teams and the 25th round of border talks held in August and October 2023, respectively.

Significance
The visit holds significance as the new government prepares to tackle the complex task of negotiating a border settlement with China.
Bhutan has been a longstanding diplomatically of India and has faced increasing pressure from China to settle the boundary dispute.
India has reaffirmed its support for Bhutan's five-year plans and the hydropower sector, emphasizing the strong bilateral ties between the two nations.
On the other hand, India closely monitors these border negotiations, particularly in the context of the Doklam tri-junction, where past standoffs have occurred.

Populism does not help public health

In India, a vital public health battle is quietly executed against diseases like smallpox, polio, neonatal tetanus, and measles. The unsung heroes are improved sanitation and vaccines, preventing illnesses and showcasing success through their absence.
Political leaders tend to prioritize short-term initiatives like building new hospitals and subsidizing treatments in private hospitals, often driven by populism.
However, in a democratic system, leaders often prioritize visible achievements, unintentionally overlooking these crucial preventive initiatives.

The case of dengue
The case of dengue highlights a focus on immediate relief rather than long-term strategies. Political leaders often prioritize setting up immediate relief camps during outbreaks, overlooking crucial aspects like understanding vector bionomics and developing effective vaccines.
The focus on providing emergency relief neglects addressing the root causes of dengue, hindering efforts in vector control, vaccine development, and public health infrastructure improvement.
This approach fails to prevent future outbreaks and strains the healthcare system.

States With Highest Dengue Cases in 2021

- Uttar Pradesh — 29,750
- Punjab — 23,389
- Rajasthan — 20,749
- Madhya Pradesh
- Delhi
- Others — 90,676
- Maharashtra
- Haryana
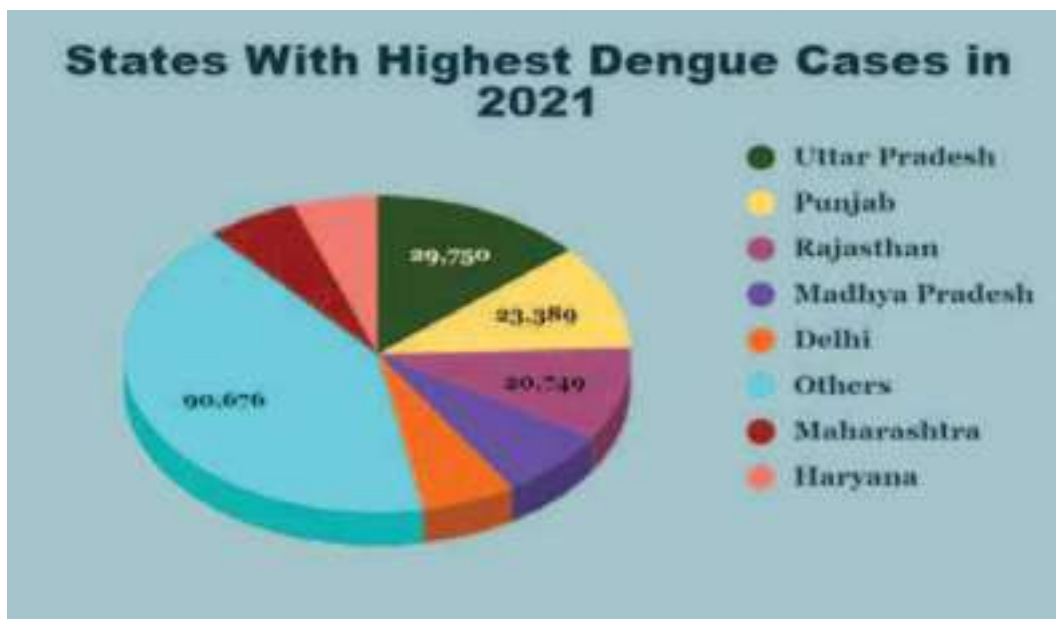
Need for Research and development

Research and development in crucial areas, such as the existing dengue vaccine and adapting public health strategies to climate change, are essential.

Similar to India's judicial setup and space program, healthcare should be detached from political processes.

Decisions should rely on scientific evidence and long-term goals rather than short-term political interests, ensuring that public health policies are driven by data and expertise, not electoral cycles.

Government measures and data

The current Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme For Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) Abhiyan aims to annually reduce stunting by 2%, undernutrition by 2%, anaemia by 3%, and low birth weight by 2%.

However, the fifth National Family Health Survey (2019-21) revealed that 35.5% of children under five were stunted, 32.1% were underweight, and anaemia rates increased from 58.6% to 67.1% in children and from 54.1% to 59.1% in women aged 15-19 years.

This significant disparity between actual prevalence and policy targets underscores a notable gap in public health efforts.

Bottlenecks

Addressing public health challenges requires a focus on behavioral change, particularly in political environments marked by populist tendencies.

In India, the absence of specialized courses like public health engineering in educational institutions reveals a gap in the multidisciplinary approach necessary for effective public health management.

Beyond treating diseases, public health involves prevention and draws on expertise from fields such as environmental science, sociology, urban planning, and economics.

However, India's public health system is currently too physician-centric, overlooking this comprehensive nature.

Way forward

Effective public health management should encompass preventive measures, policy formulation, community health, and environmental health.

A separation of powers approach is crucial for a fair and effective health system, minimizing political influence.

Managing public health within democratic systems often has shortcomings, and a separation of health-care decision-making from short-term political goals is crucial for developing sustainable health strategies that address both immediate and future needs.

29 JAN
SEBI's FPI disclosure norms
RBI's guidelines on State 'guarantees'
India-Germany inter-governmental deal on submarines
INSAT-3DS satellite
The burden of malnutrition

SEBI's FPI disclosure norms

Context

Recently, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) enhanced disclosure norms for high-risk FPIs to become effective February 1, 2024.

SEBI directives

In August 2023, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) directed Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) with over 50% of their equity Asset Under Management (AUM) in a single corporate group or a total holding in Indian equity markets exceeding Rs 25,000 crore to disclose detailed information about entities holding ownership, economic interest, or exercising control.

These measures aimed to curb potential round-tripping by certain promoters utilizing the FPI route.

Requirement of additional disclosures

SEBI in its August circular expressed concern over some Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) concentrating a significant portion of their equity portfolio in a single company or corporate group.

This raise worries about the potential circumvention of regulatory requirements, such as those related to disclosures under the Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers Regulations, 2011, and maintaining Minimum Public Shareholding in listed companies.

SEBI has mandated that Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) must furnish comprehensive information about entities with ownership, economic interest, or control in the FPI.

Timeline to meet the disclosure norms

FPIs exceeding investment limits as of October 31, 2023, must reduce exposure by January 29, 2024, unless exempt.

If disclosure data isn't provided by January-end, FPIs get an additional seven months for liquidation, with no immediate deadline.

FPIs exempted from disclosure

FPIs who are sovereign wealth funds (SWFs), listed companies on certain global exchanges, public retail funds, and other regulated pooled investment vehicles with diversified global holdings, are exempted from making enhanced disclosures.

LOOKS TO THWART STOCK PRICE MANIPULATION

"Concentrated investments raise the concern and possibility that **promoters of such corporate groups, or other investors acting in concert, could be using the FPI route for circumventing regulatory requirements** such as that of maintaining minimum public shareholding —SEBI CONSULTATION PAPER

➤ Sebi said that in such cases, the **apparent free float in a listed co may not be its true free float**, which in turn could increase the **risk of price manipulation**

Move Comes After Adani Probe

➤ The move comes after **four Mauritius-based FPIs** were found to have invested almost all of their capital in Adani Group stocks.

➤ In a subsequent probe, Sebi was **unable to zero in on the ultimate owners** of large investments in Adani Group companies' stocks

RBI's guidelines on State 'guarantees'

Context

On January 16, a working group constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) made certain recommendations to address issues relating to guarantees extended by State governments. The Working Group also prescribed a uniform reporting framework for the guarantees extended, besides expanding the definition of what constitutes a 'guarantee.'

What constitutes a 'guarantee'

A "guarantee" is a promise made by a state government to take responsibility if someone who owes money can't pay it back. This promise is part of a special agreement that helps protect the lender or investor from losing money if the borrower can't repay.

The lender or investor is called the "creditor," the person who owes the money is the "principal debtor," and the state government making the promise is the "surety."

So, if the borrower can't pay, the state steps in to make sure the debt gets paid.

Definition of guarantee

The Working Group has suggested that the term 'guarantee' should be used in a broader sense and include all instruments, by whatever name they may be called if they create an obligation on the guarantor (State) to make a payment on behalf of the borrower at a future date.

Further, it must not make any distinction between conditional or unconditional, or financial or performance guarantees to assess the fiscal risk.

About according guarantees

The Working Group advises against using government guarantees for financing through State-owned entities that replace state budget resources.

Guarantees should not create direct liabilities for the State and must adhere to Government of India guidelines, covering only the principal amount and normal interest of the loan.

They should not support external commercial borrowings, be limited to 80% of the project loan, and not be extended to private sector entities.

Risk determination

The Working Group recommends that States assign risk weights (indicating ideal lender holding to adjust risk) categorized as high, medium, or low, considering past default records, before extending guarantees.

A "desirable" ceiling on guarantees is suggested to avoid fiscal stress in case of invocation.

For incremental guarantees issued in a year, the proposal sets a ceiling at 5% of Revenue Receipts or 0.5% of GSDP, whichever is lower.

Disclosure norms

The Working Group has recommended that the apex banking regulator may consider advising banks/NBFCs to disclose the credit extended to State-owned entities, backed by State-government guarantees.

The report emphasizes that data availability from both issuers and lenders could enhance the credibility of reported State government data.

Additionally, the group recommends establishing a comprehensive database to record all extended guarantees.

India-Germany inter-governmental deal on submarines

Context

Germany has officially proposed the sale of six advanced conventional submarines to India for the Navy's Project 75-I procurement program.

Project 75-I

The Project 75-I is being pursued under the so-called "strategic partner" model of equipment acquisition.

This requires the ministry of defence (MoD) to identify Indian firms that have the capability and capacity to build and supply a particular weapons platform – such as a submarine, warship, fighter aircraft or tank.

The advanced technology needed is obtained through partnership with a foreign original equipment manufacturer (OEM).

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Depleting underwater strength

➤ India requires 18 diesel-electric subs, 6 nuclear-powered attack subs (SSNs) & 4 nuclear-powered subs with nuclear-tipped missiles (SSBNs)

➤ But has only 2 new Scorpene & 13 old conventional subs. Also 1 SSBN (INS Arihant) & 1 SSN (INS Chakra)

➤ 4 more Scorpene subs, being built at MDL under ₹ 23,652 crore Project-75, to be delivered by 2021-22

➤ 3 more SSBNs, after INS Arihant, being built at Vizag for ₹ 90,000 crore

➤ India to get 2nd SSN on 10-year lease from Russia under $1.5 billion deal. First one, INS Chakra, came in 2012 for $900 million

Project-75-India

➤ Project for 6 stealth diesel-electric submarines for around ₹ 50,000 crore first got 'acceptance of necessity' in Nov 2007

➤ Govt promulgated strategic partnership model in May 2017

➤ 2 Indian shipyards (L&T and MDL) & 5 foreign companies (Russian Rubin Design Bureau, French Naval Group-DCNS, German ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems, Spanish Navantia & South Korean Daewoo) now shortlisted

➤ Will take around 2 years for contract to be inked

➤ Will thereafter take 7 to 8 years for the first submarine to roll out

India and Germany deal

India and Germany discussed the deal at the highest level during the visit of German Defence Minister in June 2023, when he made a strong pitch for the bid by ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) in his talks with Defence Minister of India. The deal is being progressed under the 'strategic partnership' of the defence procurement procedure.

Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), along with Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Limited, has been shortlisted to partner with foreign submarine manufactures to make six advanced conventional submarines in India under a technology transfer.

INSAT-3DS satellite

Context

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has said that the INSAT-3DS satellite has been flagged off to the launch port at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.

About INSAT-3DS

The satellite is an exclusive meteorological satellite with the primary objective to provide continuity of services to the existing in-orbit INSAT-3D and 3DR satellites and significantly enhancing the capabilities of the INSAT system.

The satellite will monitor land and ocean surfaces for weather forecasting and disaster warning with state-of-the-art payloads such as a six-channel imager and 19-channel sounder meteorology payloads, communication payloads.

The satellite is designed to provide continuity of services to the in-orbit earth observation satellites.

The satellite is likely to be launched on board the GSLV F14 next month.

SAS&R transponder

The SAS&R transponder is a crucial component incorporated into the satellite.

It plays a vital role in relaying distress signals and alert detections from beacon transmitters, contributing to global search and rescue services.

The SAS&R transponder is incorporated into the satellite to relay a distress signal/ alert detection for search and rescue services with global receive coverage.

The burden of malnutrition

Malnutrition is a significant public health issue in India, affecting a large portion of the population.

Despite economic growth and improvements in various sectors, India continues to face challenges related to malnutrition, encompassing both undernutrition and overnutrition.

Even, Anemia is a significant public health issue in India, affecting a large portion of the population primarily children and women.

Reasons

The consistent intake of food lacking in essential micronutrients can lead to iron deficiency anaemia and Vitamin A, and zinc deficiency, and impair immunity.

Conversely, conditions such as celiac disease and infections like h. pylori or worm infestations can disturb the digestive system, leading to nutrient deficiencies.

Malnutrition caused by micronutrient deficiency has inter-generational impacts — anaemic mothers are known to give birth to anaemic babies.

Government measures

The government programmes like Anaemia Mukt Bharat (AMB) are among the biggest targeted measures to tackle the disorder.

It involves administering iron and folic acid (IFA) tablets and other prophylactic measures.

The Mid-day Meal Scheme for school children is another such intervention.

The government interventions with measures such as Large-Scale Food Fortification (LSFF).

Challenges and Concerns

The bigger challenge is that about 46 per cent of South Asia's population lacks access to an affordable balanced diet, as per FAO data.

According to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2023, around 74 per cent of India's population could not afford a healthy diet, and 39 per cent fell short of a nutrient-adequate one.

CHILDREN AT RISK : MALNUTRITION IN INDIA 5 FACTS

India ranks among the bottom 5 countries in child malnutrition.

Bihar, MP, Jharkhand, UP & Rajasthan are 5 states with highest malnutrition.

34% children in India under the age of 5 are underweight.

37% children in India under the age of 5 are stunted.

Every 5th under nourished child in the world lives in India.

Conclusion

Awareness is critical to the acceptance of fortified foods among the targeted beneficiaries.

An important step in this direction is to inform the beneficiaries about the stringent standards of fortification.

Multiple awareness strategies can be adopted to foster greater awareness.

This includes utilising communication channels such as community radio, videos and door-to-door outreach.

27 JAN

Deepening India-France defence ties
Rare golden tiger snapped in Kaziranga
ICJ orders Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza
Chandrayaan Aids Precision Moon Landing for JAXA
The Quality of Growth

Deepening India-France Defence Ties

Context

India and France agreed to adopt the Defence Industrial Roadmap and explore opportunities for partnership in the defence industrial sector and prioritise co-designing, co-development and co-production

Focus area

India and France have firmed up a defence industrial partnership roadmap that would provide for co-development and co-production of key military hardware and platforms and facilitate technology collaboration in a range of areas including space, land warfare, cyberspace and artificial intelligence.

The two sides also signed a new agreement for a defence-space partnership that will see them collaborate on "space situational awareness".

An MoU on coordinating on satellite launches, along with other agreements on partnerships in energy, digital health, agriculture, and education.

A joint venture for the local manufacture of civilian helicopters was agreed between Airbus and TATA.

Civil nuclear cooperation

India and France did not report any breakthrough on the civil nuclear cooperation agreement to build reactors at Jaitapur that was first signed in 2009, and saw a techno-commercial offer made by French company EDF in 2020.

French contingent parade

A French contingent is expected to take part in the parade on January 26 on Kartavya Path.

It may be recalled that a 269-member Indian contingent took part in the Bastille Day parade in France last year.

Rare golden tiger snapped in Kaziranga

Context

After a gap of about three years, the rare golden tiger has been spotted in Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR).

- Wildlife photographer from Coimbatore snapped the tiger with the golden coat on a safari in Assam's Kaziranga National Park.

An Unusual Phenotype

According to specialists, more than one golden tiger may inhabit Kaziranga, although exact numbers are as yet unconfirmed.

The distinctive golden coat of this tiger variety is attributed to a genetic variant that results in the absence of black coloring.

Typically, tigers display three colors: black, orange, and white.

However, the golden tiger lacks the black color, and even its orange coat appears faded, rendering its unique golden hue.

The golden tiger is also known as the "strawberry tiger" or "tabby tiger" did to it's magnificent color.

SOME OF THE WELL-KNOWN TIGER RESERVES IN INDIA:

ICJ orders Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza

Context
International Court of Justice ruled that Israel must prevent genocidal acts in Gaza and allow humanitarian aid into the territory.

Detective form ICJ
Israel must "take all measures in its power" to prevent genocidal acts and also stop officials making declarations inciting genocide.

The court urged Israel to take "immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance".

The case was brought by South Africa, which has accused Israel of breaching the UN Genocide Convention.

Israel reaction
The Prime Minister of Israel said the charge against Israel "is not only false, it's outrageous, and decent people everywhere should reject it".

Israel stressed during the hearings that it was acting in self-defense after the Hamas attacks of October 7 and was doing all in its power to ease the plight of civilians.

While steps to help civilians "are to be encouraged, they are insufficient" to protect the rights of the Palestinians.

South Africa and Israel
South Africa and Israel recently faced off at the International Court of Justice in The Hague over allegations of genocide.

South Africa accused Israel of committing genocide during its military campaign in Gaza and invoked the Genocide Convention.

South Africa sought provisional measures to halt the alleged genocide, while Israel denied having any genocidal intent in its response to a terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7.

South Africa accused Israel of "genocidal" acts that were intended to cause the "destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group."

Chandrayaan Aids Precision Moon Landing for JAXA

Context
Japan achieved a highly accurate moon landing, coming within meters of its target, according to its space agency.
- The country's "Moon Sniper" lander successfully touched down on the lunar surface, making Japan the fifth nation to accomplish this feat.

Landing details
Japan follows the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India in reaching the moon.

SLIM or 'Moon Sniper, which was aiming to hit a very small target, is a lightweight spacecraft about the size of a passenger vehicle.

It craft was using pinpoint landing technology that promises far greater control than any previous moon landing.

The project was the fruit of two decades of work on precision technology by JAXA.

Aim and Goal
The mission's main goal is to test new landing technology that would allow moon missions to land where we want to, rather than where it is easy to land.

If the landing was a success, the spacecraft will seek clues about the origin of the moon, including analysing minerals with a special camera.

The SLIM, equipped with a pad to cushion impact, was aiming to land near the Shioli crater, near a region covered in volcanic rock.

The Quality of Growth

The upcoming Union budget is set to be presented against a backdrop of overall economic stability in India.

Key indicators, such as robust GDP growth, moderating inflation, a narrowing current account deficit, and healthy corporate results, suggest a positive environment.

However, concerns remain regarding weak consumption demand, limited private investment, and global economic uncertainties.

Given the impending national elections in a few months, the finance minister is expected to present an interim budget focusing on key policy directions for sustained economic growth.

Government's priorities and policy focus

First, moving towards fiscal consolidation.

India's government debt is 82% of GDP in 2022-23, with 17% of total expenditure going towards interest payments.

Limited room exists for increased productive government spending, emphasizing the need for continued fiscal consolidation.

The government is expected to meet the fiscal deficit target for 2023-24, aided by robust direct tax collections and higher dividends from the RBI and public sector undertakings.

Second, the government has been emphasizing capital expenditure to drive economic growth post-pandemic.

The planned government capex to GDP ratio for 2023-24 is 3.4%.

In the last two years, interest-free loans of Rs 2.3 trillion have been allocated to state governments for capital expenditure.

With the strong growth impact of capex, the focus is expected to persist, aiming for a 10% increase to approximately Rs 11 trillion, with a continued emphasis on infrastructure.

Third, the need to spur consumption. Consumption revival has been weak, particularly among lower-income groups, despite a robust 7.3% GDP growth projection for the year.

Consumption is estimated to grow only at 4.4%, prompting the need for measures to boost it. While the government focuses on capex-led growth, there's an urgency to stimulate domestic demand, especially given the poor external demand. Despite fiscal limitations, some suggest a small excise duty cut on petrol/diesel (Rs 2-3/litre) to spur consumption, contain inflation, and maintain fiscal balance.

Fourth, increased spending on human capital.

India has a unique advantage with a large working-age population, but to capitalize on this demographic dividend, increased government investment in health, education, and skilling is crucial.

Currently, social services spending is planned to rise to 8.3% of GDP in 2022-23, up from 6.7% in 2017-18.

However, this lags behind many European countries where such spending exceeds one-fifth of GDP.

Boosting spending on these services is vital for a population heavily reliant on government support.

Fifth, a focus on agriculture and the rural sector.

Rural India, housing 65% of the population, heavily relies on agriculture with significantly lower productivity compared to China and the US.

To enhance rural incomes, adopting advanced technology, improving infrastructure, and transitioning the workforce to manufacturing and services are crucial.

Addressing rural health is imperative for sustaining India's overall growth.

Conclusion

Apart from the broad areas listed above, many others warrant attention.

For instance, it's crucial to create a good environment for businesses to grow, pay extra attention to environmental issues, and empower marginalized groups.

These are significant matters to consider when planning the budget.

Now is a good time to focus on the quality of growth, making sure it's not just fair but also sustainable and good for the environment.

23 JAN
Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana
Regulation of FCRA registration for NGOs
Committee on equal access to benefits for all SCs
EVs development and adoption for Low Carbon Economy
Tax contribution by States needs to be revisited

Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana

Context

The Prime Minister announced 'Pradhanmantri Surydaya Yojana', an initiative to generate electricity through solar power.

Adopt rooftop solar campaign

The Prime Minister chaired a meeting with senior officials of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

He urged the officials to start a massive national campaign to mobilise residential segment consumers to adopt rooftop solar in large numbers.

Rooftop solar entails installing solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of an establishment or home.

The scheme would not only reduce the electricity bill of the poor and middle class but would also make India self-reliant in the energy sector.

National Rooftop Scheme

The Centre currently has a National Rooftop Scheme that provides financial assistance totaling 40 per cent of the capital cost of a solar rooftop project.

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) selects the projects based on submissions made by discoms, wherein private contractors/vendors selected by discoms build the project.

Objective of National Rooftop Scheme

To promote the grid-connected SPV rooftop and small SPV power generating plants among the residential, community, institutional, industrial and commercial establishments.

To mitigate the dependence on fossil fuel-based electricity generation and encourage environment-friendly Solar electricity generation.

To create an enabling environment for investment in the solar energy sector by the private sector, state government and individuals.

To create an enabling environment for the supply of solar power from rooftops and small plants to the grid.

Grid-Connected Rooftop Solar Scheme (Phase II)

The goal is to reach 40,000 MW capacity from Rooftop Solar Projects by 2022.

In grid-connected rooftop solar systems, DC power from solar panels is converted to AC power using a power conditioning unit and fed into the grid.

The aim is to promote these systems among various establishments to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and encourage eco-friendly solar electricity generation.

Regulation of FCRA registration for NGOs

Context

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and World Vision India for alleged violation of laws.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

The FCRA was enacted in 1976 to regulate foreign money into the country through independent organizations.

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act was amended by the Indian Parliament in 2010.

The act aims to effectively regulate the foreign contribution by individuals or associations or companies.

Monitoring of FCRA

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) oversees FCRA implementation.

Due to COVID-19 and 2020 FCRA amendments, NGO renewals faced delays.

MHA extended the deadline to March 31, 2024, for NGOs expiring between Sep 29, 2020, and Sep 30, 2021.

FCRA regulates foreign donations to prevent internal security impact.

NGOs must register for foreign contributions, valid for five years with renewal.

NEW FCRA RULES

➤ **Registration, prior permission and renewal** of registration under FCRA, 2010 to be accepted online

➤ **Fee for various services** will be paid online

➤ All FCRA designated bank a/c and utilisation a/c to be brought on online platform of **Public Finance Management Service** and **Controller General of Accounts**

➤ **Certificate of registration, renewal, prior permission** to be sent online

➤ **Number of forms** reduced from 10 to 6

➤ **No filing of hard copy of annual returns**

➤ Requirement of seeking prior permission for **change**

of name, aims and objects, address of the association, change of bank/account etc is now relaxed to only intimation through FCRA online service

➤ **List of purposes** for which foreign contribution can be utilized, rationalized and reduced

➤ Updating of **foreign contribution records** by associations on their website now every three months

➤ Info regarding **FB page, Twitter handle** of office bearers optional

Reasons for the cancellation of registrations

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has accused the Center for Policy Research (CPR) of diverting foreign donations to support protests and legal battles against development projects, as well as misusing funds to impact India's economic interests.

The MHA alleges that CPR violated FCRA norms by producing current affairs programs, such as a report on air pollution, using foreign funds, which is prohibited under Section 3 of the FCRA.

Additionally, the MHA canceled the registration of World Vision India (WVI) for FCRA violations from 2012-13 to 2020-21, citing the highest amount of foreign donations received among NGOs registered under the Act in 1986.

How many have lost registration

As of January 22, 2024, over 16,000 NGOs in India had their FCRA registration canceled since 2015 due to violations.

In 2022, nearly 6,000 NGOs ceased operations as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) either refused to renew their application or they didn't apply.

In 2023, a record 1,111 associations were granted fresh FCRA registration, with almost half falling under the religious category, primarily Christian NGOs.

The MHA reported that out of 1,615 FCRA registration applications in 2021 and 2022, 722 were approved, and 225 were rejected.

Committee on equal access to benefits for all SCs

Context

The Union government has established a high-level committee, led by the Cabinet Secretary, to assess and devise a fair distribution method for benefits and initiatives among over 1,200 Scheduled Castes.

Background

The committee's formation follows a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister in December 2023. This initiative comes weeks after the Prime Minister call to address the demand for sub-categorization of Scheduled Castes, raised by the Madiga community in Telangana during the previous year's Assembly elections.

Madiga is a Telugu caste, mainly living in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka, with a small minority in Tamil Nadu. Madigas are historically associated with the work of tannery, leatherwork, and small handicrafts.

The Madiga community, constituting at least 50% of the SC population in Telangana.

State and Union government commissions endorse this claim, prompting states like Punjab, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu to pursue state-level reservation laws for sub-categorization within SCs.

Composition of Committee

The Committee will consist of secretaries from the Home Ministry, the Law Ministry, the Tribal Affairs Ministry, the Social Justice Ministry and the Department of Personnel and Training in addition to the Cabinet Secretary.

Aim and Objective

The aim is to address the imbalance where certain relatively forward and dominant communities have overshadowed the most backward ones.

The panel will look into ways in which benefits of other government schemes and initiatives can be focused towards these SC communities.

This includes ways to design special initiatives for communities that need it and focusing existing programmes and schemes towards them to ensure a more even distribution of benefits.

The panel is tasked with identifying criteria for shortlisting SC communities for special attention, determining the need for tailored initiatives, and devising effective delivery methods.

Constitutional provision of sub-categorising

National Commissions for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and Scheduled Tribes (NCST) in 2005 maintained that nothing in the Constitution's Articles 341 and 342 explicitly prevented Parliament from sub-categorising SCs and STs.

These Articles vest the powers of notifying SC and ST lists with the President of India and of creating the lists with Parliament.

Article 16(4) of the Constitution of India already provided for States to create special provisions for any backward classes it felt was under-represented.

EVs development and adoption for Low Carbon Economy

Context

India's vision for development by 2047 involves a significant move towards electric vehicles, backed by tax incentives, production-linked incentive schemes, and mandatory charging infrastructure, according to a senior government official.

India's transition to a low-carbon economy

The development and adoption of Electric Vehicles (EVs) play a pivotal role in India's transition to a low-carbon economy.

The comprehensive vision for 2047 includes a substantial shift towards electric vehicles across various segments, supported by tax incentives, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes, and the mandatory provision of charging infrastructure.

A shift in the modal share of freight from road to rail will be an effective lever to decarbonise the freight transport sector.

FDI in renewable power projects

The government had authorised of 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for renewable power projects underscores the nation's dedication to sustainable development.

Viksit Bharat @2047 is the vision to make India a developed nation by 2047, the 100th year of independence.

The vision encompasses various aspects of development, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance.

The recent World Economic Forum in Davos focuses on public and private collaboration for the cluster partnership model.

The booming EV market in India is attracting global attention, with projections of 1 crore annual sales and five crore jobs by 2030, as per the Economic Survey 2022-23.

Tax contribution by States needs to be revisited

The Finance Commission plays a crucial role in recommending a distribution formula for each State's share in the Union tax revenue.

The distribution formula considers various weighted determinants.

While some States have argued for higher shares based on their higher contributions to Union tax revenue, the importance of tax contribution in the formula has decreased since the 10th Finance Commission.

Various experts had propose that tax contribution remains a valid measure of efficiency, especially with the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, and should be reconsidered for inclusion in the distribution formula.

Mandate of Finance Commissions

Two important tasks of the Finance Commissions are:

(i) to recommend the proportion of the Union tax revenues to be assigned to States

(ii) to recommend the share of each State in the assigned tax revenue.

Until the 10th Finance Commission in 2000, States' shares were limited to personal income tax and Union excise duties.

Distribution of pooled Central tax revenues

Since 2000, the formula for the distribution of pooled Central tax revenues included tax effort and fiscal discipline as efficiency indicators with a weight of around 15%.

Tax effort is broadly defined as the ratio of own revenue of a State to its Gross Domestic Product.

Fiscal discipline is the proportion of own revenue to the revenue expenditure of a State.

In the 15th Finance Commission, the distribution formula had tax effort with a weight of 2.5%, and demographic performance, an indicator of efficiency in population control, was given a weight of 12.5%.

The remaining 85% weight was distributed among equity indicators of per capita income, population as per the 2011 Census instead of the conventional 1971 Census, area, forest cover, etc.

GST tax regime

GST is a consumption-based destination tax, evenly split between State and Central governments.

Despite variations in the absolute amount of GST revenue based on states' economic size and structure, the GST ensures minimal differences in states' tax efforts.

The inclusion of a state's GST contribution as an efficiency indicator in the distribution formula becomes crucial, as it remains unaffected by discretionary state tax policies and reflects the accurate tax base exploited for national benefit.

In addition to GST, petroleum consumption is also an indicator of tax contribution to the national exchequer.

The Union excise duty and sales tax on petroleum products are outside GST.

Bottom line

The share of CGST and Union excise duty is about 30% of States' share in Central tax revenue in 2021-22 and the similar ratio for personal and corporate income taxes is 64%.

The two relative contributions, namely GST revenue and petroleum consumption, of States are fair and accurate measures of States' contributions to the national exchequer and a good measure of efficiency.

There is a persuasive case for the 16th Finance Commission, recently constituted by the Union government, to debate and include these ratios as a measure of efficiency with a weightage of at least 33% in the distribution formula.

Mosquitofish has become invasive in India

Context

Recently, government and non-governmental organizations in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Punjab have introduced mosquitofish into local water bodies to combat a mosquito problem.

Background

Over the past century, significant changes in the world's climate and habitats have hastened the proliferation of mosquito-borne diseases.

Presently, these diseases are widespread in over 150 countries, impacting over 500 million individuals globally.

In India, approximately 40 million people contract mosquito-borne diseases annually, highlighting the enduring public health challenge posed by these illnesses for several decades.

What is mosquitofish

In the 1960s, biological control methods were adopted to combat mosquitoes, including the introduction of mosquitofish (Gambusia species).

These methods were considered environmentally friendly alternatives to chemical pesticides, which posed health and environmental risks.

Mosquitofish, originally from the U.S., have now become widespread globally, adapting to various environments with adverse ecological impacts.

Is mosquitofish used in India

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)plays a key role in managing mosquitoes.

Its focus includes controlling mosquito-borne diseases and conducting research for effective strategies.

In 1928, Gambusia fish were introduced in India under British rule to combat malaria. Governmental organizations like ICMR, NIMR, municipal corporations, Fisheries Department, and private entities joined efforts.

The goal was for Gambusia to control mosquito larvae.

Presently, Gambusia is widespread in India, creating self-sustaining populations. However, the well-intentioned strategy resulted in unintended ecological and environmental issues.

What effects has mosquitofish had

Mosquitofish, considered highly invasive, rank among the top hundred detrimental alien species according to wildlife biologists and conservationists.

Their resilience, voracious feeding habits, and aggressive behavior in new habitats emphasize the need for caution in using biological control methods.

The World Health Organisation stopped recommending Gambusia as a mosquito control agent in 1982.

In 2018, the National Biodiversity Authority of the Government of India also designated G. affinis and G. holbrooki as invasive alien species.

How can mosquitofish be controlled

The current problem involves both immediate threats and long-term issues.

The National Centre for Vector Borne Diseases Control (NCVBDC) recommends using Gambusia and Poecilia fishes for mosquito control, a suggestion that should be removed. Instead, experts propose a collaborative effort between mosquito biologists, entomologists, invasion ecologists, and fish taxonomists to identify native fish species in each river basin capable of controlling mosquito larvae.

Releasing these native species can effectively address the mosquito issue without the ecological risks posed by invasive alien species.

Industry delegation for copper mining opportunities in Zambia

Context

The Ministry of Mines has plans to send an Indian industry delegation to Zambia for discussions on potential copper exploration and mining projects.

Copper reserves in Zambia

Zambia has about 6 per cent of the world's copper reserves and was the eighth-largest producer of copper in 2022.
Zambia is known for its copper mines, particularly in the Copperbelt region.
The country's economy is heavily dependent on copper mining and processing.

Domestic copper demand

As per International Copper Association India, domestic copper demand grew by 16 per cent in FY2022-2023 (FY23), while demand for copper in clean energy technologies grew by 32 per cent.
Copper is widely used in sectors like construction, consumer durables, transportation, and industrial manufacturing.
It is also used in clean energy technologies including solar panels, EVs, and energy efficient motors. China Nonferrous Mining Corporation (CNMC) is among the largest producers of copper in Zambia.
At the same time, net imports of copper cathode, which is the basic product of copper production, grew by 180 per cent in the same financial year as India is not self-sufficient in copper due to low domestic reserves.

India presence in copper mining sector

Currently, India has a limited presence in Zambia's copper mining sector.
In September last year, Vedanta regained control of Konkola Copper Mines (KCM) after it was seized by Zambian authorities in 2019.
The Zambian government owns a 20 per cent stake in KCM.
In 2023, Vedanta also pledged to invest over $1.2 billion in Zambia to increase output of mined copper and pay outstanding debt.
India is not alone in investing in Zambia for its copper reserves.

NISAR Mission on track for a launch soon

Context

The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission, aimed at monitoring Earth's ecosystems, is set for an early 2024 launch.

Background

NASA-ISRO (NISAR) mission, a pioneering Earth-observing satellite built and developed jointly by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), is scheduled for an early 2024 launch.
NISAR is the first collaboration programme between the space agencies of India and the USA.
The project is also expected to be one of the world's most expensive earth imaging satellite.

About NISAR

NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission is a Low Earth Orbit (LEO) observatory being jointly developed by NASA and ISRO.

NISAR will map the entire globe in 12 days and provide spatially and temporally consistent data for understanding changes in Earth's ecosystems.

It carries L and S dual band Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), which operates with Sweep SAR technique to achieve large swath with high resolution data.

NISAR will help researchers explore how changes in Earth's forest and wetland ecosystems are affecting the global carbon cycle.

NISAR observatory, with NASA and ISRO contributions highlighted
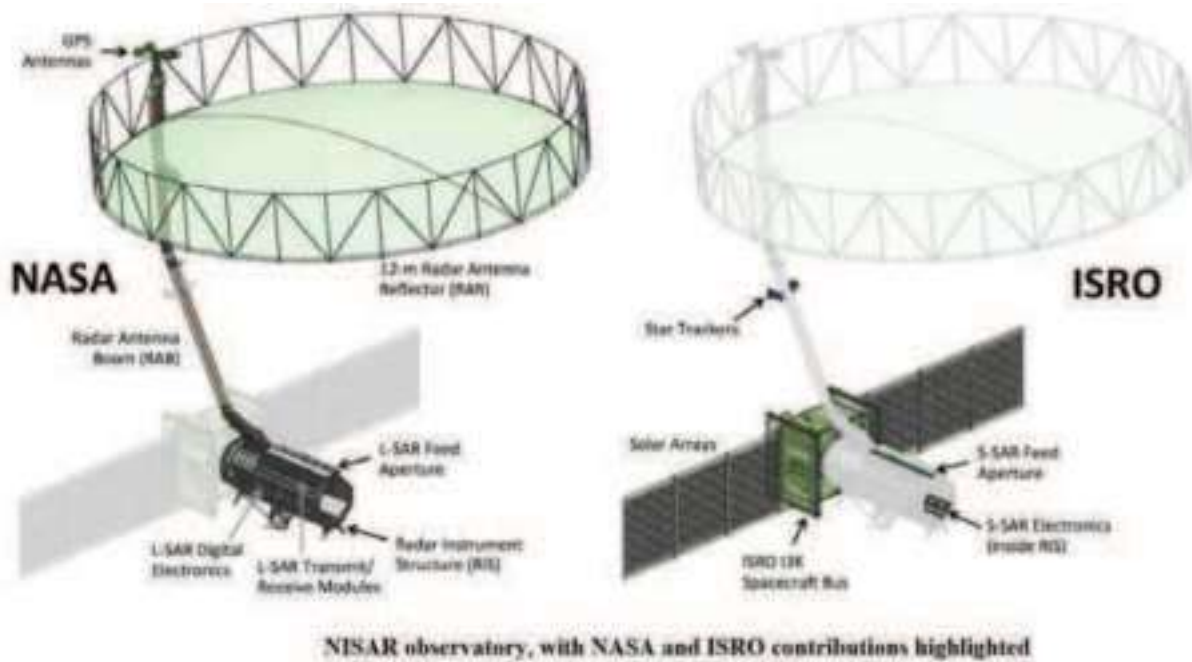
Aim

NISAR's primary focus will be Earth's forests and wetlands, of particular interest to climate scientists.

This innovative satellite aims to provide detailed insights into two types of ecosystems – forests and wetlands.

The mission will use a synthetic aperture radar to scan earth's land and ice-covered regions twice every 12 days in ascending and descending passes.

Capable of penetrating cloud cover and operating day and night, NISAR is expected to revolutionise earth-observing capability.

NISAR will also enable researchers to study deforestation and glacier melt to gain significant knowledge about climate change.

High-Level Committee on simultaneous elections

Context

The high-level committee on "one nation, one election" has received over 20,000 responses from citizens and 81% of them have "affirmed" the idea of simultaneous polls.

The suggestions were also invited from 46 political parties.

One Nation, One Election

The idea has been mooted several times previously and has been studied by the Law Commission of India.

The main idea is that polls for Lok Sabha and all state assemblies across India will be held simultaneously.

The central government has been citing financial burden caused by the continuous election cycle and an obstacle to development work during polls.

The 22nd Law Commission was constituted for a period of three years in February 2020 with Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi as its chairperson.

The Commission is likely to frame tentative timelines for simultaneous polls for the 2024 and 2029 cycles.

Arguments in favor

The primary arguments in favor of simultaneous elections are twofold:

First, that it will decrease the costs of conducting elections (and of electioneering)

Second, that it will free up political parties from being in 'permanent campaign mode', and allow them to focus on governance (and, for that matter, constructive opposition) for a five-year period.

Disadvantages

For incorporating One Nation, One Election, changes would be required in the Constitution and other legal frameworks. Critics of simultaneous elections have raised a few other objections.

First, the logistical nightmare of conducting simultaneous elections in a country of a little over 1.4 billion people.

Second is the incompatibility of a rigid election timetable with some of the fundamentals of parliamentary democracy.

Post Office Act, its unbridled powers of interception

In December, the President of India approved the Post Office Bill, 2023, intended to replace the outdated Indian Post Office Act, 1898.

The new bill has raised concerns among the Opposition in Parliament, particularly regarding the unchecked powers granted to post office authorities for intercepting items.

The newly enacted Act does not make any provision for procedural safeguards to dispel fears of misuse of the substantive provision on interception.

Provision

The proposed legislation allows the central government to authorize officers to intercept, open, or detain items in the interest of state security, foreign relations, public order, emergencies, public safety, or in case of legal violations.

This kind of a provision is kept for national security.

The bill aim is to regulate post offices efficiently, establish a modern legislative framework, and transform the postal network into a platform for citizen-centric service delivery.

The bill seeks to empower the director general of postal services to frame regulations in respect of activities necessary to provide those services and fix the charges for such services.

Key changes

Exclusive privileges of the central government

The Act provides that wherever the central government establishes posts, it will have the exclusive privilege.

The Act provides for the issuance of postage stamps as per the rules prescribed by the central government.

The Bill also states that the Post Office will have the exclusive privilege of issuing postage stamps.

Services to be prescribed

The Act specifies the services provided by the Post Office to include: (i) the delivery of postal articles including letters, postcards, and parcels, and (ii) money orders.

The Bill provides that the Post Office will provide services prescribed by the central government.

Powers to intercept shipments

The Union government's proposed revamp of the Indian Post Office Act will allow employees to open postal parcels in the interest of national security or public security, apart from also giving officers the power to divert them to the authorities concerned if there is suspicion of duty evasion.

Concerns over right to privacy

In Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors. (2017), the right to communication has been held to be a part of the right to privacy and thus protected under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966, a treaty ratified by India, prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, and correspondence, as well as unlawful attacks on honor and reputation. According to Directive Principle 51(c) of the Constitution, international conventions must be respected unless they conflict with domestic laws.

Way Forward

The Post Office Bill, 2023 provides the central government "standards for addressing on the items, address identifiers and usage of post codes".

This provision will have a far-reaching impact as the physical address may be replaced by a digital code using geo-spatial coordinates to identify a specific premise.

The new Post Office Bill 2023 ensures that various citizen-centric services will have a strong legal framework.

The newly enacted Act does not make any provision for procedural safeguards to dispel fears of misuse of the substantive provision on interception.

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Global Good-Gender Equity and Equality
Japan spacecraft lands on lunar surface
Chandrayaan-3 lander Vikram is now a landmark on Moon
India-France bilateral relations
The problem with India's science management

Global Good-Gender Equity and Equality

Context
India announced here a new alliance for global good, gender equity and equality, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

Objective
The idea of this alliance emerged from the G20 Leaders' Declaration and India's abiding commitment to the cause of women-led development.
The primary and stated objective of this new Alliance is to bring together global best practices, knowledge sharing and investments in the identified areas of women's health, education, and enterprise.
It will build upon G20 leaders' commitments, following up on initiatives such as Business 20, Women 20, and G20 EMPOWER, with the goal of benefiting the larger global community.

Support from industry leaders
The Alliance has garnered support from industry leaders, including Mastercard, Uber, Tata, TVS, Bayer, Godrej, Serum Institute of India, IMD Lausanne, and over 10,000 partners from industry.
The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is backing this alliance, which will be based at the CII Centre for Women Leadership.
The World Economic Forum has joined as a 'Network Partner,' and Invest India is on board as an 'Institutional Partner.'

Common future marked by global cooperation
At the World Economic Forum's annual meeting at Davos, Switzerland held in January 2024, India participated in the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam", ready to shape a common future marked by global cooperation, aligning with the overarching WEF theme for the year, 'Rebuilding Trust'.

Japan spacecraft lands on lunar surface

Context
Japan's 'Moon Sniper' craft made a successful 'soft landing' on the lunar surface making Japan the fifth country to reach the lunar surface.

Landing details

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, landed at about 12:20 am Tokyo time.

Japan follows the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India in reaching the moon.

SLIM or 'Moon Sniper, which was aiming to hit a very small target, is a lightweight spacecraft about the size of a passenger vehicle.

It craft was using pinpoint landing technology that promises far greater control than any previous moon landing.

The project was the fruit of two decades of work on precision technology by JAXA.

Aim and Goal

The mission's main goal is to test new landing technology that would allow moon missions to land where we want to, rather than where it is easy to land.

If the landing was a success, the spacecraft will seek clues about the origin of the moon, including analysing minerals with a special camera.

The SLIM, equipped with a pad to cushion impact, was aiming to land near the Shioli crater, near a region covered in volcanic rock.

Chandrayaan-3 lander Vikram is now a landmark on Moon

Context

A milestone was reached as a laser beam successfully traveled between ISRO's Vikram lander on the lunar surface and a NASA spacecraft in orbit. This achievement opens the door for precise target location on the moon.

Laser Retroreflector Array

The Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) on the Chandrayaan-3 lander has begun serving as a fiducial point on the Moon.

US space agency NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) achieved a laser range measurement using the LRA by successfully detecting signals reflected by it on December 12, 2023.

The ranging utilised the Lunar Orbiter Laser Altimeter (LOLA) on the LRO.

NASA's LRA was accommodated on the Chandrayaan-3 Vikram lander under international collaboration.

What is a retroreflector

The compact device, measuring only 5 cm wide, serves as a simple but robust method to reflect incoming light from any direction back to its source, minimising scattering.

Requiring no maintenance and power-free, this retroreflector boasts a long lifespan lasting for decades.

The one on Vikram lander has eight quartz-corner-cube prisms arranged within a dome-shaped aluminum frame, enabling the retroreflector to efficiently reflect light back to its origin, regardless of the incoming direction.

Various applications of retroreflector

Retroreflectors are versatile tools used in science and exploration, with a long history of deployment on the moon since the Apollo era, said NASA.

The latest generation of smaller retroreflectors offers even more applications than their larger predecessors.

The lunar retroreflectors, reflecting light back to Earth, provided valuable data indicating that the moon is gradually moving away from our planet at a rate of 3.8 centimetres per year.

India-France bilateral relations

Context
The French President is expected to meet with the Indian Prime Minister a day before the 75th Republic Day celebrations, where he has been invited as the chief guest this year.
- A 50-member delegation including officials and CEOs will accompany President.

Bilateral Trade and education
India and France's bilateral trade last year 2022-23 was $13.5 billion and this is expected to increase further.
The two countries are celebrating 26 years of their strategic partnership.
Discussions are likely to be held on the Jaitapur nuclear power plant in Maharashtra.
A major announcement is expected to be made in the education sector.
France has been encouraging Indian students to study in their universities and in order to make the courses more attractive many courses are being offered in English.
Besides, under the migration and mobility partnership extended visas for Indian students are also likely to be issued.

French contingent parade
A French contingent is expected to take part in the parade on January 26 on Kartavya Path.
It may be recalled that a 269-member Indian contingent took part in the Bastille Day parade in France last year.

Digital collaboration
The upcoming discussions between India and France will emphasize "digital collaboration," with a key focus on the implementation of an important announcement made during Prime Minister visit to Paris last June.
The announcement entails the acceptance of Indian UPI digital payments in France.
The talks will also cover:
- Advancements in strategic ties
- Maritime security
- Indo-Pacific strategy
- Climate change initiatives
- Green transitions
- Collaborations between the Indian and French space agencies

The problem with India's science management

To achieve sustained economic progress that aligns with national ambitions, leveraging scientific advances and deploying new technologies is essential, as evidenced since the Industrial Revolution.
The government of India is revamping its science management by establishing the National Research Foundation (NRF), and restructuring the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
A critical evaluation of the current administrative capacity to enhance the efficiency and resilience of Indian science is imperative in this context.

Expenditure on research and development
India's low overall expenditure on research and development (around 0.7% of GDP, compared to 3.5% for the United States and 2.4% for China) is but one aspect constraining its scientific outcomes.
Considering such low expenditure, it is pivotal to allocate money wisely and focus on high-impact projects.
Unfortunately, the scientific administration has failed to do justice to the task at hand.

An outsized role by scientists
India's science administration is characterized by the central role played by senior scientists. Their activities vary widely, from posing as top international academics to managing institution accounts and navigating legal battles against colleagues' accusations.
Many engage in extensive committee work across various institutions, and some aspire to leadership roles such as directors, vice-chancellors, and government secretaries.
These top scientists, not government bureaucrats, are responsible for the shortcomings in India's science administration and should be held accountable.

Need of hour
Scientist as Administrator Challenge
- Administering complex organizations requires specific skills in resource allocation and policy adherence.
- Attributes of good scientists may not align with administrative demands like tact, realism, flexibility, and firmness.

Metrics Selection Deficiency
- Insufficient training in choosing appropriate metrics can lead to project derailment over minor issues.

- Scientists lack the skills to balance competing factors like time, cost, and precision in administrative decision-making.

Conflicts of Interest and Quality Control Issues
- Academic-administrator dual roles create conflicts of interest.

- Indian science culture faces challenges like red tape, plagiarism, paid publications, and under-the-table dealings for funding.

System in the U.S.
Many successful science institutions globally advocate for a clear separation between administrators and scientists.
In the U.S., scientists often transition to administrative roles early in their careers, focusing solely on administrative tasks.
This model has benefits for all involved, though some resist change.
As India transforms its science establishment, it's worth questioning whether scientists should handle administrative duties.

Conclusion
India needs to recognize, like the business world did in 1908 with the MBA, that administration is a distinct skill that should be taught separately from the subject being managed.
Just as the business world understood the importance of this separation, India's science establishments must also acknowledge that effective administration is crucial for achieving economic and strategic goals.
Without addressing this, the country's science establishment may fall short of its aspirations.

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Centre support the use of GM crops
China, Philippines Ease South China Sea Tensions
Roadmap for India's domestic air passenger traffic
PM releases postage stamps on Ram Temple
Crafting a new phase in India-U.K. defence ties

Centre support the use of GM crops

Context
The Center has urged Supreme Court for approval to release GM mustard, citing its crucial role in achieving food security and bolstering India's self-sufficiency with a potential 25-30% increase in crop output.

GM Mustard
GM Mustard in India is primarily represented by Dhara Mustard Hybrid 11 (DMH-11).
It is a genetically modified variant of Herbicide Tolerant (HT) mustard.
Developed by Indian scientists, DMH-11 is genetically modified to enhance certain characteristics, such as resistance to pests and diseases.
The environment ministry allowed the environmental release of the Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH-11), a transgenic mustard developed by Delhi University for its seed production and testing before its commercial release.
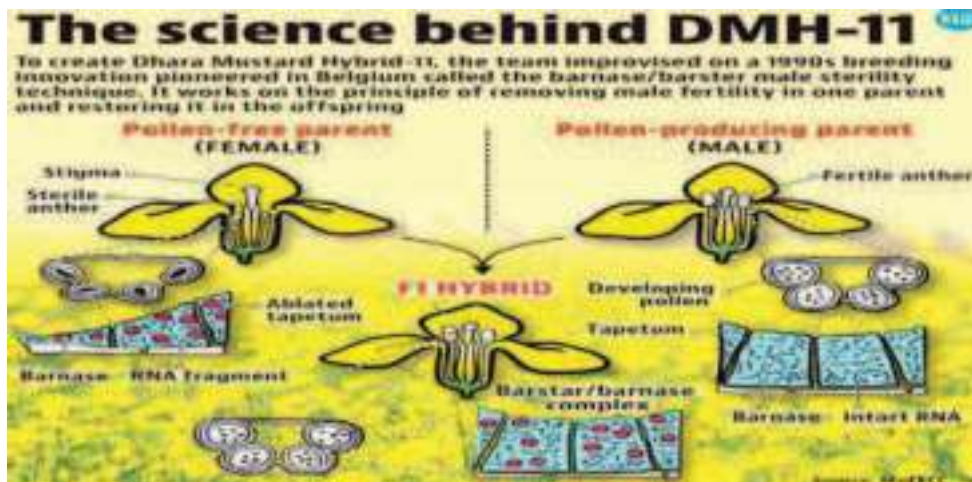
SC observation
The Supreme Court said that it only wanted what was good for India even as the government argued that growing genetically modified (GM) crops such as mustard would make quality edible oil cheaper for the common man and benefit the national interest by reducing foreign dependence.

Concerns

GM mustard has been a subject of intense political debate in the country with both pro- and anti-GM activists placing their claims and counterclaims vigorously.

Environmental activists have opposed the move and urged the government to not give final approval.

Indian honey cultivators oppose genetically modified mustard, fearing it will harm honey production and impact farmers' livelihoods.

They urge the government to reject commercial cultivation approval.

The herbicide-tolerant DMH-11 mustard variety enables farmers to use weed killer without harming crops.

Concerns arise over potential excessive herbicide use, leading to weed resistance and the emergence of superweeds.

Mustard oil consumption in India

Mustard oil is a popular cooking oil in India and has been used for centuries in traditional Indian cuisine

To meet the domestic demand almost 50% to 60% of edible oil is imported.

The government said the total edible oil demand of India was 24.6 million tonnes (2020-21) with domestic availability of 11.1 million tonnes (2020-21).

In 2020-21, 13.45 million tonnes (54%) of the total edible oil demand was met through import estimated at about ₹1,15,000 crore, which included palm oil (57%), soybean oil (22%), sunflower oil (15%) and a small quantity of canola quality mustard oil.

China, Philippines Ease South China Sea Tensions

Context

China and the Philippines have agreed to collaborate in reducing tensions in the South China Sea after a year of confrontations, easing concerns about potential armed engagement in the region.

Recent development

The China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the two sides agreed to continue to improve communication and use friendly negotiations to manage their differences at sea, "especially to manage well the situation at Ren'Ai reef."

In November, Philippines said that a Chinese coast guard ship and accompanying vessels conducted dangerous maneuvers and blasted a Philippine supply ship with a water cannon in disputed waters.

China disputed the account, saying it acted appropriately.

South China Sea dispute

The South China Sea dispute is a complex and longstanding territorial and maritime conflict involving multiple countries in Southeast Asia.

The primary source of tension revolves around competing territorial claims over various islands, reefs, and waters in the South China Sea. The region is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas, and is a crucial maritime trade route.

The territorial disputes in the South China Sea are widely seen as a potential flashpoint for armed conflict.

Multiple countries have claimed waters in the South China Sea, including Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, Malaysia and China.

Importance of the South China Sea

There are 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in deposits under the South China Sea, according to the estimates of the United States Energy Information Agency.

Moreover, the sea is home to rich fishing grounds — a major source of income for millions of people across the region.

More than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area.

Most significantly, the sea is a crucial trade route.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that over 21% of global trade, amounting to $3.37 trillion, transited through these waters in 2016.

Roadmap for India's domestic air passenger traffic

Context

The minister of Civil Aviation announced that the country's domestic air passenger traffic is expected to double, reaching 300 million by 2030.

Domestic air passenger traffic

India is the third largest domestic civil aviation market in the world, the seventh largest international civil aviation market in the world.

In 2023, the air passenger traffic was recorded at 153 million.

The Union Minister added that the domestic air traffic has surpassed the peaks recorded in the pre-COVID period.

The domestic air passenger traffic witnessed 15 percent growth CAGR while that of international 6.1 percent in the last decade.

New FDTL norms

The minister of Civil Aviation also said that the new Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) will help enhance the safety of domestic air travel in India.

Domestic demand for air travel has pushed for the need for new FDTL norms in India.

The new FDTL norms created by the government, were after careful consideration of international FDTL norms and adopting them to India.

PM releases postage stamps on Ram Temple

Context

The Prime Minister released commemorative postage stamps on the Ram temple along with a book of stamps on the Ramayana from around the world.

Aim

The stamp book is an attempt to showcase the international appeal of Lord Ram and the 48-page book covers stamps issued by more than of 20 countries.

The six stamps within the collection represent key figures and elements from the Ramayana.

The book showcases stamps issued by more than 20 countries, including the United States, New Zealand, Singapore,

Canada, Cambodia, and even by international organisations such as the United Nations.

This collection aims to underline the universal appeal and influence of Lord Ram on diverse societies across the globe.

Crafting a new phase in India-U.K. defence ties

After a 22-year gap, the Indian Defence Minister recently visited the United Kingdom.

In contrast to two decades ago, opportunities for collaboration have increased significantly.

The rise of Chinese military influence, especially in the Indian Ocean, poses a threat to India and the Sea Lines of Communications vital to the U.K.

This has prompted a reevaluation of strategic priorities by the British.

Indian Navy's technological gaps

The Indian Navy is addressing capability shortfalls compared to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

During the Defence Minister's visit to the U.K., a key focus has been securing essential technologies.

The U.K. is well-placed to assist in addressing the Indian Navy's technological gaps in comparison to the Chinese.

Both countries are strengthening cooperation, particularly in the realm of electrical propulsion for aircraft carriers.

Currently, the Indian Navy's carriers lack electric propulsion technology.

There were already preliminary engagements between the Indian and U.K. governments regarding the Indian Navy securing electric propulsion technology.

Joint working group

In February 2023, the "India-UK Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership" working group was established.

A delegation-level discussion occurred on the Royal Navy frigate HMS Lancaster during its port visit to Kochi in March of the same year.

Subsequent talks in April focused on transferring technical know-how and leveraging the Royal Navy's expertise in maritime electric propulsion for future Indian Navy surface combatants.

In November 2023, the India-U.K. electric propulsion capability partnership again met to discuss the possibility of the Indian Navy's future warships to be integrated with electric propulsion technology.

The British have agreed to train, equip and help establish the infrastructure necessary to develop an electric propulsion system.

Conclusion

The Indian Defence Minister's visit to the U.K., London is both rediscovering and bolstering its military involvement and presence East of Suez, which it had considerably until the late 1960s.

India-UK Defence relations, marked by historical resonance and contemporary strategic convergence, hold immense potential for addressing shared security challenges.

Amidst the evolving global security landscape, the India-UK defence partnership exemplifies the significance of collaborative efforts in maintaining both regional and global stability.

Iran Missile Strike on Pakistan

Context
Iran had launched a Missile Strike called "anti-Iranian terrorist groups" (Jaish al-Adl group) in Pakistan's Balochistan.

Why did Iran attack Pakistan
The attack could be seen as a retaliatory move by Iran.
In December 2023 at least 11 Iranian police officers were killed in an attack on a police station in Rask, a town close to the border with Pakistan.
That attack was claimed by Jaish al-Adl in a brief statement posted on its Telegram channel.
The Iranian government said that the group has taken shelter in some parts of Pakistan's Balochistan province.

Attacks on Syria and Iraq
Iran defended its missile strikes in Iraq and Syria, saying they were a "targeted operation" and "just punishment" against those who breach the Islamic Republic's security.
In Syria, the Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) said the strikes against alleged Islamic State (IS) targets were in response to recent attacks in Iran.

India's stand on Iran
India has backed Iran in its missile attack on alleged terror camps in Pakistan's Balochistan Province, calling it an act of "self-defence".
Iran's strikes inside Pakistan had come just a day after India's External Affairs Minister visit to Tehran.

Could Iran attacks fuel tensions in the Middle-East
Iran's latest attacks in Syria, Iraq and Pakistan could potentially raise tensions in the Middle East which is already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.
Hamas is a Palestinian militant group backed by Iran.
Moreover, Houthi rebels in Yemen, who are also said to be backed Iran, launched attacked on commercial ships and tankers in the Red Sea region.
These attacks were retaliated by the US and the UK.

CEEW study on rising Rainfall in India's sub-districts

Context
A recent independent study by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) revealed that over the last decade (2012-2022), 55% of 'tehsils' or sub-districts in India have experienced a noteworthy surge of more than 10% in southwest monsoon rainfall.

More about the study
The CEEW study, Decoding India's Changing Monsoon Patterns which is a first-of-its-kind granular analysis of rainfall in more than 4,500 tehsils across India spanning 40 years (1982-2022).
The study finds fast-shifting and erratic monsoon patterns in the last decade.
This can be attributed to the accelerating rate of climate change.
This includes tehsils in traditionally drier regions such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, central Maharashtra, and parts of Tamil Nadu.
Out of these, nearly a quarter of the tehsils are seeing a pronounced rainfall rise of over 30 per cent during the June to September period.
The study analyses high-resolution meteorological data from 1982 to 2022 that has been recorded by IMD.

Reducing rainfall
The CEEW study noted that about 11% of tehsils witnessed reducing rainfall, of which 87% saw a decline during the critical kharif sowing months; many districts saw extreme deficiencies and excesses even during 'normal' monsoon; several tehsils of Maharashtra, Goa, Odisha, West Bengal report increasing winter rainfall.
Rainfall is increasing in more than half of India's 4,400-odd tehsils or sub-districts.

The decrease occurred largely during the critical southwest monsoon.

Most of these tehsils are in the Indo-Gangetic plains which contribute to more than half of India's agricultural production as well as in northeastern India and the Indian Himalayan region.

District-level extremes

India collectively experienced 29 "normal", eight "above-normal", and three "below-normal" monsoon years during that period.

But an analysis at the district level reveals that 30% of India's districts witnessed several more years of deficient rainfall and 38% saw many years of excessive rainfall.

Twenty-three (23) districts, such as New Delhi, Bengaluru, Nilgiris, Jaipur, Kutch, and Indore, have encountered varying rainfall patterns, experiencing both deficient and excessive rainfall in recent years.

Dry regions in Rajasthan, Gujarat, central Maharashtra, and parts of Tamil Nadu have also witnessed increasing rainfall, aligning with the trend observed in a majority of tehsils reporting higher rainfall.

Annual Status of Education Report 2023

Context

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), titled "Beyond Basics", was released recently. It involved a survey by the civil society organisation Pratham among rural students aged 14 to 18.

Finding of the report

According to the ASER 2023, nearly 43% of children in the 14-18 age group cannot read sentences in English, while among their rural counterparts, 25% struggle to read a Class 2 level text in their respective regional language.

According to the report, most of the young people in this age group were enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream.

In class XI or higher, more than half are enrolled in the Arts/Humanities stream (55.7%). Females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) stream (28.1%) than males (36.3%)

Basic abilities

On abilities such as basic reading, maths and English abilities; application of basic skills to everyday calculations; reading and understanding written instructions; and financial calculations that need to be done in real life, about 25% still cannot read a Class 2 level text fluently in their regional language.

More than half struggle with division (3-digit by 1-digit) problems.

Only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds are able to do such problems correctly.

This skill is usually expected in Standard III/IV.

Use of smartphones and social media

The ASER 2023 report noted that around 89% of those surveyed had a smartphone in the household and 92% said they knew how to use it.

However, males were more than twice as likely to own their own smartphone than females, and therefore were likely spending far more time using the device for a wider variety of tasks.

The survey found that close to 90% of all youth have a smartphone in the household and know how to use it.

Incentives disbursed under PLI scheme

Context

The central government has released Rs 4,415 crore as incentives through the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for eight sectors, including large-scale electronics manufacturing, IT hardware, and bulk drugs, until October this fiscal year, as per government officials.

Beneficiary Sector

Incentive amount of around Rs 4,415 crore disbursed under PLI Schemes for eight sectors including:

- Large-scale electronics manufacturing
- IT hardware
- Bulk drugs
- Medical devices
- Pharma
- Telecom
- Food processing
- Drones

Job creation

The government said that employment generation, both direct and indirect, is over 6.78 lakh. Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Raghuram Rajan had raised questions over the lack of job creation under the scheme.

Production-linked incentive scheme

The central government introduced the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme in March 2020 to make India a competitive player in global markets and boost domestic manufacturing & exports.

The PLI scheme aims to give companies incentives on incremental sales of products manufactured in domestic units.

The schemes also attract investments in key sectors and cutting-edge technology; ensure efficiency, bring economies of size and scale in the manufacturing sector and make Indian companies and manufacturers globally competitive.

The foreign direct investment has increased significantly since the inception of the PLI scheme for the electronics segment.

How smartphones can make education inclusive

Two decades ago, there was hope for internet-enabled computers to transform education. A decade later, mobile tech made education anytime, anywhere seem possible.

We moved from "one laptop per child" to considering mobiles replacing books.

Now, almost every home is expected to have a mobile phone.

ASER 2023 reports 89% of 14-18-year-olds own smartphones, with 92% able to use them.

AI-based tutoring programs are growing.

As technology advances, making such programs in local languages will be easily possible.

Education anytime anywhere

The idea of education anytime anywhere is now being put to test.

India has achieved universal elementary school enrollment, progressing towards universal secondary and higher secondary enrollment.

However, enrollment doesn't guarantee learning, and half of adolescents start working part-time after Class X.

Flexibility in education is crucial, especially for the underprivileged who need to study while working.

Open schooling and digital technology are key, requiring decentralization and strengthening. Technology can enable learning and testing anywhere, anytime.

Subjects preference of students

The ASER 2023 survey found that 56.4% and 31.3% of rural students pursue Humanities and Science beyond Class X, but only 0.7% are studying agriculture.

Despite over 50% of India's workforce in agriculture, only a small fraction of adolescents (14-18 age group) are formally trained in agriculture, with many working in the sector while enrolled in schools or colleges.

There is a clear need to provide advanced skills and knowledge in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, traditionally passed down in families, extending beyond job or livelihood considerations.

Conclusion

India's education system has mainly focused on teaching students to excel in exams and secure jobs.

However, things are changing, while many young people still aim for good exam results and jobs, there is a growing interest in pursuing life goals beyond academics.

The system needs to adapt to support these diverse aspirations.

Technology can help, but we also need to change our way of thinking.

Understanding light-emitting diodes

Context
In October 2014, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences declared that the 21st century would be illuminated by LED lamps, awarding the Nobel Prize in physics for advancements leading to the dominance of light-emitting diodes (LEDs) over incandescent bulbs and fluorescent lamps.

What are diodes
A diode is an electronic component about 5 mm wide.
It has two points of contact, or terminals, called its anode and cathode.
A diode's primary purpose is to allow current to flow in only one direction.
It achieves this using a p-n junction.
A p-n junction is made of two materials laid next to each other.
One material is a p-type material: its primary charge-carriers are holes.
The other is an n-type material: its primary charge-carriers are electrons.
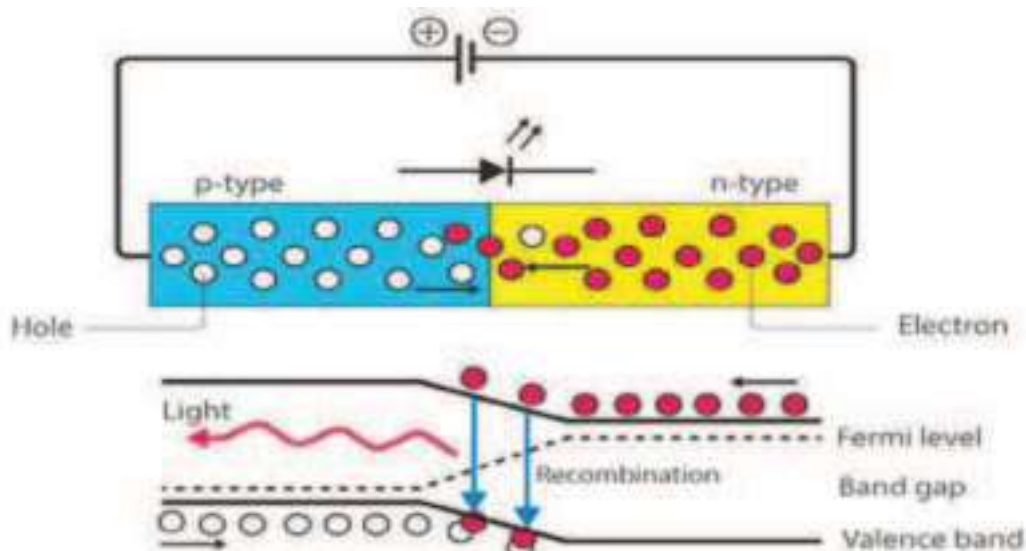
About p-n junction
A p-n junction is the meeting point of a p-type material and an n-type material.
Electrons can move easily from the n-type to the p-type, creating a one-way flow.
This asymmetry gives the diode its characteristic of allowing current in only one direction.
The anode is the wire connected to the p-type material, while the cathode is connected to the n-type material, serving as the two terminals of the diode.

What is an LED
LED stands for "light-emitting diode."
It is a semiconductor device that emits light when an electric current passes through it. LEDs are a type of solid-state lighting, which means they are based on the principle of electroluminescence, the process of light emission from a material when an electric current is applied.
An LED with a p-n junction where electrons, possessing more energy than holes, release energy upon occupying a hole.
The band gap ensures that the electron-hole recombination releases a specific amount of energy, determining the emitted visible light

What colors can an LED produce
LEDs can produce all three primary colors — red, green, and blue, different LEDs can be combined on a display board to produce a large variety of colors.

Common LED colors include:
- Red: Produced using gallium arsenide phosphide (GaAsP).
- Green: Created using gallium phosphide (GaP)
- Blue: Typically made with indium gallium nitride (InGaN).
- Yellow: Achieved by combining red and green LEDs, or using phosphor coatings.
- Orange: Produced by combining red and yellow LEDs.
- White: Generated through various methods, such as combining red, green, and blue LEDs, or using a phosphor coating over a blue LED.

Advantages of LEDs

LEDs are highly energy-efficient, consuming significantly less power compared to traditional incandescent and fluorescent lights.

LEDs have a longer operational life, lasting up to 25,000 hours or more, reducing the frequency of replacements.

LEDs emit very little heat in comparison to traditional bulbs, reducing the risk of burns and making them safer for various applications.

LEDs contain no hazardous materials like mercury and are recyclable, contributing to a greener and more sustainable lighting option.

Understanding the Tenth Schedule

Context

The Maharashtra Assembly Speaker has refused to disqualify 40 MLAs of the Shiv Sena faction after recognising it as the real Shiv Sena.
- The speaker held the appointment of whip by this group as valid. He also did not disqualify 14 MLAs of the Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (UBT) group due to technical reasons under the Tenth Schedule.

Inception of Tenth Schedule

The 52nd constitutional amendment in 1985 introduced the 'anti-defection' law through the Tenth Schedule to address political instability caused by legislators defecting from their parent parties in the 1960s and 70s.

This law disqualifies members of Parliament or State legislatures who voluntarily leave their party or vote against party instructions.

The instructions are issued by the party's 'whip,' a member of the 'legislature party' appointed by the political party.

The 'political party' refers to the entire party organization, while the 'legislature party' includes only the party members in a specific House of Parliament or State legislature.

Anti-Defection Law

The anti-defection law came into being with the *inclusion of the Tenth Schedule in the Constitution in 1985, through the 52nd Amendment Act*

According to the law, if a member of Parliament or state legislature *gives up his membership of a political party or votes or abstains from a vote contrary to the directions of his party, he can be disqualified*

The 1985 Act allowed for one-third or more of the *elected members of a party to* *merge with another party without being disqualified*

Since an amendment in 2003, the *minimum number required for a merger is two-thirds of the elected members of a party*

The law has been criticised for impinging on the *rights of elected representatives to take a position different from their party's*

The law has not been very *effective in curbing defections*

Exceptions

The Tenth Schedule originally provided for two exceptions that would not render the members liable for disqualification.

First, one-third members of the 'legislature party' splitting to form a separate group (para 3) .

Second, merger of their 'political party' with another party that is approved by two-third members of its 'legislature party'. However, considering the need to strengthen the 'anti-defection' law, para 3 was omitted in 2003.

What are the issues involved

Instances of defection have risen since the deletion of para 3.

Some members of legislature parties, constituting two-thirds, have practically defected while claiming to remain with the original party to avoid disqualification.

Notably, in September 2019, six Bahujan Samajwadi Party MLAs merged with the Congress in Rajasthan, and in September 2022, eight out of 11 Congress MLAs in Goa merged with the BJP to evade disqualification.

The authority to decide on the disqualification of members is vested in the Speaker of the House.

While they are expected to perform this constitutional role in a neutral manner, the past instances have hardly inspired confidence with Speakers favoring the ruling dispensation.

Need for reforms

The Supreme Court in Sadiq Ali versus Election Commission of India (1971), laid down the three-test formula for determining which faction is to be recognised as the original political party by the Election Commission.

These are aims and objects of the party; its affairs as per the party's constitution that reflect inner party democracy; and majority in the legislative and organisation wings.

Establishing an independent tribunal, guided by a clear Supreme Court judgment, would help clarify uncertainties related to the Tenth Schedule.

The key reform needed involves institutionalizing internal democracy in political parties through regular inner-party elections, closely monitored by the Election Commission.

Defence upgrade roadmap

Context

The government has been advised by an expert committee, led by the former principal scientific advisor, to establish a top body chaired by the Prime Minister.

- This body, with the Defence Minister and the National Security Advisor as Vice Presidents, would be responsible for determining the country's defense technology roadmap, as well as deciding on major projects and their execution.

Defence Technology Council

The Defence Technology Council by the Vijay Raghavan committee, is proposed to have an executive committee chaired by the Chief of Defence Staff.

The nine-member Vijay Raghavan panel was set up by the government last year to review the functioning of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and is learned to have submitted its report this month.

The Principal Scientific Advisor, along with the three service chiefs and their vice chiefs, will also be its members.

Furthermore, it will include representation from academia and industry, with two members from each sector.

Functioning review of DRDO

The government is reviewing DRDO's operations due to significant project delays.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, in its report presented on December 20, had expressed concerns that 23 of its 55 mission mode projects could not be completed in time.

A year before, in December 2022, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), in its report tabled in Parliament, had flagged that 119 (or 67%) of the 178 projects scrutinised by it had failed to adhere to their initially proposed timelines.

The Vijay Raghavan committee has observed that the DRDO should focus on its original goal of research and development for defence and refrain from involving itself in productization, production cycles, and product management, tasks that are more suitable for the private sector.

ICMR starts revising current National Essential Diagnostics List

Context

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the apex body in India for the formulation, coordination, and promotion of biomedical research, has invited suggestions for the revision of the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL).

Process of revising NEDL

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is updating the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL) released in 2019.

Stakeholders are invited to provide suggestions on additions or deletions of diagnostic tests to the current list by February 29, 2024.

The NEDL lists the essential and most basic tests that should be available at various levels of healthcare facilities in the country, including at the village level, in sub-health centres, health and wellness centres, and primary health centres.

World Health Organization recommendation

In 2018, the World Health Organization advised creating the National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL) for wider access to in-vitro diagnostics in healthcare facilities at different tiers. Responding to this, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) introduced India's inaugural NEDL in 2019, aiming to establish diagnostics as a crucial element of the healthcare system.

ICMR identifies essential diagnostic tests based on population health needs, considering disease prevalence, public health importance, test efficacy and accuracy, and cost-effectiveness.

The geopolitics in the Bangladesh election results

On January 7, 2024, Bangladesh held national elections marked by violence and protests, surrounded by controversy.

The ruling Awami League and its allies secured a significant victory with 225 out of 300 contested seats.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by imprisoned former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia facing corruption charges, boycotted the polls, advocating for elections under a neutral caretaker government—a provision abolished by the Awami League in 2009 after coming to power.

Bangladesh's political history around past elections remains problematic and the nature of politics, confrontational.

Regional and global geopolitics

Bangladesh has emerged as a South Asian economic powerhouse, experiencing a 7.1% annual GDP growth in 2022, surpassing $400 billion in size, and boasting a population exceeding 165 million.

Positioned strategically, the nation is a focal point in a geopolitical struggle, with China, India, Russia, and the United States competing for influence.

India and Bangladesh

India and Bangladesh share deep strategic ties with strong historical, economic, social, and cultural connections.

Bilateral trade approaches $15 billion annually, and agreements cover investment, counterterrorism, energy, and river water sharing.

Bangladesh is crucial for India in balancing China's regional influence, including the Belt and Road Initiative.

A stable Bangladesh serves as a counterweight to neighboring instability, making India actively engaged in the relationship.

India with its proactive gesture endeavors to strengthen the partnership between the two countries.

U.S. stand

The U.S. has criticized the Bangladesh government for democratic deficiencies, human rights suppression, and restricting press freedom.

Balancing strategic interests and democratic values, the U.S. Department of State plans visa restrictions on individuals in Bangladesh undermining the democratic election process.

China and Russia's responses

China is Bangladesh's number one trading partner with annual bilateral trade exceeding $25 billion.

Under its BRI, China has financed over $10 billion worth of ports, bridges, highways and other critical infrastructure.

China's Foreign Ministry felicitated the Awami League for its victory.

Russia has drawn Bangladesh closer through financing one of the nation's largest infrastructure projects, the Rooppur 2,400-megawatt nuclear power plant worth over $12 billion. With major investments at stake, Russia has taken a keen interest in Bangladesh's election.

Problems before Bangladesh

The 2024 election aftermath has turned into a geopolitical struggle, with Bangladesh's growing economic and strategic influence complicating normal business for the U.S. and its allies.

The uncertain extent of potential actions raises concerns.

Bangladesh's crucial readymade garment industry, a major source of foreign exchange, faces challenges if the U.S. and EU impose restrictions, given their significant imports of Bangladeshi garments.

In 2007, when the opposition BNP tried to manipulate elections, the United Nations issued a stern warning, indicating a potential halt to Bangladesh's involvement in peacekeeping operations.

Conclusion

Bangladesh will have to maintain a strategically balanced approach among powers, with an adaptive foreign policy towards different geopolitical risks: its priority is to attract foreign direct investment to achieve its national goal, set as out in 'Vision 2041'.

The newly elected government are expected to be fraught with challenges, both at home and abroad, as incumbent Prime Minister tries to manage a weakening economy and delicately balance geopolitics with national interests.

15 JAN
Maldives sets deadline for India to withdraw troops
Decline in new investments in Q3
Centre likely to unveil new PMAY-G version
Centre permits parallel testing for electronics from manufacturers
Regulating India's online gaming industry

Maldives sets deadline for India to withdraw troops

Context

Maldives President has requested India to withdraw its military personnel from the country by March 15, following Male's previous request for their removal two months ago.

Background

India and Maldives' long-standing relationship took a bitter turn when a social media blowout ended in 'derogatory' remarks for Prime Minister of India from three Maldivian ministers.

The announcement also comes on the heels of Maldives President's five-day state visit to China, where he agreed to "elevate" strategic ties with Beijing.

Indian troops are in the Maldives

According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel in the Maldives.

Indian soldiers have been sent to the Maldives at various points for training Maldivian troops, in both combat and reconnaissance and rescue-aid operations.

Yet, there have been some Maldivian nationals, including politicians who have protested their presence in any capacity in the country.

India and the Maldives have a long history of cooperation in a variety of areas, including defence.

China's Investment plan in Maldives

China's state broadcaster CCTV said deals with both countries includes:

- Infrastructure construction
- Medical care and health care
- Improvement of people's livelihoods
- New energy sources
- Agriculture and marine environmental protection

China's influence in the Maldives has become visible in the past few years.

Moreover, 10 islands in Maldives have been leased.

According to reports, China is also stationing ships there and conducting military operations on a large scale.

Decline in new investments in Q3

Context
Between October and December 2023, there was a third consecutive quarterly decline in fresh project outlays.

Declining trend
Fresh investment plans almost halved between October and December 2023 from the previous quarter, with public capital expenditure projects tripping at a faster pace of almost 60%, while proposed private sector outlays fell 35%.
Manufacturing investment plans, particularly in automobiles, steel, and cement sectors, witnessed a significant drop.
New road projects slumped by 56%, and fresh railway investment plans plummeted by 92.2%.
Proposed investments halved for all sectors barring electricity, with irrigation (down 75%) and manufacturing (61.5% lower) witnessing the sharpest drop.

States performance
Among the States, Maharashtra emerged as the top investment destination in Q3 with 470 new projects worth ₹1.04-lakh crore, followed by Karnataka (₹43,383 crore), Uttarakhand (₹34,024 crore), and Gujarat (₹31,379 crore).
These four States accounted for 56% of the total new investments announced between October and December.

Centre likely to unveil new PMAY-G version

Context
The government is considering launching an upgraded version of the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) for the next five years.

Budget allocation
The government has budgeted Rs 54,487 crore for PMAY-G in FY24, the highest annual allocation after the launch of the scheme in 2016.
The expected savings in PMAY-G would cover the additional allocation of Rs 16,143 crore for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in the first supplementary demand for grants, which was approved by the Lok Sabha in December, 2023.

About the new scheme
The new scheme may offer financial assistance 85% higher than the current one for each beneficiary, aimed at constructing pucca houses in rural areas.
Currently, under the PMAY- G, the beneficiaries are provided financial assistance of:
Rs 1.2 lakh in plains
Rs 1.3 lakh in hilly states-North Eastern states and union territories (UTS) of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh-as well as difficult areas and Integrated Action Plan (IAP) districts.
Under the revamped scheme, the cash support will likely be enhanced to an average of Rs 2.39 lakh/housing unit.

PM JANMAN

On November 29, 2023, the Union Cabinet approved Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM JANMAN), under which Rs 2.39 lakh/unit is given for the provision of pucca houses to improve socio-economic conditions of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGS).

PM-JANMAN is aimed to improve socio-economic conditions of the PVTGs by saturating PVTG households and habitations with basic facilities such as safe housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, improved access to education, health and nutrition, electricity, road and telecom connectivity, and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Centre permits parallel testing for electronics from manufacturers

Context

Products of electronics and mobile manufacturers can now reach the market faster as the government has allowed parallel testing of 64 electronic devices.

Compulsory Registration Scheme

Under the Compulsory Registration Scheme (CRS), electronic products, whether imported or locally manufactured, must undergo mandatory testing and obtain security approvals from the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) before being sold to consumers.

Parallel testing

In the past year, the government conducted a pilot project for parallel testing of components, departing from the traditional sequential testing system.

In parallel testing different components are simultaneously tested unlike sequential testing where the tests are done one after another.

As a result, components can be deployed and products can reach market faster in parallel testing compared to sequential testing.

Over the last one year, the government was running a pilot project for parallel testing of components, moving away from the system of sequential testing.

Regulating India's online gaming industry

India is the world's largest mobile gaming market in terms of App downloads.

The Transaction-based game revenues increased by 39% in 2022 from 2021.

The sector is expected to grow by 20% by FY25 to reach INR 231 Bn.

India has the largest fantasy sports market, with a user base of 180 Mn.

The industry is expected to grow at a CAGR of 33% in FY27.

Indian gaming raised $2.8 Bn from domestic/global investors in the last 5 years. Funding increased by 380% from 2019 and 23% from 2020.
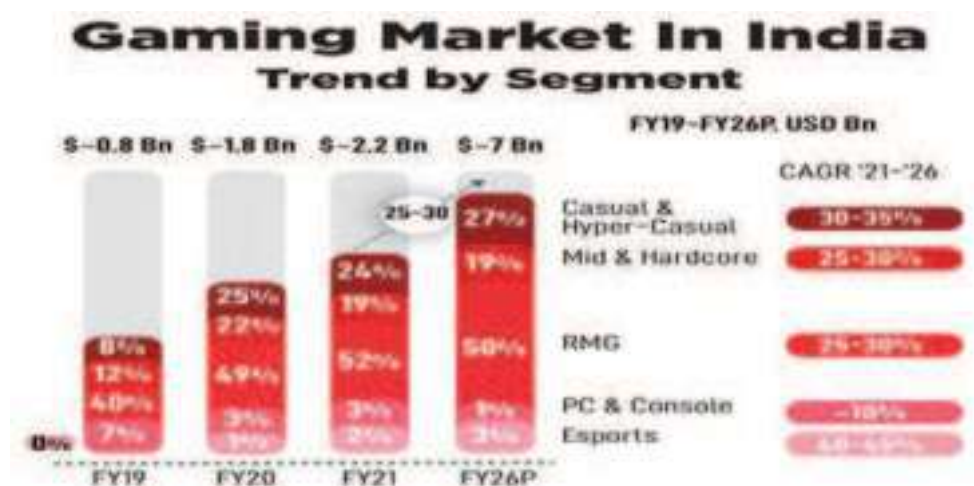
Digital markets

India, with 692 million Internet users, has the world's second-largest user base and ranks eighth in mobile app usage time. Daily app usage has increased by 32% since 2019, with 82% dedicated to media and entertainment, half of which is social media.

However, concerns arise from the rise of AI-generated deep fake videos, blurring reality.

Online service market failures now stem from the intricate interplay of data and algorithms.

The situation is further exacerbated by the growth of illegal offshore gambling and betting markets wherein the volume of digital transactions provides fertile ground for financial malpractices.

Government regulations

India contributes $100 billion annually to the illegal offshore gambling market, with a 20% growth rate over the past three years.

The country faces an estimated annual tax loss of $45 billion due to these illicit operations.

These challenges call for an urgent need for robust regulation of the online gaming industry. Some State governments attempt to ban online gaming.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has drafted amendments to the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 in relation to online gaming.

The global perspective

The U.K. government regulator regularly releases quarterly reports assessing the impact of regulations on the gaming sector.

Recent findings reveal that operators violating player protection rules faced substantial multi-million-pound fines since 2017.

Strict enforcement, along with focused harm reduction initiatives from 2018-22, contributed to a decrease in disordered gaming and medium-to-low risk gaming behavior.

The International Monetary Fund highlights that a blend of elevated taxes and lax, discretionary regulatory enforcement.

Conclusion

Establishing a strict regulatory framework is an urgent need, not just for protecting our digital nagriks and national interests, but also to ensure responsible growth of the online gaming sector.

Self-regulatory bodies will be registered with the Ministry and may register online games of such online gaming intermediaries who are its members and which meet certain criteria. Such bodies will also resolve complaints through a grievance redressal mechanism.

13 JAN
Centre to roll out human papillomavirus vaccination drive
Atal Setu: India's longest bridge
Swachh Survekshan awards 2023
EC reviews preparations for LS elections
A Bangladesh 'one-party state' and India's options

Centre to roll out human papillomavirus vaccination drive

Context

The Central government is launching an human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for girls aged 9-14, aiming to decrease cervical cancer rates, the second most prevalent cancer in Indian women.

Cervavac vaccine

Cervavac is India's first indigenously developed quadrivalent human papillomavirus (qHPV) vaccine that is said to be effective against four strains of the virus - Type 6, Type 11, Type 16 and Type 18.

It is developed by the Pune-based Serum Institute of India in coordination with the Government of India's Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

CERVAVAC is based on VLP (Virus-Like Particles), similar to the Hepatitis B vaccination.

The vaccine has received the Drugs Controller GeneraI of India's approval and has been cleared by the government advisory panel NTAGI for use in the public health programme.

Immunisation drive

The immunisation drive, planned in three phases over three years, is likely to start from the second quarter of this year.

According to sources, the campaign will begin once the government has a stock of 6.5-7 crore doses of the vaccine needed for the first phase.

Currently, the two-dose HPV vaccine is available commercially for about Rs 2,000 per dose.

But once the government includes it in its immunisation programme, it will be available for free.

The immunisation drive will be conducted through schools and existing vaccination points.

Significance

Besides cervical cancer, the vaccine also offers protection against the HPV strains that cause cancer of the anus, vagina and oropharynx.

Additionally, it also protects against the HPV strains that are responsible for genital warts.

Cervical cancer in India

India accounts for about a fifth of the world's cervical cancer cases.

With about 1.25 lakh new cases and 75,000 deaths each year, cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India, after breast cancer.

About 83 per cent of invasive cervical cancer cases are attributed to HPV 16 or 18 in India.

Nearly 8 crore children between the ages of 9 and 14 years will be eligible for the vaccine across the country.

When divided over three years, there will be at least 2.6 crore children eligible during the first year.

Atal Setu: India's longest bridge

Context

The Prime Minister will inaugurate the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu in Maharashtra.

About Atal Setu

It is a 21.8-km long six-lane bridge having 16.5 km length over the sea and about 5.5 km on the land.

The bridge originates from Sewri in Mumbai and ends at Nhava Sheva in Uran taluka in Raigad district.

The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of the bridge in December 2016.

It is the 12th longest sea bridge in the world.

The Atal Setu has been constructed at a total cost of over Rs. 17,840 crores.

Significance

It is expected to boost economic development in Navi Mumbai and other nearby areas.

It has shortened the distance between Mumbai and Navi Mumbai to just 20 minutes which earlier took 2 hours.

The construction of the Atal Setu, formerly known as the Mumbai Transharbour Link (MTHL), is in line with the government's vision to improve ease of mobility.

It will provide faster connectivity to Mumbai International Airport and Navi Mumbai International Airport.

It will also reduce the travel time from Mumbai to Pune, Goa, and South India.

It will also improve connectivity between Mumbai Port and Jawaharlal Nehru Port.

Swachh Survekshan awards 2023

Context

The President of India conferred Swachh Survekshan awards 2023 hosted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

Swachh Survekshan 2023

Indore and Surat were named the joint winners of the cleanest city award, while Maharashtra bagged the top spot among states for urban areas.

This was the seventh year in a row that Indore was named the cleanest city in the Swachh Survekshan Awards.

Surat, which has been in second place behind Indore for the past three years, won the top award for the first time.

The theme of the cleanliness survey 2023 was "Waste to wealth", while for 2024, it is "Reduce, reuse and recycle".

Ranking cleanliness

The tables list the cleanest cities with more than 1 lakh population and the best-performing States, according to the Swachch Survekshan Awards. Indore bagged the tag of India's cleanest city for the seventh consecutive time

Cleanest cities with >1 lakh population		States ranking	
Rank	City	Rank	State
1	Indore	1	Maharashtra
1	Surat	2	M.P.
3	Navi Mumbai	3	Chhattisgarh
4	Greater Visakhapatnam	4	Odisha
5	Bhopal	5	Telangana

About survey

Swachh Survekshan is a ranking exercise taken up by the Government of India to assess rural and urban areas for their levels of cleanliness and active implementation of Swachhata mission initiatives in a timely and innovative manner.

The objective of the survey is to encourage large scale citizen participation and create awareness amongst all sections of society about the importance of working together towards making towns and cities a better place to live in.

The Ministry of Urban Development takes up the Swachh Survekshan in urban areas and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation in rural areas.

The Quality Council of India (QCI) has been commissioned the responsibility of carrying out the assessment.

Top 10 cleanest cities

As per the Swachh Survekshan 2023, The list of top 10 cleanest cities with a population of more than one lakh includes Greater Visakhapatnam, Bhopal, Vijayawada, New Delhi, Tirupati, Greater Hyderabad and Pune.

State rankings

In the State rankings, Maharashtra came first, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Odisha is ranked fourth, followed by Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Sikkim, Karnataka, Goa, Haryana and Bihar.

In the category of cities with a population of less than one lakh, Sasvad and Lonavala in Maharashtra and Patan in Chhattisgarh secured the top three spots.

Cantonment Board: The Mhow Cantonment Board in Madhya Pradesh was adjudged the cleanest cantonment Board.
Ganga towns: Varanasi and Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh won the top two awards for the cleanest Ganga towns.
Sanitation workers: Chandigarh won the award for the safest city for sanitation workers.

EC reviews preparations for LS elections

Context
With only a few weeks remaining before it has to announce the schedule of the parliamentary polls, the Election Commission recently gathered the Chief Electoral Officers of all the states and Union Territories to assess the preparations.

Spotless election
The Chief Election Commissioner asked all State Chief Electoral Officers to deliver a "spotless" election.
He said "a solid set of preparations" was in place for the upcoming election.
The two-day conference is being held to share experiences and learnings from the recently held Assembly elections, along with:
- Thematic discussions on election planning
- Expenditure monitoring, electoral rolls
- IT applications
- Data management
- Electronic voting machines (EVMs)

Similar exercise
Earlier, a similar exercise had been held with the Election Commission officials and State Chief Electoral Officers at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie, along with five regional conferences in Chandigarh, Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Chennai and Lucknow in the past few weeks.

A Bangladesh 'one-party state' and India's options

India, along with China and Russia, congratulates Bangladesh Prime Minister on her re-election, despite the absence of the main opposition coalition. India, a functioning democracy, may face criticism for perceived double standards in supporting autocracies abroad while upholding democracy at home.
While India and Bangladesh maintain a strong bilateral relationship addressing security and connectivity concerns, it's important to note that Bangladesh cannot become a one-party state and rely solely on Indian support

Issue of irregularities
India's support for a controversial government, backed by questionable elections, is causing concern about its global image as a major player.
This has led to a rise in anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh, particularly among the youth who make up 60% of the population.
They are unhappy about the perceived corruption, economic mismanagement, and rising prices during the third term of the Hasina government, which followed a decade of substantial economic growth.
India faces a challenging task defending Bangladesh's elections, as its strategic partner, the United States, along with European and Asian allies, strongly criticize the electoral process.

India's regional influence
India's diplomatic tensions with western allies over Bangladesh pose a significant challenge, especially when close ties are crucial to counterbalance China.
The loss of influence in Bangladesh, following a broader trend in the region from Nepal to the Maldives, raises concerns about the effectiveness of India's "Neighborhood First" policy.
Conclusion

India should reconsider its exclusive reliance on the Awami League and explore genuinely secular platforms in gender, minority, labor, and youth spaces.
Potential alternatives could provide a more diverse political landscape.
Choosing a different approach could stop a repeat of the problem faced in 2001. Back then, trying to be friends with the BNP-Jamaat coalition government ended badly.
It caused more Islamist radicalism, which affected India.

New rule and selection process for R-Day tableaux

Context

The Defence Ministry has suggested a rotational plan for States and Union Territories to showcase their displays at the Republic Day parade, aiming to address the recurring controversies over tableau rejections.

Expert committee

To encourage new and fresh talent, the Culture Ministry empaneled 30 agencies for design and fabrication of tableaux through an open selection process.

The States and Union Territories were advised to engage these agencies following an appropriate procedure.

An expert committee comprising artists and Padma awardees was set up this year as well, based on recommendations of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.

Who are eligible for tableaux

According to a Ministry of Defence (MoD) circular dated October 30, 2023, each year, a select number of "State Governments/UT Administrations/Central/Ministries/Departments" send their tableaux to the Republic Day parade.

There is a rigorous application process which begins with interested parties submitting a concept note, along with design blueprints to the MoD.

Selection process

The tableaux proposals received are evaluated by a committee of experts appointed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), comprising prominent persons in the field of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture, choreography, etc.

The selection process happens in a phased manner.

STAGE 1 involves the assessment of the initial proposals and the design sketch/blueprint.

The Committee sits alongside official representatives of the participants and suggests modifications, if necessary. A number of proposals may be rejected in this stage itself.

STAGE 2 involves assessment of three-dimensional models of the proposals.

If the Committee is satisfied with the model, then the tableau is selected and further sent for fabrication.

The Committee can also suggest changes to models before selection.

Basis of selection

As per Ministry of Defence (MoD) "selection depends upon a combination of factors including but not limited to visual appeal, impact on the masses, idea/theme of the tableaux, degree of detailing involved in the tableaux, music accompanying the tableaux, local artists used etc."

Each year, the MoD comes up with an overarching theme, under which, participants can showcase elements relevant to their respective state/UT/department in their tableaux.

The Defence Ministry also shares the basic guidelines about what all the tableaux can or should include.

Importantly, the tableaux of two different states/ UTs must not be too similar, and eco-friendly material must be used for their construction.

U.K. to send advanced naval groups for training

Context

Britain plans to deploy warships to the Indian Ocean this year and send an aircraft carrier to the region in 2025 for joint training and operations with Indian forces, enhancing their security ties.

Littoral Response Group

The U.K. Navy will send its Littoral Response Group to the Indian Ocean region later this year, with plans for its Carrier Strike Group to visit India in 2025.

These steps build on the comprehensive strategic partnership envisaged in the 2030 India-U.K. roadmap, announced in 2021.

The U.K. and India plan to conduct joint military exercises, including a significant joint exercise by the end of 2030.
These exercises aim to support common objectives such as safeguarding crucial trade routes and upholding the international rules-based system.

Future cooperation in defence

The two nations also discussed future cooperation in defence from joint exercises to knowledge sharing and instructor exchanges.

The U.K. and India will engage in advanced military exercises, leading to a key joint exercise by 2030.

The collaboration aims to protect vital trade routes and uphold the international rules-based system.

Industry collaboration plays a crucial role in the strategic defense partnership between the U.K. and India.

The two sides also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for a bilateral international cadet exchange programme and a Letter of Arrangement (LoA) on defence collaboration in research and development.

World Employment and Social Outlook report 2024

Context

The International Labour Organization (ILO), a United Nations agency, has projected a modest rise in the global unemployment rate to 5.2% in 2024, citing an increase in joblessness across advanced economies.

About the report

According to the recent ILO's 2024 World Employment and Social Outlook report the anticipated rise would result in the global unemployment rate inching up from 5.1% recorded in 2023.

The report forecasts that the number of unemployed individuals globally will surge by two million, contributing to the uptick in the unemployment rate.

After a brief post-pandemic recovery, the ILO noted that overall labor productivity growth quickly reverted to the slow pace seen in the preceding decade.

Modest recovery

according to the ILO report, 2024 a strong job growth has led to a decrease in both the unemployment rate and the jobs gap, now below pre-pandemic levels.

In 2023, the global unemployment rate slightly improved to 5.1%, but the jobs gap, though showing progress, still stands high at nearly 435 million,

The report suggests limited employment gains for upper-middle-income countries in the next two years, while low-income and lower-middle-income countries are expected to continue experiencing strong job growth.

The ILO has raised concerns about high-income countries, predicting a negative turn in employment growth in 2024 and only modest improvements in 2025.
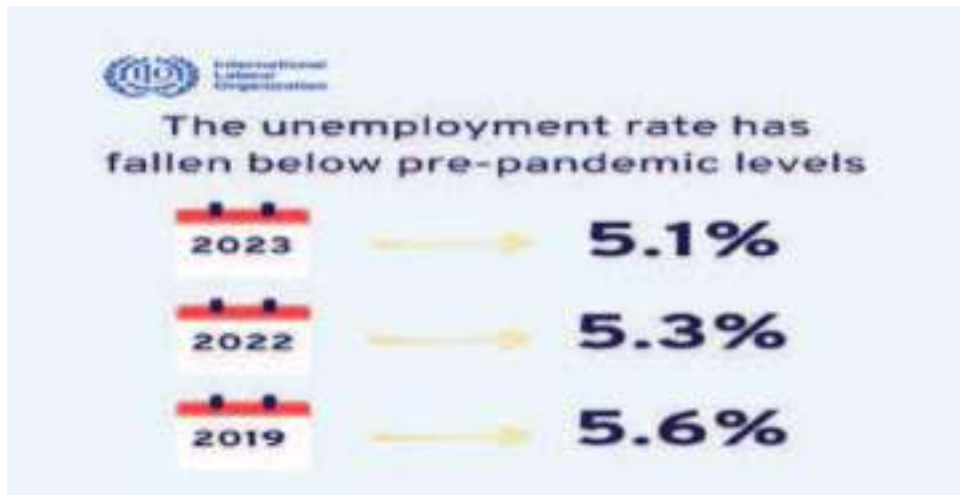
Gaps in accessibility for disabled persons across courts

Context

A recent report from the Supreme Court's Centre for Research and Planning reveals that over 50% of district court complexes lack ramps, only 25.2% provide wheelchairs, and a mere 5.1% have tactile paving for the visually impaired.

First-of-its-kind report

The first-of-its-kind report, highlights significant shortcomings in the infrastructure of district courts in India, underscoring concerns about barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing justice.

The report said that only 30.4% of court complexes in India have separate disabled-friendly toilets, despite their fundamental importance.

It highlighted that only 5.1% of district courts are equipped with tactile paving to aid individuals with visual disabilities in navigating the court buildings.

Platform for hearing disable lawyer

In a first, the Supreme Court in September allowed a lawyer with hearing disabilities to argue virtually with the help of a sign language interpreter.

The Delhi High Court too last year engaged the services of a sign language interpreter to enable a petitioner to understand the proceedings.

While these may be positive signs, as per the report, sign language interpreters who could be engaged to assist persons with hearing disabilities in accessing court proceedings are available in only 2.8% districts in India.

Infrastructure lacunae

The report revealed that out of a total sanctioned strength of 25,081 judges in the district judiciary, there are 20,831 courtrooms highlighting an infrastructure gap of 4,250 courtrooms across India.

The report said 73.5% of the available court premises are owned by the judiciary, 13.3% are owned by the respective state government, 2.6% (626 courtrooms) are rented premises, and 10.6% are under construction.

A manifesto for justice that has sprung from crises

As India staggers through multiple crises, there is a desperate search for solutions to the problems of unemployment, social and cultural strife, ecological collapse, and erosion of democratic rights.

In recent years, India has faced escalating challenges, including unemployed individuals, Natural disasters like the sinking of Joshimath and a dam burst in Sikkim added to the woes. Internal conflicts in Manipur, attempts to silence democratic voices through false cases against activists, journalists, and lawyers, as well as the mass suspension of Opposition Members of Parliament, signal a deepening malaise in the country.

Similar crises are also unfolding in other parts of the world.

A gathering of initiatives

On December 18, 85 people's movements and civil society organizations unveiled a 'People's Manifesto for a Just, Equitable, and Sustainable India.'

These groups, part of the national platform Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence), collectively advocate for:

- Ecological food production
- Decentralized water management

- Community-based energy production
- Dignified housing
- Meaningful education and health security
- Locally empowered decision-making
- Resistance against harmful projects

Aim

The manifesto is aimed at the general election 2024 but also at various local to national institutions and processes.

On the economy, it takes on the serious crisis of unemployment, especially among the youth, urging priority attention to small manufacturing, crafts, value added produce from agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and pastoralism, and the extension of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to urban areas.

To make these viable, it asks that all goods and services that can be produced through handmade and small manufacturing, should be reserved for these.

The Vikalp Sangam process has compiled hundreds of practical examples of these approaches.

Other concerns

The manifesto expresses concern about inter-faith and inter-ethnic conflicts, hate speech, and the vulnerabilities of minorities.

It calls for dialogue forums, promoting co-existence, and prioritizing marginalized groups in public and private institutions.

The manifesto advocates allocating 6% of GDP for education, emphasizing mother tongue, culturally rooted learning, and eco-friendly approaches.

Additionally, it highlights the need for community health processes, allocating 3% of GDP for initiatives addressing nutrition, safe water, and other factors contributing to a healthy life.

Focus on environmental issues

The manifesto advocates for a national land and water policy to safeguard ecological functions, community-led conservation of wildlife, and collective rights to natural resources.

It proposes transitioning India's farming to organic, biologically diverse methods by 2040, reducing toxic products and non-biodegradable materials.

The manifesto calls for decentralized water harvesting, community-managed renewable energy, and the elimination of fossil fuels and nuclear power by 2030.

The manifesto also calls for strengthening environmental impact assessment and forest clearance processes, advocating for comprehensive sector-wide assessments, particularly in energy.

It proposes the establishment of a National Environment Commissioner with independent constitutional status, akin to the Election Commissioner or the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Way forward

As Indian citizens, it is crucial for us to be vigilant and proactive, holding elected representatives accountable while actively participating in decisions that impact our lives.

The manifesto emphasizes the importance of empowering the significant youth population in the country.

The Vikalp Sangam Manifesto is infused with these notions of direct and accountable democracy, economic self-reliance, ecological responsibility, and socio-cultural equality.

10 JAN
Square Kilometer Array project
50 years of Project Tiger
Rapid rise in Web blocking orders
India seeks new textiles export markets
A Less Ableist Politics

Square Kilometer Array project

Context

India had decided to formally join the Square Kilometer Array (SKA) project, an international scientific collaboration working to build the world's largest radio telescope.

About

India has approved Rs 1,250 crore for the project, covering its funding contribution for the construction phase.

India has been involved in the SKA project right from its inception in the 1990s, and contributed to the design and development of the telescope.

To attain full member status and access enhanced scientific opportunities, countries must sign and ratify an international treaty, along with a financial commitment.

Square Kilometre Array project

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project is a global initiative aiming to construct the world's largest radio telescope, encompassing over a square kilometre of collecting area.

The Square Kilometer Array will not be a single large telescope, but a collection of thousands of dish antennas operating as a single unit. The name, Square Kilometer Array, comes from the original intention to create one square kilometre (one million square metre) of effective area for collecting radio waves.
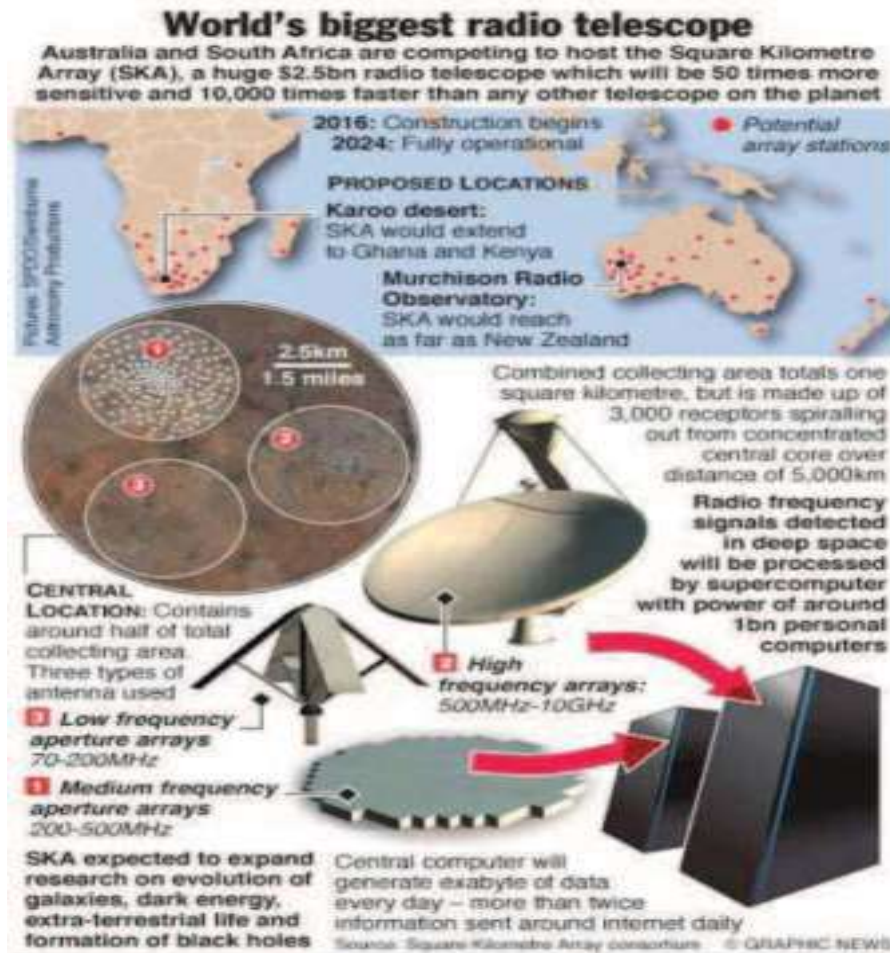
Member countries

Organisations from 14 countries are members of the SKA Organisation – Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

India's decision to join the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) as a full member marks its commitment to yet another cutting-edge international scientific endeavor.

In addition to this, India is actively engaged in other major projects like constructing a gravitational wave detector for the LIGO network, being a full member of the ITER project for nuclear fusion energy, and contributing significantly to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC).

Advantages for India

Though none of the SKA facilities would be located in India, there are immense science and technology gains for the country by participating in the project as a full member.

A full member status would provide India preferential access to the SKA facilities.

The SKA would work on highest-end technologies, including electronics, software, materials science and computing.

The intellectual properties generated by the project, though owned by the SKA Observatory, would be accessible to all the member countries.

This can offer huge learning opportunities for scientists, academics and even private industry.

50 years of Project Tiger

Context
The year 2023 marked of 50 years of Project Tiger.

The origins of Project Tiger
In 1972, India enacted the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WLPA), which introduced new spaces within notified forests called 'National Parks', where the rights of forest-dwellers were removed and vested with the State government.

In 1973, Project Tiger was launched with a mission to ensure the survival of the endangered tiger in India and preserve areas of biological importance as a national heritage.

It also created 'Wildlife Sanctuaries', where only some permitted rights could be exercised. Project Tiger was the result of this development.

There were nine tiger reserves in 1973 over 9,115 sq. km; today there are 54 in 18 States, occupying 78,135.956 sq. km.

As of 2022, the camera-trap method indicated there were 3,167-3,925 tigers in India.

COUNTING THE STRIPES

TIGER NUMBERS IN PAST CENSUSES

2006	2010	2014
1,411	1,706	2,226

OCCUPANCY AREA (SQ KM)

2006	93,700
2010	81,906
2014	89,164

2018 HIGHLIGHTS

14,000 camera traps to be used, 44% more than in 2014

3,200m Altitude of highest spot under survey (in Arunachal)

18 states in survey

MSTrIPES mobile app to track, upload and geo-tag images

55% OF DEATHS NATURAL

560 Total tiger mortality in last 6 years (2012-2017)

408 Cases closed with cause of death identified

HOW THEY DIED

Cause	Percentage
Natural deaths	55%
Poaching (of these, 20% due to electrocution)	22%
Seizures (of tiger parts)	16%
Road & train hits	4%
Eliminated	2%
Miscellaneous	1%

Source: National Tiger Conservation Authority

A change of operations
In 2005, the centre appointed a five-member Tiger Task Force to crack the mystery of vanishing tigers despite spending huge money on them.

The task force concluded that traditional methods like guns, guards, and fences were ineffective.

They also highlighted the escalating conflict between wildlife authorities and those living alongside tigers as a potential disaster.

In September 2006, Parliament amended the WLPA to create the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and a tiger conservation plan.

Forest Rights Act
The government also enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, also known as the FRA.

The FRA recognised all customary and traditional forest rights on forest land, including in tiger reserves.

Under the Act, the habitation-level Gram Sabha was to democratically determine and demarcate the forest rights that the FRA recognised.

The Gram Sabhas became the authority to protect, conserve, and manage forests, wildlife, and biodiversity within their customary and traditional boundaries.

Importantly, the FRA introduced a 'Critical Wildlife Habitat' (CWH).

Law of the jungle

The bill proposes to give higher management powers to forest officers beyond what is provided in the Forest Rights Act, 2006.

10th India's world ranking in total land area under forest and tree cover

421,000 sq. km Total forest cover in tribal districts

21.54% Total forest cover in India with regards to geographical area

2.99% Area classified as 'very dense' forest

15 states/UTs Have above 33% of geographical area under forest cover

Indian Forests (Amendment) Act 2019

PROS
- Any forest can be declared as conservation area
- Focuses on forest conservation and climate change issues
- Doesn't allow forest officer to withdraw case filed under Act
- Legalizes a new class of forests called 'commercial forests'
- Promotes production forests via involvement of private firms

CONS
- More bureaucratic control and hard-line police approach
- Higher immunity to forest officers
- Punishment to communities for crimes committed by individuals
- Any patch of forested land can be used for commercial plantations
- Increases concerns over commercial exploitation of forests

Rapid rise in Web blocking orders

Context
Website blocking orders increased over 100 times from 2013 to October 2023, according to a response to a Right to Information (RTI) application.

Surge in Bocking
In 2013, the Indian government issued 62 blocking orders under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act.
By October 2023, this number had risen significantly to 6,954.
Additionally, the Department of Telecommunications instructed ISPs in December to compile IP addresses of servers in India for expedited blocking.

Fall in data prices
The surge in blocking orders has coincided with a significant increase in internet usage, particularly after a sharp drop in mobile data prices in 2016.
The data indicate orders sent to social media and content companies for specific pages, profiles, and videos.
In 2022, the government stated that 228 websites were blocked in response to a parliamentary query.
Section 69A of the IT Act allows the Union government to block content online in the "interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence".

India seeks new textiles export markets

Context
With demand for textiles exports turning sluggish in Europe and the U.S., India is looking for new markets through free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries such as Australia and the United Arab Emirates.

Sluggish demand
The Centre is taking steps to address the issues of lack of demand and uncontrolled imports in the textiles sector.
The Hindu had recently published a series of reports on the problems in the sector due to lack of demand and unregulated imports.
The demand for Indian textiles had decline in the U.S. and European markets last year and also this year.
The quality control orders on textile materials would assure quality in the products imported and would curb the import of substandard products.

Exploring new markets

The Centre is also exploring new markets besides strengthening existing major markets for textiles.

The FTAs with the U.K. and some West Asian countries were also being negotiated, adding that the Centre's target was to achieve $100 billion in exports by the end of 2030.

Schemes such as PM Mitra and Production Linked Incentives (PLI) would help scale up production and address such issues.

A Less Ableist Politics

On December 21, the Election Commission of India issued guidelines for political parties, urging them to adopt disability-sensitive language.

The 11 guidelines focus on three main areas: inclusive communication, information accessibility, and inclusion within party structures.

Communication guidelines discourage the use of derogatory terms and stereotypes for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility guidelines emphasize making party websites and events accessible.

Need for effective strategy

First, some guidelines are considered advisory, though certain disability-inclusive communication guidelines use mandatory language like "should" and "shall."

However, other guidelines, particularly those related to inclusion within the political party framework, are still presented in discretionary terms with words like "may."

There is a need for a consistent mandate across all three categories.

Second, the guidelines on disability-inclusive communication are not yet incorporated into the Model Code of Conduct. Breaching these guidelines may subject political parties and members to action under section 92 of the RPwD Act, which deals with offenses against Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

Third, the guidelines contain ambiguity regarding certain phrases, such as "blind," "deaf," and "dumb," which are considered wrong terminology.

While these words might be derogatory in translations, they are technical terms for individuals with visual, hearing, and speech disabilities.

The ECI could benefit from a detailed list of disability-sensitive language provided by the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Fourth, the draft National Policy for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) released last year lacked a chapter on political inclusion, contrary to the Election Commission of India's advisory.

The advisory emphasizes the need for political parties to actively include PwD at all levels and adhere to accessibility norms.

To align with Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is recommended to incorporate a chapter on political inclusion in the national policy to catalyze PwD's participation in politics.

Conclusion

Currently, there is no data on the number of legislators with disabilities as the Election Commission of India (ECI) doesn't include a disability column in nomination forms and affidavits. The absence of this information has greatly contributed to the political exclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

It is anticipated that the ECI will rectify this by incorporating a disability column during the 2024 elections, marking a crucial second step towards the political inclusion of PwDs.

09 JAN
DRDO counter-drone system
DGCA revises duty norms for pilots
Roll-out of three new criminal laws in U.T.s
India seeks people-centric partnership with Bangladesh
Understanding the EU's carbon border tax

DRDO counter-drone system

Context

Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) has successfully developed counter-technology to address the growing use of drones in surveillance, logistics, and military operations.

DRDO's Counter-Drone System

The state-of-the-art system developed by DRDO is now ready for production following successful demonstrations to the armed services and internal security agencies.

The production rights have been transferred to Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) in Bengaluru. In a move to boost domestic production, DRDO has also entered into Transfer of Technology agreements with four other Indian firms to produce anti-drone systems.

This strategic move not only bolsters India's defense capabilities but also strengthens the nation's self-reliance in critical defense technologies.
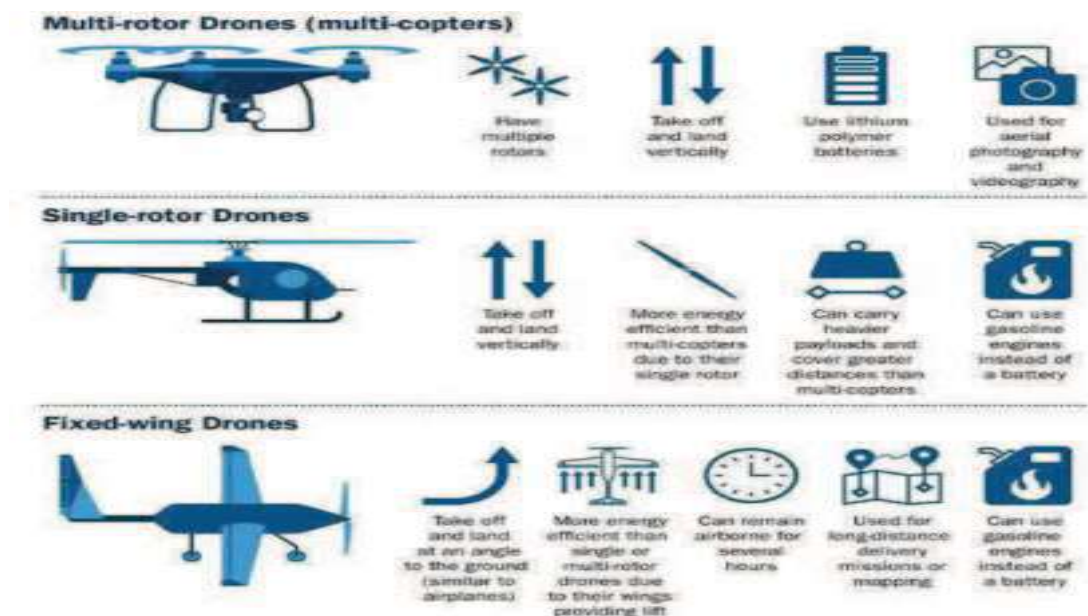
DRDO's Endeavors in Drone Development

In response to the escalating usage of drones in surveillance, logistics, and combat, India is now equipped with potent indigenous counter-drone technology, a major leap in the nation's defense preparedness.

Besides counter-drone technology, DRDO is also investing its resources in developing various drones, including micro-drones.

Among the noteworthy projects are:

- TAPAS Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) for ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance) applications.
- Short Range Armed UAV Archer for reconnaissance, surveillance, and low-intensity conflict situations.

DGCA revises duty norms for pilots

Context

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation introduced new flight duty regulations.

Proposed changes

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation introduced new flight duty regulations under which weekly rest hours for pilots have been increased from 36 hours per week to 48 hours thus ensuring sufficient time for recovery from cumulative fatigue.

The definition of night has been amended covering the period of 0000-0600 hours in the revised regulations against 0000-0500 hours earlier.

The DGCA has also reduced the maximum flight time for pilots to fly at night in a day to eight hours and cut down maximum landings by a pilot in a day to two.

The new FDTL norms have been shared with airlines and they will be required to comply with the revised norms by June 1, 2024.

Incorporating global best practices

The DGCA has also taken into consideration the best practices in the world Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), in the US, and European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in the European Union while amending the regulations and looking at the specific operating environment in India.

The revised FDTL regulations have been formulated after extensive data analysis and feedback from various stakeholders, including airline operators, pilot associations and individuals.

Pilots on fatigue issues

43%	said they were fatigued for the next flight
54.2%	suffer from severe excessive daytime sleepiness
73%	blamed early morning departures for fatigue
71%	said shouldn't have been doing cockpit duty due to fatigue
69%	said airlines not focussing on fatigue management
97%	said DGCA not doing enough to manage fatigue

Source: Safety Culture Survey (Fatigue). Safety Matters Foundation

Roll-out of three new criminal laws in U.T.s

Context
The Prime Minister, at the annual Director-General of Police Conference, addressed concerns regarding the implementation of three new criminal laws, with a focus on data storage and security.

Roadmap
The government is now considering the phased implementation of the three laws notified in December, starting with the Union Territories.

In the discussions, the Prime Minister proposed a targeted rollout of the three laws in all Union Territories by the end of 2024, expanding from the initial plan of implementing them only in Chandigarh.

It was also discussed that each State would have the flexibility to implement the laws in a phased manner.

Background
The three bills to reform criminal laws were first introduced in Lok Sabha on August 11 during the monsoon session of Parliament as Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023.

Revised criminal bills
The Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSS) will replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860; the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill (BSS) will replace the Indian Evidence Act, 1872; and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita Bill (BNSSS) will replace the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

This criminal law reform brings terrorism offences into a general crime law for the first time, drops the crime of sedition, and makes mob lynching punishable by death.

India seeks people-centric partnership with Bangladesh

Context
The Prime Minister of India congratulated Bangladesh Prime Minister for a historic fourth consecutive victory in the Parliamentary elections.

Fifth term in office
Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League, secured her fifth term as Bangladesh's Prime Minister in the recently concluded national elections.
The opposition boycotted the polls, expressing concerns about the fairness of the voting process.
Unofficial results from the Election Commission show the Awami League winning 223 out of 299 seats, ensuring a simple majority in parliament.

Major progress in Bilateral relationship

Akhaura-Agartala rail link
The much-awaited Agartala-Akhaura rail link project will be inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister of India and his Bangladesh counterpart.
Akhaura-Agartala rail link project was first conceptualized in January 2010, where the two countries agreed to lay the tracks from Akhaura in Brahmanbaria to Nischintapur of Agartala.
The construction of a 15.064-km-long new railway line was started in 2018.

Development Partnership
Bangladesh is the biggest development partner of India.
India has extended 3 lines of credit (LOC) worth $8 billion to Bangladesh in the last 8 years for infrastructure development in various sectors including roads, railways, shipping and ports.

Friendship Pipeline
The Friendship Pipeline between India and Bangladesh is intended to connect the eastern Indian state of West Bengal with Bangladesh, facilitating the transportation of natural gas. The project aims to enhance energy cooperation between the two nations, promoting economic and diplomatic ties.

Understanding the EU's carbon border tax

India is facing a significant challenge with the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).
The policy aims to tax carbon-intensive imports into the EU starting from October 1, 2023, with full implementation by 2026.
There have been ongoing discussions between the EU and India regarding the potential impact of CBAM.
The Commerce and Industry Minister expressed concerns, describing the proposed carbon tax on imports as "ill-conceived" and warning it could be the "death knell" for India's manufacturing sector.

EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
A carbon border adjustment tax is a duty on imports based on the amount of carbon emissions resulting from the production of the product in question.
The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) puts a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods entering the EU.
As a price on carbon, it discourages emissions and as a trade-related measure, it affects production and exports.
The CBAM will enter into force in its transitional phase as of 1 October 2023 and the permanent system will enter into force on 1 January 2026

India's concern
The carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) or carbon tax is expected to have an impact on India's iron, steel, and aluminum exports worth $8-$9 billion headed into Europe and the UK.
The EU's CBAM will likely affect India's steel, aluminum, cement, and fertilizer exports, leading to increased prices for Indian companies in the EU market.
This may reduce competitiveness and demand.
India is considering relief measures, such as compensating affected exporters, to mitigate the impact of the carbon tax imposed by the EU and the UK and maintain global competitiveness.

India's options

India faces limited options in dealing with the CBAM framework.

One approach is to challenge it, asserting a violation of the common but differentiated responsibilities principle agreed upon in the Paris Agreement.

Another option involves the EU collecting the tax and returning funds to affected countries for investment in green technologies.

This pragmatic approach gains significance as CBAM progresses into its definitive phase in 2026.

Ongoing negotiations with the EU need careful monitoring for potential resolutions.

India has already lodged a challenge against CBAM at the World Trade Organization, citing special and differential treatment provisions

Bottom line

India is identified as one of the top eight nations facing negative consequences from the CBAM. Key sectors like steel are expected to be significantly impacted by the CBAM.

The UK's announcement of implementing its own Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) by 2027 will likely impact India's exports.

Consequently, India must urgently develop carbon taxation measures aligned with the Paris Agreement principles to protect its industries.

08 JAN
AI Voice clone fraud in India
Supreme Court Legal Services Committee
IAF aircraft carries out first ever night landing
India - U.K. to deepen defence ties
Structured negotiation as a boost for disability rights

AI Voice clone fraud in India

Context

In May last year, a report disclosed that 47% of surveyed Indians were victims or knew someone affected by an AI-generated voice scam, nearly double the global average.

AI voice clone scams in India

In India, a report titled 'The Artificial Imposter' from May last year highlighted a concerning trend. It revealed that 47% of surveyed Indians either experienced or knew someone who fell victim to AI-generated voice scams.

This rate is almost double the global average of 25%, with India leading in the number of victims.

According to McAfee's findings, Indians are highly susceptible to scams, with 66% admitting they would respond to urgent

voice or phone calls from apparent friends or family members seeking money.

The report highlights that message claiming robbery (70%), car accidents (69%), lost belongings (65%), or financial aid during travel abroad (62%) are particularly effective.

The study emphasizes vulnerabilities, especially when callers pose as parents (46%), spouses (34%), or children (12%).

Global cases on AI voice clone

In January, users on 4chan began using free AI voice cloning tools to create fake celebrity hate speech.

This included instances where Emma Watson, known for her role in Harry Potter, recited a portion of Mein Kampf, and conservative pundit Ben Shapiro made racist comments about Democrat politician Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez.

In a notable incident in April last year, a family in Arizona received a ransom threat for a fake kidnapping carried out using an AI-cloned voice.

A report by Market US has revealed that the global market for these applications stands at $1.2 billion in 2022 and is estimated to touch almost $5 billion in 2032 with a CAGR above 15-40%.
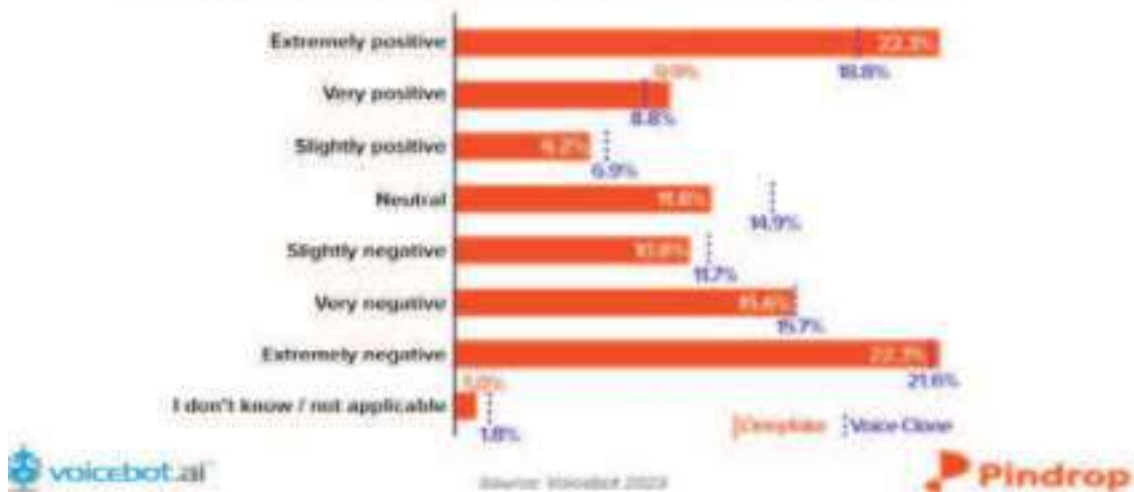
How are voice clones done

Scammers can easily exploit online programs like Murf, Resemble, and Speechify, which replicate an individual's voice from an uploaded audio clip with high accuracy.

Major tech companies, such as Meta and Apple, have also joined the AI voice scene.

Meta introduced SeamlessM4T, a multilingual model for real-time language translation, while Apple's iOS 17 now includes a voice cloning feature designed to assist individuals at risk of losing their voice due to degenerative diseases.

ChatGPT, also has a voice transcription feature that can be used for cloning.

Preventive measures

Two-Factor Authentication (2FA): Encourage the use of two-factor authentication for sensitive accounts and transactions.

Biometric Security Measures: Use advanced biometric technologies, such as voiceprint recognition, for secure authentication.

Awareness the Public: Raise awareness about voice clone fraud through public campaigns, media, and online platforms.

Secure Communication Channels: Promote the use of secure communication channels for sensitive information, such as encrypted voice and video calls.

In November last year, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission or FTC launched a Voice Cloning Challenge which asked the public to send in their ideas to detect, evaluate and monitor cloned devices.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

Context

Supreme Court Justice BR Gavai has been nominated as the Chairman of the Supreme Court Legal Services Committee (SCLSC).

About Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

In 1987, the Legal Services Authorities Act was enacted to give a statutory base to legal aid programmes.

It aims to provide free and competent legal services to eligible groups, including women, children, SC/ST and EWS categories, industrial workers, disabled persons, and others.

Composition

Section 3A of the Act states that the National Legal Services Authority or NALSA shall constitute the committee.

It consists of a sitting SC judge, who is the chairman, along with other members possessing the experience and qualifications prescribed by the Centre.

Both the chairman and other members will be nominated by the CJI.

Further, the CJI can appoint the Secretary to the Committee.

As of date, the SCLSC consists of chairperson and nine members nominated by the CJI.

Need for Legal Services in India

The Indian Constitution, particularly Article 39A, emphasizes the state's role in ensuring legal justice is accessible to all citizens, regardless of economic or other disabilities.

Moreover, Articles 14 (right to equality) and 22(1) (rights to be informed of grounds for arrest) also make it obligatory for the State to ensure equality before the law and a legal system that promotes justice based on equal opportunity.

The concept of a legal aid program was initially proposed in the 1950s, but it wasn't until 1980 that a national committee, led by Justice PN Bhagwati, was formed to address the matter.

State and District Legal Services Authorities

In every state, State Legal Services Authorities (SLSA) were established to implement NALSA's policies and directions, give free legal services to people, and conduct Lok Adalats.

An SLSA is headed by the Chief Justice of the respective High Court and includes the senior HC judge as its Executive Chairman.

Similarly, District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs) and Taluk Legal Services Committees were established in districts and most taluks.

Situated in the District Courts Complex in every district, each DLSA is chaired by the District Judge of the respective district.

LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITIES/COMMITTEES

IAF aircraft carries out first ever night landing

Context

For the first time, a C-130J Super Hercules transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) carried out a night landing at the high-altitude Kargil advanced landing ground near the Line of Control (LoC).

IAF's operational capabilities

The night landing of the tactical lift aircraft with the elite Garud commandos on board at the Kargil airstrip demonstrated the IAF's operational capabilities in the strategically crucial sector.

The Kargil airstrip is located at an altitude of around 10,500 feet.

The C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, manufactured by US aircraft maker Lockheed Martin, is an advanced tactical airlifter utilized by the Indian Air Force (IAF) for special operations and humanitarian crises. The night landing of the C130J is significant for the Air Force in many ways.

Enhancing infrastructure

The defence ministry has also been focusing on enhancing infrastructure at almost all airfields along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), including the Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) as per operational requirements.

It is especially boosting infrastructure at the Daulat Beg Oldi Advanced Landing Ground (ALG) as well as the Nyoma airstrip.

The Daulat Beg Oldi ALG is located close to the LAC at an altitude of 16,700 feet and is known as the highest airfield in the world.

Temperatures in Daulat Beg Oldi drop up to minus 40 degrees Celsius during harsh winter months.

India - U.K. to deepen defence ties

Context

The Defence Minister of India will United Kingdom to rejuvenate strategic and security ties between the two countries, including possible collaboration to jointly develop fighter jets and other military platforms.

Focus area

India and United Kingdom are expected to discuss a wide range of issues in the spheres of defence, security and industrial cooperation including sped-up negotiations towards a free trade agreement (FTA) expected to significantly enhance the GBP 36-billion bilateral partnership.

The defence minister will be accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising senior officials from the three services, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and department of defence production.

India-UK defence partnership

In April 2022, Prime Minister of India and his then British counterpart had agreed on a new and expanded India-UK defence partnership.

During his visit to India, Prime Minister of UK had announced that the UK is creating an Open General Export Licence (OGEL) for India to "reduce bureaucracy and slashing delivery times for defence procurement.

The British prime minister also said that the UK will help India in the co-development of military hardware, including indigenous production of fighter jets.

The India-UK relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the India-UK virtual summit held in May 2021.

Structured negotiation as a boost for disability rights

Structured negotiation, a collaborative approach to dispute resolution, is gaining popularity as an alternative to litigation.

It entails inviting the defaulting party, often a service provider, to the negotiation table, emphasizing the advantages of compliance with social welfare legislations.

Ms. Feingold has notably contributed to its success, particularly in resolving disability rights cases in the United States.

Success rate of negotiation

Structured negotiation successfully addressed inaccessible ATMs, point-of-sale devices, pedestrian signals, and websites.

It persuaded Walmart, CVS, and Caremark to create accessible prescription bottles.

It also drove institutional reform for more accessible voting machines and websites.

Structured negotiation creates a win-win scenario by helping service providers avoid litigation costs and negative publicity, while enabling complainants to access the marketplace barrier-free.

Legal precedents play a crucial role, paving the way for businesses to ensure accessibility without resorting to litigation, benefiting both parties involved.

India's red tape

The growing backlog, bureaucracy, and paperwork in Indian civil courts discourage traditional dispute resolution.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 allows reporting non-compliance to the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (CCPD).

The CCPD can issue notices and impose penalties to ensure accessibility, but its effectiveness in addressing marketplace barriers is uncertain.

The CCPD recently instructed PayTM to make its mobile app accessible for Persons with Disabilities.

Priority is key

The success of alternative dispute resolution for persons with disabilities depends on how much priority service providers give to their needs.

Without recognizing the benefits of catering to persons with disabilities, achieving amicable settlements outside of court

will be challenging.

In the context of India, businesses must embrace structured negotiation to tap into the significant purchasing power of people with disabilities.

It's crucial for businesses to prioritize the needs of disabled users, and engaging in structured negotiations is a powerful move in that direction.

Conclusion
Structured Negotiation can be a solution, allowing service providers to avoid non-compliance issues and legal fees.

It empowers Persons with Disabilities to directly address concerns with service providers and oversee implementation fixes.

06 JAN
Cabinet approved 'Prithvi' programme for earth observation
Deep tech start-up policy soon
Criticism to the new PG medical education regulations
NSO data on India's GDP growth
The need to examine the examination system

Cabinet approved 'Prithvi' programme for earth observation

Context
The Union Cabinet has approved the overarching scheme "PRITHvi VIgyan (PRITHVI)" of Ministry of Earth Sciences, for implementation during the period from 2021-26.

Sub-schemes of programme
The scheme encompasses five ongoing sub-schemes namely:
- Atmosphere & Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services (ACROSS)
- Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology (O-SMART)
- Polar Science and Cryosphere Research (PACER)
- Seismology and Geosciences (SAGE)
- Research, Education, Training and Outreach (REACHOUT)

Aim and Objectives
- To improve and increase long-term observations of the atmosphere, ocean, geosphere, cryosphere, and solid earth to track changes in the planet
- To develop models to understand and predict weather, ocean and climate hazards, and understand the science of climate change
- To explore polar and high-seas regions of the earth to discover new phenomena and resources
- Develop techno- logy for exploration and sustainable harnessing of oceanic resources for societal applications
- To translate knowledge and insights from earth system science into services for societal, environmental, and economic benefit

Deep tech start-up policy soon

Context
According to the Principal Scientific Adviser, the government will soon present a new deep tech policy to the Union Cabinet for approval.

Draft of the policy
In July 2023, the government unveiled a draft of the policy for public comment.

Following feedback from the industry, a final version is reportedly ready.

"Deep tech" is a buzzword in tech and start-up circles with no precise definition as yet.

The draft policy refers to Startup India's database, stating that as of May 2023, there are 10,298 recognized startups in the deep tech space.

Deep tech startups are characterized by the development of impactful intellectual property based on new scientific breakthroughs, yet to be fully realized.

Themes of draft policy
Draft National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP) is based on the following themes:
- Nurturing Research, Development & Innovation
- Strengthening the Intellectual Property Regime

- Facilitating Access to Funding
- Enabling Shared Infrastructure and Resource Sharing
- Creating Conducive Regulations, Standards, and Certifications
- Attracting Human Resources & Initiating Capacity Building
- Promoting Procurement & Adoption
- Ensuring Policy & Program Interlinkages
- Sustaining Deep Tech Startups

Startup India's database

The draft policy refers to Startup India's database, stating that as of May 2023, there are 10,298 recognized startups classified under various sub-sectors within the deep tech space.

Deep tech startups are characterized by the development of impactful intellectual property based on new scientific breakthroughs, with potential outcomes yet to be realized.

Criticism to the new PG medical education regulations

Context

The recently notified Post-Graduate Medical Education Regulations, 2023 have drawn criticism from doctors' fraternity.

Post-Graduate Medical Education Regulations, 2023

The National Medical Commission (NMC) has introduced reforms in postgraduate medical education, including equal stipends for PG students at private and state-run colleges, minimum casual leave, and residential accommodation.

The regulations also outline penalties for non-compliance and address seat reservations and the establishment of academic cells.

The NMC has postponed the National Exit Test (NExT) until further notice.

The regulations introduce six types of PG medical courses with varying durations, covering broad-specialty qualifications, super-specialty courses, diploma courses, and post-doctoral certificate courses.

Concerns over new regulations

The key concerns highlight by the doctor in the notified Post-Graduate Medical Education Regulations, 2023 includes working hours, mental health, burnout issues among resident doctors, and irregularity of stipends have not been addressed. Doctors are also unhappy that the guidelines are silent on the integration of Artificial Intelligence in the curriculum.

NSO data on India's GDP growth

Context

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected the Indian economy to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2023-2024.

GDP growth trend

India's real GDP growth in 2023-24 is estimated at 7.3%, compared to 7.2% a year ago, as per the first advance estimates of

national income released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

The Indian economy grew 7.7 per cent in the first half (April-September) of FY24, data for which was released on November 30.

Interestingly, the NSO expects the growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) in the economy to ease slightly from 7% in 2022-23 to 6.9% this year.

Growth forecast

In December, RBI elevated its growth forecast for FY24 to 7% from its initial estimate of 6.5% citing robust growth in high-frequency indicators.

The Indian economy demonstrated a faster-than-expected growth of 7.6% year-on-year during this period, following a 7.8% expansion in the previous quarter.

Some economists, however, expect India's full-year economic growth to range closer to RBI's forecast of 7%.

The government's GDP forecast for FY2024 is essentially based on the April-November data available to it.

First estimates

India's economy is expected to grow 7.3% in the current fiscal year, according to the first advance estimates released by the National Statistical Office

Source: CMIE, Reuters
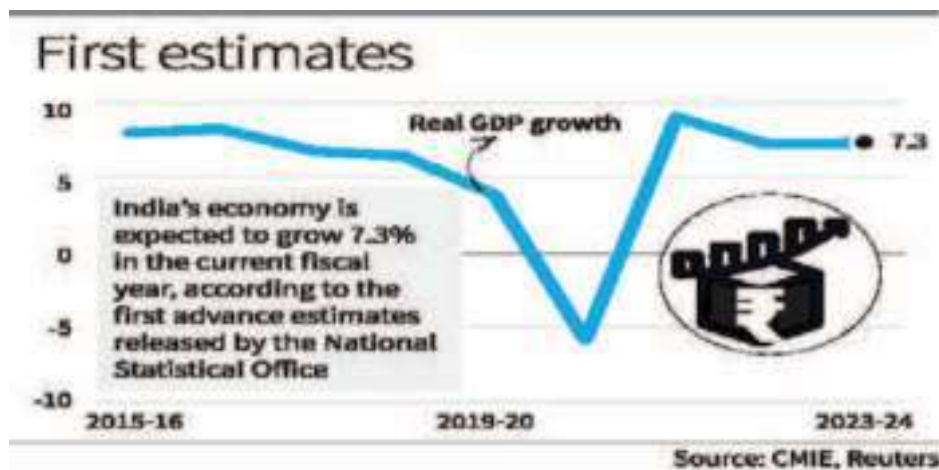
The need to examine the examination system

During exam seasons, media often highlights scandals in universities and school boards, impacting the credibility of the examination system and the certificates issued.

The reliability of educational institutions' examination systems is crucial for maintaining educational standards.

The focus on known examination patterns, such as memory-based testing, can lead to a narrow approach to teaching and learning.

Inflating marks and achieving high pass percentages become priorities for education administrators, resulting in increased talent search costs for employers.

A credible examination system is essential for improving the overall standard of education.

Decentralised system

India has over 1,100 universities and 50,000 affiliated colleges, enrolling 40.15 million students.

Additionally, there are 60 school boards certifying over 15 million students annually.

The key to maintaining credibility and education standards lies in transparency in teaching and assessment, as excessive secrecy and standardized approaches can lead to issues.

In a decentralized education system, confidentiality and standardization in exams are less significant, while maintaining a minimum standard is crucial. Transparency and effective oversight play key roles in ensuring the required standards.

Assessment quality

The academic courses in India aim for outcome-based learning, guided by regulatory boards' advisories on curriculum, pedagogy, and examinations.

However, institutions often deviate due to a lack of effective oversight.

To address this, a transparent oversight model and increased involvement of professional bodies in curriculum design are essential.

Examination reforms should run parallel to curriculum changes, avoiding a sequential approach.

The issue of secrecy in assessments, from question creation to grading, poses a challenge.

Evaluation is indiscriminate, and grades don't reflect differences in learning.

Employability depends on higher-order skills, not certified by examination boards.

Measures needed

Minimum learning standards can be achieved through various approaches in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment.

Ongoing teacher-led assessments can be improved with proper documentation and real-time oversight.

Transparent summative assessments, including student feedback on teachers, are crucial for accountability.

The setting of question papers can be standardised in terms of academic content, and evaluation can be standardised with checks and balances.

Transparency in accessing the evaluation process by students and measures to address their grievances should be in place.

Conclusion

Regular external audits of university and school assessment systems are crucial to uphold reliability and consistency.

Grades must distinguish academic attainments, and the examination process should be transparent and credible, adhering to minimum acceptable standards while maintaining confidentiality.

Reforming the examination system to ensure its credibility is a key way to improve educational standards.

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05 JAN

Centre to expand ECGC cover to jewellery exporters
India and Nepal sign long-term power agreement
New antibiotics could target drug-resistant bacterium
India's digital footprint makes it vulnerabilities to cybercriminals
How AI is changing what sovereignty means

Centre to expand ECGC cover to jewellery exporters

Context

The union minister for Commerce and Industry said the government is keen to expand Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) cover and asked gems and jewellery industry leaders to form a committee to help exporters in the sector.

Formation of committee

The commerce and industry minister suggested forming a committee consisting of ECGC, the government and Gem Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) representatives to develop a certain mechanism that will help the industry to cross the hump and start giving exporters credit cover.

India's gem and jewellery industry

India has the potential to become the global epicenter of the gem and jewellery industry with a holistic ecosystem encompassing all diverse constituents and elements.

Massive investments are being made to create a world-class infrastructure, including the 20-acre India Jewellery Park in Navi Mumbai.

Presently, India is a powerhouse of jewellery manufacturing and the domestic gem and jewellery market, and after the India-UAE CEPA bilateral trade agreement, the sector is looking forward to trade agreements with GCC, the UK, EU and Canada.

Net export of gems & jewellery FY22 (USD billion)
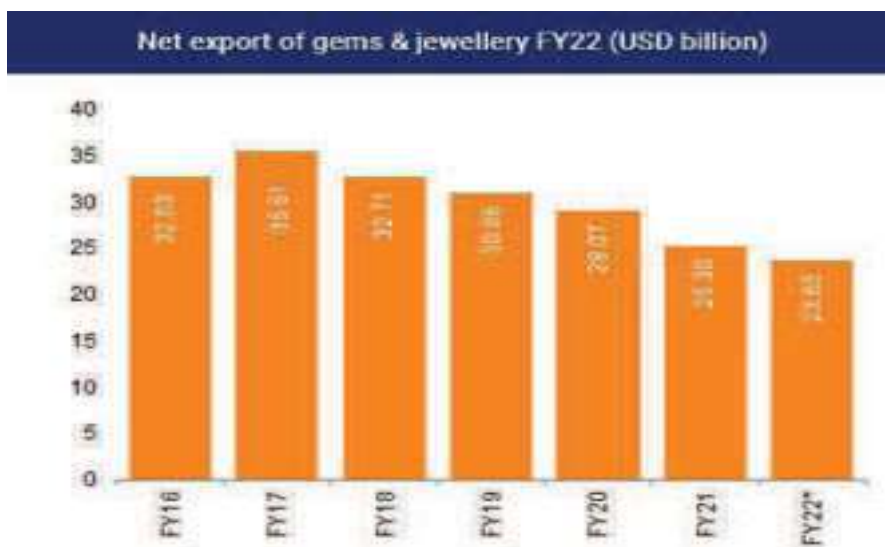
About ECGC

ECGC Ltd is a wholly-owned entity of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in India.

Initially established as the Export Risks Insurance Corporation in 1957, its name was changed to Export Credit & Guarantee

Corporation Ltd in 1964 after introducing insurance covers to banks.
ECGC aims to boost exports by offering credit insurance services to protect exporters from non-payment risks by overseas buyers due to commercial and political factors.
Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) form 97% of the client base of ECGC.

Clusters in Indian gems and Jewellery industry

India and Nepal sign long-term power agreement

Context
Nepal signed a long-term agreement for the export of 10,000 MW power to India, an MoU for cooperation in renewable energy, and jointly inaugurated three cross-border transmission lines.

Memorandum of understanding
Renewable energy: A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between India's NTPC Limited and the Nepal Electricity Authority will focus on cooperation in the development of renewable energy.

Space sector: Another agreement between New Space India Limited (NSIL) and the Nepal Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) will facilitate the launch of the Munal satellite on India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).

Development projects: The other agreement between the two governments covers Indian grants for implementing high-impact community development projects.

- The two sides also discussed disaster management, tourism, civil aviation, people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and the development partnership.

Power Transmission: India and Nepal also virtually inaugurated three 132-kV cross-border transmission lines, including the second circuits of the Raxaul-Parwanipur line and the Kataiya-Kusaha line, and the New Nautanwa-Mainhiya line.

New antibiotics could target drug-resistant bacterium

Context
Researchers have identified a new class of antibiotics with the potential to tackle a drug-resistant bacterium, Acinetobacter baumannii.

New type of antibiotic
Scientists say they have developed a new type of antibiotic called Zosurabalpin to treat bacteria that is resistant to most current antibiotics and kills a large percentage of people with an invasive infection.
Zosurabalpin, the antibiotic, was found to be effective against CRAB (carbapenem-resistant Acinetobacter baumannii)-induced pneumonia and sepsis in mouse models.

CRAB infections
CRAB is common in Asia and the Middle East and causes up to 20% of infections in intensive care units worldwide.
It accounts for about 2% of infections found in US hospitals.
The bacteria thrives in medical environments like hospitals and nursing homes.
People at the highest risk of infections are those who have a catheter, who are on a ventilator or who have open wounds from surgery.
The pathogen is so difficult to eliminate that the US Food and Drug Administration has not approved a new class of antibiotic to treat it in more than 50 years.

India's digital footprint makes it vulnerabilities to cybercriminals

Context
A group of cyber-security providers had warned that huge population and fast-expanding economy makes India vulnerable to cybercriminals and cyber-attack.

India's digital footprint
With a population of over 1.4 billion and a rapidly expanding economy, India's digital footprint has made it an alluring target for cybercriminals seeking to exploit vulnerabilities.

India has witnessed a significant increase in internet penetration, driven by the widespread use of smartphones and affordable data plans.

Caution for future
Data breaches would skyrocket in 2024, there would be continued acceleration in ransomware activities in addition to a surge in identity-based attacks resulting from increasing cloud adoption, and deepfakes would also pose a looming threat to the country's cybersecurity this year.

McAfee Corp., a player in online protection, forecast that in 2024 the global excitement around the Olympic Games will become a breeding ground for scams.

Cyber-scammers will exploit consumer enthusiasm around the event, targeting fans who are eager to buy tickets, book travel, access hot content, and participate in giveaways.
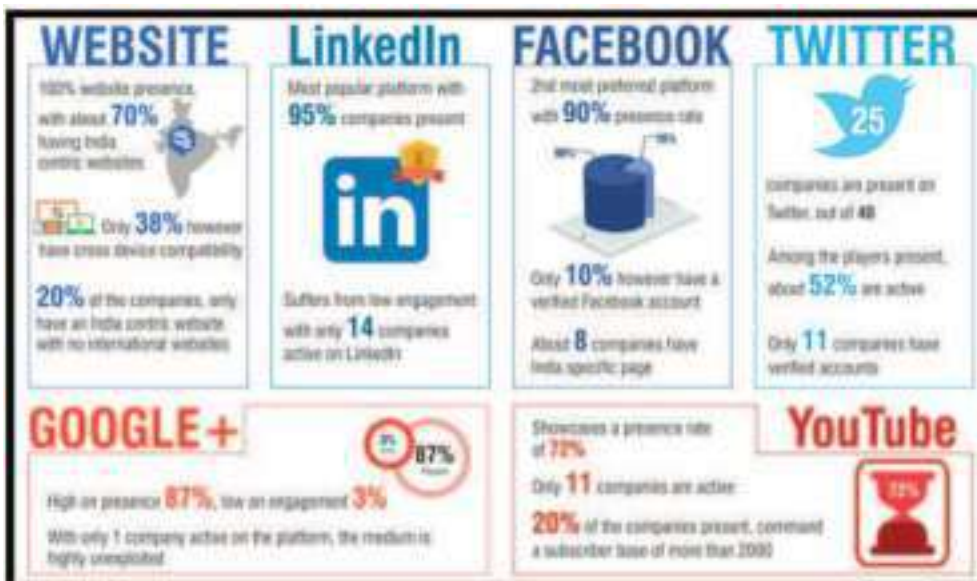
How AI is changing what sovereignty means

During global political competition and the aftermath of the voilent events of 2023, including regional wars and civic conflicts, technocrats, ecocrats, and bureaucrats worldwide are quietly implementing initiatives aimed at securing a brighter and more expansive future for human rights.

In October 2023, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) hosted a joint session of the High-Level Committee on Programmes and the High-Level Committee on Management.

This initiative focused on the use and governance of AI and related frontier technologies.

UNESCO on ethical use of AI

The UNESCO declaration outlines key principles for the ethical use of AI in the United Nations system.

These include respecting, protecting, and promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms, and human dignity, along with considerations for ecological sustainability, diversity, and inclusiveness.

These principles extend across eleven specific areas of concern, such as good governance and just development.

A recommended outcome is the establishment of a system-wide normative and operational framework for the ethical use of AI within the United Nations system, anchored in these guiding principles.

Digital sovereignty

Advancements in AI and its humanistic applications are crucial, but ignoring discussions on "digital sovereignty" and engaging in "digital diplomacy" would render such progress speculative.

The concept of territorial sovereignty is gradually evolving into digital sovereignty, central to corporate governance.

AI governance spans borders and multiple levels, with control shifting towards amassed classified data.

Addressing issues like disinformation, misleading content, and hate speech is paramount for ensuring truth and accountability in governance and development.

Digital wars

The current digital conflicts between the US and China highlight three interconnected "digital empires," as outlined in Anu Bradford's 2023 book, "Digital Empires."

The US embraces a free digital model, granting complete freedom to the AI industry, reminiscent of a techno-optimistic approach.

This approach, rooted in free market fundamentalism, has propelled the social media industry's global growth from $193.52 billion in 2001 to $231.1 billion in 2023, with projections reaching $454.37 billion in 2027 (Business Research Company).

The global ascent of the Chinese state-driven model raises concerns among the US, EU, and other democratic nations about its implications.

Concerns over China regulation

The concern is that China's regulatory approach, despite impressive technological progress, is oppressive, and its state-driven model attracts authoritarian regimes.

In contrast, democratic societies, particularly in the EU, favor a human-centric digital economy, emphasizing human rights as crucial for inclusive and sustainable development, as stated in the November 22, 2021, EU Declaration on Development.

Bottom line

AI has changed how wars are fought, especially with machines that can make their own decisions about using deadly force.

This shows a heavy reliance on machine learning and a move away from human involvement in how wars are conducted.

The use of AI in war raises concerns about setbacks to international humanitarian law.

The imperative to "humanize" AI applications in both civil and military contexts.

04 JAN
India to launch GSAT-20 satellite
Why is upskilling necessary for the rural youth
NCDC survey on antibiotics usage
Cybercrime plants originate in China, Cambodia and Myanmar
I-T searches, a form of extra-constitutional power

India to launch GSAT-20 satellite

Context

For the first time, the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch GSAT-20, a communication satellite on a SpaceX rocket.

About GSAT-20

GSAT-20 (renamed as GSAT-N2) is a high throughput Ka-band satellite.

Ka-band satellites deliver high-speed broadband internet connectivity and digital video and audio transmission.

GSAT-20 weights 4,700 kg and offers an HTS capacity of nearly 48Gpbs.

The satellite has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote/unconnected regions.

SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket

New Space India Ltd (NSIL), the ISRO's commercial arm, announced its plans to launch communication satellite GSAT-20 onboard SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket.

ISRO will be launched onboard Falcon-9 under a launch service contract between the NSIL and the SpaceX, USA.

Falcon 9 is the world's first orbital class reusable rocket.

Reusability allows SpaceX to re-fly the most expensive parts of the rocket, which in turn drives down the cost of space access.

Significance

The GSAT-20 offers high throughput capacity of nearly 48 gbps.

The satellite has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote regions including Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

The high-capacity satellite aims to boost India's broadband communication, especially in remote and unconnected regions of the country.

Why is upskilling necessary for the rural youth

Context

During a Life Skills Collaborative discussion, the majority of rural youth expressed a preference for staying in their villages when asked about their future aspirations. The UN predicts that nearly half of India's population will reside in urban areas by 2047.

- It is crucial not to overlook those who choose to stay behind in villages.

Primary source of rural income

Rural livelihoods heavily rely on farming, with many children contributing to family income through work on family farms.

However, there is a significant shift as more farmers are leaving agriculture for non-farming jobs, indicating a potential agrarian crisis.

National Sample Survey Office data from 2004-05 to 2011-12 shows 34 million farmers transitioning to sectors like construction.

This emphasizes the urgency of promoting agriculture as an appealing career for rural youth and creating alternative employment options.

Measures to control migration

To curb the migration of rural youth to urban areas for employment, it is crucial to offer vocational training, instilling pertinent rural skills.

Many students' express aspirations limited to local opportunities during school discussions.

Upskilling opportunities similar to what the Delhi government is trying to achieve with the 'Skills On Wheel' initiative must be brought to students' doorsteps.

Current vocational education opportunity

In rural India, Industrial Training Institutes offer vocational education to upskill the population, but there's a lack of placement opportunities.

Currently, rural education neglects skill development, impacting youth who rely on schools for life skills.

According to the Life Skills Collaborative Voices 2023 survey of 15,856 young people in 11 districts, two-thirds of those aged 19-22 have never received vocational training, with only 5% enrolled.

Integrating life skills into rural school education could empower the youth and cultivate a thriving generation.

How can education be improved

To enhance rural education effectively, it is crucial to tailor programs that offer both technical and life skills to empower youth in these areas.

Drawing inspiration from successful models in other developing economies, such as Mexico's tele-schools and Bhutan's well-being-infused curriculum, can provide valuable insights. Tele-schools in Mexico, for instance, deliver subject lessons along with values, significantly increasing access to value-based secondary education in remote areas with limited secondary school availability.

Organisations such as NIIT Foundation and Pratham Institute are working with children in rural areas to provide upskilling opportunities.

Hybrid life skilling programs are offered both by NIIT in collaboration with UNICEF through its self-learning platform, and Pratham, which offers courses in both industry-specific skills (such as in healthcare, electrical, construction) and life skills.

NCDC survey on antibiotics usage

Context

According to a recent survey by the National Centre for Disease Control, the patients were given antibiotics to prevent infection, rather than to treat it

About the survey

The results of the survey conducted by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), mapping the patients treated for one to five days each at 20 tertiary-care institutes across 15 States and two Union Territories between November 2021 and April 2022.

Of the 11,588 admissions and 9,652 eligible patients, 72% were prescribed antibiotics.

Of them, only 45% were prescribed antibiotics for therapeutic indications, meant to treat infection or disease.

Findings

The NCDC survey reveals that over 50% of nearly 10,000 patients were prescribed antibiotics as a preventive measure rather than for treating infections.

The survey highlights concern about increasing antibiotic resistance, with 94% of patients receiving antibiotics before a confirmed medical diagnosis of the specific infection cause.

The survey report noted wide variations between hospitals, with some prescribing antibiotics to 37% of the patients, while the prevalence was 100% in other institutes.

WHO on AMR

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as one of the top threats to public health.

It is a natural phenomenon as bacteria evolve, making drugs used to treat infections less effective.

However, as the NCDC survey notes, one of the main drivers for the development of antibiotic resistance is the excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics.

The NCDC is the nodal agency for India's national programme on AMR containment, of which one of the key components is the surveillance of antibiotic usage.
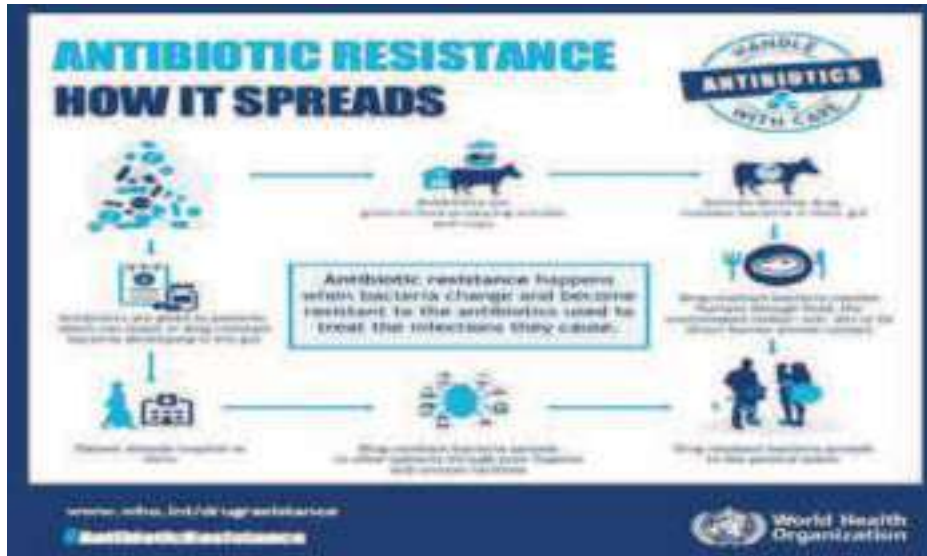
Cybercrime plants originate in China, Cambodia and Myanmar

Context

According to the CEO of the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre, Around 50% of the daily cybercrime complaints to the national helpline originate from China, Cambodia, and Myanmar.

Cybercrime cases

As per the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre, an average of 5,000 cyber complaints are registered in the country every day.

From April 1, 2021-December 31, 2023, ₹10,319 crore had been lost to cyber fraud.

In 2023, around 15.5 lakh cybercrime complaints were received, up from 26,049 such complaints in 2019.

In the past five years, 31 lakh cybercrime complaints were received and FIRs were filed in 66,000 cases.
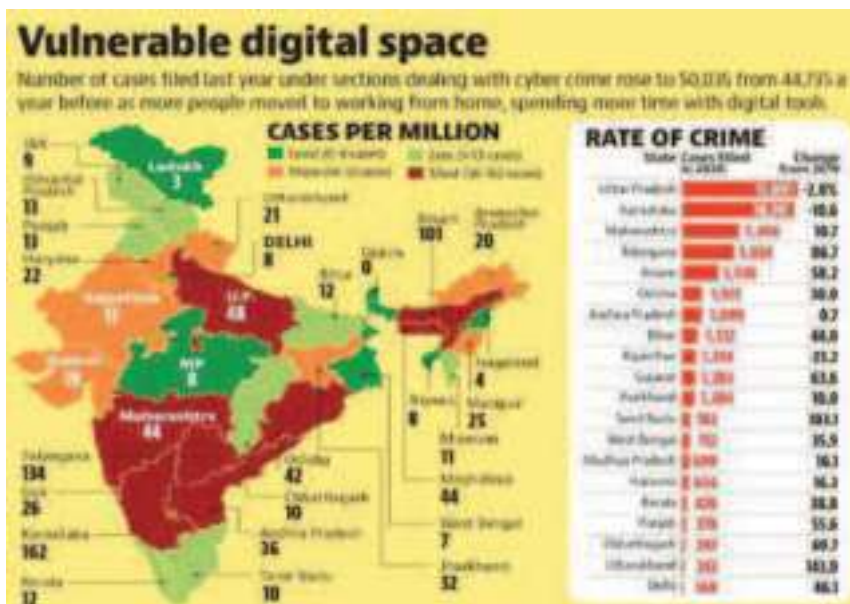
Helpline and grievances

The 1930 helpline is operational in all 36 States and Union Territories and if a call is made by a victim of financial fraud within an hour of the crime being committed, the banks are able to block the money.

Since April 2021, ₹1,127 crore has been blocked in several bank accounts on the complaint of 4.3 lakh victims.

However, only ₹100 crore has so far been returned to complainants.

The Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre officer said this was an area of concern and the government is working on a mechanism to help people get back their blocked money.

I-T searches, a form of extra-constitutional power

In August 2017, the Supreme Court of India, in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India, affirmed the fundamental right to privacy under the Indian Constitution, marking a significant milestone in civil rights jurisprudence.
The decision was expected to safeguard individual liberties from arbitrary governmental actions.
The six separate judgments rendered in the case spoke through a common voice.
The verdict emphasized placing the individual at the core of constitutional discourse, subjecting any state action affecting privacy or related rights to rigorous scrutiny.

Judicial deference to executive authority

An illustrative instance is the application of Section 132 of the Income Tax Act, 1961.
This provision empowers tax authorities with unrestricted police authority to conduct searches, seize assets, including cash, bullion, and jewelry, based on a mere "reason to believe" that income disclosure is inadequate.
However, the statutory safeguards for the purported grounds of a search are minimal.
Recently, the Gujarat High Court scrutinized income-tax authorities regarding a raid on a lawyer. The lawyer, as per his counsel, alleged that he and his family were virtually detained for several days, enduring a continuous search from the morning of November 3 to the morning of November 7.

Search and seizure and proportionality

In 1961, the income-tax law underwent a comprehensive overhaul, introducing Section 132 to grant explicit search and seizure powers.
The constitutionality of this provision was challenged in Pooran Mal vs Director of Inspection (1973), where the Supreme Court upheld it, citing M.P. Sharma vs Satish Chandra.
The Court also rejected the notion that statutory search provisions could undermine constitutional protection under Article 20(3).

Lesson from SC order

First, it mentions that the context of the discussed passage is focused on searches under the Code of Criminal Procedure, where actions were typically authorized by a magistrate.
In contrast, searches under the Income-Tax Act do not need judicial approval.
Second, the court's interpretation of the law has evolved.
Rights in the Constitution are no longer viewed in isolation; for instance, the right to privacy is inherent in the right to personal liberty under Article 21.

Conclusion

According to Puttaswamy judgements, the state's power to search and seize should not be seen merely as a social security tool but subject to the doctrine of proportionality.
Section 132 of the Income-Tax Act appears to violate this principle, demanding executive actions to strictly conform to statutory law.
A warrant for an income-tax search must be well-founded and open to rigorous judicial review to ensure proportionality.

03 JAN
Protest against new hit-and-run law
New rule for family pension nominee
Centre to notify new criminal laws soon
Centre to suspend free movement along Myanmar border
Raj Bhavan needs radical reforms

Protest against new hit-and-run law

Context

A nationwide protest and strike was launched by truck drivers against the stringent punishment prescribed in the 'hit-and-run' provision under the under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Provision under BNS

Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which replaces the colonial era Indian Penal Code, drivers who cause a serious road accident by negligent driving and run away without informing police or any official from the administration can face up to 10 years imprisonment or a fine of Rs 7 lakh.

Earlier rule for hit-and-run

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) did not have a specific provision for hit-and-run cases.
Actions in such cases were taken under Section 304 A of the IPC.

According to that section, a person causing the death of another due to a rash or negligent act could invite a jail term of a maximum of two years or be fined.

All cases of hit-and-run along with other forms of activities that came under the ambit of causing death by a "rash and negligent act" were lodged under Section 304 A of the IPC.
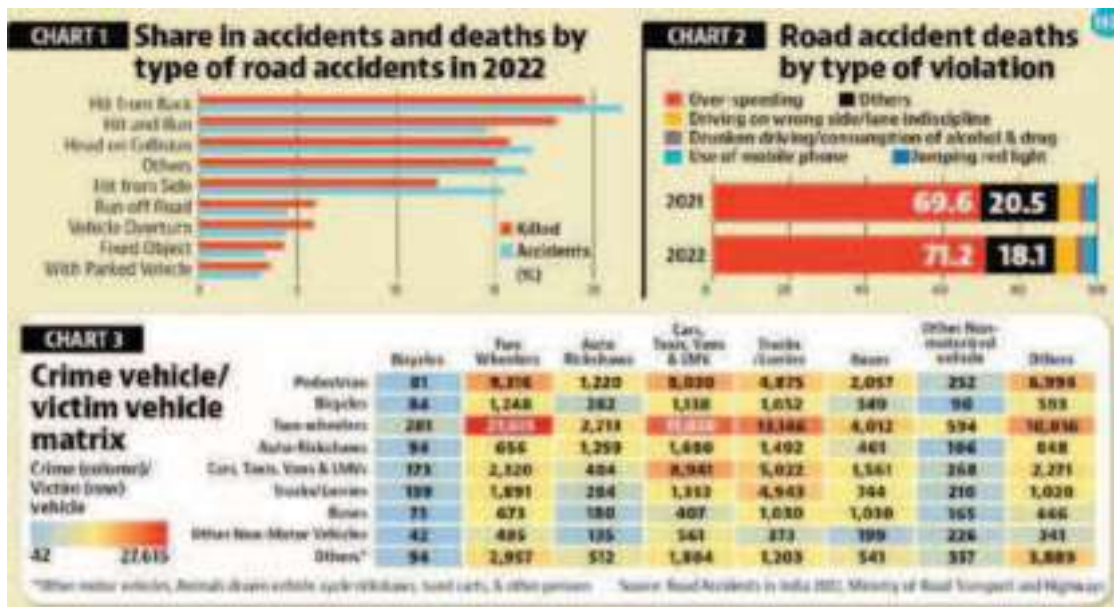
Meeting with Transport Union

As transporters across the country struck work to protest the increase in punishment in hit-and-run cases in the yet-to-be-implemented Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) convened a meeting with the All India Motor Transport Congress.

Transporters, including bus and taxi unions, have called a nationwide strike to protest Section 106 of the BNS.

The Union Home Secretary said that the government wants to clarify that the new laws have not been implemented yet.

He also points out that the decision to invoke Section 106(2) of the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita will be taken only after consultation with the All-India Motor Transport Congress.

Impact of strike

The impact of the strike was being felt all over the country, especially in the northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh, and also in West Bengal, Odisha, and in the southern States.

The three-day strike is likely to impact the distribution of fuel and essential commodities.

New rule for family pension nominee

Context

According to the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, a female government servant or pensioner may now nominate their children for family pension in precedence of her husband in cases of marital discord.

Amendment to CCS (Pension) Rules of 2021

The Centre has amended the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules of 2021, to allow women government employees and pensioners to nominate their children for receiving family pension over their spouse.

Till now, the rules provided for the family pension to first go to the surviving spouse and the children became eligible to receive it only after the death of the spouse.

The Centre also held consultations with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, following which it was decided to allow this.

Demand from women officials

The Centre noted that a large number of references had been received from various Ministries and Departments about whether women officials and pensioners are allowed to do this.

In the case of a minor or child with a disability, the pension will go to the guardian.

The child will be eligible to get the pension after they attain adulthood.

The amendment is progressive in nature and would empower women employees/pensioners significantly.

Centre to notify new criminal laws soon

Context
According to the government functionary, the three new criminal-justice laws -- the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) will be notified by January 26 and implemented across the country within a year.

Implementation strategy
The official added that it will take nine months to a year for the three criminal laws to be implemented across the country. A pilot project is all set to begin in Ahmedabad in the next two months.

The official added that 3,000 master trainers will train the police personnel who will work in a pyramid set-up percolating to each district in the next few months.

The official said the integration would result in a faster justice system, in tune with the new laws.

Chandigarh will be the first to see the integration and implementation of all platforms.

Formation of task force
A task force has been constituted under the Bureau of Police Research and Development to oversee the training.

The National Crime Records Bureau will coordinate the integration of the other wings of the criminal justice system, including the Interoperable Criminal Justice System, the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System, the Adjournment Alert Module, and the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and System.

Three bills introduced

Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023
- It will have **356 sections** (instead of 511 sections in IPC)
- 175 sections have been amended
- 8 sections have been added, and 22 sections have been repealed

Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023
- It will have **533 sections** (instead of 478 sections in CrPC)
- 160 sections have been changed
- 9 sections have been added, and 9 sections have been repealed

Indian Evidence Act, 1872
TO BE REPLACED BY
Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023
- It will have **170 sections** (instead of 167 sections in IEA)
- 23 sections have been changed
- 1 section has been added, and 5 sections have been repealed

Centre to suspend free movement along Myanmar border

Context
The central government is set to suspend the free movement regime (FMR) along the India-Myanmar border to stop the influx of illegal migrants.

Free movement regime
The Free movement regime (FMR) allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to 16 kilometres inside the neighbouring country without a visa.

It was implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy.

Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar and who is a resident of any area within 16 km on either side of border can cross over on production of a border pass with one year validity and can stay up to two weeks per visit.

India and Myanmar border
The border between India and Myanmar is porous in nature.

It is 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar border.

The border passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, currently has FMR.

Manipur shares around 390 km of porous border with Myanmar and only about 10 km has been fenced so far.

Raj Bhavan needs radical reforms

The Governor of Kerala is under scrutiny for controversial actions during a visit to Calicut University.
He directed the police to remove posters criticizing him, labeled Students' Federation of India activists as "criminals," and accused the Chief Minister of supporting them.
Additionally, he toured Kozhikode without prior notice, breaching protocol.
Such incidents prompt reflection on the conduct of Governors in Opposition-ruled States and the legal implications of such behaviour.

Constitutional morality

The Constitution primarily outlines the functions, powers, and duties of Governors without enquiring into individual behaviour.
Nonetheless, the concept of constitutional morality is based on "moral values of the Constitution".
The notion of constitutional culture is deemed essential for Governors' public conduct.
In the NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018) case, the Supreme Court stressed that constitutional morality imposes responsibilities on individuals in constitutional positions.
The recent incident by the Governor of Kerala raises concerns about constitutional morality.

Limits to immunity

Article 361 of the Constitution grants limited and conditional immunity to Governors, stating they cannot be held accountable in court for actions related to their official duties.
However, this does not mean that Governors are not liable for their misbehavior unconnected with their official duty.
In the 2006 case of Rameshwar Prasad v. Union of India, the Supreme Court ruled that Governors' actions, particularly

when recommending Presidential rule in Bihar, can be subject to judicial review if deemed motivated and whimsical.
The case did not specifically address the issue of immunity for extra-constitutional gestures and statements by Governors.
Nonetheless, the Court emphasized the importance of selecting "right persons" as Governors to uphold the sanctity of the post.

Commission reports
Sarkaria Commission
- The 1988 Sarkaria Commission Report criticized Governors for lacking impartiality and becoming agents of the Union.
- The recommendation for Governors to remain detached from local politics remains unfulfilled, with the situation worsening over time.

M.M. Punchhi Commission
- The Justice M.M. Punchhi Commission report in 2010 emphasized that Governors should not bear additional positions and powers beyond constitutional obligations to ensure fair and impartial discharge of their duties.
- The report warned against appointing Governors as university chancellors, stating that it could lead to controversies and public criticism for Raj Bhavan.

Way forward
In the future, the government may need to change Article 155 of the Constitution, which deals with appointing Governors.
The Sarkaria report suggests that future regimes should consult with the Chief Minister before making these appointments.
To improve the selection process, there could be a new independent body responsible for choosing the Governor, with the Chief Justice of India playing a significant role.
Additionally, there should be a rule preventing former Governors from getting appointed to other official positions.

02 JAN

Nepal-India Joint Commission Meeting
How radiocarbon dating revolutionised science
First girls' Sainik School inaugurated
Ministries flagged MSP concerns
Reigniting the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation

Nepal-India Joint Commission Meeting

Context
The External Affairs Minister is set to conduct a Joint Commission Meeting with the Nepalese counterpart to finalise an agreement on purchasing hydel power from Nepal, outlining the modalities for the transaction.
- The last meeting was held in January 2021.

Agenda of discussion
- An agreement on the modalities of purchasing 10,000 MW of hydroelectric power from Nepal
- Discussions on air connectivity issues and digital payments
- Inauguration of development projects funded by India

Power deal
Technical experts have been discussing the plans for buying Nepal's power exports, investments, and power-generation projects.
There's a breakthrough initiative allowing Nepal transmission rights to sell power to Bangladesh via India.
India has agreed to facilitate the first trilateral power transaction, enabling Nepal to export up to 40 MW to Bangladesh.
This development is crucial for Nepal's goal of expanding power exports to India and other regional countries.

Nepal-India Joint Commission
The Nepal-India Joint Commission is a diplomatic forum established to enhance bilateral relations and cooperation between Nepal and India.
This commission typically involves high-level meetings between the foreign ministers of both countries.
The Nepal-India Joint Commission focuses on addressing and resolving matters of strategic importance, such as trade, transit, water resources, energy, and security.
The commission provides a platform for both nations to engage in constructive dialogue and strengthen their partnership.

How radiocarbon dating revolutionised science

Context

Radiocarbon dating revolutionized various scientific fields by providing a reliable method to measure and understand the past. It offered a clearer perspective on human migration, the history of civilizations, and changes in Earth's climate.

About radiocarbon dating

'Dating' is a method by which the age of an object can be determined.

Dating involves radiocarbon dating and accomplishes this by utilizing carbon-14, an isotope. Cosmic rays in the Earth's atmosphere create carbon-14 when they interact with nitrogen-14, and this process is continuous.

Carbon-14 combines with oxygen to form radioactive carbon dioxide, entering the carbon cycle through plants, animals, and another biomass.

In the 1940s, chemists Martin Kamen and Sam Ruben synthesized carbon-14 in the lab.

How does radiocarbon dating work

Radiocarbon dating determines the age of organic materials by measuring the remaining carbon-14, which is replenished during an organism's lifetime but diminishes after death due to radioactive decay.

The predictable decay rate allows scientists to calculate the time elapsed since an organism's death.

This method is effective up to about 50,000 years, as beyond that point, carbon-14 concentration has decreased significantly.
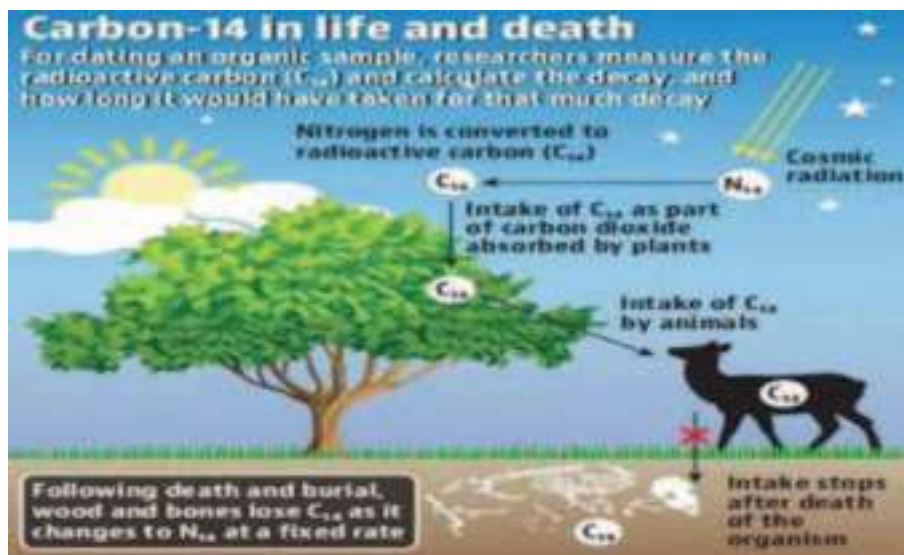
Tools of radiocarbon dating

Accelerator Mass Spectrometer (AMS): Measures carbon-14 with high precision.

Sample Collection Tools: Trowels, drills, or corers used to collect organic material samples.

Magnetic Sector: In traditional methods, separates carbon isotopes based on mass; AMS uses electric and magnetic fields.

Data Analysis Software: Analyzes data and applies calibration curves for accurate age determination.

The Geiger-Muller tube: It contains a noble gas, such as helium or neon, and a rod passing through the centre. A high voltage is maintained between the tube's inner surface and the rod.

How did radiocarbon dating change science

According to the American Chemical Society, "radiocarbon dating provided the first objective dating method – the ability to attach approximate numerical dates to organic remains".

This technique, crucial in archaeology and geology, assigns numerical dates to organic remains. It enables the dating of archaeological sites, comparison of object ages, and validation of findings across distant locations.

In India, radiocarbon dating holds political significance for dating temple and mosque artefacts. Notably, a 2020 breakthrough by researchers from Cyprus, the Netherlands, and Russia enhanced radiocarbon dating's time resolution, improving accuracy to specific points within a year.

First girls' Sainik School inaugurated

Context

The union minister for Defence inaugurated the first all-girls Sainik school at Vrindavan and termed it as a beacon of light for girls who aspire to join the armed forces and protect the motherland.

Samvid Gurukulam Girls Sainik School

The Defense Ministry has inaugurated Samvid Gurukulam Girls Sainik School, the first all-girls sainik school, with approximately 870 students.

This initiative is part of establishing 100 new sainik schools in collaboration with NGOs, private, and state government schools across all states and Union territories.

In addition to the existing 33 sainik schools, the new girls' school serves as a significant opportunity for aspiring young women to join the Armed Forces and contribute to the nation.

Induction of girl to sainik schools

In 2019, the defense ministry approved the phased admission of girl children to sainik schools, beginning from the academic session 2021-22.

This decision followed the success of the pilot project at Sainik School Chhingchhip in Mizoram. The establishment of 100 new sainik schools aims to provide quality education aligned with the National Education Policy 2020, offering enhanced career opportunities, including entry into the armed forces.

The initiative also encourages collaboration with the private sector to contribute to nation-building by shaping today's youth into responsible citizens for tomorrow.

Ministries flagged MSP concerns

Context

Documents obtained through the Right to Information Act 2005 reveal that various departments raised concerns by writing to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

Query through RTI

A recent RTI filed by The Indian Express reveals that the proposal to set a high Minimum Support Price (MSP) for certain rabi crops for the 2024-25 marketing season has faced criticism.

Various Union ministries argue that this approach hinders crop diversification and disproportionately benefits specific states.

The Cabinet approved increased MSP for crops like wheat, barley, gram, lentil, rapeseed and mustard, and safflower in October, 2023, with the maximum increase being 7.08% for lentils and 7.06% for wheat compared to the previous year.

Concerns

Import dependence: The Department of Food & Public Distribution said the MSP for oilseeds has not delivered the desired result in terms of an increase in domestic production, and India is still dependent on imports to fulfil 55% of its requirements.

The department said an increase in the MSP of oilseeds will incentivise farmers to increase its production and also shift to high yielding varieties.

Unequal benefits: The Department of Expenditure highlighted a bias in wheat procurement favoring certain states, urging the need for more inclusive coverage.

They emphasized the need to explain the notable MSP increases for wheat and lentils, advocating for crop diversification towards oilseeds and pulses.

Non-price measures, like enhancing farm mechanization, were recommended and suggested for review through the Expenditure Finance Committee.

WTO obligations: In September 2023, the Department of Commerce emphasized India's obligation to the World Trade Organisation's "de-minimis" subsidy limit.

India exceeded the limit for rice in consecutive years and invoked the 'Peace Clause,' permitting such breaches for developing countries under specific conditions.

Counter notifications from some WTO members contested India's adherence to the commitment.

Reigniting the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation

The recent visit of India's Chief of the Army Staff to South Korea marked a significant moment in the countries' defence relations.

While strengthening diplomatic ties, the visit also brought to light challenges that require careful consideration.

Exploring these challenges and identifying opportunities for mutual growth is crucial for advancing India-Korea defence cooperation in the complex landscape of global geopolitics.

Korean view of India's regional role

The Indian government's heavy emphasis on weapons acquisition and technology transfer from Korea.

Overcoming Korean government resistance is crucial for recognizing India as more than just a defense product consumer.

Korea needs to understand India's regional power and its potential for contributing to peace in the Indo-Pacific.

Both countries need to prioritize long-term strategic goals over short-term gains, considering potential roadblocks from powerful arms lobbies.

Coalition challenge

The emerging coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia poses a new serious challenge to collaborative efforts between the two nations.

Divergent stances may emerge, requiring a detailed evaluation of each party's strategic priorities.

India's Chief of the Army Staff's high-level interactions with Korean military leadership and engagements with top defense institutions like Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency of Defence Development (ADD) are expected to strengthen the bond between the defense communities of both nations.

Technological collaborations

India and South Korea are set to collaborate on advanced defense systems, leveraging their technological capabilities.

The focus on technology underscores their shared vision for future conflicts.

This partnership holds limitless potential, positioning both nations at the forefront of innovation and self-reliance in defense.

Emphasis on space warfare, information warfare, and cybersecurity opens avenues for further cooperation.

Korea's digital expertise offers opportunities to develop robust security measures.

Joint efforts in countering terrorism, especially in maritime security, align with shared concerns and interests in the Indian Ocean.

Peacekeeping and exercises

India and South Korea, with their United Nations peacekeeping expertise, aim for collaborative efforts to enhance regional and global stability.

Sharing insights and resources in peacekeeping operations underscores their joint commitment to peace and security.

Collaboration extends to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) through joint exercises and the exchange of best practices, highlighting their shared responsibility in addressing vulnerabilities to natural disasters.

Mutual growth is found in enhancing joint army exercises, fostering interoperability, and strengthening the capabilities of both armies for effective collaboration in diverse scenarios.

Conclusion

India and Korea face a persistent challenge in establishing a shared vision for a new comprehensive defense framework.

Both nations need to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation and understand their roles in a rapidly evolving global scenario.

A strategic, balanced approach, coupled with adaptability to the evolving geopolitical landscape is key to unlocking a robust and enduring defence collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region.

The focus should move beyond bilateral cooperation towards a paradigm shift that deepens their understanding of their roles in the changing global landscape.

01 JAN
Centre constitutes Sixteenth Finance Commission
Indian Navy deploys frontline destroyers, frigates in Arabian Sea
Centre approved 4G mobile services along India's international borders
Aadhaar-based payment system for MGNREGS workers
Floods and a 'preventive measure' that Needs Review

Centre constitutes Sixteenth Finance Commission

Context

The Central government appointed former NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya as the Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission.

Mandate of 16th Finance Commission

The Sixteenth Finance Commission shall make recommendations as to the following matters, namely:

1. Allocation of taxes between the Union and States under Chapter I, Part XII of the Constitution, including the distribution of net proceeds.
2. Determining principles for grants-in-aid to State revenues from the Consolidated Fund of India and the amounts to be paid under Article 275 of the Constitution.
3. Identifying measures to enhance a State's Consolidated Fund to support Panchayats and Municipalities based on recommendations from the State Finance Commission.

The Sixteenth Finance Commission is tasked with reviewing current financing arrangements for Disaster Management initiatives, specifically considering funds established under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (53 of 2005), and providing relevant recommendations.

Constitutional Provisions
Article 268: Facilitates the levy of duties by the Centre, with collection and retention by the States.
Article 280: Outlines the FC's composition, qualifications for members, and its terms of reference.
- It mandates the FC to recommend the distribution of net tax proceeds between the Union and States and the allocation among States.
- It also addresses the financial relations between the Union and States and the devolution of unplanned revenue resources.

Indian Navy deploys frontline destroyers, frigates in Arabian Sea

Context
Amid the recent spate of attacks on merchant vessels, the Indian Navy has now deployed a total of four destroyers, one frigate and one P-8I long-range patrol aircraft in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden to ensure maritime security.

About Task Groups
According to Indian Navy the Task Groups comprising destroyers and frigates have been deployed to undertake maritime security operations and render assistance to merchant vessels in case of any incident.
It added that aerial surveillance by long-range maritime patrol aircraft and Robotic process automation (RPAs) has been enhanced to have a complete maritime domain awareness. Towards effective surveillance of EEZ, Indian Navy is operating in close coordination with Coast Guard.

Monitoring the Arabian Sea
The Navy further added that it was closely monitoring the Central/North Arabian Sea, in coordination with national maritime agencies.
The Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring safety of merchant shipping in the region.

Global efforts in Red sea
The Prime Minister of India and Israel discussed the Houthi threat to maritime security in Red Sea.
U.S. Defense Secretary announced the creation of a multinational operation named as Operation Prosperity Guardian to safeguard commerce in the Red Sea following a series of missile and drone attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis.
The group participating countries include the U.K., Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain.
The group will conduct joint patrols in the southern Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

Centre approved 4G mobile services along India's international borders

Context
The Ministry of Home Affairs has approved 4G mobile services for more than 1,100 border outposts along India's international borders, including the border with China.

Tripartite agreement

The Ministry said it had signed a tripartite agreement with the Department of Telecommunications and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited to execute the project over the next six-and-a-half years.

The project will cover 1,117 border outposts and intelligence posts of the armed forces and the Intelligence Bureau.

Significance of 4G services

The rollout of 4G services promises a multitude of benefits for border security operations. The 4G services will improve communication channels and will facilitate real-time information sharing between outposts, enabling quicker response to threats and enhanced situational awareness. Additionally, access to high-speed internet will empower troops with better access to operational resources, training materials, and communication with families, potentially boosting morale and well-being.

While the project primarily focuses on the China border, it will also encompass other critical frontiers like Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.
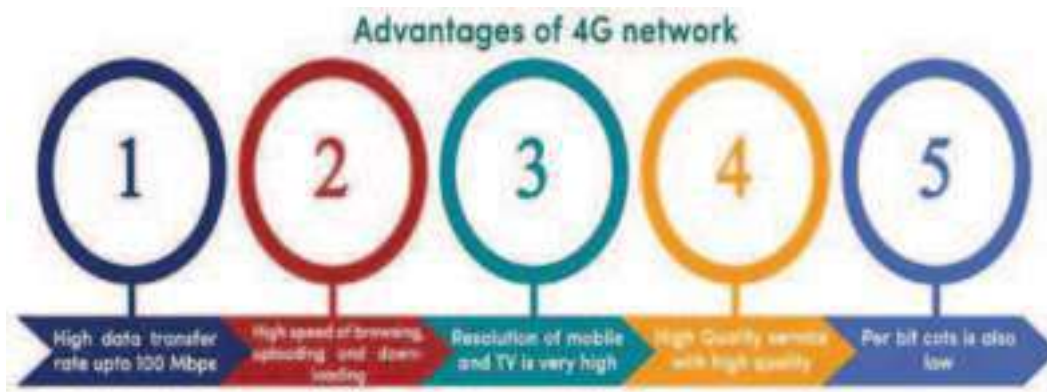
Progress so far

In 2023, out of the 379 villages and hamlets approved under the 4G saturation project for the Union Territory of Ladakh, mobile phone towers have been established at only nine sites, with the foundation work completed at 34 sites.

Since 2020, India and China have been engaged in a stand-off at multiple locations along the undermarketed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

Aadhaar-based payment system for MGNREGS workers

Context

In 2024, all workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme are to receive their wages through an Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS).

Integration with ABPS

From 2024, wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) will be paid only through an Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS), which requires the Aadhaar details of workers to be seeded to their job cards.

The fifth extension of the deadline to make the system mandatory, giving the State governments time to reconcile databases ended on 31 December 2023.

The ministry of Union Rural Development data show that 34.8% of the job card holders remain ineligible for this mode of payment as on December 2023.

About ABPS

Aadhaar-based wage system uses the worker's unique 12-digit Aadhaar number as their financial address.

APBS is a gateway created by the National Payments Corporation of India to enable departments and agencies administering government schemes to transfer funds to Aadhaar-enabled bank accounts of beneficiaries.

The basic idea of the APBS to act on the principle that a person's Aadhaar number becomes their financial address.

The government contends that ABPS implementation will plug leaks, ensure speedy payments, and reduce rejection.

Floods and a 'preventive measure' that Needs Review

Days after Cyclone Michuang, Chennai residents still feel the impact of decisions made on their behalf.
Also, the 2015 rains, delaying the release of water from a full reservoir, without a proper warning or precautions, is believed to have caused tragic flooding.
Accountability for such decisions is crucial.

Dangers in a home without power
The choice to stop electricity supply to areas where cyclonic winds can damage power cables and cause live wires to drop into flooded streets appears logical and sensible.
However, when done as a broad 'preventive measure' for an extended period after the event, it poses risks.
Prolonged power cuts raise several safety concerns.
Homes and neighborhoods plunged in darkness can be dangerous by themselves.
That an elderly relative can trip, fall, and break a hip is a worry as it can be as life-threatening as suffering a heart attack.
In 2021, Tamil Nadu had 13.8 crore people over the age of 60 years and many live alone, or with limited assistance.
An area-wide power disruption is a significant hazard.

Decision-making in crisis
Decision-making in any crisis can be emotionally challenging and psychologically stressful.
In major disasters, large-scale decisions become a rigorous test of intellect, analysis, and personal resilience due to the devastating nature of the event.
The potential cost of mistakes looms large in a decision-maker's mind, which tends more often towards conservative options being preferred.
Shutting off the electric supply in the event of a storm can be life-saving.
But, restoring supply promptly afterwards is also vital to save lives and safeguard against terrible individual consequences.

The yardstick must be justification
Government officials with the authority to cut off electricity in specific areas during a disaster must justify and document their decisions in real-time for potential review.
Premature restoration poses risks, while unjustifiable power cuts can have significant mortality risks.
Decision-making in complex scenarios like natural disasters is challenging, requiring appreciation for the experts involved.
Calls for public transparency should be approached cautiously, as reviews should remain within the domain of specialists due to the confidential nature of the processes.
Lessons from the 2015 floods caution against turning complex decisions into populist contests.

Need for shared responsibility
In a healthy democratic system, no person or entity should wield unchecked power over crucial decisions, and choices should not be made arbitrarily.
It is time to hold the decision-makers accountable for their choices, especially when their choices impact the lives of millions.
The underlying principle is that decision-makers must justify their choices with rationale and evidence, subject to review.
If decisions are found indefensible, they should be promptly overturned or modified.
While shutting off electricity supply in an extreme weather event can be life-saving, restoring power without delay can also help avert problems for many.

FEBRUARY
2024

Daily News and Editorial Analysis
February 2024

Medical Termination of Pregnancy in India

Why in the News?

- Recently, the Delhi High Court has reversed its order that permitted a 26-year-old woman to terminate her 29-week-old pregnancy.
- The court, now advocating for the unborn child's(foetus) right to life, has directed the woman to undergo delivery at either AIIMS or any central or state hospital.
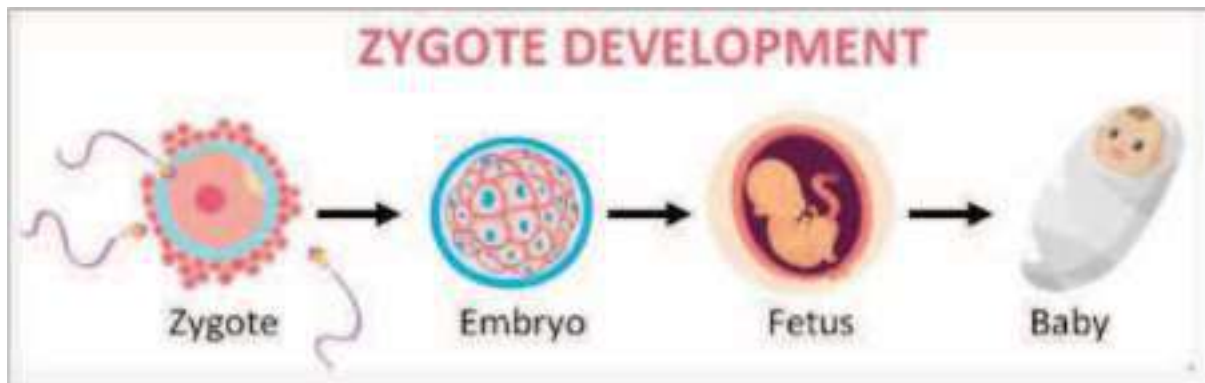
Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971

- Shantilal Shah Committee(1966): To deliberate on the legalisation of abortion in the country due to high abortion rates in 1960's.
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971 was enacted, permitting safe and legal abortions to protect women's health and decrease maternal mortality.

Key Features of MTP Amendment Act 2021

- Termination Due to Failure of Contraceptive Method or Device: The MTP Act permitted married women to terminate pregnancies up to 20 weeks in case of contraceptive method or device failure.
- The MTP Amendment Act extended the allowance to unmarried women as well.
- Medical Boards: The board will assess pregnancies beyond 24 weeks for substantial foetal abnormalities.

Provisions for Terminating Pregnancy(MTP Act, 1971 vs MTP (Amendment) Act, 2021)

Time Since Conception	MTP Act, 1971	MTP (Amendment) Act, 2021
Up to 12 weeks	On the advice of one doctor	On advice of one doctor
12 to 20 weeks	On advice of two doctors	On advice of one doctor
20 to 24 weeks	Not allowed	On advice of two doctors for special categories of pregnant women
More than 24 weeks	Not allowed	On advice of medical board in case of substantial fetal abnormality
Any time during the pregnancy	On advice of one doctor, if immediately necessary to save pregnant woman's life	On advice of one doctor, if immediately necessary to save pregnant woman's life

Constitutional Stance
- The Constitution does not explicitly mention the right to abortion.
- Suchita Srivastava vs. Chandigarh Administration case, 2009: The Supreme Court said it falls under Article 21 - Right to Life and Personal Liberty.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ
1. **What are the continued challenges for Women in India against time and space? (UPSC CSE 2019)**
2. **"Recent amendments to the Right to Information Act will have a profound impact on the autonomy and independence of the Information Commission". Discuss. (150 words) (UPSC CSE 2020)**

Three-stage truce in Gaza Strip

Why in the News?
- Recently a Three stage truce in Gaza strip was proposed.

Gaza ceasefire proposal involved a three-stage truce:
1. Hamas would release the civilians among hostages
2. Then soldiers, and
3. Finally the bodies of dead hostages.

What is the Israel-Palestine Conflict?
- The proposal followed talks in Paris involving intelligence chiefs from Israel, the U.S. and Egypt, with the prime minister of Qatar.
- 1917, Balfour Declaration: Jewish "national home" in Palestine was announced. Prompts Arab and Jewish violence.
- 1948, Creation Of Palestine: Britain withdrew its forces from Palestine.
- The UN presented a partition plan to create independent Jewish and Arab states.
- Arab Israeli War (1948): Israel controlled about 50 % more territory than originally envisioned by the UN partition plan.
- Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO)(1964): Founded, with the aim of freeing Palestine from the clutches of Israel and setting up the dominance of Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world.
- The United Nations granted the PLO observer status in 1975, recognizing Palestinians' right to self-determination.
- Six-Day War: In the 1967 war, Israeli forces seized the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank & East Jerusalem from Jordan and Sinai Peninsula & Gaza strip from Egypt.
- Camp David Accords (1978): Brokered by the U.S to solve the Palestine issue.
- 1987: Hamas, a terror organisation, seeking to fulfill the free Palestine agenda through violent jihad.
- Oslo Accords:1993: Under the Oslo Accords Israel and the PLO agree to officially recognize each other and renounce the use of violence.

India's Stand on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

- India recognised Israel in 1950.
- It is also the first non-Arab country to recognise Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the statehood of Palestine in 1988.
- Further, India believes in a Two-State Solution with respect to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q. Golan Heights touches the boundary of which of the following countries? (UPSC CSE 2016)

1. Syria
2. Jordan
3. Turkey
4. Israel.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

A. 1, 2 and 3 only
B. 2, 3 and 4 only
C. 1, 3 and 4 only
D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Sub-Categorisation of SC

Why in the News?

- Central Govt. sets up a committee led by the Cabinet Secretary, to address the issue of dominant Scheduled Caste (SC) communities receiving more benefits than the most backward ones.
- Set up in response to the Madiga community's demands in Telangana.

Need for Sub Categorisation of SC in India: A case of Madigas

- The Madiga community constitutes 50% of SCs in Telangana.
- Due to the dominance of the Mala community, they can not reap the benefits of SC related benefits.
- Similar issues in other states: Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs in Punjab, Paswans in Bihar, Jatavs in UP.
- Need for Sub Categorisation of SC in India: A case of Madigas
- The Madiga community constitutes 50% of SCs in Telangana.
- Due to the dominance of Mala community, they can not reap the benefits of SC related benefits.
- Similar issues in other states: Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs in Punjab, Paswans in Bihar, Jatavs in UP.

Corruption Perceptions Index, 2023

Why in the News?

- In the recently released Corruption Perceptions Index, 2023 by the Transparency.

Findings:

- International India is ranked at 93 out of 180 countries.
- In 2022, India secured the 85th position.
- The Corruption Perceptions Index utilises a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 representing high corruption and 100 indicating a very clean environment.
- Top ranking: New Zealand and Singapore.
- Bottom countries: North Korea and Myanmar.

Hybrid Electric Vehicles

- The vehicle uses both the internal combustion (usually petrol) engine and the battery-powered motor power.
- While In EVs, electricity stored in batteries is the main source of energy to drive the car.
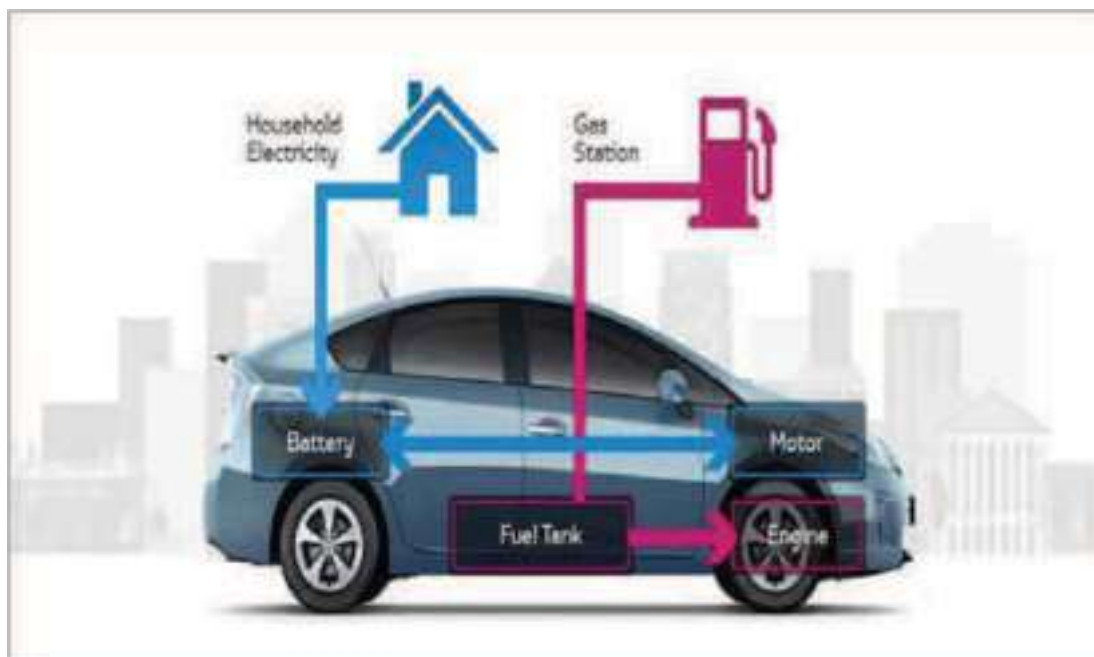
Main Advantages
- Fuel Efficiency: Better fuel efficiency, more power, and minimum emissions.
- Increased Mileage: Reduced engine size and car weight, translates into increased mileage.
- Instant Torque: Provide high torque even at low speeds.
- Reduced Pollution: Reduce harmful pollutants such as Co2, nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter (PM), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- Energy Diversity and Security: EVs contribute to energy diversity by reducing dependence on oil imports.

Government initiatives to promote EV adoption
- Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME)scheme II.
- National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP)
- National Mission on Transformative Mobility and Battery Storage
- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme.
- EV30@30 campaign

Rising Tensions in Korean Peninsula
Why in the News?
- The ongoing developments in the Korean peninsula have raised serious concerns about the deterioration of the international security environment and a deepening of major power rivalry.

Historical Background
- World War II: The Korean peninsula was divided into two by the end of World War II.
- Cold War Alignment: The North went under the ambit of the Soviet Union and the South under the U.S.
- The Korean War (1950-53): The first "hot war" of the Cold War. Present Status: Decades after the cessation of active conflict and the end of the Cold War, the two countries are still divided over ideology and political leanings. (North being an authoritarian dynastic regime allied with China and Russia, and the South being a liberal democracy allied with the U.S.)
- Reasons for Global Concerns North Korea's Nuclear Program: North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Ex. Hypersonic missile(able to evade missile defense),The Hwasong-8 Missile.
- Stalled Denuclearization Efforts: Previous diplomatic efforts at denuclearization, such as the 2018 Singapore and 2019 Hanoi summits, yielded no results.
- Escalatory Rhetoric and Actions: North Korea's frequent missile tests and South Korea's joint military exercises with the US and Japan heightens the rhetotic.

- Economic pressures: North's reliance on China for support may influence its negotiating position. International interests: USA has deployed THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) in South Korea.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q. What is "Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)", sometimes seen in the news? (2018)
(a) An Israeli radar system
(b) India's indigenous anti-missile programme
(c) An American anti-missile system
(d) A defence collaboration between Japan and South Korea.

Humboldt's enigma

Why in the News?

- In recent years, Humboldt's enigma has garnered increased attention in the field of ecology as researchers seek to understand the unexpected biodiversity found in mountain ecosystems, challenging traditional beliefs.

Tropics and high primary productivity
- The world's tropical areas receive more energy from the Sun because of the earth's angle of inclination.
- So, the tropics have greater primary productivity, facilitating greater diversity: more ecological niches become available, creating more complex ecosystems and greater biological diversity.

What is Humboldt's enigma?
- Proposed by: The concept of Humboldt's Enigma was proposed by Alexander von Humboldt which explores the relationship between temperature, altitude, humidity, and biodiversity.
- Ex: The northern Andes range, which includes Chimborazo, is recognized as the world's most biodiverse location.

Decoding Humboldt's Enigma
- Humboldt's enigma proposes that biodiversity isn't confined solely to Earth's tropical regions.
- It suggests that various regions beyond the tropics, such as mountainous areas, also exhibit significant biodiversity.

16th Finance Commision

Why in the News?

- Government Appoints Four New Members in Finance commission

16th Finance Commision

- Established under Article 280(1) of the Constitution with Dr. Arvind Panagariya, former Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog as chairman.
- It has the critical responsibility of recommending the formula for revenue distribution between the Centre and the States for the upcoming five-year period starting from April 1, 2026.

Major Terms of Reference for 16th Finance Commission?

- Division of Tax Proceeds: Recommending the distribution of taxes between the Union Government and the States under Chapter I, Part XII of the Constitution.
- Principles for Grants-in-Aid: Establishing the principles governing grants-in aid to the States from the Consolidated Fund of India. Especially under Article 275 of the Constitution.
- Ways to enhance Consolidated Fund of a State: Identifying measures to enhance the Consolidated Fund of a State.
- Evaluation of Disaster Management Financing: The Commission may review the current financing structures related to Disaster Management initiatives.
- This involves examining the funds created under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and presenting suitable recommendations for improvements or alterations.
- Key Recommendations of 15th Finance Commission
- Share of States in Central Taxes: The Commission proposed maintaining the states' share in central taxes at 41% for the 2021- 26 period, a slight reduction from the 42% allocated during 2015- 20 by the 14th Finance Commission.
    - This 1% adjustment aims to adjust for the newly formed union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh from the central resources.
- Fiscal Deficit and Debt Levels: The Commission recommended that the Centre limit its fiscal deficit to 4% of GDP by 2025-26.

Criteria for Devolution:

Criteria	14th FC (2015-20)	15th FC (2020-21)	15th FC (2021-26)
Income Distance	50.0	45.0	45.0
Area	15.0	15.0	15.0
Population (1971)	17.5	-	-
Population (2011)*	10.0	15.0	15.0
Demographic Performance	-	12.5	12.5
Forest Cover	7.5	-	-
Forest and Ecology	-	10.0	10.0
Tax and fiscal efforts*	-	2.5	2.5
Total	100	100	100

UPSC Civil Services Examination,(PYQ)

Q. Discuss the recommendations of the 13th Finance Commission which have been a departure from the previous commissions for strengthening the local government finances. (2013)

Supreme Court Designates 56 lawyers as senior advocates and 11 of them were women

Senior Advocates

- These are advocates who are designated as senior advocates by the supreme court of India or by any High Court.
- The court can designate any advocate, with his consent, as senior advocate by considering the virtue or special knowledge or experience in law.
- A senior advocate is not entitled to appear without an Advocate on Record in the Supreme Court or without a junior in any other court or tribunal in India.

Who is an AoR?
- Only an AoR can file cases before the Supreme Court.
- AoR is essentially the link between the litigant and the highest court of the country.
- The Supreme Court Rules, 2013 prescribe eligibility criteria for an AoR.
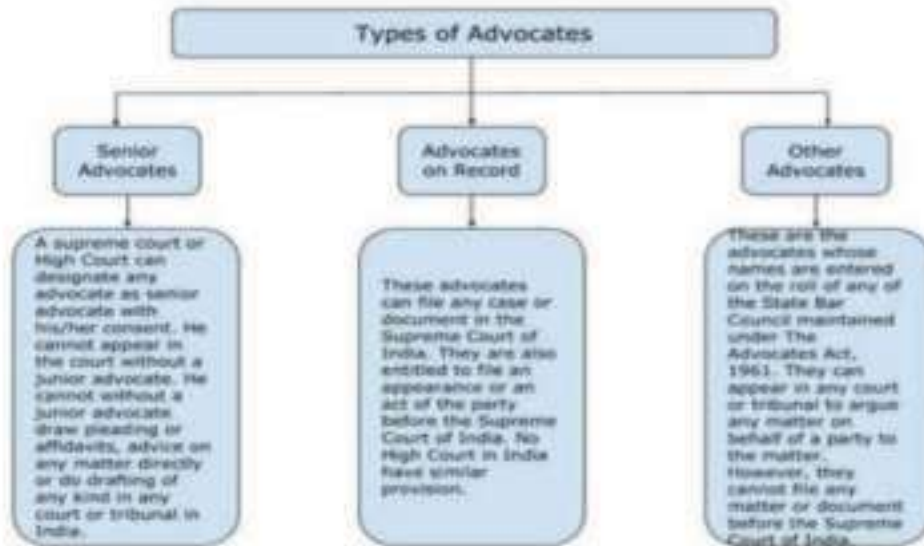
Legal Practitioners Act 1879
- The Act defined the term "legal practitioner" to include advocates, vakils, or attorneys of any High Court.
- Tout- It also introduced a new definition of the term "tout".
- A tout is someone who procures clients for a legal practitioner in exchange for payment.
- The definition also included people who frequented civil or criminal courts, revenue offices, railway stations, etc. for such procurement purposes.

Advocate Act, 1961
- Aim- To create a single class of legal practitioners known as "advocates."
- All India Bar Council- It established the council consisting of the Attorney General of India, the Solicitor General of India, and one representative from each State Bar Council, elected by its members.
- Bar Council of India- Make rules on matters such as legal education, professional conduct, legal aid, and recognition of foreign qualifications.
- Advocates- It defines an advocate as a person who is enrolled in any State Bar Council and who is entitled to practice law before any court or authority in India.

Advocates Amendment Bill, 2023
- Its purpose was to weed out 'touts' from the legal system.
- The Bill repeals the Legal Practitioners Act, 1879 and amended the Advocates Act, 1961

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q. With reference to India, consider the following statements:
1. Government law officers and legal firms are recognised as advocates, but corporate lawyers and patent attorneys are excluded from recognition as advocates.
2. Bar Councils have the power to lay down the rules relating to legal education and recognition of law colleges.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Tip of the day

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY RESOURCES YOU HAVE.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THEM, IT WILL NEVER BE ENOUGH.
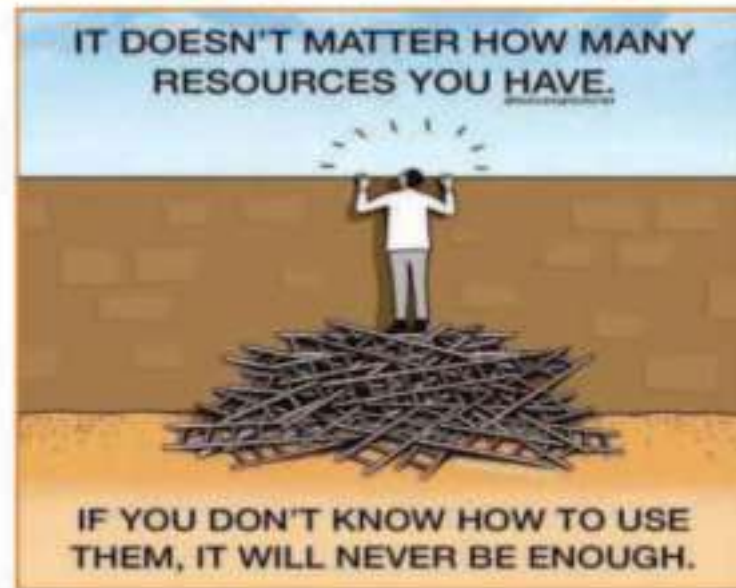
Ladakh Shutdown

Why in the News?

- Protests in Ladakh call for statehood and constitutional protections under the sixth schedule for the Union Territory.
- Ladakh witnessed a widespread shutdown as thousands participated in marches, advocating for statehood and constitutional protections under the sixth schedule for the Union Territory.

Mains demands

- Apex Body Leh (ABL) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the two socio-political organisations are pursuing four main demands:
- Statehood for Ladakh.
- Safeguards under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Reservation of jobs for the youth of Ladakh.
- Protections like Article 370 and 35A.

Why are the demands?
- After the revocation of special status of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution by Parliament in 2019.
- The fear of big businesses and conglomerates taking away land and jobs from the local people have contributed to this demand.
- In 2019, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes recommended the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, noting that the new UT was predominantly tribal (more than 97%).

Counterargument
- As per MHA , Ladakh's inclusion in the Sixth Schedule would be difficult. The Constitution is very clear, the Sixth Schedule is for the Northeast.

Six schedule areas and provisions
- Special provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the four north-eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) : Article 244, legislative, judicial, and administrative Powers.
- Autonomous Districts: The governor to organise and re-organise . Acts of Parliament or the state legislature do not apply with specific modifications and exception
- District Council: Each autonomous district has a district council consisting of 30 members. 4-nominated by the Governor, 26 are elected, term: 5Yrs

Powers of the District Council
- Legislative Powers: Can make laws on certain specified matters like land, forests, canal water, shifting cultivation, village administration, the inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs and so on. But all such laws require the assent of the Governor.
- Judicial Powers: They can constitute village councils or courts for trial of suits and cases between the tribes.
- Administrative Powers: The district council can establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, ferries, fisheries, roads and so on in the district.
- Financial powers: They are empowered to assess and collect land revenue and to impose certain specified taxes.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q1) The provisions in Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India are made in order to (2015)
(a) protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes
(b) determine the boundaries between States
(c) determine the powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats
(d) protect the interests of all the border States

Q2) Under which Schedule of the Constitution of India can the transfer of tribal land to private parties for mining be declared null and void? (2019)
(a) Third Schedule
(b) Fifth Schedule
(c) Ninth Schedule
(d) Twelfth Schedule

Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC) draft report

Why in the News?
- Recently, the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) draft report was approved by the Uttarakhand Cabinet.
- The UCC drafting committee was led by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai

Key Highlights:Uttarakhand's UCC Draft
- Prohibit of polygamy, halal, iddat, triple talaq, and child marriage.
- Uniform age for girls' marriage across all religions.
- Mandatory registration of live-in relationships.
- Inheritance rights for both men and women.

What is UCC?
- Scheduled tribes (STs) have been exempted from the purview of the bill.
- Article 44 of the Indian Constitution Provides for UCC in India.
- It states that the state should try to establish a uniform civil code for all citizens throughout India.
- This code would be a single set of personal laws that would apply to all citizens, regardless of religion.
- Goa is the only state in India with a UCC, following the Portuguese Civil Code of 1867.

UCC: Stands in India
For: SC of India
- Shah Bano Begum Case,1985
- Sarla Mudgal v. Union of India, 1995

Against:
- The 21st Law Commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan observed that the "formulation of a Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage".

Interim Budget Mentions Blue Economy 2.0

Budget Proposals For Blue Economy
- Restoration and Adaptation
- Scheme focusing on restoration and adaptation measures will laucbnhed.
- Integrated Aqua Parks
- Setting up five integrated aquaparks to boost aquaculture productivity in line with Mega Food Parks.
- Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yoiana (PMMSY)
- PMMSY will be intensified to double exports to Rs 1 lakh crore and generate 55 lakh employment opportunities.

Blue Economy
- The term Blue Economy refers to an economy based on preservation, and regeneration of the marine environment while sustainably promoting human growth and development.
- The scope of the blue economy was realised by Gunter Pauli in "The Blue Economy: 10 years, 100 innovations, 100 million jobs".
- The focus would be on preserving marine health as much as it would be on human growth.
- Boosting marine trade and opportunities.
- Other areas: Tourism, renewable energy, the development of fisheries, etc.

Significance of the Blue Economy
- Transport: 7,500-km-long coastline , 9 coastal states, 12 major, and 200 minor ports, 95% of the country's trade happens through maritime transportation and contributes an estimated 4% to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- Offshore Energy Production: Ramagundam Floating Solar Power Project at Ramagundam, Telangana. Omkareshwar floating solar park, Map.
- Aquaculture and Marine Biotechnology: They have potential to contribute to the country's food security and improve the health of the ocean ecosystem.
- Synergy With SDG: SDG14 'life below water'.

Steps taken by the Government to Promote the Blue Economy
- Deep Ocean Mission
- India-Norway Task Force on Blue Economy for Sustainable Development
- Sagarmala Project
- O-SMART
- Integrated Coastal Zone Management
- National Fisheries Policy
- NavIC

6th Khelo India Youth Games

Why in the News?
- Khelo India Youth Games Mascot Unveiled

More about News:
- The 6th edition of Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) is currently underway, across four cities in Tamil Nadu: Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, and Coimbatore.
- Squash is making debut this year, while
- Silambam: Demonstration sport.
- Mascot: Veera Mangai.

Khelo India Youth Games
- The games are held annually in January or February and are part of the government's Khelo India initiative.
- The previous 5 editions of the Youth Games have been held in Delhi, Pune, Guwahati, Panchkula and Bhopal.
- Two categories, under-17-year-old school students and under-21 college students.
- No other team barring Maharashtra and Haryana have won the KIYG title to date.

Tip of the day

The distance between your

DREAMS ← and **→ REALITY**

is called
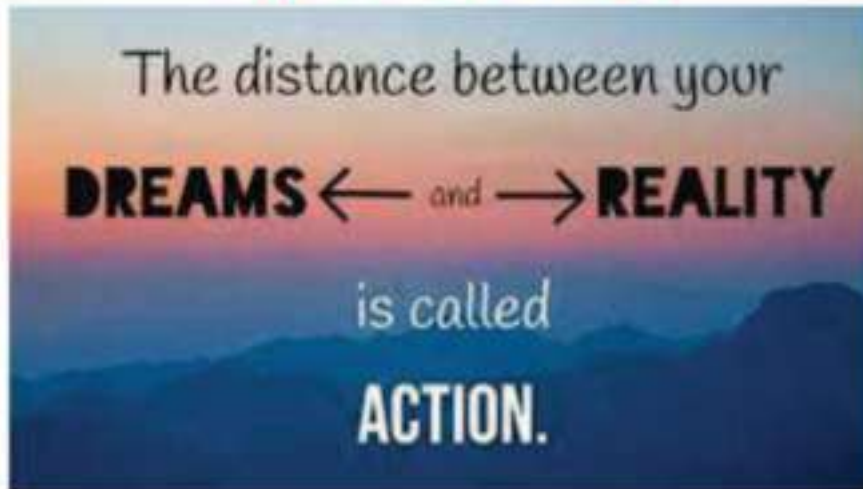
ACTION.

RS passes Bill to curb exam malpractices, paper leaks

Need for Such a Bill

Instances of Question Paper Leaks:
- There have been a very large number of cases of question paper leaks in recruitment exams across the country in recent years.
- At least 48 instances of paper leaks in 16 states over the last five years
- The leaks affected the lives of at least 1.51 crore applicants for about 1.2 lakh posts.

Key Provisions of the Bill
- Defines Public Examination as any examination conducted by a "public examination authority" listed in the Schedule of the Bill, or any such other authority as may be notified by the Central Government.

The schedule lists five public examination authorities:
- Union Public Service Commission (UPSC),
- The Staff Selection Commission (SSC),
- The Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs),
- The Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS),
- The National Testing Agency (NTA)

Note: NTA conducts the JEE (Main), NEET-UG, UGC-NET, the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) Other Provisions

Punishments
- Under the Bill all offences shall be cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.
- Punishment for "any person or persons resorting to unfair means and offences" can be three to five years in prison, and a fine up to Rs 10 lakh.
- Investigation and Enforcement:
- The bill mandates that offences under the proposed law will be investigated by officers not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or Assistant Commissioner of Police.
- High-Level National Technical Committee on Public Examinations : To focus on developing protocols to secure digital platforms.
- The Union Cabinet recently approved the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- UAE became the first Country to sign both CEPA and BIT with India.
- India has signed CEPAs with South Korea and Japan.

What is Bilateral Investment Treaty
- The BIT is an agreement between two nations to establish the terms and conditions for Foreign investments between two countries .
- It falls under the broader umbrella of International Investment Agreements (IIAs), as recognized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

India's Model BIT
- Adopted in 2016.

Aims:
- To strike a balance between investor rights and government obligations.
- To provide robust protection to foreign investors in India and Indian investors abroad

Significance of BITs
- Investor Confidence: Because The BIT establishes a framework focusing on fair treatment, national and most-favored-nation treatment.
- Dispute Settlement: They also establish an independent forum for dispute settlement through arbitration.
- FDI Inflow: These treaties facilitate increased FDI inflow by contract enforcement.
- Economic Growth: By attracting foreign investment, BITs contribute to economic growth and employment generation in the host country.
- Legal Protection: BITs offer legal protection to investors.

UPSC PYQ

Q) The term 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' often seen in the news in the context of the affairs of a group of countries known as (2016)
  (a) G20
  (b) ASEAN
  (c) SCO
  (d) SAARC

Budget 2024 Three Economic Corridors on Anvil

Three Strategic Economic Corridors
- Under the PM Gati Shakti framework, the government aims to establish three distinct economic corridors:
- Energy, Mineral, and Cement Corridors: Focused on efficient transportation of critical resources.
- Port Connectivity Corridors: Aimed at enhancing connectivity to major ports for streamlined logistics.
- High Traffic Density Corridors: Geared towards reducing congestion and improving operational efficiency.

What is Gati Shakti?
- Infrastructure model which aims to make India a world class infrastructure hub by providing integrated and seamless connectivity for movement of people, goods and services.
- A digital platform will be created to bring 16 ministries including rail and roadways together for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure projects.
- The Gati Shakti scheme will subsume the Rs 110 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline that was launched in 2019.

Major Targets of Gati Shakti
- 11 industrial corridors and Two new defence corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh
- 4G connectivity in all villages
- Increase renewable energy capacity to 225 GW
- Expanding the national highway network to 2 lakh kms.

Kokborok language

- TBSE agrees to allow Kokborok language exam papers to be written in both Roman and Bangla scripts. Initially, only the Bangla script was allowed for Kokborok exams.
- Students were allowed to write their Kokborok papers only in Bengali script citing resource constraints.
- The board has now allowed the students to write Kokborok in Bengali and Roman scripts.
- Students were allowed to write their Kokborok papers only in Bengali script citing resource constraints.
- The board has now allowed the students to write Kokborok in Bengali and Roman scripts.

Kokborok
- Kokborok is the mother tongue of the Borok people, who are also known as Tripuri.
- They reside in Tripura and other North-Eastern states and Uttarakhand.
- It is a member of the Tibeto-Burman language family.
- It serves as the lingua franca among various tribal communities in Tripura.
- It is officially recognized as one of the state languages of Tripura.
- Interim Budget 2024 Says IMEC Corridor Will Be The Game Changer For India

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) Project
- It is Ship, Rail and Road project extending across two corridors, that is,
- The East Corridor – connecting India to the Arabian Gulf,
- The Northern Corridor – connecting the Gulf to Europe.
- The IMEC corridor will also include an electricity cable, a hydrogen pipeline and a high-speed data cable.

Signatories: India, the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, the European Union, Italy, France, and Germany.

Significance
- IMEC bypasses Pakistan: To connect to Western countries.
- The transit time to Europe would be 40% faster compared to the Suez Canal maritime route.
- Strategic Engagement with Arabian Peninsula: The corridor deepens India's strategic engagement with the Arabian peninsula and African Countries.
- Alternative to BRI: IMEC has been dubbed as a counter to China's ambitious BRI.

India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC)

UPSC PYQ

Q)The Siachen Glacier is located to the: (UPSC 2020)
   A.East of Aksai Chin
   B.East of Leh
   C.North of Gilgit
   D.North of Nubra Valley

S.N. Bose

Why in the News?

- S.N. Bose National Centre for Basic Sciences in Kolkata celebrated the 100th anniversary of the last of the four revolutionary publications Satyendra Nath Bose that led to new quantum mechanics.

Contributions of SN Bose

- SNBNCBS, an Autonomous Research Institute established under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), in 1986
- Laid the foundation for quantum statistics.
- He collaborated with Einstein that led to the development of the Bose-Einstein condensate theory, predicting the existence of a unique Fifth state of matter.
- Deduced Planck's Black body radiation law without any reference to classical electrodynamics.

Five states of matter

- There are four natural states of matter: Solids, liquids, gases and plasma.
- The fifth state is the man-made Bose-Einstein condensates.
- BECs are formed when particles are cooled to near absolute zero, causing them to coalesce into a single quantum object that acts as a wave in a relatively large packet.
- At that point, clusters of atoms begin functioning as a single quantum object with both wave and particle properties.

Five states of matter

Discuss the work of 'Bose-Einstein Statistics' done by Prof. Satyendra Nath Bose and show how it revolutionised the field of Physics. (2018)

The Indian toy industry

Why in the News?

- Recently, The Indian toy industry exhibited remarkable growth, exports surged by 239% and imports dropped by 52% between 2014-15 and 2022-23 making India a net exporter.

Reasons:
- Tariff and Non-Tariff Barriers: The increase in customs duty on toys from 20% to 70% in March 2023, acted as a significant deterrent to toy imports.
- Global Supply Chain Disruption: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains in 2020-21, adversely affecting imports.

Challenges faced by Toy Industry in India

- Foreign dependence for sourcing raw materials: Indian manufacturers often need to import materials from South Korea and Japan.
- Lack of Technology: Most of the domestic toy manufacturers use outdated technology and machinery, which affects the quality and design of the toys.
- High Tax Rates: Currently, electronic toys are taxed at 18% GST, while non-electronic toys incur a 12% GST rate.
- Cheap Alternatives: China constitutes around 80% of toy imports into India, negatively impacting domestic toy manufacturers.
- Unorganized and Fragmented: 90% of the market being unorganised.
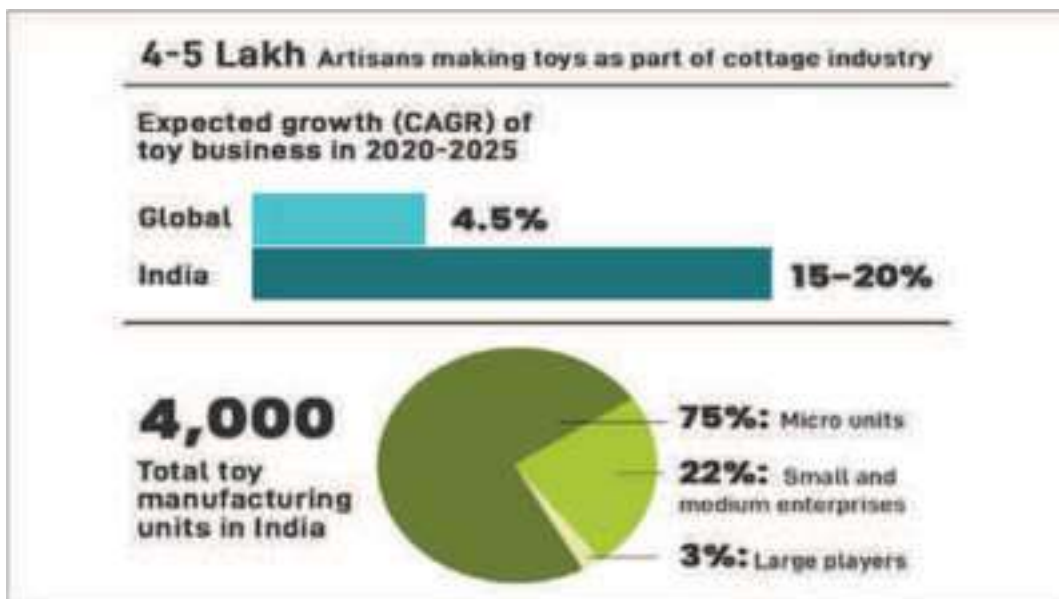
CAR T-cell Therapy

What is CAR T-cell Therapy?
- Unlike chemotherapy or immunotherapy which involve taking drugs, CAR T-cell therapies use a patient's own cells.
- They are modified in the laboratory to activate T-cells and target tumor cells.
- CAR T-cell therapy has been approved for leukaemias (cancers arising from the cells that produce white blood cells) and lymphomas (arising from the lymphatic system).

Procedure
- T cells are taken from a patient's blood and then a special receptor gene is added to the T cells in the laboratory.
- The special receptor is called a chimeric antigen receptor (CAR).
- Large numbers of the CAR T cells are grown in the laboratory and given to the patient by infusion.
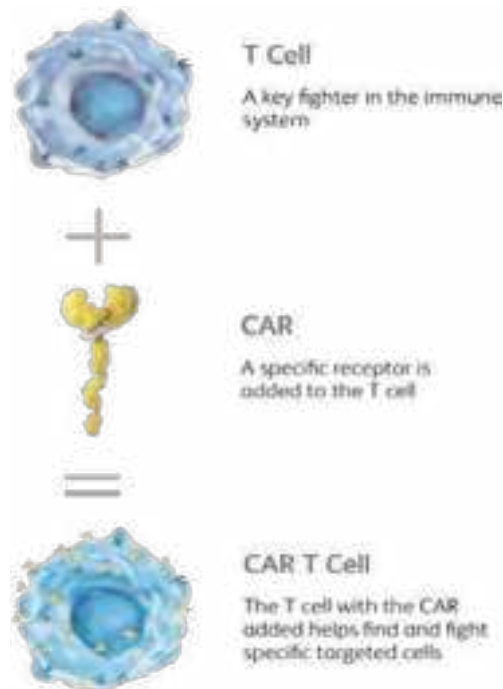
Significance
- High clinical efficacy.
- That's why they're referred to as "living drugs."

Significance and Challenges

Challenges:
- Difficult to Prepare:
- The first successful clinical trial was done a decade ago, and the first indigenously developed therapy in India was performed in 2021.
- Side Effects:
  - The potential side-effects are also significant, associated with cytokine release syndrome (an activation of the immune system and collateral damage to the body's normal cells) and neurological symptoms (severe confusion, seizures, and speech impairment).
- Affordability: costly

What are T-Cells?

- T cells, also known as T lymphocytes, are a type of white blood cell that play a central role in cell-mediated immunity, which means they help the body recognize and respond to foreign substances, such as viruses, bacteria, and abnormal cells, such as cancer cells.
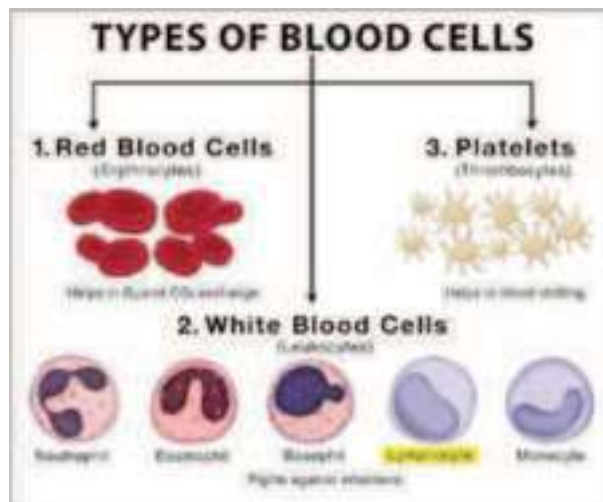
UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. Which one of the following statements best describes the role of B cells and T cells in the human body?(2022)

(a) They protect the environmental allergens. body
(b) They alleviate the body's pain and inflammation.
(c) They act as immunosuppressants in the body.
(d) They protect the body from diseases caused by pathogens.

Tip of the day

ROME WAS NOT BUILT IN A DAY.

Zircon Missile

Why in the News

- Recently, the 3M22 Zircon, or SS-N-33, is a scramjet-powered manoeuvring anti-ship hypersonic cruise missile developed in Russia.

Hypersonic Missile

Features:
- Speed: Mach 9 and a range of 1000 km.
- It's a two-stage missile that uses solid fuel in the first stage and a scramjet motor in the second stage.
- A hypersonic missile is a missile capable of travelling at hypersonic speed, i.e. between 5 and 25 times the speed of sound.
- It uses hypersonic air-breathing scramjet technology.
- In 2021, DRDO successfully flight-tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV), with the capability to travel at 6 times the speed of sound.

Ex.
- China-DF-17
- Air Breathing Engine
- The Russian-made Avangard.

Air-breathing engines
- Air-breathing engines use oxygen from the atmosphere in the combustion of fuel.
- Ramjet: A ramjet is a form of air-breathing jet engine that uses the vehicle's forward motion to compress incoming air for combustion without a rotating compressor.
- Ramjets work most efficiently at supersonic speeds but they are not efficient at hypersonic speeds.
- Scramjet: A scramjet engine is an improvement over the ramjet engine as it efficiently operates at hypersonic speeds and allows supersonic combustion.
- Dual Mode Ramjet (DMRJ) : A dual mode ramjet (DMRJ) is a type of jet engine where a ramjet transforms into a scramjet over Mach 4-8 range, which means it can efficiently operate both in subsonic and supersonic combustion modes.
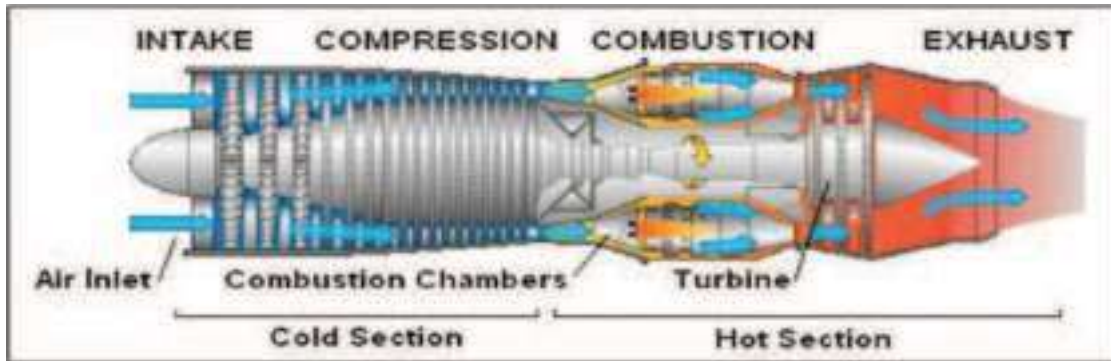
Speed Range	Mach Number	Velocity in m/s
Subsonic	< 0.8	< 274
Transonic	0.8–1.2	274–412
Supersonic	1.2–5	412–1715
Hypersonic	5–10	1715–3430
High-hypersonic	10–25	3430–8507

UPSC PYQ

With reference to Agni-IV Missile, which of the following statements is/are correct? (2014)
1. It is a surface-to-surface missile.
2. It is fuelled by liquid propellant only.
3. It can deliver one-tonne nuclear warheads about 7500 km away.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:
(a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Kalasa-Banduri Project

Why in the News?
- The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has deferred a decision on Karnataka's application for the diversion of forest land for the construction of the Kalasa nala irrigation projects in the Mahadayi basin.

Kalasa-Banduri Project
- Aim: To divert Mahadayi river water into the Malaprabha river in the state of Karnataka to enhance drinking water supply to Dharwad, Belagavi, Bagalkote, and Gadag districts.
- It involves building dams across Kalasa and Banduri, two tributaries of the Mahadayi river to divert water to the Malaprabha river (a tributary of Krishna river).
- Disputing states: Karnataka, Goa, and Maharashtra.

Mahadayi River
- Originates in Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary (Western Ghats), Belagavi district of Karnataka.
- It is essentially a rain-fed river also called Mandovi in Goa.
- The river travels 35 km in Karnataka; 82 km in Goa before joining the Arabian Sea.

Aral Sea

Why in the News?

- As Per NASA, The Aral Sea began shrinking in the 1960's due to water being diverted for irrigation projects.

What are the factors responsible for the disappearance of the Aral Sea?

- As per the space agency's findings, in 1960, the Soviet Union initiated a significant water diversion project by redirecting the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers for irrigation purposes.
- Note– The Aral Sea formed from water flowing from the Syr Darya and the Amu Darya rivers.
- While the project caused the desert region surrounding the sea to flourish, it had a catastrophic effect on the Aral Sea.
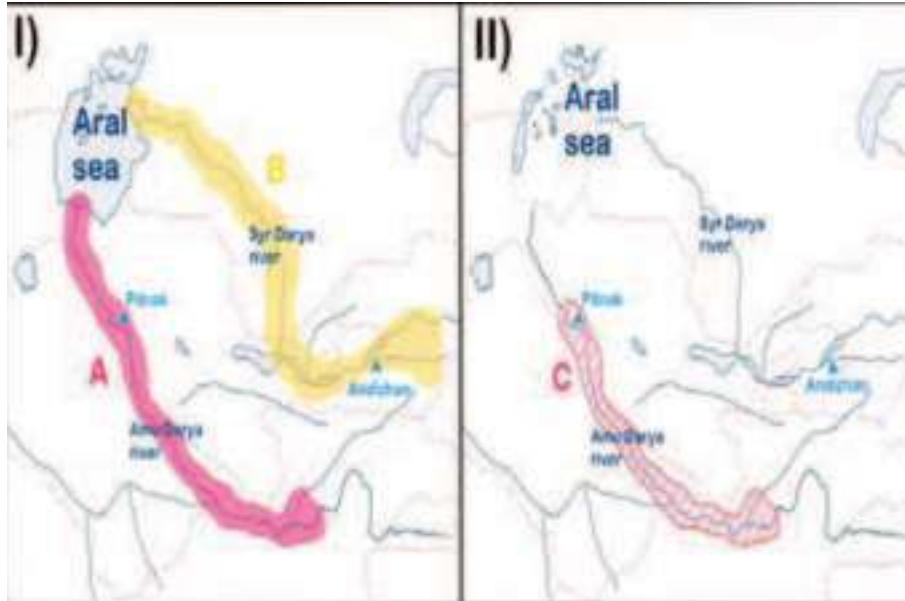
About Aral Sea

- Borders– It marks the border between Kazakhstan to the north and Uzbekistan to the south.
- The shallow Aral Sea was once the world's fourth largest body of inland water.
- Now only the fragments of the sea exist.
- Drainage– It encompasses drainage from Uzbekistan and parts of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Kyrgyzstan.

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)

- Recently two individuals have lost their lives due to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a viral infection prevalent in Karnataka.
- The Kyasanur Forest is a protected area located in the Shimoga district of Karnataka.
- It is part of the Western Ghats mountain range.

Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)
- A zoonotic illness, aka"monkey disease" because it primarily affects humans and monkeys.
- It is caused by the Kyasanur Forest disease Virus (KFDV).
- First identified in 1957 in a sick monkey from the Kyasanur Forest in Karnataka.
- Since then, between 400-500 human cases per year have been reported.
- Eventually, KFD emerged as a grave public health problem spreading through the entire Western Ghats.

Transmission, Diagnosis and Treatment

Transmission:
- In nature, the virus is maintained mainly in hard ticks (Haemaphysalis spinigera), monkeys, rodents, and birds.
- To humans, it may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal (a sick or recently dead monkey).

Diagnosis:
- Diagnosis can be made in the early stage of illness by molecular detection by polymerase chain reaction(PCR).
- Later, serologic testing using Enzyme-linked Immunosorbent Serologic Assay (ELISA) can be performed.

Treatment and Prevention:
- A vaccine (Formalin inactivated KFDV vaccine) does exist for KFD and is used in endemic areas of India.
- The forest department is distributing (N, N-diethyl phenylacetamide) DEPA oil, to be applied to exposed skin which acts as a tick repellent.

UPSC PYQ

Consider the following statements:
1) Dengue is a protozoan disease transmitted by mosquitoes.
2) Retro-orbital pain is not a symptom of dengue.
3) Skin rash and bleeding from nose and gums are some of the symptoms of dengue.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?(2018)
a) 1 and 2
b) 3 only
c) 2 only
d) 1 and 3

Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS)
- A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court (SC) of India unanimously struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) .
- The SC declared the amendments made to the Finance Act, 2017, the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951, the Income Tax Act, 1961, and the Companies Act, 2013, as unconstitutional.
- The SC asserted that the EBS violated the fundamental right to information guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

What is the SC Ruling on the Electoral Bond Scheme?
- Representation of the People Act, 1951: Section 29C mandated political parties to disclose donations exceeding Rs 20,000, balancing the right to information with donor privacy.
- Finance Act, 2017 Intervention: Introduced an exception exempting donations via Electoral Bonds from disclosure requirements.
- SC Verdict: Struck down the amendment, emphasising the importance of transparency and privacy balance.
- Companies Act, 2013: Section 182 restricted corporate donations, imposing a cap (7.5% of the average profits of the preceding three fiscal years) and disclosure requirements.
- Finance Act, 2017 Intervention: Removed the cap and disclosure obligations for corporate donations.
- SC Verdict: Nullified the amendment, citing concerns about unchecked corporate influence on elections.
- Income-tax Act, 1961: Section 13A(b) mandated the maintenance of records for contributions above Rs 20,000.
- Finance Act, 2017 Intervention: Exempted Electoral Bond contributions from record-keeping requirements.
- SC Verdict: Struck down the amendment, upholding voters' right to information.

What are electoral bonds?
- Electoral Bond is a financial instrument for making anonymous donations to political parties.
- The bonds are issued in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh and Rs. 1 crore without any maximum limit.
- State Bank of India is authorised to issue and encash these bonds, which are valid for fifteen days from the date of issuance.
- Donations made via electoral bonds enjoyed 100% tax exemption under the scheme.
- Eligibility to Receive Funds via Electoral Bonds:
- Only political parties registered under Section 29A of the RPA, 1951, and which secured not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last elections to the Lok Sabha or a state legislative assembly, are eligible to receive electoral bonds.

UPSC PYQ

Q) Right to Privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of Right to Life and Personal Liberty. Which of the following in the Constitution of India correctly and appropriately imply the above statement? (2018)

(a) Article 14 and the provisions under the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution.
(b) Article 17 and the Directive Principles of State Policy in Part IV.
(c) Article 21 and the freedoms guaranteed in Part III.
(d) Article 24 and the provisions under the 44th Amendment to the Constitution.

Gupteswar forest
- The Odisha government has declared the Gupteswar forest in Koraput district as its fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS).
- Mandasaru (Kandhamala district), Mahendragiri (Gajpati district), and Gandhamardan (Bargarh & Bolangir districts) were previously declared as BHS

Gupteswar Forest
- The forest finds its roots in the sacred groves traditionally revered by the local communities.
- The Vamsadhara River flows through it.
- Tribal communities like the Dongria Kondh tribe and Parajasb lives here.
- Gupteswar Cave
- It is a Hindu cave shrine located inside the Gupteswar forest in Koraput district of Odisha.
- It is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Odisha.
- It is named after Lord Shiva, who is also known as Gupteshwar.

Biodiversity Heritage Sites

ria	Unique ecosystems having rich biodiversity with one or more of the following components: (a) Richness of wild and domesticated species (b) High endemism (c) Presence of Keystone, rare and threatened species (d) Wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species (e) Past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds, and having significant cultural, ethical, or aesthetic values.
l sion	Under Section-37 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, the State Government in consultation with local bodies may notify areas of biodiversity importance as B
ose	Enhance the quality of life of local communities through the conservation of su sites.
agement	The State Government in consultation with the Central Government may fram rules for the management and conservation of BHS.
rictions	The creation of BHS may not put any restriction on the indigenous practices an usages of the local communities
BHS	Nallur Tamarind Grove in Bengaluru, Karnataka was designated as India's first

PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Recently the Gupteswar Cave has been frequently seen in the news, it is located in:
A) Karnataka
B) Odisha
C) Madhya Pradesh
D) Uttar Pradesh

Joint European Torus (JET)

- European researchers at the Joint European Torus (JET) in the UK achieved a significant breakthrough in nuclear fusion, generating a record-breaking 69 megajoules of energy from just 0.2 milligrams of fuel.
- This achievement marks the largest amount of energy ever produced in a fusion experiment.

What is JET?
- It is a large tokamak, the first device to achieve controlled fusion power using deuterium and tritium.

What are Tokamaks?
- They are machines that confine plasma using magnetic fields in a donut shape.
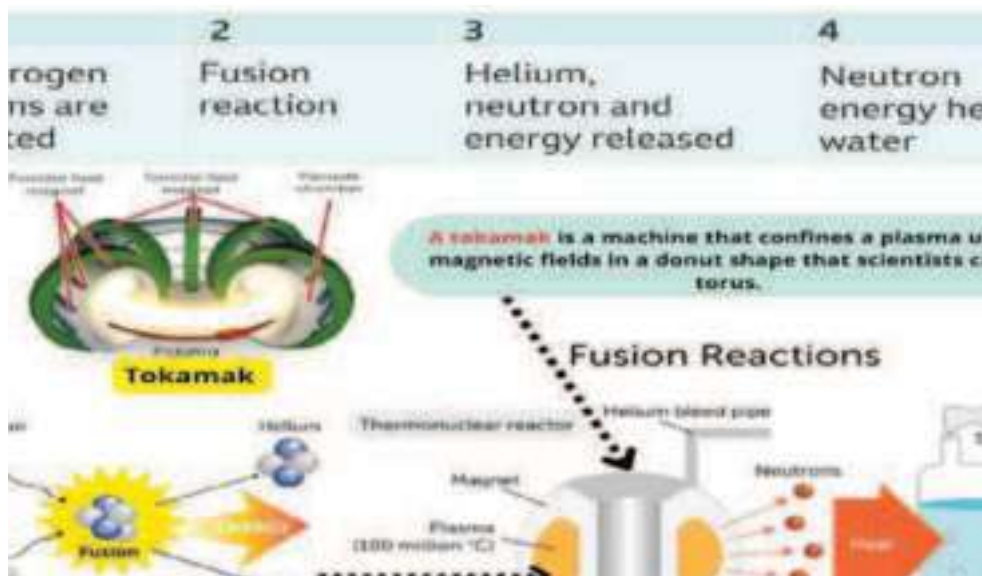
India's involvement in Nuclear Fusion

ITER Project Participation:
- ITER India joined the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project in 2005.
- ITER is a global initiative aimed at constructing the largest tokamak reactor in the world.
- The members include China, the European Union, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the United States.
- Institute of Plasma Research (IPR): The Institute of Plasma Research (IPR) is an autonomous institute under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and leads India's fusion program.

The Weimar Triangle
- Poland, France, and Germany have pledged to strengthen Europe's security and defense capabilities.
- The foreign ministers of the three nations met to discuss reviving the Weimar Triangle, aimed at enhancing cooperation.

The Weimar Triangle
- Established in 1991, aims to foster cooperation and strengthen ties between Germany, France, and Poland.
- The group derives its name from the city of Weimar, Germany, where its inaugural meeting occurred.
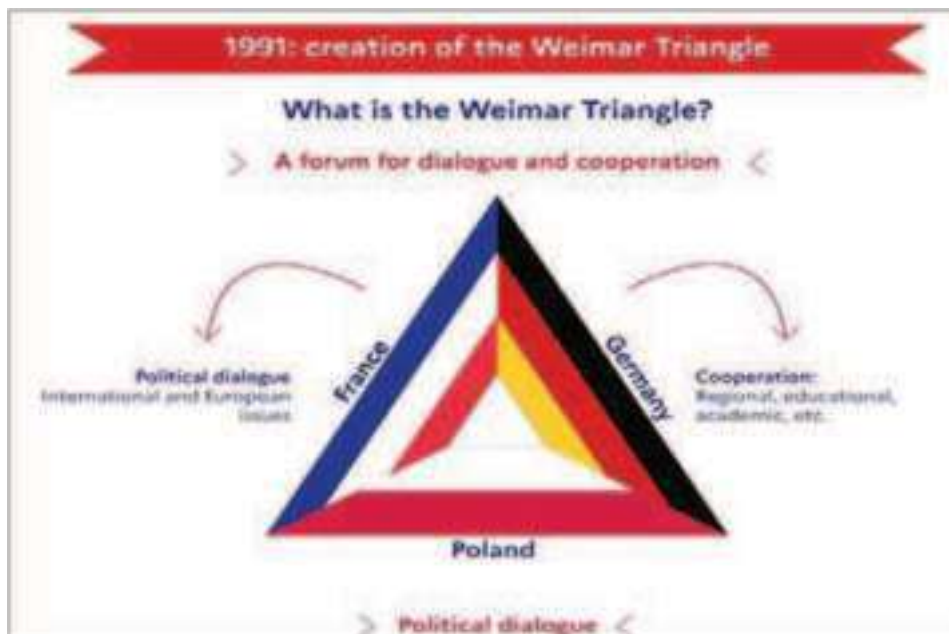
Objectives of Weimar Triangle
- The main goal of the Weimar Triangle was to support Poland's transition from communism to democracy and market economy and to facilitate its integration into the European Union and NATO.
- To promote cooperation between the three countries on cross-border and European issues, such as security, energy, climate, migration, and human rights.

Quote of the day

SUNDERLAL BAHUGUNA, CHIPKO ACTIVIST

"Ecology is permanent economy."
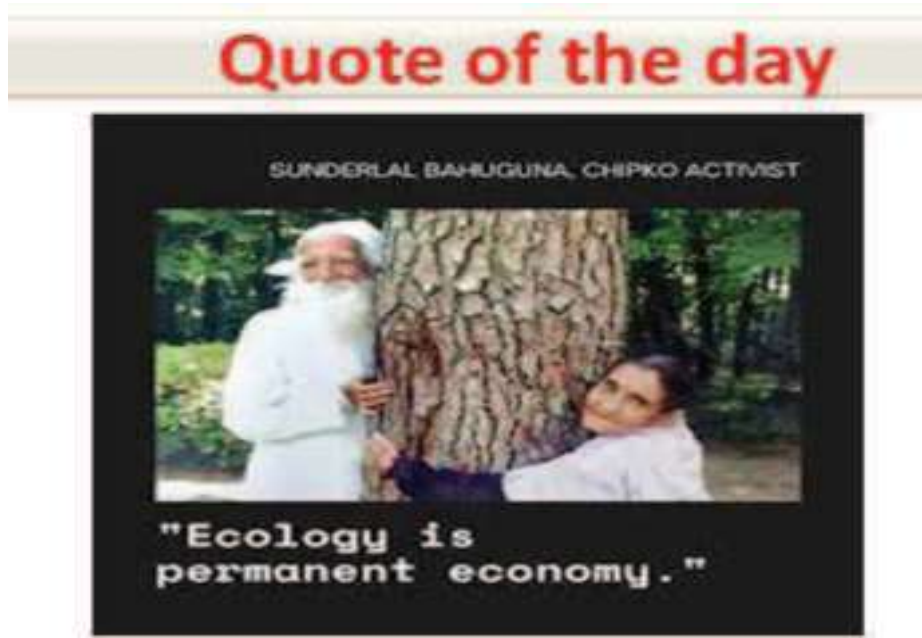
International Energy Agency (IEA) and India
- India is in discussions with the International Energy Agency (IEA) to become a full member, enhancing its role in global energy security.

Background
- India became an Associate member of IEA in March 2017 but it was in engagement with IEA long before its association with the organization.
- Earlier in 2021, India also inked a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the IEA.
- India is the world's third-largest energy consumer.

Criteria for IEA membership
- OECD membership
- Crude oil reserves are equivalent to 90 days of the previous year's net import (India currently has strategic oil reserves equivalent to only 9.5 days of its needs, but when combined with storage at refineries and depots, it reaches a total of 66 days, still below the IEA requirement.)
- Demand restraint programs (to reduce national oil consumption by up to 10%)

International Energy Agency
- It is an autonomous Intergovernmental Organisation established in 1974 in Paris, France.
- The 31 member countries and 13 association countries of the IEA represent 75% of global energy demand.
- It mainly focuses on economic development, energy security and environmental protection. These policies are also known as the 3 E's of IEA.

Major Reports:
- World Energy Outlook Report.
- World Energy Investment Report.
- World Energy Statistics.
- World Energy Balances.
- Energy Technology Perspectives.
- India Energy Outlook Report.

UPSC PYQ

With reference to the International Energy Agency, consider the following statements:

1. It was established based on the framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
2. The IEA releases the World Energy Outlook.
3. India is a full time member of IEA.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

[A] 2 and 3 only
[B] 3 only
[C] 2 only
[D] 1 and 2 only

National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) Way Forward Annual Report 2023

- The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) released a report (National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) Way Forward Annual Report 2023) showcasing efforts to improve e-Service delivery.

What is E-Governance?

- E-governance, meaning 'electronic governance' is using information and communication technologies (ICTs) at various levels of the government and the public sector for the purpose of enhancing governance.
- The application of ICT to transform the efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.

Key highlights of the NeSDA Way Forward Annual Report 2023

- Jammu and Kashmir offer the highest number of e-services (1117) among all States/UTs.
- 76% of mandatory e-services are available, a significant increase from 48% under NeSDA 2019.
- Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Assam, and Odisha provide 100% of their services through their identified Single Unified Portal.
- The tourism sector has the highest usage of e-services in 23 out of 36 States/UTs.

Challenges to e-governance in India

- Low literacy levels: Especially digital literacy
- Language barriers: Most of the e-governance applications are in English which limits its usage by common people.
- Unfriendly user interface: Most government websites are designed to the expert level in terms of user interface and transaction formats.
- Difficult access: E.g., some people may have limited access to ICT devices.
- Data privacy: Lack of sufficient security standards and mistrust of digital mediums hinder the wide use of e-governance services.

E-governance initiative of Government of India

- National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)
- Digital India initiative
- JAM Trinity
- E-Kranti The mission is to ensure a Government wide transformation by delivering all Government services electronically
- Mobile App for New-age Governance (UMANG)Single platform for accessing government services.
- Goods and Services Tax Network
- Government eMarketplace(GeM)Portal for transforming government procurement.
- Digi Locker: A platform for digital issuance and verification of documents.
- Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMG-Disha): Initiative promoting digital literacy in rural areas.

About Madagascar

- After Indonesia, Madagascar is the second-largest island nation in the world.
- Furthermore, Madagascar is the world's fourth-largest island, trailing only Greenland, New Guinea, and Borneo.
- Located in the Indian Ocean to the east of Tanzania and Mozambique, Madagascar is an island republic that is a part of Africa.
- Discovered for the first time by the explorer Marco Polo.

Nepal's Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative earns UN recognition for ecosystem restoration.

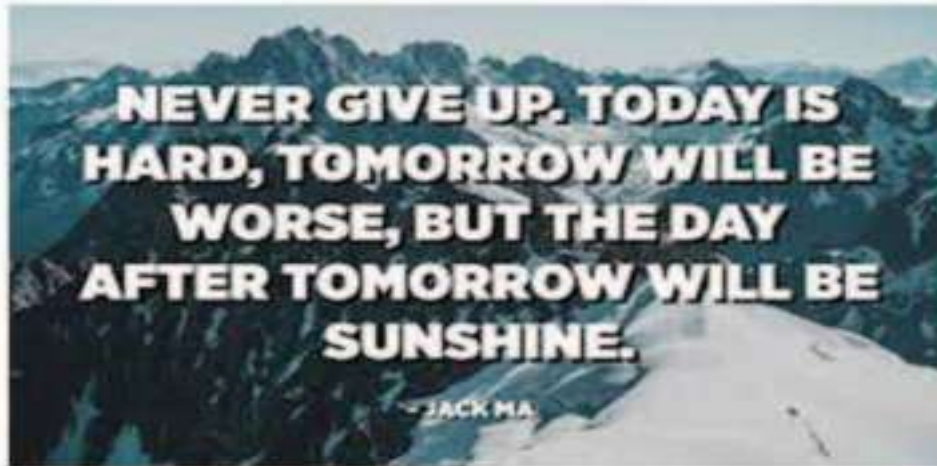**What is the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative?**
- It is a transboundary biodiversity hotspot launched in 2001.
- It aims to conserve critical habitats for tigers, rhinos, elephants, etc., covering ecosystems of the Terai region.
- Spanning over 900 km from the Bagmati River (Nepal) to the Yamuna River (India), it extends across 5 million hectares and supports over seven million people.
- Aims at fostering transboundary conservation efforts.

About UN World Restoration Flagships (commenced in 2022)
- These are initiatives recognized by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030).
- The flagship is led by UNEP and FAO.
- It's part of the UN's commitment to restore one billion hectares of ecosystems.

Quote of the day

NEVER GIVE UP, TODAY IS HARD, TOMORROW WILL BE WORSE, BUT THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW WILL BE SUNSHINE.

-JACK MA

BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi
- The Prime Minister is scheduled to inaugurate the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi.
- The temple marks the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi.

Features of the temple
- The temple is hand-carved by Indian artisans from Rajasthan and Gujarat and is considered the first traditional Hindu stone temple in the Middle East.
- The seven spires representing unity among the emirates, were unveiled.
- The temple symbolises unity and harmony..

About BAPS
- BAPS stands for Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (a Vaishnav sect of Hinduism).
- It is a Hindu denomination within the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.
- The organization was founded in 1907 by Shastriji Maharaj.
- Bhagwan Swaminarayan (1781-1830) popularised the faith in the late 18th century.
- Network of 1,550 temples worldwide.
- Notable temples in New Delhi, Gandhinagar, London, Houston, Chicago, Atlanta, Toronto, Los Angeles, Nairobi
- Architecture of BAPS Temple in Abu Dhabi
- Built in Nagara style.
- The external facade uses pink sandstone, and the interior uses Italian marble.
- Two central domes symbolise human coexistence.
- Seven shikhara represent the seven Emirates of UAE.
- Nano tiles for comfortable walking, even in hot weather.
- Holy river' surrounding the temple with waters from Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati depicted.
- Varanasi-like ghat was created.

Nano Tiles
- Nano tiles are a revolutionary type of ceramic tiles that have been engineered using nanotechnology.
- These tiles are known for their exceptional strength, durability, and resistance to stains, scratches, and water.

UPSC PYQ

The distinct architectural style of temple construction in different parts of India was a result of geographical, ethnic, racial, historic and linguistic diversities. Comment. (250 words)

Farmers Protest 2.0

- Farmers Protest 2.0 is underway as farmers from Punjab, Haryana, and Western Uttar Pradesh march towards Delhi on February 13.

Key Demands of Farmers?
- Main demand in the farmers' 12-point agenda is to grant them legal guarantee Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops, and the determination of crop prices in accordance with the Dr M S Swaminathan Commission's report.
- üThe Swaminathan Commission Report states that the government should raise the MSP to at least 50% more than the weighted average cost of production. It is also known as the C2+ 50% formula.
- C2 includes the imputed cost of capital and the rent on the land.

- The imputed cost of capital accounts for the interest or returns that could have been earned if the capital invested in farming were instead invested elsewhere.

- **What is** MSP?
  The MSP is the rate at which the government purchases crops from farmers, and is based on a calculation of at least one-and-a-half times the cost of production incurred by the farmers.

Three Kinds of Production Cost:
1.'A2': Covers all paid-out costs directly incurred by the farmer in cash and kind on seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, hired labour, leased-in land, fuel, irrigation, etc.
2.'A2+FL': Includes A2 plus value of unpaid family labour.
3.'C2': It is a more comprehensive cost that factors in rentals and interest for owned land and fixed capital assets, on top of A2+FL.

- ACP considers both A2+FL and C2 costs while recommending MSP.
- CACP reckons only A2+FL cost for return.

The other demands are:
- Full debt waiver for farmers and labourers;
- Implementation of the Land Acquisition Act of 2013, with provisions for written consent from farmers before acquisition, and compensation at four times the collector rate.
- Note: A collector rate is the minimum value at which a property can be registered when buying or selling it. They serve as a reference point to prevent the undervaluation of properties and tax evasion.
- Punishment for the perpetrators of the October 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri killings;
- India should withdraw from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and freeze all free trade agreements (FTAs).
- Pensions for farmers and farm labourers.
- Compensation for farmers who died during the Delhi protest in 2020, including a job for one family member.
- The Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 should be scrapped.
- 200 (instead of 100) days' employment under MGNREGA per year, the daily wage of Rs 700;
- Strict penalties and fines on companies producing fake seeds, pesticides, fertilisers; improvements in seed quality;
- National commission for spices such as chilli and turmeric.
- Ensure the rights of indigenous peoples over water, forests, and land.

UPSC PYQ

Consider the following statements: (2020)
  1.In the case of all cereals, pulses and oil-seeds, the procurement at Minimum Support Price (MSP) is unlimited in any State/UT of India.
  2.In the case of cereals and pulses, the MSP is fixed in any State/UT at a level to which the market price will never rise.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
  (a) 1 only
  (b) 2 only
  (c) Both 1 and 2
 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Swami Dayanand Saraswati
- Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati was a philosopher, social leader and founder of the Arya Samaj.
- He was the first to give the call for Swaraj as "India for Indian" in 1876.
- Swami Dayanand Saraswati was born on February 12th, 1824 in Tankara, Gujarat in a Brahmin family.
- The first Arya Samaj unit was formally set up by him at Mumbai in 1875 and later the headquarters of the Samaj were established at Lahore.
- He introduced a complete overhaul of the education system and is often considered as one of the visionaries of modern India.
- The DAV (Dayanand Anglo Vedic) schools came into existence in 1886 to realize the vision of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.
- The first DAV School was established at Lahore with Mahatma Hansarj as the headmaster.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati
- Recently, the Prime Minister of India addressed a programme on the 200th birth anniversary of Swami Dayananda Saraswati.
- Swami Dayanand Saraswati was born as Mool Shankar Tiwari on 12th February 1824 in Tankara, Gujarat.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

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Quote of the Day
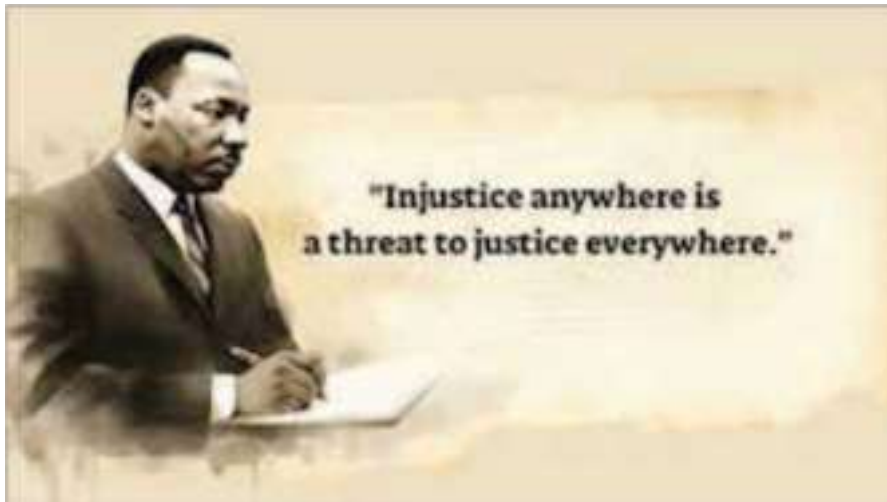
"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

6ᵗʰ Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/National Security Advisers (NSA) on Afghanistan

- Recently, the 6th Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/National Security Advisers (NSA) on Afghanistan was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
- India reiterated its collective approach to combating terrorism as stated in the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 2593).

Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan

- It is a series of high-level meetings involving National Security Advisers (NSA) or senior security officials from countries in the region, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, India, and other Central Asian states.
- These dialogues are platforms for discussing and coordinating regional approaches to address security challenges and promote stability in Afghanistan and the broader region.
- Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan follows the objective of UNSCR 2593.
- The resolution, passed by the 15-member organ (UNSC), calls for the prevention of Afghan territory from being used as a terror state.

India's efforts towards Afghanistan?

- In a bid to provide essential support, a Humanitarian Air Corridor has been established between Delhi and Kabul.
- India has invested 3 Billion Dollars through nearly 500 projects spanning all 34 provinces in Afganistan.
- The Indian Army's Border Roads Organisation constructed a major road in 2009 in the remote Afghan province of Nimroz, connecting Delaram to Zaranj.
- This has proved a viable alternative route for the duty-free movement of goods through the Chabahar port in Iran to Afghanistan
- Salma Dam, Afghan-India Friendship Dam (AIFD) is a hydroelectric and irrigation dam project located on the Hari River in Herat Province of western Afghanistan.
- India-Afghanistan relations have been strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was signed between the two countries in October 2011.

Key Issues Affecting India-Afghanistan Relations

- Impact on Regional Stability: The drug trade originating from Afghanistan (golden crescent) has been a major contributor to instability and violence.
- Economic and Infrastructure Hurdles: Indias's efforts have been impeded by security concerns, corruption, and various other challenges after the fall of Afghanistan in the hands of the Taliban (2021).
- Attack on Indian Nationals: The bombing of a Sikh gurdwara in Kabul claimed by ISIS-K, has raised concerns for India.
- Shift in Security Dynamics: Until August 2021, India relied on a friendly government in Kabul and the security presence of the United States in Afghanistan for its security.
- The US withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021.

Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)

- Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) has decided to examine if a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) against her former husband.
- Reignited the debate on whether secular laws should be given precedence over distinct personal laws.

Evolution of Maintenance Law For Muslim Women

Pre-1986: Maintenance under Section 125 of CrPC:
- Before the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, Muslim women could seek maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) like women from other communities.
- This was affirmed by the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Mohd. Ahmad Khan v. Shah Bano Begum, 1985.

Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act ,1986:
- Enacted in response to the Shah Bano case.
- It restricted the maintenance period to the iddat period.
- Note: Iddat is a period, usually of three months, which a woman must observe after the death of her husband or a divorce before she can remarry.

Danial Latifi v. Union Of India Case, 2001
- The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the 1986 Act but extended the right of a Muslim woman to get maintenance till she re-marries.

2009:
- In 2009, the SC reiterated that divorced Muslim women could claim maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC, even beyond the iddat period, as long as they do not remarry.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019
- A divorced Muslim woman can seek maintenance.
- The Act declares any pronouncement of talaq by a Muslim husband upon his wife, by words, either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever, to be void and illegal.
- The Act entitles a divorced Muslim woman to receive from her husband such amount of subsistence allowance, for her and dependent children, as may be determined by the Magistrate.
- The Act is a special law that overrides the provisions of Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, which deals with the maintenance of wives, children and parents.
- However, a divorced Muslim woman can choose to not be governed by the Act and opt for other remedies available under any other law or custom.

UPSC PYQ

Which Article of the Constitution of India safeguards one's right to marry the person of one's choice? (2019)
- (a) Article 19
- (b) Article 21
- (c) Article 25
- (d) Article 29

Quasar J0529-4351

- Astronomers have discovered the brightest object in the universe, a quasar powered by the fastest-growing black hole on record.
- Quasar is named J0529-4351 and was found using the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope.
- It is located over 12 billion light-years away and its black hole devours the equivalent of one sun per day.
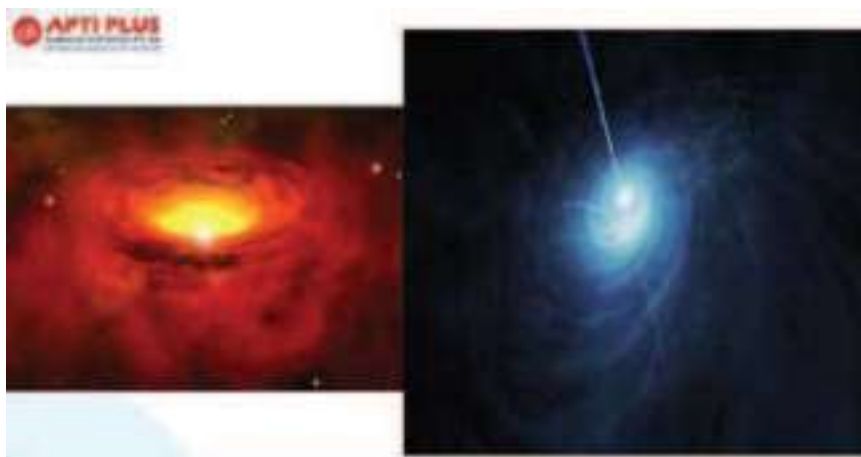
Quasars

- Short for "quasi-stellar radio source"
- Quasars are highly luminous objects in the early universe, and it is
- powered by supermassive black holes.
- It has gas spiraling at high velocity into an extremely large black hole.
- Pulsar vs Qasar:
- A pulsar is a neutron star while a quasar is a supermassive black hole.
- This means that a quasar is much more massive than a pulsar.
- Additionally, a quasar forms the nucleus of a galaxy while a pulsar is part of a galaxy and may orbit a quasar.
- A neutron star is the collapsed core of a massive supergiant star.

UPSC PYQ

Q. Consider the following phenomena: (2018)
1. Light is affected by gravity.
2. The Universe is constantly expanding.
3. Matter warps its surrounding space-time.

Which of the above is/are the predictions/predictions of Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, often discussed in the media?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Quote of the Day

"Dream, Dream, Dream. Dreams transform into thoughts and thoughts result in action."
— Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

BeAnInspirer.com
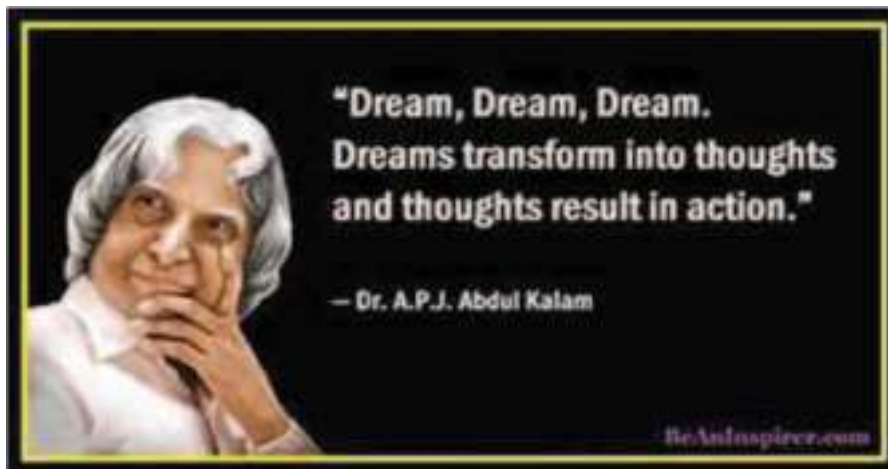
Maharashtra celebrates Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti, PM Modi lauds him

Birth

- He was born on 19th February, 1630 at Shivneri Fort in District Pune in the present-day state of Maharashtra.
- He was born to Shahaji Bhonsle, and Jijabai
- He was crowned as the king of the Marathas on 6th June , 1674, at Raigad.

Conflict with Mughals

- Shivaji defeated a large force of Shaista Khan (Aurangzeb's maternal uncle) and the Bijapur army in Pune,1659.
- In 1664, the wealthy Mughal trading port of Surat was sacked by Shivaji.
- In June 1665, the Treaty of Purandar was signed between Shivaji and Raja Jai Singh I (representing Aurangzeb).
- As per this treaty, many forts were relinquished to the Mughals and it was agreed that Shivaji would meet Aurangzeb at Agra.
- When Shivaji went to meet the Mughal emperor at Agra in 1666.
- He was arrested and kept prisoner. But he cleverly escaped.

Important Battles

- Battle of Pratapgad, 1659 : Fought at the fort of Pratapgad near the town of Satara, Maharashtra, between the forces of the Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and the Adilshahi general Afzal Khan.
- Battle of Surat, 1664 : Fought near the city of Surat, Gujarat,between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Inayat Khan, a Mughal captain. He Sacked Surat.
- Battle of Purandar, 1665 : Fought between the Mughal Empire and Maratha Empire.
- Battle of Sinhagad, 1670 : Fought on the fort of Sinhagad near the city of Pune, Maharashtra between Tanaji Malusare, a commander of Maratha ruler Shivaji Maharaj and Udaybhan Rathod, fort keeper of Mughals.
- Battle of Kalyan, 1682-83 : Bahadur Khan of the Mughal Empire defeated the Maratha army and took over Kalyan.
- Battle of Sangamner, 1679 : Fought between the Mughal Empire and Maratha Empire. This was the last battle in which the Maratha King Shivaji fought.

Maratha Administration

- The King was the supreme head of state who was assisted by a group of eight ministers known as the 'Ashtapradhan'.
- The peshwa, also known as the mukhya pradhan, originally headed the advisory council of the raja Shivaji.
- Shivaji abolished the Jagirdari System and replaced it with Ryotwari System, and changes in the position of hereditary revenue officials which was popularly known as Deshmukhs, Deshpande, Patils and Kulkarnis.
- The revenue system was patterned on the Kathi system of Malik Amber in which every piece of land was measured by Rod or Kathi.
- Chauth and Sardeshmukhi were other sources of income.

Note:

- Chauth amounted to 1/4th of the revenue which was paid to Marathas to safeguard themselves against raids from Shivaji's forces in Non-Maratha territories.
- Sardeshmukhi was an additional levy of 10%demanded from areas outside of the Maratha kingdom.

News

- Recently, during the 37th African Union Summit, 2024 in Ethiopia, African heads of state unanimously agreed to a historic ban on the trade of donkey skin, thereby prohibiting the killing of donkeys across the continent for their hides.
- This is a significant outcome as it follows the Dar es Salaam declaration adopted at the first Pan-African Donkey Conference in December 2022.

Dar es Salaam Declaration

- The Dar es Salaam declaration was signed in Tanzania during the Pan African Donkey Skin Conference.
- It underscores the rapid decrease in Africa's donkey population.
- It advocates for a 15-year halt on the commercial slaughter of donkeys for their skins.
- Why is Donkey Skin Traded?
- Donkeys are slaughtered for their skins, which are then exported to China.
- The collagen from the donkey skins is used to create a product known as ejiao (a traditional Chinese medicine) which is then used in food, drink, and beauty products.

Need for ban

- To prevent Animal suffering and inhumane slaughter or dunkeys.
- They are crucial for various economic activities . E.g. fetching water, transporting goods and using it as a draught animal.
- Livelihoods of thousands of African people are dependent on donkeys.

Key Facts about Indian Wild Ass

- Subspecies of Asian Wild Ass (Equus hemionus)
- Distribution: The World's last population of Indian WildAss is restricted to Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.
- Habitat: sandy, saline, Desert and grassland ecosystems.
- Conservation Status:
- IUCN: Near threatened
- CITES: Appendix II
- Wildlife Protection Act (1972): Schedule-I

UPSC PYQ

A sandy and saline area is the natural habitat of an Indian animal species. The animal has no predators in that area but its existence is threatened due to the destruction of its habitat. Which one of the following could be that animal? (2011)
   (a) Indian wild buffalo
   (b) Indian wild ass
   (c) Indian wild boar
   (d) Indian gazelle

Sustainable & Inclusive Development of Natural Rubber Sector (SIDNRS)

- The financial allocation for the Rubber sector under the 'Sustainable & Inclusive Development of Natural Rubber Sector (SIDNRS)' has been increased by 23% for the next 2 financial years (2024-25 and 2025-26).
- The government has also announced plans to set up three nodal Rubber Training Institutes in the Northeast to promote the development of rubber-based industries in the region.
- It will also promote the formation of Rubber Producers Societies (RPS) for the empowerment of rubber growers.

About Natural Rubber:
- Natural rubber is derived from the latex or milky sap of the rubber tree, scientifically known as Hevea brasiliensis.
- Primary organic component: Polyisoprene.
- It was introduced to tropical Asia and Africa by the British Government during the later part of the 19th century.
- Growing Conditions:
- Tropical climate with annual rainfall of 200 – 450 cm.
- It requires lateritic fertile soil with an acidic pH of 4.5 to 6.0.
- Minimum and maximum temperature should range from 25°C to 34°C and 80% relative humidity is ideal for cultivation.
- Bright sunshine for about 2000 hours per annum at the rate of 6 hours per day.

Sustainable & Inclusive Development of Natural Rubber Sector (SIDNRS) Scheme
- Aims to promote the sustainable and inclusive development of the natural rubber sector in India.
- The SIDNRS scheme was launched in the FY 2017-18.
- It is implemented by the Rubber Board.

Components of the scheme:
- Subsidy for Replanting Old Rubber Trees: with high-yielding and disease-resistant varieties.
- Promotion of Intercropping: Financial assistance provided to rubber growers for intercropping rubber with other crops such as pineapple, banana, and cocoa.
- Support for Capacity Building: Training and extension services provided to rubber growers.
- Development of Infrastructure: Financial assistance for the development of infrastructure facilities such as roads, water harvesting structures, and processing units in rubber-growing areas.
- Promotion of Rubber-Based Industries: Financial assistance provided for the establishment and expansion of rubber-based industries such as tire manufacturing, footwear manufacturing, and latex processing units.

Rubber Production and Consumption:

- India is currently the world's 6th largest producer of natural rubber while it also remains the second biggest consumer of the rubber products globally (after China).
- Thailand is the world's leading natural rubber producing country (35% of global natural rubber production in 2022).
- In South Asia, India holds the 4th-largest position following Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam.
- About 40% of India's total natural rubber consumption is currently met through imports.
- Major rubber producing states include: Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Assam.

Rubber Board

- The Rubber Board is a statutory organisation constituted under the Rubber Act, 1947 and functions under the administrative control of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- The Board is headed by a Chairman appointed by the Central Government and has 28 members representing various interests of the natural rubber industry.
- The Board's headquarters is located at Kottayam in Kerala.

UPSC PYQ

Match List-I with List-II and select the correct answer using the code given below the Lists: (2008)
List-I (Board) List-II (Headquarters)

List-I (Board)	List-II (Headquarters)
A. Coffee Board	1. Bengaluru
B. Rubber Board	2. Guntur
C. Tea Board	3. Kottayam
D. Tobacco Board	4. Kolkata

Code: A B C D
  (a) 2 4 3 1
  (b) 1 3 4 2
  (c) 2 3 4 1
  (d) 1 4 3 2

Quote of The Day

DO WHAT IS RIGHT, NOT WHAT IS EASY.

APTI PLUS
Academy for Civil Services Pvt. Ltd.
CREATING CIVIL SERVANTS FOR THE NATION
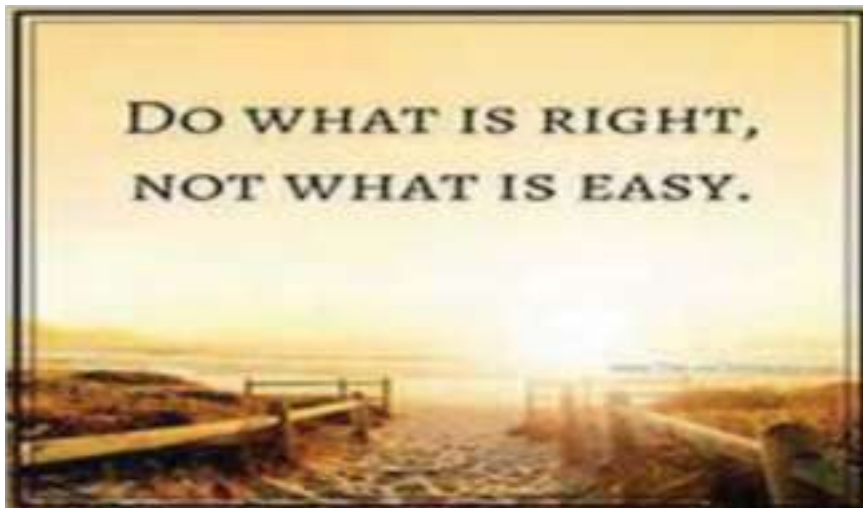
MARCH
2024

MARCH 2024

Supreme Court of India invoked Article 142 of the Constitution to overturn the Chandigarh mayoral election results

Why in the News?
- Recently, the **Supreme Court of India** invoked **Article 142 of the Constitution** to overturn the Chandigarh mayoral election results.
- **The presiding officer** had announced the winner by invalidating eight votes cast in favour of his opponent.
- **Reason:** To **ensure justice and uphold the sanctity of the electoral process** in the Chandigarh mayoral election.

What is Article 142 of the Indian constitution?
- Article 142 empowers the **Supreme Court to pass any decree or order** necessary for doing **complete justice** in any case or matter pending before it.
- These decrees or orders are **enforceable across India's territory.**
- Article 142 is supported by several other provisions, including **Article 32 (which ensures the right to constitutional remedies), Article 141 (mandates that all courts within India must abide by the Supreme Court's decisions)**, and **Article 136 (which allows for the Special Leave Petition).**
- This collective framework is known by the term **"judicial activism".** Through this Supreme Court can override **parliamentary** legislation to deliver **"complete justice".**
- This **reinforces the Court's role as a guardian of the constitution**.
- **Previous Judgments where Article 142 was invoked:** *Union Carbide Corporation vs Union of India (1991):* SC Ordered UCC to pay USD 470 million in **compensation for the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy.**

Criticism:
- **Risk of encroaching upon the separation of powers, inviting criticism of judicial activism.**
- **May lead to judicial overreach.**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q. With reference to the Constitution of India, prohibitions or limitations or provisions contained in ordinary laws cannot act as prohibitions or limitations on the constitutional powers under Article 142. It could mean which one of the following? (2019)

(a) The decisions taken by the Election Commission of India while discharging its duties cannot be challenged in any court of law.

(b) The Supreme Court of India is not constrained in the exercise of its powers by laws made by the Parliament.

(c) In the event of grave financial crisis in the country, the President of India can declare Financial Emergency without the counsel from the Cabinet.

(d) State Legislatures cannot make laws on certain matters without the concurrence of Union Legislature.

Global Pulses Conference

Why in News?

- Recently **Global Pulses Conference**, an **annual gathering of pulses producers, processors, and traders,** was jointly organised by the **National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED)** and the **Global Pulse Confederation.**

Global Pulse Confederation

- **Confederation with 24 national associations** and **over 500 private sector members.**
- It is based in **Dubai** and licensed by the **Dubai Multi Commodity Centre (DMCC).**
- Conference is important because India is aiming to **achieve self-sufficiency in-pulses by 2027**.

Status of Pulse Production in India

- India is the largest producer (25% of global production), consumer (27% of world consumption) and importer (14%) of pulses in the world.
- Pulses account for around 20% of the area under food grains and contribute around 7-10% of the total foodgrains production in the country.
- Top Pulses Producing States: Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

Main Varieties

- **Rabi Pulses (contribute over 60%):** Gram (chickpea), Chana (Bengal gram), Masoor (lentil), Arhar (pigeon pea).
- **Kharif Pulses: Moong (green gram), Urad (black gram), Tur (arhar dal).**

Significance of pulses

- **Nutritional Powerhouses:** Pulses are **rich in protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals,**providing essential nutrients for human diets.
- **Soil Enrichment:** They **fix nitrogen in the soil**, improving fertility and reducing the need for synthetic fertilisers due to their **leguminous nature.**
- **Climate Smart Crop:** Pulses are **drought-tolerant (water-efficient) crops and have a-lower carbon footprint** compared to many other crops, contributing to sustainability.
- **Crop Health and Rotation:** Including pulses in crop rotations enhances **soil structure**, reduces **disease cycles, and suppresses weeds**, promoting healthier agricultural systems.

Government Initiatives

- **National Food Security Mission (NFSM)-Pulses**
- **Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) Scheme**
- **Price Stabilization Fund**
- **Dedicated Portal for Tur Dal Procurement:**Through which farmers can register and sell their produce to NAFED and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF) at a minimum support price or market price.

What is NAFED?

- **National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. was established on 2nd October 1958.**

- It is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.
- It is an apex organisation of marketing cooperatives for agricultural produce in India.
- It is currently one of the largest procurers of agricultural products like onions, pulses, etc

Rani Chennamma's rebellion

Context:
- **Recently,** several social groups across the country organized **a national campaign Naanoo Rani Chennamma (I am Rani Chennamma too) to commemorate 200 years of Rani Chennamma's rebellion against the British East India Company.**

About Rani Chennamma
- **Chennamma was born in Kakati,** a small village in today's Belagavi district of Karnataka.
- She became queen of Kitturu (now in Karnataka) when **she married Raja Mallasarja of the Desai family.**
- **After Mallasarja's** death in 1816, his eldest son, **Shivalingarudra Sarja, ascended the throne.**
- **Before his death in 1824, Shivalingarudra adopted** a child, Shivalingappa, as the successor.
- However, the British East India Company refused to recognis**e Shivalingappa as the successor of the kingdom under the 'doctrine of lapse'.**

Key facts about the Kittur Rebellion
- **John Thackery, the British official at Dharwad, l**aunched an attack on Kittur in October 1824.
- **In this battle British forces lo**st heavily and the Collector and political agent, St. John Thackeray was killed by **the Kitturu forces.**
- Two British officers, Sir Walter Elliot and Mr. Stevenson, were also taken as hostages.
- However, the British army again attacked the Kittur Fort and captured it.
- Rani Chennamma and her family were imprisoned and jailed, where she died in 1829.

What was the doctrine of Lapse?
- **Under the doctrine of Lapse,** any princely state without a natural heir would collapse and would be annexed by the Company.
- **The princely state of Kitturu** was taken over by the **British East India Company in 1824 by imposing the 'doctrine of lapse', even before it was officially articulated by Lord Dalhousie,** Governor General for the British East India Company, between 1848 and 1856.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ
Q. Defying the barriers of age, gender and religion, the Indian women became the torch bearer during the struggle for freedom in India. Discuss. **(2013)**

Quote of the day

SUCCESS IS NOT FINAL;
FAILURE IS NOT FATAL:
IT IS THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE
THAT COUNTS.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL
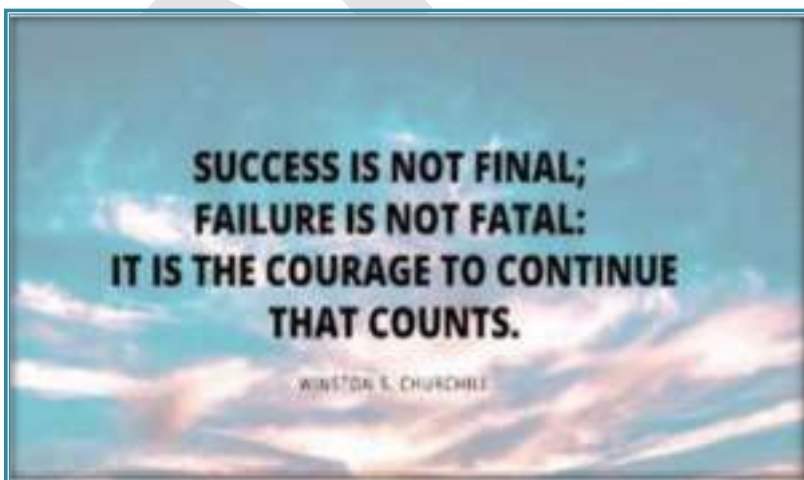
Regional benches of the Supreme Court
Context
- **Law** Ministry has endorsed the **proposal to establish regional benches of the Supreme Court throughout India**.
- Previously, the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice** had proposed regional benches for the Supreme Court nationwide.

What are the Regional Benches of the Supreme Court?
- Regional Benches of the Supreme Court are **proposed branches of the apex court** established in various parts of the country to **decentralize judicial authority and increase accessibility to justice.**

The need for regional benches of the Supreme Court arises from:
- **Backlog in the judicial system:** There is a significant backlog of cases, with over 80,000 cases awaiting resolution before the 34 judges of the Supreme Court.
- **The strain on existing judicial infrastructure:** The backlog highlights the strain on the existing judicial infrastructure
- **Efficiency and streamlining:** A more efficient and streamlined legal process is required to address the backlog and ensure timely resolution of cases.
- **Distribution of workload:** Regional benches can help distribute the workload more evenly across the country, reducing the burden on the main Supreme Court in Delhi.
- **Accessibility to justice:** Regional benches can improve accessibility to justice for litigants from different parts of the country, especially those who face challenges in travelling to Delhi for legal proceedings.
- **Reduction of travel and expenses:** Litigants and legal professionals would benefit from reduced travel and associated expenses by having access to justice closer to their location.
- **Enhanced Focus on Constitutional Matters:** With the main bench in New Delhi exclusively addressing constitutional issues, regional benches could specialize in handling appellate cases, allowing for more informed decisions.

Argument Against Regional Benches of SC
- **Regional benches could** lead to the disintegration of the institution.
- **Potential for regional biases or political influence** to impact judicial decisions at regional benches.
- **Bench establishment** would require significant financial resources and investment in infrastructure.
- **Regional benches may overshadow or weaken** the central authority of the Supreme Court.

Viewpoints from legal experts on regional benches:

Legal Position	Details
Article 130	Article 130 states that the Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places as the Chief Justice of India (CJI) may, with the approval of the President, appoint from time to time.
Law Commission Report	The 229th Law Commission Report (2009) recommended the establishment of four regional benches in Delhi, Chennai or Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai to hear non-constitutional issues, aiming to enhance accessibility to justice.
Bar Councils	In July 2021, Bar Councils in southern India submitted a representation to the Chief Justice of India, advocating for the establishment of a Supreme Court bench in the region to improve access to justice for people residing in the south.
Chief Justices of India	Historically, no Chief Justice of India (CJI) has supported convening the Supreme Court outside of Delhi, expressing concerns that regional benches could potentially undermine the prestige of the apex court.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

With reference to the Indian judiciary, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2021)

1. Any retired judge of the Supreme Court of India can be called back to sit and act as a Supreme Court judge by the Chief Justice of India with the prior permission of the President of India.
    2. A High Court in India has the power to review its own judgement as the Supreme Court does.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither I nor 2

Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC) draft report
Why in News?

* **The Maharashtra Assembly** recently passed the **Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Bill 2024,** setting aside **10% reservation for the Maratha community** in jobs and education under socially and educationally backward categories.

Bill provisions:

* The Bill specifies the **Maratha community as a Socially and Educationally Backward Class** under **Article 342A (3)** of the Indian Constitution. It provides reservation for this class under **Articles 15(4)**, 15(5), and 16(4) of the Constitution.
* The Bill ensures that the principle of **creamy layer is applicable,** restricting reservation to those **Marathas who are not in the creamy layer category.**
* **The Bill highlights "exceptional circumstances and extraordinary situations"** justifying reservations to the Maratha community above the 50% ceiling set by the **Supreme Court (Indira Sawhney judgement(1992).**
* With the addition of 10% reservation for the **Marathas, the total reservation in the state will now reach 62%.**

Article 342A (3), Articles 15(4), 15(5), and 16(4)

* **Article 342A (3**) states that every state or union territory can prepare and maintain a **list of socially and educationally backward classes (SEBCs).** These lists can be different from the Central List.
* **Article 15(4)** empowers the state to make special provisions for the **advancement of any SEBCs of citizens** or the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.
* **Article 15(5)** enables the state to make provision for the **reservation of seats in admission to educational institutions** for the backward classes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, **except for minority educational institutions.**
* **Article 16(4)** authorizes the state to make provision for the reservation of **appointments or posts** in favour of any backward class of citizens.

Badami Chalukya temples
Badami Chalukya temples

* **Context:** Two **Badami Chalukya temples**, estimated to be 1**,300-1,500 years old**, along with a 1,200-year-old label inscription, were recently **discovered in Mudimanikyam village on the banks of the Krishna River.**
* The Badami Chalukyas, established by **Pulakesi I in 550 AD, ruled from Badami (Vatapi) in Karnataka**.
* They were known for their **unique Vesara style of architecture**, a blend of **South Indian and North Indian styles.**

Chalukyan architecture

* **Temples built during their** time period do not have a covered ambulatory path
* **The Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal built in imitation of Kailashnath temple** is the jewel of Chalukyan architecture
* **The Rameshwaram temple at Ellora** built in 7th century was also built during the Chalukyan time period
* **Lad Khan temple and Durga temple at Aihole** are other noteworthy monuments built during this time period.

Indian Gharial

Context:
- The Indian Gharial, a **critically endangered crocodile species**, has been sighted in the **Greater Kaziranga landscape for the third consecutive year**.
- Kaziranga's abundance of **freshwater fish species makes it one of the best habitats for gharials.**

Gharial:
- **Sometimes called gavials,** are a type of Asian crocodilian distinguished by their long, thin snouts.
- The population of Gharials is a good indicator of clean river water.
- Known **to be a relatively harmless, fish-eating species.**

Habitat:
- Mostly found in **fresh waters of the himalayan rivers.**
- **Primary Habitat: The Chambal river**
- **Other himalayan rivers like Ghagra, Gandak river, Girwa river, Ramganga river and the Sone river are secondary habitats.**

Protection Status:
- **IUCN List of Threatened Species: Critically Endangered**
- **CITES: Appendix I**
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I**

Mugger or Marsh Crocodile:
- **Mainly restricted to the Indian subcontinent where it may be found in a number of freshwater habitat types and also in coastal saltwater lagoons and estuaries.**
- **It is already extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar.**

Protection Status:
- **IUCN List of Threatened Species: Vulnerable**
- **CITES: Appendix I**
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I**

Estuarine or Saltwater Crocodile:
- **Considered as the Earth's largest living crocodile species, infamous globally as a known maneater.**
- **Habitat: Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park, the Sundarbans in West Bengal and the Andamans and Nicobar Islands.**

Protection Status:
- **IUCN List of Threatened Species: Least Concern**
- **CITES : Appendix I (except the populations of Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, which are included in Appendix II).**
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 : Schedule I**

Quote Of The Day

Be the change
that you wish to
see in the world.

— MAHATMA GHANDI

Ecocide
Context
- **Belgium** has made history by becoming the **first country in the European Continent** to recognise **'ecocide' as a national as well as an international crime.**
- The law aims **to punish corporations**, aiming to prevent and punish severe environmental degradation such as **extensive oil spills.**

What is Ecocide?
- Ecocide is considered a form of **environmental crime** and is often associated with significant **negative impacts on biodiversity, ecosystems, and human well-being.**
- The definition was provided by the **Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide,** formed by the **Stop Ecocide Foundation.**
- Recognizing ecocide as a crime aims to hold individuals and corporations accountable for their actions and to prevent further environmental degradation.
- **The countries with domestic ecocide laws are France (2021),** Ukraine (2001), Kazakhstan (1997), Kyrgyzstan (1997), Russia (1996), Tajikistan (1998), Uzbekistan (1994), Vietnam (1990) etc. India is yet to make it an offence.

Belgium
- Belgium **is a federal and constitutional monarchy** divided into two main linguistic and cultural regions:
  1. **Flemish (Dutch)-speaking** Flanders and
  2. **French-speaking** Wallonia.

- Belgium is called the **'Cockpit of Europe'** because it is where the **largest number of European battles have taken place in history.**
- Its capital, Brussels, is also the HQ of the European Union (EU).

UPSC PYQ

Q. Consider the following statements: (2019)

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 empowers the Government of India to:

1. State the requirement of public participation in the process of environmental protection, and the procedure and manner in which it is sought
2. Lay down the standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

RS passes Bill to curb exam malpractices, paper leaks
Context

- The government has extended the ban on **'Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir'** as an 'Unlawful Association' for another five years under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) 1967.**
- This extension comes **after the outfit was initially declared unlawful on February 28, 2019**.
- Jamaat**-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir** has been involved in **fostering terrorism and anti-India propaganda, l**eading to **secessionist sentiments in Jammu and Kashmir.**

What is an 'Unlawful Association'?

- An **'Unlawful Association'** refers to an organization or group that has been deemed illegal or prohibited by the government due to its involvement in activities that **pose a threat to national security, sovereignty, or integrity.**

What is UAPA?

- **The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) is an anti-terrorism law enacted in India (in 1967)** with the aim of preventing unlawful activities and combating terrorism.
- **The Act assigns absolute power to the central government,** by way of which if the Centre deems an activity as unlawful then it may, by way of an Official Gazette, declare it so.

Key features of UAPA:

- Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.
- **It** will be applicable to the offenders in the same manner, even if the crime is committed in a foreign land, outside India.
- It has the death penalty and life imprisonment as the highest punishments.
- Under the UAPA, the investigating agency can file a charge sheet in maximum of 180 days after the arrests and the duration can be extended further after intimating the court.
- As per amendments of 2019: The Act empowers the Director General of National Investigation Agency (NIA) to grant approval of seizure or attachment of property after the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the NIA who are of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism.
- It also included the provision of designating an individual as a terrorist.

Criticisms

- **Violative to Fundamental Rights:** It criminalizes dissent and protest, and can be used to target activists, journalists, students, and minorities who raise their voice against the government.
- Lacks Safeguard Mechanism: The law lacks adequate safeguards and accountability mechanisms to prevent misuse and abuse of power by the authorities.
  - It gives the central government the sole discretion to designate individuals as terrorists, without any judicial review or opportunity for appeal.
  - It also shifts the burden of proof to the accused, making it difficult to obtain bail or fair trial.
- **Against the Federal Structure: T**he law is against the federal structure of the country, as it encroaches upon the powers of the state governments to maintain law and order and investigate crimes.
- **Low Conviction Rate:** According to the Union Home Ministry, only 2.2% of the cases registered under the UAPA between 2016 and 2019 ended in conviction by courts.
- This shows that the law is used to harass and intimidate innocent people, rather than to curb terrorism.

UPSC PYQ

Q. Indian government has recently strengthed the anti-terrorism laws by amending the Unlawful Activities(Prevention) Act, (UAPA), 1967 and the NIA Act. Analyze the changes in the context of prevailing security environment while discussing scope and reasons for opposing the UAPA by human rights organizations. (2019)

Vikramaditya Vedic Clock
Context

- **The world's first Vedic clock, the 'Vikramaditya Vedic Clock,' based on Indian 'panchang' calculations, was inaugurated at Jantar Mantar in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.**

## About Vikramaditya Vedic Clock

- It is the world's first 'Vedic Clock', designed to display time according to the ancient Indian traditional Panchang (time calculation system).
- Ancient Panchang calculated time based on positions of Sun, Moon, and other planets for every day of the year on a fixed place (longitude, latitude) and time of day (in 24-hour format IST).
- It has been positioned on an 85-foot tower within Jantar Mantar in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh.
- It also provides information on planetary positions, Muhurat, astrological calculations, and predictions.
- In addition to this, it also indicates Indian Standard Time (IST) and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).
- The clock will calculate time from one sunrise to another.
- The reading will start from 0:00 with the total time of 30 hours (an hour of 48 minutes).

Why Ujjain?

- Ujjain's rich heritage in timekeeping dates back centuries, with the city playing a pivotal role in determining India's time zones and time difference.
- According to Indian astronomers, the Tropic of Cancer is supposed to pass through Ujjain.
- It is also the 0 degree meridian of longitude of the ancient Hindu geographers.
- From about the 4th century B.C. Ujjain enjoyed the reputation of being India's Greenwich.
- Before 82.5E longitude was adopted for IST, Ujjain (75.78E) was considered as Bharat's time meridian.
- The Vikrami Panchang and Vikram Samvat calendars are also released from Ujjain.

<div>

What is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) ?

- **Greenwich Mean Time or GMT is the mean (average) solar time at the Greenwich Meridian or Prime Meridian, 0 degrees longitude.**
- **The time displayed by the Shepherd Gate Clock at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London, is always GMT.**
- **When the sun is at its highest point exactly above the Prime Meridian at the Royal Observatory, it is 12:00 noon at Greenwich.**

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Quote Of The Day

"An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind."

-Mahatma Gandhi
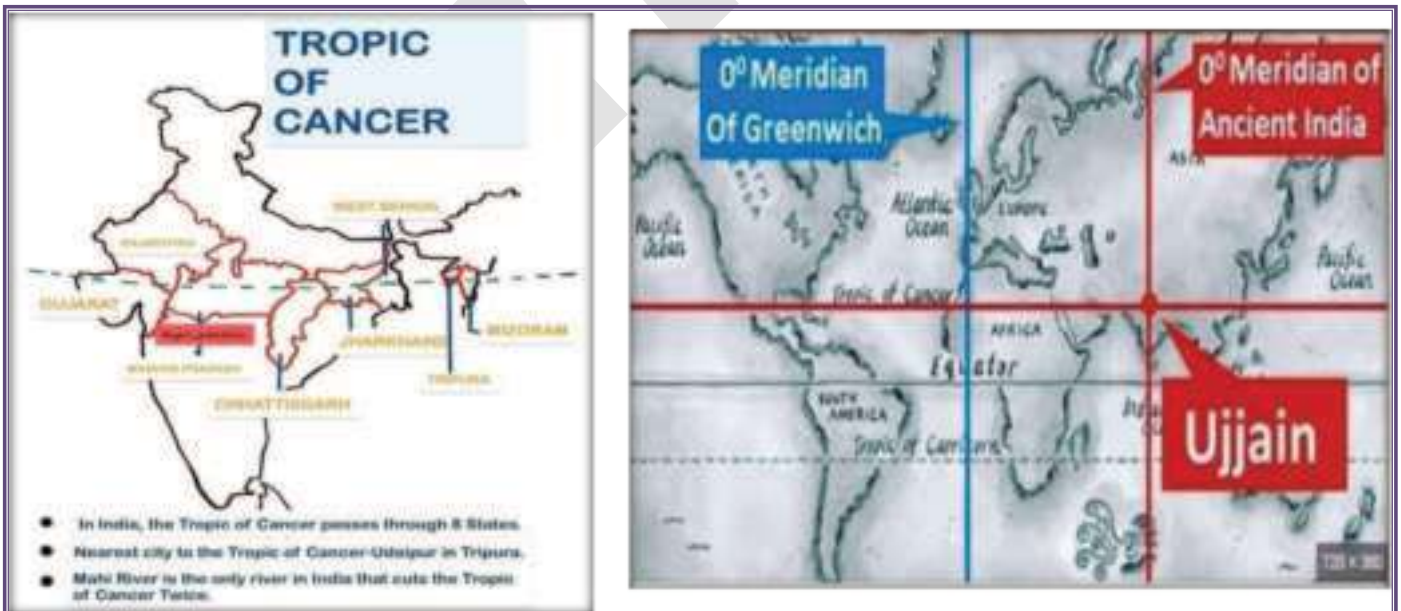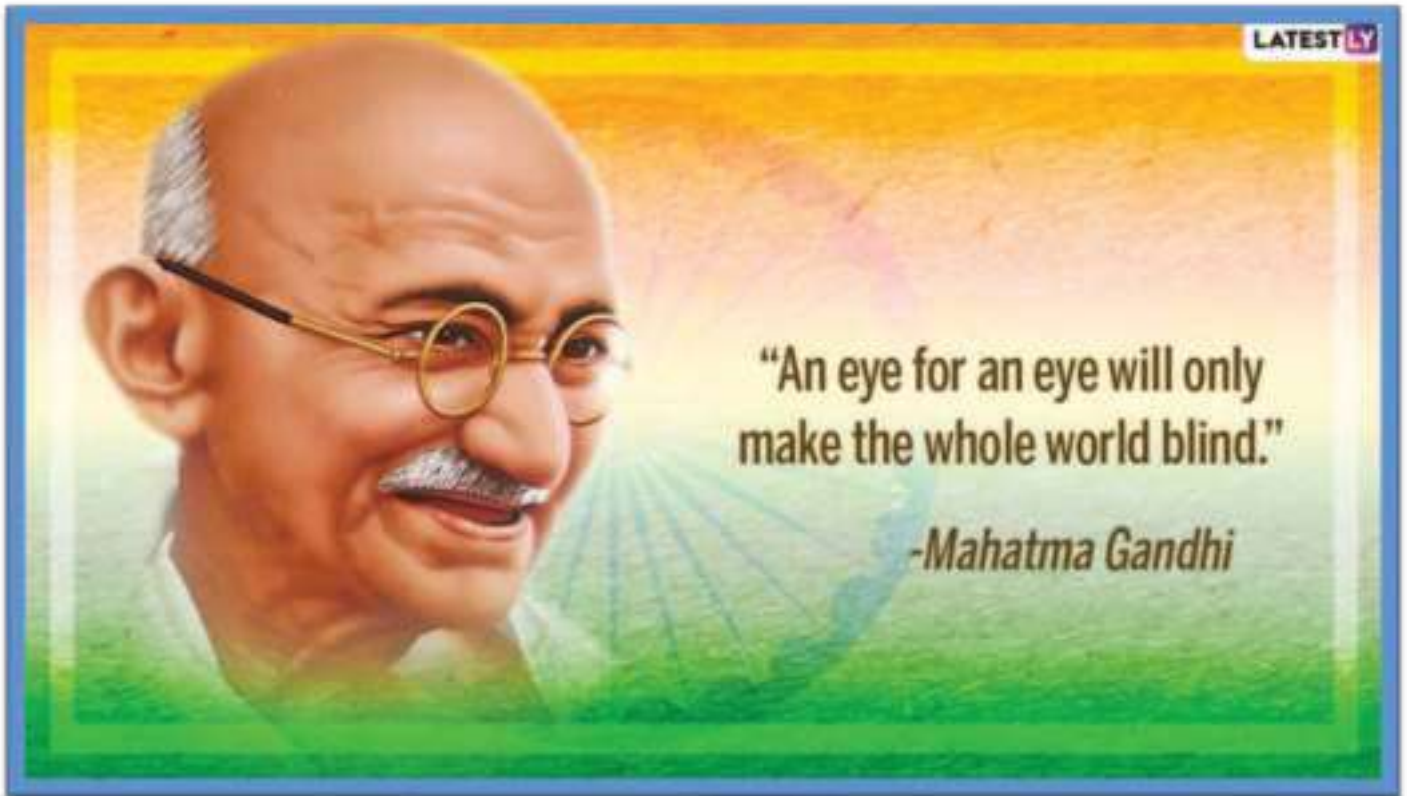
Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam
Context
- The **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam introduces** changes in electronic evidence provisions, addressing definitions and admissibility concerns.

What is Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam?
- It is **a new criminal law in India that replaces the Indian Evidence Act.**
- It introduces changes **in provisions relating to electronic evidence, including definitions and admissibility procedures.**
- It is part of the **three new criminal laws, the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (replacing IPC), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (replacing CrPC), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (replacing IEA),** will be enforced from **July 1, 2024**.
- The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam **retains much of the Indian Evidence Act's content**, with minor changes in secondary evidence scope and electronic evidence provisions.

Major provisions of BSA 2023
Provisions retained from Indian Evidence Acts
- **Admissible Evidence: Following things would be considered an admissible evidence:**
  o **A Proven Fact:** A fact is proven when the Court believes it to exist based on presented evidence.
  o **Police Confessions:** Confessions made to police officers or in police custody.

Key Changes Incorporated in BSA, 2023
- **Documentary evidence includes electronic records. Oral evidence can be given electronically.**
- **The precise definition of "document" includes electronic records.**
- **Clarity on primary (electronic) evidence, allowing multiple stored recordings to be primary evidence.**
- **Synchronization with IT Act, 2000 terms like 'semiconductor memory' and 'any communication device' for better visibility.**

Changes proposed in criminal laws

Union home minister Amit Shah has introduced three key bills in the Lok Sabha that, if approved, will overhaul India's criminal justice system. A look at key aspects of the bills

THE BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA (BNS) BILL, 2023
Proposed to replace Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860

The IPC, which was framed by the British, is the official criminal code of India that lists various crimes and its punishments

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- Sedition deleted, but another provision **penalising secessionism**, separatism, rebellion and acts against sovereignty, unity and integrity of India brought in
- Provision of **death penalty** for gang rape of minors and for mob lynching
- **Community service introduced** as one of the punishments for the first time

THE BHARATIYA NAGARIK SURAKSHA SANHITA, 2023
Proposed to replace Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), 1973

The CrPC lays down the procedure for investigation, arrest, court hearing, bail and punishment in criminal cases

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- **Time-bound investigation**, trial and judgment within 30 days of the completion of arguments
- **Video-recording** of the statement of sexual assault victims to be made mandatory
- New provision for **attachment of property and proceeds** of crime

THE BHARATIYA SAKSHYA BILL, 2023
Proposed to replace the Indian Evidence Act, 1872

The IEA applies to all judicial proceedings in the country and defines the particulars of evidence produced and admissible in courts

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- **Documents to also include** electronic or digital records, e-mails, server logs, computers, smart phones, laptops, SMS, websites, locational evidence, mails, messages on devices
- **Digitisation of all records** including case diary, FIR, charge sheet and judgement
- Electronic or digital record shall have the same legal effect, validity and enforceability as paper records

Three new criminal laws
UPSC PYQ
Q) **Comprehensive reforms are needed in the criminal justice system to ensure effective enforcement of the law, uphold accountability, have a well-trained workforce and speedy disposal of the cases. Comment. (250 words)**

Gaganyaan mission
Context:
- The Prime Minister announced the **names of the four astronauts undergoing training for India's Gaganyaan mission** during his visit to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre.
- The astronauts are Group Captain **Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair**, Group Captain **Ajit Krishnan**, Group Captain **Angad Pratap**, and Wing Commander **Subhanshu Shukla.**

The PM also inaugurated three major space infrastructure projects of ISRO during his visit
PSLV Integration Facility (PIF)
- Boosts frequency of **Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) launches** from 6 to 15 per year.
- Caters to launches of S**mall Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV)** and other small launch vehicles designed by private space companies.
- PSLV is a **four-stage launch vehicle used for** launching satellites into Geosynchronous and Geostationary orbits.

- **SSLV is a 3-stage Launch Vehicle** used for launching satellites in low earth orbit at low cost.

Semi-cryogenics Integrated Engine and Stage Test facility

- To enable the development **of semi-cryogenic engines and stages**, which will increase the payload capability of present launch vehicles.
- **Equipped with liquid Oxygen and kerosene supply systems** to test engines up to 200 tons of thrust.

Trisonic Wind Tunnel at VSSC

- **Used** for **aerodynamic testing for characterization of rockets** .

Gangayan Mission

- The mission aims to demonstrate ISRO's human spaceflight capability by launching a human crew to an orbit of 400 km and safely bringing them back to Earth.
- Launch Vehicle: The GSLV Mk III, also known as LVM-3.
- The astronauts selected for the Gaganyaan mission underwent training in Russia.
- The spacecraft comprises the Orbital Module (OM), Service Module (SM), and Crew Module (CM). The OM orbits the Earth. The SM supports the CM while in orbit, which provides a human-friendly environment in space.
- Vyomitra, a humanoid robot, will perform microgravity experiments and monitor module parameters. It will accompany Indian astronauts in space missions and will also be a part of uncrewed experimental Gaganyaan missions prior to the crewed spaceflight missions.

Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR)
Context

- The World Economic Forum's Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) was inaugurated during BioAsia 2024 in Hyderabad.

Aim

- It aims to create 10,000 job opportunities in health tech, support emerging companies, and generate novel ideas.
- The focus areas include real-world evidence, healthcare analytics, and informatics.
- Initiatives like a clinical registry, innovation sandbox, and data analytics lab are underway.
- The centre aims to develop industry-ready talent through skilling programs.

What is C4IR?

- C4IR stands for the Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Initiative by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to establish centres that focus on harnessing the potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies and driving collaboration between governments, businesses, and academia to address global challenges and opportunities.

About 4IR:

- The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), also known as the Digital Revolution, is characterized by the integration of technologies that blend the physical, digital, and biological realms.
- Coined by Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the WEF, 4IR includes technologies such as IoT, robotics, VR, AI, quantum computing, and 3D printing.
- It brings about advancements in technology, boosts productivity and efficiency, contributes to economic growth, and facilitates good governance.

About WEF:

- **The World Economic Forum is an international non-governmental organization for public–private sector collaboration based in Geneva, Switzerland.**
- **It was founded on 24 January 1971 by German engineer Klaus Schwab.**

New GI Tags
Why in News?

- The traditional **crochet lace craft of Narasapur in Andhra Pradesh** received a **Geographical Indications (GI) tag** amidst competition from machine-made lace from China.
- The craft is geographically limited to **19 mandals in West Godavari and Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Konaseema districts** in the Godavari
- Similarly, **Majuli masks and manuscript painting in Assam** gain GI recognition.
- These GI tags aim to rejuvenate and promote traditional crafts, ensuring their continued legacy and heritage preservation.

Gegraphical Indication (GI) Tag:

- The **Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** registeres the craft in the **Geographical Indications Registry (GIR),** certifying that these products are confined to these region.

Majuli Masks

- The handmade masks are traditionally used to **depict characters in bhaonas (a traditional form of entertainment, with religious messages), or theatrical performances** with devotional messages under the **neo-Vaishnavite tradition,** introduced by the 15th-16th century reformer saint **Srimanta Sankardeva.**
- The masks **can depict gods, goddesses, demons, animals and birds like Ravana, Garuda, Narasimha, Hanuman, Varaha**.
- People are nowadays modernizing Majuli mask-making by moving beyond the confines of **sattras** (**Monastery)** to embrace contemporary contexts.
- Sattras were founded by **Srimanta Sankardev** and his disciples to serve as centres of **religious, social, and cultural reform.**

Majuli Manuscript Painting:

- The manuscript paintings of Majuli are a form of religious art closely linked to the island's Vaishnavite culture, centred around worship.
- This art form's origin is attributed to Srimanta Sankardev, depicting the charcters of the Bhagwat Purana in Assamese. It continues to be practised in every sattra in Majuli.
- Majuli Manuscript Painting are inspired by the Pala school of Painting art.
- Pala art refers to the style of Buddhist art that developed in the Pala Empire of eastern India (8th-12th centuries.

UPSC PYQ

Q. Which of the following has/have been accorded 'Geographical Indication' status? (2015)
1.Banaras Brocades and Sarees
2.Rajasthani Daal-Bati-Churma
3.Tirupathi Laddu

Select the correct answer using the code given below:
 (a) 1 only
 (b) 2 and 3 only
 (c) 1 and 3 only
 (d) 1, 2 and 3

Quote Of The Day

Try and fail, but never fail to try!

Context:
- In **Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh & Others (2014),** the Supreme Court ruled that information disclosing a **cognizable offence** must be recorded as a **First Information Report (FIR)** in a book maintained by the officer in charge of the police station, **not in the General Diary.**
- The Court analyzed the **interplay between Section 154 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and Section 44 of the Police Act, 1861**, concluding that FIR registration takes precedence.
- Section 154 – cognizable cases
- **Section 44 of the Police Act, 1861-** general diary.

General Diary (GD)
- General Diary, also called **Station Diary or Daily Diary in some States**, is maintained under the provisions of **Section 44 of the Police Act, 1861.**
- **Section 44 of the Police Act, 1861** states that it shall be the duty of every officer in charge of a police station to keep a general diary to record therein **all complaints and charges preferred, the names of all persons arrested, the names of the complainants, the offences charged against them, etc.**
- It is a record of all important transactions/events taking place in **a police station, including the departure and arrival of police staff, the handing over or taking over of charges, arrest of a person, details of law-and-order duties, the visit of senior officers, etc.**
- Additionally, the GD summarizes each **First Information Report (FIR)** registered at the police station**.**
- Simultaneously**, the GD entry** reference is noted in the **FIR Book**, while the **FIR number** is mentioned in the **GD entry**.

What is a First Information Report (FIR)?
- **It** is a written document prepared by a Police officer based on information given by an aggrieved person or any other person, either **in writing or made orally**, about the commission of a **Cognizable Offence.**
- The investigation is started only after the **filing of the FIR.**

Who can lodge an FIR?
- Anyone who knows about the commission of a cognizable offence can file an FIR.
- It is not necessary that only the victim of the crime should file an FIR.
- An FIR can only be lodged in cases of cognizable offences.

General Diary (GD) vs. First Information Report (FIR)
- A copy of each FIR is sent to the **superior officers and to the concerned Judicial Magistrate.**
- A copy of GD is **not sent to the Judicial Magistrate**, though its copy is sent to a superior police officer.
- The Magistrate of the district **shall be at liberty to call for any inspection of such GD/FIR.**
- The signature of **the complainant is obtained in the FIR Book** as and when the complaint is given to the police station. There is no such requirement of **obtaining signature of the complainant in the general diary.**
- The general diary is **an internal police record**, while in the **case of F.I.R., a copy of these will be provided to the complainant.**
- **FIR, Forms the basis for criminal proceedings** and investigations. It is **admissible as evidence in court.**

Three semiconductor units
Context
- The Union Cabinet, led by the PM, approved the establishment **of three semiconductor units** as part of the **'Development of Semiconductors and Display Manufacturing Ecosystems in India' initiative**.

The approved units include:
1. **Semiconductor Fab in (Dholera) Gujarat**
2. **Semiconductor ATMP(Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging) unit in Morigaon, Assam**
3. **Semiconductor ATMP unit for specialized chips in Sanand (Gujarat)**

Aim:

• These units are **poised to generate significant employment opportunities** and **accelerate** India's capabilities in **chip fabrication and advanced packaging technologies.**

Semiconductors

• Any of a class of crystalline solids intermediate in electrical conductivity between a conductor and an insulator.

• Semiconductors are employed in the manufacture of various kinds of electronic devices, including diodes, transistors, and integrated circuits. Such devices have found wide application because of their compactness, reliability, power efficiency, and low cost.

• Uses- power devices, optical sensors, and light emitters, including solid-state lasers.

• Semiconductor fabrication, often referred to as "fab," is the process of manufacturing semiconductor devices, such as integrated circuits (ICs) and transistors
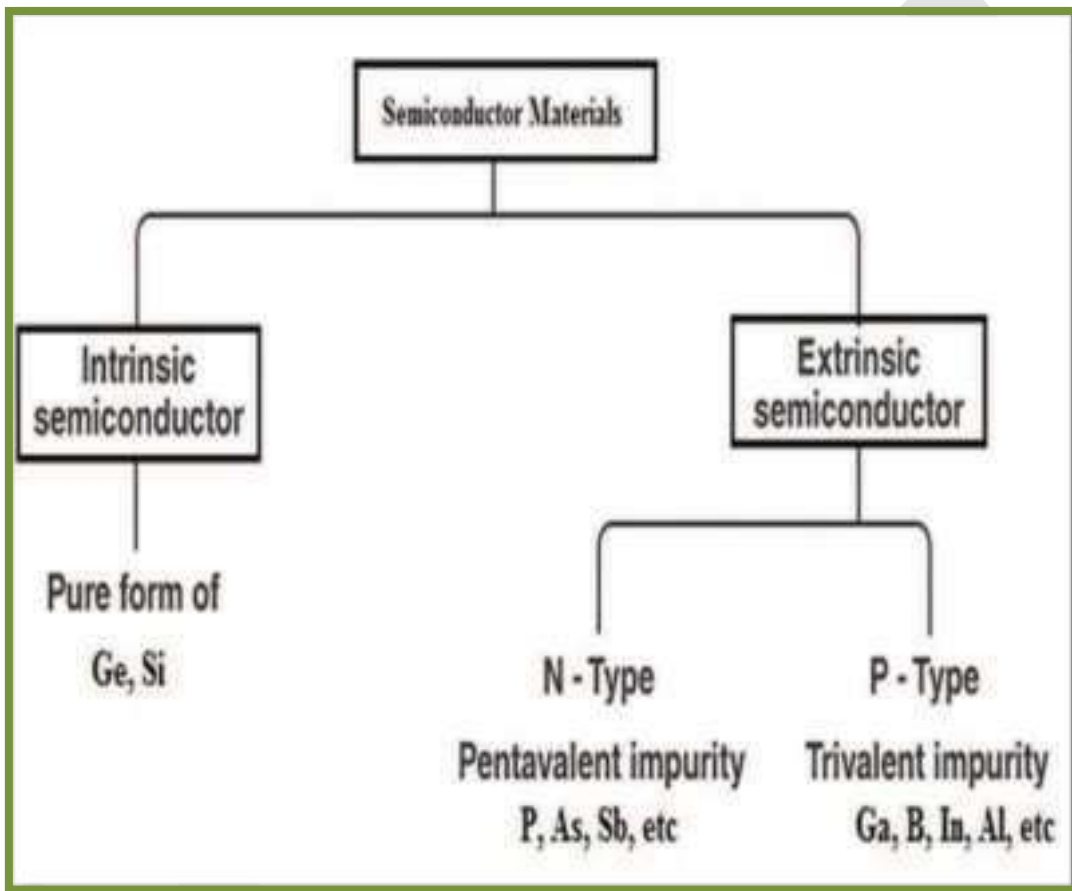
Indian Electronic Sector

• **The Indian electronics sector is tremendously growing with the demand expected to cross USD 400 billion by 2023-24.**

• **Domestic production has grown from USD 29 billion in 2014-15 to nearly USD 70 billion in 2019-20 (Compounded Annual Growth Rate of 25%).**

Government Initiatives

• Scheme for setting up of Compound Semiconductors / Silicon Photonics / Sensors Fab and Semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging (ATMP) / OSAT facilities in India has been announced.

• Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme with 3 components- Chip Design Infrastructure Support, Product Design Linked Incentive, and Deployment Linked Incentive.

• The Government of India has approved plans to set up two chip-making facilities in Greater Noida in Uttar and Prantij in Gujarat (about 50 km) from Gandhinagar under the Electronic Manufacturing Clusters (EMC) scheme.

- India Semiconductor Mission was launched in 2021 and it aims to provide financial support to companies investing in semiconductors, display manufacturing and design ecosystem.

Context

Recently, Prime Minister of India flagged off India's first indigenously built hydrogen fuel cell ferry boat in virtual mode.

The hydrogen cell-powered inland waterway vessel launched under the Harit Nauka initiative.

PM also laid down the foundation of ₹17,300-crore project, including the outer harbor at the V.O. Chidambaranar Port.

The vessel has been built at the Cochin Shipyard.

Importance

- It will make urban mobility smooth and easy through inland waterways.
- The vessel underscores the pioneering step for embracing clean energy solutions and aligning with the nation's net-zero commitments.

Note: The V.O. Chidambaranar Port is the first Green Hydrogen Hub Port of the country and the projects include a desalination plant, hydrogen production and bunkering facility.

What is the Harit Nauka initiative?

- **The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways unveiled the Harit Nauka guidelines for inland vessels in January 2024.**

Guidelines

- As per the guidelines, all states have to make efforts to use green fuels for 50% of inland waterways-based passenger fleets in the next one decade, and 100% by 2045.
- This is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as per the Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047.
- Globally, the shipping industry is increasingly transitioning to green fuels due to environmental regulations, sustainability goals, and advancements in green fuel technologies.
- Hydrogen and its derivatives are gaining attention for promising zero-emission fuels for the industry.

What is a Hydrogen Fuel Cell ?

- Hydrogen fuel cells are a clean, reliable, quiet, and efficient source of high-quality electric power.
- They use hydrogen as a fuel to drive an electrochemical process that produces electricity, with water and heat as the only by-products.
- Hydrogen is one of the most abundant elements on earth for a cleaner alternative fuel option.

Significance

- **Zero Emission Solutions:** It is one of the best Zero Emission solutions. It is completely environment friendly with no tailpipe emissions such as SO_2, CO, etc other than water.
- **Quiet Operation:** The fact that the fuel cells make little noise means that they can be used in challenging contexts, such as in hospital buildings.
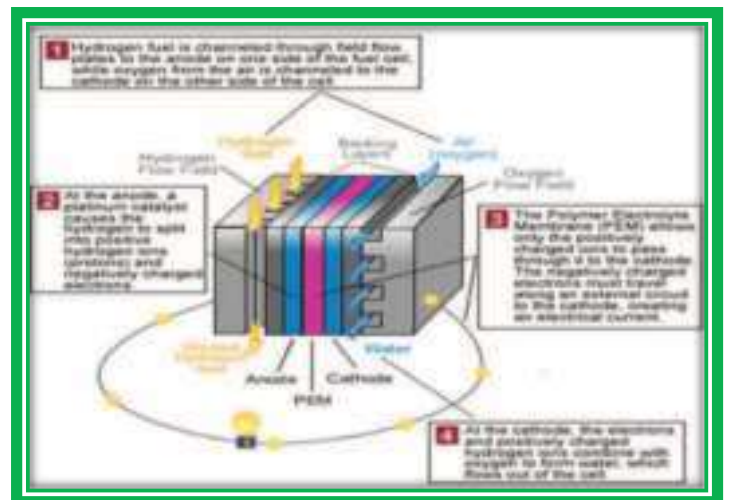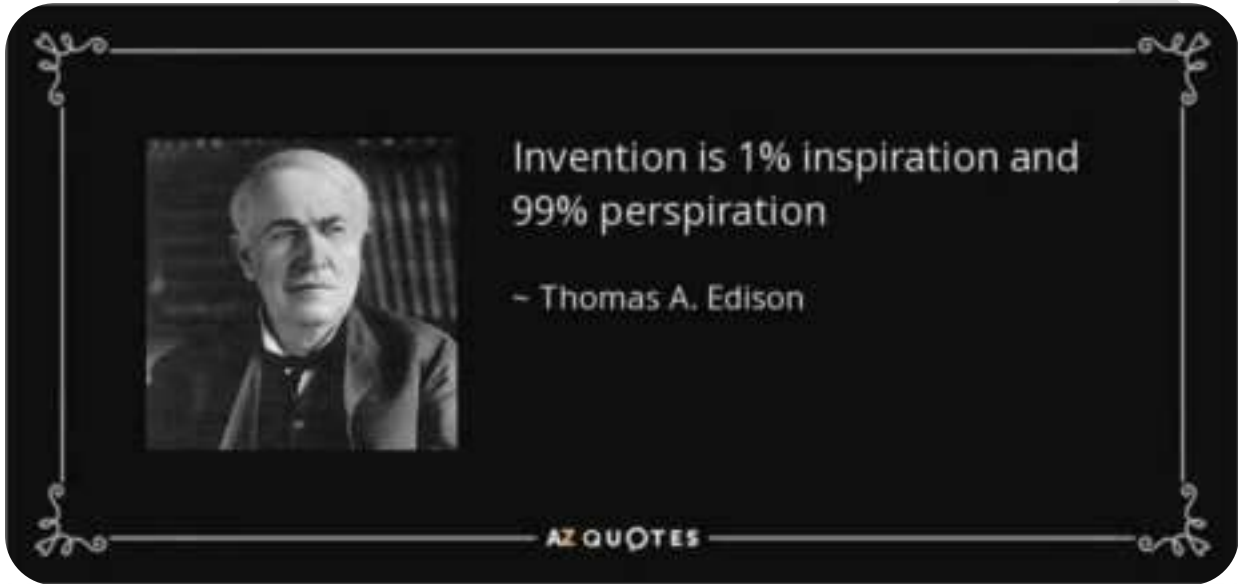
UPSC PYQ

Q. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles produce one of the following as "exhaust" (2010)

(a) NH_3

(b) CH_4

(c) H_2O

(d) H_2O_2

Quote Of The Day

Invention is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration

~ Thomas A. Edison

AZ QUOTES

India-Indonesia Relations

Why in the News?

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Bank Indonesia (BI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for establishing a framework to promote the use of local currencies (the Indian Rupee (INR) and the Indonesian Rupiah (IDR)) for cross-border transactions.
- Earlier in 2023 India and Malaysia announced that they will settle trade in INR in addition to other currencies.

Key Highlights of the MoU b/w RBI and Bank Indonesia

- The primary objective of the MoU is to facilitate bilateral transactions in INR and IDR, covering all transactions.
- To foster the development of an INR-IDR foreign exchange market.
- It is expected to promote trade between India and Indonesia, deepen financial integration, and enhance the historical, cultural, and economic relations between the two nations.

India-Indonesia Relations

- **Commercial Relations:** Second largest trading partner of India in the ASEAN region. Bilateral trade has increased from USD 4.3 billion in 2005-06 to USD 38.84 billion in 2022-23.
- **Political Relations:** Both countries were chief supporters of independence for Asian and African countries, leading to the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961.
- One of the Priority country in 'Look East Policy' in 1991.
- Both countries are members of G20, East Asia Summit and the United Nations.
- **Cultural Relations:** The stories from the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata form a source of Indonesian folk art and dramas.
- **There** are approximately 100,000 people of Indian origin in Indonesia.

Efforts for the Internationalisation of the Rupee

- **Liberalisation of Capital Markets:**
  - Full Capital Account Convertibility. The availability of rupee-denominated financial instruments, such as bonds (Masala Bond) and derivatives, have been increased to enhance the rupee's appeal

- **Promotion of Digital Payment Systems:**
  - Initiatives like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) have facilitated digital transactions in rupees.
  - Sri Lanka; Mauritius; France; UAE; Singapore; Bhutan; Nepal and Bhutan have adopted UPI .

- **Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs):**
  - India permitted authorized banks from 18 countries (Ex. Russia and Malaysia) to open Special Vostro Rupee Accounts (SVRAs) for settling payments in rupees at market-determined exchange rates.

- **Currency Swap Agreements:**
  - Signed by the RBI with several countries (Ex. Japan, Sri Lanka and SAARC members).

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Q1. Convertibility of rupee implies (2015)
 (a) being able to convert rupee notes into gold
 (b) allowing the value of rupee to be fixed by market forces
 (c) freely permitting the conversion of rupee to other currencies and vice versa
 (d) developing an international market for currencies in India

Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex
Why in the News?

- The Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court has ordered the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct a scientific survey of the Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Dhar district to clarify its original nature.
- The controversy revolves around the original status of the site as a temple.

- The petitioner cites an ASI report claiming that the original Bhojshala and Vagdevi temples were demolished to build a mosque. A survey was requested to determine the actual history of the site.

Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque Complex

- The Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex was originally a temple of goddess Sarasvati built by Parawara King Bhoja in 11th Century AD.
- The monument also retains some slabs inscribed with Sanskrit and Prakrit literary works.
- Noted as a great patron of art and literature, King Bhoja is said to have established a school, now known as Bhojashala.
- Under an agreement with the ASI, Hindus perform puja in the temple every Tuesday, and Muslims offer Namaz every Friday.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI, which falls under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for the archaeological research and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- It administers more than 3650 ancient monuments, archaeological sites, and remains of national importance.
- Its activities include carrying out surveys of antiquarian remains, exploration and excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and maintenance of protected monuments, etc.
- It was founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham- the first Director-General of ASI.
- Alexander Cunningham is also known as the "Father of Indian Archaeology".
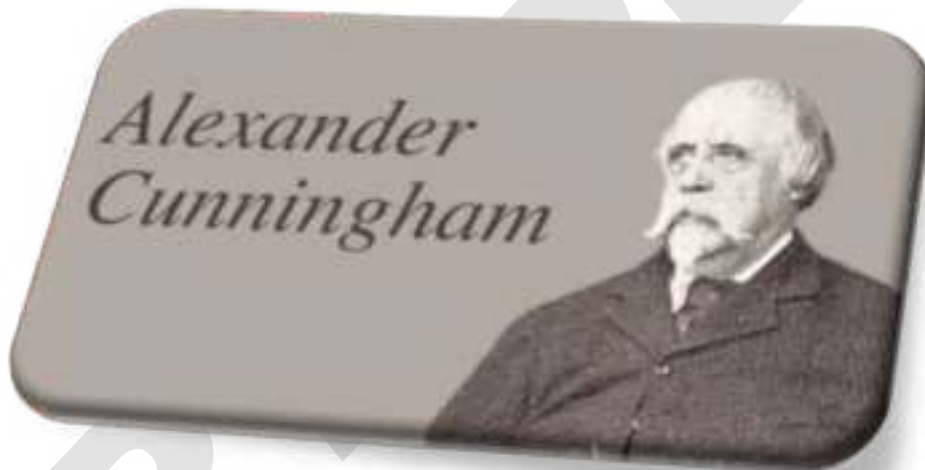
UPSC PYQ

Q. With reference to the history of India, consider the following pairs: (2020)

	Famous Place	Present State
1.	Bhilsa	Madhya Pradesh
2.	Dwarasamudra	Maharashtra
3.	Girinagar	Gujarat
4.	Sthanesvara	Uttar Pradesh

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

(a) 1 and 3 only
(b) 1 and 4 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 2 and 4 only

EC Arun Goel Quits

What is the Election Commission of India?

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering Union and State election processes in India.
- **Establishment:** 25th January 1950 (celebrated as National Voters' Day). The secretariat: New Delhi.
- Administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies in India, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.
- It is not concerned with the elections to panchayats and municipalities in the states.
- For this, the Constitution of India provides for a separate State Election Commission.

Constitutional Provisions

- Part **XV (Article 324-329):** It deals with elections and establishes a commission for these matters.
- **Article 324:** Superintendence, direction and control of elections to be vested in an Election Commission.
- **Article 325:** Prevent discrimination for inclusion in, or to claim to be included in a special, electoral roll-on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex.
- **Article 326:** Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be based on adult suffrage.
- **Article 327:** Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures.
- **Article 328:** Power of Legislature of a State to make provision with respect to elections to such Legislature.
- **Article 329:** Bar to interference by courts in electoral matters.
- **Article 243 K & Article 243 ZA** were inserted to establish a State Election Commission

Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India Case, 2023

- A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court (SC) unanimously ruled that the appointment of the **Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners** shall be made by the President on the advice of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha and Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- In case no leader of the Opposition is available, the leader of the largest opposition Party in the Lok Sabha.
- The Parliament passed the **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023**, in response to the directive of the Supreme Court in the Anoop Baranwal v Union of India case, 2023.

Structure of ECI

- Originally -only one election commissioner After the Election Commissioner Amendment Act 1989-a multi-member body.
- The Election Commission shall consist of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such number of other election commissioners, if any, as the President may from time-to-time fix.
- Presently, it consists of the CEC and two Election Commissioners (ECs).

Appointment & Tenure of Commissioners

- The President appoints CEC and Election Commissioners as per the CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

Tenure:

- Six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
- The salary and conditions of service of the CEC and ECs- equivalent to that of the Cabinet Secretary.

Removal

- They can resign anytime
- The CEC can be removed from office only through a process of removal similar to that of a SC judge by Parliament, while ECs can only be removed on the recommendation of the CEC.

UPSC PYQ

Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 3 only

Don't stop when you're tired.
Stop when you're done.

-Wesley Snipes
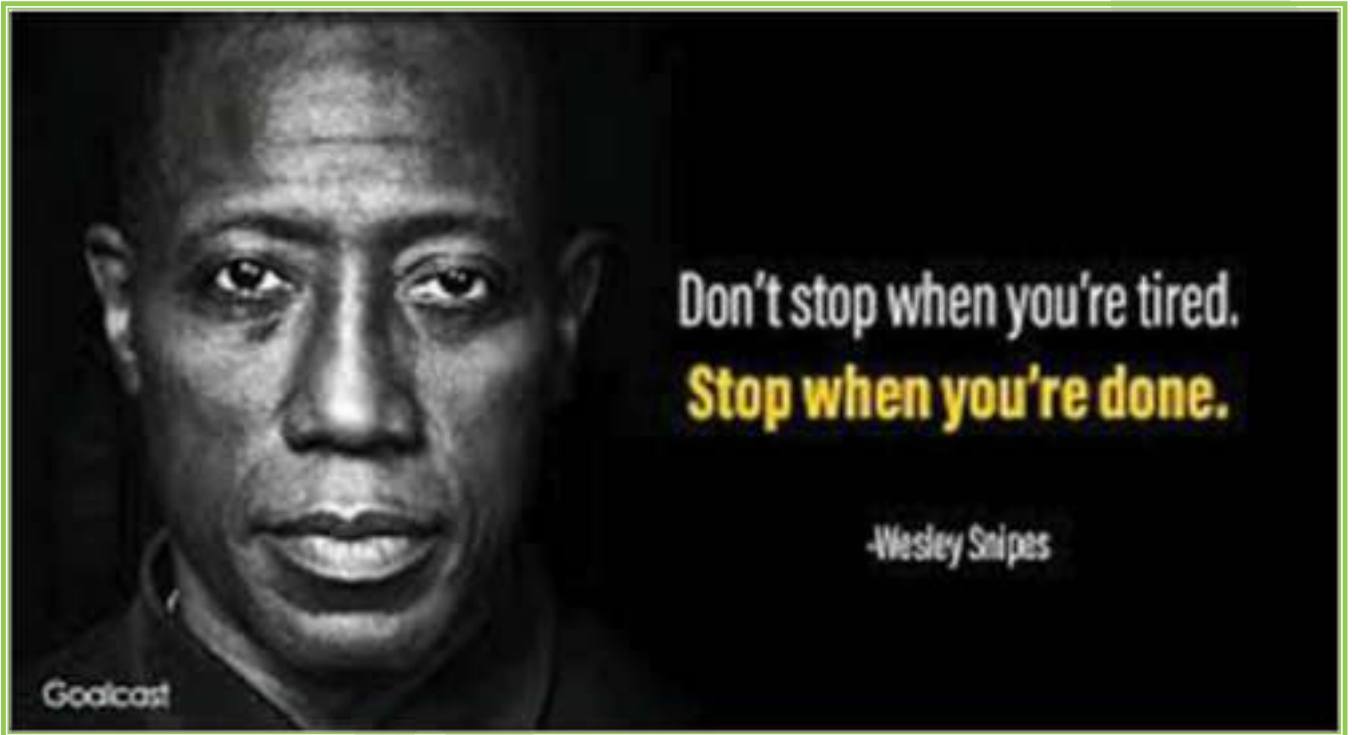
New highway toll collection system
- Recently, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways of India announced in Parliament that the government intends to roll out a new highway toll collection system based on the global navigation satellite system (GNSS) before the model code of conduct for the 2024 election becomes effective.

What is the New Proposed Highway Tolling System?
- The proposed highway tolling system utilises the GNSS, including the Indian satellite navigation system **GAGAN (GPS Aided GEO Augmented Navigation) for accurate location tracking.**
- The GNSS is a term used to refer to any satellite-based navigation system, including the US' **Global Positioning System (GPS).**
- It uses a large constellation of satellites to provide more accurate location and navigation information to users globally as compared to the GPS alone.
- Toll amounts are deducted from a digital wallet, ensuring seamless and cashless transactions.
- The new system will likely coexist with the existing FASTag-based toll collection initially.

Challenges
- Enforcement Infrastructure: Setting up a nationwide network of A**utomatic Number-Plate Recognition (ANPR)** cameras for enforcement purposes requires significant infrastructure development.
- Privacy Concerns: Data security and user privacy need to be addressed effectively.

Benefits

- ISmoother Traffic Flow:
- Faster Commutes: quicker travel times and a more efficient highway network.
- Fairer Billing: The system aims to offer users the benefit of paying tolls only for the actual distance travelled, promoting a pay-as-you-use model.

FASTag

- FASTag is a device that employs **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** for making toll payments directly while the vehicle is in motion.
- FASTag (RFID Tag) is affixed on the windscreen of the vehicle and enables a customer to make toll payments directly from the account which is linked to FASTag.
- It is operated by the **National Highway Authority of India (NHAI)** under the supervision of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

GAGAN

- GPS Aided GEO Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) is an initiative by the Indian Government for Satellite-based Navigation Services in India.
- It aims to enhance the accuracy of global navigation satellite system (GNSS) receivers through reference signals.
- The **Airports Authority of India (AAI) and the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** have collaborated to develop the GAGAN as a regional Satellite Based Augmentation System (SBAS).

UPSC PYQ

Q.1 Which one of the following countries has its own Satellite Navigation System? (2023)

(a) Australia
(b) Canada
(c) Israel
(d) Japan

National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) Way Forward Annual Report 2023

- Recently, on the 94th anniversary of the Dandi March, the Prime Minister of India laid the foundation for the Sabarmati Ashram Redevelopment Project in Ahmedabad.
- The Project is a Rs 1,200 crore initiative to restore, conserve, and rebuild the original Sabarmati Ashram founded by Mahatma Gandhi.

Historical Significance of the Sabarmati Ashram?

- Founded in 1917 by Mahatma Gandhi, the Sabarmati Ashram is situated on the western bank of the Sabarmati River, Ahmedabad.
- Gandhi set up five settlements during his lifetime, two in South Africa (Phoenix Settlement in **Natal, and Tolstoy** Farm **outside Johannesburg), and three in India.**
- Gandhi's first Ashram in India - Kochrab area of Ahmedabad in 1915, and the others are **Sabarmati Ashram (Ahmedabad), and Sevagram Ashram (in Wardha).**
- It witnessed the launch of the Dandi March in 1930.

- Apart from the Dandi March, Gandhiji also launched the **Champaran Satyagraha (1917), the Ahmedabad mills strike and Kheda Satyagraha (1918), the Khadi movement (1918), the Rowlatt Act and Khilafat Movements (1919), and the Non-Cooperation movement (1920) while living in Sabarmati.**
- Vinoba Bhave lived in a cottage at Sabarmati Ashram called "Vinoba Kutir".

What is the Dandi March?
- In ancient times, salt making was primarily carried out by farmers, who were often referred to as salt farmers.
- Over time, salt became a commercial commodity, and the British imposed a salt tax, making it a symbol of colonial exploitation.
- Mahatma Gandhi recognized the salt tax as a particularly oppressive measure and saw it as an opportunity to mobilise the masses in a non-violent protest against British rule.
- On March 2, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a letter to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India, informing that he intends to break the salt law as an act of civil disobedience.
- The Dandi March commenced from the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad on March 12, 1930'. The 24-day march.
- On April 6, 1930, Gandhi symbolically broke the salt law by picking up a handful of salt from the shores of Dandi.

UPSC PYQ
Q1. **Who among the following is associated with 'Songs from Prison', a translation of ancient Indian religious lyrics in English? (2021)**
(a) Bal Gangadhar Tilak
(b) Jawaharlal Nehru
(c) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
(d) Sarojini Naidu

Assisted Dying
- France, after recently adding abortion as a constitutional right, is now considering legalising a form of assisted dying called "aid in dying".
- The proposed bill will have strict conditions, allowing assisted dying for individuals with incurable illnesses expected to cause death in the short- or middle-term.
- The country already allows passive euthanasia.
- **Netherland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain** allows both euthanasia and assisted suicide for anyone who faces "unbearable suffering"

Active and passive euthanasia
- Assisted Dying: Assisted dying involves individuals who are terminally ill seeking medical assistance to obtain lethal drugs, which they then administer themselves to end their own lives.
- The primary distinction of assisted dying is that individuals actively participate in the process of ending their lives with the aid of medical professionals.
- Passive Euthanasia: Passive euthanasia occurs when life-sustaining treatments are withheld or withdrawn, allowing the patient to die naturally.
- This may involve decisions to stop medical interventions such as ventilators, feeding tubes, or medications that sustain life.
- Active euthanasia involves deliberately using lethal substances or actions to end a person's life.

India's case
- India allows for passive Euthanasia.
- In **Aruna Ramachandra Shanbaug v. Union of India Case, 2011,** Supreme Court recognised passive euthanasia in this case (for Aruna Shanbaug, who was in vegetative state) by which it had permitted withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment from patients not in a position to make an informed decision.
- In **Common Cause V/s Union of India Case, 2018,** the Supreme Court of India legalised passive euthanasia, citing the importance of a 'living will.'
- The court emphasised that dignity in the dying process is integral to the right to life guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution.

Marine Security Belt 2024"

- Iran, Russia, and China began a joint naval drill in the **Gulf of Oman**. **The drill, called "Marine Security Belt 2024".** The drill, which includes warships and aviation, is their fourth joint military exercise since 2019.
- Naval representatives from **Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Oman, India, and South Africa** are acting as observers during the exercise.
- The Gulf of Oman is a western extension of the Arabian Sea and is situated in the Middle East between the countries of Iran, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.
- The Gulf connects the Arabian Sea with the Strait of Hormuz, which then empties into the Persian Gulf.
- The **Gulf of Oman is bordered by Pakistan and Iran in the north;** by the United Arab Emirates in the west and by Oman in the south.

You never fail until you stop trying.

Albert Einstein

Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019

- Recently, the Indian government notified the rules for the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019, paving the way for its implementation after over 4 years since its passage by Parliament in December 2019.
- The CAA, 2019 is an Indian legislation that provides a path to Indian citizenship for migrants belonging to six religious minorities: Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

Application Process

- The application process for citizenship under CAA has been made under Section 6B of the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Applicants need to prove their country of origin, religion, date of entry into India, and knowledge of an Indian language to qualify for Indian citizenship.
- **Date of Entry into India:** Applicants can provide **20 different documents** as proof of entry into India, including visas, residential permits, census slips, driving licenses, Aadhaar cards, ration cards, government or court letters, birth certificates, and more.

Mechanism for Implementation of Rules

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has assigned the task of processing citizenship applications under the CAA to the P**ostal department and Census officials under the Union government.**
- Final decisions on applications will be made by empowered committees led by **the Director (Census Operations) in each State.**
- These committees will include officials from various departments, including the **Intelligence Bureau, Post Master General, State or National Informatics Centre, and representatives from the State government's Department of Home and Divisional Railway Manager.**
- District-level committees, headed by the Superintendent of the Department of Post, will verify applications, with a representative from the District Collector's office as an invitee.

Citizenship in India

- Citizenship in India is listed in the Union List under the Constitution and thus is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament.
- Under this authority, Parliament enacted the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- **The Act specifies that citizenship may be acquired in India through five methods:**
  - by birth in India,
  - by descent,
  - through registration,
  - by naturalisation (extended residence in India), and
  - by incorporation of territory into India.
- Children born in India to ambassadors are not eligible for Indian citizenship based solely on their birth in the country.

Article No.	Subject Matter
5.	Citizenship at the commencement of the Constitution
6.	Rights of citizenship of certain persons who have migrated to India from Pakistan
7.	Rights of citizenship of certain migrants to Pakistan
8.	Rights of citizenship of certain persons of Indian origin residing outside India
9.	Persons voluntarily acquiring citizenship of a foreign State not to be citizens
10.	Continuance of the rights of citizenship
11.	Parliament to regulate the right of citizenship by law

Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019

- The Citizenship Act, 1955 was amended in 2019 to grant citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, or Christian migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.
- Under the amendment, migrants who entered India on **31st December 2014, and had suffered "religious persecution or fear or religious persecution"** in their country of origin would be made eligible for accelerated citizenship.
- It exempts the members of the s**ix communities from any criminal case** under Foreigners Act, 1946 and Passport Act, 1920 which specify punishment for entering the country illegally and staying on expired visas and permits.
- **Relaxations:**
  o Under the Citizenship Act, 1955, for citizenship by naturalization an applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, as well as for 11 of the previous 14 years.
- The 2019 amendment relaxes the second requirement from 11 years to 6 years as a specific condition for applicants belonging to these six religions, and the aforementioned three countries.

Exemptions:

- Sixth Schedule areas, which include Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram ; areas covered by the Inner Line Permit system (ILP) .
- The concept of Inner Line separates the tribal-majority hills of the Northeast from the plains areas. To enter and stay in these areas, an Inner Line Permit (ILP) is needed.

Concerns Related to the CAA, 2019

- **Constitutional Challenge:** Critics argue that it violates Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on religion.
- **Potential for Disenfranchisement:** The CAA is often linked to the National Register of Citizens (NRC), a proposed nationwide exercise to identify illegal immigrants.
- CAA-31st December 2014 while latter-March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date for the deportation of illegal migrants.
- **Impact on Assam Accord:** In Assam, there is a specific concern regarding the compatibility of the CAA with the Assam Accord, 1985.
  o The CAA's provision of a different timeline for granting citizenship could conflict with the provisions of the Assam Accord, leading to legal and political complications.
- **Secularism and Social Cohesion:** The CAA's focus on religion as a criterion for citizenship eligibility.
- **Exclusion of few Religious Communities**: The exclusion of certain religious communities from the CAA and its subsequent rules, such as Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetan Buddhists, who faced religious persecution in their home countries, raises concerns.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, PYQ

Local self-government can be best explained as an exercise in (2017)
(a) Federalism
(b) Democratic decentralisation
(c) Administrative delegation
(d) Direct democracy

ETHANOL 100

- The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas launched 'ETHANOL 100' at select **183 retail outlets in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi, and Tamil Nadu**.
- ETHANOL 100 is a revolutionary automotive fuel that consists of 100% ethanol.
- It is a biofuel produced from renewable sources such as corn, sugarcane, or other plant materials.
- ETHANOL 100 is aimed at reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promoting sustainability, and contributing to a cleaner environment by lowering greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional gasoline.
- The initiative aligns with the vision to achieve **20% ethanol blending (E20) by 2025-26, reducing import dependency and boosting the agriculture sector.**

## Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test

- Recently, the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education, conducted a Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT) as part of the ULLAS (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society) - Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram across 23 states.
- The FLNAT assesses Reading, Writing, and Numeracy skills, to evaluate foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

FLNAT aims

- To certify non-literate learners and
- promote multilingualism by conducting the test in regional languages, aligning with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
- Learners who qualify will receive a certificate from the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) recognising their achievement in foundational literacy and numeracy skills.

ULLAS

- ULLAS is a centrally sponsored scheme for the period **2022-2027** to cover all aspects of Education For All and it was previously known as Adult Education.
- The scheme empowers adults **aged 15 and above** with basic literacy, numeracy, and critical life skills, fostering lifelong learning.

Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.

– JIM ROHN
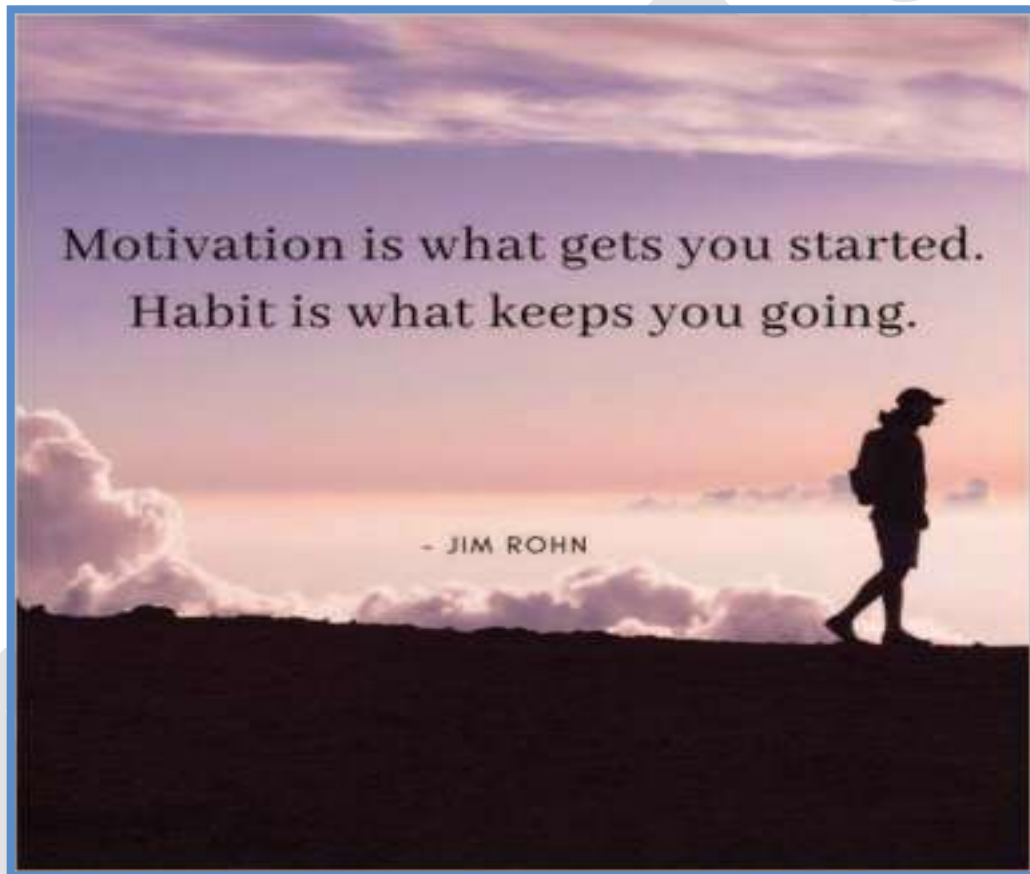
Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform
Context

- Participating in the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform, India has presented a detailed model on behalf of the **G4 nations for United Nations Security Council Reform.**
- The model mainly demands for new permanent members elected democratically by the UN General Assembly and a flexibility on the veto issue.
- The **G4 (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) was created in 2004 and has been promoting Security Council reform.**

TRICK : G4 COUNTRIES ARE **BIG JAPAN**

- **B**-Brazil,
- **I**-India,
- **G**- Germany,
- Japan,

The G4 nation comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan are four countries which support each other's bids for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council.

Key Features of the G4 Proposed Model
- Addressing Under-representation
- **Membership Expansion:**
  - From the current 15 to 25-26 members.
- **This** expansion includes adding 6 permanent and 4 or 5 non-permanent members.
- **Flexibility on Veto:**
  - G4 model offers flexibility on the veto issue.
- Democratic and Inclusive Election: Democratic and inclusive election by the UN General Assembly.

United Nations Security Council
- The United Nations Security Council, established under the UN Charter in 1945, constitutes one of the UN's six principal organs.
- Comprising 15 members, it includes 5 permanent members (P5) and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms.
- The permanent members are the Un**ited States, Russian Federation, France, China, and the United Kingdom.**
- **According to Oppenheim's International Law :**
  - In United Nations, "Permanent membership in the Security Council was granted to five states based on their importance in the aftermath of World War II."

- India's participation in the Security Council has been as a non-permanent member during the periods of 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92, 2011-12, and 2021-22.

Why does the UN Security Council Need to be Reformed?
- Representation **and Legitimacy:**
  - The Security Council plays a crucial role in peacekeeping and conflict resolution, with binding decisions that impact all member states.
  - To ensure these decisions are respected and implemented universally, the Council must possess the necessary authority and legitimacy, which requires representation reflecting the current global landscape.
- Outdated **Composition:**
  - The current composition of the Security Council, based on the geopolitical situation of 1945 and expanded marginally in 1963/65, no longer accurately represents the world stage.
  - With 142 new countries joining the United Nations since its inception, regions like Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean lack adequate representation, necessitating adjustments to the Council's composition.
- **Recognition of Contributions:**
  - The UN Charter acknowledges that countries making substantial contributions to the organisation should have a role in the Security Council.
- **Misuse of Veto Power:**
  - Affects democratic principles and hinders the Council's ability to take essential decisions if it conflicts with the interests of any of the P-5 members.
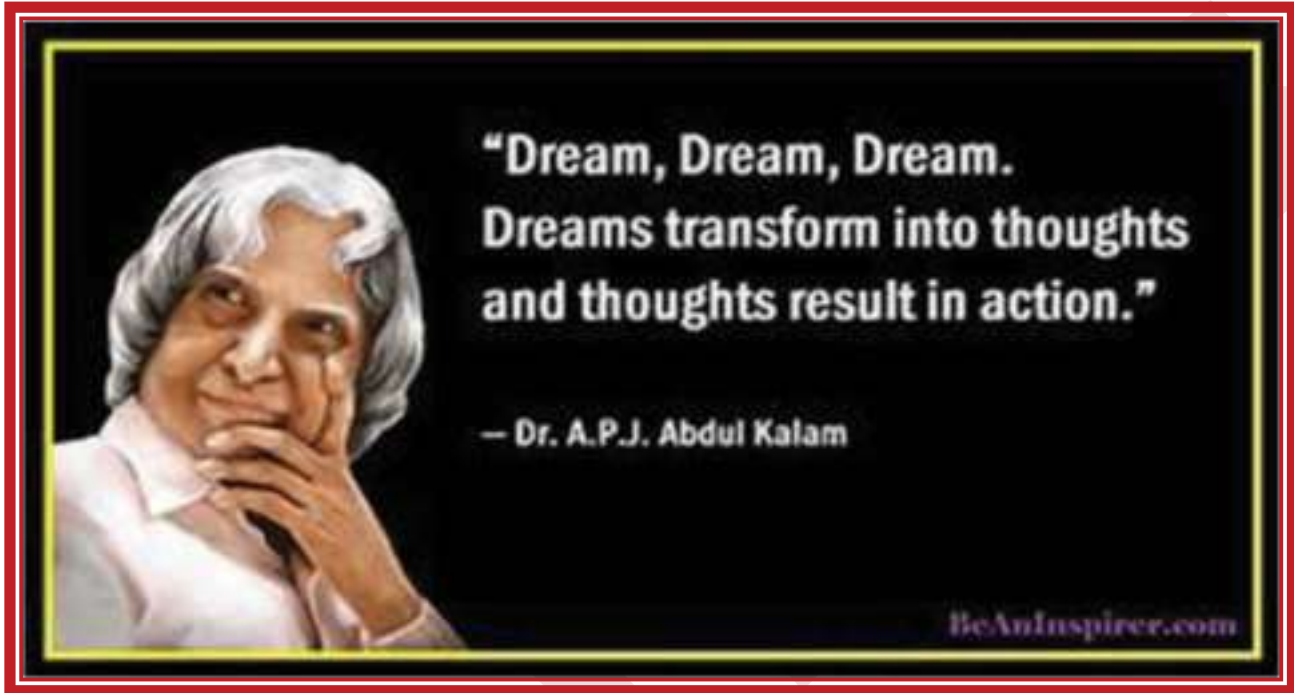
Procedure of UN Security Council Reforms:
- UN Security Council reform requires an amendment under Article 108
- **First Stage:** The General Assembly, where each of the 193 member states holds one vote, must endorse the reform with a two-thirds majority, equivalent to at least 128 states.
- **Second Stage:** This amended Charter requires ratification by at least two-thirds of the member states, including all five permanent Security Council members.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

The Security Council of UN consists of 5 permanent members, and the remaining 10 members are elected by the General Assembly for a term of (2009)

(a) 1 year
(b) 2 years
(c) 3 years
(d) 5 years

"Dream, Dream, Dream. Dreams transform into thoughts and thoughts result in action."

— Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

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Bonds
Why in News?

- Recently, the State governments have mobilised a record **Rs 50,206 crore** through the auction of State Development Loan (SDL) Bonds, marking the largest such weekly borrowing ever.
- The funds raised far exceeded the indicative borrowing target of **Rs 27,810 crore set for the period, as per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data.**
- This indicates robust demand for state government securities in the financial markets.
- SDLs are the part of Government Securities (G-Sec), where State Governments raise loans from the market.
- SDLs are dated securities issued through normal auctions similar to the auctions conducted for dated securities issued by the Central Government.

What are Bonds?

- A bond is an instrument to borrow money. It is a written acknowledgement of debt that one party owes another.
- A bond could be floated/issued by a country's government or by a company to raise funds.
- **Since Government Bonds (referred to as G-secs in India, Treasury in the US, and Gilts in the UK) come with the sovereign's guarantee,** they are considered one of the safest investments.

### Types of G-Secs:
Treasury Bills (T-bills):

- Treasury bills are zero coupon securities and pay no interest. Instead, they are issued at a discount and redeemed at the face value at maturity.
- They are issued in three tenors, namely, 91 day, 182 day and 364 day.

Cash Management Bills (CMBs):

- Lauched In 2010. It is a new short-term instrument to meet the temporary mismatches in the cash flow of the Government of India.
- The CMBs are issued for maturities of less than 91 days.

Dated G-Secs:

- Dated G-Secs are securities that carry a fixed or floating interest rate which is paid on the face value. Generally, the tenor of dated securities ranges from 5 years to 40 years.
- State Development Loans (SDLs): State Governments also raise loans from the market which are called SDLs. SDLs are dated securities issued through normal auctions similar to the auctions.

Types of Government Securities
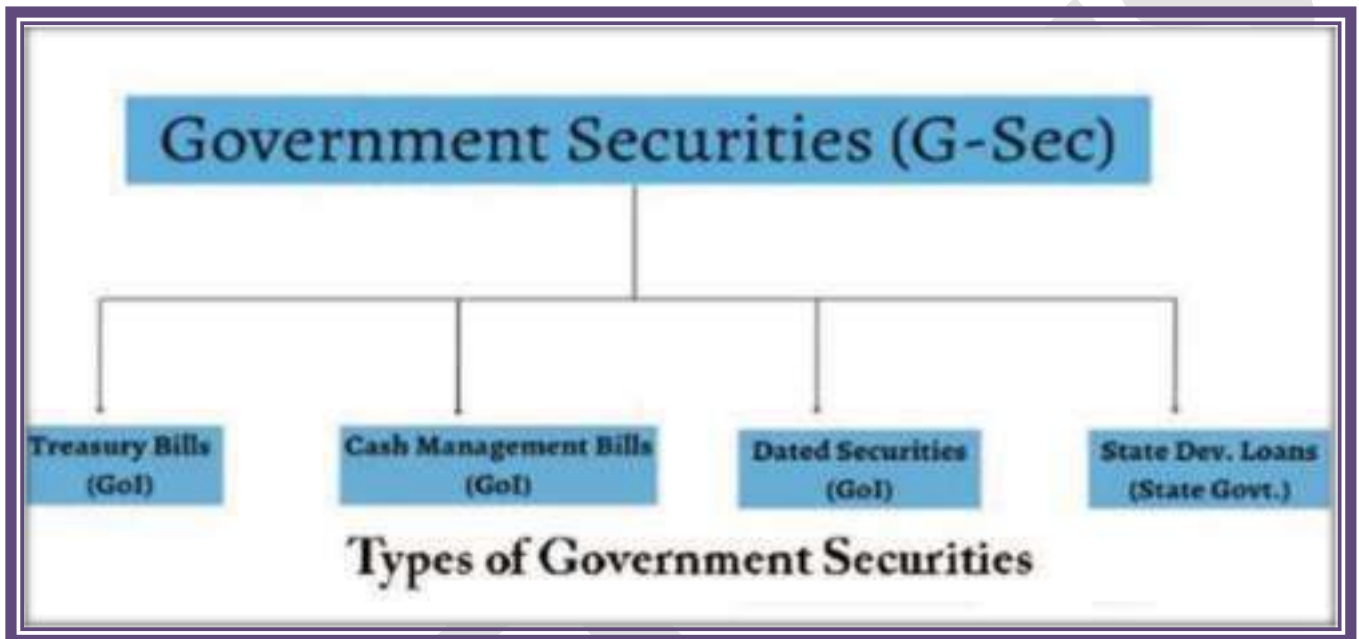
UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

1. **In the context of the Indian economy, non-financial debt includes which of the following? (2020)**
2. Housing loans owed by households
3. Amounts outstanding on credit cards
4. Treasury bills

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 2 only
(c) 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

2) In the context of Indian economy, 'Open Market Operations' refers to (2013)

(a) borrowing by scheduled banks from the RBI
(b) lending by commercial banks to industry and trade
(c) purchase and sale of government securities by the RBI
(d) None of the above

India Mozambique Tanzania (IMT) maritime trilateral exercise

- **INS Sujata and INS Tir** have entered the harbour phase of the India-Mozambique Tanzania (IMT) maritime trilateral exercise.

- **These** exercises demonstrate India's and the Indian Navy's dedication to bolstering maritime security and cooperation with neighbouring countries in the Indian Ocean Region while advancing **SAGAR (Safety and Growth for All in the Region).**

Mozambique and Tanzania
- Mozambique is a country in southeast Africa bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east, Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west, and Eswatini and South Africa to the southwest. The capital and largest city is Maputo.
- Tanzania is a country in East Africa within the **African Great Lakes region**. It borders Uganda to the north; Kenya to the northeast; the Indian Ocean to the east; Mozambique and Malawi to the south; Zambia to the southwest; and Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west.

Additional Perks to Students

Planning Commission

- The Planning Commission of India was set up by a Resolution of the Government of India in March 1950.
- Prime minister was the ex officio chairman of the planning commission assisted by a deputy chairman. It included 6 union cabinet ministers as its ex officio members. There was also a member secretary.
- Formulate plans [Five Year Plans (FYP)] for the most effective and balanced utilization of resources.

Five Year Plans

- The Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950.
- Planning Commission was set up on 15 March 1950.
- The plan era started from 1 April 1951 with the launching of the First Five Year Plan (1951-56).
- The idea of economic planning for five years was taken from the Soviet Union under the socialist influence of first Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru.

FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN (1951 -56)

- It was launched for the duration of 1951 to 1956, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru.
- KN Raj- Architect
- It was based on the Harrod-Domar model with a few modifications.
- Its main focus was on the agricultural development of the country.
- This plan was successful and achieved a growth rate of 3.6% (more than its target of 2.1%).
- At the end of this plan, five IITs were set up in the country.
- IIT Kharagpur(1951), IIT Bombay (1958), IIT Madras (1959), IIT Kanpur (1959), and IIT Delhi (1961). Decades later, the sixth IIT was established in Guwahati (1994).
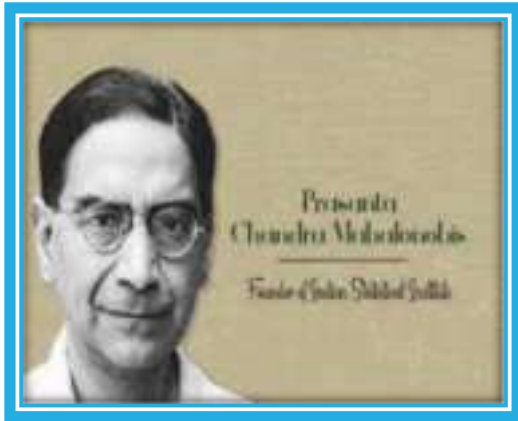
2nd Five Year Plan (1961-66)

- Duration of 1961 to 1966
- This plan is also called 'Gadgil Yojna'
- India was engaged in two wars:
- the Sino-India war of 1962 and (2) the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965.
- The plan was a flop due to wars and drought.
- The target growth was 5.6% while the achieved growth was 2.4%.

3rd Five Year Plan (1961-66)

- It was based on the P.C. Mahalanobis Model.
- Its main focus was on the industrial development of the country.
- The target growth rate - 4.5% and achieved a growth rate of 4.27%.
- Iron and steel industries at Durgapur, Bhilai and Rourkela,
- Chemical fertilizers plant at Sindri.
- Rail engine factory at Chittaranjan.

SHORTCUT : MADRAS

M - Mahalanobis Model
A - Atomic Energy Commission
D - Durgapur steel company, Tata Inst of Fundamental Research
R - Rourkela Steel Company, Rapid Industrialisation
A - Agriculture
S - Socialistic Pattern of Society

Fourth FYP and plan holidays

- Three annual plans called Plan Holidays from 1966 to 1969.
- Fourth FYP 1969 to 1974, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi.
- Two main objectives of this plan i.e. growth with stability and progressive achievement of self-reliance.
- 14 major Indian banks were nationalized and the Green Revolution was started.
- Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 and the Bangladesh Liberation War took place.
- Implementation of Family Planning Programmes

Fifth five year plan (1974-79)
SHORTCUT : PSTM
P - Poverty Eradication
S - Self reliance
T - Twenty Point Programme
M - Minimum Need Programmea

- Achieved a growth of 4.8% against the target of 4.4%.
- This plan was terminated in 1978 by the newly elected Morarji Desai government.

Sixth five year Plan (1980-85)

* After the termination of the fifth Five Year Plan, the Rolling Plan came into effect from 1978 to 1990.
* Its growth target was 5.2% but it achieved a 5.7% growth
* Garibi Hatao Slogan.

Seventh Five year plan (1985-90)

* Its duration- 1985 to 1990, under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi.
* For the first time, the private sector got priority over the public sector.
* Its growth target was 5.0% but it achieved 6.01%.
* Volatile political situation at the centre.
* Two annual plans-1990-91& 1991-92.

SHORTCUT : EFGH (the alphabets)

E - Employment generation
F - Foodgrain production was doubled
G - Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (1989)
H - Hindu rate of Growth

Eighth Five year plan (1992-97)

L - LiberalisationDuring this plan, Narasimha Rao Govt.
Launched the New Economic Policy of India.
P - Privatisation
G - Globalisation

- This plan was successful and got an annual growth rate of 6.8% against the target of 5.6%.
- High growth of agriculture and allied sector, and manufacturing sector, growth in exports and imports, improvement in trade and current account deficit
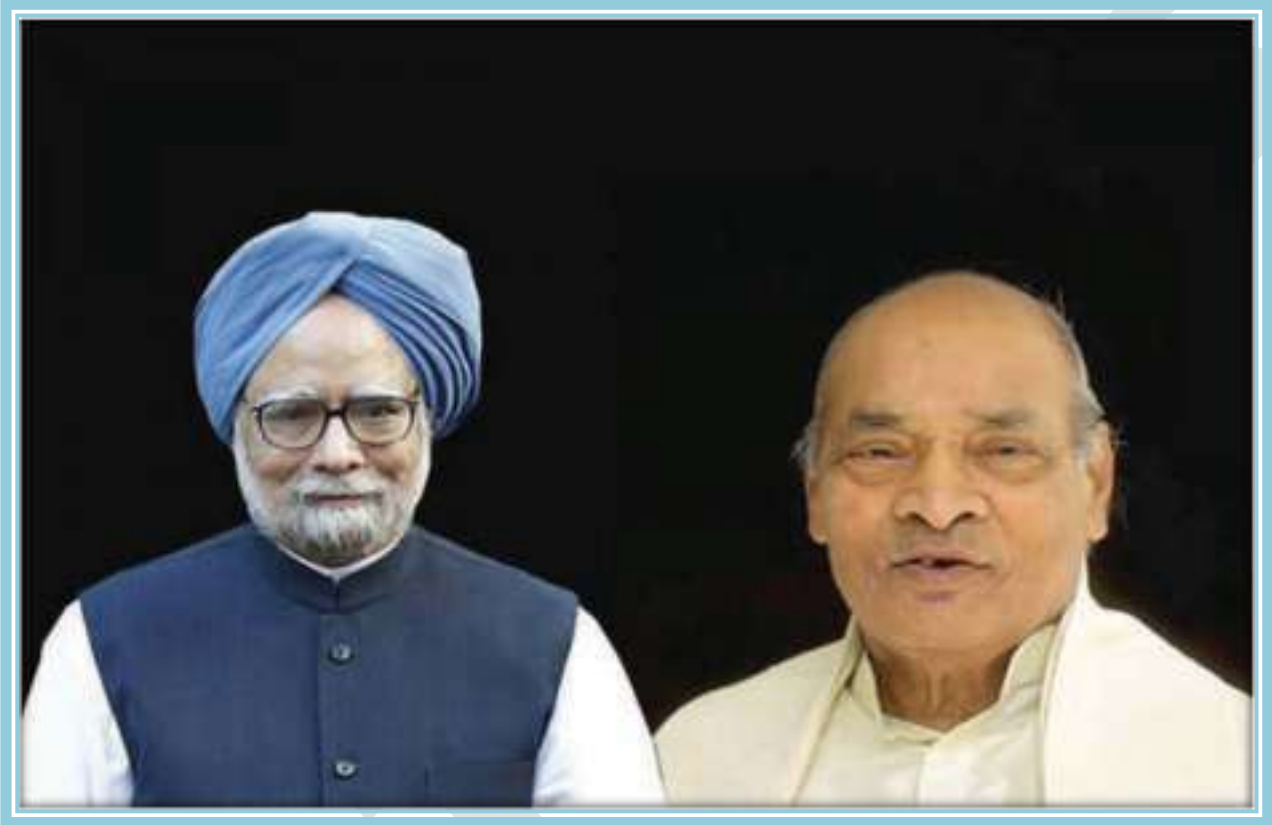
Ninth five year plan (1997-2002)

I. Its duration was from 1997 to 2002, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
II. The main focus of this plan was "Growth with Social Justice and Equality".
III. It was launched in the 50th year of independence of India.
IV. This plan failed to achieve the growth target of 6.5% and achieved a growth rate of 5.6%.
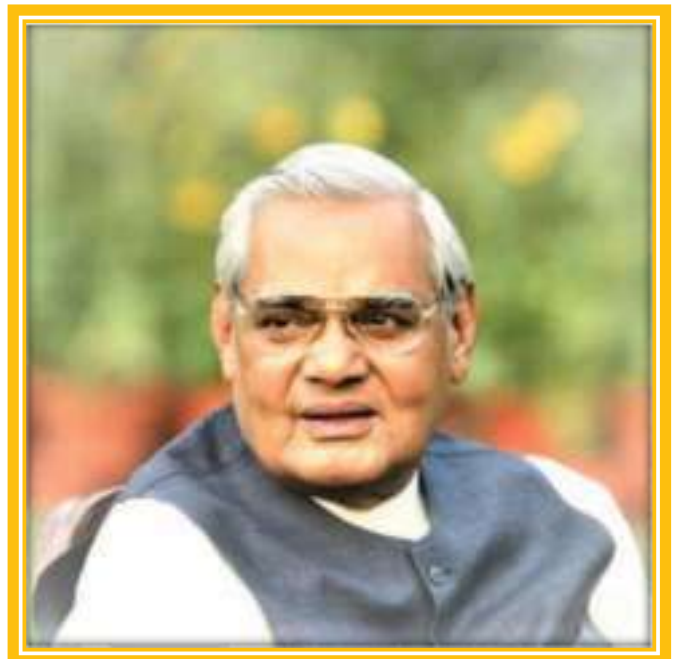
Tenth Five Year Plan

I. Its duration was from 2002 to 2007, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh.
II. This plan aimed to double the Per Capita Income of India in the next 10 years.
III. It also aimed to reduce the poverty ratio to 15% by 2012.
IV. Its growth target was 8.0% but it achieved only 7.6%.

Eleventh five year plan

Its duration was from 2007 to 2012, under the leadership of Manmohan Singh.

It was prepared by the C. Rangarajan.

Its main theme was "rapid and more inclusive growth".

It achieved a growth rate of 8% against a target of 9% growth

Twelfth Five Year Plan

I. Its duration is from 2012 to 2017, under the leadership of Manmohan Singh.

II. Its main theme is "Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth".

III. Its growth rate target was 8%.

.Rangarajan

Niti Aayog was established in 2015, by the NDA government, to replace the Planning Commission which followed a top-down model.

Frequently asked questions:

1. The very first five-year plan of India was based on the model of:
(a) Mahalanobis model
(b) Harrod Domar Model
(c) Bombay Plan
(d) None of these

2. Which programme given the slogan of Garibi Hatao?
(a) 7th five-year plan
(b) 3rd five year plan
(c) 6th five year plan
(d) 5th five-year plan

3. When was the plan holiday declared?
(a) After the third plan
(b) After the fourth plan
(c) After the fifth plan
(d) After the sixth plan