

NEWS TODAY

GOVERNMENT INTERNET SHUTDOWNS COST ALMOST \$24 BILLION GLOBALLY IN 2022

- Findings are part of a recent report by UK-based privacy and security research firm Top10VPN.
- Key findings related to India**
 - India imposed 34 major shutdowns in 2022, significantly more than any other country in the world.
 - Total cost of internet restrictions was \$184.3 million.
 - Shutdowns were highly localised to specific districts, cities and even villages, and tended to be in response to civil unrest, often pre-emptively.
 - Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir endured most extensive major internet outages.
- Internet shutdown is defined as an intentional disruption of internet or electronic communications for a specific population or location, to exert control over flow of information.
 - It can be caused by Internet blackouts, Social media shutdowns or Throttling (reduced speed of internet).
- Legal provisions related to Internet shutdowns in India**
 - Until 2017, mostly governed under section 144 of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and Indian Telegraph Act 1885.
 - In 2017, Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, were notified. Despite rules, government has also used broad powers under section 144.
 - Section 69(A) of IT (Amendment) Act, 2008 gives power to block particular websites.

- Only Home Secretary of the Union or a state can pass an internet shutdown order to be reviewed by a committee within 5 days.
- Under unavoidable circumstances order can be issued by an officer of rank of Joint Secretary or above, authorized by central or state Home Secretary.

NEW PLATEAU TYPE DISCOVERED FROM MAHARASHTRA

- A rare low-altitude basalt plateau has been discovered in Thane region in Western Ghats (a global biodiversity hotspot and UNESCO World Heritage site in India).
 - This is the fourth type of plateau to be identified in the region; previous three are laterites at high and low altitudes and basalt at high altitudes.
 - 76 species of plants and shrubs from 24 different families have been found.
- Plateaus are dominant landscapes in Western Ghats. They are classified as a type of rocky outcrop.
- Rocky outcrops are geological features that protrude above the surface of surrounding land.
 - They are formed by weathering that happens at different rates, causing the less weathered rock to remain exposed.
 - They are found on all continents, in most climate zones and vegetation types.
- Significance of rocky outcrops**
 - Support high levels of species diversity and endemism.
 - They have seasonal water availability, limited soil and nutrients, making them ideal to study effects of climate change on species survival.
 - They provide critical breeding sites for many top order mammalian and avian predators; nesting sites for colonial species such as seabirds, bats and swifts.



- Basalt is an igneous rock that is formed from the quick cooling of lava rich in magnesium and iron.
- It has a very fine-grained structure. E.g, the Deccan plateau.
- These rocks are also sources of phosphorus (P), potassium (K), calcium (Ca), and several micronutrients essential for plant nutrition.

GOVERNMENT MODIFIED WILDLIFE FUND RULES FOR KEY INFRA PROJECTS

- Centre has **exempted road, rail, and transmission line projects** from having to deposit 2% and 0.5% of total project cost towards **cost of Wildlife Management Plan (WMP) and Soil and Moisture Conservation Plan (SMCP)** respectively.
 - WMP and SMCP are **prepared in accordance with conditions** stipulated by **Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC)**.
- Earlier, MoEF&CC made it **mandatory for all projects to deposit this cost** for obtaining final forest clearance under Forest Conservation Act (FCA) 1980.
 - Now **cost for WMP and SMCP will be proportionate** to extent of forest land involved instead of total project cost.
- FCA, 1980 **regulates deforestation in the country**. It was enacted after **State Governments failure resulted in diversion of forest land** without any regard to environmental consideration.
- Key provisions of the act**
 - It **prohibits felling of forests for any non-forestry use** without prior clearance by the central government.
 - Clearance process includes** seeking consent from local forest rights-holders and from **wildlife authorities**.
- In **T N Godavarman case (1996)**, **Supreme Court expanded coverage of FCA, 1980** to all areas that satisfied dictionary definition of a forest; Previously, FCA applied largely to reserve forests and national parks.



INDIA AND NEW EURASIA

- Recently **several countries** including Japan, South Korea, Australia etc. have **taken initiatives** suggesting a growing **focus over better relationship between European and Asian countries**.

- About Eurasian Region**



- Geographically represented by Eurasian Plate**, covering most of Europe and Asia, there is a **lack of an agreed international understanding** of what constitutes the region.
- New dynamics in the Eurasian region**
 - As **Russia and China unveiled a Eurasian alliance** this led to **strengthening of Western alliance** in Europe.
 - It also provided the **basis for a new kind of alliance between China's East Asian neighbours and Russia's West European neighbours** (through initiatives like QUAD, AUKUS etc).
- This new dynamic **presents certain challenges for India** in terms of:
 - Managing coalition** with both the blocks (Russia-China and Western alliances) **becoming difficult**.
 - Rising proximity** between **Russia and China**.
- Significance of Eurasia for India**
 - Region is richly endowed with **commodities such as crude oil, natural gas, cotton, gold, copper, aluminium, and iron**.
 - It is strategically positioned as an **access point between Europe and Asia**.
 - Apart from **checking Chinese influence**, it will help India to **overcome hostile alliances** in the region (e.g. Turkey-Pakistan alliance).

NATIONAL LEVEL STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEWS OVERALL PROGRESS OF ATAL BHUJAL YOJANA

- Atal Bhujal Yojana (Atal Jal) is a **Central Sector Scheme for facilitating sustainable ground water management**. It will be implemented **over a period of 5 years (2020-21 to 2024-25)**.
 - One of the **main objectives** of scheme is to **bring about behavioural change** at ground level.
- Scheme is being taken up** in nearly 8350 **water stressed Gram Panchayats of 7 states** namely Haryana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.
 - It is funded by **Government of India and World Bank on a 50:50 basis**.
- Scheme has two components**:
 - Institutional Strengthening & Capacity Building component** by facilitating strong data base, scientific approach and community participation in ground water sector.
 - Incentive Component** for incentivizing states for achievement of pre-defined results.
- Scheme uses a four pronged strategy**: Decision support tools for ground water management, Strengthen community based institutions to foster management, Improve water use efficiency and enhance ground water recharge and Fiscal decentralisation.
- Scheme envisages **active participation of the communities and panchayats in various activities** such as formation of Water User Associations, preparation of Gram Panchayat-wise Water Security Plans etc.

ALSO IN NEWS



India-supported resolution adopted by UNGA

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted **India-supported resolution 'Education for Democracy'** that reaffirms right of everyone to education.
- Resolution **encouraged Member States** and other stakeholders **to integrate education for democracy into their education standards.**
 - Further, resolution also highlighted that **states should work with relevant stakeholders to close digital divides.**
- **UNGA was established in 1945** under **Charter of UN.** It is the **chief policy making body** of the organisation.
 - **Each of the 193 Member States of UN has an equal vote.**



Adjudicatory Board for Major Ports notified

- **Major Port Authorities Act, 2021** envisages **constitution of an Adjudicatory Board.**
- Adjudicatory Board shall **consist of a Presiding Officer and two members.**
 - Presiding Officer shall be a **retired Judge of Supreme Court** or a retired **Chief Justice of a High Court.**
- Presiding Officer and Members of the Adjudicatory Board shall be **appointed on recommendation of a Selection Committee consisting of :**
 - Chief Justice of India or his nominee
 - Secretary of Department of Personnel and Training
 - Secretary of Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways



Google to follow CCI order

- In a major ruling, Supreme Court declined to stay Competition Commission of India (CCI)'s directions to Google to correct its **anti-competitive practices.**
 - Google **abused its dominant position** to mandate pre-installation of Google mobile service including Search, YouTube, Maps **on phones** by original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).
- **CCI issued several directives** to Google including:
 - **OEMs shall not be forced to pre-install** a bouquet of apps.
 - **Google shall not deny its Play Services APIs** to disadvantage OEMs, app developers.
 - **Google should not restrict uninstalling of its pre-installed apps.**



Electoral Bonds

- **Sale of 25th tranche of electoral bonds** started.
- Electoral bonds (valid for 15 days from the date of issue) can be purchased by a citizen of India or entities incorporated or established **in India.**
 - **Sold in multiples** of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore.
 - **SBI is the only bank authorised** to sell them.
- **Eligibility:** Registered political parties that secured at least one percent of votes polled in the most recent General or Assembly elections.



Indian Star Tortoise (Geochelone elegans)

- A recent study has revealed that **genetic diversity of the species as well as habitat has suffered major losses** because of **rampant illegal trade.**
- Star Tortoises, with their **distinct star-like markings** on the shell, are **found in dry lowlands of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.**
- **IUCN Status:** Vulnerable
- Also **included in Appendix I of CITES** (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).



Drone Jammers

- Recently, **Indian Army issued Proposal** for vehicle based drone jammers.
- **Various ways of drone jamming:**
 - **Radio Frequency jamming** which disrupts link between drone and its operator by generating radio frequency interference.
 - **Satellite link disruption** through which drone would lose GPS assistance for deciding its flight path.
 - **Spoofing** through which a wrong navigation link is fed to drone by jammer to misdirect the drone.
 - **Dazzling** through which camera of drone is blinded through a high intensity laser or light beam.

 <p>TB Vaccine Accelerator Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WHO announced plans to establish a new TB Vaccine Accelerator Council. • It will facilitate the licensing and use of effective novel TB vaccines catalysing high-level alignment between various stakeholders in identifying and overcoming barriers to TB vaccine development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ BCG is currently the only licensed TB vaccine. • TB is caused by bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis. It typically affects lungs (pulmonary TB) but can affect other sites.
 <p>Meteorite</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five new meteorites were found in the in the Blue Ice region of Antarctica. • Meteoroids are objects in space that range in size from dust grains to small asteroids. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When meteoroids enter Earth's atmosphere at high speed and burn up, the fireballs or shooting stars are called meteors. ➤ When a meteoroid survives a trip through the atmosphere and hits the ground, it's called a meteorite.
 <p>Ganjam kewda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a rising demand for kewda oil from Odisha's Ganjam region. • Ganjam kewda (Pandanus fascicularis) oil is steam-distilled from the flower of aromatic screwpine plant and used as an aromatic in the food industry and other sectors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Male spike is attractive for its characteristic aromatic odour, whereas female spike is odourless and develops into a woody drupe. • It is registered under Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999.
 <p>Saansad Khel Mahakumbh 2022-23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PM inaugurated second phase of Sansad Khel Mahakumbh 2022-23 in Basti District, UP. • Khel Mahakumbh organises various competitions in both indoor and outdoor sports like wrestling, kabaddi, football, hockey, volleyball, handball, table tennis etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Apart from these, competitions in essay writing, painting, rangoli making etc. are also organised. ➤ Event is aimed at promoting young sporting talent at local grassroot level. ➤ Mahakumbh will have special focus on promoting female participation in sports for their empowerment.
 <p>Places in news</p>	<p>Oman (Capital: Muscat)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India and Oman have agreed to jointly fight all manifestations of terrorism collectively. • Political features & Boundaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Oman is oldest independent state in Arab World situated at southeastern edge of Arabian Peninsula. ➤ Shares its land borders with UAE, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. ➤ Situated at confluence of Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, sharing its maritime borders with Iran and Pakistan. • Geographical features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highest Point: Jabal Akhdar. ➤ It has no perennial rivers or lakes. <p>South Korea (Capital: Seoul)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India and South Korea agreed to deepen cooperation in multiple areas at 5th Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue in Seoul. • Political features & Boundaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bordered by Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) to north, East Sea (Sea of Japan) to east, East China Sea to south, and Yellow Sea to west. ➤ Shares land border with North Korea and maritime borders with China and Japan. ➤ Separated from Japanese island of Tsushima by Korea Strait to southeast. • Geographical features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highest Point: Mt. Halla-san, a shield volcano on Jeju (Cheju) Island. ➤ Major Rivers: Nakdong (NakdongGang) and Han (Hangang) River.  