INDEX

INDEX

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

The **National Health Authority (NHA)**, under **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)**, introduced the **'Scan and Share' service** for faster outpatient department (OPD) registrations in 2022. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), up to 5 lakh patients have benefited since last year due to **QR code-enabled registration at hospital counters**, which has helped reduce long queues.

Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM)

● Launched in **2021** during the third anniversary of the Ayushman Bharat PM Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY), ABDM **will connect the digital health solutions** of hospitals across the country with each other.

● It will enable individuals to discover hospitals, laboratories and pharmacies across the country. The health record of every citizen will be digitally protected.

Components

Health ID	• It will be used for the purposes of **uniquely identifying persons, authenticating them**, and threading their health records **only with the informed consent of the patient** to help hospitals, insurance firms, and citizens access health records electronically when required
Electronic medical record (EMR) web app	• **Comprehensive digital version** of a patient's chart (**medical and treatment history**) from a single health facility. It is to create a **web application** that operates on a **set of standards** (interoperability and medical terminologies).
Health Facility Registry (HFR)	• Comprehensive repository of health *facilities(including hospitals, clinics, diagnostic laboratories and imaging centers, pharmacies*, etc) across different systems of medicine.
Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR)	• **Comprehensive repository of all healthcare professionals** involved in delivery of healthcare services across **modern and traditional systems of medicine**
Personal Health Record-System (PHR)	• It will enable an individual to manage information about his/her healthcare. This includes viewing of records comprising of health data, lab reports, treatment details, discharge summaries across one or multiple health facilities.
Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission Sandbox	• It will act as a framework for **technology and product testing** that will help organisations, including private players intending to be a part of ecosystem(Health Information Provider or Health Information User) or efficiently link with building blocks of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission

● The Mission will not only make the processes of hospitals simplified but also will i**ncrease ease of living**.

● **The Digital Ecosystem** will also enable a host of other facilities like **Digital Consultation**, Consent of patients in letting medical practitioners access their records, etc.

● With the implementation of this scheme, **old medical records cannot get lost as every record will be stored digitally.**

- In order to create a National Digital Health Ecosystem, the **NHA** acts as the implementing agency of the mission.
  - NHA is constituted for implementing AB PM-JAY, as an attached office of the MoHFW with full functional autonomy
- **The Health Facility Registry** (HFR) is the core building block of ABDM that aims to serve as a single source for verified information on health facilities across the country.

Background In Which ABDM Was Launched And Its Significance

- In a follow-up of **the National Health Policy's (NHP) 2017** specific goals for adopting digital technologies, the MoHFW constituted a committee headed by **Shri J. Satyanarayana**.
- This committee produced the **National Digital Health Blueprint** (NDHB)
  - Taking forward the NDHB, a digital ecosystem for healthcare services across the country, ABDM was launched.

'Scan and Share' Service Under The ABDM

- The service is currently provided in 125 districts across 25 States and UTs and it is a typical example of how technology can be leveraged to provide better services to patients and to improve the system efficiency.
- The participating hospitals (365), both government and private, display their unique QR codes in patient-registration areas.
- The patients can scan the QR code using any health application such as ABHA app, Aarogya Setu app, EkaCare, DRiefcase, Bajaj Health or PayTM.
- The patients then share information like name, age, gender, and unique health ID [ABHA number] to the Health Management Information system [HMIS] of the hospital.
- This enables paperless registration, instant token generation, saves patients' time and the health facility is able to optimise resources deployed for registration.
- This process also leads to the patient's health records getting digitally linked to their Ayushman Bharat Health Account. Patients can manage and access this from their phone anytime anywhere.

ABDM Performance

- Since nationwide launch, ABDM has achieved significant growth with over -
  - 23 crore ABHA(Ayushman Bharat Health Account) numbers (earlier known as Health ID),
  - **1.14 Lakh health facilities registered in the HFR,**
  - 33 thousand healthcare professionals under the Healthcare Professionals Registry (HPR),
- With more individuals, healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses, paramedics, etc.) joining ABDM, **digitisation of health records at their point of creation is now possible.**

PRIVILEGE MOTION

EDITOR'S CUT

A privilege motion was passed against senior BJP MLA and deputy leader of the opposition in Rajasthan Assembly.

Background

- The BJP leader had filed a **public interest litigation** (PIL) in Rajasthan High Court seeking direction to the Assembly Speaker to decide on the resignations of 81 MLAs.

- The privilege motion was moved because he had approached the High Court through PIL despite the resignation matter being under consideration of the Speaker.

About Privilege Motion

- Parliament members enjoy certain **rights and immunities**, individually and collectively, known as **parliamentary privileges** so that they can "effectively discharge their functions".
    - o The Speaker/ Rajya Sabha (RS) chairperson is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion.
- Parliamentary privileges are enjoyed by the two Houses of Parliament, their committees and their members.
- Parliamentary privileges are also applicable to the persons entitled to *speak and take part in the proceedings of a House of Parliament or any of its committees* including the Attorney General of India and Union ministers but do not extend to the President.
    - o **Article 361** of the Constitution provides for privileges for the President.
- **Article 194** deals with the powers, privileges and immunities of the State Legislatures, their members and their committees.
- **Article 105** of the Constitution mentions two privileges of Indian Parliament:
    - o Freedom of speech in Parliament
    - o Right of publication of its proceedings
- The Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 provides *freedom from arrest and detention of members* under civil liabilities (but not criminal liability) during the continuance of the meeting of the House or of a committee.
    - o The members enjoy freedom from arrest in any civil case 40 days before and after the adjournment of the house and also when the house is in session.
    - o No member can be arrested from the limits of the parliament without the permission of the house to which s/he belongs.
    - o If the detention of any members of the parliament is made, the chairman or the speaker should be informed by the concerned authority, of the reason for the arrest.
- Parliament has not made any special law to exhaustively codify all the privileges. They are rather based on five sources:

Constitutional provisions	Various laws made by Parliament	Rules of both the Houses	Parliamentary conventions	Judicial interpretations

- When any of these rights and immunities are disregarded, the offence is called a **breach of privilege** and is punishable under law of Parliament.

Who Can Move It?

A notice can be moved by <u>any member of either House</u> against those being held guilty of breach of privilege in the form of a **motion.**

Concerned Rules

Rule No 222 in Chapter 20 of the **Lok Sabha Rule Book** and correspondingly **Rule 187 in Chapter 16** of the **Rajya Sabha** rulebook governs privilege.

Process

- A member may with the <u>consent of the Speaker</u>, raise a question involving a breach of privilege *either of a member or of the House or of a committee.*

- But a notice should be given **in writing** to the Secretary- General by 10 A.M. on the day the question is proposed to be raised. If the question raised is based on a document, the notice shall be accompanied by the document.

  - o Speaker may on being satisfied about the urgency of the matter allow a question of privilege to be raised

- Conditions to raise the question:

  - o Not more than one question shall be raised at the same sitting.

  - o The question shall be restricted to a specific matter of recent occurrence.

  - o The matter requires the intervention of the house.

- The Speaker if gives consent and holds that the matter proposed to be discussed is in order, shall call the member concerned, who while <u>asking for leave</u> (permission) to raise the question of privilege, **makes a short statement.**

Privileges Committee

- In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates a committee of privileges consisting of 15 members as per respective party strengths.
- In the Rajya Sabha, committee of privileges consists of 10 members.
  - A report is then presented to the House for its consideration.
  - The Speaker may permit a half-hour debate while considering the report and may then pass final orders or direct that the report be tabled before the House.
- A resolution may then be moved relating to the breach of privilege that has to be unanimously passed.

- If objection to leave being granted is taken, the Speaker requests the members in favour of leave to rise in their places, and if:

  - o Not less than twenty-five members rise accordingly, the Speaker shall declare that leave is granted.

  - o Less than twenty-five members rise, the Speaker informs the member that such member has not received the leave of the House.

- The Speaker if refuses to give consent or is of opinion that the matter proposed to be discussed is not in order, he may read the notice of question of privilege and state that the consent is refused or the notice of question of privilege is not in order.

- If the leave is granted, the House refers it to a **Committee of Privileges** on a motion made either by the member who has raised the *question of privilege* or by any other member.

Previous Cases

- A large number of notices are rejected, with penal action recommended in only a few.

- **Case of Indira Gandhi, 1978:** It was the most significant case when Indira Gandhi who had just won the Lok Sabha elections from Chikmaglur was expelled from the House. Then home minister Charan Singh moved a resolution of breach of privilege following observations made by the Justice Shah Commission which probed excesses during the Emergency.

- Expulsion of Subramanian Swamy,1976: He was charged with bringing disrepute to Parliament by his activities through interviews in foreign publications that were construed as anti-India propaganda and was expelled from Rajya Sabha.

- In 2005, 11 "tainted" MPs, who were caught in a sting over the cash for query scandal, were expelled from the House.
- Against Prime Minister and the Defence Minister,2018: Congress moved a privilege motion against them claiming that they had misled the members of the Parliament on the Rafale fighter jet deal.

Deputy Speaker: Constitutional Position

The present Lok Sabha and five state Assemblies have not elected Deputy Speakers. The Supreme Court issued notices to the Centre and five states — Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand — over the failure to elect a Deputy Speaker.

Constitutional Position About The Deputy Speaker

- **Article 93** (For Lok Sabha) and **Article 178** (For Legislative Assembly) says "The House of the People shall, <u>as soon as may be</u>, choose two members to be Speaker and Deputy Speaker and, so often as the office of Speaker or Deputy Speaker becomes vacant, the House shall choose another member."

Is It Mandatory To Have A Deputy Speaker?	How Soon Must The Deputy Speaker Be Elected?
Both Articles 93 and 178 use the word **"shall",** indicating that the election of Speaker and Deputy Speaker is mandatory under the Constitution.	1) "As soon as may be", say Articles 93 and 178. But they do not lay down a specific time frame. 2) **Rule 8** of The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha says the election of Deputy Speaker "shall be held on such date as the Speaker may fix".

Do The Powers Of The Speaker Extend To The Deputy Speaker As Well?

The Deputy Speaker presides over the Lok Sabha when the Speaker is absent from the sitting of the House.

In Case Of Vacancy	In Case Of Absence
Article **95(1)** says: "While the office of Speaker is vacant, the duties of the office shall be performed by the Deputy Speaker".	The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provide that the Speaker shall nominate from amongst the Members, a Panel of not more than ten Chairpersons, any one of whom may preside over the House in the absence of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker

- When the Deputy Speaker presides over a sitting of the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly, he has the same powers as the Speaker.
- **No appeal** lies to the Speaker against a ruling given by the Deputy Speaker or any person presiding over the House in the absence of the Speaker.
- It should be noted here that the Deputy Speaker is **not subordinate** to the Speaker. He is directly responsible for the House.

Can The Courts Intervene In Cases Of A Delay In Electing The Deputy Speaker?

- **Article 122:** The validity of any proceedings in Parliament shall not be called in question on the ground of any alleged irregularity of procedure.
- Courts usually don't intervene in the procedural conduct of Parliament. In September 2021, a petition was filed before the Delhi High Court, which argued that the delay in the election of the Deputy Speaker violated Article 93. However, there is no precedent of a court forcing the legislature to elect the Deputy Speaker.

- However, experts said that the courts do have jurisdiction to at least inquire into why there has been no election to the post of Deputy Speaker since the Constitution does envisage an election "as soon as may be".

Centre's Position

- The Treasury benches have maintained there is no "immediate requirement" for a Deputy Speaker as "bills are being passed and discussions are being held" as normal in the House.

- A Minister argued that "there is a panel of nine members — senior, experienced and selected from different parties — who can act as chairpersons to assist the Speaker to run the House".

Need of Deputy Speaker

- Maintains Continuity of the office whenever speaker is absent/office becomes vacant.

- Informs The House: If Speaker resigns, he/she tenders resignation to Deputy Speaker.
    - ✓ If the post of Deputy Speaker is vacant the Secretary-General receives the letter of resignation and informs the House about it.

- Strengthens Opposition: Since 2011, convention has been to offer the position of deputy Speaker to Opposition party. Though Constitutionally, Deputy speaker can be from Opposition or Majority party.

Extra Mile
1) The institutions of Speaker and Deputy Speaker originated in India in 1921 under the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1919 (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms).
2) Madabhushi Ananthasayanam Ayyangar was the first Deputy Speaker. He also served as the 5th Governor of Bihar. G.V.Malvankar was the first Speaker of the Lok Sabha.
3) One of the exemptions to Anti-Defection Law is Speaker/Deputy Speaker can voluntarily give up the membership of the political party without being disqualified under Anti-defection law. Thereafter S/he re-joins that political party or may become a member of another political party.

EDITOR'S CUT

Digitization of Courts

The Supreme Court in Feb' 2023 introduced on an experimental basis the live transcription of its proceedings using the Artificial Intelligence (AI) mechanism. The **virtual screen live-streaming** of a Constitution Bench hearing of the Thackeray-Shinde dispute (Maharashtra Political crisis) showed a separate screen showing the arguments and comments made during the hearing.

e-Courts Project

- The Government of India has launched the **e-Courts Integrated Mission Mode Project** in the country for _computerization of District and subordinate courts_ with the objective of improving access to justice using technology.

Background
- In India, e-governance in the field of administration of justice began in the late 1990s, but it accelerated after the enactment of the Information and Technology Act, 2000.
- As the 21st century began, the focus was on digitising the court's records and establishing e-courts across the country.
    - In the year 2006, e-courts were launched as a part of National e-Governance Plan (NeGP).
- In this regard, the Allahabad High Court is a guiding example. When he was the Chief Justice of Allahabad HC, Justice D Y Chandrachud (present CJI) had conceptualised and initiated the project to digitise approximately one crore case files in one year.
- In 2018, the Supreme Court allowed the live streaming of cases of constitutional and national importance on the basis of the judgement in Swapnil Tripathi vs Supreme Court of India, 2018.
- In July 2021, the Gujarat HC became the first court in the country to livestream its proceedings. Its example was followed by other HCs like Karnataka, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Patna.
- The e-Committee of the Supreme Court has directed state governments to make e-filing of cases and petitions mandatory from January 1, 2022.

- eCourts project is being implemented in association with **e-Committee of Supreme Court** of India and Department of Justice.
- This project is based on the "National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of **Information and Communication Technology** in the Indian Judiciary". This project is being completed in different phases which are as follows:

Phase 1	Phase I of the project was implemented during 2011-2015.
Phase 2	• Phase II of the project started in 2015 under which 18,735 District & Subordinate courts have been computerised. Phase II of the project is nearing its completion. • During Phase II, one video conference equipment each has been provided to all Court Complexes including taluk level courts
Phase 3	• Detailed Project Report (DPR) for e-Courts Phase III has been finalized and approved by the e-Committee, Supreme Court of India. • Phase III mentions various new features such as: • *Digital and Paperless Courts* aimed at bringing court proceedings under a digital format in a court; • Online Court focussing on *eliminating the presence of litigants or lawyers* in the court; • use of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and its subsets like Optical Character Recognition (OCR) etc for analysis of case pendency, forecasting future litigation, etc. The Union Government in its Budget 2023-24 has announced Rs. 7000 Cr. for e-Courts phase III. Phase III of the e-Courts project envisages a judicial system that is more affordable, accessible, cost-effective, predictable, reliable, and transparent for every individual

Following Initiatives Have Been Taken Under e-Courts Project

- **National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG):** It is a *database of orders, judgments, and cases,* created as an online platform under the e-Courts Project. It provides information relating to judicial proceedings/decisions of all computerized district and subordinate courts of the country. Litigants can access case status information.
- **Justice Clocks:** To make effective use of databases created through National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), 39 LED Display Message Sign Board System called Justice Clocks, have been installed in 25 High Courts.
- **Electronic Case Management Tools (ECMT):** They have been created with Mobile Apps for lawyers (total 1.50 cr. downloads till 31stOctober 2022) and **JustIS app** for judges.
- **A new "Judgment Search" portal:** It has been started with features such as search by Bench, Case Type, Case Number, Year, Petitioner/ Respondent Name, Judge Name, Act, Section, Decision: From Date, To Date and Full Text Search. This facility is being provided free of cost to all.
- **The Wide Area Network (WAN) Project:** Under this project, connectivity has been provided to 99.4% of total Court Complexes across India with 10 Mbps to 100 Mbps bandwidth speed.
- **National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes (NSTEP):** It has been launched for technology enabled process serving and issuing of summons.

Significance of The Digitisation of Judiciary

- The digitisation of court records was necessary due to the challenges of **storing and preserving** large numbers of physical files, some of which are decades old.

- Digitisation ensures that records can be **traced electronically** when required, as **missing records** can lead to the setting aside of convictions and the acquittal of accused persons (Mentioned in State of Uttar Pradesh v. Abhay Raj Singh case).

- It can significantly **reduce the time taken to transmit them** from lower to appellate courts, helping to address delays in cases.

- The use of **e-filing by counsels** can prevent cases from being adjourned due to missing or untraceable documents.

- Digital systems allow lawyers and litigants to easily **check the status of their cases** and related documents without needing to physically visit the court.

- Digitisation also facilitates the **timely sharing of information between courts and government** agencies, leading to a more efficient justice system.

- As per Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud, the transcription of the live streaming literally takes a major step towards becoming truly a "court of record" for learning court craft. Further he added, "Of course, it helps judges and the lawyers, but it will also help our law colleges. They can analyse how matters are argued…It is a huge resource."

- The transcribing is the second major decision towards making the court more transparent after SC's decision to livestream its proceedings before Constitution Benches.

The digitisation initiatives, including e-filing, digitisation of court records and video conferencing, will significantly reduce the time and cost involved in litigation and provide timely justice to the people. The success of digitisation in Indian courts will depend on continued investments in technology and the implementation of best practices to ensure the optimal use of digital resources.

Right To Be Forgotten

Recently, a doctor filed a plea for enforcement of his 'Right to be Forgotten', which includes the removal of news articles and other incriminating content related to his "wrongful arrest" in response to a "fabricated FIR against him" which he claims is causing detriment to his life and personal liberty.

Background

- In April 1999, a practicing doctor was accused of offenses under the IPC, including causing death by negligence (Section 304A), cheating (Section 417).

- In August 2009, a trial court order exonerated (acquit) him of all charges.

- Thus, the doctor approached the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the respondents like Google, PIB, and Press Council of India, by availing his "Right to be Forgotten" to remove all "irrelevant" news content causing "grave injury" to his reputation and dignity.

- Hence, in March 2023, the Delhi High Court is all set to hear a doctor's plea

Present Status In India About RTBF

Explicitly, The RTBF is not recognized by the constitutional provision or by a law in India. However, it is found inherently in the different provisions of the law or constitution. The various implicit arrangements regarding the RTBF are as follows:

About Right to be Forgotten (RTBF)

- It is the right to remove or erase content so that it's not accessible to the public at large.
- It empowers an individual to have information in the form of news, video, or photographs deleted from internet records, so it doesn't show up through search engines, like Google
- Origin and Evolution: The origin of this Right can be traced back to the French jurisprudence on the 'Right to oblivion' 2010. This Right of Oblivion aided convicted criminals, who had completed their imprisonment terms, by removing the publication of particulars of their crimes and their criminal life.

Section 43A of the Information Technology Act, 2000

- It says that organizations who possess sensitive personal data and fail to maintain appropriate security to safeguard such data, resulting in wrongful loss or wrongful gain to anyone, may be obligated to pay damages to the affected person.

- The **IT Rules, 2021** lay down the procedure for filing complaints with the designated **Grievance Officer** so as to have content exposing personal information about a complainant removed from the internet.

K.S.Puttaswamy vs Union of India Case (2017)

- In this case, a **nine-judge bench**, referred to the European Union Regulation of 2016 which recognized "the right to be forgotten" an individual's right to remove personal information from the system when "he is no longer desirous of his personal data to be processed or stored".

- The SC also recognised the 'right to be forgotten' as part of '**right to privacy'** under Article 21 (the right to life and liberty).

- The Supreme Court had also stated that the 'Right to be forgotten' was subject to **certain restrictions**, and that it could not be used if the material in question was required for the-

- exercising the right to freedom of expression and information,

- fulfilling legal responsibilities,

- carrying out duties in the public interest or public health,

- protecting information in the public interest,

- conducting scientific or historical studies, or for statistical purposes, or

- establishing, executing, or defending legal claims.

Jorawer Singh Mundy vs Union of India

- An American citizen approached the Delhi High Court in 2021 seeking the removal of all publicly available records of a case registered against him under the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

- He argued that although the trial court acquitted him back in 2011, he was unable to find a job in the United States on account of a quick Google search showing the judgment in his case. Despite a good academic record, this prejudiced his chances of employment.

Thus, the court directed respondents like 'IndianKanoon' to remove the same.

Personal Data Protection Bill

Justice BN Srikrishna Committee's draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 introduced a new right called the right to be forgotten.

- The draft law envisages creation of an authority where one can apply to restrict dissemination of information that may be private in nature and is sensitive, impacting one's life.

Under the **Digital Personal Data Protection Bill (DPDB) 2022,** Upon receiving a request from Data Principal, a Data Fiduciary can make: ✓ Corrections ✓ Updations ✓ Erase any personal data no longer required except for legal purposes.

- If the data principal is unsatisfied with the response of a Data Fiduciary to a grievance or receives no response within 7 days, it may register a complaint with the Board.

{For more about DPDB 2022, refer The Recitals- Nov 2022}

RTBF In The World

The concept has been discussed and put into practice in several jurisdictions, including the USA, Argentina, the European Union (EU), and the Philippines.

- In July 2015, Russia passed a law that allows citizens to delist a link from Russian search engines if it "violates Russian laws or if the information is false or has become obsolete".

- The EU in 2018 adopted the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Article 17 of which provides for the right to erasure of certain categories of personal data — that which is considered no longer necessary, that for which consent has been withdrawn or processing of which has been objected to, personal data unlawfully processed, and data where there is a legal obligation for erasure.

Challenges Associated With 'Right To Be Forgotten'

- Media and journalism are an essential part of democracy and news should be circulated freely and independently. The proposed "Right to be forgotten" would restrict journalists from disclosing certain people's past, requiring them to wait for an adjudicating officer's decision. This could hinder journalists' ability to provide information and ideas through the media.

- The Indian Constitution's Article 19 grants the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression. If the Right to be forgotten (RTBF) is legalized, content creators and websites may be required to remove certain data from their channels, which could potentially affect their right to freedom of speech and expression and also the Right to information of other individuals.

Way Forward

- To implement the Right to be forgotten, privacy needs to be included as a reasonable restriction under Article 19 (2) through a significant amendment to the Constitution.

- There must be a balance between the right to privacy and protection of personal data, covered under Article 21, and the freedom of information of internet users under Article 19.

- A comprehensive data protection law is necessary to address these issues and minimize conflicts between the two fundamental rights, which form a crucial part of the golden trinity (Art. 14, 19, and 21) of the Indian Constitution.

Information Database for Municipal Bonds

- The Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has launched an **information database** related to **municipal bonds** on its website to assist <u>municipal debt issuers</u> & other stakeholders in municipal debt market.

- This is part of Sebi's initiative to develop the bond markets and provide a common platform for stakeholders to discuss the concerns of the *issuers of municipal debt securities and requirements of investors.*

- Users will gain access to a wide range of information in the form of statistics and regulations, circulars, guidance note, and FAQs issued by Sebi concerning municipal debt securities.

- The repository also contains various <u>checklists for pre-listing requirements</u> and <u>certificates from various intermediaries</u> to be obtained by an issuer who plans to tap the municipal bond market.

- Templates for agreements between various stakeholders and an indicative due diligence questionnaire for merchant bankers are also included.

- It is expected that the platform will increase awareness of and improve traction in the market for municipal debt securities.

Municipal Bonds

- Municipal bonds are an **alternative source of finance** to fund projects undertaken by municipal corporations.

- It is a kind of **debt instrument** where investors give loans to local governments (Urban Local Bodies).

- It helps to raise funds from the stock market. *Bidding takes place on an electronic trading platform after the bond is listed on the exchange.*

- Municipal bonds are issued by civic bodies for specific projects and usually have a 10-year tenure. The ULB pays the annual interest on the bonds to the investor at the decided rate.

- The face value (cost) of each instrument slot (piece) of a municipal bond is a minimum of Rs 10 lakh.

- Bonds are issued to institutional and high net worth individuals. It can be subscribed to (purchased) by a single investor or multiple investors.

- In India, the municipal debt market is in a nascent stage and SEBI is taking steps to increase awareness by holding such events.

- Since 2017, as many as 12 issues of municipal bonds have been made by 10 municipal corporations, raising almost Rs 2,000 crore.

- The funds raised have been used for various developmental projects like liquid waste management projects, water supply projects, tertiary sewage treatment plants and residential projects.

Types of Municipal Bonds in India: There are two types of municipal bonds in India

- **General Obligation Bonds:** These are issued to raise finances for general projects such as improving the infrastructure of a region.

    o Repayment of the bond, along with interest, is processed through revenue generated from different projects and taxes.

- **Revenue bonds:** These are issued to raise finance for specific projects, such as the construction of a particular building.

    o Repayment of such bonds (principal and accrued interest) shall be paid through revenues explicitly generated from the declared projects.

Escrow Account

- An escrow account is a third-party account where funds are kept before they are transferred to the actual beneficiary.

- It provides security against scams and frauds especially with high asset value and dispute-prone sectors like real estate.

Benefits Of Municipal Bonds

- The difference between a bank loan and a municipal bond is that an institution can issue a bond only if it has favorable credit ratings.

Conditions for approval of bonds

- **The bonds can only be issued after an in-depth** analysis of the debt paying capacity **of the ULB, which is based on various parameters including the balance sheet for the past five years.**
- Credit rating firms assess the financial health of the ULBs **and give credit ratings. This indicates that the ULB** has the capacity to repay the annual amount owed to the lender.
- **AA++ is considered to be the best rating — which was given to Ahmedabad and Surat in Gujarat. The next best rating is the AA rating.**
- **It is compulsory to open an** escrow account, **in which the Central government transfers all the annual incentives (Rs 13 crore per Rs 100 crore bond issued) so that the payment to be made to the investor is assured.**
- **ULBs also share an** information memorandum, **that carries details of the ULB and its financial performance.**

- The bond also increases the number of investors available to the civic body, as compared to a loan from a single bank.

- Bonds lead to transfer of funds from the Centre, increase in transparency and efficient revenue generation.

India's Farm Exports

- India's agricultural exports are expected to scale a new peak in the financial year ending March 31, 2023.

- The value of farm exports in **April-December 2022**, at $39 billion, was 7.9% higher than the $36.2 bn for the corresponding period of the previous year. At the present rate, the record $50.2 bn exports achieved in 2021-22 look set to be surpassed.

- However, equally significant are the imports of agri produce, that at $27.8 bn in Apr-Dec 2022, have grown 15.4% over the $24.1 bn for Apr-Dec 2021.

- As a result, there has been a further **shrinking of the surplus on the farm trade account.**

INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL TRADE IN MILLION US DOLLARS

YEAR	EXPORTS	IMPORTS	TRADE SURPLUS
2012-13	41726.33	18978.33	22748.00
2013-14	43251.66	15528.94	27722.72
2014-15	39080.43	21151.77	17928.66
2015-16	32808.64	22578.60	10230.04
2016-17	33696.83	25643.40	8053.43
2017-18	38897.21	24890.90	14006.31
2018-19	39203.53	20920.34	18283.19
2019-20	35600.47	21859.99	13740.48
2020-21	41895.68	21652.05	20243.63
2021-22	50240.21	32422.30	17817.91
Apr-Dec 21	36155.42	24071.55	12083.87
Apr-Dec 22	38997.92	27770.64	11227.28

- The table shows that the surpluses even in 2020-21 ($20.2 bn) and 2021-22 ($17.8 bn) were lower than the $22.7 bn and $27.7 bn of 2012-13 and 2013-14 respectively.

Export Drivers

- The two big contributors to India's agri-export growth have been **rice and sugar**.

- India in 2021-22 shipped out an all-time-high 21.21 million tonnes (mt) of rice. That included 17.26 mt of non-basmati and 3.95 mt of basmati rice.

  o In the current fiscal, the growth has been primarily led by basmati rice. Its exports have gone up by 40.3% in value and 16.6% in quantity terms.

- Sugar exports hit a record value of $4.60 billion in 2021-22, as against $2.79 billion, $1.97 billion, $1.36 billion, and $810.90 million in the preceding four fiscals. This fiscal has seen a further surge of 43.6%, from $2.78 billion in April-December 2021 to $3.99 billion in April-December 2022.

- India exports of rice and sugar are well on course to touch, if not top, $11 billion and $6 billion respectively in 2022-23.

- **Marine products** exports, too, are likely to exceed last year's peak of $7.77 billion, having registered a marginal 2.7% jump from $6.12 billion in April-December 2021 to $6.29 billion in April-December 2022.

- However, exports of some big-ticket items have slowed. The value of **buffalo meat shipments** fell 5.1% from $2.51 billion in April-December 2022 to $2.39 billion in compared to April-December 2021. So did spices: down by 6.7% from $2.95 billion to $2.75 billion.

- While **wheat exports** have grown by 3.9% from $1.45 billion to $1.51 billion in same period, they are unlikely to sustain or even reach the 2021-22 full-fiscal level of 7.23 mt ($2.12 billion), due to a poor crop and the ban on shipments imposed in May 2022.

Import Statistics

- More than a general _export slowdown, it's the growth in imports that is a cause for concern_. This has come mainly from the following three commodities.

- The first is **vegetable oils**, whose imports shot up from $11.09 bn in 2020-21 to $18.99 bn in 2021-22, and even more during the first nine months of 2022-23 over the same period of last fiscal — from $14.04 bn to $16.10 bn or 14.7%.

- Further, India's **cotton exports** reached an all-time-high of $4.33 bn back in 2011-12. It remained at reasonably high levels until 2013-14 ($3.64 bn), before plunging to $1.62 bn by 2016-17 and $1.06 bn in 2019-20. There was a recovery thereafter to $1.90 bn in 2020-21 and $2.82 bn in 2021-22.

- But during this fiscal, not only have exports collapsed to $512.04 million in April-December (from $1.97 billion in April-December 2021), imports have also increased from $414.59 million to $1.32 billion for the same period.

- In other words, **India has turned from a net exporter to a net importer of cotton**.

- In case of **Cashews**, during April-December 2022, imports have posted a 64.6% rise to $1.64 billion from $996.49 million in April-December 2021, even as exports of cashew products have decreased from $344.61 million to $259.71 million for the same period.

Policy Implications

- From the chart, it can be seen how closely India's farm performance is linked to international commodity prices.

- The UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Food Price Index — having a base value of 100 for the 2014-16 period — averaged 122.5 points in 2012-13 and 119.1 points in 2013-14.

INDIA'S FARM EXPORTS VS WORLD FOOD PRICES

Exports ($ Billion) ■ FAO Food Price Index (2014-16=100)

Year	Exports ($ Billion)	FAO Food Price Index
2012-13	41.73	122.51
2013-14	43.25	119.06
2014-15	39.08	109.86
2015-16	32.81	90.01
2016-17	33.70	94.74
2017-18	38.90	98.16
2018-19	39.20	94.81
2019-20	35.60	96.49
2020-21	41.90	102.48
2021-22	50.24	132.98

- In those years, India's agri-exports were at $42-43 billion. As the index crashed to 90-95 points in 2015-16 and 2016-17, so did exports to $33-34 billion.

- The exports recovery in 2020-21 and 2021-22 happened along with rising global prices and the FAO index averaging 102.5 points and 133 points in the two years.

- The FAO index peaked at 159.7 points in March 2022, just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Since then, it has fallen every month, with the latest reading of 131.2 points for January 2023 the lowest after the 129.2 points of September 2021.

- Going by past correlation, **it is expected to lead to India's farm exports slowing down in the months ahead**. Moreover, this could be **accompanied by increased imports, as was the case from 2014-15 to 2017-18.**

- Thus, the focus of policymakers too, may have to **shift from being pro-consumer (banning/ restricting exports) to pro-producer (providing tariff protection against unrestrained imports)**.

- Furthermore, the government needs to have a proactive approach in case of cotton and edible oils to improve their production.

  o The effects of not allowing new genetic modification (GM) technologies after the first-generation Bt cotton are impacting exports as well.

  o Similarly, in edible oils, where planting of GM hybrid mustard has been permitted with great reluctance — and which is now a matter before the Supreme Court.
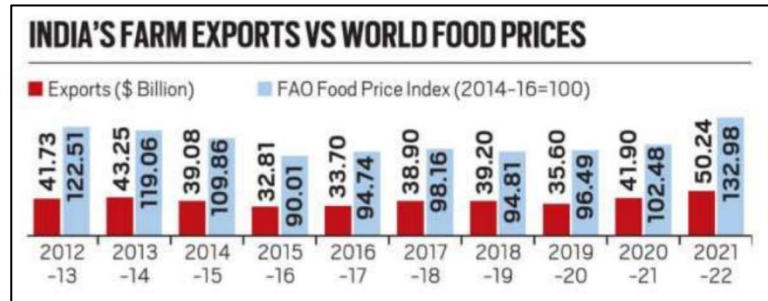
Government Initiatives to Promote Agricultural Exports
• The Government has taken several steps at State/District levels.
• **Agriculture Export Policy 2018 –**
o In order to boost farm exports, the Government introduced a comprehensive Agriculture Export Policy in 2018, with the following objectives –
▪ To diversify our export basket, destinations and boost high-value and value-added agricultural exports including focus on perishables.

- - To promote novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional and non-traditional agri products exports.

  - To provide an institutional mechanism for pursuing market access, tackling barriers and deal with sanitary and phytosanitary issues.

  - To strive to double India's share in world agri exports by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.

  - To enable farmers to get benefit of export opportunities in overseas market.

- **District as Export Hub Initiative –**

  o Under this initiative, products including agricultural products with export potential have been identified in all **733 districts across the country**.

- **Transport and Marketing Assistance for Specified Agriculture Products –**

  o It is a Central Sector Scheme.

  o It aims at providing assistance for the international component of freight to mitigate the freight disadvantage for the export of agriculture products.

- Besides, **Product specific Export Promotion Forums (EPF)** for eight high potential agri products i.e., *Grapes, Mango, Banana, Onion, Rice, Nutri-Cereals, Pomegranate, Floriculture & Plant material* have been created.

Chinese Spy Balloon Shot Down By USA

The US military has downed the **suspected Chinese spy balloon** over the Atlantic Ocean and launched a mission to recover all the equipment from its debris. This has drawn a strong reaction from China which warned of repercussions over America's use of force against its civilian unmanned airship.

Spy Balloon and US-China Tie

A. **Why USA is Worried?**

- Earlier, the Pentagon said it has detected a surveillance balloon over Montana. It was found to be traveling at an altitude well above commercial air traffic.

  o Montana is home to some of America's most lethal nuclear Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICMBs).

- USA claimed that the balloon was being used by the People Republic of China to surveil strategic sites in the continental United States.

- By shooting down the balloon, USA addressed the **surveillance threat posed to military installations** and further underlineneutralise any intelligence value it could have produced, preventing it from returning to China.

- Chinese infiltration of US on the ground and now in the air has stirred disquiet in both strategic and political circles.

  o Proposed land purchases by China in neighboring North Dakota is being opposed US lawmakers and military analysts.

  o They say that it could be cover for spying on a nearby military facility where drone test flights are conducted.

B. **What Is China's Response?**

- China has said the balloon, spotted over the state of Montana, is merely a "civilian airship" which deviated from its planned route.
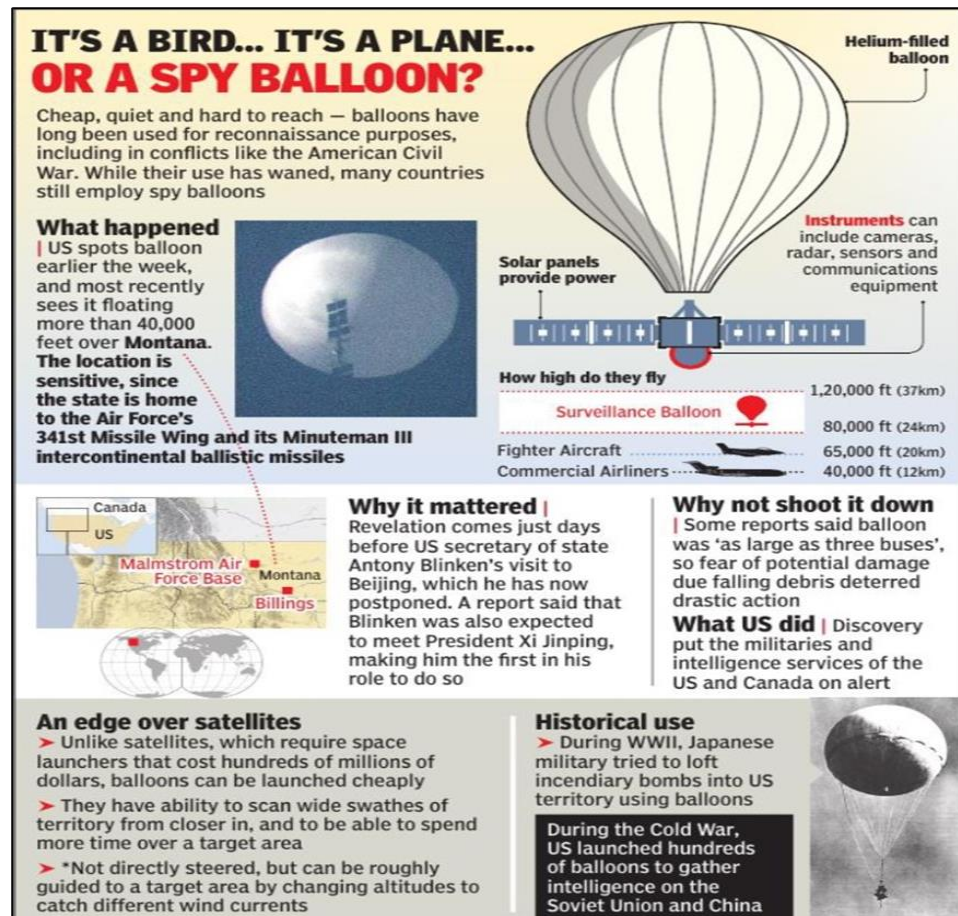
- It contended that the use of force by USA was an obvious overreaction and a serious violation of international practice.

What Are Spy Balloons?

- A contemporary spy balloon is a piece of spying equipment, for example a camera, suspended beneath a balloon that floats above a given area, carried by wind currents.

- Modern balloons typically hover between 24km-37km above the earth's surface (80,000ft-120,000ft)

Why Use Spy Balloons Rather Than Satellites?

- For the last few decades, satellites were used on a regular basis. But now _lasers or kinetic weapons_ are being invented to target satellites. Hence, there is a resurgence of interest in balloons.

IT'S A BIRD... IT'S A PLANE... OR A SPY BALLOON?

Cheap, quiet and hard to reach — balloons have long been used for reconnaissance purposes, including in conflicts like the American Civil War. While their use has waned, many countries still employ spy balloons

What happened | US spots balloon earlier the week, and most recently sees it floating more than 40,000 feet over **Montana**. The location is sensitive, since the state is home to the Air Force's **341st Missile Wing and its Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles**

Helium-filled balloon

Instruments can include cameras, radar, sensors and communications equipment

Solar panels provide power

How high do they fly
Surveillance Balloon .... 1,20,000 ft (37km)
.... 80,000 ft (24km)
Fighter Aircraft .... 65,000 ft (20km)
Commercial Airliners .... 40,000 ft (12km)

Why it mattered | Revelation comes just days before US secretary of state Antony Blinken's visit to Beijing, which he has now postponed. A report said that Blinken was also expected to meet President Xi Jinping, making him the first in his role to do so

Why not shoot it down | Some reports said balloon was 'as large as three buses', so fear of potential damage due falling debris deterred drastic action

What US did | Discovery put the militaries and intelligence services of the US and Canada on alert

An edge over satellites
➤ Unlike satellites, which require space launchers that cost hundreds of millions of dollars, balloons can be launched cheaply
➤ They have ability to scan wide swathes of territory from closer in, and to be able to spend more time over a target area
➤ *Not directly steered, but can be roughly guided to a target area by changing altitudes to catch different wind currents

Historical use
➤ During WWII, Japanese military tried to loft incendiary bombs into US territory using balloons

During the Cold War, US launched hundreds of balloons to gather intelligence on the Soviet Union and China

- Although, these balloons don't offer the same level of persistent surveillance as satellites, but are easier to retrieve, much cheaper to launch, scan more territory from a lower altitude, and spend more time over a given area because they move more slowly than satellites.

Russia Suspends New START Treaty

Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that Moscow was **suspending** its participation in the New START treaty. Speaking in his state-of-the-nation address, Mr. Putin also said that Russia should stand ready to resume nuclear weapons tests if the U.S. does so. If this happens, it would end a global ban on nuclear weapons tests in place since Cold War times.

What Could Putin's Announcement Mean?

- As per Russian President, the country is not withdrawing from the treaty entirely. But Moscow will not allow NATO countries to inspect its nuclear arsenal.

- Analysts believe It is entirely symbolic since Russia had not been permitting inspections anyway. As per them, the move appears to be aimed at pressuring President Biden and allies.

Why Are Security Experts All Over The World Worried About This Announcement?

- **Deterioration of Nuclear Disarmament Efforts**

- This is at a time when tensions between the United States and Russia have reached a recent peak after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year.
- **Signals that nuclear weapons are an effective form of diplomatic leverage**
  - This largely depends on the posture taken by the USA after this announcement. If the United States makes concessions, other countries might get the signal that nuclear weapons hold keys in such cases.

START Treaty

- The name START comes from the original "**St**rategic **A**rms **R**eduction **T**reaty", known as START-I.
  - START-I was signed between the **US** and the erstwhile **USSR** in 1991, and came into force in 1994.
- START-I capped the numbers of _nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)_ that each side could deploy at 6,000 and 1,600 respectively.
- START-I lapsed in 2009 and was replaced first by the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT, also known as the Treaty of Moscow), and then by the **New START treaty**.

What Is The New START Treaty

- New START Treaty is officially known as - "_Treaty between USA and Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms_".
  - It was signed by then-President Barack Obama and then-Russian president Dmitry Medvedev in 2010.
- The treaty entered into force in February 2011, and placed new verifiable limits on intercontinental-range nuclear weapons.
- Under the treaty, the United States and Russia were given **7 years** to scale back their stockpiles of strategic offensive arms — broadly, nuclear warheads deployed by missiles, planes or submarines that can travel long distances.
- After February 2018, both the countries had to maintain the stockpiles of these arms within the limits fixed by the treaty, for the period the treaty remained in force.
- US and Russia Federation subsequently agreed to extend the treaty through February 4, 2026.

How Is Compliance With The Treaty Ensured?

- Detailed procedures for the implementation and verification of the central limits, and all treaty obligations, are part of the treaty terms.
- The treaty provides for 18 on-site inspections per year for US and Russian inspection teams.

Have The United States And Russia Complied With It?

- Both countries met the limits spelled out in the treaty by February 2018 and appear to have remained at or below them since then.
- However, regular inspections mandated by the agreement have not been held for the past three years — initially because of the coronavirus pandemic, and later because relations soured after Russia invaded Ukraine.

One Year of War In Ukraine

Russia's war against Ukraine has completed one year. Calculations on both sides that this would be a short, swift war have proved wrong.

Why Russia Invaded Ukraine?

- **Russia wanted a guarantee that Ukraine can never join NATO**

- o Russia's main demand was a commitment from NATO to end its further expansion into former Soviet republics — especially Ukraine.

- **Russia wants NATO arms out of Eastern Europe**

  - o Russia wants NATO to stop deploying its weapons and forces in countries in Central and Eastern Europe that joined the alliance after 1997.

- **Russia wants a ban on NATO missiles within striking distance**

  - o Russia has nervously watched as NATO has demonstrated that it can deepen its involvement in Ukraine — providing weapons and training.

  - o NATO missiles on Ukrainian soil might pose serious threat to Russia's security.

MONTH BY MONTH

24 FEB 2022: Russia invades Ukraine from North, East, South. Over the next couple of days, two biggest cities, Kyiv and Kharkiv, come under intense shelling and missile attacks.

MARCH: Russia takes Kherson region, seeks to form land bridge between Crimea and Donbas oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk. Largest number of civilians killed in this month.

APRIL: Russian forces pull back from Kyiv; evidence emerges of civilian massacre in Bucha *(above)*. Ukrainians start retaking territory in North; sink Black Sea Fleet flagship *Moskva*.

MAY: Mariupol falls after weeks of bombardment and Ukrainian resistance; Azovstal steel plant reduced to ruins; Russian takes all of the Black Sea coast except Odesa.

JUNE: Ukraine retakes Snake Island in Black Sea off Odesa, which Russia had captured on day 1 of the war; morale-boosting victory hits aura of Russian naval prowess.

JULY: US-made HIMARS deployed. All of Luhansk falls to Russia; bloody war in Donbas has ground along slowly since. Fears rise around Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.

AUGUST: Ukraine launches major counteroffensive in Kherson using West-supplied weapons; targets Russian air base in Crimea. IAEA inspectors are allowed in Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant.

SEPTEMBER: Counteroffensive gains momentum; Ukraine takes back most of Kharkiv. Reports of demoralisation in Russian ranks. Nord Stream undersea pipelines are sabotaged.

OCTOBER: Blast hits Kerch Strait Bridge linking Crimea with Russia. Russia seeks to cripple Ukraine's energy infra; annexes Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia.

NOV-DEC: Russia withdraws from Kherson city to eastern side of Dnipro; war drags on with no major gains to either side; Ukraine drones hit military bases inside Russia.

JAN-FEB: Ukraine hits building in Donetsk housing Russian troops; Moscow says 89 soldiers dead. US, UK and Germany say will send tanks to Ukraine; Biden visits Kyiv *(above)*.

- **Russia wants autonomy for eastern Ukraine**

  - o Russia says Ukraine must meet its obligations under 2015 agreements.

    - ▪ The peace deal, known as the **Minsk agreements,** was signed to end the fighting between Ukraine's army and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

    - ▪ It was brokered by **France and Germany**. But it could not bring peace in the region.

    - ▪ The Minsk agreements also provided additional autonomy to the separatist Russian-speaking territories in the Donbas.

What's The Current Status Of The War?

- Russia is expected to launch a new offensive in the coming days. Right now, focused fighting has been going on in some flashpoints along the frontline.

Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine Reshaping The Geopolitics Of The World

- **European countries started to focus on its security and defence.**

  - o In this respect, the German turnaround from its post-World War pacifism was the most significant.

- **Re-energised Europe-US security alliance**

  - o NATO has opened its door to the proposed inclusion of Sweden and Finland.

  - o For this inclusion, Turkey's approval is awaited. If this inclusion takes place, it will form the new military frontiers of the alliance against Russia.

- **Europe at the centre of new arms race between Russia and the US**

- o Russia suspended its participation in the New START Treaty, negotiated with the US in 2011 to cap their nuclear weapons.
- o The trust deficit between Russia and the West is at an-all time high. The US-led alliance is pouring weapons into Ukraine.

- **Russia- China axis**

  - o Former Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi met President Putin in Moscow in an affirmation of the friendship formalised last year as "limitless".

  - o However, keeping its economic interests in mind, Beijing does not wish to jeopardise its Europe ties.

  - o Hence, over the last year, <u>China has remained at arm's distance from Russia's war</u> – no Chinese weapons for Moscow, and even a warning by President Xi Jinping against nuclear weapons.

- **Growing interest in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad**

  - o Earlier, the security experts had predicted that the Russia-Ukraine war would distract US interest from the Indo-Pacific, which proved to be wrong.

  - o Now, even European countries are showing more interest in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad than before, and want in.

- **Concerns of developing nations**

  - o The war has disrupted the supply chain and the prices of energy, fertilisers and other essential commodities have increased.

India's Position On Russia-Ukraine War

- **Strategic Autonomy**

  - o For India, the Ukraine war has been an *opportunity to practice strategic autonomy.*

  - o Adopting a *nuanced neutrality*, Delhi has maintained its relationship with Moscow and worked around Western sanctions to buy oil from Russia.

  - o As much as *25% of India's oil purchase is now from Russia*, from less than 2% before the war.

- **India's Voting at UN and Its Bodies**

  - o In the last year, the UN and its bodies have voted on resolutions pertaining to the Russia-Ukraine war at least 39 times: 38 times since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24 and once in January 2023.

  - o India, which has <u>maintained a diplomatic balancing act and has walked the tightrope between US-led West and Russia</u>, has abstained on most occasions.

- **More Calibrated Stance Adopted By Delhi In The Past One Year**

  - o So far, India has taken a calibrated stance based on its own national interests.

    - ▪ It had said it was deeply disturbed, but did not name Russia at all.

    - ▪ It called for cessation of violence and hostilities, which is permanent in nature.

- - It had flagged its core concern about Indian nationals. About 22,000 Indian nationals, mostly students, had to be evacuated by special planes.
    - It called for respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, and respect for UN charter and international law.
    - It advocated diplomacy. It maintained that dialogue and diplomacy is the path forward.
  - During the early phase of the war, India relied on balancing act since it needed cooperation from both Russian and Ukrainian sides to evacuate its citizens from the conflict zone.
    - After its last batch of students were airlifted by the second week of March 2022, the Indian position focussed on the other elements: respect for UN charter, territorial sovereignty and integrity.
  - Although, after the Bucha massacre - in which innocent civilians were killed - India joined the western chorus in condemning the incident.
    - It even asked for an international probe.

- **Nukes Must Be Off The Table**
  - As Russian President Putin and other Russian leaders made nuclear threats, India expressed concern.
  - India categorically said that no side should resort to the nuclear option.
    - Later, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief said PM Modi's concerns about the use of nuclear weapons have had an impact on the Russians amid Ukraine war.

- **India And The Issue Of Food Grains**
  - New Delhi was approached by Ukraine and other partners to intercede when the issue of food grains being blocked by Russia was raised.
  - India stepped in to convey its message to Moscow.

- **India & G-20 Declaration In Bali**
  - PM Modi's said to Russian President in Samarkand in September 2022 on the sidelines of the SCO that "This is not an era of war".
  - This became India's mantra, which even found its way into the G-20 declaration in Bali.

- **First Virtual Summit of the Voice of the Global South**
  - New Delhi's position also evolved as it felt the impact of the rising energy commodities prices.
  - In January 2023, India hosted the first virtual summit of the Voice of the Global South, where it raised the issue of rising prices of food, fuel and fertiliser.
  - It also flagged the concerns of the developing and the less-developed world on energy and food security. This will now be the consistent theme till the G-20 summit.

- **India and the Upcoming G-20 Summit**
  - With a year of geopolitical turmoil due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, India as the chair of G-20, will face the challenge of negotiating a declaration while balancing between Russia and the West.

Conclusion

- So far, India has walked on a diplomatic tightrope while maintain strategic autonomy in its decision making and promoting its national interests.

- But the longer the war continues, the more pressure on India from the Western alliance to choose the right side.
  - E.g., Ukraine asked India to support a UNGA resolution timed for the first anniversary of the war, asking Russia to withdraw from its territory.

- In this context, serious diplomatic efforts need to be made to end the war and the upcoming G-20 presidency can be used as a platform towards this direction.

India, Canada FMs Discuss Reset In Ties With Indo-Pacific Strategy

- Canadian Foreign Minister met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for the **India-Canada Strategic Dialogue** held in Delhi.
- The visit is seen as an attempt by both sides to put bilateral ties back on track. It focused primarily on Canada's newly released Indo-Pacific strategy that calls India an important partner.

Canada-India Relations: Background

- Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1947.
- Bilateral relation was elevated to a strategic partnership during PM Modi's visit to Canada in 2015.

Cooperation in COVID-19 Pandemic

- Repatriation flights:
  o Special charter flights were operated by the Canadian High Commission and facilitated by India to evacuate stranded Canadian nationals from India.
- Supply of medicines:
  o Export of a total of 12.34 crore paracetamol tablets, 5 crore Hydroxychloroquine tablets and 3510 kgs of Hydroxychloroquine Sulfate USP (API); and 10 Million eye shield with face mask were shipped to Canada.

Trade Relations

- A priority market for Canada, in 2021, India was Canada's 14th largest export market, and 13th largest trading partner overall.
- According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade during 2021:
  o Canada's Exports to India was US$2.39 Billion; and
  o India's Exports to Canada was US$3.56 Billion.
- Canada and India are working toward a **Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)** and a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement.
  o India is also negotiating the **Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA),** ahead of a CEPA.
- Canadian Pension Funds have invested around US$ 32.6 billion in India till 2020.
  o Pension Funds and other major investment firms have pledged portfolio investments of over US$ 50 billion in India.

Development Cooperation

- After 55 years of bilateral programming in India totaling $2.39 billion, Canada's bilateral development assistance program came to an end in 2006.
  o This was following a change in Indian government policy regarding aid.
- Canada supports various projects in India via Grand Challenges Canada.

- o The main programming sector of the Partnerships for Development Innovation Branch is _maternal, newborn and child health_, which includes support to early childhood development.

Nuclear Cooperation

- Canadian aid to India in the nuclear field begun in 1956. However, this relationship deteriorated in 1974 after India conducted **Smiling Buddha nuclear test**.
  - o Canada was among the first countries to participate in India's nuclear power program.
  - o CIRUS, research reactor was built in India in 1960, with the help of Canada.
- Later, in June 2010, the nuclear cooperation was restored when a _Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA)_ with Canada was signed.

Science and Technology

- Canada was a partner country for the Technology Summit 2017.
- Department of Biotechnology under **IC-IMPACTS program** implements joint research projects in health care, agri-biotech and waste management.
- Department of Earth Science and Polar Canada have started a programme for exchange of knowledge and scientific research on Cold Climate (Arctic) Studies.

Cooperation in Space

- ANTRIX, the Commercial arm of ISRO, has launched several nanosatellites from Canada.
- ISRO in its 100th Satellite PSLV launched in January 2018, also flew Canadian first LEO satellite.

Cooperation in Indo-Pacific

- In November 2022, **Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy was released**.
  - o Canada, 20% of whose population originates in the Indo-Pacific region, is the last G7 nation to embrace the concept of the Indo-Pacific.
- The Canadian strategy document contains sharp words on China's coercive challenge to the international rules-based order and on human rights.
- On the other hand, this document highlights India's strategic importance and asked Canada to work closely with India.

People-to-People

- Canada hosts one of the largest Indian diasporas in the world, numbering 1.6 million (PIOs and NRIs) which account for more than 4% of its total population.
  - o In the field of politics, in particular, the present House of Commons (total strength of 338) has 22 Members of Parliament of Indian-origin.
- For the first time, Canada Post and India Post joined hands to issue a commemorative stamp on Diwali in 2017. Diwali has been celebrated on the Parliament Hill for the last 18 years.

Challenges

- **Separatist Khalistani groups**
  - o Canada has been providing a safe haven for separatist Khalistani groups, which New Delhi sees as the Liberal Party's pandering to these groups for votes.
    - ▪ Diaspora Sikhs are well represented in the Trudeau government. Some of them are politically supported by pro-Khalistan groups.
    - ▪ Jagmeet 'Jimmy' Dhaliwal, whose New Democratic Party supports Trudeau's minority government in Parliament, is viewed with suspicion by the Indian establishment.

- o Last year, New Delhi objected to Canada permitting a Khalistani secessionist "referendum" in the Sikh diaspora.
- **Canada is slow to act against anti-India elements on its soil**
  - o Recently, a Hindu temple near Toronto was vandalised and defaced with anti-India graffiti.
  - o Concerns that Canada is slow to act against anti-India elements on its soil have been a constant irritant in the relationship.
- **Other irritants include**
  - o Attacks on Indian-origin people;
  - o Canadian comments over India's farmer protests and India's cancellation of diplomatic talks in response.

Conclusion

- Both countries seem to realise that any attempt to reset bilateral ties will need to surmount Canada's vote-bank restraints and India's security concerns.
- Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy emphasised India's strategic importance.
- It offers a wider staging ground for the two to come together, based on a shared suspicion of China, seeking to expand trade ties, and invest in supply chain resilience.

Visit Of Chancellor Of Germany To India

The Chancellor of Germany, Mr. Olaf Scholz, paid a State visit to India. This was the Chancellor Scholz's first visit to India in his current role.

- This was also the **first standalone visit** of a German Chancellor to India since the **biennial Inter-Governmental Consultation (IGC)** mechanism commenced in 2011.
- IGC is a whole-of-government framework under which Ministers from both countries hold discussions in their respective areas of responsibility and report on the outcome of discussions to the Prime Minister and Chancellor.

Key Outcomes

- **India-Germany Vision to Enhance Cooperation in Innovation and Technology**
  - o India and Germany agreed on a _vision statement_ to enhance cooperation on innovation and technology.
  - o Under the framework of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on 'Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technological Development', the two countries share a long history of cooperation in science and technology, research and innovation.
  - o This agreement was signed in May 1974.
- **Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP)**
  - o The leaders discussed progress on GSDP - an umbrella partnership that provides political guidance and steer to robust ties in climate action and SDGs.
  - o Under this, Germany will also place €10 billion in new and additional commitments under their development cooperation portfolio in India.
- **Cooperation in Green Hydrogen**
  - o India and Germany also agreed to cooperate on Green Hydrogen.

- o   Indo-German Green Hydrogen Task Force was constituted in September 2022 and an Action Plan is close to finalisation.

- **Triangular Development Cooperation**
  - o   India and Germany agreed to work on development projects in third countries.
  - o   The four projects, announced in May 2022, are now in different stages of implementation:
  - o   **Cameroon**: Potato Seed Production through Rooted Apical Cuttings (RAC) Technology.
  - o   **Malawi:** Agri Business Incubator Models for Women in Agriculture & Food Systems.
  - o   **Ghana**: Developing Bamboo-Based Enterprises for Sustainable Livelihood and Income Generation.
  - o   **Peru:** Development of a geospatial portal prototype for planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion of Peru (MIDIS) interventions and social programs.

- **Other Agreements**
  - o   Both sides concluded agreements on "Digital Transformation, FinTech, IT, Telecom and Supply chains' diversification".

- **Issue of Khalistani Separatism and Extremism Discussed**
  - o   India has earlier pointed to the presence of pro-Khalistan groups and elements in Germany.
  - o   And New Delhi is concerned at the recent turn of events in Punjab as well.

India-Germany Bilateral Relations

Background

- India and Germany have a **'Strategic Partnership'** since May 2000.

- This has been further strengthened with the launch of **Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC)** in 2011 at the level of Heads of Government.

- On March 7, 2021, **India and Germany marked the 70th anniversary** of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Economic & Commercial Relations

- Germany is India's largest trading partner in Europe and has consistently been among India's top (10-12) global partners.
  - o   Germany was the **11th largest trading** partner in FY 2021-22 (12th during FY 2022-23 up to August 2022).

- **Bilateral trade in 2021-22** was USD 24.85 billion registering an increase of 14.2% over FY 2020-21.
  - o   Indian exports during this period increased by 21.6% reaching **USD 9.88 billion** and Indian imports increased by 9.7% to **USD 14.97 billion**.

- Germany is the **9th largest FDI source for India**. The total FDI from Germany to India from April 2000-June 2022 is over USD 13 billion.
  - o   Indian investments in Germany continue to grow, having surpassed the figure of USD 7 billion.

Development Cooperation

- Germany committed a total volume of new funding of USD 1,368.02 million for 2021 for Financial & Technical Cooperation.

- Energy, sustainable economic and urban development, environment & management of natural resources are priority areas.

Security & Defence

- MoU on Security Cooperation signed at the 3rd IGC held in Delhi in 2015 defines collaboration in this field.

- There are dialogue mechanisms on various aspects of security, including:

  - Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism
  - Cyber Consultations
  - Joint Steering Group on Disaster Management in Berlin (2016)
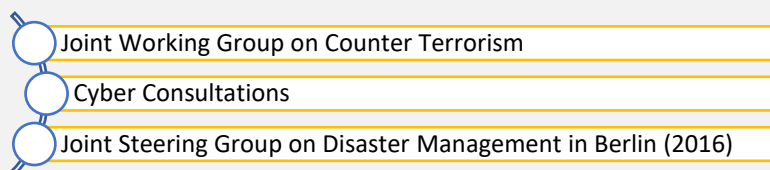
Science & Technology

- Bilateral Science and Technology cooperation is implemented under an Inter-Governmental Agreement on 'Cooperation in Scientific Research and Technological Development'.

- The jointly funded Indo-German Science and Technology Centre (IGSTC) was set up in Gurgaon in September 2008.

Sister State/City Arrangements

- The States of Karnataka and Bavaria, Maharashtra and Baden Wuerttemberg, and the cities of Mumbai and Stuttgart have twinning arrangements.

  o Twin city relations between Coimbatore and Esslingen were established in 2016.

Education

- There are approximately 29,000 (2020) Indian students who are studying in Germany, a number which is rising each year.

  o Around 800 German students are studying or doing internships in India.

- Instruments of faculty exchange and student mobility between India and Germany are:

  o *Visiting Advanced Joint Research (VAJRA)* from DST and *Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC)* from MoE

  o New Passage to India (from the German side).

Challenges

- Germany finds India a **more complex partner to negotiate** and conduct business with.

  o On the other hand, doing business with China is seen to be relatively simpler (even in the face of forced technology transfers, intellectual property rights violations etc.).

- It is commonplace in Germany to **point to the flaws in Indian democracy**, and thereby deem India an unworthy partner, at least in terms of shared values.

- Germany focuses **on trade and investment as the main conduit** to deepen its relations with India. As a result, Germany remains adamant on labour and environmental standards, at the expense of macro-level values of liberalism.

Conclusion

- Similar geopolitical perceptions form the foundation for the expansion of Indo-German relations. Economically, India continues to present great growth potential for German companies.

- However, strategic alignments, mismatched capabilities and inability of Germany to reconcile its values with its strategic interests particularly in the field of social policy have prevented bilateral security competition from reaching their full potential.

- In this backdrop, both the countries require close consultations on issues that define their *national interests,* as well as broad-ranging cooperation and coordination on security, commercial, and developmental issues.

EDITOR'S CUT — G20 Finance meet

- First G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) under India's G20 Presidency meeting took place in Bengaluru. The meeting ended without a joint communique.
  - A joint communique could not be issued as differences prevailed among member nations over how to describe Russia`s invasion of Ukraine.
  - Russia and China opposed the paragraphs condemning Russia's war on Ukraine.
  - These countries took the position that finance ministers and central bank governors should not get into geopolitical issues and that the mandate of FMCBG nations was to discuss economic issues.
- In place of a joint communique, a **G20 Chair's Summary and Outcome Document** was released.

Key Highlights Of The Chair's Summary And Outcome Document

- **Retained the Words of G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration**
  - The document retained G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration (November 15-16, 2022) regarding the Russia-Ukraine war.
    - Bali declaration proclaimed "today's era must not be of war", echoing PM Modi's remarks before President Putin on the sidelines of the SCO summit in September 2022.
    - The declaration had also endorsed PM Modi's emphasis on three key points: ***threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible***, **diplomacy *and dialogue*** and ***today's era must not be of war***.
- **Urgency to address debt vulnerabilities in low and middle-income countries**
  - Strengthening multilateral coordination by official bilateral and private creditors is needed to address the deteriorating debt situation and facilitate coordinated debt treatment for debt-distressed countries.
  - The document tasked the *International Financial Architecture Working Group* to develop a G20 Note on the Global Debt Landscape in a fair and comprehensive manner.
  - Vulnerable nations are looking at G20 nations to relieve the debt stress.
    - The four countries – Ghana, Sri Lanka, Zambia and Ethiopia, would benefit from the current discussions on *debt restructuring.*
- **Joint Technical Paper On Crypto-Assets**
  - The document also decided to ask the *IMF and the Financial Stability Board (FSB)* to bring out a joint technical paper on crypto-assets.
    - Originally, this was proposed by India in order to synthesise the macroeconomic and regulatory perspectives of crypto-assets.
  - These organisations are expected to present their joint paper during the 4th G20 FMCBG Meet, scheduled in October 2023.
  - This would help in the formulation of a coordinated and comprehensive policy approach to crypto assets.
    - This is relevant as many countries, including India, do not have a regulatory framework for crypto assets.

Issue Of Unsustainable Debt Levels

- According to a new policy brief published by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**, 52 low and middle-income developing economies are either in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress.

  - This accounts for more than **40% of the world's poorest people**.

- 25 developing economy governments have external debt service payments higher than 20% of total revenue – the highest number of countries in more than 20 years.

  - **External debt** is the portion of a country's debt that is borrowed from foreign lenders, including *commercial banks, governments, or international financial institutions*.

  - **Debt service** refers to the money required to pay the *principal and interest* on an outstanding debt for a particular period of time.

- The UNDP report added that a **30% haircut** on their public external debt stock in 2021 could help save up to $148 billion in debt service payments over eight years.

  - Haircut is the difference between the **current market value of an asset** and the value ascribed to that asset.

  - Specific to debt restructuring, a haircut is the reduction of outstanding interest payments or a portion of a bond payable that will not be repaid.

  - In other words, a debt haircut refers to part of the debt being "written off".

- In December 2022, **World Bank** had said that the world's poorest countries owe $62 billion in annual debt service, a year-on-year increase of 35%, warning of a rising risk of defaults.

Steps Taken By The World Leaders To Address The Issue

- Debt restructuring along with inflation control and harnessing digital progress were also listed as crucial policy priorities by IMF

- **Under the G20 Presidency**, India has been pressing for ways to tackle the aggravated debt vulnerabilities facing developing nations mainly on account of the continuing geopolitical tensions and the pandemic.

- In order to help vulnerable countries, group of creditors are preferring to have a haircut (debt forgiveness).

- On the other hand, there are group of countries, led by China, who are using *rescheduling with lower interest rates* as to tool to help these vulnerable countries.

Punjab Turmoil: Pro-Khalistan Preacher's Aide Released From Jail

- Recently, hundreds of followers of radical leader Amritpal Singh clashed with the police outside Ajnala police station near Amritsar, Punjab.

  - They demanded the release of one of their members from police custody in an alleged kidnapping case.

- Later, this individual, an aide of Amritpal Singh named Lovepreet Singh 'Toofan', was released from Amritsar Central Jail.

Who Is Amritpal Singh

- Amritpal Singh is a follower of pro-Khalistan slain militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

- In fact, he is being dubbed 'Bhindranwale 2.0' in Punjab these days.

- Recently, he took the reins of the 'Waris Punjab De' organisation following the death of its founder, actor-activist Deep Sidhu.

WHAT IS 'WARIS PUNJAB DE'?

- 'Waris Punjab De', translating to their 'heirs of Punjab', was floated by lawyer-actor-turned-activist Sandeep Singh alias Deep Sidhu in September 2021, ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections.
- The social organisation was originally floated as a pressure group to protect and fight for rights of Punjab and raise social issues.
- It works to help the youth of the state follow the tenets of Sikhism and establish Khalsa Raj.
- Its founder had described it as an organisation that would fight for the rights of Punjab against the Centre and raise voice whenever there will be any attack on the culture, language, social fabric and rights of Punjab.

Khalistan Movement in Punjab

- The Khalistan movement is a fight for a separate, sovereign Sikh state in present day Punjab (both India and Pakistan).

- The movement was crushed in India following **Operation Blue Star** (1984) and **Operation Black Thunder** (1986 and 1988).

  o Operation Blue Star began on June 1, 1984 to flush out militants from the Golden Temple and neutralise Bhindranwale.

- However, it continues to evoke sympathy and support among sections of the Sikh population, especially in the Sikh diaspora in countries such as Canada, UK, and Australia.

When Did The Movement Start And Why?

- **Origin lies in India's independence and subsequent Partition along religious lines**

  o The Punjab province, which was divided between India and Pakistan, saw some of the worst communal violence and generated millions of refugees.

  o Lahore, the capital of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's great Sikh Empire, went to Pakistan, as did holy Sikh sites including Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.

  o While most Sikhs found themselves in India, they were a small minority in the country, making up around 2 per cent of the population.

- **Struggle for greater autonomy & States Reorganisation Commission**

  o The political struggle for greater autonomy began around the time of Independence, with the Punjabi Suba Movement for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking state.

  o The **States Reorganisation Commission**, in its 1955 report, rejected this demand, but in 1966, after years of protest, the state of Punjab was reorganised to reflect the Punjabi Suba demand.

  o The erstwhile Punjab state was trifurcated into the Hindi-speaking, Hindu-majority states of **Himachal Pradesh** and **Haryana**, and the Punjabi-speaking, Sikh-majority **Punjab**.

- **Anandpur Sahib Resolution**

  o In 1973, leaders of the Akali Dal met at the sacred town of Anandpur Sahib, the birthplace of the Khalsa.

  o They released a list of demands that would guide the political path of the Akali Dal.

  o Among other things, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution demanded autonomy for the state of Punjab, identified regions that would be part of a separate state, and *sought the right to frame its own internal constitution*.

- o The Akali Dal was trying to cash in on the growing demand for an autonomous state which had emerged alongside the Punjabi Suba movement.
  - ▪ This demand had gone global by 1971 — when an advertisement appeared on The New York Times proclaiming the birth of Khalistan.

- **Rise of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale**
  - o Many in Punjab sought to <u>go beyond just a demand for greater autonomy</u>. One such man was Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.
  - o Bhindranwale was a charismatic preacher who soon positioned himself as the authentic voice of the Sikhs.
  - o He found a captive audience in the state's youth, especially those in the lower rungs of the social ladder, and massed a massive following.
  - o By 1982, he took up residence inside the Golden Temple, directing demonstrations and clashes with the police.
  - o The movement was geared towards the demands first articulated in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.
  - o However, amidst growing religious polarisation, sectarian violence, and Bhindranwale's own harsh rhetoric against Hindus, the then government declared the movement tantamount to secession.

- **The Aftermath of Operation Blue Star**
  - o This operation gravely wounded the Sikh community around the world. It also galvanised the demand for Khalistan.
  - o Punjab saw the worst violence, becoming the hub of a long drawn-out insurgency that lasted till 1995.

Why Punjab Is Witnessing Increased Activities Of Pro-Khalistan Groups In Recent Years?

- **Sacrilege Issue**
  - o NIA had said that the Sikh youths are being radicalised after the incidents of sacrilege (violation/ injurious treatment) of the Guru Granth Sahib in 2015.
  - o This issue remains one of the main arguments forwarded by pro-Khalistan groups to push their agenda.

- **Drug Issue**
  - o These groups have raised the issue of smuggling of drugs into the state, linking it to a conspiracy to reduce Sikhs to slaves or even to eliminate them.
  - o The failure of governments to check smuggling have given an impression of a deliberate neglect on the issue, which is being cashed by pro-Khalistan groups.

- **Social Media & Role of Diaspora**
  - o Pro-Khalistan groups have created their space through clever use of social media. It is via this that the Khalistan narrative has been kept alive.
  - o Also, songs by popular singers have long flirted with themes of violence. In June 2022, the Centre had to ensure a ban on the SYL song of Sidhu Moosewala, which was seen as glorifying Khalistani militants.
  - o **Sikh diaspora** in Western countries, including Canada and Germany, are effectively utilizing social media to spread the propaganda.

- **No Militancy**
  - o While visuals of armed pro-Khalistani activists clashing with police are alarming, these groups are more into strident activism, rather than any agenda of organised militancy as in 80s and 90s.

- o There is no evidence of links to any organised militant group. This makes difficult for the government to act against them.

- **Hindu Rashtra Demand**

    - o There is a growing narrative around a "Hindu Rashtra", which further plays into the security among Sikhs over its implications for minorities like them.

- **Rising Unemployment**

    - o According to the data released by the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy Private Limited (CMIE) in January 2023, of every 100 persons in Punjab, only seven are unemployed.

    - o But, the year-long Farmers' protest in 2021 and railways blockades have created negative sentiments among investors leading to further rise in unemployment.

Conclusion

- Openly pushing the separatist idea of Khalistan, pro-Khalistan groups have been challenging the theory of nationalism, drawing parallels between the idea of Sikh sovereignty and Hindu Rashtra.

- While enhancing the security efforts in the region, the Centre must collaborate with the State government in order to tackle the issue before it gives birth to full-fledged Khalistan Movement 2.0.

The Finance Minister of India introduced the last full-fledged Union Budget (for 2023-24) before the Lok Sabha elections of 2024. The Finance Minister of India called it the **first Budget in Amrit Kaal.** The vision for the Amrit Kaal is an <u>empowered and inclusive economy</u> that is technology-driven and knowledge-based with a robust financial sector.

The Budget is divided into two parts:

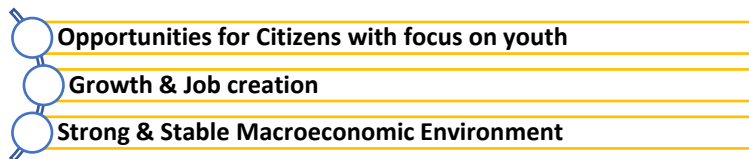| Part A	•Deals With Various Developmental Initiatives Across Different Sectors Of Economy.
Part B	•Deals With Taxation, Both Direct And Indirect

Part A

Amrit Kaal (Period of 25 Years (2023-2047))

The Vision for 'Amrit Kaal' articulated in the Union Budget for FY 2023-24 is centered around:

- **Opportunities for Citizens with focus on youth**
- **Growth & Job creation**
- **Strong & Stable Macroeconomic Environment**

While going in the future, the achievements in the past need to be acknowledged.

Achievements Since 2014: Leaving No One Behind

In the 75th year of India's Independence, the World has recognized the Indian Economy as a '**bright star'** as the Economic Growth is estimated at **7%,** which is the highest among all major economies, in spite of the massive global slowdown caused by COVID-19 and Russia-Ukraine War. The following achievements took place in the Indian economy:

- The Indian economy has increased in size from *being 10th to 5th largest in the world* in the past 9 years.
- **Per capita income** has more than doubled to ₹**1.97 lakh** in around nine years.
- **EPFO membership** has more than doubled to 27 crore.
- 7,400 crore digital payments of ₹126 lakh crore has taken place through **UPI** in 2022.
- 11.7 crore household toilets constructed under **Swachh Bharat Mission.**
- 9.6 crore LPG connections provided under **Ujjwala.**
- 220 crore **covid vaccination** of 102 crore persons.
- 47.8 crore **PM Jan Dhan bank accounts**.
- Insurance cover for 44.6 crore persons under **PM Suraksha Bima and PM Jeevan Jyoti Yojana**.
- Cash transfer of ₹2.2 lakh crore to over 11.4 crore farmers under **PM Kisan Samman Nidhi.**

Saptarishi

The Budget listed **seven priorities** of the Union Budget and said that they complement each other and act as the 'Saptarishi' guiding us through the Amrit Kaal. They are as follows:

inclusive development	reaching the last mile	infrastructure and investment	unleashing the potential	green growth	youth power	financial sector

So, we will study Key budgetary provisions as per the above seven broad areas to understand length and breadth of the Union Budget 2023-24.

Budget w.r.t. Inclusive development (Social Justice) and the last mile connectivity

The Budget envisions a prosperous and inclusive India, where the fruits of development reach all regions and citizens, especially our youth, women, farmers, OBCs, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. **Overall priority for the underprivileged (vanchiton ko variyata)**

Last Mile connectivity (Inclusive Growth)

- Investment of Rs. 75,000 crore, including Rs. 15,000 crore from private sources, _for one hundred critical transport infrastructure projects_, for last and first mile connectivity for ports, coal, steel, fertilizer, and food grains sectors.
- **Aspirational Blocks Programme** covering 500 blocks launched for saturation of essential government services across multiple domains such as _health, nutrition, education, agriculture, water resources, financial inclusion, skill development, and basic infrastructure._
- **PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY)** Scheme to supply free food grain to all Antyodaya and priority households has been extended for the next one year (from 1st January 2023). The entire expenditure of about Rs 2 lakh crore will be borne by the Central Government.

Women

- To commemorate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, a _one-time new small savings scheme_, **Mahila Samman Savings Certificate** to be launched.
  - It will offer deposit facility **upto Rs 2 lakh** in the name of women or girls for tenure of 2 years (up to March 2025) at fixed interest rate of 7.5% with partial withdrawal option.

Elderly

- The maximum deposit limit for **Senior Citizen Savings Scheme** to be enhanced from Rs 15 lakh to Rs 30 lakh.

Tribals

- Rs. 15,000 crore for implementation of **Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission** over the next 3 years under the Development Action Plan for the Scheduled Tribes.
- Centre to recruit 38,800 teachers and support staff for the 740 **Eklavya Model Residential Schools**, serving 3.5 lakh tribal students over the next three years.

Health

- Sickle **Cell Anaemia** elimination mission to be launched.
- Joint public and Private Medical research to be encouraged via select ICMR labs for encouraging collaborative research and innovation.
- New Programme to promote research in Pharmaceuticals to be launched.

Education

- District Institutes of Education and Training to be developed as vibrant _institutes of excellence for Teachers' Training._

- A **National Digital Library for Children and Adolescents** to be set-up for facilitating availability of quality books across geographies, languages, genres and levels, and device agnostic accessibility.
- *Three centers of excellence for Artificial Intelligence* to be set-up in top educational institutions to realise the vision of "Make AI in India and Make AI work for India".

Governance

- **Phase-3 of the E-Courts** project to be launched with an outlay of Rs. 7,000 crore for efficient administration of justice.
- **Jan Vishwas Bill** to amend **42 Central Acts** has been introduced to further trust-based governance.
- **National Data Governance Policy** to be brought out to unleash innovation and research by start-ups and academia.
- *One stop solution for reconciliation and updation of identity and address* of individuals to be established using **DigiLocker service** and **Aadhaar** as foundational identity.
- **PAN** will be used as the common identifier for all digital systems of specified government agencies to bring in Ease of Doing Business.
- **iGOT Karmayogi**, an integrated online training platform, launched to provide continuous learning opportunities for lakhs of government employees to upgrade their skills and facilitate people-centric approach.

The Budget w.r.t. Infrastructure and Investment

- Rs. 10 lakh crore **capital investment**, a steep increase of 33% for third year in a row, to enhance growth potential and job creation, crowd-in private investments, and provide a cushion against global headwinds.
- Capital outlay of Rs. 2.40 lakh crore has been provided for the **Railways**, which is the highest ever outlay and about nine times the outlay made in 2013-14.
- **New Infrastructure Finance Secretariat** established to *enhance opportunities for private investment in infrastructure.*
- **Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF)** will be established through use of Priority Sector Lending shortfall, which will be managed by the **National Housing Bank**, and will be used by public agencies to create urban infrastructure in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.
- Encouragement to states and cities to undertake urban planning reforms and actions to transform our cities into '*sustainable cities of tomorrow'*.
- Transition from manhole to machine-hole mode by enabling all cities and towns to undertake 100 percent mechanical desludging of septic tanks and sewers.
- *Income of authorities, boards and commissions* set up by statutes of the Union /State for the purpose of housing, development of cities, towns and villages, or regulating and developing an activity or matter, proposed *to be exempted from income tax.*
- Outlay for **PM Awas Yojana** is being enhanced by 66% to over Rs. 79,000 crore.
- Tourism infrastructure to be facilitated in border villages through the **Vibrant Villages Programme.**
- 100 labs to be set up for **5G services** based application development to realize a new range of opportunities, business models, and employment potential.

The Budget w.r.t. Finance

- **National Financial Information Registry** to be set up to serve as the central repository *of financial and ancillary information for facilitating efficient flow of credit,* promoting financial inclusion, and fostering financial stability. A new legislative framework to be designed in consultation with RBI to govern this **credit public infrastructure**.

- Financial sector regulators to carry out a comprehensive review of existing regulations in consultation with public and regulated entities. **Time limits** to decide the applications under various regulations would also be laid down.

- **Integrated IT portal** to be established to enable investors to easily reclaim the unclaimed shares and unpaid dividends from the **Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority**.

- **Central Processing Centre** to be set up for faster response to companies through centralized handling of various forms filed with field offices under the Companies Act.

- **SEBI** to be empowered to develop, regulate, maintain and enforce norms and standards for education in the National Institute of Securities Markets and to recognize award of degrees, diplomas and certificates.

- Amendments proposed to the **Banking Regulation Act, the Banking Companies Act and the Reserve of India Act** to improve bank governance and enhance investors' protection.

GIFT IFSC

Period of tax benefits to funds relocating to **IFSC, GIFT City** extended till 31.03.2025. To enhance business activities in GIFT IFSC, the following measures are to be taken.

- Delegating powers under the SEZ Act to **IFSCA (International Financial Services Centres Authority)** to avoid dual regulation.

- Setting up a *single window IT system for registration and approval* from IFSCA, SEZ authorities, GSTN, RBI, SEBI and IRDAI.

- Permitting acquisition financing by IFSC Banking Units of foreign banks.

- Establishing a subsidiary of EXIM Bank for trade refinancing.

- Amending IFSCA Act for statutory provisions for arbitration, ancillary services, and avoiding dual regulation under SEZ Act

- Recognizing *offshore derivative instruments as valid contracts*.

- Countries looking for digital continuity solutions would be facilitated for setting up of their **Data Embassies** in GIFT IFSC.

The Budget w.r.t. Green Growth and Environment

- **'Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes', MISHTI,** to be taken up for mangrove plantation along the coastline and on salt pan lands, through convergence between MGNREGS, CAMPA Fund and other sources.

- 500 new '**waste to wealth**' plants under **GOBARdhan (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan**) scheme to be established for promoting **circular economy** at total investment of Rs 10,000 crore. 5 per cent compressed biogas mandate to be introduced for all organizations marketing natural and biogas.

- **Green Credit Programme** to be notified under the **Environment (Protection) Act** to incentivize and mobilize additional resources for environmentally sustainable and responsive actions.
- **Amrit Dharohar scheme** to be implemented over the next 3 years to encourage optimal use of **wetlands,** enhance bio-diversity, eco-tourism opportunities and income generation for local communities.
- Annual production of **5 MMT under Green Hydrogen Mission** to be targeted by **2030** to facilitate transition of the economy to low carbon intensity and to reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports.
- Centre to facilitate one crore farmers to adopt natural farming over the next three years. For this, **10,000 Bio-Input Resource Centres** to be set-up, creating a national-level distributed micro-fertilizer and pesticide manufacturing network.

The Budget w.r.t. Youth Power (Employment and Skill Development) and Utilisation of Emerging Potential

- **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0**, to be launched to skill lakhs of youth within the next three years covering new age courses for Industry 4.0 like coding, AI, robotics, mechatronics, IOT, 3D printing, drones, and soft skills.
- 30 **Skill India International Centres** to be set up across different States to skill youth for international opportunities.
- A unified **Skill India Digital platform** to be launched for enabling demand-based formal skilling, linking with employers including MSMEs, and facilitating access to entrepreneurship schemes.
- **Direct Benefit Transfer** under a pan-India **National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme** to be rolled out to provide stipend support to 47 lakh youth in three years.

The Budget w.r.t. Occupational Structure (Agriculture, Manufacturing and Services)

Agriculture

- **PM Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother Earth" (PM-PRANAM)** to be launched to incentivize States and Union Territories to promote alternative fertilizers and balanced use of chemical fertilizers.
- **Atmanirbhar Clean Plant Program** with an outlay of ₹2200 crore to be launched to boost availability of disease-free, quality planting material for high value horticultural crops.
- **Agriculture Accelerator Fund** to be set-up to encourage agri-startups by young entrepreneurs in rural areas.
- To make India a global hub for **'Shree Anna'**, the Indian Institute of Millet Research, Hyderabad will be supported as the Centre of Excellence for sharing best practices, research and technologies at the international level.
- ₹20 lakh crore agricultural credit targeted at animal husbandry, dairy and fisheries.
- A new sub-scheme of **PM Matsya Sampada Yojana** with targeted investment of ₹6,000 crore to be launched to further enable activities of fishermen, fish vendors, and micro & small enterprises, improve value chain efficiencies, and expand the market.
- Digital public infrastructure for agriculture to be built as an open source, open standard and interoperable public good to enable inclusive farmer centric solutions for growth of agri-tech industry and start-ups.

- **Computerisation of 63,000 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS)** with an investment of ₹2,516 crore initiated.
- States are encouraged to set up a **Unity Mall** for promotion and sale of their own and also all other states' _ODOPs (One District, One Product), GI products and handicrafts._
- Massive _decentralised storage capacity_ to be set up to help farmers store their produce and realize remunerative prices through sale at appropriate times.
- Rs. 5,300 crore to be given as central assistance to **Upper Bhadra Project** to provide sustainable micro irrigation and filling up of surface tanks for drinking water.
- Provision of a higher limit of Rs. 2 lakh per member for cash deposits to and loans in cash by Primary Agricultural Co-operative Societies (PACS) and Primary Co-operative Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (PCARDBs).

Manufacturing/Industry/MSME

- **Entity DigiLocker** to be set up for use by MSMEs, large business and charitable trusts to store and share documents online securely.
- **Revamped Credit guarantee scheme** for MSMEs to take effect from 1st April 2023 through infusion of Rs 9,000 crore in the corpus. This scheme would enable additional underlined collateral-free guaranteed credit of Rs 2 lakh crore and also reduce the cost of the credit by about 1 percent.
- New co-operatives that commence manufacturing activities till 31.3.2024 to get the benefit of a lower tax rate of 15 per cent, as presently available to new manufacturing companies.
- Date of incorporation for income tax benefits to start-ups to be extended from 31.03.23 to 31.3.24.

The Budget w.r.t. Culture

- **Bharat Shared Repository of Inscriptions (Bharat SHRI)'** to be set up in a digital epigraphy museum, with digitization of one lakh ancient inscriptions in the first stage.

Part B

FISCAL MANAGEMENT (Revenue & Expenditure)

Key Numbers

In ₹ crore	2021-22 (Actuals)	2022-23 (Budget Estimates)	2022-23 (Revised Estimates)	2023-24 (Budget Estimates)
Revenue Receipts	21,69,905	22,04,422	23,48,413	26,32,281
Capital Receipts	16,23,896	17,40,487	18,38,819	1,870,816
Total Receipts	37,93,801	39,44,909	41,87,232	45,03,097
Total Expenditure	37,93,801	39,44,909	41,87,232	45,03,097
Revenue Deficit	10,31,021	9,90,241	11,10,546	8,69,855
Effective Revenue Deficit	7,88,375	6,72,598	7,84,958	4,99,867
Fiscal Deficit	15,84,521	16,61,196	17,55,319	17,86,816
Primary Deficit	7,79,022	7,20,545	8,14,668	7,06,845

Budget at a Glance

2021-22 (Actuals) • 2022-23 (BE) • 2022-23 (RE) • 2023-24 (BE)

In ₹ crore

Receipts
Revenue: 21,69,905 / 22,04,422 / 23,48,413 / 26,32,281
Capital: 16,23,896 / 17,40,487 / 18,38,819 / 18,70,816

Expenditure
Revenue: 32,00,926 / 31,94,663 / 34,58,959 / 35,02,136
Capital: 5,92,874 / 7,50,246 / 7,28,274 / 10,00,961
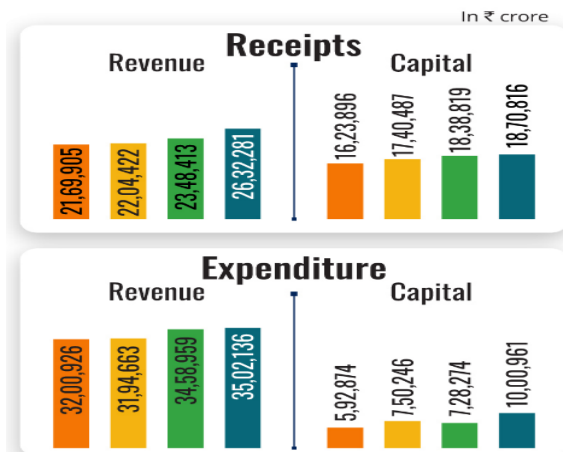
Revised Estimates 2022-23	Budget Estimates 2023-24
1) The _total receipts other than borrowings_ is Rs 24.3 lakh crore, of which the net tax receipts are Rs 20.9 lakh crore. 2) The total expenditure is Rs 41.9 lakh crore, of which the capital expenditure is about Rs 7.3 lakh crore. 3) The fiscal deficit is **6.4 percent of GDP**, adhering to the Budget Estimate.	1) The total receipts other than borrowings is estimated at Rs **27.2 lakh crore** and the total expenditure is estimated at Rs **45 lakh crore**. 2) The net tax receipts are estimated at Rs 23.3 lakh crore. 3) The **fiscal deficit is estimated to be 5.9 percent of GDP.** 4) To finance the fiscal deficit in 2023-24, the net market borrowings from dated securities are estimated at Rs 11.8 lakh crore. 5) The gross market borrowings are estimated at Rs 15.4 lakh crore.

Fiscal Deficit

- Targeted Fiscal Deficit to be **below 4.5% by 2025-26.**
- 'Effective Capital Expenditure' of Centre to be Rs. 13.7 lakh crore.
- The entire **fifty-year interest free loan** to states to be spent on capital expenditure within 2023-24. Part of the loan is conditional on States increasing actual Capital expenditure and parts of outlay will be linked to States undertaking specific loans.
- Fiscal Deficit of 3.5% of GSDP allowed for States of which _0.5% is tied to Power sector reforms._

DIRECT TAXES

Direct Tax proposals aim to maintain continuity and stability of taxation, further simplify and

rationalise various provisions to reduce the compliance burden, promote the entrepreneurial spirit

and provide tax relief to citizens.

- Highest surcharge rate to reduce from **37% to 25%** in the new tax regime. This further resulted in reduction of the maximum personal income tax rate to 39 per cent.
- **Agniveer Fund to be provided EEE status**. The payment received from the Agniveer Corpus Fund by the Agniveers enrolled in Agnipath Scheme, 2022 proposed to be exempt from taxes. Deduction in the computation of total income is proposed to be allowed to the Agniveer on the contribution made by him or the Central Government to his **Seva Nidhi account.**

Personal Income Tax

There are five major announcements relating to the personal income tax.

1) The rebate limit in the new tax regime has been increased to ₹ **7 lakh**, meaning that persons in the new tax regime with income upto ₹ 7 lakh will not have to pay any tax. The tax structure in the new personal tax regime has been changed by _reducing the number of slabs to five and increasing the tax exemption limit to ₹ 3 lakh._ This will provide major relief to all taxpayers in the new regime.

2) The benefit of standard deduction has been extended to the salaried class and the pensioners including family pensioners under the new tax regime. _Salaried individuals will get standard deduction of ₹ 50,000 and pensioner ₹ 15,000 as per the proposal_. Each salaried person with an income of ₹ 15.5 lakh or more will thus gain ₹ 52,500, from the above proposals.

3) The **highest surcharge rate** in personal income tax has been reduced from **37% to 25**% in the new tax regime for income above ₹2 crore. This would result in the maximum tax rate of personal income tax coming down to **39%** which was earlier 42.74%.

4) The limit of tax exemption on leave encashment on retirement of non-government salaried employees has been increased from ₹3 lakh to ₹25 lakh.

5) The new income tax regime has been made the default tax regime. However, the citizens will continue to have the option to avail the benefit of the old tax regime.

Old and New Tax Regime

New Tax Regime		Old Tax Regime	
Total Income (Rs)	Rate (per cent)	Total Income (Rs)	Rate (per cent)
Up to 3,00,000	Nil	Up to INR 2.5 lakh	Nil
From 3,00,001 to 6,00,000	5	INR 2.5 lakh to INR 5 lakh	5
From 6,00,001 to 9,00,000	10	INR 5 lakh to INR 7.5 lakh	20
From 9,00,001 to 12,00,000	15	INR 7.5 lakh to INR 10 lakh	
From 12,00,001 to 15,00,000	20	INR 10 lakh to INR 12.5 lakh	30
Above 15,00,000	30	INR 12.5 lakh to INR 15 lakh	
		Above INR 15 lakh	30

Common IT Return Form

The Union Budget also proposes to roll out a next-generation **common IT return** form for taxpayer convenience.

- The Budget stipulates a plan to <u>strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism</u> for direct taxes.
- It also proposed for deployment of about 100 Joint Commissioners for disposals of small appeals in direct tax matters.

INDIRECT TAXES

The Budget emphasized on simplification of tax structure with fewer tax rates so as to help in reducing compliance burden and improving tax administration.

- The **number of basic customs duty rates** on goods, other than textiles and agriculture, has been reduced from 21 to 13.
- To avoid cascading of taxes on blended compressed natural gas, excise duty on GST-paid compressed biogas contained in it has been exempted from excise duty.

- Customs duty exemption has been extended (till 31.03.2024) to import of _capital goods and machinery required for manufacture of lithium-ion cells for batteries used in electric vehicles_.
- **National Calamity Contingent Duty** on specified cigarettes has been revised upwards by about 16%.

Amendments In CGST Act

- The Budget provides for amending the CGST Act so as to raise the _minimum threshold of tax amount for launching prosecution_ under GST from ₹ 1 crore to ₹ 2 crore, except for the offence of issuance of invoices without supply of goods and services or both.
- The compounding amount will be reduced from the present range of 50 to 150% of tax amount to the range of 25 to 100%.
- It will also **decriminalize** certain clauses of the Act like obstruction and preventing any officer from discharge of his duties, deliberate tampering of evidence or failure to supply the information.
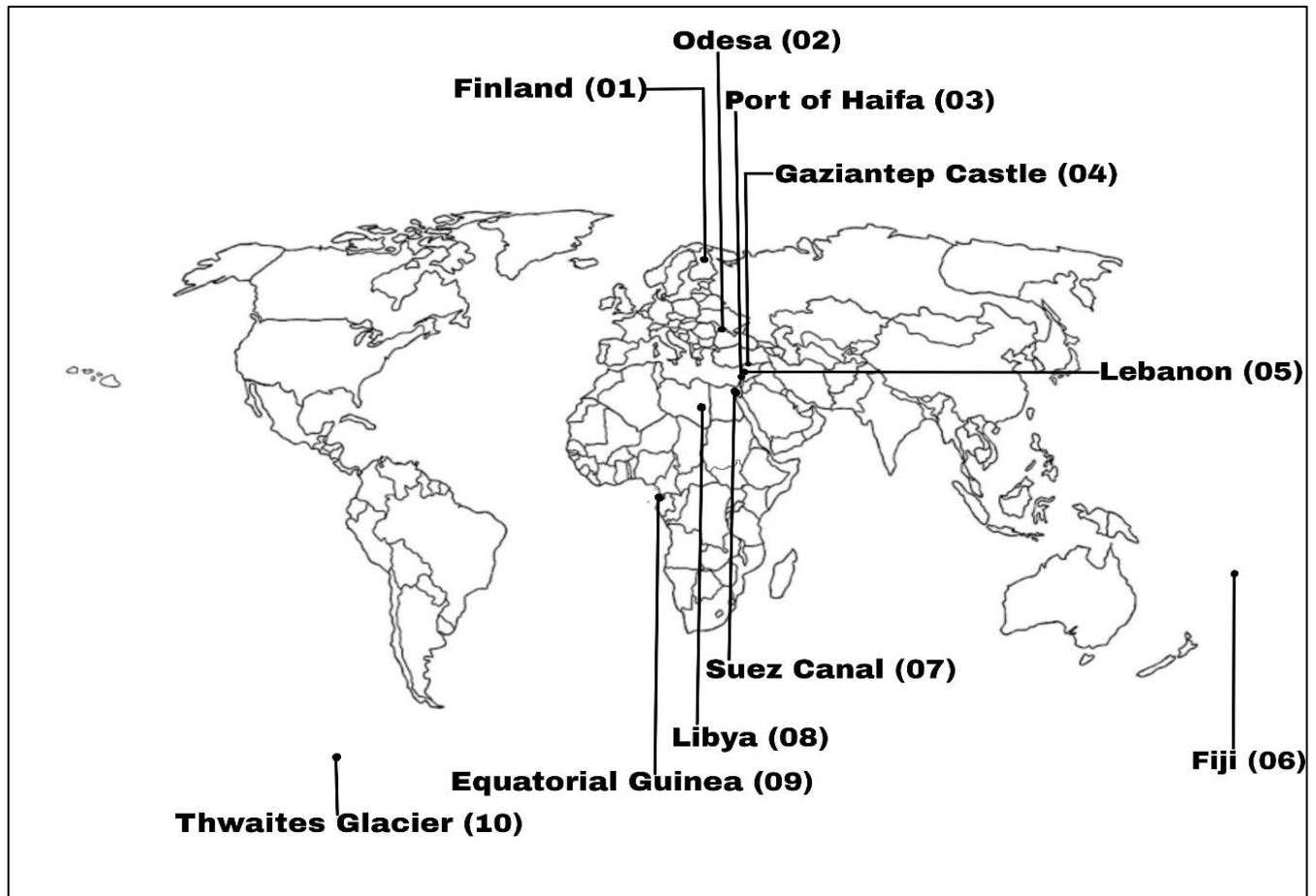
Overall Analysis of Rupee
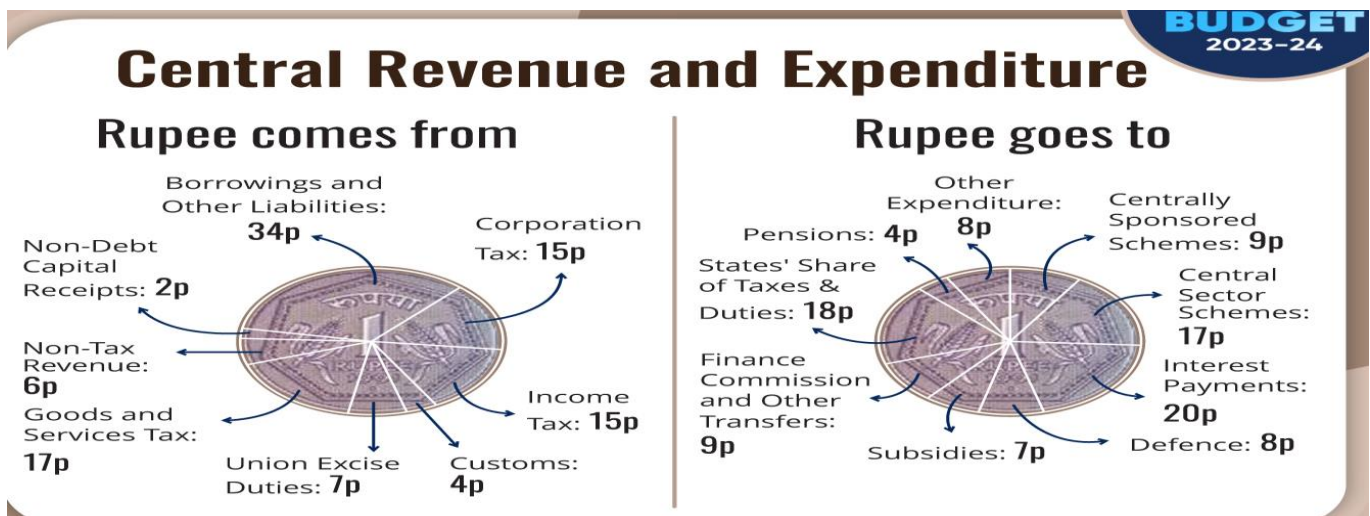
CONCLUSION

Overall, the budget proposed several measures to achieve these goals, including a new tax regime for individuals, increased allocation for agriculture and rural development, and a substantial increase in infrastructure spending. The budget also aimed to simplify tax administration, enhance compliance, and reduce tax disputes.
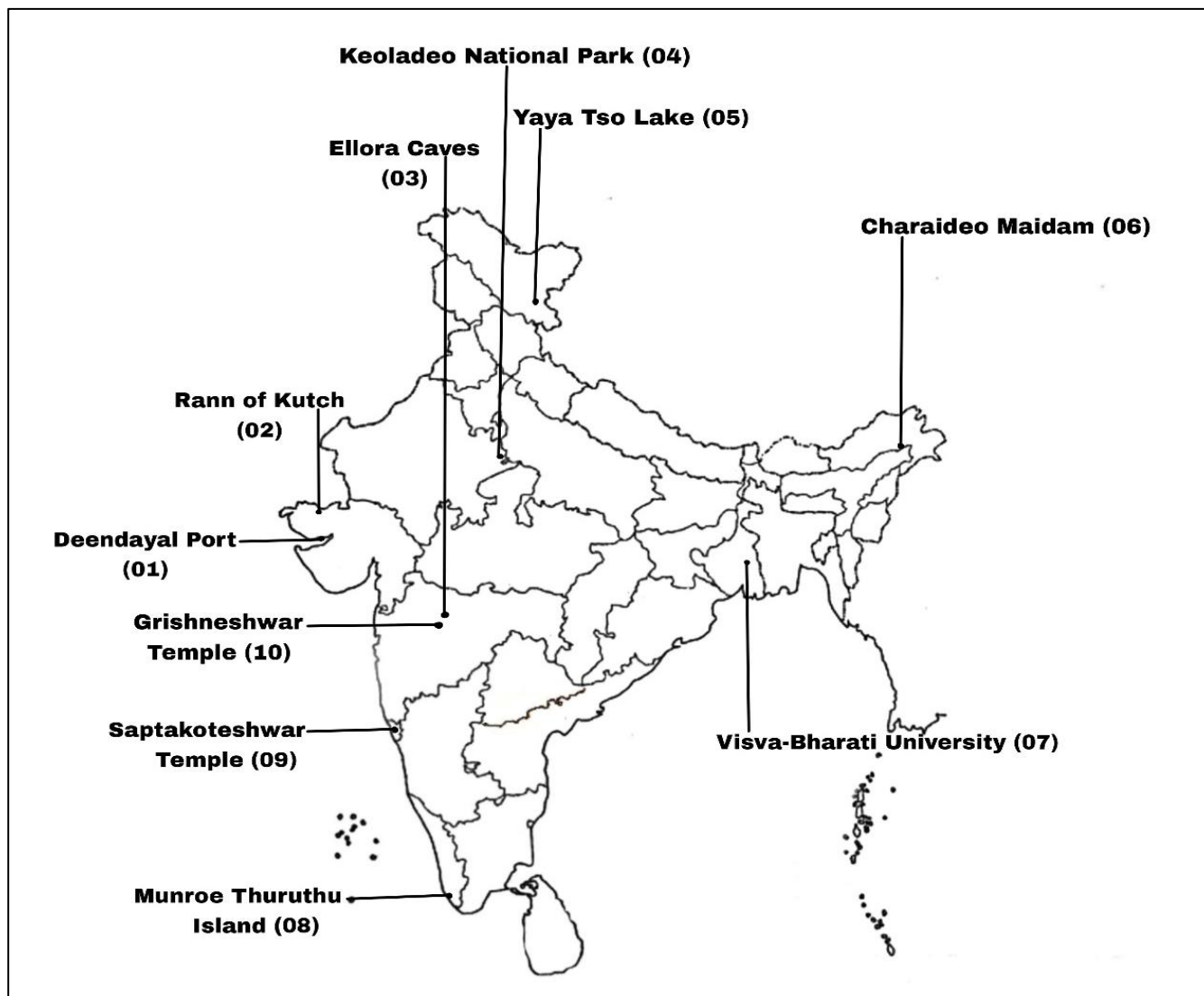
International Places In News

01	**Finland**	India and Finland are looking to expand ties across a range of cutting-edge technologies including quantum computing and nuclear technology. It is a **Nordic Country** located in northern Europe. It is bordered by <u>Norway, Russia, Gulf of Finland, Gulf of Bothnia, and Sweden.</u> Part of Finland lies north of <u>Arctic Circle, known as Upland Finland.</u> Its capital and largest city is **Helsinki.** Its largest lake, Saimaa, is the 4th largest in Europe.
02	**Odesa**	The World Heritage Committee decided to add the **historic centre** of **Odesa** to its list of World Heritage sites. It is an international city in Ukraine and a major seaport and transportation hub located on the <u>north-western shore of the Black Sea</u>. It incorporates two other large ports, **Yuzhne** to the east and **Chornomorske** to the south.
03	**Port of Haifa**	The Adani Group acquired the port of Haifa for USD 1.2 billion. It is located in **northern Israel**, adjacent to the city of Haifa along the Mediterranean Sea. It is also located near the busy **Suez Canal** shipping route. It handles nearly half of the country's container cargo and is also the nation's principal port for passenger traffic and cruise ships. It has a **natural deep-water harbor.**
04	**Gaziantep castle**	The 2,000-year-old Roman-era Gaziantep Castle was severely damaged by the devastating earthquake. It is located on a hilltop in southern Turkey's city of Gaziantep. It was 1st built by the **Hittite Empire** as an observation point and

		later built into a main castle by the Roman Empire. It has the shape of a somewhat irregular circle. It has 12 towers, some of which are adorned with Ayyubid and Mamluk decorations. It is a world heritage site.
05	**Lebanon**	Lebanon has devalued its official exchange rate by 90%.-It is a country in Western Asia, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It consists of a narrow strip of territory and is one of the world's smaller sovereign states. The capital is **Beirut.** It is located between Syria and Israel. It is part of the Levant region of the Middle East.
06	**Fiji**	Deputy PM of Fiji has expressed hope to partner with India in meeting climate action goals. It is an <u>island nation in Melanesia and an archipelago in Southern Pacific Ocean consisting of around 330 islands</u>. It is located in Oceania between Hawaii and New Zealand. Two major islands - **Viti Levu** and **Vanua Levu** - make up 87% of Fiji's total landmass.
07	**Suez Canal**	World's biggest shipping company is suing its rival, seeking compensation for delays caused by a 2021 blockage of the Suez Canal. It is an artificial sea-level waterway running north to south across the **Isthmus of Suez in Egypt**, to connect the <u>Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea</u>. It separates the African continent from Asia.
08	**Libya**	The United Nations migration agency says at least 73 migrants are missing and presumed dead after a shipwreck off Libya's coast. It is located in North Africa. Most of the country lies in the Sahara Desert. It is bounded by Mediterranean Sea, Egypt, Sudan, Niger, Chad, Tunisia and Algeria. The major physical features of Libya are the Nafusah Plateau and the Al-Jifarah Plain, the Akhḍar Mountains (Green Mountains). Libya is so dry that no permanent rivers flow through its boundaries. Water may flow beneath the ground and occasionally seep aboveground into dry streambeds called wadis.
09	**Equatorial Guinea**	Equatorial Guinea declared the country's 1st-ever outbreak of Marburg virus disease (MVD). It is located on the west coast of Africa. It consists of a mainland territory, Rio Muni, which is bordered by Cameroon to the north and Gabon to the east and south.
10	**Thwaites Glacier**	Scientists studying Thwaites Glacier, say warm water is seeping into its weak spots, worsening melting caused by rising temperatures. It is a broad and vast Antarctic glacier flowing into Pine Island Bay. It is also known as the **Doomsday Glacier.** It is part of the Amundsen Sea. It loses more than 50 billion tons of ice to the ocean yearly, contributing to about 4% of the annual sea level rise. As part of the **International Thwaites Glacier collaboration**, a team of U.S. and British scientists monitored the glacier using an **underwater robot** vehicle known as **Icefin**.it was **established in 2018.**

01	**Deendayal Port**	Logistics company DP World won a major contract to develop, operate and maintain a mega-container terminal at Deendayal Port. It was previously known as **Kandla port**. It is situated on **Gulf of Kutch** in Gujarat. It is the largest port of India in terms of volume of cargo handled. It is a protected natural harbour. It is recognized as one of the major ports in India.
02	**Rann of Kutch**	**Mega Khadi fashion show,** 1st ever on Rann of Kutch, was organized by Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). It is a salt marshy land in Thar Desert in Kachchh, Gujarat. It is the largest salt desert in world. It includes Great Rann of Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh and Banni grassland. It is part of <u>Indian wild ass sanctuary, and Kachchh desert wildlife sanctuary.</u> It is home to the only remaining population of chestnut-coloured Indian wild ass (khur).
03	**Ellora Caves**	Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the historic Ellora Caves. It lies in Charanandri hills in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. It is listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in **1983** and known for its Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain temples and monuments. These Caves are **34 in number (17 Brahmanical, 12 Buddhist and 5 Jain)** and dates to the period between 6th and 11th Century AD. They are adorned with beautiful sculptures, paintings, and frescoes.

04	Keoladeo National Park	The Rajasthan state Forest Department has proposed to construct a zoo inside Keoladeo National Park. It was formerly known as the **Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary**, located in the eastern part of Rajasthan. The Siberian crane is one of the rare species that was spotted here. It was designated as **Ramsar site** in 1981 and as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1985. It is given legal protection under the provisions of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Indian Forest Act, 1927.
05	Yaya Tso Lake	Yaya Tso Lake was declared **Ladakh's 1st biodiversity heritage site** under the Biological Diversity Act. It is known as a bird's paradise for its beautiful lake located at an altitude of 4,820 metres. It is a nesting habitat for a large number of birds and animals, such as the bar-headed goose, black-necked crane and brahminy duck. It is also one of the **highest breeding sites of the black-necked crane in India.**
06	Charaideo Maidams	The Centre has decided to nominate the Charaideo Maidams for the UNESCO World Heritage Centre this year. It represents the late medieval (13th-19th century CE) mound burial tradition of the **Tai Ahom community in Assam**. It enshrines the mortal remains of the members of the Ahom royalty, who used to be buried with their paraphernalia
07	Visva-Bharati University	Visva-Bharati University will soon get the heritage tag from UNESCO to take the distinction of world's first living heritage university. It is one of India's major Central Government funded autonomous university located in West Bengal. It was established in 1921 by **Rabindranath Tagore**. It was given the status of Central University in 1951 through a central Act. It is renowned for its cultural festivals called **Poush Mela and the Basanta Utsab** which attracts a number of artisans from all across the country.
08	Munroe Thuruthu Island	Study by National Centre for Earth Science Studies (NCESS) revealed anthropogenic interventions as main reason for sinking of Munroe Thuruthu Island. Almost 39% of its land area has been lost in past 2 decades. It is a group of eight island located at the confluence of Ashtamudi Lake and the Kallada River, in Kollam, Kerala. This island is also known as Sinking Island of Kerala. Island's subsidence began with construction of **Thenmala dam** under Kallada Irrigation Project.
09	Saptakoteshwar Temple	The Prime Minister has expressed happiness over the renovation of Shree Saptakoteshwar Devasthan. It is located in **Goa.** The original Saptakoteshwar Temple was built around the twelfth century by the **Kadamba dynasty** in Narve on Divar Island. The mandapa of the temple is built in a distinctly European style. The most important festival celebrated at the temple is Gokulashtami.
10	Grishneshwar Temple	Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited the Grishneshwar temple. It is located in the Aurangabad, Maharastra, near Devagiri fort and Ellora Caves. It is one of the **12 Jyotirlinga shrines** and the smallest of all, dedicated to Lord Shiva and has been mentioned in the Shiva Purana and Padma Purana. It is constructed using red stones in an interlocking pattern and is composed of a five-tier spire or shikara. Current structure was built by **Queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore** in 18th century AD.

01	**Alaska Range**	The Alaska Range is the biggest mountain range in Alaska and forms part of the American Cordillera. The highest mountain of Alaska Range is Denali. It acts as a high barrier to the northward flow of moist air from the Gulf of Alaska. The range is part of the **Pacific Ring of Fire**. The range is drained to the north by the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers and to the south by numerous streams that ultimately flow into the Gulf of Alaska of the Pacific Ocean.
02	**Rocky Mountains**	These mountains are a stretch more than 4,800 km from Canada to central New Mexico. Highest peak in the Rockies is **Mt. Elbert in Colorado.** It is the part of the **Great Divide** that separates the rivers that drain into the Atlantic or the Arctic, from flowing into the Pacific Ocean. The rivers that flow from the Rocky Mountains include Arkansas River, Colorado River, Columbia River, Missouri River etc. Numerous national monuments, designated wilderness areas, and national parks are located in the Rockies, including **Banff National Park** in Canada and **Yellowstone National Park**
03	**Appalachian Mountain**	It is the great highland system of North America, the eastern counterpart of the Rocky Mountains. It extends for about 3,200 km. It forms a natural barrier between the eastern Coastal Plain and the vast Interior Lowlands of North America. They include High plateaus (Greenland), Labrador or Laurentian Plateau (Canada) and the Appalachian Mountains (the United States).

04	**Atlas Mountains**	It extends some 2,500 km across Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. It separates the Mediterranean and Atlantic coastlines from the Sahara Desert. The range's highest peak is Toubkal in central Morocco.
05	**Alps**	It the highest and most extensive mountain range system that lie in south-central Europe. It stretches 1,200 km in a crescent shape across eight Alpine countries: France, Switzerland, Monaco, Italy, Liechtenstein, Austria, Germany, and Slovenia. Peaks higher than 4000km in Alpine regions are known as **Four-Thousanders**. **Mont Blanc** is the highest peak of Alps
06	**Ural Mountains**	It extends from the Kara Sea to Ural river along the border of Kazakhstan. It marks the northern part of the border between Europe and Asia. The highest point is **Mount Narodnaya.** It formed due to *Continent-Continent collision of supercontinent Laurussia with the young and weak continent of Kazakhstania.*
07	**Hindu Kush**	It is an 800-km long mountain range in Central and South Asia, west of the Himalayas. It extends in Afghanistan Pakistan and Tajikistan. In the north the eastern edge of the Hindu Kush merges with the Karakoram range. Towards its southern end it joins the White Mountains near the Kabul River. The range has several high snow-capped peaks, with the highest point being **Tirich Mir or Terichmir in Pakistan.**
08	**Kunlun Mountains**	It constitutes one of the longest mountain chains in Asia.It forms the northern edge of the Tibetan Plateau south of the **Tarim Basin.** It starts at the eastern Pamir plateau, traverses Xinjiang and Tibet, and extend to Chinese province Qinghai. The Kunlun Mountains stand parallel to the Tian Shan Mountains in the north and the Himalayan mountains in the south.
09	**Great Dividing Range**	It runs roughly parallel to the east coast of Australia and forms the 5th-longest land-based mountain chain in the world, and the longest entirely within a single country. It is also known as the **Australian Alps** and was formed due to rifting. It blocks the flow of moist air coming from the Tasman Sea. Its highest point is Mount Kosciuszko
10	**Himalayas**	It separates the plains of the Indian subcontinent from the Tibetan Plateau. The range has the planet's highest peaks, Mount Everest. It runs west-northwest to east-southeast in an arc 2,400 km long. It is bordered by the Karakoram and Hindu Kush ranges, Tibetan Plateau, and the Indo-Gangetic Plain. In west Nanga Parbat, lies just south of the northernmost bend of Indus River. **Namcha Barwa** lies in the eastern end of the Himalayas.
11	**Drakensberg Mountains**	It is the main mountain range of Southern Africa. It is part of the Great Escarpment and separates the extensive high plateaus from the lower lands along the coast. It is the main watershed of South Africa and is the source of the **Orange River.** It surrounds by temperate grasslands on the east called **Velds**.
12	**Andes Mountains**	It is the longest above-water mountain range in the world. It extends over seven countries which include Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. The highest elevation in the Andes is **Mount Aconcagua** in Argentina. It is also home to the world's highest volcano, the **Ojos del Salado** on the Chile-Argentina border.

SOCIAL ISSUES

India's Gender Budget Up By Over 30%

- India's Gender Budget, which aims to reduce the gender gap, was allocated ₹2.23 lakh crore in the Union Budget 2023-24, which is just 2.12% higher than the Revised Estimates (RE) of ₹2.18 lakh crore for 2022-23.

- However, it was at least 30% higher compared to last year's Budget Estimates (BE) of 1.71 lakh crore.

- **Overview:**
  - There was **a 0.63% rise** in the share of the Gender Budget in government's total expenditure. The estimated Gender Budget stood at **4.96% of the total expenditure** this year, compared to 4.33% last year.
  - The gender budget has been **an average of 4.9% of the total expenditure** as per budget estimates during the previous 15 years.
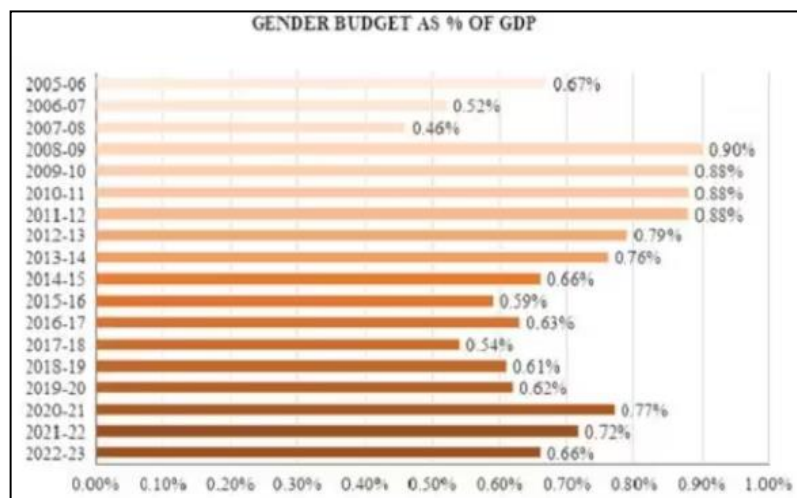
Gender Budgeting

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) defines gender budgeting as **a tool to achieve gender mainstreaming** so as to ensure that the benefits of development reach women as much as men.

- The government publishes a **Gender Budget Statement** (GBS) every year along with the **Union Budget.**
  - GBS is a reporting mechanism for ministries/departments **to review their programmes from a gender perspective** & present information on allocations for women.

- As such, it is **not a separate accounting exercise** but an ongoing process of keeping a gender perspective in policy/programme formulation, its implementation and review.

Timeline of Gender Budgeting in India

2001: Then Finance Minister of India, in his Budget speech, makes a special reference. The National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) analyses the Union Budget 2001-02 from a gender perspective for the first time.

In 2005-06, The Gender Budget was first introduced, when the Expenditure Division of the Ministry of Finance issued a note on gender budgeting as a part of the Budget Circular.
- **Part A** of the note reflects Women Specific Schemes, which have 100% allocation for women.
- **Part B** of the note reflects Pro-Women's Schemes, where at least 30% of the allocation is for women.

In 2007, the Department of Expenditure issued a charter outlining the composition of Gender Budgeting Cells (GBCs) and their functions.

In 2010, the Planning Commission clarified that in place of the Women Component Plan, the Ministry of Finance and MoWCD should adopt Gender Responsive Budgeting or Gender Budgeting only.

Gender budgeting in states: In 2021, the MoWCD stated that 27 states/UTs had adopted Gender Budgeting.

- So, it **entails the dissection of the government budgets** -
  - To establish its gender differential impacts and
  - To ensure that gender commitments are translated into budgetary commitments.

Issues With Gender Budgeting In India

- **Quantum of gender budgeting and fiscal marksmanship:** India's gender Budget remains in the range of 4 - 6% of the total expenditure and less than 1% of its GDP. It also l**acks fiscal marksmanship,** which is the accuracy of budgetary forecasting.

- **Concentrated in 5 key ministries:** Around 90% of gender budgeting is concentrated in five ministries. When it comes to livelihood, **MGNREGA is the biggest scheme in gender budgeting**.

GENDER BUDGET AS % OF GDP

Year	%
2005-06	0.67%
2006-07	0.52%
2007-08	0.46%
2008-09	0.90%
2009-10	0.88%
2010-11	0.88%
2011-12	0.88%
2012-13	0.79%
2013-14	0.76%
2014-15	0.66%
2015-16	0.59%
2016-17	0.63%
2017-18	0.54%
2018-19	0.61%
2019-20	0.62%
2020-21	0.77%
2021-22	0.72%
2022-23	0.66%

- Areas like transportation, water collection and water security remain ignored.

- **Post-Covid-19 approach:** The last Budget failed to address critical areas highlighted by pandemic in 2021-22 and 2022-23, despite the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on women.

What Needs To Be Done To Promote Gender Budgeting?

- **Applying a gender lens to Budget:** Nobody is saying that make exclusive schemes, but include a gender perspective to government schemes uniformly.

- **Track gender disaggregated data:** To determine who is benefiting from government schemes.

- **Decentralisation:** Empowering officials at district level and panchayat level who deal with ground realities on a day-to-day basis.

Recent Gender Budget Announcements

- **Decoding Part A and B of Gender Budget**

    - There was a whopping **228% hike in Part A of the Gender Budget** compared to last year, while Part B saw a **6% drop** from 2022-23.

    - **Part A** of the Gender Budget, which was allotted over ₹88,000 crore this year, is dominated by the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana** (both Urban and Rural housing).

    - **Part B - the bigger of the two components** - received ₹1.35 lakh crore in the 2023 Budget. Part B comprises several schemes pertaining to rural development, health, education and women empowerment.

- **Allocations To Key Schemes**

    - **Safe City Project**, an initiative under the **Nirbhaya Fund scheme** for ensuring safety of women and children, saw an eight-fold increase in allocation - from ₹165 crore in RE 2022-23 to ₹1,300 crore in BE 2023-24.

    - **SAMBAL**, a sub-scheme comprising old schemes like **One Stop Centre, Women Helpline and Beti Bachao Beti Padha**o, saw no change in allocation

    - Another sub-scheme **SAMARTHYA**, which includes women empowerment programmes like **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana and Swadhar Greh**, was earmarked 33% more compared to RE 2022-23.

    - SAMBAL and SAMARTHYA are part of the larger umbrella scheme **'Mission Shakti'**, an integrated women empowerment programme that came into effect in 2022.

Andhra's Guaranteed Pension Scheme

- At a time when the country is debating Old Pension Scheme (OPS) Vs. New Pension Scheme (NPS), a new model, proposed by the Andhra Pradesh government, has caught the attention of the Union Finance Ministry.

- What has attracted officials in the Union government about this model is it combines the elements of both the OPS (defined benefit) and the NPS (defined contribution).

Difference between NPS and OPS

- The Old Pension Scheme is a pension-oriented scheme. It offers regular pensions to employees during retirement.
    - Thus, in OPS, the pension amount is constant and guaranteed.
- On the other hand, the National Pension Scheme is an investment cum pension scheme.
- Therefore, NPS doesn't guarantee fix returns as it is subjected to market volatility i.e., in NPS, contributions are defined, but benefits depend on the market.

Andhra Pradesh Government's Proposed Pension Model

- It is attractively called the '**Guaranteed Pension Scheme' or the GPS**.

- Employees can get a <u>guaranteed pension of 33% of their last drawn salary if they contribute 10 per cent of their basic salary every month</u> which is matched by a 10% contribution by the state government.
  - They can get a guaranteed pension of 40 per cent of their last drawn salary, if they are willing to contribute a higher (14%) of their salary every month.
    - This will be matched by 14% government contribution.
- It acknowledges states can't get back to the OPS, and yet takes a bold leap that a guarantee, even if not 50 per cent of salary, may be possible.

What Could Union Government Learn From This Model?

- Officials in the Union government pointed out that the return under NPS is about 9.5% or so.
- Hence, the <u>average monthly pension for government employees under the NPS could be at least 40 per cent of their last drawn salary</u>.
- While OPS offered 50% of the last drawn salary, this gap of approx. 10% - under NPS – can be addressed innovatively.
- The innovation could come in the form of the Central government making up for the 10 per cent gap between the returns.
- This may also be possible by <u>increasing the quantum of monthly contribution by the government under the New Pension Scheme</u>.

{For more about OPS and NPS, Refer The Recitals-November 2022}

Assam Crackdown on Child Marriage

Assam has arrested over 2,000 men in a state-wide crackdown on child marriages that have taken place in the state. Assam has a high rate of maternal and infant mortality, with child marriage being the primary cause, according to reports by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5).

Legal Interventions

- There are several laws including the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006** and the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**, which aim at protecting children from violation of human and other rights.

- In 2021, **Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021** was introduced in the Lok Sabha. Currently, it is studied by the Standing Committee.
  - The Bill seeks to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act and *increase the marriage age of women from existing 18 years to 21 years*.

  - Ministry of Women & Child Development in 2020 had formed a committee headed by **Jaya Jaitly** to examine the matter. The committee submitted a report stating that the *marriageable age for women should be increased from 18 to 21 years of age, in light of factors like reproductive health, education, etc*.

Child Marriages in India:

- In India, child marriage reduced from 47.4% in 2005-06 to 26.8% in 2015-16.
- In the last five years, it declined by 3.5% points to reach 23.3% in 2020-21, according to the latest NFHS-5 data.
- There is a growing trend for a decline in the overall prevalence of child marriage, but 23.3% is still a disturbingly high percentage in a country with a population of 141.2 crores.
- Eight States have a higher prevalence of child marriage than the national average —
  - West Bengal, Bihar, and Tripura top the list with more than 40% of women aged 20-24 years married below 18, according to NFHS data.
  - Some States have shown a reduction in child marriages, like Madhya Pradesh (23.1% in 2020-21 from 32.4% in 2015-16), Rajasthan (25.4% from 35.4%), and Haryana.

Global Scenario:
- According to data from UNICEF, *the total number of girls married in childhood stands at 12 million per year.*
- The 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals aim to eliminate *all harmful practices*, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations, under goal 5.

Schemes/ Policies For Preventing Girl Child Marriage

- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) –**
  - Launched in 2015, it encourages parents **to invest and build funds for the future studies and marriage expenses of the girl's children**.

- **Balika Samriddhi Yojana –**
  - This central government scheme ensures the enrolment and retention of girl child in primary and secondary schools. It aims at the **prosperity of a girl's child and provides them with a better quality education**.

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao –**
  - This scheme celebrates girl children, literally translating to Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl child. It believes in women empowerment and creating an inclusive ecosystem for the same.
  - This scheme is **to promote girl children's safety before and after they are born**.

Under What Law Are The Arrests Being Made?

- Men who married girls below 14 years of age would be booked under the Protection of Children From Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (commonly known as **POCSO Act**).
  - The POCSO Act criminalises sex between a minor and an adult.
  - The law does not recognize a minor's consent as valid.

- Meanwhile, those marrying girls between 14 and 18 years would be booked under the **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006**.

Debate On Muslim Age Of Marriage

- Under Muslim personal laws, the marriage of a bride who has attained puberty is considered.
  - Puberty is presumed, in the absence of evidence, on **completion of the age of 15 years**.

- However, under Child Marriage Act, the minimum legal age to get married is 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

- This gap between Muslim personal law and special legislations prohibiting child marriages or sexual activity of minors puts a shadow on criminality on such marriages.

Judiciary's Opinion

- The Supreme Court is currently examining this issue since different High Courts have ruled differently on it.
  - **Punjab and Haryana High Court** in a string of rulings has held that a Muslim girl can legally marry after attaining puberty.
  - In October 2022, the **Karnataka High Court** quashed a POCSO case against a Muslim man.
    - He was arrested after a hospital made mandatory disclosures under the law when his pregnant wife, aged 17 years and two months visited a doctor.

Demand for Greater Tipraland

The newest political party in Tripura, the Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) Motha, has created a flutter with its demand for Greater Tipraland.

About Greater Tipraland

- Greater Tipraland is the core ideological demand of the TIPRA Motha.

- The objective is to carve out a new State for the 19 indigenous tribes of Tripura under Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution.
  - **Article 2** - Parliament may by law admit into the Union, or establish, new States on such terms and conditions as it thinks fit.

- o **Article 3** comes into play in the case of formation of new States and alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States by the Parliament.

- **Regional Extent Of The Proposed State**

  - o It includes the region under Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous district Council (TTAADC) and 36 villages out of it, within the Tripura State boundaries.

  - o The demand seeks to include every tribal person living in indigenous area or village outside TTAADC

  - o However, the idea doesn't restrict to Tripura tribal council areas.

    - ▪ It extends to include Tiprasa (indigenous people of Tripura) spread across different states of India like Assam, Mizoram etc.

    - ▪ It also includes those living in Bandarban, Chittagong, Khagrachari and other bordering areas of neighbouring Bangladesh.

How Did The Demand Originate?

- **Apprehension of the Indigenous Communities**

  - o The demand mainly stems from the anxiety of the indigenous communities in connection with the change in the demographics of the state, which has reduced them to a minority & dislodged from land reserved for them.

  - o It happened due to the huge influx of refugees from East Pakistan leading to bitter differences.

    - ▪ From 63.77% in 1881, the population of tribals in Tripura was down to 31.80% by 2011.

- **Ethnic Conflict And Insurgency**

  - o The conflict between the tribals and the non-tribals escalated in 1980 and took the shape of armed insurgency.

    - ▪ The demand for autonomous regions or separate statehood during this time metamorphosed to **sovereignty and independence**.

    - ▪ However, after a political truce was reached between the State and the rebel groups, the demand for statehood was revived.

- **Rise of Ethnic-Politics**

  - o There has been a revival of ethnic nationalism in Tripura by newly formed political party. It claims that a separate state could alone alleviate problems faced by Tripuri tribes.

- **Alleged discrimination faced by Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC)**

  - o TTADC receives 2% of the State budget while it has 40% of the State's population.

    - ▪ TTADC was formed under the sixth schedule of the Constitution in 1985.

    - ▪ Its aim is to ensure development and secure the rights and cultural heritage of the tribal communities.

    - ▪ It has legislative and executive powers and covers nearly two-third of the state's geographical area.

  - o It also highlights the unfulfilled demands of revising National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Tripura.

Integration of ChatGPT with Whatsapp For Key Government Schemes

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) is reportedly working on a ChatGPT-powered **WhatsApp chatbot** to help Indian farmers learn about various government schemes.

- A small team at MeitY called **Bhashini** is testing the WhatsApp chatbot powered by OpenAI's ChatGPT.

About Bhashini

- Bhashini is a **local language translation** mission that aims to break the barrier between various Indian tongues by using available technology.

- This government platform aims to AI and Natural Language Processing (NLP) resources available in the public domain to be used by -- Indian MSMEs, startups and individual innovators.

How Does It Work?

- The project is aimed to build and develop an ecosystem where various stakeholders can unite to maintain an ever-evolving repository of data, training and benchmark datasets, open models, tools and technologies.

- This online platform also has a **separate 'Bhasadaan' section** which allows individuals to contribute to multiple crowdsourcing initiatives.

- The contribution can be done in four ways -- **Suno India, Likho India, Bolo India and Dekho India** -- where users have to type what they hear or have to validate texts transcribed by others.

- Users, especially farmers in rural areas, may not always want — or be able to — type out their queries, questions can be put to the chatbot using voice notes.

- These contributions can help to improve the open repository of data to digitally enrich their native language.

Importance of Bhashini

- According to Census 2001, India has 22 official languages, 122 major languages and 1599 other languages.

- However, most of the content available on the web is in English.

- This project aims to break the massive Indian language barrier and it wants developers to offer Indians digital services in their local languages.

- Bhasini comes with the sole purpose of developing a **national digital public platform for languages** to provide universal access to content.

    o This is expected to improve the delivery of digital content in all Indian languages.

How Will The Chatbot Work?

- A user could simply ask a question using voice notes, and receive a voice-based response generated by ChatGPT.

- The chatbot has been developed keeping in mind sections of India's rural and agrarian population that most depend on government schemes and subsidies.

Mental Healthcare Act 2017

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in a report flagged the "**inhuman and deplorable**" condition of all 46 government-run mental healthcare institutions across the country.

- The NHRC's observations were made after visits to all operational government facilities, **to assess the implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act (MHA), 2017**.

Mental Healthcare Act 2017

- **It discourages long-term institutionalisation of patients**

Background in which the MHA was Enacted

- MHA's predecessor - the Mental Healthcare Act, of 1987, prioritized the institutionalization of mentally-ill people and did not afford any rights to the patient.
    o It also provided disproportionate authority to judicial officers and mental health establishments to authorize long-stay admissions against the informed consent of the individual.
- The 1987 Act embodied the ethos of the colonial-era Indian Lunacy Act, 1912, which linked criminality and madness.
- Hence, the intention was never to define illness but to protect social order, which -
- Not only violates Article 21 of the Indian Constitution which protects personal liberty,
- It also indicates a failure of the government(s) to discharge the obligation under various UN Conventions (ratified by India) relating to the rights of persons with disabilities.
- The MHA 2017 was a watershed moment for the right-to-health movement in India, after the enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016.
- This was the first time a psychosocial approach (not only a psychiatric approach) to mental healthcare was adopted and has shifted from providing only treatment to centring the rights and the will of the person.

and reaffirms the rights of people to live independently and within communities.

- The government was made responsible for **creating opportunities to access less restrictive options for community living** - such as halfway homes, rehab homes, etc.
- The Act also **discourages using physical restraints** (such as chaining), objects to unmodified electro-convulsive therapy (ECT).
- It pushes for the **rights to hygiene**, sanitation, food, recreation, privacy, and infrastructure and recognises that **people have a capacity of their own** (unless proven otherwise).
- It also empowers people to make "**advance directives**" and can nominate a representative for themselves.

Challenges To Implementation of MHA

- According to a 2018 report, **almost 36.25%** of residential service users at state psychiatric facilities were **found to be living for one year or more** in these facilities.
- The main reasons are -

  - Non-compliance to MHA regulations
  - Absence of community-based services
  - **Social stigma** that looks at a person with mental illness as a "criminal" deserving of incarceration

- Under the MHA, all States are required to establish a **State Mental Health Authority and Mental Health Review Boards** (MHRBs), to oversee the functioning of the mental healthcare institutes.
  - In a majority of the States, these bodies are yet to be established or remain defunct, which makes redressal in case of rights violations difficult.
- In 2022, the Bombay HC held that mental healthcare institutes **do not routinely assess the condition of patients to ascertain if they can be discharged**.
- **Poor budgetary allocation and utilisation** of funds further create a scenario where shelter homes remain underequipped, understaffed, service providers are not adequately trained, etc.
- People are either put in these establishments by **families or through the police and judiciary.** In many cases, **families refuse to take them** because of the social stigma.
- **Gender discrimination** plays a role here, as **women are more likely to be abandoned** due to family disruption, marital discords and violence in intimate relationships.
- **The dearth of alternative community-based services** and socio-economic opportunities further complicates access to rehabilitation.

What Needs To Be Done To Strengthen Mental Healthcare?

- The State Mental Health Authority **should meet at least four times** (as mandated under the Act), to oversee that the entire mental healthcare system is functioning effectively.
- **The model of reintegration and recovery** (needs to be replicated elsewhere):
  - **Chennai's Institute of Mental Health** launched five halfway homes, where people can access the confidence and skills needed to manage themselves outside a structured institution.
  - **Kerala** has also started half-way homes and community living centres, providing rehabilitation to people who are abandoned by family members.
- The need of the hour is to implement **rights and recovery-based approaches** to change attitudes and practices on the ground.

Changes In Organ Transplant Rules

The Union health ministry modified national organ transplantation guidelines to allow even those **above 65 years** of age to register to receive an organ for transplantation from deceased donors.

- The Union Health Ministry is working on a **'One Nation, One Organ Allocation'** policy in consultation with states to come up with uniform guidelines for registration, allocation and other aspects of the process.

- The government is also planning to introduce <u>a chapter in school curriculum regarding organ donation awareness for students</u>.

Organ transplantation in India: Statistics

- According to data accessed from the Health Ministry, the number of organ transplants have increased by over 3 times from 4,990 in 2013 to 15,561 in 2022.
- Of the 15,561 transplants, a majority — 12,791 (82%) — are from live donors and 2,765 (18%) are from deceased organ or cadavers transplants.
  - Up to 11,423 of the 15,561 organ transplants are for the kidney, followed by liver (766), heart (250), lung (138), pancreas (24) and small bowel transplants (3).
- There is also a geographical skew in deceased donations.
  - All but two deceased organ donations in 2021 were in 15 states.
  - The top five — Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka — accounting for more than 85% of the total.
- One reason for the geographical skew could be that most organ transplant and harvesting centres are concentrated in these geographies.
- India has an organ donation rate of about 0.52 per million population.
  - In comparison, the organ donation rate in Spain, the highest in the world, is 49.6 per million population.
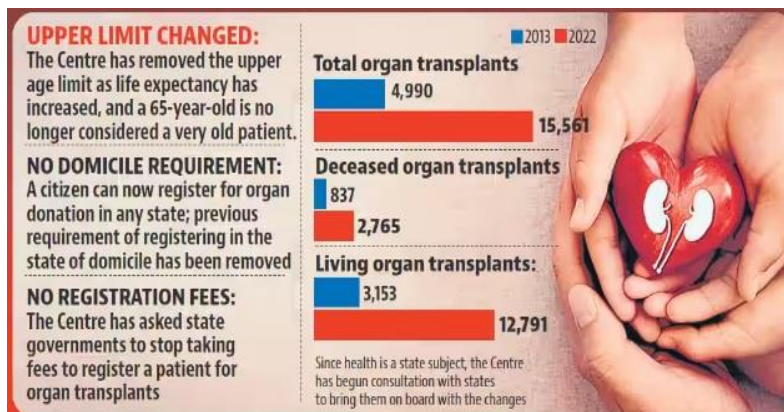
Regulatory Frameworks Guiding The Organ Transplantation In India

- **Legislation**

  - In 1994, The **Transplantation of Human Organs Act (THOA)** was promulgated by the government of India.

  - The **Transplantation of Human Organs Rules** followed in 1995 and were last amended in 2014, increasing the scope of donation and including **tissues for transplantation.**

  - The act made <u>commercialization of organs a punishable offence</u> and legalized the concept of brain death in India allowing deceased donation by obtaining organs from brain stem dead person.

- **Institution**

  - **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization** (NOTTO) is a national level organization set up under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

  - It functions as apex centre for all India activities of coordination and networking for:
    - ✓ procurement and distribution of organs and tissues; and
    - ✓ registry of Organs and Tissues Donation and Transplantation in country.

Changes Brought In Organ Transplantation Policy

- **Upper Age Limit For Registration Has Been Removed**

  - The new guidelines have done away with the 65-year age limit for registration of patients seeking organs from a deceased donor.

  - <u>There was no age cap for living donor transplants</u>, where family members donate organs like kidneys and livers.

  - However, people over the age of 65 years couldn't register to receive organs from deceased donors as per guidelines of NOTTO

UPPER LIMIT CHANGED: The Centre has removed the upper age limit as life expectancy has increased, and a 65-year-old is no longer considered a very old patient.

NO DOMICILE REQUIREMENT: A citizen can now register for organ donation in any state; previous requirement of registering in the state of domicile has been removed

NO REGISTRATION FEES: The Centre has asked state governments to stop taking fees to register a patient for organ transplants

Total organ transplants: 4,990 (2013); 15,561 (2022)
Deceased organ transplants: 837 (2013); 2,765 (2022)
Living organ transplants: 3,153 (2013); 12,791 (2022)

Since health is a state subject, the Centre has begun consultation with states to bring them on board with the changes

- **No Domicile Requirement**

  - It has asked states to remove the domicile criterion for registering those seeking organs from deceased donor for transplant procedures.

- o Now the needy person can go to any state of the country and register for getting organ and also get the transplant done.
  - The patient will be allotted a unique ID by NOTTO on registering.
  - This will get carried forward even if the patient changes multiple hospitals in different States.
- **No Registration Fee Required**
  - o Noting that some states have been charging fees ranging between Rs 5,000 to 10,000 for registering such patients, the Union Health Ministry has asked them not to charge money.

National Tribal Festival

- At the inauguration of the **Aadi Mahotsav** - a mega **National Tribal Festival**, at Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium in Delhi, PM stated that the Centre has been making efforts to mainstream the nation's tribal communities.
- According to the PM, the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman (**PM-VIKAS**) has been introduced to provide traditional craftspeople with financial support in addition to skill development.

History of National Tribal Festival

- The tribal festival is organised **annually** by the **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation Limited** (TRIFED) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs since **2015**, when it was titled "VANAJ".
- TRIFED has been organising **Aadi Mahotsav - National Tribal Festival** to provide direct market access to the tribal master-craftsmen and women in large metros and state capitals.

About Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman (PM-VIKAS)

- It was announced in the **Union Budget 2023-24** as a step towards developing the nation's artisans **to enhance the scope, calibre and reach of their goods** (to domestic and international markets**),** by providing -
  - o Technology to increase their productivity and profit,
  - o Skills training for age-old and traditional crafts, and
  - o The opening of credit lines
- The scheme will significantly benefit the weaker sections and women of society.
- The scheme will also be implemented into the Micro, Small, and Medium-scale Enterprises (MSME) value chain, which will enhance their opportunity to scale up their business**.**
- It will contribute to India's growth and development, as the craftspeople and artisans are the true spirits of self-reliant and independent India**.**

Special Marriage Act

Recently, a Bollywood actress chose to marry under the provisions of the Special Marriage Act, 1954.

Who Can Get Married Under Special Marriage Act?

- The applicability of the Act extends to the people of all faiths, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, and Buddhists, across India.
- The minimum age to get married under the SMA is 21 years for males and 18 years for females.
- However, once married as per the secular law, under Section 19 of the Act, any member of an

Special Marriage Act

- The Special Marriage Act of 1954 (SMA) was passed by the Parliament in October, 1954.
- It governs a civil marriage where the state sanctions the marriage rather than the religion.
- Issues of personal law such as marriage, divorce, adoption are governed by religious laws that are codified.
- These laws, such as the Muslim Marriage Act, 1954, and the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, require either spouse to convert to the religion of the other before marriage.
  - o In the Indian system, both civil and religious marriages are recognised.
- However, the SMA enables marriage between inter-faith or inter-caste couples without them giving up their religious identity or resorting to conversion.

undivided family who professes the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain religion shall be deemed to effect their severance (ending a connection) from the family.

- This would affect rights, including the right to inheritance, of the persons choosing to marry under the SMA.

Procedure For A Civil Marriage

- As per Section 5 of the Act, the parties to the marriage are required to give a notice, in writing, to a "Marriage Officer" of the district.
- Before the marriage is solemnized, the parties and three witnesses are required to sign a declaration form before the Marriage Officer.
- Once the declaration is accepted, the parties will be given a "Certificate of marriage".

"Notice Period" Under The SMA?

- As per Section 6, a true copy of the notice given by the parties will be kept under the Marriage Notice Book.
- Upon receiving the notice, the marriage officer shall publish it in some conspicuous place in his office to invite any objections to the marriage within 30 days.
- Section 7 deals with Objection to marriage. It allows any person <u>before the expiration of thirty days from the date of the notice's publication to object to the marriage</u>.
  - Various grounds of objection are specified in Section 4 of the Act.
- If an objection has been made, the Marriage Officer cannot solemnize the marriage until he has inquired into the matter of the objection.

Criticisms of SMA

- The provisions related to the practice of posting the notice are often criticised as they are commonly invoked to harass consenting couples.
- The unwarranted disclosure of matrimonial plans by two adults entitled to solemnize it may, in certain situations, jeopardize the marriage itself.
- In certain instances, it may even endanger the life or limb of the party due to parental interference.
  - In January 2021, the Allahabad High Court ruled that couples seeking to solemnize their marriage under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 can choose not to publish the mandatory 30-day notice of their intention to marry.

Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme Transforming Social Welfare In India

- Transfer of subsidies to the beneficiaries through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) has reached about **Rs 5.5 trillion** so far in the current financial year i.e., 2022-23.
- Given that a lot of dues are cleared in the last month of the year, ***the DBT transfers are expected to surpass Rs 6.3 trillion achieved in FY 2021-22***.

DBT subsidies

- **Fertiliser subsidies** worth Rs 1.9 trillion have been provided to farmers so far in the current financial year.
  - This is 53% higher than Rs 1.24 trillion in the whole of FY22 as input costs and global prices of fertiliser doubled in a year or so.
- **Subsidies worth** Rs 1.5 trillion were transferred to beneficiaries via foodgrains under the public distribution system (PDS) so far in FY23.
  - The food DBT through PDS will likely end the year around Rs 2.2 trillion in FY23, the same as in FY22.
  - The elevated food DBT is due to Government of India providing free ration to 81.35 crore poor people under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)**.

- Also, under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana-Rural (PMAY-R), the DBT benefits have reached **Rs 38,638 crore**.

Achievements Of The DBT Program

- The first payment was made in the Puducherry for the Janani Suraksha Yojana in January 2013.

- Since then, *DBT has helped in reforming Government delivery system by re-engineering the existing process in welfare schemes for simpler and faster flow of information/funds*.

About Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

- Government of India launched the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Program on 1st Jan 2013.
- With DBT program, GoI aims to *make payments directly into the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of the end beneficiaries*, removing any malpractices from the existing system such as diversions and duplicate payments.
- The primary objective of the DBT program is to *bring transparency and terminate pilferage from distribution of funds sponsored by Central Government*.

DBT Process
- The following are the steps or sub-sections, which are the major checkpoints in DBT process –
  - Public Financial Management System (PFMS) registration.
  - Examination of eligibility of the beneficiary.
  - Verification of the beneficiaries' bank account/ Aadhar Enabled bank account.
  - Initiation of the payment
- PFMS (Public Financial Management System) is a Central Plan Monitoring System of the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
  - It is used as a common platform to carry out both Aadhar and non-Aadhar e-payments for the DBT program.

- The benefits include accurate targeting of the beneficiaries, de-duplication and reduction of fraud.

- **DBT during Covid-19 Pandemic –**

  - Between March 24 2020 and April 17 2020, the DBT payments under all the central sector/centrally sponsored schemes through PFMS amounted to *Rs 27,442 crore in the accounts of 11.42 crore beneficiaries* through schemes like PM-KISAN, MGNREGS, NHM, etc.

- By 2022, more than 135 crore Aadhaar cards have been generated, there are 47 crore beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, 6.5 lakh Bank Mitras delivering branchless banking services and mobile subscribers number more than 120 crore.

- On the basis of this wide network, the DBT program has **318 schemes of 53 central ministries** spanning across sectors.

- In rural Bharat, *DBT has allowed the Government to provide financial assistance (effectively and transparently) to farmers with lower transaction costs*.

- The DBT system has enabled the government to save significantly on its social-sector welfare expenditure through targeted deliveries.

- The *Government's cumulative savings on expenditure, due to the DBT till FY21-end, was 2.23 trillion*.

- According to an estimate by the Central government the Aadhaar-enabled DBT platform helped in –

  - **Eliminating 41.1 million fake LPG connections**,

  - **Eliminating 39.9 million duplicate ration cards** and

  - **Resulted in 10% savings on wages** on account of the deletion of non-existent MGNREGS beneficiaries.

National Commission for Safai Karamcharis

The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK), after being headless for close to a year, has finally got a chairperson, vice-chairperson and member on board.

- After the current appointments, posts for four members remain vacant.

- Due to vacancies over the past year, one consultant was looking after the works relating to sewer deaths in India.

Need for NCSK

- **Deprivation among Safai Karamcharis**

  o The Government has taken many steps for the upliftment of the Safai Karamcharis.

  o However, the deprivation suffered by them in socio-economic and educational terms is still far from being eliminated.

- **Sporadic instances of manual scavenging**

  o As per the NCSK (2020 data), a total of 631 people have died in the country while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the last 10 years.

  o Although manual scavenging has been almost eradicated, sporadic instances do occur.

  o In 2018, 29,923 people were engaged in manual scavenging in Uttar Pradesh, making it the highest in any State in India.

> ## National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)
>
> - **NCSK was established as an institution to investigate the conditions of Safai Karamcharis (waste collectors) in India and make recommendations to the Government.**
> - **It is currently a non-statutory body under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.**
>
> **Background of NCSK**
>
> - **The NCSK was established in the year 1993 as per the provisions of the NCSK Act 1993 initially for the period upto 31.3.1997.**
>   - **Hence, initially NCSK was established as a statutory body.**
> - **Later the validity of the Act was initially extended up to 2002 and thereafter up to 2004.**
>   - **The NCSK Act ceased to have effect from 29.2.2004.**
> - **After that the tenure of the NCSK has been extended as a non-statutory body from time to time through resolutions.**
> - **The tenure of the present Commission was up to March 2022. However, it was extended further for a period of three years.**
>
> **Functions of NCSK**
>
> - **The NCSK has been giving its recommendations to the Government regarding:**
>   - **specific programmes for welfare of Safai Karamcharis,**
>   - **study and evaluate the existing welfare programmes for Safai Karamcharis,**
>   - **investigate cases of specific grievances etc.**
> - **The NCSK has been assigned the work to monitor the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013.**
> - **It is the only body *keeping track of sewer deaths in the entire country*.**

Challenges Faced by NCSK

- NCSK does not have any powers and works as a non-statutory body on government resolution.

  o Recently, the govt mentioned in the Parliament that there is no such proposal for converting the commission into a statutory body.

- Due to this, the commission is not able to implement its own orders or directions.

- The chairperson and members are political appointees, so they don't question the government or speak against their schemes.

- The commission remains understaffed and many posts remain vacant.

- The commission itself is running on a temporary basis, the posts in the commission are filled either through deputation or co-terminus basis.

Nominated Member As a Chairman of Rajya Sabha

In December, P T Usha became the first nominated member in the history of the Rajya Sabha to be included in the panel of Vice-Chairman of the House. In February, PT Usha chairs Rajya Sabha proceedings.

Panel Members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

The panel members run the House, in the absence of presiding officers of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Parameter	Panel of Chairpersons of Lok Sabha	Panel of Vice-Chairpersons of Rajya Sabha
Are Panel members mentioned in the Constitution?	NO. Under the Rules of Lok Sabha, the Speaker nominates from amongst the members a panel of not more than ten chairpersons.	NO. Under the Rules of Rajya Sabha, the Chairman nominates from amongst the members a panel of vice-chairpersons.
Is there any preference to preside over the House?	No. **Any of them** can preside over the House in the absence of the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker. S/He has the same powers as the Speaker when presiding.	No **Any one of them** can preside over the House in the absence of the Chairman or the Deputy Chairman. S/He has the same powers as the Chairman when so presiding.
Can panel member preside when the presiding officer's seat is vacant?	NO. If there is a vacancy in the office of speaker and the deputy speaker, the panel members cannot preside over the house. The Speaker's duties are to be performed by such member of the House as the **President** may nominate for the purpose. Elections are held, as soon as possible, to fill the vacant posts.	NO. If there is a vacancy in the office of chairman and vice chairman the panel members cannot preside over the house. The Chairman's duties are to be performed by such member of the House as the President may nominate for the purpose. Elections are held, as soon as possible, to fill the vacant posts.
What happens when all the panel members are absent?	Any other person as determined by the House acts as the Speaker.	Any other person as determined by the House acts as the Chairman.

Party Name & Symbol and Role of Election Commission of India (ECI)

The Election Commission of India allotted the name 'Shiv Sena' and the party's bow and arrow symbol to the Eknath Shinde faction in effect recognising it as the original party founded by Balasaheb Thackerey.

- The EC ruling comes at a time when the Supreme Court is still to decide on the <u>dispute over the powers of the Deputy Speaker to disqualify rebel Shiv Sena MLAs when a notice for his own removal has been given</u>.
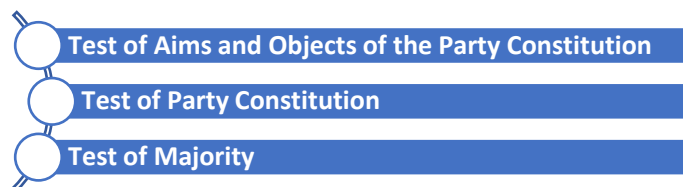
Background

- Both the factions of Shiv Sena led by former CM Uddhav Thackeray and incumbent CM Eknath Shinde claimed the party name and the symbol belongs to them, ever since Eknath Shinde revolted against the Uddhav Thackeray-led government last year.

- For immediate electoral purposes, the EC froze the party symbol and advised factions to contest elections with different names and temporary symbols.

- On 17 February 2022, however, both the party name 'Shiv Sena' and the party symbol 'bow and arrow', which has traditionally been used by Uddhav Thackeray's family, have now been retained by the Eknath Shinde.

- The EC cited the **Sadiq Ali judgment** in its order in the Shiv Sena case.

Is There A Way Other Than The Test Of Majority To Resolve A Symbol Dispute?

- In almost all disputes decided by the EC so far, a clear majority of party delegates/office bearers, MPs and MLAs have supported one of the factions.

- Whenever the EC could not test the strength of rival groups based on support within the party organisation (because of disputes regarding the list of office bearers), <u>it fell back on testing the majority only among elected MPs and MLAs</u>.

- Only in the case of the split in the AIADMK in 1987, which happened after the death of M G Ramachandran, the EC was faced with a peculiar situation.
  - The group led by MGR's wife Janaki had the support of the majority of MPs and MLAs, while J Jayalalithaa was supported by a substantial majority in the party organisation.
  - But before the EC was forced to make a decision on which group should retain the party symbol, a rapprochement was reached.

How ECI Allotted Party Name and Symbol?

There are **three criteria** that are used to decide disputes between warring party factions. While passing its decision, the EC considered and analyzed these **three tests** mentioned in the **Sadiq Ali case** which includes:

- Test of Aims and Objects of the Party Constitution
- Test of Party Constitution
- Test of Majority

Why is the Test of Aims and Objects of the Party Constitution and Test of Party Constitution not applied In Present Case?

- The ECI said that the *amended Constitution of 2018 of Shiv Sena* is not on record of the Commission. It said that the Constitution of 2018 has conferred widespread powers of making various organisational appointments on a single person.

- The EC also said that the <u>complete list of office bearers of various bodies</u> was not also provided to the Commission, whenever elections were held, or appointments were made. This violated the criteria for parties registered under the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Thus, the ECI concluded that using the above two Tests for determining the present dispute case will be undemocratic and catalytic in spreading such practices across parties. **Hence, ECI relied upon the Test of Majority in the legislative wing.**

Test of Majority

- It shows qualitative superiority in the majority test of legislative party to the Shinde faction which has support of _40 out of 55 Sena MLAs and 13 out of 18 Sena MPs._

- On the other hand, Thackeray led Sena has only 15 MLA out of 55 and five MPs out of total 18 MPs.

Thus, The Commission gave its decision on a "test on majority" as the group of MLAs supporting the Eknath Shinde group had got nearly 76% of the votes polled for the 55 winning Shiv Sena candidates in the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly Elections, while the Uddhav Thackeray faction got only 23.5% of votes.

Can The Decision Of ECI Be Challenged?

- **In Sadiq Ali and Another v. Election Commission of India case**, the Supreme Court decided that the EC is a tribunal and its decision regarding derecognition of a party or allocation of symbols in case of dispute could be challenged **only by appealing to the Supreme Court under Special Leave Petition.**

- But later, it was decided that it can be challenged in High Courts too.

Powers of Election Commission on Election Symbol

- The **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968** empowers the EC to recognise political parties and allot symbols.

- **Applicability**: It applies to disputes between **recognized national and state parties**. For disputes within registered but unrecognized parties, the EC generally advises them to solve their disputes amicably or to approach the court.

What Happens To The Group That Doesn't Get The Parent Party's Symbol?

- Before 1997, EC used to recognise the party, not getting the symbol, based on the criteria fixed for recognition of parties under Paras 6 and 7 of the Symbols Order.

  o I.e., if the breakaway party had support of sufficient MPs/MLAs as per the criteria, it was recognised by EC as National/State Party.

- The **EC in 1997 felt that merely having MPs and MLAs is not enough**, as the elected representatives had fought and won polls on tickets of their parent (undivided) parties.

- The EC introduced a **new rule** under which the splinter group of the party — other than the group that got the party symbol — **had to register itself as a separate party**.

- These parties could lay claim to national or state party status only on the basis of its performance in state or central elections after registration.

Extra Mile
Sadiq Ali And Anr. vs Election Commission of India, 1971 (The Sadiq Ali case) 1) In the so-called Sadiq Ali case, a dispute arose between two factions of the Congress In 1969. 2) The EC in 1971 relied on the test of majority to decide which side should get the party's name and symbol. Two other criteria — a test of party constitution and test of aims and objects — were considered and rejected. 2) ECI ruled that the faction backed by Indira Gandhi was the real Congress, and its decision was subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court.

Unparliamentary Expressions

Portions of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's speech delivered in Lok Sabha have been expunged — or removed — from the records of Parliament by the orders of the Speaker.

What Are The Rules On Expunging From The Record?

- Under **Article 105(2)** of the Constitution, Members of Parliament (MP) have freedom of speech in the House.

- It is a very substantive freedom without which parliamentarians cannot function freely and fearlessly. So, whatever they say in the House cannot be questioned by any other authority. It is a privilege enjoyed by the members of Parliament

- However, MPs don't enjoy the freedom to say whatever they want inside the House. The speech of MPs is _subject to the discipline of the Rules of Parliament, "good sense" of its Members, and the control of proceedings by the Speaker_. These checks ensure that MPs cannot use "defamatory or indecent or undignified or Unparliamentary words" inside the House.

What are "Unparliamentary" expressions?

- Over the years, a huge number of words, both in English and other Indian languages, have been found to be "Unparliamentary". The Presiding Officers of both the Houses of the parliament have the job of keeping such words out of Parliament's records.

- The **Lok Sabha Secretariat** brings out a volume of 'Unparliamentary Expressions' which are viewed as Unparliamentary in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. This book contains words or expressions that would likely be considered rude or offensive in most cultures.

> **Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha**
>
> - Rule 380 ("Expunction"): It empowers the Speaker to expunge words which are defamatory, indecent, Unparliamentary or undignified from the record of the debate.
>   - The Speaker has been given certain discretion in treating a word as 'Unparliamentary' as there are no hard and fast rules about it.
>   - Rule 261 of the Rules of the Rajya Sabha give similar powers to the presiding officers
>
> - Rule 381 says: "The portion of the proceedings of the House so expunged shall be marked by asterisks and an explanatory footnote shall be inserted in the proceedings as follows: 'Expunged as ordered by the Chair'."

- The last book was published in **July 2022**. In the past, such compilations have been brought out in 1986, 1992, 1999, 2004 and 2009.

- Members of Parliament may not be able to use those words (mentioned in book) in their speeches in the House any longer.

- State legislatures too are guided mainly by the same book of Unparliamentary expressions.

How Is The Decision To Expunge A Word (Or Portion Of A Speech) Taken?

- If a member uses a word that could be indecent and hurts the decorum or dignity of the House, the **head of the reporting section** sends it to the Speaker or the Presiding Officer citing relevant rules and precedence with a recommendation to expunge them.

- The Speaker has the discretion under Rule 380 to expunge the word or usage. Once the Speaker expunges the word or usage, it comes back to the reporting section which removes the word from the records and mentions in the proceedings as "expunged as ordered by the chair".

At the end of the session, a compilation of words removed from the records, along with reasons, is sent to the Speaker's office, Sansad TV, and the editorial service for information.

What Happens After A Word Has Been Expunged?

- Expunged portions of the proceedings cease to exist in the records of Parliament, and they can no longer be reported by media Houses, even though they may have been heard during the live telecast of the proceedings.

- However, the **proliferation of social media** has introduced challenges in the **watertight implementation** of expunction orders.

To sum up, India's politics demands the opposition to focus on substantial issues affecting the nation, inside and outside Parliament. The nation's law makers should also not forget Thomas Jefferson's famous quote: "Eternal vigilance is the price of democracy".

Neutral Citation System

Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud announced that the Supreme Court will adopt a "neutral citation system" for its judgments.

Concept of Citation	Concept of Neutral Citation
A case citation is essentially an identification tag for a judgment. Typically, it would contain 1) a reference number, 2) the year of the judgment, 3) the name of the court that delivered that judgment, and 4) a shorthand for the journal publishing the judgment. Example of Citation, for the landmark Kesavananda Bharati case: The citation in 'Supreme Court Cases', In the All-India Reporter (AIR), the citation is AIR 1973 SC 1461.	Earlier, Judgments mention citations *while referring to precedents* and often use citations *from different Law Reporters*. This would create numbers of citations for the same case. This ambiguity is curated by the Neutral citation system. 1) A neutral citation would mean that the **court would assign its own citation.** It will be a court-approved system of citation, which would be *independent of the series of law reports or other publications, and unique to each decision.* 2) Law Reporters are periodicals or annual digests that publish judgments, often with an editorial note to make it accessible for lawyers to refer to precedents.

How Will The SC Implement The Neutral Citation System?

All 30,000 judgments are going to have neutral citations. It will be done in three phases.

- The first tranche will be till January 1, 2023. i.e., orders and judgments w.e.f. January 1, 2023, will be assigned a neutral citation at the time of their publishing on the official website.

- Then the Second tranche will be till judgments from 2014 and then finally it will go back to 1950.

Why Is A Neutral System Good Or Necessary?

- Every order and judgment (reportable and non-reportable) of the Supreme Court of India would have a citation of its own, thereby facilitating easy identification, referencing, and retrieval of cases.

- Makes it easier for legal practitioners to locate and cite cases accurately and efficiently.

- Provides a consistent and identifiable citation format that can be used by anyone.

- Access to citations, which at present is available only to the subscription holders of private law reporters, would now be available to everyone free of cost in the reformed and indigenous form of 'Neutral Citations'.

- Neutral Citation helps in providing transparency and predictability concerning the settled legal position. It also aids in enhancing public scrutiny, education, academic research and development of law.

With artificial intelligence (AI) enabled translation of judgments and transcribing of court proceedings, a uniform citation is necessary. The Neutral Citations are to ensure a uniform pattern of citing all decisions of the High Court and the Supreme Court. The **Delhi, Kerala, and Madras HCs** have already introduced neutral citation.

National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG)

Recently, two capacity-building programmes for the civil servants of Bangladesh and Arunachal Pradesh commenced at the **National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG),** Mussoorie campus.

About NCGC

- It is dedicated to promoting collaboration and learning among civil servants in India and neighbouring countries, in line with the 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' philosophy.

- It was established as an apex–level autonomous institution in 2014 under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
- Its head office is at New Delhi and its registered office at Mussoorie.
- The Centre traces its origin to the National Institute of Administrative Research (NIAR), which was set up in 1995 by the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA). NIAR was subsequently rechristened and subsumed into NCGG.

Mandate of NCGC

NCGC serves as the country's premier institution for promoting good governance, policy reforms, and capacity building of civil servants within India and in other developing nations. It also functions as a think tank in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs.

Governing Body & Management Committee of NCGC

Governing Body	Management Committee
The affairs of the NCGG are managed under the overall superintendence and direction of the Governing Body, which is headed by the **Cabinet Secretary.**	The NCGG also has a Management Committee, which is responsible for the administration and management of the society with regards to detailed plans.
▪ Cabinet Secretary: Chairperson ▪ Secretary (DoPT): Vice-Chairperson	•Secretary, Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT): Chairperson • Director, LBS National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie: Vice Chairperson

Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Report

Dr. Bibek Debroy, Chairman of EAC-PM, released the 2nd edition of the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) report.

About The Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) Report

- The FLN Report is a joint report published by the EAC-PM (Economic Advisory Council to Prime Minister), Government of India and Institute for Competitiveness.
- The first FLN report was released in 2021. It is a benchmark for states and UTs to track their performance in achieving universal foundational learning by 2026-27.
- This report highlights the importance of early education years in the overall development of a child. It further highlights the role of well-planned early interventions like the **National Education Policy (2020) and the NIPUN Bharat guidelines,** leading to long-term improved learning outcomes.
- The report's findings cover the role of nutrition, access to digital technology and language-focused instructional approach.
- The Index includes five pillars comprising 41 indicators. The five pillars are: *1) Educational Infrastructure, 2) Access to Education, 3) Basic Health, 4) Learning Outcomes and 5) Governance*.

Concept of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy

- In the schooling system, Foundational Literacy and Numeracy refers to the education of a child between **3-8 years of age.** This essentially includes the initial three years of preschool, followed by early primary education up to grade 3, as per the National Education Policy (NEP 2020).
- The aim of FLN is to ensure that children learn in a joyful manner through play, stories, rhymes, activities, local art, craft and music and develop strong foundations for lifelong learning.

Key Findings Of The FLN Report 2023

The second edition of the foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) report captures the role of **language in education** and focuses on improving the learning outcomes using appropriate assessments and medium of instruction.

- It captures the fundamental concepts children require to become skilled readers and highlights distinct challenges faced in a multilingual environment.

- In this context, it is crucial to understand the need to integrate the <u>medium of instruction</u> and teaching in languages familiar to children.

Large State Category	Small State & UT Category	Northeastern States
West Bengal maintained its lead while Uttar Pradesh stood at the bottom.	Punjab ranked highest on the index, whereas Telangana ranked lowest. Among the union territories, Puducherry emerged as the top performer on the index, while Ladakh was identified as the poorest performer.	Sikkim was at the top while Meghalaya was at the bottom of the index.

Overall, India's average score is 44.48. 18 out of 36 State/UTs have scored above country average in FLN index.

Recommendations of the Report

The report recommended to undertake various assessments pertaining to:

1. <u>linguistic system</u> (includes phonology, vocabulary/lexicon, and syntax),

2. <u>orthographic system</u> (includes symbols and mapping principles), and

3. <u>writing mechanisms</u> and move the focus to improving the periodicity of National Assessment Survey (NAS) and the sample size of FLS for assessing the learning outcomes effectively.

- Finally, the need for <u>data monitoring at a disaggregated level for FLN outcomes</u> is also required to be integrated into the system, along with clearly defined outcome-based indicators on pedagogical framework and education in India.

Extra Mile
NIPUN Bharat Mission - The Ministry of Education has launched a National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), for ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains (FLN) by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27. - As a part of implementation of NEP -2020 Ministry of Education, Govt. of India has launched NIPUN Bharat Mission for FLN in2021.

All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE)

Ministry of Education released All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020-2021.

About AISHE

- The Ministry has been conducting All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) since 2011, covering all higher educational institutions located in Indian Territory and imparting higher education in the country.

- The survey collects detailed information on different parameters such as student enrollment, teacher's data, infrastructural information, financial information etc.

- For the first time, in AISHE 2020-21, HEIs have filled data using entirely online data collection platform through the **Web Data Capture Format (DCF)** developed by Department of Higher Education through the National Informatics Centre (NIC).

Highlights of the AISHE

Following are the key highlights of the survey:

Student Enrollment	Teacher's Data	Infrastructural Information
1) Enrollment in higher education increases to 4.14 crore, crossing the 4-crore mark for first time; increase of 7.5% from 2019-20 and 21% from 2014-15. 2) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has improved from the previous year for all social groups. The details are as follows: Female enrollment reaches 2 crore mark, increase of 13 Lakh from 2019-20. Gender Parity Index (GPI) has increased from 1 in 2017-18 to 1.05 in 2020-21 Significant increase of 32% in OBC Student enrolment. Significant increase of 28% and of 47% in enrolment of SC & ST students respectively in 2020-21, compared to 2014-15. 3) Enrollment in Distance Education has increased by 7% in 2020-21 from 2019-20. 4) Among Disciplines at undergraduate level, enrollment is highest in Arts (33.5%), followed by Science (15.5%), Commerce (13.9%) and Engineering & Technology (11.9%).	1) Total number of faculty/teachers increases by 47,914 from 2019-20. 2) The total number of faculty/teachers are 15,51,070 of which about 57.1% are male and 42.9% are female. 3) The female per 100 male faculty has improved to 75 in 2020-21 from 74 in 2019-20 and 63 in 2014-15.	1) Number of Universities has increased by 70, number of colleges has increased by 1,453, in 2020-21 over 2019-20. 2) Government Universities (59% of total) contribute towards 73.1% of the enrolment. Government Colleges (21.4% of total) contribute towards 34.5% of the enrolment. 3) The enrolment in Institute of National Importance (INIs) has increased by nearly 61% during the period 2014-15 to 2020-21. 4) Enrolment has increased in 2020-21 compared to 2014-15 in the Specialized Universities relating to Defence, Sanskrit, Biotechnology, Forensics, Design, Sports etc. 5) Availability of different infrastructural facilities in HEIs in 2020-21: • Libraries (97%) • Laboratories (88%) • Computer centers (91%, from 86% in 2019-20) • Skill Development Centre (61%, from 58% in 2019-20) • Connectivity to National Knowledge Network (56%, from 34% in 2019-20) 6) 43% of universities and 61.4% of colleges are located in Rural Areas.

Analysis of AISHE

- From the latest AISHE report, it is evident that the enrollment rate in higher education has increased significantly, with more students enrolling in postgraduate and research programs.

- However, the report also highlights the need for improvement in the quality of education, research infrastructure, and faculty development.

- Moreover, the report emphasizes the importance of equal access to higher education for students from all sections of society, including marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

Adani Enterprises Calls Off FPO

- Adani Enterprises decided to call off its ₹20,000 crore **follow-on public offer** (FPO) and return the money that it had collected from investors.

- The Adani Group has seen the stocks of its publicly listed companies crash steeply, causing its overall market capitalisation to drop significantly.

- A report by U.S. firm **Hindenburg Research** had accused the Adani Group of stock manipulation and accounting fraud. The Group has denied all allegations.

Follow-on Public Offer

- An FPO is a process through which companies that are **publicly listed** on the stock market, issue additional shares to investors.

- During an FPO, a company could decide to issue **fresh shares** to investors, or existing shareholders in the company could decide to sell their shares to other investors.

  - An FPO is similar to an initial public offering (IPO), except that an IPO refers to the issuance or sale of shares by a company to investors when it taps into the public market for the **very first time.**

  - In an IPO, the price is either fixed or variable as a range, while in an FPO the price is dependent upon the number of shares as they increase or decrease and is market-driven

  - FPOs can also be a way for existing shareholders to sell their shares and exit the company.

  - It also provides an opportunity for existing shareholders to increase their stake in the company.

- FPOs are used by companies to diversify their equity base and raise capital for their business. This capital can be used for a variety of purposes such as general corporate expenses, working capital, expansion, and debt reduction.

- FPOs are typically offered at a **discount** to the current market price of the shares, which can make them more attractive to retail investors. This allows them to participate in the potential upside of the company's performance.

- Additionally, FPOs come with the advantage of *more information being available about the company, as it has already been listed on the exchange and has a track record of performance.*

- This allows investors to make more informed decisions about investing in the company.

- Also, by the time of FPO, the company already has a well-established corporate governance structure and investors have a better idea about the management's track record.

Types of FPOs

Diluted FPO	Non-Diluted FPO
- In diluted FPO, the **new offer of shares** increases the outstanding shares of the company. - A new set of shares are issued to the public through diluted FPO to raise the *capital for funding new projects, and activities or for paying debts.*	- Non-diluted FPOs are issued when existing shareholders of the company sell their stocks to the public. Non-Diluted FPOs are also known as **secondary market offerings.** - Non-Diluted FPOs do not benefit the company in terms of raising more capital as these are generally issued to change the shareholding ownership pattern.

- The FPO) of Adani Enterprises Ltd (which was eventually called off by the company) was significantly subscribed by **Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs).**

- SEBI defines a QIB as <u>an institutional investor that possesses the necessary expertise plus the financial background to carefully evaluate and strategically invest in capital markets</u>.

- As per **DIP (Disclosure and Investor Protection) Guidelines** formulated in 2000, SEBI designates the following as QIBs:

  o Public financial institution as defined in Companies Act, 1956;

  o Scheduled commercial banks;

  o Mutual funds;

  o Foreign institutional investor registered with SEBI;

  o Multilateral and bilateral development financial institutions;

  o Venture capital funds registered with SEBI;

  o State Industrial Development Corporations;

  o Insurance Companies registered with (IRDA);

  o Provident Funds with minimum corpus of Rs.25 crores;

  o Pension Funds with minimum corpus of Rs. 25 crores.

- These entities are <u>not required to be registered with SEBI as QIBs</u>. Any entities falling under the categories specified above are considered as QIBs.

PM KUSUM Extended

The government has extended the **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM)** scheme, till March 2026.

PM KUSUM

- The PM KUSUM scheme was launched by **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) in 2019**, to add solar capacity of **30,800 MW by 2022**, with total central financial support of Rs 34,422 crore.

- **State Nodal Agencies (SNAs)** of MNRE coordinate with States/UTs, discoms and farmers for implementation of the scheme.

Objectives

- The scheme **aims** to boost solar capacity to provide **energy security to Indian farmers**. At the same time, it aims to achieve the aim by **increasing India's share of solar power generation**.

- It also aims at **de-dieselization** of the farm sector, providing water and energy security to farmers, increasing the income of farmers and curbing environmental pollution.

Scheme Components

- **Component A:** It focuses on the installation of **10,000 MW of solar capacity by setting up small power plants** of capacity of 2 MW. These power plants will be set up by farmers, panchayats, cooperatives, farmer producers etc. in barren land.

  o **Procurement Based Incentive (PBI)** will be provided for the first five years by MNRE to DISCOMs, for buying the power from farmers/developers.

- **Component B:** It lays emphasis on the installation of **20 lakh standalone solar-powered agriculture pumps (off grid)**. The government will support individual farmers in setting up solar pumps of a capacity up to 7.5 Horse Power (HP).

- **Component C:** Solarisation (conversion) of 15 lakh grid-connected agriculture pumps.

Central Finance Assistance (CFA) for Component B & C

- CFA of 30% of the benchmark cost or the tender cost, whichever is lower; State Government subsidy 30%; Remaining 40% by the farmer

- In North Eastern States, Sikkim, J&K, Himachal, Uttarakhand, Lakshadweep and A&N Islands, CFA of 50%, State Government subsidy 30%, Remaining 20% by the farmer

Reasons For The Extension

- After conducting a third-party evaluation scheme, it was found that **the scheme has not achieved the desired result**, as the pace of scheme implementation was significantly affected due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- As of December 31, 2022, only 88.46 MW of solar capacity had been added; 181,058 solar pumps had been installed and 1,174 grid-connected pumps converted.

Scheme Benefits

- The scheme will open a stable and continuous source of income to the rural land owners for a period of 25 years by utilisation of their dry/uncultivable land & selling surplus solar energy to the state.

- Further, in case cultivated fields are chosen for setting up solar power project, the farmers will continue to grow crops as the solar panels are to be set up above a minimum height.

- It would ensure that sufficient local solar/other renewable energy based power is available for feeding rural load centres and agriculture pump-set loads, which require power mostly during the **day time.**

- The scheme is expected to create job opportunities in the installation, maintenance, and operation of solar power projects

- As these power plants will be located closer to the agriculture loads or to electrical *substations* in a decentralized manner, it will result in reduced transmission losses for discoms.

- The solar pumps will save the expenditure incurred on diesel for running diesel pump and provide the farmers a reliable source of irrigation through solar pump apart from preventing harmful pollution from running diesel pump.

- PM-KUSUM has a mandatory requirement for deploying *domestically produced solar cells* and modules under Component B and C, thus giving fillip to domestic solar manufacturing.

APEDA Organizes Buyer Seller Meet with UAE

- As a part of its series of sensitization programmes that are aimed at promoting the **export of millets** and its value-added products, APEDA organized a Virtual-Buyer Seller Meet to harness export opportunities in United Arab Emirates (UAE).

- APEDA also launched **e-Catalogue** for the UAE which contains information on various Indian Millets and range of their value-added products available for export, list of active exporters, start-ups and importer/retail chain/hyper markets, etc.

- It has also planned to organize millet promotional activities in South Africa, Dubai, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Sydney, Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America.

- APEDA has also signed an MoU with Indian Institute of Millet Research (IIMR) to boost value-addition and farmers' income.

Millets In India

- India is one of the leading producers of millets in the world with an estimated share of around **41% in the global production**.

- As per FAO, <u>world production of millets</u> in the year 2020 was **30.46** million metric tonnes (MMT) and <u>India's share</u> was **12.49 MMT**.

- India recorded 27% growth in millet production in 2021-22 as compared to millet production in the previous year was 15.92 MMT.

- India's **top five millet producing states** are Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

- There are 16 major varieties of millet, which are produced and exported. Exports of millets from India include mainly **whole grain** and the export of *value-added products of millets from India is negligible.*

- Share of export of millets is nearly 1% of the total millet production. However, it is estimated that the millets market is set to <u>grow from its current market value of more than USD 9 billion to over USD 12 billion by 2025</u>.

- **India's major millet exporting countries** are U.A.E, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Oman, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, U.K and U.S.A. The varieties of millets exported by India include Bajra, Ragi, Canary, Jawar, and Buckwheat.

- The **major millet importing countries:** Indonesia, Belgium, Japan, Germany, Mexico, Italy, U.S.A, United Kingdom, Brazil and Netherlands.

AGRICULTURAL AND PROCESSED FOOD PRODUCTS EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (APEDA)
(MINISTRY OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA)

- APEDA was established under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act passed by the Parliament in 1985.
- Headquartered in New Delhi, it functions under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Functions
- Promotion of *export-oriented production* and development of the Scheduled products;
- Registration of persons as exporters of the scheduled products;
- Fixing of standards and specifications for scheduled products for the purpose of exports;
- Improving of packaging of the scheduled products;
- Improving of marketing of the scheduled products outside India;
- Training in various aspects of the industries connected with the scheduled products;
- It also functions as the Secretariat to the National Accreditation Board (NAB) for the implementation of accreditation of the Certification Bodies under National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) for Organic exports.

South India's 1st Industrial Corridor Project

- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of **South India's 1st Industrial Corridor Project** to be implemented at Tumakuru which is spread over 8500 acre of land under the **Chennai Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC)**.

- The CBIC project includes the development of industrial townships at three nodes: **Krishnapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Tumakuru (Karnataka), and Ponneri (Tamil Nadu)**.

- Tumakuru Industrial Township has been planned with holistic and integrated approach in line with the principles of PM-GatiShakti to address the issue of **last mile multi-modal connectivity** to the economic zone.

- The Multi Modal connectivity ecosystem will ensure a **seamless movement of raw material and finished goods**.

- The **National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICDIT)**, and the **Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB)**, have taken up the development of the Industrial Township.

- The project will be a **mixed-use development** comprising of land uses like industrial, institutional, residential, commercial, green spaces etc. making it a completely self-sustainable and resilient smart industrial city.

- Target sectors are Food Products, Textile and Apparels, Electronics, Auto & Auto Components, Pharmaceuticals, Chemicals, Engineering, General Manufacturing etc.

Impact

- The Phase-A of the project is expected to generate employment opportunities for approximately 88,000 people and attract investment of around Rs. 7,000 crore over a period of 5-6 years, triggering growth and prosperity in the region.

- It will facilitate investments, foster innovation, enhance skills development and build finest manufacturing ecosystem for pitching India as a global investment destination.

- It will contribute to futuristic and inclusive growth of the country with the vision of 'Make in India, Make for the World'.

32 Projects in 4 Phases under 11 Corridors forming part of National Infrastructure Pipeline

- Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC)
- Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIC)
- Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC)
- Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VCIC)
- Bengaluru-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (BMIC)
- Odisha Economic Corridor (OEC)
- Hyderabad Nagpur Industrial Corridor (HNIC)
- Hyderabad Warangal Industrial Corridor (HWIC)
- Hyderabad Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (HBIC)
- Extension of CBIC to Kochi via Coimbatore
- Delhi Nagpur Industrial Corridor (DNIC)

National Industrial Corridor Development and Implementation Trust (NICDIT)

- The NICDIT under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, is the institutional framework to implement the National Industrial Corridor Programme (NICP).
- NICDIT originated in 2007 as the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Project Implementation Trust Fund (DMIC-PITF). In 2016, the government approved the expansion of the scope of the existing DMIC- PITF and re-designated it as NICDIT.
- NICDC is a Special Purpose Vehicle with equity shareholding of Government of India at 49%.
- NICP has been conceived to promote world class manufacturing facilities and develop futuristic industrial cities in India.
- The broad objective of NICP is to provide plug and play infrastructural facilities for setting up large scale manufacturing units.
- These futuristic industrial cities will compete with the best manufacturing and investment destinations in the world.
- 32 greenfield industrial smart cities under 11 industrial corridors are being developed with world class Plug-n-Play infrastructure.
- The Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor was the first corridor taken up for development in 2011.

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme

- The **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** has shared that under Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS), 477.25 crore has been approved to 133 incubators of which Rs. 211.63 crore has been disbursed as on 31st December 2022.

- The flagship schemes under **Startup India initiative** namely, _Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS), Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) and Credit_

Startup India Scheme

- Launched in 2016, by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (DPIIT)). It aims to:
  - Build a strong ecosystem that supports the growth of startup businesses.
  - Drive sustainable economic growth.
  - Generate large scale employment opportunities.

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)

- DPIIT is a central government department under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- It is responsible for formulation and implementation of promotional and developmental measures for growth of the industrial sector.
- Individual administrative ministries look after the production, distribution, development and planning aspects of specific industries allocated to them. However, DPIIT is responsible for the overall industrial policy.
- It is also responsible for facilitating and increasing the foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to the country.

Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS) extend support to startups at various stages of their business cycle.

Need For SISFS

- Easy availability of capital is essential for entrepreneurs at the early stages of growth of an enterprise.
- However, funding is generally available to startups only after the proof of concept has been provided. At the same, it is difficult for early-stage startups to get loans from banks.
- The capital required at this stage often presents a make-or-break situation for startups with good business ideas.
- Many innovative business ideas fail to grow due to the *absence of this critical capital required at an early stage for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry and commercialization.*

Proof Of Concept And Prototype

Proof of concept	•It is a test conducted to check whether a **product or idea is good enough** to be taken to the commercialization stage
Prototype	•It is an early sample or model of a product created to test the product before the launch.

Objective of SISFS

- SISFS provides **financial assistance** to startups for proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry and commercialization.
- This would enable these startups to rise to a level where they will be able to raise investments or seek loans from commercial banks or financial institutions.

Details of SISFS

- Launched in January 2021, SISFS was approved with a corpus of **Rs. 945 crore for the period of 4 years**. In this period, it is expected to support an estimated 3,600 entrepreneurs through 300 incubators.
- An **Experts Advisory Committee (EAC)** has been created by DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) to execute and monitor SISFS.
  - The EAC **evaluates and selects incubators** for allotment of funds, monitors progress, and takes all necessary measures for efficient utilization of funds.

Incubators and Seed Funding

- Business **incubators** are institutions that support entrepreneurs in developing their businesses, especially in initial stages.
- **Seed funding** is the earliest stage of investment in a business.

Eligibility

- A startup, recognized by DPIIT, incorporated not more than 2 years ago at the time of application.
- Startups should not have received more than Rs. 10 lakhs of monetary support under any other Central or State Government scheme.

Funding Provisions

- The Seed Fund is disbursed to eligible startups through eligible incubators across India.
- Grants of up to **Rs 5 Crores** is provided to the eligible incubators selected by the EAC.
- The selected incubators provide grants of up to **Rs 20 lakhs** for validation of Proof of Concept, or prototype development, or product trials to startups.

- Furthermore, investments of up to Rs **50 lakhs** are provided to the startups for market entry and commercialization.

Impact of SISFS

- SISFS will act as a bridge between ideas and their implementation. It will create a strong startup ecosystem, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns of India, which are often deprived of adequate funding.

- Independent & ambitious thinking in the startup ecosystem will encourage entrepreneurship and create a culture that will recognise innovation.

- These startups will also help create huge employment opportunities.

Global Quality Infrastructure Index

- The Global Quality Infrastructure Index (GQII) 2021 was released. It is an initiative of the independent consulting firms Mesopartner and Analyticar to **research and share data on Quality Infrastructure.**

  o GQII rankings are published and presented post-facto for each year based on the data collected till the end of that year.

GQII 2021: Global Ranking and Subrankings by QI area (184 Economies)

Economy Name	Economy Code	GQII Rank	GQII Scores	Rank Metrology	Rank Standardization	Rank Accreditation
Germany	DEU	1	0,996	2	2	1
China	CHN	2	0,990	3	1	3
United States	USA	3	0,987	1	8	2
United Kingdom	GBR	4	0,982	4	4	6
Japan	JPN	5	0,976	5	3	12
France	FRA	6	0,973	7	6	11
Korea, Republic of	KOR	7	0,962	6	7	17
Italy	ITA	8	0,957	15	5	4
Spain	ESP	9	0,949	13	10	7
India	IND	10	0,932	21	9	5
Poland	POL	11	0,927	19	15	7
Switzerland	CHE	12	0,924	14	12	21
Brazil	BRA	13	0,924	11	20	18
Australia	AUS	14	0,923	9	18	22
Czech Republic	CZE	15	0,923	18	13	14
Turkey	TUR	16	0,921	16	25	10
Netherlands	NLD	17	0,914	20	11	15
Mexico	MEX	18	0,913	10	42	9
Canada	CAN	19	0,912	8	24	26
South Africa	ZAF	20	0,909	12	27	19

- GQII **ranks 184 economies** in the world on the basis of quality infrastructure (QI).

- A formula calculates a score for each country based on its position in the sub-rankings for **Metrology**, **Standards** and **Accreditation**.

- It allows to compare the quality infrastructure of different countries worldwide. This creates confidence in international trade and contributes to the protection of consumers and the environment.

Key Findings

- Geographically, the **top 25 QI systems** are <u>mainly located in Europe, North America, and</u>

QUALITY COUNCIL® OF INDIA QCI
Creating an Ecosystem for Quality

- It was established in *1997* jointly by Department for Promotion of Industry & Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, and the Indian industry.
- It was established under the *Societies Registration Act*, to provide accreditation services in various sectors for *product, services and persons*.
- It is operated through the constituent Boards of QCI, primarily the:

  o National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB),
  o National Accreditation Board for Testing & Calibration Laboratories (NABL).

- *NABCB provides accreditation* to the certification, inspection, and validation/verification bodies.
- *NABL provides accreditation* to the *testing, calibration and medical laboratories.*
- Both, NABCB and NABL are signatories to the Multilateral Recognition Arrangements of the international bodies, the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC).
- The government, regulators, industry and conformity assessment bodies increasingly rely on the NABCB and NABL accreditation for conformity assessment in India.

Asia-Pacific, with some exceptions, such as **India (10th),** Brazil (13th), Australia (14th), Turkey (16th), Mexico (18th) and South Africa (20th).

- India's **national accreditation system has been ranked 5th** in the world in GQII 2021.

- Furthermore, India was ranked **21st in terms of metrology** and **9th in standardisation**.

- Accreditation helps establish the competence and credibility of conformity assessment bodies which perform testing, certification and inspection.

- **Quality Council of India (QCI)** is the body that handles accreditation in India

- **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)** is responsible for developing standards.

- **Council Of Scientific And Industrial Research – National Physical Laboratory (CSIR–NPL)** manages metrology system.

Sagar Parikrama

- Sagar Parikrama Phase III was launched from Hazira Port, Surat, by the **Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying.**

- After Surat, the 720 km journey proceeds towards the coastal line of Maharashtra at Satpati, Vasai, Versova, and will end at Sasson Dock, Mumbai.

- Phase I and Phase II of Sagar Parikrama were organized in Gujarat in March 2022 and September 2022 respectively.

- It is an evolutionary journey conceived in the sea across the coastal belt *demonstrating solidarity with all fisherfolk, fish farmers and concerned stakeholders* in the spirit of Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

- Sagar Parikrama program shall be celebrated in all coastal States/UTs through a pre-decided sea route from Gujarat, Diu, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Andaman & Nicobar, and Lakshadweep Islands

- The main **objectives** of Sagar Parikrama are:

  o Facilitate interaction with fishermen, coastal communities and stakeholders to *share information of various fisheries related schemes and programs* being implemented by the government.

  o Promote *responsible fisheries* with focus on sustainable balance between the utilization of marine fisheries resources for food security of nation and livelihoods of coastal fisher communities; and

  o Protection of marine ecosystems.

Significance

- In addition to raising awareness, Sagar Parikrama has also made significant contributions to **oceanographic research.**

- During the first circumnavigation, the sailors collected valuable data on ocean currents, weather patterns, and marine life. This information has been used by scientists to better understand oceans and to develop strategies for their protection.

- Sagar Parikrama continues to inspire and educate people around the world about the importance of ocean conservation.

INDIA'S MARINE ECONOMY

- India has a coastline of *8118 km, covering 9 maritime States & 4 UTs* and provides livelihood support to 2.8 million coastal fisher folk.
- India contributes 8% of the global share of fish production and is ranked *3rd largest fish producer in the world*. Also, India ranks 1st in *inland capture fish production*
- The total fish production of the nation is 162.48 lakh tonnes, of which 121.21 lakh tonnes are from inland and 41.27 lakh tonnes from the marine.
- The value of fisheries exports stood at Rs 57,586.48 crores (4th largest exporter). The sector shows a steady growth rate in Gross Value Added (GVA) accounting for a 6.72% share of agriculture GDP and contributing to about 17% of agriculture exports.

- The organization has also expanded its reach, offering programs and resources for students and educators to learn more about the ocean and its ecosystems.

International Centre of Excellence for Dams

- The Central Water Commission (CWC) has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with IIT, Roorkee (IITR) to develop **International Centre of Excellence for Dams (ICED)** under externally funded **Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)** Phase II and Phase III.

- The MoA will remain valid for ten years or till the duration of the DRIP Phase-II and Phase-II Scheme, whichever is earlier.

- ICED, Roorkee will provide specialized technical support in investigations, modelling, research and innovations, and technical support services to the **Indian and overseas dam owners**.

- The Centre will work for agreed dam safety areas to support and provide solutions to various emerging challenges faced in dam safety

- It will also carry out applied research, education, and technology transfer in dam safety management at local, regional, national, and international levels.

- The Centre will start with the focus on the **two key areas**, *reservoir sedimentation and seismic hazard mapping & analysis* in the initial years.
  - New areas will be added as the need arises from implementation of the Dam Safety Act in the near future.

- In the long run, the Centre will aim to deal with the complete life cycle of the dams

- IITR will aim to reach a level of **self-sufficiency** within ten years by generating income streams through the knowledge and capabilities developed on dam safety and rehabilitation, reservoir sedimentation and seismic hazard mapping and analysis.

Significance

- ICED will empower Make in India initiative in the area of dam safety by undertaking advanced research and developing technologies and application products;

- It will fast-track innovations to provide most appropriate solutions to various challenges in the dam safety;

- It will create a pool of competent manpower for dam owning agencies and industry equipped with state of the art theoretical and practical know-how.

Status of dams in India

- In terms of large dams, India ranks third globally after China and United States of America, with **5334 large dams** in operation. There are also several thousand smaller dams.

- DRIP was launched by Union Government in 2012 with financial assistance from World Bank.
- The project implementation agencies are the owners of dam (i.e. Water Resources Departments (WRD) or State Electricity Boards (SEB)) in the participating States.
- The overall implementation of the project is coordinated by Central Water Commission (CWC)
- The project development objectives of DRIP are to:
  - Improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams in a sustainable manner;
  - Strengthen the dam safety institutional set-up in participating states as well as at central level.

- Indian dams and reservoirs play an important role in the economic and agricultural growth by storing approximately 300 billion cubic meter of water annually.

- However, 80% of the existing dams are more than 25 years old, with some dams that are 100-year-old. These dams require maintenance and capacity building.

Khanan Prahari App

- The government has launched a mobile app **Khanan Prahari** and a web app **Coal Mine Surveillance and Management System (CMSMS)** for reporting <u>unauthorized coal mining</u> activities.
  - Khanan Prahari app is part of (CMSMS).
- The basic objective of CMSMS is <u>reporting, monitoring and taking suitable action on unauthorised coal mining activities</u> like rat hole mining, pilferage etc.
- It is a web-based **Geographic Information System (GIS)** application through which location of sites for unauthorised mining can be detected.
- There are two ways in which illegal coal mining is reported/ identified through CMSMS.
- One way is through **periodic scanning of Satellite imagery** (In house) and the second is through the <u>information provided by responsible citizens</u> using the mobile application 'Khan Prahari'.
- The basic platform used in the system is of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology's (MeiTY) map which provides village level information.
- The **leasehold boundary** of all the coal mines is displayed on this map. The system will use satellite data to detect changes by which unauthorised mining activity **extending beyond the allotted lease area** can be detected and suitable action can be taken on it.
- The complaint originating from coal mines allotted to Coal India will go to Coal India Offices and those originating from coal blocks not allotted to Coal India will go straight to the State Government Officers.
- Moreover, for each complaint the alert will also go to the District Magistrate and SP of the district.

Millet International Initiative for Research and Awareness (MIIRA)

- During its G20 Presidency, India proposed to the launch of a global initiative (MIIRA) to encourage the consumption and production of millets.
- MIIRA will aim to <u>connect the millet research organisations across the world while also supporting research on millet crops</u>.
- It is in line with the **UN declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets** and the Centre's plan to make India a global hub for millets.
- Besides setting up a web platform to connect researchers and holding international research conferences, the plan is also to <u>promote millet consumption</u> by raising awareness.
- For MIIRA to take off, India will contribute the "**seed money**" while each G20 member will later have to contribute to its budget in the form of a membership fee.
- The <u>MIIRA secretariat will be in Delhi</u>. With India being a major producer of millets, this will ensure a flow of investment from the country's industry and research bodies.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

- As per the results of a large sample survey conducted by Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), has helped in generating **1.12 crore net additional employment** during a period of approximately 3 years (i.e. from 2015 to 2018)
- The entrepreneurs taking loans under the scheme are from economically weaker sections (EWS) of society.
- But the biggest beneficiary group under the scheme are women. Out of the total loan accounts under PMMY, **more than 64% accounts are of women**.
 - Also, 22% loan has been given to new entrepreneurs.

- For example, out of the total 81 lakh loans extended in the State of Rajasthan, more than 52 lakh loans have been extended to women entrepreneurs in the last 3 financial years.
- Start-ups by women entrepreneurs have not just helped them gain economic independence but also provided employment to other women.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY)

- PMMY was launched in 2015, for providing **collateral-free** loans up to 10 lakh by Member Lending Institutions.

- These loans are given by commercial banks, Regional Rural Banks, Small Finance Banks, Micro Finance Institutions (MFI) and Non Banking Finance Companies (NBFC).

- Any individual, who is otherwise eligible to take a loan and has a business plan for small business enterprise can avail loan under the Scheme.
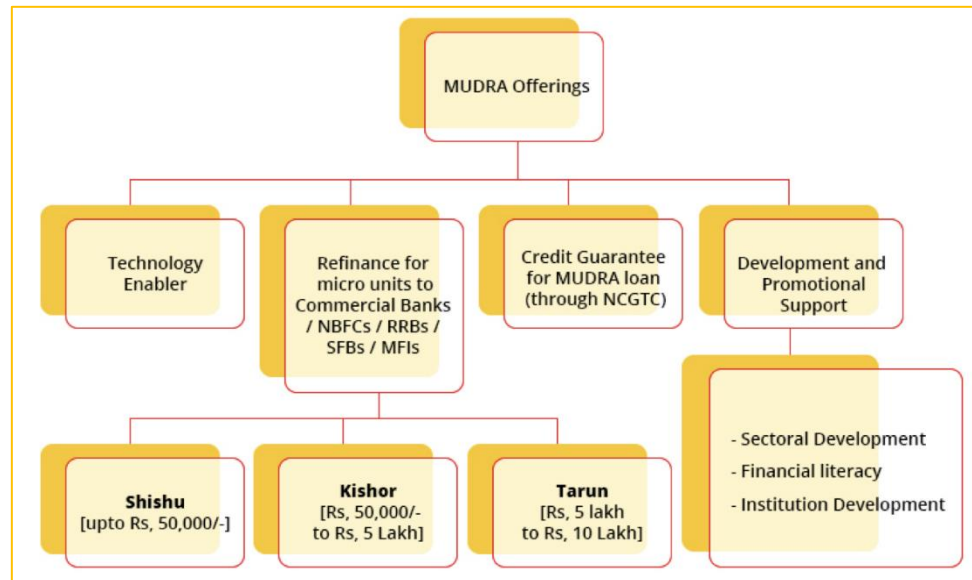
- S/he can avail loans for income generating activities in the manufacturing, trading, services sector and also for activities allied to agriculture (fishing, dairy, and food processing etc.) across 3 loan products, viz:
  - **Shishu**: covering loans up to Rs 50,000.
  - **Kishor**: covering loans above Rs 50,000 and up to Rs 5 lakh.
  - **Tarun**: covering loans above Rs 5 lakh and up to Rs 10 lakh.

- Provision for online applications through **Udyami Mitra portal** is provided.
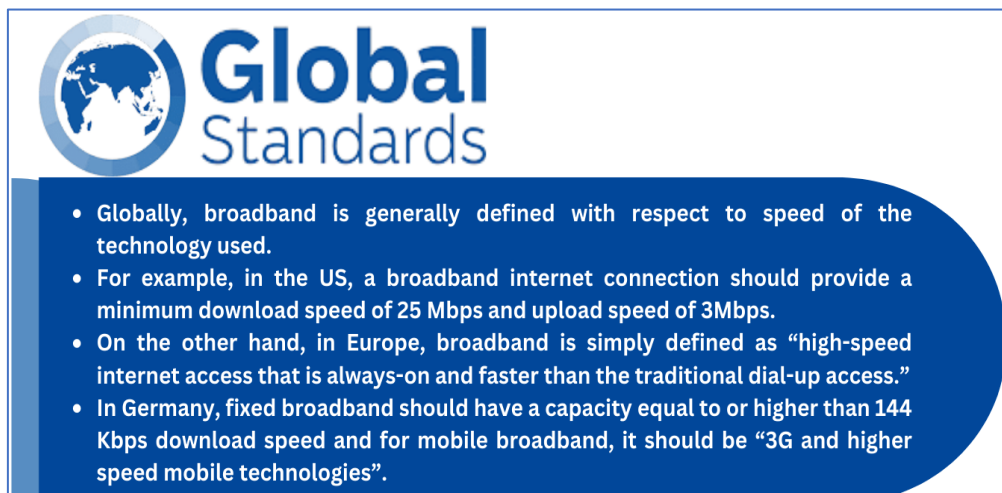
Broadband Definition Updated

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has revised the minimum download speed for broadband connectivity to 2 Mbps (Megabits per second) from 512 kbps.

- As per TRAI's **definition**, Broadband is a **data connection** that is able to support interactive services including Internet access and has the capability of minimum download speed of **2 Mbps** to an individual subscriber from the **point of presence (POP)** of the service provider intending to provide Broadband service.

- While broadband is generally understood to mean home WiFi connections, government statistics include *faster mobile internet connections in the category*. Thus, **wired broadband and wireless broadband will both be subject to this 2Mbps limit.**

- TRAI also recommended that broadband should be categorised in **three segments: basic, high-speed and ultra high-speed**.

- Basic broadband services should offer at least 2Mbps to 30Mbps download speeds while high-speed plans should offer anywhere between 10Mpbs to 100Mbps download speeds.

- Ultra-high speed broadband connection should provide 100Mbps to 1Gbps speeds.

Background

- The effort to update this definition has been on for over a decade, by which time the internet speeds in the country have surpassed 2Mbps significantly.

- The **National Telecom Policy 2012** had set a goal of updating the definition of broadband to **2Mbps by 2015**. TRAI had also formally recommended the new speed to the Department of Telecommunications in September 2021.

- The industry resisted this definition update due to the potential implications it would create when 4G networks are not able to reliably serve at least 2Mbps.

- This includes instances when too many devices connected to a single tower cause network congestion, or when a user is too far from their nearest base station.As per the Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), the actual speed available to or experienced by the broadband customer varies depending upon a number of dynamic factors.

- Thus, with focus towards affordability and availability, the earlier definition (of 512 Kbps) was recommended by COAI in 2020.

Current Status in India

- By the previous definition, there were 825.38 million broadband users in India in November 2022.

- According to a 2021 report by Ookla, around 97.5% of Indian broadband subscribers meet the 2Mbps threshold.

  o The median **wired broadband speed** in India is over 75Mbps, and for **wireless broadband (mobile)** it is over 36Mbps. As 5G coverage on networks expands, these numbers are likely to go up.

- According to Airtel a minimum speed of 2 Mbps is just enough to send texts and emails, and much higher speeds are required to stream movies or use OTTs.

- A typical broadband plan provided by a telecom operator promises speeds between 40 Mbps and 1 Gbps.

Global Standards

- Globally, broadband is generally defined with respect to speed of the technology used.
- For example, in the US, a broadband internet connection should provide a minimum download speed of 25 Mbps and upload speed of 3Mbps.
- On the other hand, in Europe, broadband is simply defined as "high-speed internet access that is always-on and faster than the traditional dial-up access."
- In Germany, fixed broadband should have a capacity equal to or higher than 144 Kbps download speed and for mobile broadband, it should be "3G and higher speed mobile technologies".

Additional Surveillance Mechanism

- The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has placed Adani Enterprises, Adani Ports, and Ambuja Cements under the additional surveillance mechanism (ASM).

- This means trading in their shares will require a **100% margin**, which is aimed at curbing speculation and short-selling.

- The move comes as shares of Adani group companies continue to fall in the light of accusations of stock manipulation and fraud levelled against the group by New York-based Hindenburg Research.

- **ASM was introduced in 2018** with the intention to **protect investors from market volatility and unusual changes in share price**.

- The shortlisting of securities for placing in ASM is based on criteria that are jointly decided by the SEBI and exchanges.
- It covers the following **parameters**: high low variation, client concentration, market capitalisation, volume variation, delivery percentage, and number of unique PANs.
- Put simply, an ASM shortlisting signals to investors that the **stocks have seen unusual activity**.
- However, the shortlisting of securities under ASM is purely on account of market surveillance and it **should not be interpreted as an adverse action against the concerned company/entity**.

MSCI Index

- Global index provider MSCI has changed its weightage for four Adani Group stocks in its various widely tracked indices.
  - This was done after reviewing how many shares are available in the "**free float**" category — that is, shares which can be freely traded without any restrictions.
- **MSCI, or Morgan Stanley Capital International**, is a leading provider of critical decision support tools, including stock indexes, and services for the global investment community. It has over 160,000 indexes in its portfolio.
- MSCI Indexes facilitate the construction and monitoring of portfolios in a cohesive and complete manner, avoiding benchmark misfit.
- At the core is its modern index strategy, which provides consistent treatment across all markets, followed globally by investors.

MSCI Indexes

- MSCI has indexes for countries, regions, emerging markets, developed markets, small cap, all cap and even Islamic indexes.
- It selects stocks for its equity indexes that are easily traded and have high liquidity, with companies having high free float getting more weightage.
- It prefers stocks that have active investor participation and are without owner restrictions.

MSCI India Index

- The MSCI India Index is designed to measure the performance of the large and mid-cap segments of the Indian market. With 113 constituents, the index covers approximately 85% of the Indian equity market.
- Overall financial stocks have 24.74 per cent weightage and IT 15.72 per cent in the India index.
- The index is **reviewed quarterly** with the objective of reflecting change in the underlying equity markets in a timely manner, while limiting undue index turnover.

Significance

- MSCI indexes are widely tracked by foreign portfolio investors, hedge funds and other sovereign wealth funds which allocate funds to various markets like India depending on the overall weightage and direction given by these indexes.
- If India and its top listed companies get good weightage in MSCI indexes, foreign investors invest more funds on that basis and vice versa.
- The action on the Adani companies means these stocks will be less favoured by foreign investors and hedge funds while making their India allocations.

Steel Industry

- India has become the **2nd largest consumer of finished steel in the world**. The finished steel consumption was **106 million tons (MT)** during the FY22.

- The per capita steel consumption in the World is around 233 kg. However, the **per capita consumption of steel in India is around 77.2 kg**, gone up by 50% in last 8 years,

- Steel is a **deregulated sector** and Government's role is that of a facilitator for encouraging steel consumption in the country.

- Thus, the Government has brought **National Steel Policy (NSP), 2017** which forecasts per capita steel consumption to increase up to 160 kg by 2030-31.

- Government's push for infrastructure development through Gati-Shakti Master Plan, Make-in-India initiative for manufacturing sector, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna (PMAY) etc. would provide the required push to the demand and consumption of steel in the country.

- Ministry of Steel has also set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) with Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs (MoHUA) having members from Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Central Public Works Department (CPWD), Technical Institutions (IITs/NITs) & Industries for encouraging steel usage in Housing and Construction sector

Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GERD)

- India's R&D expenditure-GDP ratio of 0.7% is very low when compared to major economies and is much below the world average of 1.8%.

- The main reason is the low investment in R&D by the corporate sector. While the corporate sector accounts for about **two-thirds** of gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) in leading economies, its share in India is just 37%.

- However, there is evidence, that India's GERD data are an underestimate.

- A 2022 info brief of the National Science Foundation (NSF) of the United States on Foreign R&D by U.S.-based MNCs shows a spend of $9.5 billion (₹649.7 billion) on R&D in India in 2018. This increased to $9.8 billion (₹690.2 billion) in the following year.

- There are MNCs from other leading countries also spending on R&D in India. But the latest R&D Statistics, published by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) in 2020, has provided an estimate of ₹60.9 billion R&D spending in 2017-18 by foreign MNCs.

- This is only about 10% of what U.S. firms have reported to have spent in India on R&D.

Issues With The Current System

- The National Science and Technology Management Information System (NSTMIS) of the DST is the agency that compiles GERD statistics in India.

- It is easier to gather the information on R&D by the government sector, the higher education sector and public sector enterprises.

- The challenge lies in collecting data from the private corporate sector. There are two key factors that make the official R&D estimates significantly inadequate.

  o The **method used** for identification of R&D performing firms does not capture all the R&D performing firms.

  o The *NSTIMS relies on the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) list of recognised R&D units and the Prowess database of the Centre For Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd.* for this purpose.

- The DSIR list may not have many of the actual R&D performers for two reasons:

- o Firms which consider <u>government incentives as not attractive enough</u> or that are sensitive about sharing <u>critical information with the DSIR</u> may not be inclined to register themselves with the DSIR.

  - o Second, it may be difficult for <u>R&D firms in services</u> such as software and R&D services to meet the requirement of having separate infrastructure for R&D to distinguish it from their usual business.

- In fact, many of the R&D performing enterprises in new technology areas may come under the services category.

- A study at the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development, that looked at 298 firms receiving foreign investment (2004-16) for R&D purposes, found that only 11% had been registered with DSIR.

- The Prowess database, on the other hand, covers only 3.5% of the currently active registered enterprises in India.

- Some of the leading Indian enterprises in new technology areas and foreign R&D centres are not covered in both the DSIR directory of recognised R&D units and Prowess.

Way Ahead

- Transforming India's R&D statistics to truly reflect the R&D ecosystem needs **short-term and medium-term measures.**

- In the short term, the NSTMIS should use the <u>patents granted data, both in India and the U.S.,</u> in addition to its current method to identify R&D performing enterprises.

- While surveys can collect much more information related to innovation activities, R&D statistics should not be restricted to the responses to the surveys.

- Instead, annual R&D estimates can be prepared from **mandatory disclosures** that the enterprises are required to make to the MCA.

- In order to ensure compliance and proper reporting, <u>technologies can be used like in the case of revamped income-tax return forms</u> where <u>various sections are interlinked.</u> Additionally, proper disclosure of information to regulatory agencies, including R&D spending data, should be made an essential component of the environmental, social and governance (ESG) ranking of enterprises.

UPNEXT India

- The **first edition of UPNEXT India** was inaugurated in the presence of international buyers and exhibitors.

- UPNEXT India is **organized by Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) and supported by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry under the Market Access Initiative (MAI) Scheme**.

- This initiative is in the form of a series of <u>Reverse Buyer Seller meet</u> and has been kick-started with Japan.

  - o The objective of the **Reverse Buyer Seller** meet is to provide an opportunity to prospective importers(buyers) to interact with Indian counterparts(sellers) about the requirements and to increase the potential of exports of Indian textile products.

Market Access Initiative (MAI) Scheme

- MAI is an **Export Promotion Scheme** designed to act as a catalyst to promote India's exports on a sustained basis.

- It is formulated on **focus product-focus country approach**. This helps to evolve specific market and specific product through market studies/survey.

- Under it, assistance is provided to Export Promotion Organizations, Trade Promotion Organizations, National Level Institutions, Research Institutions, Universities, Laboratories, Exporters etc.

- The assistance helps in enhancement of exports through <u>accessing new markets or through increasing the share in the existing markets.</u>

- The following activities are eligible for financial assistance under the scheme:
  - Marketing projects abroad; Capacity building; Support for statutory compliances; Studies; Project development; Developing foreign trade facilitation web portal; Support cottage and handicrafts units.

> **Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC)**
>
> Incorporated in **1978**, AEPC is the official body of apparel exporters in India that provides invaluable assistance to Indian exporters as well as importers/international buyers who choose India as their preferred sourcing destination for garments.

Chief Economic Advisor

- The Chief Economic Advisor recently tabled the Economic Survey in the Parliament.
- The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) is the one in the Union Ministry of Finance who <u>advises the government on economic matters</u>.
- The CEA is the **ex-officio cadre-controlling authority of the Indian Economic Service**.
- Also, the CEA is **head of the Economic Division of the Department of Economic Affairs**, Ministry of Finance.
- The main role of the CEA is to produce the Economic Survey of India which is presented in Parliament a day before the Union Budget presentation every year.

World Economic Outlook

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) released the World Economic Outlook report. The WEO is **released twice every year** — April and October.
- It presents an <u>analysis of global economic developments</u> during the near and medium term.
- It gives an overview as well as detailed analysis of the world economy, by considering issues affecting industrial countries and developing economies.

Key Takeaways

Global Growth

- In the October 2022 WEO, the forecast was that the global growth rate will decelerate from **3.4% in 2022** to **2.7% in 2023**. In short, it held that the worst is yet to come, and for many people 2023 will feel like a recession.
  - In the January update, however, the IMF effectively rules out a global recession: "**Negative growth in global GDP**—which often happens when there is a global recession—**is not expected.**
- Instead, it expects global growth to bottom out in 2023 before starting to improve in 2024.
  - As such, the global growth, is now projected to fall to **2.9 percent in 2023** before rising to **3.1 percent in 2024**.
- Compared with the October forecast, the estimate for 2022 and the forecast for 2023 are both higher by about 0.2 percentage point, reflecting positive surprises and greater-than-expected resilience in numerous economies.
- China, Russia, US, Germany, and Italy are some of the key economies that have seen the most significant upward revisions in their 2023 GDP forecasts.
- The United Kingdom saw a substantial (almost 1 percentage point) downgrade in its 2023 GDP.

Global Inflation

- Inflation, which destabilized the global economy, is expected to have peaked in 2022 but the **disinflation** (the fall in inflation rate) will be slow and will take all of 2023 and 2024.

- About 84% of countries are expected to have lower <u>headline (consumer price index)</u> inflation in 2023 than in 2022.

- Global inflation is set to fall from 8.8 percent in 2022 (annual average) to **6.6 percent in 2023** and **4.3 percent in 2024**—above pre-pandemic (2017–19) levels of about 3.5 percent.

- Price rise is slowing for two main reasons:

- Monetary tightening all across the world — higher interest rates reduce the overall demand for goods and services and this, in turn, slows down inflation.

- Due to demand slowdown, prices of different commodities — both fuel and non-fuel — have come down from their recent highs.

- In 2023, advanced economies are expected to have an inflation of 4.6% while emerging economies will continue to face an inflation of 8.1%.

Indian Scenario

- **There's been no change in India's growth outlook since October 2022.** Growth in India is set to decline from **6.8% in 2022** to **6.1% in 2023** before picking up to **6.8% in 2024**, with resilient domestic demand.

- India's GDP growth rate is expected to be significantly higher than all its comparable economies, especially China (which is set to grow at 5.4% in 2023 and 4.5% in 2024).

- This means India will remain the world's fastest growing major economy both in 2023 as well as 2024.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Paris Club Likely To Provide Financial Assurances To IMF On Sri Lanka Debt

- The Paris Club, an _informal group of creditor nations_, will provide financial assurances to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Sri Lanka's debt.
- This assurance is a key step needed to unlock a $2.9 billion bailout by the IMF.

What is the Paris Club?

- The Paris Club is a group of mostly western creditor countries that grew from a 1956 meeting, in which Argentina agreed to meet its public creditors in Paris.
- **Objective –** To find sustainable debt-relief solutions for countries that are unable to repay their bilateral loans.
- It is a _forum where official creditors meet to solve payment difficulties faced by debtor countries_.
- **Member Countries –** Australia, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.
  - All **22** are members of the group are also part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
    - OECD is a group of 38 member countries that discuss and develop economic and social policy.

> **Extra mile:** The **London club** is another informal group that was founded in 1976. It is similar to the Paris club, except for **banks lending to countries** instead of other countries

[For detailed discussion on Economic crisis in Sri Lanka, please refer the topic "_Sri Lanka and IMF reach preliminary agreement for $2.9 billion loan_" from The Recitals -September 2022]

India, Singapore Start Instant Fund Transfer

- India and Singapore have integrated their respective real-time payment network for the first time to facilitate cross-border exchange.
- India's **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)** and its equivalent in Singapore known as **PayNow** have been conjoined.
  - This will enable transfer of remittances, funds and payments between the two countries in a quick and real-time.

Significance of UPI-PayNow Linkage

- **Development of infrastructure for cross-border payments between India and Singapore**
  - Hence, it closely aligns with the G20's financial inclusion priorities of driving faster, cheaper and more transparent cross-border payments.
- **Benefits to the citizens of both countries**
  - It will enable users of each of the two fast payment systems to make _instant, low-cost fund transfers_ on a reciprocal basis without a need to get on board the other payment system.
  - It will also help the Indian diaspora in Singapore, especially migrant workers and students.
  - As per financial experts, the integration of the system will bring down the cost of sending remittances by as much as 10%.

- Of the total inward remittances to India in 2020-21, the share of Singapore stood at 5.7%, according to the RBI Remittance Survey, 2021.
    - There are approximately 6.5 lakh Indians, including NRIs and persons of Indian origin (PIO), currently residing in Singapore.
- This was as per the ministry of external affairs (MEA) document "Population of Overseas Indians (2022)".

UPI — UNIFIED PAYMENTS INTERFACE

- UPI is a system that powers multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application (of any participating bank).
- It does so by merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments into one hood.
- In other words, UPI is an interface via which one can transfer money between bank accounts across a single window.
    - UPI supports both Person-to-Person (P2P) and Person-to-Merchant (P2M) payments and it also enables a user to send or receive money.
- It was launched in 2016, by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

What are the features of UPI?
- Immediate money transfer through mobile device round the clock 24*7 and 365 days
- Hassle free transactions as customers are not required to enter the details such as Card no, Account number, IFSC etc.

PayNow
- Similar to India's fast payment system UPI, PayNow is Singapore's counterpart.
- With just a mobile number, users can send and receive funds from one bank or e-wallet account to another in Singapore.
- This peer-to-peer payments linkage is enabled through participating banks and Non-Bank Financial Institutions (NFIs) in the country.

India Extends A Helping Hand To Earthquake Hit Turkey

- India has sent rescue and medical teams, including an *Army medical team and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)* personnel, along with medical supplies to quake-hit Turkey and Syria.
    - Thousands of people are killed and injured by a huge earthquake which struck south-eastern Turkey, near the Syrian border.
- The search and rescue operations by NDRF in these countries were carried out for nearly 10 days under the banner of **'Operation Dost'**.
    - With Operation Dost, India has strengthened its global image as the first responder to any calamity in any part of the world.

India-Turkey Bilateral Relation

Background

- Diplomatic relations were established and Ambassadors exchanged in 1948.
- Since the establishment of diplomatic relation, political and bilateral relations have been warm and cordial.
- However, some sporadic tensions remain in the relationship due to Turkey's support for Pakistan. Its stand on Kashmir has also been a problem area between the two countries.

Political Relation

- After the diplomatic relations were established, the visit by the first PM Nehru in 1960 was the first prime ministerial visit to Türkiye.
- Most recent political level contacts include a bilateral meeting between PM Modi and Turkish President Recep Erdogan in September 2022 on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Samarkand (Uzbekistan).

Economic & Commercial Relations

- Bilateral Trade Agreement between India and Türkiye was signed in 1973.
- It was followed by an Agreement on setting up an India–Türkiye *Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation (JCETC)* in 1983.

- Bilateral trade crossed USD 10.70 billion in 2021-22.
  - India's export to Tukey was $ 8,716.13 million.
  - India's import was $ 1,996.75 million.
- The major Indian exports to Turkey: Petroleum products, auto components/parts, man-made yarn, fabrics, made ups, aircraft & spacecraft parts, etc.
- Imports from Turkey: Industrial machinery, broken/unbroken poppy seeds; machinery and mechanical appliances, iron and steel articles, inorganic chemicals, granite and marble, etc.
- Indian companies have invested about USD 126 million in Turkey and Turkish investment in India is about USD 210.47 million.

Cultural Relations

- India and Türkiye have traditionally shared cultural linkages. There is a formally arrangement for cultural cooperation through a *Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP).*
- A Festival of India in Türkiye, India by the Bosphorus, was held in March-April 2019 showcasing Indian dance, music, food and fashion in major cities in Türkiye.
- Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) sponsored Gujarati folk dance group 'Saptak' visited Bursa (Türkiye) in the 34th International Golden Karagoz Folk Competition in July 2022.

Indian Community

- Türkiye has a small Indian community of around 2000 people. They are mostly in Istanbul and working in commercial organizations, banks and computer firms, universities etc.
- There are currently around 200 Indian students in Türkiye.

Challenges in the relationship

- **Tukey's stand on Kashmir**
  - In 2022, Turkish PM Erdogan, in his UN General Assembly speech, criticized India for failing to resolve ties with Pakistan and establish a fair, permanent peace and prosperity in Kashmir.
- **Abrogation of Article 370 by India**
  - After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, which abolished the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, India-Turkey ties have deteriorated.
- **Turkey has fast emerged as a hub of anti-India activities**
  - Turkey follows a 3-pronged approach in this regard:

    employment of Kashmiri journalists

    providing scholarships to Indian Muslims

    funding NGOs in India to influence Indian Muslims

  - Turkey also encourages radical Kashmiri youth to shift base to Istanbul and Ankara.
  - Moreover, Turkey-made pistols were recovered from Pakistani terrorists earlier this year.
- **Issue of Cyprus, Armenia and Greece**
  - In response to the stand taken by Turkey on Kashmir, PM Modi responded by holding meetings with the leaders of Armenia, Cyprus, and Greece, three countries with which Turkey has disputes.
  - In 2021, Indian EAM Jaishankar met the foreign minister of Cyprus and called for adhering to the UNSC resolution on Cyprus.
    - Turkey has been routinely criticized for its illegal occupation of Northern Cyprus.

o In the most recent border dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan, India encouraged an end to hostilities by the aggressor side, which many believe to be Azerbaijan.

  ▪ Armenia and Azerbaijan are fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

  ▪ In this war, Turkey has supported Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

- The stalemate in India-Turkey relations stems from Turkey's inability to decouple itself from Pakistan and the Kashmir issue and conduct relations with India independently.

- Turkey is looking for avenues to strengthen its dwindling economy. Improved ties with India would certainly help Turkey in this regard.

India, U.S. Step Up Strategic Partnership With Technology Initiative

- India's NSA Ajit Doval and the U.S. NSA Jake Sullivan officially launched the United States-India *initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies* **(iCET).**

- Both the leaders were meeting in Washington for the inaugural dialogue of the iCET.

Key Highlights

- The meeting highlighted **6 areas of planned cooperation**:

  o strengthening innovation ecosystems; defence innovation and technology cooperation; resilient semiconductor supply chains; space; STEM talent; and next generation telecommunications.

- Under iCET, these leaders launched programs to enhance the strategic partnership between the two countries.

- The programs include:

  o A Research Agency Partnership between the U.S. National Science Foundation and Indian science agencies;

  o A mechanism to cooperate on quantum computing that will also involve academia and industry;

  o Developing a new defence industrial cooperation roadmap;

  o Supporting the development of semiconductors in India, including by setting up a taskforce to identify opportunities; and

  o Increasing space cooperation including human spaceflight.

- A private-public dialogue was also announced to further 5G/6G cooperation and the adoption of Open RAN (technology to connect phones to each other and to the internet) in India.
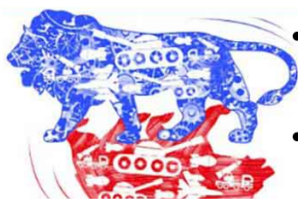
ABOUT iCET
- iCET was launched by President Biden and PM Modi during the Quad summit on May 2022.
- It was established in order to elevate and expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between India and USA.
- It seeks to build supply chains which increase co-production, co-development and increase linkages between the countries' start-up ecosystems.

SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

5th Regional Dialogue on Afghanistan

- National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval participated in the **fifth multilateral meeting of secretaries of security councils/ NSAs on Afghanistan**, held in Moscow.
    - 4th Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan was held in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe

- NSA Doval also called on the President Putin and had wide-ranging discussions on bilateral and regional issues.
    - It should be noted that the ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.
    - India has not yet condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue.

Key Highlights

- **Need for inclusive and representative government in Afghanistan**
    - India reiterated its call for an "inclusive and representative" government in Afghanistan.
        - India has not recognised the Taliban administration in Kabul.
        - However, an Indian technical team is stationed at the Indian embassy in the Afghan capital. This team has been overseeing the *humanitarian assistance* that India has been providing over the past year.

- **People of Afghanistan were among India's foremost priorities**
    - The well-being and humanitarian needs of the people of Afghanistan continues to guide India's policy towards Kabul.
        - Recently presented **India's Union Budget 2023-24** allocated ₹200 crore for the development and humanitarian needs of the Afghan people.
        - India has so far delivered 40,000 MT of wheat, 60 tonne of medicines, 5,00,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses, winter clothing and 28 tonne of disaster relief.
        - India has also granted fresh scholarships to 2,260 Afghan students including 300 Afghan girls in the past two years.

- **On Terrorism**
    - India reiterated its position that no country should be allowed to use Afghan territory to export terrorism and radicalisation.
    - It reaffirmed the importance of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2593.
        - The resolution was passed in August 2021 under India's Presidency.
        - It demands that Afghan territory not be used to threaten or attack any other country or to shelter and train terrorists.

Regional Dialogue on Afghanistan

- **Participants:** Russia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were represented at the 5th meeting. The meeting was held **at the level of** NSAs.

- **Objective**
    - To discuss various issues related to Afghanistan.
        - This includes the security situation and humanitarian challenges facing Afghanistan.

- o This meeting is among the heads of the security establishments. Hence, it is _not a protocol-oriented meeting._
- o It mostly discusses practical cooperation — from intelligence sharing to information gathering to counter-terrorism capacity-building.
- o The meeting looks at evolving a regional security architecture to deal with these challenges, arising out of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Genesis Of The Dialogue

- The idea of such as dialogue was first mooted in 2018, when the US decided to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.
- First two meetings (in 2018 and 2019) were hosted by Iran. 2020 meeting was cancelled due to pandemic.
- In November 2021, **India hosted** the 'Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan'.
  - o So far, Pakistan has not attended any of these meetings.
  - o China did not participate in the meeting hosted by India in 2021.
    - ▪ Chinese absence sends out a signal that it doesn't want to associate with any process led by India.

Defence Ministers' Conclave

- The Defence Ministers' Conclave was held on the sidelines of Aero India 2023 in Bengaluru.
- At the conclave, Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh hosted the Defence & Deputy Defence Ministers of 27 countries.

About the Conclave

- The broad theme of the conclave was '***Shared Prosperity through Enhanced Engagements in Defence***' **(SPEED).**
- It sought to address aspects related to deepening cooperation for capacity building, training, space, AI and maritime security to grow together.

Aero India 2023

- The 14th edition of the biennial show, Aero India 2023, was inaugurated by PM Modi at the Air Force Station in Yelahanka, Bengaluru in February.
- It is being organised on the theme '***The runway to a billion opportunities'*** and the show seeks to display India's growth in aerospace and defence capabilities.
- Aero India 2023 is being organised by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) on behalf of the Department of Defence Production (Ministry of Defence).

Significance of Aero India

- **Export of indigenous air platforms**
  - o The event aims to promote export of indigenous air platforms like Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Tejas, HTT-40 etc.
- **Opportunities for domestic MSMEs and start-ups**
  - o It will integrate domestic MSMEs and start-ups in the global supply chain and attract foreign investments including partnerships for co-development and co-production.
- **Aims to strengthen India's relations with others countries**
  - o Though Aero India is a business event, it additionally aims to strengthen India's relations with others countries.

- o This is evident from the participation of 98 countries, the Defence Ministers of 32 countries and Air Chiefs of 29 countries.

62nd Session of UN Social Development Commission

- The UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD) has elected **India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj** as its chair for the 62nd session.
- The opportunity to chair the 62nd session of CSocD comes at a time when India is leading the G20 and is steering the global agenda through its G20 Presidency.
- In addition, India has undertaken a number of initiatives and policies to advance the social development of its citizens, which might be very advantageous for other nations.

62nd Session of the Commission for Social Development

- **Theme** – *"Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication"*
  - o The theme emphasises the important connection between social development and social justice as fundamentals to achieving SDGs.

UN Commission for Social Development (CSocD)

- CSocD, formerly known as Social Commission, has been in existence from the very inception of the United Nations.
- It advises the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Governments on a wide range of social policy issues and on the social perspective of development.
  - o CSocD is a functional commission of the ECOSOC of the UN
- CSocD meets annually in New York, usually in February.

Purpose

- Since the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the CSocD has been the key UN body in charge of the **follow up and implementation** of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.
- Since 2006, the Commission has taken up key **social development themes** as part of its follow up to the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit.

Membership

- Originally 18, membership now stands at 46.
- Members are elected by ECOSOC based on equitable geographical distribution for 4 year terms.

UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

About
- It is **one of the six principal organs** of UN which was established by UN Charter (1945)
- It is responsible for the direction and coordination of the *economic, social, humanitarian, and cultural activities carried out by the UN*.
- Decisions are taken by simple majority vote. The Presidency of ECOSOC changes **annually**.

Members
- It has 54 members which are elected for 3 years terms by the General Assembly.
  - Four of the five permanent members of the Security Council have been continuously re-elected.
  - This is because they provide funding for most of ECOSOC's budget, which is the largest of any UN subsidiary body.

Function
- ECOSOC is responsible for **coordinating** the social and economic fields of the organization, specifically in regards to the 15 specialized agencies, 5 regional commissions, 8 functional commissions.
- It also serves as a central forum to discuss the international social and economic issues and formulating policy recommendations addressed to the member states and the United States system.

Manipur Hosts B20 Conference

- CM of Manipur inaugurated a conference on 'Opportunities for Multilateral Business Partnerships in *ICT, Tourism, Healthcare and Handloom'* in Imphal.
- This was the first of the four sessions of **B20 conference** scheduled in Northeast India.

What Is B20 Conference

- The Business 20 (B20) is an event which is part of the **G20 Summit**. It is the voice of the G20 business community.
- More specifically, its main purpose consists in *developing recommendations and issuing relevant commitments from the business leaders and business organizations to deal with nowadays issues*.
- The B20 composes of delegates from the G20 countries, including top executives from the leading multinational corporations.
- The first B20 Conference took place in South Korea in 2010.

Working of B20

- The B20 has no standing secretariat. The *leadership rotates every year together with the G20 Presidency*.
- The B20 delivers concrete actionable policy recommendations on priorities established by each rotation presidency to spur economic growth and development.
- Its working proceeding is based on **Task Forces (TFs)** and **Action Councils (ACs)** entrusted with developing consensus-based policy proposals to the G20 and to international organizations and institutions.
- Each TF is composed of around 100 businesses representatives from the G20 countries and from selected invited countries and international organisations.

Task Force Report on CAPF

A task force, which was formed in 2021 to look into suicide and fratricide (killing of one's own forces) cases in the **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs),** has submitted its draft report to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

- o   It was headed by V S K Kaumudi, the Special Secretary (internal security) in the Home ministry.

Key Highlights Of The Report

- **Following Three major factors that led to incidents of suicides and fratricides**

Service Conditions	Working Conditions	Personal Issues
1) lack of job satisfaction as compared with their counterparts of other sectors, 2) Bullying at workplace, 3) Fear of initiation of disciplinary or legal action, 4) Lack of communication between company commander and jawans 5) Frequent transfers.	1) extended working hours, 2) inadequate time to rest and recreation, 3) sense of isolation and lack of social as well as familial support, and 4) lack of robust grievance redressal mechanism.	1) stigma of certain diseases, mental/psychiatric disorders 2) feeling of hopelessness or depression, 3) groupism/casteism/instigation by others on petty issues 4) drug/alcohol abuse, etc.

- Under the service conditions, the task force found leaves the main trigger in CRPF, ITBP, BSF, SSB, Assam Rifles.

- The task force also flagged slow promotions, continuous posting in conflict theatres, dissatisfaction from the New Pension Scheme (NPS), little opportunity for growth and development, absence of trained professionals to deal with the trauma of personnel in the CAPFs.

Suicides and Fratricides in CAPFs: Statistics

- Data, shows that in total, 642 personnel, including 10 women personnel, had committed suicide and 51 fratricide incidents took place in the CAPFs between 2017 and 2021.

- The maximum suicide incidents for the said period were reported in the CRPF (227), while 175 suicides, including 4 women personnel, were from the BSF.

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)

- Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) is the collective name of Armed Police Organisations in India. These armed police organisations are:

  - o   Assam Rifles (AR) – Administrative control - MHA, Operation control – MoD (Ministry of Defense)

  - o   Border Security Force (BSF)

  - o   Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)

  - o   Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

  - o   Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)

  - o   National Security Guard (NSG)

  - o   Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

- Technically known as Para-Military Forces, it works under the administrative control of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Roles of CAPFs

- **Border Guarding Forces**

    o Out of the forces mentioned above, **AR**, **BSF**, **ITBP** and **SSB** are primarily the 'Border Guarding Forces'.

- **Assisting Civil Administration**

    o **CRPF** is deployed to assist the Civil Administration under the State Governments / UT Administrations in matters relating to maintenance of Public Order, internal security and counter insurgency.

    o CRPF has two specialized wings:

    ▪ The **Rapid Action Force (RAF)** to deal with the riots

    ▪ **Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA),** also known as 'jungle warriors, to deal with Left Wing Extremism / insurgency.

- **Protection To Vital Installations**

    o **CISF** provides security and protection to vital installations of national / strategic importance including PSUs, airports, atomic power plants, space organizations, industrial units, important national museums, Government buildings in Delhi and other important sensitive organizations.

- **Counter terrorism and anti-hijacking operations**

    o In addition, NSG is a specialized strike Force trained in Counter terrorism & anti-hijacking operations.

    o It is also entrusted with the task of securing the high-risk VIPs and acts as sky marshal for securing the domestic and international flights.

Big Infrastructure Push For Villages On Border

- The Union Cabinet approved the allocation of Rs 4,800 crore for the Centre's **Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP)** for the Financial Years 2022-23 to 2025-26.

- It also approved the induction of over 9,000 troops in the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), raising of seven new ITBP battalions.

Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP)

- **Background**

    o VVP was announced in the Finance Minister's Budget Speech 2022.

    o The programme envisages coverage of **border villages on Northern border** having sparse population, limited connectivity and infrastructure, which often get left out from the development gains.

- **Coverage**

    o The Centrally sponsored village scheme will cover the <u>border areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Ladakh</u>.

- **Aims**

    o To ensure **comprehensive development** of these villages, thereby improving the quality of life of people living in identified border villages.

    o To encourage people to <u>stay in their native locations in border areas</u>, reversing outmigration from these regions and <u>contributing to improved border security</u>.

- **Implementation**

    o The programme fund the *development of vital infrastructure and creation of livelihood opportunities* in 19 districts, 46 border blocks, four states, and one UT along the country's northern land border.

- o It will cover 2,963 villages with 663 villages included in the first phase.

- o The programme assists in identifying and developing the economic drivers based on local human and natural resources of these border villages

- o Key outcomes that have been attempted are: all-weather road, drinking water, 24×7 electricity – solar and wind energy, along with mobile and internet connectivity.

- o With respect to tourism, regular field trips will be held for students as part of a **Seema Darshan programme.**

- **Institutions Involved**

  - o Gram Panchayats will assist the district administration in developing vibrant village action plans.

  - o Through this 100 % saturation of Central and state schemes will be ensured.

- **No Overlap with Border Area Development Program:** The government has stated that VVP will not have an overlap with Border Area Development Program (BADP).

  - o The Department of Border Management, MHA has been implementing the BADP through the State Governments as part of a comprehensive approach to Border Management.

  - o The programme aims to meet the special development needs of the people living in remote and inaccessible areas (within 0-10 km) situated near the international border.

  - o It covers 460 border blocks of 117 border districts in 16 States and 2 UTs.

  - o It also aims to saturate the border areas with the essential infrastructure.

THE INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)

About
- ITBP is a specialized Armed Police Force of the Nation which was raised in the wake of Chinese aggression in 1962 with a modest strength of 4 battalions.
- It was raised under an integrated 'guerrilla-cum-intelligence-cum-fighting Force' self-contained in supplies, communication and intelligence collection.

Role
- At present, *the ITBP guards 3,488 km long India-China borders* ranging from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jachep La in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Apart from this, the Force also has important roles in many internal security duties and operations against the **Left-Wing Extremism** in the state of Chhattisgarh.
- ITBP also conducts relief and rescue operations as 'First Responders' for natural calamities in the Himalayan region.

Headquarter and administrative control
- The Force Headquarters is in New Delhi. It is under the administrative control of MHA.

1 **Border Security Force (BSF)**
Bangladesh border | Strength: 2,46,385

2 **Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)**
China border | Strength: 83,790

3 **Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)**
Nepal, Bhutan borders | Strength: 87,457

4 **Assam Rifles**
Myanmar border | Strength: 59,438

Border Management

Why Border Management Is Needed For India?

- India's internal security challenges are invariably linked with the security of the country's borders.

- This is due to the hostile attitude of some of India's neighbours and their tendency to exploit India's persistent national challenges.

- The challenge of *long-standing boundary and territorial disputes, coupled with steep terrain, extreme climatic conditions and porosity of borders*, has rendered India's Borders vulnerable.

- This has made efficient and effective border management a foremost priority for the Indian Government.

What Are The Strategies For Border Management In India?

- Approach and practices of border management vary from one border to another, based on the security perceptions and relationship with the neighbouring country.

- **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is responsible for border management**.

- The strategy to deal with border security challenges involves:

    o The management of <u>international land & coastal borders</u>

    o Strengthening of <u>border policing & guarding</u>

    o Creation of <u>border infrastructure</u> such as roads, fencing & floodlighting of the borders as well as the strengthening of <u>coastal security infrastructure</u>

    o Development of <u>Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)</u> on the land borders of the country

    o Implementation of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP)

What Are The Various Schemes For Border Management?

- **Border Infrastructure and Management (BIM) Scheme**:

    o It is a Central Sector Scheme comprising of projects aimed at infrastructure development of India's international borders.

        ▪ It is being implemented by Border Management-I Division under MHA.

    o The scheme aims to *enhance the security along the borders* of the country and involve implementing a number of projects for the development of border infrastructure.

        ▪ E.g., Border Fence, Border Roads, Border Floodlights, Border Out Posts (BOPs), Helipads and foot tracks along the international borders of the country.

    o It also involves deployment of **technological solutions** in such patches of the borders, which are not feasible for physical fencing.

- **Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)**:

    o CIBMS has been conceptualized to integrate manpower, sensors, networks, intelligence and command control solutions.

    o It aims to improve situational awareness at different levels of hierarchy to facilitate prompt and quick response to emerging situations along the India-Pakistan Border (IPB) and India-Bangladesh Border (IBB).

Section 69(A) of IT Act

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) recently issued orders to block 138 online betting platforms and 94 money lending apps under **Section 69(A) of the Information Technology Act, 2000**.

Background

- The decision was based on a recommendation of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

- The MHA had received inputs from central intelligence agencies that some of the sites and apps were allegedly linked to China and contained "*material prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India*".

What Is Section 69 of the IT Act?

- Section 69 of the IT Act confers on the Central and State governments the power to issue directions "to intercept, monitor or decrypt any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer resource".

- It *allows the government to issue <u>content-blocking orders</u> to online intermediaries such as Internet Service Providers (ISPs), telecom service providers, web hosting services, search engines, online marketplaces, etc*.
- If social media intermediaries do not adhere to the regulations and guidelines, they may face monetary penalties and imprisonment for a maximum period of seven years.
- Compliance is important to fight cybercrime, which includes hacking, digital impersonation, and data theft, and to prevent the misuse of the internet, which is a growing concern for law enforcement officials.

Grounds On Which Section 69 Of The IT Act Can Be Invoked?

If the Centre or state government are satisfied that blocking the content is necessary and expedient on the below mentioned grounds, then it can direct the concerned authority to block the content. Section 69A of the IT Act permits the state to impose 'reasonable restrictions' for the same reasons as those for clause 2 of the Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.

- sovereignty or integrity of India,
- defence of India,
- security of the State,
- friendly relations with foreign States or
- public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above or for investigation of any offence

What Is The Procedure To Block Such Content/Apps?

- Since 2009, the MeitY has possessed blocking powers similar to those of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.
- Although MeitY derives these powers from the IT Act, it is the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking for Access of Information by Public) Rules, 2009 or the **IT Rules, 2009**, which explain the process to issue such orders.
- The IT Rules include provisions such as review committees, the opportunity for a fair hearing, strict confidentiality, and maintenance of records by designated officers.

Judiciary's Opinion On The Issue

Shreya Singhal vs Union of India (2015) –

- In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court had struck down **Section 66A of the IT Act**.
  - Section 66A made **sending of offensive messages using a computer or any other communication devices a crime**.
  - The police had to determine whether an information sent in the message qualified as offensive or not.
- W.r.t. <u>Section 69(A) of the IT Act, the Court held it to be</u> ***constitutionally valid***.

Recent Instances of Government Invoking Section 69(A) of IT Act

- Following cross-border tensions with China, the MeitY banned 59 apps in June, 2020, including TikTok, Shareit, Shein, Xiaomi Mi Community, Clash of Kings, Weibo, Likee, etc.
- Similarly, in September, 2020, the government banned 118 apps, including the gaming app PUBG, followed by another ban on 49 apps on November 19, 2020.
- Section 69A was revisited in July 2022 when Twitter sued the MeitY in the Karnataka HC over blocking orders that failed to adhere to the procedural requirement of giving users a hearing.

Indo-US Exercise TARKASH

The sixth edition of the joint Indo-US exercise (Named TARKASH) was held in February.

- Held recently in Chennai (Tamil Nadu), TARKASH is a joint exercise by the National Security Guard (NSG) and US Special Operations Forces.
- This exercise had, for the first time, included Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) terror response in its drill.
- The name TARKASH is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning 'quiver' - a container used to hold arrows.
- The exercise is named after INS Tarkash, a Talwar-class frigate that was commissioned in 2012.

About CBRN

- CBRN weapons, which are also classified as weapons of mass destruction (WMD)
- The details of the CBRN weapons are as follows:

Chemical Weapons	Biological Agents
1) Chemical weapons are designed to release toxic chemicals that can cause severe injury or death to people, animals, and plants.	1) Biological weapons use microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, or toxins, to cause harm or death to people, animals, or plants.
2) These chemicals can be released in various forms, including gases, liquids, and solids.	2) These weapons can be particularly dangerous because they can spread easily and quickly and can be difficult to detect and treat.
3) Examples of chemical weapons include nerve agents, blister agents, choking agents, mustard gas and blood agents.	3) Examples of biological weapons include anthrax, smallpox, botulinum toxin and Ebola virus.
4) Mustard gas damages the respiratory tract, skin, and eyes and nerve agents victims rapidly become unconscious, have breathing difficulties, and may eventually die.	4) anthrax causes fever, malaise, cough, shock and Death within 36 hours whereas botulinum toxin leads to paralysis of respiratory muscles.
Radiological Weapons	**Nuclear Weapons**
1) Radiological weapons use ionizing radiation to cause harm or damage.	1) Nuclear weapons use nuclear reactions to release large amounts of energy in the form of heat, light, and radiation.
2) These include devices that emit radiation, such as dirty bombs	2) Examples of nuclear weapons include atomic bombs and hydrogen bombs.

- The most recent use of CBRN in the form of a sarin gas attack was witnessed in Syria in 2017 when more than 100 people died.

Exercise Dharma Guardian

The fourth edition of India-Japan bilateral Army exercise 'Dharma Guardian' was held at Camp Imazu in Shiga province, Japan.

About Dharma Guardian

- The first Dharma Guardian exercise was held in 2018.
- The exercise involves various activities, including tactical drills, jungle warfare, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.
- The exercise takes place in both India and Japan, with troops from both countries participating in the training.

Other Military Exercises Between India And Japan

In January 2023, the two Air Forces held the maiden air exercise '**Veer Guardian'.**

MALABAR: It is a trilateral **maritime** exercise between India, Japan, and the United States. The exercise is aimed at enhancing the interoperability of the three navies and promoting maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
JIMEX: It is a bilateral maritime exercise between the Indian Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force.
Sahyog-Kaijin: It is a joint exercise between the Indian Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard.
Shinyuu Maitri: It is a joint military exercise between the Indian Air Force and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force.
Cope India: It is a bilateral air exercise between the Indian Air Force and the United States Air Force, which is hosted by India. However, Japan also participated in the 2018 edition of the exercise.

Exercise Desert Flag VIII

Indian Air Force participated in Exercise Desert Flag VIII. The IAF participated with five LCA Tejas and two C-17 Globemaster III aircraft.

About Exercise Desert Flag VIII

- Exercise Desert Flag is a **multilateral air exercise** in which participants Air Forces are from UAE, France, Kuwait, Australia, UK, Bahrain, Morocco, Spain, Republic of Korea, and USA
- This was the **first occasion** when the indigenously made light combat aircraft (LCA) Tejas participated in an international flying exercise outside India.

LCA Tejas
- India's HAL (Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) designed and developed the LCA Tejas, which was introduced as a replacement for the aging Mig 21 fighter planes.
- Tejas made its first flight in January 2001. The aircraft was inducted into Indian Air Force in 2016.
- It is the smallest and lightest in its class of contemporary supersonic combat aircraft.
- Tejas is fully capable of carrying a load of 8 to 9 tonnes. It can fly with as many weapons and missiles as Sukhoi.
- Its biggest advantage is its speed. These aircraft can fly as fast as the speed of sound, i.e., Mach 1.6 to 1.8, up at an altitude of 52,000 feet.

MISHTI, Amrit Dharohar, PM PRANAM

- In the annual budget speech Finance Minister announced multiple schemes towards protection and conservation of mangroves and wetlands.
  - ➢ It includes MISHTI, Amrit Dharohar, PM PRANAM.
- This is part of a larger green push with focus on the environment and climate change.

MISHTI

- It stands for **Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes.**
- It will facilitate mangrove plantations along India's coastline and on salt-pan lands.
- It will operate through convergence between *MGNREGS, Campa Fund and other sources.*
  - o **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA)** are meant to promote afforestation and regeneration activities as a way of compensating for *forest land diverted to non-forest uses*. National CAMPA Advisory Council has been established as per orders of Supreme Court
- It will aim at the intensive afforestation of coastal mangrove forests.

> India joined the "Mangrove Alliance for Climate" launched during the UNFCCC COP27.

PM PRANAM

- It stands for **Prime Minister Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment and Amelioration of Mother Earth.**
- It will seek to incentivize states and union territories promoting underlying alternative fertilizers and the balanced use of chemical fertilizers.
- It aims to ultimately bring down the government's subsidy burden, which is estimated to reach Rs 2.25 lakh crore in 2022-23: 39% higher than last year's figure of Rs 1.62 lakh crore.

Amrit Dharohar

- It will be implemented over the next **3 years** to encourage optimal use of **wetlands,** and enhance biodiversity, carbon stock, eco-tourism opportunities and income generation for local communities.
- It will emphasise on the importance of wetlands and their preservation, with an outlook that is inclusive of local communities as caretakers of the ecosystem.

World Wetlands Day

- It is observed on 2nd February every year all over the world to commemorate the signing of the **Ramsar Convention** on Wetlands of International Importance in 1971.
- It aims to create awareness about the need for conservation of wetlands.
- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted **resolution 75/317** for World Wetlands Day on August 2021 to give it an official recognition.
- India is a party to the Convention since 1982 and has so far declared 75 wetlands as Ramsar sites covering 23 states and UTs
- At present, Tamil Nadu has a maximum number of Ramsar sites which is 14, followed by UP which has 10 numbers of Ramsar sites.

{For more about Wetlands, refer The Recitals-August 2022}

Decline In Long-term Groundwater Storage in Ganga Basin

A new estimate has been published in the journal Nature Scientific Reports about Long-term groundwater storage in Ganga basin

Key Findings Of The Study

- Long-term groundwater storage in Ganga basin declined at a rate of **2.6 cm per year** between 1996-2017.
- The average storage decline in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal was estimated to be roughly 2cm/ year, 1 cm/year and 0.6 cm/ year, respectively.
- The impact of the decline is more pronounced in Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi, with declines in average storage of about 14 cm/ year, 7.5 cm/ year and 7.2 cm/ year respectively.
    - Delhi and Haryana have high groundwater abstraction rates, which explains the steep decline.
- West and southwest areas, including agriculturally intensive regions and urban areas like Delhi and Agra, took the biggest hit.
- Rajasthan, whose groundwater reserves contribute about 90% of the drinking water and 60% of the irrigation, is showing an improvement in groundwater levels in the recent past.
- The Brahmaputra basin, which was not a part of the study, shows more groundwater level reduction than the Ganga and Indus basins.

About Ganga Basin

- It is the largest river basin in the country draining an area of 8,61,452 sq km. It outspreads in India, Tibet (China), Nepal and Bangladesh.
- It is a little more than a quarter (26.3%) of the total geographical area of the country.
- It is bounded by the Himalayas in the north, the Aravalis in the west, the Vindhyas and the Chotanagpur Plateau in the south, and the Brahmaputra ridge in the east.
- In total, the Ganga has **11 basin states/UT** – Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi.

{For more about Ground water refer, The Recitals-November 2022}
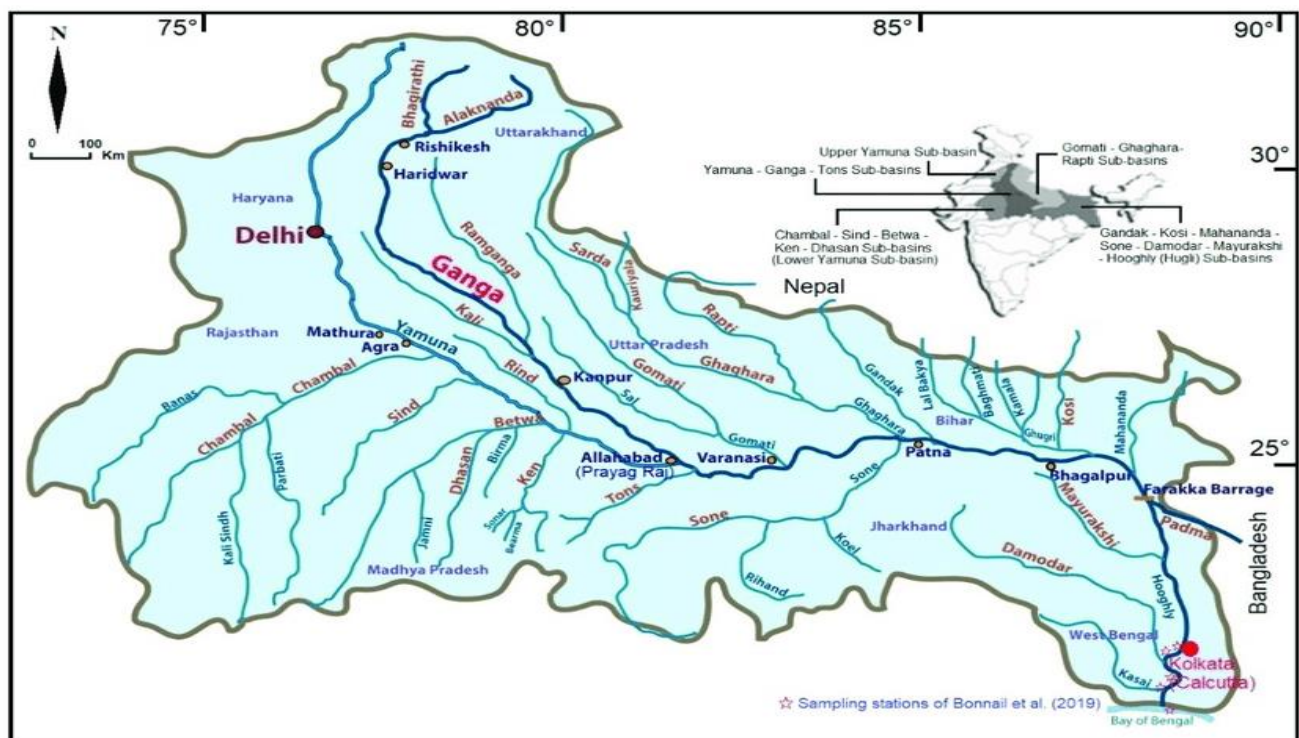
International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC)

The 5th International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) was held in Canada.

➢ Canada is bordered by 3 oceans - Pacific, Arctic and Atlantic - and has the longest coastline in the world.

About IMPAC

- It has been organized to discuss solutions to address the funding gap of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

- It brings together scientists, policy makers, practitioners, and stakeholders from around the world to discuss the latest scientific knowledge, best practices and challenges in the management of MPAs.

- IMPAC congresses are a collaborative effort between the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the chosen host country.

- Since 2005, the IUCN has co-hosted four IMPAC events-

IMPAC1	IMPAC2	IMPAC3	IMPAC4
Australia (2005)	USA(2009)	France (2013)	Chile (2017)

Key Outcomes of 5th Congress

- As many as 70% of MPAs are underfunded: A well-managed and sufficiently funded MPA can restore good health to vulnerable ecosystems.

- Roughly 10 million square kilometres of the ocean must be annually brought under MPA to protect 30% of the world's ocean by 2030.

   o This target was set at the 15th Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in 2022.

   o It is important because currently, MPAs represent only about **6% of the ocean**. Of this, 2.4% are fully and highly protected and 3.6% are highly protected. The remaining 0.8% are designated and 2% have been proposed and committed.

- It will provide a forum for sharing knowledge and best practices in an open environment

Significance of MPA

- It protects important marine ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds and provides critical habitat for threatened and endangered species.

- It can help mitigate the effects of climate change by conserving marine ecosystems and their associated species, which play an important role in regulating Earth's climate.

- It can provide economic benefits including increased tourism and recreation opportunities, as well as commercial benefits such as increased fish stocks.

Extra Mile

- MPAs cover less than 4.01% of the total area of all Protected Areas of India.

- In India, PAs that fall-in whole or in part-within swath of 500 m from the high tide line and to marine environment are included in the Marine Protected Area Network.

- There are a total of **128 marine Protected Areas** in India.

Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR)

A Supreme court-appointed panel noticed that **illegal constructions** for the establishment of a tiger safari were being done within the buffer area of Corbett Tiger Reserve.

About Corbett Tiger Reserve

- It is located in the Nainital, Uttarakhand. This reserve encompasses the **Patli Dun valley**.

- It is the 1st national park of India established in the year 1936 as **Hailey National Park.**

- Later in the year 1954-55 it was renamed **Ramganga National Park.**

- In the following year, it was renamed Corbett national park after hunter and writer Edward Jim Corbett.

- The area came under Project Tiger, when Project Tiger was launched in 1973 from the Dhikala zone of Corbett National Park.

- The Ramaganga river flows through the tiger reserve and is the lifeline of the reserve.

- It is an ideal home for many majestic animals like the Royal Bengal Tiger, Asiatic Elephant, Reptiles, Birds and many other wild animals.

| Extra Mile: Nearby Related Places |
|---|
| • **Sitabani Forest Reserve**: The place magnetizes millions of bird watchers yearly. It is also to be the place where Goddess Sita rested throughout the exile, and a very old temple dedicated to Sage Valmiki is also positioned in the reserve. |
| • **Garjiya Devi Temple:** This revered shrine is to be found on the bank of **Koshi River** amidst the Jim Corbett National Park. |

Mammatus Clouds

NASA's astronomer explained the formation of the Mammatus clouds

About Mammatus Clouds

- These are some of the most unusual and distinctive clouds formations with a *series of bulges or pouches emerging from the base of a cloud.*

- They are usually formed in *association with large cumulonimbus clouds.*

- Typically, turbulence within the cumulonimbus cloud will cause Mammatus to form, especially on the **underside** of the projecting anvil as it rapidly descends to lower levels.

- This reverses the usual cloud-forming process of upward growth, making for an uneven cloud base.

- There's a common misconception that it is a sign of severe storm weather, but there is no concrete proof

- Mammatus clouds generally form in the most unstable cumulonimbus, meaning that there is also a chance of hail, heavy rain and lightning in the vicinity, and if the air is cold enough during winter, they can produce snow.

CUMULONIMBUS CLOUDS

- These are a body of clouds that are present in the entirety of the troposphere.
- Researchers often refer to it as a thunderstorm's anvil because it has the shape of an anvil.
- It is responsible for rainfall. Furthermore, large cumulonimbus clouds produce severe storms, tornadoes, and large hail.
- It forms through convection over warm and unstable air.
- They start developing in small sections called small cumuli and can grow to the size of large powerhouses.
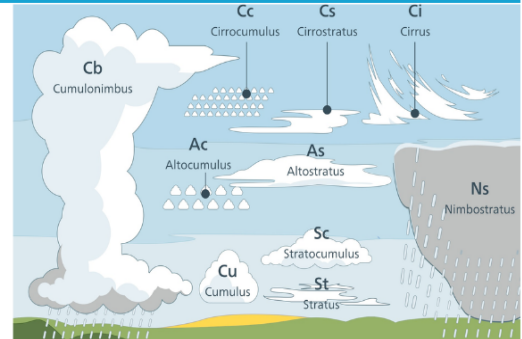
Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary

The 1st-ever bird survey in Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary was conducted and the volunteers recorded 186 species of birds.

About Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located in the Thane District of Maharashtra. It is known to be a paradise for birdwatchers.

- It has two rivers, the **Tansa and Vaitarna**, and the sanctuary gets its name from the former, which divides the sanctuary into two parts.

- The sanctuary forms the catchment area of Tansa lake, along with the surrounding forests of *Khardi, Vaitarna, Wada, and Shahapur ranges.*

- **Tansa reservoir**, along with **Vaitarna and Bhatsa reservoirs**, is the major source of water for the cities of Mumbai and Thane.

- It has Southern Tropical Moist Deciduous Forest, with a few patches of Evergreen Forest.

- There are 54 species of mammals and more than 250 species of birds found in the sanctuary. Mammals include leopard, sloth bear, porcupine, and barking deer.

Nagarahole Tiger Reserve: The bird survey conducted at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve has resulted in the recording of 290 bird species, including a few migratory ones.

About Nagarahole Tiger Reserve

- It is located in **Karnataka** and is a major hub of conservation under Project Tiger and Project Elephant.

- It was previously known as Rajiv Gandhi National Park.

- It is named after a small river Nagarahole, meanders within the habitat, before joining the river Kabini.

- It forms a critical connecting habitat for tigers and elephants to other areas of the Western Ghats through the **Brahmagiri wildlife sanctuary** and to the Eastern Ghats through the **Bandipur Tiger reserve.**

- It is acclaimed as one of the high-density tiger populations in the country after Corbett & Kaziranga tiger reserves respectively.

- The habitat also forms part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG)

- The 1st G20 **Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG)** meeting concluded in Bengaluru.

- It ended on a positive note with all G20 countries showing interest and commitment to constructively work towards the objective of the three priority areas:

  o Arresting Land Degradation, Accelerating **Ecosystem Restoration** and Enriching Biodiversity.

  o Promoting a Sustainable and Climate Resilient **Blue Economy**.

  o Encouraging **Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy.**

- It was hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

- It marks the beginning of constructive discussions within G20 countries for a sustainable future, led by India's G20 presidency.

River Cities Alliance

DHARA the annual meet of the River Cities Alliance members was organized by the **National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG)** in association with the **National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)** in Pune.

- DHARA which stands for Driving Holistic Action for Urban Rivers, is a platform to co-learn and discuss solutions for managing local water resources.

About River Cities Alliance

- It is a dedicated platform for river cities in India to ideate, discuss and exchange information for sustainable management of **urban rivers.**

- It started with 30 cities in 2021 and currently has 95 cities as members across India.
- It symbolizes the successful partnership of the two Ministries i.e., **Ministry of Jal Shakti and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.**
- The Alliance focuses on three broad themes:

Networking	Capacity Building	Technical Support

- Its primary objective is to provide the member cities with a platform to discuss and exchange information on aspects that are vital for sustainable management of urban rivers.
- Alliance gives cities an opportunity to strengthen aspects of governance for river cities and improve their livability to attract external economic investment

Saman Bird sanctuary

The Asian Waterbird Census revealed that there has been decline in the number of migratory bird species from North Asia and Central Asia at the Saman Bird sanctuary.

About Saman Bird sanctuary

- It is located in the Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh. It is a **seasonal oxbow lake** on the Ganges floodplain.
- It is heavily reliant on the arrival of the south-westerly monsoon, which provides most of the annual rainfall.
- It was notified in 1990 in order to protect the large population of **sarus cranes** in the area.
- It has been designated as a protected Ramsar site since 2019.
- It is an important wintering site for many migrating birds including the greylag goose.
- Settlement encroachment and salinization are posing threats to this sanctuary.

Periyar Tiger Reserve

A four-day bird survey conducted by the forest department has identified 231 species of birds in the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

About Periyar Tiger Reserve

- It is located in the Western Ghats of Kerala.
- It is the 1st tiger reserve of Kerala, declared in 1978.
- It is named after the Periyar River. Two main rivers, Pamba and Periyar drain the reserve.
- It is home to many tribal communities including Mannans, Malayarayans and the Palians.
- It comprises tropical evergreen, semi evergreen, moist deciduous forests and grasslands.

PERIYAR RIVER

- It is the longest river and the river with the largest discharge potential in the Indian state of Kerala.
- It originates from Sivagiri hills of Western Ghats and flows through the Periyar National Park.
- It flows into Vembanad Lake and finally into Arabian Sea.
- The main tributaries of Periyar are Muthirapuzha, Mullayar, Cheruthoni, Perinjankutti.

Depsang Bulge

- It is a 900 square kilometre area of mountain terrain in the disputed Aksai Chin region.
- It was conceded to India by China in 1960 but remains under Chinese occupation since the 1962 Sino-Indian War.
- The area is immediately to the south of Depsang Plains and encloses the basin of the Burtsa Nala.
- The area is perceived to be of strategic importance to both the countries, sandwiched by strategic roads linking border outposts.

Zaid Crops

- Zaid season is a short season during the summer months.
- It requires hot, dry weather as a critical growth period and long days for flowering.
- The Zaid Crops are raised between the Rabi and Kharif Seasons' agricultural cycles.
- Watermelon, cucumber, muskmelon, pumpkin, lentils, fodder crops, etc. are a few examples of Zaid crops.
- It is cultivated in majority of the northern and northwestern states, including Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in Morigaon, Assam.
- It was declared as wild life sanctuary in 1987.
- It has the highest concentration of one-horned rhinos in the world.
- Under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020) rhinos were translocated from Pobitora and re-introduced into the Manas National Park.
  - Earlier, under the same programme, two rhinos were similarly translocated from Pobitora to Manas National Park in 2008.

Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2023

- It is published by Germany-based think-tank New Climate Institute (NCI).
- The Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor assesses the transparency and integrity of 24 major companies' climate pledges and strategies.
- The 24 companies assessed in this report are major multinational companies.
- It evaluates four main areas of corporate climate action: tracking and disclosure of emissions, setting emission reduction targets, reducing own emissions, and taking responsibility for unabated emissions through climate contributions or offsetting.
- These companies will reduce their total greenhouse-gas emissions by 36% by their respective target's years, typically 2040 and 2050, compared with the reduction of at least 90% that is needed.

Pink Dolphin

- It is also known as the boto, lives only in freshwater.
- It is found throughout much of the Amazon and Orinoco River basins in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Venezuela.
- It is a relatively abundant freshwater cetacean with an estimated population in the tens of thousands.

- These animal species use echolocation which lets the animal determine the size and shape of any surrounding item or object.
- It is listed as Endangered in the IUCN Red list.

Marine Spatial Planning Framework (MSPF)

- The 1st Marine Spatial Planning Framework (MSPF) in India was launched in **Puducherry.**
- It is to be implemented by India and Norway together under the Indo-Norway Ocean Initiative.
  - The initiative was created under an MoU signed between the countries in 2019.

About Marine Spatial Planning Framework (MSPF)

- It is a public process of analyzing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas.
- It is a practical way of creating and establishing a more rational use of marine space and interactions between its uses.
- It is also a way of balancing the demands of development with the need to protect the environment and deliver social and economic outcomes in an open and planned manner.

Need for Marine Spatial Planning Framework (MSPF)

The increase in anthropogenic activities has increased the stress on the ecosystem of the ocean. These stresses are creating new threats to the marine ecosystem.

Gross Domestic Climate Risk Report

- The report titled Gross Domestic Climate Risk was released by Australia-based Cross Dependency Initiative (XDI).
  - XDI is a part of the Climate Risk Group of companies quantifying the costs of climate change.

About Gross Domestic Climate Risk Report

- It calculates the physical climate risk to the built environment in over 2,600 states and provinces around the world in 2050.
  - Built environment refers to aspects of the surroundings that are built by humans to support human activity like homes and workplaces.
- It also identifies which of these jurisdictions see the greatest escalation of modelled damage from 1990 to 2050.
- It aimed at helping investors with their choice of long-term investment destinations.

Major Highlights of the Report

- Together, China, India and the US make up over half the states and provinces in the top 100.
- China has the highest number of provinces in the top 50 most climate risk-prone territories of the world, followed by the United States.
- Southeast Asia experiences the greatest escalation in damage from 1990 to 2050 anywhere in the world.
- 14 Indian states are set to remain within the top 100 most climate risk-prone territories of the world by 2050.
- Punjab is among the top 50 states or provinces across the world at **high risk of damage**
- Bihar is set to be the most climate-vulnerable region in India by 2050 with a global rank of 22nd, followed by Uttar Pradesh and Assam.

- Assam is the **global topper** within the top 50 vulnerable regions in terms of **increase of climatic impacts** during 1990-2050, a whopping 330%.

Open Pit Mine

An open pit mine collapsed in China's northern Inner Mongolia region on, killing at least two people and leaving more than 50 missing.

About

- It also known as opencast mining, is a surface mining technique that extracts minerals from an open pit in the ground.
- It is the most common method used throughout the world for mineral mining and does not require extractive methods or tunnels.
- This technique is used when mineral or ore deposits are found relatively close to the surface of the earth.
- Most of the world's annual output of copper, gold, and iron ore is from open-pit mining.

Effects of Open Pit Mining

- It consumes enormous amounts of water.
- It changes geological, hydrological and geotechnical conditions.
- Unrehabilitated pit areas remain elevated risk of erosion and flooding even after mining are exhausted.

Alternatives to Open Cast Mining

- **In-situ recovery (ISR)** - It is an extraction process designed to leave a mine's physical location undisturbed. It is touted as an environmentally cleaner method of extraction.
- **Block caving mining** - It is an underground mass mining method that allows for the bulk extraction of large, relatively lower grade, ore deposits with substantial vertical dimensions.

Species in News

Heimang	• These are trees which grows widely in Manipur and other north-eastern regions • Its fruit have a citrus-like tartness and, it is packed with nutrients such as polyphenols, flavonoids, and antioxidants. • Traditional healers of Manipur called it Maibas or maibis, prescribe it for common gastrointestinal problems. • Local communities use heimang leaves to prepare an herbal shampoo called **chinghi.**
Turnersuchus Hingleyae	• Palaeontologists have discovered fossils of this ancient marine crocodile. • Its age dates back to the early Jurassic, Pliensbachian period, which was about 185 million years ago. • Due to their relatively long, slender snouts, they would likely have looked similar to the currently living Gharial crocodiles.
Soliga Ecarinata	• It is a newly found wasp • The name Ecarinata was given to the species as it does not have ridges in some parts of its body. The species was colorful and distinct. • It has been named after the Soliga community, which is an **indigenous tribe of Karnataka,** inhabiting the peripheral forest areas near Biligiri Rangana Hills.

White-tailed Deer	• It is the smallest members of the North American deer family, found in North America from southern Canada through Central America. • They have long, slender legs, prominent ears, and large liquid brown eyes against thick white eye rings. They have a shiny black nose contrasting with a whitish nose-band. The chin is white and edged on either side with a wide band of dark hair. The throat area is also white or grayish. • Only male deer grow antlers, which are shed each year. • It is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red list.
Asiatic Black Bear	• It is also called Himalayan bear, Tibetan bear, or moon bear • It has a glossy black coat with a whitish mark shaped like a crescent moon on the chest. • It is omnivorous, eating insects, fruit, nuts, bees and honey, small mammals, and birds as well as carrion. • It is listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List and Schedule I under the Indian wildlife protection act, 1972.
Dickinsonia	• The discovery of **cholesterol molecules** in fossils of Dickinsonia lends support to the idea that Dickinsonia was an animal. • It is an extinct genus of basal animal that lived during the late Ediacaran period on ocean floors around present-day's Australia, Russia and Ukraine. • It typically resembles a bilaterally symmetrical ribbed oval.
Thyreus Narendrani	• Researchers from Kerala have discovered a new species of cuckoo bee from the Kole wetlands and named it Thyreus narendrani. • Cuckoo bees parasitise the nest of other bees by breaking and entering and laying their eggs. • Unlike other female bees, cuckoo bees lack pollen-collecting structures.
Pangolins	• Pangolins are the only mammals wholly-covered in scales. • Eight species of pangolins are found on two continents namely Asia and Africa. They range from Vulnerable to Critically Endangered. • The Indian pangolin and the Chinese pangolin are found in India, which are listed as Endangered and Critically Endangered, respectively. • It is poached for its meat and scales, which are used for food and medicine.
Rhododendrons	• They are a diverse genus of about 1,000 species of woody flowering plants in the heath family (Ericaceae). • They are native to the temperate regions of Asia, North America, and Europe, as well as to the tropical regions of southeast Asia and northern Australia. • They occur in a variety of habitats, including alpine regions, coniferous and broadleaved woodlands, temperate rain forests, and even tropical jungle conditions. • It is the **national flower of Nepal** where it is known as Lali Guras, and it also the **state tree of Uttarakhand.**

FAIRY Robot

Tampere University have developed a **Dandelion seed**-inspired flying robot (known as FAIRY Robot) that can potentially become an alternative for some pollinators.

About FAIRY Robot

- FAIRY robot stands for **Flying Aero-robots** based on the Light Responsive Materials Assembly.
- It is a tiny lightweight robot that relies on wind to float in the air like a Dandelion seed.
- Its shape, size and movement can be controlled with a **light source** such as a laser beam or an LED.
- The FAIRY project started in September 2021 and will last until August 2026.

Significance of FAIRY Robot

- The populations of major pollinators bees, butterflies, wasps, beetles and others are diminishing drastically worldwide.
- This rapid decline of pollinators is alarming and poses a great threat to biodiversity and food security.
- These concerns may be allayed soon with the help of fairy robot. it can be used in controlled, coordinated, precise pollination.

Caesium-137

A Caesium-137 capsule lost in transit was discovered in Western Australia using specialised detection equipment that detected radiation.

About Caesium-137

- It is the most common radioactive form (isotope) of caesium.
- Caesium is a soft, flexible, silvery-white metal. It becomes liquid near room temperature, but easily bonds with chlorides to create a crystalline powder.
- Cesium-137 has a half-life of about 30 years, meaning that it takes 30 years for half of the material to decay.
- It is produced as a byproduct of nuclear reactions, such as nuclear weapons testing and nuclear power generation.

Application	Potential Risk
Cesium-137 is also used in a variety of industrial and medical applications, such as: 1) radiotherapy for cancer treatment, 2) radiation therapy for sterilization, and 3) research applications to study the behavior of ionizing radiation. 4) industrial gauges that detect the flow of liquid through pipes.	1) Cesium-137 emits gamma radiation, which can cause damage to living tissue and increase the risk of cancer. 2) Due to its long half-life and radioactive properties, cesium-137 is a significant environmental and health concern in areas affected by nuclear accidents, such as the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011. 3) It can cause serious illness when touched, leading to burns and acute radiation sickness.

Space Debris

The Government of India has announced that 111 payloads and 105 Space debris have been identified as Indian objects orbiting Earth.

About Space Debris

- It is also known as space junk or space garbage. It refers to the **man-made objects** in space that no longer serve a useful purpose, such as defunct satellites, spent rocket stages, and other debris that has been left behind from human space activities.
- It orbits around the earth at tremendous speeds about 25000 kph in low Earth.

Space Debris: Cause of Concern

- It could cause significant damage to an operational satellite or a spacecraft in case of a collision.
- The increasing amount of debris in space also increases the likelihood of collisions between debris, which can create even more debris and exacerbate the problem.

Strategies To Address Issue Of Space Debris

- According to NASA, debris in orbits below 600 kms will fall back to Earth within several years, but above 1,000 kms it will continue circling the Earth for a century or more.
- Actively removing debris from orbit through space missions. For Example: The European Space Agency (ESA) and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) have both launched missions to test debris removal technologies.
- Developing new regulations and guidelines to limit the creation of new debris

India's Step to Tackle Space Debris

1) **Project NETRA (Network for space object Tracking and Analysis)**
   - The ISRO has initiated it in Bengaluru.
   - It is an early warning system in space to detect debris and other hazards to Indian satellites.

2) **ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Operations Management (IS 4 OM)**
   - It has been established in 2022.
   - It works towards more focused efforts to continually monitor the objects posing collision threat and concerted activities to mitigate the risk posed by space debris.

3) **Space Situational Awareness (SSA) Control Centre**
   - India has established an SSA Control Centre in December 2020 to detect, track, and catalog space objects.
   - The center is equipped with high-end tracking systems

4) **Indigenous Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Technology**
   - India has developed its ASAT technology, which allows it to destroy satellites in low-earth orbit.
   - This technology can be used to remove defunct satellites and space debris from orbit, reducing the risk of collisions.

5) India has built the capability for COLlision Avoidance (COLA) analysis and **Space Object Proximity Analysis (SOPA)** for safeguarding of its space assets.

6) Being an active member of Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC) since 1996, ISRO follows the Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines recommended by IADC and UN for limit on creation of space debris.

7) Establishment of dedicated observational facilities (RADARS, Optical Telescopes, space-based platforms) to derive more accurate orbital information of space objects.

Global Effort To Tackle Space Debris

1) **United Nations Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines** for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

2) **Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee (IADC)**: It is an international forum of space agencies, authorized governmental entities for the coordination of activities related to the issues of human-made and natural debris in space.

3) **Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS):** It has been established by the United Nations to develop guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, including space debris mitigation.

4) **Space Traffic Management**: The International Association for the Advancement of Space Safety (IAASS) is working on developing a framework for space traffic management. This framework would provide guidelines for safe and responsible space operations, including the mitigation of space debris.

Wolf 1069 b

Astronomers have discovered a potentially **habitable exoplanet** just 31 light-years away from Earth known as Wolf 1069 b.

About Wolf 1069 b

- It is an exoplanet that orbits a red dwarf star called Wolf 1069.

- It orbits its star at a distance of about 0.038 astronomical units (AU), which is very close compared to the distance between Earth and the Sun. As a result, the planet's year is only about 18 Earth days long.

- Wolf 1069 b is tidally locked to its parent star, meaning one side is always in daylight, and the opposite side is always in darkness.

{For more About Habitable Zone, refer The Recitals- January 2023}

Extra Mile
1) One of the most exciting goals of exoplanet research is to find a habitable world similar to Earth. However, of the more than 5000 exoplanets astronomers have discovered so far, only about 1.5% have masses below two Earth masses. Just about a dozen of them populate the so-called **circumstellar habitable zone**, the range in a planetary system where water can maintain a liquid form on the planet's surface.
2) A dwarf star is any star of average or low luminosity, mass, and size. The colour of dwarf stars can range from blue to red, the corresponding temperature varying from high (above 10,000 K) to low (a few thousand K).
3) Chinese scientists have proposed a space project named **Closeby Habitable Exoplanet Survey (CHES).** It will be the 1st space mission specially designed to search for habitable terrestrial planets around nearby Sun-like stars.

Bard

- Google is all set to launch Bard, a new conversational AI chatbot based on the **Language Model for Dialogue Application (LaMDA).**

- Google developed the language model known as Google Bard AI (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers) to produce high-quality text by anticipating the next word in a given phrase based on context.

- Due to Google's massive data gathering, Bard AI has an edge over other AI platforms like ChatGPT in terms of the breadth and scope of information it can access.

There are several significant differences between ChatGPT and Google Bard AI even though both are AI language models.

Google Bard AI	ChatGPT
Bard will use material that is **currently available online**, including statistics and sources. Bard will have access to the most recent date and will be able to deliver more up-to-date information.	ChatGPT's knowledge is restricted to the events through 2021.
Bard will have access to a wealth of data and be integrated with Google's search engine.	ChatGPT will deliver data which is supported by Microsoft.

Bard will be able to break up complex ideas into bite-sized, conversation-starting morsels. The objective is to disseminate information more broadly.	Chat GPT, on the other hand, produces material in response to the text prompt.

Overall, BARD is a powerful tool for natural language processing, with the ability to generate human-like text and understand the context and nuances of language.

Extra Mile
1) Microsoft introduced a new AI-improved Bing in the same week that Google launched Bard. This version of Bing is powered by a cutting-edge OpenAI big language model that has been specially tailored for search.
2) "Bard" typically refers to a poet or storyteller who recites epic poems or other literary works. The term is often associated with the works of William Shakespeare, who is commonly referred to as the "Bard of Avon" due to his significant contributions to the English language and literature.

{For more About LaMDA, refer The Recitals- June 2022}

{For more About ChatGPT, refer The Recitals- December 2022}

Quasicrystal

Scientists have discovered a 3rd natural source of quasicrystals in the Sand Hills of north central Nebraska, USA.

About Quasicrystal

- Most crystals are composed of a **three-dimensional arrangement** of atoms that repeat in an orderly pattern. But quasicrystals behave differently than other crystals. They have an orderly pattern that includes <u>pentagons, fivefold shapes, but unlike other crystals, the pattern never repeats itself exactly.</u>

- The American Israeli scientist Dan Shechtman discovered quasicrystals in the lab in 1982. In 2011, the Nobel Prize in chemistry was awarded to him.

- It has poor heat conductivity, which makes them good insulators.

- Quasicrystals have been widely created in labs and known to "possess novel electrical, photonic, and mechanical properties that aren't found in other materials.

- It is used in surgical instruments, LED lights and non-stick frying pans, needles for acupuncture and surgery, dental instruments and razor blades.

Extra Mile
Although quasicrystals can be easily produced, they are rarely found outside of the laboratory.
- The first one was identified in a meteorite, found in 2009 near the Khatyrka River in Chukhotka, Russia.
- The second one was discovered in 2021 during the study of debris from the site of the world's first nuclear explosion, which took place in 1945 in New Mexico (Trinity test of the Manhattan Project).
- For the formations of quasicrystals, materials were subjected to extremely high-pressure and high-temperature shock events.

Solar Prominence

Scientists observed a large prominence near the Sun's north pole.

About Solar Prominence

- It is a **large, loop-like structure** on the edge of the solar disk that sometimes stands out brightly against the dark background of space.

- They appear **very bright and hot** but are <u>actually much **cooler and denser**</u> than the surrounding plasma in the Sun's corona.

- These are shaped by the <u>Sun's complex magnetic field</u>, often forming loops with each end anchored to the Sun's surface.

- These are enormous, extending out for many thousands of kilometers and can last for several days or up to several months.

- There are several different types of solar prominences, including 1) quiescent prominences and 2) eruptive prominences

  1) **Quiescent prominences** are relatively stable and long-lasting.

  2) **Eruptive prominences** (also known as solar flares or coronal mass ejections) can release huge amounts of energy and material into space and can have significant effects on Earth's space environment.

Overall, solar prominences are an important feature of the Sun, and studying them can help scientists better understand the Sun's magnetic field, as well as its impact on Earth and the wider solar system.

Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs)

- It is an explosive outburst of plasma from the Sun.

- The blasts originate in magnetically disturbed regions of the Sun's upper atmosphere, or corona.

- The blast of a CME carries about a billion tons of material out from the Sun at very high speeds of hundreds of kms per second.

- It contains particle radiation, mostly protons and electrons and powerful magnetic fields stronger than what is normally present in the solar wind.

- They can cause geomagnetic storms on Earth that can have significant impact on both ground- and space-based technological systems.

Aubrite Meteorite

The meteorite that crashed in two villages in Gujarat has been identified as an aubrite meteorite.

Aubrite Meteorites

- It is a coarse-grained igneous rock that formed in **oxygen-poor conditions** and contains exotic minerals not found on Earth.

- Around 90% of the meteorite was composed of orthopyroxene.

  o orthopyroxenes are pyroxenes with a certain structure. Pyroxenes are silicates consisting of single chains of silica tetrahedra ($SiO4$).

- It has similar and unique characteristics of highly <u>reducing conditions on the surface of planet Mercury.</u>

- It could prove important for understanding planetary processes in the future.

- The rare aubrite was last found in India only in 1852 in UP's Gorakhpur.

Studying aubrite meteorites can provide valuable insights into the composition and history of the asteroid belt as well as the formation and evolution of the solar system.

Quaoar

- Astronomers have found a ring around a Quaoar (dwarf planet).

- Quaoar is located in the Kuiper Belt, a region of the outer solar system beyond the orbit of Neptune. Quaoar is thought to be a "trans-Neptunian object" or TNO, meaning that its orbit lies beyond Neptune.

- Quaoar is named after a creation deity of the Tongva people, who are indigenous to the Los Angeles area.

- It is about 697 miles wide (1,121 kilometers).

- It is roughly one-twelfth the diameter of Earth, one-third the diameter of the Moon, and half the size of Pluto.

- Its surface is moderately red and composed of low-density ice mixed with rock.

- It also has a moon of its own, which is known as **Weywot.**

- As the dwarf planet is too small and too distant to be observed directly, the researchers detected the ring with the help of a phenomenon called **stellar occultation.**

Stellar Occultation

- It occurs when, as seen from Earth, a **bright star passes behind a planet**.

- The phenomenon occurs rarely, is used by researchers to analyse a planet's atmosphere and determine if it has a ring around it.

- This allows astronomers or anybody on Earth to observe the sharp silhouette (outline) of the planet for a brief period of time.

The discovery of Quaoar and other dwarf planets like it has led to a re-evaluation of what should be considered a planet in our solar system.

Abell 2744

- This Hubble image, taken by the Advanced Camera for Surveys, shows the central part of **merging galaxy cluster Abell 2744.**

- Abell 2744 is a **giant galaxy cluster** located about 4 billion light-years away from Earth in the constellation **Sculptor**, with a total mass of around 4 trillion times that of the Sun.

- Abell 2744 is also known as the "**Pandora Cluster**" or the "Abell-2744 Cluster".

- It is so massive that its powerful gravity bends the light from galaxies far behind it, making the background objects appear larger and brighter in a phenomenon called gravitational lensing.

- In recent years, Abell 2744 has been the target of several major observational campaigns, including the Hubble Frontier Fields program, which used the Hubble Space Telescope.

Vertiplane X3

AIIMS-Rishikesh tested the feasibility of the Vertiplane X3 to deliver drugs to primary health centers or small hospitals in case of emergency. The demonstration was a success, and opened doors for the AIIMS to initiate the tendering process.

About Vertiplane X3

- It is built by TechEagle, a deeptech firm.

- It is the **fastest** made-in-India **hybrid e-VTOL** (electric vertical take-off and landing) drone.

- It can fly a distance of 100 km across different terrains.

- It has a maximum speed of 120 kmph and a payload capacity of 3 kg.

Significance

- Delivery with drones (30 minutes) will be especially helpful in hilly areas

- The drone emits a negligible amount of carbon dioxide during the flight.

- It is also ideal for the delivery of cargo for healthcare, defence, maritime, hyperlocal and e-commerce to strengthen conventional logistics supply chain with improved and faster accessibility.

---

* In future, the technology might also be used to transport organs between hospitals

This is not the first time a drone has been used to transport medical supplies. In fact, in a pilot project led by the Indian Council of Medical Research, Covid-19 vaccines were delivered using a drone in Manipur.

Chandrayaan-3

The Chandrayaan-3 lander has successfully completed the crucial EMI-EMC (Electro - Magnetic Interference/ Electro - Magnetic Compatibility) test.

About Chandrayaan-3 (3rd Moon mission)

* It will be a mission repeat with technological updation of Chandrayaan-2.
* Chandrayaan-3 interplanetary mission has three major modules: 1) the Propulsion module, 2) Lander module, and 3) Rover. The mission's complexity calls for establishing radiofrequency (RF) communication links between the modules.
* It will showcase the capability for safe landing (By Lander) and roving on the lunar surface (By rover), which is where Chandrayaan-2 failed due to a last-minute glitch in the soft-landing.
* It will be launched without orbitor as Chandrayaan 2 already launched Orbitor.
* Its propulsion module will behave like a communications relay satellite.
* If Chandryaaan-2 mission had gone successfully, then India would have been the 4th nation to make a soft landing on the Moon.

About EMI-EMC Test

* Electromagnetic interference (EMI) refers to the disturbance of electrical or electronic equipment by electromagnetic radiation or conduction. It can result in a loss of performance or complete failure of the equipment.
* Electromagnetic compatibility (EMC) refers to the ability of electronic devices to operate without being affected by or causing EMI.
* Tests were conducted to ensure compatibility between the **lander and rover** for the post-landing phase.

EMI/EMC testing is essential for ensuring the proper functioning of electronic equipment in different environments and preventing interference with other devices. It is an essential pre-satellite mission test that verifies the functionality of the satellite subsystems in space and their compatibility with the anticipated electromagnetic levels in Space.

Chandrayaan-1 (1st Lunar Mission)	Chandrayaan-2 (2nd Lunar Mission)
launched in October 2008 by PSLV and It was operational for 312 days till August 29, 2009.	launched from the Satish Dhawan Space in July 2019, by GSLV Mk III-M1
It involved an orbiter and an impactor, both built by ISRO. the 1st to discover water on the Moon.	The mission consisted of an Orbiter of the Moon, Vikram the lander and Pragyan the rover. But the lander and rover malfunctioned in the final moments and crash-landed.

Solar Radiation Management (SRM) Technologies

Researchers have proposed that dust can be launched from moon to a Lagrange point to achieve Solar Radiation Management (SRM) objectives.

About Solar Radiation Management (SRM)

* It is a group of proposed geoengineering technologies that aim to reduce the inflow of solar energy, rather than to reduce global warming by reducing greenhouse gases.

- It aims to offset greenhouse warming by reducing the incidence and absorption of incoming solar radiation.
- It proposes to do this by making the Earth more reflective, that is by increasing the planetary albedo, or by otherwise diverting incoming solar radiation.

Some Of The Most Commonly Discussed SRM Technologies

- Space-based Reflectors: Space sunshade, using mirrors in space, placing giant satellites at Lagrange point 1, space parasols, etc.
- Stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI) methods involving the injection of sulfate aerosols into the stratosphere to reflect sunlight back into space.
- Marine cloud brightening (MCB), the seeding of high cirrus clouds with heterogeneous ice nuclei. In simple words, spraying seawater into the atmosphere to create more reflective clouds, which would reflect more sunlight back into space.
- Surface Albedo Modification: Surface-based alternatives such as whitewashing roofs, growing more reflective crops, etc.

It's important to note that SRM technologies are largely theoretical and have not yet been widely tested. There are also concerns about the potential unintended consequences of these technologies, such as disrupting rainfall patterns or affecting agriculture.

Atacama Large Millimeter Array

Italian researchers have discovered an **Invisible Galaxy** using Atacama Large Millimeter Array.

About Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA)

- It is an astronomical interferometer (Observatory) of 66 radio Antennas located on the Chajnantor plateau in Chile's Atacama Desert.
- It is an international partnership between Europe, United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Chile.
- ALMA comprises 66 high-precision antennas, spread over distances of up to 16 kilometers. This global collaboration is the largest ground-based astronomical project in existence. These antennas work together to observe _millimeter and submillimeter wavelengths of light from the universe._
- This light has wavelengths of around a millimeter, between infrared light and radio waves, and is therefore known as millimeter and submillimeter radiation. This allows ALMA to observe some of the coldest and most distant objects in the universe, such as protoplanetary disks, molecular clouds, and distant galaxies.
- ALMA's antennas can be moved and reconfigured to form different configurations, allowing for flexible and precise observations of different parts of the sky. Hence, it provides insights on the birth of stars and detailed imaging of local star and planet formation during the early Stelliferous epoch.

ALMA is a major resource for astronomers worldwide, providing new insights into the formation and evolution of galaxies, stars, and planetary systems.

About Invisible Galaxy

The Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) has been instrumental in detecting and studying many invisible galaxies in the universe.

- Invisible galaxies are galaxies that emit very little or no visible light, making them difficult to observe with traditional optical telescopes.
- ALMA's ability to detect the faint emissions from these invisible galaxies, revealing their structures and properties.

- For example, in 2016, ALMA detected a massive, invisible galaxy in the early universe that is thought to be one of the earliest and most distant galaxies ever observed.
- By studying the movements of gas and dust in invisible galaxies, astronomers can infer the presence and properties of dark matter.

HWASONG-15

- It is an intercontinental ballistic missile developed by North Korean.
- It can carry a super-large heavy warhead which is capable of striking the whole mainland of the U.S.
- The missile's more spacious payload fairing may allow the future deployment of large or multiple nuclear warheads and penetration aids to complicate missile defense.

Neuromorphic Camera

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have developed a novel technique that combines optical microscopy with a neuromorphic camera.

About Neuromorphic Camera

- A neuromorphic camera mimics the way the human retina converts light into electrical impulses.
- In a typical camera, each pixel captures the intensity of light falling on it for the entire exposure time the camera focuses on the object. All these *pixels are pooled together* to reconstruct an image of the object. Neuromorphic cameras capture **visual information** in a way that is similar to the way that the human eye and brain process visual information.
- In neuromorphic cameras, each pixel operates independently and asynchronously, generating events or spikes only when there is a change in the intensity of light falling on that pixel.
- It is aided by **machine learning algorithms** that can go beyond the diffraction limit of light and detect minute objects.
  - When a microscope cannot resolve/Distinguish between two objects, it is known as the **diffraction limit.**
- It has a very high dynamic range (>120 dB) which means they can be used in different conditions ranging from a very low-light environment to very high-light conditions.

Messier 92

Astronomers have recently released an image of the **globular cluster Messier 92 (M92) captured** by the James Webb Space Telescope.

About Messier 92

- It is a globular cluster of stars in the northern constellation of Hercules.
  - Globular clusters are spherical aggregates of several thousand to millions of stars bound by gravity.
- It was first discovered by Johann Elert Bode in 1777 and independently rediscovered by Charles Messier in 1781.
- M92 is one of the brightest globular clusters in the sky and can be seen with binoculars or a small telescope. It is estimated to be about 26,700 light-years away from Earth and has a diameter of about 109 light-years.
- The predominant elements within it are hydrogen and helium. The cluster contains hundreds of thousands of stars, many of which are ancient and metal-poor, meaning they have a low abundance of elements heavier than helium.
- It has an estimated mass of up to 330,000 solar masses.

Ultraviolet Transient Astronomy Satellite (ULTRASAT)

NASA will launch **Israel's 1st space telescope mission**, the Ultraviolet Transient Astronomy Satellite (ULTRASAT) in early 2026.

About ULTRASAT

- It is an **ultraviolet observatory** with a large field of view.
- ULTRASAT will measure ultraviolet light that cannot be measured from Earth
- One of the key advantages of observing in the UV spectrum is that it allows astronomers to study the hot, young, and energetic phenomena that are invisible in other wavelengths.
- It's wide field of view will allow it to quickly discover and capture ultraviolet light from sources in the cosmos that change on short timescales.
- It will investigate the secrets of short-duration events in the universe, such as supernova explosions and mergers of neutron stars.

Microsoft's Project ELLORA

- Microsoft launched Project ELLORA (Enabling Low Resource Languages) in 2015.
- It will help in preserving 'rare' Indian languages.
- It aims to create **digital ecosystems for Indian languages** that do not have underlined enough presence online.
- Microsoft Research has chosen to focus on three of these for now which is Gondi, Mundari and Idu Mishmi.

Gamma-Ray Eclipse

- Scientists analysed data from NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope to **identify the first gamma-ray eclipses** from a type of binary star system known as the **Spider system.**
- Gamma Ray eclipse are caused by the **low-mass companion star** of the **superdense star (**pulsar) moving in front of it and very briefly blocking high-energy photons.
- It is a binary star system in which a **superdense star (pulsar)** spins quickly, eats another star.

MicroLED Displays

- It is an emerging flat-panel display technology consisting of arrays of microscopic LEDs forming the individual pixel elements.
- Compared to widespread LCD technology, its displays offer better contrast, response times, and energy efficiency.
- Its **inorganic** nature gives it a longer lifetime advantage over **OLEDs (organic light-emitting diode)** and allows them to display brighter images with minimal risk of screen burn-in.

Blackbox

- It is technically known as an Electronic Flight Data Recorder and is mandatory on commercial flights.
- It is used to investigate the details of the events immediately preceding an accident.
- There are two different flight recorder devices: the **flight data recorder (FDR)** preserves the recent history of the flight through the recording of dozens of parameters collected several times per second; the **cockpit voice recorder (CVR)** preserves the recent history of the sounds in the cockpit including the conversation of the pilots. The two devices may be combined in a single unit. A black box is the size of a shoe box.

Verkko Software

- It is an innovative software for assembling complete, gapless diploid genomes.
- It is developed by researchers from National Institutes of Health (NIH), US.
- It makes the process of assembling complete genome sequences more affordable and accessible.

Perovskite

- It is a material that has the same crystal structure as the **mineral calcium titanium oxide** (CaTiO3), the first-discovered perovskite crystal.
- It is extremely unstable towards ambient (humidity and oxygen) conditions that restrict their commercialisation.
- They have applications in various fields of optoelectronics, including photovoltaic solar cells, photodetectors, light-emitting devices, etc.
- A large number of different elements can be combined together to form perovskite

CCR5-delta 32 Mutation

- HIV primarily targets CD4 immune cells in the human body.
- The CCR5 receptors on the surface of CD4 immune cells serve as a portal for HIV virus entry.
- Nevertheless, the CCR5-delta 32 mutation inhibits the HIV virus's surface receptors from developing, essentially closing the door.
- Individuals who have the mutation are virtually immune to HIV infection, while occasional cases have been observed.

Neutrinos

- These are the 2nd most abundant particles in world, after photons. They are fundamental particles, meaning they are not made up of smaller particles, and they have no electric charge, making them difficult to detect.
- These are very similar to an electron but have no electrical charge and a very small mass, which might even be zero.

How Are Neutrinos Created?

- Neutrinos are created in a variety of processes, including nuclear reactions in stars, radioactive decay, and high-energy particle collisions.
- They are also produced in large quantities in the sun, where they are formed through nuclear fusion reactions.

Types of Neutrinos

- Neutrinos come in three different types or "flavors": **electron neutrinos, muon neutrinos, and tau neutrinos.**
- These flavors can change or oscillate between each other as neutrinos travel through space, a phenomenon known as neutrino oscillation.

Properties of Neutrinos

- One of the unique properties of neutrinos is that they interact very weakly with matter, meaning they can pass through vast amounts of material without being detected.
- This property makes them difficult to observe
- Scientists have developed large underground detectors that use vast amounts of material to increase the likelihood of interaction between neutrinos and matter.

The Indian Neutrino Observatory (INO)

- It is an underground research facility located in the Bodi West Hills region of Tamil Nadu, India.
- The facility is designed to study neutrinos and their properties to advance our understanding of fundamental physics and astrophysical processes.
- The primary goal of the INO is to study neutrino oscillations, the phenomenon where neutrinos change between different flavors as they travel through space.

- The detector will be able to detect neutrinos from a variety of sources, including the sun, the atmosphere, and cosmic rays, and will be used to study the properties of these particles.
- Tamil Nadu government objected that the project falls within it a significant tiger corridor, namely the Mathikettan-Periyar tiger corridor.This corridor links the Periyar Tiger Reserve along the Kerala and Tamil Nadu borders and the Mathikettan Shola National Park.

Radio Galaxy

A team of astronomers discovered several elusive dying radio galaxies.

About Radio Galaxy

- It is a particular type of active galaxy that emits more light at radio wavelengths than at visible wavelengths.
- It is also known as a radio-luminous galaxy or radio-loud galaxy.
- This galaxy is driven by <u>non-thermal emissions.</u>
- Radio telescopes show that some radio galaxies, called extended radio galaxies, have lobes of radio emission extending millions of light-years from their nuclei.
  - Centaurus A is a nearby example of an extended radio galaxy that features two outer lobes 650,000 and 1,350,000 light-years in diameter.
- There are two broad classes of radio galaxies –
  - Core-halo radio galaxies - They exhibit radio emission from a region concentrated around the nucleus of the galaxy.
  - Lobed radio galaxies - They display great lobes of radio emission extending, in some cases, for millions of light years beyond the optical part of the galaxy.

JO201

The **Hubble Space Telescope** captured an image of JO201.

About JO201

- It is a jellyfish galaxy in the Abell 85 galaxy cluster. JO201 is an example of a planetary nebula, and its beautiful and intricate structure is the result of the complex interaction between the ionized gas and the intense radiation from the white dwarf at its center.
- The colors in the image correspond to different elements in the nebula, with red indicating hydrogen, green indicating nitrogen, and blue indicating oxygen.
- It is at a distance of about 700 million lightyears, in the constellation of Cetus or the Whale.
- It has been moving through the massive galaxy cluster at supersonic speeds, for around a billion years.
- The tentacles of JO201 appear so short because it is moving towards us along the line of sight.

> **Jellyfish Galaxy**
> - The name "Jellyfish" comes from the resemblance of these galaxies to the underwater creatures with long, trailing tentacles.
> - It is a type of galaxy that exhibits long tentacles or tendrils of gas, dust, and stars that appear to be streaming away from the galaxy's main body.
> - These tentacles are formed as the galaxy moves rapidly through the hot gas of a galaxy cluster, causing the gas to strip away from the galaxy and form a tail.
> - This process is called ram-pressure stripping.

Sursingar

In his Mann ki Baat address Prime Minister spoke of several musical instruments and folk artists who he hoped would continue to inspire everyone at the grassroots towards making performing arts more popular.

Sursingar

- He mentioned the Sursingar, a **stringed musical instrument that is similar to the sarod**, but which is older and produces deeper notes.

- The instrument is made of **wood** and has a gourd attached to a hollow wooden handle with a metal fingerboard.

- The strings of the instrument, usually four in number and made of brass or bronze, are plucked with a metal pick.

- The Sursingar can be played either holding it vertically in front of the musician and supported by his left shoulder like the Veena or holding it parallel to the ground like the Sarod, or like the Sitar, which is held at an angle of 50-60 degrees to the ground.

- The Sursingar (along with the Rudra Veena and the Surbahar) **usually accompanies Dhrupad**, the genre of Hindustani vocal music which has a low, deep, and thoughtful pitch.

- With very few artisans now making the Sursingar, the instrument is rarely used in performances.

- Kolkata-based multi-instrumentalist **Joydeep Mukherjee** is credited with reviving the Sursingar, along with another "lost" stringed instrument, the Radhika Mohanaveena,

- **Radhika Mohanaveena** is named after its creator, Radhika Mohana Maitra.

Karakattam

- Karakattam is an ancient folk dance of **Tamil Nadu** in which performers in colourful saris dance with a **pot (karakam) on their head** to invoke **Mariamman, the goddess of rain**.

- The dance form became well known with the success of the Tamil film Karakattakkaran (1989), but has been criticised by purists for becoming vulgar of late.

- Traditionally, this dance is categorized into two types:

  o **Aatta Karakam** symbolizes joy and happiness. It is mainly **performed as entertainment**.

  o **Sakthi Karakam** is performed only in temples as a **spiritual offering**.

- Three tiers of flower arrangements of different colours sit on top of a container filled to the brim with either water, rice, or soil. All of this is balanced on the head of a Karakattam dancer while he or she dances.

- Other highlights include blowing fire, inserting needles into their eyes, and keeping balance while holding a bottle parallel to the ground on the performer's back

- **V Durga Devi** of Salem is a well-known Karakattam dancer.

Lavani

- Recently the dance form of Lavani was at the centre of a controversy, when some top political leaders from Maharashtra directed against organising vulgar public shows in the name of Lavani.

- The word Lavani comes from **'lavanya' or beauty**. Lavani is a traditional folk art form in which women dancers wearing <u>nine-yard-long sarees</u> in bright colours, make-up, and ghunghroos perform on dholak beats on a stage before a live audience.

- As an indigenous art form, Lavani has a history going back several centuries, and it attained particular popularity in the **Peshwa era in the 18th century**.

- Traditionally, performances were held in front of <u>kings or lords,</u> and for the entertainment of <u>tired soldiers resting during breaks in fighting</u>.

- There are several sub-genres of Lavani, of which the most popular is the **Shringarik (erotic) kind**, in which the lyrics are often teasing, with sensuous dance steps and delicate gestures employed to convey erotic meaning.

- Over the years, Lavani has gained more acceptability among the people, even though certain taboos around it continue.

- The <u>audience has historically been all-male</u>, but in recent years, some women too have begun to attend performances.

Sant Ravidas

- Guru Ravidas Jayanti was observed on February 5 this year. This year marks the 646th birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas.

- Guru Ravidas Jayanti is commemorated on **Magh Purnima**, the day of the full moon in the month of Magh, according to the Drik Panchang

- Born in **1377 C.E. in Varanasi,** Uttar Pradesh, Guru Ravidas was an <u>Indian mystic, poet, social reformer and spiritual guru</u>.

- 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 <u>oppose the Indian caste system</u> through his poems and teachings based on spirituality and spread the <u>message of equality</u>.

- Around 41 poems accredited to Ravidas were included in the **Adi Granth**, the sacred scripture of Sikhism.

- Ravidas was the <u>founder of the Ravidasia religion</u>. He was also known as the <u>spiritual guide of Meera Bai,</u> who is an eminent personality in the sphere of Hindu spiritualism.

Keeladi Findings

- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) submitted a report on the findings of the Sangam-era site of Keeladi.

- Keeladi is a tiny hamlet in the <u>Sivaganga district in south Tamil Nadu.</u> It is about 12 km south-east to the temple city of Madurai and is located along the **Vaigai river**.

- The excavations here from 2015 prove that an urban civilisation existed in Tamil Nadu in the Sangam age on the banks of the Vaigai river.

Key Findings

- In the eight rounds of excavations, including the first three by the ASI, over 18,000 artefacts have been found from the site.

- Discovery of heaps of pottery suggest the existence of a pottery making industry, mostly made of locally available raw materials. Over 120 potsherds containing **Tamil Brahmi inscriptions** have been found.

- Keeladi, along with other Tamil Nadu sites which have over a thousand inscribed potsherds, clearly suggest the long survival of the script.

- Spindle whorls, copper needles, terracotta seal, hanging stones of the yarn, terracotta spheres and earthen vessels to hold liquid suggest various stages of a weaving industry. There also existed a dyeing industry and a glass bead industry.
- Gold ornaments, copper articles, semi-precious stones, shell bangles, ivory bangles and ivory combs reflect the artistic, culturally rich and prosperous lifestyle of the Keeladi people.
- Agate and carnelian beads suggest import through commercial networks while terracotta and ivory dice, gamesmen and evidence of hopscotch have been unearthed revealing their pastime hobbies.

Keeladi's Link to Sangam Age

- The Sangam age is a period of history in ancient Tamil Nadu which was believed to be from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.
- The name is derived from the renowned Sangam poets of Madurai from that time.
- The new report repositions the Sangam age between 800 BCE and 300 CE.
- Even this period of history has been classified into three periods. The pre-early historic period between 800 BCE to 500 BCE, mature early history between 500 BCE to the end of 1st century BCE and post early history from 1st century BCE to 300 CE
- Keeladi could also provide crucial evidence for understanding the missing links of the Iron Age (**12th century BCE to 6th century BCE**) to the Early Historic Period (**6th century BCE to 4th century BCE**) and subsequent cultural developments.

Keeladi's Link to Indus Valley

- The Keeladi artefacts have led academics to describe the site as part of the Vaigai Valley Civilisation. The findings have also led to comparisons with the Indus Valley Civilisation while acknowledging the cultural gap of 1,000 years between the two places.
- Till now, the gap is filled with Iron Age material in south India, which serve as residual links. However, some of the symbols found in pot sherds of Keeladi show close resemblance to Indus Valley signs.
- A lot of digging and study has to be done to establish the links between these two civilisations.
- As per Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA) Keeladi has all the characteristics of an urban civilisation, with brick structures, luxury items and proof of internal and external trade.
- It comes across as an industrious and advanced civilisation and has given evidence of urban life and settlements in Tamil Nadu during the Early Historic Period. Keeladi has also added to the credibility of Sangam Literature.

Yakshagana

- The Prime Minister recently expressed deep grief over the demise of noted Yakshagana playback singer, Shri Balipa Narayana Bhagawatha
- Yakshagana is a traditional Indian theatre form, developed in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Uttara Kannada, Shimoga and western parts of Chikmagalur districts, in the state of **Karnataka** and in Kasaragod district in **Kerala.**
- It combines dance, music, dialogue, costume, make-up, and stage techniques with a unique style and form. It is believed to have evolved from pre-classical music and theatre during the period of the Bhakti movement.
- It is traditionally presented from dusk to dawn and its stories are drawn from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata and other epics from both Hindu and Jain and other ancient Indic traditions.
- Yakshagana is synonymous with massive headgears, elaborate facial make-up and vibrant costumes and ornaments.

- Usually recited in Kannada, it is also performed in Malayalam as well as Tulu (the dialect of south Karnataka), with percussion instruments like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals) acting as the accompanying orchestra.

Maharishi Dayanand Sarawati

- The Prime Minister inaugurated the year-long celebrations commemorating the **200th birth anniversary of Maharishi 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 brahmans 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 brahmans 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 campaigned 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 the likes of Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.
- 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**".