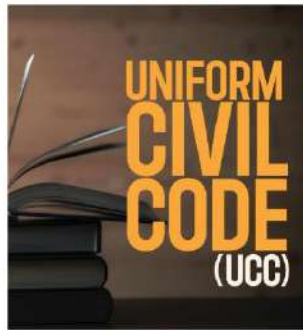




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Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released data on household consumption expenditure for the year 2022-23. The data shows per capita monthly household expenditure more than doubled in 2022-23 as compared to 2011-12.

Key Takeaways From The 2022-23 Survey

- **Share of spending on food in India changed over the last 20-odd years**
 - Between 1999-2000 and 2022-23, the share of expenditure on food has gradually declined for both urban and rural households.
 - However, it is for the first time that expenditure on food has fallen to less than 50 per cent of the total consumption expenditure in rural India, and to less than 40 per cent in urban India.
- **Within foods, what are we eating?**
 - The share of cereals and pulses within overall food consumption expenditure has reduced, both in rural and urban areas.
 - The share of spending on milk has increased, so much so as to overtake that on cereals and pulses combined — i.e. foodgrains — in 2022-23.
 - The average rural as well as urban Indian has, for the first time in 2022-23, spent more on fruits and vegetables than on foodgrains.
 - The spending on *vegetables* alone exceeded that on cereals, and likewise for *fruits* vis-a-vis pulses.
 - A growing share of the consumer rupee is also going to eggs, fish and meat.
 - When combined with the rising and falling shares of milk and pulses respectively, it suggests a clear preference among Indian consumers for animal proteins over plant proteins.
 - Indians are spending more, as a percentage of their total expenditure, on processed foods, beverages and purchased cooked meals.
- **Spending on food and the items consumed supports Engel Curve hypothesis**
 - Named after the 19th century German statistician Ernst Engel, it broadly states that as incomes grow, households spend a smaller proportion of that on food.
 - Even within food, they would buy more of “superior” and less of “inferior” items.
 - In the present case, cereals, sugar and pulses are inferior, while milk, egg, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables, beverages and processed foods are superior.
- **The average monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) of agricultural households**
 - For the first time, *MPCE of agricultural households* has fallen below the overall average of rural households.
 - The average MPCE of families self-employed in agriculture was Rs 3,702 in 2022-23, while the overall average of rural households was Rs 3,773.
 - The gap between the MPCE of agricultural families and the overall average of rural households has been *narrowing over the years*.
 - The MPCE of casual labourers and regular wage earners engaged in agriculture was also lower than the rural average
- **Average MPCE in Indian households**
 - The average MPCE in Indian households rose by 33.5% since 2011-12 in urban households to ₹3,510.
 - Rural India’s MPCE saw a 40.42% increase over the same period to hit ₹2,008.

- The MPCE numbers mentioned above do not include the estimated values of things people get for free through social welfare programs like the PM Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) or state-run schemes.
- It, however, included a few non-food items received through such schemes, including computers, mobile phones, bicycles, and clothing.
 - By adding the imputed cost of free items, the average monthly consumption expenditure stood at Rs 3,860 in rural areas and Rs 6,521 in urban areas.
- **Difference in average MPCE between rural and urban households**
 - The difference in average MPCE between rural and urban households has narrowed to 71.2 per cent in 2022-23 compared with 83.9 per cent in 2011-12.
 - This suggests rural consumption spending has risen more than urban consumption spending during the 11-year period.
- **Comparison among states**
 - MPCE is the highest in Sikkim for both rural (₹7,731) and urban areas (₹12,105).
 - It is the lowest in Chhattisgarh, where it was ₹2,466 for rural households and ₹4,483 for urban household members.
- **Need to review the inflation basket**
 - Inflation is calculated based on the changes in the price levels of items in a large basket. These items must ideally reflect what Indians are consuming.
 - The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation, also called retail inflation, is currently based on a basket that was decided in 2012.
 - However, over the last 11 years, as the latest Household Consumption Expenditure (HCE) Survey 2022-23 shows, a lot has changed.
 - For example, the CPI (Rural) basket assigns a weightage of 12.35 per cent to 'cereals and products'.
 - But as discussed above, the latest HCE Survey shows rural households spend just 4.91 per cent on cereals (and cereal substitutes).
- **On poverty**
 - As per NITI Aayog CEO B V R Subrahmanyam, the latest consumer expenditure survey indicates that poverty has come down to five per cent in the country.
 - People are becoming prosperous both in rural and urban areas.
 - The data showed that the average per capita monthly expenditure for all categories stood at Rs 3,773 in rural areas and Rs 6,459 in urban areas.
 - The average per capita monthly expenditure of 0-5% fractile (bottom 5%) class is pegged at Rs 1,373 in rural areas and Rs 2,001 in urban areas.
- **Demand for a legal guarantee to MSP and the survey data**
 - The demand for a legal guarantee to MSP is mainly from farmers of 23 crops, including foodgrains and sugarcane.
 - But farm sector's growth is being led by livestock, fisheries and horticulture crops outside MSP purview.
 - However, the survey data shows that their growth is largely market demand-driven.
 - Hence, it raises an important question:
 - if consumption of milk, fish, poultry products, and fruits and vegetables is rising much more than cereals and sugar, shouldn't the focus be on promoting production of the former as opposed to the latter?

Extra mile

Background:

- ▶ The last survey on consumer expenditure was conducted in the 68th round (July 2011 to June 2012).
 - This is because the government had junked the findings of the last Survey, conducted in 2017–18, citing data quality issues.
- ▶ In November 2019, the Statistics and Programme Implementation Ministry said it was examining the feasibility of conducting the next Survey in 2020–2021 and 2021–22. However, the Survey could not be launched in the last two years due to the pandemic.
- ▶ For the first time in about 11 years, the government released the data of the All-India Household Consumption Expenditure Survey.
 - ▶ The survey was carried out between August 2022 and July 2023.
 - ▶ The data will play a key role in reviewing critical economic indicators, including the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poverty levels, and the Consumer Price Inflation (CPI).

Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES)

- ▶ The CES is traditionally a quinquennial (recurring every five years) survey conducted by the government's National Statistical Office (NSO).
- ▶ It is designed to collect information on the consumption spending patterns of households across the country, both urban and rural.
- ▶ The data gathered in this exercise reveals the average expenditure on goods (food and non-food) and services.
- ▶ It helps generate estimates of household Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (MPCE) as well as the distribution of households and persons over the MPCE classes.

Significance of Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES)

- ▶ **Vital in gauging the demand dynamics**
 - The estimates of monthly per capita consumption spending are important in measuring the demand dynamics of the economy.
 - It is also useful for understanding the shifting priorities in terms of baskets of goods and services.
- ▶ **Assessment of living standards & growth trends across different strata**
Invaluable analytic and forecasting tool
 - It helps policymakers spot and address possible structural anomalies that may cause demand to shift in a particular manner.
 - It provides pointers to producers of goods and providers of services.
 - It is used by the government in rebasing the GDP and other macro-economic indicators.



Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024

Recently, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, was passed by both the Houses of Parliament.

About the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024

The bill seeks to prevent the use of unfair means in public examinations & promote fair conduct.

Objective

- To bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examination systems.
- To reassure the youth that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded, and their future is safe.
- For effectively and legally deterring persons, organized groups or institutions that indulge in various unfair means and adversely impact the public examination systems for monetary or wrongful gains.

Need

- **Delay and Cancellations of Exams:** Between 2018 and 2023, over seventy question paper leak cases have happened. Hence, states saw at least a dozen cancellations and delays of recruiting drives.
- **Absence of Specific Legislation:** to deal with unfair means adopted or offences committed by various entities involved in the conduct of public examinations by the Central Government & its agencies.
- **Identifying and Dealing:** with persons, organized groups or institutions that exploit vulnerabilities of examination system and indulge in various unfair means and adversely impact the public.

Key Provisions

1. **Defines 'Unfair Means' (Under Section 3):** Following acts performed for monetary or wrongful gains will be considered as unfair means-

- Leakage of question paper or answer key or any part;
- Participating in collusion with others to leak the question paper or answer key;
- Accessing/taking possession/Tampering of question paper or an optical mark recognition response sheet without authority;
- Providing solution to one or more questions/Directly or indirectly assisting the candidate by any unauthorized person during a public examination;
- Altering the assessment except to correct a *bona fide* error without any authority;
- Willful violation of norms or standards or security measures set up by the central government for conduct of a public examination on its own or through its agency;
- Tampering with any document necessary for short-listing of candidates or finalizing the merit or rank of a candidate in a public examination; Or Tampering with the computer network/System;
- Manipulation in seating arrangements, allocation of dates and shifts for the candidates to facilitate adopting unfair means in examinations;
- Threatening the life, liberty or wrongfully restraining persons associated with the public examination authority or the service provider or any authorized agency of the government; or obstructing the conduct of a public examination;
- Creation of fake website to cheat; and
- Conduct of fake examination, issuance of fake admit cards or offer letters to cheat.

2. **Offences (Section 9):**

- *Conspiracy for Unfair Means:* by any person or group of persons or institutions.
- *Disruption In Conducting Public Examination:* No person authorized, engaged or entrusted with the duties to conduct public examination shall-
 - Enter the exam premises with intent of disruption;
 - Open, leak or possess or access or solve or seek assistance to solve such question paper;
 - Give any confidential information or promise to give such confidential information related to or about such question paper;
 - Reveal or cause to be revealed or make known to any other person any information.



- **Failure to Report to the Police:** The service provider should report the *use of unfair means* to the concerned police authorities and inform the public examination authority. In case the service provider resorts to commit the offence or is involved in facilitating the same, the public examination authority should report it to the concerned police authorities.
- **Conducting the Exam at an Unspecified Premises:** will be an offence if done without the written approval of the public examination authority.
 - ✓ In case of unforeseen circumstances, any change in the examination centre without prior consent of the public examination authority will be exempted from being considered as an offence.

3. **Inquiry and Investigation:** An officer not below the rank Deputy Superintendent or Assistant Commissioner of Police will investigate the offences under the Act and the case may be transferred by the central government to any central investigating agency.

4. **Punishment:**

- **Cheating-** All offences under the Act will be cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable and mandates a three-to-five-year prison term after conviction under the act along with a fine of Rs. 10 lakhs.
 - ✓ A cognizable offense is a criminal offense that allows a police officer to arrest someone without a warrant and start an investigation, even without court permission. Cognizable offenses are more serious than non-cognizable offenses.
 - ✓ A non-compoundable offence is one in which the case cannot be withdrawn by the complainant even when the complainant and the accused have reached a compromise, and a trial must necessarily follow.
- **Organized Crimes-** By a service provider or any individual or group of individuals or any institution, an imprisonment of 5-10 years along with 1 crore fine will be imposed. If an institution is involved in committing an organized crime, its property shall be subjected to attachment and forfeiture and the proportionate cost of examination.
 - Service Providers will be barred from being assigned any such responsibility for a period of four years.
 - If an institution is involved, its property shall be subjected to attachment and forfeiture and the proportionate cost of examination shall also be recovered from it.

**In case of default on payment of fine, an additional punishment of imprisonment shall be imposed as per the provisions of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

5. **Power to Make Rules:** The act empowers the Central Government to make rules to carry out the provisions of this Act and every such rule made should be laid, as soon as maybe after it is made, before each House of Parliament for their approval.

6. **High-level National Technical Committee on Public examinations:** In order to strengthen the security of the computerized examination process, the bill suggests forming a high-level national technical committee on public examinations.

- ✓ The committee will investigate creating digital platform insulation protocols, coming up with strategies and tactics for creating unbreakable IT security systems,
- ✓ It would also make sure that testing facilities are electronically monitored and create national guidelines and services for the physical and IT infrastructure that will be used to administer these tests.

Exemptions: Candidates shall not be liable for action under the Act and shall continue to be covered under the extant administrative provisions of the concerned public examination authority.

Benefits

1. **Serve as a Model Draft:** for States and would aid them in preventing the criminal elements from disrupting conduct of their state level public examinations.
2. **Boost Confidence in System** of students tired of continuous exam cancellations, postponements and delays.

3. **Fear of Consequences:** will be created in the minds of individuals thinking of sorting to unfair means for monetary or personal gains.



Chandigarh Mayor Election Quashed

The Supreme Court (SC) has quashed the result of Chandigarh Mayor Election which fell into controversy after the returning officer deliberately invalidated eight ballots cast in favour of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-Congress candidate and declared the BJP candidate a winner.

✓ While delivering the judgement, the Supreme Court invoked the sweeping powers conferred on the court under Article 142 of the Constitution.

Background

- Election for Chandigarh's Mayor post was held on January 30, 2024, of the 36 votes cast during the polls, the BJP secured 16 votes while the joint AAP-Congress combine received 12.
- 8 votes which were cast in favour of the AAP candidate were held invalid by the RO and BJP candidate was declared the winner.
- After videos showed the RO marking ballot papers so they could be declared invalid, AAP councilor moved to the High Court (HC) which ordered to list his petition after three weeks without granting an immediate stay on the results. Following which he approached the SC.
- During the hearing, the RO informed the court that he had marked the eight votes to segregate them as they had already been defaced by the councilors.
- The court rendered the remarks by the Presiding Officer as inconsequential based on regulation 6 of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation (Procedure and Conduct of Business) Regulations 1996 and ruled that the 8 votes cast in favour of the AAP candidate were to be treated as valid.
 - As per regulation 6 of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation (Procedure and Conduct of Business) Regulations 1996, a ballot can be invalid only if-
 - ✓ more than one vote is cast;
 - ✓ there is any mark identifying the voter;
 - ✓ The marks are placed in an ambiguous manner making it doubtful to whom the vote is cast.

Final SC Verdict

- The court, while using its power under Article 142 of the Constitution, held that allowing such a practice would be destructive of the most valued principles on which the entire edifice of democracy depends.
- It ruled in the favour of the AAP councilor and immediately quashed the result of the election declared by the presiding officer.

About The Returning Officer (RO)

Who is a Returning Officer?

The one who conducts the election in a constituency (or sometimes two) and returns elected candidate is a returning officer.

Appointment: He/she is appointed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in consultation with the concerned State Government or Union Territory (UT).

Duties and Responsibilities:

- To publish the notice regarding the election and implement Model Code of Conduct;
- To accept and scrutinize the nomination forms;
- To publish the affidavits of candidates and allot symbols to the contesting candidates;
- To print and dispatch postal ballot papers;
- To prepare the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and Voter-Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPATs);
- To train polling personnel, sector officers, area/zonal magistrates etc. in all aspects, including use of EVMs with VVPATs;
- To ensure free and fair election;
- To designate the counting centres and get them approved by ECI;
- To send notice to the candidates about the place, date and time of counting of votes;
- To count the votes and declare the result;
- To ensure speedy grievance redressal;

- It also expressed its disappointment over the actions of the RO as he had unlawfully altered the course of the Mayoral election and made a false statement before the court. The court therefore ordered a show-cause notice to be served to the RO under Section 340 (conduct affecting the administration of justice) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

About Article 142 of the Constitution

- This article gives a special power to the SC to pass such decree or make such order as is necessary for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it if a law or any statute fails to do so.
- Such orders are enforceable throughout the territory of India as prescribed by any law made by Parliament or order of the President of India.

Purpose For Inclusion In The Constitution

- The framers of the Constitution envisioned that a compromised judiciary could be a barrier preventing many from accessing justice or realizing their rights.
- Hence, Article 142 was created to grant the Supreme Court the authority to dispense justice in extraordinary situations free from the constraints of legal or bureaucratic obstacles.

Importance

- **Helps Ensure Justice:** by allowing the SC to transcend the limitations of law or statute.
- **Helps in Exercising Executive and Legislative Functions:** in certain situations, such as issuing guidelines, direction or orders to governments/authorities.
- **Allows Intervention:** in matters of public interest, human rights, constitutional values or fundamental rights and to protect them from any violation or infringement.
- **Source of Judicial Activism:** as it enhances the role of SC as a guardian of the constitution and the final arbiter of law.
 - ✓ *Judicial Activism* refers to the collective framework of- Article 142+ Article 32 (which ensures the right to constitutional remedies) + Article 141 (mandating that all courts within India must abide by the decisions of SC) + Article 136 (allows Special Petition Leave).

Scope

While the powers under Article 142 are extraordinary in nature, the apex court has defined its scope and extent through its following judgments over time.

1. **An Order Should Be Consistent with Fundamental Rights:** This was clarified in the *Prem Chand Garg Case, 1961* where the SC held that- “an order to do complete justice must not only be consistent with the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but also with the substantive provisions of the relevant statutory laws (made by the Parliament). Therefore, the SC cannot use its powers under Article 142 to contravene the Provisions of Article 32 (Right to Constitutional Remedies).
 - ✓ This judgement was upheld by a seven-judge bench in *A R Antulay vs R S Naik, 1988 case* where the SC using Art 142, transferred cases against Antulay pending before the special judge to the High Court.
2. **An Order Cannot Override a Substantive Law:** as held in the *Supreme Court Bar Association vs Union of India, 1998*. The powers under Article 142 are supplementary in nature and could not be used to supplant or override a substantive law and “build a new edifice where none existed earlier”.
3. **An Order Should Not Cause Injustice:** to a person who is not a party to the case as held in *A. Jideranath vs Jubilee Hills Co-op House Building Society, 2006 case*.

Uses

1. *Union Carbide Corporation vs Union of India, 1991 (Bhopal Gas Tragedy Case):* SC announced a settlement and stated that all civil proceedings wherever pending were concluded in terms of settlement. It quashed all criminal proceedings arising out of the disaster, ordered to award compensation to the victims and clarified

that prohibitions on limitations on provisions contained in ordinary laws cannot limit the constitutional powers under Article 142.

2. *Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra, 2002*: The five-judge bench observed that Article 142 empowers the SC to act in whatever manner they may deem fit to establish complete justice. Therefore, the idea of curative petition evolved.

✓ Curative Petition is the final remedy to reconsider dismissed review petitions and can only be considered in case of:

violation of principles of natural justice

question of bias against the presiding judge

abuse of the process of the court

✓ It must be certified by a senior advocate. If the petition is found to be vexatious, the court may impose exemplary costs on the petition.

3. *Manohar Lal Sharma v. Principal Secretary, 2014*: It was held that the SC under Article 142, can deal with exceptional circumstances interfering with the larger interest of the public to fabricate trust in the rule of law. It therefore cancelled the allocation of 214 coal blocks made between 1993 and 2011, except those which were made through competitive bidding, hailing them invalid, unfair arbitrary and violative of Article 14.

4. *Babri Masjid Case*: In this 2019 judgement, the court affirmed that the disputed land was the birthplace of Rama and that the Babri Masjid was built after the demolition of a Hindu temple. Therefore, directed the State to grant the Sunni Waqf Board five acres in a "prominent" location in Ayodhya for the construction of a mosque.

5. *Permanent Commission to Women Officers in Army, 2020*: In this landmark verdict, the apex court rejected the Centre's stand on "physiological limitations of women" as being based on "sex stereotypes" and "gender discrimination against women" and directed to consider all serving SSC women officers for permanent commission within three months irrespective of them having completed 14 years or, as the case may be, 20 years of service.

6. Divorce on the ground of irretrievable breakdown of marriage: The Constitution Bench held that the Supreme Court had the power under Article 142 to grant divorce to parties who directly approached it.

Criticism

1. **Arbitrary and Ambiguous**: due to the sweeping powers available with the SC under Article 142.

2. **Scope of the term 'Complete Justice' Undefined**: The description of the term can vary from case to case & in the absence of proper definition, it can result in misuse of the term & provides wide discretion to court.

3. **Encroachment on Separation of Powers**: Unlike the legislature and the executive, the judiciary cannot be held accountable for its actions. Therefore, judiciary should not venture into areas of lawmaking as it could result in judicial overreach.



NDPS Act, 1985

Supreme Court (SC) recently overturned an order by Madras High Court (HC) granting anticipatory bail to a respondent accused under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

✓ An anticipatory bail is a bail granted to any person for a non-bailable offence under Section 438 of the CrPC if the person thinks that he may be arrested on false or trump up charges or due to enmity with someone or if a false case is likely to be built up against him. This concept was introduced to protect a person from confinement in any way until and unless held guilty.

About Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985

- This act was introduced to control and regulate drug abuse and prohibit activities related to the production, cultivation, sale, purchase, transport, storage, and/or consumption of any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
- This Act also provides for identification, treatment, rehabilitation, social re-integration of the addict among others.
- ✓ “Narcotic Drugs” include coca leaf, cannabis or hemp (like charas, ganja), opium, poppy straw, and all manufactured drugs.
- ✓ “Psychotropic substance” are the substances which modify the mind. means any substance, natural or synthetic, or any natural material or any salt or preparation of such substance or material included in the list of psychotropic substances specified in the Schedule of this Act. For example- Amphetamine, Methaqualone, Diazepam, Alprazolam, Ketamine, etc.

Objective

- To prevent, combat, and regulate operations relating to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and to add or omit the list of psychotropic substances.
- To provide for the forfeiture of property derived from or used in, illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.
- To implement the provisions of the international conventions on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances to which India is a party.
- ✓ India is signatory to the following convention which seek to limit the use of narcotics and psychotropic substances for medicinal, personal and scientific purposes and prevent their abuse-
 - UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs, 1961*- aims to combat drug abuse by coordinated international action.
 - UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971*- aims to prevent and combat abuse of psychotropic substances and their illicit traffic.
 - UN Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988*- aims to control illicit trafficking of drugs.

Need: Prior to 1985, the statutory control over drugs was being exercised through the Opium Act of 1852, Opium Act of 1878 and The Dangerous Act of 1930. All of these regulations became outdated and inadequate with increasing drug abuse across the world. Thus, NDPS was introduced.

Applicability: It covers the whole territory of India as well as all Indian citizens living outside India and all persons travelling aboard ships and aircraft registered in India.

Key Amendments

- **1988:** It introduced stricter provisions for financing illicit traffic which included production, possession, sale, purchase, transportation, warehousing.
- **2001:** It made navigation easier for addicts by easing the bail process.
- **2014:**
 - Uniform regulation was achieved across the country, preventing state-by-state conflict.
 - Essential narcotics like morphine, fentanyl etc. used in pharmaceutical preparations were made accessible to patients.
 - Death penalty for repeat criminal convictions for trafficking large amounts of drugs was reduced to a discrete 30-year sentence and maximum penalty for “small quantity” offences was raised from 6 months to 1 year.

** Morphine, critical to pain management, was extremely difficult to procure in India until NDPS Act of 1985 was amended in 2014.

** The Centre has empowered the Border Security Force (BSF), Seema Suraksha Bal (SSB) and Assam Rifles to register cases under the NDPS Act.

Punishments

The Act employs a graded system of penalties, where the severity of punishment fluctuates based on whether the offense involves small, commercial, or intermediate quantities of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

- *For Possession/Sale/Manufacture:* Punishment is imposed based on the quantity of seized drugs and on the severity of the offence. For example- if a person is found with a “small quantity i.e. less than 1 kg” of cannabis, then he may be awarded with a prison sentence of up to one year with a fine of up to Rs 10,000 whereas for commercial quantity (i.e. 20 kg or more), the fine could be up to Rs. 2 lakhs (and more as per the discretion of the court) and a jail term extendable up to 20 years.
- *For Consumption:* Consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances could attract a sentence of up to six months as well as a fine of up to Rs 10,000.
- *For Repeated Offenders:* A jail term of up to one and one-half times the maximum term of imprisonment could be imposed as well as a fine of up to one and one-half times the maximum fine and may also be sentenced to death if found guilty of a similar offence again, depending on the number of drugs seized.

** By amendment to the Act in 1989, The sentence awarded under the NDPS Act is ‘non-commutable (i.e. cannot be substituted by a lesser sentence)’ due to the serious nature of the offence, except for the sentence awarded for the consumption of drugs.

Procedural Safeguards: Alongside the stringent provisions & penalties, the Act has procedural safeguards as follows:

- Any person being searched has a right to be searched before a Gazetted Officer or a Magistrate.
- The person who is arrested should be informed, as soon as may be, the grounds for his arrest.
- If the arrest or seizure is based on a warrant issued by a magistrate, the person or the seized article should be forwarded to that magistrate.

Extra Mile: Other Steps/Initiatives/Institutions to curb Drug Menace in India

The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances aligns with Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, which mandates the State to strive towards prohibiting the consumption of intoxicating drugs, except for medicinal purposes, due to their detrimental effects on health.

Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MoSJE) is the nodal Ministry for drug demand reduction in the country.

Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA)

- NMBA was launched on 15th August 2020 by MoSJE in 272 identified most vulnerable districts & now it has been extended to all districts across the country.
- It intends to reach out to the masses and spread awareness about substance use with focus on higher educational Institutions, university campuses & schools.

National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR for 2018-2025 by MoSJE):

- A Toll-free Helpline Number 14446 for de-addiction & for providing primary counselling and immediate referral services to the persons seeking help through this helpline.
- **Navchetna Modules**, teacher-training modules have been developed by MoSJE for sensitizing students (6th - 11th standard), teachers and parents on drug dependence, related coping strategies and life skills.
- A mobile app and web portal - '**Map Drugs**'—was also launched for identifying and destruction of illegal farming in the country.
- e-portal called '**SIMS**' (Seizure Information Management System) for cases involving large seizures

- **UNODC** (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) will build on the discussions and interventions to strengthen cooperation with the Indian Government and law enforcement agencies in developing a comprehensive strategic framework to address the drug problem.

Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF)

- In December 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) had directed the state governments to create dedicated ANTFs under their respective DGPs to fight the menace of drugs for a "drug-free India" by 2047.
- ANTF would investigate criminal cases, classified or assigned by the Supreme Court or the High Court, government, DGP.

	Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN)	Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)
Nodal Ministry	Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Home Affairs
Constituted	Founded in 1950 as the Opium Department (Now CBN)	in 1986 under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.
Functions	1) License farmers to cultivate opium poppy 2) Procures the opium produced by licenced cultivators	coordinating entity between various narcotics and drug law enforcement agencies within the country and also as India's nodal point with international agencies like UNODC



Rights of Forest Dwellers

The Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary released a notification recently excluding six tribal forest villages (villages located in the reserve forest area) in Bargur Hills. Responding to which, forest dwellers have raised concerns about being denied their rights under Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA).

- ✓ Thamarakarai, Solakanai, Nadukal Thittu, Kakkayanur, Kinatthadi and Doddakombai are the habitations to have been excluded.

About Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS- 18th wildlife sanctuary of Tamil Nadu)

- **Location:** It occupies a prominent position in the Eastern Ghats as they merge with the Western Ghat at the Nilgiris. It is the catchment of the Palar River that drains into the Cauvery River.
- **Significance:**
 - ✓ It is part of the corridor that connects the Sathya Mangalam Tiger Reserve (STR) located in Tamil Nadu to the Male Mahadeshwara Hills Tiger Reserve and the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, both located in Karnataka and plays a crucial role in maintaining a viable tiger population.
 - ✓ It is also part of the Nilgiris Elephant Reserve and is home to a healthy population of large herbivores including elephants and the Indian Gaur.

Concerns Raised By The Tribals

1. **Denied Basic Rights:** The tribals have alleged that they have been denied basic rights and facilities as they are not revenue villages and have therefore been excluded from the sanctuary and confined to an arbitrary area of 3.42 sq. Km.
 - ✓ To ensure that the FRA is implemented in letter and spirit, it is necessary to ensure that all forest villages and other such villages are converted to revenue village by the district administration in collaboration with the Panchayati Raj institutions.

2. **No More Cattle Grazing** is allowed in the Thanthai Periyar Sanctuary preventing Bargur cattle, a traditional breed native to the Bargur forest hills from accessing their traditional grazing grounds.

About Forest Rights Act, 2006

It recognizes the rights of the forest dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities depend for their livelihood, habitation and other socio-cultural needs.

Objectives

- To undo the historical injustice occurred to the forest dwelling communities resulting from the inadequate recognition of their forest rights on ancestral lands and habitat while consolidating State forests during the colonial period as well as in independent India.
- To ensure land tenure, livelihood and food security of the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers.
- To strengthen the conservation regime of the forests by including the responsibilities and authority on Forest Rights holders for sustainable use, conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance.

Rights Guaranteed to Forest Dwellers under the Act

1. *Individual Rights*: includes Rights of Self-cultivation, habitation and ownership to land farmed by them (subject to a maximum of 4 hectares per family).
 - ✓ Ownership is only for land that is actually being cultivated by the family concerned and no new lands can be granted.
 - ✓ The land cannot be sold or transferred to anyone except by inheritance.
 2. *Community Rights*: Includes rights of grazing, fishing and access to Water bodies in forests; habitat rights for PVTGs, traditional seasonal resource access of Nomadic and Pastoral community, access to biodiversity, right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge, recognition of traditional customary rights and extracting Minor Forest Produce (such as tendu patta, herbs, medicinal plants etc. except timber).
 3. *Conservation Rights*: right to access and use the forest resources in the manner that they were traditionally accustomed, to protect, conserve and manage forests; protect forest dwellers from unlawful evictions and provides for basic development facilities for the community of forest dwellers to access facilities of education, health, nutrition, infrastructure etc.
- ** Alongside the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Settlement Act of 2013, the Forest Rights Act safeguards the tribal population by preventing their eviction without proper rehabilitation and settlement.

Can Anyone Living In The Forest Claim These Rights?

No, to claim rights under FRA, three conditions must be satisfied, the applicant must be-

1. A member of the Scheduled Tribe in the area where the right is claimed; or
2. Primarily residing in forest or forests land for three generations (75 years) prior to 13-12-2005; and
3. Dependent on the forest or forests land for Bonafide livelihood needs.

Vesting Authority

The Gram Sabha is authorized to initiate the process for determining the nature and extent of individual or community forest rights or both within the local limits of its jurisdiction by receiving claims, consolidating and verifying them.

- ✓ Gram Sabha (defined under Article 243B of Indian Constitution) is a legislative body operating at village level and consists of all persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls for the Panchayat at the village level.

Process of Availing Rights

1. After verifying the claims received, the Gram Sabha passes a resolution for each recommended claim and forwards the same to the Sub-Divisional Level Committee (constituted by the state government).

2. The Sub-Divisional Level Committee examines the resolution passed by the Gram Sabha, prepares the record of forest rights and forwards it to the District Level Committee for a final decision.
3. The decision of the District Level Committee is final and binding.
4. A State Level Monitoring Committee can be constituted by the State to monitor the whole process of recognition and vesting of forest rights and to submit its reports to the nodal agency i.e. the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

✓ The Sub-Divisional Level Committee, the District Level Committee and the State Level Monitoring Committee consist of six members- three members from among the officers of the departments of Revenue, Forest and Tribal Affairs of the State Government and three members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions at the appropriate level, appointed by the respective Panchayati Raj Institutions, of whom two are Scheduled Tribe members and at least one is a woman.

**If any person is aggrieved by the resolution of the Gram Sabha, he may prefer a petition to the Sub-Divisional Level Committee within 60 days from the date of decision. Similarly, if any person is aggrieved by the decision of the Sub-Divisional Level Committee, he may prefer a petition to the District Level Committee within sixty days from the date of decision.

**The aggrieved person cannot directly approach the District Level Committee against the resolution of the Gram Sabha unless the same has been preferred before and considered by the Sub-Divisional Level Committee.

**No petition can be disposed of, unless the aggrieved person has been given a reasonable opportunity to present his case.

** FRA violations, in the case of STs, will also be considered as a crime under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

Is FRA Applicable in National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves?

Yes, it is applicable in National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries and Tiger Reserves, but FRA only recognizes pre-existing rights which are already being exercised by the forest dwellers in the National Parks and Sanctuaries and no new rights can be created which might potentially impact the ecological balance inside the protected areas.

Significance	Challenges Faced
<p>1. Addresses "Encroachments" issue: by recognizing individual forest rights (IFRs) and allowing habitation and cultivation or other activities that existed before December 2005.</p> <p>2. Addresses "Access and Control" Issue: by recognizing the rights of village communities to access and use forests, to own and sell MFP, and to manage forests within their customary boundaries, including in sanctuaries and national parks. Thus, ensuring decentralized forest governance.</p>	<p>1. Slow and Incomplete Recognition of Community Rights:to access and manage forests. The (still colonially structured) forest bureaucracy is vehemently opposed to these rights, as it stands to lose its zamindari.</p> <p>2. Cumbersome Claim Filing Process:that the claimants have to go through while filing claims along with issues like poor connectivity and digital literacy, such as using the VanMitra software (launched in Madhya Pradesh) adds to the miseries of forest dwellers.</p> <p>3. Non-Transparent Claim Rejections:The claimants often get no information why their claims have been rejected as the claim verification and approval is a three-tier process involving no transparency.</p> <p>4. Delayed Resolution of Claims:The lengthy process of claim verification lead to delays in the resolution. Even the open-and-shut cases of 'forest villages' have not been addressed in most States.</p> <p>5. Easy Targets for Voluntary Rehabilitation:as communities in Protected Areas are being precariously placed and forests are being handed over for mining or dams without community consent.</p>

Extra Mile: Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), 1972

About the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA), 1972

- Enacted in 1972, this act provides legal protection to wild animals and plants, and establishes penalties for offences such as hunting, poaching, and trading in wildlife.
- Sanctuaries and National Parks (NP) can be notified under WLPA.
- Under this act, people living inside Wildlife Sanctuaries are allowed to enjoy all their rights unless prohibited, but the same is not permitted in the case of NPs.
- No new rights are permitted once the notice of intent is issued.
- If a new Sanctuary/ National Park is being proposed, the Collector should first inquire into the rights of all persons, their nature and extent and decide whether to admit the claims in Sanctuaries and to acquire all rights in National Parks.
- The law mandates similar procedures when some land is initially notified as forests. Courts routinely condone these violations.

Does FRA Override WLPA?

Yes, being enacted later, the FRA overrides the WLPA. All the provisions of WLPA that contravene provisions in the FRA are null and void. Therefore, before notifying a Protected Area under the WLPA, the government first needs to determine rights under the FRA and acquire the consent of the Gram Sabhas concerned.

- ✓ Since FRA became operational, the country until 2023, has acquired 15,605 sq. km of Protected Areas including nine National Parks (3,462 sq. Km) and 77 Sanctuaries (12,143 sq km).



Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

The Uttarakhand Assembly passed the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill recently, becoming the first state in independent India to implement UCC proposing a common law on marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, and live-in relationships for all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

About Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

What Is Meant By UCC?

It seeks to replace existing diverse personal laws that vary based on religious affiliations with a common law governing personal matters, including marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance, and succession, for all citizens regardless of their religion.

** A Uniform Civil Code aims to establish consistency not only in laws across diverse communities but also within each community, thereby promoting equality between the rights of both men & women.

Related Constitutional Provisions

Article 44 of the Indian Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policies (DPSP-Part 4) directs the state to secure a uniform civil code for the citizens throughout country.

Origin

- The British Government in 1835 first submitted its report recommending a uniform code for Indian laws relating to crimes, evidence, contracts etc. But this recommendation excluded personal laws of Hindu and Muslims from its perspective.
- B N Rau committee was formed in 1941 to examine the need of common Hindu laws. It therefore recommended a codified Hindu Law giving equal rights to women. This recommendation was adopted in 1956 as the Hindu Succession Act to amend and codify the laws relating to unwilled succession, among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs.
- But there were still separate personal laws for Muslim, Christian and Parsis.

- Dr. B R Ambedkar, while formulating the Constitution made UCC voluntary and recommended its implementation when the nation was ready to accept it.
 - ✓ **UCC in DPSP:** The 5:4 majority vote by the fundamental rights sub-committee, led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, decided against categorizing UCC under fundamental rights.

Present Status of UCC In India

- UCC has not yet been implemented for the country instead the different personal laws (determined based on religious identity) enacted in the country based on different religious customs and practices govern matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption such as- Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956; The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956; Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act (1937); Christian Marriage Act (1872); Parsee Marriage and Divorce Act (1937) etc.
- **Personal Laws in India:** At present, individuals following various faiths, including Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews, adhere to their respective personal laws.
 - ✓ Inconsistencies emerge when Hindus and Muslims enter into matrimony under the Special Marriage Act, as Hindus remain subject to Hindu Personal Law, whereas Muslims are not.
- But at the state level, Goa was the first state to have a UCC followed by Uttarakhand which recently passed the UCC bill.
 - ✓ Portugal enacted a Portuguese civil code in 1867 which was extended to its overseas provinces (that included Goa) in 1869. Since then, Goa has had an UCC.

Diverse Views on UCC

➤ Supreme Court (SC)-

- *Shah Bano Case, 1985:* The Supreme Court held that the Muslim Woman has a right to get maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPC after she is given triple talaq by her husband and therefore, recommended bringing a common civil code to remove laws with conflicting ideologies.
- *Sarla Mudgal Case, 1995:* The court held that a Hindu marriage can only be dissolved under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and conversion to Islam and marrying again would not dissolve a Hindu marriage. The SC asked for implementation of Uniform Civil Code.
- *John Vallamottam Case, 2003:* In this case, the SC asked the parliament to bring in UCC while striking down Section 118[7] of the Indian Succession Act which imposed unreasonable restrictions on Christians while donating their property for religious or charitable purpose by will.
- *Shayara Bano Case, 2017:* In this case, which was based upon the archaic practice of triple talaq, SC concluded that the Constitution requires the State to provide for a UCC to remedy and ease maladies.
- *Joseph Shine vs. Union of India, 2018:* SC while striking down Section 497 (adultery) of Indian Penal Code as it violated Articles 14, 15 and 21, emphasized on the need for gender-neutral laws and enactment of UCC to address inconsistencies in personal laws.
- *Paulo Coutinho vs Maria Luiza Valentina Pereira Case, 2019:* The SC made a strong pitch for UCC and lamented the Centre for total inaction on this front despite judicial exhortation.
- 2023: The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional jurisdiction of states to establish committees (As per Article 162 of the Constitution) to examine the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code. E.g. Uttarakhand and Gujarat Government.

- **Law Commission-** The 21st Law Commission (headed by Justice Balbir Singh Chauhan) held that UCC is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage and discriminatory practices, prejudices, and stereotypes within a particular religion and its personal laws should be studied and amended.

Need For UCC

Challenges Faced in Implementation

<p>1. To Protect the Vulnerable: including women and religious minorities through a common law applicable to all.</p> <p>2. To Promote Nationalism: as a common law will help bring national spirit and unity.</p> <p>3. To Simplify laws: around marriage ceremonies, inheritance, succession, adoptions that are presently segregated based on religious beliefs like the Hindu code bill, Shariat law, and others.</p> <p>4. To Promote Gender Equality: by replacing the personal laws that contain discriminatory provisions against women such as instant talaq, polygamy in Muslim men, laws of inheritance etc.</p> <p>5. To Promote Secularism: A common law for all irrespective of religion will help achieve the goal of secularism in real.</p>	<p>1. Diverse Community based Rights: of an individual are upheld by personal laws of different religions, it is difficult to bring a single law governing all aspects of social life and satisfying everyone through a common code that adequately address the principles and provisions of diverse community laws.</p> <p>2. Contradicting Constitutional Provisions: makes it difficult to implement UCC like-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ While Article 44 envisages uniformity in personal laws but the inclusion of personal laws in concurrent list indicates protection of diversity. ➤ Article 43 notes that the state shall endeavor by suitable legislation but in Article 44 the suitable legislation part is missing making it not compulsive on the legislature as such. ➤ Article 31C that was inserted after the 42nd amendment in 1976 by Indira Gandhi Government says that if a law is made to implement the directive principle, it can't be challenged in the court of law on the grounds of violation of fundamental rights secured under Article 14 and Article 19. <p>3. Can be used for Communal Politics: Framing a UCC will open a Pandora's Box with unintended consequences and people in power will use it for their own propaganda and disrupt the social life of Hindus as well as Muslims.</p> <p>4. Sensitivity of the Issue: is another point for the delay in implementation as the government wants to prevent mass protests and negative public reaction.</p> <p>5. Infringement of Religious Freedom: of citizens as UCC can contradict some religious beliefs and practices and legislation regarding the same can result in state interference in religious affairs.</p> <p>6. Fear of "Hindu Rashtra": Minorities fear that UCC could favour the beliefs and practices of "Hindus" more, ignoring the minority religious beliefs and practices.</p>
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About the Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code (UCC)

The bill seeks to govern and regulate the laws related to marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relationships etc. in the state.

- ✓ It has been prepared by a five-member committee led by former Supreme Court Judge Ranjana Prakash Desai.
- ✓ The Seventh Schedule of the Constitution provides that both the Centre and state legislatures can legislate on matters pertaining to family laws. In pursuance of this power, the government of Uttarakhand passed Uniform Civil Code in the state Assembly.

Applicability-

- It will be applicable to the residents of Uttarakhand (but only to those who identify within the binary genders of male and female who are in heterosexual relationships, thus leaving most LGBT persons outside its ambit).
- It excludes members of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and their unique customary practices.
 - ✓ UCC does not disturb those customary practices pertaining to family law that are protected under Part XXI the Constitution.

Key Features of the Bill

1. Regulates 'Live-in' Relationships:

- **Mandatory Registration Requirement:** All the heterosexual couples (irrespective of their domicile) in a live-in relationship will have to mandatorily register their relation by submitting a "statement of live-in relationship" to the concerned registrar within one month of entering such relationship.
- **Penalties for Non-Registration:** Failure to register will attract imprisonment for up to three months or a fine up to Rs. 10 thousand or both. If no registration is made upon being issued a notice, there is a provision for six months of imprisonment or a fine of ₹25,000 or both.
- **Consequences of False Statements:** Any false statement will also attract imprisonment for up to three months or a fine of Rs. 25 thousand or both.
- **Notification to Parents/Guardians for Minors:** Declarations will also be sent to the parents/guardians if either of the partners is less than 21 years of age.
- **Registrar's Summary Inquiry:** The registrar upon receiving the information, may conduct a "summary inquiry" to ensure that the relation does not fall under prohibited categories i.e., if a partner is married or in another relationship, if either of the partner is minor and his/her consent was obtained *forcefully, by fraud or misrepresentation*.
- **Timely Decision by Registrar:** The registrar must take a decision within 30 days and reasons must be conveyed in writing in case of refusal of permission.
- **Termination of Relationship:** The relationship can be terminated by either of the parties by submitting a "statement of termination".
- **Maintenance Claim for Desertion:** A woman can claim maintenance from her live-in partner in case of desertation.

2. **Illegitimate Children:** The bill abolishes this concept and extends legal recognition to children born in void and voidable marriages, as well as the ones born in live-in relationships.

3. **Bigamy/Polygamy** is prohibited under the bill as per section 4 which states that neither party should have a spouse living at the time of the marriage. Thus, prohibition on bigamy/polygamy has been extended to all communities/Religions.

4. Marriages:

- **Compulsory Marriage Registration:** Registration of marriage has been made compulsory while the marriageable age is left the same i.e., 21 and 18 for men and women respectively.
- **Flexibility in Marriage Ceremonies:** Marriages may be solemnized through any ceremonies or rituals as per legislations such as The Anand Marriage Act, 1909, Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937, and The Special Marriage Act, 1954, among others.
- **Public Inspection of Marriage Register:** Upon registration, the Register of Marriages is open to public inspection.
- **Validity of Unregistered Marriages:** An unregistered marriage remains valid but failure to register a marriage after issue of notice by the sub-registrar will attract a fine of Rs 25,000.
- **Exception for Customary Marriages:** It retains the "custom" exception for married parties within the "degrees of prohibited relationships" from the Hindu Marriage Act.
 - ✓ Degrees of prohibited relationship applies to two people who share a common ancestry or are the wife/husband of a common ancestor. It applies to those communities, which have an established custom allowing marriage within the degrees of prohibited relationships.

5. **Divorce:** (Men and women have been accorded similar rights with respect to divorce.)

- **Restrictions on Divorce Initiation:** It prohibits the initiation of divorce proceedings (Section 28) before one year of marriage but if the petitioner has suffered "exceptional hardship" or if the respondent has exhibited "exceptional depravity", then divorce can be filed.

- **Mandatory Court Order for Divorce:** No marriage can be dissolved without a court order or else it can attract imprisonment of up to 3 years.
- **Grounds for Divorce and Exclusions:** Divorce can also be obtained on the grounds of religious conversion, but it excludes the case of “irretrievable breakdown of marriage”.
- **Women's Right to Divorce:** Women can specifically seek a divorce if the husband has been found guilty of rape or any kind of unnatural sexual offence or if he has more than one wife.
- **Child Custody Following Divorce:** The custody of a child up to 5 years remains with the mother after the divorce.

6. **Inheritance Rights:** (The Bill extends equal property rights for sons and daughters across all classes.)

- It abolishes the coparcenary system governing ancestral property under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and all properties will pass as individual property as per the scheme of intestate succession which guarantees equal property rights for the spouse, children, and parents.
- In case there is no immediate family, the property will be equally divided among second-line relatives (first cousins from the paternal side). Others can also stake a claim if no eligible claimants are found.
 - ✓ As per the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, property can be held as coparcenary property or self-acquired property. Four generations of Hindus hold ancestral property as coparceners. The share of the deceased in the coparcenary property forms part of the property pool again. Consequently, for a person to get their individual share in coparcenary property, the property has to be partitioned.
 - ✓ Self-acquired property on the other hand, is individual property, and is passed on as per rules for intestate succession on death.

7. **Guardianship:** It remains silent on the question of guardianship. Thus, the Guardians and Wards Act (GWA), 1890 will continue to govern court-appointed guardians while natural guardianship will be governed by personal laws.

- ✓ All personal laws on guardianship follow the archaic common law principle wherein the father is deemed the guardian of the child and has the right to take decisions in relation to the child and the child’s property whereas the mother is relegated to the role of caretaker.
- ✓ The Supreme Court (SC) in the past has attempted to end this discrimination by stating that the mother can be appointed the guardian of the child if the father fails at discharging his functions as a guardian.

8. **Adoption:** It fails to provide for mandatory registration of adoption unlike marriages and live-in relationships. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA), 1956 and the Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act, 2015 will continue to prevail.

- ✓ Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs can adopt under HAMA. It involves the giving and taking of the child between the surrendering parent or guardian and the adoptive parents.
- ✓ Adoption can also be done under the secular JJ Act, 2015 by anyone irrespective of their religion. It provides sufficient safeguards to protect the safety and best interests of the child being adopted.

Criminalization Under The Bill

1. Child marriage and marrying within prohibited degrees of relationship have been criminalized.
2. Dissolution of marriage through modes other than the judicial mode of divorce prescribed under the Code is punishable with imprisonment as well as fine.
3. Compelling, abetting, or inducing any person to observe any condition for remarrying is punishable with imprisonment of up to three years and will be liable to pay a fine of ₹1 lakh.
4. Existing Muslim personal law practices governing marriage and divorce such as *Nikah Halala*, *Iddah/Iddat*, *Talaq-us-Sunnat*, *Talaq-i-Biddat (Triple Talaq)*, *Khula*, *Maba’arat*, *Zihar* have all been criminalized without explicitly naming them.
 - ✓ *Nikah Halala* is the condition of marrying a third person before marrying the divorced spouse

- ✓ *Iddah/Iddat* is the the period a woman must observe after the death of her husband or after a divorce before marrying another man.
- ✓ *Talaq-us-sunnat* is pronouncement of divorce by the husband during the period between menstruation followed by sexual abstinence.
- ✓ *Khula* is divorce on the instance of the wife.
- ✓ *Maba'arat* is divorce by mutual consent.
- ✓ *Zihar* is availability of judicial divorce to wife if husband compares her to any woman within prohibited degrees of relationship.

Concerns Raised

1. **Excludes LGBT Community:** Missing out on the opportunity to follow SC's decision on the marriage equality matter, wherein it had clarified that state legislatures are competent to ensure marriage equality for all.
2. **Irretrievable breakdown of marriage:** as a ground for divorce has been ignored under the bill despite being recognized in several Supreme Court judgments.
3. **Relies on Criminalization:** for enforcement of the bill which can further impact minority communities, as several religious and customary practices of religious minorities have been outlawed and hurt their religious sentiments.
4. **Surveillance Regime:** Under which the registrar can conduct an inquiry and the registration book is open to all- can be misused to harass inter-faith and inter-caste couples.
5. **Breaches Right to Privacy (Article 21):** by mandating registration of live-in relationships as it forces one to reveal his/her personal (intimate) life to the State. Compulsory registration also takes away the freedom to choose not to be married. This provision intrudes into the domain of privacy recognized as a fundamental right in the Putta Swamy ruling (it challenged the validity of Aadhaar scheme).
6. **Opposes Uniformity of Article 44 in India:** as the Constitution framers did not intend for every State to have its own different version of a UCC but a common UCC for the whole country.
7. **Leaves out STs and Hindu Undivided Families (HUF):** STs (comprise nearly 3% of the state's population) are excluded from the bill and HUFs find no mention.
 - ✓ HUFs consists of all persons directly descended from a common ancestor, and the wives and daughters of the male descendants. All the members are considered as one unit under HUF and get tax benefits.



SC Strikes Down Electoral Bond Scheme

A five-judge Constitution Bench (Led by CJI DY Chandrachud) unanimously struck down the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) terming it unconstitutional, manifestly arbitrary and a violation of the Right to Information (RTI) under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution and disproportionate restrictions.

About The Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS)

Electoral bonds (EBs) are interest-free bearer bonds or money instruments which can be used for making donations to eligible political parties. There is no cap on the number of electoral bonds that one can purchase, and such donations were exempted from tax.

- ✓ Eligible Political parties are the ones registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) who have secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly.

Face Value- EBs can be sold in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10 lakh, and Rs 1 crore through authorized branches of the State Bank of India (SBI).

From Where And When It Could Be Purchased?

It could be purchased from designated branches of State Bank of India (SBI) on the first 10 days of the beginning month of every quarter (January, April, July, and October each year).

Validity

They were valid for 15 calendar days from the date of issue and any proceeds from the bonds, which are not encashed within 15 days of being issued, were to be deposited in the Prime Minister Relief Fund (PMRF).

Who Could Purchase EBs?

Any person could purchase an EB through a KYC-compliant account to make anonymous donations to a political party. The term "Person" here includes- an Individual; Hindu Undivided Family (HUF); a Company; a Firm; an Association of Persons or a Body of Individuals, whether incorporated or not.

The EBS Timeline

- **2017:** The scheme is introduced as a Finance Bill.
- **September 14, 2017:** The scheme is challenged by NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms'.
- **October 3, 2017:** Notice issued by SC to Centre and EC on PIL filed.
- **January 2, 2018:** The scheme is notified by the Central government.
- **November 7, 2022:** The sale days of EBs increased from 70 to 85 in a year where any assembly election may be scheduled.
- **October 16, 2023:** Pleas against the scheme referred to a five-judge Constitution bench.
- **November 2, 2023:** The verdict on the scheme is reserved by SC.
- **February 15, 2024:** Unanimous judgment by SC bench annuls the scheme.

The Final Verdict

In its final judgement, the SC bench answered the following questions:

Q1. Does the electoral bond scheme violate the Right to Information (RTI) of Voters under Article 19(1)(a)?

- Yes, the court held that anonymous donations violate the RTI under Article 19(1)(a) as money enhances access to legislators and raises the legitimate possibility of quid pro quo or mutually beneficial arrangements such as favourable policy changes.
- It highlighted that economic inequality contributes to political inequality due to the deep association between money and politics.

Q2: Is curbing the circulation of black money in electoral financing a legitimate reason to restrict RTI?

- No, the court held that the RTI can only be restricted based on Article 19(2)- reasonable restrictions to freedom of speech and expression. It does not include curbing black money as a restriction.
- There are other less restrictive options available than EBS to curb black money in electoral financing.
- The bench held that for EBS to be considered legitimate, it should satisfy three aspects based on the court's proportionality test, laid down in *KS Puttaswamy, 2017* case over the right to privacy-
 1. *Existence of a law:* EBS was brought through the Finance Act which amended the Income Tax Act, 1961 and the Representation of People's Act (RPA, 1951).
 2. *The law must demonstrate a legitimate state interest:* to which the government argued that the objectives ranged from curbing black money to protecting the privacy of the donors.
 3. *Whether the encroachment on fundamental rights is proportional to the objection sought to be achieved:* the court held that the state could adopt a least restrictive method that didn't infringe upon the fundamental rights like there could have been a ₹20,000 cap on anonymous donations. Therefore, an infringement of the right to information is not proportionally justified to curb black money in electoral financing.

Q3. Whether the right to donor privacy includes information about a citizen's political affiliation?

- Yes, examining the Puttaswamy verdict, the court held that the Constitution guarantees a right to informational privacy of political affiliation as the *Puttaswamy* verdict categorically recognized that the freedom of political expression cannot be freely exercised without the privacy of political affiliation as the information regarding a person's political beliefs can be used to suppress dissent or to discriminate that individual by denying employment and therefore a lack of privacy could disproportionately affect those whose political views contradict the views of the mainstream.
- Political affiliation can also be used to disenfranchise voters through voter surveillance (identifying voting patterns based on the information collected).

Q4. Whether the infringement of RTI is justified for the protection of donor privacy?

- This question was decided based on the right to privacy of political affiliation.
- The court held that financial contributions to political parties are usually made for two reasons- for a political party and as a quid pro quo.
- Huge contributions made by corporations should not be treated at par with the contributions made by any individual such as a teacher, student or a farmer.
- Therefore, protection of donor privacy doesn't justify infringement of RTI as the right to privacy of political affiliation only extends to contributions made as a genuine form of political support and not to the ones used for influencing policies.

Q5. Whether unlimited political contributions by companies are unconstitutional?

No, the court held that the contributions made by companies are purely business transactions made with the intent of securing benefits in return ('Crony Capitalism').

- ✓ The scheme permitted donations from companies operating at a loss, potentially creating an avenue for the formation of shell companies with the intent of directing funds towards political parties.

Amendments Through Finance Act 2017

The court, along with quashing the electoral bond scheme, struck down the amendments made by the government through The Finance Act, 2017 to Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), the Income-tax Act, 1961, and the Companies Act, 2013 to facilitate corporate donations to political parties.

Law	Provision	Amendments by Finance Act 2017	Supreme Court's Decision
Section 29C of Representation of the People Act, 1951	It requires political parties to prepare a report detailing all the contributions received higher than Rs 20,000 along with donor information.	It added an exception to Section 29C as per which the requirement to declare all donations more than Rs 20,000 would not apply to the ones received through EBs.	The court while striking down the amendment held that the original requirement to disclose contributions of more than Rs 20,000 did an effective job of balancing voters' RTI with the right to privacy of donors, as donations below this threshold were far less likely to influence political decisions.
Section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013	A company could only donate 7.5% of its average net profits during the previous three financial years and was also required to disclose the amount contributed along with	It removed the cap of 7.5% on the amount of donation to a political party and the company was no longer required to declare which political party it had sent a donation to, nor the specific amount.	The court held that permitting unlimited corporate contributions authorizes unrestrained influence of companies in the electoral process and violates the right to free and fair elections and Article 14 (right to equality). It therefore restored the

	the particulars of the amount and the receiving party's name.		original provision which is meant to curb corruption in electoral financing.
Section 13A(b) of The Income-tax Act, 1961	It mandates a political party to maintain a record of all contributions received above Rs 20,000 along with the name and address of the donor.	Section 13A(b) was amended to include the words "other than contribution by way of Electoral Bonds" and added Section 13A(d) which required all donations exceeding Rs 2,000 to be given through certain methods, which included Electoral Bonds.	It struck down both the amendments and held that exempting political parties from maintaining a record of donations received through EBs violates the right to information of voters under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

Directions Issued by SC

1. It ordered the SBI to immediately stop issuing any further EBs and furnish details (including the date of purchase, the name of the purchaser and denomination) of each bond purchased since April 12, 2019, to the ECI by March 6.
2. It ordered the Election Commission of India (ECI) to subsequently publish all the information shared by the SBI on its official website by 13 March 2024.
3. It ordered the return of EBs that are within the validity period of fifteen days but have not yet been encashed by the political party, to the issuing bank so that the amount can be refunded back to the purchaser's account.

Far Reaching Implications of the Supreme Court's Landmark Judgement

1) Ensuring Equal Opportunities for All Political Parties:

- The verdict aims to create a fair and level playing field for every political party, eliminating discrimination based on vote share or popularity.
- This shift will empower smaller and regional parties to compete on an equal footing with the ruling party and major opposition groups, providing voters with a genuine array of choices.

2) Strengthening Democratic Framework:

- In a democratic system, safeguarding the voters' right to information is paramount.
- Withholding 'essential' information under the guise of privacy and the intent to regulate unaccounted money to political parties contradicts the importance of transparency.

3) Diminishing the Impact of Money and Corporate Influence in Politics:

- By eliminating the possibility for donors to conceal their identity and motives under the cloak of anonymity.
- This measure will hinder political parties from succumbing to the vested interests of donors, ensuring a focus on serving the public interest and the collective welfare.

4) Boosting Transparency and Accountability in Political Funding:

- By guaranteeing public access to information regarding the source and amount of funding received by political parties through electoral bonds.
- This provision empowers the public to scrutinize and hold political parties accountable for their actions and performance.

Bird's Eye View of The Verdict

1. The EB scheme is violative of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
2. Infringement to the Right to Information is not justified to curb black money.
3. Fundamental Right to Privacy also includes citizens' Right to Political Privacy and Affiliation.

4. Struck down amendments made by Finance Act 2017 to Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), the Income-tax Act, 1961, and the Companies Act, 2013.
5. Unlimited political contributions by companies are arbitrary in nature and unconstitutional.
6. Ordered SBI to stop issuing further EBs and to disclose the names of the contributors since 2019 to the Election Commission by March 6, 2024.
7. Ordered the ECI to furnish all the details received by SBI on its website by 13 March 2024.

{For more information on the Electoral Bonds Scheme, please refer to The Recitals-November 2023 edition}



Farmers' Protest and MSP Demand

- A major demand of the farmers protesting in Delhi is for the enactment of a law to guarantee MSP for all crops, as per the formula recommended by the Dr M S Swaminathan Commission.
- This comes at a time when a committee appointed by the central government in July 2022 continues to deliberate on ways to make MSP more effective and transparent.

Minimum Support Price (MSP) Regime in India

- **Background:**
 - The Food-Grain Enquiry Committee, established by the Nehru administration in 1957, was the first attempt to address the agricultural earning issue.
 - However, it turned out to be insignificant.
 - Then, in 1964, Lal Bahadur Shastri formed the Food Grain Price Committee (under LK Jha), to push for a MSP regime.
 - Despite the fact that the report was quickly accepted by the Shastri government, the first MSP announcement was made in 1967.
 - Thus, the MSP regime came into existence as a policy decision and the government set up the Agricultural Prices Commission for fixing MSP for crops.
 - The commission was renamed as the CACP in 1985.
- **About MSP**
 - MSP is a form of market intervention (a policy decision not enforceable by law) by the Government to insure agricultural producers against any sharp fall in farm prices during bumper production years.
 - These are announced by the **Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs** (Chaired by the Prime Minister of India).
 - The recommendations of the **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices** (CACP) at the beginning of the sowing season for certain crops forms the basis of these announcements.
- The CACP considers the following factors when *recommending* MSPs –
 - A commodity's demand and supply;
 - Its cost of production;
 - Market price trends (both domestic and international);
 - Inter-crop price parity;
 - The terms of trade between agriculture and non-agriculture (the ratio of farm input and farm output prices);
 - A minimum of 50% as a margin over cost of production; and
 - The likely implications of an MSP on consumers of that product.
- **Objectives**

- MSPs are a guarantee price for farmer's produce from the Government to prevent the farmers from distress sales and to procure food grains for public distribution.
- E.g. if the market price for a commodity falls below the specified minimum price due to bumper production and a market glut, government agencies will buy the entire quantity supplied by farmers at the announced minimum price.
- **Crops covered:**
 - Government announces MSPs for **22** mandated crops and fair and remunerative price (**FRP**) for **sugarcane** (total 23).
 - Crops covered by MSPs include:
 - 7 types of cereals (paddy, wheat, maize, bajra, jowar, ragi and barley),
 - 5 types of pulses (chana, arhar/tur, urad, moong and masur),
 - 7 oilseeds (rapeseed-mustard, groundnut, soyabean, sunflower, sesamum, safflower, nigerseed),
 - 4 commercial crops (cotton, sugarcane, copra, raw jute).

2022 Committee

- **Background**
 - This panel was constituted seven months after farmers who had gathered at Delhi's border called off their year-long protest, after the Prime Minister announced the repeal of the farm laws.
 - The committee's subject matter has three points: **MSP, natural farming, and crop diversification**.
 - However, the terms of reference do not include a legal guarantee for MSP.
- **About**
 - The committee was notified by the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare in July 2022.
 - The committee, which has 26 members, is headed by Sanjay Agrawal, a former agriculture secretary.

Term Of Reference Of The Committee

- **To promote Zero budget natural farming (ZBNF).**
 - ZBNF guides farmers toward sustainable farming practices, which helps to retain soil fertility, ensure chemical-free agriculture, and ensure low production costs (zero cost), thereby increasing farmers' income.
- **To provide suggestions on 5 points regarding natural farming including -**
 - **Suggestions for programmes and schemes for value chain development**, protocol validation and research for future needs.
 - **Support for area expansion** under the Indian Natural Farming System by publicity and through involvement and contribution of farmer organizations.
- **To change crop patterns keeping in mind the changing needs of the country.**
- **To recommend measures to strengthen the Agricultural Marketing System** in response to the country's changing needs.
 - This is to ensure higher value to farmers through remunerative prices for their produce by capitalizing on domestic and export opportunities.
- **To provide suggestions on 4 points related to crop diversification** including -
 - Mapping of existing cropping patterns of agro-ecological zones of producer and consumer states;
 - Strategy for diversification policy to change the cropping pattern according to the changing needs of the country;
 - Arrangement for agricultural diversification and system to ensure remunerative prices for the sale of new crops;
 - Review and suggestion on micro irrigation scheme.
- **To make MSP more effective and transparent.**

- It will also make recommendations to give CACP more autonomy as well as measures to make it more scientific.

Consequences of According Legal Stature to MSP

- A policy paper by NITI Aayog's agricultural economist **Ramesh Chand** argues that price level that is not supported by demand and supply cannot be sustained through legal means.
- The paper noted that segments like horticulture, milk and fishery (where market intervention is nil or very little) showed 4-10% annual growth whereas the growth rate in cereals, where MSP and other interventions are quite high, remained at 1.1% after 2011-12.
- Higher procurement cost would mean increase in prices of food grains, leading to inflation, which would eventually affect the poor.
- There also lies practical difficulties in getting the private sector on board for buying at legally guaranteed MSP.
- The paper cited the example of sugarcane – where the support price (**Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP)**) is the statutory minimum price – and pointed out the accumulation of crores in arrears as private sugar mills could not find FRP for sugarcane matching with sugar prices.

Suggestions

- **Provide Direct Income Support:** MSP is a short-term solution. It is not a sustainable solution for all of Indian agriculture.
 - Instead of arbitrarily fixing prices of goods in the market, the more effective way might be to provide direct income support to those who are poor — regardless of whether they are farmers or not.
- **Investment Boost to Infrastructure:** Better irrigation facilities, easier access to credit, timely access to power, creating lots of warehouses, and ramping up of extension services including post-harvest marketing.
 - It is when such facilities are provided — either free or at an accessible price point — that the Indian farmer would become less vulnerable.
- **Eliminate Disguised Unemployment in Agriculture sector:** The solution to the economic distress of Indian farmers lies outside agriculture. It lies in boosting India's industrial and services sectors.
 - These are the two sectors that can absorb the excess labour that is engaged at present in extremely unremunerative farm activities and provide them with well-paying jobs.
 - It is only when industries and services sectors grow rapidly for the next couple of decades that India's farm distress will get alleviated.

Extra Mile

- The fourth meeting between Union Ministers and farmer representatives to deliberate on their demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP on crops, remained inconclusive.
- However, the meeting moved in a 'positive' direction as the government proposed to give a guarantee on procuring of five crops on MSP.
- A proposal was discussed in which the government agencies like NCCF and NAFED will get into a contract and buy produce pulses - arhar, tur and urad, and corn from the farmers on MSP.
 - **There will be no limit on the quantity.**
- Similarly, the government proposed that the Cotton Corporation of India will enter 5-year agreement with farmers to buy cotton crops at MSP.
- However, the **protesting farmers have rejected the above mentioned proposals & demanded a legally guaranteed MSP for all crops across the country.**



Interim Budget 2024

The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Interim Union Budget for 2024-2025 in Parliament.

Vote on Account

- **Article 116 of the Constitution allows** the Lower House to make any grant in advance for the estimated expenditure for part of any financial year by voting and passing such a legislation. This is called vote on account.
- A simple vote on account includes presenting the Centre's fund requirements for salaries, ongoing projects and other expenditure for the transitional period.
- It cannot make any changes to tax rates. It is also valid only for two months and can be extended up to four months.

Interim Budget

- **Background: Need for an interim Budget**
 - As per Article 112 of the Indian Constitution, annual financial statement is laid before both Houses of Parliament.
 - Annual financial statement is a statement of the estimated receipts and expenditure of the Government of India for a specific financial year.
 - The Centre seeks both Houses' approval to withdraw the necessary funds from the Consolidated Fund of India.
 - Hence, this statement has to be passed by both Houses.
 - However, in an election year, the incumbent Government cannot present a full Budget as there may be a change in the executive after the polls.
 - Hence, the need for an interim budget.
- **Constitutional Provisions of Interim Budget**
 - There is **no constitutional provision for an interim budget.**
 - Hence, the Centre chooses to seek the Lower House's approval for the funds required for the transition period (April - July) till the new government presents a full Budget— via the **votes on account provision.**
- **About**
 - In an interim budget, the Finance Minister presents the current state of the Indian economy, its fiscal status including India's revised estimated growth in the next year.
 - S/he will also detail the government's planned and non-planned expenditure and receipts.
 - While the Centre has to desist from announcing any major scheme which could influence voters or present an Economic Survey, the government is allowed to revise tax rates via an interim budget.
 - The interim budget too is presented to both Houses on February 1 by the Finance Minister, put to vote and then sent for Presidential approval.
 - Like the Union budget, the interim budget too is debated in the Lok Sabha before passage

Key Highlights of the Interim Budget 2024-25

- **No change relating to taxation**
 - No change relating to taxation has been proposed in the Interim Budget.
 - The same rates for direct taxes and indirect taxes, including import duties, have been retained.
- **Withdrawal of Outstanding direct tax demands**
 - The Minister announced to improve tax payer services which is in line with the government's vision to improve ease of living and ease of doing business.
 - The Interim Budget proposes to withdraw such outstanding direct tax demands:
 - up to Rs. 25000/- pertaining to the period up to financial year 2009-10 and
 - up to Rs. 10,000/- for financial years 2010-11 to 2014-15.
 - This is expected to benefit about a crore tax payers.

- **Direct tax collections trebled**
 - Over the last 10 years the direct tax collections have more than trebled and the return filers swelled to 2.4 times.
 - The Govt has reduced and rationalised the tax rates due to which under the new tax regime there is no tax liability for tax payers with income up to Rs. 7 lakh.
 - The Minister also mentioned about **decrease in corporate tax rates** for existing domestic companies from 30% to 22%, and for certain new manufacturing companies to 15%.
 - The Government's focus has been to improve tax-payer services.
 - This has led to transformation of age-old jurisdiction-based assessment system, and filing of tax returns has been made simpler and easier.
 - **Average processing time of returns** has been reduced from 93 days in the year 2013-14 to a mere ten days this year.
- **Number of steps taken in customs to facilitate international trade**
 - Over the last four years since 2019, the import release time declined:
 - by 47 per cent to 71 hours at Inland Container Depots,
 - by 28 per cent to 44 hours at air cargo complexes and
 - by 27 per cent to 85 hours at sea ports.
- **Laying of White Paper**
 - The Minister announced that the Government will come out with a white paper, on 'where we were then till 2014 and where we are now, only for the purpose of drawing lessons from the mismanagement of those years'.
- **Capital expenditure outlay for the next year**
 - Capital expenditure outlay for the said period has been increased by 11.1% to Rs **11,11,111 crore**, which would be 3.4% of the GDP.
 - This is in the wake of building on the massive tripling of the capital expenditure outlay in the past 4 years resulting in huge multiplier impact on economic growth and employment creation.
- **Real GDP growth rate**
 - India's Real GDP is projected to grow at 7.3% in FY 2023-24.
 - Indian economy has demonstrated resilience and maintained healthy macro-economic fundamentals, despite global economic challenges.
 - As per the IMF, **India is likely to become the third-largest economy in 2027** (in USD at market exchange rate).
 - It also estimated that India's contribution to global growth will rise by 200 basis points in 5 years.
 - Moreover, various international agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, OECD and ADB project India to grow between 6.4 per cent, 6.3 per cent, 6.1 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively in 2024-25.
- **GST reduced compliance burden**
 - GST has reduced the compliance burden on trade and industry by unifying the highly fragmented indirect tax regime in India.
 - Mentioning about a recent survey conducted by a leading consulting firm, she said that 94% of industry leaders view the transition to GST as largely positive.
 - **Tax base of GST has more than doubled** and average monthly gross GST collection has almost doubled to Rs. 1.66 lakh crore this year.
 - States' SGST revenue, including compensation released to states, in the post-GST period of 2017-18 to 2022-23, has achieved a buoyancy of 1.22.
 - The biggest beneficiaries are the consumers as reduction in logistics cost and taxes have brought down prices of most goods and services.

- Strong growth in economic activity has imparted buoyancy to revenue collections and pointed out that GST collection stood at ₹1.65 lakh crore in December 2023. This is the 7th-time that gross GST revenues have crossed ₹1.6 lakh crore.
- **Receipts and Expenditure**
 - In 2024-25, the total receipts other than borrowings and the total expenditure are estimated at Rs 30.80 and 47.66 lakh crore respectively.
 - The tax receipts are estimated at Rs 26.02 lakh crore.
 - ✓ The Revised Estimate of the total receipts other than borrowings is Rs 27.56 lakh crore, of which the tax receipts are Rs 23.24 lakh crore.
 - ✓ The Revised Estimate of the total expenditure is Rs 44.90 lakh crore.
 - The revenue receipts at Rs 30.03 lakh crore are expected to be higher than the Budget Estimate, reflecting strong growth momentum and formalization in the economy.
- **Help extended to State Govts**
 - The scheme of fifty-year interest free loan for capital expenditure to states will be continued this year with total outlay of Rs1.3 lakh crore.
 - A provision of 75000 crore rupees as fifty-year interest free loan is proposed this year to support the milestone-linked reforms of Viksit Bharat by the State Governments.
- **Fiscal consolidation**
 - To reduce fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26, the fiscal deficit in 2024-25 is estimated to be **5.1% of GDP**, adhering to that path.
 - Budget 2021-22 had announced to reduce the fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.
 - Similarly, the gross and net market borrowings through dated securities during 2024-25 are estimated at Rs 14.13 and 11.75 lakh crore respectively and both will be less than that in 2023-24.
- **FDI inflow**
 - The FDI inflow during 2014-23 was USD 596 billion marking a golden era and this is twice the inflow during 2005-14.
 - For encouraging sustained foreign investment, **govt is negotiating bilateral investment treaties** with foreign countries, in the spirit of 'first develop India'.
- **Achievement on the developmental aspects**
 - The Government has assisted 25 crore people to get freedom from multi-dimensional poverty.
 - Credit assistance was provided to **78 lakh street vendors under PM-SVANidhi**.
 - **PM Mudra Yojana** has sanctioned 43 crore loans aggregating to Rs 22.5 lakh crore for entrepreneurial aspirations.
 - Thirty crore Mudra Yojana loans have been given to women entrepreneurs.
 - **PM Awas Yojana (Grameen)** is close to achieving the target of three crore houses and two crore more houses will be taken up in the next five years to meet the requirement arising from increase in the number of families.
 - Similarly, through **rooftop solarization**, one crore households will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units free electricity every month.
 - Encouraging Cervical Cancer Vaccination for girls (9-14 years)
 - **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana** has benefitted 38 lakh farmers and generated 10 lakh employment.
 - **Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Yojana** has assisted 2.4 lakh SHGs and sixty thousand individuals with credit linkages.
- **Promoting startups**

- For tech savvy youth, a corpus of rupees one lakh crore will be established with fifty-year interest free loan.
- The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates.
- This will also encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains.
- **Railways**
 - Three major economic railway corridor programmes will be implemented:
 - energy, mineral and cement corridors,
 - port connectivity corridors, and
 - high traffic density corridors.
 - Moreover, forty thousand normal rail bogies will be converted to the Vande Bharat standards to enhance safety, convenience and comfort of passengers.
- **Aviation**
 - The number of airports have doubled to 149 and today five hundred and seventeen new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers.
 - Indian carriers have pro-actively placed orders for over 1000 new aircrafts.
- **Allocation for MGNREGS:**
 - The Government has announced to provide Rs 86,000 crore for MGNREGA scheme
 - The amount was **Rs 60,000 crore** for 2023-24.
- **Subsidy on Food, Fertilizer & Fuel:**
 - The subsidy bill on the '3 Fs' — food, fertilizer and fuel — is slated to fall to a five-year-low of **Rs ~3.8 lakh crore in 2024-25**.
 - The fertilizer subsidy has been decreased with hopes on improvement in situation in Ukraine & increased domestic production.
- **Committee to study challenges arising from fast population growth**
 - The Government will form a high-powered committee for an extensive consideration of the challenges arising from fast population growth and demographic changes.
 - The committee will be mandated to make recommendations for addressing these challenges comprehensively in relation to the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.



Issues With Financial Devolution Among States

- Recently various States from South India have claimed that they have not been receiving their fair share as per the present scheme of financial devolution.
- They have raised issues about their less than proportionate share of receipt in tax revenue when compared to their contribution towards tax collection.


Basis For Allocation

- The share of States from the divisible pool (vertical devolution) stands at 41% as per the recommendation of the 15th FC.
- The distribution among the States (horizontal devolution) is based on various criteria. The Table 1 lists the criteria for horizontal devolution among the States from the 11th to 15th FC.
- 'Income distance'** is the distance of a State's income from the State with highest per capita income which is Haryana. States with lower per capita income would be given a higher share to maintain equity among States.
- 'Population'** is the population as per the 2011 Census. Till the 14th FC, weightage was given for the population as per the 1971 Census but that has been discontinued in the 15th FC.
- 'Forest and ecology'** consider the share of dense forest of each State in the aggregate dense forest of all the States.
- 'The demographic performance'** criterion has been introduced to reward efforts made by States in controlling their population. States with a lower fertility ratio are scored higher on this criterion.
- 'Tax effort'** as a criterion has been used to reward States with higher tax collection efficiency.

Issues With Devolution

What is Divisible Pool of Taxes?

- ▶ **Article 270** of the Constitution provides for the scheme of distribution of net tax proceeds collected by the Union government between the Centre and the States.
- ▶ The taxes that are shared between the Centre and the States include corporation tax, personal income tax, Central GST, the Centre's share of the Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) etc.
- ▶ This division is based on the recommendation of the **Finance Commission (FC)** that is constituted every five years as per the terms of **Article 280**.
- ▶ Apart from the share of taxes, States are also provided grants-in-aid as per the recommendation of the FC.
- ▶ The divisible pool, however, does not include cess and surcharge that are levied by the Centre.



How is Finance Commission Constituted?

- ▶ It consists of a chairman and four other members who are appointed by the President.
- ▶ The **Finance Commission (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1951**, has specified the qualifications for chairman and other members of the commission.
- ▶ Union government has notified the constitution of **16th Finance Commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Arvind Panagariya** for making its recommendations for 2026-31.


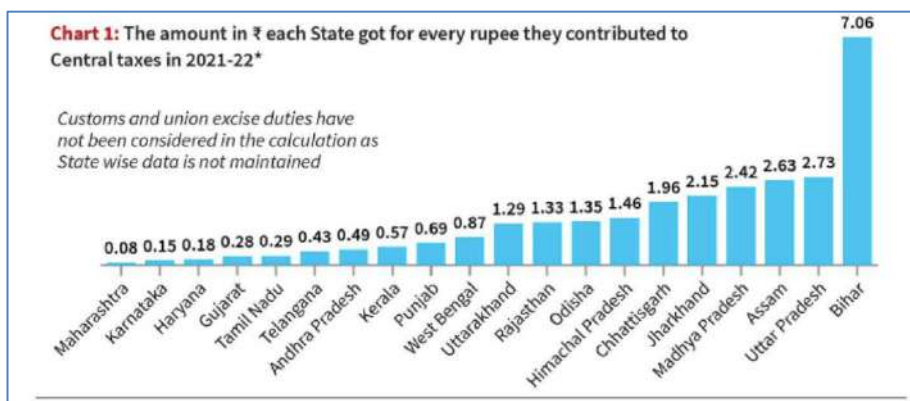


Table 1 : The criteria for horizontal devolution among States over the last five FCs

Criteria	11th FC 2000-05	12th FC 2005-10	13th FC 2010-15	14th FC 2015-20	15th FC 2021-26
Income Distance	62.5	50	47.5	50	45
Population (1971 Census)	10	25	25	17.5	-
Population (2011 Census)	-	-	-	10	15
Area	7.5	10	10	15	15
Forest cover	-	-	-	7.5	-
Forest and ecology	-	-	-	-	10
Infrastructure index	7.5	-	-	-	-
Fiscal discipline	7.5	7.5	17.5	-	-
Demographic performance	-	-	-	-	12.5
Tax effort	5	7.5	-	-	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100



- **Firstly**, cess and surcharge collected by the Union government is estimated at around 23% of its gross tax receipts for 2024-25, which does not form part of the divisible pool and hence not shared with the States.

- To provide a perspective, **the total tax revenue** for the year 2022-23 (actual), 2023-24 (revised estimates) and 2024-25 (Budget estimates) of the Union government is ₹30.5, ₹34.4 and ₹38.8 lakh crore respectively.

- The State's share was ₹9.5, ₹11.0 and ₹12.2 lakh crore respectively, which constitutes around 32% of the total tax receipts of the Centre which is significantly less than the 41% recommended by the 15th FC.

- **Secondly**, the amount each State gets

back for every rupee they contribute to Central taxes shows steep variation. Chart 1 shows the same for the year 2021-22.

- It can be seen that **industrially developed States** received much less than a rupee for every rupee they contributed as against States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

- This is partly due to the fact that many corporations are headquartered in these State capitals where they would remit their direct taxes. However, this variation can also be attributed to the difference in GST collection among various States.

- **Third**, the percentage share in the divisible pool of taxes has been reducing for southern States over the last six FCs as can be seen in Chart 2.

- This is attributable to the higher weightage being given for equity (income gap) and needs (population, area and forest) than efficiency (demographic performance and tax effort).

Way Ahead

- It must be noted that States generate around 40% of the revenue and bear around 60% of the expenditure. The FC and its recommendations are meant to assess this imbalance and propose a fair sharing mechanism.

- There are **three important reforms** that may be considered for maintaining the balance between equity and federalism while sharing revenue.

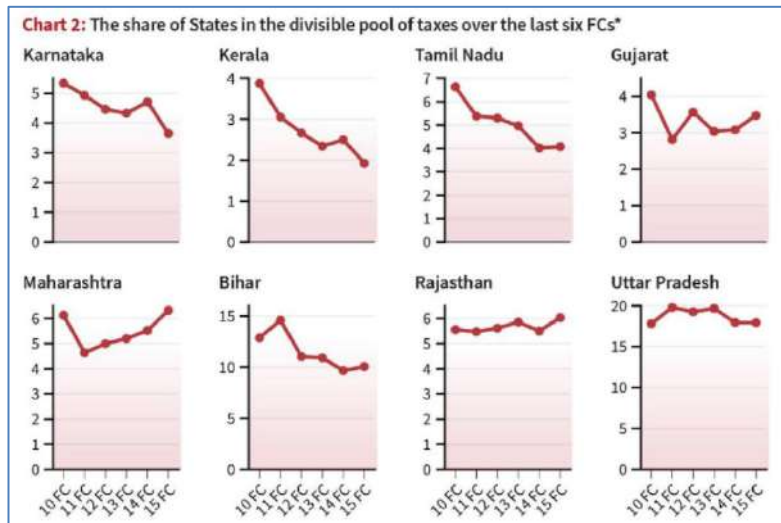
- **Firstly**, the divisible pool can be enlarged by including some portion of cess and surcharge in it. The Centre should also gradually discontinue various cesses and surcharges it imposes by suitably rationalising the tax slabs.

- **Secondly**, the weightage for *efficiency criteria in horizontal devolution should be increased*.

- GST being a consumption-based destination tax that is equally divided between the Union and the State means that State GST accrual (inclusive of Integrated GST settlement on inter-state sales) should be the same as the Central GST accrual from a State.
- Hence, relative GST contribution from States can be included as a criterion by providing suitable weightage in future FCs.

- **Finally**, similar to the GST council, a more formal arrangement for the participation of States in the constitution and the working of the FC should be considered.


- It is also important that States uphold principles of fiscal federalism by devolving adequate resources to local bodies for vibrant & accountable development.



Northern Ireland Gets A Govt.

- An Irish nationalist made history recently by becoming Northern Ireland's **first minister** as the government returned to work **after a two-year boycott**.
- The Parliament of Northern Ireland was paralysed over new trade rules between the European Union and the United Kingdom necessitated by Brexit.

Governance system of Ireland




Background

- > Northern Ireland was created in May 1921 by partitioning Ireland, and consists of the six northeastern counties of the island.
 - In 1922, the rest of Ireland gained independence from the British (today's Republic of Ireland, with its capital in Dublin).
- > Northern Ireland remained with the United Kingdom, but tensions simmered between the side loyal to the Crown, and the faction wanting to join the Republic.
- > Today, the side loyal to the British Union are called **unionists**, while those who support a united and free Ireland are called **nationalists**.

Belfast Agreement or the Good Friday agreement

- > By the end of the 1960s, a bloody conflict was raging in Northern Ireland among those who wished to remain with the UK and those who wanted to join Ireland.
- > Finally, in 1998, the **Good Friday Agreement** was signed to end the bloodshed, and gave Northern Ireland a unique system of governance.



Unique system of governance

- > Both unionists and nationalists share power in Stormont, the Parliament buildings in Belfast.
- > Both sides have to cooperate for the government to work.
- > While the faction that wins more votes in elections gets the post of First Minister, the other side gets the chair of Deputy First Minister, with equal power.

Northern Ireland Protocol and Collapse of Parliament in 2022

- **Background: Northern Ireland Protocol**
 - After the UK left the European Union, Northern Ireland remained its only constituent that shared a land border with an EU-member, the Republic of Ireland.
 - Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) together with Northern Ireland forms the United Kingdom.
 - Since the EU and the UK have different product standards, border checks would be necessary before goods could move from Northern Ireland to Ireland.
 - However, an open border between the two was a key component of the **1998 Good Friday agreement**.
 - Keeping this in mind, Northern Ireland Protocol was negotiated in 2020 between the U.K. and E.U.
- **Protocol led to the Collapse of Northern Ireland Parliament (Stormont) in 2022**
 - This protocol angered the unionists, who believed it undermined Northern Ireland's position with the UK.
 - Thus, the Unionists refused to allow government formation after Northern Ireland went to polls in May 2022, and did not allow Stormont to function.

About The Protocol

- 01

It is a trading agreement that was negotiated in 2020 between the U.K. and the E.U.
- 02

Under this agreement both the U.K. and E.U. agreed that the inspection of goods would be conducted between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
 - This agreement effectively created a de facto border in the Irish Sea between Northern Ireland and the rest of the U.K.
- 03

Northern Ireland continued to follow many of the EU's rules, meaning that lorries can continue to drive across the border without having to be inspected.
- 04

The protocol was signed as part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement, which is now ratified under international law.

The New Deal

- Various efforts were made to resolve the problem, including the **Windsor Framework of February 2023**.
- **Windsor Framework**
 - The framework has two crucial aspects:
 - introduction of a **green lane and red lane system** for goods that will stay in Northern Ireland and those that will go to the EU respectively;

- **'Stormont Brake'**, which allows Northern Ireland lawmakers and London to veto any EU regulation they believe affects the region adversely.
- British goods meant for Northern Ireland will use the **green lane** at the ports, and will be allowed to pass with minimal paperwork and checks.
- Goods destined for Ireland or the rest of the EU will have to take the **red lane**, with the attendant customs and other checks.
- The new **Stormont Brake** means the democratically elected Northern Ireland Assembly can oppose new EU goods rules that would have significant and lasting effects on everyday lives in Northern Ireland.
 - For this, they will need the support of 30 members from at least two parties.
 - The British government can then veto the law.
- **A new deal has been reached**
 - Windsor Framework was refused by the Unionist by saying that these measures were far too little.
 - Now, a new deal has been reached, published as a command paper called 'Safeguarding the Union' by the UK government.
 - Its three main points include:
 - The green lane is now called the **UK Internal Market channel**, on which checks and customs paperwork have been reduced further, to only "risk and intelligence-based checks" relating to "criminality, smuggling and disease";
 - There is a "**Internal Market Guarantee**" which says that at least 80% of Great Britain to Northern Ireland goods will pass through this channel;
 - the UK government will extend a £3.3 billion package to help Northern Ireland's finances.



High Duties Strategy To Curb Imports From China

Multiple wings of the government have begun to criticise the Centre's moves to gradually raise customs tariffs, particularly the more recent targeting imports of Chinese components and inputs.

India's Import from China and Blockade Targeting Chinese Imports

- India accounts for negligible share in China's total trade (barely 3% of Chinese exports), but still accounts for **14%** of India's imports with -
 - Not just inputs for the domestic industry in sectors ranging from **electronics to pharmaceuticals and textiles to leather**,
 - But also, capital goods, being sourced from China.
- **The blockade targeting Chinese imports** had gained traction across Central ministries and departments in the aftermath of the Galwan border clash in 2020.
- There is an increase in the average tariffs to **18.1% in 2022 from 13% in 2014.**
 - Moreover, to check cheap quality imports from China, India imposed **Quality Control Orders (QCOs)** that restrict MSMEs from getting necessary input material.
- Tariff hikes have been undertaken multiple times covering well over 500 major item categories since 2016.
 - Analysts caution that in some cases where customs duty hikes have been proposed, duties are close to or have effectively **crossed the WTO-mandated "bound rates"**.

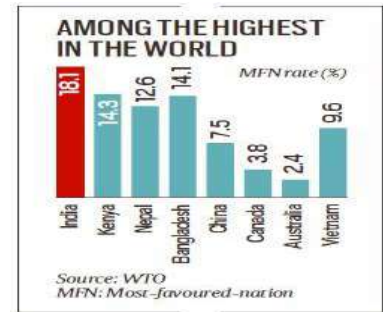
TOP ITEMS IMPORTED FROM CHINA IN FY23	
Category	Amount (\$ bn)
Engineering goods	30.34
Electronic goods	30.21
Chemicals and related products	20.08
Non-electrical machinery	11.7
Industrial machinery	6.2
Medicinal & pharmaceutical products	3.4
Artificial resins, plastic materials etc.	5.2

Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)

- These are the customs duty rates that a country commits to all other members under the most favoured nation (MFN) principle.

Comparing India's Tariffs with Other Countries and Adverse Impact of High Tariffs

- Globally there is no country where tariffs are so high (as in India). India's tariffs are higher than countries in **South East Asia and even Africa**.
- India is currently negotiating FTAs with **developed countries which have maximum tariffs at 60%** that too on products such as tobacco. India's highest tariffs go up to 150%.
- These restrictions are now seen to be impacting sectors such as **electronics and pharmaceuticals** leading to either a loss of
 - Domestic output or
 - Competitive advantage (high production cost rendering India's exports uncompetitive) for Indian manufacturing.
- Industries have warned of the detrimental impact of higher tariffs being used as a **protectionism tool**.
 - India's high tariffs pose a disincentive to **de-risking supply chains beyond China**.
 - As a result, countries such as **Vietnam, Thailand and Mexico** are offering lower tariffs on components to grab the space vacated by China.



Indian Government's Response to Allegations of High Tariffs

- **The Ministry of Commerce denies these duty as "protectionist" in nature.**
- India's stance on hiking tariffs mirrored the broader trend globally, and that New Delhi had shown a renewed interest in signing bilateral FTAs over the last 24 months.
- India has chosen to stay out of important mega regional trading arrangements, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Need to Gradually Reduce Duties on Imports from China

- **From the perspective of development economics**, it makes sense to gradually decrease duties and integrate better with global markets and then negotiate FTAs.
- Protectionism is not nationalism. It only brings inefficiency (at the cost of hurting consumers).
- Nearly 8 years of protectionism **have not increased India's manufacturing share of GDP (~15%)**, despite several sops, including extraordinary tax advantages.
- Therefore, **an advanced strategy to use tariffs as a diplomatic tool is the need of the hour**; otherwise, the achievements of India's manufacturing-focused thrust (including from schemes like PLI) may be in danger.
- The MeitY had **pushed for a lowering of duties** of about 20% on parts including circuit boards, chargers and fully assembled phones, by at least 5% points.
 - This was partly agreed to and the government reduced duty on several IT goods ahead of the Interim Budget 2024.
- **These calibrated changes in duty rates will -**
 - Help the domestic industry in capacity creation,
 - Provide a level playing field,
 - Easing the raw material supply side constraints and
 - Enhance ease of doing business.



Parliamentary Committee Report on Local Fintech Players

- In its recent report, the Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology expressed worries about foreign-owned fintech apps having too much control in India.
- The committee suggested that Indian-owned apps should be encouraged more.
- It pointed out that while the UPI made up a large portion (73.5%) of all digital payments in terms of volume in the fiscal year 2022-23.
- However, its share of the total payment value was much smaller, at only 6.67%.

Key Highlights Of The Report

- **Regulation of Digital Payment Apps** due to their increasing usage in India.
 - It highlighted that regulating local apps, compared to foreign ones, would be more practical for entities like RBI and the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).
- **Domination of Foreign-Owned Fintech Apps**
 - The Committee noted the dominance of fintech apps owned by foreign entities, such as PhonePe backed by Walmart and Google Pay, in the Indian fintech sector.
 - PhonePe holds the largest market share in terms of transaction volume, followed by Google Pay.
 - As per the statistics recorded between October and November 2023:
 - PhonePe accounted for 46.91% of the market share.
 - Google Pay held 36.39% of the market share.
 - NPCI's BHIM UPI only had a 0.22% market share in volume terms.
- **Usage Statistics**
 - NPCI's data from December last year revealed:
 - Customers initiated a total of 5,642.66 million transactions using PhonePe.
 - Another 4,375 million transactions were made using Google Pay.
 - Only about 24.30 million transactions were made using BHIM.
- **Committee's recommendation supported NPCI's Transaction Volume Cap**
 - In November 2020, the NPCI implemented a 30% volume cap on transactions conducted through UPI by single player.
 - This regulation aimed to limit the number of transactions initiated by third-party apps like PhonePe and Amazon Pay, ensuring a balanced usage of the interface.
 - Originally, apps exceeding the prescribed cap were given a two-year period to comply with the directive, scheduled to conclude by December 31, 2022.
 - However, citing the need for further expansion and equilibrium in the UPI ecosystem, the compliance deadline was extended to December 31, 2024

Concerns About Fraud

- **Fintech Companies and Money Laundering Concerns**
 - The Committee highlighted that fintech companies were being exploited by scamsters for money laundering purposes.
 - An example cited was the Abu Dhabi-based app called Pyypl, which was reportedly administered by Chinese investment scamsters.
 - This situation posed challenges for Indian law enforcement agencies in tracking the flow of illicit funds gathered through scams on the platform.
- **Fraud Trends and Ratio**
 - Despite an increase in the volume of transactions over the past five years, the ratio of fraudulent transactions to total transactions has remained relatively low.
 - ✓ The fraud to sales ratio, representing the proportion of fraudulent transactions to total transactions in a financial year, hovered ~0.0015%.

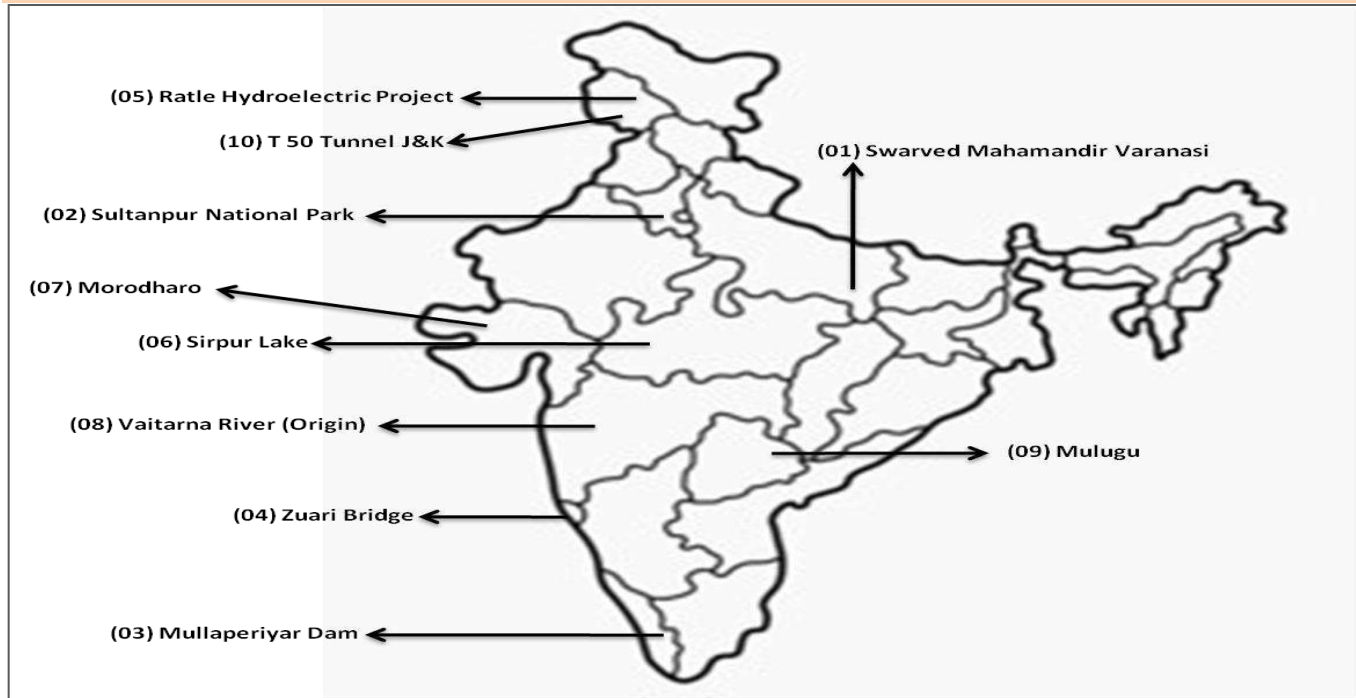
- As of September 2023, in the ongoing financial year, this figure slightly increased to 0.0016%.
- **Impact on UPI Users**
 - The percentage of UPI users affected by frauds stood at 0.0189%.
 - Despite concerns about fintech platforms being used for illegal activities, the overall impact on users remained relatively low compared to the total volume of transactions.

Way forward

- **Advantages of Local and Foreign Fintech Players**
 - Local fintech companies possess a natural advantage in comprehending the intricacies of the customer base, various ecosystem participants, and the digital public infrastructure within the Indian market.
 - They are also well-versed in navigating the broader market infrastructure.
 - Conversely, foreign fintech firms excel in leveraging new technologies, employing innovative techniques, and capitalizing on global connectivity.
 - Hence, there is the necessity of fostering a balanced mix of local and foreign fintech players to effectively serve the Indian ecosystem. This balance would be crucial across diverse sectors such as payments, lending, wealth management & insurance.
- **Regulatory Emphasis on Accountability and Compliance with local laws**
 - They underscored the importance of adherence to regulatory frameworks to ensure the integrity and stability of the fintech sector within the Indian market.

MAPS: PLACES IN NEWS

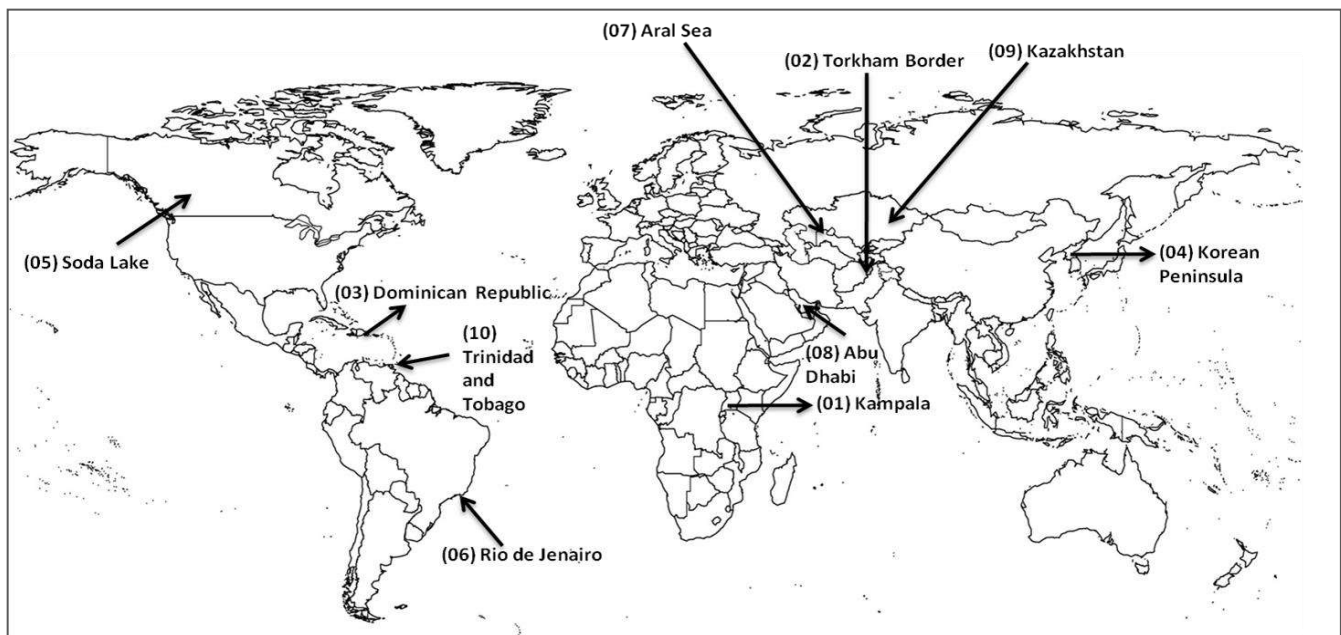
National Places In News



1	Swarved Mahamandir Varanasi	It is the world’s largest meditation centre, where 20,000 people can sit together and meditate. Prime Minister recently inaugurated the world’s largest meditation centre, Swarved Mahamandir, in Varanasi.
2	Sultanpur National Park	According to forest department officials the Sultanpur National Park in Farrukhnagar, Gurugram has reported a decrease of 20-30 per cent in the number of migratory birds

		this season. It comprises mainly of wetlands. It was notified as a Ramsar site, a wetland of international importance, in 2021.
3	Mullaperiyar Dam	Tamil Nadu cancelled the decision to open the spillway shutters of Mullaperiyar dam recently after a lull in rainfall and a reduced inflow of water to the dam. It is a masonry gravity dam situated on the Periyar River in Thekkady, Idukki district, in Kerala. It is located, on the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats. The dam is built at the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers.
4	Zuari Bridge	Goa's Zuari Bridge become fully operational recently. It is located on the Zuari river at Cortalim village on Margao-Panaji National Highway. It is a 13.20-kilometer eight-lane bridge across Zuari river. It is India's second longest cable-stayed bridge. It will have significant benefits for transport from North Goa to South Goa by strengthening connectivity for Mormugao Port Trust.
5	Ratle Hydroelectric project	Chenab River has been diverted to expedite construction of a dam for the Ratle Hydro Electric Project in J&K. The project is a Run of River Scheme on the Chenab River, located in the Kishtwar district, in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.
6	Sirpur lake	The Government organised a national event at Sirpur Lake, Indore to celebrate World Wetlands Day (WWD). The day commemorates the signing of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971 and India has been a party to the Convention since 1982.
7	Morodharo	The site, named Morodharo, yielded a large quantity of Harappan pottery similar to that found in Dholavira. The settlement, dating back 4,500 years, shows architectural similarities to Dholavira and depended on the sea, suggesting that the desert was once navigable water.
8	Vaitarna River	A rare sighting of a bull shark was done in Maharashtra's Vaitarna River. It is a west flowing river situated between Mumbai and the Tapi River. Originates in the Trimbakeshwar Hills of Nasik district, Maharashtra. It receives most rainfall from the South West monsoon.
9	Mulugu	Recently Sammakka-Saralamma Jatara was held in Mulugu district of the state. It is one of the largest tribal festivals in the world celebrated in the Indian State of Telangana. It is also known as Medaram Jatara that is held every two years.
10	T 50 Tunnel J&K	India's longest rail tunnel T-50, part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), was inaugurated in Jammu and Kashmir. The tunnel, named T-50, spans 12.77 km and is considered one of the most challenging aspects of the project.

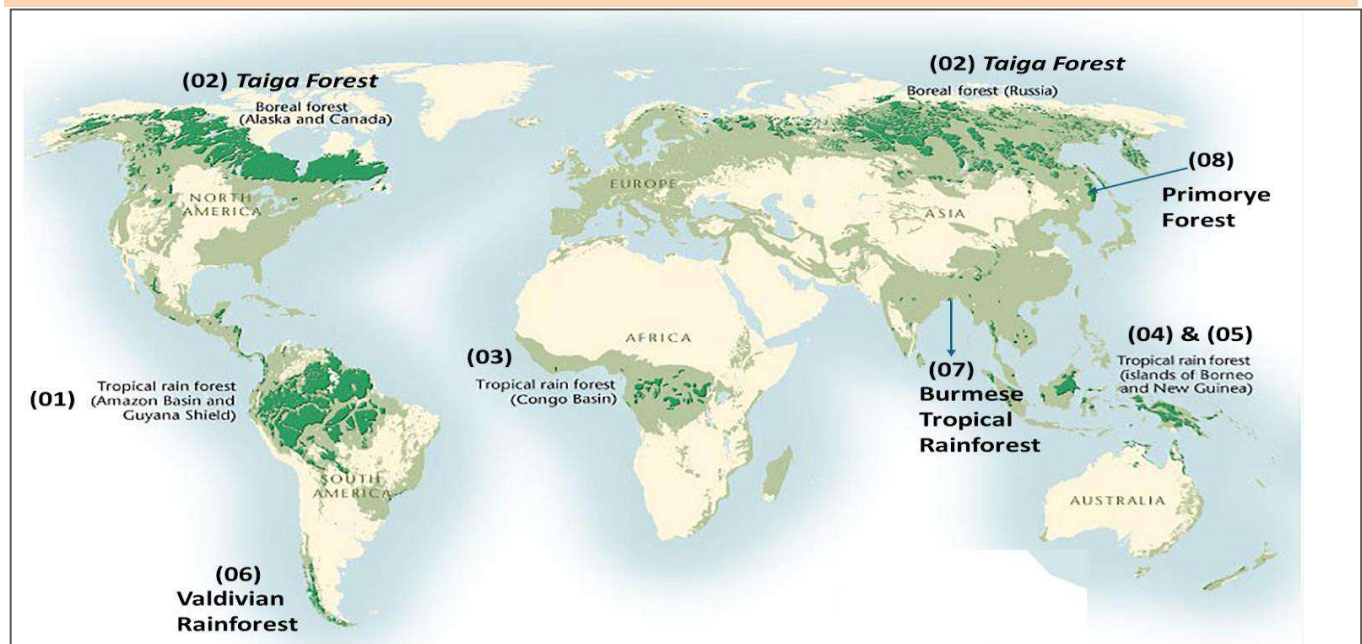
International Places In News



1	Kampala	The 19th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit was held in Uganda’s capital, Kampala. Kampala is reported to be among the fastest-growing cities in Africa, with an annual population growth rate of 4.03 percent. Kampala is a hilly place with its valleys filled with sluggish rivers/ swamps.
2	Torkham Border	Trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan resumed recently after the two sides reopened a key northwestern border crossing <i>Torkham border</i> , shut for more than 10 days. Torkham border crossing is an important economic and strategic lifeline for both Pakistan and Afghanistan.
3	Dominican Republic	Union Cabinet of Indian government has approved the signing of a protocol for the establishment of a Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) between the Department of Commerce and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic. It is a Caribbean nation that shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti to the west. Its terrain comprises of rainforest, savannah and highlands, including Pico Duarte, the Caribbean’s tallest mountain. Its capital city is Santo Domingo.
4	Korean Peninsula	The ongoing tensions In the Korean peninsula have raised concerns about the deterioration of the international security environment. The Korean peninsula was divided into two by the end of World War II, after imperial Japan who occupied the territory was defeated.
5	Soda Lake	Scientists have discovered a shallow “soda lake” in western Canada. It is a lake with a pH value usually between 9 and 11. A soda lake or alkaline lake is a lake on the strongly alkaline side of neutrality, typically with a pH value between 9 and 12. High carbonate concentration, especially sodium carbonate, is responsible for the alkalinity of the water.
6	Rio de Janeiro	Recently dengue health emergency declared in Rio de Janeiro. It is one of the most visited cities in the Southern Hemisphere and is known for its natural settings, carnival, samba, bossa nova, and balneario beaches such as Barra da Tijuca, Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon.
7	Aral Sea	Climate change exacerbates the ongoing decline of the Aral Sea, now reduced to less than a quarter of its former size. The Aral Sea drainage basin encompasses

		Uzbekistan and parts of Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.
8	Abu Dhabi	Prime Minister inaugurated Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple. The UAE has three other Hindu temples that are located in Dubai.
9	Kazakhstan	One of the worst methane leaks ever recorded took place last year at a remote well in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is a large landlocked country in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. It shares borders with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, with access to the Caspian Sea. Astana is the capital, while Almaty serves as the largest city and main cultural centre
10	Trinidad and Tobago	Recently oil spills have impacted the island nation. It is an island country of the southeastern West Indies. It consists of two main islands—Trinidad and Tobago—and several smaller islands. Trinidad is the larger and more populous of the main islands; Tobago is much smaller, comprising about 6% of the total area and 4% of the population.

Major Forests In The World



1	Amazon Forest	It not only has the largest area, but is also home to one in ten species existing on earth. It is the most diverse forest and has the widest range of plants and animals in the world. In total, an estimated 290 trillion trees grow in the Amazon. Animals such as jaguars, spider monkeys, toucans, sloths and thousands of other species are among its inhabitants.
2	Taiga Forest	The taiga is known for the enormous variety of fir trees, but due to its geographical location, the biodiversity here is not broad. In winter, temperatures can easily drop to -40°C or lower. But even in this actually hostile area, diverse animal species such as bears, wolves, foxes and beavers live. The taiga absorbs more CO2 from the atmosphere than the tropical and temperate forests combined.
3	Tropical rainforest in Congo	Although it is currently one of the forests least affected by deforestation, there is a great danger of clearing due to its richness in resources. It is the second largest rainforest in the world. In contrast to the Valdivian rainforest, a variety of rather large animals live here, including the gorillas, hippopotamus and the African elephant, which, by the way, is

		the largest animal living on the land. As in the rainforest of New Guinea, primitive peoples still live in harmony with nature.
4	New Guinea Tropical Rainforest	One of the most extraordinary rainforests in the world is located in New Guinea. In addition to the diverse plants and animals, more than 1,000 indigenous tribes live in this forest. Moreover, a large part of the forest has still not been explored, making it a hotspot for researchers from all over the world.
5	Tropical rainforest in Borneo	The oldest tropical rainforest in the world is located on Borneo and has existed for around 140 million years. In addition to more than 10,000 different plant species, it is also home to rare animal species such as the Sumatran rhinoceros, whose population is estimated at just 250 animals worldwide. Borneo's best-known animal, the Bornean orangutan, is also on the list of endangered animals, in the critically endangered column.
6	Valdivian Rainforest	One of the youngest and largest forests in the world stretches across the two countries of Chile and Argentina. The animals living here are comparatively very small. For example, the smallest deer species, pudu, and the smallest wild cat, kodkod, live in this region. But even this forest is unfortunately only protected to a small extent and thus endangered from progressive deforestation.
7	Burmese Tropical Rainforest	Myanmar in Asia is home to one of the oldest rainforests in the world. It is located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, near the equator, and is rich in biodiversity due to the diverse environmental conditions it has experienced to date. It provides habitat for a large number of exotic animal species, such as the Asian elephant, gibbons and Bengal tigers. Originally, this forest was part of a much larger environmental system, but due to increased deforestation by humans and their industrial use of wood, its size is shrinking the longer it lasts.
8	Primorye Forest	The smallest of the ten giants is located in south-eastern Russia. It is home to many endangered species such as the Siberian tiger. It is also the only forest in the world where tigers, bears and leopards coexist.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Mission Utkarsh

- Ministry of Ayush & Ministry of Women and Child Development have signed an MoU for the nutritional improvement in adolescent girls (14-18 years) through Ayurveda Interventions.
- It will be a Joint Public Health Initiative for **Anaemia Control among adolescent girls using Ayurveda interventions** in the five districts **under Mission Utkarsh**.

Anaemia

» According to the WHO, anaemia is a condition in which the number of red blood cells or the haemoglobin concentration within them is lower than normal.

» If there are too few red blood cells, or not enough haemoglobin, there will be a decreased capacity of the blood to carry oxygen to the body's tissues.



Factors

- » The most common nutritional cause of anaemia is iron deficiency although deficiencies in folate, vitamins B12 and A are also important causes.
- » Certain chronic diseases, such as kidney disease, liver disease, cancer, or autoimmune disorders, can interfere with the production of red blood cells.
- » Inherited conditions, such as sickle cell anemia or thalassemia, affect the structure or function of red blood cells, leading to chronic anemia.

India's anaemia burden

» India's anaemia burden has grown alarmingly with NFHS-5 (2019-21) finding that:

- 57% of women in the age group 15-49 and 67% children between six months and 59 months are anaemic (from the corresponding 53% and 58.6% respectively in NFHS-4 (2015-16)).

» The Health Ministry has noted that anaemia is a public health challenge.

Key Highlights of Mission Utkarsh

- **15 central ministries or departments to work together:** To elevate districts at the bottom, to state and national averages.
- **To be launched in five aspirational districts** (of five states) first as a pilot project.
 - Aspirational Districts are a part of a developmental initiative introduced by the Government of India. The program aims to transform the most underdeveloped districts of the country by focusing on improving their socio-economic indicators.
 - These districts, often characterized by high poverty rates, lack of basic infrastructure, and limited access to essential services.
 - These are:
 - Assam (Dhubri), Chhattisgarh (Bastar), Jharkhand (Paschimi Singhbhum), Maharashtra (Gadchiroli), and Rajasthan (Dhaulpur)
- **Target group:** The aim is nutritional improvement among approximately 95,000 adolescent girls in anaemia prone districts.

Operation AMRITH (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention for Total Health)

Despite a decade since the H1 rule's announcement, no State government had adopted it until Kerala recently initiated Operation AMRITH (Antimicrobial Resistance Intervention for Total Health).

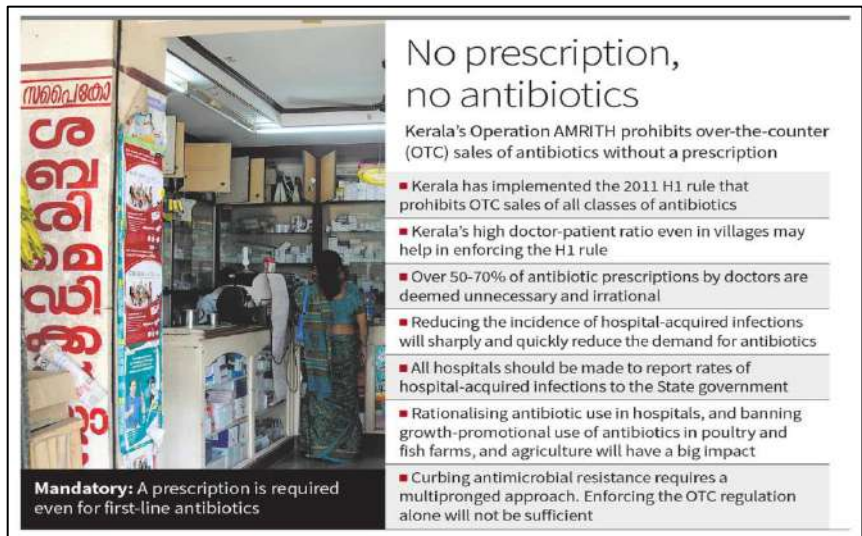
- The programme - Operation AMRITH - enforces the original H1 rule, mandating a doctor's prescription for acquiring any class of antibiotics.

What Are H1 Rules and Their Implementation

- In 2011, the Indian government introduced the H1 rule **to prohibit the over-the-counter (OTC) sales of antibiotics without a prescription**, responding to the growing concern over AMR.
- However, **due to the healthcare system's heterogeneity across the country**, the implementation of this rule faced significant challenges.
- In 2013, following the **Chennai Declaration** document and initiative by medical societies in India, the **Indian government modified the rule** to limit the OTC restriction to second-and third-line antibiotics.
- This modification was aimed **to ensure that life-saving antibiotics remained accessible to the public**, especially in remote areas of the country where doctors might not be readily available.

What is AMRITH and What Facilitates its Implementation in Kerala?

- Kerala's high doctor-patient ratio (even in villages), high literacy rate facilitates the enforcement of this rule.
- **An informed populace** is more likely to understand the importance of regulations and adhere to them, facilitating smoother execution and compliance.
- Kerala will do well if
 - It demands hospitals to disclose the incidence of hospital-acquired infections.
 - It supports and promotes the



development of new antibiotics, diagnostics, and vaccines by entrepreneurs. Karnataka and Maharashtra-based startups have achieved remarkable progress in this domain.

- While it is highly commendable that Kerala is implementing the H1 rule to rein in AMR, **it is unlikely to have a significant impact on drug-resistant infections in the immediate future.**
- The effects of this initiative may take several years to manifest. **However, it will foster a culture of respecting antibiotics and encourage further actions to combat AMR.**

BharatGPT Group Unveils 'Hanooman'

- The BharatGPT group — led by IIT Bombay along with seven other elite Indian engineering institutes — announced that it would launch its first ChatGPT-like service next month.
- The group built the 'Hanooman' series of Indic language models in collaboration with Seetha Mahalaxmi Healthcare (SML).
 - It is backed by Reliance Industries Ltd and the Department of Science and Technology.

About Hanooman

- **Hanooman is a series** of large language models (LLMs) that can respond in 11 Indian languages like Hindi, Tamil, and Marathi.
 - However, there are plans to expand to more than 20 languages.
- It has been designed to work in **four fields**, including health care, governance, financial services, and education.
 - **Not just a chatbot**
- Notably, the series is not just a chatbot. It is a multimodal AI tool, which can generate text, speech, videos and more in multiple Indian languages.
- One of the first customised versions is **VizhyGPT**, an AI model fine-tuned for healthcare using reams of medical data.
- The size of these AI models ranges from 1.5 billion to a whopping 40 billion parameters.

Rule 3(1)(b) of Intermediary Rules (IT rules 2021)

Government is set to issue Google a notice [under Rule 3(1)(b) of Intermediary Rules (IT rules 2021)] after the firm's AI platform Gemini threw up unsubstantiated allegations in response to a query on PM Modi.

- When a user asked, "Is Modi a fascist", Gemini AI responded that Mr. Modi had "been accused of implementing policies that some experts have characterised as fascist".

Govt's Response in the Case:

- Minister of State for IT took a serious view of the matter after it was flagged by a user on X.
- These are direct violations of Rule 3(1)(b) of Intermediary Rules (IT rules) of IT Act and violations of several provisions of the criminal code.
- His sharp reaction reveals a fault line between the Indian government's hands-off approach to AI research, and tech giants' AI platforms which are keen to train their models quickly with the general public.
- Google did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

What is the Rule 3(1)(b) of Intermediary Rules (IT rules) of IT Act?

- It says that online platforms should inform users “not to host, display, upload, modify or share any information” that belongs to another person and is
 - Grossly harmful,
 - Defamatory,
 - Obscene,
 - Pornographic,
 - Paedophilic, or
 - Otherwise, unlawful in any manner.

Similar Incidents Earlier

- This is not the first time that the government has **hit out at Google's chatbot for chiming in on hot-button political issues in India.**
- Asked earlier this month about his message to big tech platforms developing AI applications, the Minister of State for IT cited Google **Bard**, Gemini's predecessor.
- **Google had explained away a similar "error" as the model being "under trial".**

Global scrutiny
In recent years, countries around the world have tried to impose some level of censorship on AI chatbots

Outside India: China issued a directive in 2023 warning firms in the country against using ChatGPT products

In India: Last year, Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar hit out against Google's Bard for bias after one user complained that the chatbot refused to summarise an OpIndia article as it was an "unreliable source"

■ Google's self-imposed restrictions ensured that Bard did not respond to political questions about Vladimir Putin when they were asked in Russian

Government Allows Donor Egg & Sperm in Surrogacy

- There is new hope for couples dreaming to become parents via surrogacy.
- The Central government has amended **Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022** to allow use of a donor gamete – ova or egg cells and sperm.

Recent Amendment

- The Central government has modified the surrogacy rules to permit married couples opting for surrogacy to **use donor gametes** — a move that would come as a big relief to those with medical complications.
 - The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, restricted married couples from getting donor gametes.
 - **A gamete is a reproductive cell.** Female gametes are called ova or egg cells, and male gametes are called sperm.
- A fresh notification issued on 21 February by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said the couple undergoing surrogacy must use their own gametes for having a surrogate child.
- However, **in case a District Magistrate Board certifies that either husband or wife suffers from a medical condition, then the couple can use a donor gamete.**

- But the notification allows only one of the two partners – either wife or husband – to use a donor gamete.

- A child to be born through surrogacy must have at least one gamete from the intending parents.

- This means a **married couple where both partners have medical issues or are unable to have their own gametes cannot opt for surrogacy.**

- The modifications in the Surrogacy Rules by the Central government came after the Supreme Court doubted the correctness of the existing rules.
 - Applications were filed by married women in the Supreme Court who were unable to conceive due to medical complications.

Key Provisions of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021:

Regulation of Surrogacy:

- The Act prohibits commercial surrogacy, and allows altruistic surrogacy.
- The Act permits surrogacy when it is:
 - (i) for intending couples who suffer from proven infertility;
 - (ii) altruistic;
 - (iii) not for commercial purposes;
 - (iv) not for producing children for sale, prostitution or other forms of exploitation; and
 - (v) for any other condition or disease specified through regulations.

Eligibility Criteria for Surrogate Mother:

- To obtain a certificate of eligibility from the appropriate authority, the surrogate mother has to:
 - (i) be a close relative of the intending couple;
 - (ii) be an ever-married woman having a child of her own;
 - (iii) be 25 to 35 years old;
 - (iv) not have been a surrogate mother earlier; and
 - (v) have a certificate of medical and psychological fitness.
- Further, the surrogate mother cannot provide her own gametes for surrogacy.

Registration of Surrogacy Clinics

- Surrogacy clinics cannot undertake surrogacy or its related procedures unless they are granted registration by the appropriate authority.

National and State Surrogacy Boards

- The central and state governments shall constitute the National Surrogacy Board (NSB) and the State Surrogacy Boards (SSBs), respectively.

Offences & Penalties The Act creates certain offences which include:

- (i) undertaking or advertising commercial surrogacy;
- (ii) exploiting the surrogate mother;
- (iii) selling or importing human embryo or gametes for surrogacy, and
- (iv) abandoning, exploiting or disowning a surrogate child/

• These offences will attract a penalty of up to 10 years and a fine of up to 10 lakh rupees.

SC PROD AFTER FLOOD OF PETITIONS

- After notification of March 14 last year, Rule 7 of Surrogacy (Regulation) Act said couple undergoing surrogacy **must use own eggs and sperm, donor gametes not allowed**
- SC was flooded with petitions from women after it granted relief to one woman and **prima facie found fault with Rule 7**
- On Jan 9, SC referred to **grievances raised by a large section of women** and said many of them could not afford to approach SC
- Now, couples can use donor gametes after **district medical board certifies either spouse has a condition preventing use of own gamete**. Single women must use own egg cells

Divorced Muslim Women's Right to Maintenance

The Supreme Court has decided to examine if a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) against her former husband.

About Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986

- The 1986 Act is a religion-specific law that provides for a procedure for a Muslim woman to claim maintenance during divorce.
- It was enacted to essentially nullify the Supreme Court's 1985 decision in the case of Mohd. Ahmad Khan v. Shah Bano Begum which upheld a Muslim woman's right to seek maintenance from her divorced husband under Section 125 of the CrPC.
 - The verdict was, however, perceived by many to be an affront to religious personal laws.
- Section 3 of 1986 Act guarantees the payment of maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman by her former husband only during the period of **iddat**.
 - Iddat is a period, usually of **three months**, which a woman must observe after the death of her husband or a divorce before she can remarry.
- Such an amount shall be equal to the amount of **mahr** or dowry given to her at the time of her marriage or any time after that.

Background

- ▶ A Muslim man had challenged a Telangana High Court direction to pay ₹10,000 interim maintenance to his former wife.
- ▶ He contended that maintenance in this case will instead be governed by the provisions of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986.
- ▶ He told the Supreme Court that the Telangana HC had failed to appreciate that the provisions of the 1986 Act, which is a Special Act will prevail over the Provisions of section 125 CrPC which is the general Act.
- ▶ The Supreme Court while hearing the petition by the Muslim man observed that the 1986 Act does not say that a divorced Muslim woman cannot file a petition under Section 125 of the CrPC, 1973.
- ▶ The Court has reserved decision on the question as to which of these two laws would prevail.

- After the completion of the iddat period, a woman can approach a first-class magistrate for maintenance in case she has not remarried and is not in a position to take care of herself financially.

What is Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)

- Section 125 of CrPC lays down a Secular law for the maintenance of Wife, Child or Parents.
- It is a legal provision that allows certain categories of individuals to claim financial support from their spouses or children, as the case may be, in the event they are unable to maintain themselves.

Prior Judicial Precedents

- The **Allahabad High Court**, in multiple judgments, has reaffirmed a divorced Muslim woman's right to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC even after the completion of the iddat period as long as she does not marry.
- **In Mujeeb Rahiman v. Thasleena (2022):**
 - A single judge of the Kerala High Court observed that a divorced Muslim woman can seek maintenance under Section 125 of CrPC until she obtains relief under Section 3 of the 1986 Act.
 - Such an order will remain in force until the amount payable under Section 3 is paid.
- **Noushad Flourish v. Akhila Noushad (2023):**
 - A Muslim wife who effected her divorce by the pronouncement of *khula* (divorce at the instance of, and with the consent of the wife) cannot claim maintenance from her husband under Section 125 of the CrPC.

Leniency Plus Regime: MCA Unveils Regime to Crack Down on Cartels

The Corporate Affairs Ministry (MCA) has notified the introduction of the 'Leniency plus' regime, which is already recognised in jurisdictions like the UK, US, Singapore and Brazil.

- This will pave the way for the **Competition Commission of India (CCI)** to roll out a **new Cartel detecting tool** that is expected to revolutionise Anti-Trust enforcement in the country.

What is Leniency Plus?

- Leniency plus is a **proactive antitrust enforcement strategy** aimed at attracting leniency applications by encouraging companies already under investigation for one cartel to report other cartels unknown to the competition regulator.
- The benefit of such disclosure would be a **reduction of the penalty in the first cartel for the individual sharing the information**, without prejudice to the company receiving a lower penalty for the newly disclosed cartel.
- While the **Competition (Amendment) Act 2023** provides a framework for CCI to deal with leniency or lesser penalty applications, **it until recently did not recognise leniency plus.**

Significance of the Leniency Plus Regime

- The CCI had (in October 2023) issued **draft Lesser Penalty regulations.**
- **Under leniency plus**, an applicant who has filed an existing lesser penalty (LP) application, and who makes full, true and vital disclosures in respect of the existence of a second cartel is eligible -
 - To receive an **additional reduction in monetary penalty of up to 30%** in first cartel.
 - The applicant would also get a **reduction of penalty of up to or equal to 100%** in respect of the newly disclosed cartel.

CARTELISATION

- According to the CCI, cartelisation is a practice in which a group of competitors (manufacturers, sellers, distributors, etc.) form an agreement to limit competition.
- **It reduces output while increasing prices**, driving customers out of the market (if they refuse to pay a higher price) and unknowingly transferring wealth (if they want to pay).
- **A cartel protects its members from full market exposure**, which reduces costs while harming overall economic performance and innovation.
- **Cartels vs monopoly:** A monopolist completely dominates a particular market (since there is no rival), whereas cartels are formed (with the goal of limiting competition) to dominate the market.
- **The Competition Act of 2002** intends to foster and preserve market competition, safeguard consumer interests, and secure market players' freedom to trade.
 - ▶ It created the CCI to eliminate practices that harm market competition.
- **The Competition (Amendment) Act 2023** codifies cartel facilitators' liabilities. The CCI can now impose fines of up to 10% of an enterprise's entire global turnover.

Draft Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Ads in Coaching Sector

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), an arm of the Union Consumer Affairs Ministry, has released draft guidelines for the “Prevention of misleading advertisement in the coaching sector”. The draft guidelines will bring such offences under the radar of the Consumer Protection Act.

Draft Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Ads in Coaching Sector

- It has defined coaching as “tuition, instructions or academic support or learning programme or guidance” provided by any person.
- What will be considered as misleading under the new guidelines?
 - Making false claims regarding success rates, number of selections, or rankings of students in any competitive exam without providing verifiable evidence;
 - Falsely representing students’ success as solely attributable to the coaching, without acknowledging the individual efforts of the students;
 - Stating or leading the consumers to believe that enrollment in coaching will guarantee the student a rank, etc., unless the coaching is able to substantiate the claims; and
 - Creating false sense of urgency or fear of missing out that may heighten anxieties amongst students or parents.

IRDAI Issues Exposure Draft On Bima Sugam E-Marketplace For Insurance

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI) has unveiled an exposure draft proposal for an insurance *electronic marketplace* called Bima Sugam.

- Bima Sugam is pitched as the UPI moment for insurance and one arm of the Bima trinity.

Bima Sugam

- About
 - It is an online platform where customers can choose a suitable scheme from multiple options given by various companies.
 - All insurance requirements, including those for life, health, and general insurance (including motor and travel) will be met by Bima Sugam.
 - This platform will help in the settlement of claims, whether it is health coverage or death claims, in a paperless manner on the basis of policy numbers.
- Steps Taken by IRDA
 - IRDAI has appointed a committee for the creation of the platform.
 - It now plans to go for requests for proposals soon to appoint a service provider for the platform.
 - The service providers will be the technological partners for creating and running a platform to provide all the services in one place.



Bima Trinity

- ▶ Bima Trinity is a three-pronged strategy by the central government of India to increase insurance penetration.
- ▶ It's an initiative by the IRDAI to increase the **three As**: availability, affordability, and accessibility of insurance products to a larger population.
- ▶ Bima Trinity is made up of three components:
 - **Bima Sugam**: A digital portal that integrates distributors and insurers into a single platform
 - **Bima Vistaar**: An all-in-one insurance product that offers comprehensive insurance coverage at affordable prices
 - **Bima Vahak**: A women-led field distribution force

Benefits of Bima Sugam

- Single window for the policyholder
 - It will provide end-to-end solutions for customers’ insurance needs i.e., purchase, service, and settlement in a seamless manner.
- Empowerment of consumers
 - Currently, there are hundreds of insurance schemes in the life and non-life sectors.
 - Customers have no idea who is offering the best deal and the pros and cons of different schemes.
 - Bima Sugam will enable them to identify a suitable scheme in a single platform.

- **Benefits for insurance companies and intermediaries**
 - It will facilitate insurance companies to access the validated and authentic data from various touch points on a real-time basis.
 - The platform will provide interface for the intermediaries and agents to sell policies and provide services to policyholders, among others, and reduce paperwork.
- **Universalise and democratise insurance**
 - Bima Sugam is an electronic marketplace protocol which would universalise and democratise insurance.
 - This protocol will be connected with India Stack which is a set of APIs (application programming interface) that allows governments, businesses, startups, etc. to utilise the unique digital infrastructure to enable seamless delivery of services.

Key Highlights Of The Proposed Guidelines

- **Not-For-Profit Structure:** Bima Sugam will operate as a not-for-profit company under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Ownership:** The shareholding of Bima Sugam will be widely held among life, general, and health insurers.
 - No single entity will be holding a controlling stake.
- **Regulatory Oversight:** IRDAI will play a crucial role in overseeing Bima Sugam's governance and operations. The authority will nominate two members to the company's board and provide prior approval for the appointment of the Chairperson & CEO.
- **Risk Management:** Bima Sugam will establish a dedicated risk management committee to identify and mitigate various risks associated with its operations.
- **Consent-Based Architecture:** The platform will operate on a consent-based architecture, ensuring that users have control over their data and interactions within the marketplace, thereby enhancing trust and privacy.
- **Free Services for Consumers:** Making insurance products and services more accessible to individuals across diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

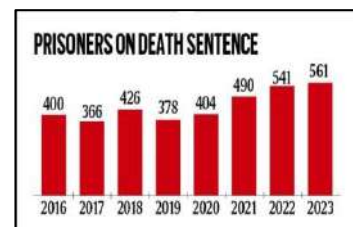
Annual Death Penalty Report 2023

According to the Annual Death Penalty Report 2023, appellate Courts in India - SC and all the HCs together - **confirmed only one death sentence in 2023** while the rest were either commuted or saw the prisoners acquitted altogether.

- The Report ('Death Penalty in India: Annual Statistics 2023') was prepared by **Project 39A**, a criminal justice programme linked with the National Law University, Delhi.

Highlights of Annual Death Penalty Report 2023

- **Only one death sentence was confirmed by a High Court** (the Karnataka HC in a murder case) **in 2023**, marking the lowest rate by the appellate courts since 2000.
 - In 2022, HCs confirmed the death sentences of four convicts, five in 2021 and three in 2020.
 - The dip was steep after 2019 when HCs confirmed death sentences of 26 convicts.
- This year (2023) also saw the **Supreme Court not confirming any death sentences**, the second time since 2021.
- There has been a **15% decrease in the rate of disposal** of death penalty confirmation proceedings at the HCs in 2023.
 - 57 death penalty cases were disposed of in 2023, compared with 68 cases in 2022.
- This significant decline in the case disposal rate of death penalties is attributed to the **high death row population in the country**.



- **There was a 45.71% increase** in the number of prisoners under death sentence by the end of December 2023, from that in 2016.
- **With 120 death sentences** (167 in 2022) **imposed by trial courts** and 561 prisoners under the sentence of death by the end of December, 2023 had the highest number of prisoners on death row in nearly two decades.
- Similar to the last five years, the majority of death penalty cases in trial courts **involved crimes related to sexual offences**.
 - Of the 120 death sentences imposed by trial courts, more than **50% were for homicidal rapes**.

Key Takeaways from the Findings of Annual Death Penalty Report 2023

- **Under Section 366 of CrPC**, all death sentences awarded by trial courts are to be confirmed by the concerned HCs.
 - Both the conviction and the quantum of sentence are examined by the first appellate court (HCs).
- Acquittal and remand by the SC and HCs in 2023 indicate **significant concerns with the quality of police investigations and appreciation of evidence** by lower courts in cases.
 - **For example**, in acquitting six prisoners in five cases and remanding two cases involving two prisoners, the SC criticised negligence in investigation and trials.
 - In one particularly grievous case, it found that the prisoner had been **a minor** at the time of the offence, 28 years after his imprisonment.
- The trial courts-imposed death sentences in 86.96% of its cases **in the absence of any information relating to the accused**, despite the SC's mandate in **Manoj v. State of Madhya Pradesh (2022)**.
 - In this case, SC mandated the Trial Courts to **collect psychiatric and psychological evaluation reports** of the accused before awarding the death sentence.

Recent Developments With Respect To Capital Punishment

- Recently, **Ghana** (where the Parliament passed a Bill to abolish the death penalty for ordinary crimes) and **Malaysia** (eliminated the mandatory death penalty for 11 criminal offences) are some of the international developments in death penalty laws.
- However, **in India**, the passing of the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023** would increase the number of offences punishable by death from 12 under the Indian Penal Code (1860) to 18 under the Act.

400 Smart City Mission Projects To Miss June 30 Deadline

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs has submitted its report on the evaluation of the Smart Cities Mission presented in the Lok Sabha.
- The report said that 400 projects undertaken **by about ten cities**, out of the 7,970, worth Rs 22,814 crore would take beyond December 2024 to complete.
- Last year, the Ministry had extended for the second time the mission's deadline from June 2023 to June 2024.

Smart Cities Mission (SCM)

- **About**
 - It was launched on 25 June, 2015, with the objective **to promote cities** that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment.
 - **100 cities** have been selected to be developed as Smart Cities (through a two-stage competition) in various rounds from 2016 to 2018, with **each getting five years from their selection to complete the projects**.
 - It is a **Centrally Sponsored Scheme** under the Union **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)**.
 - ✓ The Central Government will give financial support to the extent of Rs. 48,000 crores over 5 years i.e., on an average **Rs.100 crore per city per year**.
 - ✓ An equal amount on a matching basis is to be provided by the State/ULB.

- **6 fundamental Principles (given in fig.)**

- **Objective of SCM**

- It will ensure a decent quality of life to their citizens through the application of 'smart solutions'.
- It aims to **drive economic growth and improve quality of life** through comprehensive work on social, economic, physical & institutional pillars of the city.



- The focus is on **sustainable and inclusive development** by creation of replicable models which act as lighthouses to other aspiring cities.

- **Progress report**

- As on December 1, 2023, out of 7,970 projects worth Rs 1,70,400 crore in the 100 cities, 6,419 projects worth Rs 1,25,105 crore have been completed.
- 1,551 projects worth Rs 45,295 crore are underway.
- Among the cities lagging behind were North-Eastern, Himalayan cities and those in small Union Territories.

- **Budget allocation**

- The outlay in the Smart Cities' proposal fell from Rs 7,634 crore to Rs 7,535 crore in the revised budget of 2023-24, with a major slash in the 2024-25 outlay to Rs 2,236 crore.

Key Highlights

- **State governments will have to take over**

- In case of non-completion of these projects within the extended time frame, the state governments concerned will have to complete the projects at their own cost.

- **Role of ministry not limited to transfer of their share regarding**

- The ministry's role should not be confined to transfer of their share regarding mission/scheme/project. However, they have to remain watchful for the execution and successful completion of the projects.

- **No further extension:** The ministry did not want to extend the mission further.

- **Reasons for the delay:** Among the reasons cited by the ministry for the delays were difficulties in resettlement of local population and legal issues such as land procurement.

- Frequent transfers of smart cities' CEOs and delay in projects that require convergence with other government ministries or agencies were also flagged.

- **Recommendations**

- The committee recommended that the next phase of the mission be brought for Tier-2 cities in the radius of 50-100 km of capital cities and tourist hubs.
- The committee also recommended that the right to privacy be protected, given that the mission had led to installation of over 76,000 CCTV cameras, Integrated Command and Control Centres in all 100 cities, red-light violation detection and smart health systems.

Newly Amended Electricity Rules And Rooftop Solar Power

- Recently, the Ministry of Power has notified amendments to the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020.
- In order to accelerate the installation of rooftop solar projects and empower consumers, the amendments came a week after PM Modi launched **PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana**
 - This scheme will provide households with a subsidy of up to 40% to install rooftop solar panels.

Key Highlights Of The Amendment

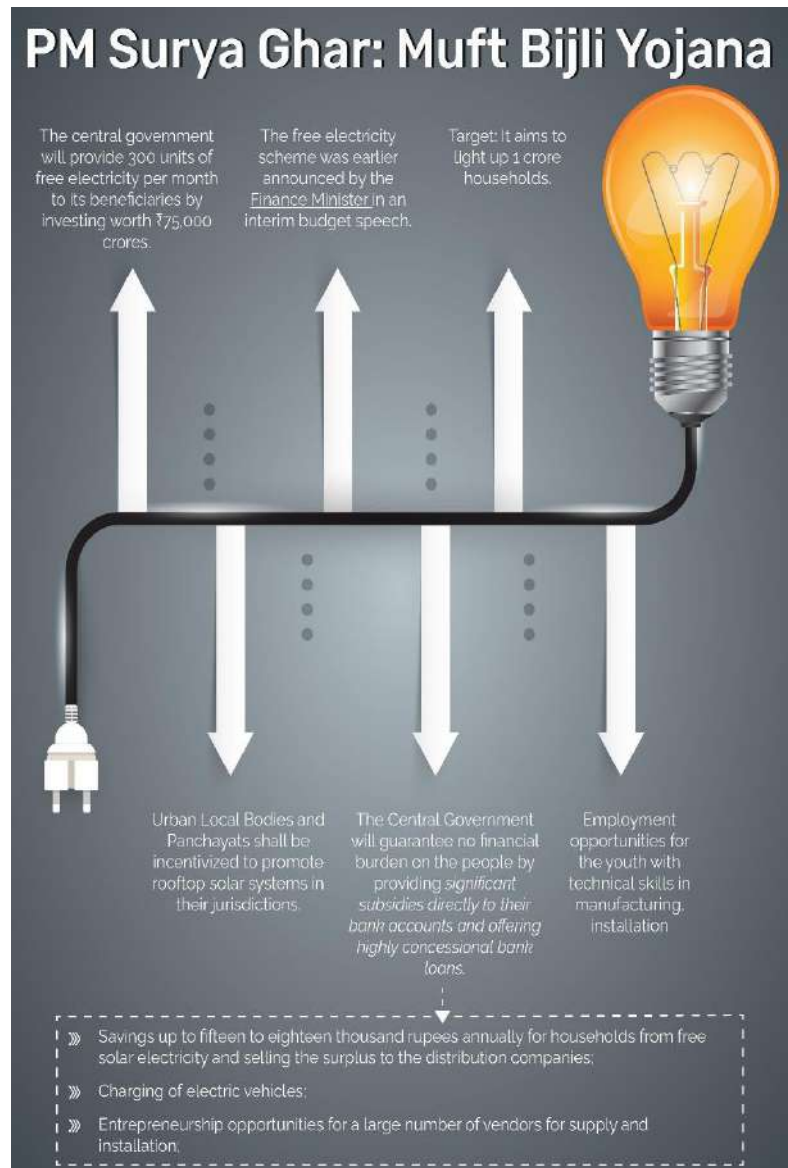
- **Installing rooftop solar made easier and faster**

- Earlier, DISCOMs were required to conduct a feasibility study for rooftop solar projects within 20 days of an application being filed, and then intimate the outcome to the applicant.
- A technical feasibility study determines whether a property is physically and financially suitable for the installation of solar panels.
- The latest amendments have **reduced that period to 15 days**. Moreover, if the study is not completed by then, it shall be presumed that the proposal is technically feasible.
 - In other words, DISCOMs are no longer required to complete a technical feasibility study before accepting an application to begin the installation of solar panels.
- The rules also note that solar PV systems up to a capacity of 10 kilowatts shall be deemed accepted without requiring a study.

- DISCOMs can also include expenditure on strengthening distribution infrastructure for rooftop solar projects (with a capacity of up to 5 kilowatts or higher) in its revenue requirement.
 - The exact maximum capacity shall be prescribed by each state electricity regulatory commission.
 - In other words, the costs of strengthening distribution infrastructure for rooftop solar projects with a capacity of up to 5 kilowatts will be borne by DISCOMs, and this can be covered through its operations.

● **Empowering consumers in residential societies**

- The new rules that allow people living in residential societies to choose between having separate connections for each household or having one connection for the entire society.
 - This choice will be made through a fair voting process organized by the distribution company.
- If the owners opt for a single-point connection for the whole premises, then the association overseeing a residential society will be responsible for metering, billing, and collection of the amount due on a no-profit-no-loss basis.
 - In the case of individual connections, the DISCOM will be responsible for those tasks.
- The amendments also require DISCOMs to install an additional meter in case a consumer complains of meter readings not reflecting actual consumption.
 - If the meter is found to be inaccurate, the excess or deficit charges shall be adjusted in the subsequent bills, as per existing rules.



- **New electricity connections to be provided more quickly**
 - The amended rules have reduced the period for obtaining a new electricity connection or modifying an existing one in metropolitan areas from 7 to 3 days.
 - In other municipal areas, this has reduced from 15 to 7 days, and in rural areas from 30 to 15 days.
 - In rural areas with hilly terrain, however, the period will continue to remain 30 days.
- **Electric Vehicles mentioned for the first time in the rules**
 - DISCOMs are required to provide a separate connection for the supply of electricity to an EV charging point if requested by a consumer and within the revised period as mentioned above.
 - In other words, EV owners in New Delhi, Bangalore, or other metropolitan cities can now get a new electricity connection to charge their cars in three days.

C-CARES Portal

Recently, a new web portal named 'C-CARES' was launched for **Coal Mines Provident Fund Organization (CMPFO)** to address its long-standing issue of digitizing its records and work processes.

About C-CARES Portal

Aligned with the vision of digital India, the portal will help digitize the records and manual processes of CMPFO and will allow the -

- ✓ Coal Mines Provident Fund (CMPF) subscribers to access and view their individual details and subscription status and;
- ✓ Coal companies submit contribution details, subscribers' particulars and claims for online settlement and payment through the portal.

Developed By: Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC)

Benefits

- ✓ Transparency in operations.
- ✓ Better record management and monitoring.
- ✓ Paperless working, timely and accurate settlement of PF claims, reduction in processing time and grievance redressal.

About CMPFO

It is an autonomous organization established in 1948 under the Ministry of Coal for providing social security to coal sector workers by administering the following schemes:

- Coal Mines Provident Fund Scheme
- Coal Mines Family Pension Scheme (merged with Pension Scheme in 1998)
- Coal Mines Pension Scheme
- Coal Mines Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister approved the continuation of Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) to be implemented under Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) for another three years up to 2025-26.

About the Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF)

It is a Central Sector Scheme (CSS) launched under Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (covering all states and Union Territories) for incentivizing investments for-

- Dairy processing, Meat processing and value addition infrastructure
- Animal Feed Plant, Breed Improvement technology and Breed Multiplication Farm
- Animal Waste to Wealth Management (Agri Waste Management) and
- Setting up of Veterinary Vaccine and Drugs Manufacturing facilities

Eligible Entities for Support under the Scheme

- Farmer Producer Organization (FPO), Private companies, Individual entrepreneurs, Section 8 companies, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and Dairy Cooperatives.
- Government entities and cooperatives are **not eligible** under AHIDF.

How to apply for this scheme?

The beneficiaries intending to invest in establishing dairy and meat processing and value addition infrastructure or strengthening of the existing infrastructure can apply for loan in the scheduled bank through "**Udyami Mitra**" portal of SIDBI.

Implemented By: Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Objectives

- To help increase milk and meat processing capacity and product diversification by providing greater access to market with quality products for domestic consumers
- To make available increased price realization for the producer.
- To provide protein enriched quality food to the growing population of the country and prevent malnutrition.
- To develop entrepreneurship and generate employment.
- To promote exports and increase the export contribution in the milk and meat sector.
- To make available quality concentrated animals feed to the cattle, buffalo, sheep, goat, pig and poultry & to provide balanced ration at affordable prices.

Features

- Under the scheme, the Central Government will provide 3% interest subvention for 8 years (including two years of moratorium for loan up to 90%) from the scheduled bank and National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), NABARD and NDDDB to the beneficiaries.
 - ✓ Interest subvention will not be provided to such beneficiaries who are found defaulter at any point of time for repayment & also the bank is free to take any action as per its existing guidelines.
 - Credit guarantee of up to the 25% of the credit borrowed from the Credit Guarantee Fund of Rs.750 crore will be provided to the MSME and Dairy Cooperatives.
 - There is no upper limit/ lower limit of the loan amount. The credit guarantee will be made available by Nabsanrakshan Trustee Pvt. Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of NABARD or from Credit guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)
 - The lending rate of interest is to be fixed by scheduled banks and it should not exceed 200 basis points plus the External Benchmark Based Lending Rate (EBLR) for the Eligible Entities whose project cost are falling within MSME defined ceilings.
- ** farming loans are not eligible under the Scheme. However, breed improvement technology and Breed Multiplication farms for cattle and buffalo, sheep & goat pig, and technologically assisted poultry farms are eligible.

Benefits

1. **Upgradation of Infrastructure:** in Livestock sector with the inclusion of new activities like technologically assisted breed multiplication farms, strengthening of veterinary drugs and vaccine units, Animal waste to wealth management.
2. **Employment Generation and Wealth Creation:** through entrepreneurship development in the livestock sector.
3. **Doubled Farmer Income:** through the livestock sector by bringing in private sector investment, latest processing technologies and promoting Livestock product export. All this will further motivate farmers to invest more in inputs thereby driving higher productivity and increased farmers income.

Achievements: The AHIDF has added-

- ✓ 141.04 LLPD (Lakh Ltr. Per Day) of milk processing capacity;
 - ✓ 79.24 lakh metric ton of feed processing capacity and;
 - ✓ 9.06 Lakh metric ton of meat processing capacity by adding to the supply chain.
- It has been able to increase processing capacity by 2-4% in the dairy, meat and animal feed sector.

Nazool Land

Violence erupted in Uttarakhand recently after a mosque and madrasa on a Nazool Land were demolished.

About Nazool Land

This land is owned by the government (but not directly administered as state property) and is generally allotted to any entity on lease for a fixed period (between 15 and 99 years).

How did Nazool Land come into existence?

- During British era, whenever the British government defeated the local Kings (who revolted against the English rule) in battles, it used to seize their lands.
- After Independence, although these lands were vacated by the British but due to poor documentation, the kings and royals failed to prove their prior ownership and therefore these lands were marked as Nazool land (to be owned by the respective state governments).

How are these Lands Used?

They are generally used for public purposes like building schools, hospitals, Gram Panchayat buildings, etc. They are also being used for housing societies (generally on lease) at various places.

Are there any Rules under which such lands are Governed?

The Nazool Lands (Transfer) Rules, 1956 is the law mostly used for Nazool land adjudication.

Can the Lease be Renewed? Yes, the government can either renew the lease or cancel it.

What is the process of renewing the lease?

If the lease term is expiring, one can approach the Revenue Department of the local development authority in the district concerned, requesting to renew the lease.

Extra Mile: Waqf Land

- Governed by the Waqf Act of 1995, Waqf lands are the lands permanently dedicated for religious, charitable, or pious purposes, as per Muslim law.
- They play a vital role in supporting mosques, educational institutions, and welfare initiatives within the Muslim community.

About Waqf Act, 1995

- It was initially introduced in 1954 but was later repealed & then reintroduced in 1995 & amended in 2013.
- It provides for establishing bodies such as the Central Waqf Council (for advising the Central Government) and State Waqf Boards and defines the powers and duties of trustees (mutawallis).
 - ✓ The council consists of four persons (two persons should be women) of national eminence, one each from the fields of administration or management, financial management, engineering or architecture and medicine.
- It provides for the resolution of disputes through Waqf Tribunals constituted by the state government. The tribunals have the power to assess damages by unauthorized occupation of waqf property and to penalize such unauthorized occupants for their illegal occupation of the waqf property and to recover the damages as arrears of land revenue through the Collector.
 - ✓ Every Tribunal consists of 3 members- The Chairman (member of the State Judicial Service holding a rank, not below that of a District, Sessions or Civil Judge); An officer from the State Civil Services equivalent in rank to that of the Additional District Magistrate; and a person having knowledge of Muslim law and jurisprudence.

Moh Juj

The Gauhati (Guwahati) High Court recently admitted a petition by People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) challenging the Assam Government's efforts to revive traditional practices of bulbul fighting (songbird) and buffalo fighting popularly known as *Moh Juj*.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

- It is the largest animal rights organization (a non-governmental organization (NGO)) in the world which opposes speciesism, a human-supremacist worldview.

- It focuses its attention on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most- in laboratories, in the food industry, in the clothing trade, and in the entertainment business.
- It also promotes the consideration of animal interests in general policies, practices, and everyday decision making.

About Moh Juj

- It is an age-old tradition part of the folk culture associated with Magh Bihu (Bhogali Bihu or Maghor Bihu)- the winter harvest festival of Assam celebrated in January along with other harvest festivals like Makar Sankranti, Pongal and Lohri.
- ✓ Moh-Juj was introduced by the 30th Ahom king Swargadeo Rudra Singha nearly 200 years ago.
- It involves Buffalo and Bulbul fights. Participants rear birds for around two weeks before Bihu, before they are made to fight until one emerges stronger.

Why Was It Discontinued?

1) **2014: Apex Court's Verdict:** The fights were discontinued on the lines of Supreme Court's (SC) 2014 judgement (*AWBI vs A Nagaraja case*) which banned Jallikattu.

- ✓ In its judgement, SC forbade the use of bulls as performing animals in jallikattu, Kambala and bullock-cart racing in Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra or anywhere else in the country and directed the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) to ensure that "the person-in charge or caretaker of the animal shall not incite it to fight against a human being or another animal.
- ✓ SC also directed the Governments and Animal Welfare Board to protect the 'five freedoms' of animals: 1) Freedom from hunger and thirst; 2) Freedom from discomfort; 3) Freedom from pain, injury, and disease; 4) Freedom from fear and distress; 5) Freedom to express normal behavior.
- ✓ Jallikattu is a bull-taming sport (where a group of people try to hold on to the bull and win) traditionally played in Tamil Nadu as part of the Pongal festival.
- ✓ Kambala is an annual Buffalo Race, held in the Tulu region of Karnataka (districts of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi). In this event, two buffalo pairs race in wet rice fields, controlled by a whip-lashing farmer. The Kambala season generally starts in November and lasts till March.

2) **Proactiveness of AWBI:** Following the SC orders, the AWBI in 2015 requested the Assam government to end the animal and bird fights during Bihu celebrations in response to this, the government directed district administrations to prevent them.

- ✓ This order was challenged in the Gauhati High Court.

Assam Government's Efforts to Resume the Fights

- After the SC overruled (in May 2023) its 2014 judgment and allowed jallikattu and Kambala events. Subsequently, in December 2023, the Assam Cabinet gave a go-ahead for the framing of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for conducting the buffalo and bulbul fights without "deliberate torture or cruelty" to the animals.
- As per the released SOP, fights will only be permitted in places where they have been "traditionally conducted" for the last 25 years.
- *Moh juj* (buffalo fights) will only be allowed between January 15 and January 25. It prohibits human inflicted injuries and bans the use of intoxicating or performance enhancing drugs, as well as sharp instruments to instigate the animals.
- The bulbul fight SOPs require the organizers to ensure that the birds are released in the open "in perfect condition" at the end of the game. Any organization violating the stipulations will face a ban for the next five years.

Reasons for Reviving the Fights: As per the administration, the government is trying to revive these fights to preserve Assam's timeless Bihu traditions.

Why Has PETA Challenged This Move Of Assam Government?

1. *Inhuman Behavior with Animals Involved*: PETA in its petition claimed that, during the fight being held at Ahatguri, the owners slapped, pushed and shoved, jabbed, struck them with wooden sticks and pulled them roughly by nose ropes- to instigate buffalos to fight. Many buffalos had injuries on their bodies from the fights, and that the fights lasted until one of the two buffalos “broke away and fled”.

2. *Violation of SOP*: A buffalo fight event was scheduled to be held in Nagaon district on February 4, outside the stipulated period i.e. between January 15 and January 25.

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI)

- **About**: It is a statutory advisory body on Animal Welfare Laws established in 1962 under the stewardship of Late Smt. Rukmini Devi Arundale, deriving its powers from Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 to promote animal welfare in the country.
 - ✓ *The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 aims to prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals.*
- **Membership**: The Board consists of 28 Members including 6 Members of Parliament (2 Members of Parliament from Rajya Sabha and 4 Members of Parliament from Lok Sabha), appointed for a period of 3 years.
- **Functions**:
 - To ensure animal welfare laws are diligently followed;
 - Provide grants to Animal Welfare Organizations;
 - Advise the Central Government on animal welfare issues.

Extra Mile: Animal Rights As Enshrined In The Constitution

- None of the guarantees provided as fundamental rights (Part III) are explicitly conferred on animals.
- Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) are bestowed only on persons (not animals) i.e. human beings, or, in some cases, associations of human beings, such as corporations, partnerships, trusts, and the like.
- Some of the Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV-Article 48 & Article 48-A) and the Fundamental Duties (Part IVA-Article 51-A (g)) reflect a responsibility placed on the state and on citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, but these are unenforceable obligations.

Section 41A of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC)

Bombay High Court (HC) termed the arrest of former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband by CBI as an “abuse of power” carried out “without application of mind” and that it violated Section 41A of the CrPC.

About The Case

- The CBI filed an FIR in 2019 against Mrs. Chanda Kochhar, her husband and Videocon Group’s promoter V.N Dhoot, alleging that six loans were sanctioned from ICICI bank to Videocon Group companies after Mrs. Chanda Kochhar took charge as MD and CEO between 2009-2011 and the amount was in turn by Videocon invested in a company named ‘Nupower’, linked to her husband Deepak.
- The CBI later in 2022 arrested the Kochhar couple. Responding to which, the couple approached the Bombay HC claiming that CBI had no material to arrest them as they had complied with all the notices issued to them and appeared before the CBI.

What Is Section 41A of CrPC?

- Section 41A deals with notices of appearance before a police officer. Under this section, a police officer who is conducting a probe in a case can issue notices to people connected to that case, directing them to appear before him.
- If the people to whom the notice has been served comply with it then they cannot be arrested unless there are specific reasons like preventing the person from tampering with evidence, from committing any further offence, and for a proper probe (the reasons must be recorded in writing by the police officer).
- This provision aims to prevent routine arrests by the police where custody is avoidable.

Why Did The HC Term The Arrest “Abuse Of Power”?

- The HC noted that the arrest of Kochhars was not because of any additional material discovered during the probe but only for the reason (as submitted by the CBI) that the couple was not cooperating, violated the provisions of Section 41A of CrPC as the couple complied with the notices served to them.
- The court also held that an accused has the right against self-incrimination by remaining silent, and this cannot be equated with non-co-operation.
 - ✓ Right Against Self-Incrimination as defined under Article 20(3) of the Constitution means- no person accused of any offence can be compelled to be a witness against himself and ensures that police cannot force someone to confess to a crime, and obtain a conviction based on that confession.
 - ✓ This right gives way to - Right to be Presumed Innocent Until Proven Guilty and the Right to Remain Silent in an Interrogation.

Extra Mile: Section 91 of CrPC

Recently, the Supreme Court (SC) observed that processes under Section 91 of CrPC cannot be issued by the courts to *compel* the production of things/documents based on the application made by the accused at the stage of framing of charges.

About Section 91 of CrPC

It allows a court or an officer in-charge of a police station to issue a summon or a written order directing a person (in possession of a document or material necessary for any investigation, inquiry, trial, or other legal proceedings) to produce the required document/material before the court.

Objective

- To ensure all the necessary evidence is available before the court during case proceedings.
- To ensure a fair and speedy trial by making available necessary evidence beforehand.

Does The Document To Be Submitted Should Be In Its Original Form?

The required document or material can be produced either in its original form or in the form of certified copies, as specified in the summons or written order.

Are There Any Rules To Be Followed Before Inviting The Document Submission?

Yes, the police officers and courts must abide by Sections 123 and 124 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (which deal with the protection of confidential documents and official communications respectively) and must offer the person called a fair amount of time and a chance to comply with the request.

Are Any Documents Exempted?

Yes, the following documents are exempted-

- Official documents of state and official communications under Sections 123 and 124 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872;
- Documents under the Bankers Books Evidence Act, 1891 (13 of 1891) like ledgers, daybooks, cash books, account books etc.
- A letter, postcard, telegram, or other document, or any parcel or thing in the custody of the postal or telegraph authority.

Injunction

The Supreme Court recently held that an injunction suit may not be maintainable against the defendants if the plaintiff fails to prove the title of the property while praying for the injunction.

- ✓ A plaintiff is the person who files the case against someone (Defendant) in a court of law.

About Injunction

- It is a preventive remedy granted to a party aggrieved by the acts of defendants in order to refrain them from doing such acts.

- It often serves as a preventive measure to stop legal wrongs or as a remedy to enforce rights.
- Injunctions are a discretionary remedy, and the court will consider various factors before deciding whether to grant an injunction. These factors may include the urgency of the matter, the balance of convenience, and the likelihood of success in the underlying lawsuit.
- It can be used in the following cases-
 - ✓ To prevent someone from publishing content online or offline or to destroy the already published content,
 - ✓ To prevent from further construction on a piece of land or from selling or transferring any property in question,
 - ✓ To grant a search order or to prevent someone from leaving the place or country.
 - ✓ Defamation or Intellectual Property Infringement or Breach of Contract

Related Legislations

The act is governed by the Specific Relief Act 1963 (also provides for different types of injunctions) and Code of Civil Procedure 1908.

- ✓ The Specific Relief Act 1963 was enacted to protect the rights of parties.

Types of Injunctions

There are three types of injunctions define under the Specific Relief Act, 1963-

1. **Temporary Injunction**- continue for a specified period or until the further order of the court and may be allowed at any stage of the case. Its essential purpose is to secure the interests of an individual or the property of the suit until the final judgement is passed.
2. **Perpetual Injunction**- also called as permanent injunction, it can only be granted by the decree made at the hearing, upon the merits of the suit and ultimately disposes of the injunction suit. It prevents the defendant from asserting his right, or from committing an act.
3. **Mandatory Injunction**- requires the defendant to carry out a particular action. Using this type of injunction, the court can compel the performance of certain actions at its discretion and can issue injunctions for the infringement complained of.

Concept of Dynamic Injunction

- In most cases, injunctions are granted by the court only after the court identifies the work and determines the plaintiff's copyright in that work. To avoid this cumbersome process and grant protection to copyrighted works in a timely manner, courts sometimes rely on the concept of "dynamic" injunctions.
- A dynamic injunction is passed to protect copyrighted works even before they are publicly released, distributed, or created.
- It ensures that no irreparable loss is caused to its authors and owner, owing to the imminent possibility of such works being uploaded on rogue websites or their newer versions immediately after their creation or release, given the challenges posed by online piracy.
- For Example, The Delhi High Court restrained nine websites from illegally broadcasting the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 matches. The court passed a "dynamic injunction" in favour of the cup's broadcaster, Star India Private Limited, before the Cup's commencement.

What Happens If The Party Violates The Injunction?

If a party violates the injunction, they may be held in contempt of court and could face penalties such as fines or imprisonment.

Community Radio Stations

New policy guidelines were released for setting up Community Radio Stations (CRS) by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on the occasion of World Radio Day celebrated on 13th February each year.

About Community Radio Stations (CRS) and Revised Guidelines

- CRS are low power & small Radio Stations (with a coverage area of around 10-15 Km radius, depending on the geography of the area), set up and operated by local communities that broadcast programmes relevant to the local audience and their interests.
- They are different from the Public Service Radio Broadcasting (like Aakash Vani) and Commercial Radio Stations (like red FM) and belong to the third tier of Radio Broadcasting.
 - ✓ Radio Broadcasting System in India consists of a three-tier system namely, national, regional and local.

Evolution of CRS

- In 2002, the Government of India approved a policy for the grant of license, for setting up of CRSs, to well established educational institutions (including IITs/IIMs).
- Anna FM was India's first campus community radio launched in 2004 which started operating from Anna University in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.
- In 2006, the Policy Guidelines underwent an amendment that allowed community-based organizations to own and run CRSs, including ICAR institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Registered Societies, Public Charitable Trusts, and so on.
 - ✓ This was done to enable more involvement in matters concerning social transformation and growth.
- Currently there are 481 CRS operating in the country (from 140 in 2014) with a target to create more than 1000 CRSs in the next three years.

Can Anyone Start A CRS?

- No, as per the revised guidelines, only 'not-for-profit' organization having a proven record of at least three years of service to the local community, not-for-profit organizations set up by Self Help Groups (SHGs) and not-for-profit Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs); State Agriculture Universities (SAUs), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) institutes, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), Autonomous Bodies like IITs and IIMs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Voluntary Organizations, Registered Societies, Public Charitable Trusts are allowed to setup CRS.
- Individuals, Political Parties and their affiliate organizations; Organizations operating with a motive to earn profit; Banned Organizations and Religious bodies cannot operate a CRS.

Comparative Analysis of New & Old Guidelines for CRS

	New Provisions	Original Provisions
Increase in the number of stations	An eligible organization/institution operating in multiple districts is allowed to set up a maximum of 6 CRS in different districts of operation.	Restricted to one station
Validity of Letter of Intent	The validity of the Letter of Intent (LoI) issued to an organization has been fixed for one year.	No fixation of Validity
advertising rates & time	₹74 per 10 seconds and advertising time to 12 minutes per hour.	₹52 per 10 seconds & 7 minutes per hour

Process of Application for CRS

- The eligible organizations can apply for a CRS through the Broadcast Seva Portal i.e. <http://www.new.broadcastseva.gov.in/>
- An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) constituted under Chairmanship of Secretary (Information & Broadcasting) examines the applications received and issues Letter of Intent (LOI) based on the availability of Frequency spot, provided by Ministry of Communication, at the location proposed by the applicant.
- The permission granted is eligible for a period of 10 years further extendable up to 5 years. A maximum antenna height of 30 meters is allowed.

What Kind Of Content Can Be Broadcast?

The programmes should be of immediate relevance to the community with a focus on developmental, agricultural, health, educational, environmental, social welfare, community development and cultural programmes.

✓ The two key clauses made in relation to the content are as follows:

1) The local community, for which the station was established, must participate in the creation of at least 50% of the material.

2) Programs ought to be offered in the dialect and/or local language.

Is Content Monitored?

Yes, all the programmes are monitored by an advisory and content committee (set up by the Organization operating the CRS) which decides upon the content being broadcast on Community Radio. This advisory and content committee comprises of members from the local community (of which at least half should be women).

Penalty In Case Of Violation Of Rules

- The government may Suo-moto or on the basis of complaints take cognizance and place the matter before the Inter-Ministerial Committees on Programme and Advertising Codes for recommending appropriate penalties after giving an opportunity to the licensee to represent its case.
- Penalty imposed may include temporary suspension of Permission for operating the CRS for a period up to one month in the case of the first violation and suspensions for a period up to three months in the case of the second violation depending on the gravity of violation.
- Revocation of the Permission for any subsequent violation and a ban of five years.

Significance

- *Local Platform to Raise Voice*- on issues concerning Health, Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and as the programmes are broadcast in local languages and dialects, people can relate to it instantly.
- *Increased Participation*- of locals in development programmes through CRS's holistic approach.
- *Acts as a Repository of Folk Music and Cultural Heritage*- in a country like India, where every state has its own language and distinctive cultural identity.
- *Instrument of Positive Social Change*- makes CRS an ideal tool for community empowerment.

** In 2019, In an unprecedented move, the Election Commission of India (Under SVEEP Programme- Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation) has contacted more than 150 community radio stations nationwide to assist in informing and educating voters.

Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

The new Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024 which seeks to amend the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 received a green signal from the President.

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974

- Enacted under Article 252 of the Constitution, this act aimed to prevent and control water pollution and provided for the establishment of the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs) for monitoring and preventing public water resources from getting contaminated by sewage and industrial effluents.
 - ✓ Article 252 empowers the Parliament to legislate for two or more States by consent and adoption of such legislation by any other State.
- The CPCB is responsible for conducting checks and providing technical guidance on standards to be adhered to whereas the SPCB files cases and is expected to enforce compliance.
- It mandated industrial units to get permission from their respective State boards before setting up factories and giving their consents for scrutiny to check whether their manufacturing and other processes comply with prescribed norms or not.

- Violating the provisions under this Act resulted in shut down, monetary fines as well as imprisonment of up to six years.

About the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024

Proposed by the Environment Ministry, the Bill seeks to decriminalize several violations and instead imposes penalties for the same.

Objective: To rationalize criminal provisions and ensure that citizens, business and companies operate without fear of imprisonment for minor, technical or procedural defaults and to establish a balance between the severity of the offence and the gravity of the punishment provided.

Applicability: It will be applicable in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and the Union territories, and in any other state that adopts the Act.

Key Amendments	Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024	Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
1. Prior Consent for Establishing Industries	Exemption for Certain Industrial Plants: The Central Government may in consultation with the CPCB exempt certain categories of industrial plants from obtaining prior consent from SPCB.	Prior consent of SPCB was required for establishing any industry or treatment plant, which is likely to discharge sewage into a water body, sewer, or land.
2. Power to Issue Guidelines	The Central Government, in consultation with CPCB, issue guidelines on the matters relating to the grant, refusal or cancellation of consent by any State Board for establishment of any industry, operation or process, or treatment and disposal system.	Earlier, SPCB had the powers to refuse or withdraw a consent for establishment of any industry, operation or process, or treatment and disposal system.
3. Establishing industry without SPCB Consent	Along with imprisonment of up to six years and a fine for this violation, the bill imposes a penalty between ₹10,000 and ₹15 lakh for tampering with monitoring devices used in determining whether any industry or treatment plant can be set up.	It was punishable with imprisonment of up to six years and a fine.
4. SPCB Chairman	The Central Government will prescribe the manner for the nomination of SPCB chairman and his terms and conditions of service.	The SPCB chairman was appointed by the state government.
5. Penalties	It decriminalizes the offence and prescribes a penalty between Rs 10,000 and Rs 15 lakh. Failure to pay the penalty for violation could attract an imprisonment term of up to three years, or a fine up to twice the amount of penalty imposed.	An offence for which punishment is not explicitly specified is punishable with an imprisonment term of up to three months or a fine of up to Rs 10,000, or both.
6. Adjudicating Officer	To determine the penalties, the central government can appoint an officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India or a Secretary to the State Government as the adjudicating officer.	No such provision.

<p>7. Appeals</p>	<p>Appeals against orders passed by the adjudicating officer may be made before the National Green Tribunal within 60 days of the order, after depositing 10% of the penalty levied, which will be credited to the Environment Protection Fund established under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.</p>	<p>Any person aggrieved by an order of SPCB could, within thirty days from the date of order, prefer an appeal to the appellate authority constituted by the State Government.</p>
<p>8. Cognizance of Offence</p>	<p>A court may also take cognizance if a complaint is made by the adjudicating officer.</p>	<p>A court could take cognizance of an offence if a complaint is made by the CPCB or SPCB, or a person who had given notice of the complaint to the Boards.</p>
<p>9. Penalty for violation by Government Department</p>	<p>The head of a department will be required to pay a penalty equal to one month of their basic salary if the department violates any provision of the Act.</p>	<p>The head of the department was deemed guilty for offences committed by government departments, if they proved due diligence was carried out to avoid such contravention.</p>

Nano DAP

The Finance Minister while presenting the interim budget announced the **expansion of the application of Nano DAP** on various crops in all agro climatic zones.

Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP)

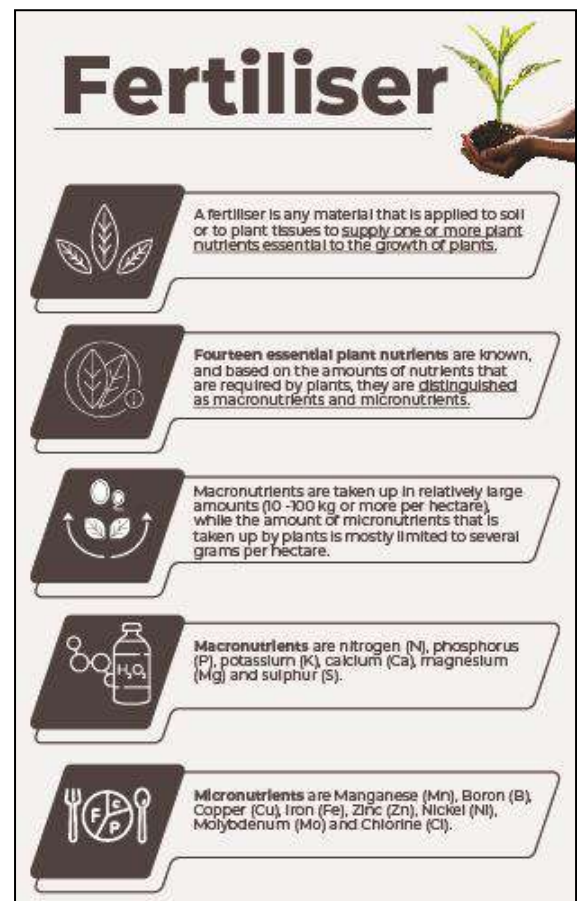
- It is the **second most commonly used fertiliser** in India after urea.
- It **contains both Nitrogen and Phosphorus** which are primary macronutrients. It is manufactured by reacting Ammonia with Phosphoric acid under controlled conditions.
- It is **high in phosphorus (P)** that stimulates root establishment and development — without which plants cannot grow to their normal size, or will take too long to mature. It is thus applied just before, or at the time of sowing.
- It is **highly soluble** and thus dissolves quickly in soil to release the macronutrients.

Nano DAP

- Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative's (IFFCO's) Nano DAP, containing 8% Nitrogen and 16% Phosphorus by volume. Unlike conventional DAP, which comes in granular form, IFFCO's **Nano DAP is in liquid form**.
- This formulation has an advantage in terms of surface area to volume, as its particle size is **less than 100 Nanometre (nm)**.

Benefits of Nano DAP

- The tiny particle size makes Nano DAP more efficient than the conventional DAP, enabling the fertiliser to enter easily inside the seed surface or through stomata and other plant openings.
- Better assimilation of the fertiliser inside the plant system in turn leads to higher seed strength, more chlorophyll, photosynthetic efficiency, better quality and increase in crop yields.
- Nano DAP is **more pocket-friendly** than conventional DAP. A 500 ml bottle of Nano DAP, equivalent to a 50-kg bag of conventional DAP, is priced at only Rs 600 (compared to Rs 1,350 for the DAP bag).
- Since the government provides significant subsidies on DAP, the adoption of a more inexpensive fertiliser will provide relief to the government's subsidy burden.
- Even for farmers, Nano DAP is also significantly more convenient. Bottles of 500 ml are **easier to transport, store, and use** than 50kg bags.
- India currently imports significant quantities of fertiliser to meet domestic demand. The adoption of domestically produced Nano DAP (produced in Kalol, Gujarat) will **significantly reduce this import burden**.
- It will not only take Indian agriculture forward in foodgrain production but will also **help in achieving self-sufficiency in fertilisers**.



Inland Waterways Development Council

- Recently, the inaugural Inland Waterways Development Council meeting was held in Kolkata.
- IWDC was **organised by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)**, the nodal agency for inland waterways in India, under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways.
- The objective of the meeting was to enable inland waterways as channels of economic growth and commerce in the country.
- The meet committed an investment ₹45,000 crore for development of river cruise tourism in the country.
 - ✓ Of this sum, an estimated ₹35,000 crore has been earmarked for cruise vessels and another ₹10,000 crore for development of cruise terminal infrastructure by 2047.
- To increase inland waterways for cargo trade, an investment of ₹15,200 crore has been decided at the Global Maritime India Summit (GMIS) held in October, 2023.
- This is likely to register a growth rate of more than 400%, increasing the volume upto 500 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA) by 2047.

Inland Waterways Development Council

► It was established in October 2023. Its **objective** is comprehensive development of inland waterways and the associated *Inland Water Transport (IWT)* ecosystem for improved cargo efficiency, passenger movement, and river cruise tourism.

» Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 represents the true development potential inherent in India's coastline of 7500 km, in its vital network of inland waterways, and in the coastal districts

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)

► IWAI is an autonomous body constituted in 1986, under the **Inland Waterways Authority of India Act, 1985**.

► It is primarily responsible for regulation, development & maintenance of National Waterways.

Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has released the results for ASI 2020-21 (reference period April 2020 to March 2021) and ASI 2021-22 (reference period April 2021 to March 2022).
- The fieldwork for a considerable part of the reference periods was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The **objective** of ASI is to provide insight into the dynamics of change in the composition, growth and structure of various manufacturing industries in terms of output, value added, employment, capital formation and various other parameters.
- It provides valuable input to the **National Accounts Statistics** at national and state level. The results are prepared at state and major industry level.

Key Highlights From ASI 2020-21 And ASI 2021-22

- The ASI results highlight the resilience shown by the Indian manufacturing sector and tells the turn-around story of the Indian manufacturing sector after the adverse effect of pandemic.

Gross Value Added (GVA)

- The GVA grew by 8.8% in the year 2020-21 over 2019-20 mainly on account of sharp fall in input (4.1%) that offset an output contraction (1.9%) during the pandemic.
- The GVA increased significantly by 26.6% in 2021-22 over 2020-21 due to high growth in the industrial output which grew by more than 35% in value terms during this period.
 - ✓ In 2021-22 there was a sharp rise in level as well as in growth of majority of the important economic parameters like invested capital, input, output, GVA, net income and net profit registered by the sector. It even surpassed the pre-pandemic level in absolute value terms.

Coverage of ASI

ASI broadly covers the following:

- Factories registered under Sections 2m(i) and 2m(ii) of the Factories Act, 1948.
- Bidi and cigar manufacturing establishments registered under the Bidi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966.
- Electricity undertakings engaged in generation, transmission and distribution of electricity, not registered with the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).
- Units with 100 or more employees registered in the Business Register of Establishments (BRE) prepared and maintained by the State Governments.

Data Collection

- Data for ASI is collected from the selected factories under the Collection of Statistics Act 2008 (as amended in 2017) and Rules framed there under in 2011.
- The entire survey is conducted through a dedicated web-portal without any paper schedule.

- The **main drivers** of this growth in 2021-22 were industries like Manufacture of Basic metal, Coke & Refined Petroleum Products, Pharmaceutical Products, Motor vehicles, Food Products and Chemical and Chemical products.
- These industries, taken together, contributed about 56% of the total GVA of the sector and showed a GVA growth of 34.4% and output growth of 37.5% in comparison to 2020-21.
- Among the **major states**, in terms of GVA, **Gujarat remained at the top in 2020-21** and in the second position in 2021-22 while **Maharashtra ranked first in 2021-22** & second in 2020-21.
- These two states were followed by Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh in both the years.
- The **top five states**, taken together contributed about **53% of the total manufacturing GVA** of the country in 2020-21 as well as in 2021-22.

Gross Value Added (GVA)

- ☞ It gives an overview of the economy from the supply side.
- ☞ It is the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area, industry or sector of an economy.
- ☞ It tracks the value-added by different sectors of the economy such as agriculture, industry and services. In other words, GVA provides an idea of the income earned by people involved in the various sectors.
- ☞ GVA is an important measure used to determine GDP.
- ☞ $GVA = GDP + \text{subsidies on products} - \text{taxes on products}$



Employment Trends

- Due to Covid, there had been a marginal fall in employment in 2020-21 which was compensated in 2021-22 with total estimated employment in the sector showing a robust growth of 7.0 % year-on-year.
- In fact, the estimated number of persons engaged in this sector in 2021-22 has exceeded the pre-pandemic level (that is 2018-19) by more than 9.35 lakh.
- Average emoluments (payments) also registered an increase with average salary earned per employee in the sector had gone up by 1.7% in 2020-21 and by 8.3% in 2021-22 in comparison to respective previous years.
- The **top five states** employing highest number of persons in this sector were **Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana** in ASI 2020-21 as well as in ASI 2021-22.
- Taken together, these states contributed about **54% of total manufacturing employment** in both the years.

Fair Price Shops on ONDC

- The Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD) has launched a pilot initiative to onboard 11 fair price shops (FPS) in Himachal Pradesh onto the Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC) platform.
- This is the first time when Fair Price Shops are onboarded on ONDC. The success of the pilot in Himachal Pradesh will serve as a model for statewide and nationwide adoption in the future.
- Following the launch, a workshop was conducted to familiarise FPS dealers with ONDC functionalities, including product cataloguing, service order processing, and commission structures.

Significance

- The initiative is part of ongoing efforts to modernise FPS operations and signify a paradigm shift in the digitalisation of essential services.
- It aims at providing additional avenues of income generation for FPS dealers along with enhancing beneficiary satisfaction.

Open Network Digital Commerce (ONDC)

☞ Launched in December 2021, ONDC is an initiative of the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.



- ☞ It has been incorporated as a private sector led non-profit company, to create a facilitative model to help small retailers take advantage of digital commerce.
- ☞ It is **not an application, platform, intermediary, or software** but a **set of specifications** designed to facilitate open, unbundled, and interoperable open networks.
- ☞ Currently operating across more than 500 cities and towns nationwide, ONDC aims to promote open networks for the exchange of goods and services over digital and electronic networks.
- ☞ Recently, the **Chennai Metro Rail** became the first metro service to make ticketing services available for passengers on the ONDC platform. Kochi Metro, Kanpur Metro, Pune Metro, and other metro rail services are anticipated to join the network.

- The initiative is part of the broader Digital India initiative that seeks to empower FPS dealers by providing them with a digital marketplace presence and access to a wider customer base beyond National Food Security Act (NFSA) beneficiaries.
- It will also provide FPS dealers with a level playing field to compete with larger retailers and e-commerce platforms.
- Additionally, beneficiaries who face difficulties in making online purchase can approach the FPS dealer to make online orders on their behalf.

Fair Price Shop

- It means a shop which has been licensed to distribute essential commodities to ration card holders under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- The term is defined in Section 2(4) of **National Food Security Act, 2013**.

SAFEETY Technology

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has transferred the Smart Food Grain Storage System (SAFEETY) technology to Paras Defense and Space Technology Ltd.
- SAFEETY is developed by Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering and Research (SAMEER) under MeitY's guidance.
- It has cutting-edge features such as conveyORIZED loading and unloading of grain bags with RFID for traceability, online weight and moisture measurement and radio frequency based removal of moisture from grain.
- This state-of-the-art system has a remarkable capacity, efficiently handling almost one truckload (approximately 28 tons) of grains in just 40 minutes.
- The transfer of SAFEETY technology signifies a step towards realising the Innovation, Science and Technology theme of Viksit Bharat at 2047.
- The collaboration between government entities and private industry highlights the commitment to leverage technology for the nation's progress and development.

Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)

- The Union Cabinet has approved PM-MKSSY.
- PM-MKSSY is a **Central Sector Sub-scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada** for formalization of the fisheries sector and supporting fisheries micro and small enterprises.
- It will be implemented for **four years** from FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27 across all the States and UTs with an investment of Rs 6,000 crores.

Implementation Strategy: The Sub-scheme has the following major components -

Component 1-A: Formalization of Fisheries Sector

- Fisheries, being an unorganised sector needs to be gradually formalized by creation of registry of the fish producers, fish workers, vendors and processors including micro and small enterprises.
- For this purpose, a **National Fisheries Digital Platform (NFDP)** will be created and all the stakeholders will be mobilized to register on it, by providing financial incentives.
- NFDP will undertake training and extension support, improve financial literacy, facilitate project preparation and documentation through financial support.

Component 1-B: Facilitate Adoption Of Aquaculture Insurance

- Facilitate creation of appropriate insurance product, covering **at least 1 lakh hectare of aquaculture farms** during project period. It will also provide **onetime incentive** against purchase of insurance.
- The onetime incentive will be at the rate of **40% of the cost of premium** subject to a **limit of Rs.25000 per hectare** of water spread area of the aquaculture farm.
- The maximum incentive payable to single farmer will be Rs.1,00,000 and maximum farm size eligible for incentive is 4 hectares of water spread area.
- The onetime incentive will be provided for **one crop only i.e. one crop cycle**.
- SC, ST and Women beneficiaries would get an additional incentive of 10%

Component 2: Support Microenterprises To Improve Fisheries Sector Value Chain Efficiencies

- It seeks to improve value chain efficiencies in fishery sector through a system of **performance grants** with associated analytics and awareness campaigns.
- **Performance grant** for a **microenterprise** shall not exceed 25% of the total investment or Rs.35 lakhs, whichever is lower for General Category.
 - ✓ 35% of total investment or Rs.45 lakhs, whichever is lower, for SC, ST and Women owned microenterprises,
- Performance Grant for **Small enterprise**: Shall not exceed 25% of total investment or Rs.75 lakhs, whichever is lower, for General Category and 35% of total investment or Rs.100 lakhs, for SC, ST and Women owned small enterprises.
- Performance Grant for Village Level Organizations and Federations of SHGs, FFPOs and Cooperatives shall not exceed 35% of total investment or Rs. 2 crores, whichever is lower.

Component 3: Expansion of Fish And Fishery Product Safety And Quality Assurance Systems

- It seeks to incentivize fisheries micro and small enterprises to adopt safety and quality assurance systems in marketing of fish and fishery products through provision of performance grants.

Objectives



- Gradual Formalization of the unorganized fisheries sector through self registration of fishers, fish farmers and supportive workers under a *National Fisheries Sector Digital Platform*.
- Facilitating access to **institutional financing** for fisheries sector micro and small enterprises.
- Providing **one-time incentive** to beneficiaries for purchasing **aquaculture insurance**.
- Incentivising micro and small enterprises through **performance grants** for adoption and expansion of fish and fishery product safety and quality assurance systems including creation and maintenance of jobs.

Intended Beneficiaries



- Fishers, fish (aquaculture) farmers, fish workers, fish vendors or people directly engaged in fisheries value chain.
- Micro and Small enterprises in the form of proprietary firms, partnership firms and companies registered in India, societies, Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), cooperatives, federations, village level organizations like Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- Fish Farmers Producer Organizations (FFPOs) and startups engaged in fisheries and aquaculture value chains. FFPOs also include Farmers Producer Organizations (FPOs).

- This is expected to expand the market for fish and to create and maintain jobs especially for women.
- It is expected to expand domestic market for fish through increased supply of safe fish and fishery products which will attract new consumers.
- Scale of performance grants:

Component 4: Project Management, Monitoring And Reporting:

Establishment of Project Management Units (PMUs) to manage, implement, monitor & evaluate project activities.

Significance

- Gradual formalization of fisheries sector and **enhanced access to institutional credit** will support 6.4 lakh micro-enterprises and 5,500 fisheries cooperatives.
- Gradual shift from conventional subsidies to performance-based incentives in fisheries.
- Address issues of aquaculture crop losses due to disease through insurance coverage for aquaculture to strengthen production, productivity.
- **Enhance export competitiveness** through value addition, value realization and value creation.
- Increase in incomes due to enhanced profit margins due to value chain efficiencies.
- It is projected to create **1.7 lakh new jobs**, with a special emphasis on employing 75,000 women and also aims to generate 5.4 lakh continued employment opportunities in the micro and small enterprises value chain.
- It will lead to promotion of environment and sustainability initiatives and facilitate ease of doing business and transparency.

Sangam: Digital Twin

- The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has recently introduced the 'Sangam: Digital Twin' initiative, inviting Expressions of Interest (EoI) from various sectors.
 - ✓ DoT has invited EoI from industry pioneers, startups, MSMEs, academia, innovators and forward-thinkers for the initiative.
- Digital Twin technology **creates virtual replicas of physical assets**, enabling real-time monitoring, simulation, and analysis to adapt to the changes for achieving the best outcomes.
- Digital Twin is a **Proof of Concept (PoC)** distributed in **two stages**.
 - **First stage is exploratory** for creative exploration, and the **second stage is for practical demonstration** of specific use cases, creating a future blueprint to scale up and replicate successful strategies in future infrastructure projects through collaboration.
 - A PoC is a demonstration of a product, service or solution. It should demonstrate that the product or concept will fulfill customer requirements and also provide a strong business case for adoption.

Significance

- The initiative is aimed at creating an ecosystem maximising the value of technological advancements for development.
- It aligns with advancements in communication, computation and sensing over the past decade. It integrates 5G, IoT, AI, AR/VR, AI native 6G, Digital Twin and next-gen computational technologies to break silos and promote a whole-of-nation approach.
- It brings all stakeholders on one platform aiming to transform ideas into solutions, bridging the gap between conceptualisation and realisation, facilitating advancements in infrastructure.
- It encourages a holistic approach to innovation, uniting stakeholders to unified data and collective intelligence.

Business Payment Solution Provider (BPSP)

RBI has asked card network Visa & Mastercard to stop its Business Payment Solution Provider (BPSP) business in commercial and business payments through corporate credit cards.

BPSP

- BPSPs offer **business-to-business payment services to corporates using credit cards.**
- BPSP started around 2017 as a solution to let small businesses accept card payments without having a card terminal in their account.
- Before BPSP, these payments were often made by the corporates through their RTGS and NEFT account transfers, which are debit transactions. BPSP allowed them to make credit payments.
 - ✓ For instance, a business can make payments to its smaller suppliers using this mechanism, even though the latter do not have the infrastructure for accepting credit payments.
 - ✓ Under this arrangement, the intermediary accepts card payments from corporates for their commercial payments and then transfers the funds via IMPS/RTGS/NEFT to non-card accepting recipients.
- As per RBI this arrangement qualified as a payment system. Under the provisions of Payment and Settlement Systems (PSS) Act, 2007, such a payment system requires authorisation under Section 4 of PSS Act.
- This authorisation has not been obtained in the case of BPSP. The activity was, therefore, without legal sanction.
- The RBI also raised concerns over non-compliance of Know Your Customer (KYC) norms in such transactions.



MoU Between IEPFA and DBS

- Under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) an MoU has been signed between the Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA) and DBS Bank.
- As per the MoU, DBS Bank will support IEPFA's investor awareness and protection activities.
- Previously, IEPFA has also signed MoUs with the Bank of Baroda and ICICI Bank for similar activities.

IEPFA

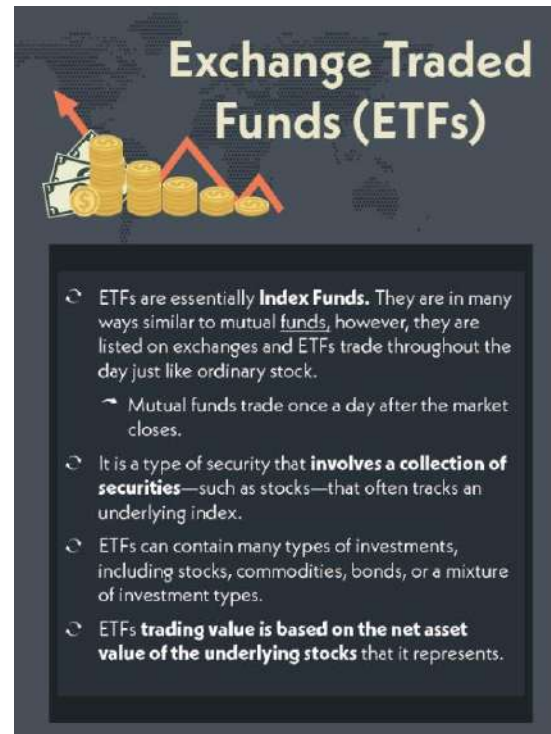
It was set up in **2016, under the aegis of the MCA** for administering the Investor Education and Protection Fund for making refunds of shares, unclaimed dividends, and matured deposits/debentures to investors.

DBS Bank

- DBS is a leading financial services group in Asia with a presence in 19 markets. It has been present in India for 29 years, opening its first office in India in 1994.
- DBS Bank India Limited is the first among the large foreign banks in India to start operating as a wholly owned, locally incorporated subsidiary of a leading global bank.

Rise In Gold ETFs

- Gold Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs) attracted Rs 657 crore in January, marking a seven-fold jump compared to the previous month.
- In 2023, Gold ETFs witnessed an inflow of Rs 2,920 crore, which was higher than the Rs 459 crore inflow seen in 2022.
- The attractiveness of gold as a safe haven and a hedge against inflation enhanced significantly in 2023.
- Rising inflation, subsequent interest rate hikes, and geopolitical events boosted the demand as investors sought a secure investment option.
- Gold ETFs, which aim to track the domestic physical gold price, are passive investment instruments that are based on gold prices and invest in gold bullion.
- Gold ETFs are units representing physical gold which may be in paper or dematerialised form.
- One gold ETF unit is equal to 1 gram of gold and is backed by physical gold of very high purity. They combine the flexibility of stock investments and the simplicity of gold investments.



Skill India Centre

- The Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship recently inaugurated the first Skill India Centre (SIC) of the country in Sambalpur, Odisha.
- By targeting the *high economic growth sectors*, each SIC aims to address the specific skill needs of industries that have the potential to drive regional development and create sustainable employment opportunities.
- India requires a skilled and competent workforce to push its development journey forward in the 21st century. However, the new-age and future skills are available at considerably higher cost in global markets.
- Thus, the Centre has decided to democratize access to quality education and establish a level playing field for the aspiring youth.
- The SIC will equip a vast majority of youth with employable skills in demand-driven trades, creating an industry-ready workforce, encouraging entrepreneurship and strengthening the skilling ecosystem.
- It is designed to build the capabilities and knowledge in trades that are high in demand such as Media & Entertainment, Leather, Tourism & Hospitality, and IT-ITeS.
- It will play a pivotal role in designing curriculum along with industry experts which will be aligned with the changing industry needs, promote standardization, and create employment opportunities that meet demand for skilled talent across industries.
- The centre is equipped with best-in-class infrastructure, cutting-edge technologies and modern facilities that will catalyse demand for formal skills.
- It will offer enhanced accessibility, personalized learning experiences, and improved career guidance. It will also enable learners to acquire relevant skills, stay updated with industry trends, and contribute to India's workforce development effectively.

Increase in FCI's Authorised Capital

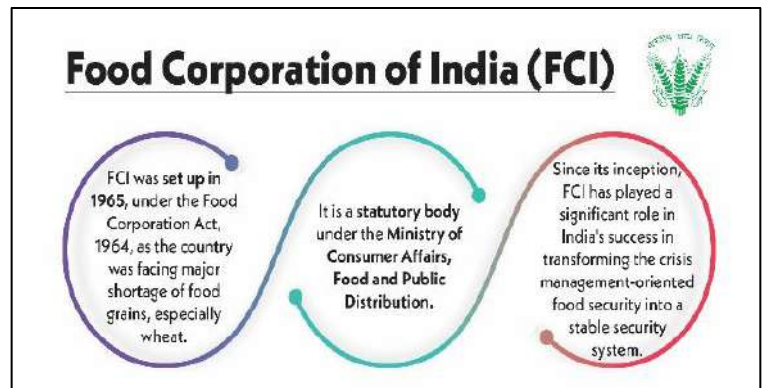
The government has increased the authorised capital of state-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) **from ₹10,000 crore to ₹21,000 crore** to enhance the operational capabilities and fulfill its mandate effectively.

Need For The Increase

- FCI is the pillar of India's food security architecture
- The functions include the procurement of food grains at Minimum Support Price (MSP), maintenance of strategic food grain stocks, distribution to state governments and UTs, and stabilization of food grain prices in the market.
- While the food subsidy is essentially the difference between the economic costs of the grains for the government and the issue (retail) prices to the beneficiary consumers, the loss-making operations are undertaken by FCI and other government agencies.
 - As per the revised estimates for 2023-24, out of the total allocation of Rs 2.11 trillion under the food subsidy expenses, Rs 1.39 trillion is routed through FCI.
- These operations are funded out of Budget, but sometimes, delays in release of budgetary funds necessitate FCI to borrow from market/National Small Saving Fund (NSSF) to continue the operations without any disruptions.
- The interest on these loans adds to the food subsidy expenditure.

Significance Of Increased Authorised Capital

- The government provides equity to FCI for working capital requirement and for creation of capital assets.
- Increase of authorised capital will reduce the interest burden, reducing the economic cost and ultimately affecting the subsidy of government positively.
- With this infusion of capital, FCI will modernize its storage facilities, improve transportation networks, and adopt advanced technologies.
- These measures are essential not only for reducing post-harvest losses but also for ensuring efficient distribution of food grains to consumers.
- FCI is undertaking a comprehensive initiative to create an integrated IT system, leveraging existing internal and external systems.



Pigeon Pea Breeding Protocol

- The Hyderabad-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) has come up with an innovation in Pigeon pea breeding and announced the World's first Pigeon pea speed breeding protocol
- The new method promises to *substantially cut the time required* to develop new Pigeon pea lines with desirable traits, effectively bringing food to dryland communities faster.
- The Pigeonpea's **long growth cycle** and **sensitivity to day length** have limited breeding efforts, with only about 250 varieties released globally over six decades.
- Typically, developing a new variety of pigeon pea takes about **13 years** of breeding, testing and release.
- The new protocol developed by ICRISAT showed that the breeding cycle takes around seven years and can be reduced to **2 to 4 years**.
- Thus, the new protocol helps to develop climate-resilient, nutritionally superior, and higher-yielding pigeon pea varieties at an unprecedented pace.
- It will pave the way for self-reliance in pulse production and meeting the dietary necessities of nations such as India, Myanmar, Kenya, Tanzania, Myanmar, and Mozambique.

Pigeon Pea

- Pigeon pea, also called arhar and tur in India, is an important legume crop for the country's nutritional security. **India is the largest producer as well as importer of the grain.** It is primarily consumed as dal (split pulse) in India.
- A staple in tropical and subtropical diets, it is crucial for food security and soil health globally and is **mainly cultivated in semi-arid regions.**
- It can be grown with a **temperature** ranging from 260C to 300C in the rainy season (June to October) and 170C to 220C in the post rainy (November to March) season.
- It is a six to nine month crop. The longer duration of the crop is a result of its short day nature, photosensitivity and seasonal specificity.
- It is very sensitive to low radiation at pod development, therefore flowering during the monsoon and cloudy weather, leads to poor pod formation.
- It is commonly intercropped with a wide range of crops. In India, it is estimated that 80 - 90 % of the pigeon pea is intercropped.
- It has a **low glycemic index** and is rich in thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B-6, folate, vitamin A, calcium, zinc, iron, magnesium and phosphorus.

Glycemic Index (GI)

- GI is a **value** assigned to foods based on how quickly and how high those foods cause increases in blood glucose levels.
- Foods low on the GI scale tend to release glucose slowly and steadily. Foods that have a high GI release glucose rapidly.

iMPEAL-AI Program for AI Startups

- International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Technology (iCreate) and Microsoft recently signed an MoU facilitated by the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY) to boost AI startups in India.
- Under it, **iMPEL-AI (iCreate-Microsoft programme for Emerging Leaders in Artificial Intelligence)** an AI based innovation programme was launched.
- The iMPEL-AI programme is designed to encourage AI innovation and product development with access to both *mentorship and technology infrastructure* that are needed by Indian innovators to build globally successful AI ventures.
- The program will screen 1100 AI innovators across India to become **AI Most Valuable Players (MVPs)**.
- It will focus on key sectors, such as healthcare, education, agriculture, smart cities, sustainability, and financial inclusion, to select and scale approximately 100 startups nationwide.
- The top 25 will receive go-to- market support from Microsoft's Global Network to develop advanced, globally competitive products.
- Microsoft and iCreate will also provide AI skilling opportunities to 11,000 innovators, startups, and young Indians from across the country through Microsoft's Learning Management System.
- On completion, participants will receive globally recognized certifications from Microsoft.

iCreate

- iCreate is a joint venture between Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation Limited (GMDC) and Gujarat Entrepreneurship and Venture Promotion Foundation (GEVPF).

- It is an independent centre to promote Start-up India scheme. The centre aims to provide technology and assistance to innovative entrepreneurs.

Guidelines on State Guarantees on Borrowings

- A working group constituted by RBI has submitted its report to address issues related to guarantees extended by State governments.
- The working group, constituted in July 2022, comprised of members from the Ministry of Finance, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, and some State governments.

Purpose of a 'Guarantee'

- Primarily, guarantees are used in **three scenarios** at the State level:
 - Where a **sovereign guarantee** is a precondition for concessional loans from bilateral or multilateral agencies (*to public sector enterprises*);
 - To improve **viability of projects** or activities with the potential to provide significant social and economic benefits; and
 - To enable public sector enterprises to raise resources at lower interest charges or on more favourable terms.
- State governments are often required to sanction, and issue guarantees, on behalf of State-owned enterprises, cooperative institutions, urban local bodies and/or other State-governed entities, to respective lenders.
- The latter could be commercial banks or other financial institutions. In return, the entities are required to pay a guarantee commission or fee to the governments.

Guarantee

- A 'guarantee' is a legal obligation for a State to make payments and protect an investor/lender from the risk of default by a borrower.
- As per the **Indian Contracts Act (1872)**, it is a contract to "perform the promise, or discharge the liability, of a third person in case of his default."
- The contract involves **three parties**: the principal debtor, creditor, and surety.
 - The entity to whom the guarantee is given is the '**creditor**'.
 - The defaulting entity on whose behalf the guarantee is given is called the '**principal debtor**' and
 - The entity giving the guarantee (State governments in this context) is called the '**surety**'.
- For instance, If A delivers certain goods or services to B and B does not make the agreed-upon payment, B is defaulting and at the risk of being sued for the debt. C steps in and promises that she would pay for B. This constitutes a guarantee.

Key Recommendations Of The Report

Definition

- The term 'guarantee' should be **used in a broader sense** and include all instruments that create obligation on the guarantor (State) to make a payment on behalf of the borrower at a future date.
- Further, it must make any distinction between *conditional or unconditional, or financial or performance guarantees* in order to assess the fiscal risk.
- These are contingent liabilities that may present a potential risk in the future.

Guidelines For According Guarantees

- Government guarantees should not be used to obtain finance through State-owned entities, which substitute budgetary resources of the State Government.
- Additionally, they should not be allowed to create direct liability/de-facto liability on the State.
- It further recommends adherence to Government of India guidelines that stipulate that guarantees be given **only for the principal amount and normal interest component** of the underlying loan.

- Furthermore, they must not be extended for external commercial borrowings (ECBs), must not be extended for more than 80% of the project loan and they must not be provided to private sector companies and institutions.
- Finally, appropriate preconditions, such as period of guarantee, levy of (guarantee) fee to cover risk, government representation on the management board of the borrowing entity, and right to audit, among other things, must be specified.

Risk Determination, Fee And Ceiling

- States should **assign appropriate risk weights** before extending guarantees. The categorisation could be high, medium or low risk.
- These must also consider past record of defaults. They must also disclose the methodology of assigning.
- To manage the potential stress, for incremental guarantees (additional guarantees) issued during a year, the report proposes a **ceiling at 5% of Revenue Receipts or 0.5% of GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product)** — whichever is less.
- And finally, the guarantee fee must reflect the risk involved in the borrowers' project and activities.
- Based on the risk assessment, the base fee or **minimum guarantee fee must be set at a minimum of 2.5%** per annum. Moreover, additional risk premium may be considered based on the risk assessment.

Disclosures and Honouring Commitments

- RBI may consider advising banks/NBFCs to disclose the credit extended to State-owned entities, backed by State-government guarantees.
- Availability of data, both from issuer and the lender, may improve the credibility of the data reported by the State government.
- It has also sought a proper database capturing all *extended guarantees*. And a unit may be set up at the State level to track the same — alongside its compilation and consolidation.
- About honouring guaranteed obligations, it recognises that delays may affect the credibility of issued guarantees. This may result in reputational risk as well as legal risk for the State government.
- Thus, States must be cautious before extending any fresh finance to entities that have failed in honouring commitments before.
- Moreover, it is in the interest of the State Governments to ensure that all guarantees in respect of loans and bonds, when there is a default, are honoured without delay.”

Restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank

- RBI recently barred Paytm Payments Bank from offering all its core services — including accounts and wallets — from March, effectively crippling the company's business.
- The action is technically not a cancellation of the licence of Paytm Payments Bank, but it limits the company's operations to a very large extent.
- The regulator has banned Paytm Payments Bank from providing banking services such as transfer of funds, Aadhaar Enabled Payment System, Immediate Payment Service & Bharat Bill Payment Operating Unit
- Moreover, no further deposits or credit transactions or top-ups will be allowed in customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Card cards, etc.
- However, the central bank has allowed the withdrawal or utilisation of balance amounts by customers without any restrictions, up to their available balance.

Reason for Restrictions

- RBI stated that the crackdown was a result of the bank's failure to comply with regulations despite repeated warnings.

- Instances of the total value of transactions — running into crores, much beyond regulatory limits in minimum KYC pre-paid instruments led to money laundering concerns.
- Further, lakhs of non-KYC (Know Your Customer) compliant accounts and in thousands of cases single PANs were used for opening multiple accounts.
- Paytm Payments Bank and its parent OCL also came under RBI scrutiny for lack of requisite information barriers within the group, and data access to China-based entities that were indirect shareholders in the payments bank through their stake in the parent company.
- The central bank is concerned about allowing any institution or banking entity to expose depositors' money to such risks.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Schengen Zone in Europe

- Kosovo recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen zone in Europe, world's largest zone of free movement, becoming the last western Balkan non-European Union (EU) nation to waive visa requirements.
- Citizens of Kosovo can now enter the Schengen as tourists for 90 days within 180 days.

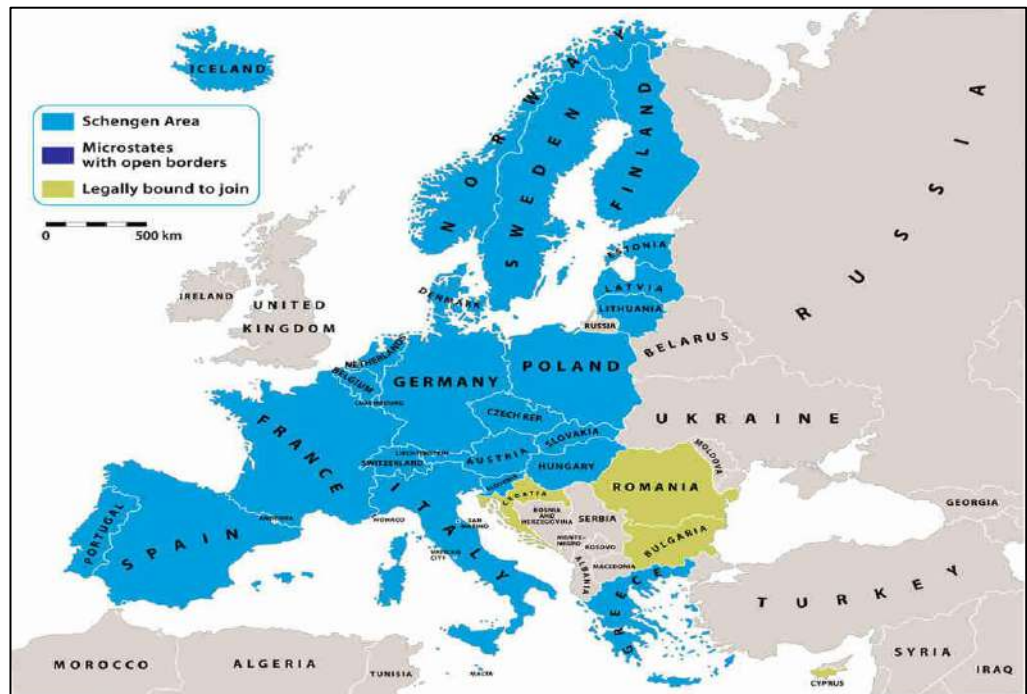
Why Was Kosovo's Application Kept Pending for Years?

- **The case of Kosovo is appalling** given that the European Commission had in 2018 cleared Pristina's (capital of Kosovo) preparedness to tackle illegal migration and corruption, **preconditions for the entry.**
- **The single biggest obstacle to the country's Schengen visa waiver** was strong opposition from several EU members, which do not recognise the **2008 unilateral declaration** of independence by the breakaway state from Serbia.
 - **Kosovo** has not been accorded legal statehood by the UN and denied recognition by Russia and China.



About the Schengen Area

- The zone is known after **Schengen**, the tiny Luxembourg village bordering France and Germany, where the **agreement was signed in 1985** among five of the six EU founding members except Italy.
- Currently, it is an **area encompassing 27 European countries** that have officially abolished border controls at their mutual borders.



- It mostly functions as a **single jurisdiction under a common visa policy** for international travel purposes.
- **Croatia**, a EU member since 2013, joined Schengen in 2023, while **Romania and Bulgaria**, EU members since 2007, will gain partial Schengen entry from 31 March 2024.

What Are The Advantages Of The EU's Border-Free Policy

- For nationals of any country, the benefit is the **freedom to travel with a single Schengen visa** to other European nations within the borderless area.

- For EU states, the Visa-free borderless travel, alongside the single currency adopted by 20 EU countries, is the **most visible symbol of European integration**.
 - The integrity of Schengen was critical for the success of the post-war European project.

Is Admission to Schengen Mandatory for EU Members?

- **When the Schengen agreement took effect in 1995**, only 7 of the entire 15-member union at the time joined the **passport-free area**.
- Today, **23 of the 27 EU states** are part of the passport-free zone, **excluding Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria and Ireland**.
- Additionally, the Schengen area comprises **27 countries**, including **four non-EU members**: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Norway.
- It is important **not to confuse the status of the four countries with the recent entry of Kosovo** and the other five western Balkan entrants which are *not counted among the Schengen 27 members*.

Challenges Faced by the Schengen Region

- Schengen had come under enormous strain following the **Eurozone sovereign debt crisis** during the last decade.
- **The arrival of thousands of migrants** from conflict zones in Africa and West Asia and the anti-immigrant-politics stoked by the continent's far-right populist parties also strained the region.
 - **The EU had even considered removal from Schengen**, countries located on the bloc's Mediterranean border, as individual states contemplated unilateral reinstatement of borders.

EU Launches Non-Military Mission To Protect Cargo Ships In Red Sea

- EU has launched a naval mission to help protect cargo ships in the Red Sea as attacks by Houthi rebels continue to threaten maritime traffic, hamper trade.
- Dubbed 'Aspides' (Greek for shield), the mission will be run out of Larissa in central Greece — home to the Hellenic Air Force and a NATO headquarters.
- The Iranian-backed Houthis have waged a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas.
- In response, U.S. and British forces have bombed multiple targets used by the Houthis.
- However, the EU mission will not take part in any military strikes and will only operate at sea.

PM Modi's Visit to UAE

PM Modi is on an official visit to the United Arab Emirates. This is his seventh visit to the UAE since 2015 and the third in the last eight months.

Key Pacts Signed During The Visit

- **Bilateral Investment Treaty Signed:** This agreement will be a key enabler for further promoting investments in both countries.
- **Energy cooperation:** An MoU has also been signed on cooperation in the field of electrical interconnection and trade.
 - This opens new areas of collaboration in the field of energy, including energy security and energy trade.
- **Fostering regional connectivity:** For the IMEC (*India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor*), first announced during the G20 Summit 2023, India and the UAE have formed an "Intergovernmental Framework Agreement".
 - This would build on previous understandings and cooperation on this matter and foster India and the UAE cooperation furthering regional connectivity.
- **MoU on cooperation in Digital Infrastructure Projects**
 - This will create a framework for a wide-ranging cooperation, including investment cooperation, in the digital infrastructure sector.

- It will also facilitate sharing of technical knowledge, skills and expertise.
- **Agreement on interlinking of the instant payment platforms - UPI (India) and AANI (UAE):**
 - This will facilitate seamless cross-border transactions between the two countries.
 - This follows the MoU on interlinking payment and messaging systems signed in July 2023 during Hon'ble PM's visit to Abu Dhabi.
- **Agreement on inter-linking domestic debit/credit cards - RuPay (India) with JAYWAN (UAE):**
 - This will enhance the universal acceptance of RuPay across the UAE.
- **Cooperation protocol between the National Archives of the two countries** for restoration and preservation of archival material.
- **MoU for cooperation in the field of heritage & museums:** This would foster engagement between the two countries aimed at supporting of Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat.

Other Highlights Of The Visit

- **Interaction at the Indian Community Event - "AHLAN MODI" in UAE**
 - PM Modi addressed the Indian community in the UAE at 'AHLAN MODI', an event organized in his honour by the Indian community in the UAE.
- **Temple inauguration**
 - On February 14, PM Modi inaugurated the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Mandir.
 - This is the first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi.
 - BAPS a denomination of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, a Vaishnav sect of Hinduism.
 - **Features of the temple**
 - The Abu Dhabi temple is a traditional stone Hindu temple with seven shikhars representative of the seven Emirates of the UAE.
 - Built in the traditional Nagar style, the temple's front panel depicts universal values, stories of harmony from different cultures, Hindu spiritual leaders and avatars.
 - While the external facade uses pink sandstone from Rajasthan, the interior uses Italian marbles.
 - Apart from 15 value tales from Indian civilisation, stories from the Maya civilisation, Aztec civilisation, Egyptian civilisation, Arabic civilisation, European civilisation, Chinese civilisation and African civilisation have been depicted.

[For detailed discussion about India-UAE bilateral relation, refer the topic ***"PM Modi's State Visit to UAE"*** from The Recitals – July 2023]

Qatar Frees 8 Ex-Indian Navy Men Jailed On Espionage Charges

- Qatar has released eight veterans of the Indian Navy who were sentenced to death on espionage charges.
- This development follows intense diplomatic efforts nearly four months after a Qatari court's death sentences were commuted to various prison terms.
- The release of the Navy veterans is a testament to the robust diplomatic channels and the goodwill shared between India and Qatar.
- It not only reinforces the safety and security of Indian nationals abroad but also strengthens bilateral ties.
- Millions of Indians reside and are employed across the Gulf region, serving as a significant source of remittances for India and playing a key role in the prosperity of Gulf economies.
- This incident demonstrates India's growing influence on the global stage and its ability to protect its citizens' interests internationally.

[Also refer the topic ***"Qatar court sentenced 8 Indian Navy veterans to death"*** from The Recitals – October 2023.]

State Visit Of PM Of Greece To India

- Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic (Greece), Kyriakos Mitsotakis is on a State visit to India.
- PM Mitsotakis was the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker at the **9th Raisina Dialogue**, 2024 in New Delhi.

Key Highlights Of The Visit

- **Mobility and migration partnership agreement**
 - India and Greece will soon sign a mobility and migration partnership agreement to ease skilled migration between the two countries.
 - The pact would provide employment opportunities for Indians in Greece besides easing flow of students and business people between the two countries.
- **Towards doubling the bilateral trade by 2030**
- **Defence cooperation:** Both the countries agreed to work towards co-production and co-development of military hardware.
- **Other areas of cooperation:** Both sides also resolved to cooperate in the Eastern Mediterranean region.
 - PM Modi also referred to the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
 - Launched in September 2023, the IMEC is seen as an initiative by like-minded nations to gain strategic influence in the face of China's BRI.
 - He said IMEC would make a significant contribution to the development of humanity in the long run.
 - Both leaders emphasized shipping and connectivity as priority areas for cooperation, alongside a reaffirmed commitment to combat terrorism.
- **75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Greece in 2025:** Plans were outlined to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Greece in 2025, showcasing shared heritage and achievements on the global stage.

Raisina Dialogue

- **About:** It is an annual conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics, which aims to address the most challenging issues faced by the world.
 - The conference takes place in New Delhi and is attended by people from political, business, media, and civil society backgrounds.
- **Institutions involved:** Delhi-based think tank Observer Research Foundation, in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs, hosts the conference.
- **Theme of the 2024 edition:** *“Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate, Create”*.

[For more discussion on India-Greece Bilateral Relation, refer the topic **“PM Modi's visit to Greece”** from The Recitals – August 2023]

China Moves its Nationals into its Vacant 'Defence Villages' Along LAC

- Chinese nationals have started occupying several of their model “Xiaokang” border defence villages across India's north-eastern borders.
 - China has been building 628 "Xiaokang" or "well-off villages" along India's borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region since 2019.
- While the exact nature of these villages is unclear, the dwellings are understood to be **“dual-use infrastructure”** - for both civil and military purposes, and seen as a **Chinese assertion of its territorial claims along the LAC**.

Line of Actual Control (LAC)

- The LAC is the **demarcation** that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory.
- **The LAC is only a concept** not agreed upon by the two countries, neither delineated on a map or demarcated on the ground.
- **India** considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the **Chinese** consider it to be only around 2,000 km.

- **It is divided into three sectors:** the eastern sector which spans Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, the middle sector in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and the western sector in Ladakh.
- **India's claim line** is the line seen in the official boundary marked on the maps as released by the Survey of India, including both Aksai Chin and Gilgit-Baltistan.
 - **This means LAC is not the claim line for India.**
- **In China's case, LAC is the claim line except in the eastern sector,** where it claims the entire Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet.

Infrastructure Development At the LAC

- **The Chinese have consistently improved their existing infrastructure** (along the LAC) including improving their connectivity through passes, constructing roads and bridges and their model villages.
 - China has also been constructing infrastructure, including border villages, in Bhutanese territory.
- In the last three to four years, **India has also stepped-up work on its border infrastructure** - this includes improving forward connectivity, constructing alternate routes to the LAC as well as connecting them.
- Under the **Vibrant Villages programmes**, India plans to develop **663 border villages** into modern villages with all amenities in the first phase.
 - Of them, at least 17 along the borders with China in **Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh**, have been selected for development as a pilot project under the programme.
- Also, **three major highways** are at different stages of construction in Arunachal Pradesh: the Trans-Arunachal Highway; the Frontier Highway; and the East-West Industrial Corridor Highway.



Indians Can Travel To Iran Without A Visa

- Indians holding ordinary passports can go to Iran without a visa, as long as they are visiting the country for tourism purposes. Also, they must enter Iran via air.
 - While the announcement for this had been made in December 2023, the conditions have been announced now, and the relaxation has come into effect from February 4.
- The relaxation does not apply to those travelling for other purposes, like work or study.
- Why has Iran lifted visa requirements?
 - In December 2023, Iran had announced the relaxation for India as well as 32 other countries.
 - The decision is aimed to showcase Iran's commitment to global interaction.
 - Iran aims to counter negative perceptions and rumours with this move, while combating the phenomenon of Iranophobia.
- **Waiver of visa requirement for Indian citizens**
 - Kenya, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam have also recently waived visa requirements for the citizens of India.
 - Thailand had announced a visa exemption for Indian citizens, from November 10, 2023 to May 10, 2024.
 - At present, 27 countries provide visa-free entry to the citizens of India.

India Sends Assistance To Cholera-Hit Zambia

- India has sent medical and material assistance to Zambia as the southern African country deals with a deadly cholera outbreak.
 - As per the Red Cross, the outbreak began in the Zambian capital region and by early January 2024 had killed around 333 people.
 - The aid consisting of 3.5 tonnes of water purification supplies, chlorine tablets and ORS sachets was handed to Zambia.

UPI Launched In Sri Lanka And Mauritius

- India launched its *unified payments interface (UPI)* system in Sri Lanka and Mauritius.
- RuPay card services were also introduced in Mauritius as part of this strategic initiative.
- The launch will enable availability of UPI settlement services for Indian nationals travelling to Sri Lanka and Mauritius as well as for these nationals travelling to India.
- The extension of RuPay card services in Mauritius will enable Mauritian banks to issue cards based on RuPay mechanism
 - It will facilitate usage of RuPay Card for settlements both in India and Mauritius.
- The Centre has been pushing to export its UPI system along with the RuPay network – which is a rival to Mastercard and Visa – to a number of countries.
 - Earlier, in February 2024, NPCI International Payments, in partnership with Lyra, a French e-commerce and payments firm, had announced the acceptance of UPI in France starting with tickets to the Eiffel Tower.
 - Singapore, Bhutan, and the UAE, among others, also accept UPI.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference (CASGC) 2024


- PM Modi inaugurated the Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA) - Commonwealth Attorneys and Solicitors General Conference (CASGC) 2024 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.
- The theme of the conference is “**Cross-Border Challenges in Justice Delivery**”.

Key Highlights Of The Speech Delivered By PM Modi

- **Need to rethink, reimagine and reform including modernizing legal systems**
 - PM Modi pointed out the vast networks created by criminals across countries and their usage of the latest technology both in funding and operations.
 - He also drew attention to the fact that economic crimes in one region are being used to fund activities in other regions, and the challenges of the rise of cryptocurrency and cyber threats.
 - In this context, he underscored the need to rethink, reimagine and reform including modernizing legal systems, making the system more flexible and adaptable.
- **Technology can also have a positive impact on justice systems**
 - He said that in the last few years, India has used drones to map places and provide clear property cards to rural people, reducing disputes, the possibility of litigation, and load on the justice system, making it more efficient.
 - He said **digitalisation has also helped many courts** in the country, taking proceedings online, which has helped people access justice even from far-away locations.
- **Indian legal system witnessed a record number of reforms**
 - PM Modi pointed out that India’s legal system was inherited from colonial times, but the last few years have witnessed a record number of reforms.
 - He mentioned the abolition of thousands of obsolete laws from colonial times, and underlined that it has boosted ease of living and ease of doing business.
 - He further highlighted that the 3 new legislations have replaced more than 100-year-old colonial criminal laws.
 - Earlier, the focus was on punishment and penal aspects. Now, the **focus is on ensuring justice**.

Commonwealth Legal Education Association (CLEA)

- **About**
 - CLEA fosters and promotes high standards of legal education in the Commonwealth.
 - Founded in 1971, it is a Commonwealth-wide body with regional Chapters and Committees in Asia, Southern Africa, West Africa, the Caribbean and Europe.
- **Goal**



Commonwealth

- ▶ The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 56 independent and equal countries.
 - The last two countries to join the Commonwealth were Gabon and Togo in 2022.
- ▶ It was established by the London Declaration in 1949.
- ▶ The Commonwealth's roots go back to the British Empire. But today **any country can join the modern Commonwealth**
- ▶ The member governments have agreed to shared goals like development, democracy and peace.

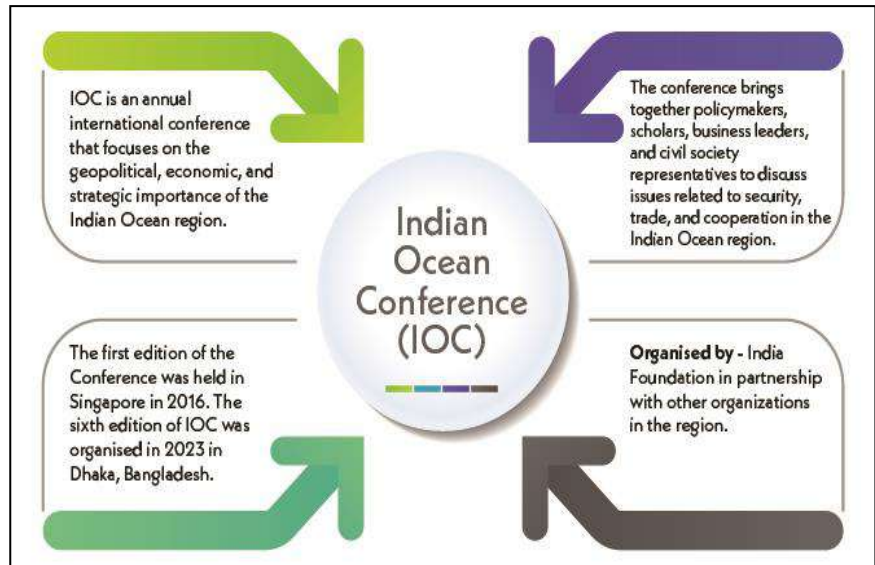
Birth of the modern Commonwealth

- ▶ After its independence in 1947, India wanted to become a republic which didn't owe allegiance to the British king or queen.
- ▶ However, it also wanted to stay a member of the Commonwealth.
- ▶ The London Declaration of 1949 said that republics and *other countries* could be part of the Commonwealth. Thus, the modern Commonwealth of Nations was born.

- To make legal education socially relevant and professionally useful, particularly through:
 - the development of law curricula and teaching methodologies;
 - assisting law schools to prepare themselves for the demands of the profession in the context of the information revolution and other global challenges; and
 - supporting continuing legal education and distance learning programmes.

7th Indian Ocean Conference

- The 7th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference was held in Perth, Australia on 9-10 February, 2024.
 - It is being held in association with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia, along with S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore and Perth-US Asia Centre in Australia.
- Theme of the conference is "Towards a Stable and Sustainable Indian Ocean".



Key Highlights Of The Speech Delivered By EAM Jaishankar

- **Highlighted the challenges in Indian Ocean**
 - At one extremity, there are threats to maritime traffic, piracy and terrorism.
 - At the other, there are challenges to international law, concerns about freedom of navigation and overflights, and of safeguarding of sovereignty and of independence.
 - In between, **a range of trans-national and non-traditional threats** present themselves, largely visible in a spectrum of interconnected illegal activities.
- **Expressed concern regarding grey areas of various kinds**
 - Some may emanate from climate change and natural disasters. Also, disruptive events are occurring with greater frequency and deeper impact.
 - There are also the consequences of distant happenings, such as the fuel, food and fertilizer crises that many countries of the region have experienced.
 - Unsustainable debt, opaque lending practices, unviable projects and injudicious choices are also affecting countries of this region.
- **Highlighted the challenges that are structurally inherent in the current form of globalization**
 - The current form of globalization has led to over-concentrations of manufacturing and technology.
 - However, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of disperse production across more geographies and need to build reliable and resilient supply-chains.
 - The digital era and emergence of AI has, in parallel, put a premium on trust and transparency.
- **Drivers of the future**
 - Our sustainable future lies in concentrating on the drivers of the future: digital, electric mobility, green hydrogen and green shipping, to cite a few.

WHO Launches Digital Health Platform

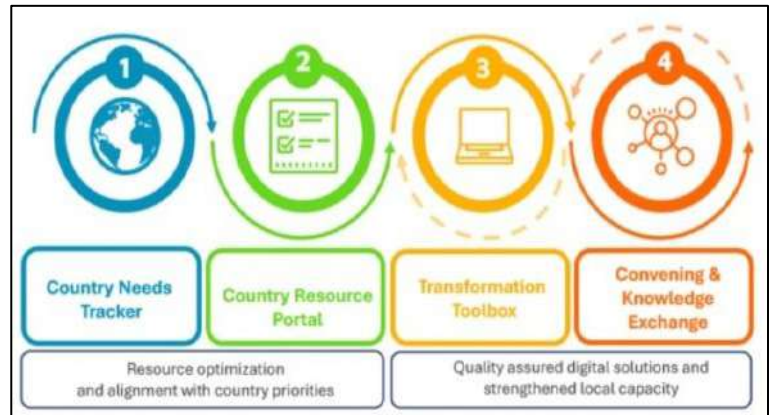
One of the three priority areas agreed upon during **India's G20 presidency in 2023** was accomplished as the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) through a virtual platform.

Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)

- **GIDH is one of the key deliverables of India's G-20 Presidency.**
- It will consolidate the evidence and amplify recent and past gains in global digital health while strengthening mutual accountability to enhance the impact of future investments.
- GIDH will be a WHO Managed Network ("Network of Networks") that will promote equitable access to digital health.
 - It will do so by sharing digital goods and knowledge.
- GIDH will ensure inclusivity, integration, and alignment of healthcare goals by not leaving anyone behind.

Pillars of GIDH: It Will Have Four Pillars

- **Country Needs Tracker** - facilitating *digital health investments* to be informed by country priorities;
- **Country Resource Portal** – identifying traditional as well as innovative resource opportunities, and promoting transparency, while reducing the risk of duplication for enabling a standards-based prospective and retrospective analysis of resourcing gaps in digital health.
- **Transformation Toolbox** – advocating for quality-assured tools and resources that strengthen country capacity and autonomy to manage the national digital health transformation.
- **Convening and Knowledge Exchange** - promoting strengthened collaboration and knowledge exchange across global, regional, and national networks in digital health.



[For detailed discussion on Digital Health, refer the topic "**G20 Health Ministers' Meeting**" from The Recitals – August 2023]

World Governments Summit 2024

Prime Minister Modi participated in the World Governments Summit in Dubai as Guest of Honour. He also delivered the special keynote address on the theme of the Summit - "**Shaping the Future Governments**".

World Governments Summit

- **About**
 - The World Government Summit is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of government worldwide.
 - It is an **annual event held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.**
 - Each year since its inception in 2013, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments with a focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.
- **World Governments Summit Organization** is a global, neutral, non-profit organization dedicated to shaping the future of governments.
- **Headquarter:** Dubai, United Arab Emirates

India on UNSC Reform

- India's Permanent Representative at the **UN Ruchira Kamboj**, speaking at the **Inter-Governmental Negotiations** on Security Council Reform stressed upon the need for comprehensive reform of the Security Council.
- India has questioned how much longer can the will of five permanent members of the UNSC continue to override the collective voice of the world organisation's 188 member states.
- India also stressed that **equity must be the cornerstone** of global efforts to reform the 15-nation UN body.
 - Equity demands that every nation, irrespective of its size or power, be afforded an equal opportunity to shape global decision-making.
- India highlighted that expanding only in the *non-permanent* category of the Council will not solve the problem.
 - It will in fact widen the difference between permanent and non-permanent members even more, thereby perpetuating inequities instead of removing.

Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN)

• About

- IGN is a series of discussions and negotiations among member states of the United Nations aimed at reforming the structure and functioning of the UNSC.
- The IGN process was initiated to address the perceived need for the expansion of the Security Council's membership to better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness.
- IGN was formally recognized by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 2008 as a platform for member states to engage in discussions and negotiations regarding the reform of the UNSC.
- However, the diplomatic impasse persists in part because member states have never agreed to negotiate on.

• Composition

- The IGN is composed of several different international organisations, namely:
 - The African Union;
 - The G4 nations (India, along with Brazil, Japan and Germany are pressing for a permanent seat in the reformed UNSC);
 - The Uniting for Consensus Group (UfC), also known as the "Coffee Club";
 - The L.69 Group of Developing Countries;
 - The Arab League; and
 - The Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

• Features

- Each group represents a different set of positions vis-a-vis reforming the UNSC.
- The group's conversations are considered "informal" in nature due to the lack of single text, and thus, UNGA rules of procedure do not apply.
- But in 2015, a framework document was agreed when it comes to the reform, which can be the basis for future talks.

New Trade Route To Israel Involving Mundra Port

As Houthis continue to attack Israel-linked ships in the Red Sea, Israeli transport minister recently announced an alternative route for trade, involving the Mundra port in Gujarat.

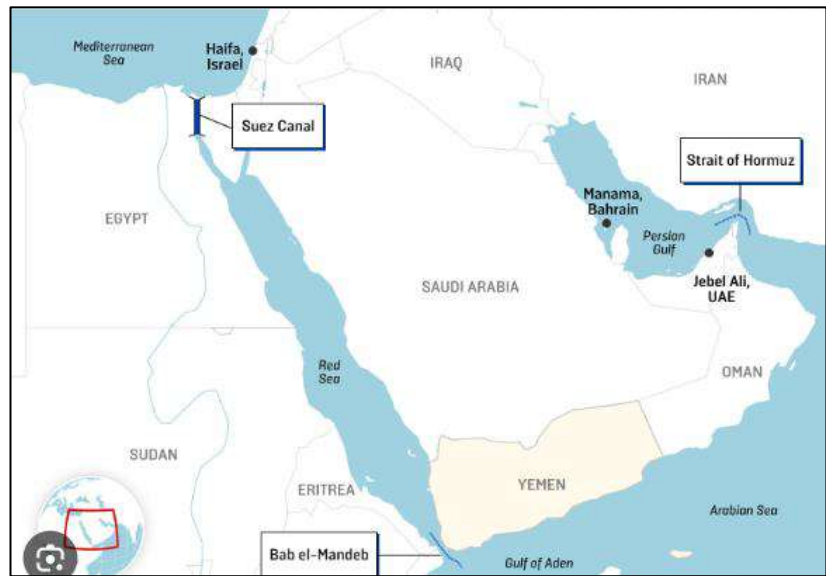
New Route

- Under this, goods would move:
 - from Mundra to ports in the UAE, such as *Dubai's Jebel Ali Port*, by sea, and

- then via land through Saudi Arabia and Jordan to Israel.
 - Land corridor became feasible due to signing of the **Abraham Accords** (aimed at normalising ties between Israel and some Arab states) in 2020.

- A major part of the land transport will be carried out on trucks.
- A similar route might be used in the **India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** too.

- The ambitious project aims to link India to Europe via the Middle East, but its final shape is yet to be decided and the Gaza war has thrown a spanner in its progress.



Benefits, Costs Of The New Route

- The land route will significantly cut travel time and costs for Israel, and will generate revenue for Saudi Arabia and Jordan in terms of transport fee and duties.
- However, trucks can carry far fewer goods than a ship can, and to that extent, trade will be limited.
- Also, the route depends on Israel maintaining friendly ties with the two countries, in a rapidly fluctuating situation in the Middle East.

Red Sea

• About

- Red Sea is narrow strip of water extending south eastward from Suez, Egypt, to Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
- Basically, it is a narrow inland sea between the Arabian Peninsula and Africa.
 - The Red Sea separates the coasts of Egypt, Sudan, and Eritrea from those of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- The Gulf of Aqaba, a northeastern extension of the sea, reaches southern Israel and south-western Jordan.

• Significance for India

- **Freight rates for Indian shipments headed to Europe and Africa could surge as much as 25-30%** if there is disruption along this route.
 - For India, the Red Sea trade route is the shortest trade route for ships moving from Asia to Europe.
 - India is heavily reliant on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait for its crude oil, LNG imports and trade with parts of West Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- This route is vital for 30% of global container traffic.

Nordic-Baltic Cooperation - the NB8

- In this year's Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi, the eight Nordic-Baltic countries participated together as representatives of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation, the NB8.
- **About Nordic-Baltic cooperation**
 - **NB8 (Nordic - Baltic Eight)** is an informal (non-institutionalized) regional co-operation format that includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden.

- In 1992, the regional cooperation format had brought together five Nordic countries and three Baltic countries in order to discuss important regional and international issues in an informal atmosphere.
 - In 2000, it was decided that the Nordic-Baltic cooperation format would be called Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8).
- Nordic countries are members of the European Union (except Iceland and Norway which are members of EFTA).
- Nordic countries collectively represent an economy of more than USD 2.012 trillion with a population of just above 27 million allowing a very high standard of living.
- **India and NB8**
 - The Nordic-Baltic cooperation with India spans fields as diverse as innovation, green transition, maritime, health, intellectual property rights, new technologies, space cooperation and artificial intelligence, student exchanges, culture and tourism.
 - Trade and investment figures between the Nordic region and India are steadily increasing.

Africa Club

- The Africa Club was launched at the 37th African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
 - 37th African Union Summit was held in February 2024.
- It is the Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (which are African owned and controlled). The Africa Club's goals include:
 - Promoting democratic principles and institutions
 - Encouraging popular participation
 - Promoting peace, security, and stability on the continent
 - Accelerating political and socio-economic integration of the continent
- Members of the Africa Club include prominent institutions like:
 - African Export-Import Bank; Trade and Development Bank; Africa Finance Corporation; African Reinsurance Corporation; African Trade and Investment Development Insurance, etc.

High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS)

CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) has successfully tested an unmanned aerial vehicle, called High Altitude Pseudo Satellite (HAPS).

About HAPS

- HAPS are aircraft positioned above 20 km altitude, in the stratosphere, for very-long-duration flights counted in months and even years. These unmanned aircraft may be airplanes, airships or balloons.
- It will be able to rise to 23 km and stay airborne for at least 90 days.
 - During the recent test, the 5-metre-long system, with a wingspan of 11 metres and weighing 23 kg, rose to about 3 km and stayed put for about eight hours.

Benefits/Advantages of HAPS

- These solar-powered vehicles have been designed to plug the missing link between unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) flying in lower altitudes and conventional satellites in space.
- The use of HAPS is considered for a variety of applications such as:
 - telecommunications, emergency/public safety communications, intelligent transportation systems, maritime surveillance,
 - environmental monitoring, land border control applications, etc.
- Compared to ground-based communication networks, HAPS can cover larger areas with less interference.
- They could also help ease data transfer when used as an intermediate conduit between a satellite and ground-based telecom networks.
- Unlike regular satellites that are expensive to build and launch, HAPS cost far less and are easier to launch.

Significance for India

- With a long and complex land border of about 15,000 km and a coastline of about 7,500 km, safeguarding the borders is crucial for India and necessitates varied solutions.
- These aerial platforms are suitable for round-the-clock missions, border patrolling, target tracking, maritime surveillance and navigation, and even missile detection.
- China's state-owned aerospace and defense conglomerate, Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), has been working on varied HAPS platforms for surveillance purposes.
 - In 2018, it successfully tested its solar-powered Morning Star drone which can reportedly stay airborne for months.

DAC Approves Projects To Boost Capabilities Of Armed Forces

- The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has cleared capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 84,560 crore.
- This has been done to boost the capabilities of the Armed Forces and the Indian Coast Guard. These proposals include:
 - 15 maritime reconnaissance and multi-mission maritime aircraft for the Navy and the Coast Guard,
 - Six flight refueller aircraft for the IAF,
 - New generation anti-tank mines for the Army,
 - Heavy weight torpedoes (HWT) for the Navy's Scorpene-class submarines.
- The **DAC approved changes to the DAP 2020** concerning benchmarking, cost computation, payment schedules, procurement quantities, and other aspects.
 - These amendments were approved to promote procurement of advanced technologies from start-ups and MSMEs.
 - The approvals lay special emphasis on procurement of various equipment from Indian vendors.

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- **About:** Headed by **Defence Minister**, DAC is the highest decision-making body in the Ministry of Defence on new policies and capital acquisitions for the Indian military, including the Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Indian Coast Guard.
- **Responsibility**
 - It is responsible for procurement and acquisition of weapons and equipment for the Indian military.
 - The DAC approves projects in three ways:
 - Buy projects: An outright purchase
 - Buy and make projects: A purchase followed by licensed production or indigenous development
 - Make projects: Indigenous production and R&D

Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020

- **About**
 - The DAP 2020 has been established as a potential catalyst for the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan, in the sector of defence manufacturing.
 - It focuses on simplifying the defence acquisition and institutionalising monitoring mechanism for selection of best equipment in a transparent and competitive manner.
- **Salient Features of DAP 2020**
 - Notification of positive indigenisation lists in respect of weapons/platforms to ensure that equipment mentioned in the list is not procured through import.
 - Highest priority to procurement under Buy (Indian-Indigenous Design, Development & Manufacture [IDDM]) category.
 - Reservation for MSMEs and small shipyards for orders up to Rs 100 crore/year.
 - Increased Indigenous Content (IC) in various categories of procurement under DAP-2020.
 - Introduction of new category of **Buy (Global-Manufacture in India)** to give push to 'Make in India' initiative of the Government.
 - Indigenisation of imported spares through Make-III Process introduced with the aim of enhancing self-reliance through import substitution.

About 'Make' Category

- The 'Make' category of capital acquisition seeks to build indigenous capabilities through the involvement of both public and private sector.
- **'Make-I'** refers to government-funded projects while **'Make-II'** covers industry-funded projects.
- **'Make-III'** covers military hardware that may not be designed and developed indigenously, but can be manufactured in the country for import substitution.
- Indian firms may manufacture these in collaboration with foreign partners.

Ensuring Child Safety Online

- In early February, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg provided a public apology to parents whose children were victims of online predators during a Congressional hearing.
- The **Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis** hearing was reportedly called to examine and investigate the plague of online child sexual exploitation.

Issues With Children's Safety Online

- **Challenges**
 - **Exposure to Inappropriate Content:** Children may come across inappropriate content such as violence, pornography, hate speech, etc. while browsing the internet.

- **Online Predators and Grooming:** There is a risk of children encountering online predators who use social media and gaming platforms to establish relationships with children.
 - They can use this relationship to groom them for exploitation or abuse.
- **Cyberbullying** which involves the use of digital technology to harass, intimidate, or humiliate others.
 - This can have serious psychological and emotional consequences for children.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Children may not fully understand the importance of privacy settings and may unknowingly share personal information online.
- **Addictive Behaviour:** Excessive screen time and use of digital devices can lead to addictive behaviour among children.
 - This will affect their mental and physical health, as well as their academic performance and social interactions.
- **Responsibility of tech companies**
 - Vast amounts of data, including about non-verbal behaviour are collected by the tech companies.
 - This allows them to facilitate hyper-personalised profiling, advertising, and increased surveillance, impacting children’s privacy, security, other rights and freedom.
 - Across the world, parents and activists are aggressively advancing the agenda of having the tech companies take responsibility, or provide platforms that are safe by design for children and young users.
- **Reach of generative AI**
 - Generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence technology that can produce various types of content, including text, imagery, audio and synthetic data.
 - It could also be used by bad actors or inadvertently cause harm or society-wide disruptions at the cost of children’s prospects and well-being.
 - Generative AI can quickly make text-based lies that look just like those written by people. These lies can be more convincing than what humans write.
 - AI-generated images are sometimes indistinguishable from reality.
 - Children are vulnerable to the risks of mis/disinformation as their cognitive capacities are still developing.
 - There is also a debate about how interacting with chatbots that have a human-like tone will impact young minds.

What Can Be Done To Keep Children Safe Online?

- **Increased responsibility of tech companies:** The primary responsibility is that of the tech companies who will have to incorporate safety by design.
 - The proceedings of the Congressional hearings have made it obvious that these companies are fully cognisant of the extent to which their apps and systems impact children negatively.
- **UNICEF's Guidance for Child-Friendly AI**
 - **Children's Development and Well-being** - AI should support children's growth and happiness.
 - **Protecting Children's Data and Privacy** - AI should safeguard children's information and privacy.
 - **Highest Data Protection Standards** - Applying the strictest data protection rules to children's data in virtual worlds and metaverse environments.
- **Government Responsibilities for Children's Online Safety**
 - **Regulatory Frameworks Oversight** - Governments must regularly check and change rules to make sure new technologies don't harm children's rights.
 - **Addressing Harmful Content and Behaviour** - Governments should take action against harmful content and behaviours that are bad for children online.
- **Responsibilities of parents**
 - Use an internet security suite

- Use parental controls
- Teach kids about privacy
- Monitor what your kids post online
- Create rules such as which websites they can visit & how long they can spend online.
- Report online abuse

Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has introduced a new medal, Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak, after merging four existing medals. These existing medals were:
 - Union Home Minister’s Special Operation Medal,
 - Union Home Minister’s Medal for Excellence in Investigation,
 - Asadharan Aasuchana Kushalata Padak and
 - Union Home Minister’s Awards for Meritorious Service in Forensic Science.
- The award will be in the form of a medal, styled and designated as the Kendriya Grihmantri Dakshata Padak.

Exercises

Vayu Shakti-2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted Exercise Vayu Shakti-2024 in February 2024 at the Pokhran firing range in Rajasthan. ● The exercise aimed to demonstrate the IAF's full spectrum of operations, including combat and fire capabilities, in a realistic scenario. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ex Vayu Shakti is a triennial exercise, conducted once every three years. ○ The last edition of Vayu Shakti was held in February 2019.
Joint military exercise Sada Tanseeq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The first joint military exercise between the Indian Army and the Royal Saudi Land Force, called Sada Tanseeq, was held at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan.
2024 MILAN exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MILAN 2024, the 12th edition of the Indian Navy's largest naval exercise, was held in February 2024. ● The exercise took place in Visakhapatnam and included the participation of over 50 countries. ● Theme of this year’s exercise was "<i>Camaraderie Cohesion Collaboration</i>". ● During this exercise, the Defence Minister inaugurated NISHAR, a <u>platform created by the Indian Navy for networking and information-sharing</u>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NISHAR allows ships of the friendly navies to share information through the MITRA terminal, which works on plug-and-play architecture.

Army Plans New Corps For Operations Along LAC In Central Sector

- Army plans to set up new corps (called **18 Corps**) for its operations along Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the central sector, stretching 545 kilometers across Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand.
- The Army's Headquarters Uttar Bharat (HQ UB) area will be converted into a full-fledged operational corps, shifting its focus from its *current responsibility of peacetime duties*.
 - The HQ UB area is based in Bareilly.
 - It is currently a static formation looking after peacetime locations and training establishments of Uttarakhand and western Uttar Pradesh, in addition to the LAC running along Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
 - This region is also referred to as the central theatre.

Five More Wetlands To Ramsar List

Five new wetlands (3 in Karnataka and 2 in Tamil Nadu) in India have been added to the Ramsar list reaching total count to 80.

✓ The Ramsar Convention recognizes wetlands of international importance.

1. Aghanashini Estuary (Karnataka)

- It is formed at the confluence of Aghanashini River with the Arabian sea. The brackish water of the Estuary provides diverse ecosystem services including flood and erosion risk mitigation, biodiversity conservation and livelihood support.
- The wetland also provides livelihoods to 6000-7500 families by supporting fishing, agriculture, collection of edible bivalves and crabs, shrimp aquaculture, traditional fish farming in the estuarine rice fields (locally known as Gazni rice fields).
- The mangroves bordering the estuary help to protect the shores against storms and cyclones.

2. Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve (Karnataka) (Also designated as Important Bird Area (IBA))

- It is a man-made reservoir constructed to store rainwater for irrigation purposes, but it has also become a haven for diverse wildlife and a popular birding destination.
- It is home to over 166 species of birds, of which 130 are migratory. The wetland harbors two vulnerable species, namely Common pochard and River tern.
- **Significance:** Important wintering ground for the Bar-headed goose, breeding ground for resident and migratory birds, provides water for irrigation and domestic use.
- The Magadi Kere Conservation Reserve was declared a conservation reserve in 2018

3. Ankasamudra Bird Conservation Reserve (Karnataka)

- It is a humanmade Village Irrigation Tank built centuries back and is the only bird conservation reserve in the dry zone of Northern Karnataka.
- Biodiversity: Over 200 species of birds, including pelicans, cormorants, storks, ducks, herons, egrets, ibises, owls, and raptors.
 - ✓ Over 30'000 waterbirds nest and roost at this wetland, which also supports more than 1% of the biogeographic population of Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis.

4. Karaivetti Bird Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu) - lies in the Central Asian Flyway

- It is one of the largest inland wetlands of Tamil Nadu and is a significant source of groundwater recharge for the area. Water from the wetland is utilized by the villagers for cultivating agricultural crops such as paddy, sugar cane, cotton, corn, and split red gram.
- Habitat: Freshwater lake, wetland, farmlands
- Biodiversity: Over 200 species of birds, including pelicans, storks, herons, ibises, egrets, ducks, owls, and raptors

5. Longwood Shola Reserve Forest (Tamil Nadu)

- It derives its name from the Tamil word, "Solai", which means a 'tropical rain forest'.
- The 'Sholas' are found in the upper reaches of the Nilgiris, Anamalais, Palni hills, Kalakadu, Mundanthurai and Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu.
- These forested wetlands serve as habitats for the globally endangered Black-chinned Nilgiri Laughing thrush, Nilgiri Blue Robin, and vulnerable Nilgiri Wood-pigeon. As many as 14 out of 26 endemic birds' species of the Western Ghats are found in these wetlands.
- Significance: Provides vital water source for Kotagiri and surrounding villages, acts as a natural habitat for diverse wildlife, contributes to maintaining the microclimate of the region.

Extra Mile: Analysis of Ramsar Sites

The Ramsar Convention, established in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran, stands as the sole international treaty dedicated exclusively to the preservation of wetlands. India signed this convention in February 1982.

- Tamil Nadu continues to have the maximum number of Ramsar Sites (16 sites) followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 sites).
- Sundarbans in West Bengal is the largest and Renuka Wetland in Himachal Pradesh is the smallest Ramsar Site of India.
- Chilika Lake in Odisha and Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan were the first sites in India to be designated as Ramsar Sites.

The Montreux Record:

- It is a list of wetland sites on the Ramsar List of wetlands of international importance.
- The list includes sites where ecological changes have occurred, are occurring, or are likely to occur due to human interference, pollution, or technological developments.
- Two wetlands of India are in Montreux record
 1. Keoladeo National Park (Rajasthan) 2. Loktak Lake (Manipur)
 - ✓ Chilika Lake in Odisha was also on the Montreux Record but was removed in 2002. The lake was added to the record in 1993 due to siltation & sedimentation clogging the lake's mouth.

Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

More than 300 vultures were recorded in the recently completed synchronous vulture survey in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR).

About Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR- first biosphere reserve in India established in the year 1986)

- **Physiography & Location:** NBR is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Declared in 2012) located in the Western Ghats & includes 2 of the 10 biogeographical provinces of India. It falls under the biogeographic region of the Malabar rain forest.
 - ✓ Biogeographic zone represents the major species groupings. The country has been divided into ten biogeographic zones. These ten zones each represent a unique combination of historical, climatic, and physical factors.
 - ✓ The Western Ghats zone is divided into two biogeographic provinces namely: – 1) Malabar Plains Area 2) Western Ghats Mountains Area.
- NBR encompasses parts of Tamil Nadu (Highest Area), Kerala and Karnataka. The Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Wyanaad Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Mukurthi National Park and Silent Valley are the protected areas present within this reserve.
- **Vegetation:** The NBR harbors a wide spectrum of ecosystem types such as tropical evergreen forests, Montane sholas and grasslands, semi-evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and thorn forests.
 - ✓ The sholas of the NBR are a treasure house of rare plant species.
- **Flora:** Of the 3,300 Plant species 132 are endemic to the NBR. The genus Baeolepis is exclusively endemic to the Nilgiris. Some of the plants entirely restricted to NBR include species of Adenoon, Calacanthus, Baeolepis, Frerea, Jarodina, Wagatea, Poeciloneuron, etc.
- **Fauna:** Nilgiri tahr, Nilgiri langur, slender loris, blackbuck, tiger, gaur, Indian elephant and marten are some of the animals found here.

Water resources (one of the critical catchment areas of peninsular India)

- Many of the major tributaries of the river Cauvery like the Bhavani, Moyar, Kabini and other rivers like Chaliyar, Punampuzha, etc., have their source and catchment areas within the NBR.

- Many hydroelectric power projects are present in the Kundah, Bhavani and Moyar basins.

The People in NBR (A variety of human cultural diversity)

- Tribal groups like the Todas, Kotas, Kattunayakan, Irullas, Kurumbas, Paniyas, Adiyans, Edanadan Chettis, Cholanaickens, Allar, Malayan, etc., are native to the reserve.
- Except for Cholanaickens who live exclusively on food gathering, hunting and fishing, all the other tribal groups are involved in their traditional occupation of agriculture.
 - ✓ The Oscar-winning documentary *Elephant Whisperers honors the Kattunayakan tribe's conservation legacy.*

Extra Mile: Nilgiri BR & Much more

Neelakurinji

- It is a shrub that is found in the shola forests. Nilgiri Hills (literally means the blue mountains) got their name from the purplish-blue flowers of Neelakurinji that bloom only once in 12 years.
- It blooms in altitudes between 1,600 and 2,695 meters in the Western Ghats and grows abundantly in the shola grassland above 1,800 meters.
- Tamil Nadu's 'Paliyan' tribe used the Neelakurinji flowers to calculate age.
- Neelakurinji is now designated as a protected plant under Schedule III of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, according to the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF).

Siberian Rubythroat

- It is a ground-loving songbird. Its winter migration has been recorded in Nilgiris.
- It primarily breeds in Siberia, while wintering in southern and south-eastern Asia

Nilgiri Elephant Reserve

- This Reserve and adjacent areas host the largest Asian elephant population in India.
- Nilgiris Elephant Corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile Sigur plateau, which connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats.

Seaweed Cultivation

The first National Conference on the Promotion of Seaweed Cultivation was held at Koteshwar, Kutch in Gujarat.

About Seaweed (wonder plants of the sea/ non-flowering algae without root, stem & leaves)

- Seaweeds are macroscopic algae growing in the marine and shallow coastal waters and on rocky shores. They are classified as chlorophyta (green), rhodophyta (red) and phaeophyta (brown) on the basis of their pigmentation.
- Big seaweed creates kelp forests, which are dense underwater forests

About of Seaweed Cultivation (seaweed farming- Crop Duration: 45 - 60 days)

- It is the practice of growing and harvesting seaweed in controlled conditions to produce food, fuel, and other products.
- Seaweed is a renewable resource that grows quickly and does not require freshwater or land. It can also help to improve water quality by absorbing excess nutrients.
- The Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) unfolds an ambitious vision for the seaweed cultivation in the fisheries sector, with a strategic focus, it aims to propel the seaweed industry forward.
- India has a seaweed production potential of 10 million tonnes (targeted to produce 1.1 million tonnes of seaweed by 2025).
- Two main types of seaweed cultivation:

Marine (most common type)

Land-based (Less common than marine type)

Takes place in the ocean, either in open water or in net pens	Takes place in tanks or ponds on land and becoming more popular because it is less susceptible to pests and diseases
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Selection of Site for Seaweed Cultivation:

- CSIR-Central Salt & Marine Chemicals Research Institute (CSMCRI-Under Ministry of Science & Technology), Bhavnagar (Gujarat) would select the area for development of seaweed cultivation.
- CSIR- CSMCRI would be the technology partner, Department of Fisheries of Coastal States would be the Implementing Agency and NFDB (National Fisheries Development Board) would provide financial assistance.

Application of seaweeds

- **Food:** Seaweed is a nutritious food that is high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. It can be eaten fresh, dried, or processed into a variety of products, such as sushi, soups, and snacks.
- **Animal feed:** Seaweed can be used as a feed supplement for animals, such as fish and poultry.
- **Fuel:** Seaweed can be fermented to produce biofuels, such as ethanol and biogas.
- **Chemicals & Fertilizer:** Seaweed can be used as a fertilizer to improve soil fertility. Seaweed has the ability to reduce the effects of ocean acidification.
- **Medical:** Seaweeds are also termed as the 'Medical Food of the 21st Century' as they are being used as laxatives, for making pharmaceutical capsules, in treatment of goiter, cancer, bone-replacement therapy and in cardiovascular surgeries.
- **Binding agent:** It works as an effective binding agent in many commercial items such as toothpaste and fruit jelly and is a popular softener in organic cosmetics and skin care products.

Government initiatives to promote Seaweed Cultivation

- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY - executed by the Department of Fisheries):** This flagship scheme aims to boost fish production and income of fishers and fish farmers. The scheme adopted a “cluster or area-based approach” to create fisheries clusters. The scheme focuses on activities with potential to generate employment such as seaweed and ornamental fish cultivation.
- **Seaweed Mission:** This proposed mission aims to commercialize seaweed farming and processing for value addition. It seeks to increase cultivation along India’s 7,500 kilometers coastline.
- **Multi-Purpose Seaweed Parks:** These parks are being established in coastal districts to create integrated seaweed farming ecosystems. (The first park in Tamil Nadu)
- **Commercialisation of Seaweed Products:** The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)- Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has successfully commercialized two seaweed-based nutraceutical products, CadalminTM Immunalgin extract (CadalminTM IMe) and CadalminTM Antihypercholesterolemic extract (CadalminTM ACe).
 - These products, developed with eco-friendly 'green' technology, aim to boost anti-viral immunity and combat high cholesterol or dyslipidemia (imbalance of cholesterol).

Atmospheric Rivers

The Atmospheric Rivers have brought massive rainfall to certain parts of US (California) recently.

About Atmospheric Rivers (tropical or moisture plumes/water vapor surges/cloud bands.)

- They are long, narrow regions in the atmosphere (like rivers in the sky) that transport massive amounts of moisture (comparable to the flow of the Amazon River).
- They are essentially corridors of concentrated water vapor moving across the sky, often stretching thousands of miles in length & hundreds of miles wide (particularly over the Pacific Ocean).
- When the atmospheric rivers make landfall, they often release this water vapor in the form of rain or snow. On average, the Earth has four to five active atmospheric rivers at any time.

Examples of Atmospheric Rivers:

- A well-known and strong one is the Pineapple Express, with moisture transported from the tropical Pacific around Hawaii to the US and Canadian West Coasts.
- The eastern half of the US also experiences atmospheric rivers, with moisture pulled from the Gulf of Mexico. Western Europe and North Africa also experience frequent atmospheric rivers, as do New Zealand and Australia.

Formation

- As the world warms (More impact of Climate Change), the atmosphere can hold more moisture which will lead to rainier atmospheric river events.
- Atmospheric rivers form over the warm tropical oceans, where the sun's heat evaporates large amounts of water vapor into the atmosphere. This moist air rises and cools, forming clouds.
- The Coriolis force, caused by the Earth's rotation, then deflects this air mass, often poleward, creating long, narrow bands of concentrated moisture known as atmospheric rivers.

Positive And Adverse Impacts

- Atmospheric rivers are responsible for 90 percent of the movement of moisture from the tropics toward the poles. This means they are a major factor in the formation of clouds and therefore have a significant influence on air temperatures, sea ice, and other components of the climate.
- **Heavy rain:** Atmospheric rivers can cause intense rainfall, leading to flooding, landslides etc.
- **Snowfall:** In colder regions, atmospheric rivers can bring heavy snowfall, which can be beneficial for water supplies but can also disrupt transportation and infrastructure.
- **Strong winds:** Atmospheric rivers can also be accompanied by strong winds, which can cause damage to trees, power lines, and buildings.

Brumation

Researchers have observed instances of brumation in various reptilian species across habitats.

About Brumation

- It is a state of reduced activity and physiological slowdown experienced by certain reptiles during colder months. (Similar to hibernation in mammals).
 - ✓ While both brumation and hibernation involve a reduction in metabolic activity, they are distinct adaptations specific to the physiological and behavioral characteristics of the respective animal groups.
- **Purpose:** Brumation is a survival strategy that helps reptiles conserve energy during periods of environmental stress, such as cold temperatures or reduced food availability.
- **Trigger:** The trigger for brumation is often a decrease in environmental temperature and the corresponding decrease in daylight hours. These environmental cues signal to the reptile that it's time to enter a state of reduced metabolic activity.
- **Physiological Changes:** During brumation, reptiles undergo physiological changes to slow down their metabolism. This includes a decrease in heart rate, respiratory rate, and overall activity.
- **Duration and Patterns:** Brumation patterns can also vary within a species based on geographical location and local climate conditions. Some reptiles may enter a short brumation period, while others may remain dormant for several months.
- **Commonly Brumating Species:** Brumation is observed in various reptiles (Primarily ectothermic (cold-blooded)), including snakes, turtles, and some lizards. For example, certain snake species may seek refuge in underground burrows or other sheltered locations during the winter months.

- **Emergence and Post-Brumation Behavior:** When environmental conditions become more favorable, such as warmer temperatures and increased daylight, reptiles emerge from brumation. They gradually resume normal activities, including feeding and reproduction.

Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)

NITI Aayog has unveiled the GROW report and portal.

About the GROW

Objectives

- **Restore degraded land:** Aims to revitalize 26 million hectares of barren land by 2030, contributing to India's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) commitment.
- **Promote agroforestry & improve rural livelihoods:** Encourage integration of trees and shrubs alongside crops and livestock on farms, enhancing environmental and economic benefits.
- **Create carbon sink:** Foster a new carbon sink capable of sequestering 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, mitigating climate change impact.

Key Features (Multi-institutional collaboration= Government + Private + NGOs)

- **Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI):** Developed a robust index using remote sensing and GIS technologies to map the suitability of different agroforestry practices across all Indian districts.
- **Generating Live Maps:** Generates area prioritization regime i.e highly suitable area, moderate and less suitable for agroforestry & generates live maps.
- **GROW-Suitability Mapping Portal:** Accessible platform showcasing state and district-level agroforestry suitability data, empowering stakeholders to make informed decisions.

Gupteshwar Forest

Odisha government has declared Gupteshwar Forest as the fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) of the state.

✓ Mandasaru, Mahendra Giri and Gandhamardan were previously declared as BHS.

How is BHS selected?

- Under Section-37 of Biological Diversity Act, 2002 the State Government in consultation with local bodies may notify areas of biodiversity importance as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS).
- They are well-defined areas that are unique, ecologically fragile ecosystems with a high diversity of wild and domesticated species, the presence of rare and threatened species, and keystone species.

Terai Arc Landscape

Nepal's Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) initiative receives global recognition from the U.N. as one of seven World Restoration Flagships.

About Terai Arc Landscape (Launched in 2001)

- TAL is an 810 km stretch between the river Yamuna in the west and the river Bhagmati in the east, comprising the Shivalik hills, the adjoining bhabhar areas and the Terai flood plains.
- It is spread across the Indian states of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and the low-lying hills of Nepal. In total, the landscape has 13 Protected Areas, nine in India and four in Nepal.
- **Objectives:** Conserving critical habitats; Connecting fragmented landscapes; Engaging local communities and promoting transboundary cooperation.

- The landscape boasts of some of India's most well-known Tiger Reserves and Protected Areas such as Corbett Tiger Reserve, Rajaji National Park, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, Valmiki Tiger Reserve.
- These forests are home to three flagship species, 1) the Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*), 2) the greater one horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) and 3) the Asian elephant.

UN World Restoration Flagships

- The United Nations has recognized seven initiatives from regions spanning Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean, and Southeast Asia as World Restoration Flagships.
- Global initiative launched in 2021 by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and led by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
- It aims to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean.
- Seven World Restoration Flagships:

➤ The Restoring Mediterranean Forests Initiative	➤ The Living Indus initiative
➤ The Acción Andina Social Movement	➤ Sri Lanka Mangrove Regeneration Initiative
➤ Regreening Africa's Agriculture	➤ Growing Forests in Africa's Drylands Initiative
➤ Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) Initiative	

Thrips Parvispinus

Thrips Parvispinus, an invasive pest species, which have dominated or even replaced the native chilli thrips.

Background

- The change in weather and climatic conditions during the crop season might have favoured the establishment of thrips parvispinus, resulting in a sudden upsurge in the chilli ecosystem.
- As per a study, 40 to 80 per cent of the damage to chilli crop in Andhra Pradesh & Telangana is due to thrips. 2015 saw the first mention of this species in India, on papaya from Bengaluru.
- It has also been reported from Thailand, Australia and Europe.
 - ✓ Thrips are an important group of sucking pests which cause significant economic losses both as pests and vectors of serious plant viruses in several horticultural crops.

About Thrips Parvispinus

- Also known as the South-East Asian thrips, is a tiny insect pest that is native to Southeast Asia but has spread to many other parts of the world, including Europe, North America, and Africa.
- It is a polyphagous pest, meaning that it can feed on a wide variety of plants, including vegetables, fruits, ornamentals, and even weeds.

Steinernema Adamsi

Scientists have discovered a new species of nematode, called Steinernema adamsi.

About

- This tiny warrior, barely visible to the naked eye (around 0.5mm long and half the width of a human hair) holds the potential to revolutionize pest control in warm, humid climates.

Characteristics & Benefits:

- It thrives in warm, humid conditions where other beneficial nematodes struggle. It offers a safe and environmentally friendly alternative to chemical pesticides which can help farmers reduce reliance on harmful chemicals and protect human health.
- Kills insects by entering their bodies and releasing bacteria that are fatal to the host and effective against a wide range of insect pests, including beetles, weevils, and moths.

Nematodes (Most species are free-living and feed on microorganisms, but many are parasitic.)

- Also known as roundworms. They are a diverse group of unsegmented, bilaterally symmetrical, worm-like creatures belonging to the phylum Nematoda.
- They are abundant, representing the most common multicellular organisms on earth, found in nearly every habitat from the deepest ocean trenches to the highest mountain peaks.

Trichoglossum Syamviswanathii

Researchers recently discovered a new fungus species in Kerala named *Trichoglossum syamviswanathii*.

About it (Commonly known as “hairy earth tongues”)

- It is a Saprobic fungus, meaning it decomposes dead organic matter.
- **Significance:** It increases our understanding of fungal diversity in India, particularly in the Western Ghats region. Its role in decomposition highlights the importance of fungi in nutrient cycling and ecosystem health.

Characteristics:

- **Color & Shape:** Dark brown to black; Club-shaped with a smooth, hairless cap.
- **Size:** Cap diameter of 2-3 mm, stipe length of 10-15 mm
- **Habitat:** Grows on decaying wood in tropical forests.

Broom Grass

Tribal people from Karbi Anglong and Assam are carrying broom grass now during the harvest season of the cash crop that will continue till the end of February.

✓ Karbi Anglong in Assam is the largest producer of brooms in India.

About Broom grass (Also known as *Andropogon glomerates*/Jharu)

- Broom grass is a tall, clump-forming perennial grass native to Asia, Africa, and Europe. It is a wind-pollinated plant, and its seeds are easily dispersed by the wind.
- It is a perennial, high value, non-perishable, nontimber forest product (NTFP) that grows abundantly in degraded, steep or marginal land.
- **Botanical Characteristics:** It can grow up to 3 meters tall and has long, narrow leaves that are up to 1 meter long. The flowers are arranged in a spike-like inflorescence at the top of the stem. It is a tough & adaptable plant that can grow in a variety of conditions, including poor soil & dry climates.
- **Types:** Big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass, Switchgrass

Cultural and Economic Significance

- **Traditional Usage:** The grass is valued for its long, sturdy stems, which make it suitable for crafting traditional brooms or brushes. It can also be used as a source of biofuel and animal feed.
- **Broom Production:** Rural communities often engage in the harvesting and processing of broom grass to create brooms or broomsticks for local use.
- **Sustainability:** The use of broom grass for broom-making contributes to a sustainable and eco-friendly practice, utilizing a locally available resource and often used for erosion control.
- Its non-perishable nature makes broom grass a suitable cash crop establishing high market demands. It can regenerate quickly, even in degraded land & doesn't require much maintenance.

Central Asian Flyway

The UN convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of wild animals (CMS) has endorsed India's proposal for the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) and has approved the inclusion of 14 more migratory species from various regions worldwide in the CMS appendices for conservation.

✓ The first-ever, *State of the World's Migratory Species report* was launched at CMS COP14.

What is a Flyway? It is a geographical region within which a single or a group of migratory species completes its annual cycle – breeding, moulting, staging and non-breeding.

About COP 14 of CMS (held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, in February 2024)





- It was the first UN wildlife meeting in Central Asia.
- The CMS holds a Conference of the Parties (COP) every three years, where the member states review progress and adopt new measures for the conservation of migratory species.
- The adopted initiative (inclusion of 14 more migratory species) includes the establishment of a coordinating unit in India with financial support from the Indian Government.







{For more details on Central Asian Flyway, kindly refer May 2023 Recitals/Page No. 100}

Findings of State of the World’s Migratory Species report

- More than one-in-five (22 per cent) of CMS-listed species are threatened with extinction.
- Nearly all (97 per cent) of CMS-listed fish are threatened with extinction.
- The extinction risk is growing for migratory species globally, including those not listed under CMS. Half (51 per cent) of Key Biodiversity Areas identified as important for CMS-listed migratory animals do not have protected status

Other Species In News

<p>Alpine Ibexes (IUCN: Least Concern)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warmer temperatures caused by climate change are changing the lifestyles of mountain goats (Alpine Ibexes) in the European Alps, according to research. • Alpine ibexes (Capra ibex), a mountain goat species, are forced to change their diurnal habits to nocturnal to avoid hot days. • This lifestyle shift is making them vulnerable to predators such as wolves, hindering their movement and may lead to eventual population decline. • Habitat and adaptations: Learn about the high-altitude homes of Alpine ibexes, their incredible climbing skills, and the special features that help them thrive in such a harsh environment.
<p>White rhinoceros</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientists in Berlin announced the first successful embryo transfer in a white rhinoceros using a method that offers hope for saving the critically endangered northern white rhino subspecies from extinction. • IUCN status: Northern White Rhino: Critically Endangered • The Indian rhinoceros is different from its African counterparts with respect to possessing only one horn and is vulnerable in the IUCN Red list.
<p>Melanistic Tiger</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Odisha Govt announced to establish a melanistic tiger safari — a first of its kind in the world. The safari will be established near Baripada in Mayurbhanj. • IUCN status: Endangered • The abnormally dark or black coat in such tigers is termed pseudomelanistic or false coloured. • Simlipal has the world’s highest rate of black tiger sightings in the world
<p>Laughing Gull</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laughing gull from North America spotted at Chittari estuary in Kasaragod, first time in India. • Conservation status: Least concern • Habitat: Salt marshes, coastal bays, piers, beaches, ocean. Generally found only in coastal regions, but also ranging several miles inland to rivers, fields, dumps.

<p>Snow Leopard</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government of India have recently launched Status Report of Snow Leopards in India, India's first nationwide report. • The report emphasised the need for a dedicated Snow Leopard Cell at the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). • Habitat: Cold High Mountains. • IUCN: Vulnerable. Schedule I: Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
<p>Dusted Apollo</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dusted Apollo, a rare high-altitude butterfly has been sighted and photographed for the first time in Himachal, indicating the flourishing diversity of Apollo butterflies in the region. • The Dusted Apollo has a wingspan of 50-60 mm and white wings with black borders and markings. Its body is black with white markings, and its antennae are orange-tipped. • The most distinguishing feature is the dusting of brown scales on its forewings, which gives it its unique appearance. • This butterfly is found in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, between 3,500 and 4,800 meters above sea level. It is particularly common in Ladakh, India, and Nepal.
<p>Black Necked Crane</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wildlife Institute of India and the Zoological Survey of India have been carrying out assessment of the black-necked cranes. • Listed in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Appendix I of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora and the Convention on conservation of Migratory Species. • Important habitats of Black-necked Crane have been notified as a Protected Areas, for example, Changthang Sanctuary, Ladakh.
<p>Indian Gray Wolf</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indian grey wolf was spotted in the confines of the National Chambal Sanctuary(Uttar Pradesh) • IUCN: Least Concern, Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972: Schedule I, CITES: Appendix 1 • Habitat: Scrub, grasslands and semi-arid pastoral agro-ecosystems • Wide distribution range that extends from the Indian subcontinent to Israel.
<p>Spur-winged lapwing</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birdwatching community from Telangana have spotted a spur-winged lapwing at Ammavaripet Lake near Warangal • IUCN Status: Least Concern • Habitat is found around wetlands, but also away from water in cultivated areas. Its native to North Africa, the Middle East and Mediterranean regions.
<p>Cuscuta dodder (love vine)</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuscuta dodder an Invasive weed, native to North America, is slowly threatening the Chengalpet forests and Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary in Chennai. • They are leafless, yellow, orange, or red thread-like twining stems that have no chlorophyll and therefore cannot photosynthesize. • They obtain their nutrients by attaching themselves to other plants using <i>haustoria</i>, which are specialized root-like structures that penetrate the host plant's stem and tap into its vascular system. • There are over 200 species of dodder found worldwide, and they can parasitize a wide variety of plants, including crops, ornamentals, and native plants.

PM Modi Announces 4 Astronauts For Gaganyaan

PM Modi announced the names of the four astronauts, who would fly to low-Earth orbit as part of the ISRO's Gaganyaan — the first crewed Indian space mission.

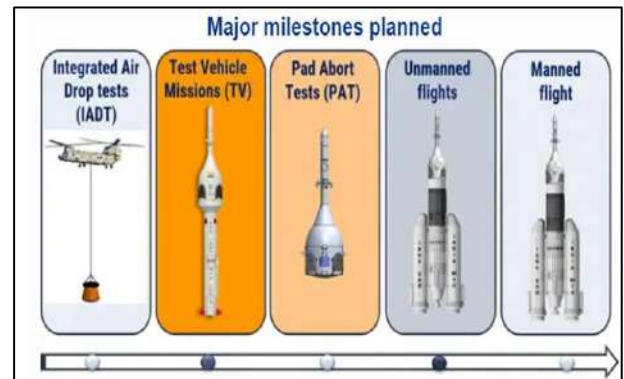
- The selected astronauts are:
 - Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Angad Prathap, Ajit Krishnan, and Shubanshu Shukla.
 - They are all either wing commanders or group captains with the Indian Air Force (IAF) and have extensive experience working as test pilots.

Gaganyaan

- Gaganyaan project envisages **demonstration of human spaceflight capability** by launching a **crew of 3 members to an orbit of 400 km** for a 3 days mission and bring them back safely to earth.
 - It is part of the **Indian Human Spaceflight Programme (IHSP)**, which was initiated (2007) by the ISRO to develop the technology needed to launch crewed orbital spacecraft into low earth orbit (LEO).
- **Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3/GSLV Mk3) rocket.**
 - **India's heaviest rocket** consists of solid stage, liquid stage and cryogenic stage.
- All systems in the LVM3 launch vehicle are re-configured to meet human rating requirements and christened **Human Rated LVM3/HLVM3**.

Current Status Of Gaganyaan Missions

- The Gaganyaan missions include both manned and unmanned missions.
- The first unmanned Gaganyaan-1 mission, a test flight to check the technology readiness for the final mission, is scheduled to take off by the end of 2024.
- The manned mission, which will fly a three-membered crew into a low earth orbit at an altitude of 400 km for a period of three days, is scheduled later.
- **Development of crew module and crew escape system**
 - ISRO is also developing technology for the proposed human-space flight mission.
 - These include:
 - the development of life support systems to provide an earth-like environment to the crew in space,
 - crew emergency escape provision, and
 - evolving crew management aspects for training, recovery, and rehabilitation of crew.
 - In October 2023, the space agency successfully conducted the first test of a basic crew module and crew escape system (CES).
 - CES is a part of the module that ensures “the crew is taken to a safe distance in case of any emergency either at launch pad or during ascent phase.
 - The next month, the space agency began to experiment with a crew module uprighting system.
 - This system is used to ensure that the crew module, making a splashdown in the sea after a space mission, stays upright and does not get inverted in the water.
- **Training of astronauts:** The four selected astronauts have completed their generic training at Russia's Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre.
 - Their training took place after ISRO-Glavkosmos (a subsidiary of Russian space agency Roscosmos) signed an MOU in June 2019.



- The astronauts are currently undergoing training at ISRO's astronaut training facility in Bengaluru. One of the four astronauts is also expected to be trained by the American space agency NASA.

CERN Scientists Carry Out Laser Cooling Of Positronium

- In a major scientific breakthrough, an international team of researchers has successfully demonstrated laser cooling of Positronium for the first time.
- The results show that the researchers were able to cool Positronium atoms from about 380 Kelvin to 170 Kelvin using a specialised laser system.
- The breakthrough experiment was carried out by the Antihydrogen Experiment: Gravity, Interferometry, Spectroscopy (AEGIS) collaboration at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN).

Antihydrogen Experiment: Gravity, Interferometry, Spectroscopy (AEGIS)

● About

- AEGIS is an experiment at CERN that studies the effects of gravity on antimatter.
- The experiment's primary goal is to directly measure the gravitational acceleration of Earth on **antihydrogen**.
 - Antihydrogen is the antimatter counterpart to hydrogen.
 - A hydrogen atom is made up of a positively charged proton and a negatively charged electron.
 - An antihydrogen atom is made up of a negatively charged antiproton and a positively charged positron.
- It is a collaboration between physicists from Europe and India.
- The experiment is designed to help explain the matter-antimatter asymmetry in the visible universe.
 - Antimatter is stable as long as it doesn't come into contact with matter.
 - However, it only lasts a fraction of a second on Earth without special precautions.

● **Location:** The experiment is located at the Antiproton Decelerator facility at CERN.

● **Achievement:** In 2018, AEGIS became the first in the world to demonstrate the pulsed production of antihydrogen atoms.

Positronium

- Positronium, comprising a bound electron (e-) and positron (e+), is a fundamental atomic system.
 - The matter, which forms the world around us, consists of atoms, the simplest of which is hydrogen.
 - This is made up of a positively-charged proton and a negatively-charged electron.
 - Positronium, on the other hand, consists of an electron and its antimatter equivalent, a positron.
 - It was first detected by scientists in the US in 1951.
- Due to its very short life, it annihilates with a half-life of 142 nano-seconds.
- Its mass is **twice the electron mass** and enjoys the unique distinction of being a pure leptonic atom.
- This hydrogen-like system, with halved frequencies for excitation, makes it a great contender for attempting laser cooling and thereby performing tests of fundamental theories in physics.
 - Cooling the Positronium slows the atoms down, making it easier for scientists to study.

Western Equine Encephalitis

Recently, Outbreak of Western Equine Encephalitis Virus occurred in horses in Argentina and Uruguay.

About Western Equine Encephalitis

Caused by	An alphavirus: Western Equine Encephalitis virus (WEEV)
Transmission	By mosquitos' bites primarily of the Culex tarsalis and Aedes species
Affects	To Horse (occasionally in humans, but it can be severe)
Symptoms	Fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, seizures, coma, and potentially death.

Diagnosis	Blood tests, Spinal tap (lumbar puncture) to examine cerebrospinal fluid.
Prevention	Use mosquito repellent containing DEET (N, N-Diethyl-meta-toluamide), Eliminate mosquito breeding sites etc.

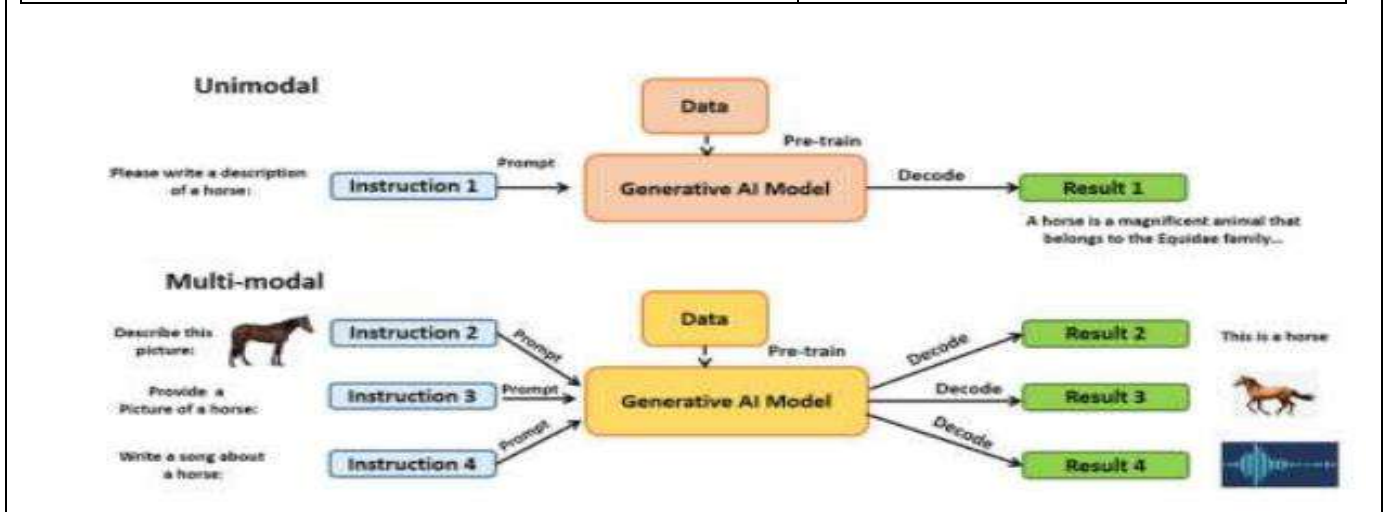
Large Multi-Modal Models (LMM) In Healthcare

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released comprehensive guidance on the ethical use and governance of large multi-modal models (LMM) in healthcare.

About Large Multi-Modal Models (LMMs)

- **Integration of Modalities:** LMMs are a type of artificial intelligence (AI) that can process and understand information (deep learning models) from various sources, including text, images, audio, and video.
- This ability makes them particularly promising for healthcare, where data often comes in diverse formats like medical images, electronic health records (EHRs), and patient narratives.
- Examples of LLM-guided Multimodal Model: OpenFlamingo, MiniGPT-4, Otter, InstructBLIP, BLIVA

Advantages	Challenges
<p>1) Analyzing complex medical data: Like radiology images, genetic information & patient history to identify patterns.</p> <p>2) Personalized & Precision medicine: By considering patient's medical history, genetic makeup.</p> <p>3) Accessibility and affordability: Ensuring equitable access to LMM-powered healthcare technologies for all.</p>	<p>1) Ensuring Data privacy and security: sensitive medical data is crucial when using LMMs.</p> <p>2) Bias and fairness: LMMs can perpetuate biases present in the data they are trained on.</p>



Telepathy: Neuralink Implants

Elon Musk's startup Neuralink has implanted its wireless brain chip (called **Telepathy**) in a human for the first time.

Potential Applications of Neuralink's Telepathy

- **Medical:** Restoring lost function in people with paralysis or spinal cord injuries. Treating neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease and epilepsy. Monitoring brain activity for early detection of diseases.
- **Sensory augmentation:** Enhancing vision or hearing for people with sensory impairments. Controlling prosthetic limbs with thought.
 - ✓ In Switzerland the case of a man paralyzed waist down being able to walk again with the help of a brain-spine interface was used to convert the signals from the brain to stimulation for the spine allowing the person to walk.

- **Communication:** Sending and receiving information directly between the brain and computers. Facilitating communication for people with speech or language difficulties.
 - ✓ Neuralink has conducted numerous in-depth experiments on animals. In these experiments, monkeys demonstrated mental abilities through computer games.

About Neuralink (founded by Elon Musk in 2016)



- Neuralink is a tech startup for a brain-computer interface (BCI), and their proprietary chip is a surgically implantable device.
- BCI is a fascinating and rapidly evolving field of technology that aims to create a direct communication pathway between the *brain and external devices* (such as computers or prostheses) without utilizing conventional neuromuscular channels like nerves and muscles.



About Telepathy

- Telepathy is wireless brain chip that is surgically implanted in the skull with ultra-thin wires connecting to the brain.
- It can record a massive amount of data from individual neurons and transmit it to a computer to execute a certain task.

Challenges to Neuralink's Telepathy

- Safety, Privacy and security: The long-term safety and risks associated with implanting a device in the brain are still unknown.
- Ethical implications: The potential impacts of this technology on human identity, free will, and decision-making raise ethical questions.
- Neurosecurity: There is a chance that a person's thoughts or actions could be unintentionally controlled or managed by BCIs.

Zodiacal Light

The Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) in Ahmedabad has observed the origin of interplanetary dust responsible for zodiacal light, focusing on Mars' moons, Deimos and Phobos.

About Zodiacal Light

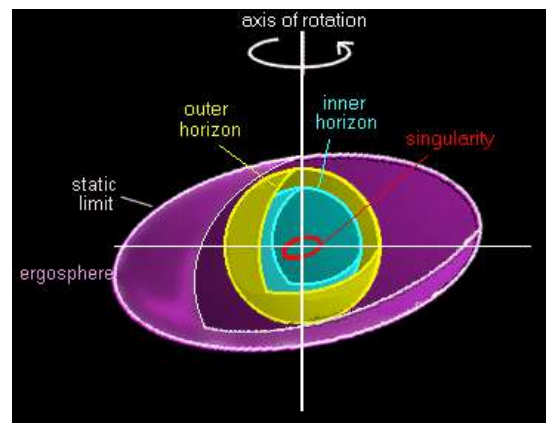
- Zodiacal light is a faint, diffuse glow of sunlight scattered by interplanetary dust particles in the solar system. It is most visible just after sunset or before sunrise when the Sun is below the horizon, and the sky is dark enough to observe this faint illumination.
 - ✓ The name "zodiacal light" comes from its location along the zodiac, which is the band of the sky through which the Sun, Moon, and planets move (It is not exclusive to any particular zodiacal constellation).
- **Origin:** Zodiacal light is produced by sunlight scattered by tiny dust particles that are distributed in the plane of the solar system. These particles are thought to be remnants of comets and asteroids.
- **Visibility:** It is most easily seen on clear, moonless nights in areas with low light pollution. The faintness of the zodiacal light makes it difficult to photograph, but it can be seen with the naked eye under the right conditions.
- **Study and Exploration:** Space missions, such as the European Space Agency's IRAS (Infrared Astronomical Satellite) and NASA's COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer), have contributed valuable data on the infrared emission associated with zodiacal dust.

Kerr Black Hole

Researchers at University of California & Cambridge recently carried out a theoretical study focusing on a class of black holes known as Kerr black holes.

About Kerr black hole (Rotating Black Hole)

- A Kerr black hole is theoretically predicted black hole that rotates at a constant rate, using the theory of massive high-spin particles, named after New Zealand mathematician Roy Kerr, who discovered the exact solution for its existence in 1963.
- Unlike a non-rotating black hole, which has a single spherical event horizon, a Kerr black hole has **two event horizons**: 1. Inner event horizon 2. Outer event horizon
- It also has two other interesting regions:
 1. **Ergosphere**: A region outside the event horizon where the rotation of spacetime is strong enough to drag along objects, including light.
 2. **Ring singularity**: This is the theoretical point of infinite density at the center of the black hole where all the matter that has fallen in is crushed.



Difference between Rotating & Non-rotating black hole (primary parameter is angular momentum)

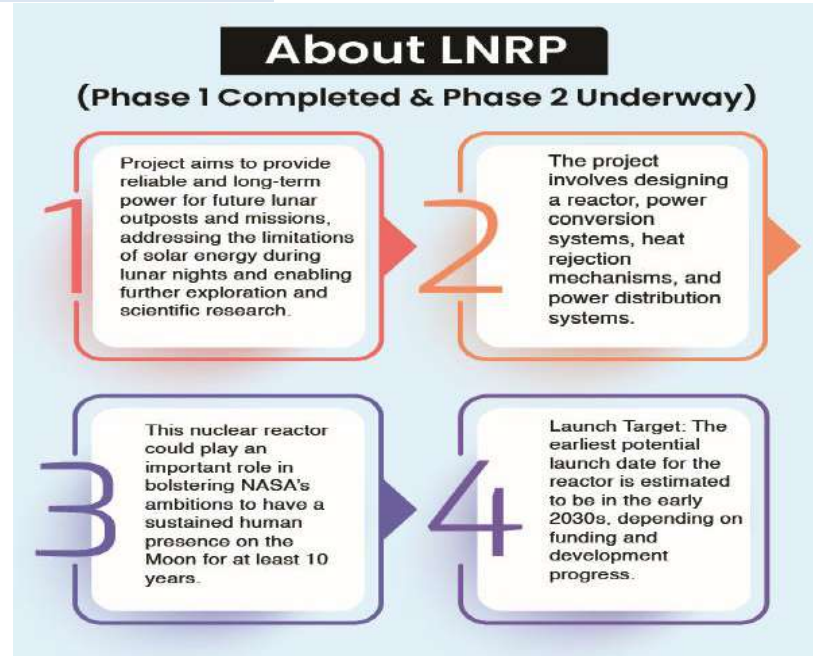
	Rotating (Kerr) black holes	Non-rotating (Schwarzschild) black holes
Angular Momentum	Have angular momentum due to their rotation.	Do not have angular momentum.
Event Horizon Shape	This rotation causes the black hole's event horizon to be oblate or flattened at the poles	They are spherically symmetric, and their event horizon is a perfect sphere .
Ergosphere	Have an ergosphere,	Do not have an ergosphere.
Type of Singularity	At the center of a Kerr black hole is a ring-shaped singularity rather than a point. This is a consequence of the black hole's rotation.	The singularity at the center of a Schwarzschild black hole is a point singularity .
Frame-Dragging	Exhibit frame-dragging, where the rotating spacetime "drags" nearby objects along with it.	Do not exhibit frame-dragging

Lunar Nuclear Reactor Project (LNRP)

NASA recently announced that it is finishing the initial phase of its ambitious plan to build a small electricity-generating nuclear reactor on the Moon.

Implications of Project

- **Sustainable Lunar Exploration:** By providing a reliable and independent power source, the reactor can enable longer-duration missions, support permanent lunar bases, and power scientific instruments for extended periods.
- **Resource Utilization:** The project could pave the way for in-situ resource utilization (ISRU) on the Moon, extracting usable materials like ice water and using them for fuel or construction.
 - ✓ A nuclear reactor could be placed in permanently shadowed areas (where there may be water ice) or generate power continuously during lunar nights, which are 14-and-a-half Earth days long.
- **Gateway to Mars:** The technology developed for the lunar reactor could be adapted for future missions to Mars, providing crucial power for establishing a human presence on the red planet.
- **International Collaboration:** The project has the potential to foster international collaboration in space exploration, with other countries potentially joining the effort or benefiting from its advancements.



Organoid Neural Network

Scientists have fused brain-like tissue with electronics to make an 'organoid neural network' that can recognize voices and solve a complex mathematical problem.

About Neural Networks

- Neural networks are a class of machine learning models inspired by the structure and functioning of the human brain. They are composed of interconnected nodes, also known as neurons, organized into layers.
- These networks can learn from data, generalize patterns, and make predictions or decisions without being explicitly programmed for a particular task.
- **Deep Learning:** Neural networks with many hidden layers are referred to as deep neural networks. Deep learning involves training these deep architectures to learn complex representations and features from data.
- Used in diverse applications, including image recognition, language processing, and robotics.

What are Organoids?

- They are Miniature, 3D structures grown from stem cells (Cultivated in the lab under controlled conditions) that resemble specific organs, in this case, the brain.
- These Organoids Mimic the structure and function of certain brain regions to some extent.

About Organoid Neural Network (ONNs)

- ONNs integrate organoids with neural network technology. By interfacing brain organoids with microelectrode arrays (MEAs), researchers can record and stimulate their electrical activity.
- This electrical activity is then used to create a computational model of the organoid's neural network. This model can then be used for further experimentation and AI development.

- This invention extends neuromorphic computing – the practice of modelling computers after the human brain – to a new level by directly including brain tissue in a computer.

Applications	Challenges
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding brain function: ONNs offer a more realistic and dynamic model of brain activity compared to traditional cell cultures. Drug discovery: Testing drugs on ONNs could provide a predictive model for their effects on the human brain. Neuromorphic AI: Developing AI systems that function closer to the principles of the brain could lead to more efficient and flexible technologies. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complexity: Organoids are still simplified models and don't fully capture the full complexity of the brain. Scalability: Scaling up ONNs to mimic larger brain regions and functionalities remains a challenge.

GRAPES 3 Experiment

The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research's GRAPES-3 experiment (in Ooty, India) has identified a novel characteristic in the cosmic-ray proton spectrum.

About GRAPES 3 (Gamma Ray Astronomy PeV Energies phase-3 experiment)

GRAPES 3 is a Muon telescope facility to study cosmic rays. It also investigates phenomena like solar modulations and geomagnetic effects on cosmic ray intensity.

Objective: To investigate cosmic rays (Understand the origin, acceleration, and propagation) in the PeV (Peta-electron Volt) energy range, which corresponds to extremely high-energy particles.

About Cosmic Rays

- ✓ Cosmic rays are high-energy charged particles (move through space at nearly the speed of light), primarily protons and atomic nuclei, that originate from various sources in the universe.
- ✓ They constantly bombard Earth's atmosphere from outer space producing particle showers. (The term "cosmic rays" is a bit misleading, as they are not rays but rather fast-moving particles).
- ✓ The shower particles constitute electrons, photons, muons, protons, neutrons etc.

Components:

- **Scintillator array:** 400 plastic scintillator detectors covering an area of approximately 50,000 square meters. These detectors record the charged particles produced when a cosmic ray interacts with the atmosphere.
- **Muon detector:** Large area (560 m²) tracking muon detector to identify muons, secondary particles produced in cosmic ray interactions, and study their properties.

Extra Mile: Muon Particle & its importance

Muons are elementary particles, meaning they are not composed of smaller constituents.

- Mass and Charge**

Muons have a mass of approximately 207 times that of an electron.
- Lifetime**

The average lifetime of a free muon at rest is about 2.2 microseconds.
- Generation and Interaction**

Muons are produced in various high-energy processes, such as the decay of ions in cosmic ray interactions with the Earth's atmosphere or in particle accelerators.
- Cosmic Ray Detection**

Muons are frequently used in the study of cosmic rays. When cosmic rays, which consist of high-energy particles from space, interact with the Earth's atmosphere, they produce showers of secondary particles, including muons.
- Muon detectors**

are used to study the properties and characteristics of these cosmic ray showers.
- Applications**

Muons are used in muon tomography, a technique that uses muons to create images of the interior of dense objects, such as volcanoes or archaeological structures.

Findings so far

- Discovered a new feature in the cosmic-ray proton spectrum at around 166 TeV energy, suggesting a deviation from a single power-law spectrum and offering valuable insights into acceleration mechanisms.
- Observed acceleration of muons during thunderstorm conditions (In 2014), potentially providing new avenues for studying cosmic ray acceleration in Earth's atmosphere.

Anusandhan National Research Foundation

The Parliament passed "Anusandhan National Research Foundation" (ANRF) Act 2023 which aims at equitable funding and democratization of resources in research and academics.

Brief About Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023

- This Act provides for the establishment of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (NRF).
- It also repealed the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB) established by an act of Parliament in 2008 and subsumed it into NRF.

About ANRF (Set up in 2023 & Operationalized by the Department of Science & Tech (DST))

- It aims to be the apex body for R&D (research and development) in the country, providing strategic direction and funding for research initiatives across various disciplines.
- It was set up in accordance with the recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP).
- NRF will promote the culture of research and innovation throughout India's universities, colleges, research institutions and R&D laboratories and give further impetus to Clean Energy research in India and Mission Innovation.
- PM of India will be the Chairman of the Executive Council of ANRF. The Central Govt has appointed Secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DST) as the interim Chief Executive Officer of ANRF.
- **Functions:** To provide funding for research projects through grants, fellowships, and other instruments, to establish and manage research facilities and infrastructure, to promote collaboration between researchers in India and abroad, to disseminate research findings and promote public understanding of science

Green Propulsion System

Under the DRDO's Technology Development Fund (TDF) program, a Green Propulsion System was developed and successfully demonstrated in-orbit capability on a payload launched by the PSLV C-58 mission.

- ✓ TDF is a flagship programme of Ministry of Defence executed by DRDO under the 'Make in India' initiative for funding innovation in defense and aerospace, especially to start-ups and MSMEs.

About Green Propulsion System

- A type of rocket engine that uses non-toxic and environmentally friendly propellants.
- These propellants are typically less hazardous to handle and produce fewer harmful emissions than traditional propellants such as hydrazine (alternative to chemical propulsion systems).

Different types of green propellants under development, including:

- **Ionic liquids:** These are salts that are liquid at room temperature, and they can be used as both fuel and oxidizer in a rocket engine.
- **High-test peroxide (HTP):** This is a concentrated form of hydrogen peroxide that can be used as an oxidizer in a rocket engine.
- **Methanol and ethanol:** These are simple alcohols that can be used as fuels in a rocket engine.
- **Biopropellants:** These are propellants derived from biomass, such as vegetable oils or algae.

PSLV C 58

- PSLV-C58 was the 60th flight of ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle.
- It was launched on January 1, 2024, from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, India.
- The primary payload of the mission was the XPoSat satellite, which is designed to study X-ray emissions from celestial sources.

Extra Mile: ISRO & its Rocket Propulsion System

Different propulsion systems develop thrust in different ways, but all thrust is generated through the same application of Newton's third law of motion. For every action there is an equal & opposite reaction.

Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC):

- There are two centres 1. Thiruvananthapuram and 2. Bengaluru
- LPSC is the center for design, development and realization of liquid propulsion stages for ISRO's Launch Vehicles. Development of fluid control valves, transducers, propellant management devices for vacuum conditions.

The ISRO Propulsion Complex (IPRC):

- It is the main testing hub for ISRO's liquid propulsion systems. It's located near Kanyakumari at Mahendra Giri Hills, Tamil Nadu.
- Formerly, IPRC was known as LPSC, Mahendra Giri and taking cognizance of the future growth of the space program of our nation and the concomitant expansion at Mahendra Giri, it was elevated as IPRC with effect from February 01, 2014.
- It is one of the ISRO centers that could be called as the "Jet Propulsion Laboratory of India" as all liquid, cryogenic and semi cryogenic stage and engine related tests of ISRO's launch vehicles and satellites are carried out here.

Electric Propulsion System (EPS):

- ISRO is also working on an Electric Propulsion System (EPS) that can reduce the dependence on chemical propellant. The EPS system was first flown on South Asia Satellite (SAS) – GSAT-9 launched in 2017 and is working satisfactorily.
- With the help of EPS, satellite weight can be reduced, as the chemical propellants are replaced by electrical system, the weight of which is not so significant compared to chemical propellant.

Frozen Smoke (Aerogel)

Researchers have developed a sensor made from 'frozen smoke' that uses artificial intelligence techniques to detect formaldehyde.

About Frozen smoke/Aerogels (A Synthetic Material With An Extremely Low Density And High Porosity)

- Aerogels are incredibly lightweight, making it one of the lightest solid materials in existence.
- Aerogels are solid materials that are mostly composed of air, with a gel-like structure that replaces the liquid component of a gel with a gas.
 - ✓ The nickname "frozen smoke" comes from its appearance, as aerogels are translucent and have a hazy or smoke-like appearance.
 - ✓ Aerogel (a silica-based material) is also known as solid smoke/air, solid cloud & blue smoke.
- **Properties:** Aerogels have remarkable properties, such as being excellent thermal insulators and having high surface areas.
- **Applications:** They are often used in various scientific & industrial applications, including insulation for spacecraft, oil spill cleanup & as a medium for capturing stardust in space missions.
 - ✓ Despite its delicate appearance, aerogel is surprisingly strong and can support heavy loads despite its extremely low density.

What is Formaldehyde?

- It is a colorless, pungent gas and the simplest aldehyde (with the chemical formula CH_2O). It is an important industrial chemical with a wide variety of uses.
- **Properties:** It is a flammable gas with a boiling point of -19°C and a melting point of -118°C . It is soluble in water and many other organic solvents.

Formaldehyde As Pollutant

- **Emission:** It is a common Volatile organic compound (VOC) and is emitted by household items including pressed wood products, wallpapers and paints, and some synthetic fabrics.
- For the most part, the levels of formaldehyde emitted by these items are low, but levels can build up over time. Formaldehyde can lead to serious health problems with prolonged exposure even at low concentrations.
- Formaldehyde is a strong irritant to the skin, eyes, and respiratory system. It is also a carcinogen, and exposure to formaldehyde has been linked to an increased risk of nasal cancer.

3D Printed Brain Tissue

Researchers have created the world's first 3D-printed brain tissue that behaves like natural brain tissue.

About 3D Printing Brain Tissue

- It refers to bioprinting techniques that generate structures resembling real brain tissue.
- This is achieved by using specialized printers and "bioinks" containing living cells and supporting materials. By carefully arranging these components, researchers can create structures with similar cellular composition and architecture to specific brain regions.
- It is a low-cost medical technology that could help with brain damage. The technology uses human induced pluripotent stem cells (hiPSC) to create young neurons of the cerebral cortex.

Current Developments In This Direction

- **Functional neurons:** Scientists have successfully printed brain tissue containing functional neurons that communicate with each other, mimicking basic brain activity.
- **Different cell types:** Research focuses on incorporating various cell types found in the brain, like astrocytes and microglia, for more complex functionality.
- **Disease models:** Researchers are printing brain tissue with specific disease-related mutations to study neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.
- **Drug testing:** Printed brain tissue could serve as a platform for testing new drugs and understanding their effects on brain cells.

Bioink (Specialized Type Of Ink Used In 3D Bioprinting)

- It differs from traditional ink by incorporating living cells alongside biocompatible materials that support cell growth and function.
- It behaves like a "living ink" capable of building miniature versions of tissues and organs layer by layer.

Components Of Bioink

- **Living cells:** These can be stem cells, specialized cells like neurons or muscle cells, or even a combination of different types.
- **Biomaterials:** These provide a scaffold for the cells to adhere to and grow within. Common examples include hydrogels, alginates, and collagen.
- **Growth factors and nutrients:** These are essential for supporting cell survival, proliferation, and differentiation.

India's First Hypervelocity Expansion Tunnel Test Facility

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IITK) has successfully built and tested India's first hypervelocity expansion tunnel test facility putting the country among handful of nations with this advanced hypersonic testing capability.

About

- Developed by the Hypersonic Experimental Aerodynamics Laboratory (HEAL) at the IIT Kanpur- within the Department of Aerospace Engineering).
- It was indigenously designed and developed with funding and support from the Aeronautical Research and Development Board (ARDB), the Department of Science and Technology (DST), and IIT Kanpur.
- 24-meter-long facility is capable of generating hypersonic speeds ranging from 3 to 10 kilometers per second, simulating the hypersonic condition encountered during atmospheric entry of vehicles, asteroid entry, scramjet flights, and ballistic missiles.
- Also Called S2 and nicknamed Jigarthanda
- It was successfully established and tested in 2023.

Application Areas

- **Help Existing Missions:** S2 will help ISRO with its Gaganyaan mission and to test the Reusable Launch Vehicle and DRDO with its development of hypersonic cruise missiles.
- **Boost the research ecosystem:** It will enable more aerospace engineers and researchers to pursue hypersonic research.
- **Future missions:** The research activities and data generated in the facility will serve as an input for optimization of existing vehicles as well as futuristic defense and Space Missions.
- It will empower India's space and Defence organizations with domestic hypersonic testing capabilities for critical projects and missions

Micellar Water

It has become a skincare staple and has received endorsements from dermatologists and makeup artists.

About Micellar Water

- Micellar water is a popular skincare product that has gained popularity for its gentle and effective cleansing properties. It consists of tiny oil molecules called micelles suspended in soft water.
- These micelles attract and trap dirt, oil, and makeup, making it easy to remove impurities from the skin without the need for harsh rubbing.

Working

Micells are microscopic clusters of molecules with a unique double personality:

1. Oil-loving heads: On the outside of the micelle, you'll find heads that adore oil and dirt. Think of them as tiny sticky notes grabbing onto anything greasy.
2. Water-loving tails: On the inside, the micelles have tails that crave water. This allows them to dissolve comfortably in the micellar water solution.

This double nature plays a key role in cleaning.

Key Features of Micellar Water

- **Cleansing:** Micellar water is suitable for all skin types (including sensitive skin). It is known for its ability to lift away impurities without stripping the skin of its natural oils.
- **Makeup Removal:** Many people use micellar water as a makeup remover. It is effective in breaking down & removing various types of makeup, including foundation, mascara, and lipstick.
- **Multi-Purpose:** Some micellar waters are formulated to serve multiple purposes, such as cleansing, toning, and hydrating the skin. These products may contain additional ingredients like vitamins, minerals, or floral extracts.

Open AI: Sora

OpenAI (the creator of the revolutionary chatbot ChatGPT) has unveiled a new generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) model named Sora that can convert a text prompt into video.

About Sora

- Sora is an AI model that can create realistic and imaginative videos/scenes from text instructions.
- It is trained on a massive dataset of text and video and can generate videos up to 60 seconds long while “maintaining the visual quality and adherence to the user’s prompt.”

Sora Model Mechanism

- The model uses a transformer architecture that unlocks superior scaling performance much similar to ChatGPT models.
- The AI model shows videos and images as collections of smaller units of data which are known as patches. Each of these patches is similar to tokens in GPT.
- OpenAI stated that Sora is built upon past researches conducted for DALL-E and GPT Models.
 - ✓ DALL-E is a text-to-image model developed by OpenAI (introduced in January 2021) that creates digital images from natural language descriptions.
- It borrows the recapturing technique from DALL-E 3 which includes generating descriptive captions for visual training data.

Applications of Sora

- It is capable of generating complex scenes with numerous characters with specific types of motion and accurate details of the subject and background.
- The model can understand not only what the user’s prompt, but also be able to comprehend how these things will reflect in the real world.
- Sora has an in-depth understanding of language which allows it to interpret prompts with accuracy and create characters that showcase vibrant emotions.

INSAT-3DS Mission

Satellite INSAT-3DS on launch vehicle GSLV-F14 was successfully launched by the ISRO.

About INSAT-3DS Mission (fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES))

Objective

- To augment the country's meteorological (weather, climate & ocean related) services with the presently operational INSAT-3D & INSAT-3DR in-orbit satellites.
 - ✓ INSAT-3DS, with a mission life of 10 years, will take over the functions of INSAT-3D (launched in 2013) and INSAT-3DR (2016) that have come to the end of their mission life.
- To enhance the monitoring of Earth’s surface, atmosphere, oceans, and environment, elevate capabilities in data collection and dissemination.

Features of This Mission

- Meteorological data from the INSAT-3DS satellite shall be utilised by institutes of the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), namely, India Meteorology Department (IMD), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), and Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).
- INSAT-3DS comprises four payloads, including 1) an Imager, 2) a sounder, 3) a data relay transponder, and 4) a satellite-aided search and rescue transponder.
- The mission will help in short-range forecasts of extreme weather events such as thunderstorms, provide visibility estimation for aviation, and help in studying forest fire, smoke, snow cover, climate studies.

- This mission was launched by GSLV-F14 Rocket which is a three-stage (51.7 m long) launch vehicle having a liftoff mass of 420 Tonnes.

CE 20 Cryogenic Engine and Human Rating

ISRO has successfully completed human rating of its CE20 cryogenic engine which will boost to Gagan Yaan mission.

What Is The Meaning Of Human Rating?

- The term "Human Rating" in the context of a cryogenic engine referring to the process of a comprehensive evaluation and verification process to ensure that a cryogenic engine is suitable for carrying human spaceflight missions.
- This process includes assessing the engine's design, manufacturing & operational capabilities to ensure they meet the stringent safety requirements necessary for crewed space missions.

LVM3 & it's CE 20 Cryogenic Engine (Developed by the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC))

- Designed to power the upper stage of the LVM3 launch vehicle (Earlier known as GSLV Mk III) Comprising solid, liquid & a cryogenic stage. (carried the Chandrayaan-2 & 3 missions)
 - ✓ LVM3 is configured as a three-stage vehicle with two solid strap-on motors (S200), one liquid core stage (L110) and a high thrust cryogenic upper stage (C25).
- The first Indian cryogenic engine to feature a gas-generator cycle. The CE-20 uses a combination of LOX and LH2 propellants in a gas generator cycle.
- LVM3 is one of the most powerful rockets in ISRO's fleet with a Payload capacity of 4 Tonnes to geosynchronous transfer orbit (GTO) and 10 Tonnes to low Earth orbit (LEO).

CULTURE

Deepastambham

- A 390-year-old **Deepastambham (lamp post)** has been discovered in Mudimanikyam village in Nalgonda (Telangana).
- While **Dhwajastambam (flag poles)** are part of temple architecture, lamp posts are rare in the Deccan while they are common in temples in the west coast including Goa.
- Based on the inscription engraved on the lamp post near the ruined Śiva temple, the pillar can be **dated to 1635**.
- The inscription written in **Telugu mixed with Tamil language**, is **dedicated to Kasi Viswanatha**.
- The village is about 180 kilometres from Hyderabad which was **ruled by the Qutb Shahi rulers at that time**.
- The lamp post might have been the geographical indicator for traders and ships passing through the area as this village has a recorded history from early medieval times.

Attukal Pongala

The annual event of Attukal Pongala held recently saw a huge turnout.

- Attukal Pongala is a 10-day religious festival celebrated at the **Attukal Bhagavathy Temple** in Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala.
- On the ninth day there is a huge gathering of thousands of women in the temple.
- The pongala preparation starts with the ritual called '**Aduppuvettu**'. This is the lighting of the pongala hearth (fireplace) called **Pandarayaduppu**.
- Also known as the Sabarimala for women, the festival is marked as the largest annual gathering of women by the Guinness World Records.

Sant Ravidas

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the statue of Sant Guru Ravidas and paid tributes on his birth anniversary.
- Sant Ravidas Jayanti is observed on **Magh Purnima**. This year marks the 647th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas.
- Born in **1377 C.E. in Varanasi**, Uttar Pradesh, Guru Ravidas was an Indian mystic, poet, social reformer and spiritual guru.
- Also known by Raidas, Rohidas and Ruhidas - his devotional songs and verses created a lasting impact upon the **Bhakti Movement**.
- He was among the first people to oppose the Indian caste system through his poems and teachings based on spirituality and spread the message of equality.
- Around 41 poems accredited to Ravidas were included in the **Adi Granth**, the sacred scripture of Sikhism.
- Guru Ravidas is considered the founder of the Ravidasia religion. He was also known as the spiritual guide of Meera Bai, who is an eminent personality in the sphere of Hindu spiritualism.

Subika Painting

- Efforts are being made to preserve the ancient **Subika painting from Manipur**.
- The Subika painting style is intricately linked to the Meitei community's cultural history through its **six surviving manuscripts — Subika, Subika Achouba, Subika Laishaba, Subika Choudit, Subika Cheithil and Thengrakhel Subika**.
- This ancient painting style is used in the **Puyas (archaic Manipuri manuscripts)**. However, awareness about this unique art form has reduced over the years, leading to its near extinction.
- Although the **royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba**, doesn't mention a specific founder, there is a possibility that this art form existed when the writing tradition was introduced in the state.
- Despite Manipur's prominence in Raas leela and Nat Sangkritan, it lags behind in the field of visual arts. The historical roots, evident in Subika paintings, reveal a once prominent position. Experts estimate the use of Subika paintings since the **18th or 19th century**.

Subika Laishaba

- Among these manuscripts, Subika Laishaba represents a direct and authentic continuation of the Meitei cultural tradition depicted through visual images.
- The illustrations of Subika Laishaba have visual language from the elements such as lines, shapes, forms, colours, and patterns.
- These visual images become Meitei's cultural motif, structure to create visual effects as well as express cultural significance meaning and values.
- The visual images found in the Subika Laishaba manuscript are painted on handmade paper. It is also found that materials of manuscript are prepared indigenously either handmade paper or barks of tree.

Sammakka Saralamma Jathara

- The Prime Minister recently extended greetings on the start of the Sammakka Saralamma Jathara.
- Sammakka Saralamma is one of the largest tribal festivals in the world, held every two years (biennially), in Medaram village, Telangana.
- It is a festival with no vedic or brahmanic influence and is the **state festival of Telangana**.
- It commemorates the fight of a mother and daughter, Sammakka and Saralamma, with the reigning rulers against an unjust law.
- People offer bangaram (gold) in the form of jaggery of a quantity equal to their weight to the goddesses and take holy bath in Jampanna Vagu (stream).

- ✓ Jampanna Vagu is a tributary to River Godavari. Jampanna was the tribal warrior and the son of tribal Goddess Sammakka.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati

- The Prime Minister recently addressed a programme on the 200th birth anniversary of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.
- Born on 12th February, 1824, Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) was one of the most influential figures of 19th-century India.

Arya Samaj and Vedic Schools

- A major part of his mission was to address the fragmented nature of Hindu society. According to him, the brahmins were primarily to blame for this – they had corrupted the Sanatan Dharma in order to maintain and grow their own status and influence in society.
- By depriving the layman of Vedic knowledge, they were successful in deforming Hindu religion into something it was not.
- His book, Satyarth Prakash (1875), emphasised the “return to Vedic principles” that Dayanand Saraswati believed had been lost over time.
- To propagate his message, he **founded the Arya Samaj in 1875**, leading a reform movement within orthodox Hinduism.
- Arya Samaj was a **monotheistic Hindu order** that rejected overly ritualistic traditions and social dogmas of orthodox Hinduism and promoted a united Hindu society on the basis of Vedic teachings.
- Arya Samaj has played a key role in cultural and social awakening of the country by its emphasis on social reforms and education.
- Even before the establishment of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati had founded multiple Vedic schools. Modelled on missionary schools that were increasingly popular among Indians.
- These Gurukuls provided an Indian alternative, based on principles of the Vedas. For Dayanand Saraswati, this was crucial to break the monopoly of brahmins on Vedic knowledge.

Dayanand's philosophy

- Dayanand Saraswati preached respect for other human beings, supported by the Vedic notion of the **divine nature of the individual**.
- Crucial among his “ten founding principles of Arya Samaj” is the idea that all activities must be done for the benefit of humankind as a whole, rather than individuals or even idols and religious symbols.
- While Dayanand did not fully oppose the institution of caste itself, he advocated for significant reform within it.
- Citing the Vedas, he claimed that caste is not supposed to be hereditary but rather on the basis of an individual's talents.
- Furthermore, he was **against the practice of untouchability**, which he believed was an outcome of centuries of brahmanical domination. Crucially, he advocated Vedic education for all castes.
- His views on women were also against the orthodox Hindu thinking at the time. He campaigns for the education of women as well as against regressive practices such as child marriage.

Dayanand's legacy

- Dayanand Saraswati's legacy has had a lasting influence. First, his message was particularly important at a time when nationalist sentiment in India was rising.
- He is **credited to have first used the term swaraj (self-rule) in 1875**, which would later be picked up by Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.

- His criticism of the British from a religious point of view, as well as providing an ancient Indian alternative was crucial to the nationalist discourse of the time.
- Second, his work was also important for the consolidation of Hindus. Through the organisation of Arya Samaj, he was among the first to advocate conversion into the Hindu fold.
- This became a very popular movement by the early 20th century, especially aimed at lower caste converts who were given a higher social status and self-esteem under the more egalitarian Arya Samaji philosophy.
- Today, Dayanand Saraswati's legacy carries on through the Arya Samaj centres found across India as well as the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic schools and colleges.
- Providing quality education even in the most remote places, DAV schools have over time become popular.
- Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, India's second President called Dayanand Saraswati "**a maker of modern India**".

AWARDS/ PERSONALITIES IN NEWS

Chevalier de la Legion d' Honneur

- Shashi Tharoor was recently conferred France's highest civilian honour, the Chevalier de la Legion d' Honneur.
- France recognised Tharoor for his efforts to strengthen the bond between India and France, his dedication to global peace and his friendship with France.
- The Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour) was established by **Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802**.
- It acknowledges extraordinary accomplishments and services rendered to France. It covers contributions in arts, literature, science and public service, among others.
- Durga Charan Rakshit was the first Indian to receive the honour. Rakshit was given the award in 1896 for his humanitarian work.

58th Jnanpith Award

- Celebrated Urdu poet and lyricist Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya will be awarded the Jnanpith award.
- Sampooran Singh Kalra, also known as Gulzar is considered one of the finest Urdu poets of his generation and is a top director and writer of Hindi cinema.
- Gulzar, born in 1934, has received the Sahitya Akademi Award for Urdu, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the Padma Bhushan and multiple National Film awards for his work.
- His song "Jai Ho" for the film Slumdog Millionaire, received an Oscar in 2009 and Grammy in 2010.
- In poetry, he **invented a new genre 'Triveni'** which is a non-mukaffa poem of three lines.

Rambhadracharya

- Rambhadracharya, is a Hindu spiritual leader, educator and writer of more than 240 books and texts, including four epics. He is also the founder and head of Tulsi Peeth in Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh.
- Born in 1950, Rambhadracharya is a polyglot, who speaks 22 languages. He is one of the present four Jagadguru Ramanandacharyas of the Ramananda sect and has been holding this position since 1982.
- A poet and writer in several Indian languages including Sanskrit, Hindi, Awadhi and Maithili, he received the Padma Vibhushan in 2015.

Jnanpith Award

- Instituted in 1961, the Jnanpith Award is the highest literary award in India presented annually by the **Bharatiya Jnanpith**. It is conferred to an author for their outstanding contribution towards literature since 1965.
- It can only be conferred upon an Indian citizen and is given only to writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution and English, with no posthumous conferral.
- The award carries a cash component of ₹11 lakh, a statue of Vagdevi and a citation.
- The first recipient of the award was the Malayalam writer G. Sankara Kurup who received the award in 1965 for his collection of poems, Odakkuzhal (The Bamboo Flute).