



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

BLUE DRAGON

Scientists have discovered a new mosasaur, named Wakayama Soryu, in Japan that lived 72 million years ago.

18 DEC - 23 DEC 2023

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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GENERAL STUDIES – 2

Topics: Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

1. DILUTION OF RIGHT TO VOTE: “ONE PERSON, ONE VOTE, ONE VALUE”

Context:

The SC has directed the GoI to establish a Delimitation Commission to address the need for increased reserved seats for SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and State assemblies

What is “One Person, One Vote, One Value”?

It is a democratic principle ensuring equal voting rights for every individual, with each vote holding equal value. This concept underscores the democratic ideal of providing all citizens an equal say in decision-making processes.

Significance of One Person, One Vote, One Value:

Significance	Description
Fairness in Electoral Process	Ensures everyone an <u>equal chance to have their voice heard during elections</u> , promoting a fair and just democratic system.
Prevents Discrimination:	Acts as a <u>safeguard against discrimination</u> based on race, gender, religion, or any other factor that could be used to exclude individuals from the electoral process.
Encourages Participation:	Knowing that <u>every vote holds the same value motivates citizens to actively participate</u> in the electoral process, fostering a more engaged and informed electorate.
Political Equality	Establishes <u>political equality by providing an equal opportunity for every citizen</u> to participate in the political decision-making process, regardless of background or identity.

The dilution of the principle of “One person, One vote, One value” can occur through quantitative and qualitative dilution.

- **Quantitative Dilution:**
 - Unequal weight of votes due to deviations in population among constituencies.
 - Example: In U.P., an MP represents around 2.53 million people, while in Tamil Nadu, an MP represents around 1.84 million people.

- **Qualitative Dilution:**
 - Reducing a voter’s chance to elect a preferred representative through gerrymandering.
 - Techniques include cracking (dividing minority areas), stacking (submerging minorities), and packing (concentrating minorities).
 - Highlighted in reports like the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution and the Sachar Committee Report.
 - **Example:** Many of the Reserved seats for SCs had Muslim populations exceeding 50%, impacting Muslim representation in Parliament (currently Muslim MPs % are at 4.42% despite a 14.2% population).
 - If the seats were not reserved, Muslim candidates could have won

Constitutional Safeguards to Avoid Dilution:

Constitutional Safeguards	Description
Articles 81 and 170 of IC	Specify that the <u>population ratio for Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies</u> should be the <u>same</u> , as practicable.
Article 327 of IC	Empowers Parliament to make laws related to delimitation, and such laws are <u>immune from being questioned in court</u> .
Delimitation Commission Act 1952 and Art 329A of IC	Declare that the <u>orders of the Delimitation Commission are final</u> , possessing the full force of law and are immune from legal challenge.
Articles 330 and 332 of the IC	Guarantee the <u>reservation of seats for SCs</u> (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes) in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.
	The government has formed delimitation commissions, with the fourth one <u>addressing reserved constituencies and extending the moratorium until after the 2026 Census</u> .

What is delimitation?

It is the act of **redrawing the boundaries of an Assembly or Lok Sabha** seat to reflect changes in population over time, based on the most current Census data. The process may alter the **number of seats in a state** so that the population of all seats is as uniform as possible across the state. Delimitation Commissions have been established **four times in India's history**: 1952, 1963, 1973, and 2002 under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972, and 2002. **The 42nd Amendment Act** in 1976 **froze the population figure of the 1971 Census** for delimitation until the 2001 Census. In 2002, delimitation was further delayed for 25 years (until 2026) through **the 84th Amendment**.

Legal/constitutional provisions:

- **Article 82:** Following each census, the **allocation of Lok Sabha seats to the states**, as well as the division of each state into territorial constituencies, shall be re-adjusted by such authority as Parliament may by law determine.
- **Section 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1950:** It allows for delimitation of Parliamentary and Assembly constituencies in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur or Nagaland.
- **Article 170 (Composition of the Legislative Assemblies):** Census figures (2001) shall be used for the purpose of readjustment of constituencies in the State.
- **Reservation of seats for the SCs/STs** will be provided as per Articles 330 (Lok Sabha) and 332 (State Assemblies) of the Constitution.

Conclusion:

The next Delimitation Commission should address **both quantitative and qualitative dilutions** for fair and adequate minority representation.

Insta Links:

- **Delimitation in Assam: Changes Proposed and Concerns**

Mains Links:

Q. What is delimitation? Examine its objectives and how delimitation affects the representation of the people act. (250 words)

[Topics: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.](#)

2. TELECOM BILL 2023

Context:

Lok Sabha passed the **Telecom Bill 2023**, aiming to replace existing laws, including the **138-year-old Indian Telegraph Act**.

Need of the Bill:

The Telecommunication Bill 2023 is essential for:

- **Sector Transformation:** The telecommunication sector has undergone substantial changes, including shifts in nature, usage, and underlying **technologies like 5G**.
- **Modernization of Laws:** Existing telecom laws in India date back to colonial times (two of them) and 1950.
- **Safety and Security:** The Telecommunication Bill 2023 aims to overhaul outdated laws, providing a legal and regulatory framework **prioritizing the safety and security of telecommunication networks** while fostering inclusive digital growth.

Key provisions of the Bill:

Key Provisions	Details
Repealed Acts	The bill seeks to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885; Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933; Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950; Amends the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act, 1997
Authorisation for Telecom-related Activities	<p>Prior authorization is needed from the central government for providing telecom services, establishing, operating, maintaining, or expanding telecom networks, and possessing radio equipment</p> <p>Existing licenses remain valid for the grant period or five years if unspecified</p>
Assignment of Spectrum	<p>Spectrum will only be assigned through auction, except for specified uses such as national security, defence, disaster management, weather forecasting, transport, satellite services (DTH and satellite telephony), BSNL, MTNL, and public broadcasting</p> <p>Supreme Court in 2012 ruled that there should be competitive auctioning for the distribution of natural public-owned resources such as spectrum.</p> <p>Central government may re-purpose or re-assign frequency ranges or allow sharing, trading, leasing, and surrender of spectrum</p>
Trusted Sources Regime	The Bill allows the government to curb the import of telecom equipment from potentially adversarial nations (this provision was 1 st introduced post-India-China border conflict for Chinese equipment)

Cyber Security	The Telecommunication Bill 2023 empowers the central government to establish cyber security rules , encompassing the collection, analysis, and dissemination of traffic data in communication networks.
Satellite Internet Allotments	Provisions for allocating spectrum to satellite Internet providers like OneWeb, SpaceX's Starlink
Powers of Interception and Search	Messages interception, monitoring, or blocking on specified grounds , including public safety, emergencies, and security of the state
	Telecom services suspension on similar grounds is allowed in the act.
	The government may take temporary possession of telecom infrastructure , network, or services during public emergencies or safety concerns
Powers to Specify Standards	Authorized officers may search premises or vehicles for unauthorized networks or equipment
	Central government may set standards and assessments for telecom equipment, infrastructure, networks, and services
Right of Way	Facility providers may seek right of way over public or private property to establish telecom infrastructure - Non-discriminatory and non-exclusive right of way, to the extent possible
Protection of Users	Measures for user protection, including prior consent for specified messages, creation of Do Not Disturb registers , and reporting mechanisms for malware or specified messages
	Mandatory biometric authentication for telecom customers to combat spam calls and messages
	Online mechanism for registration and redressal of grievances by entities providing telecom services
Appointments to TRAI	Amendments to the TRAI Act allow individuals with at least 30 years of professional experience to serve as the chairperson and at least 25 years of professional experience to serve as members
Digital Bharat Nidhi	Universal Service Obligation Fund has been renamed as Digital Bharat Nidhi. It allows for the fund utilization for research and development

Regulation of OTT Apps	The bill excludes over-the-top (OTT) services and apps (e.g. Twitter, WhatsApp) from the definition of telecommunication services
	OTT services will be regulated by the Ministry of Electronics and IT through the potential Digital India Act
Offences and Penalties	The bill prescribes punishment for unauthorized provision of telecom services or access to networks/data punishable with imprisonment, fines, or both
	The central government will appoint an adjudicating officer (rank of joint secretary and above) for civil offences
Appeal Process	Appeals to Designated Appeals Committee and Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT)
Disasters	In times of public emergencies, the government may temporarily take control of telecommunication services to prioritize the transmission of crucial messages

Concerns related to the bill:

Concerns	Details
Privacy Concerns	Entities mandated for biometric user authentication to curb fraud, raising user privacy concerns
Ambiguity in Definition	The generic definition of 'telecommunication services,' open to wide interpretations
Possession of Network	Telecommunication Bill 2023 grants government authority to "take temporary possession" of the network
	There is a need for clarity on the definition of "possession" and the duration of a "temporary" term
Potential Misuse of Power	The bill empowers central and state governments to suspend communication during public emergencies or for public safety. Critics have raised concerns about potential misuse to suppress dissenting voices
Restrictive Powers of TRAI	The draft allows the appointment of private sector corporate executives as TRAI chairpersons. A person from a private field may dilute the neutral adjudication of cases by TRAI.
Spectrum Allocation	Starlink (Elon Musk), Project Kuiper (Amazon), and Tata Group (India) oppose auction-based allocation of satellite spectrum.

Government Schemes:

- 1. PM-WANI:** Initiative for Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface.
- 2. Bharatnet Project:** Focuses on nationwide broadband connectivity.
- 3. PLI Scheme:** Supports manufacturing of telecom and networking products.
- 4. Bharat 6G Alliance:** Collaboration for advancing 6G technology in India.

The way forward and Conclusion:

To safeguard **against misuse**, executive action triggered by a declared national emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution should **necessitate Parliamentary approval**. Ensuring alignment with fundamental rights, particularly the **right to privacy**, is crucial in aspects of message interception and service suspension. The government, armed with extensive powers granted by the Bill, must **address privacy concerns with openness and undertake rule-making processes transparently**, engaging in consultations with various stakeholders. Broader consultations, involving private entities, the public, and other stakeholders, should be conducted to **gather diverse perspectives** on the current version of the bill.

About TRAI:

TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) is a **statutory body** formed under the **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act, 1997**. Its mandate includes **regulating telecom services and determining/revising** tariffs. The TRAI Act was amended to create the **Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal** (TDSAT) to handle adjudicatory and dispute functions formerly managed by TRAI.

About the Telecom sector in India:

The Indian telecom industry **ranks second globally** with **1.179 billion subscribers** (wireless + wireline) as of August 2023. It stands as the **fourth-largest sector** for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), constituting **6% of total FDI inflow**. India's teledensity, indicating telecom penetration, is at **over 84%**.

Insta Links:

- [The draft Telecommunication Bill, 2022](#)
- [Letting go of a chance to democratize telecom services](#)

Mains Link:

Q. Discuss the challenges facing the Indian telecom sector today. What should the Government of India do to save the telecom sector?

3. PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON CHILD LABOUR

Context:

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on **Labour, Textiles, and Skill Development** has highlighted the need for a **uni-**

form definition of 'child' under various laws in the effort to eliminate **child labour by 2025**.

Recommendations of the Committee:

Recommendation	Details
Definition of Child	The panel recommends a uniform definition of 'child' under various laws to eliminate ambiguity.
Policy Implementation	Policy to eliminate child labour has to go a long way to achieve the target stipulated in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 (to end all forms of child labour by 2025)
Age Criteria Discrepancies	Notes discrepancies in age criteria across acts (CALPRA Act, JJ Act , etc.) and suggests examining and resolving them. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 defines a child as a person aged 6 to 14 years . Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 defines a child as a person who has not completed 18 years of age . ILO sets the minimum age for work at 15 years , with exceptions for light work from the age of 13.
Positive List of Occupations	Urges the ministry not to include hazardous occupations in the positive list where adolescents can work.
Guidelines for Fund Utilization	Recommends formulating guidelines for utilizing funds collected as fines for child labour violations and increasing fine amounts.
District-level Fund	Suggests creating a district-level fund for child labourers' immediate relief and rehabilitation.
Stricter Punishments	Proposes incorporating stricter punishments, including license cancellation and property attachment , alongside fine increases.
Accountability of Employers	Calls for fixing accountability of principal employers and traffickers in addition to the employing entity.
DPS Functions Assignment	Notes that functions of district project societies (DPS) are not assigned and recommends a standard operating procedure (SOP) to avoid discontinuity .
Police Accountability	Recommends provisions in the CALPRA Act similar to those in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 for action against the police.

Child Tracking Mechanism	Advocates <u>establishing a National Level Child Tracking Mechanism</u> for coordinated efforts in prevention, tracing, tracking, rescue, rehabilitation, and re-integration.
Child-friendly Police Stations and Courts	Urges the ministry to pursue with other ministries for <u>child-friendly police stations and courts</u> .

What is Child labour?

A form of modern slavery, child labour includes any work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, and physical or mental development. (ILO). The practice includes trafficking, sexual exploitation, debt bondage, and exploitation in armed conflicts.

Article 24 of the Indian constitution prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or employed in any hazardous employment. India ratified both fundamental ILO Conventions on Child Labour (138 and 182) in 2017.

Impact of Child Labour:

- Perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty (child labour → poor education, health → less economic opportunities → poverty), denying children their fundamental rights and a better future.
- Child labour exposes children to physical (injuries, health complications and long-term developmental issues) and mental harm (anxiety, emotional trauma and a sense of hopelessness).

Prevalence in India:

1. According to the latest National Sample Survey data, UP leads with an estimated **2.1 million** child labourers.
2. UP together with Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and MP constitute nearly 55% of the total working children in India.
3. Rural-urban distribution: The prevalence of child labour in rural areas (14%) is close to three times higher than in urban areas (5%).
4. Gender distribution: Child labour is more prevalent among boys than girls at every age.
5. Sectoral distribution: The agriculture sector accounts for **70% of child labour** (112 million), followed by 20% in services and 10% in industry).
6. Their educational status: Nearly 28% of children aged 5-11 years and 35% of children aged 12-14 years involved in child labour are out of school.
7. Two major hotspots of child labour and child trafficking are the immigrant area which had come from Bengal and Bangladesh, and tribal areas of Assam.

Government Schemes related to Child Labour are:

1. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986: Amendment in 2016 banned the employment of children below 14 years.
2. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976: Prohibits systems of labour where individuals, including children, work in servitude to pay off debt.
3. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015: Governs laws related to children in conflict with the law.
4. Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012: Aims to prevent commercial sexual exploitation of children.
5. The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill: Draft published in 2021 detailing measures for prevention, protection, and rehabilitation. Specifies penalties for “trafficking” and “aggravated trafficking.”
6. Broadens the scope of “victims” to include transgender persons.
7. National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme: Implemented by the Union Ministry of Labour & Employment. Rehabilitation of child labourers through District Project Societies under the District Magistrate.

Way ahead:

The theme for World Day Against Child Labour 2023 (June 12) was “Social Justice for All. End Child Labour!” – highlighting the connection between social justice and the issue of child labour. Therefore, there is a need to prioritise –

- Access to quality education empowers them with the knowledge and skills they need to break free from the clutches of labour.
- Enforcement of labour laws and providing social protection.

Conclusion:

The battle against child labour necessitates a united front – a resolute stance against this grave injustice that brings together governments, non-profits and individuals from all walks of life.

Insta Links:

- [Child trafficking in India](#)
- [The issue of child labour in India](#)

Topics: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

4. SULTAN OF OMAN VISIT TO INDIA: INDIA-OMAN RELATIONS

Context:

On December 16, the Indian Prime Minister held bilateral talks with the Sultan of Oman at Hyderabad House in New

Delhi, aiming to **strengthen the strategic partnership** between the two nations.

Facets of India-Oman Relations

Key Points	Description
Background	India and Oman share ancient historical ties that span over 5,000 years . These relations were shaped by maritime trade links, cultural exchanges, and geographical proximity In ancient times, the Sumerians, Akkadians, and later the Assyrians had trade links with the people of the Indus Valley (now India). Oman's strategic location made it a crucial hub for maritime trade, connecting the civilizations of the East and West.
Modern Relations	India and Oman established diplomatic relations in 1955 , elevated to a strategic partnership in 2008 , with Oman holding a pivotal position as India's primary defence partner in the Gulf region Oman is a strategic partner in the Gulf Cooperation Council, Arab League, and IORA . Gandhi Peace Prize 2019 was conferred on the Late HM Sultan Qaboos for strengthening ties.
Defence Relations	The Joint Military Cooperation Committee (JMCC) is a key forum for defence engagement. Military exercises include Al Najah, Eastern Bridge, and Naseem Al Bahr .
Economic & Commercial Relations	Bilateral trade during FY2022-23 reached over \$12 billion ; Over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures are present in Oman; India was the 2nd largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022. Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) and Joint Business Council (JBC) oversee economic cooperation. Indian companies have investments in sectors like iron, steel, cement, and textile . The proposed India-Middle-East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) project will see Oman playing an important role in India's connectivity ambitions.

Cultural Cooperation	Close cultural ties with the Indian Social Club promoting cultural diversity. Celebration of National Days, Festivals, and events promoting Indian culture. Yoga is popular , and cultural events were celebrated in 2019 for significant anniversaries.
Maritime Cooperation	Oman's strategic location is at the gateway of the Strait of Hormuz . India signed a pact in 2018 to access Duqm port , enhancing maritime cooperation. Duqm Port provides base facilities, Operational Turn Round and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships in the region
Indian Diaspora	Around 7 lakh Indians in Oman , with a significant presence in various professions. Several Indian families have been residing for over 150-200 years. They have contributed in diverse fields such as doctors, engineers, teachers, etc

Oman's strategic importance for India:

Oman holds strategic importance for India due to its position at the **gateway of the Strait of Hormuz**, a crucial passage for **one-fifth of India's oil imports**. All three branches of the Indian armed forces engage **in regular bilateral exercises with Oman**, fostering trust and cooperation. India secured the **Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support**. This move aims to enhance **India's presence in the Indian Ocean region**, countering Chinese influence.

Challenges in India-Oman relationship:

- **Geopolitical Dynamics:** The evolving geopolitical landscape in the Middle East (esp. with the ongoing **Israel-Palestine war**) and **India's good relations with Israel** can pose challenges to the stability of India-Oman relations.
- **Strategic Moves by Other Nations:** Actions by other major players in the region, such as China's BRI may impact the dynamics between India and Oman.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Oman's economic challenges, particularly in the context of fluctuations in oil prices, can have repercussions on India's energy security and economic interests.
- **Security Concerns:** The region's security landscape, including issues related to terrorism, Piracy and maritime security.
- **Port Access Sensitivities:** India's military access to the Port of Duqm could be perceived as a challenge by other nations, potentially affecting diplomatic relations in the region.

Conclusion:

India faces a **shortage of energy resources** to meet its current and future demands, necessitating **long-term energy collaborations** with nations like Oman. Strengthening ties with Oman not only **addresses India's energy needs** but also contributes to enhancing strategic depth in the region. This collaboration aligns with **India's Indo-Pacific vision**, particularly in the **Western and Southern parts of the Indian Ocean**, reinforcing its geopolitical presence.

Insta Links:

[Oman's Duqm port](#)

Mains Links:

Q. The question of India's Energy Security constitutes the most important part of India's economic progress. Analyse India's energy policy cooperation with West Asian countries. (UPSC 2017)

Prelims Links:

Q. Which of the following is not a member of 'Gulf Cooperation Council'? (UPSC 2016)

- (a) Iran
- (b) Saudi Arabia
- (c) Oman
- (d) Kuwait

Ans: A

GENERAL STUDIES – 3

Topics: Conservation related issues, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. ARCTIC REPORT CARD FOR 2023

Context:

The **Arctic Report Card for 2023**, published by NOAA, reveals the Arctic experiencing its **warmest summer on record**, with temperatures **rising four times** faster than elsewhere.

Key Highlights of the Report:

Key Highlights	Details
Record High Temperatures	The 2023 summer in the Arctic was the warmest on record . The Arctic has warmed nearly four times faster than the global average since 1979 due to climate change

Impact of Rising Temperatures	Unprecedented wildfires occurred , leading to community evacuations. Decline in sea ice extent, severe floods, food insecurity , and rising sea levels. Direct impacts on ecosystems, human health, and cultural practices .
Thawing of Sub-sea Permafrost	Warmer ocean temperatures accelerate the thawing of subsea permafrost . The release of methane and carbon dioxide contributes to global warming and exacerbates ocean acidification.
Food Insecurity Due to Salmon Decline	Western Alaska experienced significantly reduced populations of Chinook and chum salmon . Populations were 81% and 92% below the 30-year mean, respectively. Impact on Indigenous communities relying on salmon for sustenance. Cultural, food security, and economic implications.
Wildfires in Arctic Regions	Canada witnessed its worst wildfire season on record, affecting 40% of its Arctic and Northern land mass . High temperatures and dry conditions led to over 10 million acres burned in the Northwest Territories.
Glacier Thinning and Flooding	Rising temperatures caused dramatic thinning of the Mendenhall Glacier in Alaska over the past 20 years. In August 2023, a glacial lake burst through its ice dam, causing unprecedented flooding and severe property damage in Alaska's Juneau .
Greenland Ice Sheet Melting	Despite above-average winter snow accumulation , the ice sheet lost roughly 350 trillion pounds of mass between August 2022 and September 2023. Greenland's ice sheet melting is the second-largest contributor to sea-level rise .

India's engagement in the Arctic:

- India's engagement with the Arctic began when it **signed the Svalbard Treaty in February 1920** in Paris between Norway, the US, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Ireland, and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen. Ever since then, India has been closely monitoring all the developments in the Arctic region.
- **India initiated its Arctic research program in 2007** with a focus on climate change in the region. The objectives included studying **teleconnections**

between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon, to characterize sea ice in the Arctic using satellite data, and to estimate the effect on global warming.

- India already has a research station in the **Arctic, Himadri**, for the research work.

Also in the News:

India's Year-round Presence in Arctic

Source: [IE](#)

India has **launched its first winter expedition to Himadri**, its **Arctic Research Station** at Ny-Ålesund in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. The station, which was previously operational for about 180 days annually, **will now remain operational throughout the year**. This move makes India one of the **few countries to operate its Arctic research bases during winter**.

India's first Arctic Winter Expedition, led by the National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), will begin **year-round observations in Svalbard**, the world's northernmost inhabited place. Challenges include limited space, harsh climate, and geopolitical complications. The expedition aims to **better understand climate change, polar-tropical climate teleconnections, and impacts on India's weather patterns**.

For: [India unveils its Arctic policy: Click Here](#)

About NOAA:

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (HQ: Washington, D.C.; Founded: 1970) is based **scientific and regulatory agency** within the United States Department of Commerce, a United States federal government department.

About Arctic Report Card:

It is issued **annually since 2006**, and provides timely, peer-reviewed information on the current state of various components of the Arctic environmental system in comparison to historical records.

Insta Link:

[Arctic Report Card: The Arctic Is Becoming Wetter and Stormier](#)

Prelims Links:

Q. The term 'IndARC', sometimes seen in the news, is the name of (USPC 2015)

- (a) an indigenously developed radar system inducted into the Indian Defence
- (b) India's satellite to provide services to the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim
- (c) a scientific establishment set up by India in the Antarctic region
- (d) India's underwater observatory to scientifically study the Arctic region

Ans: D

Q. Which of the following statements is/are correct about the deposits of 'methane hydrate'? (UPSC 2019)

- Global warming might trigger the release of methane gas from these deposits.
- Large deposits of 'methane hydrate' are found in the Arctic Tundra and under the sea floor.
- Methane in the atmosphere oxidizes to carbon dioxide after a decade or two.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Topics: [Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.](#)

GENERAL STUDIES – 4

1. ROLE OF POWER IN BUREAUCRACY

Context:

The [discussion](#) centres on the **role of power in bureaucracy**, emphasizing the impact it has on an individual's character.

Abraham Lincoln: "Nearly all men can withstand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

The provided quote by Abraham Lincoln suggests that a **person's true character is revealed when they are in a position of power**. Facing adversity may bring out positive traits, but wielding power tests **one's ethical character**.

What is Power?

Power refers to the **ability or capacity to control, influence, or direct the behaviour** of others or the course of events. It encompasses the authority to make decisions, allocate resources, and shape outcomes.

Role of Power in Bureaucracy:

Aspect	Description	Examples
Attraction of Power	Power is a significant attraction in bureaucracy , drawing individuals to influential roles.	Civil servants aspiring for positions with politicians (Politico-Bureaucrat Nexus)
Enabler in Decision-Making	Power serves as a great enabler in bureaucratic decision-making , allowing individuals to implement policies and make crucial choices.	High-ranking bureaucrats influence policy decisions and resource allocations.

Influence on Character	Power can influence an individual's character, potentially leading to changes in behaviour, demeanour, and ethical standards.	Instances of bureaucrats displaying arrogance, exploitation, or misuse of authority.
Abuse of Power	The misuse of power is a concern, with instances of individuals exploiting their authority for personal gain or to further narrow self-interests. "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"	Cases of corruption, bribery, and favouritism in bureaucratic practices.
Test of Character	Position of power tests a bureaucrat's ability to exhibit ethical traits such as integrity, humility, compassion, and empathy.	

Lord Acton	"Despotic power is always accompanied by corruption of morality."
Henry Adams	"Power when wielded by abnormal energy is the most serious of facts."

Conclusion:

In a democracy, those in power should exhibit humility and ensure positive interactions with the public.

2. EXAMPLES OF ETHICS

Example 1: Morality of the Unethical

Context:

The [article](#) suggests that the concept of morality among the unethical may be **surprising to conventional thinking**, which tends to categorize everything rigidly.

In the recent **humanitarian crisis in Uttarkashi**, where a tunnel collapse trapped 41 workers. Despite **advanced technology failing to rescue them**, a last-resort decision was made to call in **rathole miners** (environmentally harmful and officially banned mining activity).

These miners, often associated with **low social status and mining mafias**, manually burrowed to **rescue the workers**, showcasing **courage and skill** derived from **informal mentoring**.

The story emphasizes the **importance of acknowledging morality** regardless of its **unconventional origins** (even in **activities considered unethical**)

What is Morality?

It refers to a **set of principles or rules** that guide human behaviour based on concepts of **right and wrong**. It involves distinguishing between actions that are **considered ethical or virtuous** and those that are deemed **unethical or morally wrong**.

What Should be done:

- **Empowerment:** Power should be exercised to empower others rather than exploit them. This involves using authority to enhance the capabilities and well-being of the people served.
- **Maintaining Moral Strength:** Individuals in positions of **power need to constantly guard against** the potential misuse of authority. **Maintaining high moral character** becomes essential for those in influential roles.
- **Public Service Ethics:** In public service, power should be wielded responsibly, considering the welfare of the public. A bureaucratic attitude should **align with rules and compliance**, but interactions should reflect humility and a service-oriented approach

Thinkers on Power:

Thinker	Quote
Bertrand Russell	"Power is given only to him who dares to stoop and take it ... one must have the courage to dare."
Woodrow Wilson	"Power consists in one's capacity to link his will with the purpose of others, to lead by reason and a gift of cooperation."
George Orwell	"Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing."
Mao Zedong	"Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."
Voltaire	"With great power comes great responsibility."

Example 2: Environment VS Economy

Coffee importers to the European Union (EU) are reducing purchases from **small farmers in Africa** in anticipation of the **EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)**, set to take effect in late 2024. The law **aims to ban the sale of goods linked to deforestation**.

Critics argue that these sourcing strategies could **increase poverty among small-scale farmers and raise prices for EU consumers**. The EUDR requires importers to prove that their commodities **did not originate from deforested land**.

Positive Impact:

- **Environmental Conservation**

- **Global Sustainability:** Encourages global sustainability efforts by holding **importers accountable for the ethical sourcing** of commodities, and promoting responsible practices in supply chains.

Negative Impacts

- **Impact on Small-Scale Farmers:** Scaling back purchases may **increase poverty** among small farmers in countries like Ethiopia, **negatively affecting their livelihoods** and social well-being.
- **Higher Prices for EU Consumers:** Reduced imports may lead to higher prices for EU consumers, potentially impacting their **access to affordable goods** and raising ethical concerns about **economic equality**.

The decision may **have unintended consequences**, emphasizing the need for a **comprehensive and socially responsible** approach to sustainability regulations.

CONTENT FOR MAINS ENRICHMENT

1. GREENWASHING

Context:

The UK banned advertisements from **Air France, Lufthansa, and Etihad** in December, accusing them of greenwashing—misleading consumers about the environmental impact of air travel.

Greenwashing involves **creating a false impression of climate-friendly practices**, and it often overshadows environmentally damaging activities. The aviation industry, responsible **for around 2.5% of human-produced CO2 emissions**, faces scrutiny. Without measures, its contribution could rise to **5% by 2050**, per the UN IPCC.

2. RAIMATI GHIURIA

Context:

Raimati Ghiuria, known as the **“Queen of Millets,”** has garnered attention for preserving **30 rare millet varieties in India**.

Raimati, with **minimal formal education**, credits her knowledge to practical experience. She is celebrated for her contributions to **promoting millet farming, training other farmers**, and establishing a farm school. Raimati’s contributions extend to **processing millets into value-added products**, leading a **self-help group**, and receiving state-level recognition and awards.

Usage: You can use the example to show the value of **Cultural Preservation, Environmental Stewardship, Community Empowerment, Promotion of Healthy Living, Inclusivity and Collaboration**

FACTS FOR PRELIMS

GS-1

1. KASHI TAMIL SANGAMAM

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the **Kashi Tamil Sangamam** in **Varanasi**, celebrating the historical and cultural connections between North and South India.

- It aims to deepen **people-to-people bonds** and showcase art, music, handloom, handicrafts, and cuisines from Tamil Nadu and Varanasi.

2. GOA LIBERATION DAY

Context:

On 19th December 1961, **India annexed Goa from Portuguese rule through Operation Vijay**, following years of failed diplomatic efforts. It was initially a UT and was Declared the **25th Independent State of India** on May 30, 1987

History:

Goa, a Portuguese colony since 1510, continued as such after India gained independence in 1947.

Timeline:

Year	Event
1510	Goa became a Portuguese colony after Admiral Afonso de Albuquerque defeated the Sultan of Bijapur .
1928	Tristão de Bragança Cunha established the Goa National Congress, a pivotal moment in Goan nationalism.
1946	Ram Manohar Lohia leads a historic rally in Goa, calling for civil liberties, freedom, and integration with India.
1949	Formal diplomatic relations were established between India and Portugal .
1950	Bilateral relations declined due to Portugal's refusal to surrender enclaves of Goa, Daman and Diu, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.
1951	Portugal changed its constitution, claiming Goa as an overseas province, potentially linked to NATO membership .
1961	Daman & Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli integrated into India.
1961	Operation Vijay was launched by the Indian Government to annex Daman Diu and Goa on December 19, ending Portuguese rule.
1961	Liberation of Goa brings an end to 451 years of Portuguese overseas provincial governance.
Reason for the delay in securing Goa	Prime Minister Nehru , hesitant to engage in military conflict, focused on diplomacy. Tensions escalated in 1955 when Portuguese forces fired on satyagrahis, leading to 25 deaths Overall, the differences between groups advocating satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) and military action contributed to delays in the liberation of Goa.

About Goa	Goa is situated on the southwest coast of India in the Konkan region, separated from the Deccan highlands by the Western Ghats.
	Sonsogor is the highest point. Seven major rivers include Zuari, Mandovi , Terekhol, Chapora, Galgibag, Kumbarjua Canal, Talpona, and Sal
	Protected Sites: Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary, Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary, Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhagwan Mahaveer Sanctuary, Mollem National Park.



3. KATABATIC WINDS

Context:

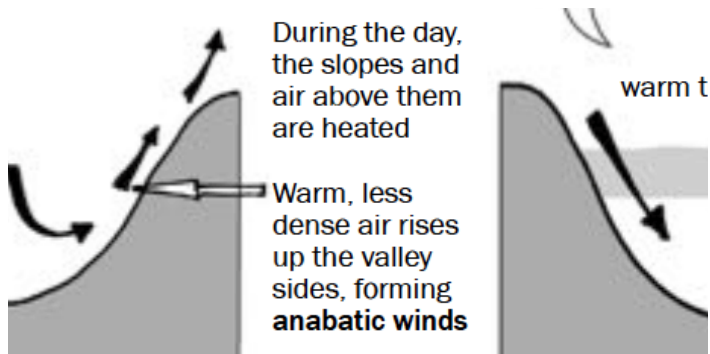
A surprising phenomenon has been observed in the **Himalayas**, where **'katabatic' winds** are **triggered when high temperatures affect high-altitude ice masses**.

- This leads to **cold air blowing to lower-altitude areas**, potentially **slowing down the effects of the global climate crisis in some regions**.
- The study reveals that a **temperature gap between air above the mountains and cooler air** in contact with ice **masses causes increased turbulent heat exchange, leading to stronger cooling of the surface air mass**.

Anabatic Winds – These Winds are **upslope winds** driven by **warmer surface temperatures** on a **mountain slope than**

the surrounding air column.

Katabatic Winds – Katabatic winds are **downslope winds** created when the **mountain surface is colder than the surrounding air and create a downslope wind.**



4. SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARDS

Context:

The **Sahitya Akademi** has announced the winners of its Annual Sahitya Akademi Awards for the year 2023 in **24 languages.**

- The awards include **9 for poetry, 6 for novels, 5 for short stories, 3 for essays, and 1 for literary study.**
- The awards, which **include a casket containing an engraved copper plaque, a shawl, and a cash prize of Rs. 1,00,000/- each.**

The **Sahitya Akademi Award** is a **literary honour** given annually by **India's National Academy of Letters.** The award recognizes and **promotes excellence in writing and acknowledges new trends.**

5. MITHILA

Context:

Bihar Chief Minister **Nitish Kumar** has initiated **a Rs 72-crore development plan for Goddess Sita's birthplace at Punaura Dham in Sitamarhi at Mithila.**

- The epic mentions Sita using **names like Vaidehi, Janaki, Sita, and Mithilapuri, the last being an obvious reference to Mithila in Bihar.**

About Mithila:

- **Mithila, described in the Vishnu Puran as north of the Ganga and south of the Himalayas, includes present-day Darbhanga, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura, and some areas in Bihar and Nepal.**
- **Janakpuri in Nepal is a modern name for Mithilapuri mentioned in the Valmiki Ramayan. The Bihar government, in coordination with Nepal, has included Janakpuri in the Ramayana Circuit.**

GS-2

1. DARE TO DREAM SCHEME

Context:

The **Dare to Dream (D2D) scheme** is a contest organized by the **Ministry of Defence in India,** specifically by the **Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO).**

- The contest aims to **encourage innovation and creativity among individual innovators and start-ups.**

About Dare to Dream Contest:

- The **Dare to Dream Contest,** initiated in **memory of former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam,** is an annual initiative by the **Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).**
- **Launched in 2019,** the contest **provides a unique opportunity for start-ups, innovators, entrepreneurs, and individuals above 18 years old** to address key challenges in emerging technologies, ultimately contributing to enhancing **India's defence and aerospace capabilities.**
- The evaluation criteria for entries include **completeness of proposal, scientific soundness, design completeness, merit, technological readiness level achieved, and innovation.**
- The contest aims to bring together a **diverse group of participants to foster innovation and creativity** in addressing technological challenges relevant to defence and aerospace.

2. SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION

Context:

The Rajya Sabha's Subordinate Legislation Committee has criticized the Union government for **prolonged delays in framing rules** for Acts passed by Parliament.

What are Subordinate Legislations?

Subordinate legislations are **laws or regulations** created by authorities to **implement and administer** the broader statutes passed by the legislature. These regulations, also known as **delegated or secondary legislation,** provide detailed guidelines and procedures necessary for the effective enforcement of primary laws.

- **Subordinate legislation** is necessary due to legislative time constraints, allowing experts to provide details, especially in emerging areas like data protection.
- Although the concept of delegated legislation was not mentioned specifically in the **Indian Constitution** it can be understood by **interpreting Article 312.**

What are the concerns?

1. There have been **recurrent delays by Union Ministries** in completing the framing of rules within the **stipulated six months** after passing an Act.
2. There has been **a lack of serious efforts by ministries**
 - a. **National Food Security Act, 2013:** Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand are yet to com-

- plete the process of rule-making
- b. **Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006** has been granted ten extensions so far, yet the **process of framing subordinate legislation** is nonconclusive.
 - c. **Wakf Act, 2013**: State governments were delaying the process of framing subordinate legislation
 - d. **Rules of Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act** has not been framed even if four years had lapsed without any progress

About the Committee on **Subordinate Legislation** in Rajya Sabha

It is formed **under Rule 204 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business** in the Council of States. Its mandate involves **scrutinizing and reporting to the House on the proper exercise of powers** to make rules, regulations, bylaws, schemes, etc., as conferred by the Constitution or delegated by Parliament.

3. BORROWINGS BY THE STATES

Context:

States in India may have the option to **access around ₹2.04 lakh crore** in additional borrowings beyond their **net borrowing limits** for the year, according to the Finance Ministry.

The Centre has granted **22 states permission to raise nearly ₹61,000 crore** this year, exceeding their net **borrowing ceilings set at 3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)**.

Reason:

This additional borrowing capacity is **extended to states that fulfilled pension liabilities** by contributing to the **National Pension System (NPS)**. Additionally, states can potentially raise **over ₹1.43 lakh crore** based on the **Ministry of Power's recommendations** tied to power sector reforms.

Rules regarding borrowing by States:

States in India have a **normal net borrowing ceiling set at 3% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP)** for the fiscal year 2024, as per the **Fifteenth Finance Commission's recommendation**. Additionally, states **receive an extra 0.5% of GSDP** in borrowing capacity as a **performance-based incentive** for power sector reforms, enabling them to borrow ₹1.43 lakh crore for FY24 based on the Ministry of Power's recommendation.

Constitutionally, Article 293(3) stipulates that a **state cannot raise a loan without the consent of the Government of India** if any part of a previous loan from the central government remains outstanding.

4. ELECTORAL LITERACY IN CLASS-ROOMS

Context:

The **Ministry of Education and the Election Commission of India** have entered into a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** to integrate **voter education and electoral literacy into the formal education system in India**.

- The objective is to **prepare students as future voters and encourage greater electoral participation**.
- The MoU includes the **introduction or updating of NCERT textbooks to incorporate electoral literacy in the National Curriculum Framework for Classes 6th to 12th**.
- Additionally, **voter education and electoral literacy** will be integrated into the curricular framework of **colleges, universities, and adult education**.
- Teachers will receive training to **incorporate this subject matter into their courses**.

5. NATIONAL GEOSCIENCE DATA REPOSITORY (NGDR) PORTAL

Context:

The Ministry of Mines has launched the **National Geoscience Data Repository (NGDR) Portal**.

Spearheaded by the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)** and Bhaskaracharya Institute of Space Applications and Geoinformatics (**BISAG-N**), this online platform aims to provide **comprehensive access to geospatial information nationwide**. The initiative represents a significant step toward **democratizing critical geoscience data**, fostering innovation in exploration, and empowering stakeholders in various industries and academia.

The portal has been created as a part of the **National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP), 2016**.

About **National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP) 2016**:

It seeks to **boost exploration in India** by encouraging **private-sector involvement**. Key features include **auctioning exploration blocks** for private sector involvement with revenue sharing, **creating public geoscientific data**, and mapping the entire country using low-altitude and close space flights for precise location of minerals like gold, silver, copper, etc.

About GSI:

The Geological Survey of India (GSI) (HQ: Kolkata) is a **scientific agency founded in 1851** under the Ministry of Mines. It conducts **geological surveys and studies**, providing essential earth science information to government, industry, and the public. As one of the world's oldest organizations of its kind, GSI actively participates in various industries and interna-

tional geoscientific forums.

About BISAG-N

The Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG-N) is an **autonomous scientific society** supporting technology development, research, and cooperation in the geospatial technology domain. It is an agency of the Department of Science and Technology Government of Gujarat, located at Gandhinagar, Gujarat

GS-3

1. SECURITIES APPELLATE TRIBUNAL (SAT)

Context:

The **Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT)** has overturned the **Securities and Exchange Board of India’s (Sebi)** fine of Rs 7 crore on the **National Stock Exchange (NSE) in the dark-fibre case.**

- The investigation focused on potential **violations of regulations and circulars related to fraudulent and unfair trade practices.**

About Dark Fiber:

Dark fibre, also known as **unlit fibre**, is **unused fibre-optic cable and infrastructure.** It’s available for **purchase or rent from network service providers.**

Dark fibre is used for **private networking, internet access, and internet infrastructure networking.** It’s typically used for **telecom and network communications.**

Dark fibre is different from **“lit fibre” which refers to cables that are actively being used.** Dark fibre is **inactive because no information is passed through** it, so no light pulse is transmitted.

2. SCHEME TO ACCELERATE EXPLO- RATION OF CRITICAL MINERALS

Context:

The **Ministry of Mines** has introduced a **new scheme to expedite the exploration of critical and deep-seated minerals.**

- Under this initiative, the ministry will **directly sanction exploration projects to Notified Private Exploration Agencies (NPEAs).**
- Additionally, these NPEAs are **now permitted to bid for auctioning mineral blocks they have explored,** a privilege previously unavailable to them.

This decision aims to **eliminate delays in project approvals, accelerate project execution, and encourage larger companies and international players** to engage in exploration proj-

ects with NMET funding.

3. LOGISTICS COSTS IN INDIA DECREASES

Context:

The logistics costs in India for the fiscal year 2021-22 ranged between **7.8% and 8.9%** of the GDP, showing a decline **from 8.7-9.9%** in 2011-12, according to a report by the **National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER)** and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) (under Commerce Ministry)

Reason for this reduction?

The report, titled **‘Logistic Cost in India: Assessment and Long-term Framework,’** attributes this reduction to faster growth in nominal GDP compared to logistics costs and a decline in fuel prices during the period of 2014-15 to 2016-17.

About Logistics:

About Logistics in India	Description
What is Logistics?	Logistics refers to the management and coordination of the flow of goods, services, and information from the point of origin to the point of consumption. It involves various activities such as transportation, storage, handling, and distribution to ensure the efficient movement of products within the supply chain.
Status	India has ranked 38 out of 139 countries in the World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index 2023 (2018 rank of India was 44) Gujarat has topped the Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) 2021 index The unorganized sector amounts to over 90% of the logistics sector Only five states (Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana) contribute to 70% of exports, creating disparities in income and job generation
Benefits	Enhances trade competitiveness; Improves supply chain efficiency; Promotes Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Steps taken by the government	The logistics division in the Commerce Ministry has been created
	Logistics Efficiency Enhancement Program and Vehicle Fleet Modernization Program to improve logistics efficiency. So far, 22 states have already implemented logistics policies
	Gati Shakti Scheme; Bharatmala Program (building about 84,000 Km of new highways); Sagarmala Project (unlock the potential of the country's 7,5000 Km coastline and 14,500 Km of navigable waterways); Railways: Freight corridors; e-Air WayBill (e-AWB), and e-Cargo
	Previously, the government had planned to replace the Multimodal Transportation of Goods Act, 1993 (MMTG) with a National Logistics Efficiency and Advancement Predictability and Safety Act (NLEAPS)
	National Logistics Policy 2022 : Improves EXIM logistics and facilitates logistics park development
	Land Port Management System (LPMS) : Digitizes operations at Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)
	National Logistics Portal (Marine) : Provides a single-window platform
FASTag-based electronic toll collection	

4. TAX INSPECTORS WITHOUT BORDERS (TIWB) PROGRAM

Context:

Tax Inspectors Without Borders (TIWB) program, a collaborative effort between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), was recently launched in Saint Lucia.

India has been selected as the **Partner Administration** and will contribute **Tax Experts** to the 12-18-month initiative. This marks the seventh TIWB program supported by India through the provision of Tax Experts.

Aim: The program's focus is on the **effective use of automatic exchange of information** under the **Common Reporting Standard (CRS) framework**. TIWA will facilitate the **transfer of tax audit knowledge and skills** to developing country tax administrations using a practical, **"learning by doing"** approach.

Saint Lucia is an Eastern Caribbean island nation with a pair

of dramatically tapered mountains, the Pitons, on its west coast. Saint Lucia is **one of two sovereign states** in the world named after a woman and is the only one named **after a human woman** (Ireland is named after a goddess).

5. KRUTRIM

Context:

Ola has announced the development of a **"Made for India" Large Language Model** like **ChatGPT** equivalent called **Krutrim**.

- This AI system, designed to **support 10 Indian languages**, will operate **independently from Ola's mobility and EV businesses**.
- The system, trained on proprietary datasets, aims to address India's linguistic diversity and cultural context.

A **large language model (LLM)** is a type of **artificial intelligence (AI) program** that can recognize and generate text. LLMs are built on **machine learning, specifically a type of neural network called a transformer model**

6. BLUE DRAGON

Context:

Scientists have discovered a **new mosasaur, named Wakayama Soryu**, in Japan that lived **72 million years ago**.

- Dubbed the **"blue dragon," this marine predator**, comparable in **size to a great white shark**, was found with **unique features such as long rear flippers and a shark-like dorsal fin**.
- Researchers believe these **traits enhanced its agility and speed in the water**.
- Classified as **Megapterygius wakayamaensis**, the mosasaur challenges existing ideas about marine **reptile locomotion and offers insights into the diversity and evolution of mosasaurs**.
- The naming as **"blue dragon" reflects its cultural significance in Japanese folklore**.
- **Mosasaurs, apex predators of the late Cretaceous period**, coexisted with dinosaurs and became extinct due to a mass extinction event **caused by an asteroid impact**.

The discovery sheds light on prehistoric marine life and adds to our understanding of Earth's ancient oceans.

7. KAKRAPAR-4 NUCLEAR REACTOR

Context:

The **fourth unit of the Kakrapar Atomic Power Project (KAPP-4) in Gujarat**, with a capacity of **700 MWe**, achieved criticality recently, marking the **initiation of a controlled fission chain reaction**.

- The Kakrapar facility, houses the **largest indigenous nuclear power reactors** built by the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)**.
- These pressurized heavy water reactors (PHWRs) **utilize natural uranium** as fuel and heavy water as

coolant and moderator.

- The Kakrapar Atomic Power Station includes two operating PHWRs with a capacity of 220 MWe each, known as KAPS-1 and -2.

The **NPCIL, a public sector undertaking of the Department of Atomic Energy**, already operates indigenous PHWRs at other facilities.



8. HYDROGEN CYANIDE

Context: Scientists using data from **NASA’s Cassini spacecraft** have discovered **hydrogen cyanide**, a **crucial molecule for life formation**, in the **oceans of Saturn’s icy moon Enceladus**.

- Published in Nature Astronomy, the study suggests that **Enceladus subsurface oceans may possess more chemical energy** than previously thought, **potentially supporting the creation and persistence of complex organic compounds**.
- The research, based on Cassini’s data collected between 2004 and 2017, identified hydrogen cyanide, along with **methanol, ethane, and oxygen**, in the **plumes of water vapor erupting from Enceladus’s surface**.

These findings strengthen the **case for the moon’s habitability**, indicating that it may contain **essential molecules for life and provide insights into the formation of complex biomolecules**.

9. JN.1 VARIANT OF COVID

Context:

A **new COVID-19 subvariant, JN.1**, identified in Kerala, has raised concerns, prompting the Union Ministry of Health to **initiate preparedness measures**.

- The variant, **considered to be Omicron subvariant BA.2.86 or Pirola**, has been spreading in several countries, including China.
- The JN.1 variant is **noted for its ability to spread faster and evade immunity**.
- Symptoms include **fever, runny nose, sore throat, headache, and mild gastrointestinal symptoms**.

10. NOMA

Context:

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** recently added **noma**, a **severe gangrenous disease of the mouth and face**, to its list of **neglected tropical diseases (NTD)**.

- Also known as **cancrum oris**, **noma** has a **high mortality rate of around 90%** and is **linked to extreme poverty, malnutrition, and poor access to sanitation and oral hygiene**.
- The disease primarily **affects children aged 2-6 in poor communities**, and due to a lack of awareness, there are unreliable estimates, with the latest data dating back to 1998.

Symptoms:

- The disease, which manifests **as gum inflammation**, is thought to be **caused by bacteria in the mouth**.
- It often starts as an **ulcer on the mucous membrane, frequently after measles or other illnesses**.
- Survivors may face **facial disfigurement, jaw muscle spasms, oral incontinence, and speech problems**.

The disease, also known as the **‘face of poverty,’** was common in the **Western world in the past, disappearing with economic progress**.

Noma’s inclusion in the WHO’s list of neglected tropical diseases is seen as a **significant step toward eradication, prompting calls for increased attention and resources**.

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of **tropical infections** that are common in **low-income populations in developing regions of Africa, Asia, and the Americas**. They are caused by a variety of pathogens, such as viruses, bacteria, protozoa, and parasitic worms (helminths).

11. KHELO INDIA PARA GAMES

Context:

The Union Sports Minister **officially closed the inaugural**

edition of the Khelo India Para Games in Delhi.

Haryana emerged as the top-performing state with 105 medals, including 40 gold, followed by **Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu**.

What is the Khelo India Para Games?

The **Khelo India Para Games (KIPG)** is aimed at **empowering para athletes** in India. Organized by the **Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Sports Authority of India**, and other bodies, it is part of the **broader Khelo India Initiative**.

Khelo India was introduced by the **Indian government in 2017** and encompasses the:

1. **Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG)** (commenced 2018): **Annual national competition** for youngsters representing states
2. **Khelo India University Games (KIUG)** (commenced 2020): Showcases university students' talent in sports
3. **Khelo India Winter Games (Commenced 2020)**: Promotes winter sports in India
4. **Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCE) scheme**: It aims to enhance sports infrastructure by supporting existing training facilities.

12. PEOPLE WITH BLOOD DISORDER NOT ELIGIBLE FOR RESERVATION

Context:

People with blood disorders like **thalassemia, haemophilia, and sickle cell disease** are not eligible for job reservations in government roles under the **Persons with Disabilities category**, according to **India's Social Justice Ministry**.

The three diseases were included in the **list of disabilities under the Right to Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016**, but they are **excluded from job reservation benefits**.

Rules regarding Reservations for disabled people:

1. **4% reservation in government jobs** is available for people with disabilities
2. Every government establishment **must reserve 1% of the total number of vacancies** for people with benchmark disabilities.

The RPwD Act defines benchmark disabilities as:

- Autism
- Intellectual disability
- Specific learning disability
- Mental illnesses

The RPwD Act also defines disabilities as:

- Blindness and low vision
- Deaf and hard of hearing

- Locomotor disability, including cerebral palsy, leprosy, dwarfism, acid attack victims, and muscular dystrophy

About the Three Diseases:

Condition	Nature	Impact
Thalassemia	Blood disorder affecting haemoglobin	Reduced ability to produce normal haemoglobin
Haemophilia	Bleeding disorder, deficiency of clotting factor	Prolonged bleeding, difficulty in clotting
Sickle Cell Disease	Genetic blood disorder, abnormal hemoglobin	Altered red blood cell shape, circulation issues

13. MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF MARINE SPECIES

Context:

The Government of India has implemented various measures to conserve marine species

Steps Taken by the Government for Conservation of Marine Species:

Steps Taken	Details
1) Protected Areas	Designation of 130 Marine Protected Areas and identification of 106 Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas (ICMBAs) for safeguarding marine species.
2) Scheduled Animals	Listing of many threatened marine species as Scheduled animals in the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 .
3) IDWH Scheme	Prioritization of threatened species like marine turtles, humpback whales, and Dugongs for assessment and monitoring under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitat (IDWH) scheme .
4) Dugong Conservation Reserve	Establishment of the Dugong Conservation Reserve in Palk Bay for the conservation of Dugongs and seagrass-associated marine species.
5) National Marine Turtle Action Plan	Release of the National Marine Turtle Action Plan with the aim to conserve marine turtles and their habitats in India.
6) Project Dolphin	Launch of Project Dolphin in 2021 as a government initiative to conserve both oceanic and riverine dolphin species.

7) Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2019	Promulgation under the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 , focusing on conservation and management plans of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) like Mangroves, Seagrasses, Sand dunes, Corals, Coral reefs, Turtle nesting grounds, etc.
8) Biological Diversity Act 2002	Implementation of the Biological Diversity Act 2002 and associated rules to ensure the protection, conservation, and sustainable use of marine species.
9) Financial Assistance	Granting funds under centrally sponsored schemes to maritime states for the conservation of Corals and Mangroves. CAMPA funds provided for Dugong conservation.
10) Centre for Marine Living Resources and Ecology (CMLRE)	An attached office under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is mandated with the development of management strategies for marine living resources through ecosystem monitoring and modelling activities.
11) Marine Megafauna Stranding Management Guidelines, 2021	Release of guidelines for actions during stranding and entanglement events , improving coordination between stakeholders.

14. LATHYRISM

Context:

Grass pea, also known as khesari dal, has been historically infamous for causing lathyrism, a neurological disease leading to lower limb paralysis.

- In the late 19th century, an outbreak of **lathyrism linked to grass pea led to its ban in India in 1961 under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act.**
- Despite the ban, **grass pea cultivation continued**, and researchers **developed low-toxin varieties.**
- In 2015, an expert committee **recommended lifting the ban**, emphasizing its **potential for food security amid climate change.**

Lathyrism is **a neurological disorder** caused by **eating too much grass pea** (*Lathyrus sativus*). It's also known as **neuro-lathyrism**

Lathyrism is one of the **oldest known neurotoxic disorders**. It's a skeletal disorder caused by the **toxin BAPN, which inhibits the copper-containing enzyme lysyl oxidase**

15. GENE DRIVE TECHNOLOGY

Context:

Scientists are developing a "gene drive technology" to **po-**

tentially eliminate malaria-causing mosquitoes in Africa.

- This technique involves **releasing genetically modified male mosquitoes** into the environment to **prevent female mosquitoes from producing new female offspring**, leading to a **reduction in malaria transmission.**
- Despite the promising nature of the technology, **there are ecological concerns, and some advocacy groups oppose it**, emphasizing **potential unpredictable consequences on the ecosystem.**

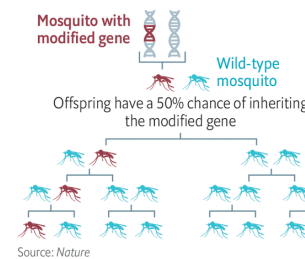
Gene drives work by increasing the chances of a particular gene **being passed on to more than 50% of the next generation**, potentially leading to the **extinction of a population**

Drive-by killing

How gene drives can quickly change whole populations

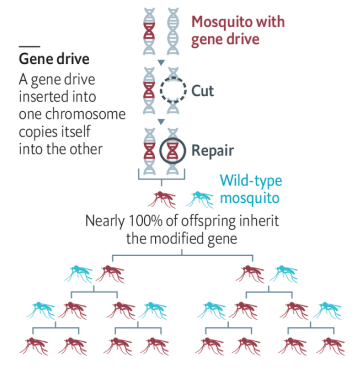
Normal genetic modification

A gene added to only one chromosome gets into half of offspring



Source: Nature

The Economist



16. 2024 IS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CAMELIDS

Context:

The **United Nations has declared 2024** as the **International Year of Camelids** to emphasize the **significant importance of camelids**, such as **alpacas, Bactrian camels, dromedaries, guanacos, llamas, and vicuñas**, in the lives of people worldwide.

- Camelids contribute to **food security, nutrition, and economic growth** in over 90 countries, especially for **Indigenous Peoples and local communities.**
- They play a crucial role in meeting **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by providing sources of **milk, meat, fibre, and transportation.**

The **International Year of Camelids 2024** aims to raise awareness of **their untapped potential and encourage** increased investment in the **camelid sector**, promoting research, capacity development, and innovative practices and technologies.

18. EVERGREENING OF LOAN BY AIF

Context:


The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has strengthened **regulations for Regulated Entities (RE), including banks and financial institutions**, to curb the evergreening of loans through investments in **Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs)**.

What is the evergreening of loans?

It refers to the **practice where a lender extends new credit** to borrowers who are struggling to meet their **debt obligations**. Instead of addressing the underlying financial issues, the lender provides **additional funds**, essentially giving the appearance that the borrower's financial situation is stable.

This can **create a temporary illusion of creditworthiness** but may lead to a cycle of **increasing debt and delayed resolution** of financial difficulties. Regulatory authorities often aim to prevent evergreening to ensure a transparent and healthy financial system.

What is AIF:



Alternative Investment Funds

Ministry of Commerce and Industry has committed over 7000cr for Alternate Investment Funds (AIF) which in turn will invest in Start-Ups.

AIFs refer to any **privately pooled investment fund**, (whether from Indian or foreign sources)

Types of AIFs

Category I
AIFs that invest in early-stage ventures in areas that are desirable for social and economic growth.


- Venture Capital Funds
- Infrastructure Funds
- Angel Funds
- Social venture Funds

Category II
Investment in Equity and Debt Securities

- Private Equity Funds
- Debt Funds
- Fund of Funds

Category III
Funds that leverage using different kinds of instruments or use different trading strategies for returns

- Hedge Funds
- Private investment in Public equity Fund (PIPE)



Fund Type	Description
Private Equity	Invest into private companies with an aim to profit from growing the value of the business through a controlling stake e.g. Burger King, Boots Pharmacy.
Venture Capital	Invest into early-stage, emerging growth companies to profit from growing an ideal start-up company into a large and successful company e.g. Uber, Airbnb, Whatsapp.
Private Debt	Invest into various private debt instruments/ loans to deliver superior risk-adjusted returns vs. savings/ bonds.
Hedge Funds	Funds that invest money in anything that they believe will make a profit – so they try to find profitable returns across all types of market conditions.
Real Estate Funds	Make equity or debt investments into stable cash flow generative properties or riskier property developments.

Benefits

- Helps in **diversified investment in various sectors**.
- Reduce dependence on **foreign capital**
- Reduce the impact of **market volatility**

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17. ZERO TRUST AUTHENTICATION (ZTA)

Context:

In response to the **increasing threat of cyberattacks**, the Indian government has established a **secure e-mail system for 10,000 users in critical ministries and departments**.

- The e-mail system operates on **Zero Trust Authentication (ZTA)** and has been developed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- The security measures include **two-factor authentication with options like facial recognition or biometrics**, and **log-in and log-out times are recorded and monitored**.
- These steps are part of the government's broader efforts to **strengthen cybersecurity** following multiple cyberattack attempts targeting critical installations and government websites.

Zero Trust Security



Zero Trust Authentication (ZTA) is a security framework that requires users to be **authenticated and authorized** before being granted access to **applications and data**

While REs **commonly invest in AIF units as part of their regular operations**, certain transactions involving AIFs have **raised regulatory concerns**. To address these concerns, the **RBI prohibits REs from investing in AIF schemes** with downstream investments in **debtor companies of the RE**. If an AIF scheme, in which an RE is an investor, makes a downstream investment in a debtor company, the **RE must liquidate its investment within 30 days**. Failure to do so requires a 100% provision on the investments.

19. TOUCHSCREENS

Context:

The article explores the working principles of touchscreens, focusing on their historical development and prevalent technologies.

- Touchscreens serve the dual purpose of receiving inputs and displaying outputs, making them integral to devices like smartphones, ATMs, household appliances, and more.

There are two main types of touchscreens, capacitive and resistive.

- **Capacitive touchscreens**, used in smartphones, operate by detecting changes in electric fields when a finger touches the screen.
- **Resistive touchscreens**, with two conductive sheets separated by a small gap, function based on the change in resistance when touched.

The rising dominance of capacitive touchscreens in consumer electronics since 2007 due to their superior image clarity, sensitivity, and durability compared to resistive touchscreens.

20. ANTI-COLD FIXED DRUG COMBINATION

Context:

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) in India has prohibited the use of an anti-cold fixed drug combination in children below four years of age.

About fixed drug combination:

- Combination products, also known as fixed dose drug combinations (FDCs), are combinations of two or more active drugs in a single dosage form.
- The Food and Drug Administration, USA defines a combination product as 'a product composed of any combination of a drug and a device or a biological product and a device or a drug and a biological product or a drug, device, and a biological product'.

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) is India's national regulatory body for cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. It's responsible for overseeing the import, manufacture, sale, and distribution of medical devices in the country.

21. TEMPO SATELLITE

Context:

NASA's TEMPO satellite, the Tropospheric Emissions: Monitoring of Pollution sensor, is a ground breaking Earth-observation satellite in geostationary orbit designed to provide hourly measurements of pollutants over North America.

- TEMPO covers a vast area from Canada's oil sands

to the Yucatán Peninsula and spans across the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, enhancing its ability to monitor air pollution comprehensively.

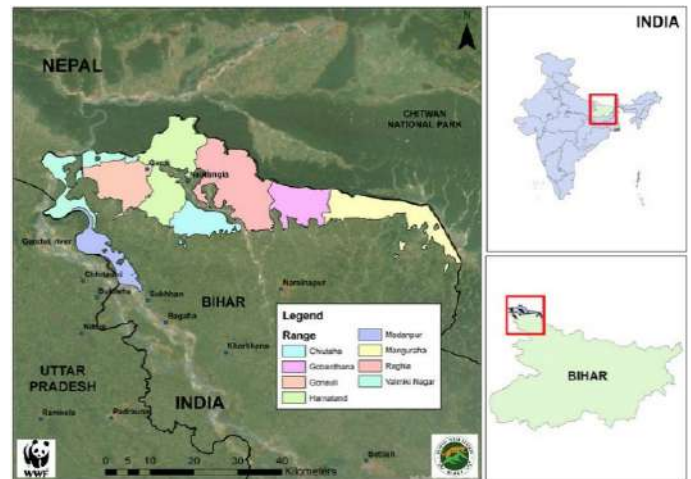
22. VALMIKI TIGER RESERVE (VTR)

Context:

The rise in tiger numbers at Bihar's Valmiki Tiger Reserve (VTR) is attributed to a reduction in human activities, particularly restrictions on illegal mining in the eco-sensitive zone.

- The ban on sand and stone mining inside VTR, along with strict limits in its eco-sensitive zone, led to increased grassland cover.
- Tiger numbers in VTR increased from 28 in 2014 to 54 in the current year, with 31 recorded in 2018.

Bihar is also pursuing the establishment of a second tiger reserve in Kaimur district.



23. OPERATION PROSPERITY GUARDIAN

Context:

The US has introduced Operation Prosperity Guardian, an enhanced naval protection force in the southern Red Sea to counter Houthi attacks on merchant shipping under the Combined Task Force 153 (CTF 153).

- The Houthi attacks, initially focused on supporting Hamas in Gaza, have escalated to target merchant tankers in the Bab el-Mandeb strait.
- Operation Prosperity Guardian includes participation from the UK, with HMS Diamond contributing alongside three US destroyers.

The Combined Task Force 153 (CTF 153) is a United States Navy-led initiative that focuses on Red Sea Maritime Security. It was established in 2022 and is one of five task forces operated by the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

24. FASTER ADOPTION & MANUFACTURING OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES (FAME) - II SCHEME

Context:

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Industry has recommended extending the **Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) - II Scheme** by at least **three more years**.

Other Recommendations:

- **Scope Enhancement:** The committee suggests broadening the **scope of the FAME-II Scheme** to support more electric vehicles, making it more inclusive.
- **Subsidies on Electric Two-Wheelers:** The committee recommends restoring subsidies on **electric two-wheelers**
- **Support for Electric Four-Wheelers:** The committee advises increasing the number of electric vehicles supported in the four-wheelers category and including **private electric four-wheelers in the FAME II Scheme**, with a cap based on the cost and battery capacity of the vehicle.
- **Charging Infrastructure Incentives:** The committee suggests incentivizing the installation of charging stations and extending support to **individual investors, women’s self-help groups, and cooperative societies**.
- **More funds:** It also recommends allocating more funds to entities like **Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL)** to popularize EV mobility.
- **Consistent National Policy:** There is a need for a consistent and stable national policy on electric mobility.

About FAME Scheme:

Background	FAME India is part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan , aiming to encourage electric vehicles through subsidies across all vehicle segments.
Phases of the Scheme	Phase I: Started in 2015 and completed on March 31, 2019. Phase II: Started in April 2019 and concluded on March 31, 2022.
Technologies Covered	Hybrid and electric technologies , including Mild Hybrid, Strong Hybrid, Plug-in Hybrid and Battery Electric Vehicles.
Monitoring Authority	Department of Heavy Industries, Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises .

Focus Areas of the Scheme	Technology development; Demand creation; Pilot projects; Charging infrastructure
Objectives of the Scheme	Encourage faster adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles through up-front incentives; Establish necessary charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.
Salient Features of Phase II of FAME	Emphasis on electrification of public transportation , including shared transport; Incentives primarily for vehicles used in public transport or registered for commercial purposes; Benefits extended to vehicles with advanced batteries like Lithium-Ion batteries .

25. RAMP (REJUVENATION, ACCELERATION, AND MITIGATION OF PANDEMIC) PROGRAM

Context:

Recently **three sub-schemes** were introduced as part of the **RAMP (Rejuvenation, Acceleration, and Mitigation of Pandemic) program**.

- These schemes focus on **supporting Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** and addressing **key challenges they face**.

About the schemes:

- The first scheme, **MSE GIFT**, aims to encourage **green investment and provide financing for the transformation of MSMEs**.
- The second scheme, **MSE SPICE**, is designed to **promote and invest in the circular economy, emphasizing sustainable practices**.
- Lastly, the **MSE scheme on Online Dispute Resolution for Delayed Payments** focuses on resolving payment delays through online dispute resolution mechanisms, facilitating smoother financial transactions for MSMEs.

These sub-schemes collectively contribute to the **broader goal of boosting the MSME sector and fostering sustainable business practices**.

26. NAMDAPHA FLYING SQUIRREL

Context:

The Namdapha flying squirrel, **missing for 42 years**, has been rediscovered in Arunachal Pradesh.

Last **described in 1981**, the species was thought to be extinct or confused with a similar species.

About Namdapha Flying Squirrel

It is classified as **Critically Endangered (CR)** by the IUCN and is listed under **Schedule II of the Wildlife Protection Act**. Located in **Namdapha National Park**, Arunachal Pradesh, it was one of the **25 “most wanted lost” species** targeted by the Global Wildlife Conservation’s **“Search for Lost Species” initiative**.



Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve

Context: A rare sighting of a tiger in India's Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve led officials to uncover several timber depots in the core area of the reserve.

Namdapha flying squirrel (CR)

About the park

- **Namdapha National Park (est. 1983)** is nearly 2000 km² large protected area in Arunachal Pradesh (in the biodiversity hotspot in the Eastern Himalayas)
- **Name:** From the name of a river originating in the park and it meets Noa-Dehing river (tributary of the Brahmaputra)
- Lies between the **Dapha bum range of the Mishmi Hills and the Patkai range.**



The park lies in close proximity to Indo-Myanmar-China trijunction.



Hoolock Gibbons (the only 'ape' species found in India)

- **Namdapha is the Fourth largest national park in India** (Hemis NP (Ladakh)> Desert NP (Rajasthan)> Gangotri NP (Uttarakhand)
- On the **Tentative Lists of UNESCO World Heritage Sites** in India.
- Only Park in the World to have the four Feline species: **Tiger, Leopard, Snow Leopard and Clouded Leopard**

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MAPPING

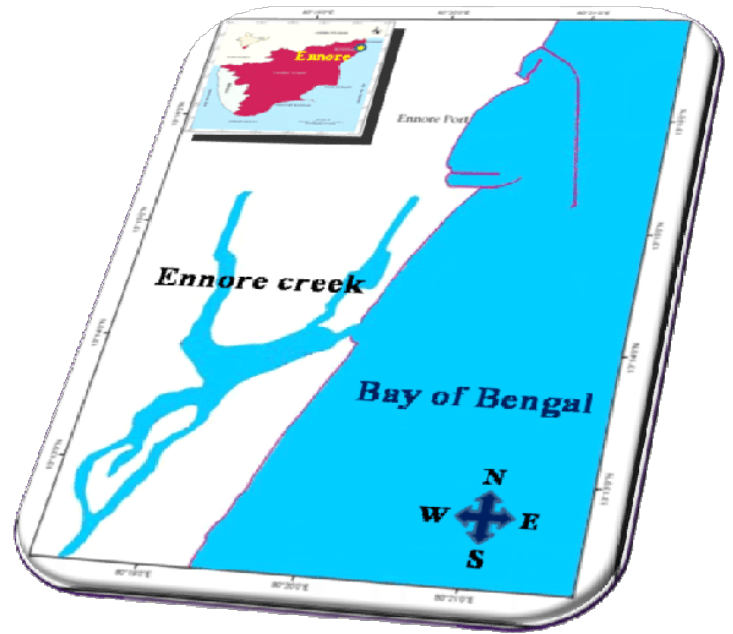
1. BUCKINGHAM CANAL AND ENNORE CREEK

Context:

During the recent **Cyclone Michaung**, an **oil spill** occurred from the **Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL)** into the **Buckingham Canal and Ennore Creek** in Tamil Nadu.

The wetland has suffered from **pollution caused by industries and neglect**, as evidenced by the continuous presence of **fly ash and hot water**. Despite NGT directives, little progress has been made in **restoring and protecting the fragile ecosystem** of the **Ennore wetlands**.

Ennore Creek in Chennai, situated along the **Coromandel Coast**, serves as a crucial buffer for the aquifers of the **Araniyar-Kosasthalaiyar Basin**, protecting them from the sea. Positioned in the floodplains of three rivers on a disaster-prone coastline, Chennai relies on wetlands like Ennore Creek as natural shock absorbers during calamities.



2. SIERRA LEONE

Context:

The **November 26 coup attempt in Sierra Leone** was driven by political instability **post-President Bio's contested re-election and economic challenges**, including a high cost of living and poverty.

ECOWAS, of which Sierra Leone is a member, is poised to intervene to maintain constitutional order, as seen in its **actions in Niger**.

ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) is a regional political and economic union of fifteen countries located in West Africa.



Sierra Leone, located on **West Africa's southwest coast**, shares borders with **Liberia and Guinea**. **Freetown** serves as the capital and largest city.



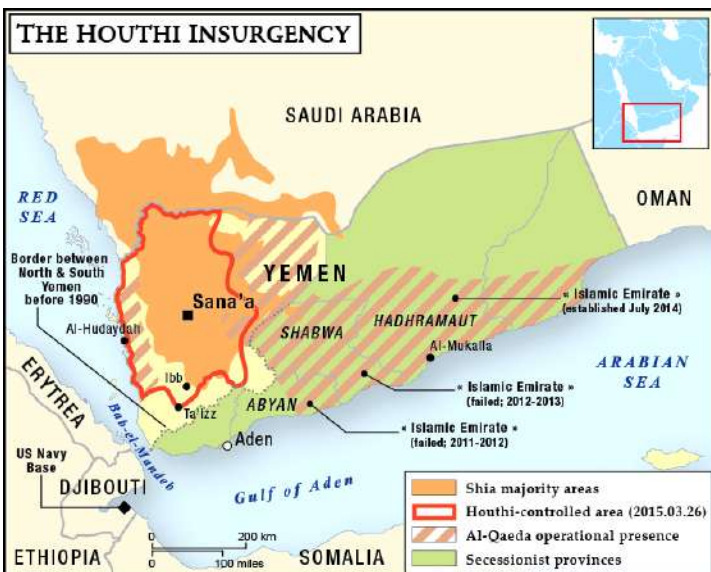
3. YEMEN (HOUSHI REBELS)

Context:

In the last four weeks, Houthi militants from Yemen have attacked commercial ships 12 times. Prominent shipping fleet operators have paused/rerouted their movements through the Red Sea route.

The Houthi movement originated in the early 1990s in Yemen as a Zaydi revivalist group (a sect of Shia). Initially focused on religious and social networks, it evolved into a powerful force, leading insurgency against perceived corruption and external interventions. The Houthi-Saleh alliance captured Sana'a in 2015, triggering a civil war in Yemen.

Yemen is a country in West Asia located at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. It shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman and maritime borders with Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. Yemen is a member of the Arab League, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.



4. GELEPHU SMARTCITY PROJECT (BHUTAN)

Context:

Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has unveiled the 'Gelephu Smartcity Project,' a mega international city near the Indian border covering 1,000 square kilometres.

The project aims to create an economic corridor connecting South Asia with Southeast Asia via India's northeastern states, particularly Assam. The Gelephu Special Administrative Region (SAR) will have different laws to attract foreign investment and include plans for an international airport. The project involves an India-Bhutan railway line to Gelephu and aims to connect Bhutan to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Singapore.

Bhutan is a landlocked country in the Eastern Himalayas, bordered by China and India. Known as "Druk Yul" or "Land of the Thunder Dragon," it has a constitutional monarchy with a king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of government. Vajrayana Buddhism is the state religion, and Gangkhar Puensum is its highest peak, also the highest unclimbed mountain globally.



5. MALDIVES

Context:

The Maldives has expressed its intention to terminate a bilateral agreement with India that allowed collaboration in the hydrographic survey of Maldivian territorial waters.

What is a Hydrographic Survey?

A hydrographic survey is a scientific process that involves mapping and measuring the physical features of underwater terrain. It includes the study of the depth, topography, and characteristics of the seabed and water bodies.

The decision, part of the new Maldives government's initiatives, comes after calls for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel. The agreement, established in June 2019, aimed

to enhance the **Maldivian government's capability** to map coastal waters and Exclusive Economic Zone.

The new Maldives government had **earlier requested the withdrawal of Indian troops** from the Island Country.

The Maldives is a **South Asian archipelagic state** in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Sri Lanka and India. Comprising **26 atolls**, it is the **smallest country in Asia** and one of the world's **most geographically dispersed** sovereign states. With a total area of about 90,000 square kilometres, including the sea, and a population of 521,021, it is the **2nd least-populous country in Asia**. **Malé** is the capital, situated on the **Chagos-Laccadive Ridge**, making it the **world's lowest-lying country**. Inhabited for over 2,500 years, the Maldives has a rich history influenced by Islam, and European colonial powers, and achieved independence from the **United Kingdom in 1965**.

